

Siblings in the *Choepori*: A Psychoanalytic Approach*

Thanks to Freud's own interests and, perhaps, a romantic perception of Classical Greek civilisation as in some way closer to nature than our own, psychoanalysis has long taken an interest in Greek tragedy and, since the 1950s, has been absorbed into the tragic scholar's toolkit¹.

The *Oresteia*, in particular, has had its share of explicitly psychoanalytic readings, from, for example, the psychoanalyst Green, who, in his 1969 book 'Un oeil en trop' reads the play as dominated by Orestes' Oedipal relationship with his parents. The classicist Caldwell, in 1970, summarises the action of the trilogy as follows: 'Orestes reveres his father but kills him in the form of a substitute; he repudiates his mother, but the act in which he kills her is symbolic incest. The meaning of the repressed is revealed in the mechanism of repression, and the conscious act contains its opposite'².

Since the 1970s, psychoanalysis has moved on. Feminist psychoanalysts have questioned whether a psychoanalytic orthodoxy which relies upon the stern authority of the father to induce normal psychological development and characterises women as neurotics tormented by a perpetual lack reflects more the prejudices of practitioners than clinical reality³.

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¹ Reinhard Lupton 2005 is a useful short introduction to psychoanalytic engagements with tragedy. Leonard's comprehensive and astute account of the dialectic between ancient Greece and modern French thought is an indispensable guide to the subject (Leonard 2005). The essays in Wilmer – Zukauskaitė 2010 give an excellent impression of the vibrancy of contemporary approaches to Sophocles' *Antigone*, one play which has been particularly fruitful not only for psychoanalytic thinkers (thanks largely to its treatment in Lacan 1998) but also in modern thought more broadly from Hegel on. (Butler 2000 has been an extremely influential as a reading of Antigone, and an example of how to do modern psychoanalytic criticism, but see Seery 2006 for the suggestion that Butler's approach is not so new to classicists, and had in fact been foreshadowed by Steiner 1996). Loraux 1987 is the reflection of a classicist steeped in psychoanalysis on psychoanalysis' place in the classics.

² As well as those explicitly psychoanalytic readings mentioned, Goldhill 1985, Segal 1974, 1985, and Loraux 1996 are notable commentators on the play whose work engages with psychoanalysis.

³ Although some feminists have rejected psychoanalysis as hostile to women (this position is staked out by Millett 1970), from the 1970s onward, feminists have reappropriated psychoanalysis in various ways, to give non-biological, non-essentialist explanations for gender differences. The

Similarly, Deleuze and Guattari, two Frenchmen on the fringes of the psychoanalytic establishment, have problematised the notion that the single developmental model, of father-mother-infant, can dominate everyone's psyches, and lambasted orthodox psychoanalysts for reducing the full spectrum of psychic conditions to the same old Oedipal neurosis⁴.

These new approaches to psychoanalysis constitute a move away from a 'vertical' model (whereby a person's psyche is formed by paternal authority, and preserves a position in itself for this authority – the very position into which the analyst himself steps), towards a model under which the mind is constituted of relations of a non-hierarchical, 'horizontal' nature⁵.

In fact, since the 1970s, there has been a critical search for new ways to apply new psychoanalytic theories to tragedies. Going 'beyond Freud' has become the catchword for critics. Within classics, Jean-Pierre Vernant wrote his essay 'Oedipus without the complex,' demolishing the legitimacy of a Freudian approach through the close textual analysis which he points out is lacking from most psychoanalytic readings⁶. The great instigator of the 'return to [a barely recognisable] Freud', Jacques Lacan marked his difference from the master by declaring that Oedipus' analysis could only be considered complete at Colonus⁷ and then focusing his attentions on Sophocles' Antigone instead⁸. Michel Foucault turned to (a Deleuzo-Guattarian, as Leonard points out) Oedipus in a neglected lecture in 1973⁹.

