The Aeschylean Chorus

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A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
to the Department of Greek and Latin, Faculty of Arts and Humanities,
University College London

January 2019
Declaration

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

The chorus lies at the heart of the tragic genre for the Greeks. Yet modern scholars, audiences and theatre professionals have struggled to relate to this element of the tragic performance, which lacks a direct equivalent in modern Western theatre. Furthermore, the dramatic chorus (tragic or comic) is unique among Greek choral groups, as it combines a fictive identity inside the world of the play with the ritual identity of a chorus performing at a religious, civic festival. It thus occupies a space that is enriched by both strands of its existence: the fictionality of its persona, which is fully integrated into the tragic plot, and the rich tradition and connotations of Greek chorality.

This thesis offers a new reading of the chorus across the Aeschylean corpus, organised around the fictive identity of the chorus members. Chapter 1 draws on the stark gender divide that characterises Greek life and the way this is translated into female tragic choruses, while the chapter also examines the rich non-dramatic choral tradition that underpins female tragic choruses. Chapter 2 analyses Aeschylus’ take on the ‘barbarian’ in an era where issues of identity are particularly relevant due to the Persian wars and the emerging supremacy of the Athenians. Chapter 3 looks at aged choruses, examining the connotations of wisdom and weakness that old age has in Greek thought, and how this impacts on the position of the chorus in the play. Chapter 4 analyses the peculiar case of divine tragic choruses, and examines how Aeschylus incorporates the notion of the divine as understood by the Greeks into the pre-dramatic tradition of divine choruses. The chapter also look at the construction of chorality in Aeschylus’ satyr plays.

Where possible, evidence from fragmentary plays, as well as works that have influenced, or been influenced by, Aeschylus has been used to expand our perspective on Aeschylus’ dramatic practice.
Impact Statement

This thesis aims to offer a reevaluation of the chorus in the Aeschylean corpus and thus deepen our understanding of the tragic chorus as a whole and reaffirm the centrality of chorality in Greek culture.

With its emphasis on elements of the fictional identity of the chorus that are based on socio-political taxonomies, this thesis also touches on issues relating to identity-shaping mechanisms and the power of the visual medium.

In an era when we are moving away from traditional modes of representation, largely owing to the widespread use of social media, the Greek tragic chorus can offer useful insights into our own ways of expressing, questioning and shaping collective and personal identities.

The investigation of this seemingly uniquely uniform voice of a group of people whose dance and song lies at the heart of Greek tragedy can also open up new ways of looking at modern theatrical performances and offer a perspective on the history and evolution of theatrical practice.
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Acknowledgements

It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the debts I have incurred during the writing of this thesis.

I would first like to express my gratitude and heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Professor Chris Carey. His unstinting generosity with his time and ideas, his good humour and his pragmatic advice have been indispensable for the completion of this dissertation.

I would also like to thank Professor Stephen Colvin, whose door was always open whenever I needed his help or advice through the years, including at the final stages of my thesis.

My thanks also go to the Head of the Department of Greek and Latin, Professor Gesine Manuwald, and all the staff and students of the Department, who made UCL such a supportive, positive environment to work in; the staff of the Institute of Classical Studies, for providing a stimulating and welcoming environment for a researcher; Professor Soteroula Constantinidou and Professor Constantinos N. Constantinides, for the kind help and wise advice they have given to me so generously over the years; and the Greek State Scholarships Foundation (IKY) for their financial support.

Finally, I would like to thank all the people I have met and exchanged ideas with, especially my friends Margarita and Elena, for sharing the joys and stress of London life with me; and James, for his kindness and generosity.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my partner and my dear family, for loving me always.
Abbreviations


Abbreviations of authors and their works follow the OCD³.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the use of the chorus by Aeschylus, the earliest surviving Athenian dramatist. Starting from the fictive identity of the dramatic chorus, which makes it unique among choral groups in Greek antiquity, the thesis looks at the way in which these fictive identities are created and deployed both within the individual plays and across the Aeschylean corpus as a whole. It draws on the advances made in the study of tragedy thanks to its cross-fertilization by other disciplines, such as social studies, linguistics, performance and theatre studies, and incorporates new insights gained by the extensive study of choral non-dramatic poetry in recent years.

Based on the understanding of this need to contextualize Greek drama in historical, socio-political and performative terms, and consequently on the better understanding of the centrality of the chorus in Greek culture including tragedy, the thesis is structured in four chapters. Each chapter examines the Aeschylean chorus from a different starting point relating to the dramatic identity of its members, namely their gender, ethnicity, age, and their divine or human nature. Starting from these elements, which correspond to basic biological and socio-political categories and remain stable throughout individual plays, the thesis aims to explore the various and varied ways in which Aeschylus uses his chorus: how the chorus’ appearance in dramaturgic and performative terms (costumes, dancing, singing, movement) contributes to role, spectacle and theme; what functions the chorus carries out in any one play; what kind of utterances it is given; finally, how all these strands converge to reflect and affect the plot and the preoccupations of each tragedy.

With my analysis, I hope to offer a fuller picture of Aeschylus’ choral practice, and as a result deepen our understanding of the dramatic chorus and its place vis à vis the notion of Greek chorality. A number of recent studies, which deal with the chorus in individual Aeschylean plays, or approach the dramatic chorus from a number of different perspectives, testify to the increasing interest in the subject and highlight the timeliness of this project.¹

¹ See, e.g., Gagné and Hopman 2013; Billings, Budelmann and Macintosh 2013; on the tragic chorus observed from specific angles, see, e.g. Dhuga 2011 on old age; Trieschnigg 2009 for the chorus of Seven against Thebes and non-dramatic maiden choruses; Gruber 2009 on the Aeschylean chorus, choral emotions and audience reception.
A. The Identity of the dramatic chorus

Performances of Greek tragedy in the fifth century lie in the centre of what is essentially a religious festival of the community. The chorus was, in a very real sense, the heart of the genre: through the history of Athenian tragedy, irrespective of any changes in the use of the chorus, it was inconceivable for a tragedy to be staged without one. Beyond this, the singing and dancing chorus of tragedy as part of a civic festival is heir to a long tradition of public choral performance. Thus, while the dramatic chorus bears some unique features, which are discussed below, it never ceases to be just one of a large number of choruses that perform in the polis under various occasions, and thus to be part of a larger cultural context of chorality.

Despite the widespread presence and performance of choral groups in ancient Greece, the function of a chorus is often difficult for the modern Western audience to grasp fully, largely owing to the lack of analogous performances in the modern West. Choral lyric poetry has thus attracted considerable scholarly attention and has been analyzed from a number of angles, including the performative occasion of the song and the categorization of its genres, the ‘I’ of the dancing chorus and its relation to

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2 As often noted, a poet had to apply for, and be granted, a chorus by the city to present his play, see Ar. Eq.513 (χορόν αἰτοῖν); Arist. Poet.1449b (χορόν καμάδων ὁπεὶ ποτὲ ὅ ἀρχων ἔδωκεν); Pl. Resp.383c; Cratin. fr.17PCG. For the details of the institution of choregia see Wilson 2000, ch.2.

3 There is no denying that the dramatic chorus evolved quite dramatically during and after the fifth century. But it is telling for its centrality that it remained an integral part of tragedy even when its lyrics seemed to have little to do with the plot (for the dramatic chorus in fourth-century Athens see Jackson 2014; for the choregic aspect see Wilson 2000, 266-7).

4 The uniquely Athenian genre of drama seems to have taken up some of the functions carried out by melic performances in other city states (cf. Nagy 1994/5; Calame 1999; Kowalzig 2004). Other prominent choral genres in Athens included the dithyramb (see Zimmermann 1992) and the paean (see Rutherford 2001); for an exploration of a number of ritual choral performances in a wide geographical area see Kowalzig 2007. For the necessity to treat tragedy, and its chorus, with regard to its historical and performative context see the seminal work of Winkler and Zeitlin 1990; the contributions in Arion 3.1 (1994/5); Edmunds and Wallace 1997; Goldhill and Osborne 1999; Wiles 2000; Ley 2007.


6 This uneasiness is, perhaps positively, reflected in the varied ways in which modern directors have presented a Greek tragic chorus on stage, not infrequently reducing it to one single member (cf. Slaney 2013 for Senecan tragedy see and Biet 2013 for French dramas of the 16th and 17th century). For an analysis of the complexities the chorus presents for the post-classical dramatist and how these have been tackled in a variety of contexts in a wide chronological and geographical framework see Billings, Budelmann and Macintosh 2013, esp. parts 2-4.

7 See the classic discussion by Harvey 1955; also, Calame 1974 and Cairns 1972; for the current view of scholarship on genre categorisations, see Depew and Obbink 2000 and Carey 2009; and, with an emphasis on performance Cingano 2003; for genre-crossing, with a focus on Roman republican literature, see Barchiesi 2001.
the poet, the implications of commissioned poetry and its relation to the ethics and politics of the community. While all these aspects apply to the dramatic chorus, and will be examined in this thesis, there is an additional parameter that renders the tragic chorus unique among its lyric counterparts: the overt and sustained fictional identity of the choreutai; and the concomitant fictionality of the occasion of their utterances. As will be analyzed below, while a certain degree of identity-building is present in any scripted performance, the fictionality of the dramatic chorus does not simply set it apart from other choral groups in terms of definition; it reshapes its nature and widens the spectrum of choral roles and functions, and eventually of the reactions of, and reception by, the audience.

More specifically, rather than being recognisable members of the community, who often identify themselves by name, the dancers of the tragic chorus are masked and costumed, so as to completely conceal their real identity and replace it with an identity that is often antithetical to their own. Young Athenian men become, within the drama, men or women, young or old, usually non-Athenians, and frequently non-Greeks, and can even represent divine creatures.

Likewise, both the location and the occasion of the tragic song are fictional. Only a minority of surviving tragedies take place in Athens, and when they do, temporal

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8 Lefkowitz 1988, 1991 and 1995; D’Alessio 1994; Currie 2013. For the dramatic chorus in particular, see Kaimio 1970 on the grammatical person and number used by the tragic dancers.

9 Carey 2007; Hornblower 2009, with further references; Currie 2011; see also Stehle 1997 for an analysis of female choruses as both reflecting and shaping community standards.

10 While most of the observations I make above on the tragic chorus also apply to the comic chorus, the differences between the two genres are too significant to allow a common treatment at this point, despite the elements they share and the generic interaction between the two (see Taplin 1986; Foley 2008). For the comic chorus see Bierl 2009.

11 E.g. the girls in Alcman’s or Pindar’s partheneia (an impressive ten girls are mentioned by name in Alcman’s fr.1PMGF, one in his fr.3PMGF, and two maidens in Pindar’s fr.94b5-M, though not all scholars agree whether these are the real names of the performers, or if they even refer to the dancers themselves: on the issue, see, e.g., Page 1951, 44-69; Puelma 1977; Hutchinson 2001, 94).

12 Though the identity of dithyrambic dancers may sometimes be complicated (see for example Zimmermann 1992, 85 and Fearn 2013, 142-3 on the choral projection in Bacchylides 17), they are, crucially, dressed in festive attire, and wear no masks (for a succinct account of similarities and differences see Zimmermann 2005, 50-51 and Griffith 2013, 264). Demosthenes (18.262) calls the dress worn by dithyrambic choruses ἐσθῆς and ἵματα, words referring to everyday pieces of clothing, however ornate or elaborate.

13 But see Calame 2005, 104-132 for the subtle interplay between real and fictional identity that is achieved through the mask.

14 From the surviving tragedies only Aeschylus’ Eumenides takes place in the city of Athens, while Sophocles’ Oedipus at Colonus and Euripides’ Heracleidai and Suppliants are set in Athenian demes (Colonus, Marathon and Eleusis respectively. Oedipus at Colonus and Heracleidai also feature a chorus of Athenian elders).
distance ensures that the setting is not the Athens known to the audience attending the
performance in Athens. With very few exceptions, the Athens of tragedy is the
Athens of the mythic past, far removed from the democratic polis of the fifth century.

Despite the possible allusions to the dramatic performance that arise through the
frequent metatheatrical and metapoetic gestures found in dramatic songs, dramatic
festivals are never explicitly mentioned in surviving tragedy. And when the
circumstances that occasioned the choral song are expressly referred to in a tragedy,
these are fully embedded in the plot of the play.

Thanks to its essential integration in the world of the drama the dramatic chorus
also does something that non-tragic choruses never do, that is, engage in spoken
dialogue. This is a fact that has received insufficient attention in the past, with dialogue
being viewed as the jurisdiction of characters, as opposed to singing and dancing,
which defines primarily the chorus. The chorus, however, does interact with the rest
of the cast at the level of the action and its participation in dialogue specifically is
often important for the action of the play.

In its unique, dual nature the chorus thus combines a long tradition of civic
choral performances and a dramatic identity, and is, therefore, both separate from, and
assimilated to, the characters and action of the drama. Starting from Aristotle, this fact
discomforted earlier scholars, who frequently perceived the chorus as either just one
more *dramatis persona*, or as an entity separate from the characters and the actions of
the play. In the former case, this approach generated studies that analyze the
participation of the chorus in the action of the play, though occasionally with a strong

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15 The only surviving tragedy set in the fifth century is Aeschylus’ *Persians*, which takes place in far-away Persia. In that play Athens is very much the democratic polis that the theatre audience inhabited.

16 Whenever Athens features in surviving tragedy (for an exception see previous note), it is always a monarchy, though Athenian kings are never presented as tyrannical in tragedy (for the figure of the Athenian king in tragedy see Atack 2012). For the way in which tragedy maintains a preoccupation with current issues despite the chronological or geographical distance of its plot, see Whitmarsh 2013; cf. Vernant 1988.

17 See Henrichs 1994/5 on choral self-referentiality. For metatheatre in Greek drama, see Segal 1982; Dobrov 2001; Slater 2002 (on Aristophanes); and more recently Torrance 2013 (on Euripides).

18 Cf. Taplin (1977, 132-2) who notes that Greek tragedy features no direct references to the theatre.

19 Cf. Griffith 2013, 264 with n.29.

20 Lyric parts have received disproportionate attention compared to iambic utterances, and this inevitably resulted in an one-sided understanding of the function of the chorus (Gardiner 1987, 4). This tendency was expressed by a surge of interest in the structural elements of the chorus at the end of the 19th and the start of the 20th century, mainly from German scholars (see n.23 below).

21 See, e.g., p.106 for the chorus and Clissa in *Choephori*. Cf. Aristotle’s requirement for the chorus to be one of the characters (see n.128 on p.61).
focus on the ‘character’ of the chorus’. In the latter case, scholarship has often focused on lyric songs and understood the chorus primarily as a medium for the expression of generalized *gnomae* of an ethical colouring, either the poet’s own, or those of an imagined spectator, who enacted the reactions to the events of the play as the poet wished ‘der idealisierte Zuschauer’ to do. While these early views were frequently based on different methodological approaches than in current use today, they do reveal the difficulty of grasping fully the multi-faceted nature of the dramatic chorus that still persists.

For the reasons highlighted above the dramatic chorus is a particularly complex phenomenon and its analysis requires consideration of all the varied elements operating simultaneously in every utterance, movement or action of the chorus: words, sound and image, performative and social context, even the composition and predisposition of the audience itself. A number of recent advances in scholarship have equipped us with a much stronger sense of the overall choral civic background and the relation of the dramatic chorus with non-dramatic lyric, and have provided a more nuanced approach to other elements, especially relating to the identity of the chorus, such as gender or ethnicity.

In recent decades, the significance of the performative occasion has been established as crucial for the treatment of Greek poetry. In this framework the central character of choral performance in the totality of Greek culture has been reevaluated and repeatedly reaffirmed, and in recent years the significance of pre- and non-dramatic lyric and its relation to drama have started to gain prominence in

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23 Hence the famous ‘Sprachrohr’ theory, the ‘poet’s mouthpiece’ (for this discussion, especially in German scholarship, see Gruber 2009, 2-5).
24 For the term, see Schlegel 1846, 76-7. For this notion in modern scholarship, see Hose 1991, 1:1.5; Gruber 2009, 24-26. Cf. Billings 2013, for a discussion of early views on the chorus that are ‘antithetical’ to Schlegel and Schiller’s more structural understanding of the tragic chorus.
25 Kranz, in his seminal 1933 book *Stasimon*, succinctly, if somewhat broadly, describes the role of the chorus: ‘er ist Person des Stückes, er ist Instrument zur Begleitung, Gliederung, Vertiefung des Dramas, er ist endlich Organ des dichterischen Ich’ (p.171).
26 See p.11 with n.6.
27 For the importance of performative and socio-historical context for the dramatic chorus see p.11; for lyric poetry see next paragraph.
preoccupation with the dramatic chorus. The need to approach tragedy within a broader generic framework and examine it in relation with ritual and civic performance has started to produce interesting results.

Since lyric genres in Greece were strongly associated with, even defined by, performance, embedding of lyric genres in tragedy generates a wide range of questions. The associations genres bring with them can be negotiated and explored in the safe environment of a dramatic situation, as analyzed below. In turn, they can open up the issues treated in a tragedy by introducing elements that are not explicitly there in the text, but are by association present in the performative moment and therefore by implication in the minds of the spectators. In my thesis, I argue that tragedy fully exploits the connotations of order, beauty, morality and civic norms that non-dramatic choruses embody for its Athenian audience. At the same time, due to its fictive setting and invented situations, drama is uniquely able to question and negotiate these very norms upon which chorality is founded without ever turning too subversive. As a result, tragedy provides, I believe, a more expansive, rather than a more restrictive notion of chorality, and one that can uphold, and advance, rather than hinder or subvert social norms. The social dimensions of dancing groups and the social bonds they generate have often been noted, but I believe it is tragedy’s ability to radically disturb the predicted norms of chorality without ever abandoning them that makes it so varied, interesting and effective in exploring the preoccupations of each tragedy; and potentially also occasionally renders tragedy a less comfortable viewing than a civic performance.

From the middle of the twentieth century Classical studies have been more open to a dialogue with other disciplines, especially social studies, anthropology, sociology

29 See n.7.
30 Plato in his Laws, however, is famously averse to the idea of choral performances enacting actions that a good citizen should avoid (Pl. Leg.2.656c-6). The relationship between tragedy, especially the chorus and its audience, and the Athenian democracy of the fifth century has been the subject of a famous exchange of articles between Goldhill (1994 and 1996) and Gould (1996), with a further response by Carter 2004. Most recently on the subject see Carter 2011, esp. the introduction and parts 1-2.
31 Prauscello 2013, 271, with n.61.
32 Prauscello (2013, 272) notes on chirality: ‘because we remember the rhythmic progress so far, we are inclined to form the expectation of its continuation in an orderly fashion and take pleasure in the fulfilment of that expectation’.
and linguistics, as well as performance and theatre studies. Insights from these fields have encouraged classicists to view Greek texts as much more than text and become more sensitive to its social and historical context and the wealth of implicit or explicit references this adds at all levels of the written word. This turn has also encouraged scholars to examine fresh themes such as gender, ethnicity, and social status in tragedy. For tragedy in particular, consideration of staging has become integral to our understanding, and to the degree that our scanty evidence allows, with the help of archaeological and literary evidence, the visual and aural elements of drama have been studied, such as dance, music, movement, masks and costume. Methodological approaches, such as narratology, have afforded more concrete tools to access the text, while the study of fragmentary texts has allowed us to reevaluate conclusions drawn from surviving works. These approaches have given us useful insights and offer a basis for subtly nuanced perspectives on tragedy. The combination of all these factors has resulted in an immense progress in our understanding of the notion and pragmatics of ancient Greek choruses.

B. The ancient reception of Aeschylean choruses

Aeschylean choruses in particular stand out of the modern reader of his plays, through their dense metaphorical language. But already in antiquity the choruses of Aeschylus seem to have made an impression, both on account of their elevated language, and due to the impressive dramaturgical effects they achieved.

Dense, high-brow language is considered a typical feature of Aeschylean tragedy generally, and it is around this element that Aristophanes constructs one of the most famous ancient critiques of Athenian tragedy, pitching Aeschylus against Euripides in his Frogs, with the chorus addressing Aeschylus as the ‘the first of the Greeks to rear towers of majestic utterance and adorn tragic rant, take heart and open

33 For an overview, see Davidson 2008, esp.194-5; see also Ley 1994.
34 Seminal works include Hall 1989 (ethnicity), and Zeitlin 1996 and Foley 2001 (gender).
35 For the movement of the actors see the groundbreaking work of Taplin 1977, and for space in tragedy Rehm 2002, and Edmunds 1996; for costume see Wyles 2011; and specifically for masks, Wiles 2007 and a very interesting article by Meineck 2010/11 on the neuroscience behind the tragic mask. For dance, see Ley 2007; and for music, Wilson 2005.
37 Most 1998; Sommerstein 2003; McHardy et al. 2005; and for comedy, Arnott 1996; Storey 2003; Bakola 2010.
the floodgates’ (1004-5, transl. Henderson). Aristophanes, however, goes further than that and comments specifically on the issue of Aeschylean choruses a number of times, including a section dedicated to the choral parts of the plays of Euripides and Aeschylus (1248ff.). Euripides, in his attempt to expose his rival describes how Aeschylus started his plays with silent characters sat in the background while his chorus ἤρειδεν ὁρμαθοὺς ἀν/ μελῶν ἐφεξῆς τέτταρας ξυνεχῶς ἀν’ (914-15). This is meant mainly as a comment on Aeschylean silences, it does, however, give us important information of the use of the chorus, as it presents the opening choral lyrics in Aeschylean tragedies as excessively long. Surviving tragedy confirms this, with Aeschylean parodoi comprising a number of strophic pairs, sometimes followed by epodes.39

The deliberately intricate language of Aeschylus was, according to Aristophanes, accompanied by striking choreography:

τοὺς Φρύγας οἴδα θεωρῶν,
ὅτε τῷ Πριάμῳ συλλυσόμενοι τὸν παιδ’ ἠλθον τεθνεῶτα,
πολλά τοιαύτη καὶ τοιαύτη καὶ δεῦρο σχηματίσαντες. (Ar. fr.696PCG)

The emphasis on this Aristophanic fragment is clearly on the dance-steps, which must have made enough of an impression for Aristophanes to be able to use them for comic effect. Given that this was a play featuring a chorus of non-Greeks,40 the distinctive choral movement might be reflecting a particularly exotic presentation of the chorus, or even one relating to exaggerated, ‘barbarian’ gestures of lamentation.41 A similarly innovative approach to choral dancing is claimed for Aeschylus by Athenaeus, who states that Aeschylus ‘created many dance-steps and passed them on to the members of his choruses’ (transl. Olson). Athenaeus also credits the peripatetic philosopher Chamaeleon with the information that Aeschylus was in charge of the choreography of his plays himself, rather than employ a dance master.42

38 Several other passages in the Frogs parody Aeschylus’ high, convoluted language and/or translate it in an analogous comportment by the character ‘Aeschylus’, e.g. 814-25, 854-5, 902-4, 924-930, 937-941, 961-967, 994-9, 1015-17, 1058-61, 1125-74, 1365-1406.
39 Sommerstein 1996, 914-5n.
40 For the ethnicity of the chorus of Phrygians, see n.171 (p.235).
41 For the association of exaggerated lamentation with barbarians, see p.150.
42 Athen. Deipn. 1.21d.
One should be wary of the reliability of such information, especially when this involves stories of πρῶτος εὑρετής.\textsuperscript{43} Despite this, however, and the potential circularity of lexicographical evidence (Athenaeus draws explicitly on Aristophanes for some of the information on Aeschylean choruses), there seems to emerge a consistent picture of the Aeschylean chorus as dramaturgically innovative. This, as we will see, is supported by our analysis of Aeschylus’ surviving dramas, though there are elements in ancient critique that might point to an Aeschylean reluctance for choral or musical innovation.\textsuperscript{44} The chorus in Aristophanes’ \textit{Frogs} wonders what Euripides could criticise in his rival’s lyrics, given that Aeschylus ‘composed more lyrics of the finest quality (πλείστα δὴ καὶ κάλλιστα) than anyone else to this day’ (1254-6, transl. Henderson). But it is precisely an accusation of repetition of unimaginative patterns that Euripides levels against Aeschylus (1261-1280), as well as a lack of variation of musical innovation (1281-1307).

Dance-steps, however, are not the only reason why Aeschylean choruses stand out in ancient sources; the overall theatrical effect achieved by them also comes up both in Aristophanes’ \textit{Frogs} and in Aeschylus’ \textit{Life}. When Aeschylus brings up his \textit{Persians} as an example of his inspiring a war-like spirit to the citizens, Dionysus agrees by remembering his enjoyment when the chorus of Persians ‘clapped their hands together like this and cried “aiee”!’ (Ar. \textit{Frogs} 1029, transl. Henderson).\textsuperscript{45} And another Aeschylean chorus seems to have made an even starker impression upon its audience, according to the \textit{Life of Aeschylus}:

But some say that at the performance of the Eumenides, when he [Aeschylus] led on the chorus one by one, he frightened the people so much that some children lost consciousness and unborn babies were aborted.

(\textit{TrGFIIII} Test.A.1.30-32, transl. Burges Watson)

The emphasis of the author is here on Aeschylus’ use of visual effect to shock his audience, but it is telling for the Aeschylean chorus that the example used regards the chorus of \textit{Eumenides}, with Pollux later even speculating that it is precisely because of

\textsuperscript{43} Cf. n.215 on p.156.

\textsuperscript{44} See, e.g., Aeschylus disdain with Euripides’ ‘Cretan arias’ (Ar. \textit{Frogs} 849), which might be a reference to ‘choreographic accompaniment’ (Henderson 2002, 141n.82), and with Euripides’ general readiness to adopt musical tropes from various sources (Ar. \textit{Frogs} 1298-1307).

\textsuperscript{45} Cf. pp.135f. for another distinctive instance of choral movement in \textit{Persians}. 18
this instance that the number of the members of the tragic chorus was reduced down from fifty (Pollux, *Onomasticon* 4.110).

The use of *opsis*, rather than the plot, to produce ‘pity and fear’ has been criticized by Aristotle in *Poet*.1453b1-10, in a passage that has been read by some as a possible criticism of Aeschylean practice (especially the reference to τετρατοδίοις).\(^{46}\)

Further than that, Aristotle is less helpful than one would hope in his analysis of the tragic chorus. While he states that Aeschylus played a crucial role in the early development of the tragic chorus by reducing the choral component,\(^{47}\) it is another Aristotelean reference to the function of the tragic chorus that seems most pertinent to Aeschylus, namely Aristotle’s requirement that the chorus should be regarded as one of the actors ‘not as in Euripides, but as in Sophocles’ (*Poet*. 1456a25-27). Aeschylus is conspicuously absent here, despite the fact that some of the most prominent examples of choruses playing a crucial, sometimes even central part in the plot, can be found in Aeschylus (e.g. *Suppliants* or *Eumenides*). Scholars have attributed this conspicuous absence to reasons that range from Aristotle’s considering Aeschylus as working with what was not yet a mature dramatic form,\(^{48}\) to Aristotle’s linguistic and theological preferences that do not necessarily agree with Aeschylus’.\(^{49}\)

Inevitably, the use of secondary sources entails a certain difficulty of interpretation due to its selective, and often unreliable nature, as well as a risk of circularity. In addition, considerations of genre, in particular with Aristophanes, or aim and scope, as is the case with Aristotle, further complicate any references to Aeschylus. Despite these factors, however, there seems to emerge a vivid and rather consistent picture of the choruses of Aeschylus through our examination of ancient sources: Aeschylus is viewed as someone whose practice was distinctive, innovative and defining of the genre and of the chorus in particular, in terms of language, movement and spectacle overall.

\(^{46}\) Lucas 1968, ad loc.; Halliwell 1986, 95n.20.


\(^{48}\) Halliwell 1986, 247 (see also 244-7, for his discussion on the issue), who also explains Aristotle’s relative neglect of choral lyric as the result of his overall theory of poetry and tragedy.

\(^{49}\) Wiles 2007, 103-4; see also Halliwell 1986, 95n.20 for the scant treatment of Aeschylus generally in the *Poetics*. 
C. Studies on the Aeschylean chorus

Given the insights gained from research developments and the striking nature of the Aeschylean chorus it is, therefore, surprising that scholarship has largely failed to apply those insights to a systematic analysis of the dramatic chorus.\textsuperscript{50} Though monographs on the chorus of Sophocles and Euripides exist, most are now several decades old and, for all their merits, view the choral parts mainly from a literary standpoint and address less their performative and social context.\textsuperscript{51} This gap has begun to be filled only in recent years, first by collective volumes that attempt to bring new insights together for a fresh analysis of the tragic chorus,\textsuperscript{52} or studies that examine the dramatic chorus from a specific point of view;\textsuperscript{53} and second, by a number of studies on choruses of specific Aeschylean plays. On Aeschylus, Thomas has extensively dealt with the chorus of Aeschylus’ Suppliants and argues for their ambiguous status as foreigners and Greek, as male and female at the same time.\textsuperscript{54} Trieschnigg’s 2009 dissertation is dedicated to the Seven against Thebes and focuses on the identity of the choral group as maidens, and the relation of the chorus of this tragedy to non-dramatic maiden choruses.\textsuperscript{55} The chorus of Agamemnon in particular has received considerable attention.\textsuperscript{56} Specifically in the case of Agamemnon, however, scholars have in general failed to place adequate emphasis on the fact that the chorus is only the first part of a tripartite construction.\textsuperscript{57} This comes as a surprise, since the trilologic format of the work has been taken into account for the exploration of many other aspects of the Oresteia.\textsuperscript{58}

The most recent monograph on all six Aeschylean tragedies (with an appendix on Prometheus Bound) is that by Gruber published in 2010. Gruber’s study consists in a play by play analysis and his central thesis is that the tragic chorus is essentially a ritual chorus which uses emotion (that felt and expressed by the chorus, and that evoked in the audience) to trigger the audience’s identification and thus steer their

\textsuperscript{50} For possible reasons, cf. Zimmermann 2005, 47-8.

\textsuperscript{51} For Sophocles, see Burton 1980; Gardiner 1987; and more recently Reitze 2017. On Euripides, Hose 1990. For satyr drama see Seidensticker 2003. For Gruber’s study of the Aeschylean chorus, next page.

\textsuperscript{52} Most recently Billings, Budelmann and Mackintosh 2013; Gagné and Hopman 2013.

\textsuperscript{53} Prominent is here Swift 2010, dealing with lyric echoes in drama; see also n.28.

\textsuperscript{54} Thomas 1998.

\textsuperscript{55} Trieschnigg 2009.

\textsuperscript{56} Schenker 1989; Thiel 1993.

\textsuperscript{57} But see Käppel 1998, who examines the chorus across the three plays of the Oresteia.

\textsuperscript{58} Lebeck 1971 examines imagery across the three plays. More recently see Gurd 2001 (on silence), Wilson 2006 (the notion of dikê), Allen 2009 (on pain and suffering), Leão 2010 (legal language), Catenaccio 2011 (dreams), Fedeli 2013 (animal imagery).
reception of the play. Gruber rightly pays attention to the ritual setting of tragedy and emphasizes the affective aspect of tragedy and the role this plays in its reception, which is often, regrettably, lost on modern readers who experience the play without the help of music, dance, or visual effects. He also offers a very detailed and close linear analysis of all choral utterances play by play.

Despite the book’s undeniable merits, at times the primary material does not fit easily into the single model Gruber has selected, which detracts from the chorus the versatility that one finds when examining the plays. As, for example, when the female nature of the chorus of Seven against Thebes is downplayed by Gruber in order for their authority and unity of their role to be rescued. As we will see in the relevant chapters, it is often precisely because of their dramatic identity that the chorus is allowed to operate in a space with permeable boundaries and thus introduce into the play preoccupations that would have been out of bounds for other ritual choruses. The occasionally delinquent nature or the chorus’ resistance to accepted social norms within the plot of the play adds value to their eventual endorsement of these norms and their compliance to ritual roles. For example, the final taming of Eumenides and their integration into a safe cultic role would not have been as impressive and effective if they had not initially been presented also like savage monsters.\(^59\)

Monographs on the chorus of individual plays, on the other hand, such as Trieschnigg’s, constitute a more promising approach. The in-depth analysis of one single play from the point of view that the writer finds more suitable for the specific play can give interesting insights into the text. Trieschnigg displays a fine understanding of the complexities of the dramatic chorus, as her analysis takes into account the need to locate the chorus within a larger performative and cultural context, while she also does not shy away from noting and analyzing the multi-layered nature of the choral utterances that results from the combination of dramatic and ritual identity.\(^60\) Her study emphasizes especially the effect of non-dramatic poetry both on the composition and on the reception of tragedy. In doing so, Trieschnigg makes useful

\(^59\) The blood-thirsty nature of the Eumenides is another instance where Gruber’s model of audience identification with the chorus fails to offer a very convincing interpretation (see Gruber 2009, 431ff., esp.433-4).

\(^60\) Trieschnigg (2009, 42-3) adopts Calame’s tripartite distinction of the choral voice into emotive, hermeneutic and performative. This scheme can work well, if one does not lose sight of the fact that the three voices can function simultaneously, and makes sure not to over-privilege the hermeneutic voice.
observations, in particular on maiden choruses. On the other hand, the result runs the risk of reading like a running commentary, which can potentially obstruct one’s more synoptic view of the choral role in the play as a whole, its contribution to the overall atmosphere of the play, its variation and evolution through a single tragedy. The room for synthesis and use of material from the rest of the corpus is thus necessarily limited. While every study on the chorus of a play needs to make sense on the basis of the specific text, drawing into the discussion evidence from the rest of the Aeschylean plays, both surviving and fragmentary, as well as from the plays of Sophocles and Euripides, allows for conclusions that can benefit from, and in turn advance, our understanding of the tragic chorus in general.

For these reasons, it is my firm belief that a synoptic approach to the chorus in the Aeschylean corpus as a whole is still needed, as it presents significant advantages over other methods of approach.

D. The approach taken in this study

My review of the work that has been done so far on the Aeschylean chorus highlights the important contributions that these studies have made. At the same time, however, it offers an insight into the strengths and limitations of different approaches, especially on how single-play studies stand opposite larger analyses dealing with multiple plays.

The first dilemma one faces, therefore, in a study of the chorus is whether one will focus on one single play, or will incorporate more or all of the plays into it. The small number of surviving Aeschylean tragedies makes both possible, in a way that would be difficult to achieve in the case of Euripides without risking partisanship or superficiality. The bulk of primary evidence for our study comes from the choral parts of the six surviving Aeschylean tragedies (and Prometheus Bound, which though I consider non-Aeschylean offers a fruitful basis for comparison with some aspects of Aeschylean usage),\(^\text{61}\) with the addition of what can be gleaned from fragmentary plays. I have elected in this study to use a thematic approach, based on the dramatic identity of the chorus: its gender, ethnicity, age, and human or divine nature. While no

\(^{61}\) For the authenticity of Prometheus Bound see p.224, n.120.
methodology is free of complications, a thematic study of the chorus in the Aeschylean corpus presents, as I show below, various significant advantages over other methods of approach and thus promises to offer new, invaluable insights into the chorus of the tragedies of Aeschylus, as well as a fresh perspective on the Greek dramatic chorus as a whole.

This integrative approach allows one to place the specific effects in firm relation to the larger output, include evidence from fragmentary plays and different playwrights, and eventually achieve a synoptic view of authorial practice, thus avoiding the risk of losing sight of the larger picture. Here lies, in my opinion, one of the advantages of an integrative approach for the exploration of the dramatic chorus, in that it allows one to trace larger trends across a play, a trilogy, a corpus, and by extension across the dramatic chorus in general.

The very nature of the dramatic chorus renders the thematic approach particularly apt for the current thesis. As discussed above, the chorus is embedded in the fictional world of the play, while it never ceases to be a chorus as we know it from non-dramatic poetry. In that sense, the chorus in a tragedy will narrate the past and the present; offer generalized wisdom in the form of gnomae; react with various emotions to the events of the play and thus partly guide the emotional reaction of the audience; interact and reason with the characters; it will, at points, direct or influence the plot with its actions. In a single play, a variable selection of these functions will be deployed following the twists and turns of the plot. Often, the chorus will switch from one function to the other rapidly, or it will carry more than one function simultaneously, and this sequence of functions in the wider framework of its dramatic identity will have an impact on the atmosphere and pace of the play (or of a trilogy). For this reason, the thematic approach offers the ideal tool for us to explore this diversity and the shift that comes with the linearity of the play.

However, there is more than one thematic approach available: starting from the identity of the chorus is not the only way of achieving synthesis of this sort. One could equally operate with a set of formal categories based on the roles open to, and played by, the chorus from play to play (narrator, spectator, adviser etc.). Starting from these functional aspects of the chorus, such as its narrative role, its character (though
character has also been viewed by some as a permanent feature)\textsuperscript{62} and its ritual activity could also catch the diversity and complexity of its operation.

The difficulty that arises from this approach is that both sets of features (the ‘permanent’, for which I have opted, and the ‘functional’ ones I consider as an alternative) cannot always be clearly separated. By examining, for example, how a certain chorus exercises a selection in the narrative one will be drawn into discussion about their gender, or the ritual in which they happen to be engaging at the moment (cf. e.g. mythic exempla used by Choephori and Agamemnon; or the past narrated by the chorus of Suppliants; the kommos sung by the women in Choephori, or the summoning of the dead Dareius by the chorus of elders in Persians).

Therefore, precisely because the chorus is constantly shifting between roles, an analysis based on choral function risks fragmenting the perception of the play by breaking up choral utterances and reducing the whole to the sum of its parts. On the other hand, a theme based on the identity of the chorus within the plot offers a firm standing ground, so to speak, from where to analyze and synthesize the varied and versatile functions of the chorus at any given moment. Finally, themes such as those chosen in this study offer an additional advantage. It is precisely this fictive identity of the chorus, as discussed above, that separates the dramatic chorus from other choral groups. It therefore encapsulates the distinctiveness of the tragic chorus, eliminates the risk of fragmentariness by making it possible to explore the plurality of the roles of the chorus within the overall development of the plot, while the four different themes on which this thesis specifically is structured offer a preview of the endless potential opened up thanks to the varied identity of the chorus members.

Themes also allow one to bring together multiple plays and thus trace similarity and divergence of usage not solely at the level of a single play, but by extension at the level of a trilogy, or even across the corpus. In consequence, one can discern patterns, stress similarities and differences and thus decide how typical or a-typical a usage is. This allows valid conclusions not only for the playwright in question, but also comparisons with other tragedians, which in turn promises to offer a better understanding of the tragic chorus as a whole.

\textsuperscript{62} For the character of the tragic chorus, see p.14.
An additional advantage of this approach is that it allows evidence from fragmentary plays to be utilised. Since scholarship has by now acquired a new awareness of the value fragments can add to the investigation of ancient literature, a thematic approach opens up a new avenue for incorporating fragmentary evidence. It allows one to identify and evaluate patterns, especially in the role and function of the chorus, in plays that survive more or less intact; to notice the correlation of choral usage to other characters; and more importantly, to view how the chorus is used to emphasize or enrich certain preoccupations of the play, or to affect the overall rhythm and atmosphere. Having explored the use of the chorus in surviving tragedies, one can more easily complement the results with evidence from fragmentary plays. Thus, detached verses or passages (used with caution) can find a place as supportive evidence for surviving plays; in turn, surviving plays can help reconstruct the larger framework where fragments would have once stood. A thematic approach, therefore, allows for the maximum possible integration of fragmentary evidence, minimizing at the same time the risk of building too much on ground that is, unavoidably, shaky.

Finally, it needs to be stressed that the approach used in this study should not be viewed as sacrificing granularity for the sake of the larger picture. On the contrary, general conclusions cannot be drawn without close reading of the text. While one cannot aim at the level of detail found in a lemmatic commentary or a close linear analysis, still any conclusions can only be drawn by gauging detail against a wider background, and by using details to reconstruct the general background. What we are looking for is the manifestation of a given theme in a given play, and the variations it displays within a play and across the corpus. Within the themed chapters, I aim to synthesize evidence from different plays and thus avoid excessive narrative, while maintaining a level of engagement with the text that ensures valid conclusions.

While a thematic approach is, as I hope to have shown, particularly apt for the study of the tragic chorus, it is largely the selection of specific themes that will decide the success or failure of the enterprise. By looking at the nature of the material at hand, one is in a position to multiply the gains of a thematic approach by selecting themes that are tailored to the nature of the material. With this in mind, the themes that will

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63 See n.37.
form the four chapters of my thesis are gender, ethnicity, old age, and divinity. These
have been selected on the two following grounds.

The first reason pertains to the performative and fictional nature of the genre,
which entails a largely visual element. My four themes constitute four principal
categories of the dramatic identity of the chorus, are instantly recognisable by the
audience upon seeing the chorus, and correspond to features that stay with the chorus
from start to finish. Once a chorus enters the stage as a female chorus, it will remain
female in mask and costume, and largely in conduct, to the very end of the play.
Likewise, an elderly chorus will not be rid of their masks and white hair (or their
walking sticks) before the play is over; and a chorus of barbarians will bear the visual
marks of its ethnicity in their clothing, headdress, possibly colour of skin, for the
duration of the play. Despite the subtle ways in which any of these issues are explored
in tragedy, the four categories are, in a sense, permanent, central to how the other
characters perceive the chorus, and how the audience understands the chorus. They
are also unaffected by the plot, and visually constantly present. In that sense, gender,
ethnicity, age and divine status are seen as ‘permanent’ features of the dramatic chorus,
which can function helpfully as flexible axes against which a variety of other roles and
features can be projected and evaluated.

The second reason for the selection of the four themes relates to the necessity to
understand the essence of choral performance as it was viewed and experienced by the
Greeks. Since the chorus of a particular play is a manifestation of the phenomenon of
the tragic chorus within the framework of a civic festival, by using those themes, I
wish to incorporate into my investigation as far as possible the religious, ritual and
civic affiliations of the chorus. In my approach the chorus is understood both as a
result of its socio-historical context, and as a factor in shaping this context. In that
sense, the four themes that I have selected are roles that are largely socially and
externally defined, though not all of them occur as choral groups in real-life. This is,
for example, the case with foreigners, who do not perform as a chorus on Greek soil,

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64 While this is true of tragedy, comedy will not refrain from tampering even with this basic category
of male versus female. Its male characters will dress up as females, sometimes indulgently, (e.g.
Euripides’ in-law in Thesmophoriazusae, or even Agathon in the same play), and so will women dress
up as men (e.g. the women in Ecclesiazusae). Tragedy refrains from this sort of cross-dressing within
its plots, although it too explores gender roles and identities.

65 See above, pp.23f., for the additional ‘roles’ or features of the chorus.

but are perceived, both as a group and as individuals, as a notional category by the Greeks. Each theme thus automatically brings into the play certain connotations (social, ritual, religious, but also literary), and facilitates in this way the correlation of different functions with the more stable features of the chorus. It should be noted that the four categories selected are not exclusive, since often choruses bear more than one of these features, such as, for example, the chorus of Choephori, which falls into the category of female and old, or the chorus of Eumenides, which is female, old, and divine. In such cases, the feature that most defines the chorus will decide into which chapter each chorus will be treated, but cross referencing the discussion will ensure that we do not lose sight of the complexities of the chorus’ identity.

E. The themes

i. Gender

Greek social organisation is largely based on an antithetical understanding of strictly defined gender roles. But, however strict these roles may be expected to be in real life, at least in theory, they are rather more unstable and negotiable in fantasy. Women are prominent in a variety of cultic and religious roles, as well as in literature. And it is especially in such contexts that the tensions generated from the highly gendered Greek social structure emerge and are explored and negotiated. Tragedy in particular is fond of female characters, and shows a predilection for female choruses: female choruses seem to have been a favourite of Aeschylus and Euripides, though not of Sophocles, who opts frequently for male choruses.67

As a performative medium in which both context and character are fictional, drama is in an advantageous position to negotiate gender, for a number of reasons. First, the female in drama enjoys a role, often protagonistic, that it never has in real life. Secondly, tragedy allows suppressed female (and male) qualities to be played out and negotiated. Dialogue between male and female, and speech modes from which

67 Out of seven surviving Sophoclean plays only two feature female choruses. For Aeschylus the figure is four out of six (counting Eumenides in the female choruses too, and excluding Prometheus as non-Aeschylean). In Euripides the preference for female choruses is even clearer thanks to the larger number of surviving tragedies: fourteen out of seventeen plays feature a female chorus. For the probability that these statistics reflect accurately tragic practice and are not merely an accident of survival, see Castellani 1989, 2-3.
women are normally excluded both in real life and in non-dramatic lyric, can be exercised in the theatre, and thus tensions between genders, and more importantly tensions and paradoxes within gender roles, can be played out, more overtly and more freely than is ever possible for civic, non-dramatic choruses.

Many of these issues have been explored with regard to female characters in tragedy, but scholarship has been slow to apply these insights on the female tragic chorus or explore in depth the distinction between female characters and female choruses. One could rightly argue that many of the remarks made about female characters in tragedy automatically apply to female choruses as well. The collective nature of the chorus, however, generates different dynamics. A female chorus is not simply ‘female’, it is a group of women acting in unison. As a result, their actions and utterances are necessarily more ‘political’ (in the sense of action that takes place in, and affects, the polis). We will see that the tragedians display an awareness of the fact that certain groups, such as women or slaves, do not usually act as groups in real-life: slaves are never supposed to partake in any structured collectivity, while women have a restricted, yet important presence within specified cultic and ritual occasions. In this respect, female choruses are in an advantageous position in relation to female characters to serve as mouthpieces for civic opinion.

It is, however, not simply the collective nature of a female chorus that renders it different both from individual female characters, and from other categories of dramatic choruses. Perhaps even more significant is the prominent presence of female choruses in the cultic and literary tradition. Restricted in Athens to funerals and weddings, females, especially younger ones, have a long history of choral performance in Archaic and Classical Greece. In contrast, choruses of slaves, old men and foreigners are the result of dramatic imagination and are thus better aligned with their dramatic identity and the associations this identity has in real life. Female choruses are, therefore, a particularly promising lens for looking into drama. Not only do they bring into it a variety of considerations of social roles and norms, but they can also work as

68 For the female in tragedy, see the seminal works of Foley 1981 and 2001; Zeitlin 1990; Seidensticker 1995; more recently, see Foley 2001; Mossman 2001 and 2005 (with emphasis on female utterance in tragedy and further recent references). See also Cawthorn 2013.
70 MacLeod 1982, 132.
71 For the absence of slave choruses in Attic drama, see p.114 n.11.
the focal point for the interaction between tragic and non-dramatic lyric, as well as the interaction between dramatic and ritual choruses. They are, in other words, a very fine tool for exploring the frequently subtle, yet dynamic, innovation that fifth-century tragedy constitutes.

ii. Ethnicity

A chorus of old men or women may be a phenomenon that stretches the notion of Greek chorality, as we will see below. The most striking tragic choice for a chorus, however, are choruses of foreigners, which appear quite often on the tragic stage in plays taking place in Greek poleis and beyond. Even if foreigners were within the Greek horizon of experience, both in real life and in literature, choruses consisting of foreigners are an extraordinary innovation of tragedy. A Greek would never have seen an alien chorus perform, and there is no mention of such a chorus in literature before tragedy.72

Strikingly, however, non-Greek choruses are very common in Greek tragedy, even when the plot of a play would not have made it the most obvious choice (e.g. Euripides’ *Phoenician Women*). Ethnicity is particularly interesting in a poet like Aeschylus, whose career was flourishing at the time when the sense of an antithesis between Greek and barbarian was increasingly becoming an integral part of Greek ethnic identity.73 Non-Greeks had been a continuous presence in literature already from Homer onwards, and it seems that Greek ideas on alienness covered a range of qualities, from effeminate to tyrannical, qualities that were often geographically distinguished, so that, for example, northern Thracians gained a reputation for savage ferocity, while Easterners (and with them Ionian Greeks) were considered prone to luxury, excessive emotionality and effeminacy.

72 For non-dramatic barbarian choruses, see p.113 with notes.
73 Hall 1989 in her seminal study argues for the ‘invention’ of the stereotypical barbarian in the fifth century, specifically under the influence of the Greeks’ efforts against the Persians. While scholars have rightly argued for the Greek vs non-Greek antithesis as a more long-standing and wide-spread process of self-definition than merely a reaction to the Persian wars (e.g. Harrison 2002), recent past must have acted as the catalyst for the crystallization of such ideas (e.g. Hornblower 1991, 11; Hall 1997, esp. 44ff. For a recent review of the debate, see Vlassopoulos 2013, esp. pp.1-4 and ch.2. For tragedy, recent scholarship has allowed for more nuanced approaches, and more room for negotiation on the part of the tragedian (see, e.g., Vidal-Naquet 1997; Harrison 2002; Papadodima 2010, with further references).
Despite the temporal proximity of Aeschylean tragedy to the Persian Wars, Aeschylus uses, as all subsequent fifth-century tragedy, heroic themes and settings, with the exception of Persians, and one needs to consider whether the presentation of mythic barbarians may have been affected by contemporary definitions and experiences of foreigners. All this already illuminates both the ‘fictionality’ of such attributes, and their flexibility, and tragedy will exploit this tension to further question and negotiate what is Other, and by extension, what is Self.

Again, the case of a chorus of barbarians, rather than of individual characters, is a complex one. The associations a choral performance has with civic, religious and literary authority are confronted with the ability of the audience to grant its sympathy to, or even identify with, a chorus of non-Greeks. Not all dramatic barbarians are the same of course, and each case needs to be treated with attention to the context and the specifics of the presentation of the barbarians in question. Foreigners in an all-foreigners play (e.g. Persians) differ in some respects from plays where a foreign chorus find themselves in a Greek polis (e.g. Euripides’ Trojan Women or Aeschylus’ Suppliants), or in a Greek territory away from Greece (e.g. the fragmentary Phrygians set in the Greek camp at Troy). Equally, the barbarian as antithetical to the Greek male overlaps, though it does not coincide, with other categories of Other, in particular with the female.74 This interaction is frequently explored in tragedy especially in the case of Eastern foreigners with their perceived effeminate qualities and it will therefore form part of our analysis.

iii. Old Age

The Greeks, like many other societies, viewed old men as repositories of wisdom and experience. They were thus seen as particularly suitable to carry out admonitory roles in a variety of public and private scenarios, exercise their political rights as citizens and influence political action by their stance and decisions. On the other hand, old age is inevitably synonymous with physical decline and therefore diminished capacity for practical action. The two antithetical connotations, that is, political and social authority deriving from accumulated experience, and lack of physical power,

make old men a good fit for tragedy. Tragedy is frequently preoccupied with authority and abuse or usurping of ruling power, and especially the boundaries between monarchy and tyranny. A chorus that is able to perceive, but unable to act – as a chorus of elders is – presents both clear practical advantages for the plot, and the possibility to explore these issues.

Choruses of old men are not only relevant to the existential and political preoccupations of tragedy, but also to its nature as a choral genre. While old men retain the political and social role they had as adult males, they have lost their performative value, as they can no longer participate in choral civic performances.\textsuperscript{75} Thanks to tragedy, old men take centre stage again, though it is possible that their declined physical power may have been reflected on their stage presence in terms of rhythm, movement, even perhaps their mode of singing.

Indeed, the lack of physical power of a chorus of elders is what has resulted in bundling choruses of old men together with foreigners and women as ‘marginal’.\textsuperscript{76} Dhuga has recently rightly challenged the idea of marginality in the case of old choruses, arguing instead for authority, and choral intervention, growing with age.\textsuperscript{77} As I hope to show, however, physical decline affects the stance of an elderly chorus within the play more deeply than Dhuga allows. Dhuga’s study also focuses on the more straightforward case of choruses of old male citizens, does not treat choruses of old women and mainly dwells on cases where old age is central for the plot of the play in other ways as well (as it is for example in Sophocles’ \textit{Oedipus at Colonus}, a play in which the main character’s old age, exaggerated by his inability to see, is repeatedly dwelled upon). For us, it will be of importance to see how age is differently played out by men and women, since for women civic value is a feature that does not apply in real life, while other, more familial roles, such as this of the mother or the \textit{trophos}, are suitable for older females. The chorus of elders in \textit{Agamemnon} will be the focus of this chapter. The old age of the female choruses of \textit{Choephori} and \textit{Eumenides} will be addressed in the chapters on Gender and Divinity respectively.

\textsuperscript{75} Male choruses of boys and men performed annually in dithyrambic competitions in fifth-century Athens (see Zimmermann 1992, 35-38); Carey 2007, 206-7.

\textsuperscript{76} For an overview of the debate see Ebbott 2005.

\textsuperscript{77} Dhuga 2011.
iv. Divinity

Finally, in a genre so deeply preoccupied with the divine, it is perhaps no surprise that divine choruses seem to have been an option for tragedians. Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* and the non-Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound* are the sole surviving tragedies featuring a divine chorus, though divine choruses may have been less uncommon than our surviving evidence indicates.\(^78\) As tragedy is predominantly situated in mythic times and tragic characters are almost exclusively named mythic characters, divine choruses enter simultaneously into two different areas, myth and theology. Divine choruses have a long literary past, as they occur already in Homer, Hesiod and lyric poetry, where they are frequently employed as an expression of order, harmony and beauty of cosmic dimensions.\(^79\) Tragedy is, however, the first genre to bring divine choruses visibly before an audience, and, expanding the epic practice, present them in sustained interaction with humans. Inevitably a dynamic emerges in the relationship between human and divine that must have been different from that found in the world of epic and lyric, and also very different from experiences of the divine in the context of cultic practice. Opening up the spectrum of what a god can be presented to do is also perhaps partly what allowed Aeschylus to produce a unique chorus of chthonic divinities, as the Erinyes are, raising questions about what chorality can ultimately represent.

Here evidence from fragmentary plays, such as the *Nereides*, will serve as a useful control. The chorus of the non-Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound* will be useful in affording a perspective from which to look at Aeschylean divine choruses. Does a divine chorus differ substantially as to its function in the play from a human one? How would the interaction between humans and gods be played out in the theatre?\(^80\) Why have divine choruses remained a relatively unpopular choice for tragedians? Such and

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\(^{78}\) Lost Aeschylean plays that may have featured divine choruses include *Amymone, Heliades, Nereides, Dionysou Trophoi, Orēithyia*. Sophocles’ titles of possibly relevant lost plays include a *Mousai*, and a *Hybris*. For Euripides there are not many promising candidates, but a divine chorus may be hidden for example behind a title such as *Phaethon* (cf. Aeschylus’ *Heliades* (*Daughters of Sun*)).

\(^{79}\) Cf. n.146 on p.229.

\(^{80}\) We cannot be certain as to the involvement of human characters in tragedies that featured a divine chorus. If *Eumenides and Prometheus Bound* (as well as *Nereides*) are any indication, the co-existence on stage of humans and gods could easily be accommodated by the playwright. The generic difference of the comic *Clouds* should make one wary of treating evidence from that play as strictly comparable.
similar questions will form part of our investigation in the fourth chapter of the thesis. The investigation of divinity will be complemented by an analysis of Aeschylean practice regarding satyr drama, with the aim of providing further insights into the use of the choruses of satyrs, that is, creatures that form a very distinctive, non-human category of their own.

Finally, reference must be made to a quality unique to Aeschylus, i.e. the fact that he is the only dramatist whose trilogies survive. As mentioned above, while for the *Oresteia* the need to be treated as a whole has been since long considered self-evident, scholarship has largely failed to apply this on the chorus. Any continuities or discontinuities between the choruses of the three plays, the effect rendered by their juxtaposition, the possible need for a variation of chorus in the sequence of plays (in terms of both identity and mood) that may have emerged due to the format of the tragic competitions, all these are issues that deserve our attention. In turn they can offer a deeper understanding into the plays themselves, as does the treatment of the plots and the characters of the plays within the frame of the trilogy.

\footnote{p.20.}
Chapter 1: GENDER

A. Introduction

Athens was a society where gender was one of the basic elements in defining a person’s identity, and its patriarchal structure meant that almost every aspect of private and public life, cultural activity and creation, and all identity-forming mechanisms were in the hands of men. Women were viewed as inferior to men and naturally destined to be ruled by them.¹

In this context, Athenian women were expected to marry at the age of fourteen to sixteen.² Marriage ensured that a Greek woman found her ‘normal’ and useful³ position in running the household⁴ and bearing children, thus ensuring the continuation of both the family bloodline and the polis, while also facilitating wealth exchange and the creation of new connections between oikoi. The role of mother allowed women to play an important part at a critical formative stage and gave them an active and influential role in the household. This reality created a disparity between public ideology and private practice, which in turn allowed tragedy to present women, usually mothers, or other women in place of a mother, such as nurses, as capable of influencing grown-up men and instigating them to certain actions.⁵

A woman’s perpetual state of dependence upon a man meant that a woman enjoyed very few of the privileges of public life,⁶ while sharing fully in any misfortunes that befall her community. This was especially true at times of war: at war women are subject to emotional and physical abuse⁷ and the reduction of themselves

² The word parthenos indicated a young unwed girl, but was also used for other categories as well: a parthenos was ‘a virgin, a girl or a young woman; or a concubine with or without a child; or a still pregnant wife, or a wife who had not yet given first birth, or an elderly woman without child or husband (an old maid, a spinster)’ (Viitaniemi 1998, 49). The use of the word for an elderly childless female might be surprising to the modern reader, but Aeschylus, for example, uses it for Eumenides.
³ ‘men are good absolutely, women are good for their function’ (Foley 2001, 110).
⁴ Where she can even display some independence, cf. Arist. Eth.Nic.1160b33-35. Also Pol. 1277b24-25; 1264b1-3. Plato seems to have a rather more ‘divergent’ view on the subject (for a brief review see Foley 2001, 112-3).
⁶ Including, probably, watching dramatic performances. For a thorough review of the issue of women’s presence in dramatic festivals, see Powers 2014, ch.2.
⁷ Cf. the lyric parts of Seven, Agamemnon, or even Suppliants.
to objects and prizes to be exchanged between the victorious males, suffering of lifelong slavery and mourning for the loss of their philoi and the concomitant loss of their social position.\(^8\)

The frequent victimization of women resulting from their dependent social position, created a bond between women and victims of all sorts, both male and female, and put them in a privileged position from which to reflect on issues of power and abuse of power, compulsion and free will. Women were thus granted particular prominence in contexts of suffering and loss. The other side of the same coin was the perceived excessive female emotionality and an inclination to lose control easily.\(^9\) As a result, women often find themselves in the role of aggressor, and in turn victimize others with their actions, with obedient, harmless and unharmed women usually finding their way into tragedy only in minor, secondary parts (e.g. Ismene in Sophocles’ *Antigone*).

Despite their subjugated position within the *oikos*, women played a prominent role in the cult life of the city, particularly during two central social institutions, that is, funerals and weddings.\(^10\) These were the only private occasions where female activity in public was fully endorsed by the Athenian society, under the strictly defined rules of the ritual and the guidance of men, and therefore in a way that is controlled and harmless.\(^11\)

While performance at funerals were often left to older females, other cult songs were particularly associated with *parthenoi*. Virginity is described across a number of genres as a state of vulnerability\(^12\) and wildness that puts the family and the society at risk of disorder,\(^13\) and any wish to prolong this state beyond the expected time limits is potentially dangerous.\(^14\) This transitory, liminal state was coloured by the anxieties surrounding marriage for the bride: the separation from the paternal *oikos* and the emotional difficulties of integration to a new household, as well as the first

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8 E.g. Euripides’ *Trojan Women*.
10 Just 1989, 110-111.
14 For women in the Hippocratic corpus, see Dean Jones 1994; King 1983 and 1998; Hanson 1990.
sexual experience and the pain and dangers involved in childbirth. Virginity and its socially approved ending also occupied an important place in Greek fantasy about gender, with various myths, visual representations and cult songs articulating the anxiety about marriage but also the necessity of the marital union, and the threat to the male-governed order that parthenoi potentially represent.

The strong female presence in myth and cult explains partly the paradox of the prominent role of women in Greek drama, despite their invisibility in real life: out of our thirty-one surviving fifth-century tragedies, Sophocles’ Philoctetes is the only play without a single female presence. In this chapter, I aim to examine Aeschylus’ female choruses not only as a manifestation of the female, but also as a manifestation of female chorality. Tragedy operates within the same cultural context as other female choral performances and engages in a complex way with cult songs, integrating and reworking them as befits its scope, especially since tragic poets frequently opt for female choruses, and indeed choruses comprising young women. Surviving partheneic fragments allow us to examine how authority is constructed by a chorus of real-life parthenoi and how these disquieting associations of virginity in Greek life and fantasy bear upon the performance of young females in real-life ritual, or a group of males posing as young females within the plot of a play.

The only partheneia of any length that survive are Alcman’s fr.1 and fr.3 PMGF and Pindar’s fr.94a S-M. An analysis of these fragments reveals a number of features that seem to be consistently present in partheneic songs, though their degree

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16 E.g., the Amazons, the Danaids or Persephone.
18 All three surviving Aeschylean maiden choruses, namely Suppliants, Seven, Eumenides (for Eumenides, see n.2), the virgins cause a disruption before they are eventually tamed by the end of the play.
19 Not considering Rhesus, which I consider as a non-Euripidean (for the debate, see Liapis 2012, pp.lxiv-lxxv and Fries 2014, 22-47). Notably Philoctetes has a clear military theme and features a chorus of sailors.
20 Foley 2003, appendix; Castellani 1989, 1-3.
21 See D’Alessio 1994, 119-120, for an insightful list of the sort of statements a maiden chorus can make.
23 Most scholars do not accept 94b as a partheneion (Klinck 2001, 276; contra Lehnus 1979, 79-80; 1984, 89, n.52).
may vary between different works. The first element, prominent in both Alcmanic
*partheneia*, is a degree of sensuality not only in the description of the performing
virgins, but also throughout the text. Given that the performers are female members
of the community on the cusp of marriage, it is hard to believe that the harmony of
their movement and appeal of the voice are simple offerings of aesthetic pleasure
and not also displays of their readiness to engage with male members of the
community and thus fulfill their designated social role. Of course, the sensuality in
Alcman’s poems does not equal sexuality. For the Greeks, the harmony of a beautiful
body had an ethical and social dimension as well.

Pindar’s *daphnephorikon* is overall less playful than Alcman’s, with less emphasis on the physical appearance of the performers. This may come down to
artistic style or performative occasion, where part, or all, of the officiates were male,
restricting the degree of ‘sensual’ emphasis that would be appropriate. Still, Pindar’s
poem is also punctuated by grammatical forms that reveal the gender of the
performers and their maiden nature is repeatedly stressed (1-2, 12), with details such
as the ‘tender hands’ and ‘girdled dress’ (94b.6-7) attracting attention to the physical
aspect of the performers and appealing to the senses.

A second point of interest is the explicit reference of the maidens to their
virginal status and the conventions of speech society expects from a *parthenos*:

\[
\text{ἐ̱μὲ δὲ πρέπει}
\text{παρθενήϊα μὲν φονεῖν}
\text{γλώσσα τε λέγεσθαι· (Pind. fr.94b.34S-M)}^{32}
\]

Despite what may seem like a statement that aims to confine the singing girls
into singing only what is proper, the range of themes the maidens go on to discuss

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24 I use the word interchangeably with ‘maiden’ or the Greek *parthenos*.
25 For the historicity of the named girls, see Clark 1996, 143n.2.
26 ‘these events are sensually intense in that they stimulate aural, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic senses’ (Clark 1996, 145).
27 Luginbill (2009, 28 with n.1) and Cowan (1990, 199-228) on girls learning what is to be female.
28 Ferrari 2008 seems to be drawing on that idea when she argues that the maidens in Alcman’s *partheneion* were impersonating heavenly bodies, reflecting the harmony of the heavenly *kosmos*, and thus calling for order and harmony in their own community.
29 According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Dem*.39.42) Pindar’s *partheneia* differ from his other works, but are still noble and dignified as the rest of Pindar’s poetry.
differs little from what is usually included in Pindar’s epinician poetry. This leads one to read the verses as a rhetorical strategy: by referring to their virginal status and their awareness of it, the maidens generate moral authority, which reflects or sustains the role they undertake for the community and reinforces their ethical pronouncements.

Another feature that implicitly grants an authoritative tone to the song is the very fact that a partheneic chorus is given the authority to praise (and potentially blame) individual members of the community. In Pindar’s *daphnephorikon* the community is entrusting a mechanism of social control, praise in this case, to a chorus of maidens. The praise poetry *par excellence*, epinician poetry, is normally performed by men. But this function is here extended to maidens, who address their praise to a prominent male member of the community.

Finally, Bacchylides 13, while not a *partheneion*, provides a parallel in introducing unexpectedly a lengthy description of the performance and words of a maiden chorus. While praising Aegina, the male chorus envisages a chorus of *parthenoi* who also praise Aegina, and in the course of the poem the two choruses merge in many instances. The *parthenoi* here ‘objectify’ the praise, as expressed not by the poet, but by a third person. In other words, the maiden chorus is employed to grant authority to a male chorus. It is telling for a Greek’s perception of the female civic voice that, of all possible choruses, Bacchylides opts for a chorus of maidens.

Choral projection in an epinician context is always an ‘optimistic validating rhetorical strategy,’ and in both Pindar and Bacchylides it is predominantly done through maiden choruses, either named mythic groups or unnamed groups of maidens. This should warn one against reading too much into the young age and the modest and submissive attitude and the feminine nature of any female chorus.

While lyric poetry occasionally comments on perceived negative sides of the female, it never allows these features to be enacted in song and dance. On the other hand, ideas and institutions that form the real-life background of the performance in

33 ‘Their [the maidens’] praising function in Pind. *Parth.* II 50-65 is in many respects similar to that of the ‘poet’ in the victory odes’ (D’Alessio 1994, 120).
34 Aioladas, whose grandson, Agasicles, must have been the *daphnephoros* (Calame 1994/5, 139).
35 In what Henrichs’ has called ‘choral projection’ in tragedy (1994/5, 56).
36 Maehler 1982, 265.
38 Power 2000, 70.
39 Power 2000, 68.
lyric poetry are thematised by tragedy in an overt and potentially subversive way. A lyric *hymenaios*, for example, may refer to the sides of the marriage that are sources of fear or discomfort for the female. But tragedy goes one step further with plays such as Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* which dramatizes, among other things, the Greek belief that marriage is the way to tame women, and presents women physically running away from the men who are coming after them. While the elements of fear and hesitation, coercion or even violence are present in the *epithalamion*, the fictive nature of the tragic plot allows them to be presented as (potential) action. In non-dramatic lyric any subversive statements are de-validated by the performance itself, which celebrates the very institution that the song ‘questions’. While non-dramatic lyric performances create the civic norm and smooth out tensions,\(^{40}\) through the medium of fictionality and representation tragedy is at liberty to subvert and negotiate.\(^{41}\)

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\(^{40}\) Kurke (1991, 107) calls epinician poetry ‘the antitype to tragedy’.  
\(^{41}\) Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1972; cf. Segal 1981, 239.
B. Seven against Thebes

Seven against Thebes is our second earliest surviving Aeschylean play, and one of the few that we know with certainty to have been part of a tetralogy. The didaskalia that survives on a fragmentary papyrus confirms that the tragedy was produced in 467BC together with Laius as the first play of the trilogy and Oedipus as the middle one. As the last play of the trilogy, Seven begins at the critical moment before the clash between the attacking Argive army led by Polynices and the Theban army presided by his brother Eteocles, the king of Thebes. The play is set in the beleaguered city of Thebes, and features an all-Theban cast and a female Theban chorus, thus being centred on the perspective of those under siege.

i. Male control: setting the scene

The play starts with a monologue by Eteocles, addressed to the ‘citizens of Thebes’ (1). A monologue at the opening of a play is common in the three tragedians, including Aeschylus. Out of the six surviving Aeschylean tragedies, two start with a part given to the chorus (marching anapaests in Persians, marching anapaests followed by a long strophic song in Suppliants). The rest (all three plays of the Oresteia, and Seven) start with a monologue. At the start of each monologue of the three plays of the Oresteia there is a prayer: the guard on the roof of the house of the Atreidai in Agamemnon is asking that the gods relieve him of his troubles (1-21) before he catches sight of, and turns to a salutation of, the light that signals the fall of Troy (22). Orestes prays at the tomb of Agamemnon in Choephori and calls on Hermes and
his father to help him upon his return to Argos (1-9), and, when he notices the entering chorus, he speculates on their identity (10-21). Finally, the Pythia in *Eumenides* opens the play with a prayer to deities that are significant for the Delphic oracle (1-33) and retreats into the oracle to continue with her duties, until she is interrupted by the horrific sight of the Furies asleep in the temple (34ff.). The three monologues are, therefore, structurally similar in that they start with a prayer, and, once the speaking character concludes the prayer, a visual stimulus triggers a second part, which the actor delivers alone on the empty stage.

