

Reconstructing Revenge
Thyestes Tragedies from Sophocles to Seneca

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Reader beware.

Abstract

This thesis reconstructs the Attic and Republican fragments of lost Thyestes tragedies, in order to track the development of the revenge theme through the tragic tradition. Here I reconstruct Sophocles' and Euripides' Thyestean plays by analogy with each tragedian's extant corpus by comparing extracts that resemble the fragments in language and content. To develop an understanding of Thyestes' myth in Attic tragedy, I consider references to Thyestes and his ancestors in the tragedies featuring his descendants, providing points of contrast with Seneca's extant *Thyestes*.

When reconstructing the Republican fragments of Ennius' *Thyestes* and Accius' *Atreus*, I consider the quotation context of the fragment, be it in Cicero, the grammarians or later scholia, in order to examine the themes in the surviving lines and their reception. This allows me to explore how the use of Thyestes' myth in the political texts of the Roman Republic shaped Ennius' *Thyestes*, Accius' *Atreus* and, in turn, Seneca's Imperial *Thyestes*.

Though I contextualise these fragments in the trend of Thyestes tragedies written by minor Roman tragedians, often politicians, the few fragments of these tragedies and the political careers of the tragedians prevent me from reconstructing them here, since they are not indicative of changing presentations of revenge in tragedy more broadly. Similarly, I have not included sections on the fourth-century Greek fragments of Thyestes tragedies here, given that little in the surviving fragments pertains to the revenge theme. Though my complete monograph would include these 'minor' tragedians, for the purposes of the comparative methodology set out in this thesis I have included the best known playwrights of Thyestes tragedies. This has allowed me to incorporate *fragmenta incerta*, fragments from mythically relevant tragedies and a discussion of the texts in which the fragments are quoted to provide a more detailed understanding of Thyestes' myth before Seneca.

Ultimately, by reconstructing Atreus' motives, supernatural influences and the presentation of Thyestes' feast in Sophocles', Euripides' Ennius' and Accius' works, this thesis argues that Seneca's *Thyestes* is not a uniquely violent revenge play.

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Introduction

What drives a tragic hero to revenge? Comparative studies often ask this question of European Renaissance tragedy, drawing on Senecan drama as an archetype, an original model for how to produce compelling tragedies, with little reference to Greek sources.¹ Whilst these studies provide an interesting insight into the inheritance of Classical tragic motifs in later European works, few scholars apply this comparative methodology to the Classical material itself, despite the fact that Roman tragedians regularly adapted the Greek myths for their own audiences. Therefore, this thesis will develop a comparative study of how revenge was presented in both Greek and Roman tragedy, to consider how the same revenge myth was shaped for different audiences, from different societies, in different performance spaces.

Taking the dramatization of Thyestes' feast as the basis of my study, I will compare the fragmentary Greek *Thyestes* plays of Sophocles and Euripides against the Roman fragments of Ennius' *Thyestes* and Accius' *Atreus*, charting the development of the myth down to Seneca's extant *Thyestes*.² This work will provide an analysis of how the fundamental human desire for revenge is portrayed through the same myth, but in the contrasting cultural contexts of the Dionysian festivals, the Roman *ludi* and Roman recitation drama. It will prove a meaningful comparison of Greek and Roman tragedy by assessing how the presentation of the myth varies, to in turn consider how revenge both reflects and shapes contemporary values.

Whereas earlier German studies have recreated Greek plays based on their Roman adaptations,³ here the fragmentary plays, be they Greek or Latin, will be reconstructed using contemporary evidence to better reflect the context of the tragedies. I will first consider the influence of pre-existing adaptations of the Thyestes myth. Having established the mythic context, I will then compare stylistic elements in the fragments with parallels in each tragedian's own corpus. This methodology will ground my discussion of the fragments in their original contexts and avoid the trap of favouring

¹ Miola (1992) and Kerrigan (1996). Even Burnett's monograph *Revenge in Attic and*

² Numerical references for the fragments are taken from the *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta (TrGF)* and Ribbeck's first edition of *Tragicorum Romanorum Fragmenta* (Ribbeck) unless stated otherwise (Ribbeck²) and use the Loeb translations indicated in the bibliography, making amendments (as indicated) where necessary.

³ Ribbeck 1875, Strauss 1887 and Lesky 1966. cf. Collard on this trend of German scholarship (2017 pp.350-1).

Seneca's *Thyestes* as a source against which the fragmentary tragedies are to be recreated; for it is the very malleability of the Thyestes myth in different tragedies that will indicate changing attitudes to tragic revenge.