This paper takes as its starting point the supposition that since psychoanalytic analysis has proved useful to previous critics of the *Oresteia*, it will be pertinent for contemporary readers of the trilogy to ask whether the most recent trends in analysis can provide any further insight.

In 2003 the psychoanalyst Mitchell suggested a way out of the 'vertical' preoccupations of psychoanalysis which could stand up in clinical as well as ideological terms. In her book, 'Siblings: sex and violence', Mitchell suggests that 'horizontal' (here, inter-sibling) relationships could play a far greater role in psychic develop-

best general work on feminism and psychoanalysis remains Mitchell 1974 (which reevaluates the Freudian analytic tradition from a feminist perspective), though since that volume's publication Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray have emerged as important figures in the mainstream of both feminist and psychoanalytic theory.

⁴ Deleuze – Guattari 1972.

⁵ Diverse theoretical positions can be read as falling in line with this broad trend. Kristeva's 'semiotic' is a theory of the mind's generation of meaning according to which concepts are linked associatively in a network which is continually under construction, thus allowing for the heterogeneity of meaning; it is a direct reaction to Lacan's 'symbolic', which conceives of signifiers attached to static signifieds (see Kristeva 1977). For Deleuze – Guattari 1972, the principal mental disorder is not neurosis but psychosis, which they argue covers a multiplicity of mental experiences which cannot be expressed by a traditional psychoanalysis preoccupied with Oedipal neurosis, or even in conventional language, which presupposes a single, static speaking subject.

⁶ Leonard's critique of the essay and its intellectual context points out the extent of Vernant's dependence upon the equally anachronistic framework of anthropology (Leonard 2005, 38-47).

⁷ Lacan 1988, 210.

⁸ Lacan 1997.

⁹ Foucault 1994. Again, Leonard's reading, which brought this work to my attention, is extremely useful (Leonard 2005, 70-95).

ment than previously suspected, with siblings (or even, in the case of only children, a child's suspicion that his parents might have another child) inspiring identification, hatred, affection, desire, jealousy, and (with the child's imagining that a new baby is a 'replacement' for himself) the first intimations of mortality.

In the light of these developments this paper will explore what a psychoanalytic approach Aeschylus' *Oresteia* can do for the 'horizontal' relationships between the siblings of the plays. This is not to deny the importance of those 'vertical' relationships between parents and children (something which is evident throughout, and particularly in the *Choephoroi*, dominated as it is by matricide in the father's name), but it is an attempt to draw attention to a relatively neglected but nevertheless important aspect of the plays¹⁰.

According to Mitchell, an infant's psychic development is governed by both identification with the sibling and by a formation of a sense of self in distinction to the sibling. I will argue that the relationship between siblings in the *Oresteia* is characterised by an alternation of identification and differentiation which makes sense both in the light of Mitchell's ideas and in terms of the wider themes of the play.

One need not have recourse to theory to justify the interest in siblings in the trilogy. There is hardly a character in the trilogy without a brother or sister who will also have a role to play. Orestes and Electra are the most obvious examples, though Iphigeneia, despite being dead before the action begins, provides the impetus behind the entire trilogy; Agamemnon is first mentioned alongside his brother Menelaus (and the third line of the *Agamemnon* makes clear the palace belongs to both brothers, not only the title character); the sisters Clytemnestra and Helen are twin exemplars of female depravity in the first play, though only one is present onstage; the *Erinyes* themselves are sisters, the daughters of Night; and the crime of Atreus was committed against his brother Thyestes.

1. Recognition.

The second play in the *Oresteia* opens, famously, with the recognition and reconciliation of two siblings who have long been separated: Orestes and Electra, the two surviving children of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. The placing of such explicit treatment of the sibling relation at the centre of the trilogy itself suggests the importance of the theme, and the episode is revealing of how siblinghood is constructed in the trilogy. The play begins with Electra entering along with the Chorus, and Orestes watching their entrance.