Unlike these cases, the prologue of *Seven* is not a soliloquy or a prayer. Eteocles opens the play with a public speech explicitly addressed to the Theban citizens (Κάδμου πολίται 1). Given the imminent attack of the Argive army, the harangue fits the military context and succinctly sets the scene by introducing a feeling of martial urgency. It also maps onto real-life (and literary) Greek war experience in a combination of battle exhortation and political speech.

However, there is a striking peculiarity of usage in the present opening. In surviving tragedy the address πολίται is invariably delivered to (male) citizens who form the chorus of the play and are present at that stage, and is frequently followed by a response from the chorus in question. As we shall see, the identity and presentation of Eteocles’ addressees is important for our view of the chorus and has long been debated. An early suggestion had Eteocles’ character addressing the citizens already at hand, that is, the theatre audience. This proposition has a superficially appealing economy in offering an addressee who is already present. It relies, however, on the possibility of audience address, a phenomenon for which there is no

48 For the prologue of *Choephoroi*, see p.89.
49 See pp.198f.
50 For battle exhortations in lyric and Homer, see Latacz 1977; for exhortations in historiography and the relation to real-life practice, see Hansen 1993.
51 See Soph. OT 512, Ant.806, OC 1579; Eur. Heracl.826 (ξυμπολίται). In most cases the full address is ἄνδρες πολίται. The same applies to Aeschylus (Ag.855), with the exception of Sept.253 where the word is used for the gods (θεοὶ πολίται). Mastronarde (1994, 1758-63n.) rightly dismisses Eur. Phoen.1758 as interpolation. Interestingly enough, the word ‘citizen’ is not used in *Persians* (reflecting a Greek reluctance to apply the term to barbarians?).
52 With the exception of *Agamemnon*, in all instances noted in the previous note the chorus is the first to speak after a character addresses them.
53 It is, however, far from impossible for a chorus or character to address someone who is not onstage: the choral address to Clytemestra in Ag.84 is a case in point for the necessity both to inspect more closely such cases, and to keep an open mind about the possibilities in Greek theatre (see Taplin 1977).
certain or probable instance in extant tragedy and which is rightly rejected as a practice in Greek tragedy by scholars in this and other cases.\textsuperscript{54} The alternative of expecting the audience simply to imagine a group of citizens on the empty stage\textsuperscript{55} has no parallels in surviving tragedy and has found little support from scholars, since it offers no obvious theatrical advantages other than the positive impact on the choregus’ bill.

The solution most favoured by scholars is the presence of a group of mutes onstage to represent the Theban citizens.\textsuperscript{56} The mute crowd is a well-attested theatrical practice\textsuperscript{57} and, if used in this play, it would successfully contrast the subsequent entry of the chorus and visualize the major antitheses of the play (female vs. male, emotion vs. logic, disruption vs. norm). For the ancient spectator a look at the orchestra would quickly dissipate any doubt as to the addressee, especially if a group of mutes was already present.\textsuperscript{58}

It would have been possible for Aeschylus to construct a speech where Eteocles expounds the dramatic situation in a soliloquy, a solitary prayer to the gods, or an address to the chorus. However, by addressing instead a group of respectful, obedient citizens who are about to fight to defend their city, Aeschylus is constructing the antithesis that will dominate the first part of the play between the measured, disciplined, logical male and the disruptively frightened female. He also postpones the entrance of the chorus and builds up momentum for the chorus to break into the orchestra, panicky, loud and disruptive, contrasting the audience of the king’s composed address, obedient and calm in its silence. Eteocles is thus able to reveal the setting of the play with his address to the ‘citizens of Thebes’ (1), which allows the reference to the siege (22–23) and the enemy (28) to be postponed until the latter part of his speech.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{54} See in particular Bain 1975, 22n.1 and Taplin 1977, 129ff..
\textsuperscript{55} A position hesitantly defended by Ieranò 2002, 77.
\textsuperscript{57} Cf. the attendants that accompany characters of high social status in tragedy (Taplin 1977, 79-80); also, more ‘significant’ mute groups, such as the jurors in Iphigenia (see Taplin 1977, 390; cf. p.156)
\textsuperscript{58} It is a tempting thought that Aeschylus may have left the orchestra empty, thus triggering the association of the address πολίτευμα with a male chorus yet to enter. The subsequent parodos of the panicky female chorus would then function as a surprising spectacle. But, as noted above, arguments weigh in favour of a group of mutes.
\textsuperscript{59} The relatively sparse information may be also due to the place of the play in the trilogy. The previous play(s) may have already prepared the audience for the situation. Cf. the particularly rich opening of Agamemnon or the specific details given in the prologue of Persians or Suppliants (assuming that it is
The tone of the introductory part of the play is, therefore, defined by Eteocles’ speech and the choice of citizens as his audience. The formal structure of the king’s speech, with its appropriation of rhetorical techniques, underscores the public occasion. The group listens silently, and exits quietly to carry out his instructions (30ff.). Such respectful and unquestioning obedience exemplifies what seems to be the ideal relationship between a leader and his subjects, and will prove relevant when later in the play the chorus will clash with the king and subsequently make their peace with him.

In this way, Aeschylus constructs an opening scene where the tone is calm and ordered. The lack of any objection or even reply enhances this effect. A public speech just before a battle, in front of an audience that seems in its silence to consent, leaves the spectators with the impression that Eteocles is directing the preparations for battle with firm discipline.

We catch the first glimpse of future troubles when the scout enters with a report from the front (39). The scout treats the king respectfully (note his address ἐφάρμοστε Καδμείων ἄναξ 39), yet his description reveals a certain emotional agitation and stress. Having concluded a narrative on the vows of revenge exchanged by the Argive leaders (42-51), the scout remarks that ‘no words of pity passed their lips’ (51) (transl. Sommerstein). He dwells on their lion-like, steel-hearted war spirit and describes in pictorial detail the hostile army (39-68). The dust raised by the movement of the

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60 Hutchinson 1985, 42. For the structure of Eteocles’ speech see also Thalmann 1978, 86-87.
61 Taplin 1977, 136-7 (with references to previous scholars who have the chorus exit later); Sommerstein 2008, 157; Hutchinson (1985, 48) seems to favour an exit at 38.
62 In just under ten lines, through the description of a sacrifice, he paints a vivid picture of the Argive leaders, focusing on the visceral determination of the Argives to win or die trying: [...] θοῦριοι λοχαγέται, / ταυροφοραγοῦντες ἐς μελάνδετον σάκος/ καὶ θεογένοις χερσὶ ταυρείου φόνου, / Ἀρη τ’, ἔνυις καὶ φιλαίματον Φόβοι, ὀφαλμώστησαν ἡ πόλει κατασκαφὰς / δέντες λείποντες στῶν Καδμείων βα/ ἢ γην θεογένεις τὴν ὀρφάσσειν φόνοι, / μενμεῖα θ’ αὐτῶν τοῖς τεκτόσιν ἐς δόμους/ πρὸς ἄγαμ’ Ἀδράστου χερσὶν ἔστεφον, δάκρυ λείβοντες (42-51) This description was famous already in antiquity (Hutchinson 1985, ad loc.). Modern scholars are similarly struck both by its solemnity and its gory nature (Torrance 2007, 48-51; cf. Thalmann 1978, 52 and for the theme of blood the oath introduces (ibid.50-1).
approaching army and the foam dripping from the horses’ mouth, all give a picture of seemingly overwhelming force and bring home the urgency of the situation.

The sense of danger is enhanced by Eteocles’ prayer on the scout’s exit. While concluding a scene with a prayer is not uncommon, inclusive invocations to the gods, such as the one with which Eteocles begins his prayer, are usually found at the end of a prayer. This slightly contra-normative start will be followed by the first, albeit indirect, reference to the disturbing familial history of Oedipus. Unsurprisingly, Eteocles calls onto the gods to protect his city, but the tone of the prayer is disturbing:

μή μοι πόλιν γε προμνόθεν πανώλεθρον
ἐκθαμνίσῃτε δηάλωτον, Ἑλλάδος
φθόγγον χέουσαν, καὶ δόμους ἐφεστίους·
ἐλευθέραν δὲ γήν τε καὶ Κάδμου πόλιν
ζεύγλῃσι δουλίῃσι μήποτε σχεθεῖν·
γένεσθε δ' ἀλκή· ξυνὰ δ' ἐλπίζω λέγειν·
(71-76)

The words that dominate the prayer are words of enslavement and destruction. The imminent nature of the danger is underscored in the way the king emphasizes the alternative that needs to be avoided. In that respect, this, second, monologue of Eteocles resembles other Aeschylean monologues used to open a play. Formally it is a prayer, part of a normal procedure in preparation for war. At the same time, however, it is the first instance when we will see Eteocles become affected by the situation, a reaction which already brings the king slightly closer to the panicky maidens of the parodos.

ii. The entrance of the women

Despite the flashes of danger and emotion that the scout and Eteocles offered so far, the atmosphere of a controlled and orderly public occasion has been maintained in the first part of the play. This is abruptly interrupted by the entrance of the chorus, a group of panicky Theban females who break onto the orchestra. The parodos is very

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63 ἐγγὺς γὰρ ἤδη πάνοπλος Ἀργείων στρατὸς/ χωρεί, καὶ πεδία δ' ἀργηστής ἀροθές/ χραίνει σταλαγμοῖς ἵππικῶν ἐκ πλευμῶν (59-61).
64 Hutchinson 1985, ad loc.
unusual in surviving tragedy in its disruptive and loud nature and contrasts strongly the controlled calmness of the opening part of the play, coming close only to the parodos, and opening part overall, of Eumenides.

The very first words of the maidens, the very first choral words of the play, are an emphatic expression of female panic:

\[ \text{θρεύματα φοβερά μεγάλ' άχη} \]
I cry aloud for great, terrible sufferings (78)

\( \text{Θρεύμα} \) carries connotations of discordant noise, meaning ‘to shriek’, ‘to cry aloud’, and is invariably used in tragedy to express severe distress. It is also a highly gendered word, used by women only. Suddenly, the empty space on which Eteocles uttered the composed iambics of his prayer is filled with emotion, and indeed negative emotion. Within a couple of lines, the tone of the play turns loud, panicky, and disruptive, and it will remain so for the next thirty lines.

The syntax of the first part of the parodos is crisp and uncomplicated, consisting in asyndeta and short sentences (brief for Aeschylean standards and clearly structured with a very basic syntax), while a couple of rhetorical questions express the chorus’ agony about their future fate. The staccato effect is enhanced by the metre, which is dochmiac, and indeed resolved dochmiacs unmixed with other metres until line 107, with only three metrically different lines: 100, 103, 106. Dochmiacs are not a rare metre in Greek tragedy, but it is a metre associated in all three tragedians with strong emotions, both positive (joy, triumph) and, more often, negative (panic, fear, horror, horror, horror).

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66 For sounds in Seven, see Ieranò 1999.
68 See previous note and Lupaş-Petre 1981, ad loc.; Edmunds 2002, 106; LSJ, s.v. θρέομαι (for the Ionic form used here, see Hutchinson 1985, ad loc.).
69 In the opening lyric part only one sentence exceeds two verses (90-92). In the first strophe sentences are slightly longer, but remain short for Aeschylean standards. In the opening of the parodos of Agamemnon, grammatical sentences can extend over ten verses, e.g. 40-54, though that parodos is admittedly particularly elaborate. Other Aeschylean choruses start off using more complicated syntax too (cf. Suppliants or Persians).
70 89-105 are successive one- or two-line questions, punctuated only by two short phrases expressing panic (97 ἰώ, μάκαρες εὐδοξοί/ σκεπάζει βρέτων ἔχοι αὐξάνει, 103 κτυπών δέδοικα πάταγος οὐχ ἕνος δορός).
despair), although is not always as urgent. The song is astrophic at least until 108. The dochmiacs in this passage match the fear and agony expressed in every way by the chorus. The choice of the specific rhythm would have had implications for the staging of the parodos in that it must have been reflected in agitated dancing.

It has been suggested that the parodos of the chorus may have been staged as a scattered entry. This suggestion is attractive, since it would match the agitated rhythm of the choral lines and visualize the panic expressed by the chorus. Despite the appeal of the suggestion, however, sporaden entries, where the chorus members enter one by one, or in smaller, disorderly groups, rather than in formation, are not attested with certainty in surviving tragedy. It is, therefore, imperative to examine whether evidence in support of such an entry can be extracted from the text, and, if yes, what the dramaturgic effect of such an entrance would be.

The case for a scattered entry has been argued for the entrance of the chorus in Eumenides. Though this does not establish the scattered entry as a widespread practice, it highlights the possibility that it could be used to achieve certain effects. The text of the parodos in Seven emphasizes that the chorus is terrified, and Eteocles is repulsed by their movement and voices when he enters (181ff.). The preference for a metre other than the recitative anapaests (frequently employed by Aeschylus for his parodoi) also possibly points to the potential for heightened emotion. The astrophic form of the song further enhances this, and, if the chorus-members broke into the orchestra one by one, this would create both an impressive initial spectacle, and more

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71 Hutchinson (1985, ad loc.) notes that the metre can denote ‘wild emotion’; the tone of dochmiacs is ‘always urgent or emotional’ (West 1987, 56). Dale (1968, 110) notes that dochmiacs are used sometimes in earlier Aeschylean plays ‘like any other metre for appeal or reflection’, but in her metrical analysis of the choral part in tragedy it is difficult to trace this nature of the metre, and she herself elsewhere recognizes its exceptional nature (Dale 1969, 254-5).
72 Thus Thalmann 1978, 87; or even until 149 (Taplin 1977, 142) or 150 (Hutchinson 1985, ad loc.). In Persians, Suppliant and Agamemnon the chorus enters in marching anapaests, but Persians and Suppliant lack a prologue. From the plays that have a prologue, in Choephoroi the chorus enters in iambics (punctuated with other metres including a few dochmiacs towards the end of the parodos).
73 Ley 2007, 139 (for the association of dochmiacs with disturbed dance movements). See also Webster 1970, 113-5.
74 Mesk 1934, with references to earlier works including Wilamowitz. See also Taplin 1977, 141f.; Lupaş-Petre 1981, 42; Scott 1984, 160; Fletcher 2007, 29.
75 See pp.207f.
76 θρέμματι οὐκ ἀναστικέα (182); βρέτῃ πεσούσας πρὸς πολιοισσχόν θεών/ αὐείν, λακάζειν, σωφρόνων μισήμαται (185-6); τάστε διαδρόμους φυγάς (191).
emphasis on the taming of the chorus as the play proceeds. In other words, one can trace elements that could support a sporaden entry.

On the other hand, ancient Greek choruses move and sing, for most of the time, in unison and this by no means restricts their potential to express a wide range of emotions. A fracturing of the chorus is not a prerequisite for rendering panic or confusion. A larger number of people all entering the orchestra in synchronized agitated dancing would produce the same effect as successfully. One should keep in mind here the audience’s familiarity with choral practice and therefore its heightened receptivity in translating rhythm, movement and song into the respective emotion, even if that is given in a schematized or stylized manner.

The choral utterances upon entry are a series of staccato sentences which could, but need not, be divided between individual members. However, the text here and later on does give any indication of a tendency of the maidens of the chorus to ‘split’. We are missing, I believe, the compelling evidence of a sporaden entry that one finds in Eumenides. Rather, the chorus are acting in unison, and are consistently treated as a uniform body. In fact, a unified chorus may itself offer certain advantages. As a group the chorus would generate an antithesis between them as women and Eteocles, or men in general, and they would also contrast strongly with the silent, immobile body of citizens that constituted Eteocles’ audience at the beginning of the play.

In this first part of the play, Aeschylus has opted for a relatively composed and tranquil opening, with little to alarm the audience other than their foreknowledge of the myth suddenly turns into panic and chaos. As in Eumenides, here, too, the ‘culprit’ is the chorus, though the two cases are both similar and distinct: in Eumenides, the chorus is fearsome, here it is fearful. In both cases, however, it is anxiety about one’s own future that triggers the outburst of emotion and provokes a major character in the play to attempt to discipline the chorus (Eteocles here, Apollo in Eumenides).

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77 The parallels of Suppliants and Eumenides as described by Fletcher (2007, 31) could offer some support for this alternative: the Danaids in Suppliants, ‘enter the drama in an orderly manner because they are under his [their father’s] supervision’; cf. Trieschnigg 2009, 41.

78 While in Eumenides the possibility of a sporaden entry is anticipated by the Erinyes waking up one another. Notice also the change of subject from one line to the next (140ff. ἔγειρ', ἔγειρε καὶ σὺ τίνδ', ἕγω δὲ σέ./ εὐθείως ἀνίστω, κἀπολακτίσας ὑπνον).
The prologue thus creates expectations of male order and control, which are subverted when the female chorus enters. The result is a complex dramatic effect. The juxtaposition of two scenes that contrast so sharply in mood and rhythm creates an instantly gratifying variation of spectacle and at the same time defines early in the play the emotional spectrum of the tragedy. Contrasting moods and reactions to the events of the plot will prove to be central to this otherwise ‘static’ play, and the tone for this is set already at the beginning. In this sense, Aeschylus is surprising us by creating misleading expectations, but is also preparing us for what will follow by introducing the main themes of the play.

At the same time, the contrast between the two reactions to war is presented in highly gendered terms, and thus introduces one of the thematic axes of the play, namely gender and the antitheses that ensue from the social understanding of gender roles. As stressed in the introduction of this chapter, the male vs. female antithesis is quintessential to the Greek understanding of the world and as such it forms the backdrop of many tragedies. In fact, one cannot think of a single surviving Aeschylean tragedy where this theme is not pertinent. All the more so in a trilogy about the family of Oedipus. The chorus at the beginning of the play may be presented as disrupting civic peace, but the trilogy as a whole is about distorted relations between the sexes and the consequent disturbance of social gender roles: a woman’s destination in life is to have children, but not bear the children of her own son, as Jocasta does. A man must defend the city from external danger, as Oedipus does by killing the Sphinx, and defend his personal safety and honour, as Oedipus attempts to do by killing Laius, but the benefits become toxic when he secures his social status by killing his own father.

The members of Laius’ family, by attempting to carry out the roles that society has assigned to them according to their gender, end up breaching those very rules. Seven, as the third play of the trilogy, opens at the climactic moment when the problems of the oikos and the problems of the polis merge, with war as their final articulation.

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79 Cf. the reversal of roles later in the play with the chorus advising the demented Eteocles (see pp.56-60).
81 For a structuralist analysis of the play and the constant tension between polis and family see Zeitlin 1982, esp. ch.1.
iii. Managing gender identity

We have analyzed above the implications of the gender of the chorus, but what makes this chorus so clearly ‘female’? Though the gender of the chorus is a constant, in that it is a feature that does not change in the course of a play and remains clearly visible in the mask and costumes of the dancers throughout the performance,\(^\text{82}\) it can still be verbally and visually manipulated in the course of the play, and thus become more or less prominent at any given moment in the plot, or in any play as a whole. Moreover, gender is a cluster of features, roles and possibilities, rather than a single feature. As a result, different facets of gender can emerge at different points in a tragedy. It is, therefore, worth considering if and how the playwright articulates the gender of a female chorus in each case.

The chorus of *Seven against Thebes* is a group of local, free maidens.\(^\text{83}\) Costume would designate them as free,\(^\text{84}\) but their status is also implied in their supplicating to the gods to avert their enslavement if their city falls (110-1). Since costumes would have made it clear that this is not a chorus of foreigners, one should assume, according to common dramatic technique, that a Greek chorus in a Greek city is local, unless one is invited to do otherwise by the text.\(^\text{85}\) Eteocles, although annoyed by their panic-stricken reaction, does not seem at any point to be puzzled or surprised by their presence, and the chorus seems to identify its own fate with that of the city.\(^\text{86}\) When the chorus entered, terrified by the prospect of an attack, with the intention of supplicating the gods,\(^\text{87}\) their gender would be immediately evident to the audience on first sight of the dancers not only by their costumes and masks, but also by their voices and movements.\(^\text{88}\) However, the chorus do not draw attention to their gender and no grammatical indication of the gender of the *choreutai* occurs for some twenty lines.\(^\text{89}\)

\(^{82}\) See pp.26f. for gender as a ‘permanent’ feature.
\(^{83}\) For the virginal nature of the chorus see pp.53 and 59f.
\(^{84}\) For the anxieties surrounding clothes as an indicator of status (including onstage), see Wyles 2011, 103.
\(^{85}\) Contrast the self-presentation of the dislocated free women of Euripides’ *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, 164ff.
\(^{86}\) Cf. the (suspect) ἐγὼ <πάτρια> προσπέσω/ βρέτη δαμόνων (95-6) and 156 τί πόλις ἁμι πάσχει, τί γενήσεται; Though slaves could identify with the city or the household of their master, see, e.g. the chorus of *Choephoroi* who support the legal heir of the Atreidai.
\(^{87}\) For the placing of the statues and the staging at this point, see Thalmann 1978, 88-9.
\(^{88}\) Foley 2003, 5-6.
\(^{89}\) But see above for θρεῖμαι (78), a straightforwardly ‘female’ word, p.45.
In other respects, too, the text is sparing in information about them. The chorus has not been announced before its entrance, and there is no apparent reason for their entrance.\footnote{Taplin 1977, 63-4 and 198f.} Unannounced choral entrances are not uncommon in Aeschylus: ‘the chorus enters because it is the chorus’.\footnote{Taplin 1977, 67-8.} However, the chorus often explain their presence, even if briefly. Unlike the present chorus, other Aeschylean choruses offer clear explanations of their role and the occasion that brought them in, as in Persians (1-15), Suppliants (1-18), Choepori (22-31), and Agamemnon (punctuating the anapaestic part of the parodos, 40-121).\footnote{So does also the chorus of Prometheus Bound 128-135 (see p.228).}

The chorus will eventually ‘present’ themselves at the start of the strophic part of their song,\footnote{At 109ff., though there, too, their self-references are not extensive, see below p.53.} but initially Aeschylus strategically withholding information. At this stage, the chorus enters in agitated dancing, out of control, and its intentions, function and identity are lost in a storm of emotion. This absence of verbal articulation of key attributes has a double effect. First, the emphasis is thrown firmly on to the visual aspect of their entry rather than simply being encoded in their words. Second, I argue, it creates a degree of indeterminacy which allows the various features (age, sex, marital status) of the choral dramatic identity to be manipulated in a flexible way in the course of the play to a degree that would not be possible if they were too rigidly defined upon their first entry. This is not to underestimate the visual potency of costume that would communicate clearly to the audience the main elements of the choral identity (e.g. different hairstyle for a younger or a mature woman, and/or grey hair for an elderly one).\footnote{Halliwell 1993; Marshall 1999.} Nor should one, however, overlook the fact that tragedy is a genre that rests on the combined effect of word and image, for reasons partly also related to practical issues, that is, the need to be heard and seen in a large open air theatre without a sound system or artificial lighting in place to direct the audience’s attention at will.\footnote{Cf. Marshall 1999, 188; also his remark that ‘this is a world before corrective lenses and for many viewing at a distance would be difficult’ (199n.32). One should add the lack of artificial lighting, which in today’s theatre plays a far greater role than we often realize in ‘explaining’ things for us even when used in an inconspicuous manner.}
iv. Maidenly Emotions

As mentioned above, the very first utterance of the chorus was a self-confessed female ‘shriek’. Indeed, logic and order disappear the very moment a large group of females enters out of control. That this is not putting it too strongly is shown both by the construction and content of the parodos itself as analyzed above, and by Eteocles’ reaction to this, his tirade against women.

The chorus’ conduct provokes an unusually strong reaction from Eteocles, and this is underscored by the way tragic conventions are handled in this part of the play. Eteocles’ reaction to the choral song, irrespective of any view we take on its validity, is very unusual in formal terms: as it has been rightly observed, the character who speaks right after a choral song tends to ignore the choral song that preceded or to acknowledge it with a perfunctory, brief transitional phrase. Eteocles’ reception of the choral song is far from this generic ‘indifference’. The king finds the panicky maidens disturbing and inappropriately emotional, and embarks on a sustained attempt to discipline them.

What is it that provokes such a strong reaction from Eteocles? A sense of urgency dominated the play from the very beginning, as befits a play set in a city under siege. Both Eteocles and the scout, the two characters that speak before the parodos, recognize the state of affairs as one that could potentially cause fear. At the same time, however, the situation is seen as one that calls for controlled and confident action and Eteocles and the scout speak about plans, determination, and the grounds for hope. Unlike the maidens of the chorus, they are planning and directing the future.

This is exactly what changes with the entrance of the chorus. From the very start the choral utterances are a sustained expression of fear. Fear has been a possibility held at bay through careful planning and strong male control. Now emotion has materialized before the eyes of the audience. The chorus is both unwilling and unable to master the sort of control that Eteocles exercised so far. Their reaction is essentially a centrifugal response to the common threat which ultimately focuses on the individual

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96 p.45.
97 See Foley 2001, 47n.96 for Aeschylus depicting Eteocles’ reaction as extreme.
98 Hutchinson 1985, ad loc., who also points out the similarly abusive Apollo after the parodos in Eumenides.
and dramatizes potential disintegration. The female chorus is not viewing war in its larger context as a means of saving the city, but focus on the potential personal and familial consequences.  

And in doing so, they are displaying what is perceived by the Greeks as a highly gendered attitude to fear, as we will see in the following pages.

First, the kind of fear the maidens of the chorus are expressing is a very narrowly focused concern. Their city is under siege and a defeat would bring with it the total destruction of Thebes, the enslavement of the population, and the fall of males at battle. However, all these considerations seem to rank second for the Theban maidens, who are primarily concerned with their own fate if Thebes is captured. While for the male characters defeat equals capturing of the city, for the Theban maidens slavery equals enslavement of themselves. That does not come as a surprise, since women are in war the victims _par excellence_, in that they experience the full negative effect of war, while they remain throughout unable to (try to) control the outcome of it. All women can do is wait passively to discover – and experience – how the decisions of males will turn out.

Already from the _Iliad_ the Greeks tend to view the effects of war through the female, and regard non-combatants as the quintessential victims of war, who suffer the full horrors of war, as they are condemned to a life of servitude. This tendency is also displayed in tragedy: male choruses invariably mention non-combatants, mainly females, when they speak of war (cf. the Persian councillors in _Persians_ 537-547, 580-583; or the Argive elders in _Agamemnon_, who are non-combatants themselves). Expressing concern about females suffering at war is perhaps also, on the part of males, a way of handling and exploring the trauma that war is causing on themselves. Female choruses, on the other hand, and their safety at war relies

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99 For the Greeks, a woman’s place is inside (the house and the city), in Eteocles’ words μέλει γὰρ ἀνδρί—μὴ γυνὴ βουλευέτω—τὰξιωθεὶν ἐνδον δ’ ὀσόν μὴ βλάπτην τὸί (200-201). For the subtle way in which Aeschylus’ treats the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ in the play, including as source of danger and/or place resolution, see Thalmann 1978, 38-42. The _oikos_-centred side of the female will be exploited later in the play when the women will admonish Eteocles in a motherly tone (p.59).
101 See p.144.
102 Aesch. Ag.429-436.
103 Similarly with the consequences of defeat on barbarians, cf. pp.147 for _Persians_. For war trauma in ancient Greece, see Meineck and Konstan 2014.
completely on the males, and along those lines the chorus of Seven sees the male combatants as the means of preserving their own safety.

v. Female Rituals

While the maidens of the chorus threaten civic order through their expression of excessive fear, they also display a deep awareness of their designated social role, that is, their right, and duty, to perform religious rituals. In the first choral self-references the chorus refer to themselves as a company of maidens supplicating the gods to save their city from the enemies:

\[
\text{idete parthenon} \\
\text{ikéson loxon doulosúnas úpe} (110-111)
\]

and

\[
\text{klúete parthenon klúete pandíkas} \\
\text{xeióstónous litás} (170-1)
\]

These are also the only two explicit references to the chorus’ virginal status, along an indirect one in lines 454-5 πωλυκῶν θ’/ἐδωλίων <μ> ύπερκόταρο/ δοφί ποτ’ ἐκλαπάξαι. The word parthenoi is in both instances combined with words related to supplication (ikéson loxon and litás): the chorus define themselves as virgins engaged in the ritual of supplication to the gods.

In the parados, therefore, despite the confused and emotional nature of the scene, the chorus carries out a typically female, socially sanctioned, function, that is, in war they pray to the gods on the acropolis. There is a specific intertext which would perhaps present itself to a large part of the Greek audience, Iliad 6.269ff. The allusion to a paradigmatic text highlights, as shown below, their aberrant behaviour, while maintaining the potential for authority. Things are happening in the Iliad in a different manner, and the context is different too. Hector turns down Hecuba’s suggestion to make libations to Zeus and suggests in turn that Hecuba gather the old

104 Foley 1981, 160; this is the only ‘public’ role allowed to a woman at war (Foley 1981, 161); Easterling 1987, 15.
women and offer sacrifices to Athena so that the goddess shows mercy to the Trojans. Control of the process is then left to the male over completely obedient females, who conform immediately to his wishes. The ritual in Homer is properly structured, which generates a sense of order.\textsuperscript{105} The \textit{Iliad} provides the norm against which the abnormality of the present situation must be gauged. Hector and Eteocles are partly similar in their insistence to go to their death despite warnings against it, though Eteocles is already more transgressive in deciding to fight his own brother. Eventually, Hector will calmly see his determination through, surrounded by his family and community, while Eteocles will lose his self-control, break down, and will need to be admonished by the female chorus once he hears that he will fight his own brother in single combat.\textsuperscript{106} Moreover, Athena in the \textit{Iliad} rejects the women’s appeal (6.311), which potentially creates an element of suspense as to the outcome of the prayer in \textit{Seven}. Troy is after all a city that will be sacked, it is for the Greeks the sacked city \textit{par excellence}, therefore any intertextual dialogue between Thebes and Troy cannot but intensify the atmosphere of fear and panic.\textsuperscript{107}

The intertextual relationship with \textit{Iliad} 6 does not end there. In \textit{Iliad} 6.490ff. Hector asks Andromache to go back to her woman’s tasks, as men must see to the fighting. This is a commonplace, but we can reasonably expect the spectators to have recognised the Iliadic allusion,\textsuperscript{108} given both the previous allusion to the \textit{Iliad} which would have raised the awareness of the audience\textsuperscript{109} and the popularity that the passage seems to have enjoyed.\textsuperscript{110} This is the last time in the \textit{Iliad} that Hector sees his family, and the last time he is seen in the city alive, and we know that Eteocles’ final exit from the stage will also lead to his death. Like Hector in \textit{Iliad} 22, Eteocles will be brought back only to be lamented.\textsuperscript{111} The epic male-female encounters overshadow the dramatic encounter, for those members of the audience who pick up the intertextual gesture. Both will ultimately die for their determination to fight. Both will die in a duel. The difference of course is that Eteocles will die in a fratricidal struggle.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{105} Ieranò 2002, 82 and 83; Bruit-Zaidman 1991, 46. \\
\textsuperscript{106} Zimmermann 2004, 197. See also below, p.59. \\
\textsuperscript{107} Cf. Zimmermann 2004, 196. \\
\textsuperscript{108} ‘Aeschylus probably glances at Hector’s last words to Andromache’ (Hutchinson 1985, 200n.). Also Garner 1990, 25; cf. Lupaş-Petre 1981, 77; Easterling 1987, 15-6; Hutchinson 1985, 77. \\
\textsuperscript{109} Cf. Zimmermann 2004, 195-6. \\
\textsuperscript{110} Cf. the scholiast’s remark τὸ Ὀμηρικὸν παραφράζει (Σ Sept.200a Smith). The familiarity of the audience with the passage seems corroborated by Ar. \textit{Lys.} 519. \\
\textsuperscript{111} For a detailed analysis of allusions that mark the difference from the Homeric parallel see Ieranò 2002 and Zimmerman 2004.
\end{flushright}
Therefore, a tension emerges between the chorus’ ritual role as defined within the drama by its identity as women and the specific way in which they carry out their designated role.\textsuperscript{112}

The tension between ritual norm and ritual reality re-emerges in the third \textit{stasimon} (822-874), where the chorus engages in another ritual act, the lamentation of the dead brothers. At first the chorus are wavering as to how to react. Should they sing a triumphant song for the victory of the Thebans or should they rather lament for the dead princes?\textsuperscript{113}

\begin{center}
πότερον χαίρω κάπολολιξώ
πόλεως ἀσινεὶ † σωτήρι ... ἢ τοὺς μογερούς καὶ δυσδάμονας
ἀτέκνους κλαύσω πολεμάρχους; (825-8)
\end{center}

Their initial inability to decide on a manner of singing (825-831) is stressed again a few lines later (835f. and emphatically with alliteration of the -δ- ἡ δύσορνις δέ ἐστίν παροβάλλω δοφός). This is the last of a series of ‘distorted’ songs: the ‘strange’ prayer of the \textit{parodos}, the first \textit{stasimon} which is half prayer half an imagined narration, and finally this one, before the choral ‘order’ is reinstated in the final lament.\textsuperscript{114}

The final lament is one that conforms far better than the rest of the songs in the play to the norms of its genre. Not only is it a suitable conclusion for the play, but it also ensures that the last song the chorus sings is a fully endorsed female activity. The ritual act of lamentation is one more feature of this chorus that renders its female nature particularly apt, since formal lamentation of the dead is largely left to women in real life in Greece.\textsuperscript{115}

The chorus displayed from the start an inability to carry out its religious tasks in the designated way, and allowed its emotions to take over. This is behaviour as

\textsuperscript{112} For an examination of this tension in the first part of the play see Giordano-Zecharya 2006.
\textsuperscript{113} The chorus’ matter-of-factly way of referring to the lament of both princes provides yet another argument against the authenticity of the final scene, since there is nothing in their words to imply that they intend to deal with the two separately or in a different way.
\textsuperscript{114} The authenticity of the final scene has received considerable attention by scholars (references in Hutchinson 1985, 1005-78n.); for an illuminating discussion, see Taplin 1977, 871ff. My discussion here and in the following pages addresses the final part which is of undisputed authenticity and does not feature Antigone.
\textsuperscript{115} Cf. pp.96ff.
typical for a dramatic chorus as it would be exceptional for a civic one. While in terms of the dramatic plot this is a social failure on the part of the chorus, it is only possible in tragedy due to the ‘mixing up of genres’, a choral feature that is perhaps unique to tragic lyric, or at least very defining of it, namely the duality and fictionality of the occasion.

vi. Women: the polis and the oikos

From our analysis so far, there emerges a twofold image of the chorus. On the one hand, the disruptive maidens of the prologue, who infuriate the king and let their emotions get in the way of proper ritual activity. On the other, a cohesive group of maidens who perform socially approved rituals for the sake of the city and the royal house. It is in their second capacity as a chorus that the maidens capitalize on the connotations of gnomic wisdom and authority that chorality has for the Greeks. These connotations are partly what prepares the audience for the second part of the play, where the chorus appears as a group of calm, authoritative women who admonish Eteocles and finally take on the task of lamenting the dead king and his brother.

Already when Eteocles is assigning the warriors to the seven gates, there is a perceptible change in the attitude of the chorus. After the first ‘Redepaar’, the chorus comments:

τὸν ἁμόν νυν ἀντίπαλον εὐτυχεῖν
θεοὶ δοϊεν, ἡς δικαίως πόλεως
πρόμαχος ὁρνυται τρέμω δ’ αἵματη-
φόρους μόρους ύπερ φίλων
ὀλομένων ἰδέσθαι. (417-421)

Fear is still present, but it is no longer the first, or the sole, response of the chorus. Contrary to their earlier self-focused anxiety, they now ask of the gods to safeguard the warriors fighting to protect them, and introduce a religious and moral tone into their short intervention (θεοί, δικαίως). Their utterances, however, are still

116 Swift 2010, 80.
117 Cf. pp.11f.
punctuated by words that reveal that the reality of war is filtered through their personal preoccupations, and the focus has just begun to shift to a more civic perspective.119

The choral interventions after the rest of the speeches of Eteocles follow a similar pattern of well-wishing for the warriors and their morally and religiously justified fight, with a brief mention of themselves as potential victims and their fear.120 The degree of focus on themselves, the warriors, and the city varies, but Zeus, the gods and the righteousness of the war that the Thebans are fighting feature prominently. With each intervention, the disruptive parodos seems farther removed and the maids ease their way into their normative choral persona. Finally, when Eteocles decides to fight his brother in single combat, the chorus speaks as an authoritative bearer of gnomic wisdom:

μή, φίλτατ' ἀνδρῶν, Οἰδίπου τέκος, γένη
όργην ὡμοίος τῷ κάκιστῷ αὐδώμενῷ
ἀλλ' ἄνδρας Ἀργείοισι Καδμείους ἅλις
ἐς χεῖρας ἐλθεῖν· αἷμα γὰρ καθάρσιον.
ἀνδροῖ' ὁμαίμοιν θάνατος ὧδ' αὐτοκτόνος –
οὐκ ἔστι γῆρας τοῦδε τοῦ μιάσματος. (677-682)

In a couple of lines, the Greek attitude to murder and war, the sacred nature of blood relations and the undying pollution of murdering a kinsman, prudence and arrogance are invoked by the chorus as self-evident truths. And as such they would have been received by the majority of the audience. In the words of the Theban maidens of the chorus, one traces a certain degree of affection towards the king, suggestive of a caring, protective and admonishing attitude associated with a motherly stance. In a rhetorically balanced act, the chorus are gently prompting the king to do the right thing while calling on universal moral principles.

At this point the chorus side for the first time strongly with the city and the king and seem to direct their (now calmer) concern less to themselves and more to the common interest of Thebes and the royal family:

119 Scholars often comment on the dual themes at work in Seven (polis and oikos) and usually speak of a move from the civic to the familial (see e.g. for a good analysis of this through imagery Thalmann 1978, ch.2). Conacher 1996, 39 is right to note the inseparable nature of family and city in the play. I argue that the chorus, as a single entity that represents both with shifting emphasis over the course of the tragedy, is an important medium for communicating these concerns in the play.
120 452-456; 481-485; 521-525; 563-567; 626-630.
δέδοικα δὲ σὺν βασιλεύσι (764-5)
μὴ πόλις δαμασθή;
τι δ’ ἐστι πράγμας νεόκοτον πόλει πλέον; (803)
πότερον χαίρω κἀπολολύξω
σωτήρι πόλεως ἀσινεία,
ἡ τούς μογεροὺς καὶ δυσδαίμονας
†τάτεκνους† κλαύσω πολεμάρχους; (825-8)

For Eteocles the chorus is also no longer a disruptive force, and its words are now treated with the self-evident respect characters usually display towards commonplace choral utterances. The chorus even go so far as to ask the king to obey a group of women (712 πείθου γυναιξί καίπερ οὐ στέργων ὅμως). Significantly, they are now γυναῖκες, women, and not parthenoi. Unlike maiden choruses in lyric the chorus in this play had not claimed that their virginity should impose constraints on their speech and action, but rather expressed their feelings freely and in spite of Eteocles’ strong rejection. Now, they act with authority and are perceived by Eteocles as such.121

The change in the attitude of the chorus and Eteocles is a result of the change in external circumstances and the ensuing change in the feelings of the characters. It has been argued that female gender is an obstacle to authority and that the maidens now achieve a more civic status precisely because they leave aside their affective female nature. This is, however, not doing justice to the complex way in which tragedy views gender. We have already seen above that the virgin female voice can traditionally be a locus of authority while remaining explicitly female,122 and it is, I believe, within this framework that we should view the chorus in Seven: emotionality and lack of control are only one part of the virginal status, and maidens can, and are expected to, perform well-ordered songs, and comment wisely and authoritatively on matters of importance for the community. At the same time, the plot has now, in the second part of the play, turned a public affair (the Argive attack onto Thebes) to a more oikos-centred status (the duel between the two brothers).

In that sense, the increased interest of the chorus is markedly female, since the matter has taken a turn from the political to the more natural relations of the family,

121 The authority of the Danaids in Suppliants also appears to fluctuate in the course of the play (see pp.69-80) though perhaps not as strongly as in Seven.
122 pp.37f.
which is, for the Greeks, the natural jurisdiction of the female. The way in which the maidens address the king is illuminating in that respect, as they call him (φίλον) Οἰδίπου τέκος (677). τέκος is the poetic word for τέκνον and it is used also ‘as a term of endearment from elders to their younger’ (LSJ⁹, s.v.). The address is used again at 203 (in the first, high-tension exchange between chorus and king), while at 686 the chorus asks the king τί μέμονας, τέκνον; The first two cases (203, 677) are slightly less telling since the word τέκος is mainly designating the king as son of his father, which is common practice, though one should notice that he is also ‘dear’. The third one, however, at 686 has a clearly intimate and protective tone, as if an elder is addressing a younger and less experienced person.

How can then a group of frightened maidens address the king in such a way? The address is indeed striking, so much so that it has led some scholars to highly implausible assumptions, such as that the chorus does not consist of young girls, but a mixed group of women of different age,¹²³ or even that from this point on the chorus no longer represents a group of maidens, but a chorus of wise councillors.¹²⁴ The text does not give support to either assumption, unless one is willing to resort to the hypothesis of a lacuna, where the change of chorus would have been indicated. I believe no such measures are necessary, since both kinds of address are easier to explain in the context of the plot.¹²⁵

In the very first exchange between chorus and king, the address indicates that the chorus is well-disposed and respectful towards their king, despite their panic. In the second exchange, on the other hand, after Eteocles has heard that he will have to fight his own brother in single combat, the chorus is dealing with an Eteocles overwhelmed by the circumstances and it now falls to them to admonish the king and indicate the prudent line of action.¹²⁶ This turn underscores the value of the indeterminacy that the poet applied previously to the description of the chorus. Although they acted in the first part of the play as maidens, with any negative

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¹²³ Delcourt 1932, 25-7, accepted by Valakas (1993, 56n.2).
¹²⁴ Solmsen 1937, 201; contra Brown 1977, 316.
¹²⁵ Scholars have long seen the similarities (including in structure) between the two epirrhematic exchanges between the chorus and Eteocles (see Thalmann 1978, 94-5).
¹²⁶ Thalmann 1978, 94. Zimmermann (2005, 53) also mentions the importance of the plot in this case (cf. Zimmermann 2002), as well as the capability of any dramatic chorus to function over and above its dramatic identity.
associations the word may bear for a Greek, they were not exclusively, or too emphatically, described as such in the play. On the contrary, they were always seen by Eteocles as ‘women’.127 This is what allows them now to carry out another ‘female’ function, namely the role of a mother to admonish and strive for the welfare of the family, as well as the generic choral function of the wise, authoritative advisor.

vii. Conclusion

The chorus of Seven against Thebes is an emphatically female tragic chorus. Its gendered qualities are a central preoccupation for a large portion of the drama and are extensively commented upon. The chorus display a proneness to excessive emotionality and socially disruptive behaviour, and in that respect they are contrasted with the male ideal of control and order. At the same time, however, their transgression emerges from their attempt to carry out the roles that society has assigned to them, more or less formally defined: on the one hand, they participate in a variety of religious rituals (including supplication, prayers, and lament); on the other, they appropriate the role of the motherly figure that functions within the constraints of the house, who sees only negative associations in war and values the natural bond of family relationship higher than the political bond of the polis.

They are female in the sense that they do conform largely to a Greek’s understanding of a woman’s place and behaviour in society. They are also dramatically female in that they conform to a tragedian’s understanding of a female figure: boundaries are here more permeable, antitheses more strongly delineated, so that they can be more effectively negotiated and explored. The disturbing female potential has been a matter of interest for lyric poets already. The tragedians, with the license of a fictional dramatic context and fictional characters, have the freedom to explore in greater depth the ramifications of social gender, before they finally seek a socially viable closure for their stories.

127 Cf. 188 τῶν γυναικῶν γένεσις; 195 τοιαύτα τῶν γυναιξις συνναιῶν ἔχουσι; 256 ὦ βασιλεύ, γυναικῶν ὁ πάπας γένος; Until they finally use the term themselves (see previous page). For the modern reader there is perhaps nothing striking in this, since virgins are a subcategory of women. However, that is not the case for Greeks who use the term ‘woman’ (γυνή) to designate the adult married woman.
C. Suppliants

The chorus in *Suppliants* has an unusually prominent role in the play. This led scholars in the past to speculate on an early date of composition, and therefore understand the dominant position of the chorus as a result of the closer temporal proximity of the play to the choral origins of the genre. However, the publication of P.Oxy.2256 fr.3, which mentions Aeschylus as victorious with a tetralogy including *Danaides* and *Amymone*, has led to a reevaluation of the text and resulted in the current consensus that *Suppliants* is not Aeschylus’ earliest surviving play, but rather one produced in the 460’s. This has in turn inevitably changed our understanding of Aeschylus’ use of the chorus in this tragedy. Irrespective of the date of composition, the play is particularly interesting for a treatment of female choruses in Aeschylus. Not only does it place a female chorus in a protagonistic role, but the plot enacts a situation that the Greeks considered as defining of the female: marriage was a woman’s ultimate social role and the anxieties and difficulties surrounding this matter are repeatedly addressed in Greek literature. The subject matter allows Aeschylus to highlight and negotiate themes that have been consistently viewed as ‘female’ by the Greeks.

The chorus consists of virgins who have fled Egypt under the guidance of their father Danaus in order to avoid marriage with their Egyptian cousins, and have reached Argos seeking asylum from the Argive king Pelasgus. A combination of the choral identity and the circumstances of the plot gives this chorus a number of characteristics that have the potential to result in social disturbance and therefore can function as

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128 It is also one of the few surviving plays that meet Aristotle’s *desideratum* that the chorus must be regarded as one of the actors, see p.19.
129 See Garvie 2006, ch.2-4 for the arguments and convincing counter-arguments. Also FJ-W, 1:25-9 for a more succinct account.
130 Argued in detail by Garvie 2006, chs. 1-4 (for the papyrus, see esp. pp.1-28). Some scholars extend the possible date range as late as the late 450’s (cf. Taplin 1977, 194-8; FJ-W, 1:22f.; Sommerstein 2008, 1:279, who also rightly notes that the years 468 and 467 are excluded as occupied respectively by a Sophoclean victory and by Aeschylus’ Theban trilogy). However, Scullion (2002, 87-101) argues on stylistic grounds that a date around 475 is possible.
131 With the play now largely accepted as a product of a ‘mature’ Aeschylus, scholars have seen the prominence of the chorus as an element of innovative and experimental dramaturgy, see, e.g. FJ-W, 1:26; Garvie 2006, 139; Taplin 1977, 87; Sommerstein 1996, 153. Murnaghan (2005, 183) is, however, right, I think, to draw attention to non-dramatic female choruses and their possible influence on the play: it may well be that Aeschylus is not so much imagining the dramatic chorus in a radically new way, but that he is drawing from a long non-dramatic choral tradition to re-cast female choruses in a dramatic context.
132 See pp.35f.
alienating for the audience. The Danaids are unmarried females with a transgressive attitude towards the institution of marriage, they are foreigners and are engaging in supplication, a ritual that by definition presupposes a crisis and confronts the community with a dilemma. In the following analysis I will examine how these features tie in with other roles that dramatic choruses usually have, such as their capacity to meditate and generalize, and if, and to what degree, they affect their actions and utterances in the play, as well as their reception from the audience.

In terms of their dramatic identity, the chorus consists of young unmarried females, on the verge of a dreaded marriage, and dependent on their father. In addition, the main theme of the play is two cult acts, supplication and marriage. Though marriage constitutes a central institution in Greek life for both genders, for a Greek woman it is not simply a milestone in her life, but what defines her role in society. Playing her part in wealth exchange and preservation between oikoi and procreation was her life destination. This connection of marriage especially with the female is evident in various Greek myths about the abduction of virgins, as well as in tragedy and non-dramatic lyric, which explore marriage through the eyes of the female, and stress the anxiety and fear that frequently accompanies this rite de passage. Marriage is ‘female’ not only in thematic, but in performative terms as well, since epithalamial poetry was probably performed by maiden choruses. Supplication, on the other hand, while not a specifically female act in real life, is necessarily more frequent with weaker members of society, which in tragic terms often translates into

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133 For the tension involved in supplication see p. 70.
134 See p. 34.
135 Cf. the seminal study by Calame (1977). Female choruses are common in plays where marriage is proving problematic for the heroines, see, e.g., Soph. El.; Eur. Med.; Hipp. (cf. Scafuro 1990). In Suppliants the whole chorus is resisting marriage, and the rest of the trilogy, sadly lost for us, may have dramatized the usual ‘fate’ of a virgin chorus as depicted in lyric, where one member of the group is separated from the rest in order to get married, and eventually the whole group disintegrates as the rest of the girls follow suit. It is, therefore, possible that there have been more persistent allusions to non-dramatic marriage themes across the trilogy than we can now trace in this single play; this not to overlook that according to myth only one of the Danaids eventually settles to her traditional role or a wife. For marriage as a tragic theme, see Seaford 1987, Scafuro 1990, Rehm 1994, Ormand 1999, Foley 2001, 59-105.
136 Swift 2006 raises for the possibility that some wedding songs were performed by mixed choruses. This interesting hypothesis could cast new light on some issues in tragedy as well (see n. 244 below), but the surviving evidence points to a strong tradition associating wedding song with maiden choruses. The last major poet whose wedding songs have come down to us is Sappho and all her songs are clearly focalized through the bride, which strongly suggests that they were sung by female choruses.
females (and old men), and thus proves suitable for exploration of issues related to the female.  

The two acts, supplication and marriage, come together in that the Danaids have fled from their oikos and their polis to avoid marriage and are forced to supplicate in order to gain the protection of a new community. But they are doing so under the guidance of their father, that is, their guardian. This brings to the fore another feature pertaining to the female, the subordinate legal and social position of women in Greece and their dependence upon their father when still unmarried. Despite the elements of its dramatic identity that align this chorus both with other female choruses in drama and with women in real life, the Danaids differ substantially in one respect from the anonymous groups that usually form the chorus of a Greek tragedy. They are not just any group of virgins, but are daughters of Danaus and sisters, a named mythic group, that constitutes part of the mythic repertoire of the Greeks and as such features in non-dramatic sources as well. Named choral groups known from myth are invariably female in Greek sources, but are attested rather scantily as choruses in surviving tragedy. This adds another dimension to this chorus, and increases its value as evidence of dramatic practice. Their mythic persona adds an extra layer of associations and expectations to their dramatic identity and provides a link with non-dramatic narratives (epic and lyric) that involve mythic choruses.

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137 Cf. the aged Oedipus in Sophocles’ Oedipus at Colonus and Dictys in Euripides’ eponymous play; the mothers of the Seven in Euripides’ Suppliants and Helen in his Helen (Menelaus initially refuses to supplicate; for Helen, see below p.76). Prometheus in Prometheus Bound views the act of supplicating his enemy (Zeus) as something only a woman would do (1003-5 φοβηθεὶς ὃθηνοις γενήσομαι/ καὶ λιπαρήσω τὸν μέγα στυγούμενον/ γυναικομίμοις ὑπτιάσμασι χερῶν). Though the Danaids are not supplicating an enemy, Prometheus’ stance may throw some light on the tragic perception of supplication in its association with women. For tragic supplication, see further Gould 1973, 74n.7; Tzanetou 2012. For personal supplication in Euripides, see Mercier 1990. For supplication and the female see Foley 2003, 278-88.

138 For non-tragic occurrences of the myth, see Garvie 2006, 163-4.

139 Among other things, their Greek descent, and hence their ‘belonging’ to the city of Argos, or the identification potential this offers to the Greek spectator; their dark mythic and literary pre-history of murdering their husbands on their wedding night, and the way this affects our evaluation of their conduct, even though they enter the play as helpless victims.

140 For the relation between non-dramatic lyric and tragedy and how this impacts the authority of the tragic chorus, see pp.36ff.
i. Self-perception, self-presentation and rhetoric

Foreshadowing the dominant role they will assume later, the chorus speak the very first lines of the play. This makes *Suppliants* one of only two surviving plays where the first lines are given to the chorus (the other being *Persians*). Though a choral opening may have been more popular than evidence suggests, the overwhelming majority of surviving tragedies begin with a speaking character, either a minor character (as in *Agamemnon* and *Eumenides*) or one of the main ones (as in *Seven* and *Choephoroi*). The obvious candidate in this play would be Danaus, who is present and dramaturgically a plausible character to speak the first lines: the Athenian audience would view him as legal guardian (kyrios) of the Danaids, and the text does invite us to view him thus, as he is the one said to be leading and advising the chorus. He also possesses the information required to provide a summary of the story, which is one of the main functions that the chorus carries out in the prologue. Yet, the very first words come from Danaus’ daughters. Danaus must have entered with them, but will remain silent for 175 lines, while the maidens immediately embark on presenting themselves and their situation to the audience.

Thus a major character is onstage, but remains silent; we are also dealing with an exceptional chorus in that the Danaids are a group of suppliants. As suppliants the chorus automatically enters an additional sphere of conventions and connotations dictated by, or related to, the act of supplication. Therefore, in order to determine how common or unusual this technique is and subsequently analyse how and why this is

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141 The pseudo-Euripidean *Rhesus* also starts with the chorus. For the openings of Aeschylean plays, see p.40.
142 Note that three of the four plays mentioned above are from Aeschylus’ final, three-actor production, and, as Sandin (2003, 37) remarks, at the time of the two-actor rule a poet would be reluctant to open the play with a minor character.
143 Cf. 11-15 (quoted on p.67). It has been rightly pointed out that Danaus functions as the choregos of a choral group in relation to his daughters: ‘he authorizes practically every song […] by telling them to sing or pray or comments on the nature of their language’ thus Fletcher (2007, 31), who also traces the choregos-chorus relationship between Eteocles and the chorus in *Seven* and between Athena and the Furies in *Eumenides*. Murnaghan (2005) points out that Danaus directs even ‘their gestures […], the use of their eyes […], and the manner of their speech […] (*Supp.* 191-203)’ (p.191). She also makes the interesting remark that, if a trial did take place in the final play of the trilogy between Danaus and Hypermestra, then this would remind one of the ‘contest’ between two chorus-leaders (p.188); one thinks here of the potential rivalry between Agido and Hagesichora in Alcm. fr.1*PMGF*.
144 Despite the lack of any indication in the text Danaus must have entered with his daughters: see Taplin 193-4 and n.1 for references to previous literature; see also pp.67f. below. Sandin (2003, 37) suggests that the chorus may have entered in single file with Danaus at the end, regulating their pace so that Danaus would come onstage, slightly delayed, once the first mention of him was made at 11.
employed by Aeschylus, a comparison is required, not simply with other choruses, but with other dramas featuring suppliants in particular.145

The only other surviving drama with a suppliant chorus is Euripides’ Suppliants.146 The chorus of that play, despite being onstage from the start, is not the first to speak. The first lines are spoken by Aethra, the character initially receiving the suppliants. The chorus is, therefore, onstage, but remains silent.147 One cannot know if Euripides deliberately has his suppliants enter differently from the bold Aeschylean Danaids,148 but an analysis of his dramaturgic choices allows us a perspective on the effect Aeschylus achieves with his presentation.

The Aeschylean suppliants initiate the supplication process themselves and argue their case with only limited involvement from their father and guardian Danaus. The Euripidean suppliants, on the other hand, remain silent for approximately forty lines and only speak after Aethra has presented their case. They do not argue their case themselves until later in the play, nor does someone who is a priori on their side.149 In other words, the chorus in Euripides is doing what Danaus advises his daughters to do in the Aeschylean play: respectfully answer the natives, rather than initiate the exchange themselves.150

These two alternative theatrical representations of supplication reflect two variants of the process of supplication in the extra-theatrical world, as suppliants could speak for themselves, or through a representative.151 The way the two choruses handle the supplication process is related to the circumstances in the two plays, which differ widely. The Euripidean suppliants are mothers mourning for their dead sons, the

146 Note that Aeschylus’ Suppliants is the only suppliant play set in Argos rather than Athens (Tzanetou 2012, 2). Euripides’ play is also much later (for the dating see Morwood 2007, 26-30).
147 This is the only surviving tragedy where the chorus enters and remains silent for some time, as choruses usually enter ‘to the first song, not before it’ (Taplin 1977, 370, see also p.225), though silent entrances have been suggested by scholars for other plays (Pickard-Cambridge 1927, 248 n.5; 1962 n.3; contra Taplin 1977, 370).
148 A reasonable possibility given that Aeschylus was a classic author by the time Euripides composed his play, and his work has provided a targeted intertext in other Euripidean tragedies (see, e.g., Bond 1974; Thalman 1993; Burian 2009; Torrance 2011 and 2013 (esp. ch.1)).
149 Aethra will supplicate on their behalf, but as the mother of Theseus she is officially on the side of the person supplicated. Cf. p.66, n.152.
150 ἀνδρόν καὶ γυναῖκα καὶ ἄρχει ἐπὶ/ ξένους ἀμήβεσθο, ὡς ἐπήλυθας πρέπει, τορως λέγοντας τὰσθ' ἀναμέλακτος φριγάς;/ φθογγή δ' ἐπέσθικ πρώτα μὲν τὸ μὴ θρασύ (194-7).
151 Naiden 2006, 41-43.
Aeschylean chorus a group of virgins who flee their suitors. Aeschylus, in having Pelasgus arrive later in the play, and in keeping Danaus silent, gives priority to speak to the chorus. Suppliants always are, or at least perceive themselves to be, victims, and speech is one of the few means of power at their disposal. The way Aeschylus composes the beginning of the play emphasizes the maidens’ readiness to grasp the opportunity to speak, rather than passively wait for a guardian to negotiate their fate. It also has the additional effect of focalizing directly through the chorus, and thus avoids giving another person’s perspective on a situation that will eventually generate strong conflict and will prove much more ambiguous than the chorus care to admit.\footnote{The difference with the Euripidean suppliants is again illuminating. As Collard (1975, 2:104) notes, “the first description of the Cho.’s [chorus’] distress is plausibly coloured by her [i.e. Aethra’s] natural sympathy”. No such external view of the issue is offered at the beginning of Aeschylus’ play.}

In order to examine the effect this has on the reception of the audience and their place in the play, one needs to view it against both the backdrop of accepted female behaviour, and against the violent mythic history of the Danaids. This analysis is further complicated by the fact that the Danaids are dark-skinned foreigners, yet of Greek descent. And they are both the chorus of their play, and its main protagonist. All these contradictory elements construct a multi-layered chorus, allow a rich exploration of the themes of the play, and invite a complex response from the theatre audience.

One of the ways in which Aeschylus creates this complex image of the chorus right from the start is through the role of Danaus and the relationship with his daughters. I argue that both Danaus’ stage presence and his and the chorus’ statements are treated by Aeschylus with a studied ambiguity, which allows him to draw out the contrasting and complementary aspects of the chorus and of Greek female stereotyping – wilful and at the same time weak, emotional and therefore needing to be controlled. It is this tension created by contradictory elements which the Greeks understand as the essence of the female that is also vital for creating a sense of the chorus as a dangerous and disruptive force (they do, after all, threaten the state with their presence and will eventually kill their husbands).

In their introductory presentation, the Danaids make an extended, emphatic reference to their father and his role in planning their flight:

πατήρ καὶ βούλαρχος
καὶ στασίαρχος τάδε πεσσονομῶν
κυδιστ’ ἄχέων ἐπέκρανεν
φεύγειν (11-14)

Danaus’ role in the flight is reiterated by Danaus himself at 176ff. and is echoed by the chorus in 969-70. One would, therefore, naturally expect him to be prominent in the first exchange with the king of Argos. However, when Pelasgus enters, the maidens retain their confident stance and it is the chorus, rather than Danaus, who address the Argive king, and present themselves in a confident and ‘manly’ way: note the Homeric tone of ἐξευχόμεσθα in line 274

βραχὺς τορός θ’ ὁ μύθος· Ἀργεῖαι γένος
ἐξευχόμεσθα, σπέρματ’ εὐτέκκνου βοός· (274-75)

When Pelasgus first sees and approaches the newcomers, he does not address Danaus, but rather wonders who this group of foreign women is. The chorus’ utterance is thus on a first level a response to his question. Theatre pragmatics may be relevant here. If one thinks in terms of scenic presence, perhaps Danaus would not immediately stand out amid a crowd of twelve dancers (or fifty girls), who have

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153 Some accounts feature an oracle, which attributes greater initiative to Danaus: a scholion to the Iliad (Σ Iliad A42 Erbse) claims that Danaus arranged the murder of the suitors in Egypt, having received an oracle that he would be killed by one of his sons-in-law. For the scholiast of PV (Σ PV 853 Herington) the flight from Egypt was arranged because of the oracle.

154 Sommerstein (1977, 67) raises the possibility that βούλαρχος and στασίαρχος have undertones of plotting and aspirations to rule.

155 But see below (p.71) for the effect their father’s absence has on the chorus, who seem to panic when he first leaves the stage.

156 ἐξευχόμαι seems to be a less common variation of εὐχόμαι, which is commonly used in Homer with an infinitive to mean ‘boast’, ‘mostly, not of empty boasting, but of something of which one has a right to be proud’ (LSJ s.v.), and is particularly common when a hero is speaking about his descent or lineage (cf. Il.6.211, Od.14.199). Hesychius’ explanation (ἀφίξομαι (ε 3805)) gives no good sense in this line, or at 272.

157 Garvie 2006, 135; cf. FJ-W, 1:27. Murnaghan (2005, 190-1) sees the presence of Danaus and his close tie with the chorus as ‘a reflection of the chorēgoi who may lie behind all tragic actors’. For the ethnicity of the chorus, see below, pp.78f.

158 Evidence on the size of tragic choruses is not conclusive. For an overview see Haigh 1907, 288-90. For the present play, most scholars are inclined towards a twelve-member chorus (FJ-W, 2:209-23n.; Sandin 2003, 204-24n.).

159 It is very improbable that the tragic chorus ever consisted of fifty dancers, see Taplin 1977, 47; RE III (s.v. ‘Chor’).
such exotic looks and carry the disquieting branches of supplication. But even if Pelasgus fails to notice Danaus, it is still remarkable that Danaus does not take the initiative to handle the situation, or that the chorus do not hesitate for a moment before addressing the foreign king. This may seem an excessively naturalistic reading of the play, but, as stressed above, the text itself draws attention to Danaus, who is the last person to speak before Pelasgus enters and under whose directions the chorus finally take their position close to the altar.

Taplin, in discussing the silence of Danaus in the opening of the play, claims that there is nothing extraordinary in a character entering silently with the chorus, and that, had more of Aeschylus survived, we would probably have at our disposal more such characters. This is, however, not simply about silence, but about persistent silence. Danaus remained silent at the very start of the play and the chorus spoke the first words there too. It is, therefore, a different case from the silent entrances Taplin considers. Danaus’ silence is not an isolated instance, but a pattern in the relationship between Danaus and his daughters as reflected on their onstage performance and positioning: Danaus stands back, and lets his daughters negotiate their cause. His stance, however, reflects also a pattern of behaviour on the part of the chorus. Despite the presence of their guardian, the chorus readily step forward to discuss their affairs, without the intervention of an intermediary.

Overall, the chorus emerges as a regulator in this first part of the tragedy, where all facts of the play will be succinctly mapped: supplication, the descent and identity of the chorus, the reason for their flight (and therefore of their presence in the play). Larger themes will also be fleetingly alluded to: cursing of their suitors – and a certain determination to avoid marriage at any cost, repeated appeal to Zeus and

160 Unless he attracted attention to himself through his position. See n.144 on p.64 for his entry.
161 239 (ὅπως δὲ χώραν ὀφεῖ κηρύκοιν ὑπά/ ἀπρόξενοι τε, νόσφιν ἡγητῶν) must be a reference to the Argives that would introduce the group of new-comers into the city, rather than to Danaus (FJ-W, ad loc.).
162 πάντων δ’ ανέκτων πάντες κοινοβομία/ σέβεσθ’· ἐν ἁγνῷ δ’ ἐσμός ὡς πελειάδων/ ἱζεσθε κύρων τῶν ὀμοπτέρων φρόβις (222-4).
163 1977, 194.
164 But see pp.71ff. for the effect of his absence on the choral behaviour.
165 2 Ζεὺς μὲν ἀριστος 20ff. τηρθ’ ἄρακομεθ’ σὺν τοῖς ἱκέτων ἐγχειρίδιος.
166 3 στόλον ἡμέτερον νικῶν ἀριθμόν/ ἀπὸ προστομίων λεπτοφωμάτων/ Νέον, Διὸν δὲ λεπτοῦ/ χόνα σφαγος Σμύρα φειγόμεν· 27f. ἠδειοῦ ἱκέτην τὸν θηλυγενέστερον στόλον· 11 Δαναὸς δὲ πατήρ καὶ βουλαρχός/ καὶ στασίαρχος ταῦτα πεπονομάζων/ κύδιστ’ ἁχέων ἐπέκρινεν.
167 6ff.
mention of Io. In other words, all the major themes of the play or the trilogy are introduced at the start of the play by the chorus. This creates an impression that the Danaids are largely in control of the acting space and the plot, despite their claim that it is Danaus who had planned out everything and despite their formally subservient position as suppliants.\textsuperscript{168}

In marked contrast to the females of Seven, the calmness of their conduct in the face of danger allows the situation to be clearly communicated to the audience. The maidens present themselves as unambiguous victims and this enhances the potential for sympathy. On the other hand, their controlled behaviour foreshadows their ability to handle their affairs in a man-like, disciplined manner and establishes the dynamics of their presence in the play. Our evaluation is further complicated by the familiarity of the motif of a fleeing virgin outside drama: it is a situation both instantly recognizable due to previous numerous treatments in myth and literature, and at the same time disturbing due to its potential social ramifications. Their impressive discipline will manifest itself in different modes of control as the plot unfolds, and will eventually take on a sinister tone, when they will attempt to manipulate and threaten the king.\textsuperscript{169}

\textbf{ii. Female authority: threats and persuasion}\textsuperscript{170}

Initially, despite their composed and decisive manner, the Danaids are, like any other suppliant, helpless victims. As they point out, the altar where they supplicate is also the place where fugitives from war can find protection (83-5). In seeking protection at the altar the chorus conform to tragic conventions about supplication,\textsuperscript{171} but also align themselves with what is for the Greeks a paradigmatic victim – often female –, that is, the non-combatants in war.\textsuperscript{172} In that sense, although male suppliants

\textsuperscript{168} Cf. p.67. Gantz (1993, 206), who remarks that Aeschylus might have toned down the prominence of Danaus as observed in myth in order to shift the focus on the dilemma of his daughters.