The study of fragments has benefitted from Wright's 2016 volume *The Lost Plays of Greek Tragedy* which considers Diogenes' fourth-century *Thyestes*. More work must be done on the fourth-century *Thyestes* plays, for which the whole genre must be re-examined, an endeavour that the present space precludes.⁴ Similarly, the Thyestes of the Roman politicians Gracchus, Cassius and Maternus must be compared against their own specific political vendettas and identities as part-time tragedians.⁵ Given that these tragedians had political careers and wrote very few tragedies, these *Thyestes* plays demand specific biographical readings, thus are less indicative of changing attitudes to revenge and thus are mentioned here by way of contextualising Ennius, Accius and Seneca in a broader tradition.

The publication of Boyle's 2017 *Thyestes* commentary has highlighted the interplay between Seneca's *Thyestes* and core texts from Accius' *Atreus*, Ennius' *Thyestes* and Seneca's prose, with Virgil, Ovid and Lucan.⁶ Yet more importantly, Boyle breaks new ground by extensively citing points of intertext with Laberius' presentation of anger,⁷ along with verbal echoes of Plautus and Petronius.⁸ This is indicative of a recent shift in Senecan studies to examine intertext not only with comedy but also with a greater variety of texts that are not intended for performance. The Seneca edition of Ramus in 2018 includes just such studies and De Gruyter has devoted a 2017 volume to *Horace and Seneca: Interactions, Intertexts, Interpretations*. My analysis of Seneca's *Thyestes* has developed from the same determination to study Senecan tragedy on its own terms, rather than as a derivative of Attic tragedy. To that end, I compare and contrast Seneca with my reconstructions without value judgements, to reflect each Thyestes tragedy as a tragedy of its own time.

⁴ Cf. Collard on Theodectes and Diogenes (2009 pp.314-15) and Haley on Diocles (accepted and forthcoming in *Ramus*).

⁵ Cf. Erasmo's extensive treatment of these tragedians' Thyestes plays (2004 1.2470-2846).

⁶ Boyle 2017 p.xx cf. Torre 2014 p.509

⁷ Boyle 2017 ad 207-10, 468-70.

⁸ Boyle 2017 ad 404-11, 421-2, 541-5, 560-6, 615-18, 659-64, 771-5, 827-34, 867-74, 875-81, 908-12, 913-19, 1052-7 (Plautus); 176-80, 369-80 423-8, 965-9, 1006-9, 1041-7, 1074-6, 1087-92, 1092-6, 1100-3, 1110-12 (Petronius).

Boyle's recent commentary on Seneca's *Thyestes* does also include a section on 'The Myth before Seneca'.⁹ Though Boyle highlights fragmentary tragedies from the family myth, the list is not exhaustive; Sophocles' *Tantalus*, for example, is not mentioned despite the prominence of Tantalus' ghost in Seneca's *Thyestes*. Given its survival, it is not surprising that many others have done so too.¹⁰ For example, Schiesaro's study on Seneca's *Thyestes* in performance has explored in detail how a contemporary audience may have experienced this revenge act.¹¹ However, Schiesaro makes little reference to the performance history of the mythic episode itself and its Greek origins. McHardy's anthropological study on *Revenge in Athenian Culture*, meanwhile surveys both non-literary evidence and Euripides' *Hecuba* before considering Orestes' motives for matricide.¹² Yet unlike Hecuba, Atreus is a male figurehead and unlike Orestes, Atreus' crime does not answer bloodshed with bloodshed, but punishes Thyestes' adultery. Thus there remains a gap in our understanding of how such a heinous revenge act as Atreus' cannibalistic feast for Thyestes may have been shaped to appeal to different tragic audiences' attitudes towards revenge.

In light of this, the present study will collate, contextualise and compare the fragments of Thyestes tragedies of Sophocles, Euripides, Ennius and Accius, in comparison to Seneca's extant work. This comparative analysis will help us to understand how key aspects of tragic revenge may have been presented in each dramatization of the myth, by focusing on the level of autonomy Atreus demonstrates when plotting revenge, the role supernatural intervention plays in instigating Atreus' revenge, and, in turn, how his revenge act is dramatised. These variations will be contextualised in the performance mode of each play and the revenge attitudes held by each audience, ultimately to consider how tragic revenge has been shaped by the societies that produced it.

A Paragon of Revenge

Plagued with betrayal, broken brotherhood and, above all, blood, the tragedies on the Thyestean feast will form the basis of my study, with Ennius' *Thyestes* providing

⁹ Boyle 2017 pp.lxxii-iii, cf. Haley (accepted and forthcoming in *JRS*).