Orestes asks, 'what may this gathering of women be that comes here, so conspicuous in their black garments?' (τί χροῖμα λεύσσω; τίς ποθ' ἦδ' ὀμήγουριστείχει γυναικῶν φάρεσιν μελαγχίμοισιπρόπουσα; *Ch.* 10-2). And then, amongst this

¹⁰ In fact, the critical turn to 'horizontalising' readings is not limited to psychoanalytic approaches. Griffith 1995 offers an acute reading of the *Oresteia* which is not psychoanalytic but does explicitly set out to examine both vertical and horizontal relationships (in this case respectively between the rulers and the ruled, and between elite ruling families of different communities) in an attempt to qualify the prevailing view of the trilogy as a triumph of legal process, divine justice, or male domination (that is, a thoroughly 'vertical' vision of the plays).

'conspicuous' crowd, he sees Electra herself, his sister, 'conspicuous in her bitter grief' (καὶ γὰρ Ἥλέκτραν δοκῶ / στείχειν ἀδελφὴν τὴν ἐμὴν πένθει λυγρῶ / πρέπουσαν 16-8).

The play thus represents Electra first as a member of a crowd, from which her brother picks her out. Orestes terms the chorus ὁμήγουρις, an assembly; the word is not etymologically related to the prefix ὁμό-, but in the context the association is suggested – naturally enough, since the tragic chorus is a group acting as a unified entity, from which no member emerges as a distinctive personality. Her appearance amongst such a group makes Electra's emergence as an individual all the more conspicuous. It as if acknowledgement by her brother were what made her an individual, or as if the sibling relation were itself what distinguished her.

Interestingly, though, Orestes uses the same word, πρέπουσα, to describe the chorus of slave women and to differentiate Electra from them; the word appears both times in the same metrical position.

This use of the same word both to assimilate Electra to the group and elevate her from it suggests that she is not distinct from the group because of any special features (her distinguishing feature is precisely shared with the collective) but in herself. Orestes sees his sister first as a member of a series. She is differentiated because he differentiates her, and by virtue of this recognition he sets her apart.

This first glimpse of Electra sets the tone for the strange condition of the sibling in this play. The lifting of Electra out of a group suggests that a sibling is someone who can be slipped in and out of a series. We will see that in the course of the play, siblings will be substituted for others, and that their identification with others will lead to their discreet elimination.

Electra's recognition of Orestes is famously preceded by her identification of signs left by her brother: the lock of hair, the footprint, and finally the weaving he shows her himself. There are two salient points about these tokens from our perspective. Firstly they introduce the idea that a person can be represented (synecdochically) by something else – a lock of hair or a footprint can signify Orestes. Secondly, the fact that Electra recognises Orestes because the traces he has left are similar to her own introduces the possibility that siblings themselves could be subject to this logic of identification and substitution.

When Electra is looking at the lock of hair left by Orestes, her first inclination is that, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις πλὴν ἐμοῦ κείρατό νιν (172, 'there is nobody who could have cut it except myself'). Immediately, though, she modifies her opinion: καὶ μὴν ὄδ' ἐστὶ κάρατ' ἰδεῖν ὁμόπτερος (174, 'and further, in appearance it is very much like') and then αὐτοῖσιν ἡμῖν κάρατα προσφεροῆς ἰδεῖν (176, 'It is very much like my own in appearance'). The slip from identifying her hair *as* her own to identifying it as *like* her own is easily made.

Electra's reaction to the footprints suggests the synthesis of these positions: she notes that they 'correspond precisely' to hers – and concludes from this that they belong to another. Electra has no problem with the idea that she and her brother be represented by the same signs. But that an identical trace can lead to a similar individual suggests that that individual might be experienced as identical; certainly, according to a certain signifying system, they are treated as such. Somehow this logic

works only with a sibling: the lock, Electra says, couldn't be her *mother's* hair. This sort of strong identification with a sibling makes sense, since two siblings occupy the same structural position in relation to their parents.