\textsuperscript{169} See p.74.

\textsuperscript{170} Buxton 1982, 68 rightly sees bia and peitho as two opposite ends of the persuasion spectrum. His analysis (ch.3) also highlights the ways in which violence and persuasion are interlinked and contrasted in the play at the familial, the political and the theological level, and how differently Pelasgus and the chorus understand these notions.

\textsuperscript{171} Differently from Homer, tragic supplication always takes place at an altar, see Tzanetou 2012, 9 with nn.31-2.

\textsuperscript{172} See above pp.5234f. War is also thematically relevant, since a war is threatened to break out any moment between the Aegyptioi and the Argives.
are to be found in tragedy, supplication in tragedy is an act with ‘female’ characteristics, as mentioned above, given its association with vulnerability. At the same time, however, while supplication never ceases to be one’s last resort, an act of despair, it places the suppliants in a context where they can potentially wield a degree of power. This in turn creates a dilemma for the person supplicated, who is called to make a decision which can have long-reaching consequences for his community. In this play, for the Danaids, supplication is the only means of securing the support of the Argive king. For Pelasgus, on the other hand, supplication is a tense and complex situation, which involves political and religious risks.

Though difficult, Pelasgus’ situation is a natural consequence of supplication, at least in its literary manifestation, since the ritual involves tension, as it presents the person supplicated with a conflict. Endangered individuals or groups supplicate with the aim of being accepted into a new community, thus creating new bonds, regulating the power relations between different social groups and maintaining a balance between human behaviour and divine will. Though an integrating mechanism, supplication is also a process during which the suppliant reaches out in an inherently aggressive manner, threatening to bring agos upon the person supplicated should the supplication be rejected. The more desperate the state of the suppliant, the graver the consequences of a supplication can be.

Though onstage supplications in tragedy are overwhelmingly successful, the fact that in real life supplication can turn one way or the other for the suppliant, adds weight to the actions and reactions of both the suppliant and the person supplicated. It should not be viewed simply as a series of pre-defined steps that can lead to success if followed properly or cause the rejection of the supplication, and consequently the

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173 For figures of male and female suppliants in tragedy, see n.137 on p.63.
175 ‘The parts involved [in supplication] as the seat of man’s life-stuff are ‘tabu’, his most vital, most vulnerable and most closely guarded parts, and [...] the gesture of touching them brings the suppliant into symbolically aggressive, yet unhurtful, contact with what the supplicated most seeks to protect’ (Gould 1973, 97).
176 Cf. Naiden (2006, 84-6), who argues that threats as part of the supplication process are overall neither common, nor successful. But see below pp.74f. for the suicide threats in this play.
178 For supplication as a process that is much more complex than a predetermined sequence of ritual gestures, see Naiden 2006, 5-25.
wrath of the gods, if not.\textsuperscript{179} It is a complex process dependent on the circumstances, and its success or failure is affected by the suppliants’ power position and their negotiation skills. In tragedy, the unpredictability of the process creates the possibility of suspense as to the outcome of the process and puts the emphasis on the character’s actions and utterances, and thus on their characterization.

In the following pages, I will examine how the Danaids employ language and social convention to achieve their goal. I will argue that their vulnerable position and the moral ambiguity of their demand casts in an equally ambiguous light their eventual success and the means they employ to secure it, which in turn allows Aeschylus to invite a complex reaction from the audience.

As noted above, the chorus were initially presented as a confident and collected group of maidens. At 504, however, when Danaus departs for the city, their stance abruptly changes. The chorus is composed and ordered under the vigilant eye of Danaus,\textsuperscript{180} but, once he is out of the picture, the chorus becomes increasingly agitated. Despite being seemingly able to negotiate their cause directly with Pelasgus with no intervention from their father, his absence seem to instill fear in them, as well as a need for directions: ἐγὼ δὲ πῶς δοκῶ; ποῦ θοράσος νέμεις ἐμοί; (505). In the absence of their legitimate male 	extit{kyrios}, the maidens seek protection from the authority male figure at hand. The situation rapidly becomes reminiscent of the first part of 	extit{Seven}.\textsuperscript{181} The Danaids turn into panicky virgins and Pelasgus attempts to calm them down. The tone of the exchange, however, is strikingly different from 	extit{Seven}. Pelasgus is more gentle to them than Eteocles is to the Theban chorus, but he is also intent on reasserting the norms of proper behaviour\textsuperscript{182} and dismisses their panicky reaction, possibly as a hyperbolic reaction to be expected from a woman.\textsuperscript{183} This change of attitude shows the members of the chorus in a different light. They are now frightened maidens at the

\textsuperscript{179} ‘supplication was a human institution with divine authority’ (Tzanetou 2012, 11, drawing on Giordano 1999). See also ibid. p.11, n.41 for tragic examples of humans punished by gods for wronging a suppliant.

\textsuperscript{180} ‘They enter the drama in an orderly manner because they are under his [their father’s] supervision’ (Foley 2007, 31); Trieschnigg 2009, 113. They both rightly compare the orderly manner of the Danaids’ entrance with the entrance of the maidens in 	extit{Sevens}, as the chorus here also has reason for, and expresses, distress, though without panicking. Cf. n.143 above.

\textsuperscript{181} See pp.44ff.

\textsuperscript{182} ‘may you speak good words when good words are spoken to you’ (512, transl. Sommerstein).

\textsuperscript{183} If the dubious line 514 included a reference to the fearful female nature, rather than the awe felt before a king (see FJ-W, \textit{ad loc}).
mercy of males, both of the Argive deme and of their Egyptian cousins. This reading is enhanced by the following *stasimon* (524-99), where the chorus ‘supplicate’ Zeus and narrate the story of Io, another vulnerable, persecuted female as a parallel to their own. In a reversal of the move we saw in *Seven*, the disruptive potential of the chorus latent in the *parodos* now gradually turns into action. Emotions run high and the stance of the chorus stresses the urgency of the situation as they await the decision of the Argives.

The stance of the chorus seems to have changed in another way as well. When they first met the king, the Danaids responded willingly to Pelasgus’ inquiries about Io and their descent. When, however, Pelasgus touches on the reason of their supplication, they become guarded. To Pelasgus’ question ἀλλὰ πῶς πατρῶι δῶματα/ λυπεῖν ἐτλητε; τίς κατέσκηψεν τύχη; (326/7), they reply with a gnomic generalization and only incidentally add a vague reason for their flight:

άναξ Πελασγών, αἰώλ’ ἀνθρώπων κακά,
πόνον δ’ ἣδος ἀν οὐδαμοῦ ταύτων πετρόν·
ἐπεὶ τίς ηὔχει τίνδ’ ἀνέλπιστον φυγήν
κέλσειν ἐς Αργοὺς κήδος ἐγγενές τὸ πρῶν,
ἐχθεί μεταπτοιοῦσαν εὐναμών γάμων; (328-332)

In what follows the chorus will become even more evasive. To the king’s question why they do not want to marry the Egyptians they reply with a rhetorical question τίς δ’ ἂν φιλοῦσ τόυς κεκτημένους; (337). The deliberate vagueness stands in sharp antithesis with the clear answers they gave in other instances. When asked what is it that they ask for, they reply that Pelasgus should not hand them over to the children of Aegyptus although they will come asking for them (341). The chorus thus display a remarkable ability to put rhetoric at their service, and oscillate successfully between clarity and evasion.

Tension has been building up from 328, where the supplication process formally begins. Up to that point the chorus held the supplication boughs and stated their intention to supplicate, but only at 333ff. do they fully clarify the object of the

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185 For the reason of the Danaids’ flight, see p.81 with nn.231-234.
186 πότεραι κατ’ ἐχθραν, ἢ τὸ μὴ θέμεις λέγεις; (336).
supplication in response to Pelasgus’ question.\textsuperscript{187} There follows a short dialogue (333-347) and an amoibaion (348-437), as the king continues to interrogate the chorus in an attempt to acquire all details of the situation. The sequence concludes with a short speech by Pelasgus, whereby he acknowledges his dilemma and states his wish to weigh the alternatives and decide. While the chorus sings, Pelasgus speaks, and indeed in iambics, a metre that Aristotle famously thought of as closer to the rhythm of conversational speech than any other.\textsuperscript{188} As such it is in general a less ‘emotional’ metre than the lyric metres used by the chorus in this exchange, and more conducive to a measured interaction.\textsuperscript{189}

The position of Pelasgus’ short speech that concludes the scene and his insistence on the metre of rational debate initially creates an impression that the king remains firm in his attempts to direct the chorus’ actions. At this point, however, the chorus switches unexpectedly to iambics too and in one single line usurps the king’s attempts to impose a firm, pragmatic tone of the exchange. This is not achieved simply by the inherent character of the iambic metre, but also by the juxtaposition of the metres used by the king and the chorus. Dhuga has rightly argued for what he calls ‘metrical authority’, that is, metre being used by the dramatist to express power relationships. In other words, speakers, including choruses, can ‘force’ a character to use their chosen metre, and in that way determine the tone of an exchange. In these cases metre becomes a rhetorical tool and operates as an authority-establishing mechanism.\textsuperscript{190} If one applies this principle to the exchange between Pelasgus and the Danaids, one might expect that the chorus abandon their lyric metre in order to argue rationally with Pelasgus, and that it is thus Pelasgus who imposes the metre on the exchange. But this is not the case here.\textsuperscript{191} By switching into iambics the chorus leave aside any trace of emotionality\textsuperscript{192} and claim their place in the negotiation. Pelasgus’

\textsuperscript{187} Pel: τί φήσεις ἰκνεύθου τῶν δ’ ἀγωνίων θεῶν, / λευκοστεφεῖς ἔχουσα νεοδρέπτους κλάδους; Chο: ὡς μὴ γένομαι δωμὶς Αἰγύπτου γένει (333-5).
\textsuperscript{188} λέξεως δὲ γενομένης αὐτῇ ἡ φύσις τὸ οἰκεῖον μέτρον εἴδει· μάλιστα γὰρ λεκτικῶν τῶν μέτρων τὸ ιαμβεῖον ἔστιν· σημεῖον δὲ τούτου, πλείστα γὰρ ιαμβεία λέγομεν ἐν τῇ διαλέκτῳ τῇ προκάλληλησι, ἐξαίμητος δὲ ὀλγάκας καὶ ἐκβαινοντες τῆς λεκτικῆς ἀρμονίας. (Arist. Poet.1449a23-29).
\textsuperscript{189} See p.181 for another instance where the chorus establishes its authority through metre, though it is there by persevering in their use of iambics rather than appropriating the character’s metre.
\textsuperscript{190} Dhuga 2011, 16.
\textsuperscript{191} Cf. Buxton 1982, 75 who notes that Pelasgus adopts here the linguistic and moral register of the Danaids.
\textsuperscript{192} Hall (1989, 130) points out that in Suppliants only non-Greek characters sing, since singing is used to express emotion, while speaking reveals constraint.
wishful tone (454 γένοιτο δ’ εὖ) is not what they want to hear, and they are not accepting it as an answer.

Having first sought to persuade, the chorus now threatens. The element of pressure that underlies any supplication and has been implicit so far becomes overt and hyperbolic: πολλῶν ἀκουσον τέρματ’ αἰδοίων λόγων (455). The chorus orders the king to listen to their ‘conclusion’. Their tone is imperative and their choice of words significant. The adjective αἰδοίος can be used in an active or passive sense to mean ‘having a claim to regard, reverence, or compassion’, ‘showing reverence or compassion’ (LSJ, s.v.), and was used by Danaus when he advised his daughters as to how to address the locals. Zeus has also been called Αἰδοίος (192 ἀγάλματα Αἰδοίου Δίως) and the maidens were advised to carry the supplication boughs σεμνῶς (193, another ambiguous word: ‘reverent’ or ‘worthy of one’s reverence’). The same ambiguity occurs here; the maidens claim that their words have been αἰδοία. Does this mean ‘respectful’? ‘Pitiful’ or ‘having a claim to reverence’? None of the meanings fits in with the threats that follow, and the word seems to be loaded with irony.

The king readily accepts their demand to be heard, which enhances the impression that the chorus rather than the king is in control, while also reinforcing one’s sense of the king as a sympathetic figure, which is already present in his espousal of democratic ideas. But the chorus does not stop there: if their wishes are not granted, the Danaids will hang themselves from the images of the gods (465 ἐκ τῶνδ’ ὀπως τάχιστ’ ἀπάγξασθαι θεῶν). This is not the first time this chorus threatens to kill themselves if their request is not granted. The first mention of suicide as the self-

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193 αἰδοία καὶ γοηδνὰ καὶ ἔσχησι ἔπη/ ξένους ἀμείβεσθ’, ὡς ἐπηλυδας πρέπει (194-5) with Sandin (2003, ad loc.), who thinks the adjective is active in meaning here and means ‘commanding reverence/pity’. He then seems to settle for ‘pitiful’ and concludes that Danaus admonishes the girls to play the part of miserable suppliants (Sandin 2003, ad loc.).

194 The ambiguous nature of the phrase is enhanced by the use earlier (21) of εγχειριδίοις for the supplicant-boughs. The word literally means ‘thing held in one’s hand’, but it is more commonly used to mean ‘dagger’. I am not convinced by Winnington-Ingram’s suggestion (1961, 148) that the chorus have entered carrying daggers.

195 Sommerstein in his Loeb edition translates as follows: ‘Listen to the conclusion of my many respectful words’.

196 According to Sandin (see above n.193).
evident alternative to a successful supplication comes very early in the play, when the chorus are yet to meet any demurrer:

Ζήγα τῶν κεκμηκότων
ιξόμεσθα σὺν κλάδοις
ἀρτάναις θανούσαι,
μὴ τυχούσαι θεῶν Ὀλυμπίων (158-161).\(^{197}\)

Now they repeat it as a direct threat, and to Pelasgus’ reaction that ‘their words flayed his heart’ (466), they reply that they have set the rules and now all decision is his. The chorus have made their final move, they have quite ruthlessly threatened the king and are now in control.\(^{198}\) They conclude the scene with a final statement addressed to the king that verges on irony:\(^{199}\)

ξυνήκας· Ὀμμάτῳσα γὰρ σαφέστερον (467)
you understand! I have opened your eyes to see more clearly.

Their threats prove effective and Pelasgus agrees to defend their cause in the Argive assembly.\(^{200}\) It is, however, not just Pelasgus’ reaction that matters here. How the audience is invited to respond to this threat is critical for our engagement with the chorus.\(^{201}\) Though the threats clearly worked for the Danaids, suicide is an extreme act, and, though not an unqualifiedly negative one,\(^{202}\) it is often attributed to madness in Greek literature,\(^{203}\) and is particularly associated with women.\(^{204}\) Hanging especially is presented as a female way of committing suicide, versus the masculine

\(^{197}\) The threat recurs at 160, 465, and 789ff., thus punctuating the play. Danaus’ advise may be affecting the chorus’ attitude, as he instructs his daughters to value right conduct higher than life itself: μόνον φύλαξει τάσδ’ ἐπιστολὰς πατρός· τοῦ σωφρονεῖν τιμῶσα τοῦ βίου πλέον (1012f.). This is a common attitude in Greek male heroic code, but one should be wary of equating a noble death in battle with a suicide. In light of the subsequent murder of the suitors as we know it from myth, one cannot but wonder whose life the maidens are advised to value less.

\(^{198}\) Bednarowski 2010 warns against viewing this as a ruthless manipulation of the king and stresses the importance of the threat in generating suspense about the plot in a well-known myth.

\(^{200}\) Cf. FJ-W, ad loc.

\(^{201}\) Contra Naiden (2006, 84), who argues that while it may seem that the Danaids succeed thanks to their threats of supplication, this is not the case, since Pelasgus goes on to instruct their father to make an appeal to the assembly. But Naiden seems to disregard that this outcome is viewed as a success for the chorus within the plot, as clearly stated in the text both by Pelasgus (478-9 ‘All the same there is no alternative but to respect the wrath of Zeus god of suppliants’, transl. Sommerstein), and by Danaus, who acknowledges Pelasgus’ decision with gratitude (490-1 ‘We value this very highly to have secured a respectful, <beneficent> sponsor’, transl. Sommerstein).


\(^{203}\) See Garrison (1995, ch.1) for a broad variety of Greek texts pertaining to suicide and the issues raised by suicide for the Greeks.

\(^{204}\) But cf. Lill 2012, who argues that often in tragedy suicide can be an attempt to assert oneself.

\(^{204}\) The only male hero in tragedy to carry a suicide through is Ajax.
suicide by sword. On the other hand, the circumstances of the plot are extreme too, so could the audience conceivably view suicide, exceptionally, as an appropriate reaction? In what follows I will analyse two parallels for explicit threats in the context of supplication, in an attempt to obtain a sense of the range of possible reactions on the part of the audience.

Euripides’ Helen is a useful tragic parallel, as it is comparable in many respects. Menelaus supplicates at the tomb of Proteus, so that he can leave Egypt with his wife against the will of the king Theoclymenus, who wants to keep Helen as his own wife. Menelaus threatens to kill Helen and himself on the tomb and thus cause an undying pollution for the king, if Theonoe, the king’s sister, refuses to grant their request (980-7). Similarly to Suppliants, the characters resort to supplication in order to avert an unwanted marriage. But there are also significant differences, especially as to what a successful supplication would mean for the person supplicated in each case. Theoclymenus is only indirectly supplicated through his sister and he would not suffer any catastrophic consequences himself should he decide to grant the suppliants their wishes. In Suppliants, on the other hand, Pelasgus and his city are threatened with war. Menelaus seems to be handling the supplication process as firmly and decisively as the Danaids, but the threat remains hypothetical, since he says that he only intends to resort to more radical measures if the supplicanda decides to use unfair means herself. Additionally, Theoclymenus is a barbarian king who kills Greeks. So it is reasonable to suppose that the audience’s sympathies would lie with the supplicating pair rather than Theoclymenus. Indeed, the supplication is a direct result of his threatening conduct. Pelasgus and the Argives, on the other hand, have done nothing to cause the impending miasma. They are an impartial party dragged into a

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205 Loraux 1987, 13-17.
206 In which, Pelasgus may eventually lose his life (see Garvie 2006, 199-202; for a review of the evidence and possible reconstructions, see FJ-W, 1:40-55).
207 He puts an end to negotiations and introduces the threats in a way which is similar – even verbally – to that of the Danaids: cf. κακεῖνον ἢ μὲ δὲ ἰδέαν ἀπλοῦς λόγος (Eur. Hel.979) with πολλῶν ἀκουσάν τέμματ’ αἰδώλων λόγων (Aesch. Supp.455).
208 ‘Suppliants are safe only if they remain in their sanctuary […], but an enemy might force them to leave by starving them out without actually violating their immunity’ (Burian and Shapiro 2011, 993-1000/981-7n.). Helen eventually persuades Menelaus to feign his death (1051), which perhaps encourages us to interpret the threat of suicide as a calculated negotiation device, rather than an extreme act of despair (especially if contrasted with other mentions of suicide in the play, see below, n.210). The Danaids, on the other hand, are not averse to extreme acts: as we know from the myth, they go so far as to murder their own husbands – this time in a ‘masculine’ manner, using daggers.
conflict that does not promise any great compensation if they do the right thing.  

Differently from Suppliants, justice in Helen lies unequivocally with the suppliants. These factors, in addition to the fact that Menelaus never properly accepts the process of supplication as the means of achieving his goal, constitute a context where threats seem more readily justified than in Suppliants.  

Outside tragedy, we find another threat of suicide in a holy place as a means of applying pressure in Herodotus 7.140, where the Athenians are enquiring the Delphic oracle. Unsatisfied by the oracular response, the Athenians follow the advice of a respected Delphian and return to the oracle as suppliants (7.141.1), this time with a much more pressing request:

«Ωναξ, χρήσον ἡμίν ἁμεινόν τι περὶ τῆς πατρίδος, αἰδεοθεὶς τὰς ἱκτερίμας τάδε τὰς τοιῇκομεν φέροντες· ἢ οὐ τοι_ai真情yna ἐκ τοῦ ἀδύτου, ἀλλ' αὐτοῦ τήδε μενέομεν ἐστι ἀν καὶ τελευτήσωμεν»  

(7.141.2)

The Athenians find themselves in a critical situation, to which the oracle can provide a solution. At this point threatening with starvation seems to them a legitimate card to play. Herodotus makes no comment on this story to indicate disapproval of their practice, which is perhaps an indication that such threats are by definition neither legitimate nor transgressive and are evaluated more accurately in context. In fact, Herodotus introduces the story with a resounding praise of Athens’ calmness in the face of the alarming oracles. It is important to notice, however, that, similarly to Euripides’ Helen, granting the request of the Athenians would not threaten the oracle in any way, and their strategy seems to receive some moral support from the fact that it has been suggested to them by a well-regarded Delphian. The second oracle satisfies the Athenians, who depart for Athens (7.142.1).

209 Though in some versions of the myth one of the Danaids and her husband Lynceus will bear a kingly race to Argos (Gantz 1993, 205-8). This could also be viewed as a mythic reinforcement of the superiority and antiquity of Greece over Egypt (along the lines of Vasunia (2001, 37) who comments similarly on Io’s movement from Greece to Egypt and back to Greece). For other similarities between the chorus and Io, see n.184 (p.72).

210 In Helen suicide is prominent elsewhere in the play, and it is always an act of despair: Helen considers suicide when she thinks that Menelaus is dead (279; 351-2); Helen’s mother Leda commits suicide over her daughter’s reputation (134-6), and her brothers may have to do the same (142).

211 Hdt.7.139, see esp.7.139.5 where the Athenians are called ‘saviours of Greece’. 
Both instances examined above seem to suggest that threats of suicide and the consequent pollution of the holy place where the process takes place are a means of negotiation that is not necessarily reprehensible. It also proves in more than one case that threats can be effective in exercising pressure. In this respect, Aeschylus’ maidens are not exceptional in using threats within the ritual of supplication. However, as stated above, these need to be evaluated in context, i.e. with regard to the addressee of the threats and the purpose they serve, as well as the identity of the chorus: in *Suppliants*, the addressee of the threats is someone who has already granted them an audience and is painted sympathetically in the play (and not towards a barbaric king, or an all-powerful oracle); the threats are used to achieve the avoidance of marriage, that is, a woman’s ultimate purpose in life (and not to ensure that an already married woman remains by her rightful husband as in *Helen*; or, in the case of the Athenians, to secure the future of a city or a country). Finally, the chorus’ identity is complicated by their story as would be known from the myth, and their ethnicity. Regarding their mythic background, the Danaids are consistently associated mainly with two details: their punishment in the Underworld, and the treacherous murder or their husbands.

The ethnicity of the chorus is complex. The Danaids are Egyptian, yet they originate from the Greek city of Argos. In examining to what extent the ethnicity of the chorus would have affected the way the audience would view their actions and utterances, a reminder about costume is apposite. Pelasgus’ first address to the chorus puts emphasis on two main elements of their identity, their role as suppliants, as we saw above, and their foreignness:

ποδαπόν δημολον τόνδ’ ἀνελληνόστολον
πέπλοισι βαρβάροις κάμπτομαι
χλιόντα προσφωνοῦμεν; οὐ γὰρ Ἀργολὶς
ἐσθής γυναικῶν οὐδ’ ἀφ’ Ἑλλάδος τόπων.
ὅπως δὲ χώραν οὔτε κηρύκων ὑπο,
ἀπρόξενοι τε, νόσφιν ἡγητῶν, μολεῖν

212 Naiden (2006, 84-86) also examines these parallels, but concludes that threats are overall not particularly successful as a means of negotiation. For his view on the threats in *Suppliants*, see n.200.
213 Even if this is mitigated by the fact that they are doing so with the approval of their father.
214 The Danaids are, like other great Greek sinners (e.g. Tantalus), punished in a way that reflects their crime (Vasunia 2001, 52).
215 The chorus of *Suppliants* has been treated by Thomas 1998 (ch.2-3), with emphasis specifically on the interplay of their complex ethnicity with their gender. I am primarily interested in the way these two elements of their identity affect their authority as a chorus.
216 And one of them will be possibly re-integrated into Argos (see above, n.209).
Pelagus is inviting us to notice that the Danaids are a dislocated group of women, while repeatedly drawing attention to what must have been a distinctly foreign attire, as well as, perhaps, the dark colour of their skin, which has already been mentioned by the chorus twice: 

While the chorus’ appearance would be a constant reminder of their alienness, their suppliant position as women who flee their suitors is what dominates their subsequent interactions with Pelagus. However, in keeping with Aeschylus’ practice of emphasizing or underplaying certain features in the course of the play, the chorus’ barbaric attitude re-emerges, this time in a political matter, namely in the way the Greek king Pelagus and the Egyptian chorus of Danaids view power:

The chorus view the king as embracing all power within himself, an autocratic attitude we also encounter in Persians.

In conclusion, the complex network of Greek ideas and myth that informs the identity of the chorus cast a different light on the threats of suicide and invites us to
view them as the ultimate expression of the chorus’s unruliness used to defend the highly transgressive rejection of marriage.  

iii. Marriage

The Danaids are shunning marriage and flee their country to escape their suitors. However strikingly aberrant such behaviour may seem, it also strikes a familiar note. As we have seen, resistance to marriage on the part of the bride and unwillingness to leave the paternal hearth for her new husband’s household are themes traditionally associated with a girl’s attitude to marriage in Greece.  

Greek society, recognized—and tried to avert—the possibility of such problems, in theory or in practice, by integrating any anxieties of the bride about her new life into prescribed and controlled ritual. In spite of our restricted knowledge of songs meant for performance at weddings, there are recurrent indications that equating marriage with violence and death and describing virginity as a state of untamed freedom and marriage as a yoke have long been part of marriage songs and the ideas surrounding marriage.

Tragedy makes extensive use of the ideology surrounding marriage and the language of the wedding ritual, often in subtly subversive ways. What, however, makes Suppliants unique among surviving plays is that the virgin’s disinclination to marry and the relevant mythic topos of a virgin’s rape is turned into a dramatic plot. Not only is marriage the starting point and subject of the tragedy, but metaphors used in myth and literature in relation with marriage are here realized onstage: the maidens literally flee their home and are pursued by the suitors; and death becomes the preferred alternative to marriage, as the girls threaten to hang themselves if the Argives

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222 In Greek thinking, maidens were in increased risk of committing suicide, and marriage could remedy such impulses (Hanson 2007, 47-8).
223 The similarity of the behaviour of the Danaids to attitudes associated with brides in Greek thought has to be an important factor in our interpretation of the Danaids’ attitude to marriage (Seaford 1987, 110).
224 See pp.35f.
225 Otherwise positive or neutral ritual acts are frequently given a threatening overtone. For the manipulation of rituals in tragedy, see Segal 1986; Vidal-Naquet 1972, 133-158; Vernant 1972, 99-131, Easterling 1988, 87-109; Henrichs 2004. More specifically, for corrupted sacrifice in tragedy, Zeitlin 1965; Foley 1985; for rituals of happy occasions taking on sinister, funerary overtones, see Seaford 1984a, and for the transgressive usage of funerary rites, Hame 2004; for the perversion of hospitality rituals, Roth 1993. For wedding rituals see previous note.
fail to protect them from their cousins. The Danaids, unlike any other Greek bride, not only experience those feelings, but go so far as to enact them. In other words, they take resistance to marriage to extremes in a way that a Greek would only ever have heard narrated, but not seen acted out. Finally, this is the only surviving tragedy – and the fragments do not suggest otherwise – where a whole chorus, and not just a single character, uses a ritual in such a subversive manner.

In this way the Danaids undergo a double dislocation. They deny both their social position as wives and future mothers, but are also geographically dislocated, as they situate themselves both outside their oikos and outside their polis. In that sense they take it onto themselves to regulate their own ekdosis, the discomforting but necessary departure from the paternal oikos. They thus display a subversive attitude to a part of the wedding, which is usually regulated and unproblematic, if distressing, for the bride. For a Greek, a woman that will not marry is a woman that cannot fit into society.

The reasons for the Danaids’ refusal to marry have been extensively analyzed and a variety of interpretations have been offered based on the tension between Greek views on endogamy and exogamy to the character of the Danaids. The scholarly dissonance reflects the vagueness with which the issue is treated in the play, though one cannot dismiss the possibility that the other two plays of the trilogy might have shed some light on the issue. Initially the Danaids seem to reject the marriage with

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226 See p.73. Also King 1983, 118ff. for the image of the virgin who undoes her girdle not to enter into a union with her husband, but in order to hang herself and thus avoid the union.
227 In Choephoroi the chorus similarly stretches the boundaries of the kommos, though in a much subtler way, see pp.98ff.
228 Female choruses are often in transit, even when this is not called-for by the plot (Murnaghan 2005, 194). This chorus also dwells on the distance they had to travel to reach Argos, which at the same time serves to stress their alienness. Our chorus is liminal in another sense as well: they address their request to two different levels, human and divine. Note 793ff., where the chorus uses vocabulary apt for the divine and ask either for Hades or for a seat in the sky. Though this is a common escapist thought, it also reveals that the Danaids struggle to integrate and creates a connection to a level below the human (underworld) or above (divine). Cf. also FJ-W (1980, 3.790n.) for the idea that girls who die unwed marry Hades; and Vasunia (2001, 49) who notes (with Loraux 1987, 18) the allusions to death by hanging, but also rape in these lines.
229 We saw above how their father’s direction is sidelined by their strong presence (p.67).
230 For representations or allusions to abduction in wedding imagery in Athens, see Oakley and Sinos 1993, 13 and 32-33; cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1973, 17n.1.
231 Thomson 1946, 161.
232 Elisei 1928, 202-11; For a review of the reasons why the Danaids reject marriage, see Garvie 2006, 215ff. See also FJ-W, 1:29, who rightly conclude that the issue is deliberately left obscure.
their cousins specifically (30, 80, 104, 223ff., 335, 741, 750, 817, 1063). Soon however the rejection of this particular marriage merges with an abhorrence for marriage in general (144ff., 392, 426, 528ff., 643, 790, 798-9, 804ff., 818, 1017). Unsurprisingly, Pelasgus takes the view that marriage is a perfectly acceptable way for families to combine the strength of their oikoi (337-8). He is, it is reasonable to assume, in line with the majority of Greek males who would view marriage as a way of increasing or maintaining the resources and power of one’s oikos. Athenian law also privileged the marriage of a girl to her closest paternal uncle if there were no male heirs. A girl was even allowed to marry her homopatric half-brother, though not her uterine half-brother. Both are relations as close, if not closer, to that of a girl to her cousin, a marriage certainly not seen as abnormal by fifth-century Greeks. One cannot help but notice that Danaus does not take part in the discussion, although he is present. As in so many other instances in Greek tragedy, radical views on marriage are expressed by the female, or, to put it differently, the poet refrains from having a Greek male express such radical views on marriage.

iv. Secondary chorus

Any evaluation of the theme of marriage in the play, and consequently of the behaviour and nature of the chorus, will be affected by our understanding of the ending of the tragedy. Both the performance of the final choral song and the identity of the singers are disputed, and the different possibilities colour differently the play overall, as well as the following play in the trilogy. No change of speaker is marked in the

233 Garvie 2006, 221.
234 Garvie 2006, 221. However, FJ-W (1:31f.) rightly stress that none of them are formally general statements.
235 For the epikleros, see MacDowell 1978, 95-108.
236 Harrison 1968, 21-22; the taboo against the marriage of siblings of the same mother could be more about property consolidation than incest concerns (Cox 1998, 116 n.42).
238 No special reference is made to Danaus’ appearance or speech, while his daughters are repeatedly described by themselves and others (even by Danaus himself, 496) as having the appearance of a foreigner (see above, pp.78ff.), unless one is eager to see references to the group as a whole as applying to Danaus as well. Here, again, the visual element, lost for us, would save us from inconclusive remarks, but lack of emphasis on Danaus’ alien appearance could prove useful if Danaus was to become the king of the Greek city of Argos later in the trilogy.
239 The only Greek male who rejects marriage is Hippolytus, who is, however, a special case, since he bears many virginal characteristics, displays an excessive loyalty to the cult of Artemis and is also called a ‘bastard’ (Eur. Hipp.309), since his mother is not Athenian.
manuscripts for the choral song of 1018-1061. However, it is evident from the text that there are two groups singing alternately.\textsuperscript{240} It is conceivable that this could be two semi-choruses of Danaids,\textsuperscript{241} but the majority of modern editors agree on the presence of a secondary chorus.\textsuperscript{242} This supplementary chorus is usually identified as a group of handmaidens, with some scholars, among them Friis Johansen and Whittle, and Taplin, opting for a male chorus.\textsuperscript{243}

If one accepts the theory that wedding songs may have also been performed by mixed choruses,\textsuperscript{244} then a male secondary chorus in this part of the play could potentially be a nod to performances of wedding songs by mixed choruses. The exit song of \textit{Suppliant} does use hymeneal language,\textsuperscript{245} which the audience would be quick to recognize thanks to their familiarity with it from non-dramatic performances. If indeed there has been a tradition of wedding songs sung by mixed choruses, the hymeneal elements will have come more strongly to the foreground. So would also their distortion (we are going to end up with murder in the next play), but also their eventual validation (Hypermestra will not kill her husband, thus affirming the necessity of marriage for a successful life).

On the other hand, a maiden chorus could also be used to highlight the unviable stance of the Danaids, and thus implicitly validate marriage. A chorus of handmaidens would then stand for the paradigmatic female, who conforms to social standards. If

\textsuperscript{240} Notice the stark contrast in tone between 1034-51 and 1018-33; 1052-3, which reads like a reply to the two previous verses, and 1052-61, which is clearly dialogic in nature. See FJ-W (3:1018-73n.) for a review of the passages that prove the presence of two choral groups or sub-groups, as well as an overview of the different suggestions on the identity of the singers.

\textsuperscript{241} See next note.

\textsuperscript{242} McCall (1976, 117) conveniently lists the modern editors’ choices and stresses that most interpreters and editors have opted for a secondary chorus (principally of handmaidens, a minority − including FJ-W − are in favour of Argive men-at-arms), while she herself argues for two semi-choruses of the Danaids. Sandin (2003, 37) wants the handmaidens to be part of the main chorus, visibly marked as ‘of inferior rank, and perhaps not carrying boughs’ already in the \textit{parodos}, and emerging as the Danaids’ handmaidens at the end of the play (954, 977).

\textsuperscript{243} Taplin (1977, 232 with n.2), who gives Danaus 1038-42 and 1047-51, dismisses the secondary maiden chorus as a later addition. Similarly Sommerstein (1995, 120f.).

\textsuperscript{244} Swift 2006. Swift starts from Euripides’ \textit{Hippolytus} and draws parallels from Greek literature and Catullus. While Swift admits that most of the evidence contradicts the assumption, she rightly stresses that association of a mixed chorus with marriage is a legitimate one − and must have also been for the ancient audience (p.135). The identity of the semi-choruses or of the two choruses in the \textit{stasimon} of \textit{Hippolytus} in question is contested, and not all modern scholars are willing to accept the suggestion first made by Verall that we are dealing with two choruses of the opposite sex. Halleran (1995, 1102-50n.) summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of introducing a male chorus in \textit{Hippolytus}, but remains himself unconvinced that this is the case.

\textsuperscript{245} Seaford 1987, 114-5.
the Danaids themselves are divided, this could foreshadow Hypermestra’s stance in the following play. One needs to note, however, that no indication of any such discordance among the group has emerged so far in the play, and that only one of its members will eventually act of her own accord.

The identity of the secondary chorus cannot be decided with certainty on the basis of the present evidence, but its gender would significantly colour our perception of the main chorus. Do we have a female secondary chorus who expresses, in contrast with the main chorus, the right ideas about marriage? In this case the aberrant stance of the Danaids is emphasized from within their own gender and this prepares us for the murder of their husbands in the next plays. Or are we presented with a male Argive chorus, who also express the right ideas about marriage, but would not completely cancel out the valid questions the Danaids pose about marriage and relations between the sexes?

Even though we cannot be entirely certain about the identity of the secondary chorus, what is important is that Aeschylus has introduced at such a prominent position, as is the ending of a tragedy, a secondary chorus, which expresses reservations towards the main chorus’ rejection of marriage. This comes right after the Danaids have gained the support of the Argives and creates fresh doubts in one’s mind regarding the validity of the maidens’ request. As a result, the drama concludes by stressing the abnormality of the stance of the Danaids. The exodos thus possibly prepares the way for Hypermestra’s own act of disobedience later in the trilogy\textsuperscript{246} and leaves things open to be settled in the following plays.

v. Changes in choral mood

The chorus in \textit{Suppliants} undergoes a development in the course of the play, as its members initially interact in a collected manner with the rest of the characters, but become increasingly disobedient and disruptive as the play proceeds. A similar turn in the choral mood has been observed in \textit{Seven}, though in the opposite direction, from panic into calm deliberation.\textsuperscript{247} Such variations, evolutions or sudden changes in the

\textsuperscript{247} See pp.56ff.
choral mood can be found in the majority of Greek tragedies. Given the intensity of the events that usually occur in the course of a tragic play, as well as the immensity of the reversal they bring with them, this is perhaps not surprising. The direction, however, of the change of the choral mood, as well as the intensity and suddenness of that change, regulates the emotional impact of the play, complements and reflects the dramatists’ preoccupations and can be used to highlight the themes of the tragedy in question.

In this section, I will not focus so much on the chorus adapting its tone simply to respond to the differing events appropriately, but will look at starker changes in the choral attitude. I will argue that such changes are not merely consequences, so to speak, of the twists and turns of the plot, but rather a tool that the dramatist uses to regulate the momentum of the performance, achieve performative and emotional variation and highlight accordingly the different themes of the play. A review of such choral switches in Aeschylean plays other than the Suppliants will help us trace the factors that decide the use and effects of this technique.

At the start of Suppliants the chorus are agitated and urgently looking to have their request granted. Their utterances, however, are calm and collected. By the end of the play, on the other hand, the chorus is panicking out of control. Together with the place of the play in the trilogy, which is examined below, what seems to account for the difference is the relationship of the chorus with the male protagonist in charge of them. In Suppliants the maidens of the chorus act under the advice of their father, though they seem able to manipulate or oppose other males: they have been disobedient to the extreme towards the Egyptians, and they intimidate Pelasgus into granting their request.

A rather more abrupt and intense change in the stance of the chorus happens in Agamemnon. The elders of the first play of the Oresteia are composed and disciplined. But they are also anxious right from the start and remain characteristically irresolute almost to the very end. Their utterances are rarely free from ambiguity and this contributes greatly to the atmosphere of foreboding that runs through the play. They

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248 See next page.
249 This could be an indication that the Danaids only conform to orders when these coincide with their own plans.
do, however, avoid outright conflict and thus maintain a collected attitude until the end when they are presented with the tyrannical regime of Aegisthus, which brings out an assertive and simultaneously unruly side of them. In other words, their change of attitude is in line with the feelings and thoughts they have been expressing throughout the play, but rather abrupt in terms of their interaction with the characters, towards whom they have been respectful and controlled.

The chorus on *Choephoroi* share in the Argive elders’ detestation for the usurpation of the throne. Rather than confront the rulers directly, however, they remain quietly intent on revenge up until the end and incite hatred in Orestes, whom they instigate to act. They even play a small but crucial part in the success of his plan. They do not seem to waver as to their resolution that violent revenge is the right path to take, and seem indifferent to the immensity of the matricide which they encourage Orestes to commit. At the very end of the play, however, they seem to suddenly realize not only how uniquely disturbing this familial murder is, but also that, rather than being the settling end they wished for, it is only the beginning of yet another cycle of violence.

I have so far looked at the factors within individual plays that explain the sudden change of choral attitude. However, the Aeschylean corpus in particular can be especially useful as a case study for understanding how the dramatic chorus affects and supports the overall tone and mood of a performance for one more reason. Aeschylus’ practice of occasionally composing in trilogic form allows one to take a macroscopic view of the chorus, and examine it not only at the level of the single play, but also across a trilogy. Swift changes, smooth variations, or gradual evolutions characterize the choruses of individual Aeschylean plays, but also the choruses of plays belonging to the same trilogy if we view them as a unit.

With that in mind, another factor to be taken into account is the place of a play in its respective trilogy. In that respect, *Suppliants* differs from *Seven* and resembles

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250 See pp.186-190.
251 See pp.106f.
252 Cho.1065-end.
253 One may object that given the very limited number of plays belonging to trilogies that have come down to us, this may be an exercise of limited value. However, by looking at the variation and change of the choral mood across a trilogy, one can draw valuable conclusions regarding the use of a chorus in single plays as well. In other words, trilogies can function as a magnifying glass for the analysis of the ways in which an ancient dramatist understands and uses the chorus in tragedy.
Agamemnon and Choephori. Seven is the last play of a trilogy, while Suppliants was probably the first.\(^{254}\) We are, therefore, not led towards the resolution of a trilogy, but rather towards the central crisis of the play, as the Egyptians will attempt to seize the Danaids, and this may account for the reverse movement in the chorus that was noted above. Agamemnon, on the other hand, shares with the chorus of Suppliants their position within their respective trilogy.\(^{255}\) Choephori falls into that category too in the sense that it is not the final play, and its ending leads in one way or another into the predicament which starts the following play, since it is only at the end that they first see the horrific nature of matricide, thus voicing a concern that must have been shared by the audience, and setting the scene for Eumenides with their focus on avenging matricide.\(^{256}\)

Since both Agamemnon and Suppliants are probably the first part of their respective trilogies (or at least not the final ones), this raises the question how the choral mood could have fluctuated not only within the play, but across the trilogy. How different the degrees of excitement or calm of the successive choruses would be in the closing scene of a play, how much they would obey, but also in what degree they would contribute to the sense of an ending. Though final choral songs in first and second plays may raise or stress anxiety and underscore the lack of resolution, there seems to be a tendency, at least in Aeschylus, to avoid pendant trilogic closures. Thus choruses seem at the end of a trilogy seem to settle into more normative performance modes and/or enactments of socially canonical behaviour. Laments are a good example of this phenomenon, as a traditionally choral activity and one with distinct connotations of social functionality.

\(^{254}\) Regarding the order of the plays of the trilogy, I believe with the majority of scholars that the arguments weigh in favour of Suppliants being the first play followed by Egyptians and Danaids (and the satyr play Amymone). A detailed defence of this position can be found in Garvie 2006, 185-6, with exhaustive references to previous literature, though some (Rössler 1993; Sommerstein 1996, 144-7 and 152-8) have recently argued that Suppliants was the middle play, which was preceded by the Egyptians (set in Egypt) and followed by the Danaids. Taplin (1977, 195-6) expresses reservations as to whether the three plays even belonged to the same trilogy.

\(^{255}\) See previous note.

\(^{256}\) For the chorus across the three plays of the Oresteia, see pp.109f.
vi. Conclusion

In conclusion, the chorus of *Suppliants* proves particularly interesting for the investigation of the female chorus in tragedy. The plot of the play, revolving around marriage and supplication, brings to the fore the ambiguities contained within the nature of the female as understood by the Greeks: the canonical role of a woman as a wife and ritual agent, but, also, importantly, the weak (and therefore often victimised), emotional and wilful female nature that needs to be controlled and tamed. Their identity is further complicated by their mixed pedigree as Egyptians of Greek origin. Wedding and the identity of the chorus as a mythic chorus of maidens highlights links with non-dramatic performances, especially epithalamial poetry: the imagery of the virgin fleeing before her suitor evokes a motif – common both in myth and in literature – that encapsulates the difficulties of this transitional stage in a woman’s life. The fact that the chorus has, alone among surviving tragedies, a protagonistic role in the drama uniquely allows this metaphor to be turned into action and the audience can witness before their eyes how dangerous and disruptive females can be if they step outside their normative roles. One could argue that Aeschylus can present a chorus that is so deeply disruptive partly because this chorus is only the first instalment of a three-piece performance. Had all of the trilogy survived, we would perhaps be able to witness the full range of Greek female stereotypes being questioned, subverted and finally reinforced when one of the Danaids would eventually settle in her destined role as wife.
D. Choephoroi

*Choephoroi* constitutes part of our only fully surviving ancient Greek dramatic trilogy and features a chorus of old female slaves. Of all Aeschylean plays that have come down to us, *Choephoroi*, along with *Supplicants*, is textually the most corrupt. The opening of the play in particular is very problematic, since it is missing from the manuscripts and has been pieced together from various secondary sources. However, while the exact text of the opening, and the exact number of lines, still eludes us, we can be certain that the play opened with a monologue by Orestes, followed by the *parodos* of the chorus. Orestes, at the start of the play, utters a prayer at the tomb of Agamemnon calling upon Hermes to help him avenge the death of his father. While at the tomb, with Pylades on his side, Orestes spots the approaching chorus and wonders who these women are. He decides to stand out of the way until he knows what prompted the procession.

The opening of *Choephoroi* resembles the opening of the other two plays of the trilogy. *Agamemnon* and *Eumenides* both begin with a prayer-monologue, which is interrupted when something catches the eye of the speaker. The effect is not as strong in all three plays, but there is a striking structural similarity between them, and the break is triggered in all three by a visual stimulus. In both *Eumenides* and *Choephoroi* the speakers break the flow of their speech upon seeing the chorus. Both choruses consist of old females dressed in black, and both are immediately perceived as a disconcerting spectacle whose unspecified nature or function worries the speaker. As it will emerge in the course of the play, the similarities between the two

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257 *Choephoroi* is also the only middle play of a known trilogy to have survived. Other surviving tragedies that formed part of a trilogy are *Seven* (third in order), and *Suppliants* (probably first in order, see n.254 p.85).

258 The play survives only on the tenth-century manuscript M (and copies of that manuscript), and the section of M containing the opening of *Choephoroi* is lost. For the text, see Garvie 1986, liv-lx and for specific passages, and the opening in particular, the *apparatus criticus* in West’s edition (West 1998). For the transmission of *Suppliants* see FJ-W, 1:55-77.

259 For a reconstruction of the opening part see West, 1985; Griffith 1987; also Garvie 1986, 1-21n.

260 This constitutes the earliest attestation of the convention of a character standing aside to observe unnoticed someone else (see Garvie 1986, 20-1n., with further references).

261 See pp.40f.

262 Taplin (1977, 362n.1) rightly notes that the break in the prologue of *Agamemnon* is much stronger than in *Eumenides*, but he is rather quick to dismiss any significant similarity between the prologues of *Eumenides* and *Choephoroi*.

263 τι χρήσιμα λέοντος τις ποθ’ ἀδὲ ὁμήχασα/ στείχει γυναικῶν φάρεσθαι μελαγχίμως/ πρέπουσα ποία ἐνεχώροι προστεκάς/ πόσειρα δόξοις τίτιμα προσκυνεῖ νέον/ ἢ πατερὶ τωμέ πάθη ἐπεικάσας τύχω/ χώσεις φεροῦσις νεφτερός μειλίγματα; (10-15, Orestes upon seeing the chorus). In *Agamemnon*
choruses run much deeper than simply their appearance; their visual similarity reflects thematic similarities as well. They are both forces of memory and revenge whose function in the play is to ensure that murderers do not go unpunished.\textsuperscript{264} This affinity is one element only among the numerous factors that create a strong sense of continuity between the choruses of the three plays of the \textit{Oresteia}\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{265}}

\textbf{i. The chorus in black}

As in \textit{Eumenides},\textsuperscript{266} before we even hear the voices of the chorus and probably before all members of the audience can catch a glimpse of them or notice them approach and file into the orchestra, we hear Orestes describe them:

\begin{verbatim}
ὁμήγυρις στείχει γυναικῶν φάρεσιν μελαγχίμοις
πρέπουσα (10-1)
\end{verbatim}

As Orestes points out, the group consists of women conspicuous in their black cloaks. With his description, Orestes is not only directing the audience’s attention to the clothes of the chorus, but also offers two alternative interpretations. Are the black clothes indicative of a misfortune that has recently befallen the \textit{oikos}? Or have the women come to pour libations for his father now long dead?\textsuperscript{267} When the chorus speak their first line, it is as if they are responding to Orestes’ remark, and thus answer the question that the audience was invited to ask. They mention briefly that they have been sent to make drink-offerings, but also emphasise that their clothes are torn and their cheeks gashed because they have been beating their hands and rending their garments in an expression of endless grief.

\begin{verbatim}
λινοφθόροι δ’ ύφασμάτων
λακίδες ἐφλαδὸν ὑπ’ ἄλγεσιν,
πρόστερνοι στολμοὶ πέπλων ἀγελάστοις
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{264} While memory is very much a domain of the Greek chorus, both inside and outside tragedy, dwelling on feelings of anger and hatred and consequent instigations to revenge are frequently associated with the female in Greek tragedy. For the female chorus as moral agent see Foley 2001, 33-36.

\textsuperscript{265} Cf. Taplin 2002, 94-5.

\textsuperscript{266} See p.87 and pp.109f.

\textsuperscript{267} See pp.198-202.

\textsuperscript{267} For the text see n.263 above. Speculation about the reasons of an entry from someone who is already onstage is a technique commonly used to increase suspense (Taplin 1977, 297-8).
From a purely visual point of view, the theatre audience must have had the same reaction as Orestes upon viewing the chorus. Opposite the small number of actors in a Greek tragedy, the tragic chorus constitutes a very large group, and one that famously rarely leaves the stage. All dancers wear identical masks and clothes, and move mostly in a formalized manner, in unison or in two groups. Therefore they are a uniform mass, which forms a constant visual element. Often they are perhaps too uniform a mass, since viewers seated far up would not necessarily be able to discern all detail.

Electra is also probably wearing black, as 16-8 seem to indicate:

Ἡλέκτραν δοκῶ
στειχεῖν ἀδελφήν τὴν ἐμὴν πένθει λυγρῶ
πρέπουσαν (16-18)

Thus Electra is visually absorbed into the black mass of the chorus. We can reasonably assume that Orestes is not wearing black. There is no such mention in the text, and, if we think in terms of the plot, Orestes would avoid arousing the suspicion of other characters with conspicuous attire. By his costume, lighter in colour or possibly in a more varied pattern in the manner of the travel dress of a wealthy

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268 These verses emphasize the mourning of the chorus, and are indications of their costumes and masks that probably featured cropped hair.
269 For the number of actors in Greek tragedy see Pickard-Cambridge 1968, 135-156; Csapo and Slater 1995, 221-3. 
270 In extant tragedies only Aesch. Eum.234 (but we probably have a change of scene there); Soph. Aj.814; Eur. Me.746, Hel.385, [Eur] Rh.564.
271 Wyles (2011, 9) rightly suggests that we should not expect absolute uniformity from the costumes of the chorus members. Still, dark colours would have been the dominant impression in the chorus of Choephori, despite possible small variations in costume or mask.
272 It is conceivable that the signs of mourning be her attitude rather than her clothes (Garvie 1986, ad loc., mentions both possibilities); note, however, that Orestes uses similar terminology for Electra and the chorus, who are explicitly described as dressed in black (12 φάρεσιν μελαγχίμοις/πρέπουσας; 18 πένθει λυγρῶ πρέπουσαν).
273 The overall presence of Electra’s character corroborates the assumption that she would be visually integrated rather than stand out. As Taplin notes (1977, 340), remarkably for a named character in Aeschylus Electra is excluded from the second part of the play, where she is not even mentioned. Garvie (1986, 691-9n.) convincingly argues against the suggestion that Electra speaks lines 691-9.
274 The only possible reference to Orestes’ attire is his mention of a piece woven by Electra depicting a wild beast (231-2 ὕφασμα τοῦτο, σῆς ἔργον χειρὸς, σπάθης τε πληγάς, ἐν δὲ θήμεσιν γυρρήν.). In the Euripidean allusion to these verses in Electra (538-44), the reference seems to be to a garment, rather than a piece of fabric.
citizen, he would stand out and thus have visually the significance that his presence will have for the action of the play too.

Black is a colour that is both uncommon for a chorus in surviving tragedy, and associated with mourning and bereavement in Greek thought and practice. In other words, black clothes are marked apparel. This ‘blackness’, therefore, deserves a closer look as to the visual impact it would have on the audience and hence on their perception of the play. The negative connotations of black clothes expand beyond bereavement dress, and are further supported by the associations of the colour black in the Aeschylean corpus. Occurrences of ‘black’ in Aeschylus, regularly carry connotations of anger, fear and spilt blood. Metaphorical use of μέλας is always negative. The mind turns black when in anger or fear, adverse luck is called black, bad dreams can be black, ἀτη is black too. More significantly for the present play, shed blood is black (Eum.981 μηδὲ πιοῦσα κόνις μέλαν αἴμα πολιτάν; Sept.735 καὶ γαία κόνις/ πιὴ μελαμπαγέξ αἴμα φοίνοιν; and it turns Ares black with its flow in Ag.1510f. ἐπιφοιαίοιν αἰμάτων / μέλας Άρης); the Erinyes, avengers of kin-murder, are black or dressed in black or dark colours (more than once in Seven 700

276 At 560 Orestes says that he will approach the house ξένῳ γἀρ εἰκώς, παντελῆ σαγήν ἔχων. Orestes has travelled from Phocis to Argos, so it makes sense that he already bears ‘the complete equipment’ of a traveller. Orestes mentions his luggage again at 675 (ἀὑτόφορον οἴκεια σαγῆ). Sommerstein (2008, 2:297) and Garvie (1986, 223) seem to think that Orestes and Pylades disguise into travellers while off-stage between 584 and 652. However, the main function of their absence is not to enter dressed in different costume, but to enter into what is now supposed to be a different place of the city: while the first part of the play takes place in front of the tomb, the scene refocuses to the palace at some point between 584-653 (Taplin 1977, 339).

277 The trilogic framework is pertinent here, since Orestes’ return has been repeatedly alluded to in Agamemnon (1280-5, 1646-8, 1667). As a result, when Orestes enters at the beginning of the play, ‘it is no mere stepping-on to get the play started, it is the return of the avenger’ (Taplin 1977, 333).

278 The suppliants in Euripides’ Suppliants ‘wear mourning, presumably black, clothes’ (thus Morwood 2001, 97n.; Collard (1975, 2:95-7n.) also rightly takes it for granted that they are dressed in black); but nowhere in the play are their clothes explicitly described as black.


280 The Eumenides are also black (μελαιναῖ) in the following play of the trilogy (52, probably meaning black-faced and black-clad, Sommerstein 2008, 2:361n.19). The black clothes is also part of a prominent antithesis that runs through the Oresteia between light and darkness, for which see Russo 1974, and for a more succinct, insightful survey Peradotto 1964, 388-393.

281 μελαινότων φοίνῃ ἀμύσσεται φόβῳ (Pers.115).

282 μελαιναῖ ξύν τύχαι (Supp.95).

283 ὁντὸς μέλαν (Supp.889).

284 μελανούσιν ἀταν (Supp. 530); μελαίνας (μελάθρωσιν) ἀτας (Ag.770).
Therefore, dressing a chorus all in black is an intense and complex dramaturgical gesture. As will be shown below, the effect of this choice is further intensified by the trilogic format of the Oresteia, and more specifically by the position of Choephori as the middle play between Agamemnon and Eumenides. The chorus of Choephori are determined not to forget, they are determined to lament, and eventually avenge their dead king, and their black, torn clothes are both the visual manifestation of this attitude, which has pronounced elements of transgressive behaviour, and a reminder of the bleak, oppressive atmosphere in the house of the Atreidai.

At the beginning of the play, Orestes was puzzled and concerned by the black robes of the chorus. The first words of the chorus confirmed his suspicion that they were on their way to pour libations, but the chorus also took the opportunity to elaborate on their endless grief (24-31; 81-3), their hatred for, and fear of, Clytemestra (45-58; 75-80), their wish and need to avenge the dead (40-1; 66-70). Orestes mentioned his father as well as his mother at the very beginning of the play thus making the connection with the first play of the trilogy. It is the chorus, however, that first elaborates on the theme of revenge and the undercurrent of hatred and fear that runs through the Argive society.

In the course of the play the chorus will display a subversive stubbornness and a tendency to disobey, and their dress visualizes this attitude. The gestures described by the chorus when they first speak are traditional gestures of mourning, and they may thus initially seem appropriate as a reaction to Agamemnon’s murder. There are, however, two elements that signify that their attitude is less normative than one might think. First, the time lapsed from the murder of the king, and second, the intensity of their gestures of self-wounding.

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285 Also in Euripides (El.1345; Or.321, 408).
286 Similarly to the Sophoclean Electra, though in a less extreme manner.
The previous play, *Agamemnon*, does not end with the murder of Agamemnon, but with the emergence of a discontent among the citizens, which finally breaks out as an exchange of threats between the chorus and Aegisthus (Ag.1577-end). With Clytemestra’s intervention any further trouble is avoided, and the Argive elders of the chorus exit in silence, suppressing their anger against the usurpers. With their entrance the chorus of *Choephori* build an atmosphere of ‘unrelieved gloom and anger’; and thus carry on the climate of unrest that has been so prominent at the end of *Agamemnon*. The disaffected chorus of the previous play emerges now in this one. But in *Choephori* all characters of the play, with the exception of Pylades, are members of the household, and so is the chorus. The switch to a more *oikos*-related context underscores the comprehensiveness of resentment and grievance that has infused both the *oikos* and the *polis* and has become, by now, chronic. We will only have to wait until the third play of the trilogy to be confronted with the cosmic ramifications of this circle of violence: the gods are angry and unsettled too, and the need of a solution has become imperative in order for the familial, social, political and divine order to be redressed.

Thus continuity, but also the passage of time, invest the opening scene with additional tension and intensify the connotations of the chorus’ black robes. The murder of *Agamemnon* may have taken place just a while ago for the theatre audience, or a few pages back for a modern reader of the *Oresteia*, but within the plot it has happened years before the opening of *Choephori*, long enough for Orestes to have become a grown man.

Yet the chorus stretches the boundaries of commemoration. The intensity of their mourning gestures points to lamenting someone more recently deceased, especially the rending of clothes and scratching of their faces. Self harming is a gesture of a high emotional tone, which was probably considered both markedly gendered by the fifth century, and potentially transgressive in its intensity. It was also conduct perhaps accepted to a certain degree for a funeral, but considered abnormal or excessive once the dead had been buried. Not only have the chorus been performing

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287 See pp.186-190.  
288 Garvie 1986, 55.  
289 Sourvinou-Inwood 2004, 166.  
290 Cf. n.294.
these rituals far longer than expected, but as a result they now enter in torn clothes, visually triggering another indicator of disorder, that of the disarranged dress.\footnote{Sourvinou-Inwood 2004, 168.}

The apparent reason why the chorus enters is not to lament the dead king, but to pour libations. Annual commemorative rites were of great significance for the Greeks, so much so that a man could adopt a son in order to ensure the proper performance of annual rites.\footnote{Kurtz-Boardman 1971, 147. See p.97, n.303 for the relation between commemorative rites and the right to inherit.} Ironically, Agamemnon has been deprived of the son who would perform these rites for him, and the libations the chorus are going to pour are not presented as a commemorative ritual, but rather as an emergency measure adopted by Clytemestra in an effort to appease her murdered husband.

To conclude, the chorus in the\textit{ parodos} embody the main themes as they will emerge in the course of the play. The chain of transgressive acts that have taken place in the trilogy and its back story have resulted in a deep and widespread disruption of civic and familial order. This is reflected in the distortion of the etiquette of death and bereavement. Those who should have been lamented, have been not\footnote{Orestes on Clytemestra’s attitude: δαίαις ἐν ἐκφοράῖς/ ἄνευ πολλῶν ἀνακτῆσαι/ ἄνευ δὲ πενθημάτων/ ἔπτης αὐτοίμωστον ἄνδρα θήψαι (433ff.). Several other passages also mention the unseemly death of the king, eg. 345ff., 350, 479, as well as – probably – the opening of the play (8ff.).} and are now lamented beyond the natural time limit\footnote{The period of mourning varies between different areas and different periods (Alexiou 2002, 9). Despite the lack of evidence regarding the details of the mourning period for archaic and classical Athens (Kurtz-Boardman 1971, 148), the belief that mourning should be confined within specific limits regulated by law is quite consistent. Periodical offerings to the tomb offered the socially approved framework for remembering and lamenting the dead, thus ensuring the re-integration of the living into the community (Kurtz-Boardman 1971, 142). Lamentation is a transitional stage, and as such prolonging it is a distortion of the expected norms (Sourvinou-Inwood 1983, 47-8; and 1995, 440). Lamentation, as well as virginity (for Electra) – another transitional phase, are extended beyond the right time by Clytemestra’s action.} and in an excessive degree,\footnote{Cf. 106, where the chorus state that they respect Agamemnon’s tomb like an altar. The equation of tomb to altar in tragedy is not unusual and later βωμός is used to denote a funerary altar (Garvie 1986, 106n.), but this choral statement is only one of a series of expressions of blind obedience to Agamemnon’s memory.} while there will be no lament onstage for those who will die later in the play.
ii. Lamentation and the etiquette of death

In Greece, where the *oikos* is a major regulator in familial and social relations, death does not signify only a personal loss for those left behind, but also a changed factor in the social hierarchy. The dead is both an extinct member of the *oikos* (in social and economic terms), and a very strong presence (in the moral and metaphysical sense). Therefore, the position of the person while still alive largely defines how far-reaching the consequences of their death will be for the family and the larger community.

Since death is much more than a personal affair in ancient Greece, so is lamentation. Clytemnestra’s decision to suppress customary burial rites, and therefore ignore social imperatives, bears additional weight since the dead was also the king. The parallel of Sophocles’ *Antigone* highlights the seriousness of such an action in a tragic context. The two cases are not identical, since Agamemnon was murdered after his return, as the rightful king, from a victorious war, unlike Polynices in *Antigone*, who had initiated an attack against his own country. In both cases there are factors that potentially give some moral authority to the refusal of burial, such as Agamemnon’s controversial decision to sacrifice Iphigeneia, or the obscure reasons why Eteocles rather than Polynices was the one to remain in Thebes, but the circumstances in *Agamemnon* still make for a radical breach of every order and custom about burial.

The customary gender role division at funerals additionally highlights Clytemnestra’s transgressive actions, which in turn, as we will see below, compels the chorus to be transgressive in an attempt to balance out Clytemnestra’s delinquency. Lamentation is one of the few occasions where the female has such a prominent, vocal presence. While the female words and actions are largely being dictated by tradition that operates with its own set of rules, lamentation is one of the few rituals where women operate without a script. Both the physical performance of the funeral rites and the preparation for them, such as washing and dressing the body are carried out by

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296 Already predicted by the chorus in *Ag*.1541-50.
297 Or even formal authority in the case of Polynices, since he was both a war dead and an enemy of his country (in Athens traitors were not allowed to be buried in Attic soil, cf. Thuc.1.136.1; and Xen. *Hell*.1.7.22).
298 Modern Greek lament offers useful insights into how the personal element can intertwine with the traditional in this context (see Alexiou 2002).
women, while the arrangements for the funeral are the responsibility of the males of the *oikos*.299 Clytemestra, true to the controlling, masculine picture of hers painted in the previous play of the trilogy, takes onto herself the male role of controlling the initiation and arrangement of the funeral, and suppresses the female role of lamentation.

As a result of Clytemestra’s transgression, the chorus, in their attempt to remedy the situation from a position of weakness, are ‘forced’ to perform a distorted ritual: the *kommos* (306-478) is a largely improvised lament that, as shown above, should have taken place a long time ago, and highlights the upset order of the *oikos* and the *polis*.300 In that respect the ritual transgression on the part of the chorus is an attempt at ritual normativity.301 This is not to underestimate that the disruptive potential is perhaps inherent in lamentation, since funerary rites are in many respects an exceptional ritual. First, lamentation interconnects personal feeling with public action, and thus almost occupies a middle ground that mediates between society and family. For the Greeks it is also a communication channel between the dead and the living, and by extension between humans and gods, especially those of the underworld. It is meant to function as a vent for grief and to guide those left behind through a regulated channel away from the pollution of death and back to the normality that the enormity of the event has disturbed. In this trilogy, both Clytemestra and the chorus interfere with funerary rituals and the chorus clearly interpret Clytemestra’s actions as a deliberate affront to Agamemnon’s honour and the reputation of his legitimate heirs.302 Finally, in Greece the right to lament seems to have always been linked with the right to inherit, which adds further tension to the ritual.303 For these reasons, lamentation had the potential to be a powerful mechanism in the hands of women, or even in the hands of men acting through women. There is evidence that the Greeks were well aware of the tension and the problems that could potentially arise from lamentation. Famously Solon sought to restrict female presence at funerals, and there are a number of laws passed from the 6th century onwards to regulate funeral rituals.304

299 Hame 2008.
300 See previous page.
301 See p.98.
302 See next page.
In this case, the dead man, Agamemnon, was the head of the oikos, and the king of the state, and should have been lamented by his closest relatives and succeeded by his son. The manner of his death, however, excluded any such possibility, since those who should have lamented him are his enemies and murderers (Clytemestra), or have been cast away (Electra, Orestes). His immediate heir is cast away as a threat, or, as Clytemestra claims in Agamemnon (877-886) sent away for his own safety and the safety of the throne. Therefore, Agamemnon’s natural mourners either do not wish to mourn or are prevented from doing so.\(^{305}\) For the chorus of the Choephoroi the dishonouring way in which the dead Agamemnon was treated is a blow on Orestes’ own honour and makes revenge imperative for the restoration of legitimate order. This process of repressing the ritual of lamentation has the effect of investing the ritual with an additional dynamic and casts a different light on the lamentation when it does eventually take place in the form of the kommos. The length and central position of this lyric part underscores its importance in the trilogy.\(^{306}\) Clytemestra and Aegisthus murdered Agamemnon and ensured his degradation by mutilating him and depriving him of an honourable funeral:

El: ἰὼ ἰὼ δαία
πάντολμε μάτερ, δαίως ἐν ἐκφοβαίς
ἀνευ πολιτάν ἀνακτ’,
ἀνευ δὲ πενθημάτων
ἐτλῆς ἀνοίμωκτον ἀνδρὰ θάψαι. (429-33)

Cho: ἐμασχαλίσθη δέ γ’, ὡς τὸ δ’ εἰδῆς,
ἐπροσε δ’ ἀπερ νιν ὧδε θάπτει,
μόρον κτίσαι μιωμένα
ἄφεστον αἰώνι σῶ. (439-44)

The king was not lamented as was fit, and did not receive a public funeral before his people. Electra’s lament was hushed and shut out of view,\(^{307}\) and the chorus are now attempting to redress the injustice by offering a lament that involves both the closest relatives of the deceased and the women of his household.\(^{308}\) In other words, the chorus take charge of the ritual, as Clytemestra did before, and thus disobey their

\(^{305}\) For Clytemestra corrupting Agamemnon’s funeral rites, see Hame 2004; also Hame 2008, 6, for the steps that were ignored or mishandled.

\(^{306}\) ‘The kommos is not only the longest lyric composition in extant Greek tragedy, it is structurally the most complex’ (Garvie 1986, 124). See also pp.124f. for the structure of the kommos.

\(^{307}\) χέουσα πολύδακρυν γόον κεκρυμμένα (449).