¹⁰ Boyle 2017 lxxii. Cf. Knoche 1941, Calder 1976; 1983; 1984, Hine 1981, Staley 1981; 2009, Boyle ed. 1983, Tarrant 2003 Meltzer 1988, Nisbet 1990, Guastella 1994, Littlewood 1997, Schiesaro 2003.

¹¹ Schiesaro 2003.

¹² McHardy 2008 pp.40-3.

reflections on the feast from Epirus where relevant. The feast episode has been chosen because Atreus emotionally tortures his brother by killing his sons and feeding them to him, rather than simply murdering Thyestes for seducing Aërope (Atreus' wife). Therefore, the feast of Thyestes epitomises a thoroughly modern English definition of revenge as an act “to inflict retributive punishment, or to exact satisfaction for (a wrong or injury, or the feelings of resentment caused by it)”.¹³

Yet such resentment is not fully captured by the Classical languages. For example as, Kerrigan points out, there is no Greek term for avenger: its equivalents are “the man who deals δίκη or ποινή (recompense)” and τιμωρός, “he who restores honour, status or respect”.¹⁴ These Greek terms capture neither the implications of bloodguilt, nor the identity crisis associated with revenge in English tragedy.¹⁵ However, the Latin *ultor* is first used to mean avenger in Accius' *Philoctetes*,¹⁶ and incorporates positive associations stemming from Roman worship of Mars Ultor that may not resonate with an Anglo-Christian speaker.¹⁷ *Vindex* though often used to mean “defender” or “champion”, is used to mean avenger by Cicero and Ovid, who each associate this role with the furies.¹⁸ This usage may also evoke corporal punishment; given the cognate noun *vindicta* may be translated as “a stick used to beat slaves”,¹⁹ or, by the Imperial period, “revenge”.²⁰ Though the Latin term *vindex* better reflects aggressive resentment, it does not convey a sense of pleasure in punishing.

If we look more closely at the emotions that typically propagate revenge, we can see the same disparity between the social economics of Greek language and the emotiveness of Latin. Kaster draws on Cicero's *Letters* to define the difference between the Greek terms for anger: νέμεσις “feeling pain at another's success because it is unmerited” and φθόνος “feeling pain at another's success because he/she is our peer”.²¹ Both reflect an emotional response to social advantage rather than personal scorn. Turning to the Latin, Kaster translates *invidere* literally as “to look against”, thereby,

¹³ s.v. *OED* ‘Revenge’ (*v.tr*)

¹⁴ Kerrigan 1996 p.21, s.v. Liddell and Scott δίκη, ποινή, τιμωρός.

¹⁵ s.v. *OCEL* ‘revenge tragedy.’

¹⁶ Accius 1 Ribbeck.

¹⁷ *Ov. Fast.* 5. 550-54, 575-8.

¹⁸ *Cic. Fam.* 5. 6. 2, *Nat. D.* 3. 18. 46; *Ov. Met.* 1. 230; 5. 327.

¹⁹ *Cic. Top.* 2.10, *Rab. Post.* 5.16; *Plaut. Curc.* 1. 3. 56; *Ov. Ars. Am.* 3. 615, *Rem. am.* 74; *Liv.* 2. 5. 9; *Hor. Sat.* 2. 7. 76; *Pers.* 5. 88; *Plin. Ep.* 7. 16. 4.

²⁰ *Petr.* 136, *Juv.* 13. 180, 191; 16. 22, *Tac.* 6. 32, s.v. *OLD vindicta, ultor.*

²¹ Kaster 2003 p.253; cf. s.v Liddell and Scott νέμεσις, φθόνος.

capturing the Greek concept of the evil eye found in βασκαίνω, which suggests that negative perception inevitably perpetuates a negative reaction.²² Yet although the Latin language better conveys the spite associated with revenge by English standards, Atreus' malevolent revenge feast is of Greek origin; the fundamental plot does not change. Moreover, elsewhere Atreus' butchery of the children is typically performed by a woman scorned, such as Procne and Philomela, Herodotus' barbarian king Astyages, or indeed both in the most famous case of Medea.²³ But Atreus is a Greek king, thus his decision to kill Thyestes' sons and feed them to him cannot be diminished as a feature of otherness: how could each audience accept such an avenger?