In Mitchell's analysis, the same slippage happens easily amongst infants, who are able to move easily between identifying their sibling as a second self, to a related other. She claims that the sibling is first of all a hated rival to an infant for the affections and attentions of the mother, but its presence also demonstrates to the infant that his own existence can be repeated: another can arrive from the same place, in the same way, as he did. According to Mitchell, a young child experiences the birth of a sibling as if he were watching his own birth and infancy replayed: the child not only fears he is being replaced, but also feels that his own existence is blotted out by the birth of his 'second self'. The birth of a sibling thus demonstrates to the infant his own mortality. At the same time, the infant harbours murderous fantasies towards his sibling, whose disappearance would not only mean he would enjoy the sole attention of his parents, but also would also represent the vanquishing of his own mortality. These theories provide a useful context for considering the relationship between Orestes and Electra, and the treatment of siblings throughout the play¹¹.

2. Identification.

In the above-mentioned scene in the *Choephoroi*, the identity of the situations, and hence of the interests of the two siblings, is expressed in language which suggests the blurring of the distinctions between them: Orestes tells Electra, when she still cannot believe that he is who he claims to be, that if he is tricking her, he is tricking himself (221), if he is laughing at her suffering, he is also laughing at his own (223). A little later (253-5) Orestes declares that he and Electra have both (ἄμφω) been exiled from their home; in fact, he alone is exiled, but he assimilates her condition to his own.

It seems, then, that Orestes identifies so strongly with Electra that he does not distinguish the boundary between their persons. This is not where the potential for slippage of the sibling ends. At 239-45, Electra joyfully heralds her brother:

ὃ τερπνὸν ὄμμα τέσσαρας μοίρας ἔχον	
ἐμοί· προσσυδᾶν δ' ἔστ' ἀναγκαίως ἔχον	240
πατέρα τε, καὶ τὸ μητρὸς ἐς σέ μοι ῥέπει	
στέργηθρον· ἢ δὲ πανδίκως ἐχθαίρεται·	
καὶ τῆς τυθείσης νηλεῶς ὁμοσπόρου·	
πιστὸς δ' ἀδελφὸς ἦσθ', ἐμοὶ σέβας φέρον	
μόνος·	245

O joyful light, you fill four roles for me. I must needs address you as father, and the af-

¹¹ In Lacan's reading of *Antigone*, by contrast, Antigone acts through *sexual desire* for her dead brother (Lacan 1997). This is not the place to comment on that articular analysis, but here I detect no such erotic yearnings.

fection I owe to a mother falls to you – for *her* I hate, with every justification – and also that of the sister who was pitilessly sacrificed; and you were a faithful brother, the only person who has shown me respect...

Electra does not merely identify her brother with herself, but sees him as someone who can be shifted from role to role, and occupy different roles simultaneously.

Read alongside Electra's readiness to elide the difference between her brother's lock and footprint and her own, and Orestes' strong identification with his sister, these lines suggest that siblings are characterised as persons who can be substituted to fulfill different roles. We will see that this exchangeability also makes it possible for siblings to be eliminated entirely.

3. Elimination.

The overshadowing and eventual eclipse of Electra by her brother over the course of *Choephoroi* has long been noted by critics (after Orestes orders her offstage at 579 f. she is not seen again). Electra's disappearance from the scene is often taken to indicate a lack of interest in her character by the playwright¹². But an engagement with the other slippages, substitutions, and, most pertinently in this regard, *removals* of siblings in the trilogy, allows us to find a positive valence in this quirk of the drama, rather than merely a negative explanation.

A move forward in this search can be found by taking a step back, and considering the role of the *other* sister, Iphigeneia, in the trilogy. In the long first choral ode of the *Agamemnon*, which gives a dizzying account of the start of the Trojan war, from 40 to 257, the death of Iphigeneia is one of the most potent images conjured up. As she is carried to the altar, her saffron robe slips to the floor, and her mouth is gagged by the men for whom she had sung in her father's hall: the snapshot is vivid, disturbing, and memorable.