\(^{308}\) ‘[...] and similarly lamentation, if it gives them honour, is called gratification’ (transl. Sommerstein).
rulers and the social norms that want women obey the directives of men. At the same time, however, they respect and uphold the very norms that Aegisthus and Clytememstra have abused, and address the designated honours to their dead king by lamenting him properly under the guidance of his rightful heirs.

The *kommos* of the chorus and the siblings (306-478) thus clarifies and extends the themes that have been set out so far in the play, and helps move the action forward. Right from the start there seem to be two different approaches to the lyrics the chorus and the siblings set out to sing. For the chorus, the lament is the means that will eventually lead to retribution. For the two siblings, on the other hand, it seems to be more an expression of grief for their loss sharing space with anger for the dishonour they suffered as a result. Neither element is alien to a dirge, since a *threnos* at the tomb traditionally expressed an array of feelings and ideas on the dead and the attitude of the living to the dead, including wishful thinking about the present and bitterness towards the dead for deserting them. The very first words of both the chorus and the siblings are indicative of their respective stance on the issue at hand, while also in keeping with traditional ways of lamenting.

To the siblings’ laments the chorus responds with verses that tune in to the grief, but push towards a more optimistic and active outcome. Orestes ignores the chorus’ remarks and dwells on the past, wishing that Agamemnon would better have died at Troy (345-354). Electra too resorts to wishful thinking and says that his murderers should have been slain instead (368-371). Here the chorus grasps the opportunity to indicate that the king’s murderers can still be punished, and that it is in the siblings’ power to do so, thus giving a practical turn to the feeling of injustice that Orestes and Electra expressed so far.

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309 ἀλλ’ ὁ μεγάλαι Μοῖραι, Διόθεν/ τὴν τελευταίαν, ἢ τὸ δίκαιον μεταβαίνει/ ἀντὶ μὲν ἔχθράς γλώσσης ἐχθρὸι/ γλώσσα τελεύτω/ ταυρελάμενον/ πρόκειται Λάκη μὲν’ ἀντεί/ ἀντὶ δὲ πληγής φονίας φονίαν/ πληγήν τινέτω (306-313).
310 See 315-322 for Orestes and 332-9 for Electra. See also 480, where Orestes asks his father for help so that he becomes the master of the house and thus honour the dead Agamemnon (483-5), and 481-2, where Electra asks to be rid of Aegisthus and find a husband (but the text is here corrupt, see Garvie 1986, ad loc.).
311 See Garvie 1986, 55 and 122, with further references.
312 ἀντὶ δὲ θρήνων εὐπορείων/ ταύτων μελίθρως ἐν βασιλείας/ νεκρώτα φίλον κομίσειεν (342).
313 A particularly bitter remark, since Agamemnon survived the war and returned as a victor only to meet a dishonourable death.
314 The chorus reminds the siblings that Agamemnon was a king, and therefore his death all the more disgraceful, as is the current status of his children: βασιλείας γὰρ ἔστι, ὦρᾳ ἔτι (360).
ταῦτα μέν, ὡς παῖ, κρείσσονα χρυσοῦ, 
μεγάλης δὲ τύχης καὶ υπερβορέου 
μείζονα φωνεῖς· δύνασαι γάρ. (372-4)

The chorus becomes yet more specific in stating that the hands of the rulers are 
unclean, and imply that chthonic powers will be by the side of the siblings:315

τῶν μὲν ἄρωγοι 
κατὰ γῆς ἡδη, τῶν δὲ κρατούντων 
χέρες οὐχ ὀσίαι δὲ στυγερὸν τούτων· 
παισὶ δὲ μᾶλλον γεγένηται (376-9)

This is a longer intervention than the ones the chorus made so far in the kommos, but 
employs a similar persuasive technique. The first part seemingly agrees with the 
previous speaker, the second part pushes forward to more aggressively drastic 
utterances, the goal being exhortation to action. Indeed, this comment has an 
immediate effect on Orestes. It marks the transition from general lamentation for 
Agamemnon and wishful punishment of the murderers to a clear realization that this 
should be carried out by himself. Electra no longer wishes for, but demands justice in 
place of injustice (398 δίκαν δ’ ἐξ ἀδίκων ἀπαιτῶ). The chorus enhances Electra’s 
feeling, appealing to established laws of retribution.316 Here again we notice a subtle 
rhetorical manipulation on the part of the chorus. Once they have heard the explicit 
utterance of Orestes’ intention to act, they turn again from the specific to general 
ethical principles that call for Orestes’ action.

The kommos is hence much more than a postponed lament. It is the process 
through which Orestes overcomes any hesitation and internalizes the oracle given to 
him by Apollo.317 By the end of it, he is fully prepared to act. The kommos is also a 
powerful intervention on the part of the chorus, who manipulate Orestes’ and Electra’s 
indignation for the murder of their father and their own dishonour in order to direct 
them to what they see as a necessary act of retribution. In the kommos, the chorus 
improvises and manipulates a ritual, combining the traditional female role of the

315 Cf. Orestes’ prayer to Chthonios Hermes at the start of the play.
316 ἄλλα νομίζεις μὲν φονίας οὐτίγνοις/ χερές ἐς πέδον ἀλλό προσατεί/ ἀίμα ἀλλά γὰρ λογίας Ἐρυνοῦ/ παρὰ τῶν πρῶτων φθημένων ἄτη/ ἐπεί ἐπάγουσαν ἐπὶ ἄτη (400-5).
317 In 269-67 Orestes foresees a bleak future for himself if he fails to avenge his father. Uncertain how 
far he should trust in such an oracle (297), he concludes that the deed needs to be done (an impersonal 
phrase), whether the oracle is true or not (298).
mourner with another role, also frequently female in tragedy, that is, the role of the moral agent.\textsuperscript{318}

The chorus is thus instigating Orestes to an act that was already his plan when he returned to Argos at Apollo’s behest. The chorus, and their kommos, is not the reason why Orestes is going to murder Clytemestra. The kommos is, however, crucial in steeling Orestes’ will. More importantly, it is central in bringing out the full significance of Orestes’ action and its ethical and social ramifications and draws the audience’s attention to larger issues such as the difficult negotiation between divine and human will, necessity and free will, crime and punishment, power and authority. At the same time, it crucially suppresses the key theme of matricide, allowing it to surface at the most effective moment, when Orestes confronts his mother.

iii. The authority of the chorus

As shown above, the chorus play a central role in instilling in Orestes the determination to go through with the matricide. In that respect they display a practical, action-orientated attitude. This is evident in their intervention later on as well, when they ask Cilissa to alter Clytemestra’s message to Aegisthus and thus ensure that Aegisthus will meet Orestes on his own.\textsuperscript{319} The chorus express hatred for the usurpers, and side unambiguously with Orestes and Electra as the legitimate heirs of Agamemnon. They manage to affect Orestes by highlighting the injustice and dishonour conferred upon him by Clytemestra’s actions and make rhetorical use of language. At the same time they repeatedly call upon moral principles and tie their personal stance strongly with the ethical and political ramifications that the circle of violence has had for the oikos of the Atreidai and the polis of Argos. They do so in their role as a group of women who lament in a funeral along with the members of the family, thus carrying out a function that is traditionally female and, under normal circumstances, socially endorsed.

These conditions give the chorus in this tragedy the leading role in defining the moral landscape of the first part of the play. Their utterances condemn murder and

\textsuperscript{318} For the persuasion that maternal figures exercise on males in tragedy, see Foley 2001, 272-199.
\textsuperscript{319} pp.105ff.
usurpation of the throne and are seemingly of a universally accepted tone. On the other hand, the chorus are urging Orestes to commit matricide. Not only is this a crime that goes against deeply rooted social and natural imperatives,\(^\text{320}\) it is also yet another crime that will inevitably continue the circle of violence that the chorus claim to be attempting to break. Despite their authoritative gnomic utterances, the chorus completely fails to recognise the moral implications and practical repercussions of the action they are championing.

Therefore, two strands converge in this chorus: on the one hand, the moral indignation for the murder of Agamemnon and the rightful anger of the people for the usurpation of the throne and the violent disturbance of the social and moral order.\(^\text{321}\) On the other, the obsessive determination to avenge their king with no consideration for the horrific crime of matricide that this involves.\(^\text{322}\) How do these two considerations affect the authority of the chorus? And how does this, in turn, affect our reception of the actions of Clytemestra and Aegisthus, as well as of Orestes?

The lament shared by the chorus and the siblings in \textit{Choephoroi} is in many respects the ideal ground for an analysis of the authority of the chorus, because of the place and function of the \textit{kommos} in the play. The \textit{kommos} in \textit{Choephoroi} is structurally highlighted, since it occupies a large, central part in the play, and even in the trilogy.\(^\text{323}\) It is also the section of the tragedy where the chorus interacts in a sustained and crucial way with Electra and particularly with Orestes, who is essentially the protagonist of the play.\(^\text{324}\) In the collective, public role of the mourners, the women of the chorus pass a moral judgment on the actions of Clytemestra and Aegisthus and give their perspective on the situation in gnomic utterances.\(^\text{325}\) Through these actions the chorus temporarily takes charge and reverses part of the injustice committed against Agamemnon, as the dead king finally receives the lamentation due to him. In this way both the position and the function of the \textit{kommos} gives the chorus a prominent,

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\(^\text{320}\) Cf. n.3 on p.112.
\(^\text{321}\) See below, p.108 with n.347, for this chorus of old foreign females slaves as a stand-in for the city.
\(^\text{322}\) In Athens, it was the dead man’s relatives' duty to ensure his death is avenged (McDowell 1978, 109-113). Yet again, punishment is complicated by the kindred nature of Clytemestra’s crime.
\(^\text{323}\) See n.306 on p.98.
\(^\text{324}\) Aristotle defines the \textit{kommos} as a form of tragic lamentation shared by the chorus and the actors (\textit{Poet.}1452b); for antiphonal singing in lamentation see Alexiou 2002, 131-150.

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dominant position. The kommos is thus instrumental in the reception of the chorus in the play and potentially colours future utterances and actions in the tragedy.

Given that authority is frequently a quality that can be best gauged in a person or chorus’ interaction with other characters, in the following pages I will look at the interaction of the chorus with two, contrasting, pairs. Starting from the kommos, I will examine the interaction of the slave women with Orestes and Electra, whom the chorus view as the legitimate heirs of the king and saviours of the polis. I will then analyze their interaction with Aegisthus and Clytemestra, whom the chorus view as murderers of the king and usurpers of the throne. I will look at the ways in which the chorus both helps to establish and sustain or withhold the authority of the different characters, and eventually how this affects the reception of the larger themes opened up by the play.

iv. The chorus and the siblings

As shown above, the chorus condemn Clytemestra’s delinquent actions and side unquestionably with the siblings. The support of the chorus for Orestes and Electra undermines Clytemestra’s authority, but also has a double effect on the presentation of the two siblings. Orestes and Electra, the main characters in relation to which the chorus of slaves should appear to be of lower status, are deprived of the rights and honour due to them, and have become themselves as dishonoured as a slave would be. The text repeatedly draws attention to the low status to which Clytemestra and Aegisthus have condemned Orestes and Electra. The two siblings are fugitives and vagrants, who have to supplicate for their life,326 live in disgrace not fit to their royal descent,327 deprived of even the material wealth a member of the royal oikos would

326 πεπραμένοι γὰρ νῦν γέ πως ἀλώμεθα/ πρὸς τής τεκούσης, ἄνδρα δ’ ἀντιλλάξατο/ Αἰγισθον, ὦγερος σοῦ φόνου μεταίπους:/ κάγιο μὲν ἀντίδουλος: ἐκ δὲ χρησάτων/ φεύγων Ὀρέστης ἑστίν (134ff., Electra on herself and Orestes); Orestes at 336f.: τάρος δ’ ἱκέται δέδεκται/φυγάδας ὃ’ ὁμοίως and 916 αἰκῶς ἐπιφάνην ὑν ἐλευθέρου πατρός; and later 1042 ἐγὼ δ’ ἄλητης τῆς ἡγήτος ἀπόδειξες (cf. Ag.1280ff.)
327 443 and 435 the chorus narrating the dishonourable story of their father; 444 Electra on her life under the new rulers (ἄτιμος, σοβήν ἀξία); 479 τρόποισιν σὺ τυραννικοῖς θανάσιν; 495 ὁ δὲ ἔλεγεισ ὁσοῦτ’ ἀνέδειν, πάτερ; 915/6 αἰκῶς ἐπιφάνην ὑν ἐλευθέρου πατρός.
normally enjoy. In other words, in their current state they differ little from the slave women of the chorus.

The marginal space that the two siblings occupy is underscored by the fact that in the first, larger part of the play, the royal offspring interact solely with a chorus of slaves. Their aid too comes from slaves (both the chorus and Cilissa) and this emphasizes the marginalization of the new generation. Orestes and Electra do not explicitly acknowledge the similarity between themselves and the slave women, but they do seem to readily accept the motherly attitude that the chorus displays towards them. The women repeatedly call Orestes and Electra ‘my child’ and admonish them as to how they should act. In that they remind us of a role that combines elements of both a slave and a mother, that is, the role of a trophos. This attitude is one implicitly claimed by the chorus, but also recognized by Orestes and Electra; the two siblings ask for the chorus’ help and more that once call upon them to become their ‘accomplice’. This relationship has roots in the prominent role elderly females must have held outside tragedy in real life, that is, the upbringing of children within the extended Greek household. The chorus are fit for the role of a motherly figure due to their identity as loyal, old, female slaves. But it is also specifically the circumstances of the play that open up the role to them. The siblings’ real mother, Clytemestra, has behaved in a markedly un-womanlike manner: not only has she murdered their father, but she also cast away Orestes and undermined Electra’s position in the oikos and her

328 249ff. νηστις πεζει αμος; 300 χρηματων αχηνια; 350 Orestes wishes that his father would have died in battle, so that people would honour himself and Electra; 408 αηηνια, ατεμα.
329 Less important members of the household are expected to join members of the family in a lament, which perhaps tones down the delinquent nature of this interaction.
330 In a reworking of the same idea Euripides’ Electra lives in a hut in the countryside, married to a dirt farmer.
331 264-5; 324; 372; 478; 524. The comparison of these passages with Seven 686, where the Theban maidens call Eteocles ‘(dear/my) child’ is illuminating for both plays: in Seven, the address is surprising and unexpected (see pp.59ff.); here, scattered as it is throughout the first part of the play, creates a consistent attitude of the chorus towards the main characters.
332 They instruct Electra on how to pour the libations (106); and at 551 they give instruction to Orestes. More importantly, they seem to shape and direct the siblings’ understanding of the past and therefore of any future action.
333 For the real trophos of Orestes, see below, pp.105ff.
334 At 84ff. Electra asks for their advice after she calls them slaves (in her address she uses the optative with αν; a polite form of request, see Garvie 1986, ad loc.); 100ff. τηρετε έστε βουλης, ω φιλαι, μετατηται ης 460 έν δε γενου προς έχθρους (the chorus to Electra, now seeing themselves as complicit to Electra).
335 See p.34.
future prospects. The maternal void this creates is filled by the chorus, as well as more explicitly by Cilissa.\footnote{See 743-765.}

The old age of the chorus does not receive much linguistic emphasis in the text, being only briefly mentioned in the play,\footnote{Their age is not explicitly stressed, but the chorus do call themselves ‘old’ once (171 παλαιά). That should be sufficient indication of their age, in combination with the following: they repeatedly address Orestes and Electra as ‘my child/children’ (though the case of Seven calls for caution, see above n.331); their general stance of admonition is self-evidently accepted by the siblings, which suggests that they are older, although older does not equal old; they may have been enslaved while Agamemnon was still present, judging by their loyalty to him (though their loyalty could be more to the legal head of the oikos than personally to Agamemnon).} though it would also be evident in the costume and masks of the dancers. It is, however, highly pertinent to their role, since the chorus’ identity centres around two attributes that are central in the identity of an elderly female Greek, that is, the motherly stance towards younger members of the household and the public role as mourners. The combination of these two characteristics highlights the spectrum of possibilities opened for the chorus thanks to its ‘double’ nature both as a group and as a character. The ritual role of mourners and libation bearers that they had at the beginning of the play is a mass, public role. And it can be carried out by the chorus because they are a group that qualifies for this function. On the other hand, the role of the nurse is a private role. As elderly, female slaves, who have been part of the household for a long time, who consider themselves unswervingly loyal to the oikos and interact with the other characters on a personal level, the chorus qualifies for this, private, role as well.\footnote{Could this more ‘private’ facet of their identity be one of the reasons why choruses of old women do not appear in pre-tragic lyric, or in Homer, and are not common in tragedy either? The figures may be misleading, but the only two surviving plays that explicitly feature old women are the present play and Euripides’ Suppliants, and both revolve around bereavement and lamentation.}

The authoritative stance of the chorus is also evident later in the play, in their exchange with Cilissa (730-782), where the chorus intervenes in a way that will prove crucial to Orestes’ success. In keeping with normal Aeschylean practice, the entrance of Cilissa is announced.\footnote{Sophocles and Euripides tend not to announce the entrance of servants, see Garvie 1986, 730-33n.} Differently to other servant entries, however, it is the chorus, rather than the newly arrived Cilissa that initiates the conversation.\footnote{Regardless of the reasons why Cilissa is not the first to speak (see Garvie 1986, 730-33n.), the effect is that the chorus appears authoritative, especially since Cilissa is a nurse and therefore superior to a common house slave.}
This variation in dramaturgic technique creates the impression that initiative rests with the chorus, an impression enhanced by another powerful choral intervention a couple of lines later. Cilissa entered on her way to meet Aegisthus, whom Clytemestra had ordered her to fetch in order that he may meet the strangers and hear the news of Orestes’ death (734-7). At this point the chorus intercepts her and adjusts slightly, but crucially, the message that Cilissa is to take to Aegisthus. They instruct her to ask Aegisthus to come out alone, without his spearmen, contrary to what Clytemestra had ordered her to do. This is a critical intervention, since Orestes will need Aegisthus to be unprotected in order to commit the murder. In intervening and affecting the plot in that way, the chorus is acting in a way strikingly similar to an actor.341

The unusual nature of this intervention is emphasized by the structure of the text. Strict one-line stichomythia is never interrupted elsewhere in Aeschylus. Here, however, the chorus not only interrupt the stichomythia, but also do so with a rather long, four-line intervention.342 The structural peculiarity corresponds to the unusual nature of the intervention, since rarely, if ever, does the chorus influence the action of a play so blatantly.343 To gauge how significant this is, we may compare it with the famous intervention of Pylades later on (900ff). Orestes, wavering before dealing the fatal blow to his mother, asks Pylades what he should do, and Pylades urges him to get on with the act:

Or. Πυλάδη, τί δράσω; μητέρ’ αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν;  
Pyl. ποῦ δὴ τὸ λοιπὸν Λοξίου μαντεύματα  
   τὰ πυθόχρηστα, πιστὰ τ’ εὐορκώματα;  
   ἀπαντας ἐχθροὺς τῶν θεῶν ἡγοῦ πλέον. (899-902)

Both interventions are crucial for the evolution of the plot, and thus similar as to their effect. They do differ, however, in other aspects. Pylades, albeit a secondary character, will have been silently present for the whole play.344 He is a free citizen, even if not Argive, and the companion of Orestes, who has journeyed with him

341 Garvie 1986, ad loc. That ‘the Chorus is obeying Orestes’s orders (cf. 581-2)’ (thus Garvie), is a minor point, especially since Orestes’ orders were of a very general nature.
342 See next page. Griffith (1977, 138) notes that two-line interruptions to stichomythia occur in Promethheus, and sometimes in Sophocles and Euripides, but only here in Aeschylus.
343 The only comparable instance in Aeschylus where the chorus affects the plot so decisively are Eumenides and Suppliants, both plays where the choruses are essentially protagonists in the play.
344 Famously discussed by Taplin 1972.
specifically for the purpose of succouring his friend in avenging the death of his father. Even so, he only speaks when directly asked for advice. The chorus, on the other hand, have a much more proactive attitude. As we saw, they are quick to address Cilissa once she enters, and, when she tells them that she is on her way to Aegisthus, they get straight to the point:

Cil. [...] στείχω δ’ ἐπ’ ἀνδρὰ τῶν δὲ λυμαντήριον οίκων, θέλων δὲ τόνδε πεῦςεται λόγον.
Cho. πῶς οὖν κελεύει νιν μολεῖν ἐσταλμένον;
Cil. ἥ πῶς: λέγ’ αὐθίς, ὡς μάθω σαφέστερον.
Cho. εἰ ἔνι λοχίταις είτε καὶ μονοστιβή.
Cil. ἂγειν κελεύει δομφόρους ὀπάνονας.
Cho. μὴ νῦν σὺ ταῦτ’ ἀγγελλές δεσπότου στύχει;
   ἄλλ’ αὐτὸν ἐλθεῖν, ὡς ἀδειμάντων κλύῃ,
   -ἀνωχθ’ ὅσον τάχιστα, γαθούσῃ φρενί.
   ἐν ἀγγέλῳ γὰρ κυπτός ὀρθοτεί λόγος. (764-773)

v. The chorus and the rulers

We saw above the chorus’ interaction with characters either of the same status (Cilissa) or characters with whom they share a cause (Orestes and Electra). But how does the chorus interact with characters they confessedly hate and fear? Clytemestra enters at 668, and we are, therefore, already almost two thirds into the play before one of the rulers appears onstage. Up to that point, the chorus has had a constant and rather prominent involvement in the plot. When Clytemestra is onstage, however, the chorus is silent. Clytemestra only interacts briefly with Orestes, and retreats into the palace again (718) to give notice of the travellers’ arrival to Aegisthus. It has been rightly noted that Clytemestra’s brief appearance at this point is an inversion of her control of the threshold in Agamemnon, and especially of her reception of the king. While the male was the deceived party in the first play of the trilogy, Orestes is now the deceiver. Orestes is in control, but feigns submission as part of his plan.345 In all this, the chorus is strikingly silent.

By keeping silent, the chorus are following Orestes’ orders who advised them earlier that they should σιγάν θ’ ὅπου δεί καὶ λέγειν τὰ καίρια (582). Their silence

345 Taplin 1977, 342-3.
could, therefore, be the right strategy for the success of their plan. On the other hand, we know that the chorus feel both hatred and fear for Clytemestra. Their feelings are translated into formal terms as a lack of direct interaction, which is consistent with their expressed hostility. On a dramaturgical level, it is also possible that the silence of the chorus is employed to emphasize the assumed change of scene. When they last speak (651) the action takes place before the tomb of Agamemnon. Now Orestes and Pylades knock on the front door of the palace. The silence of the chorus could be part of this re-focusing of the scene, as if they are still before the tomb, while Orestes has moved towards the palace gate. Taplin locates the re-focusing of the scene somewhere between 584 and 653, and states that the switch is not explicit. It is true that the shift is relevant only insofar as it is used by the playwright, that is, if the audience accepts effortlessly that from 653 the action takes place in front of the palace door, but is the chorus playing any role in that shift? It is conceivable that the dancing chorus moved towards the palace during the stasimon (585-652), thus re-focusing and redefining the acting space.

The different stance of the chorus when the rulers are present defines two levels in the play, achieved dramaturgically largely by the movement, utterances and actions of the chorus. First, the chorus are the essence of the female, the inner house that stands in antithesis to the public space, which is normally occupied by the male, but currently hijacked by Clytemestra. Orestes is expelled by Clytemestra from the public level where he lawfully belongs and is forced to collaborate with slaves. Second, the chorus is also the lowest level in the social hierarchy opposite the high level represented by the royal pair. In that axis too Orestes has found himself on the wrong side, due to Clytemestra’s actions. In a metaphorical sense, the chorus also defines the two levels of intrigue: the scenes where the chorus acts and interacts are the scenes where hidden plans are openly discussed, while the presence of the royal pair, the public figures par excellence, turn the public space into a space where utterances are by definition deceitful and potentially dangerous. In that sense the chorus are instrumental in highlighting the suppression of the people’s voice that we saw both in

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346 Taplin (1977, 339)
347 And so possibly have the city as a whole, in a continuation of the theme of diminished power within the political hierarchy as expressed in the chorus’ physical frailty in Agamemnon (see pp.167ff.); yet again, because of Clytemestra’s actions, the restoration of order is left on discredited heirs and a chorus whose status, age and gender makes them the least obvious candidate.
348 Cf. the general meaning of the corrupt Ag.794-8.
Agamemnon and in this play, and the fundamental inversion of ethical and social order. It is only when the matricide is committed that the two levels merge and the action that was planned in secret is laid open to the public judgment. This is also the first time in the play where the chorus seem to realize the immenseness of the action they have been championing.

The chorus of Choephoroi is therefore fundamental in defining different levels within the play. The chorus seems to have a similar function in the previous play of the trilogy. The chorus of Choephoroi is in many respects the opposite of the chorus of Agamemnon. While they share with them their old age and their loyalty to the legitimate king, they also differ in two crucial elements of their identity, gender and status. The chorus of Choephoroi are female slaves, while the chorus of Agamemnon were male royal councillors. They also have a very different role within their respective plays. The chorus of Agamemnon express their opposition to the current state of affairs, more implicitly initially, and quite strongly towards the end of the play. The chorus of Choephoroi, on the other hand, seem to operate at the commands of Clytemestra. They first enter to carry out the queen’s orders, and nowhere do they openly confront Clytemestra or Aegisthus. But the real picture is inverted. The chorus of Agamemnon will prove ineffectual and will exit the play hushed by the usurpers, while the seemingly obedient chorus of Choephoroi proves instrumental in the murder of the royal couple. Their silence is, in the end, different to the silence of the chorus of Agamemnon. The chorus that has all the credentials to be authoritative proves less powerful than the old female slaves of the current play. This in turn raises questions about power and authority and the relation between the two.

Finally, this chorus is the middle step in an overarching theme, namely the disturbance caused by the transgressions committed in the house of the Atreidai. The first play, through its chorus, highlighted the subversion of order in the public, official sphere. In this play, the transgressive behaviour has entered the deepest parts of the house, as is evident both by the employment of a chorus of a much more private nature than the councillors of the first play, but also by the nature of the crime committed in this one: Clytemestra murdered Agamemnon, thus severing a socially constructed relationship, that of a husband and wife. The matricide committed by Orestes in this

349 See pp.186-190.
play, on the other hand, severs a natural relationship. Both the city and the house are corrupted by the spilt blood. The third play of the trilogy will expose the disturbance caused in the cosmic order through the employment of a divine chorus and the eventual resolution by an official body. Schematically the three choruses in succession (men/public/city, women/private/house, gods/cosmos) span the spectrum of natural and social attributes. They thus provide both variation and continuity to the trilogic work. Notice that variation in the three choruses is built by retaining each time one – different – constant and building upon it from one chorus to the next: old men to old females to old female divinities.

vi. Conclusion

The stance of the chorus raises interesting questions about gender expectations and reinforces the conclusion that femaleness is a potential combination of characteristics, rather than a single feature and can be best analyzed in context. In the case of *Choephori* in particular, age is relevant, as women were associated with different roles and functions at different stages in their life. Though neither themselves nor other characters at any point dwell on their female identity, they display attitudes and carry out functions that were often left, in tragedy and real life, to aged females, such as the motherly stance towards younger members of the household, or their ritual lamentation. This choral stance contrasts sharply with Clytemestra as one of a series of transgressive females.

To conclude, this chorus keep a consistently confident stance in the play, speak authoritatively and go so far as to intervene at a crucial moment, so that they affect the outcome of events, and their attitude reveals nothing of its low social status. They thus seem to be sharing some features both with their preceding and the following chorus: they are controlled and authoritative, as is the chorus in *Agamemnon*, but they are unswervingly committed to revenge, as are the Erinyes in *Eumenides*. They may at first look like the way out of the impasse the house finds itself in, but ultimately they lose confidence, and their closing words show that they do not possess the answer, thus introducing smoothly the need for the next play:350

350 Cf. pp.84ff. for choral shifts.
ποι δήτα κρανεί, ποι καταλήξει
μετακοιμισθέν μένος ἄτης; (1075f.)
Chapter 2: ETHNICITY

A. Introduction

Despite *Persians* being the only surviving all-barbarian drama, foreigners abound in Attic tragedy and the antithesis Greek vs. non-Greek plays a prominent role across the tragic corpus.¹ The barbarian element is often introduced in plots where one would not naturally expect it, as in Euripides’ *Phoenician Women* (a foreign chorus in transit), or in his *Orestes* (a Phrygian slave²). Additionally, in plays without any barbarian characters, the notion of the barbarian often functions as a topos of conduct, mostly negative, or within a gnomic utterance. For example, Euripides, in an ironic inversion of Greek ideas of superiority, has the Taurian king Thoas exclaim that matricide would be a crime too horrible ‘even’ for a barbarian, alluding to the Greek perception of non-Greeks as cruel savages;³ in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* the king urges Clytemestra not to prostitute with loud cries before him βαρβάρου φωτὸς δίκην, ‘in the manner of a barbarian’ (919-20);⁴ and certain ways of lamenting are repeatedly associated in tragedy with barbarian nations (cf. *Cho*.423; *Pers*.937ff.).

Not only foreign characters, but also non-Greek choruses seem to have been a relatively common choice for tragedy and extant plays offer numerous examples of foreign choruses, though they tend to be choruses of foreign women, often slaves or recently enslaved victims of war.⁵ Evidence from lost tragedies supports the assumption that non-Greek choruses were a widespread phenomenon, but also strongly suggests that the range of foreign choruses extended beyond the female victims of war and included barbarians of a more varied nature: male or female, young or old, free or slaves.⁶ For us, however, *Persians* remains the only surviving tragedy

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¹ ‘There is not a single play in which the opposition between Greeks and barbarians, or between citizens and aliens, does not play a significant role’ (Vidal-Naquet 1997, 112). For select bibliography on the barbarian in tragedy, see p.29 with n.73.
² Though in this late play the portrayal of the slave is intentionally exaggerated (see Saïd 2002, 83).
⁴ Here the stereotypical barbarian is evoked right after Clytemestra asks Agamemnon what a real-life barbarian (Priam) would have done in his place.
⁵ Aeschylus’ *Persians* and *Suppliants*; Euripides’ *Hecuba, Trojan Women* (Trojan captive women in both), *Phoenician Women* (Phoenician women), *Bacchae* (Asiatic bacchanals). No Sophoclean chorus of foreigners survives. For lost plays, see the following note.
⁶ Some tentative conclusions can be drawn about the number of lost plays featuring non-Greek choruses, mostly from titles (and secondarily from hypotheseis and fragments). One may cautiously speak of 20% of Aeschylean choruses being non-Greeks. For Sophocles and Euripides the figure is about 15%. The
where the foreign chorus consists of free old men in a high social position within the drama.

Despite its relatively extensive presence in Greek tragedy, a chorus consisting of barbarians is fundamentally an invention of Attic tragedy, rather than simply an appropriation or adaptation of a real-life choral tradition, and it is, therefore, useful for our analysis for this reason as well. An overview of the identity of choruses in tragedy shows that a foreign chorus is the one that mostly stands out in respect to its fictitious character. As discussed in the introduction, female tragic choruses fell within the Athenian horizon of expectations, often incorporating elements of female choruses from non-dramatic poetry and real-life performances. In the case of aged females, tragedy does indeed stretch experience, in that such choruses go beyond the age groups of choral performance. But aged females are associated with ritual roles, and feature prominently, for example, in funerals. Likewise, aged male Greek choruses slightly strain the definition of a chorus in the sense that male elders would not normally engage in choral activity in Greece. Still, many males would have performed while young, and choral activity was part of the social identity of an Athenian male. Finally, divine choruses stand apart due to their supernatural identity, but they too form part of a long literary tradition going back ultimately to depictions of the Muses and other divine choirs in epic.

Barbarians, on the other hand, had never performed on Greek soil, nor is there evidence for any way in which large numbers of Greeks would be familiar or acquainted with choruses consisting of foreigners. Xenophon mentions song and dances of non-Greeks a number of times matter-of-factly, and it is reasonable to think that the Greeks would automatically assume universal status for some of their own institutions. This, however, does not negate the fact that choruses of foreigners have no poetic or performative pedigree in Greece, and therefore it does not diminish assumption that a lost play featured a barbarian chorus is often based on no more than the title; where reconstructions have been made by scholars, I have taken those into consideration. It is, however, possible that we are missing out on plays, for example, where the title refers to the function of the chorus, or where a chorus of servants, and therefore possibly foreigners, is a reasonable possibility e.g. Penelope. For example, should Choephoroi have not survived, we would not be able to list it with any certainty among the choruses featuring a barbarian chorus.

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7 pp. 36ff.
8 See n. 75, p. 31.
9 See p. 229 and section 4.D on Aeschylus’ Nereides.
10 X. An. 4.7.16; 5.4.18; Cyr. 8.7.1; all this is much later than most of the Athenian dramatic output.
the peculiarity of barbarian choruses. In other words, tragedy invented barbarian choruses and made consistent use of them throughout the fifth century.\(^{11}\)

The evident readiness of playwrights to introduce non-Greek choruses into their plays and their subsequent widespread presence in fifth-century tragedy shows that the study of barbarian choruses can shed light on the mechanics of tragedy and the creative process of the genre, and reveal how drama incorporated historical realities into the poetic tradition. In line with tragedy’s fascination with the Other, our analysis will show how a barbarian chorus can be used to challenge taxonomies, and define and understand the world through the Self and the Other. Along with women, old men and slaves, foreigners have often been labelled ‘marginal’ and as such deemed surprisingly central in tragedies and relevant to the genre’s exploration of issues of identity. The very notion of marginality has been rightly reassessed, but one should also remain sensitive to the idiosyncrasies of the different articulations of the Other: the origins, associations and circumstances of a barbarian chorus differ substantially from other choruses that have been characterized marginal, such as women, even for the simple fact that mass contact with other ethnicities was at the time mainly in a very specific framework, that of war,\(^{12}\) while women were an integral part of Greek society. Each group should, therefore, be examined in its own right as each presents its own challenges, and contributes to the great versatility of tragedy. One should not forget the performative aspect of tragedy, which called for, and welcomed, variety of spectacle. Barbarian choruses opened up new possibilities for costume, dance and song, and thus must have frequently resulted in impressive visual and aural effects.\(^{13}\)

Barbarian choruses are, therefore, particularly interesting for understanding the workings of tragedy with regard to the chorus, and this is the reason why it has been

\(^{11}\) If one thinks of the choruses that tragedy never used, foreign choruses seem to have been a programmatic gesture, and not merely a random inclusion in an ever expanding reservoir of potential choruses. No plays with choruses of male slaves or Greek males of lower standing seem to have been composed, despite the frequent presence of such individual characters in tragedy (the Trojan sentries of Rhesus are a case apart given the controversial nature, and possible much later date, of the play). Comedy too seems to have featured no choruses of slaves, which might be related to the mockery foreigners invariably receive in the genre, and the reduced potential for choral authority that possibly stems from it. Satyr drama features often enslaved satyrs as the chorus, but they are always liberated at the end, and are not strictly human males, or with the same requirements for dignified authority as the tragic or comic chorus. Burkert (1966, 115) understands the extended presence of barbarian (and female) choruses in tragedy as an attempt to dissociate the male Greek members of the community who execute the sacrifice from the violence of their action.

\(^{12}\) Athenians would also encounter foreigners as slaves, see Wrenhaven 2013.

\(^{13}\) See p.127 for the choral costume.
selected as one of the themes of this thesis. As mentioned above, a barbarian chorus is at the extreme limit of fictionality. But at the same time it never ceases to be a chorus like any other, with access to all the modes and roles that choruses normally have in tragedy. Finally, this combination or real-life points of reference with a fictional identity strikes a balance between the familiar and the Other and creates a fertile ground for negotiation of larger, quintessentially tragic, concerns.
B. Persians

Aeschylus’ *Persians* is the only surviving Attic tragedy that is both set outside Greece and has a cast consisting exclusively of non-Greeks.\(^{14}\) It takes place at Susa, the capital of the Persian empire and all the characters are Persian. So is the chorus, which consists of Persian elders who constitute a special counseling body in the royal court. The play, therefore, naturally has a prominent position in the treatment of the barbarian element in tragedy, and can advance significantly our understanding of the way in which ethnicity of the chorus more specifically is shaped and used by Aeschylus.

As mentioned already, the exact number of barbarian choruses in the total tragic output of the fifth century can only be roughly estimated.\(^{15}\) But, even if we had the exact figures, this would reveal little about the precise way in which Hellenicity and barbarism were employed in any one play. This can only be rightly appreciated in context, that is, in considering the various factors that function in each play, as well as the complex nature of the Greek vs. barbarian antithesis in general.\(^{16}\) On the level of dramaturgy, those factors concern the set and cast of the tragedy. That is, whether it takes place in Greece (and whereabouts in Greece) or in a foreign land;\(^ {17}\) how many, if any, of the characters are barbarian or Greek; what is the gender and status of these characters and how they are presented and interact with other characters in the play.

I will therefore begin by looking at the choices Aeschylus made in that respect in *Persians*. The play takes place on Persian soil, more specifically at Susa,\(^ {18}\) and the cast consists exclusively of Persians. A Persian chorus may seem like the obvious choice in a play on that subject, an impression enhanced by the unique position that *Persians* inevitably holds as the sole surviving dramatic treatment of the Persian wars.

\(^{14}\) Contrast Euripidean plays featuring Greek choruses in far-out lands, e.g. *Iphigeneia in Tauris* or *Helen*, or non-Greek choruses in Greece, e.g. *Phoenician Women* or *Bacchae*. See pp.156ff. for the possibility of a wholly non-Greek cast on Persian soil in Phrynichus.

\(^{15}\) See n.6 on p.112.

\(^{16}\) The opposition Greek vs. barbarian is not a straightforward one, as other codes are employed simultaneously by the playwrights, such as gender, age, social status, political system (Vidal-Naquet 1997, 115). Cf. p.30.

\(^{17}\) Different Greek cities have different uses in tragedy, see, for example, Zeitlin’s Thebes as an anti-Athens and Argos as an intermediary space between Athens and Thebes (Zeitlin 1986 and 1993). For Thebes, cf. Bernardini 2000 and Cerri 2000.

\(^{18}\) In a historically inaccurate move the tomb of Dareius is placed at Susa, rather than Persepolis. But the play needs to take place in the capital, and to feature Dareius tomb; and the Greeks were probably largely unaware of Persepolis at the time (see Garvie 2009, xiv and 65-72n.).
But this is far from true. Phrynichus is a clear attestation of the wide range of alternatives that a playwright has at his disposal in composing a tragedy. His *Sack of Miletus*, and more pertinently his *Phoenician Women*, dramatized in quite different ways different phases of the Greek struggle against the Persians.\(^19\) Once we accept that a Persian chorus – and *this* Persian chorus – was not an inevitable choice in a play on the Persian wars, we are in a better position to evaluate more accurately the effects this particular choice has.

In terms of set and cast, *Persians* conform to the norm of the Attic tragedy that has its myths unfold in the framework of a structured social organisation. With the exception of *Prometheus Bound*,\(^20\) all surviving tragedies – and the evidence for lost plays does not suggest otherwise – are played out in a city, or otherwise on a site where civic rules apply.\(^21\) For example, a military camp with clear hierarchy, with rulers and a group of people that can act as the chorus. This is, for instance, the case with Sophocles’ *Ajax*,\(^22\) or Aeschylus’ *Phrygians*.\(^23\) This convention is, so to speak, the minimum requirement, which any dramatist was free to handle as he saw fit. The poet could introduce a foreign element into the city, more or less disruptive (e.g. Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* or Euripides’ *Phoenician Women* or his *Bacchae*); he could present us with a situation where a city is threatened from outside as in *Seven*, or a city where the crisis is an internal affair, as in *Agamemnon*.

In a plot featuring a military expedition there are always two ‘camps’, and therefore the dramatist has the option of choosing sides. In our case this choice is reflected in the ethnicity of the chorus, since the play is played out exclusively by Persians.\(^24\) Still, a Persian chorus need not be a chorus of elders, since a number of

\(^19\) And with varying degrees of success. Phrynichus’ famous fining for his *Sack of Miletus* (Hdt. 6.21.2) is a reminder of the choices that can make or break a tragedy. For Phrynichus, see pp.152ff.

\(^20\) Setting the action of *Prometheus Bound* in the wilderness emphasizes Prometheus’ state as an outcast and highlights the theme of civilized/socially structured life, which lies in the heart of the Prometheus myth. It also tacitly stresses the temporal distance, since the story of Prometheus is situated at the outset of human society.

\(^21\) This is true even in plays where it is not immediately obvious (see next note).

\(^22\) Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* inverts this convention. There the social structure is imported into the play from outside (the chorus are the sailors of Neoptolemus’ ship), which only serves to stress the unviable, outcast nature of the main character. Similarly, Euripides often plays with what the Greeks would view as conditions far removed from any civilised society; but the social hierarchy is still there, see, e.g. *Iphigenia at Tauris, Helen*, the fragmentary *Andromeda*.

\(^23\) For the plot of *Phrygians*, see p.235.

\(^24\) Hopman (2013, 64-7) analyzes the variety of Persian perspectives adopted by the chorus in the play (from the narrow persona of the royal councillor to elders with a special connection with the whole of
alternative roles would be available for the chorus, and with them a range of possible focalizations, tones and relationships: the chorus could have been Persian captives in a Greek city or camp,\textsuperscript{25} Persian (or even Greek) soldiers in a Persian or a Greek camp on the front,\textsuperscript{26} or even Persian women.\textsuperscript{27} For \textit{Persians}, given that the play is set in a Persian city, old men are not a surprising choice, since non-combatants, that is, women or old men, are one of the two most frequent choices for a chorus in tragedy when war is at the centre or background of the plot.\textsuperscript{28}

Of all possible alternatives, Aeschylus presents us here with a city, a Queen and a body of respectable citizens who act as councillors to the Queen, and examines the fate of this city and the impact of the military expedition on the city and the land more broadly. \textit{Persians} is, therefore, an all-Persian play, an all-barbarian play. At the same time, it is a play where no barbarian is to be found, since for the Persians within the play their fellow Persians do not fall into the category of the Other.\textsuperscript{29}

\textbf{i. Defeated yet sovereign: the identification potential of the chorus}

In all extant tragedies where the defeated party makes an appearance, the vanquished are always presented in interaction with the victors. As a result of the defeat they have usually lost their previous status and find themselves in the mercy of the victorious party.\textsuperscript{30} In \textit{Persians}, however, no Greek appears, and this makes the play the only surviving tragedy where only the voice of the defeated is heard in the theatre.\textsuperscript{31} For the Persians of the play, the war is fought away from home. As a result,

\begin{itemize}
\item the Persian land), but also the various ideological stances that underlie some of their utterances, which allow even Athenian perspectives to be introduced into the play.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Cf. Euripides’ \textit{Hecuba}.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Cf. Aeschylus’ lost \textit{Achilleis} (\textit{Myrmidones} for a Greek chorus and \textit{Phrygians} for a foreign one).
\item \textsuperscript{27} Similarly to \textit{Seven}.
\item \textsuperscript{28} See p.40, n.44. The alternative could be warriors in a respite from battle or on a special mission (e.g. Sophocles’ \textit{Ajax}, or, possibly, Aeschylus’ lost \textit{Myrmidones} (see p.234) or even his \textit{Phrygians}.
\item \textsuperscript{29} However, Βάρβαρος and cognate words are used no less than nine times in the play of the Persians (187, 255, 337, 391, 423, 475, 636, 798, 844) by the chorus, the Queen and the messenger, though not by Xerxes or Dareius. In general, foreigners seem content to call themselves barbarians, yet another proof that, however subversive tragedy may be, it is only able or willing to ask the questions an Athenian mind could.
\item \textsuperscript{30} See, e.g., Euripides’ \textit{Trojan Women} and \textit{Hecuba} (Trojan slaves); or his \textit{Suppliants} (the mothers of the defeated Argives pleading with the victors), or even Cassandra in Aeschylus’ \textit{Agamemnon}.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Though Aeschylus manages to include a (reported) Athenian war cry at 402-5. Athenians are also an overwhelming presence in the play not only as the enemy that inflicted a catastrophic defeat upon the Persians, but also in the form of ‘Athenian’ perspectives that punctuate the drama, despite the lack of
\end{itemize}
they will learn of, and mourn for, their losses in the course of the play, and will have learned a lesson by the end of it. Their country, however, was never in danger, at least in territorial terms, and their life as citizens of a sovereign state goes on after the defeat, despite any changes that the war may have brought upon them. Their position is thus the opposite of the Athenians’, who emerged victorious from the war, but whose land was ravaged by the Persians a few years before the production of the play. Despite these two positions that seem, at first glance, antithetical, I will argue that the presentation of the chorus allows for the degree of identification necessary for a delicate balance between triumphalism, compassion and mourning for the Athenians’ own losses.

Which element, then, in the predicament or the identity of the Persian chorus creates the conditions for merging the boundary between Greek and non-Greek, between victor and conquered? The barbarian, as a category embracing all non-Greeks is the ultimate Other to a Greek. And since for an Athenian a Greek is primarily a Greek, adult, free male, the barbarian is mainly the Other to the Athenian citizen who would come to the theatre to watch the play. In that sense, by presenting a male barbarian chorus the poet already introduces a point of convergence of the Self and the Other, and thus automatically opens up an intermediate space, which complicates the identification process on the part of the audience. As a result, the chorus of Persians is inherently versatile due to its specific identity. On the one hand, the chorus consists of foreigners, and therefore contrasts the autochthonous Athenians. On the

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Athenian characters (see the implicit positive references to Athenian political values, e.g., pp.148f. or p.133).

32 The unity of king and chorus at the end of the play corroborates this reality, which is foreshadowed by the authoritarian statement of the Queen that, whatever the outcome of the war, Xerxes ὁ μοίως τῆς κοινανείς χύθηναι (214). The worry expressed by the chorus that the Persian empire might radically change after the defeat (584-97) is probably an exaggeration on the part of the Athenian dramatist.

33 Readings of the play range from patriotic celebration and Schadenfreude to empathy with the enemy and lament for the Athenians’ own losses, for a review, see Garvie 2009, xx-xxii.

34 The way in which the Persian wars are treated through the Trojan myth (see Ferrari 2000) illuminates, I believe, the masterly treatment of Aeschylus: similarly to the Persians in the play, the Trojans in epic are presented as a sovereign, respectable people who are eventually defeated, but are never presented in a state of slavery within the Iliad. Through Homer the Greeks are well trained in that kind of Other (for Homer in the play, see Said 2008).

35 For the superfluousness of qualifying a citizen further as free, Greek, adult or male, see Ebbott 2005, 366.

36 Sommerstein (1997, 64) rightly warns against the frequent misconception that only male Athenian citizens attended the theatre and that by subtracting ‘children, women if any, visitors, and metics, we may well be left with less than half of the whole audience’ (p.67).

37 Female barbarian choruses are a more straightforward case, since the Athenian male can easily contrast them with his own self-perception at all levels (Segal 1990).
other hand, they bear characteristics that were highly esteemed among the Greeks: old age and a high political position, both attributes that not only would a Greek consider sources of authority, respect, and, potentially, power, but are also presented as such in the play.\textsuperscript{38}

In addition to its specific dramatic identity and the potential for authority which springs from it, the chorus \textit{qua} chorus has access to a range of modes of thought, speech and action that are expressed in attitude and statements that go far beyond the Persian defeat and could apply to the effects of any military disaster.\textsuperscript{39} These features charge the chorus with a high degree of authority and increase the potential for identification on the part of the audience. Therefore, the chorus in \textit{Persians} in part operates in ways that resemble the function of other (Greek) choruses, since it has many of the generic features that are expected from any dramatic chorus; partly it differs, as the ethnicity of its members affects the spectrum and nature of their functions.

The play of identification with the audience in this drama is additionally intricate in another sense as well. Aeschylus is dealing with an historical event that is both recent and already in 472 BC very central to the Athenian self-perception. Men who took part in the battle would be present in the audience, as would relatives of soldiers who returned safely from the war or died fighting the Persians either at Salamis or in subsequent engagements. In that sense, the Persians in this play cannot simply be just another tragic chorus, or a group of generic barbarians. They will inevitably at some points in the play be the very enemy against whom the Athenians fought a few years ago, and whom they had seen on Attic soil.\textsuperscript{40} Even if eventually a Greek military victory, the battles with the Persians also involved a great deal of pain and bereavement for the local community,\textsuperscript{41} as well as extended physical destruction in the form of ravaged buildings, especially on the Acropolis, which would be visible.

\textsuperscript{38} See below, p.126. See also Miller 2011, who concludes through a survey of iconographical evidence that the Greeks displayed a degree of respect for Persian courage and customs.

\textsuperscript{39} Hopman 2013 analyses how their function as a chorus allows the Persian elders to bring into the play a far wider range of ‘objects, viewpoints, and ideologies’ (p.59) than would be possible for a single actor.

\textsuperscript{40} But as Loraux (2002, 49) notes, in reality enemies are enemies, while in fiction ‘the other becomes surprisingly close’. Cf. Nagy 1990, 295: ‘whatever is alien is also native’.

\textsuperscript{41} Ebbott 2005, 374. That war involves suffering for both parties is a common tragic theme, particularly prominent in Euripides: cf. Eur. \textit{Hec}.320ff.; \textit{Andr}.300, 610ff., esp. 1008-1046 on the common sufferings of Trojans and Greeks; also \textit{Trojan Women}, esp. 353-405. See also Loraux 1993.
to this audience during the performance of the play. Not only are the marks of the Persian wars still visible in the surroundings and the psyche of the Athenians, but the Persians are still an enemy for the Greeks, and the two states are still at war.\footnote{For the historical facts behind \textit{Persians} and their relevance for the play, see especially Pelling 1997. For the historical accuracy of Aeschylus' account, see Garvie 2009, xi-xvi.}

Aeschylus’ task is, therefore, a complex one, as he is faced with an audience that is proud of the great Athenian, and Panhellenic, success against the barbarians. At the same time the audience must have been fully aware of the devastating effect of war on all participants and would possibly be harbouring feelings of hostility, even of resentment and thoughts of revenge. The great victory would be for many members of the audience not just a collective achievement, but also a personal one. At the level of the individual spectator, every mention of the Persian wars would not be only a source of immense pride, but could also recall the pain for one’s own losses, and the anger against the enemy, but also possibly sympathy for the similarity of their suffering, and, as a result, more generalizing thoughts about war and its effects.

It is largely through the choice of the Persian land as the set of his play, and an all-Persian cast, that Aeschylus can explore fully a number of themes relating to the Persian wars, and to war more generally: the price of success, and the effects and causes of failure; the degree of control humans have on their own fate; the role of the political system in the fate of a country; the equilibrium of control of power between a leader and his people. By presenting the Persian misery, Aeschylus allows a degree of triumphalism and \textit{Schadenfreude}. At the same time, he offers the defeated party as a focal point for misery, and by extension as an outlet for feelings of mourning and thoughts about the catastrophic nature of war, which perhaps had little room in the celebratory climate that followed the Athenian victory. Finally, by exalting the Athenian political system against the Persian one, the poet helps the audience justify their immense sacrifice, but also invites questions about the code of practice of the nascent Athenian empire.\footnote{How much \textit{Persians} is a debate on the increasing power of Athens within the Delian league, or a cautionary tale for the emerging Athenian empire has been extensively debated (for a review of the issue of politics in \textit{Persians}, see Garvie 2009, xviii-xxii).}
ii. Self-presentation of the chorus

In the following section I will examine the self-presentation of the chorus in the opening part of the tragedy, as well as their interaction with, and perception of, other characters in the course of the play. I will focus on certain features and behavioural patterns that would be vividly distinct from the audience’s own understanding of society and their own experiences. In particular, I will look at the stereotyped formality of the Persian royal court, as is evident in the *parodos*, and the Persian perception of collectivity; the extraordinary authority and power that seems to be accorded to the king, which goes so far as to assimilate him with the divine; the undemocratic social organisation and unquestioning obedience that this brings with it; but also the authority that the chorus of elders enjoy precisely because of their association with such a powerful king.

*Persians* opens at the point where the chorus is waiting to hear about the great expedition their king Xerxes has undertaken. The play begins with the *parodos* of the chorus, as is common in surviving Aeschylus. The *parodos* is the part of the play where the chorus exposes the dramatic situation, explains the setting and timing of the play, and often sets the tone in other ways as well (song, dance, metre, imagery). It is also the first time the audience sees the chorus, who thus reveal through their costumes and masks the main elements of their dramatic identity. The chorus frequently elaborate on their origins and the reasons for coming onstage, on their age, status, ethnicity, gender, or their physical appearance. Such choral self-references take various forms and invite us to consider how they are reflected in the interaction with other characters, in the plot, and the reception of the audience in the course of the play.

In *Persians*, the very first words of the chorus are an explicit self-presentation. The chorus members are, we are told, the trusted guardians of the Persian land, whom

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44 For the *Persians* as a *nostos*-play, see Taplin (1977, 124); also Hopman 2009, 362-8. In *nostos*-themed tragedies the departed hero is always a focal point, and his safety is a matter of concern for the chorus and the characters (Taplin 1977, 124-5). In *Persians*, the chorus express their worry early in the *parodos*: ἀμφὶ δὲ νόστῳ τὸ βασιλείῳ/ καὶ πολυχρόσον στρατῆς ἴδῃ διὰ κακόμαντες ἂγαν ὀργασμοπείται/ θυμὸς ἐσωθεν (8-11).

45 Differently from surviving Sophocles and Euripides, where a *parodos* at the beginning of the play is not attested (the pseudo-Euripidean *Rhesus* starts with a short anapaestic *parodos*). For the opening of Aeschylean plays, see p.40 with n.47 and n.72 on p.46.

46 Cf. Taplin 1977, 134-6 for instances where the chorus is already in the orchestra when the play ‘officially’ begins.

47 For individual Aeschylean plays, see next note.
king Xerxes, son of Dareius, has appointed on grounds of seniority to supervise the country:

Τάδε μὲν Περσῶν τῶν οἰχομένων Ἑλλάδ’ ἐς αἰαν πιστὰ καλεῖται,
καὶ τῶν ἄρφειν καὶ πολυχύδων ἐδράνων φύλακες, κατὰ πρεσβείαν
οὐς αὐτὸς ἀναξ Σέρξης βασιλεὺς
Δαρειογενῆς
εἶλετο χώρας ἐφορεύειν. (1-7)

Within seven lines the chorus reveal their ethnicity, their social status, their office and their official title, as well as their age. Compared to the rest of surviving plays, this is a high concentration of self-descriptive information.\(^48\) In this context of detailed self-presentation, it is striking that the first grammatical first person occurs more than a hundred lines later:\(^49\)

ταύτα μοι μελαγχίτων φρήν ἀμύσσεται φόβῳ (116)

This passage in the \textit{parodos} makes explicit reference to intense fear. The fear of the chorus is expressed as a metaphor entailing torn clothes, which will turn out to be a recurrent theme of the play.\(^50\) However, the sentiment is not phrased with a straightforward first-person verb, but rather by the use of a first-person personal pronoun in a third-person phrase.\(^51\) The ‘indirect’ use of the first person by the chorus (possessive dative), and the resulting passive rather than active tone of the passage, reflects the unwillingness of the chorus to accept the passive, victimized position of the Persians that the Persian defeat has brought about. Despite their willingness to

\(^{48}\) In \textit{Agamemnon}, for example, the chorus first refer to themselves after they have set the scene in about thirty lines – and even then the self-reference is more an explanation for their presence in the city, rather than a self-presentation (cf. Hopman 2013, 69). The chorus of \textit{Choephorí} refer to themselves straightforwardly, but again in order to explain their entrance, and therefore the situation in which the oikos finds itself (pp.90f.) The opening and the chorus of \textit{Eumenides} are too exceptional to be usefully compared here (see p.198). In \textit{Seven} the chorus elaborate on their emotions, but do not present themselves (p.49f.). The newly arrived Danaids in \textit{Suppliants} give a brief biography almost at the very beginning of the play (p.64). For the need of alien or unexpected choruses to present themselves early in a play, see Gruber 2009, 107.

\(^{49}\) ‘der Chor [...] hierbei erstmals wirklich von sich selbst spricht’ (Gruber 2009, 116).

\(^{50}\) Cf. also 123-5; 199; and Xerxes’ robes and the Queen’s reference to them as an emblem of his royal status.

\(^{51}\) In contrast, the choruses mentioned in the previous note use the first person much more readily and emphatically than the Persian elders. While in Greek the organ of thought or feeling can stand for the thinking self (for Aeschylus in particular see Sullivan 1997, in a context where the first person seems generally to be avoided, it may be telling that the chorus also refrain from using the first person to express emotion.
refer to their official title and role, the Persian elders only – hesitantly – resort to the more personal tone of the first person, when overwhelmed by fear.\(^{52}\)

A tendency to avoid personal expression is possibly evident already in the very first word of the chorus, the neuter indicative pronoun τάδε (1). Garvie rightly notes that the deictic pronoun is in the neuter in order to agree with the gender of the predicate πιστὰ (2). There is, however, no need in the first place for the predicate to be in the neuter. As becomes clear from other passages, the usual translation of the Persian technical term for the royal councillors is Πιστοί, in the masculine.\(^{53}\) For Broadhead (1960, \textit{ad loc}.) the impersonal tone renders the construction apt for a body or group.\(^{54}\) Hall (1996, \textit{ad loc}.). may be closer to the mark as she notes that the neuter often renders an impersonal or formal effect and that in this context it ‘lends a solemn tone to the opening line’ of the \textit{Persians}.

While these remarks are correct, they undervalue how exceptional the form and its usage are in this passage. First, the pronoun is placed in a very emphatic position as the very first word of the play. Second, the use of the neuter abstract collective itself is rather rare. Commentators point to three tragic parallels and two instances in Thucydides. However, as shown below, these occurrences prove not to be helpful parallels to the present passage.

Orestes uses the neuter abstract collective in \textit{Choephoroi} to refer to ‘what remains from the Atreidæ’ with ‘a sort of self-contempt’:\(^{55}\) ιδεσθ’ Ατρειδάν τὰ λοιπ’ ἀμηχάνως/ ἔχοντα καὶ δωμάτων ἀτιμα (407-8). In \textit{Eumenides}, Athena promises that she will return having selected the best among her citizens (487, κρίνασα δ’ ἀστὼν τῶν ἐμῶν τὰ βέλτατα, lit. ‘all that is best among my citizens’). Jason in

\(^{52}\) It is here a first person singular. While singular and plural first person is used interchangeably for the chorus as a whole in tragedy (Kaimio 1970), the singular could be read as a further attestation to the deeply personal feeling and the antithesis with the ‘objective’, official self-presentation of the first lines. See also Gruber (2009, 117) for the psychosomatic language of the passage and the metre, and their affect on the audience.

\(^{53}\) Garvie (2009, \textit{ad loc}..) points to Xen. \textit{An.} 1.5.15 (πιστῶν); \textit{Oec.} 4.6, 4.8 (πιστοῖς in both passages); \textit{Cyr.} 5.4.1 (πιστῶν); and the present play 171 (γηραλέα πιστῶματα), 443 (πιστῖν), 528 (πιστὰ), 681 (πιστὰ), 979 (πιστῶ… ὀφθαλμόν). Judging from cases where the gender is clear, Xenophon seems to be using the masculine.

\(^{54}\) The collective of a chorus tends to be more strongly emphasized at the beginning of a play (Kaimio 1970, 182).

\(^{55}\) Garvie 2009, \textit{ad loc}..
Euripides’ *Medea* hopes that his and Medea’s children will, together with their new brothers, ‘hold the very first place in the land of Corinth.’ οἶμαι γὰρ ύμᾶς τήρου γῆς Κορινθίας/ τὰ πρῶτ’ ἐσεσθαι σὺν κασιγνήτοις ἔτι (916-7, transl. Kovacs). Finally, Thucydides uses the phrase τὰ δὲ μέσα τῶν πολιτῶν (3.82.8) to describe ‘the citizens who were of neither party [lit. the middle element of the citizens]’ (Hornblower 1991, *ad loc.*).

The cases are few, which reveals the unusual nature of the use of the personal neuter plural in *Persians*. They are also, more importantly, very different from the first line of *Persians*. With the exception of *Choephoroi*, they all refer to the quality of a generic, theoretical or potential group of people. In none is the neuter used for the chorus, and only in the case of Orestes is it self-referential. Additionally, they are all single instances in each work, while in *Persians* the neuter third person recurs in 681 (ὦ πιστὰ πιστῶν, where it has the ring of a title). Most importantly, the neuter is a pronoun, not a noun, which is a part of speech that reveals much more than simply the gender of the bearer when it is uttered. The deictic pronoun, however, reveals only the gender and number of the entity it indicates, and assumes that the rest are there for the audience to see. As such, a speaker of an inflected language like Greek, upon hearing the word ‘this’ in neuter, would expect to see something that he would usually associate with the neuter gender, such as inanimate objects. Of course the male chorus would be there to see, so the mild contradiction between cognitive expectation and visual stimulus would emphasise the odd use of the neuter. Its use point to a marked merging of the individual into the collective which will later in the play prove to be very different from the collectivity endorsed by the Athenian democracy. What we have is an emphatic self-reference to official, objective attributes of the chorus, and suppression of their subjective qualities and state of mind.

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56 ‘The social position of the two siblings is a recurrent preoccupation in *Choephoroi*, and Orestes is presenting his status here as seriously diminished, almost to the level of a thing – note that Garvie’s own parallel in the passage from *Choephoroi* comes from *Persians*: 1017 ὁρᾶς τὸ λοιπὸν τὸ δὲ τὰς ἐμὰς στολὰς; (Xerxes on his own ragged clothes).

57 See also above n.53.

58 Or possibly children or slaves: diminutives in -ιον are common in Greek, cf. also the word παιδίον, τέκνον, or βρέφος for young children (Golden 1988, 1993). See also Aristotle on slaves as naturally fit to be someone’s property (Arist. *Pol*.1254b21-23).

59 Cf. the choral remark that the Greeks ‘are not called slaves or subjects to any man’ (242, for the Greek text see n.103).

60 Cf. also pp.153ff. for τάδε as a possible allusion in Phrynichus’ *Phoenician Women*. 

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The way in which the chorus describes their office is revealing both of their attitude to hierarchy and their respect towards their superiors, and, consequently, of their own authority as representatives of the king:

εδράνων φύλακες, κατὰ προσβείαν
οὗς αὐτός ἄναξ Ξέρξης βασιλεὺς
Δαρειογενῆς
eἰλέτο χώρας ἐφορεῦειν. (4-7)

The elders of the chorus state that the King has ‘selected’ them on grounds of seniority to guard and supervise the country while he is away. There is an accumulation of titles on Xerxes, which reflects the protocol of the Persian court, and emphasises the courtly hierarchy, which the elders embrace. The word the elders use to describe their office is revealing of their perception of royal power and their own position within the social structure. The word ἐφορεῦειν (7), and its synonyms, are usually used in Aeschylus to describe a ‘divine or quasi-divine superintendence of human affairs’. But the Persian elders use it for the task of supervising the country, which the king has transferred to them in his absence. This is a perception of power that differs significantly from the Athenian picture. Unlike fifth-century Athens with its automatic ascription of authority to the mass, here authority must be granted, by the king. The chorus is now the highest ranking purely ‘human’ authority, and, since the royal family is assimilated to the divine, this authority is not simply a representation of the people, but reflects high status, power and control. The chorus of Agamemnon is very similar to this chorus in many respects. They are old, they too are councillors to the king, and they act as courtiers to the Queen while her husband is away:

ἡμεῖς δ’ ἀτίται σαρκὶ παλαιᾷ
tῆς τότ’ ἄρωγῆς ὑπολειφθέντες
μίμνομεν ἵσχυν
ἰσόπαιδα. (72-75)

61 Thus Hall 1996 and Garvie 2009, ad loc. As Hall points out, all three members of the royal family are referred to in a similarly elaborate and title-like way later in the play too (cf. 155-7, 633-4, 854-6). Cf., however, the elaborate reference of the chorus of Agamemnon to their kings at 42-4, or their address to Clytemnestra at 83-4 (for the Greek text see p.170).
62 Cf. 25 where the cognate noun is used to describe the role of the Persian leaders of the army.
63 Garvie 2009, 7n. The verb is used in Suppliants for Zeus (627) and Artemis (678) and for an unspecified ‘god’ in Eum.531.
64 Tragedy often suffuses its tragic monarchies with democratic elements in other plays (cf. n.67 below). See also n.16. on p.13 for monarchy in tragedy.
65 See next page.
However, the Persian elders, with the blessings of the departed king, are empowered to a degree far beyond that of the chorus of *Agamemnon*.66 The Argive elders think of themselves as ‘left behind’ due to their old age, rather than as honourable guardians of the land while their king fights a war in a land far away.67 The Persian chorus understands power as a prerogative of the king, who can pass it on at will. Such an attitude to power would point to a deeply undemocratic understanding of the polis for the Greek audience. This dichotomy will indeed emerge as one of the main considerations of the play in our analysis.68 At the same time, the chorus see themselves as part of this structure as in a position to ἐφορᾶν/ἐφορεύειν their country,69 and they proudly present themselves as the watchdog of the Great King. In that way, the chorus is automatically invested with a certain degree of authority.

iii. The costume of the chorus: exoticism and oriental wealth

As shown above, the self-perception of the chorus as revealed through their self-presentation features an accumulation of characteristics that make this chorus intensely un-Greek. These would have been enhanced by an important visual marker of ethnicity, instantly recognizable by the audience and less dependent on any specific reading of the text, that is, their physical appearance. Since clothing is one of the first elements that strikes one as different when facing another culture,70 and if indeed in fifth century outfit is a strong signifier both of social status and of gender,71 one can safely assume that their costume and masks, their movement and singing would all

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67 For a similar attitude, where old age prevents one from going to battle, cf. II.3.150-2. In *Agamemnon* the chorus have every reason to feel pessimistic about the future given the state of affairs in Argos. But they also seem to lack the automatic elevation of status that the Persian elders enjoy simply by being ‘the oldest’. For a direct juxtaposition of Greek and barbarian leadership ethics in *Suppliants*, see p.79.
68 See, n.103 below on the Queen’s understanding of hierarchy, pp.135f. on *proskynes* and p.146 on Xerxes’ unaccountability for the defeat.
69 The verb is not used elsewhere in Aeschylus of human administration (Garvie 1970, 89n.8 and 2009, ad loc.).
70 Cf. pp.78f. Note that there too peploi are described as ‘barbarian’, though the use may be here slightly more ambiguous since the Danaiads are also females. Cf. also the way in which Herodotus comments on the fact that the Athenians were the first to see the Persians ‘in the flesh’ and thus put a face to the dreadful name of the Mede: πρώτοι δὲ ανέσχοντο ἐνθύτετο τα Ἑλληνὶκοε ὀρόμονες καὶ [τοῖς] ἄνδρας ταυτὶ ἐνθυμένους τέως δὲ ἦν τοῦτα Ἑλληνικαῖ καὶ τὸ σύνομα τὸ Μηδών φόβος ἄκουσα (Hdt. 6.112.10).
71 For Greek dress in its social context, see Lee 2015, ch.7.
characterize them as barbarians, but also work in conjunction with the text to produce a spectacle both impressive and suggestive of the major themes of the play.