Thyestes' feast is an apt episode for tragedy. Both Atreus' infanticide and Thyestes' cannibalism could be manipulated to present a pitiable wrongdoer being struck down through the fearful feast evoking emotions that Aristotle credited to the best tragedies,²⁴ whilst the horror of the myth makes it a paragon of revenge. Atreus also fulfils the remit of Classical revenge, aptly demonstrated by McHardy: by serving Thyestes his sons, Atreus asserts his dominance as a formidable enemy and terminates competing bloodlines.²⁵ Consequently, as Burnett suggests, Atreus' anger fuses the role of tragedy and the demands of revenge.²⁶ Therefore for Aristotle, the Greek Thyestes plays ranked amongst the best tragic plotlines, one of which must have been Thyestes' feast, which is instigated by Thyestes' adultery with his brother's wife and responded to with Thyestes' rape of his estranged daughter Pelopeia; this is central to the myth overall.²⁷

By Horace's time the revenge feast was held as the ultimate tragic episode in his defence of versification:

versibus exponi tragicis res comica non volt;
indignatur item privatis ac prope socco
dignis carminibus narrari cena Thyestae.

A theme for Comedy refuses to be set forth in verses of Tragedy; likewise the feast of Thyestes scorns to be told in strains of daily life that well nigh befit the

²² Kaster 2003 p.255 s.v. Liddell and Scott βασκαίνω.

²³ E.g. Eur. *Med.* 1079ff. cf. McHardy on Neophoron's fragmentary *Medea* (2005 p.140); Soph. 581-595b Radt, Ar. *Av.* 93-101, *Lys.* 563 ff.; Hdt1.129 cf. Gangloff 2012 p.88, Damet 2012 pp.316-17.

²⁴ Arist. *Poet.* 1452b. 30-35.

²⁵ McHardy 2008 pp.57, 87.

²⁶ Burnett 1998 p.xvii.

²⁷ Aristot. *Poet.* 1453a.11, 21.

comic stock.²⁸

Clearly the extremity of Atreus' revenge reflects the anger caused by Thyestes' injury, an emotion making the myth tragic. Thus the focus herein will be on Atreus' agency as an avenger and the extent to which gods, fates and alleged familial curses compromise his autonomy in each play. Attention will then turn to how Atreus prepares for and executes the murders, to consider how his actions reflect his motivations, in order to ultimately evaluate how a contemporary audience may have judged Atreus' revenge and their own role as spectators of it.

The Myth of the Tantalids

The myth of Thyestes' family, the Tantalids, runs broadly as follows. Atreus' and Thyestes' grandfather Tantalus killed his son Pelops.²⁹ Tantalus cooked Pelops and served him to the gods, but Demeter alone ate a piece of Pelops, his shoulder. As a result Tantalus was punished with insatiable hunger in the underworld.³⁰ The gods restored Pelops and forged him an ivory shoulder to replace what had been eaten.³¹ Pelops went on to father Atreus, Thyestes, Pittheus, Troezen, Astydameia, Nicippe, Lysidice, and Eurydice by Hippodamia.³² In some versions of the myth Pelops also fathered Chrysippus by the nymph Axioche.³³

But the whole dynasty was blighted. When Pelops was racing Hippodamia's father Oenomaus in order to win her hand in marriage, Oenomaus' driver Myrtilus offered to help in exchange for a night with Hippodamia. Myrtilus loosened Oenomaus' chariot wheels and Pelops won.³⁴ When Myrtilus tried to claim his night with Hippodamia, Pelops killed him. In some versions Myrtilus cursed Pelops' line while dying,³⁵ in others Pelops provoked the wrath of Myrtilus' father Hermes.³⁶

²⁸ Hor. *Ars.* 89-91 tr. Rushton Fairclough. Of course Plautus' earlier comedy does not meet Horace's prescriptions (*Rud.* 505-6). See ch.3 pp.254 on Seneca's use of humour in *Thyestes*, perhaps inspired by Greek precedents. Cf. Panayotakis on Pomponius' Atellan farce *Atreus* (2015 p.94).

²⁹ Hyg. *Fab.* 83.

³⁰ Some variants have Tantalus disclosing secrets learned at the gods' banquets instead: Apollod. *Epit.* 2.1, Hyg. *Fab.* 82.

³¹ Philostr. *Eld. Imag.* 1.30, Vir. *Georg.* 3.4.5-10, Paus. 1.8.4-6.

³² Pind. *Ol.* 1.88f.

³³ See ch.2. p.106.

³⁴ Philostr. *Imag.* 9, Hyg. *Fab.* 84, Apollod. *Epit.* 2.4-7, Paus. 1.10.6-7; 8.2.21.6-8, 19; 8.15.11-12; 5.1.8.7, 5.2.11.9-10, Diod. Sic. 4.73.4-6.

³⁵ Paus. 2.10.17-18; Apollod. *Epit.* 2.7-8

³⁶ Eur. *Or.* 990; Tzetz. *Chil.* 1.18. 433-5; Paus. 8.15.11-12.