This is the act which sparks the rest of the action of the play: we understand when Agamemnon accepts the yoke of necessity that it is by the sacrifice which he willingly commits that he fulfils his ineluctable fate, brought about by the guilt he has inherited from the crimes of Tantalus and Atreus, and by this act renews the curse upon his house.

And yet, by the end of the *Choephoroi*, when Clytemnestra has killed Agamemnon, and Orestes Clytemnestra, when the chorus sum up the 'three tempests' which have befallen the house, the impious sacrifice of Iphigeneia is forgotten. The chain of events is summarised as follows (*Ch.* 1068-76):

παιδοβόροι μὲν πρῶτον ὑπῆρξαν
μόχθοι τάλανές [τε Θυέστου]

¹² Auer 2006 summarises scholarly attitudes towards the character of Electra and refutes scholarly contentions that she is a mere cipher, illustrative mainly of Aeschylus' lack of interest in character. I am not concerned to weigh in on the discussion of Electra's weakness of character or otherwise, but wish merely to point out that a shift of attention away from her may have grounds other than her characterisation or the playwright's level of interest in her.

δεύτερον ἀνδρὸς βασιλεια πάθη·
λουτροδάικτος δ' ὄλετ' Ἀχαιῶν
πολέμαρχος ἀνὴρ·
νῦν δ' αὖ τρίτος ἦλθέ ποθεν σωτήρ,
ἢ μόνον εἶπω;
ποῖ δῆτα κρανεῖ, ποῖ καταλήξει
μετακομισθὲν μένος ἄτης;

What first began it were the sad sufferings of him who devoured his children; the second time the victim was a man, a king, as slain in his bath, there perished the man who led that Achaeans in war, and now again, thirdly, there has come from somewhere a saviour – or should I say, death?

The significant events are identified as Thyestes' cannibalisation of his children, Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon, and finally Orestes' matricide. The impious sacrifice of Iphigeneia is nowhere in this chain. We see that it is not only Electra who fades into the background: her sister too is forgotten.

Suppressing the murder of Iphigeneia casts Clytemnestra's murder of her husband as an isolated crime, and the selection of Orestes as the subject of the *Eumenides* does justify a shift of focus onto him. Nevertheless, in a passage where Orestes' action is being cast as an impiety that came about as part of a larger series of fated profanities, the elision of a crime instrumental in this series seems bizarre.

Interestingly, a similar phenomenon occurs in the first choral ode of *Agamemnon*, with another set of siblings. At the start of the ode, Menelaus and Agamemnon are described as 'the Atreidae, a pair firmly yoked in the honour of their twin thrones and twin sceptres given by Zeus' (Ag. 44 f.). By the time the ode is over, Agamemnon is shouldering the yoke alone, persuaded not by his brother, but by private deliberation, blown by the wind of his mind towards impiety (Ag. 218-20). Menelaus is not mentioned again for the rest of the trilogy. Again, this is understandable – it is not his story – but in the context of these other disappearing siblings, it is tempting to read it as part of a wider strategy.

On an orthodox psychoanalytic reading, the shift away from Iphigeneia and Electra could be read as another strategy in the trilogy's exploration of Orestes' Oedipal coming of age: not only does he, as Caldwell suggested, achieve independence by the sexualised murder of his mother, and the avenging of his father (for Caldwell this vengeance is also a symbolic murder of his father) but the removal of his siblings from the scene allows him to uphold the fantasy of uniqueness required by his ego.

There may be some truth to this, but it cannot be the whole story. For Mitchell, the infant so strongly identifies with the sibling (who has exactly the same relationship to his parents as he himself does, and who furthermore explains the mystery of the infant's own birth) that he sees his brother or sister (gender, for once in psychoanalysis, is not important) as a second self. Benefits and injuries conferred on the sibling are thus psychically identified as pertaining to the infant himself. This complicates the sibling relationship, so it cannot be one of pure animosity, but rather also involves a degree of narcissistic love (and enmity with a sibling is also experienced as self-directed even at the same time as being self-interested).