One of the first items of clothing that springs to mind with reference to foreign costume in classical Greece are the trouser-like anaxyrides, which were possibly worn by other barbarian choruses or characters in fifth-century tragedy. Yet, despite their relevance, the anaxyrides should probably be dismissed as a possibility in the current play on the basis of the text (the references to peploi, to which we will return shortly), but also on the basis of their connotations: since trousered figures in Greek representations are usually fighters, anaxyrides are associated with warfare and martial valour (cf. the so-called ‘Median’ or ‘rider-costume’). More importantly still, trousers could potentially remind the audience of comedy’s barbarians and deprive the drama of the gravitas it required. Not only these literary associations, but also social connotations would render the anaxyrides unsuitable for the chorus: a man wearing trousers in Greece would probably have caused an effect similar to that still caused today in societies where male outfit necessarily features trousers, when a male appears dressed in skirts (cf. expressions associating ‘trousers’ with masculinity and therefore positive ethical qualities in modern Greek, such as ‘to be wearing trousers’ or ‘to honour one’s trousers.’) It is telling that anaxyrides, although obviously known to the Greeks, are not among the items adopted and adapted by them.

In the text, peploi are instead mentioned matter-of-factly when Xerxes is urging the Persian elders to tear their robes (1060 πέπλον δ’ ἐρεικόν κολπίαν ἀκμῇ χερῶν). It is not impossible that they wore an open garment which exposed the trousers worn underneath as we see them in Persian imagery in Persepolis or

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72 See Garvie 2009, xvi with n.22 for the Greek idea of a Persian costume.
73 Anaxyrides seem to have functioned from early on as emblematizing all that was foreign about the Persians (Miller 1997, 185).
74 Hall 1989, 84n.127.
75 According to Herodotus, trousers were also worn at sea battles (5.49.3 and 7.61.1). Miller (1997, 156) rightly stresses that this system of dress known to us from Greek texts and confirmed by Achaemenid art is distinct from the long, elaborate robe in which the Persians seems to have depicted their nobles and king. It is conceivable that the messenger may have worn trousers, but there is no evidence for that in the text.
76 Garvie 2009, 657-63n., following Gow (1928, 152).
77 φοράω παντελόνια αν τιμάω τα παντελόνια μου.
79 Miller (1997, 183ff.) points to two discreet systems of dress which she calls ‘horizontally agglutinative (i.e. ‘garments superimposed on one another with the result that only the outermost is
occasionally described with variations by Greek sources, or even some sleeved undergarment as well, but there is no trace of that in the text and a *peplos* is an ankle-length garment, which would conceal anything worn underneath. Peploi, however, are also not the most straightforward choice for a male chorus, since *peplos* is the word normally used in surviving Greek tragedy for women’s clothes, and the Greek males who wear it on the tragic stage are few and far between, and none of them Aeschylean. When males do wear it in drama, the reference is clearly to grand, elaborate, ceremonial robes. In Homer, *peplos* is also a female garment, but males do not refrain from using what is essentially a luxurious woven fabric as a curtain, covering for a seat or chariot, or even for a funerary urn or a dead body. In real-life fifth-century Athens, however, the *peplos* is an exclusively female dress.

*Peplos* is therefore a garment with a mixed pedigree, but predominantly feminine in fifth century, generally unfit for a Greek male, and therefore a distancing device between the Persian chorus and the Greek audience. At the same time, however, it is not wholly un-Greek, since it is regularly worn by Greek females, and therefore is part of the Greek reality, and it is also used occasionally in literature for luxurious male garments. It is also much closer to a *chiton* or the *himation*, than the *anaxyrides* would be. Other details, such as the pattern or colour of the textile, the

visible’) and ‘vertically agglutinative’ (i.e. ‘clothing worn in visible combination’, the Persian *anaxyrides* plus sleeved *himation*, *ependytes* or *kandys* being such an example).

80 E.g. Xen. *An*.1.5.8.
81 Such Persian figures occur often on Greek vases, frequently with exaggerated oriental dress, see, e.g. famously the late fifth-century ‘camel-lekythos’ in the British Museum (no. 1882,0704.1) Particularly interesting is the Persian king on an Attic *oenoechoe* dated in 460-50BC, who is depicted wearing a sleeveless chiton and an himation, over a patterned, fitted body-suit (Vatican 16536, photograph also found in Miller 2011, 141, fg.12), which has been examined in relation to Aeschylus’ play (e.g. Gow 1928).
82 Cf. Soph. *Trach. (passim)* for Heracles’ robe, but note the scholiast’s objection: οὖν εὖ δὲ τὸν ἄνδρειαν χιτῶνα πέπλον φησί (Σ Soph.Trach.602a Xenis). Agamemon in Eur. IA.1550 also wears a *peplos*, though this could be an allusion to Aeschylus (see next note). In Eur. *Cycl*.301 πέπλωμα seems to mean ‘clothing’.
83 Hall (1993, 118-9) rightly observes that Agamemnon in the *Oresteia* is the only Aeschylean male who dies wrapped in a *peplos* (Ag.1126-8; Cho.980-984, 997-1000; *Eum.*633-5).
85 See Lee 2015, 100-106 for the *peplos*, ‘decidedly a feminine garment, with strong connotations of protection and containment’ (p.106). See also Hall 1993 for the associations of Persians with effeminacy in the play.
86 Cf. p.78 for the clothes of the Danaids, but see also Aesch. *Supp*.720, where the clothes of the Egyptian suitors are called πεπλόματα, a word that seems to be interchangeable with πέπλος in tragedy (see Collard 1975, 2-95-7n.). In Xenophon the word is used both for male and female Persian dress, see, respectively, *Cyr*.3.1.13 and *Cyr*.5.1.6.
87 For the chiton and the himation, see Lee 2015, 106-100 and 113-115 respectively.
way the clothes were arranged, or even combined with different accessories, such as belts or pins, could also have conveyed an exotic and opulent effect, or, equally, rendered the dress more masculine or Greek. The dress of the Persians, therefore, would instantly mark the difference with the attire of a Greek male, but could also allow different overtones (exotic-luxurious-effeminate-Greek) to co-exist and be accentuated at different points in the play.

The thematic significance of the Persian garments in the play is enhanced by the repeated reference, throughout the first part of the tragedy, to the richness and wealth of Persia. References to clothes punctuate the play, in a contrapuntal harmony of luxury and destroyed wealth. This culminates later in the play in the destruction of wealth as presented in the rags of Xerxes’, who at 1060 urges the elders to tear their clothes in mourning too, a very common exhortation in Greek drama, however impractical as a stage action. The theme is first introduced early in the play as a narrative seed, thus forming the first part of the antithesis, and stresses the difference between the prosperity enjoyed by Persia before the war and the destructive results of the defeat.

The luxurious garments, which will later end up torn or enveloping dead bodies, are part of the overall framework of exoticism and oriental wealth that dominates the first part of the play. The exotic Persian garments would have contributed a crucial visual element to the oriental impression systematically created in the anapaestic part of the parodos (1-64). In the first two lines the words Περσῶν and Ἑλλάδ᾽(α) are juxtaposed, and until line 20 several words occur that refer clearly

88 E.g., Miller (199, 1597) draws attention to the possibility of different patterning of the sleeves and the main body of garments, or the existence of fringes in Eastern dresses, cf. Xerxes’ ‘richly decorated garments’ (836). A more somber style may have prevailed as a reaction to the extravagant oriental style after the Persian Wars, though one should be cautious not to over-interpret surviving evidence (Miller 1997, 155).

89 115-6 μελαγχίτων / φοίν αμώτεται, 125 βουσσίνας δ’ ἐν πέπλοισ πέσῃ λακίς, 180 Περσία and Greece are described as women dressed in nice and different clothes (notice εὑρίσκων, a hapax in Classical Greek), 199 Ξέρξης, πέπλοισ ήγγυσσαν ἀμφί σώματι, 277 πλαγκτοῖς ἐν διπλάκεσσι (a vivid image of the dead Persians floating in the sea wrapped in their luxurious clothes), 465 Ξέρξης δ’ ανέμοδεῖν κακῶν ὥραν βαθὸς [...], Ξέρξης ἐν πέπλοισ κάνειακακόσσα λεγό, 537-45 Persian women rend their clothes and reference is also made to luxurious bedsheets, 658 Dareius’ luxurious costume, 835-6 κακῶν ύπ’ ἄλγοες λακάτης ἀμφί σώματι/ στημορραγοῦσα ποτίκλων εὐθημάτων (the clothes run like fresh blood), 847 ατμίαν γε παιδὸς ἀμφί σώματι/ εὐθημάτων κλύσαν, ἢ ν ἀμπέχει (Atossa deplores Xerxes’ torn clothes as the ultimate dishonour) and finally Xerxes lamenting what is left of his clothes (1016) and urging the chorus to rend their clothes in mourning 1061 Ξέρξης: πέπλον δ’ ἔμεικε κολπίαν ἀκή χεῖρον.
The exotic atmosphere is intensified by the long catalogue of the leaders of the Persian army and their national origin at 21-58. The accumulation of foreign-sounding names enhances the oriental atmosphere. At the same time, the emphasis on the individual person and achievement contrasts sharply the complete lack of any Greek warrior or commander being named in the play, which in turn reminds the absence of names in the Athenian epitaphioi logoi delivered in honour of war dead and their emphasis on Athenian values. Given the emphasis on the collectivity of the Greeks elsewhere in the play, the catalogues may have un-democratic undertones and feel alien to the Athenian audience. Catalogues, however, are also an epic device, familiar to the Greeks from Homer, and their use here is yet another element in creating the image of a proud and confident state, and in consequence of a respectable and authoritative chorus. This presentation will make the reversal even more impressive and emphasize the Persian defeat, when the catalogue of Xerxes’ army turns into a catalogue of war dead (302-330), thus ensuring that the device did not serve as a glorification of the individualized achievements of a despotic regime, but rather as a full list of casualties and loss in contrast with the collectively achieved success of Athenian democracy.

90 For the theme of wealth in the play, see Garvie 2009, 3-4n., with references.
91 Loraux 1986. But see also Ebott 2000, for comparisons between Athenian casualty lists and the catalogues in the play. Again Aeschylus seems to be striking a delicate balance between sympathy and triumphalism.
92 Though catalogues are not necessarily un-Greek in tragedy: a large part of Seven is essentially an elaborate catalogue of warriors.
94 Lattimore 1943, 90; Said 2007, 80.
95 Two more such catalogues occur in the play (302-9 and 950-1001). It is, of course, more straightforward for an Athenian dramatist to single out individual, often invented, Persians than real Greeks, since selection in the latter case would be invidious. The absence of a Greek catalogue can also be seen as bringing to the fore the theological and moral aspect of the defeat rather than the Greeks’ role in it (Kitto 1961, 33-45).
iv. The chorus in interaction

I have so far examined elements of the identity of the chorus and analyzed how a combination of word and image results in a chorus that would strike the Greek audience as ethnically different and therefore alien, but also at times very familiar. In the following sections I will look at the actions of the chorus in a selection of scenes, and will analyze to what degree choral interaction in *Persians* is reminiscent of, or distinct from, Greek choruses in other plays. More specifically, I will focus on the debated issue of whether the chorus prostrates before the Queen; on the perceived divine nature of the Persian kings (in particular when the ghost of Dareius is conjured); on the stance of the chorus during the messenger scene where news of the Persian defeat is delivered, and the effect this has on the reception by the audience; as well as, finally, on the lament that the chorus sings with Xerxes at the end of the play.

The chorus as royal councillors

In the following section I will examine the interaction of the chorus with characters in the play and show that the chorus displays many characteristics that would strike the Athenian audience as alien and hence often alienating, such as their hyperbolic adherence to court etiquette, and the blind obedience to the rulers. On the other hand, there are elements that undercut a smooth presentation of the chorus as distinctly Other. Gnomic, moralizing statements are particularly central in aligning this chorus with any other dramatic chorus, as is the wider perspective on the consequence of the defeat that they bring into the play, and the different stance they display towards different rulers depending on their record as leaders.

The *Persians* open with the *parodos* of the chorus and the first character with whom the Persian elders interact is the Queen when she enters at 150. In many respects their interaction with their rulers onstage is hardly different from that of any other Greek chorus with the legitimate ruler: the Queen addresses them with respect,\(^96\) and they reply in a ready and dignified manner.\(^97\) In a typically choral fashion, they seem

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\(^{96}\) σύμβουλοι λόγου/ τοιούτα μοι γένεσθε, Πέρσαι, γηραλέα πιστώματα/ πάντα γὰρ τὰ κέδν’ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔστι μοι βουλεύματα (170-2).

\(^{97}\) εὖ τὸδ’ ἵσθι, γῆς ἄνασσα πῆρον, μὴ σε δίς φιλάστειν/ μὴ τ’ ἐπος μὴ τ’ ἔργον ὃν ἄν + δύναμις ἤγείσθαι θέλη/ εὐμενεῖς γὰρ ὄντας ἡμᾶς τὸνδε συμβουλὰς καλεῖς (173-5).
to be well versed in religious practice, and it is to them that the Queen turns to narrate her dream and ask for advice,\(^{98}\) which is promptly given and eagerly accepted by the Queen.\(^{99}\) The chorus also possesses accurate encyclopedic information about the Athenians,\(^{100}\) and about the past.\(^{101}\) Later on, the elders are treated with respect both by Dareius and by Xerxes, and display again a behaviour typical of any Greek tragic chorus, that is, they treat differently Dareius and Xerxes, who represent, respectively, the successful and the failed ruler.

Despite such elements, however, which the chorus shares with other dramatic choruses irrespective of their ethnicity, their utterances also involve elements that were fundamentally opposed not only to Athenian democracy, but also to the Greek understanding of power and status.\(^{102}\) This sense is emphasized in the exchange about the Athenians between the chorus and the Queen, where she wonders how one can fight well when not in the service of a single ruler,\(^{103}\) or later on, when the Persian elders express fear that the defeat will bring about the collapse of their political system.\(^{104}\) But the tone is set already from the very first contact of the chorus with the Queen.

The chorus first addresses the Queen in a way that is consistent with the attention to protocol and the attitude towards hierarchy (and divinity) they have displayed so far. They use her full title and describe her as the mother of a god, Xerxes, and the wife of a god, Dareius.\(^{105}\) This address is revealing of the chorus’ conception of the King’s authority and constitutes another element that stands out in relation to the chorus’ Greek counterparts: the repeated use, in the first part of the play, of epithets

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\(^{98}\) Choruses are often the audience of a character’s dream in tragedy (e.g., *Cho*.33ff), and they also frequently offer advice about the performance of rituals (cf. *Cho*.84ff.).

\(^{99}\) 215-225. For the function of the scene, see Harrison 2000, 58-60.

\(^{100}\) 230 † καὶ στρατὸς τοιοῦτος, ἐρέας πολλὰ δὴ Μῆδους κακά; 244 ὡστε Δαρείου πολίν τε καὶ καλὸν φρεάτεσι στρατῶν.

\(^{101}\) The Spartans, for example, are equally averse to a *proskynesis* before the Persian king, see n.116.


\(^{103}\) 584-94.

\(^{104}\) ἀλλ' ἤδε θεῶν ἵκον οὐρανοίοις/ φάος οὐράματα μήτηρ βασιλέως/ βασίλεια δ' ἐμὴ προσπάττω/ και προσφώνησος δὲ χρεῶν αὐτῆς/ πάντως μέσῳ προσπάττων/ ὁ βασιλέων ἄνασσι σεβασμόν /μῆτερ ἡ Ζέδεος γεραιά, χαίρε, Δαρείου γυναι/ θεοῦ μὲν εὐνάτειον Περσών, θεοῦ δὲ καὶ μήτηρ ἐφύς (150-157).
usually meant for gods.\textsuperscript{106} Xerxes is a χρυσονόμου γενεάς ἵσοθεος φῶς (80), the Queen is θεῶν ἵσον ὁφθαλμοῖς φῶς (150-1), and was born θεοῦ μὲν εὐνάτειφα Περσῶν, θεοῦ δὲ καὶ μῆτρα (157).\textsuperscript{107} Assimilation with the gods is employed elsewhere in Greek poetry to praise the exceptional qualities of a person,\textsuperscript{108} and in this context it could be an Aeschylean effort to render the effect of the royal etiquette of exalting the monarch.\textsuperscript{109} Not all scholars view the comparison with gods as a sign of excessive honour,\textsuperscript{110} but, as we see from 157, both Dareius and Xerxes are not simply god-like, but are eventually called ‘gods’.\textsuperscript{111} It has been suggested that the recurring association of the Persian royal family with gods is a reflection of fifth-century Athenian perceptions on the deification of Persian kings.\textsuperscript{112} Even if there is no concrete evidence of such Athenian beliefs, the poet is systematically employing language – and possibly gesture, as we will see in the next paragraph – that the Greeks associated with the divine. Agamemnon, asked by Clytemestra in the famous ‘carpet scene’ to tread on the luxurious tapestries, summarizes a pertinent stereotypical image of a barbarian:

\begin{quote}

ἀβρονε, μηδὲ βασιλάρων φωτός δίκην χαμαπτετές βόαμα προσχάνης ἐμοί,
μηδ' είμαι στρώσασ' ἑπιφθονον τόρον τίθειν θεούς τοι τοίοδε τιμαλφεῖν χρεῶν
ἐν ποικίλοις δὲ θνητὸν ὀντα κάλλεσιν βαίνειν ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐδαμῶς ἄνευ φόβου.
λέγω κατ' ἄνδρα, μὴ θεοῦ, σέβειν ἐμέ.

\textsuperscript{(Ag. 919-925)}\textsuperscript{113}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{106} See also p.126 for ἐφορεύειν. But they are less frequent in the middle part of the play. Gradually, starting from the messenger scene, the divine vocabulary now refers to real gods and predominantly to the vague daimon and the gods that will be held accountable for the catastrophe in the play (cf. 345, 353-4, 362, 373, 454, 472, 495ff., 515, as well as in the scene with Dareius, and the final lament with Xerxes). Dareius, called ἵσοθεος (856) by the chorus, says about his son Xerxes: θνητὸς Ὄνθεον τε πάντων ὄντες', ὡς εὐθυσία, καὶ Ποσειδῶν κρατήσειν (749-50).

\textsuperscript{107} The use of the epithet ‘divine’ for the Persian army (75 ποιμανόριον θεόν) may simply be a nod to the divine favour the chorus assumes for the expedition.

\textsuperscript{108} Indeed, ἵσοθεος φῶς is a common Homeric formula used twelve times in the Iliad for major and minor heroes alike (Said 2007, 77).

\textsuperscript{109} Hall 1996, 150-1n.

\textsuperscript{110} See, e.g., Garvie 2009, 80n.

\textsuperscript{111} Hall (1996, ad loc.) then seems right to think with Conacher (1974, 151) that ἵσοθεος is ‘an innocent enough word in epic, but with overtones of excessive self-aggrandizement in tragedy.’ The context makes the word even more ominous.

\textsuperscript{112} On this, see Garvie 2009, 157n. One cannot be certain how accurate the Greeks’ knowledge was in that respect, or for that matter how accurate Aeschylus meant his presentation to be (for the historical accuracy of Persians, see n.42 on p.121).

\textsuperscript{113} Cf. Eur. Or.1607-8, where the custom is also dismissed by Orestes as alien and unfit for a Greek city.
The extravagant material luxury, the awestruck prostration, the excessive honours bestowed upon a mortal as if he were a god, are all attitudes adopted by the chorus in the play. In this respect the Persian elders must have seemed like a very foreign chorus to the Athenian audience.

In the following pages I will examine if and how this verbal exaltation, and the exotic orientalism it connotes, is played out at the level of gesture. In 152, right before the chorus addresses the Queen, the elders state that they are abasing themselves. The verb they use is προσπίτνω. A certain formality is common in cases where the chorus first addresses a monarch, even occasionally an explicit reference as to how this should be done properly. However, nowhere in surviving tragedy is a monarch granted an act of self-abasement by the chorus, except when formally supplicated, which is not the case here.

While it is possible that this is only a speech act, most scholars rightly reject the suggestion, and interpret it as a physical deferential movement, possibly bowing or kneeling. In a text without marginal stage directions, and in the absence of a text-internal direction of a sort common in tragedy, certainty is impossible. However, consideration of the metre and the rhythmic change it denotes speaks strongly in favour of some sort of stage movement taking place here. The presence of a paroemiac in 152 is suggestive, since this metre often serves as a clausula in anapaests. The change of rhythm here may not be functioning as a final clausula, but it serves to slow down the movement, and possibly indicates a short pause which would allow for a

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114 There is no need to assume, with Broadhead (1960, ad loc.) that, while the whole chorus performs the movement, lines 150-4 are spoken by the koryphaios only, since the first person singular is frequently used by the chorus for the whole group.

115 E.g., Ag. 258-260, 783-7. See also n.61 (p.126) and Taplin 1977, 74, with further examples.

116 E.g. Soph. OC 1754-5, where Antigone’s prostration is automatically view by Theseus as a gesture of request and Soph. El.453 αὐτῷ δὲ προσπίτνω, where the verb appears in a formula of request. See also Griffith 1998, 106-8. Outside tragedy, the Spartans visiting the Persian court resolutely refuse to prostrate themselves before Xerxes (Hdt.7.136).

117 In a ‘figurative’ acts of supplication, where forms of the ritual are verbally articulated, but not physically performed, e.g. γονωσμαί σε (Gould 1973, 77).

118 An ‘act of prostration’ Harrison (2000, 82); ‘the chorus prostrate themselves’ (Sommerstein 2008, 1:31).

119 Garvie (2009, ad loc.) notes that ‘probably’ the chorus abase themselves physically in the orchestra. West (1990, 11) too suggests that the chorus kneel and remain in that position for the following dialogue (or, less convincingly, that they sit on the seats ‘whose presence has been implied’). Hall (1996, ad loc.) takes for granted that a physical act takes place, and seems to lean towards a prostration though she raises the possibility of kneeling.

120 West 1982, 52-4.
physical gesture, possibly a deep bow, a bent knee or a full kneeling movement, from the chorus. It is followed just two lines later (154) by another paroemiac, where we might conjecture that the chorus rises again.\footnote{Thus Broadhead 1960 and Garvie 2009, \textit{ad loc.} On these grounds kneeling should probably be rejected too, since it would require the movement to stop (despite its appeal in the light of 929-30 \textit{Aeschy} δε ἥθινω, βασιλεύς γαίας, αἰνῷς αἰνῷς ἐπὶ γόνυ κέκλιται).} The position of the verb προσπίτνω (152), which constitutes the sole word of the sentence and is unconnected to the previous and following sentences, also points in this direction.

But what is the exact nature of the movement? Was a full prostration performed or was some sort of moderated movement performed instead, such as the chorus kneeling, bowing or touching the ground with their hands? A full physical prostration would be an impressive dramaturgic gesture that would boldly and succinctly visualize all that was foreign in the chorus. There are, however, a number of reasons that speak against such an intense gesture and in favour of a moderated form of abasement. First, it is the word προσκυνῶ that is most commonly used by the Greeks for the Oriental practice which they imagine as prostration\footnote{Bowie (2007, 210) on Hdt 8.118.4 notes the Persian practice of ‘showing deference to the King by raising the right hand with the palm facing the mouth (perhaps touching the lips, if the Greek word κυνέω, based on ‘kiss’, is accurate) whilst inclining the upper body slightly’. He also notes, however, that the Greeks seem to ‘have interpreted \textit{proskynesis} as involving prostration in the ground’, despite this only happening in special circumstances.} rather than the verb προσπίτνω.\footnote{The verb προσκυνῶ is only found once in Aeschylus (\textit{Pers.} 499); it also occurs in \textit{PV} 936. Neither of the two instances refers gestures addressed to humans. The verb προσπίτνω is also relatively infrequent in surviving Aeschylus. It is used twice in \textit{Persians} (152 and 462), once in \textit{Seven} (95, for the images of the gods).}

Second, the chorus could more easily get down and back on their feet again if they kneeled or bowed, while a full prostration would require a more complex and time-consuming movement, or otherwise one too swift to fit the solemnity of the scene. This would also be a movement difficult to carry out for a chorus representing a group of old men, probably heavily dressed in oriental costume in a theatre where conventions dictated a certain schematization of gesture. Bowing may, therefore, be a more economical solution in terms of space and time; it is also a more ambiguous movement, and therefore more open to a number of interpretations ranging from a gesture of legitimate, if oriental, respect to one expressing excessive servility.

In terms of spectacle, the physical self-abasement of the chorus would be an impressive theatrical gesture, and one instantly recognizable as un-Greek by the Greek
It would also fit in well with the picture of the Persians drawn so far by the poet. The visible abasement of the chorus is echoed in the description of the effects of the Persian defeat later in the play: in their lament for the catastrophe, the elders describe the destruction of the Persian empire, saying that the people will no longer ‘fall on their faces (προσπίτνοντες) in awed obeisance’ (588-9). Here the addition of ἐς γᾶν makes clear that this is a physical gesture and not merely a tautologous restatement of ἅζονται. Their words reveal the prostration as central in Persian social structure and use it almost as a symbol of their political system. Aeschylus almost invariably in his surviving plays introduces his themes early in the play. We have seen above how this is done with the clothing motif, as well as with lesser devices, such as the catalogue of Persians or the divine status of the kings. It is, therefore, in keeping with his practice to introduce the prostration early in the play thus achieving both an impressive piece of dramaturgy, and a gesture that reflects important themes of the play.

The messenger scene

The scene dominated by the long messenger reports (249-531) seems to suppress the alien features of the Persian elders, who act similarly to other non-barbarian choruses. In this long scene, the chorus only interacts with the messenger in the lyric opening (249-289) and does not speak again until the messenger exits at 514. The chorus’ presence is prominent in the first part of the scene, while the Queen, though present, remains silent. It has been rightly pointed out that the chorus is the most appropriate receiver of the news of the common disaster, as well as more suitable to express emotion, while the Queen adds a more personal concern and allows the messenger to proceed to a factual reporting of the disaster.

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124 See above p.134 with n.113 for typical barbarian gestures as described in Agamemnon and Euripides’ Orestes.
125 Cf. Xen. An. 3.2.13; Isoc. 4.15. See also n.121 above
126 Frequently such motifs or themes are intertwined, such as the abasing movement being part of an address to the Queen that emphasizes her ‘divine nature’ (see n.105 on p.133), in contrasts to Xerxes, who is is simply addressed as βασιλεύς (918) when he enters dressed in rags.
127 For Atossa’s silence, see Garvie 2009, 144.
128 Conacher 1996, 17. For the Persian defeat as a double tragedy for Persia and Xerxes, see Garvie 2009, xxxiv. The queen enquires mainly about the leaders of the army and Xerxes specifically (297ff.) and is the one who asks for details (see, e.g. 335-6, 347 and 438ff.).
In this regard, the Persian chorus in this scene may be closer to what is one of the main functions of a tragic chorus, that is, to represent ‘the people’, in the sense that it enacts the reactions, feelings and thoughts of the polis towards the tragic events.\textsuperscript{129} In the current play the polis is Persian, but the chorus’ perspective, in this scene and elsewhere, is expanded to include dead warriors and grieving wives and parents, and this takes the focus away from the exotic, despotic Persian court into the less specific and more relatable sphere of human suffering.\textsuperscript{130} At this point, both real-life experience and dramatic practice are relevant for the identification of the audience with the suffering presented in the drama. The Athenians themselves had suffered as a result of their engagement with the Persians, and this traumatizing experience was a potential source of empathy for other victims of war. At the same time, Athenians were so to speak trained in watching choruses of non-combatants in plays dealing with war and its effects. The Persian chorus thus associates itself not only with real-life Athenians, or Persians, but more importantly with other dramatic choruses. This allows it to move in and out of its specific Persian identity into the more general, and less alienating, identity of a dramatic chorus.

A similarly ‘generalizing’ stance of the chorus is evident in the stance they adopt towards the defeat, which is very different from the Queen’s understanding of the defeat. For the Queen what matters is that Xerxes will remain king, as long as he returns home safely (211-214).\textsuperscript{131} The Persian elders, on the other hand, are worried that the defeat may bring about the destruction of the hierarchy and order that holds together the Persian empire (584-597). Elsewhere the chorus have shown concern for the consequences of the war on the people and the land, while the Queen remained throughout focused primarily on the fate of her son.\textsuperscript{132} This is yet another choral feature that is common to this and the majority of other Greek choruses. The troubles of a ruler are relevant to them to the degree that they impact on the land and its people

\textsuperscript{129} The respectful yet disempowered chorus of elders in Agamemnon similarly embodies the suppressed anger and worry of the Argive people for the state of affairs (see pp.167ff.). See also p.108 with n.347 for Choephorai. Hopman (2013, 65-6) rightly stresses that the Persian chorus is able to speak in a typically democratic, or even Athenian, tone, precisely because the choral medium allows a wider, multi-referential perspective.

\textsuperscript{130} E.g. 262-4, 274-7, 288-9, see also pp.144ff.

\textsuperscript{131} See McClure 2006 for the prominent narratological role of the queen.

\textsuperscript{132} Schenker 1994, 283-5. Garvie 2009 (passim) also stresses that Persians examine the common disaster of Persia and of Xerxes, with the chorus remaining more interested in the country, while Atossa remaining focused on her son.
and the respect for, and acceptance of, the ruler is equally dependent on the legitimacy of the ruler and his actions.\textsuperscript{133}

Finally, the chorus of Persian elders shares another element with other tragic choruses, that is, their gnomic, generalizing statements. Despite their elaborate Eastern costumes, their foreign perception of power, or (later) their extended lamentation, the chorus expresses throughout the play an attitude to failure and success, to suffering and triumph, that differs little from any other Greek chorus.\textsuperscript{134}

The ghost of Dareius: conjuring despotism

In their interaction with the Queen the chorus displayed attitudes that highlight its hybrid nature. On the one hand, the distinctly barbarian \textit{proskynesis}, on the other, the respectful treatment they receive from the Queen, their role in filling in the details of the plot, narrating the past, and setting the moral tone, which are functions typically performed by any dramatic chorus irrespective of its ethnicity. I will now examine the interaction between the chorus and the ghost of Dareius, which casts the chorus in a barbarian light and serves in particular, I will argue, to underscore the authoritarian nature of the Persian political system.

The invocation of Dareius (623-680) culminates in the appearance of the ghost of the dead king and has been variously interpreted as magic, or simply a religious practice, Greek or oriental.\textsuperscript{135} Jouan lists all instances of ghosts appearing in surviving Greek tragedy\textsuperscript{136} (as well as some in fragmentary plays\textsuperscript{137}), and cases of invocations for help from the dead, and examines their similarities with, and differences from, the Dareius scene. He does, however, rightly note the unique nature of the chorus’ invocation in this play: this is the sole instance where not only is the help of the dead requested, but also – emphatically – the appearance of the dead. It is also the only

\textsuperscript{133} Dhuga 2011, 5-6.
\textsuperscript{134} See Hopman 2009, 62. Cf. n.118 (p.56).
\textsuperscript{135} See below, n.143.
\textsuperscript{136} Jouan 1984.
\textsuperscript{137} See Bardel 2005.
certainly attested instance in surviving tragedy where the ghost of the dead does appear, in all splendour, as a result of an invocation.\textsuperscript{138}

There is no denying that Greek tragedy has an interest in ghosts,\textsuperscript{139} and it may be an accident of survival that this is the only scene of the sort that has come down to us. In the lack of a more substantial sample, the closest tragic parallel is the kommos of Choephoroi (306-509).\textsuperscript{140} Despite the similarities,\textsuperscript{141} one cannot overlook the fact that in Choephoroi the chorus, Orestes and Electra concentrate on requesting Agamemnon’s help, and only twice do they ask for him to appear in person (459, 489), despite the kommos being almost three times as long as the invocation of Dareius.\textsuperscript{142} Though Aeschylus could conceivably be playing with the expectation that a ghost of Agamemnon may eventually appear, it is perhaps no surprise that no ghost appears in the end, since essentially no ghost has been summoned.

The Persian elders, on the other hand, repeatedly request the appearance of Dareius himself. Initially they ask of the gods of the netherworld to allow Dareius to appear to them:

\begin{quote}
Γῆ τε καί Ἑρμῆ, βασιλεὺ τ’ ἐνέρων,
πέμψατ’ ἐνερθὲν ἐν ψυχὴν ἐς φῶς· (629-30)
Πέρσαν Σοφιγενῆ θεόν·
πέμπτετε δ’ ἄνω (643-4)
Αἰδώνεύς δ’ ἀναπομπός ἀνείης, Αἰδώνεύς,
θείον ἀνάκτορα Δαριάνα (650-1)
\end{quote}

and subsequently address directly the king himself:

\begin{quote}
βαλλήν, ἀρχαῖος βαλλήν, ἢτι, ἰκοῦ·
ἐλθ’ ἐπ’ ἄκρον κόρυφου ὄχθοι (658-9)
βάσικε πάτερ ἀκακε Δαρίαν, οἱ (664)
δέσποτα δεσποτάν φανηθ’ (666)
βάσικε πάτερ ἀκακε Δαρίαν, οἱ (671)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{138} The ghosts of Polydorus in Euripides’ Hecuba and Clytemnestra’s in Choephoroi appear unsummoned.
\textsuperscript{139} There are only three instances of ghosts on the tragic stage in surviving tragedy (Dareius in Persians and the two mentioned in the previous note). Fragmentary plays, vase paintings, and secondary sources, however, suggest that the practice may have been more widespread (for a survey, see Bardel 2000).
\textsuperscript{140} Garvie 2009, 260; Hall (1996, 151-2) acutely remarks that the closest parallel for the scene, where a community in trouble seeks advice from a dead leader is found in comedy (Aristophanes’ Frogs), and an even closer parallel in Eupolis’ Demes), and this highlights the exceptional nature of the scene.
\textsuperscript{141} See Garvie 2009, 260-1n.
\textsuperscript{142} The kommos in Choephoroi is almost 170 lines long (306-478), the invocation of Dareius less than sixty (623-680, with the invocation proper starting at 629).
This scene may have reminded the fifth-century audience of contemporary Greek religious or magical practice, or may have alluded to Greek perceptions of Persian religion, but the fact remains that the chorus succeed in conjuring the ghost of the dead king through their ritual. This is a supernatural phenomenon, and therefore much more striking than the invocation of Agamemnon examined above that must have been closer to real-life laments or invocations of the dead. Lines 694-6, where the chorus express their awe and fear before the king, may imply that the elders themselves realize the extraordinary character of their acts, though, as I will argue below, these utterances may also be a sign of respect and fear for the dead king. Undoubtedly, this is a very powerful scene in terms of spectacle. An analysis of the scene also reveals its complex nature, since a variety of elements are brought together to create this piece of theatre: current Greek religious practice and beliefs, common opinion about Persian magic, preconceptions about Oriental aesthetic and political norms.

Through a combination or dialogue and ritualistic acts, the chorus here, as elsewhere in the play, is striking a delicate balance between what could be viewed as barbarian and what would be accepted or expected as generically choral. This is largely achieved by the sequence of invocation and dialogue. The initial invocation (624-680) bears many linguistic and musical features that would be perceived as oriental, while the ensuing dialogue (787-800) shares many features with any dialogue between a Greek chorus and a Greek king.

But why is it dramaturgically necessary for Dareius to appear onstage? The magical invocation certainly creates the effect of a mystical, magical aura. This could be achieved by the ritual even if the ghost did not appear at the end of the process, though the effect would not be as tangibly supernatural. Another important function of the scene is the introduction of Dareius as a foil to Xerxes. One must, however, not underestimate the narrative ability of tragedy to construct characters that never

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143 For a review of the literature, see Garvie 2009, 259.
144 Quoted on the next page.
145 See p.142. In Euripides’ Heracles Megara seems eager to settle for Heracles to appear even as a phantom, or a dream (494-5 ἄρηξον, ἐλθέ· καὶ σκιὰ φάνηθί μοι/ ἄλως γὰρ ἐλθὼν κάτω ὅναρ γένοι σείπ).
146 The elaborate costume of Dareius (660-1) would contribute significantly to that effect.
147 See previous page for a comparison with Choephoroi.
appear on stage. Dareius could serve as the image of the successful leader in contrast to Xerxes by being repeatedly mentioned and praised by the chorus and the Queen in the course of the play (as happens, for example at 156 or 554-7).

The question of Dareius has, therefore, puzzled scholars and a variety of reasons have been offered as to what is the full, complex effect of presenting the ghost of the dead king onstage.\footnote{For a review, see Alexanderson 1967, and Garvie 2009, 274-6.} If one looks at the scene in relation to the overall presentation of Persia and the Persian chorus in the play, it seems plausible that there is an additional function carried out by this scene, that is, to visualize for the Athenian audience the autocratic Persian regime within an intensely magical, oriental, and therefore anti-rational framework. As we saw above, the relation between the Queen and the chorus reflects the autocratic atmosphere of the Persian court. However, the Queen cannot fully embody the authoritarian Persian rule, since she is only the wife and mother of the king. Nor can Xerxes, given the very special conditions of failure under which he meets with the chorus. Dareius, however, is an exemplary Persian king. He is wise, even aware of the limits of human action. But he is also fearsome to his subjects. It is not unusual for choruses in Greek drama to feel fear, but the reason is external circumstances, the knowledge of an action committed against divine will, or even the unpredictable, cruel behaviour of a tyrannical ruler. In no other Greek tragedy is a Greek chorus scared of a person who has been consistently presented in the play as the best ruler their political system can generate. The old, respectable councillors, who prostrated before the Queen, are now too afraid to look up to their king – not simply because he is a ghost, as Aeschylus makes sure to underline. The Persians were afraid of him during his lifetime too:

\[
\begin{align*}
\sigma\epsilon\beta\omicron\omicron\mu\acute{\iota} \mu\acute{e}n \pi\rho\omicron\sigma\omicron\delta\acute{\epsilon}\omicron\sigma\omicron\acute{\iota}\alpha, \\
\sigma\epsilon\beta\omicron\omicron\mu\acute{\iota} \delta^\prime \alpha\nu\tau\iota\acute{\alpha} \lambda\acute{e}\acute{\omicron}\acute{i}\iota \\
\sigma\acute{e}\dot{\theta}e\acute{\nu} \acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\acute{\alpha}i\acute{\omega} \pi\acute{e}\acute{r}i \tau\acute{a}\acute{r}b\acute{e}i. \quad \text{(694-6)}
\end{align*}
\]

This is a striking difference with other choruses. In two strophes the chorus state that they are too awestruck to speak to the king (694-6 and 700-2), thus forcing Dareius to address the Queen first. The chorus’ fear is clearly not simply a result of the supernatural nature of the event,\footnote{Thus Broadhead 1960, \textit{ad loc}.} as the text itself clearly invites us to view the scene also as a visualization of the relationship between the ruler and his subjects in a
despotic regime. Dareius attributes the speechlessness of the chorus to a δέος παλαιών (703), and the chorus admit that they are too awed to address their king because they always feared him. As has been rightly emphasized, Persians is among other things a play about democracy and despotism, and about the benefits, and dangers, of democracy in all respects, including military achievement. The ghost of Dareius exemplifies in an impressive coup de théâtre all that a good ruler should not be in the eyes of an Athenian.

Lamenting against, and with, the king

One of the distinctive features of Persians is the prevalence of lamentation as a mode of choral expression, to the extent that the play as a whole has even been described as one long lamentation. I will now examine the two laments that frame the Dareius scene: two mourning scenes interrupted by the apparition of a ghost. I will analyse how the chorus is presented through these emotionally intense and visually impressive scenes, and what effect this has particularly in highlighting their un-Greek status and in facilitating or hampering the Athenian audience’s identification with them. I argue that the final lament is the culmination of Aeschylus’ masterly treatment of this recent historical event. The drama concludes emotionally on a very high note, which manages to combine uniquely triumphalism and pride over the
Persian defeat, with mourning for the Athenian losses and for the seriousness and trauma of war in general.\textsuperscript{155}

The first lament (531-597) follows upon the messenger scene, after the Queen exits to pour libations for her son, and redirects attention away from the Queen’s personal, maternal concerns onto the reaction of the people. In a sense, this \textit{stasimon} expands on the brief lament that the chorus uttered upon first hearing of the defeat from the messenger (256-89), when they expressed their sorrow for the catastrophe that has befallen the Persian army and with it the Persians left behind.\textsuperscript{156} This is the first time we will hear the Persian elders sing a lament, but it will not be the last, as they also will sing the final lament that concludes the play (909ff.).

In this, first, lament the introductory anapaests (532-548) focus on the effect of the defeat on non-combatants, mainly on women (537-54), and old men (546ff.). The initial remarks of the chorus about the Persian suffering could apply equally well not only to war in general, but also to the Greeks who fell at that same battle: lamenting women who tear their veils and soak their garments in tears (537-545),\textsuperscript{157} dead soldiers eaten by fish (576-8), \textit{oikoi} bereft of their men (579) and aged parents who have lost their children (580-1). However, the song is punctuated by references that specify the occasion\textsuperscript{158} and remind one that these are Persians lamenting Persian losses. The Persian focus becomes especially sharp in the first strophe, where Xerxes is held responsible for the catastrophe and his lack of similarity with his father is deplored (554-6). Then the chorus turns again to the casualties of the sea-battle (558-583). And finally, to what they see as the effect of the defeat on the whole of Persia and its political system (584-97).

The ode opens with remarks about the loss and bereavement the war has brought upon the Persian population, especially to women. At this point still, the elders are addressing Zeus as the one who ‘destroyed the army’ (\textit{όλεοσας}, 533-4) and

\textsuperscript{155} Gruber (2009, 129-30) remarks on the lament as a medium that would help the audience identify with the pain of the Persians, but, underplays, I think the alienness of the chorus, especially with regard to their political outlook.

\textsuperscript{156} Lossau 1998, 37; Garvie 2009, 232.

\textsuperscript{157} It is uncertain, and perhaps not overly important, if we are to think of mothers or younger women, though the reference to ‘delicate hands’ (537) favours the latter interpretation (Garvie 2009, \textit{ad loc}).

\textsuperscript{158} Mention of Persians or Persian places (532, 535, 540, 550-3, 555, 557), and Greek places where the battle took place.
‘covered the cities in grief’ (κατέκρυψας, 535-6). In the following strophe, however, the focus changes abruptly. Now it is Xerxes who drove the army to its destruction. The chorus overtly blame Xerxes for the miseries of war, and express their dissatisfaction emphatically in three succeeding lines, all starting with Xerxes as the subject of active verbs. The repetition so common in lament has been turned by the chorus into a damning indictment of the king’s actions:

Ξέρξης μὲν ἀγανεν, ποποί,
Ξέρξης δ’ ἀπώλεσεν, τοτοί,
Ξέρξης δὲ πάντ’ ἐπέστε ὑσυφρόνως
βαφίδεσσι ποντίαις.
τίπτε Δαρεῖος μὲν οὕτω τότ’ ἀβλαβής ἔπην,
τόξαρχος πολιήταις,
Σουσίδαις φίλος ἀκτωρ; (550-6)

After this brief, yet clear attribution of responsibility to Xerxes, the chorus elaborate further the misery the defeat has caused: the suffering of the army in the battle and their fate afterwards (the shipwrecks, the dead Persians at sea, the king retreating through the inhospitable land of Thrace, \(^{159}\) 558-578); and the houses back in Persia, wrecked by the loss of men (579-583). Once they have thus exposed the immensity of the suffering, the chorus returns to the political consequences of the defeat and dedicate a whole strophic pair to it. With the use of a vivid present tense they express their concern for a total dissolution of the royal power and the discipline that was presented in the parodos as a matter of ethnic pride for the Persians. The people of Asia will no longer be paying honours, and tributes, to the king (third strophe), and the people will no longer restrain their thoughts, but will speak their mind freely (third antistrophe).

In the framework of the extraordinary pain and misery that the expedition has left behind, the chorus introduce into the ode a political interpretation of the defeat, as well as an analysis of the political consequences of the failed expedition. The defiance toward Xerxes may seem surprising in the light of previous passages where the Persian political system was presented as one with clear and respected hierarchy. However, the chorus is displaying here a conduct not dissimilar to that of other tragic choruses.

\(^{159}\) This reminds the audience to expect Xerxes (Garvie 2009, 565n.), but for Garvie (2009, 568-71n.), it also contrasts the killed soldiers with the king who survived and is returning home. While this is correct, it serves to add, rather than detract from the misery described by the chorus.
The elders adopt a different stance towards different rulers, and become less obedient and respectful when facing a ruler who lacks legitimacy or popular support.\(^{160}\) Given the extreme respect for hierarchy the chorus displayed so far, the *volte-face* here is strikingly abrupt and therefore especially significant for the evaluation of Xerxes. At the same time, is it is carefully tailored to the obedient and supportive role of the chorus, since it is arguably critical distance rather than outright defiance. *Agamemnon* presents us with an illuminating parallel, since the chorus also express their support for the returning king without hesitating to voice their criticism.\(^{161}\) There is of course a significant difference, since Agamemnon returns victorious, and in this respect at least he has given the chorus far fewer reasons to criticise him. Significantly, the accusations against Xerxes are immediately followed by a praise of Dareius (555ff.), thus focusing the critique not on the ruling family as a whole, but specifically on Xerxes. This is the first time in the play where the antithesis between the rule of Xerxes and Dareius is introduced, and it looks forward to the Dareius scene later in the play.\(^{162}\)

In their distrust and accusations against a failed ruler, the Persian chorus may indeed remind us of other Greek choruses who expressed their reservations or expressly accused a king of incompetence or usurping intents and illegitimate actions. However, their final acceptance of Xerxes highlights yet again the autocratic nature of a regime where followers have already been implicitly compared to slaves.\(^{163}\) The Persian elders, despite their criticism of Xerxes, and their overt preference for Dareius’ rule, will eventually unite with their king to lament the defeat and will enter the palace with him, in what is a dramatic presentation of the defeat, but also of Xerxes’ political survival.\(^{164}\) Between the condemnation of Xerxes’ actions by the chorus at 550-7 and the joint lament at the end of the play, there will be no change of attitude in Xerxes in any respect, nor will any new development come to light. In other words, the chorus considers Xerxes fully responsible for a terrible catastrophe, but still receives him back as the legitimate king and does not seem to question his right to remain in power.\(^{165}\)

The – Persian – chorus finally lets go of any misgivings and rediscovers their trust in

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\(^{160}\) Gruber (2009, 323) notes the parallel with the first stasimon of *Agamemnon* (cf. below, p.184); see also the constant siding of the chorus of *Choephori* with Orestes against Clytemestra and Aegisthus.

\(^{161}\) See pp.179f.

\(^{162}\) See p.141, n.148.

\(^{163}\) See n.103 on p.133.

\(^{164}\) Kantzios 2004, 9n.21.

\(^{165}\) See p.79 for Pelasgus’ perception of accountability.
their king, an attitude that had been taken for granted by the Queen very early in the play:

πράξας μὲν εὖ θαυμαστὸς ἂν γένοιτ’ ἄνήρ,
κακῶς δὲ πράξας – οὐχ ὑπεύθυνος πόλει,
σωθεὶς δ’ ὀμοίως τήσδε κοιμανεὶ χθονός. (212-4)

Right or wrong, victorious or defeated, the Persian king will continue to rule as long as he lives. The word used in this context by the Queen is ὑπεύθυνος, a word that would remind the audience of the accountability of their own officials. Evoking εὐθύναι, an institution of which the Athenians are so proud in the midst of such an anti-democratic statement stresses the antithesis between Greek and Persian government.166 Persia is presented as an empire ruled by an absolute ruler, who is authoritarian, rather than despotic. It is not, like Argos at the close of Agamemnon, a city gone wrong. It is an empire whose system of government is fundamentally flawed, or, at least, antithetical to the rightfully constructed Athenian polis.

The second political statement in the ode (third strophic pair), where the Persian political edifice is presented as falling apart, also seems abruptly introduced, since nothing in the messenger speech, or in the chorus’ reaction, has implied such far-reaching consequences.167 In the strophe we are told that the peoples of Asia

οὐκέτι περσονομοῦνται,
οὐδ’ ἐτι δασμοφοροῦσιν
dεσποτοῦνοιν ἀνάγκαις,
οὐδ’ ἐς γὰν προπίνυντες
ἀξονται’ (585-9)

And the chorus concludes, in a hyperbolic statement that presents fear as vivid reality, that the royal power has perished (589-90 βασιλεία/ γὰρ διόλωλεν ἰσχύς). Before drawing this sonorous conclusion, the chorus highlight institutions that are central to the Persian empire. As Hall (1996, ad loc.) notes ‘the word δασμὸς is particularly associated in Greek sources with the taking of tribute by Persia (X. An.1.1.8)’, in

166 Cf. Hdt.3.80.3 and 3.80.6. But cf. Rhodes (2003, 115-7), who notes that the euthynai were not restricted in democratic regimes in Greece.
167 ‘The Chorus certainly appears to jump somewhat hastily to its gloomy conclusion’ (Broadhead 1960, ad loc.).
contrast to the Athenian democratic system where taxes were payable to the state, and not to an individual ruler.\textsuperscript{168}

In the antistrophe, the chorus elaborates further the political repercussions of the defeat. This time, however, it is habits that the Persians will be adopting, rather than ones they will be abandoning, that they highlight: since they will no longer be subject to the yoke of royal power, they will be able to speak freely (591-4).\textsuperscript{169} The Persian empire will abandon modes of conduct of which it is proud, and will take on others, which happen to be very Athenian. The customs whose decline the chorus lament are those least acceptable to the Athenian ear and most typical of Greek stereotypes of the barbarian.\textsuperscript{170} At the same time, these politically loaded statements are accompanied by a powerful expression of grief. So the effect must be complex. The conclusion of the choral song is celebratory for the Athenians: αἱμαχεῖσας δὲ ἄροοροι/Ἄιαντος περικλύστα νάσος ἔχει τὰ Περσῶν (594-6).\textsuperscript{171} The chorus, starting from what was an expected reaction to the news of defeat, have slowly been building up a climactic conclusion. Not only did the Persians fail to conquer Athens, and therefore Greece,\textsuperscript{172} but Salamis now holds all that is (was) Persia, and Persia seems in danger of being culturally taken over by the Greeks.\textsuperscript{173} This hyperbolic presentation must have been welcome to the Greek audience. At the same time, it would firmly associate the chorus with the ‘other side’ of that war, and thus contribute to the distancing of the audience from the chorus.

This lyric section is the first in a series of scenes that eventually increase both emotion and alienness in the play. This, first, lament is followed by the Dareius scene and the apparition of a ghost, and immediately afterwards by one of the most passionate and intense laments in surviving tragedy. Starting from this first lament, therefore, Aeschylus is working towards the climax of the play, where triumphalism

\textsuperscript{168} Cf. the Persepolis Apadana relief (north stair), where the king, sat on his throne is receiving the tributes (for a picture of the relief, see Root 1979, pl.17). See also pp.135ff. for prostration.

\textsuperscript{169} ἐλευθεραὶ βάζειν (593). Ἰσηγορία and παρρησία was central in the Athenian perception of democracy, see Balot 2004. Cf. Hdt. 5.78.1.

\textsuperscript{170} Cf. Hall 1989, 98.

\textsuperscript{171} Scholars rightly note the deliberate ambiguity of the phrase τὰ τῶν Περσῶν is meant to include all that was and would be Persia, rather than simply the bodies of the dead Persians, see, e.g. Hall 1996, 596-7n. and Garvie 2009, \textit{ad loc}.

\textsuperscript{172} Cf. 234.

\textsuperscript{173} Cf. Harrison 2000, 28 and 74-5.
and empathy will merge in a highly emotional scene, which will allow the Athenians to vent grief for the own losses as well.

The final lament opens conventionally with the specifics of the occasion, the intention of the chorus to lament. The accusatory remarks made by the chorus (922, to which Xerxes admits at 932) are also not completely unexpected in a lament, since mourners are elsewhere angry or regretful towards the dead for the situation their death has brought about. Of course, blame here is addressed to a living person, and recurs after a clear attribution of defeat to Xerxes was expressed earlier in the play. Similarly, despite the generic features, the opening lines of the lament have an exotic colouring: ἵππες (924), although of Greek etymology (from ἵππος), is an *hapax* that sounds more like a foreign title, while the consonant complex of ἄγαβαται in the same line also has a distinct foreign sound. There are references to ‘slayers with the bow’ (926 τοξοδαμάντες, transl. Sommerstein) to Asia and the King (929). The generic rules of Greek mourning apply, but the ‘exotic’ elements keep the focus on the Persian theme of the play and underline the reversal of initial hope.

In the next two strophic pairs (950-1001) the Persian focus becomes unmistakable: within a few lines there are twenty-seven Persian (or Persian-sounding names), the final catalogue recalling in typically Aeschylean manner the glorious catalogue that opened the play. Metre is crucial in generating a tone that balances between generically choral and barbarian: ionics *a minore*, a metre with potential Asiatic associations featured prominently in the necromantic scene (and occurred already in the *parodos*, 65-115), where it underscored the exotic, alien nature of the event. The same metre is picked up here (950-3=962-5), this time mixed with more

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174 ‘The land laments its native youth/ killed by Xerxes […]’ (922-3, transl. Sommerstein).
177 See pp.145f.
178 Not yet satisfactorily explained by scholars (see Garvie 2009, 924-7n).
179 For the antithesis between Persian bow and Athenian spear, see Garvie 2009, xiii and 26n.
180 For the names of Persians in Aeschylus, see Schmitt 1978.
181 Cf. p.131.
182 West 1982, 124. Headlam (1900, 108) argues for the importance of metre in creating an Eastern atmosphere in the play.
common lyric meters (anapaests and iambics). From this point on, the common grief of the chorus and Xerxes dominate, while the specifics of the occasion become less frequent, until they finally disappear altogether and give way to verses expressing pure grief.

In all, this lament is unique in that it presents dominant male citizens together with their king lamenting passionately and tearing their cheeks in grief, thus both pointing towards functions that are typically female in tragedy, and alluding to the literary *topos* of passionate lamentation as a barbarian ‘habit’. At the same time, the lament has characteristics traditional in stylized Greek mourning. Thus Aeschylus skillfully balances the utterances of his chorus (here joined by Xerxes) between the ethnic and the generic. Overall, the unambiguously ethnic elements are denser in the middle, become less intense after that and we are reminded of the Persians again a couple of lines before the ending.

v. Conclusion

In conclusion, ethnicity matters for the evaluation of this chorus, ethnic features as seen by the Athenian eye punctuate their presence and the Persian nature defines in many aspects their action, their utterances, and their interaction with the rest of the characters. There is, however, a permeable boundary dividing Greek and non-Greek and our elders are never in their totality on the non-Greek side. Sometimes they proceed deeper into the barbarian, and stay there for longer, thus generating a highly alienating effect for the Athenian audience. But most of the time they balance effectively on the line, thus constantly inviting the audience to put themselves in their place, and as a result sit through a performance that can accommodate uniquely the

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183 Dale 1968, 52-4. For the lyric metres in the play, see the metrical appendices in Broadhead 1960 (appendix II), West 1990, Hall 1996 and Garvie 2009.
184 There are reference to Ionians (1011) and Persians (1013, 1016), to arrows (1020, 1022) and ships (1029), a mention of Ionians (1025) and fifty lines later a final reference to the Persian land (1073).
185 For self-harming gestures in lamentation, see p.93.
187 Repetition, ‘close correspondence of words or sounds between strophe and antistrophe’, antiphony, and the role of an *exarchon* (Garvie 2009, 340).
188 Scholars rightly stress how Xerxes and the Persian elders finally tune in, thus closing this ‘double tragedy of Xerxes and Persia’ (Garvie 2009, 337) with a lamentation sung unanimously by both.
189 Johnson 2005.
experience of war: struggle, pain, loss and bereavement, but also triumphal joy, and *Schadenfreude*. Sat in the theatre, the victor merges with the defeated to process his emotional trauma,\(^\text{190}\) and consider the course of his country, but never loses sight of who eventually came out on top. It is an experience that would allow one to identify with certain aspects of the chorus and thus feel and think on the war, yet the inherent ambiguity of the Aeschylean Persian chorus would allow the Athenian spectator to think, if so he wished, that what one just watched was the celebration of one of his country’s greatest successes.\(^\text{191}\)

\(^{190}\) Meineck 2012. As Loraux (2002, 53) notes, ‘the place of mourning is on the stage, not in the city-state’ – better yet, the place of mourning is onstage in distant, alien Persia. Cf. Psammenitus’ distinction between self-pity and sympathy for someone else: τὰ μὲν οἰκήμα τὴν μείζονα κακήν ἐνταύχον, ὡς τε ἄνακδατε, ἢ τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ πενθοῦσε ἄξιον ἢν δακρύων (Hdt.3.14.35).

\(^{191}\) Allan and Kelly 2013.
C. Phrynichus’ Phoenician Women

Persians may be the only surviving tragedy with a contemporary non-Greek chorus. But, as the hypothesis of Persians reveals, Aeschylus seems to have drawn his inspiration from Phoenician Women, a play on the Persian wars composed by his older contemporary Phrynichus.\(^{192}\) Phoenician Women is also the only pre-Aeschylean drama featuring a foreign chorus of which enough survives for us to reach some tentative conclusions. As such, the play can offer some perspective on Aeschylus’ dramaturgy and serve as additional evidence for non-Greek choruses in a playwright who was both chronologically adjacent to Aeschylus, and, as the intertextual allusion reveals, part of the context of Aeschylus’ poetry.

According to the hypothesis of Persians, Glaucus\(^{193}\) thought that the Persians was modelled on Phrynichus’ Phoenician Women and provided further information, such as the first line of Phrynichus’ tragedy, and a description of the opening scene:

\[
\text{Γλαῦκος ἐν τοῖς περὶ Αἰσχύλου μύθων ἐκ τῶν Φοινικιωτῶν Φοινίχου φησὶ τοὺς Πέρσας παραπεποιήθαι. ἐκτίθησι δὲ καὶ τὴν ἀρχήν τοῦ δράματος ταύτην, Τάδ' ἐστὶ Περσῶν τῶν πάλαι βεβηκότων. πλὴν ἔκει εὐνούχος ἐστὶν ἀγγέλλων ἐν ἀρχῇ τὴν Σέρξου ἤτταν, στορνύσ τε θρόνους τινὰς τοῖς τῆς ἀρχῆς παρέδροις, ἑνταῦθα δὲ προλογίζει χορὸς πρεσβυτῶν.}
\]

An examination of the opening of Aeschylus’ Persians reveals striking similarities between the two plays. This intertextual nod legitimizes us to think that Aeschylus had the play of Phrynichus in mind, as well as possibly Phrynichus’ earlier play on the Ionian revolt, at least as an alternative way of presenting a Persian defeat:

\[
\text{Tάδε μὲν Περσῶν τῶν οἰχομένων Ἑλλάδ' ἐς αἰαν πιστὰ καλεῖται, καὶ τῶν ἀρνεῶν καὶ πολυχρύσων ἐδράνων φύλακες, κατὰ πρεσβείαν}
\]

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192 The play is usually dated between 478 and 476BC, see, e.g. O’Neil 1942, 425; cf. West 1989 on the dating of early tragedy (Marx 1928 argues rather circularly that the play was later than Aeschylus). We could potentially stretch the date to 473, since Aeschylus’ play was produced in 472BC.

193 Probably Glaucus of Rhegium (Garvie 2009, 4). Too little is known about Glaucus to gauge the reliability of his claim, but he did write a work on the relation between poets (Περὶ τῶν ἀρχαίων ποιητῶν τε καὶ μουσικῶν), which may add some authority to his testimony. For tragic hypotheses, see Garvie 2006, 15-19.

194 We cannot be certain about the exact sort of influence παραπεποιήθαι describes.
οὔς αὐτὸς ἀναξ Ξέρξης βασιλεὺς
Δαρειογένης
ἐέλετο χώρας ἐφορεύειν. (1-7)

Through a close examination of the hypothesis and the surviving fragments of *Phoenician Women* in relation to Aeschylus’ *Persians*, and secondarily with Euripides’ *Phoenician Women*, I will argue that Aeschylus, in referencing Phrynichus so prominently in his own play, both honours and emulates, or even competes with, his prestigious elder contemporary, and implicitly states his intention to put his own stamp on the dramatic representation of the Persian wars. The result, as I have argued in the previous section, is a multi-faceted chorus that becomes the focal point of a variety of issues, historical, political and more universal in its message about war, success and failure, but also more subtly nuanced than Phrynichus’ with regard to the presentation of the ethnic Other in relation to the Greek Self.

### i. The departed Persians and those left behind

In using Phrynichus’ opening line to open his own play, Aeschylus has replaced the word βεβηκότων with οἰχομένων. Phrynichus’ iambic word is thus replaced with one that fits Aeschylus’ anapaestic verse. More importantly, however, the new word has, unlike the original, a sinister potential, since it can mean both those ‘who have departed’, and those ‘who are deceased’. To appreciate the subtlety of Aeschylus’ use of language here, one needs to consider the different context of the two plays. In *Phoenician Women*, the Persian defeat is announced already at the beginning. In *Persians*, however, the play starts in anticipation of news, and Aeschylus’ use of οἰχομένων enhances the sense of foreboding, a major hallmark of Aeschylean theatre.

While *Persians* open with a self-presentation by the chorus of elders, in Phrynichus, according to the hypothesis, the opening line is spoken by a eunuch as he

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195 For Nenci (1950, 222-3) the allusion is of a more confrontational nature (‘versi testimoni di una polemica, sia pur garbata’, p.222), due to Aeschylus’ personal involvement in the Persian wars.
196 Sheppard (1915, 34), followed up by Winnington-Ingram (1973), who highlights the increasingly sinister overtones that are being built into the word as it recurs in the play.
197 Or possibly even in the previous play of the trilogy, pp.158f.
198 Goward 1999, 57-60.
is preparing the seats for the Persian councillors. In Aeschylus the pronoun τάδε is used self-referentially by the chorus, but what is the pronoun used for by the eunuch in Phrynichus? ὁδὲ (here in the neuter plural) is most often used, though not absolutely, for something that is present or near. In all probability the councillors are not onstage at this point and there is no reason to think that they would be referred to with a neuter pronoun. This led Marx to conclude that the reference must be to the ‘Ort der Handlung’ and suggested a supplement for the following verses: ἐς ἐλλαδ’αίαν εὐπρεπῆ θακήματα, οὗτοι τὰ πιστὰ βασιλέως θακεῖν νόμος.

Though it is unlikely that we can recreate Phrynichus’ words, a restoration along those lines may be close to the truth (though surprisingly Marx retains the neuter form for the chorus as well, τὰ πιστά). Marx’s θακήματα, or even better ἔδρανα, which Aeschylus retains in his own version, or τὸ ἔδος in the plural, both denoting the physical seat, but also used metaphorically for the ‘seat of power’, are plausible alternatives. By attaching the genitive ‘of the Persians’ to the seats, Phrynichus designates them as the official seat of the royal council in charge of Persia as its first men have departed.

Apart from the pronounced linguistic similarity of the first verse, the hypothesis seems to suggest additional themes that are prominent in Aeschylus as well. First, the eunuch. Eunuchs are never attested in Greek royal courts at any period of Greek history, and the Greeks considered the practice of castration with horror, and viewed it as a form of cruel punishment. Greek sources, however, reveal knowledge of the existence of eunuchs in Eastern royal courts and refer to the perceived loyalty eunuchs harboured for their master, and the high esteem eunuchs enjoyed πίστιος ἐἰνέκα.

199 See pp.124-125.
200 Unless one sees Aeschylus’ use of the neuter for the chorus (see previous note) as an element that he borrowed from Phrynichus. Marx 1928, 353.
202 3-4 καὶ τῶν ἄνδρων καὶ πολυχρύσων/ ἔδρανων φύλακες.
203 The pronoun could conceivably qualify the spreads placed by the eunuch onto the seats, but the emphatic association with the departed Persians through the genitive Περσῶν fits better the seats (and their symbolism as seats of power).
205 For eunuchs in the ancient world, see Guyot 1980, who notes (p.71-2) the orientalising effect the eunuch has in Phrynichus, compared to Aeschylus.
206 Hdt. 8.105.8-9. Cf. Hdt. 3.77; 3.130; 8.105; Xen. Cyr. 7.5.60.
The Greek disapproval of castration must have coloured negatively the loyalty that resulted from the dependent existence of a eunuch, a man deprived of his male identity and the possibility of offspring, whose sole purpose would be to serve the king. Since the act of castration itself was also considered cruel, the possibility arises that Phrynichus’ barbarians are tainted by the excesses associated in Greek sources with non-Greeks. A eunuch would, therefore, strike the Greek audience as emphatically oriental and would embody all that was alien in the Persian empire, and thus alienating for a Greek.

The theme of loyalty and obedience is also prominent in Aeschylus, who transferred this πίστις to another group famously ‘faithful’, that of the elderly Persian councillors, the Πιστοί of the Greek sources. Given that the eunuch is said to be preparing the seats for the royal council (στορνύς, lit. ‘spreading (with a thing, e.g. floor with carpets, or bed with sheets)’, see LSJ9, s.v.) he is possibly covering the empty seats with luxurious rugs, thus visualizing the luxuriousness which the Greeks associate with Eastern barbarians, and to which Aeschylus puts so much emphasis in his play already from the beginning. But the seats in Phrynichus are empty, thus highlighting the disconcerting emptiness of Persia, a theme to which Aeschylus returns again and again in his own play. All these elements composed a visually rich opening that allowed the audience a glance in the most inner part of the Persian court and responded to the audience’s preconceptions about the Persians. While retaining many of the themes that seem to have featured in Phrynichus’ tragedy, Aeschylus is opening his play with a group of royal councillors thus giving his play a more public, civic focus.

207 Cf. Xen. Cyr. 7.5.61.
208 While a cruel nature is mostly associated in Greek literature with Northern barbarians (cf. p.29), a number of Herodotean Easterners are prone to excessively harsh punishments (e.g. Hdt. 4.84-85; 7.38-40.2.). It is also possible that stereotypes of the barbarian were not yet as strictly delineated as later.
209 See p.124 with n.53. It would be far-fetched to think that Aeschylus’ use of neuter for his chorus is alluding to the gender-less eunuch.
210 See pp.127ff. Marx (1928, 351) also draws attention both to the eunuch and ‘die berühmten persischen Teppiche’.
211 At least initially, cf. p.157.
212 For the theme of kenandria in Persians, see Garvie 2009, 115-9n.
ii. The chorus

Looking at the title of Phrynichus’ play (Φοίνισσαι), one seems to have no reason to doubt that the chorus of the play consisted of Phoenician women, in line with the frequent strategy of naming a play after its main chorus. The issue, however, is more complex than it seems. If the chorus consists of Phoenician women, how is one to think about the παρεδροί? The text of the hypothesis seems to point to a small number with the reference to θρόνους τινάς, some seats. But were these councillors speaking characters, mutes (some or all of them), a subsidiary chorus, or even characters who never appeared onstage? None of these alternatives seems to be without problems.

The councillors cannot possibly be main characters, since Phoenician Women is an early play and must have therefore been performed with no more than two actors. While a small group can stand for a larger one in Greek theatre, ‘two’ is for the Greeks different from ‘many’ or ‘some’. Additionally, the presence of two speaking characters as councillors onstage would only be possible if no other character was onstage at the moment. The eunuch could easily have exited before the two councillors entered, but this solution would present complications in the course of the play when further characters would be required.