In some versions of the myth, Atreus and Thyestes killed their half-brother Chrysippus on the orders of their jealous mother Hippodamia.³⁷ Atreus later ascended the throne and fathered Agamemnon and Menelaus by Aërope.³⁸ Aërope then slept with Thyestes, bearing illegitimate children to him and giving him the Golden Fleece, the royal token that would allow him to usurp Atreus.³⁹ This affair leads to Atreus' revenge feast, in which he kills Thyestes' sons and feeds them to him,⁴⁰ resulting in the reversal of the stars.⁴¹ However, some attest that the stars reversed their course following Thyestes' claim to the throne and returned to their proper course following the banquet.⁴²

Depending on the version of the myth, Pleisthenes sometimes features as Atreus' son and is the father of Agamemnon and Menelaus.⁴³ In such cases, Atreus fosters his two grandsons after Pleisthenes' death and they come to be known as the Atreidae. Hyginus' *Fabulae* 86 also describes Pleisthenes as the biological son of Atreus who was fostered by Thyestes in exile.⁴⁴ In Hyginus' account Pleisthenes is sent to kill Atreus, but Atreus fails to recognise Pleisthenes as his own son and kills him, presenting an alternative account of events after the feast of Thyestes.

A more prominent version of events after the feast is the rape of Pelopeia and begetting of Aegisthus, which is emphasised in the *Agamemnon* tragedies.⁴⁵ In this version Thyestes receives a prophecy from Apollo, following Atreus' revenge feast, recommending that he impregnate his estranged daughter Pelopeia, to sire a son to

³⁷ [Plut]. *Mor.* 313d–e, Pl. *Crat.* 395b3 (blames Atreus alone), Σ Eur. *Or.* 5 Dindorf, Σ Hom. *Il.* B105= Hellan. 4. 157. Jacoby, Paus. 5.2.20.7, Hyg. *Fab.* 85, Tzetz. *Chil.* 1.18. 415-20. In this tradition they often flee from Pelops' kingdom in Pisa to Mycenae where they finally inherit the throne from Eurystheus. Cf. Thuc. 1.9.2, Str. 8.6.19 and Apollod. *Epit.* 2.56.

³⁸ Eur. *Hel.* 390. Σ Serv. *ad Aen.* 11. 262.

³⁹ Tzetz. *Chil.* 1.18. 440-50, Apollod. *Epit.* 2. 10-12. See ch.2.pp.172 ff.

⁴⁰ Hyg. *Fab.* 246. Σ Eur. *Or.* 4. Here the sons are those of Thyestes and his wife Laodameia.

⁴¹ Aesch. *Ag.* 1597 ff.; 1219 ff, Statil. Flacc. *A.P.* 9.98= Soph. T 181 Radt, Eur. *El.* 726 ff.; *IT* 816; *Or.* 1002; Σ Eur. *Or.* 811 Dindorf.

⁴² Tzetz. *Chil.* 1.18. 445-52, Apollod. *Epit.* 2.13, Dictys *Cret.* 5.16.

⁴³ Hes. 195.3-7. West, Stes. *PMG.* 42. Betz, Aesch. *Ag.* 1602, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.2.2, Σ Serv. *ad Aen.* 1.458, Dictys *Cret.* 1.1, Hygin. *Fab.* 83, 87, Σ Eur. *Or.* 5 Dindorf. In later generations the names Pleisthenes and Tantalus are also attached to characters as a namesake, often as Thyestes and Aërope's illegitimate sons (Hyg. *Fab.* 246; Sen. *Thy.* 718-19). See ch.2 p.106 ff.

⁴⁴ Hyg. *Fab.* 86.

⁴⁵ Aesch. *Ag.* 1580-5, Soph. 247 Radt, Σ Eur. *Or.* 14 Dindorf, Ov. *Ib.* 359, Sen. *Ag.* 293, Hyg. *Fab.* 87; 88, Dio Chrys. 66.6, Apollod. *Epit.* 2.14.

avenge him.⁴⁶ This son is Aegisthus, who is then exposed and rescued by shepherds, a version that is reflected on the Apulian calyx krater of the Darius painter (c.330 BC).⁴⁷ On this krater (see Fig.1) Thyestes is depicted to either pull back or hand over his infant son Aegisthus, with Adrastus touching Thyestes' shoulder in a gesture of encouragement. Adrastus, though formerly king of Argos, was exiled to Sicyon, thus his position is analogous with that of Thyestes and he serves as a mark of the location, alongside the personification of the city.⁴⁸

According to this variant Atreus marries Pelopeia, believing her to be the daughter of Thesprotus King of Sicyon, who fostered Pelopeia before the feast. Once married, Pelopeia exposes Aegisthus, but Atreus retrieves him and raises him to kill Thyestes. However, Aegisthus realises Thyestes is his true father and returns home to kill Atreus.⁴⁹ During this action Pelopeia recognises that it was her father Thyestes who raped her when he recognises the sword he left with her at the rape scene.⁵⁰ Having discovered this, Pelopeia kills herself.