The relief that comes with Orestes' and Electra's reunion in the *Choephoroi* clearly betokens fraternal affection, and loyalty to kin. Electra prays for the return of Orestes, 'the person dearest to her of all mortals' (193 f.). As I tried to show in my examination of the treatment of the recognition tokens, the affectionate feelings of the siblings' reunion are bound up in a strong identification on both sides.

But this strong identification is troubling in the particular circumstances of Electra and Orestes: if they are so able to see the identity of their interests, even to the point of blurring the boundaries between their persons, at least in the language they employ, then how is it that they do not identify themselves in the same way with their other sibling, Iphigeneia, murdered by their father (who is acting on behalf of – and so, perhaps, identifying with – *his* brother), and avenged by their mother?

Iphigeneia is mentioned by her siblings just once, in the passage already quoted, when Electra recognises Orestes and tells him that he fills four roles for her: as well as father, mother, and brother, Orestes takes on the role 'of the sister who was pitilessly sacrificed' (243).

This brief reference to τῆς τυθείσης νηλεῶς ὁμοσπόρου, shows that Iphigeneia has not been – and is not to be – forgotten: Electra is able to identify her with Orestes. And yet, neither of the siblings act on this identification, and this half line is all either of them have to say about her, even though each experiences violence against the other as if directed against him or herself. Nowhere else do they even acknowledge her killing, even to affirm that Agamemnon was right to act as he did, in the name of a greater good.

That the children should forget the violence against their sister – or rather, not forget it, but act as if they have – suggests another layer of complexity in the psychology of the play. Perhaps the father's murder of the sister, who is a rival for the affection of the mother, is experienced as a heroic gesture – it allows the surviving infant's access to the parental attentions which the other child was dominating. (Is it too fanciful to imagine a domestic scene with Orestes and Electra filled with resentment towards Iphigeneia when she is 'taken along' to Aulis and they are left behind? Certainly Clytemnestra's furious vengeance at Iphigeneia's murder, combined with her conspicuous neglect of her other two children, is reminiscent of the sort of favouritism imputed to a parent by a child's most resentful and self-pitying imaginings.) But it is inescapable that Agamemnon's killing of the sibling, even if subconsciously perceived as a favour, is also a threat.

In fact, identification with the sibling, and the rivalrous desire to eliminate him are not as opposite as it might at first appear. The end point of identification is to be unable to distinguish between the self and the object with which one identifies – to become the object, or to experience becoming it. And at the point of becoming it, it is eliminated as an object, an other. The strong affinity between siblings that has its roots, in psychoanalysis as in Aeschylus' portrayal of the relation, in identification, achieves the same end as hostile rivalry.

The closeness between sibling identification and sibling elimination is seen in Orestes' reaction to Clytemnestra's terrible dream – in which she bears a snake which draws blood at her breast (540-51) – and subsequent dismissal of Electra.

Orestes notes that the snake came out from the same place he did was swaddled in the same clothes as he, and opened its mouth around the breast that nurtured him – Clytemnestra’s fear at the dream, means, Orestes says, that she is destined to deny by violence, and that he is to become the snake.

Orestes does not identify the snake as a symbol or metaphor for himself, but as something sharing characteristics with him: that is, he first of all acknowledges the snake to exist alongside himself, though coming from the same mother. Orestes, in short, recognises the snake as a sibling – a sibling whom he must become¹³.