The suggestion that we have a somewhat larger group of mutes, with only one of them speaking, is attractive, but not a technique attested in surviving tragedy. Eumenides present us possibly with a parallel of a larger group of mutes, who do not speak any lines, but receive considerable emphasis in the text: the jurors enter at 566 and remain silent until the end. They do, however, cast their votes at 711ff. ‘to the

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213 In surviving tragedies, whenever a collective noun is used as the title of a play, it always refers to the main chorus of the play, with ethnic collectives being one of the most common categories (though these statistics admittedly reveal more about later scholarship on the text, rather than authorial intention).
214 Thus hesitantly Mazzarino 1957, 200.
215 We cannot be certain if Phrynichus’ play was performed by one or two actors, since we are uncertain both about the date of the play and the exact date of introduction of the second actor, attributed to Aeschylus by Aristotle (Poet.1449a16-17), but cf. Csapo and Slater (1995, 221) for the ‘invention’ of such conventions.
216 See, e.g., nn.158-159 (p.67) for Aeschylus’ Suppliants.
217 Differently from many modern languages that only distinguish grammatically between singular and plural, Greek had a separate grammatical form for the dual number.
218 For groups of mutes, see p.42.
219 Unless one sees this as a parallel of a koryphaios speaking in the name of a whole chorus.
metronome-like accompaniment of an altercation in couples between Apollo and the chorus-leader’, thus providing the framework of the main action at this point. In other words, the jurors play an important, if procedural, role in Eumenides. Their silence may even be pertinent to that function, since their vote is confidential. But in the case of Phrynichus’ play a group of silent court officials is a choice both surprising and difficult to justify, since choruses of elderly councillors, at least in surviving tragedy, are invariably meant to offer their opinion on current affairs in the play. If that is also true for Phrynichus, what function would the councillors carry out, and how could one explain their silence in the face of such momentous developments as would be discussed in the play? Another possibility, namely that the seats remained empty for the duration of the play, could be employed to emphasize the catastrophe that has befallen Persia and the destruction of its resources and men, or even suggest that the devastating news means that the meeting never does take place. However, it is unattested in surviving tragedy for props to receive attention, even occupy part of the stage, and remain unused for the duration of the play.

Another fact complicates the issue further: Phoenician Women is missing from the seven plays listed in Suda for Phrynichus, while a different title is included, the Δίκαιοι or Πέρσαι or Σύνθωκοι. This title sounds suspiciously relevant to the hypothesis examined above and potentially bears on the issue of the identity and role of our group of councillors. Was the triple entry alternative titles for Phoenician Women or even for the Sack of Miletus, which is missing from the list? Or was it a different play by Phrynichus altogether? The omission from the list of the Sack of Miletus offers some encouragement to suspect the integrity and correctness of the list, and to accept the possibility that Just Ones was indeed a different play. If that is the case, there is no reason to doubt that the chorus of Phoenician Women was Phoenician.

220 Sommerstein 1989, 221.
221 Cf. p.155 with n.212.
222 This could be used to emphasise the breakdown of order, similarly to Aesch. Pers.584-97.
223 If this is the case, are we to assume a secondary chorus? This solution is problematic too, since secondary choruses in surviving tragedy are minor characters of lower status that do not give a play its title. Additionally, given the female identity of the chorus in the surviving choral fragment (see next page), it would be odd to have a subsidiary chorus of elite male citizens with a main chorus that is female and foreign.
224 Marx 1928, 348, 50; Mazzarino (1957,100) is not convinced. Cf. also n.19 on p.117.
225 Roisman 1988, 22-3; Lloyd-Jones 1966, 23f.; Taplin 1972, 68 n. 36 and 1977, 63n.2; Sommerstein 1996, 54-5. For West (1990, 12) the title ‘implies a chorus that sat’ (my italics), in the Phoenician Women or another play.
women. Euripides’ homonymous play lends additional support to this hypothesis. But we are still left with the problem of accommodating the councillors and their seats.

Another suggestion, put forward by Lloyd-Jones proposes that Phrynichus’ *Phoenician Women* and his *Just Ones/Persians/Councillors* are indeed two separate plays, belonging, however, to the same trilogy. This hypothesis explains away the difficulty of fitting two collectives into one play (Phoenician women and Persian councillors); it dissolves the dilemma of deciding on the correct title and therefore the main chorus from two equally plausible alternatives; and could easily result from an ancient scholars mixing up the plays of one single trilogy, or naming the whole trilogy after one of its constituent parts.

If Phrynichus had composed a trilogy along those lines, then the choruses in the different plays could deal with different aspects of the defeat. In *Just Ones* a male political body in the heart of the Persian empire could perhaps explore the political repercussions. The chorus of Phoenician Women in the eponymous plays could focus on the consequences of the war on the city and the women. Phrynichus would have thus perhaps demarcated the political aspect from the emotional, as well as the rulers and the central government from the ‘people’ in the huge expanses of the Persian empire.

But the existence of the trilogy itself is conjectural and generates a new string of questions that are not easy to answer. If *Phoenician Women* concerned the battle of Salamis, it is highly unlikely that the other plays of the trilogy also revolved around Salamis, and one fails to see how a trilogy could be constructed with different plays dedicated to different battles. This would also presuppose that we are ready to dismiss out of hand the evidence of the hypothesis, which reads like a very precise and confident statement and evidently comes from an authoritative source.

On the balance of probability, I would, therefore, conclude that the play mentioned in the hypothesis of Aeschylus’ *Persians* featured a female Phoenician

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226 Cf. pp.159 and 160.
227 This is rejected by Roisman (1988, 22-3).
228 See Taplin 1972, 63-7 for the confusion about the silent Achilles in Aeschylus’ Achilles trilogy in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*.
229 Which could have happened with the *Phoenician Women* in the hypothesis (Sommerstein 2008, 2n.5)
230 The defeat must be that of Salamis (see Pohlenz 1954, 2:57, followed by Roisman 1988, 21n.24; also Nenci 1950, 215), rather than of Mykale as suggested by Stoessl 1945, 158-9.
chorus. The exact identity of its members, however, as well as other details, such as the reason for their dislocation from Sidon are not easy to deduce from the surviving fragments. Two fragments that seem to be choral have the chorus speak of their home in Sidon, thus confirming that the setting of the play is in Persia, since they use the common formula of a newly arrived chorus ‘having left behind…’:

Σιδώνιοιν ἁστυ λιποῦσα
καὶ δροσερὰν Ἀσκαλόν
(fr.9TrGF)
καὶ Σιδώνως προλιπόντα ναόν
(fr.10TrGF)
–ὑ–[ωτηθι δεείλην πλειο[νες χμυρ]ίων
ἀνδρὲς ἐκτείνοντο [–κ–θη]̣ν ἐς δ<ε>ιέλην
(fr.10a?TrGF)
ψαλμοὶσιν ἀντίσπαστ' ἀείδοντες μέλη
(fr.11TrGF)
σφηκῶσαι
(fr.12TrGF)

The reference to the temple of Sidon has led some scholars to assume that, as in Euripides’ homonymous play, the women of the chorus are temple servants. This is a very reasonable hypothesis, though one cannot preclude that the reference to the temple of Sidon may simply be a topographical detail meant to summarize Sidon through its most famous location. Indeed, if one accepts the reading προλιπόντα (fr.10TrGF), this could equally well qualify the female chorus (as a group, e.g. ὅμιλον or σύλλογον) or the Phoenician army or fleet leaving Sidon for the expedition to Greece (e.g. στρατόν or στόλον).

Even if we cannot be entirely certain about the reasons why these women found themselves in the capital of Persia,231 it is significant that they are Phoenician, and more specifically from Arados, the only island of Phoenicia, off the coast on the Mediterranean Sea. The Phoenicians are relevant to an Athenian audience watching a

231 If the prologue with the eunuch does not belong to this play, it is conceivable that the tragedy is set in Phoenicia (see Nenci 1950, 217), but this would only enhance the central line of our argument.
play about the battle of Salamis for a number of reasons. As we learn from Herodotus, the Phoenician fleet made up the most important contingent of the Persian navy, and Salamis was a naval victory. More importantly still, according to Herodotus, the Phoenician ships held the western wing which was arrayed opposite the Athenians. And in their account of the battle of Salamis, both Herodotus and Diodorus tell us more about the Phoenicians: Xerxes, who was watching the battle from the mountain Aegaleos, punished severely some of the Phoenicians, and possibly threatened to punish the rest of them as well. Even if Phrynichus had not known such details, the importance of the Phoenician navy is consistently underlined in our sources and must have been pertinent to Phrynichus’ choice of chorus.

While it is not possible on present evidence to reconstruct the play, this story could be the detail on which Phrynichus drew to bring his Phoenician women to the Persian capital. The specific reasons why the women found themselves in Persia cannot be identified with certainty. Marx has suggested that they were sent as a present to the King, and the reason could well be that the Phoenicians are trying to expiate their failure in Salamis; they could form a theoretic chorus, similarly to Euripides’ Phoenician Women, who were suddenly overtaken by news of the defeat; or they could have come to the capital to lament after news of the defeat reached them.

A Phoenician female chorus is, therefore, historically relevant to the play, and could have potentially been used by Phrynichus to explore themes such as the rule of the Persians over their vast empire and their authoritative ways; or even to express the totality of the Persian defeat, by showing the widespread effects on the empire, not just on the Persian capital. At the same time, Phoenicia could have been used as a foil not only to Athens, but also to Salamis, and triumphantly celebrate the successful Greek sailors opposite the defeated, lamenting Phoenicians. In this respect, Phrynichus

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232 Hdt. 8.85.1.
233 Hdt. 8.90.4.
234 Thinking that they were responsible for the flight, according to Diodorus (11.9.4); or, according to Herodotus’ more elaborate account, ἵνα μὴ αὐτοὶ κακοὶ γενόμενοι τοὺς ἀμείνονας διαλέξῃσι, thus punishing the Phoenicians for accusing the Ionian contingent of treason in an attempt to deflect blame for the disaster from themselves (Hdt. 8.90).
235 Marx 1928, 359.
236 Though I would be inclined to see this as an innovation on the part of Euripides, who is introducing the Phoenician chorus somewhat arbitrarily in his play.
237 The involvement of the whole of the Persian empire in the expedition and the widespread effect of the defeat is a theme also explored by Aeschylus in his play (see pp.147f.).
is being perhaps less interested in merging the boundaries between Self and Other and more in constructing an antithetical image to the victorious Athenians.

**iii. Conclusion**

What then does Aeschylus gain, and what does he lose, by favouring a chorus of male elders over a female one? This choice brings about a twofold effect. First, we are presented with a chorus more suitable to discuss from a position of power and authority the cause and effect of the catastrophe, and present the official Persian verdict on the issue. Second, due to this fact, Aeschylus has composed a play both more deeply triumphant, and at the same time offering a greater identification potential for the audience: a group of women lamenting is a disconcerting spectacle, but one that the Athenians would have come across in their lives, and certainly one they are used to see in the theatre and have learned to consider as a possible female image. On the other hand, dignified elderly councillors tearing their clothes and cheeks must have been a deeply disconcerting visual. The Athenians could feel a patriotic – and personal – pride in having brought on such an effect; but at least a part of the audience (certainly those who have lost relatives in the battle) would have realized the immensity of the war and the misery it can inflict. A minor point is that Phrynichus’ chorus consists of Phoenician women, while Aeschylus makes his chorus Persians, and indeed old ones, and presents the defeat through them; one wonders if thus the defeat is presented as more central, more important and complete, and also more real, than when lamented by a group of women who have come from the periphery of the Persian empire.

Admittedly a female chorus could be useful for offering a more focused view of female suffering: the women of the chorus would have lost husbands and sons. They might also have expressed fear that the victorious Greeks will come to Asia, a thought that would offer some patriotic satisfaction to the Greek audience, but would also pose a special risk for women. Still, references to female suffering due to the war punctuate Aeschylus’s *Persians* and sentiment seems to abound in the play. So does lamentation – both often seen as ‘female’ capacities. What must have been significantly different between the two plays was probably the choreography, as the age and the gender of

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238 In the sense that a female chorus can act and speak authoritatively, but never has an official political role.
the chorus may have affected at least the rhythm of the stage movements. Yet again, since both plays centred on a painful defeat, quick tempo is not necessarily an effect one would expect Phrynichus to have sought. On the other hand, if the Phoenicians are an ally to the Persians, this may have presented the poet with some potential for criticism to the central Persian ‘government’ or it may have been used to show the impact of the defeat on the entire empire. The former element is introduced in Aeschylus’ play through the opposition of Xerxes to Dareius, as the young king is directly criticized by the chorus, and the latter features prominently in the chorus’ evaluation of the defeat.

Therefore, Aeschylus’ presentation of the chorus in Persians contributes significantly to the play achieving a balance between feelings of pride and triumph for the Greek victory and compassion and thoughts about defeat, war and its ramifications. Phrynichus’ play, on the other hand, seems, from what can be gleaned from the surviving fragments, to have conformed more closely to common stereotypes about non-Greeks: a female barbarian chorus apt for lamentation, a highly exotic opening with barbarian paraphernalia, a eunuch. Aeschylus, by changing the ‘momento psicologico’, manages to render the misery both of the combatants, and of the people back home who received the news, thus achieving a more subtle, rich, and complex treatment of the subject.

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239 Unless one is to assume an element of suspense in the women not knowing exactly what the fate of their men is, which seems unlikely as the hypothesis of the Persians clearly states that the eunuch announces the defeat in the prologue.

240 Could his fining on the Sack of Miletus (cf. n.19, p.117) have made Phrynichus’ more ‘cautious’ and eager to resort more extensively to the safety of generic conventions?

241 Nenci 1950, 220.
Chapter 3: OLD AGE

A. Introduction

In a society built around the unit of the extended family of the *oikos*, and without a retirement age, old men and women were an integrated presence in any Greek’s everyday life. The passage of time and the consequent accumulated experience was valued by the Greeks,\(^1\) while the inevitable frailty of old age would be relevant for some activities only. Specifically, an old woman’s life would continue to centre around household chores and caring for children, while for a man life would be more strongly focused on civic, rather than military duties,\(^2\) with men remaining active into old age as council members, jurors, members of various boards, politicians, writers and artists.

Old age is thus more a spectrum ranging from what would be today physically fit middle-aged men and women to decrepit elders. While old age would probably be clearly indicated on the Greek stage through mask and costume,\(^3\) our relative lack of such evidence for tragedy can make it difficult to identify character or choruses as old unless language marks them as such. In turn, it might be that old age is emphasised in tragedy only to indicate extreme old age (and thus physical weakness?), which makes one wary of the accuracy of our statistics. With this word of caution in mind, surviving tragedy gives us eleven choruses of men in a total of thirty one tragedies (including *Rhesus* and *Prometheus*), that is, slightly more than one third of the total. Out of these, seven can be securely identified as old,\(^4\) while Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* is also usually considered to feature a chorus of elders. The total number of female choruses (including divinities) in surviving tragedy is twenty, though the task of identifying their age is here complex too, and one has to rely heavily both on explicit references to their age and inferences that can be made based on their function (e.g. we may expect a female dancing in a wedding to be young).

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1 That practical wisdom accompanies old age is an omnipresent idea in Greek literature (Parkin 2003, 105-106).
2 The age of retirement from military service was 59, though it is possible that the very old (and the very young) were exempt from expeditions abroad (see Christ 2001, 404).
3 For the tragic mask, see n.35 (p.16).
Moving to the exact connotations of an elderly chorus in tragedy, old males are a slightly more complex case than females (the overt antithesis of male), or barbarians, or slaves, in that an old man is a marked category which has both a deficit against younger males, that is, diminished physical attributes, and an advantage, that is, the wisdom and experience that comes with old age. Despite the recurrent association of old age with wisdom and authority, however, the latter characteristic has frequently been overlooked and emphasis has remained on the powerlessness of old age. Recent studies have sought to rectify this by offering useful insights into the ways in which ‘marginal’ figures, including elders, act in drama, though choruses systematically receive less attention in such treatments. An exception is Dhuga’s recent study which argues against the consensus that choruses of old men in drama are a priori inactive and ineffectual due to their old age, and maintains that, on the contrary, it is often because of their old age that choruses of old men undertake action and express views that are sanctioned within a given drama.

My aim in this chapter is to examine how Aeschylus’ old choruses are situated in the spectrum of his choral presentation. I will argue that old age is one of the features of the chorus that vary within a tragedy, in the sense that attributes of old age are exploited to varying degrees in the course of the play. Additionally, my discussion will utilize the conclusions drawn from the analysis of two female old choruses, Choephoroi and Eumenides, in an attempt to offer a more comprehensive account of old age and chorality in the Aeschylean corpus and beyond, based on old choruses of both genders.

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See p.31 with n.76.

For Dhuga’s study, see p.31.

See chapter on Gender and Divinity respectively; see also p.31 on why these two plays form part of that chapter rather than the current one.
B. Agamemnon

The chorus of Agamemnon consists of elderly Argive citizens, who act as the official advisory body in the royal court. As will emerge from our discussion, the chorus’ old age is relevant with regard to two features that will ultimately define the position and function of the chorus in the play. Old age invests the chorus with moral and narrative authority, which will largely shape the audience’s understanding of the play. At the same time, however, the physical weakness of old age partly generates and justifies their inability to intervene more actively in the current affairs of the city. To reflect this intertwining of two different strands of the ‘old’ I will divide the discussion into three sections.

The first section will analyze how the poet exploits the old age of the chorus to achieve a two-fold effect: to present the power vacuum that the absence of the king has created, and to reveal the despotism of those functioning in place of the legitimate rulers. This results in a weakened and frightened city and a chorus that fails to handle the present and is fearful of the future, which in turn creates space for the plotters to achieve their goals. The second section examines how old age is claimed as the source of the chorus’ narrative authority and gives the chorus-members privileged access to knowledge of the past. At the same time, the chorus, loyal to their king and present in the city long before the usurpers took over, embody the healthy political, religious and moral civic tradition, and constitute the touchstone of proper and improper conduct in the play. The third section will look at the ways in which the two contrasting facets of the chorus (weakened position combined with moral and political authority) balance in the interaction of the chorus with the characters of the play within the events of the plot. After an authoritative, albeit ominous, start, the chorus encounter Clytemestra, and will struggle for the duration of the play to match their moral and political expectations with their position within the plot. As a result, they will defend strongly their moral outlook, but will succumb to the superior power of the new rulers and will exit unbowed, unplaced, yet silenced. Their exit will offer a natural bridge to the next play of the trilogy. The female chorus of Choephoroi share the strong sense of right of their coevals in Agamemnon, but their focus on the need for immediate

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9 The age theme runs through all three choruses of the Oresteia; for choral continuity and variation across the trilogy, see pp.109f.
revenge is far more intense, even myopic, and contributes to a far stronger determination and readiness to take action.

The chorus of Agamemnon enters in seeming response to a soliloquy spoken on the roof of the palace9 by a guard who is watching out for the fire-signal that will communicate the fall of Troy, and thus the homecoming of the army and the king.10 As often in Aeschylus, the prologue is crucial in setting the scene and illuminating the spectators on several aspects of the play, and at the same time triggering the audience’s interest in issues that are only hinted at. The guard’s last words imply that he has only told part of the story, and that he is unwilling to share the rest with those who do not know it already:11

τὰ δὲ ἄλλα σιγῶ βούς ἐπὶ γλώσσῃ μέγας
βέβηκεν· οίκος δ’ αὐτός, ει φθογγὴν λάβοι,
σαφέστατ’ ἀν λέξειεν· ὡς ἐκόν ἐγὼ
μαθοῦσιν αὐτῶ καὶ μαθοῦσι λήθομαι. (36-9)

The opening of an Aeschylean play, whether featuring a prologue or the parodos of the chorus, provides the audience with any facts that are crucial for understanding the plot. While the level of detail provided may vary between plays and while characters or the chorus who enter afterwards may offer additional elements, nowhere else in surviving tragedy does a play begin with a confessed suppression of knowledge. It is not the case that the guard lacks a piece of information, as, for example, does Orestes in Choephoroi when he is surprised to see the approaching chorus.12 It is rather a strategic decision by Aeschylus at the very beginning of the play to hold back background information and emphasize the controlled flow of information. As a result, the chorus enters in an atmosphere of ambiguity, and it is

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10 While a prologue before the parodos is not unusual in surviving Aeschylus, this one stands out by being in a way separated from the rest of the play, as the guard is a character that will not appear again in the play, does not interact with anyone else, and is also set apart by his position on the roof of the palace (for his position, see previous note). Despite the similarities (see pp. 40f. with n. 47), this prologue thus differs significantly from the prayers/ soliloquies of Choephoroi, Eumenides and Seven.
11 ‘The system of language becomes tautologous, negated, unusable as a system of communication’ (Goldhill 1984, 12). Cf. also the chorus’ refusal to narrate the sacrifice of Iphigeneia (248, with Goldhill 1984, 31).
12 See p.90.
now left to them to fill up the information gap and elaborate on the issues that the
guard introduced.13

As will be shown below, the chorus’ opening words do indeed give some of
the basic facts about the setting and time of the play and the background of the plot,
though the elders are economical about the current political situation. However, the
chorus will only partly fulfill the expectation to provide information. It will mainly
elaborate on the prehistory and setting out of the expedition, and its selective narration
and interpretation will frequently resemble the fearful hopes expressed by the guard
in the prologue. The narration of the expedition is done in two parts by the chorus,
interrupted by a self-presentation. I will examine the chorus’ self-presentation before
I turn to an analysis of the chorus’ narrative role, since the way the chorus perceive
and present themselves in this passage resonates in their utterances and attitude
throughout the play.

i. Self-Presentation: Weak and Powerful

The chorus take eleven lines to introduce themselves and focus on their old
age, which they offer as the reason for not joining the expedition:

喝水 δ’ ἀτίται σαρκὶ παλαιὰ
tῆς τῶν ἁρωγῆς ὑπολειφθέντες
μὴνομεν ἵσχυν
ἰσόπαιδα νέμοντες ἐπὶ σκῆπτροις.
ο ἡ γὰρ νεαρὸς μυελὸς στέρνας
ἐντὸς ἀνάσσων
ἰσόπρεσβυς Ἀρης δ’ οὐκ ἐνὶ χώρᾳ,
tὸ θ’ ὑπέργητων φυλλάδος ἡδή
κατακαρφομένης τρίποδας μὲν ὅδοὺς
στείχει, παιδὸς δ’ οὐδὲν ἀσέιὼν
ὅλως ἡμερόφαντον ἀλαίνει.
(72-82)

Σάρξ and σκῆπτρον: Physical weakness and political hierarchy

13 Scodel (2008, 124) speaks of ‘a hidden stratum of memory’, access to which defines one as an insider
or outsider.
The first element the elders highlight is the decline of their physical strength. The chorus describe their body as σάρξ παλαιά. The word σάρξ is found in Aeschylus only to refer to edible flesh, or to diseased flesh. It is therefore an emphatically physical word. Even when used as a synonym for the ‘body’, σάρξ places emphasis on the body at its most physical, in terms of its material components. The physicality is intensified by the use a couple of lines later of the word μυελός (76) to express possibly the lack of warlike spirit. The following parallel from Seven (about Lasthenes, one of the Theban warriors) is particularly apposite:

ἐχθρόξενον πυλωρὸν ἀντιτάξομεν,
γέροντα τὸν νοῦν, σάρκα δ’ ἡβώσαν φύει,
ποδάκες ὅμια, χειοί δ’ οὐ βραδύνεται
παρ’ ἀσπάδος γυμνωθὲν ἀρτάσαι δόρυ. (621-4)

In that passage, we have within a military context the exact opposite of the old Argives of Agamemnon. Lasthenes, the champion in question, has a youthful, swift body but an old mind. It is precisely this combination of physical prowess and intellectual and moral maturity that makes him fit for war and a suitable opponent for the upright Amphiaras. Both passages point to the commonplace Greek ideal of a fine combination of a fit body and a wise mind. The chorus in Agamemnon, linguistically much more elaborate than the characters in Seven, present themselves as a complex antithesis to the ideal warrior of the earlier play. They combine the worst, rather than the best, features of the young and the old. They are weak like dry foliage, and fearful like a little child. By using the word σάρξ, the elders in Agamemnon push to the background, for now, the positive associations of old age with wisdom, and highlight instead their extreme physical decline.

In addition to references to a body withered by age, the chorus draw attention to their walking sticks:

...ισχύν
ισόπαιδα νέμοντες ἐπὶ σκηνήτροις. (74-5)

15 An ideal combination already from the Iliad (3.108-10).
16 For the currency of this idea, see Dover 1974, 103.
17 The general meaning of this textually challenging passage must be along those lines.
Whatever strength is left in them, they say, needs to be supported by walking sticks. And a few lines later they call their walking τρίπους.18 This comes as no surprise given the reference to their own frailty above and works well in terms of plot plausibility: the elders were old enough not to be able to join the expedition when the Greek army set out for Troy ten years earlier. There must, therefore, now be a chorus of extreme old age. Staffs seem to have been a common prop for old characters and, to a lesser degree, for old choruses in tragedy19 and though we possess no external evidence for the visual representation of this chorus,20 it would create a very odd – and quite avoidable – mismatch between word and vision to mention the walking sticks emphatically without showing them.21 This verbal image must have been matched by the staging of the entrance. The elders must have entered leaning on staffs and could also be visually bent as well as rather slow in their marching anapaests.

This is related to thematic concerns of the play and the trilogy, especially the passage of time and the inability of the oikos to move forward, the antithesis between old and new, past, present and its bearing on future, which will be analyzed in this chapter. The staffs, however, have an additional dimension. Though σκήπτρον is the standard poetic word for the walking stick, it also means ‘sceptre’, the decorated stick carried as a badge of command or symbol of royal power. This meaning is normal in tragedy, and the word is used exclusively to mean ‘sceptre’ in prose literature and real life. It is therefore mainly the context that distinguishes between the two meanings for the ancient Greek audience. While here it is clear that the elders refer to their walking sticks when they use the word σκήπτροις, the context glances towards the political meaning of the word too. The proximity of σκήπτροις with certain other words in this

18 The same metaphor is famously employed by the Sphinx in her riddle, and is also found in Hesiod (Op.533). For Goldhill (1984, 16) this is an allusion to the Oedipus story meant to evoke the trigritional structure of human life (old men, men, children) and its meaning for the whole trilogy and Greek society, which is in strong antithesis with the fundamental inversion of all healthy social and familial relations in the Oresteia (cf. ibid. pp.27, 30-1). West (1978, 533n.) draws a parallel from the Rig Veda and notes that the phrase may be quite an old one commonly found in riddles. The metaphor is used again later in the play, and in Eur. Tro.275, though tragedy seems even fonder of assimilating other creatures to humans by calling them two-footed, e.g. Ag.1258 δίπους λέαινα, Supp.895 δίπους ὁφίς.

19 See Eur. HF 107-9; Phoen.1719, 1539-40; Ion 743.

20 See Richardson 1933 for a vast collection of representations of old age in Greek art.

21 ‘What is the point in not having them?’, as Taplin (1977, 36) remarks with regard to smaller, portable props. Indeed there is much point in having them in this play, not only for their representational use in the parados, but also for their potential to be used as weapons later in the play (see pp.186ff., and cf. next note).
passage furnishes it potentially with special overtones relating to the political hierarchy of the city: σκήπτρον is governed by νέμοντες, a verb often used in relation to honours, power and privileges. In addition, its proximity with ἰσχύν, ἀνάκτοις and ἰσόπρεσβυς places it in a context (72-7) with a rather high concentration of words pointing to ‘power’ and ‘ruling’.

The potential political connotations are supported by the syntactical structure of the anapaestic part of the parodos. In their first line (40), the chorus use the particle μέν as part of a reference to the ruling pair of Agamemnon and Menelaus. Though μέν can be used by itself as an introductory or transitional word, in general its use raises expectations of a matching δέ. The μέν here is answered twice in the parodos with a δέ, first with reference to the chorus-members themselves, and later in an address to the queen:

δέκατον μέν ἔτος τόδ’ ἐπεὶ Πριάμῳ
μέγας ἀντιδίκος,
Μενέλαος ἄναξ ἦδ’ Ἀγαμέμνων,
διήθοντ’ Λιδέθεν καὶ δισκήπτρου
τιμής ὀχυρόν ζεύγος Ἀτρείδαν
στόλον Ἀργείων χιλιοναύταν
τήρο’ ἀπὸ χώρας
ήματι, στρατιωτικές ἀρωγάν (40-7)

ήμεις δ’ ἀτίται σαρκὶ παλαιὰ
τῆς τότ’ ἀρωγῆς ύπολειφθέντες
μίμνομεν ἰσχύν
ἰσόπρεσβυ νέμοντες ἐπ’ σκήπτροις. (72-75)

σὺ δέ, Τυνδάρεω
θύγατερ, βασίλεια Κλυταιμήστρα,
τί χρέος; τί νέον; τί δ’ ἐπαισθομένη
τίνος ἀγγελίας

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22 A correction of the manuscript reading ἀνάκτοις, made by Hermann (see Fraenkel 1950, ad loc.).
23 The word means ‘like (that of) an old man’ and matches the ἰσόπρεσβυ of v.75. The word πρεσβυς, however, is also commonly used as a synonym for πρεσβευτής (‘ambassador’), it was a political title in Sparta and its comparative is frequently used for the alderman of a community (for examples of all three usages, see LSJ s.v.). Cf. Ag.530-1 ἄναξ, Ἀτρείδης πρέσβυς εὐδαιμόν άνήρ ἤκει (‘our senior king’).
24 Fraenkel 1950, 2:40n.
25 Fraenkel (1950, ad loc.) rightly rejects the suggestion that Clytemestra has just entered at this point; see also Taplin (1972 and 1977, 280-8) for a review of the argument.
The personal pronouns that introduce the two sentences (72 ἡμεῖς δ'; 83 σὺ δὲ) further join the three instances together. Thus the chorus situate themselves hierarchically in a space between the absent kings and the ruling queen, and the tripartite linguistic structure of μὲν-δὲ-δὲ (for the absent kings, themselves and the queen that now rules the city respectively) mirrors the elders’ perception of the proper power structure of the city. In the course of the play power dynamics will prove to be quite different from the schema presented here, as Clytemestra (and Aegisthus) first suspend the king’s and the chorus’ authority and eventually wholly usurp it. Both Agamemnon and the male councillors will prove incapable of dealing with the female Clytemestra and the effeminate and emasculated Aegisthus, and the chorus will struggle to make sense of Cassandra’s utterances, the other female they will encounter in the play. 26

The chorus’ old age is, therefore, emphatically addressed in a context that invites the audience to consider the bleak prehistory of the ruling house of the Atreidai, as well as the current state of affairs in Argos. The mention of diminished physical power (ἰσχὺν ἰσόπαιδα, 74-5), and the merging of the two meanings of σκῆπτρον (at the same time a symbol of power and of weakness) may be an early glimpse of the chorus’ later inability to intervene with any success against Clytemestra’s and Aegisthus’ plans. By intertwining ‘political’ words with their own physical weakness, the chorus turn their entrance into an enactment of the state of affairs: the absence of the kings has created a power vacuum, which is filled by defenseless, if morally sound, representatives of the people and a usurping female.

ii. Old Age as a source of power: the healthy civic traditions

It was shown above how old age of the chorus serves both as the reason for their own inadequacy in this critical civic situation, and as a symbol for the weak and disempowered state of the city and its traditions. However, in the parodos the chorus

26 pp.181ff.
mentions not only the unpleasant consequences of old age, but also its positive connotations.

**Οἰκουρός and moral superiority**

On the level of dramaturgic plausibility, the old age is the chorus’ explanation as to why they are not away at war, and therefore the reason why they can be onstage. Of course an ancient audience would not necessarily expect a chorus to explain their presence: the chorus enters because they are supposed to be in the orchestra for the duration of the drama.27 This chorus, however, has good reason, as I will argue, to emphasize their inability to join the expedition, in an attempt to dissociate themselves from two other characters who also remained in Argos, Aegisthus and Clytemestra. We have thus three categories of people who all stayed behind, but their reasons for doing so where different, which affects their moral profile in the play. Aegisthus, the man fit for war, who, nevertheless, did not go to war.28 For him, Aeschylus uses twice the word οἰκουρός,29 a word uncommon in Aeschylean tragedy.30 Clytemestra, the woman who rightfully stayed behind, but behaved unrighteously. And finally the chorus, the only party that did not join the expedition on morally defensible grounds, that is, their old age. As the chorus say to their king upon his arrival, Agamemnon will know in time τόν τε δικαίως καὶ τὸν ἀκαίρως/ πολίν οἰκουροῦντα πολιτῶν (808-9).31 But the chorus will need to pass this test of morality much earlier, and Aeschylus has its members offer from the start a good excuse for being in the city, thus giving the audience a yardstick to measure others who also stayed behind.

**Narration and the healthy civic past**

Emphasis on the old age of the chorus may also serve to stress the long time that has passed between the setting out of the expedition and the return of the army.

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27 Cf. p.50.
29 λέοντ’ ἀναλικαν εὖ λέγει στραφόμενον/ οἰκουρόν (1224-5) and γινεῖ, σὺ τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐκ μάχης μένουν/ οἰκουρός εὐθὺν ἀγάθος συμβάλλειν ἀμα/ ἄνδρὶ στρατηγῶν; τόδ’ ἐβουλεύεις μόρον; (1625-7).
30 Though more common in Euripides and Sophocles (e.g. Eur. *Hipp.787*, *Hec.1277*, *Herc.45*; Soph. *Trach.562*, *Phil.868*, *OC 343*).
31 Cf. Fraenkel (1950, *ad loc.*), who sees that as a hint by the chorus to Agamemnon; also Bollack and Judet de la Combe 1981, 180.
Time has already been an issue from the very beginning of the play, when the guard described his year(s) of duty on the roof of the palace.\(^{32}\) The chorus too start their anapaests with a reference to the ten years that have passed since the departure of the army.\(^{33}\) This is part of the play’s leading towards the culmination of the return of the king, but is also a sign of the changes that have occurred in the meantime. The old chorus is a visible reminder to the audience of the time that has passed, and therefore also of the past of the city. Although the history of the house of the Atreidai is not clear of ‘sins’, as we will come to know in the play, Agamemnon’s rightful position as king is never seriously questioned. The elderly chorus are the healthy past of the polis that has now been turned into a weak and frightened city caught in a power vacuum.

Old age is, therefore, from the start of this play both a debilitating feature and an attribute associated with moral authority. The fact that the chorus is old will also serve as one of the main foundations of the chorus’ claim to narrative authority. Narration of the past is invariably one of the functions that choruses perform in tragedy, though the way this is done differs widely among different plays,\(^{34}\) as well as a feature that the tragic chorus shares with non-dramatic choruses. Strikingly in Agamemnon the chorus will not only exercise this function, but unlike any other Aeschylean chorus it will acknowledge this role explicitly, with a statement that prefaces the second, dactylic part of the parodos (104-257):

\[
κύριός εἰμι θροεῖν δῶνον κράτος αἰσιον ἀνδρῶν
έντελέον' ἐτι γὰρ θέόθεν καταπνεύει
πειθό, μολπάν ἀλλάν, σύμφυτος αἰών' (104-6)
\]

In this self-referential passage, one’s persuasive power and credibility seems to grow stronger with time, to the degree that it becomes almost a legal right (104 κύριός εἰμι).

There are, however, a number or elements in the parodos that complicate the narrative role of the chorus and make the chorus’ narrative authority far from straightforward. First, their narration of the past is highly selective and controlled, focusing in great detail on certain events and stopping short of mentioning others. The

\(^{32}\) For ἐτείας, see Fraenkel 1950, ad loc.
\(^{33}\) δέκατον μὲν ἄθος τῶν ἐπεὶ Περίπαθο/ μέγας ἀντίδικος, [...]'/ τήρητ' ἀπὸ χώρας/ ἠρον, στρατιῶτιν ἀρωγαῖον, (40ff.).
\(^{34}\) See Goward 1999, 23-4 for Euripides; Kyriakou 2011, 512-6 for Aeschylus and Sophocles.
sacrifice of Iphigeneia (228-246) is described in vivid detail, including her reported speech, inviting pity for the young girl. Straight after this, however, the chorus state categorically: ‘what followed I did not see and do not say’ (248, transl. Sommerstein). The implication of the statement is that only an eye-witness possesses reliable information, but this explicit acknowledgment starkly contradicts normal choral practice of reporting events the chorus cannot have personally witnessed. First-hand experience is never the only source of a dramatic chorus’ narrative capacity. But their claim is also misrepresenting their own reporting of facts they cannot have possibly witnessed themselves. Their understanding of entitlement to the past goes beyond generic conventions and pertains to their dramatic identity as old men who have lived through and witnessed the pre-history of the play. But the alleged connection between knowledge of the past and eye-witnessing also suits the chorus’ recurrent unwillingness to face unpleasant facts, which results repeatedly in wishful thinking.

Related to this manipulation of the narrative is the statement made at 104-6 (quoted on the previous page), which emphasizes not simply the chorus’ right to narrate, but equally importantly their ability to do so persuasively. This metatheatrical passage describes song as the chorus’ special power and thus implicitly draws attention to the conscious construction of the choral narrative. The chorus continually enriches factual reporting with a number of devices that would affect the reception of the story by the audience. The choice, and high occurrence and length, of reported speech (especially Calchas’ (126-155), but also Iphigeneia’s mentioned above, and Agamemnon’s at 206-217); the long and elaborate similes (especially 49ff.; 76ff.); the references to omen and oracles (see the simile at 49ff. and the eagle at 114ff; and Calchas’ speech respectively); and the opinion and gnomic utterances that punctuate the parodos (e.g. fifth strophe). All these result in a vivid narrative, which frequently

35 Goldhill 1984, 32. Gruber (2009, 374) rightly remarks that the insistence on hard facts is a ‘Grundproblem’ for the chorus throughout the play.
38 Contrary to the ὥδεν κρέστος of young men (cf. Goldhill 1984, 18).
39 See Fletcher 1999, 32n.11; see also Bers 1997, 29-33.
40 See Petrounias 1976, 129-140.
invites emotional responses, creates a sense of foreboding for future events, but also steers the audience’s moral evaluation of the past.

The features mentioned above are not unique to the chorus of *Agamemnon*, though the *parodos* is not only the longest, but also one of the most elaborate in the surviving tragic corpus. What, however, is peculiar to this play is the chorus’ treatment of the past in relation with the present and the future. Despite their elaborate narration of the past of the expedition, the chorus do not resolve the uncertainty left by the watchman, as their references to the present are at best vague (e.g. 67-71) and lacking explicit causal links to the past or the future. Related to this is the fact that the proclaimed knowledge of the past is contrasted with a striking lack of information about current affairs (83-104) and their reliance upon Clytemestra for an update (83-104). It is quite unusual for a chorus to remain for such a long time uninformed about an important public evolution in the plot: this is additionally significant since the chorus consists of royal councillors, who should be informed of political affairs as soon as the royal pair is. But the chorus needs to ask and will have to wait for more than 150 lines to get an answer. Despite its willingness to know, the chorus also displays a willingness to forgo critical information, giving permission to Clytemestra to keep silent, and they will be equally reluctant to fully listen to Cassandra later on in the play.

What emerges, therefore, from the *parodos* is a contradictory attitude to knowledge and information, which is related to the suppressive regime established by the usurpers. The explicit claim to narrative authority is coloured by the chorus’ self-presentation as frail old men, which will serve as a metaphor for their reduced status within the polis, and is contradicted by their anxious, confessed lack of knowledge of current affairs. The elderly councillors should be a central authority thanks to their old age, but it is their old age that will also make them an easy opponent for the usurping couple. Old age is already from the *parodos* a factor which affects the balance between

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42 The longest in surviving tragedy (40-263), which is perhaps explained by the fact that it is both the prologue of one of the longest plays in surviving tragedy by far, and serving as an opening to the whole trilogy (Schein 2009, 386).
44 I take Clytemestra to first enter after 257, see above, n.25.
45 For the theme of silence see p.183.
46 pp.181ff.
authority and weakness of the Argive elders and will fluctuate in the course of the play, reflecting, and affecting, the plot.

The very prominent position of Clytemestra and her usurping collaboration with Aegisthus have led to the suppression and perversion of truth.\textsuperscript{47} As a result, no universally accepted report or interpretation of the past is available and, with the exception for Clytemestra, the chorus will be the sole source of authoritative information that is both constantly available and possesses first-hand experience of the recent past. Other characters that possess knowledge of the past will manage only to pass briefly through the play (Cassandra, Agamemnon), will struggle to communicate their versions of the truth and will eventually be hushed by Clytemestra.

After Agamemnon’s murder the choral narration of the past will dwindle. This could partly be because the present has now caught up with the past, and the critical situation focuses on the murder. It is also, however, a sign of the chorus’ diminished power. With the killing of Agamemnon, his version of the past loses its power too, and the usurpers find themselves in total control. The only party that could potentially offer an alternative version would be the chorus.

\textbf{iii. The chorus in interaction with the characters}

So far we have discussed the way in which the chorus perceive of, and present, themselves and how this affects their understanding of the past and their narration of the present. In the following section I will examine the major scenes where the chorus and Clytemestra interact with another character in an attempt to analyze how the various features of the chorus traced so far affect their participation in the drama, starting from the messenger scene.

\textbf{The messenger scene}

\textsuperscript{47} Scodel (2008, 125) sees Argos in the play as ‘an oppressed memory community’ and the elders have played a crucial role in making it so.
Messenger scenes in tragedy present a great variety as to who is onstage when the messenger enters and with whom and how he interacts. In cases where only the chorus is present when the messenger arrives, they may be the only ones the messenger will meet before he exits; or a character may enter, usually called by the chorus, but sometimes also on his/her own accord, and will then engage in dialogue with the messenger. In some instances one can trace separate sections of interaction between the chorus and the messenger, and between the character(s) and the messenger; in other cases, interaction between the three parties is intertwined.48

Among the widely varied messenger scenes that we find in extant tragedies, the present play still manages to stand out. The opening of the scene is canonical enough, featuring the announcement of the messenger by the chorus (489-502), a greeting by the messenger (503-537) and an introductory dialogue between the messenger and the chorus (537-550), before the messenger delivers part of his main report (551-582). The messenger will fill in any details when questioned by the chorus some lines later (615-635) and will be prompted to deliver the second part of his report (636-680). Contrary to Sophocles and Euripides, who tend to present continuous messenger reports, Aeschylean messengers can deliver their reports in two or more parts.49 In that respect there is nothing unusual in the fact that a character, Clytemestra, enters during the messenger scene and thus breaks up the messenger report.

A closer look, however, reveals the unique nature of the scene. First, the messenger is in the process of going into the palace at the behest of the chorus, when Clytemestra comes out of it.50 This is another instance where Clytemestra’s ‘control of the threshold’ is manifested.51 In entering before the messenger has the chance to seek out the queen and deliver the news, Clytemestra is already annul[ing] one of the messenger’s functions, which is to find, and deliver to, the appropriate person much

48 What one tends to think of as a generic messenger scene in tragedy is found mainly in Sophocles and Euripides, and not as frequently in Aeschylus. In her analysis of Euripidean messenger speeches, De Jong (1991, 179-80) sets out three criteria for a messenger speech: a. the speaker is not one of the main characters, b. the content of the report is narration of past events, c. the report is preceded by an introductory dialogue. The only scenes that qualify as messenger scenes in Aeschylus based on these criteria are found in Agamemnon and Persians (for the latter see pp.137-139.) Other scenes, spoken by characters in the plays of all three tragedians, may bear similarities with messenger scenes; for this distinction, see, e.g. Bremer 1976, 33 De Jong 1991, 179-80.
50 See Taplin (1977, 296-7; 299-301) for when the Queen enters and exits, and the significance this has about the Queen’s character and function in the play. Cf. Taplin 1972, 89-93.
51 Taplin 1977, 299-300.
anticipated news. She has of course done this already to a greater degree by ensuring that she would be the first to receive news of the sack of Troy through the fire-signals and withholding this information from the chorus. Second, when Clytemestra enters, she does not engage in dialogue either with the chorus or with the messenger, and, rather than seek information from the messenger, she discredits him as a source of information: she acquired the information before anyone else, she says, and she now has no need to hear any details from the messenger, since the king will soon follow and illuminate her further. Third, unlike any other character that enters during surviving messenger scenes, Clytemestra delivers her *thesis* and exits before the messenger scene is over, without interacting either with the chorus or with the messenger.

The intervention of Clytemestra annuls the canonical role of the messenger as the source of information about off-stage action and the chorus’ function of receiving and subsequently possessing that information within the play. As a result, the prominent role of the chorus in the messenger scene, rather than being a testament to its central position in the plot and its power as a source of wisdom and knowledge, is an example of its unsuccessful attempts to remain involved and interested in the affairs of the house and the city and reveals the marginalization that Clytemestra’s actions have caused.

The chorus possesses knowledge of the past and are able to communicate it to a degree, but are constantly anxiously attempting to acquire, and deliver, information about the present and the future and usually fail to do so (this recurs in their interaction with both Agamemnon and Cassandra). They do acknowledge danger but struggle to link general with specific knowledge and to accept the implications of their knowledge. Instead, they endlessly wish for the best and constantly shy away from the outcomes. This will only change at the very end of the play, in their confrontation with Aegisthus.

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52. Cf. Dhuga’s (2011, 89) remark that elderly councillors with political authority are normally addressed in tragedy when a new character enters.

53. Taplin (1977, 301) notes the unusual nature of this. Cf. Halleran (1985, 82), who sees a long *thesis* rather than a dialogue upon entrance as a sign of dominance in the case of Lycus in Euripides’ *Heracles*.

54. PP. 186ff.
The ‘carpet scene’

The messenger scene offered a glimpse into the suppression and fear that resulted from Clytemestra and Aegisthus’ regime (543, 548, 550), though the elders might at first seem central in the scene. The chorus has a similar role in the ‘carpet-scene’, to which I will now turn. Here, it is the chorus again that first addresses the returning king on his entrance (783-809) and Clytemestra also addresses the chorus. It has been suggested that this is a sign that the elders are still close to the centre of political decision, or even of the importance of the chorus in Aeschylus, but an analysis of the scene will show them unwittingly cooperating to Clytemestra’s attempts to give Agamemnon the impression of peace and order and thus help lead him to his murder.

The first words of the chorus are a lengthy, formal address, which comments on the appropriate manner of greeting, but very quickly turns to more general observations about the difference between true loyalty and the semblance of loyalty. The scene employs modes reminiscent of the reception of victors in epinician poetry, which stresses the public character of the occasion and potentially creates the impression of a polis that functions properly. The address of the chorus to the king also has elements of a more personal tone, inviting and implying direct interaction between the chorus and the king: despite a number of general gnomic and moral remarks, the first and second singular person dominates, as do direct questions and addresses, and confident future indicatives. The chorus explicitly refrain from holding back (800 οὐκ ἔπικευσώ) their initial disapproval of the expedition:

σὺ δὲ μοι τότε μὲν στέλλων στρατῖαν
etection τῆς ἑνεκ’, οὐκ ἔπικευσώ,
κάρτ’ ἀπομονώσας ἠσθα γεγραμμένος. (799-801)

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56 Gruber 2009, 347, who notes that this could be a sign of the strained relationship between Clytemestra and Agamemmon.
58 See pp.172f.
59 Steiner 2010, with references to earlier literature on the subject.
60 See 783-5; 799-801; 805.
While past criticism should be read as part of a strategy to underline the genuineness of the present praise, it also conveys a sense of familiarity and confidence on the part of the chorus that the king trusts and values the elders’ opinion. The chorus conclude their address with a remark about the righteousness of conduct in Argos during the king’s absence. They are, however, too oblique. Despite their claim to honesty, that is a hint at specific people, is also too general and thus the chorus forgo the opportunity to inform and warn the king. Despite the king’s failure to pick up on this oblique warning, the chorus’ long address, and Agamemnon’s assertion that everything will be discussed before the people (844-850), creates a momentary impression that the king, and with him the old order of things, is back in charge, and, therefore, the elders are (back) in the centre of political power and decision making as befits their status and age.

Yet the chorus’ seeming control and authority will soon be trampled by Clytemestra, who extends the scene by negotiating the way in which Agamemnon will enter the palace. In this exchange the chorus is conspicuously silent. Nowhere else in surviving Aeschylus are choruses excluded to such a degree from a scene, but always intervene in between longer character speeches, even if only with no more than a formulaic couple of verses. But this scene is dominated by Clytemestra. The king will be defeated by his queen, and the chorus, hushed again by Clytemestra’ manipulative manner, will fail to warn the king. It is only after Clytemestra’s exit at 975 that the chorus finds its voice again. Having been excluded from the action at a crucial point, it is now allowed to express themselves in their own lyrical world or inaction, permitted to sing only, not interact in trimetres with the royal couple.

In the scene that follows, the chorus will struggle again to grasp or make use of any information Cassandra will attempt to deliver. Communication will break down further until eventually the past catches up with the present and the king is murdered by Clytemestra in his bath.

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61 Thiel 1993, 201-2.
62 Cf. p.172.
The Cassandra scene

This scene, although at first glance very different, presents striking similarities with the two scenes examined above as regards the dynamics of the relation between the chorus, Clytemestra and the third character (respectively Cassandra, the messenger and the king). In all three scenes, the chorus is anxious to know, anxious to interact and make use of the news brought in by the new characters. Clytemestra, on the other hand, in both cases keeps interaction to a minimum, as she is in a superior position. In the messenger scene, she dismisses the messenger as a source of information. In the Cassandra scene, it is the chorus who creates, or tries to create, a channel through which information is admitted into the play, especially information not controlled by Clytemestra.

The Cassandra scene is situated at a crucial point in the play, right before the king’s murder, and highlights the chorus’ difficulty in interacting with other characters in a way that would advance their intentions. The elders are increasingly excluded, with Clytemestra eventually retreating into the palace leaving the maddened Cassandra onstage with the chorus. Communication in this scene is of course more straightforwardly problematic than in previous scenes. Clytemestra addresses Cassandra, as does the chorus in an attempt to elicit from her a reaction, but Cassandra does not react. The chorus and Clytemestra do not interact directly with each other, and the chorus seems to try to smooth the communication between the two women. The elders display an understanding of Cassandra’s obstinate stance, but also a complete ignorance of Clytemestra’s motives and intentions. Once Clytemestra gives up any effort to communicate with Cassandra, the chorus persevere, despite Cassandra’s obscure utterings.

Initially the chorus’ calmness contrast Cassandra’s agitation, an antithesis reflected in the metre: the chorus insists on disciplined and calm iambics, while the lyrical emotionality is completely left to Cassandra, who gradually starts to interact with the chorus. Cassandra curses Apollo thrice in self-pitying words in the first

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63 See p.178.
64 1061f. ‘The foreign woman seems to be in need of a clear interpreter’; 1069f. ‘I pity you, and I’m not going to be angry. Come on, poor girl’ (transl. Sommerstein).
65 See Dhuga (2011, 116) for the metre used by Clytemestra and the chorus as the play progresses as an indication of changing power relations.
strophe and antistrophe, until she finally asks a clear question and gets a clear answer from the chorus:

Ca: [...]  
ἄ ποι ποτ’ ἡγαγές με; πώς ποίαν στέγην;  
Cho: πώς τήν Ατρειδῶν. (1087-8)

The first piece of ‘intelligible’ communication between the two is carried out in iambics. The chorus insists on rational communication and succeeds in making the demented Cassandra temporarily ‘use’ their language. Their insistence does, however, also have a downside. By only accepting Cassandra’s speech when it is uttered in a form that is acceptable to them, the chorus miss out on, or choose to ignore, crucial information that Cassandra is trying to communicate, especially with regard to the imminent murder of the king. This is something the chorus did before: they handled confidently and authoritatively knowledge they were comfortable with, such as the prehistory of the expedition in the parodos, or hard facts, such as stating the location to Cassandra. They are, however, unable or even unwilling to understand and confront problematic situations as they are occurring or when about to occur. This attitude will re-emerge towards the end of the play during the murder of the king.

The chorus thus receives the new-comer authoritatively, combining a friendly welcome with a sensible amount of reserve. In that sense, the chorus is playing a cardinal role in introducing Cassandra into the play and making her unintelligible forebodings heard in the theatre. With their persistent interrogation they help transform the prophetic frenzy of Cassandra into more concrete utterances about the history of the house of the Atreidae, as well as to her final prophecy about the murder of Agamemnon, which she utters in intelligible iambics: Ἀγαμέμνονός σε φημ’ ἐπόψεσθαι μόρον (1246).

However, the chorus seem reluctant to absorb information that they do not have first-hand, and, though they express their belief in Cassandra’s credibility, the immensity of her revelation about the imminent murder of the king seems to

66 Esp. 1072-1109. The notion of ‘metrical authority’ (see p.73) applies here too.  
67 Gantz 1983, 82.  
68 ἡμῖν γε μὲν δὴ πιστὰ θεσπίζειν δοκεῖ (1213).  
69 As well as a prophecy of her own murder (1275ff.), and a warning about the murder of Clytemestra and Aegisthus by Orestes (1279-1284) and ὅταν γυνὴ γυναικὸς ἀντ’ ἐμοῦ θάνη/ ἀνήρ τε δυσδάμαρτος ἀντ’ ἀνδρὸς πέτη (1318-9).
overwhelm the elders, who block out the information by urging Cassandra to only speak ‘of good things’ or not at all (1247). This is the time to act if the murder is to be averted. But the chorus, resort yet again to their previous mode of wishful thinking, and generalizing thoughts about fate and the fragility of human happiness, thus failing to affect the plot in any drastic way.

We saw how the chorus seems to react consistently in a contradictory way towards information and knowledge. In the parodos they were proud to know, and narrate, the past, and anxious to learn the news, but they also seemed inclined to avoid and suppress unpleasant knowledge. At 263 they asked the Queen to inform them about the victory, but also gave her the option to keep silent: κλύοιμ' ἀν ἐγφανον' οὐδὲ στιγμῇ φθόνος (263). That this is more than an etiquette of politely asking for information is evident from the recurrence of the theme of pregnant silence. Already in the parodos the chorus displayed a tendency towards wishful thinking (cf. the refrain αἰλινον αἰλινον εἰπέ, τὸ δ' ἐν νικάτῳ at 121, 138 and 159), and an inclination to avoid receiving and delivering unpleasant information. In opening the play, the guard too stated that he will not reveal the truth to those who do not already know it. The theme of silence will ramify in the play into two directions: first the self-imposed silence (of the guard, the chorus, Cassandra at some points); second, the forced silence that the chorus will experience in particular from Aegisthus (and which will be visualized in their silent exit at the end of the play), and the silent wrath of the people. As it emerges, silence (and speech) is a main theme of the play, as is control of language and information, and the chorus’ acceptance of silence as a legitimate strategy plays a major part throughout the tragedy in the exploration of those themes by the poet. In the chorus’ own words: πάλαι τὸ σιγάν φάρμακον βλάβης ἔχω (548).  

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70 Cf. p.174.
71 So to this man it was granted by the Blessed Onesto capture the city of Priam, and he comes home honoured by the gods; but now, if he pays for the blood shed by his forefathers and by dying causes the dead to exact further deaths as a penalty, what mortal, hearing this, can boast that he was born to a destiny free from harm? (1335-42, transl. Sommerstein).
72 For the tendency of this chorus to hope for the best, and to try to suppress and disregard ominous feelings at three levels (facts, language and main characters), see Schenker 1989.
The awakening of the chorus

Silence will cease to seem like an option for the chorus when the cries of Agamemnon are heard from the palace and arouse an agitated argument among the chorus members as to what they should do. This ‘discussion’ (1343-72) has often been used as an example of the inability of the Greek chorus to act. It is worth a closer look, for indeed, in a sense, it concludes with the chorus refraining from any kind of action. The chorus’ utterances, however, do presuppose that they themselves think that this is a point where they are supposed, and wish, to act.

As shown above, the chorus perceived themselves as part of the power structure of the city. At the same time, however, they have been our only source of information on popular sentiment: they shared the pain for the dead Argives (433ff.) and mentioned the silent discontent of the citizens, who are suppressed by the new regime. The anger of the people against the new rulers seems to first be properly shared by the chorus in the choral passage that accompanies the murder of Agamemnon and forms the prelude to the chorus’ resistance to Aegisthus at the end of the play. It is thus no surprise that this choral passage has an overtly political character as several elements suggest. First, at a critical moment in the play, the choral voice is dissolved into its constituent members and separate opinions are expressed by individual chorus members ranging from exhortation to immediate, physical action (1350-1353) over long deliberation as to the right course of action (1359-1361) to submission to the new order or things however unpleasant that may be (1362-3). This is unique in surviving tragedy, where singing, speaking and moving in unison is one of the defining features of the dramatic chorus, except when the koryphaios briefly takes over only to express a sentiment shared by the rest of the chorus. Greek dramatists prefer to keep their choruses as a collective voice and only reluctantly even split it into two semi-choruses, as is shown by the dramatic convention of an exchange between half-choruses. Here the choral voice is uniquely

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73 See, e.g., Rosenmeyer 1982, 164.
74 pp. 171ff.
75 βαρεῖα δ’ αὐτῶν φαίτες ξὺν κότω/ δημοκράτω δ’ αὐξάς τίνει χρέος (456-7). For the stasimon, see Fletcher 1999. See also Raeburn and Thomas 2011, xxxii, n.34 and 456-8n.
76 Rosenmeyer (1982, 176) views the scene as a ‘parody’ of democratic debate, a view rightly rejected by Gruber (2009, 373).
77 Pickard-Cambridge 1968, 245.
fractured and contradictory. Still, Aeschylus manages to keep the scene at the very edge of generic convention through a combination of singular and plural first persons. Throughout 1346-1371 the first person singular is used to express one’s view on what should be done and the first person plural for the agent of the action. This is reminiscent of the process of political deliberation, where expression of individual opinion results in unified action. Further elements support the political reading of the passage. The notion of timely and appropriate action are often employed, though by no means exclusively, with reference to political and military action in Greek literature. Lastly, the passage is punctuated by words that largely form part of a ‘political’ vocabulary, such as as κοινωσώμεθα (1347), γνώμην (1348), ἀστοίσι (1349), ψηφίζομαι (1353), while tyranny is explicitly mentioned at 1365.

None of the elements mentioned above would be in all contexts overtly political, neither are they exceptional in Greek drama, as they form part of the usual problematic of Greek tragedy. Their concentration, however, is high, they are spoken by persons with political authority in the play and are placed right after the murder of the legitimate ruler, and shortly before the appearance of the usurpers on stage. All these elements support our reading of the passage as one with political overtones. The last proposal in this confused and agitated discussion seems to get the approval of the rest of the chorus. A decision is thus reached that precludes action owing to lack of knowledge as to how things stand (1370-1). This is, however, the closest this chorus has come to a realization that some sort of action is required, and the scene is the turning point that will culminate in the final confrontation of the chorus with Aegisthus, which is examined in the next section.

However relatable the chorus may be at that point to the audience in the sense of carrying out a familiar political process, the passage must also have been quite striking in that rarely is the choral voice in tragedy so fractured and internally contradictory. By combining an allusion to a political process with the unusual dramatic technique, Aeschylus highlights how the events of the plot overwhelm the

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78 Fraenkel 1950, 3:634.
79 See, e.g. Demosth. Olynth.1.9, 3.3; Thuc. 4.126.6, 7.5.2, 8.1.3.
80 For κοινωσώμεθα and γνώμην, see Fraenkel 1950, ad loc.
81 Dhuga (2011, 98-106) argues, however, that what emerges from the deliberation of the elders is concordance as to the necessity for action, rather than emphasis on their separate opinions.
city, and prepares us to see Orestes’ matricide in the next play as much more than simply an act of personal revenge.

Ending

As analysed earlier, the chorus in the *parodos* dwelled on their old age, as a source both of weakness and powerful authority. While visually the chorus never ceases to be old, the linguistic emphasis on old age is concentrated mainly in that first part of the play. After that, old age will recur only in a passing remark at 584, until finally it becomes central again at the very end. When Aegisthus comes onstage to gloat over Agamemnon’s murder, the chorus reacts strongly:

Αἴγισθ’, ύβριζειν ἐν κακοίσιν οὐ σέβω.
σὺ δ’ ἄνδρα τόνδε φῆς ἐκὼν κατακτανεῖν,
μόνος δ’ ἐπικτον τόνδε βουλεύσαι φόνον;
οὐ φημ’ ἀλφὲιν ἐν δίκῃ τὸ σὸν κάρα
δημοφρωρεῖς, σάφ’ ἰσθι, λευσίμους ἀράς. (1612-7)

Aegisthus’ answer to the threat is the first passage in the play where the age of the chorus is reintroduced. In the *parodos*, the physical decline of old age was the reason for the chorus not taking part in the expedition, as well as the source of their authoritative judgment. Aegisthus’ threat to the chorus here plays on both:

γνώσῃ γέρων ᾗν ὡς διδάσκεσθαι βαρῷ
τῷ τηλικοῦτῳ, σωφρονεῖν εἰσημένων.
δεσμῳ δὲ καὶ τὸ γῆρας αἰ τε νήστιδες
δύαι διδάσκειν ἔξοχωται γρηγῶν
ιατρομάντεις. [...] (1619-1623)

With the use of the concessive participle (ὡν), Aegisthus turns old age from a source of authority to a source of humiliation – they will have ‘to be taught’ *in spite of* their old age, and this is ‘painful’ (βαρῷ). The elders themselves had mentioned earlier in a positive tone that the ability to learn never ages (585 ἀεὶ γὰρ ἡβη τοῖς γέρουσιν θεῖες διδαχθεὶς ἐμαθεῖν.

82 ἀεὶ γὰρ ἡβη τοῖς γέρουσιν εἰμαθεῖν.
83 Aeschylus plays with the image of throwing a stone at someone and cursing (‘throwing’ a curse at someone): οὐ φημ’ ἀλφὲιν ἐν δίκῃ τὸ σὸν κάρα /δημοφρωρεῖς, σάφ’ ἰσθι, λευσίμους ἀράς (1615-6), thus having the chorus threaten the king but without being directly provocative.
84 Cf. γνώσῃ διδαχθεὶς ὡψ γοῦν τὸ σωφρονεῖν (1425).
Aegisthus’ pedagogical methods, however, entail physical violence, ‘imprisonment and the pangs of hunger’ (1621). Within the first verses of their exchange the chorus and Aegisthus bring up all the issues that the elders themselves associated with old age in the parodos: the chorus calls Aegisthus a woman and accuses him of shamefully avoiding the expedition, disgracing the king’s bed and planning his murder:

γύναι, σὺ τοὺς ἠκοντας ἐκ μάχης νέον –
οὐκουρός ευνήν <τ’> ἀνδρόθ αἰσχύνουσ’ ἀμα,
ἀνδρὶ στρατηγῷ τόνδ’ ἐβούλευσας μόρον; (1625-7)

Aegisthus, on the other hand, calls the chorus’ utterances ‘childish barkings’ (1631 νηπίως ὑλάγμασιν), another allusion to their own ἰσχύν ἱσόπαιδα that the chorus deplored in the parodos (74-5).

During the confrontation of the chorus and Aegisthus, all features of old age that have been presented in the parodos by the chorus as positive (wisdom and authority, the pleasure of learning even at an old age), or at least natural and excusable qualities (physical frailty, and childlike lack of fighting spirit), are turned on their heads and become now explicitly a regretful source of physical inferiority and political subjugation.

The murder of Agamemnon has established Clytemestra and Aegisthus as the ruling couple, hence undermining the position of the chorus, who are clearly loyal to the rightful royal line. This switch in the balance of power gives Aegisthus the chance to re-interpret the chorus’ old age and exploit it for his advantage. We have already seen that the chorus’ physical weakness may have been one of the factors limiting their ability to interfere more actively against the usurpers. We also saw how, in the course of the play, the chorus have attempted consistently to get involved, handle the situation, and even at points to communicate crucial information. For the most part, they have failed. Even the death cries of the king produced no more than an agitated and inconclusive deliberation. At that point, the discussion resulted in no action, but revealed the increasing unrest of the chorus about the new state of affairs. And once

Note that the first compound εὐ- in εὐμαθεῖν denotes the easy, pleasant or cooperative nature of the process.
Aegisthus comes onstage and starts to threaten the elders, they react with bravery and determination.

Aeg: ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ δοκεῖς τάδ' ἑρδεῖν καὶ λέγεις, γνώσῃ τάχα:
Cho: εἰς δὴ, φίλοι λοχίται, τούργον οὐχ ἐκάς τόδε.
Aeg: εἰς δὴ, ξίφος πρόκωπον πᾶς τις εὑρεσιζέτω.
Cho: ἄλλα κάγῳ μὴν πρόκωπος οὐκ ἀναίνομαι θανεῖν.
Aeg: δεχομένοις λέγεις θανεῖν σε· τὴν τύχην δ' αἰροῦμεθα. (1649-1654)

The attribution of lines 1649-51 is problematic already in the manuscripts and scholars have struggled to make sense out of them. Some editors attribute 1649-50 to Aegisthus, and distribute lines 1650-3 alternately to the chorus and Aegisthus. Others have given all lines alternately to Aegisthus and the chorus. A third solution is the introduction of an additional character who does not appear in the manuscripts, a captain of Aegisthus’ bodyguards, who is supposed to be speaking one of the two lines ordering the rest of the bodyguards to action.

Of the three suggestions, I find the third to be the weakest. Introducing an additional speaking character would contradict the practice of the play so far, which avoids having three speakers engaged at once. It would also be unusual in terms of attested dramatic practice to introduce an unnamed character so late in the play as part of a group of mutes, yet dressed slightly differently, only for him to speak one line. Up to this point Aegisthus and Clytemestra have been treated as the sole agents of usurpation. It is also difficult to see the need for a new character brought in to speak a single line which could as easily be given to Aegisthus. One could further argue that it unnecessarily disturbs the dynamics of the final scene: Aegisthus has been abruptly introduced, and treats the chorus as a tyrant would. A confrontation just between Aegisthus (and his entourage) and the chorus, one on the verge of getting physical,

86 Fraenkel 1950, ad loc. See also below, nn.87 and 88. Also Fraenkel 1950, 3:781ff. for a doxography of previous scholarship on the attribution of the lines and Judet de la Combe 2001, 2:758 for a chart with the attribution of lines in Fraenkel, Denniston and Page, and Dettori.
87 Page in his edition, and West (1990, 225), who prints however a slightly different text.
88 Verrall (1889) was the first to suggest this character and give him 1651); Sommerstein (2008, 2:200n.341) accepts the introduction of the character and Thomson’s (1938) attribution of 1651 to him.
89 The case of Pylades in Choephoroi, who also speaks one line only after having remained silent for the duration of the play, although a striking instance, is not really comparable. Pylades is a well-attested character in the story, is there from the start, albeit silent, and intervenes at a crucial point in the plot to steel Orestes’ will for action (cf. pp.106f.). He is also identified by name as he is given a speaking role.
90 We have no evidence for the number of bodyguards, in this and similar cases, Taplin (1977, 80) assumes that they would not be usually more than eight, as a larger crowd would detract attention from
but being stopped just in time by Clytemestra is both more effective and ties in better with the very special exit of the chorus, which leaves the stage silenced by the new rulers.\textsuperscript{91}

I believe that the arguments weigh in favour of the line attribution printed by both Page and West in their editions, and reproduced on the previous page (the text as in Page). In addition to the points made above, this line attribution has various advantages over other suggestions. First, the utterances of the chorus and Aegisthus match their respective character as portrayed in the play. Aegisthus is verbally abusive and threatens with physical violence (1649, 1653), and it is fitting for the ruler to command his guards to get ready for battle (1651). A tyrant is not likely to call his underlings φιλοι λοχῖται and to engage in this sort of camaraderie with them. It is far more plausible that the koryphaios would address in this way a group of people his own age and position, with whom he may have potentially fought together in the past, and, more importantly, with whom he is about to attempt a brave act of resistance. The military terminology, even though the chorus-members are not armed, underscores the change in the chorus’ role and also, in representing them as ready to fight, reverses the insistence on the unsuitability for military action expressed in the parodos.\textsuperscript{92}

Finally, this line attribution has the chorus implying their potential martial role – and their readiness to use their staffs as swords\textsuperscript{93} – but the unambiguous ξίφος πρόκωπον (1651) that discomforts some critics as a reference to the staffs, is left to Aegisthus, a literal reference to actual weapons. It should be mentioned that (threatened) use of walking sticks as a weapon is not unique.\textsuperscript{94} But the weapons here are badly matched. Should the verbal confrontation climax into a physical one, a weak elderly chorus would have to face bodyguards armed with swords, in what could only

\textsuperscript{91} West (1990, 226) too finds that this ‘fanciful notion breaches the economy of the scene and the dramatic conventions of the period’.