Vermeule claims that Sophocles staged this episode involving several recognitions, because the Darius painter's calyx-krater depicts Aegisthus' exposure.⁵¹ Lloyd-Jones omits Aegisthus' exposure to suggest that Sophocles' third play reflected events after Sicyon, in which Aegisthus is fostered by Atreus and tasked with killing his own father Thyestes, as related in Hyginus' *Fabulae* and depicted on the Darius painter's amphora (see Fig.2), where we see Thyestes and Aegisthus fleeing the assassination of Atreus.⁵² But I agree with Taplin's assessment of these fourth-century vases, that they most likely depict later plays by a minor tragedian,⁵³ because there is no reference to Aegisthus as a killer in Sophocles' or Euripides' extant tragedies, despite Aeschylus' emphasis on his having been conceived as an agent of revenge.⁵⁴ Whilst the image of Aegisthus killing Atreus has no clear tragic paradigm, the Darius painter does treat the exposure of the infant Aegisthus. As Taplin points out, this exposure scene includes a personification of Sicyon aligning it with Sophocles' *Thyestes*, later subtitled

⁴⁶ Dio Chrys. 66.6, Apollod. *Epit.* 2.14, Hyg. *Fab.* 88.

⁴⁷ Tzetz. *Chil.* 1.18.452-70, Hyg. *Fab.* 87.

⁴⁸ Menachmus of Sicyon 131. F 10. Jacoby.

⁴⁹ Apollod. *Epit.* 2.14, Hyg. *Fab.* 88.

⁵⁰ Hyg. *Fab.* 88, Σ Serv. *Aen.* 11; 262, Sen. *Ag.* 28-30.

⁵¹ Vermeule 1987 p.129, see Fig.1.

⁵² Hyg. *Fab.* 87; 88, Lloyd-Jones 1983 pp.106-7, see Fig.2.

⁵³ Taplin 2007 pp.205-7, pp.242-3.

⁵⁴ Aesch. *Ag.* 1580-5, Soph. 247 Radt, Σ Eur. *Or.* 14 Dindorf.

Thyestes in Sicyon.⁵⁵ For the Darius painter then, the focus is on Aegisthus' conception as an avenger, whereas the titles attributed to Sophocles' *Thyestes* plays suggest in each case that it is Thyestes who dominates the action; thus his affair, feast and the rape of his daughter suggest a more apt sequence of events. Ennius' *Thyestes* also dramatises Thyestes' exile following the feast, but relocates the raper of Pelopeia to Epirus, demonstrating a political connection as Epirus supported Macedon to fight Rome in the third Macedonian war.⁵⁶

This section has covered key variants of the myth, which indicates the expectations the audience of each tragedy would have at the outset of each performance. But when considering tragic stagings of the feast, they must be set within the context of contemporary trends in Thyestes' myth, which we must now try to establish.

Mythopoesis

The tragedies of this enquiry are part of a larger mythical tradition, thus an appreciation of their context and contribution within the mythic corpus is key to our understanding of the revenge act they present. The origins of Thyestes' feast are elusive; indeed, in Homer's *Iliad* the brothers appear to share a harmonious relationship.⁵⁷ At what point did this change?

The *Greek Anthology* provides a testimony for Sophocles' dramatization of Thyestes' feast and the stellar reversal:

Οιδίποδες δισσοί σε, καὶ Ἥλεκτρη βαρύμηνης,
καὶ δεῖπνοις ἔλαθεις Ἀτρέος Ἥλιος,
ἄλλα τε πουλυπαθέσσι, Σοφόκλεες, ἀμφὶ τυράννοις
ἄξια τῆς Βρομίου βύβλα χοροῖτυπῆς,
ταγὸν ἐπὶ τραγικοῖο κατήνεσσαν θιάσοιο,
αὐτοῖς ἠρώων φθεγξάμενον στόμασι.

Your two Oidipodes and the hate of Electra, and the Sun driven from heaven by the feast of Atreus, and many other works on the misfortune of kings in a manner worthy of the chorus of Dionysus, recommend you, Sophocles, as the chief of the company of tragic poets; for you spoke with the very lips of the

⁵⁵ Taplin 2007 pp.205-7.