The chorus approve his interpretation and exhort him to action. Orestes’ first act following this is to order his sister, Electra, to go inside. The parallel between the snake-sibling whom Orestes is determined to replace and Electra, whose role as defender of the paternal name he is now to subsume, is underscored by a simple verbal contrast. That Electra is told to go *inside*, *στέλλειν ἔσω* (554), would not be at all striking, were it not that the snake has just been described as coming out of, *ἐκλιπὼν* (543), the same place as he, that is Clytemnestra’s womb. The subtle suggestion is that Electra’s going offstage represents the negation of her birth, of her existence. In practise, since she is no longer vested with the defence of the family, this is so; and after Athena declares, as she establishes a new justice at the end of *Eumenides*, that she is for the male in all things, it is hard to see a role for an Electra again. But there is an undertone of sibling rivalry, the spiteful substitution of like for like, behind the abstract ideals: in getting rid of Electra, Orestes is enacting a fantasy that she was never born, or that he is now becoming her, or absorbing her into himself.

4. *Lex Talionis*.

Ultimately, of course, the *Oresteia* is not simply about dysfunctional family relations, but about the complex workings of fate, and the difficulties and contradictions inherent in justice. Lebeck observes, ‘in the *Oresteia*, fate is determined by two principles: first, like for like, second, the belief that an impious father begets a son destined to commit a kindred impiety’¹⁴.

The second principle of fate, that guilt may be inherited, is illustrated of course by the curse, and the repeated crimes of the house of Atreus – Tantalus, Atreus, Agamemnon, Orestes. Electra and Orestes’ preoccupation with their duty of loyalty to their father, too, emphasises the ties that bind across the generations. The other principle of fate that Lebeck identifies is the *lex talionis*, the principle of like for like. This, as Lebeck writes, also influences the course of actions, and furthermore, it is elevated to a moral imperative in the eyes of the characters.

¹³ Whallon 1958 lays out most clearly the serpent dream’s resonances for the relationship between parents and children. He shows that it echoes the description of the lion cub that turns against its foster home of *Agamemnon*, and that the serpent imagery associates Orestes with Clytemnestra in a «multivalent representation of love replaced by cruelty in the relationship between a mother and her child» (217). My observation that it has implications too for the conception of siblings in the play is certainly not intended to deny the clear pertinence of the dream to the mother-child relationship.

¹⁴ Lebeck 1971, 33.

The two principles cannot be kept wholly apart: the recurrence of crimes through the generations is brought about in part precisely by the avenging of previous crimes (avenging acts which serve to justify the guilt inherited), that is, a putting into practice of the *lex talionis*.

The younger generation's preoccupation with their forbears (with loyalty to their father and renunciation of their mother) expresses the importance of the principle of inherited guilt. But sibling relationships, not intergenerational ones, are what express the *lex talionis* in this play. The steeping of siblings in the imagery of symbolic representation and exchange associates them with the *lex talionis* as a pure principle of substitution.

In the field of psychoanalysis, attempts to move beyond the Oedipus complex have aimed to restore the freedom of the subject in the face of the determining influence of the parents. Influenced by the Marxism which permeated much of the French thought and 'theory' of the second half of the twentieth century, analysts have wanted to see people as able to transform their own situations. In the *Choephoroi*, too, sibling relationships, underwritten by both hostility and affection, represent a much looser relation than that with the wicked mother or idealised father. One sibling can identify another with himself, with others, forget her altogether, eliminate her, or absorb her into himself. This flexibility reminds us that fate in the *Oresteia* is not experienced only as an imposition on helpless human actors from above, but is also chosen by the characters (even if they could not have chosen otherwise), who make themselves guilty, by offering one criminal act as a substitute for another committed against them.

It is this association with the core principle of the trilogy which elevates the treatment of siblings to a place of central importance in an understanding of the plays.

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Abstract: Psychoanalysis has traditionally focused on the relationship between child and parents to explain the mind, but increasingly, and in different ways, theorists are questioning this top-down approach and developing 'horizontalising' methodologies. This article looks at one model of 'horizontal' relations in the *Choephoroi*, those between siblings, through a psychoanalytic lens, and finds traces of affection, rivalry, identification, and intimations of mortality in the language and action of the play.

Keywords: Aeschylus, *Choephoroi*, 'horizontal' relations, siblings, psychoanalysis.