\textsuperscript{92} The chorus’ newfound bravery is expressed in 1652, where they state their willingness to die fighting, with Aegisthus’ replying that he would happily accept this (1653), which is consistent with his insulting ways. Clytemestra displays one final time her admirable control over the plot of the play when she intervenes to avert the bloodshed (1654-6).

\textsuperscript{93} Early critics had suggested that the chorus are now brandishing swords (see Wills 1963, esp. pp.262-4 for a refutation of the argument with further references), while Fraenkel (1950, 3:782-3) views positively a suggestion by Wilamowitz (1889, 40n.) who has the chorus enter already in the parodos carrying both swords and staffs.

\textsuperscript{94} See Eur. Andr.588 and Eur. HF 254-6; Thuc.8.84.3.
turn into a massacre.\textsuperscript{95} The fact that the chorus are eager to proceed regardless of the vast imbalance in power, underscores their belated decisiveness and fighting spirit. Aegisthus’ attempts to exploit the chorus’ old age against them, prompts the chorus to overcome their physical limits, in what is yet another thematic reversal of the elders’ statement in the \textit{parodos} that fighting and old age are incompatible.

\textbf{iv. Conclusion}

In \textit{Agamemnon}, already from the \textit{parodos} old age and the time past emerges as one of the main themes. Emphatic reference to the old age of the chorus in the first part of the play sets the scene and visualizes the power vacuum caused in the city. The elderly councillors, and in them, the city, are physically defenseless towards the usurping couple. But, as the narration and judgment of the chorus reveals, the chorus possesses knowledge of the past, as well as the moral authority, if not always the ability, to gauge the situation at hand. The discrepancy between the chorus’ acute awareness of all ethical issues at stake and their lack of practical intervention is justified, for now, by their old age. As the play progresses, the dramatic events stress increasingly the chorus’ moral understanding, but its members continue to evade the facts, until the reality catches up with them. The murder of their king is the turning point, as his dying cries force the chorus to map their moral authority onto action and consider an intervention. This attempt deflates into indecisiveness, but constitutes the prelude to the final Aegisthus scene, where the chorus are stopped just on time by Clytemestra from a desperate act of resistance against Aegisthus’ guard.

In the play as a whole, the chorus expressed emotion, and directed with their songs the audience’s understanding of the situation. They were addressed by all characters regarding all major events of the play, which kept them in the centre of action throughout the play. At the same time, the dominant presence of Clytemestra kept them from intervening in any very marked manner in the state of affairs, which contrasts some very active choruses in Aeschylus which at times steer the action.\textsuperscript{96} Exemplary of their stance to deliberate but not go much further is the choral dialogue

\textsuperscript{95} Cf. Eur. \textit{HF} 268-9, where the chorus deplores their lack of physical strength that would allow them to grasp a spear and fight Lycus.

\textsuperscript{96} Cf. e.g. pp.106f. for \textit{Choephoroi} and pp.71-76 for \textit{Suppliants}. 
that takes place while the king is being murdered inside the palace. At the same time, however, with this dialogue, which reflects their deliberative role as senior citizens with a political role, the chorus prepares for their final confrontation with the usurper Aegisthus. The final confrontation, abruptly interrupted by the Queen, has a chorus exit unsettled and angry, thus leading smoothly into the next play, where the chorus’ anger will be a key component in the unfolding of the plot.

I believe that reassessing the marginality of the chorus of elders in tragedy is indeed a desideratum of modern studies, and that can be best done by reevaluating what we think qualifies as ‘action’ for a dramatic chorus in the light of the conventions of the genre. I do, however, believe that a certain degree of ineffectuality should be seen as a potential consequence of old age, and it rests with the dramatist how far he will exploit that potential. This is why physical weakness is dwelled upon more than wisdom of the elders in tragedy. The former can have an immediate, tangible effect on the action, while the latter is not only a feature inherent to an extent to any Greek choral group, but also a quality that informs the general stance of the chorus, and the way in which it may potentially influence other characters (e.g. the cooperation of the elderly slaves with the children of Agamemnon in Choephoroi). Wisdom and weakness would not surprise the audience as attributes of an elderly chorus. They would not, however, be taken for granted either, if the poet did not draw attention to them in the play. We have stressed that the chorus’s self-presentation is a description of their diminished physical strength (and general fighting spirit) due to their old age, which is supported by their presentation as old men walking with a cane. This is an emphatic statement, and is all the more noteworthy because the theme of old age of the chorus does not recur as the play evolves except for the very last part where Aegisthus comes onstage.

I therefore conclude that the degree of emphasis placed on the physical weakness of the chorus is largely what allows on a first level the chorus to stand idly by while Cassandra foretells Agamemnon’s future and what allows them to stand idly by while their king is being killed, without at the same time losing their authority to express in gnomic utterances throughout the play views that would tune in with dominant Greek ideology. The ‘political’ essence of tragedy is here relevant: the

97 See p.188.
murder of a king who has not been presented as a despot would inevitably appear have political overtones; for a male Athenian it would probably be more plausible to have a group of physically weak elders not intervene when a good ruler is being killed, rather than a chorus of vigorous young adult males. However, old age by itself is not enough, but needs to be underscored by the specific characterization of the chorus. Indeed, Aeschylus has consistently presented a chorus who fail to map their moral principles and their theoretical insight onto the situation at hand.

Old age in this play translates into multiple features, first the high social position, second the ethical value of the moral pronouncements of the elders and finally the knowledge (even eye-witness knowledge) of the pre-history of the house. Additionally, it translates into physical weakness, which can potentially facilitate the distancing of the chorus from the dramatic fiction. Therefore, old age here connotes potentiality to represent the ‘right’, to understand and resist the ‘wrong’, it is intention for action, and belief in one’s right and duty to do so, rather than actually doing it.

Relevant to the chorus’ control of their own conduct is also the way in which they (are allowed to) interact with other characters. They are either left to their own devices or are totally excluded or manipulated by Clytemestra. The former applies to their exchange with the messenger and Cassandra. In both cases, Clytemestra has no interest in handling the newcomer, since she already possesses the information they bring. The latter category includes mainly Agamemnon, whom the chorus are only allowed to briefly address, and Aegisthus, where again Clytemestra intervenes and puts an end to the scene. Therefore, the chorus are allowed contact only with characters that cannot significantly affect the plot, and are cut off or controlled during more serious encounters. Since the chorus has already from the start been associated with the civic body, one should interpret this not simply as the chorus’ ineffectuality and marginality, but also as a way for the poet to render the immensity of suppression

98 The play is not simply the story of Clytemestra’s personal revenge, and Aeschylus keeps the political and familial aspect into focus by adding, rather unexpectedly (Taplin 1977, 327), the last scene with Aegisthus, which emphasizes the effects of the murder on the city through the theme of tyranny.
99 The only surviving tragedies with a male chorus in their prime (Ajax and Philoctetes) are by Sophocles, a playwright who seems to have opted for choruses that were slightly less prone to interfere in the action than Aeschylean ones (Taplin 1984-5).
100 This is in sharp antithesis with the stance of other Aeschylean kings towards the city and the chorus: Pelasgus in Suppliants wants to share the news and the decision with the polis, and Eteocles in Seven ends up consulting with the chorus in the second part of the play.
practiced by Clytemestra and Aegisthus, and therefore the serious disturbance of the moral and political order.

Finally, one may gain some useful insight by looking at the choral utterances as a continuum, so as to acquire an understanding of their total presence in the play: initially the chorus focused mainly on narration of the events of the past, and they gradually grew more gnomic as they elaborated on the bleak past and the sinister consequences on the present. Before the murder of the king, they are anxious to express their worry about the situation in the polis (first to the messenger and then to the king). The Cassandra scene is the first instance, where the facts start to overwhelm them, until they finally become more actively involved towards the end of the play. Such an outlook on the chorus helps one keep in focus the fact that, despite the specific attributes of a chorus, nothing in a drama can be fully appreciated outside the needs of the plot, which in turn is there to serve the meaning of the play and the intentions of the dramatist in composing it.
Chapter 4: DIVINITY

A. Introduction

Gods are a recurrent presence in Greek drama, and their will is consistently viewed by both choruses and characters in tragedy as a defining factor in the world order. In this, drama differs little from other Greek literary genres, such as lyric or epic poetry. Yet drama is in the unique position of being able to physically embody its characters, and gods are no exception. The playwright most often associated with presentation of gods onstage is Euripides. In most of his surviving plays, however, gods are clearly demarcated from the plot, appearing at the beginning or the very end of the play, thus having a clearly expressed effect on the plot, almost manipulating it directly, but not mingling with the rest of the characters; they usually deliver speeches, where they explain the purpose of their presence and usually are there to manifest their power either to the spectators, or to the *dramatis personae* (they are also frequently spatially separated, such as appearing on the roof of the stage). A case apart (and also a reminder of how accidents of survival may affect our conclusions) is his *Bacchae*, where Dionysus is an integral part of the cast, and interacts as any other character with the rest of the cast. Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* comes closer to this model; in that play both Apollo and Athena, and the Erinyes, are as much characters of the play as is Orestes, the Pythia and the Athenian jurors.

The way Euripides stages his divinities points to two possible models of interaction between humans and gods: one where the divine element is clearly presented as exercising a largely unilateral effect on human affairs, from a superior level. In the second model the power of the gods is made into the subject of the play and divine actions played out among humans are intrinsic to the plot. Both *Eumenides* and *Bacchae* (as well as perhaps *Prometheus Bound*) suggest that a conflict between gods or between gods/a god and humans could lie in the heart of the second scenario. Of course, humans cannot cause any harm to gods, and when gods are ‘defeated’ or their powers re-adjusted, it is always another god who has brought this about (e.g.

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1 No divine figure appears in the surviving plays of Sophocles, and *Eumenides* is the only surviving Aeschylean drama where divinities appear, though it is possible that accidents of survival are skewing our analysis.

2 Even if humans resist divine will, such as Hippolytus in Euripides’ eponymous tragedy, where Aphrodite and Hippolytus never come face to face.
Aphrodite and Artemis in *Hippolytus*, or Athena and Apollo over the furies in *Eumenides*; *Bacchae* on the other hand stages a clear victory of the god Dionysus over the humans resisting him).

In contrast with divine characters, divine choruses are very sparse in surviving drama. As noted in the introduction, out of thirty two surviving tragedies only two feature a divine chorus, that is, *Prometheus Bound* and Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*. Much of the analysis of divine characters may apply to divine choruses too. There is, however, a further element that should be taken into account with regard to divine choruses, that is, the long literary pedigree of divine choruses in pre-tragic poetry, namely epic and lyric. This tradition of divine choruses may help explain the picture that seems to be emerging from an examination of the title of lost plays, that is, the possibility that divine choruses may have been a slightly less unusual tragic choice than we may think.4

Regarding divine choruses, one seems then to be left with two antithetical choices, or possibly with a spectrum whose two ends feature two very different versions of a divine chorus: on the one hand, the benign, peaceful chorus of young divinities that sympathises with the protagonist and stands possibly slightly outside the tumultuous world of the plot, such as Aeschylus’ Nereids or the chorus of *Prometheus*. On the other end, we have divinities like the Eumenides that present onstage the full horror and power of divine will.

In this chapter I will look at three divine choruses, Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* on the one hand, and the chorus of *Prometheus* and Aeschylus’ fragmentary *Nereids* on the other. I will look at both their overt differences and their similarities, and will analyse how divine chorality in drama is constructed within a long tradition of divine choruses in non-dramatic poetry.

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1 If *Prometheus* is a later play, then only one drama featuring a divine chorus survives from the heyday of Athenian tragedy.
4 See p.32 with n.78. Though one should perhaps consider to what degree a divine chorus is a limiting factor regarding the setting, characters and plot of a play, despite the mythic setting of Attic tragedy, which is more accommodating of mythic choruses than a contemporary setting would be.
B. Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*: chthonic divinities on the Attic stage

i. Interrupted order

*Eumenides* is in many respects a unique play. Not only it is the last play of our only surviving tragic trilogy, but it is also a play where the chorus has an almost unrivalled protagonistic role. Above all, for the purposes of the present chapter, it is the only surviving tragedy that features a chorus of chthonic deities. All these facts will be relevant to the discussion that follows.

*Eumenides* opens with a prayer by the Pythia, which, as is shown below, is crucial in creating a set-up that will strongly contrast the entrance and initial presentation of the chorus. Prayers are a common opening in surviving Aeschylus, and, when this is the case, the individual who utters the prayer is faced with a difficult or urgently threatening situation, which is briefly or more extensively explained, and asks for the god’s help in order to deal with it. While the opening of *Eumenides* is in many respects very similar to the openings of the other two plays of the trilogy in particular, the prayer by Pythia also differs substantially from all prayer openings mentioned above. First, the Pythia is a priestess. Therefore, praying is part of her tasks under normal circumstances, and not a measure to which she resorts only to remedy a problematic situation. This is not, however, any priest praying in a religious context, a common and possibly reassuring experience for a Greek. This is the priestess of the oracle of Delphi, a religious centre for the whole of Greece and beyond, and she is making a highly formalized prayer to the gods of the sanctuary past and present before assuming her post and receiving enquiries from throughout Greece. This is the dramatic enactment of civic and panhellenic order.

The ritual, therefore, creates an atmosphere of peace and order of divine origin that stretches far back in time, as the mention of Gaia and of a number of chthonic

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5 See Gruber 2009, 429n.1, who notes that the percentage of lines given to the chorus in *Eumenides* is 42%, less than in the rest of Aeschylus. For the chorus of *Suppliants* as the protagonist, see p.61 with nn.128 and 131.
6 See p.40.
7 The god is usually addressed in the first line, or is even the very first word of the prayer and hence of the play: Zeus ἀφίκτωρ (Supp.1); Zeus Ἀλεξητήριος (Sept.9); ‘the gods’ (Ag.1); Hermes Χόθνιος (Cho.1).
8 See pp.40f.
9 But see p.44 for the similarity with *Seven.*
deities reveal. In a Delphic context this seems specifically designed to give the place an air of well-established antiquity and undisrupted continuity and concord. We are emphatically told that the transition of the older nature gods to the Olympian Phoebus happened peacefully, without use of any kind of violence:

\[
\text{θελούσης, ούδὲ πρὸς βίαν τινός,}
\text{Titanaς ἀλλή παῖς Χθονός καθέξετο,}
\text{Φοίβη δίδωσι δ’ ἣ γενέθλιον δόσιν}
\text{Φοίβῳ [...] (5-8)}
\]

Aeschylus here elides the well-known story of Apollo killing the snake to get possession of the oracle.\(^{10}\) In a play that will see the bestialised representatives of the vendetta drawn into the order of the polis, a charter myth of this sort could have offered a useful proleptic gesture. Instead, Aeschylus opts for a version that avoids violence, the struggle between gods, and the mention of a supernatural creature.\(^{11}\) That is, themes that have been prominent in the trilogy already or will emerge as such in this play. The result is a deceptively innocent start, different from the ominous openings of other surviving Aeschylean plays, and especially in stark contrast with the end of the preceding play of the trilogy. At the end of *Choephori* Orestes exited hounded by the (imaginary) Furies and stated explicitly that he is heading for Delphi. Momentarily, however, the disruption of the previous play is suspended and substituted by the reassuring normality of ritual. The calm, respectable figure of the elderly Pythia contrasts strongly with the terrified, demented Orestes. The violent fracture in the mood is reinforced by a visual contrast. It is highly likely that the Pythia wore a white ritual dress,\(^{12}\) thus setting right the ‘blackness’ of the clothes of the elderly chorus of *Choephori* with their associations of mourning, violence, and distorted succession of power.\(^{13}\) Her image will also be in sharp antithesis with the black chorus of the present play.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{10}\) For the myth, see Gantz 1993, 88.

\(^{11}\) For the image of beasts and especially snakes in the trilogy, see Lebeck 1971, 13-15 and 181n.7; Sommerstein 1989, 127-8n. See also n.73 (p.212).

\(^{12}\) Sommerstein 1989, 80; for white dress in ritual contexts, see Lee 2015, 215. Cf. 352 where the Erinyes bitterly remark on their exclusion from ‘pure white garments’ during happy occasions. Contrast their own ‘black-garbed assaults’ (370, transl. Sommerstein).

\(^{13}\) See pp.90ff.

\(^{14}\) See p.201 with n.31.
Pythia’s presence is central in generating this tranquil background, and upon concluding her speech she exits asking the gods to grant her a ‘far better fortune’ than in any of her previous entrances (30-34). Her entrance into the temple, however, does not prove as peaceful as she expected – and led us to expect – and the Pythia presently re-enters. This time, she enters on all fours, out of breath and terrified, to describe the horrible spectacle that she had just witnessed inside:

\[
\begin{align*}
\eta \ \delta e\nu\alpha\lambda\varepsilon, \ & \delta e\nu\alpha \ d' \ \omega\rho\theta\alpha\lambda\mu\omicron\omicron \iota\zeta \ \varphi\omicron\alpha\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu, \\
\tau\alpha\lambda\nu \ & \mu' \ \epsilon\pi\epsilon\mu\phi\iota\nu \varepsilon \ \epsilon\kappa \ \delta\omicron\mu\omicron\nu \ \tau\omicron\nu \ \Lambda\omicron\zeta\iota\omicron, \\
\iota \ & \mu' \ \sigma\omega\kappa\epsilon\iota \ \mu' \ \mu' \ \alpha\kappa\tau\alpha\iota\nu\epsilon\iota\nu \ \sigma\tau\alpha\iota\nu \ \\
\tau\rho\xi\omicron\omega \ & \delta \ \chi\epsilon\rho\sigma\iota\nu, \ \omicron\upsilon \ \pi\omicron\delta\omicron\omega\kappa\epsilon\iota\alpha \ \sigma\kappa\epsilon\lambda\omicron\nu. \\
\delta\epsilon\iota\sigma\sigma\alpha\sigma \ \gamma\acute{\alpha} \ \gamma\rho\alpha\varsigma \ \omicron\upsilon\delta\epsilon\nu, \ \alpha\nu\tau\iota\pi\tau\alpha\iota \ \mu\epsilon\nu \ \omicron\nu. \\
\epsilon\gamma\omicron \ \mu\epsilon\nu \ \epsilon\rphi\tau\omega \ \pi\omicron\omicron\omicron \ \pi\omicron\lambda\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron \ \nu\omicron\chi\omicron\omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \omicron \ (34-9)
\end{align*}
\]

The uniqueness and potential affront to decency of an old prophetess crawling has led scholars in the past to offer various ways to explain away 36ff. But, I think, with Taplin, that the text is clear, and indeed emphatic, enough.\textsuperscript{15} We are meant to be taken aback by the entrance, a surprise that corresponds to the magnitude of the horror the Erinyes cause. The shock is accentuated by the inevitable comparison between the dignified Pythia that we saw at the beginning, and the old terrified woman that now re-appears. The change in the Pythia is a clear manifestation of the world of horror and disorder that has suddenly broken into the drama.\textsuperscript{16} The theme of fear that runs through the trilogy,\textsuperscript{17} but has been strategically suppressed in this play so far, is now graphically re-introduced, and the violent story of the house of the Atreidai resumes its central place.

\textbf{ii. Postponed parodos}

The disturbed order visualized by the terrified, crawling Pythia is further underscored by the structure of the opening part of the play. Given how central the chorus was in the ancient audience’s perception of drama,\textsuperscript{18} its first appearance in the play must have been one of the highlights of the performance.\textsuperscript{19} It is, therefore, no

\textsuperscript{15} Taplin 1977, 363.
\textsuperscript{16} Cf. Gruber 2009, 432.
\textsuperscript{17} Cf. Sommerstein 1989, 34n.
\textsuperscript{18} See p.11 with n.2.
\textsuperscript{19} Compare a modern spectator’s anticipation for the first song and dance act in a musical.
surprise that, to judge by surviving tragedies, the parodos was expected to happen at the beginning of the play, or relatively soon after. This would not be gauged so much by the amount of lines that were spoken before the chorus entered, but rather by the structure of the part of the play that preceded the parodos, the number of events that took place and the number of characters that appeared before the chorus. In other words, the part before the parodos may be shorter or longer, but convention defines and restricts its format. In the present play, Aeschylus is visibly playing on the conventions to magnify the effect of the parodos when it finally occurs and meticulously builds up anticipation of the choral entrance.

In particular, when the Pythia concluded her opening prayer and exited (34), the audience would expect the parodos of the chorus. What we get instead is – surprisingly – the Pythia re-entering. This, second, entrance is unique in surviving tragedy: secondary characters in tragedy only enter once, carry out their function and exit never to appear again, as does, for example, the nurse in Choephoroi or the guard in Agamemnon. We may imagine a brief, pregnant, perhaps puzzling moment of silence between the exit and re-entry of the Pythia, while the audience awaits in mild excitement the entry of the chorus. However, any anticipation of the chorus must have been brought to a halt by the striking performance of the Pythia upon her second entrance. By the end of it, we have heard of the chorus for the first time, and thus the spectators know that the chorus that failed to enter before is there; and they must be expecting it now, for a second time, to enter at long last. Yet, the choral parodos fails to happen for a second time, and the audience are offered instead a dialogue between two main characters of the drama about the Erinyes. What started with the potential of a structurally predictable prologue, was turned on its head within a few lines. As

20 A number ranging in surviving tragedy from 63 verses (Eur. Bacch.) to 183 in Eur. Ion (Aesch. Cho. only has 21 lines in its current form, see p.89).
21 It is unique for surviving tragedy to have such a clear break in the prologue, and, where such breaks occur, never does the same person stand on both sides of the break (Taplin 1977, 362); Aeschylus means to make the ‘two’ Pythias contrast clearly.
22 παρ’ ὀλίγον ἐξήρισεν ἕκασθιν γίνεται (Σ Eum.33a Smith). Even if the audience had been unaware of the extraordinary nature of the chorus, they would still excitedly wait for it to happen soon after the beginning of the play.
23 For West (1990, 18) this resembles ‘two prologue scenes juxtaposed’, that is, a unique combination of a monologue by a minor character and a dialogue by two main characters (see West 1990, 7).
24 See pp.196-198.
a result, we are offered one of the most structurally innovative, crowded and eventful openings in the surviving tragic corpus.25

While it is not uncharacteristic of Aeschylus to keep his audience waiting and guessing like this,26 this play of suspense does not usually entail the chorus, which tends to either start off the play (Persians, Suppliants), or to enter, announced or more abruptly, following naturally upon a speech or a dialogue (Seven, Agamemnon, Choephoroi). Perhaps the closest that we get to this eventful entry is, unsurprisingly, the entrance of another divine chorus, namely, the Oceanides in Prometheus Bound.27

iii. ‘Presence’ of the chorus before the parodos

Yet, despite the significant delay of the parodos and the concomitant physical absence of the chorus, the Erinyes are present in word from early on. Both the Pythia and Apollo deliver two relatively long and detailed descriptions of the chorus before the audience (properly) sees them.28 In tragedy, whether the parodos occurs at the very beginning of the play or comes after a prologue scene, references to the chorus’ age, ethnicity, or status by the dancers themselves or by other characters are by no means unusual and are employed for various effects: to emphasize, for example, a specific feature, to make it more intelligible or visible to spectators sitting further back, or to steer the audience’s interpretation. There are, however, two factors that make the description of the chorus in this play stand out.

First, the point in the play when these descriptions occur. Usually references to the chorus come either once the chorus has entered and is therefore there for the audience to see, or very shortly before the chorus enters, as a preparation – even if possibly a slightly misleading one: Prometheus in the eponymous play, for example, describes anxiously the approaching chorus, which turns out to be a sympathetic and friendly one.29 This is not the case in the present play, where the descriptions occur

25 It has been described as ‘Shakespearean’ (West 1990, 18; cf. Taplin 1977, 369).
26 For suspense in Aeschylus see n.198 on p.153.
27 See p.225.
28 The effect described is achieved – to a lesser degree – even if the chorus becomes visible immediately after the Pythia’s speech, as some scholars argue (see following section). For 1-116 I follow the verse arrangement as printed by Page.
29 See pp.224-227.
well before the chorus enters, and are uttered in a sense *in place* of a choral entrance. Given that the Erinyes have been described accurately, as it will turn out, by Orestes at the end of the previous play already, even more suspense and anticipation is built into the delay and the repeated references to a chorus that constantly fails to enter.

Second, in contrast with other plays where references seem to be of a more neutral, descriptive nature, both the Pythia and Apollo deliver accounts of the chorus which are negative or even straightforwardly abusive. The first of those descriptions is delivered by a terrified Pythia upon her second entrance:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{πρόσθεν δὲ τάνδρος τούδε θαυμαστὸς λόχος εὐδεί } & \text{γυναικῶν ἐν θρόνοισιν ἡμενος.} \\
\text{οὔτοι γυναίκαις, ἀλλὰ Γοργόνας λέγω,} & \text{οὐδ’ αὐτέ Γοργείουσι εἰκάσω τύποις.} \\
\text{εἰδόν ποτ’ ἢδη Φινέως γεγαμήμενας} & \text{δείπνον φερούσας ἀπτεροὶ γε μὴν ἰδεῖν αὐταί, μέλαναι δ’, ἐς τὸ πᾶν βδελύκτροποι’} \\
\text{ὅγκουσι δ’ οὐ πλατοῖσι φυσιάμασιν’} & \text{ἐκ δ’ ὦμμάτων λείβουσι δυσφιλῆ λίβα’} \\
\text{καὶ κόσμος οὔτε πρὸς θεών ἀγάλματα} & \text{φέρειν δίκαιος οὐτ’ ἐς ἀνθρώπων στέγας.} \\
\text{τὸ φύλον οὐκ ὅπαστα τηδ’ ὀμιλίας} & \text{οὐδ’ ἢτις αἰα τοῦτ’ ἐπεὐχεται γένος} \\
\text{τρέφουσ’ ἀνατεί μὴ μεταστένειν πόνον.} & \text{(46-59)}
\end{align*}
\]

The Pythia focuses on the physical appearance of the Erinyes, and despite her lack of knowledge about their identity, her description leaves the audience with a vivid mental picture of the creatures that make up the much anticipated chorus, as well as important clues as to their nature: they are female, black-robed, possibly wearing black masks, and blood drips from their eyes; they are horrible to look at, and ‘are pumping out snores that one doesn’t dare come near’ (53). The blood dripping from their eyes (54), continues the negative associations of fluid dripping that has been central in the previous plays of the trilogy, and will again become a major theme when the Erinyes will threaten to drip poison on Attica. Contact with these horrible deities is highly

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30 Cho.1048-1058.
31 Cf. Sommerstein 1989, 52n.
32 Referring to sound, the smell of their breath, or possibly both (Sommerstein 2008, 2:361n.20).
33 Sommerstein 1989, 53-4n.
34 See Lebeck 1971, 80-91.
35 See pp.218f.
undesirable, and potentially dangerous. Exclusion is not only a steady feature of chthonic divinities, but also a theme that runs through the trilogy. This links the chorus with their victim, Orestes, who was thrown out of Argos by his mother and is now self-exiled due to the pollution of matricide. More importantly, through the idea of exile, the Pythia hints at a question that will become central after the acquittal of Orestes, that is, the proper place of the Erinyes – if one there is – in the civilized world of the polis.

iv. A sleeping chorus

The Pythia has just exited when Apollo enters and frustrates yet again the audience’s expectation of a choral parados by delivering one more description of the Erinyes:

καὶ νῦν ἀλούσας τάσις τὰς μάργους ὀράζ·
ύπνῳ πεσοῦσαι δὴ αἱ κατάπτυστοι κόραι,
γραίαι παλαιαι παῖδες, αἰς οὐ μείγνυται
θεῶν τις οὐδ’ ἀνθρώπος οὐδὲ θήρ ποτε –
κακών δ’ ἐκατι καγένοντ’, ἑπεὶ κακὸν
σκότον νέμονται Τάρταρον θ’ ὑπὸ χθονός,
μισήματ’ ἀνδρῶν καὶ θεῶν Ὀλυμπίων. (67-73)

While the priestess inferred the Eumenides’ horrible nature from their horrific looks, Apollo seems to know who these creatures are, where they reside (72) and how men and Olympian gods alike are disposed towards them (69-70, 73), and fills these details in. In that sense what he says corroborates the words of the Pythia. He does, however, also add a detail describing them, disconcertingly, as ‘aged maidens, old virgins [paides, fem.’]. This oxymoron proleptically touches on the question of whether the Eumenides and what they represent will procreate, the issue of fertility, and their power to lavish their blessings on Athens.

But what exactly does the audience see at the moment when Apollo is delivering his speech? In other words, who is visible at that point (Apollo, Orestes, part of the chorus?) and what is their manner of entry? Where is the chorus during the

37 For the similarities of Orestes and Electra to the chorus in Choephoroi, see pp.103f.
38 See the following pages on the timing and mode of the chorus’ entry.
long prologue that precedes the *parodos*? Are they partly or wholly visible already from the start or are they completely out of sight until they enter the orchestra, and at which point do they enter? And how does their entry fit in with Apollo’s reference to them (67)? Second, how exactly is their entrance carried out given that they are supposed to be asleep at the start of the play and being awaken by the ghost of Clytemestra and the instigation of one another?39

The speech of Pythia (34-64) makes it clear that the scene she is describing occurs inside, and only becomes visible to her once she enters the temple. It is therefore out of sight of the audience, which can only see the front of the temple at that point. Following the Pythia’s exit, however, there is a shift to the inside. What now seems to be played out onstage from 64ff. is the scene the Pythia described, by the characters she witnessed in the temple, with the addition of the ghost of Clytemestra. As West rightly notes,40 if the play started at 64ff., we would be in no doubt whatsoever that the setting simply represents an interior scene. But the Pythia is there in our text, which leaves one with the need to explain how this shift of the scene from the outside to the inside of the temple would be staged.

The characters involved in the scene following the exit of the Pythia are Orestes and Apollo, as well as potentially some of the Erinyes, and later the ghost of Clytemestra. Most modern editors follow the suggestion made by Burges and transpose Orestes’ address to Apollo (lines 85-7) right after the exit of the Pythia at 63 and before the speech of Apollo (starting at 64).41 Maas suggested also moving 88 before 64, which I believe does indeed give a smoother transition from Orestes’ address to Apollo’s speech; it also makes for a less abrupt beginning to Apollo’s speech,42 and a far more natural close to Apollo’s address to Orestes (now line 84) before he turns to Hermes (89-93).

If we accept the transposition of Orestes’ address before Apollo’s first words, we are still left with a number of questions as to the entry of the characters. The theories that have been suggested to answer these questions fall into two groups,

40 West 1990, 265.
41 For a neat review of the reasons why this is necessary, see Sommerstein 1989, 85-7n.
42 Thus eliminating the need to think that Apollo and Orestes enter ‘in mid-dialogue’ (Taplin 1977, 363-4), a technique that Taplin himself agrees is not truly paralleled in surviving tragedy.
depending on whether the scholar supporting them believes that the _ekkyklema_ was used by Aeschylus. The first theory argues that the scene described by the Pythia, i.e. the supplicant Orestes, a number of sleeping, seated Erinyes and Apollo at the background are rolled onstage on the _ekkyklema_ through the _skene_ door once the Pythia exits. However, scholars have pointed out that it would not be possible for the _ekkyklema_ to carry the whole chorus on it, and counter-proposals usually include the smaller number of three Erinyes, based on 140-2 where the Erinyes wake up one another. Having the chorus (or some of them) slumped in their chairs would give the audience just a partial view, enough to intrigue them without fully disclosing their horrific looks. Thus suspense would be maintained, and indeed the Erinyes would become a concrete presence threatening to come alive at any moment. The presence of some of the Erinyes on the _ekkyklema_ would also make it possible for Apollo to chase them out of the temple, that is, out of the _ekkyklema_, and into the orchestra where they, as the chorus, naturally belong. Other scholars, however, have found that a partial view of some member of the chorus would detract from the suspense Aeschylus has been building up with the description of a whole _λόχος_ of beast-like women delivered by the Pythia.

The second sub-group assumes that no use of the _ekkyklema_ was made and argues for a partial view of the Erinyes through the _skene_ door, or for a complete absence of the chorus until they properly enter at 140ff. The former suggestion, first made by Wilamowitz, has the _skene_ doors open ‘as wide as possible’ to allow the audience a glance into the inside of the temple, and hence on the scene that is played out after the speech of the Pythia. This is an appealing suggestion, since it allows the delay of the _parodos_ of the chorus until 140ff., thus building up suspense and allowing for an impressive effect when the horrifying chorus of twelve Erinyes enter the orchestra in full view of the audience. But it is a theory that runs into substantial problems when the practicalities of fifth-century theatre are considered. It is quite

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43 This theory often brings in as evidence a scholion on 64, but Taplin (1977, 369) rightly warns against deducing too much from it.
44 And perhaps referring to what was possibly the canonical number of the Erinyes (Sommerstein 2008, 2:362n.22).
45 Though one should notice that the Pythia has called them _λόχος_ (46).
46 The Erinyes are described by the Pythia as sat ἐν θόροισιν (47). A θόρος is suitable for a god, but also perhaps practically useful if the Erinyes are to be carried asleep on the _ekkyklema_.
47 Taplin 1977, 371.
48 Wilamowitz 1914, 175.
difficult to think that any significant number of spectators would be able to have a
good enough sight of the inside of the skene door for the scene to make any sense,
especially a scene including a number of actors and dancers.49

A second theory for the staging of the scene without the use of the ekkyklema
has the Erinyes remain completely out of sight until 140ff. One of Taplin’s main
arguments in favour of this option is that Greek choruses consistently enter ‘to the first
song, not before it.’50 However, in order to argue that the chorus remain unseen until
140, one needs to explain Apollo’s reference to the Erinyes, which seems to indicate
clearly someone present, or at least clearly visible to both interlocutors (and the
audience?): καὶ νῦν ἀλούσας τὰς νῦν δάφνες ὑπό τὰς μάργους ὄρας (67).51 The deictic pronoun
and the verb ‘you see’ addressed to a character present on stage with him are almost
impossible to explain as metaphorical (as Taplin wishes to do), and the sense of literal
presence is enhanced by the use of the adverb νῦν. Since Taplin thinks the
transposition of Orestes’ address to the beginning of the scene is not necessary,52 he
suggests that the first time we see Orestes is not as a suppliant the way the Pythia
described him, but rather when he enters in mid-dialogue with Apollo. This would be
an unusual dramatic technique and also creates problems for the ghost scene
immediately following, where Clytemestra’s ghost addresses the Erinyes (94-149). If
we accept this interpretation, then we are left with three options: either the ghost is
simply a voice,53 which leaves us with an empty scene; or the ghost addresses an
invisible audience facing the temple; or even the ghost simply faces the audience while
addressing the absent Erinyes. If, however, the chorus is visible, Clytemestra’s ghost
can simply enter from one of the side-passages and address the sleeping Erinyes.

Finally, West, who also wishes to dispose of the need of the ekkyklema here at
least, offers an appealing theory. He argues that the stage building whose front
represented a palace or temple was originally separate from the backstage area where,

49 West 1990, 267.
50 Taplin 1977, 370.
51 It is possible that Orestes is meant to see them and we are not. If, for example, Orestes and Apollo
enter from the skene (=temple) and Apollo gestures back toward the building or its open door. For
characters referring to things they can see but the audience cannot, cf. the teichoskopia scene in Eur.
Phoen. 88–201, though this differs slightly in that it draws on a long tradition of catalogues and its
Homer model.
52 Cf. p.203.
53 Flickinger 1939, 357-9.
among other things, actors changed and props were kept for the performance. He
suggests instead that initially the representation of a dramatic building was a light,
removable construction, more like a façade with a door (he proposes a canvas stretched
on a wooden frame). If the temple was represented at the opening of the play in this
way, this façade could easily be removed once the Pythia exited to reveal the inside of
the temple. Apart from the complete lack of ancient evidence for this, from drama or
outside of it, this arrangement has practical problems: the process of removing the
façade and the revelation of a whole chorus of twelve asleep on their chairs (and
therefore looking rather unimpressive) would also probably function anti-climactically
after the suspense built in anticipation of the choral entry.

The laborious attempts of scholars to answer the riddle of the parodos of
Eumenides leave us with a number of appealing suggestions and no definitive answers.
Any interpretation largely depends on one’s understanding of the physical
construction of the ancient theatre, for which evidence is extremely slippery, as well
as one’s understanding of Aeschylus’ dramaturgy, his ability to innovate and the
effects he attempts to achieve. On that note, I think that Taplin very insightfully
stresses the ‘gradually mounting, threatening terror and horror’ (the Furies in
Choephori seen only by Orestes, then in Eumenides reflected in the effect they have
on Pythia, and finally some terrifying noises until they finally break onto the stage). I
do, however, think that presenting a small number of the Erinyes asleep on their
chairs, and thus allowing a glimpse only of their very special nature to the audience,
enhances rather than detracts from the effect. They are here now, asleep but
threatening to wake up anytime.

Displaying the Erinyes asleep has clear theatrical advantages. Enacting the
sleep that is there in word as a metaphor for the lateness of the punishment of Orestes

54 Which could ‘simply be carried or wheeled away (perhaps in sections) by stagehands’ (West 1990,
268). Since Greek theatre lacks a proscenium arch or a curtain, the audience would be trained in
ignoring processes that are frequently invisible to the modern audience, such as this described by West
(for the convention see Pickard-Cambridge 1946, 128ff.).
55 Are we to imagine twelve chairs as well, as West’s formulation (1990, 268) seems to imply, which
would also have to be removed once no longer needed?
56 For a detailed analysis of the consistent ‘presence’ of the Erinyes in the course of the trilogy, see
Bakola 2018.
57 Cf. the concluding verses of Choephori: ποί δήτα κρανεί, ποί καταλήξει/ μετακομισθέν μένος
άτης; (1075-6). For sleep in the Oresteia, see Petrounias 1976, 286-9, and more recently Mace 2002
and 2004 (esp. pp.50-9 for Eumenides).
underscores the point. The short speech of Clytemestra’s ghost opens and closes in a ring composition with a reference to the chorus sleeping (94 εὔδοιε τὸν ἁν, ὁ γὰρ καὶ καθευδουσών τί δεῖ; and 116 ὦναρ γὰρ ἕμας νῦν Κλυταιμήστρα καλῶ). Her next question answered by the chorus only with a μυγμός also accentuates the situation through repeated use of words that denote sleep, and indeed in emphatic positions as the first or second word of a verse:

μύζοιτ' ἀν, ἀνήρ δ' οἴχεται φεύγων πρόσφωσ (119)
ἄγαν ὑπνώσσεις κού κατοικτίζεις πάθος (121)
ώξεις, ὑπνώσσεις; οὐκ ἀναστήσῃ τάχος; (124)
ὑπνος πόνος τε κύριοι συνωμόται (127)
ὄναρ διώκεις Ὠσία, […] (131)

The *Eumenides* is a play that constantly blurs the boundaries between metaphor and reality, and previous metaphors evolve into scenic presentation: the hunting down of Orestes, for example, will take on a very physical aspect in the dancing of the chorus closing in on Orestes. Likewise, sleep visualizes the stagnant situation that will change before the eyes of the audience thanks to Clytemestra. This will be Clytemestra’s last act of control – she will be temporarily the *choregos* – very much in tune with her role throughout the trilogy, but also a turning point: she is now a ghost; and the chorus, once awake and let lose, will be out of anyone’s control. The text itself places strong emphasis on ‘sleep’, and thus invites us to consider this as a scene that the audience must have been able to see.

I am therefore inclined to share the view of those scholars who argue for the use of the *ekkyklema* in this scene. In addition to the advantages highlighted above, this solution also accommodates another piece of ancient evidence, the σποράδην entry mentioned in the *Life of Aeschylus*. The lines where the three Erinyes on the *ekkyklema* start waking up one another constitute the signal for the rest of the chorus to break into the orchestra from the side-passages. Thus the audience is doubly surprised. Not only do they now face the full horror of the three Erinyes of which they had previously only caught a glimpse, but the orchestra is unexpectedly flooded with

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58 See pp.212-215.
59 *TrGF* III Test.A.1.31. For the entry of the chorus, and a critique of the reliability of the anecdote, see Taplin 1978, 127.
a group of horrifying figures that dance wildly around. With the audience’s attention firmly focused onto the *ekkyklema*, this would have been an impressive *coup de théâtre*.

**v. An unwanted chorus**

Aeschylus, then, manipulates generic conventions before the *parodos* and builds up anticipation for the entrance of a horrific chorus, an impression fulfilled by their mode of entry and their costumes. The successful staging, however, of the horror of the Erinyes must have left Aeschylus with a potentially very one-sided chorus: how will these horrific beasts interact with the characters of the play? Will their utterances maintain the image created by the Pythia and Apollo before the entrance of the Erinyes? And how do the chorus perceive and present themselves?

Despite the picture of detestable, aggressive beasts conjured up before their entrance, the chorus clearly perceive themselves as the injured party.\(^6^0\) The first strophe of their first song emphatically deplores their suffering, though at first with only a vague reference to a quarry that has escaped (147-8):  

\[
\text{où ioú póπαξ, épáthoméν, phílai,} \\
\text{h̄ πολλা δή παθούσα καὶ µάτην ἕγω.} \\
\text{ἐπάθομεν πάθος δυσαχές, ὦ πόποι,} \\
\text{-ἄφερτον κακόν. (143-6)}
\]

The word *pathos* and its cognates are repeated four times in the first three lines. The chorus not only claim that they are the ones who have suffered injustice, but also describe Apollo as the young god who has ‘trampled under his foot’\(^6^1\) the older goddesses (150 νέος δὲ γαῖας δαίμονας καθιππάσω), who ἄν θεός has snatched from them an impious man who has killed his mother (149-150).\(^6^2\) Unlike Apollo, they express themselves in generalizing terms with a moral veneer (see, *e.g.* σέβων (151), ἄθεον (151), ὀνειδος (155), ἀγος (167), μᾶςματι (169). They twice stress that Apollo behaves in un-godlike manner by supporting Orestes (153 and 171).\(^6^3\) While it

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60 But see below, pp.212 ff. for their beast-like behaviour.
61 For this as a recurrent image in the trilogy, see Lebeck 1971, 38-40 and 74-9.
62 For the Erinyes, Apollo is a ‘thief’ (149 ἐπίκλοπος τίλη, 153 ἔξηκλεψας).
63 But their perspective is biased too, notice especially 171.
may still be hard to sympathize with the Erinyes, the audience is invited to reconsider the unquestionable condemnation of the beast-like chorus, to recognize that every story has two sides, and not jump to hasty conclusions about right and wrong: τί τώνδ’ ἐξεῖ τις δικαίως ἔχειν; (145).

However, choral authority is still limited by the chorus’ initial presentation and their horrific appearance, and is further challenged by Apollo when he describes the Erinyes’ way of distributing justice:

οὕτω δόμοι τοίοθε χρήμπτεσθαι πρέπει ἀλλ’ οὐ καρανιστήρες ὀφθαλμοφύχοι δίκαι σφαγά τε, σπέρματός τε ἀποφθορά παιδόν κακοῦσα χλοῦν, ἦδ’ ἀκρανία λεισμοί τε, καὶ μὺξουσιν οὐκισμόν πολὺν ὑπὸ ῥάχιν παγέντες.[…] (185-90)

and

[…] λέοντος ἄντρον αἰματορόφον οἰκεῖν τιμαύτας εἰκός, οὐ χρηστηρίος ἐν τοίοθε πλησίοις τρίβεσθαι μῦσος. (193-5)

The punishments listed by Apollo would have sounded extreme, barbarian, and alienating to the Greek ear: mutilations, castrations, gouging of eyes and executions by impalement. Such punishments are invariably viewed with disdain or detestation, and Apollo’s condemnation, though violent and threatening, would have been unreservedly shared by the Greek audience. The reference to these savage punishments matches their horrifying appearance and contradicts their self-perception as respectable, righteously angry goddesses.

However, the Erinyes persist on their claim to justice and divine authority and display conduct that aligns them with dramatic choruses with a less exceptional dramatic identity. They address Apollo respectfully (198 ἄναξ Ἀπολλόν), and they

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64 As Athena will also later state, δυοῖν παρόντοιν ἡμισος λόγος πάρα (428).
65 For these punishments as distinctly non-Greek, see Sommerstein 1989, 186-90nn. Cf. p.154 for eunuchs.
66 But see Wilson 2006 for a subtle analysis of the adverbial use of the accusative diken in the Oresteia (frequently used for animals in the trilogy, see pp.189-90) and how this complicates the notion of dike in the trilogy.
67 An address commonly used in tragedy for Apollo (e.g. Aesch. Ag.513; Soph. El.645; OT 203, and gods in general, e.g. Aesch. Pers.762), and is also used by Orestes in the play (85).
claim that it was Apollo’s actions that forced them to come to the temple. Apollo, who wished at first to chase them out of the temple and threatened to kill them if they did not leave, now engages in dialogue with them.

In that way the horrific Erinyes step yet again into their choral role in a manner that is surprising in face of their presentation so far, but also predictable within the conventions of the genre: they engage in dialogue with a major character to disagree with him and argue their case. However, their interaction with Apollo is still exceptional in Apollo’s intense resistance to enter a discussion with them, which comes close only to Eteocles in Seven. But Apollo is much more aggressive in his condemnation of the Erinyes, the effect of which is to grant the chorus authority when they eventually manage to engage the god in dialogue. The chorus also display their choral authority when they manage to dictate the framework in which the issue is discussed and to shift the narrative away from any personal whim or taste, and onto moral stances and laws that the audience could be expected to share:

Orestes is not explicitly mentioned: the chorus wish to punish a matricide, and Apollo to protect a suppliant. Despite the chorus’ displaying a more principled view that we may have been led to expect, the conflict remains unresolved, unlike other scenes of heated debate between the chorus and a character, where conflicts are settled.

In their interaction with Apollo the Erinyes, therefore, appear to perceive themselves at least as equals, and to think of Apollo as the one who has contravened divine laws of morality and justice. This is part of Aeschylus’ strategy to maintain a tense balance in the presentation of the chorus. At one level it is difficult for the audience to overlook their horrific appearance. On the other hand, the chorus often

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68 […] οὐ μεταίτιος […] παναίτιος. (199f.)
69 See, e.g., the chorus of Seven (202) once they settle after their panicked entrance.
70 Later, Orestes too will refuse to interact with the Erinyes, see below p.215.
71 Even when the confrontation takes place early in the play, as is the case with Seven; differently to Eumenides, the chorus there finally complies to Eteocles’ advice, and the play moves on.
speak rationally and they never stop insisting on principles of justice as well as specifically on the justice of their case. Their adversary for a good part of the play is Apollo, a god who consistently treats them with contempt and behaves in an equally inflexible way in his attempt to defend his protégé Orestes. These antitheses played out in word, action, and image are viewed against a background of complex and often conflicting moral principles: murder of one’s kin, pollution and purity, loyalty to family and the city. More importantly, the fact that the Erinyes are chthonic goddesses brings into play a complex network of cultic and moral codes, where fear, anger and wish for revenge are partly seen as healthy social attitudes. 

The Erinyes are, therefore, in the first part of the play a source of paralyzing fear for the Pythia, and an object of contempt for Apollo. As we noted above, choruses can cause problems or bring disorder and anxiety into the play (cf. e.g. Suppliants or Seven), and therefore be abused or subjected to criticism by other characters, but there is not a single instance elsewhere in surviving tragedy where the chorus is given so much bad publicity before the audience even sees it. Though audience’s sympathies can shift several times in the course of the play, the initial presentation of the Furies by the Pythia, who has been presented as a dependable source, and Apollo, who, even if biased, is nonetheless an Olympian god, must have rendered the identification of the audience with them problematic, or at least a complex and strained process. Their complicity with Clytemestra, who has been presented negatively throughout the trilogy, must have enhanced this effect. On the other hand, their attempts at rational interaction with the characters of the play, the respect they display towards a major Olympian god and their appeal to universally accepted principles of justice, which is inextricably related to their nature as chthonic goddesses, counterbalance their negative presentation and reflect the tense equilibrium between fear and useful social directives. While the Erinyes are still in Delphi, any viable solution seems too far removed.

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72 The ability of Erinyes to cause fear is exactly the element that will prove in the end useful for society, see below pp.218ff.
vi. Second parodos: enter the hounds?

The exit of the chorus during the play, though a technique employed very rarely in tragedy,⁷³ is well-embedded in the plot, since Apollo had already ordered the chorus out of his temple and the Erinyes have set themselves the task of tracking down Orestes. Their final lines before their exit continue the hunting metaphor that they used for Orestes right from the start,⁷⁴ and create a very tight link with their arrival at Athens. The chorus of Eumenides first entered in a striking way, and their move to Athens continues their peculiar relation with theatrical space. After their first ‘entry’, the chorus were awoken by Clytemestra’s ghost, sang their first song (143-77) and after an altercation with Apollo (179-228), they announced their determination to hunt down and punish Orestes (230-1, quoted in previous page), and left the orchestra.

The animal and hunting metaphors that punctuate the trilogy are now solidified in a chorus that comes physically as near to a beast as possible. On the other hand, this second entry is in a sense the proper parodos of the chorus,⁷⁵ since it signifies the proper beginning of the Erinyes’ choral role. First in terms of choral movement. The chorus must have entered the orchestra somewhere between 244 and 253⁷⁶ and while the koryphaios speaks 244-53, the rest of the chorus sniff around in search of Orestes.⁷⁷ The following astrophic song is possibly split between different sections of the chorus or even individual chorus members,⁷⁸ rather than sung by the chorus in unison.⁷⁹ Despite these peculiarities,⁸⁰ this entrance would still be much more regular than the first parodos of a sleeping chorus that wakes up one another, or even one whose part is first seen on an ekklyklema.⁸¹ The second, and more important, reason that makes this second parodos the starting point of the chorus’ choral role is that,

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⁷³ See p.91, n.270.
⁷⁴ For the complex network of animal imagery and hunting in the Oresteia, see, e.g. Heath 1999 (pp.32-47 for Eumenides); Vidal-Naquet 1988, esp.pp.156-9 for Eumenides. Also Lebeck 1971, 15-16, 66-7, 132.
⁷⁵ Contra Taplin 1977, 379n.1, who dismisses the discussion about which parodos is the real one.
⁷⁶ Sommerstein (1989, 253n.) seems to have them enter gradually from 243 to 253, but I do not think that the imperative ἕπου at 245 is reason enough to assume that only the koryphaios is in the orchestra at this point and speaks 244 before he calls into the orchestra the rest of the chorus. Sommerstein 2008 has the whole chorus enter at 244.
⁷⁷ Podlecki 1989, 244n.; Sommerstein 1989, 253n.; also Taplin 1977, 379.
⁷⁸ Argued in detail by Scott 1984, 162-4, and accepted by Sommerstein 1989, 253n.; thus also Taplin 1977, 379.
⁷⁹ Podlecki 1989, 244n. has the whole chorus sing together.
⁸⁰ For irregular choral formation during other epiparodoi, see Taplin 1978, 379.
⁸¹ See pp.202ff.
once the chorus enter into Athens, they will remain onstage for the duration of the play, as a chorus is expected to do. This time, the chorus will not be trespassers, but will be met with respect by Athena, the sovereign of the place, and thus will contribute to the creation of the social space where the drama will be played out. In Athens the possibility will start to emerge that the Erinyes may eventually find a place willing to accept them. The chorus themselves signal the transition with the very first word of the second parodos: εἰέν (244) ‘so far, so good’, a particle used to denote the transition to a new point.⁸²

We are now in Athens.⁸³ And the chorus, in a familiar choral move, explains the reason for their entry, which is, however, a highly unusual one ‒ they are following a trail of blood!

εἰέν· τόδ’ ἐστὶ τάνδρός ἐκφανές τέκμαρ,
ἔποιεν δὲ μηνυτήρος αφθέγγετο φραδαίς.
τετραυματισμένον γάρ ὡς κύων νεβρόν
πρὸς αἷμα καὶ σταλαγμόν ἐκματέλεμεν. (244-7)

The uniquely bestial and blood-thirsty nature of the chorus is further emphasized in the passage through the high concentration of words pertaining to raw, physical violence, both in the opening trimeters (246-9 τετραυματισμένον, αἷμα καὶ σταλαγμόν, ἀνδροκίμησι φυσιὰ σπλάγχνον) and in the following song, where the tempo is heightened with the predominance of dochiacis, a metre used to denote intense emotions and agitation (256 ματροφόνος, 260-2 αἷμα μητρῷον [...]τὸ διερὸν πέδοι χύμενον, 264-6 σ’ ἀπὸ ζώντος ὄσφειν/ ἐρυθρὸν ἐκ μελέων πέλανον ἀπὸ δὲ σοῦ/ βοσκάν φεροίμαν πῶματος δυσπότου, 267 ζώντα σ’ ἱσχνάνασ’, 268 ματροφόντας).

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⁸² Sommerstein 1989, ad loc.
⁸³ ‘One cannot say anything more specific than ‘Athens’ (Sommerstein 1989, 123); I would add, one need not say anything more specific. Of importance is not what distinguishes the two places – the Areopagus, where the trial takes place and the temple of Athena, where Orestes now supplicates – but rather what connects them, namely that they are both in Athens and under the aegis of Athena.
⁸⁴ This describes the physical exertion of the Erinyes themselves, but with an ominous mention of internal organs (σπλάγχνα) and use of the ambiguous ἀνδροκιμήσι (‘man-wearying’, but also ‘man-slaying’).
⁸⁵ See p.45.
However, the passage is also punctuated by legal vocabulary (244 τέκμαρ, 245 μηνυτήρος [...], 251 διώκουσ(α), 256 λάθη φύγαδα βάς [ό] ματροφόνος ἀτίτας, 260 ὑπόδικος θέλει γενέσθαι χεφών, 87 264 ἀντιδούναι, 268 ἀντιποίνους τίνης, 272 τῆς δίκης ἐπάξια, 273 εὐθυνος), which reminds us that the Erinyes’ pursuit of Orestes also has a rational aspect of accountability and retributive justice of cosmic dimensions. 88

The tense balance between rational argumentation and desire for uncontrollable, violent action reflects the inherent ambiguity in the nature of the Erinyes. 89 Though they feel a righteous wrath for spilt human blood, they also have a disconcerting thirst for more blood. In their understanding of justice every punishment is inevitably a new crime, and this is a paradox at the very heart of the system they embody. While the Erinyes, as shown above, perceive of themselves as ancient goddesses worthy of respect, the characters who have encountered them paint a very different picture, drawing attention to their horrific, monster-like nature. 91 Apollo explicitly calls them ‘beasts’ (80 κανώδαλα) 92 and sends them away from Delphi as a ‘herd without herdsman’ (196-7). Their song upon their second entrance visualizes vividly this aspect. The animal imagery, overwhelming in this passage, has been prominent in the previous plays of the trilogy and emerged in the Delphic scenes in the opening of this play as well, when the Erinyes assumed the role of the dogs that hunt down Orestes.

This horrible, dangerous deposit of destructive powers is what pushes the play forward. But so is the righteousness of the Erinyes’ demand to avenge murder, which is underscored by their use of legal language and their self-perception as respectable goddesses. Since Apollo is an equally powerful adversary, we are presented with a

87 For this writing, see Sommerstein 1989, ad loc.
88 Cf. 275, where Hades is ‘keeping a record’ (δελτογράφῳ) of human conduct.
89 Cf. also the rest of their song before the ‘binding hymn’ (307ff.).
90 Viewed as a fearsome, irreversible evil in the course of the trilogy (Lebeck 1971, ch.8).
91 See Wilson (2006, 190-5) for κυνός δίκην in the Oresteia, and the echo of ‘justice’ in the adverbial use of δίκην.
92 At 644 Apollo uses the term again. While the word is used as an insult in satyr drama and comedy, it is much more than an indication of Apollo’s indignation caused by the argument that the Erinyes make at 640-3 (thus interpreted by Sommerstein (1989, ad loc.), who notes that this is the only instance in tragedy where a character is addressed as ‘beast’). The term is especially loaded here as the Erinyes are literary ‘beasts, neither human nor divine: ‘the θάνη of the Furies emphasizes the fact that they have never yet been seen by any spectator in any theatre’ (Prins 1991, 179).
socially explosive situation. No solution is at sight at this point, and a new force, Athena,\textsuperscript{93} as well as a new location,\textsuperscript{94} will be required to settle the matter.

vii. Choral authority: the chorus in Athens

In Athens, convinced he has been successfully purified (276-98), Orestes refuses to interact with the chorus. The Erinyes perceive his silence as an insult and resort to the employment of their magical powers:

\begin{verbatim}
οὐδ’ ἀντιφωνεῖς, ἀλλ’ ἀποπτύεις λόγους
emspoi ἑραφεῖς τε καὶ καθεφομένος:
kai έξον με δαίσεις οὐδὲ πρὸς βωμῷ σφαγεῖς·
ύμνον δ' ἀκούση τόνδε δέσμιον σέθεν. (303-6)
\end{verbatim}

The proem of their δέσμιος ύμνος is the first explicit reference to the choral role of the chorus (ἀγε δή καὶ χορὸν ἄψωμεν 307),\textsuperscript{95} and a programmatic statement of their divine function as avengers of homicide (312-20).\textsuperscript{96} It succinctly captures the role of the Erinyes. They are the chorus of the play in terms of generic convention, but they are also goddesses in terms of their dramatic identity. Similarly to the second parodos, the cruel savagery with which they threaten to eat Orestes alive (305) punctuates the song, but so do words relating to law and justice. Yet again the chorus clashes with the protagonist and the action seems unable to move forward.

The menacing standstill is interrupted by the arrival of Athena, who enters at 397. Athena is the first major character in the play who is not implicated in the family history, and therefore not \textit{a priori} associated either with Orestes or the chorus:

\begin{verbatim}
tίνες ποτ' ἐστε; πᾶσι δ' ἐς κοινὸν λέγω (408)
\end{verbatim}

And, while she recognizes that the chorus does not look like anything she has seen before (411-12), she states clearly that the spectacle intrigues her, but does not terrify

\textsuperscript{93} See following section. Cf. Zeitlin 1990 for Athens as a place of resolution.
\textsuperscript{94} Argos has failed to provide a solution in the two previous plays (see also next note).
\textsuperscript{95} For the choral self-referentiality of the scene, see Henrichs 1994, 61-5, who comments on the chorus here ‘combining the two basic modes of choral performance (khōros 307, mousa 308), the song (humnos 306, 331, 344) as well as the dance (orkhēsmoi 370), in an agitated display of ritualized violence’ (p.61).
\textsuperscript{96} Notice that the Erinyes allude to homicide in terms vague enough to have a wider appeal (Sommerstein 1989, 310-11n.).
her (407). She also explicitly refrains from jumping to conclusions about the chorus based on their looks only, since she thinks it unjust and inappropriate to criticise anyone who has done no harm:

λέγειν δ’ ἀμομφον ὄντα τοὺς πέλας κακῶς
πρόσω δικαίων ἥδ’ ἀποστατεῖ θέμις. (406-414)

Questions about their identity are often posed to newcomers in tragedy. However, there is more at work here than generic convention. Both Orestes and the chorus are already well-known to the audience in this tragedy, and Athena, being a goddess, could be aware of their identity already, as is, for example, Apollo at Delphi.97 Athena’s questions therefore invite a new answer, a new definition of who the Erinyes are and therefore mark a new beginning for the play. Athena’s conciliatory attitude is in marked contrast to that of Apollo in particular, who treated the chorus with contempt and disgust, and for the first time the Erinyes are invited to present themselves to an eager listener.

Athena’s stance towards the chorus is significant for our perception of them, due to the authority with which the goddess is invested. While she displays a firm determination to protect Athens, she is not willing to do so at the expense of justice. After a series of characters in this and the previous plays that were blindly tied to their own perception of justice,98 Athena is firm, yet flexible, just, but also practical in her need to protect Athens from the harm with which the Erinyes threaten it. Confronted with such a figure, the threatening ways of the Erinyes may seem more pronounced and less viable. On the other hand, the sensible and respectful Athena immediately recognises the chorus as an equal interlocutor and this radically redefines the framework within which the matter will be settled. Her just nature paired with her practical sense is a new model, and it will prove invaluable in channelling the powers of the Erinyes into a constructive, rather than a destructive route.99

Importantly, Athena is throughout fully aware of the attributes and the powers of the Erinyes that the chorus perceived as their means of securing a rightful claim to

98 Apollo in this play, as well as Electra and the chorus in Choephoroi, endorse matricide to avenge Agamemnon; Clytemestra killed her husband and expelled her son to secure her own place in the palace. Rabinowitz 1981.
justice. The Erinyes themselves recognise their changed position, and within forty lines from Athena’s entrance, they entrust the final decision about Orestes to her:

Athena’s acknowledgment of the power of the Erinyes and her willingness to accept their authority turns the focus to the political and moral aspects of Orestes’ case and change radically the power balance among the characters. In the first part of the play, despite their apparent control of the etiquette of tragic interaction, the chorus remained socially excluded. At Athens, on the other hand, away from the claustrophobic atmosphere or Argos, no character was on stage to oppose them, other than Orestes, who at this point was a vulnerable quarry. While one should constantly keep in mind the horrifying visual aspect that is only verbally there for us when reading the text, their immediate dominance of the stage upon their second entrance brings out two important functions of the chorus: the Erinyes establish the continuity of the play, since they are from the start an important string that runs through every single moment of the play; Orestes’ position, albeit prominent, is much less central to the preoccupations of the play (and fades completely once his fate has been decided at the trial); the chorus, on the other hand, are the collective element that claims and finally gets a place, creating in this process a very specific social context that encompasses an array of public spaces.

The stance of the characters towards the chorus is a major factor for our perception of the chorus, as has been often repeated in this thesis. Additionally, for this chorus in particular one should also keep in mind the ancient audience’s conception of a god’s ability (and right) to cause fear, as well as the readiness of the Greeks to accept supernatural phenomena. Fear of punishment was inscribed in the way the Greeks perceived their relationship with the gods. The words of a fearful divinity were not automatically less authoritative, right, or credible; perhaps even quite the contrary. The Erinyes have been a constant presence in the trilogy and were consistently associated with justice, even if of an ambiguous, or flawed nature. This does not make their presence more attractive, but it does complicate the associations they bear and undermines any simple emotional reaction. Justice is a desideratum in
the trilogy from the start, and the Erinyes personify already from *Agamemnon* the discomforting, yet necessary and unabated desire to set things right.

In other words, the Erinyes have a great power that directly threatens the world of the tragedy, but at the same time they stand for something that is essential to the world of the play. This feature is unique among surviving tragic choruses. That they demand justice, even if of their own unviable way, makes them in a sense indispensable, and distinguishes them from other choruses that may possess power, but of a clearly negative sort. One thinks here, for example, of Aeschylus’ *Egyptians*, who, if they indeed constituted the chorus of the play, would be perhaps as threatening, but straightforwardly negative.

**viii. The play after the Trial: Athens and the Erinyes**

With the conclusion of the trial, the case is settled for Orestes and the Atreidai, and the *genos*-part of the trilogy is thus completed. Orestes welcomes the outcome of the deliberation and departs,\(^{100}\) probably accompanied by Apollo.\(^{101}\) Unlike Orestes, who is satisfied with the verdict, the Erinyes feel insulted and dishonoured, and their savage, revengeful nature — temporarily appeased by Athena — now returns. The reaction of the Erinyes will initiate a new phase of the crisis that will need to be settled by the end of the play.\(^{102}\) They threaten to inflict upon Athens a plague that will make the land infertile:

\[
\text{ἐν γὰ τάδε, φεύ,}
\text{iὸν ἰὸν ἀντιπένθη μεθείσα καρδίας}
\text{σταλαγμόν χθονι}
\text{ἄφροσον ἐκ δὲ τοῦ}
\text{λειχήν ἄφυλλος ἄτεκνος, ἰὸ δίκα,}
\text{πέδον ἐπισύμενος}
\text{βροσοφθόρους κηλίδας ἐν χώρᾳ [βαλεί]. (781-7=811-16)}
\]

\(^{100}\) ‘His part is played; the ‘Oresteia’ is over’ (Taplin 1977, 402).

\(^{101}\) For the silent exit of Apollo (quite unusual for a major character), with references to the possibility of textual corruption, see Taplin 1977, 403-6. But Apollo was throughout the play a supporter of Orestes, so he may have exited silently with him.

\(^{102}\) It is not unusual for Aeschylus to end the play in long lyric structures, but this comes usually as the conclusion of the play, and not as a new beginning (Taplin 1977, 409). Taplin also notes (p.407) the startling reversal of the usual pattern found in suppliant plays, where the pursuer is the one who is sent away, while in *Eumenides* the Erinyes remain.
In the epirrhematic exchange between Athena and the Erinyes, their intransigent nature is emphasized by the verbatim repetition of their part twice (778-792=808-822). This repetition is unique in surviving tragedy. Repetition of whole stanzas are only found in tragedy in refrains, not, as here, in place of an answer within an epirrhematic sequence. The Erinyes retreat again to a model of action that threatens Athens and precludes any peaceful integration of the Erinyes. This attitude has been present throughout the play, but was so far sidelined by the more pressing need for a verdict on Orestes’ act. The goddess will fight this fight for the Athenians ‘solely with the weapons of persuasion’ and will eventually tame the chorus with her unrivalled rhetorical technique, interspersed with eulogizing utterances for the city of Athens (852ff.). Athena promises the Erinyes a highly honourable position in the polis, but the turning point seems to be her claim that whether the Erinyes decide to go or stay, it would be unjust to curse the city. For the first time after the trial, the Erinyes now engage in dialogue with Athena (892-915), and by the end of it, Athena has managed to turn them once again away from their personal, revengeful manner to a proper choral one. They now sing in alternation with Athena of divine blessings and a happy future for Athens, and come closer than any other instance in the trilogy to a civic chorus singing for a happy occasion of the community. The transformation of the Erinyes from stubbornly intransigent creatures to a functional civic chorus within the play and their future ability to grant blessings to Athens is apparent also at 1014: the two final strophes sung by the Erinyes (and each followed by a strophe sung by Athena in the same spirit) are in a celebratory tone and start with the words <χαίρετε, χαίρετε ἐν αἰσθήμασι πλούτου (996) and the second one similarly with χαίρετε, χαίρετε δ’ αὖθις, ἐπεὶ διπλοίζω (1014, Athena returns a χαίρετε χύμεις at 1003); the chorus that refused to listen to Athena’s words a few lines earlier and stubbornly sung their refusal twice in exactly the same words, now employ repetition in a positive

103 Sommerstein 1998, 240. The veiled threat of the thunderbolt (827-8) is no doubt one of those weapons.
104 There are few, if any, instances in surviving Greek tragedy where such a dangerous crisis is averted solely through persuasion (cf. Dhuga 2011, 47), and one might be here inclined to think that this conclusion would leave the Athenian audience feeling proud of its city and its tutelary goddess.
105 For an accurate and dense description of the process taking place in this scene see Sommerstein 1989, 240.
106 οὐ τάν δικαίως τῇ ἐπιφρέσκοι πώλει/, μην τιν’ ἢ γόπον τιν’ ἢ βλάβην στρατῷ (888f.).
107 Swift (2010, 166-7) draws attention to the play’s use of athletic language and points out that victory is taking on a positive meaning at the end of the trilogy.
statement that has the sound of ritual incantation to it, an impression enhanced by the fact that it is sung by a divine chorus.