⁵⁶ Boyle 2017 lxxiii.

⁵⁷ Hom. *Il.*2.104-8. Kirk rightly claims that: "Homer does not mention Iphigenia by that name but that does not mean that the tale was post-Homeric," particularly given that Homer's *Odyssey* (*Od.*1.35-41, 3.304-10) reflects Clytemnestra's consequent affair with Aegisthus (1985 pp.65, 126-7). This suggests that Homer sanitised his epics by avoiding mythical variants later adopted by the tragedians such as the sacrifice of Iphigenia and, perhaps, Thyestes' feast too.

heroes.⁵⁸

Böhme argues that the feast was a Sophoclean innovation, incorporated in his second *Thyestes* play of three, which he believes centred on the loss of the Golden Fleece.⁵⁹ This befits the general consensus that Sophocles wrote three *Thyestes* plays: the first treating his affair with Aërope, the second relating the Thyestean banquet, and the third detailing Thyestes' incestuous conception of Aegisthus with his daughter Pelopeia, so that their son may avenge the feast.⁶⁰ Böhme's claim that Sophocles introduced the feast is based on three key arguments. Firstly, that two scholia, allegedly drawing from Pherecydes' fifth-century mythography, fail to include details of the feast because it did not yet exist as a variant.⁶¹ Secondly, that the lack of iconographic depictions of the banquet before Sophocles' play suggests that there was no pre-existing version.⁶² Thirdly, that Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* (413 BC) fails to mention Thyestes' feast, despite discussing the issue of the Golden Fleece, whereas Euripides' *Orestes* (408 BC) does reference this episode, suggests that the myth was adapted, between Euripides' plays, in Sophocles *Thyestes' Feast* (c.410 BC).⁶³

However, the absence of the feast episode in Euripides' scholia need not suggest that the episode did not exist before Sophocles' *Thyestes*. Böhme is basing his case on how Pherecydes relates information from these scholia, which raises questions as to what variants the scholia included, what details Pherecydes chose to relate and what survives from Pherecydes' text. Pherecydes' fragments *do* allude to the conflict over the Golden Fleece, which is not attested in Homer's epics.⁶⁴ Reference to Thyestes' feast may not have been selected in the scholia or Pherecydes, or it may simply have been lost. Moreover, a lack of iconographic evidence is not sure proof that the myth was not circulating in the oral tradition; nor is there evidence of the feast itself on post-Sophoclean pottery.

As regards Euripides' plays, we should remember that elements of the *Thyestes* myth are brought in to enhance the plot or characterisation of *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

⁵⁸ Statil. Flacc. *A.P.* 9.98= Soph. T 181 Radt (My translation).

⁵⁹ Böhme 1972 pp.10-11, pp.32-43.

⁶⁰ Gantz 1993 p.546. Cf. Collard on the various titles of Sophocles' *Thyestes* tragedies and the multiple plotlines (2009 p.311). N.b. the Parian Marble only records one of Sophocles' *Thyestes* plays, simply suggesting that *Thyestes* predated Sophocles' final competition in 406 BC. *Mar. Par.* 72. Jacoby.

⁶¹ Σ Eur. *Or.* 811 Dindorf, Σ Hom. *Il.* B 105. Erbse, Apollod. *Epit.* 2.10-13.

⁶² Böhme 1972 p.10.

⁶³ Böhme 1972 pp.12-13.

⁶⁴ Pher.132 Fowler. cf. Σ Eur. *Or.* 995= *Alcmaeonis* 6West.

Reference to Thyestes' feast is better suited to *Orestes*, a play concerned with patriarchal revenge, than *Iphigenia in Tauris*, in which she and Orestes escape execution, thus temporarily evading the ancestral guilt of Thyestes' feast.⁶⁵ Indeed, to confirm their identities Iphigenia and Orestes discuss in Tauris the traditional cause and effect of the banquet, the Golden Fleece and stellar reversal, yet avoid gruesome details of the feast.⁶⁶

Moreover, Böhme's supposition that Sophocles was often inspired by Herodotus, and thus refashioned the myth of Astyages and Harpagus in *Thyestes' Feast*, is problematic.⁶⁷ As Griffith points out, this theory forces us to consider the references to Thyestes' feast in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* to be interpolations from a later production.⁶⁸ Yet Böhme fails to prove that these lines are interpolated and they are well integrated in direct references in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and as a theme of inherent guilt pervading the household throughout the *Oresteia*. For whereas preceding versions of the myth have Agamemnon arrive at Aegisthus' home,⁶⁹ Aeschylus' watchman claims he is waiting on the Atreidae's roof (στέγαις Ἀτρειδῶν) where the feast took place.⁷⁰ Given that Aeschylus alluded to Thyestes' feast first, a linear development of Thyestes' feast myth is more likely: originating from the oral tradition, perhaps appearing in now fragmentary poetry and then finally emerging as a tragedy.⁷¹

For although the relationship between Atreus and Thyestes in Homer's epics seems amicable, the sixth-century poet Stesichorus wrote a now fragmentary *Oresteia*,

⁶⁵ Note there is no ill-portended mention of the feast in Iphigenia's prologue, in which she fully outlines her Pelopid ancestry (Eur. *IT* 1-9).