This uniquely inclusive conclusion recognizes the usefulness of fear as a deterrent for delinquency and thus incorporates the power of the gruesome goddesses into the social fabric. The effect of celebration that expands outside the dramatic context to become a celebration of the community and its conception of justice and the judicial system is enhanced by the introduction of a secondary chorus.

The secondary chorus

In this section I will address the issue of the secondary chorus and will analyse how its presence and identity ties in with presentation of the main chorus and ultimately with the preoccupations of the play and the trilogy as a whole.

The final lines of the play (1032-47) are attributed to the προπομποί by most modern editors, who rightly accept that the lines are sung by a subsidiary chorus,¹⁰⁸ and not by the main one.¹⁰⁹ However, as has been rightly noted, the word denotes the function of the group in the play, but reveals little about their identity. In other words, these are the people who accompany the Erinyes in the procession, but who are they precisely?¹¹⁰

Following a suggestion made by Hermann,¹¹¹ Taplin points to references to the jurors made since they entered at 566 and argues that the propompoi mentioned on 1005 (τῶνδε προπομπῶν) are simply the jurors, and that they constitute the secondary chorus, which sings the final words of the play. The proposition to employ persons already onstage as the secondary chorus is appealing on two grounds. First, it eliminates the need to bring on stage a second chorus, which is an economical solution for the production and its costs;¹¹² and second, the jurors have become in the play ‘the fathers of Athenian justice’,¹¹³ and their joint exit with the Erinyes would thus ideally

¹⁰⁸ For the manuscript readings, see West 1990, 292-3.
¹⁰⁹ This is proved by the repeated addresses to the Erinyes.
¹¹⁰West 1990, 293.
¹¹²Taplin 1977, 411 and 412 respectively.
¹¹³Taplin 1977, 411.
enact the integration of the Erinyes into the Athenian polis,\textsuperscript{114} and the success of Athena’s final solution that unites in a viable scheme the human jurors of the Areopagus and the Erinyes as divine agents.

Despite its merits, this suggestion stumbles on a number of points in the text, in particular the mention of Athena’s female temple-servants that, she says, will join her in escorting the Erinyes to their new, rightful place:

\[
\text{πέμψω τε φέγγει λαμπάδων σελασφόρων}
\]
\[
\text{ἐς τοὺς ἔνερθε καὶ κατὰ χθονὸς τόπους}
\]
\[
\text{ξὺν προσπόλοισιν αἴτε φρουροῦσιν βρέτας}
\]
\[
\text{τούμον, δικαίως.} \quad (1022-5)
\]

The mention of the female πρόσπολοι at 1024 has been interpreted as a clear indication for the presence of a group of females that will take part in the final procession. Taplin opposes this suggestion on two grounds: first, that we would expect a secondary chorus to receive a proper introduction, and second that Athena’s announcement of the sacred procession need not necessarily mean that everything she mentions can be seen onstage.\textsuperscript{115} However, as pointed out by Taplin himself, evidence for the introduction of secondary chorus is scanty and inconsistent, while it is quite difficult to see how Athena’s reference to the procession refers to anything other than the procession that takes place at the end of the play. If no procession was enacted within the drama, one could argue that she refers to a future action happening after the end of the tragedy, but it would create an odd mismatch of word and action to describe one sort of procession and enact a different one. Such an inconsistency is easily avoided by bringing onstage the temple-servants mentioned by Athena. The presence of a newly arrived group of female temple-slaves\textsuperscript{116} presents the additional advantage that they could have brought with them a number of props that are mentioned from

\textsuperscript{114} Another problem in these final lines are the ‘special robes dyed with purple’ of 1028 (transl. Sommerstein); the condition of the text does not allow us to know who wore the red robes. In general, however, red robes are associated with cult and sacrificial processions, and we know that they were worn by metics. It is an interesting hypothesis that the Erinyes, still wearing their horrible masks, now put on the red robes and find their place as dwellers of Athens (Taplin 1977, 413).

\textsuperscript{115} Taplin 1977, 412.

\textsuperscript{116} The natural point for their entry is 1005, as conceded even by Taplin (1977, 411) who rejects their presence altogether.
1005 onwards (animals, torches and purple robes),\textsuperscript{117} which eliminates the need for stagehands to carry them and contributes to the ritual feel of the scene.

In conclusion, the text seems to be clearly indicating the presence of the female temple-slaves, so one can accept that it is them who sing the final lines. At the same time, Taplin is right to think that the προπομποί mentioned at 1005 are the jurors. The most sensible solution then seems to be West’s who has the female temple-slaves sing the final lines, and in his edition prints νεωκόροι rather than προπομποί as the speakers of 1032f., thus clarifying their role.\textsuperscript{118}

The relentless, savage pursuit of the Erinyes is now canonized in a formal, socially and religiously endorsed πομπή (1034).\textsuperscript{119} Their horrifying nature is still present and visible to the audience, but from now on it will serve the common good as Athena nicely summarizes, reminding the modern reader of the crucial visual aspect of an ancient tragedy:

\begin{quote}
\textit{ἐκ τῶν φοβερῶν τῶν διπερσώπων}
\textit{μέγα κέρδος ὁ τοῖς πολίταις·} (990-1)
\end{quote}

\section*{ix. Conclusion}

Our analysis of the chorus of \textit{Eumenides} has highlighted the unique complexity of this chorus. They are horrible, old παῖδες, an unattractive and unwelcome chorus that cause horror and disgust to anyone who comes near them, that, unlike any other chorus, snore on stage, hunt down their victim as if he was an animal and choose as their choral mode an apocryphal magic ritual, δέσμιος ὕμνος; they rightfully seek to avenge murder, but do so in a way too savage to be comfortably accommodated within the life of a community; as goddesses, they possess great powers of destruction, but also a great capacity to bless the people and the city if so they wish.

Despite these contradictions, both their generic role as the chorus of the play and their divine nature gives them access to a moral authority and allows them

\textsuperscript{117} Sommerstein 1989, 276-7.
\textsuperscript{118} West 1990.
\textsuperscript{119} Taplin 1977, 415.
eventually to be tamed into a positive force of dominant importance for the life of the polis. The position of the play as the final part of a trilogy is significant in this evolution of the chorus: the silenced anger of the chorus of *Agamemnon* has turned into a blind desire for revenge by the start of *Choephori* and the chorus’ feelings can only find an outlet through the actions of Orestes. The desire (and necessity) for revenge finally reaches its peak in *Eumenides* and both the house of the Atreidai and the city of Argos are trapped in a cycle of bloody vendetta. The move of the play to Athens and the presence of the firm, yet conciliatory, Athena allows the gradual change in the choral mood, and the eventual transformation of the chorus from the embodiment of the vendetta into a civic chorus celebrating the integration of crucial moral principles into the regulated justice of the polis.
C. Prometheus Bound: a divine maiden-chorus

The chorus of Prometheus Bound adds invaluable evidence to this chapter, despite its disputed authenticity, for two reasons: first, it is one of the only two surviving dramas featuring a divine chorus, and since the evidence is so slim, one cannot afford to disregard it; second, this divine chorus conforms much closer than Eumenides to what I strongly believe to have been the predominant type of divine chorus in Attic drama overall.

i. A divine entrance

After Hephaestus, accompanied by Kratos and Bia, fastens Prometheus onto the rock, Prometheus is left alone onstage, tied and unable to move. While he is in the process of delivering a rhesis deploring his sufferings and enumerating his benefactions to humanity, he is interrupted by a sudden noise and an unexpected scent:

τίς ἂχω, τίς ὀδὴ προσέπτη μ' ἀφεγγής,
θεοσυντος, ἢ βρότειος, ἢ κεκραμένη;
[…]
φεὺ φεὖ, τί ποτ' αὐ τινάθισσα κήλω
πέλας οἰωνῶν; αἰθὴ δ' ἐλαφραῖς
πτερύγων ὑποσυρίζει. (115-16 and 124-6)

120 I believe, with the majority of scholars, that the play has been persuasively shown to be of non-Aeschylean authorship. Though never doubted in antiquity, the authenticity of Prometheus was first questioned by Westphal in 1856, but his thesis found little support until 1977, when Griffith argued on a range of grounds for a non-Aeschylean authorship. His study resulted in a hesitant consensus on the non-Aeschylean authorship of the play. Studies rejecting the authenticity are West 1979 (who suggests that the play and its trilogy was the work of Aeschylus’ son Euphorion); Bees 1993; Lefèvre 2003. So inclined is also Taplin (1977 pp.240-75 and appendix). A smaller number of scholars, however, argue that, on present evidence and given the low percentage of Aeschylus’ work that survives, one cannot be certain that the special features of the play are anything more than a variation in Aeschylus’ technique. See, e.g., Herington 1970; Pattoni 1987 (mainly on metrical grounds) and Podlecki (2005, 192-200); Lloyd-Jones (2002, 19 and 2003, 70) expresses tentatively his inclination to accept the Aeschylean authorship. Winnington-Ingram (1983, 175-6), who seems to doubt the Aeschylean authorship of the play, is, I think, apposite: ‘For un-Aeschylean features it is often possible to think up explanations: as they multiply, the question arises in the mind how many special hypotheses one should allow oneself!’

121 It is possible that the presentation of its chorus may have drawn on Aeschylean choral practice, given that the play, even if not Aeschylean, has been heavily influenced by Aeschylus.
The announcement of the chorus by Prometheus is longer than most chorus announcements and its metre distinctive.¹²² This emphasizes the helplessness and confessed fear of Prometheus,¹²³ and explains in a naturalistic touch his inability to perceive the chorus with senses other than sight since he is tied to the rock. At the same time, however, as we will see below, Prometheus’ announcement of the choral entrance is reminiscent of divine epiphanies,¹²⁴ and thus apposite to the parodos of a divine chorus. In other cases in surviving tragedy where a character notices the chorus before they are fully within the orchestra, it is always the case that they have seen them approach, rather than heard, let alone smelled them.¹²⁵

While the supernatural identity of the approaching chorus emerges from Prometheus’ words, the exact nature of the parodos is not easy to determine. While repeated references to flying and wings by Prometheus (see 123-5, quoted above), by the chorus (128-130; 279-81) and by their father Oceanus (286-7; 395) indicate clearly that the chorus and Oceanus travelled (and therefore entered?) in some sort of winged vehicle,¹²⁶ the chorus are strikingly absent in the scene (284-396) following the entry of Oceanus at 284. How and when do the chorus then become visible to the audience and when do they take their place in the orchestra, if they do not enter into it straightaway?¹²⁷

Some scholars have taken the mention of winged vehicles at face value and suggested that all or part of the chorus are mounted on smaller cars or a bigger one, which is rolled into the orchestra possibly by other members of the chorus,¹²⁸ or that the mechane was used to lift a big car carrying the chorus somewhere above and behind Prometheus,¹²⁹ or that this big car, or the separate smaller cars, were rolled

¹²³ παν μοι φοβερὸν τὸ προσέρπον (127), possibly with an allusion to another important element of the myth, that of the eagle eating his liver.
¹²⁴ See below, pp.226f.
¹²⁵ Cf. p.90 and p.200 for Choephoroi and Eumenides respectively.
¹²⁶ For the scholiast the swift-winged (286), four-legged (395) bird is a griffin (Σ PV284a Herington). Sommerstein (2008, 1:475n.30) agrees with the scholiast, but Griffith (1983, 286n.) suggests that Oceanus may have ridden on a sea-horse or his chariot may have been drawn by a winged horse. For individual vehicles for the Oceanids, see Taplin 1977, 252 with further references.
¹²⁷ For a survey of the different possibilities of staging of the parodos, see Taplin 1977, 252-60 and Griffith 1983, 109.
¹²⁹ This would probably be above the mechanical capabilities of fifth-century Attic theatre, see Griffith 1983, 109 and Taplin 1977, 254.
onto the roof top of the stage building. Others have preferred to leave more to the audience’s imagination and have the chorus simply dance into the orchestra pretending that they are flying mounted on sea-creatures or winged little cars. Taplin is apposite when he points out that there is ‘little point in half measures’ in this case: we need to either opt for an extravaganza of water nymphs on flying cars; or we need to trust that a successful spectacle can be achieved through a combination of enacting of flying and the eager imagination of the audience.

I therefore think that the mechane and the vehicle needs to be reserved for the entrance of the Oceanus. This leaves us with one of two solutions, both of which would provide the impressive opening we are led to expect and are compatible with the text and the physical resources of the Theatre of Dionysus. First, the chorus enters onto the skene roof-top on foot imitating a flying movement and has an exchange with Prometheus, and then they are briefly removed from the view of the audience when they accept Prometheus’ invitation to come down to earth (272 and 279-80) until they enter at 397 from one of the side entrances. This solution accommodates the references to flying, to a place high above whence the chorus descend, and the absence of the chorus from the Oceanus scene. The second solution is to simply have the chorus enter into the orchestra at 127 on foot imitating a flying movement, perhaps nest around the orchestra during the Oceanus scene and stand up to dance again after Oceanus exit at 397. If we suppose in addition that the vehicle carrying Oceanus is resting on the skene roof while the Oceanides enter flying into the orchestra this could explain the complete lack of interaction between father and daughters, since it means that they have arrived together.

Irrespective of how one decides on the manner of entry, however, a flying chorus is not found elsewhere in surviving tragedy. It is used to create a composite expression of the superhuman as it is combined with another element that warns the

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130 Griffith (1983, 109) finds the last solution to be the most economical one, and suggests that the chorus remain onto the stage building until, upon Prometheus’ request, they descend towards the orchestra (272ff.), which also explains in his view why the chorus does not take part in the Oceanus scene. Sommerstein (2008, 1:458 n.17) too thinks that rolling out the car onto the roof ‘makes better sense of 277-83’. I find that the practical difficulties of this cumbersome solution are curiously ignored by both scholars.

131 Thomson 1932, 130n.


133 In Aristophanes’ Clouds flying is of course also part of the chorus’ supernatural persona (see 266, 277-81, 289-90; 323; they are described as σμῆνος by Socrates (297).
tied Prometheus of the approaching chorus, that is a smell, an ὀdsn (115).\textsuperscript{134} This is in line with other instances where the presence of a god is to be inferred by signs such as a smell or a musical sound (cf. Call. fr.227 Pfeiffer; Hymn 2.1-7, Eur. Ba.589-93 and Hipp.1391-2).\textsuperscript{135} When Prometheus first perceives the chorus, they are (still) ἀφεγγής (115) to him, and while they will appear to him and to the audience in a moment, perhaps the emphasis on him ‘sensing’, rather than seeing, the chorus, is meant to remind the audience of other divine epiphanies.\textsuperscript{136}

**ii. Human Maiden Choruses**

If the exotic entrance and the anxiety of Prometheus seem designed to stress the divine status of the chorus, other aspects of their identity and treatment point to characteristics usually expected from young, unmarried females both in real-life and in tragedy. The Oceanides refer to the need to have the permission of their father in order to get out of their cave and visit Prometheus (130-1), and they have come accompanied by their father, since maidens are not supposed to frequent public places without good reason by themselves.\textsuperscript{137}

\[\text{προσέβα τόνδε πάγων, πατρώς μόγις παρειπούσα φρένας (130-1)}\]

For Prometheus the chorus are also largely defined by their parentage:

\[\text{τῆς πολυτέκνου Τηθύως ἐκγόνα, τοῦ περὶ πᾶσαν θ' εἰλισσομένου χθόν' ἀκομμίτῳ ἑνύματι παῖδες πατρός Ὀκεανοῦ (137-40)}\]

Blood ties are not present in non-mythic maiden choruses in tragedy, but in this play they are thematically relevant for a number of reasons: the origins of the Oceanids

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{134} Quoted on p.224.
\item \textsuperscript{135} Barrett (1964, 1392n.) referencing Fraenkel; also Eur. Hipp.1283, where Artemis is probably appearing at height, above the house, and is therefore not visible to the hero, but only to the audience (Barrett 1964, 1283n.).
\item \textsuperscript{136} For the possibility of a different kind of ‘divine’ smell, one needs look no further than Aeschylus’ Eumenides (see p.201 with n.32).
\item \textsuperscript{137} Griffith (1983, \emph{ad loc.}) compares 531-2, where the maidens imagine themselves in place for a sacrifice to the gods in their father’s house. Cf. p.64 for Suppliants.
\end{itemize}
emphasize their status as part of a system of older powers that ruled before Zeus, and as natural elements, both central preoccupations in the play; the chorus are related to Prometheus through kinship, since he has married one of their sisters, Hesione (559-60), while Oceanus – who has come with them to Prometheus and to whose direction they themselves draw attention – seems to be on good terms with Zeus and thus offers to mediate between him and Prometheus (325ff.). The identity of the chorus both as related to Prometheus on the one hand, and as divine creatures of the ‘older’ order of a minor position, which apparently has allowed them to keep a lower profile in the conflict between the old and the new gods, on the other, are conditions that predispose them to be sympathetic to Prometheus.\footnote{Their sympathy is taken for granted by Hermes (1058-9) and confirmed by the chorus (1066-70).}

While these blood ties differentiate this chorus from other tragic choruses and align them with female choruses found in myth, they also link them with non-tragic maiden performances, where the young girls seem to be bound together in a more intimate way than simply the occasion of the song.

Therefore, this chorus has, in contrast to the chorus of \textit{Eumenides}, all the features one finds in mythic choruses, that is, they are young females, they are consistently presented in literature and outside of it as a group bound by a common quality (often they are sisters and often derive their name from their father, as the Oceanids in this play).\footnote{See Calame (1997, 31) for the suffix -ιδ- or -αδ- used to signify the feminine and to denote (the former) ‘subordination and belonging […] used to form many patronymics’, the latter ‘indicating geographic association’.

Their sympathy is taken for granted by Hermes (1058-9) and confirmed by the chorus (1066-70).}

As already stressed, a chorus need not offer an excuse for its presence onstage.\footnote{See p.50.} Female choruses, as well as female characters, however, often refer to their entry as the result of an emotion, frequently caused by a noise they heard.\footnote{Griffith 1983, 133-4n.}

Here too it was the noise from Hephaestus’ hammer that caused them to shed their \textit{aidos} and come out. αἰδώς (134) is a feeling and attitude expected from a maiden.\footnote{The maidens qualify their \textit{aidos} as \textit{θεμερῶπις} (134), which raises the possibility of an intertextual relation with Empedocles, since the word is only found here and in fr.122D-K of Empedocles, where it is used in a list of nymphs as an epithet of Harmonia.

Their sympathy is taken for granted by Hermes (1058-9) and confirmed by the chorus (1066-70).} Susceptibility to emotion is displayed elsewhere by the chorus, in the form of compassion for the suffering Prometheus (145, 160, 242, 260, 398), and fear for the outrageous events they witness (181, 540, 691ff.). The use of the word \muχώς (134)
may also point to the maiden nature of the chorus, since the word can be used for the ‘women’s part of the house’.\(^{143}\)

Therefore, the present chorus must have entered in a spectacular way, meant to create a composite impression of the superhuman and underline the divine nature of the chorus. At the same time, however, certain features align the Oceanides with human tragic maiden choruses: the need for their father’s guidance, their association with the inner parts of the home, their susceptibility to emotion, as well as their motherly comforting of the scared Prometheus.\(^{144}\) The chorus’s compassion for Prometheus especially runs through the play, and culminates in an ode turning from expression of feelings to a more formalized, choral lamentation, where they describe their feelings as shared by the whole of remote land (97-424), and sea (431-2), as well as by Hades (433). Their expression of feeling throughout the play is deep and personal, and in their response to Io’s suffering we see the more self-concerned worry that is often found with female choruses in tragedy. This is yet another prominent theme when maidens are concerned, and a feature that this divine chorus shares with any human tragic (and non-tragic) female chorus: concern about their own fate.\(^{145}\)

### iii. Links with non-dramatic poetry

As mentioned already, the presentation of maiden choruses in tragedy draws heavily on non-dramatic maiden choruses. The present chorus, in particular, not only aligns itself with this tradition, but additionally displays striking linguistic resonances of specific partheneic fragments that have come down to us.

For all Greek choral lyric, including maiden choruses, order is a central preoccupation, as it is a defining feature of chorality for the Greeks.\(^{146}\) It is no accident that the first reference our chorus makes to themselves is as φιλία [...] τάξις (128-9), ‘a friendly formation’.\(^{147}\) Amidst the noise and commotion caused by their entrance,

\(^{143}\) Griffith 1983, \textit{ad loc}.
\(^{144}\) Cf. pp.59f. and pp.104f. for a similar choral attitude in \textit{Seven} and \textit{Choephoroi} respectively.
\(^{145}\) Cf. pp.52f.
\(^{147}\) The ‘swift eagerness’ or ‘competition’ of their wings (129) could either denote competition, or simply haste. If pointing to an element of friendly strife, this too could be reminiscent of Alcman’s images of competition (cf. fr.1.50ff. \textit{PMGF}, though the meaning of the passage is disputed). Cf. the more ‘combative’ λόχος that was used for the Erinyes in Aesch. \textit{Eum}.46.
the chorus carefully highlight their discipline and bond as a formal group, based on their *aïdos* (134) and their usual obedience to their father’s word (130-1). The male relative is here both the *kyrios* of the real-life and the *choregos* of the dramatic performance, and as such is the person responsible for their *aïdos*.

This is not the only occasion when our chorus are understood as a choral group. Later in the play they refer to the bridal song they sang for their sister Hesione:

\[
\text{τὸ διαμφίδιον δὲ μοι μέλος προσέπτα}
\text{τὸδ' ἐκεῖνό θ' ὀτ' ἄμφι λουτρά καὶ}
\text{λέχος σὸν ύμεναιόν (555-7)}^{149}
\]

The reference to marriage does not come as a surprise. It is thematically central in the play, since Zeus is proposing to contract a marriage which could destroy him. At the same time, however, it is both extensively exploited in tragedy, and relevant to non-dramatic maiden songs: a young girl’s transition from puberty to adulthood and their integration in the community as married women featured prominently in *partheneia* and in the two long partheneic fragments of Alcman (fr.1 and 3PMGF).^{150} The chorus sang a wedding song (560 ύμεναιον) at the wedding of Prometheus, the bride being their sister Hesione. We are reminded here again of the common *topos* of both *partheneia*, and wedding songs, whereby one (or even two, cf. Alcm. fr.1PMGF) girl is singled out and praised separately.^{151}

A more specific thought about marriage expressed by the chorus of *Prometheus* seems to echo Alcman’s maidens:

\[
\text{μήποτε μήποτέ μ', ὦ}
\text{Μοῖραι <μακραίωνες>, λεχέων Διός εὐνά-
τειαν ἴδοισθε πέλουσαν·}
\text{μηδὲ πλαθεิὴν γαμέτα τινὶ τῶν ἐξ οὐρανοῦ.}
\text{ταρβῶ γὰρ ἀστειογάνωφα παρθενίαν}
\]

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148 See n.143 on p.64.
149 The text as printed by West 1990. Choral projection is a common choral technique and in lyric poetry choruses usually project their performance onto the performance of a mythic chorus (see pp.38ff.). The chorus of *Prometheus* are themselves a mythic chorus, and they are thus able to project their current song onto a past song of their own.
150 See ch.1.A(pp.36ff.).
151 Calame (1977) thinks that singling out Agido and Hagesichora may be a hint that they are slightly older and therefore ready to get married. Bowie (2011) argues that the two girls are singled out due to their royal status, and that the initiatory rite regards all girls of the chorus.
Io’s ‘marriage’ with Zeus has suggested a course of thought to the maiden chorus that one needs to marry within one’s rank, and wish never to share in Zeus’ bed (895-6), nor to ‘be united with any partner from among the heavenly ones’ (897-8). The necessity to marry one’s equal and the limitation of human nature was a widespread topos. But again the similarity, even at a linguistic level, with Alcman’s fr.1 PMGF is striking:  

\[(\text{μὴ} \text{τις} \text{ἀνθρώπων} \text{ἐς} \text{ὠραν} \text{ὸν} \text{ποτήσθω} \] 
\[\text{μηδὲ} \text{πη} \text{οῆτω} \text{γαμήν} \text{τὸν} \text{Ἀφροδίταν}. \text{(fr.1.16-17PMGF)}\]

In the chorus’ lyrics we find further resonances of Alcman’s verses. Earlier in the play, the chorus say that they came ἀπέδιλος (135), that is, without wearing their sandals. This, together with σύθην (135 ‘rushed’) expresses their hurry to find out what is happening, though we need not take this as an indication that the dancers are unshod. For the idea of not having time to pause in order to get dressed there are numerous parallels in a variety of non-dramatic works.

Apart from the possibility that the use of this word may be drawing from non-dramatic poetry, and even alluding specifically to Alcman’s partheneion, the reference to sandals, potentially draws attention to the physicality of the chorus, a stable feature of maiden choruses. The youthful beauty of the girls is stressed later in the play as well:

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152 Trieschnigg also (2009, 133) notices the similarities of sentiment.
153 Cf., e.g., Hes. Op. 345; Pl. N. 1.20; Theoc. Id. 24.36; A. R. Argon 4.43; Bion 1.21; Non. D. 5.407.
154 Sandals and words with –pedilon as the second compound are used in lyric and tragedy (usually reproducing some form of the Homeric χρυσοπέδιλος. E.g. Od. 11.604; Hes. Th. 454; Pl. fr. 94b.705-M, fr. 88.65-M, h. Merc. 57; Sapph. fr. 103.13 Voigt; E. IA 1042). Cf. Pl. fr. 94b.705-M on Andaisstrota’s sandals. The word ἀπεδιλός, however, is only found elsewhere in Alcman’s first partheneion (unless Lobel’s reading ἀπε[b]εδιλός in Pl. fr. 169a.365-S is correct). In this context of emphatic parthenaic chorality, and given the rarity of the word, the echo may be suggestive of a deliberate gesture specifically towards the parthenaic poetry of Alcman.
156 The reference to lack of sandals may also be relevant to the divine, natural element of the chorus, as nymphae are regularly depicted on vases barefoot, in a visualization of their close association with nature and their position as slightly outside ‘culture’, whose products sandals are. The genealogy of the chorus sets them apart from human maiden choruses, yet links them with the fantasy of a Greek maiden: as we have seen, maiden choruses due to their transitional nature often have tendencies (extreme emotionality, violence, disobedience to social norms) that disturb the given order of things. The Oceanids, however,
Cheeks come up often in tragedies by female choruses in the context of grief and mourning: women – and men – wet their cheeks with their tears, or scratch them with their nails in mourning. So do eyes that are often shedding tears or are drained of tears after long suffering (e.g. Soph. **OC** 1709-10; Eur. **Cycl.** 405). However, both ‘cheeks’ and ‘eyes’ are at the same time traditional *topoi* of female beauty, both in drama and in non-dramatic poetry.\(^{157}\) That we are not reading too much into the passage is evident from the use of the adjective ῥαδινός,\(^{158}\) and indeed for the eyes.\(^{159}\) The poet combines here the two, and makes an easy transition from the divine maidens of the *parodos* to the chorus of young females that mourn for Prometheus’ fate and console him, a typically, if not exclusively, female function in tragedy.

One final point of contact between the chorus of the play and Alcman is the scent Prometheus speaks about as a divine feature.\(^{160}\) Nice perfumes on the hair is also a feature (probably) used by Alcman to emphasize the beauty (and desirability) of Astymeloisa in fr.3*PMGF*

\[
[ -κ]ομος νοτία Κινύρα χ[άτ]ις \\
[ ἐπὶ π]αρειαν χαίταισιν ἱσδεν (71-2)
\]

My comparison mainly with Alcman’s *partheneia* (and secondarily with Pindar’s *daphnephorikon*) has stressed some partheneic features in the choral parts of *Prometheus* and the way in which chorality is constructed in this tragedy. This chorus falls within a long tradition of tragedy integrating non-dramatic chorale lyric into constructing its own understanding of a chorus within a fictional dramatic situation. The comparison, however, has also highlighted striking similarities in language (and sentiment) with specific fragments of Alcman. Though one cannot argue with certainty for the direct influence of Alcman on the poet of *Prometheus Bound*, Alcman’s poetry

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\(^{157}\) See the reference to the dancers’ eyes in Alcm. fr.1*PMGF*, or the special light, power, or beauty of the queen’s eyes in Aesch. **Pers.** 150.

\(^{158}\) For the attribution of the ῥαδινός to the ‘eyes’, ὀσσων, see Griffith 1983, *ad loc*.

\(^{159}\) Which is not usually a dramatist’s preferred way to highlight the age of a chorus or a character.

\(^{160}\) See p.226.
seem to have been fairly well known in Classical Athens\textsuperscript{161} and one cannot preclude any such influence.

Even if an intertextual relationship is not certain here, the comparison points to similarities between dramatic choral odes and non-dramatic lyric poetry, and emphasizes the prominence of the maiden identity of this chorus. This is of particular importance for the present chapter, since divine choruses in other plays must have worked in similar ways. The fact that the chorus are young, unmarried females gives them access to a wide range of both feelings and song-modes (and dance-modes, we may assume); the fact that they are beautiful, divine creatures, on the other hand, grants them a safe distance both from the events of the play, and from the social restrictions and expectations. Certain restrictions still apply to them (we saw that they share many features and concerns with human maiden choruses), but their maiden nature chorus in combination with their divine nature gives the dramatist greater freedom to move them in and out of both roles for the needs of the plot and the preoccupations of the play.

iv. Conclusion

Overall, the maidens of the chorus of Prometheus seem to conform quite closely to the idea of a divine chorus as found in non-dramatic poetry. They are a winged τάξις of beautiful, youthful nymphs, the Oceanids, who leave their idyllic natural abode to console Prometheus, and advise him to be wise and reject arrogance as this can only lead him to destruction; they are girls that commiserate Io and have learned a lesson from her suffering, that sung a wedding song for their sister; and who largely restrict their choral action to songs that one is used to expect from a chorus, containing gnomic wisdom about the value of knowing one’s limitations. The chorus of the fragmentary Nereides examined in the next section also falls into this category, and thus also boldly contrasts the uniquely gruesome chorus of Eumenides.

\textsuperscript{161} Carey 2011, 447-56.
D. Nereides

Though I have focused on Prometheus Bound because it offers the best source of comparison with Aeschylus’ achievement in Eumenides, Eumenides is not in fact our only evidence on Aeschylus’ practice regarding divine choruses. In this section, I will look at the fragmentary play Nereides, as a play featuring a chorus of young, female divinities. Nereides is attested as a title of an Aeschylean tragedy in the Catalogue (T 78, 11c), as well as in the context of frr.150-3TrGF.162 Although there is no ancient evidence to connect this play with a trilogy, it has been generally assumed, since it was first suggested by Welcker,163 that it formed part of a trilogy, often called Achilleis by scholars, which also included Myrmidones and Phrygians/The Ransom of Hector. With the exception of West,164 scholars who accept an Achilles trilogy assume that Nereides was the middle play preceded by Myrmidones and followed by Phrygians.165 Before I turn to an analysis of Nereides and its chorus, I will briefly mention the predominant reconstructions of the three plays, since they bear on the issues arising in the Nereides.

Based on a number of substantial fragments that survive from Myrmidones, we may say with a reasonable degree of certainty that the play dealt with Achilles’ wrath. The chorus must have consisted of followers of Achilles who tried to make him let go of his anger and help the Achaeans at war. The play must have opened with the seated, muffled Achilles who refuses to speak.166 We may reasonably assume that after the parodos representatives of the Greeks entered and tried to appease his anger,167 until eventually Phoenix enters, manages to elicit a reaction from Achilles (who sends perhaps at this point Patroclus to fight in his place), and also, finally, a respectful and measured reply. The play must have concluded with the announcement of Patroclus’ death in the battle and a joined lament by Achilles and the chorus.168

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162 Correctly as Νηρεῖδες and in the epicized form Νηρηῖδες (fr.153TrGF); also corrupted as Νηρεῖς (fr.154TrGF ἐν Νηρεῖ).  
163 Welcker 1824, 415.  
164 West 2000, see n.173, for a critique of his thesis.  
165 See Michelakis 2002, and 22n.1 for references to previous literature.  
167 Hadjicosti (2008, 116) rightly refutes Sommerstein’s (1996, 339) argument that there was no embassy in the play.  
168 For this reconstruction see especially Taplin 1972, 69-75.
Phrygians, which I take to be the third play of the trilogy, must have unfolded along the lines of Iliad 24 and we can be fairly certain that it evolved around Priam’s visit to Achilles in order to recover Hector’s body. Various reconstructions have been advanced based on the few fragments that survive, the broad outline being that Priam successfully pleads with Achilles to let him take his son’s body back to Troy. The Phrygians of the title must have constituted the chorus and Priam’s escort in his visit, and must have joined him at the end of the play in a lamentation for the dead Hector.

If we accept the outlines given above, then the plot of the Nereides must have corresponded roughly to Iliad 19-23, with the following events taking place in the course of the play. Thetis, accompanied by her sisters the Nereids, hears Achilles’ lament and comes to console him; she appeases Achilles who decides to return to the war in order to avenge the death of Patroclus, and asks for new weapons since his own were given to Patroclus in the previous play. Thetis and the chorus return and deliver him the weapons. Achilles goes to battle, kills Hector, and returns with his body. This reconstruction is criticised by West, who suggests the transposition of the play from the second position, where it is usually ascribed, to the third, which, he finds, resolves any difficulty. His theory is bold, but the problems West traces are not as weighty as he presents them to be. I therefore believe, with the majority of scholars, that

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169 Michelakis 2002, 54-5.
171 The Phrygians are listed among the allies of the Trojans in Il.2.862, and are throughout referred to as a separate people. However, their exact ethnic origin in the play is complicated by later tragic practice that tends to use the term Phrygian for the Trojans. Cf., however, Hall 1988, who draws attention to a conjectural occurrence of this interchangeability already in Alcaeus.
172 West’s strongest argument is that the Achilleis should have included the death of Achilles (cf. fr.350TrGF, which West suggests comes from the Nereides), and that this could only have taken place in the final play, and with no better chorus than Thetis and her sisters (West 200, 342).
173 West is uncomfortable with the prominent ‘role’ Hector’s death is given in most reconstructions of the play on two grounds: first, he argues, the climax of the play cannot be the death of a character that has not been seen at all by the audience (Hector cannot have made an appearance, since the Nereids – the chorus – must have remained close to the sea-shore, i.e. Achilles’ tent); second, West thinks that ‘Hector’s body and the Nereids do not go together’ (p.341), since the death of Hector can only have been presented ‘from the Trojan point of view’. However, defining the death of Hector as the climax of the play is misleading. Hector is present in the trilogy in order to be killed, and the climax is rather Achilles’ killing of Hector and the abuse of his dead body: compare Hector in the Iliad, where the hero is more a focal point for the exploration of relationships (husband, father, son, leader and enemy), rather than a center of attention himself. The dramatic focus is necessarily narrower than in epic, even if simply by the number of actors, and the focus of the present trilogy must have been Achilles. West’s re-ordering has other disadvantages too, such as throwing off balance the mirror images of the veiled Achilles in the first and third play (for which see Taplin 1972, 62-76).
Nereides was the second play of the trilogy and the dramatic outline roughly as presented above.

As mentioned earlier, the title of the play is well attested. As is usually the case with collectives, we can reasonably assume that this refers to the Nereids who formed the chorus of the play. Both the Iliad and fr.150TrGF encourage this conclusion. In the Iliad we have two relevant instances: first, Thetis hears Achilles lament for Patroclus and emerges from the sea together with her sisters, the Nereids, in order to console him (Il.18.35-147). During this visit Achilles asks for a new armour, and Thetis later returns, alone, to bring it to him (Il.19.1-39). Aeschylus may well have merged the two visits.

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The chorus are, as their name reveals, daughters of Nereus and sisters, in other words a collective of young female divinities, kindred to one another, and widely attested as a group outside tragedy both in literature and in iconography. One member of their group, Thetis, is married to Achilles’ father Peleus, and is thus the mother of the main character of the play, her son Achilles. The marriage of Thetis is a prominent theme in Greek literature and art, and it would not be too far-fetched to assume that Thetis would have been presented in the play as the only one that is married, contrary to her unmarried younger sisters. This relationship of Thetis to Achilles, and by extension of the chorus to Achilles, predisposes the chorus to be sympathetic to him. Although the minutiae of this interaction eludes us, the Iliadic evidence supports this point, as in the epic Thetis and the Nereids come specifically in order to console Achilles:

ομερδαλέων δ’ ὄμωξεν ἄκουσε δὲ πότνια μήτηρ ἡμένῃ ἐν βένθεσιν ἁλὸς παρὰ πατρὶ γέροντι, κώκυσέν τ’ ἀφ’ ἐπειτα’ θεαὶ δὲ μιν ἀμφαγέροντο πάσαι ὅσαι κατὰ βένθος ἀλὸς Νηρηΐδες ἴσαι. (18.35-9)

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174 See p.156, n.213.
175 Sommerstein 2008, 3:156.
176 Hes. Theog.240-64; Il.18.35-51; Pi. Isthm.6.6. Cf. Alcm.fr.1.19PMGF.
177 LIMC Nereides, 303-414.
178 Similarly to the Oceanids in Prometheus.
179 Cf p.228 for Prometheus Bound. Although the sample is too small to allow certain conclusions, the two instances may point to a tendency to create a connection between the divine chorus and the mortal cast of the play, perhaps in an attempt to reduce the vast distance that separateed them, thus facilitating interaction within the plot.
In tragedies choruses frequently enter because a noise has attracted their attention, and especially choruses that come from afar often mention their place of origins. The Iliadic passage quoted above could thus be easily translated into the opening lines of a chorus of Nereides who leave their watery abode and enter the orchestra in response to Achilles’ distress. Fr.150TrGF neatly fits this assumption:

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δελφινηρὸν πεδίον πόντου
dιαμειψάμεναι (fr.150TrGF)
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The fragment is anapaestic and as such it must (given the content) have formed part of the initial words of the chorus in the parodos. Similarly to this chorus, the Oceanids in Prometheus Bound also emerge from their cave deep in the sea having been startled by the sound of Hephaestus’ hammer. In both these plays that feature a divine chorus, Prometheus Bound and Nereides, there is emphasis on the nymphs leaving their previous, natural, distant peaceful abode to enter the problematic environment of the drama. Differently from human choruses, where distance is particularly stressed, for these divine choruses the emphasis is on the fact that they are entering a different sphere and are thus misplaced from their natural place.

Regrettably no further choral fragments survive from the play, but there are some further points worth making about the chorus. These, in spite of a certain degree of circularity, will also make the case for the commonly accepted order of the plays in the trilogy stronger, as is shown below.

According to most reconstructions, all three plays must have featured choral lamentation. In the first play the lamentation for a Greek, Patroclus, is sung by the Greek chorus of the Myrmidon warriors. In the last play, the Phrygians who accompany Priam lament for the Trojan Hector. The middle play is a slightly more

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180 Cf. e.g. the parodoi of PV; Phryn. Phoen.; Aesch. Supp.; Eur. Supp.
181 On the basis of pictorial evidence, it has been assumed that the chorus entered on dolphins. This would tie in well with the entries of the other two divine choruses examined above that have both been visually impressive and with an emphasis on a supernatural element. Dolphins are of course not supernatural, but riding on a dolphin is. There are, however, numerous association of dolphins with choral dancing, including on vases (see Kowalzig 2013, 35-40), which may be another presentation on nymph-dancing as the ideal choral dance.
182 Cf. p.228.
183 Both the Oceanids and the Nereids are water-nymphs. Since nature in the sense of wildness is more often in Greek tragedy associated with mountains rather than sea (cf. e.g. Euripides’ Bacchae), selecting the sea over the mountains may be used to tone down the wilderness-factor.
184 For the echoing of the laments across the trilogy, see Michelakis 2002, 54.
complicated case: since the Nereids come having heard the lament of Achilles for Patroclus, it is possible that they would join into this lament upon their entrance. But even if this is not certain, there is another instance of the play where lamentation of the chorus must be assumed, based both on reconstructions of the play and on common dramatic technique. At the end of the play, when the body of Hector comes onstage, the Nereids must have reacted in a lamenting tone. Even if the raging manner of Achilles would not have allowed for a full lamentation, it would have made it all the more necessary to acknowledge the immensity of the event in all its complications. Their lament for Hector could also have possibly served as a premature lament for Achilles himself, similarly to Thetis’ lament in the *Iliad* (18.52-64). The divine status of the chorus would have facilitated this expansive interpretation that blurs the boundaries between Greek and barbarian. One is reminded here again of the chorus in *Prometheus Bound*, who are on good terms with both parties of the divine strife: both the representative of the old generation of gods, Prometheus, and with the new god Zeus, as it is highlighted by Oceanus’ willingness to mediate between Prometheus and Zeus. In Prometheus the chorus sympathize with Prometheus and boldly express their view on the situation. Still, a number of factors seem to guarantee that some degree of distance is maintained between the chorus and the events of the play: divinity and the essential invulnerability this entails for the Oceanids, as well as their good relationship with other divine figures seems to be part of this in *Prometheus*. The chorus of *Nereides* may reasonably have featured a similar attitude: Thetis’ way with Zeus in the *Iliad* comes in support of this.

Finally, the choruses in the three plays exemplify the tendency for variation across a trilogy that we have already traced as a feature of the Aeschylean chorus: the chorus in *Myrmidones* are Greek (human) males, the chorus of *Nereides* are divine females, the chorus of *Phrygians* are Trojan, i.e. barbarian, (human) males. We have variation on different axes: human-divine, male-female, and Greek-barbarian, all

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185 Michelakis 2002, 53 with n.71.
186 No fragment of Achilles’ reaction to the death of Hector survives, but the corrupt fr.151 *TrGF* may be relevant. The lines, as divided by Luppe (1998) who accepts a conjecture by Latte are as follows: ἐναρκτάντας δὲ φθόγγος ἐμοί ἐγκυκτον ψυσα/τέλος ἀπολείψει. The speaker of these lyric anapaests has been variously assumed to be Achilles (on the basis of the context of Hesychius who transmits the fragment), or the chorus (which I think is an attractive suggestion). Whichever the case, it does point to the direction of the Iliadic abuse of the dead Hector by Achilles.
fundamental antitheses in Greek tragedy. The placement of the divine chorus in the middle may have possibly eased the transition between the Greek and the barbarian, in a trilogy where the issue of ethnicity must have been of some significance, and where the boundaries between Greek and barbarian must have been presented in a way at least as complex as in most Greek tragedies.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the chorus of this play is a collective group of (young) female divinities, traditionally perceived as a group with mainly positive associations; they are related to the protagonist, and must have kept a sympathetic attitude to him; their songs must have been songs expected from a female chorus, and had we more of them, we would probably be able to trace more specific connections between their song and non-dramatic lyric forms. The tentative conclusions one can draw about the chorus of the play place it in the same category of another divine chorus, the Oceanids of *Prometheus Bound*.

The two Aeschylean plays with divine choruses examined above, *Eumenides* and *Nereides* have little in common except divinity. But if one accepts the legitimacy of asking the question which of the two is more normative, I would be inclined to conclude in favour of the Nereids. Admittedly our sample of divine choruses is too limited to allow any certainty, but the chorus of *Prometheus Bound* seems to support our conclusion. Both the chorus of Prometheus and the chorus of Nereids seem to have features that one would understand as as inescapable for any chorus, both in drama and outside of it. Though not necessarily a unique case, the chorus of *Eumenides* is a case apart, and one cannot but be impressed by the sheer boldness of Aeschylus’ choice in his final production.

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188 And thus of a chorus that falls slightly outside the categories of ethnicity; notice that Greeks and Trojans share their gods as a matter of fact in Greek literature.
189 Though titles of lost plays, such as *Phorkides or Graiai* should make one wary of equating any divine chorus with a group of peaceful, beautiful young goddesses.
E. Satyr drama: Aeschylus’ other non-human choruses

Our analysis of the divine choruses highlighted that divine choruses varied from the benign, such as the Nereids, or the Oceanids of *Prometheus*, which fell neatly into the pattern of female divine groups known from myth, to the horrifying Eumenides, who drew on the Greek understanding of the divine as a terror-inducing power. What, however, was common across divine choruses in Aeschylus was the emphasis on the supernatural character of their appearance and action, that was often described with the use of animal imagery.¹⁹⁰

This aspect of the presentation of divine choruses in Aeschylus displays some commonalities with another category of non-human choruses, namely the choruses of satyr dramas. Satyr drama is a genre that is heavily disadvantaged in terms of survival, with only one play, Euripides’ *Cyclops*, surviving intact, and our remaining evidence coming mainly from papyrus fragments, vase paintings and what little remains from ancient scholarship on the subject.¹⁹¹ One should keep in mind, however, that all three tragedians, including Aeschylus, produced a large number of satyr plays. Aeschylus in particular was among a handful of tragedians that ancient sources seem to have regarded as particularly skilled in the production of satyr dramas,¹⁹² and no tragedian seemed to have been able to conceive of a dramatic tetralogy without a satyr drama, before Euripides substituted the final play of his tetralogy with *Alcestis* in 438BC.¹⁹³

The exact nature of satyr plays, their place in the overall dramatic performance and their relation to their preceding tragedies is a matter of scholarly debate,¹⁹⁴ starting already from Aristotle’s claim that tragedy developed ‘from a satyric ethos’ (1449a20, transl. Halliwell). In this section, I will examine how the Aeschylean choruses of satyrs map onto the rest of the choruses in the Aeschylean corpus, and where, in particular,

¹⁹⁰ See pp.225f. for *PV* and pp.237f. for *Nereides*. The non-human nature of the satyric chorus is one of the elements that bring satyr drama closer to comedy, but there are possibly more significant differences than similarities between comedy and satyr drama. For a thorough treatment of the relationship between the two, see Shaw 2014.
¹⁹¹ For a survey of the literary evidence, see KPS, 1-5, and for archaeological evidence, KPS, 41-73.
¹⁹² Paus. 2.13.6, Diog. Laert. 2.133.
¹⁹³ Other Euripidean plays have been interpreted as prosatyric, for references to the debate see Griffith 2015, 15n.5.
¹⁹⁴ For a succinct overview, see Griffith 2015, 16-22; on the function of satyr drama, see Seidensticker 2005, 48-9, and more recently, Di Marco 2017. Cf. also Chamaeleon’s explanation of the phrase ὦδέν πρὸς τὸν Δίωνυσον (Chamaeleon, fr.38 Wehrli) as a complaint by audiences that tragedies had lost their Dionysiac themes, and Zenobius’ further comment that this is what led to the introduction of the satyr dramas in the City Dionysia (5.40).
they stand in relation to the largely socially defined categories that form the chapters of this thesis.

The introduction of satyr dramas in the City Dionysia falls within a long tradition of a satyric presence in myth, literature, visual art and cult. Satyrs were male creatures of the wild, bearing a mixture of human and animal features that vary over time and across different sources. They seem to have been fused with the silens in the course of the sixth century BC and the two terms were used interchangeably, before the Silenus re-emerged as an individual figure, the father of satyrs, in satyr drama. Satyrs are consistently characterised by an appetite for wine, food and sex, are represented naked, and formed from early on members of the thiasos of Dionysus. At the same time, however, despite accusations of uselessness, they are also, paradoxically, associated with wisdom and beauty.

Unlike both tragedy and comedy, where choruses can take on a variety of dramatic identities in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and human or non-human nature (they can be divinities, or even, in comedy, animals), the chorus of satyr drama are without exception satyrs. In satyr drama, the satyric costume consists in a furry perizoma (loincloth), representing satyric nudity, with a phallus and horsetail attached, and a mask which presents them as bearded, snub-nosed and balding, with pointed animal ears. Based on their specific roles in each play, we should expect the satyrs to have other props, or adjustments to their costumes, such as carrying nets in Aeschylus’ Dictyoulkoi or adapting their costumes in the manner of Greek athletes in his Theoroi.

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195 Brommer 1941, 222-8.
196 For a succinct presentation of the figure of satyrs outside of drama with references, see Seaford 1984b, 5-10.
197 Seidensticker 2003, 102, who also raises the possibility of a secondary female chorus based on titles of satyr plays that point to a female collective, such as, e.g. Aeschylus’ Trophoi.
198 Though some theatrical satyrs wear a smooth, rather than furry, loincloth (Seaford 1984b, 3).
199 KPS 13.
200 Pollux’s (Onom.4.118) more varied description must be referring to post-classical costume (Seaford 1984b, 7).
i. The chorus as κνώδαλα and male sexuality

Dictyoulkoi\(^{201}\) is not only Aeschylus’ largest surviving satyric fragment, but also one that, partly due to its length, can give us an insight in the construction of chorality in Aeschylus’ satyr dramas. The drama takes its start from Danaë and Perseus’ arrival to the island of Seriphos. Two characters (possibly Dictys and a fisherman\(^{202}\)) spot Danaë’s chest in their nets and try to haul it onshore. Failing to do that on their own, they cry for help, which could be the prompt for the chorus to enter, and together they manage to get the chest (fr.46a-\(\text{cTrGF}\)).\(^{203}\) Silenus welcomes Danaë (fr.47a,765-772), stating that he will be glad to act as her host and protector (πρόξενον and προπράκτορα). Silenus’ warm welcome prompts Danaë’s reaction, which is, at the same time, our first insight into how the chorus is perceived by a third party:

\(<\Delta\.\)>
[ ]οι̣δε κνω̣δάλοις με δώσετε
[ ]...γοι̣σι λυμανθήσομαι
αίχ][μάλτωτος ο̣,οσ̣,ω κακά
[ ]αι̣γογυν ἀγχόνην ἀρ’ ἀψομαι
[ ]ας τεμού̣σα κωλυτήριον (fr.47a, vv.773-9)

While Danaë is not specifying in the surviving lines why she is horrified at the prospect of being the guest of Silenus and the chorus of satyrs, she uses to describe them a word that is repeatedly used in satyric fragments to refer to the satyrs, that is, κνώδαλα. The word means ‘animal/wild creature’, but is used also pejoratively with the meaning ‘brute, beast’. It is thus doubly appropriate for the satyrs; it refers both to their half-animal nature and to their brutish behaviour, thus encapsulating the very essence of a satyric chorus. Satyrs occupy both physically and socially a space that is separate from the rest of the characters in a drama. Their animal features and their association with the god Dionysus, and their concomitant disregard for socially

\(^{201}\) The catalogue lists a play called Δικτυουργοί (T78, 4b), but surviving fragments support the title Δικτυουλκοί.

\(^{202}\) If the chorus is already onstage (see next note), or, if one is happy to separate Silenus from the chorus, one of the two speakers could be Silenus.

\(^{203}\) Taplin 1978, 419.
endorsed rules of engagement, which includes their attitude to women, wine and their master Dionysus, places them in a space between men and gods.

This ambiguous relation to both men and gods reminds one of the chorus of *Eumenides*, whom Apollo described as creatures with which neither men nor gods want to associate.  

Further than than though, and more strikingly, Apollo calls the Eumenides κνώδαλα while the members of satyric choruses are repeatedly called κνώδαλα in surviving satyric fragments, the Eumenides are the only chorus to be described thus outside satyr drama. The disregard of both Danaë and Apollo for the respective choruses, and their use of a word that expresses the offence that the satyrs cause to accepted social norms are similar for both choruses. Both the satyrs and the Eumenides express and endorse a deep connection with nature, the Eumenides as chthonic divinities and the satyrs in their unhindered expression of their physical appetites, but also their child-like emotions and reactions, such as fear, wonder, and curiosity.

At the same time, behind the seemingly negative presentation of both the satyrs and the Eumenides lurks a potential positivity. As we saw, the Eumenides eventually play a crucial role in ensuring that a healthy element of fear is introduced into the official Athenian justice system. Similarly, the chorus of the satyr drama conclude dramatic tetralogies in a way that celebrates the Dionysiac element of the festival, both in terms of the cultic associations of boys and men dressing up as satyrs, and in terms of their spirit: their attempt to indulge in all of life’s pleasures, their enthusiastic engagement in whatever life throws at them, but also their flexibility in accepting failure and taking a back step when that seems the most expedient thing to do, in combination with the happy ending that we know always awaits them, offers a life-affirming counter-paradigm to the rigidly principled heroes of tragedy.

After the satyrs have heard Danaë’s complaints, they turn their attentions to baby Perseus, and engage with him in an equally enthusiastic manner:

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204 See pp.202ff.
205 See p.214.
206 Sommerstein 1990,329.
207 Seidensticker 2005, 48. See also Griffith 2015, 107 for the complex reaction of the audience towards the satyrs, involving both admiration and jealousy for their carefree existence, and disgust for their overt disrespect of social norms and over-indulgence in physical appetites.
ὦ φίντων, ἴθι δεῦρο
θάρσει δή τί κινύρη;<ω;
δεῦρ' ἐς παιδας ἱωμεν ὁς;
ἐξη παιδοτρόφους ἐμὰς,
ὦ φίλος, χέρας εὐμενής,
τέρψῃ δ' ἱκτει καὶ νεβρο[ίς]
ὑστρίχων τ' ὀβρίσθων[ι]
κοιμήσῃ δὲ τρίτος έξων
κομπότων καὶ τετόρι τῶδε. (fr.47a,802-811)

The satyrs here take on the ultimate female role, that of a surrogate mother, or a trophos, and they do so willingly and of their own accord. At the same time, they make the role their own, by promising to teach the young boy their wild ways, but also taking for granted Danaë’s sexual availability to them after she will have accepted Silenus as her husband:

καὶ τήνδ' ἐσορῶ νύμφην ἡδη
πάντω βουλομένην τῆς ἡμετέρας,
φιλότητος ἄδην κορέσασθαι. (fr.47a, 824-826)

This fragment highlights another stable feature of the satyric chorus, namely the sexual appetite of the satyrs. This is one of their most prominent features in myth, but also one that is constantly kept in the mind of the theatre audience by the erect phallus that forms part of the satyric costume. This in turn highlights another aspect of the identity of the satyrs, that is, that they are young males. As we have seen, young males are the one category that tragedy is most reluctant to use as a chorus. A satyric chorus thus gives drama a chance to explore an array of qualities that Athens understands as desirable for males, yet as qualities that need to be contained and regulated within a civic context, though some of them are allowed to find unfettered expression within Dionysiac rituals. It also allows the satyrs in roles that are considered clearly female (such as the motherly stance we saw above) or even childish, like surprised curiosity or fear, as we will see below.

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208 For satyrs and the male sexuality, see Griffith 2015, 50-2; see also Lissarague 1990. There is, however, some evidence of older satyr choruses, see Seaford 1984, 4.
209 Griffith 2015, 18-19 and 24ff.
ii. Satyric occupations: a chorus with its own agenda

*Theoroi* or *Isthmiastai* is the second largest satyric fragment of Aeschylus and one that, despite the absence of an obvious mythic theme, highlights an important aspect of the satyric chorus, namely their tendency to display a significant degree of independence from the main characters, and pursue their own goals within the plot, often engaging, willingly or not, in unexpected tasks. The play takes place in Corinth, where the satyrs have found themselves with Dionysus in order to dance at the Isthmian Games. They have decided, however, to run away and become athletes under the protection of possibly Sisyphus or Theseus. After the satyrs have marvelled at their likenesses, which their new master has brought in, Dionysus catches up with the chorus and accuses them of betraying him (fr.78a TrGF), scolding them for having replaced their Dionysiac dancing with an attempt at athletic performance:

\[
\text{εἰ δ' οὖν ἔσωξα τὴν πάλαι παρὸ[μιᾶ̣]ν,}
\]
\[
\text{τοῦρχημα μᾶλλον εἰκός ἦν σὲ.[.....]εἰν.}
\]
\[
\text{σὺ δ' ἰσθμᾶξες καὶ τρόπους καὶ[νοὺς μ]αθὼν. (fr.78a, vv.31-4)}
\]

The plot seems to revolve around the common theme of the satyrs attempting or being forced to attempt tasks they are usually not good at. Dionysus, if our understanding of his reference to a proverb (παροιμίαν) is correct, reminds the chorus of their area of expertise, that is, dancing, and honouring Dionysus. The satyric chorus, however, has its own goals, which frequently clash with those of their master and the other characters, and pursue those goals with vigour. In this, the satyr chorus is sharply contrasted with most dramatic choruses, who may have their own views about the events of the plot, but only affect it indirectly. An exception in this is the chorus of *Eumenides*, who drive the plot and function throughout in defiance of the protagonists of the play; was Aeschylus drawing on satyr choruses in constructing the chorus of *Eumenides*, with their wild dancing and their animalistic behaviour, going so far as to hint at that influence by having them called κνώδαλα?

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210 The play appears with a double title in the Catalogue (T78, 6c).
211 For the identity of the speaker, see KPS, 144, n.62.
212 I am following the reconstruction of Sommerstein 2009, who accepts the fragment arrangement suggested by Snell 1956 and Henry and Nünlist 2000. Numbering and text of the fragments as in TrGF.
214 KPS, 136n.28
The chorus’ ineptitude in the task and their unwillingness to put in the work required in order to master their new skill is possibly shown in Silenus’ complaints at how hard they have been training for the games (fr. 78a, vv.39-46).²¹⁵ It is then either Dionysus who brings the satyrs shackles (ironically calling them ἀθύρματα) or the satyrs’ new master bringing some athletic equipment.²¹⁶ The satyrs respond with fear:

ἔγω [φέ]ξω σοι νεοχμᾶ [.....] ἀθύρματα
τούτ[ι τό] πρῶτὸν ἐστί σοι τ[ῶν παχ[większ].
Cho: ἐμοὶ μὲν οὔχι τῶν φίλον νείμον τιν.
μὴ ἀπειτε μηδ’ ὄρνιθος οὐνεκ’, ἀγαθέ, –
Cho: τί δὴ γανούσθαι τούτο; καὶ τί χρήσομαι;
ἐντευτ[()]. τῆ[ν τε]χνὴν ταύτη[ν] πρεπ[
Cho: τί δ’ ἀντιποιεῖν [...].τιτ[λου]ν μου.[.]ανδαν[]
ἐννοιμάζειν [.....] ἐμμελέστατον.
Cho: φέρω[ ca. 17 litt. ] ἐμβήσεται.
ἐπιο[ ca. 17 litt. ] βάδην ἐλ[α]ξ[S]
..]ε[ ca. 19 litt. ] ἃη[φ.ξ]ων σφυρά (fr.78c, vv.50-61)

The chorus’ fearful response, either to the prospect of being shackled by their former master²¹⁷ or at being finally confronted with the actual task they have chosen, highlights the usual predisposition of the satyrs,²¹⁸ their child-like, fearful nature and the light-hearted mood with which they abandon the goals they had previously enthusiastically embraced. The various tasks which the chorus take up in the different plays ensure that the otherwise potentially repetitive concept of a satyric chorus is a stable and predictable element at the end of the four-part dramatic performance, while at the same time allowing for performative and narrative variety.

In Theoroi in particular, the chorus’ new-found enthusiasm for sports centres around a contest between art/dance and sports, which brings into focus the chorus’ association with wild dancing. There is further reference to dance in the surviving

²¹⁵ Sommerstein 2008, 91n.13. KPS, 138 think the speaker is Dionysus replying to Silenus’ earlier complaints against himself.
²¹⁶ For the debated identity of the speaker, see KPS, 140n.40.
²¹⁷ Despite the frequent motif of enslaved satyrs, we have no indication in surviving fragments of Aeschylus to enslaved satyr choruses; but they may have described their association with Dionysus as slavery, see fr.78c,vv.5ff., with KPS, 29.
²¹⁸ Props often bring forward the unsuitability of the satyrs for the tasks they take up, see Seaford 1984b, 80n.
fragments (fr.79TrGF καὶ μήν παλαίων τώνδε σοι σκωπευμάτων\textsuperscript{219}), which many be continuing the theme of conflict between the satyrs’ present and past occupation. Given that satyrs are generally associated with wild, agitated dancing, which often reflects the action,\textsuperscript{220} one would expect dance to be particularly prominent in a play that receives so much linguistic emphasis as is evident from the surviving fragments. Given that satyr plays form the closing of a four-part performance, their dancing would define to a large extent the mood and atmosphere of the ending of a tetralogy.

To conclude, Aeschylus seems to have exploited fully in his satyr plays the ambiguous nature of a satyr, ‘cruder than a man and yet somehow wiser, combining mischief with wisdom and animality with divinity.’\textsuperscript{221} For a dramatist like Aeschylus, who displayed such dexterity in teasing out the subtle ambiguities of the fictional social identity of his choruses, emphasizing or downplaying different facets of the chorus’ persona, the inherent ambiguity of the satyrs must have offered a fertile ground for innovation. A certain ‘independence’ that satyr choruses generally seem to display from the main characters, bring them closer to some of the most strikingly central Aeschylean choruses, like \textit{Eumenides} and \textit{Suppliants}. Finally, the satyric chorus must have provided a stable element at the end of each tetralogy, one that precisely because of its predictability must have opened new avenues of innovation, in order to maintain the momentum of a four-part performance and bring it to a suitably satisfying end.

\textsuperscript{219} Of a dance where the satyrs raised their hand to their eyebrows as if looking out into the distance (Seidensticker 2003, 112; cf. Athen.14.629ff.; Pollux 4.103.
\textsuperscript{220} For satyric dance, see KPS, 21-8; Seidensticker 2003, 110-117.
\textsuperscript{221} Seaford 1984b, 7.
This thesis has examined the Aeschylean chorus in all six surviving Aeschylean tragedies, one fragmentary Aeschylean play, as well as two plays with close ties to Aeschylus that can help us gain a perspective on the Aeschylean chorus from outside the Aeschylean corpus, namely the pseudo-Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound*, and Phrynichus’ *Phoenician Women*.

In each play I have attempted to identify the lead feature of each chorus (gender, ethnicity, age, divine nature) as this emerges from the text and from the analysis of Greek cognitive categorization regarding social identity, and to explore the ways in which the choice and presentation of these features impact on the shape, themes and development of each play and (where possible) the trilogy (if any) more generally. In viewing the chorus through the lens of one feature, I have not underestimated how other features and roles co-exist: a female chorus can also be old, and a male chorus non-Greek, while at the same time taking on the role of a narrator. On the contrary, focusing on an element of the choral identity that is undeniably constant has allowed me to deal with the elusive nature of the dramatic chorus, a presence that is continuously present in a play, yet surprisingly multi-layered and evolving in the course of a single tragedy or a trilogy.

The predominance of women, old men and foreigners as the chorus in surviving tragedy had often resulted in an emphasis on the ‘marginality’ of its members. This view has recently been challenged by scholars, who have wished to shake off the burden of marginality of the dramatic chorus. With my thesis I offer a re-assessment of the marginality of the tragic chorus in two ways. First, by redefining what constitutes tragic action and analyzing how the Aeschylean chorus is integral in the plot of the plays, but also by analyzing choruses that seem to have an exceptionally protagonistic role in the play, i.e. *Eumenides* and *Suppliants*, which could be a feature more prominent in Aeschylus than other tragedians. Second, by re-instating, to a degree, the importance of marginal social identity. Marginality is both a metaphor for inaction in Aeschylean tragedy, and an important way of bringing into tragedy a wide variety of perspectives: groups that are in many respects central in a Greek’s life, yet have no voice in other genres or formal positions in the public life of the *polis*, are
given a prominent position in the Aeschylean chorus. Foreigners, women, slaves, elders are invested with the authority of a chorus and allow Aeschylus to engage in a complex exploration of the Self and the Other.

This process of testing the boundaries of Self and Other is made possible by what has emerged in the course of this thesis as an important feature of the Aeschylean chorus, that is, the way in which language and action are employed to underscore or de-emphasize certain features of the dramatic identity of the chorus at different points in a tragedy. Aeschylus’ dexterous use of elaborate language allows different facets of the chorus to emerge at different points in the play as fits the preoccupations of a tragedy, and with them different associations to be brought into the play both from real-life and from other genres. For example, a chorus of young females can be more emphatically transgressive, thus evoking the rich mythic background that understands virginity as a liminal, potentially dangerous place; or it can be more compliant, even motherly and wise, carrying associations of the wise figure of mother in a Greek household, the serene virgin of cult, or the harmonious divine choruses of myth.

The cultic and literary associations mentioned in the previous paragraph is another feature that emerged as central in the construction of chorality in Aeschylus. The dramatic chorus, despite its specific dramatic identity, never ceases to be a chorus performing in the framework of a public religious festival in a culture where choral performances are an important institution. The idea of a ritual chorus performing for the community and its automatic investment with authority, as well as specific non-dramatic genres, such as partheneia, form the background of the dramatic chorus and inform, by association and direct allusion, the way the chorus operates in the Aeschylean chorus.

Finally, a peculiarity of Aeschylean dramaturgy, that is, the composition of tragedies in a trilogic format, can usefully expand our view on the chorus of individual plays. Analysing the way in which Aeschylus uses the chorus to provide thematic and performative contrast and continuity across a trilogy can increase our sensitivity of this function in the course of single plays, not only in Aeschylus, but also in Sophocles, Euripides and in comedy. The performative realities of Greek tragedy have plays presented in sequences of four. Our sole surviving dramatic trilogy, Aeschylus’ Oresteia, has its three choruses share one feature (old age), while differing widely in
others (gender, ethnicity and human vs divine nature). The shared feature is thematically relevant, has a fluctuating emphasis within the plays and across the trilogy, while the differing features as they are realized within the different plots provide performative variation in terms of song, dance and costume. Even if generally the three, or four, plays presented by each poet were mostly – or eventually – unconnected in terms of plot, the fact remains that the plays, composed by the same poet, were part of a single performative experience.

This reading of the chorus as an important continuous strand that runs through the performance, shaping the atmosphere and rhythm of the play and reflecting and affecting its themes, can prove useful for the exploration of fragmentary plays. Choral fragments do not always have a prominent position in our readings of lost tragedies, but, as has been shown in the case of Nereides and Phrynichus’ Phoenician Women, not only can they often contribute to the reconstruction of details of the plot, but can also offer invaluable insights into the themes and perspective of the play as a whole.

While my approach is not the only possible method for analysing the dramatic chorus, it is a hermeneutically convenient way that allows us to bring together and understand the different strands that converge in the dramatic chorus without losing sight of the plot within which this is happening. This ideally accommodates the dual nature of the dramatic chorus as a choral group and a character, without forcing a separation or strict delineation of the two, which is not only undesirable, but also impossible to do without losing some of the richness and complexity of the choral presence. A similar approach could be fruitfully applied to Sophocles and Euripides. Such studies would allow comparisons between the three tragedians and help us better understand which features are shared by all three and which are unique to individual playwrights; how they have drawn on their predecessors and affected one another’s art; evaluate better the interaction between tragic and comic chorus; and trace any evolution of the tragic chorus over the course of the fifth century, and possibly also understand better its radical transformation in the following century.


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