⁶⁶ Eur. *IT* 811-18. See ch 2. p. 150 ff. These details seem to have been included in Sophocles' *Thyestes* (Dio Chrys. *Or.* 66.6).

⁶⁷ Böhme 1972 p.17ff.

⁶⁸ Aesch. *Ag.* 1096-7, 1190-1, 1217-24 (Cassandra), 1241-5 (Chorus), 1581-1611 (Aegisthus), Griffith 1974 p.214.

⁶⁹ Hom. *Od.* 4.496-537 and Σ Eur. *Or.* 46 Dindorf sets out different locations for the palace itself, so reference to it rather than assumption based on geographical location is key: φανερόν ὅτι ἐν Ἄργει ἢ σκηνῇ τοῦ δράματος ὑπόκειται. Ὅμηρος δὲ ἐν Μυκῆναις φησὶ τὰ βασιλεία Ἀγαμέμνονος, Στησίχορος δὲ καὶ Σιμωνίδης (549) ἐν Λακεδαίμονι. (It is clear that the play is set in Argos. But Homer puts Agamemnon's palace in Mycenae, Stesichorus and Simonides in Sparta) Gantz 1993 p.665. Strabo claims these areas were conflated in tragedy (8.6.19).

⁷⁰ Aesch. *Ag.* 3.

⁷¹ It is not viable to conclude with Graf that tragedians borrowed from archaic poetic presentations of myth *more* so than oral tradition, not least because Graf himself goes on to demonstrate the tragedians' awareness of the oral tradition (1996 pp.152-3). E.g. Eur. *Ion* 196-7, 506; *IA* 86-7, cf. Plato *Rep.* 350e and 377c.

which influenced Aeschylus', Sophocles' and Euripides' versions of the myth.⁷² No references to Thyestes' feast survive in Stesichorus, though such references are present in the tragedies he influenced.⁷³ Moreover, Thyestes' feast is what typically motivates Aegisthus' attack on Agamemnon and seduction of Clytemnestra, which *is* attested by Homer.⁷⁴ With this in mind, it seems likely that the conflict between Atreus and Thyestes was a feature of Stesichorus, given that the ensuing vengeance of Thyestes' surviving son, Aegisthus, was part of the Oresteia myth in the sixth century.⁷⁵ Though the fragmentary nature of Stesichorus' *Oresteia* prevents us from proving the presence of Thyestes' feast in these accounts, we may consider the omission of the cannibalistic feast in Homer to be a question of propriety. Homer does not blemish Agamemnon with this ancestral guilt, just as he marginalises Agamemnon's own bloodguilt for sacrificing Iphigenia.⁷⁶ So although there is no direct reference to Thyestes' banquet in the extant sixth-century texts, its loss and omission seem more likely than the Sophoclean innovation posited by Böhme.⁷⁷

Yet the Thyestes myth as we know it established itself on the Attic stage. Fragments suggest that Diocles of Athens (early fourth-century BC) wrote at least two comic burlesques, owing to the testimony for *Thyestes B*.⁷⁸ This indicates that one of Diocles' burlesques presented Thyestes' feast both because it is at the centre of the myth and because it had already become rooted in the befitting genre of tragedy. For example, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* refers to Thyestes' feast,⁷⁹ and one of Sophocles' fragmentary Thyestes plays seemingly dealt with the episode in full.⁸⁰ Euripides'

⁷² E.g. Clytemnestra's dream (Stes. 219 Campbell, Aesch. *Cho.* 514-52). Most notably, as Finglass points out (2015 p.507), Stesichorus reflects the recognition of Orestes' lock (P.Oxy.2506= Stes. 26 Campbell, Aesch. *Cho.* 168-95; Soph. *El.* 90ff.), the luring of Iphigenia (Eur. *IA* 95-105) and Apollo's gift of the bow to Orestes (Eur. *Or.* 268-9). Stesichorus' version itself allegedly drew on Xanthus' earlier *Oresteia* (Ath. *Deipn.* 12.513a).

⁷³ Some allude to a family curse: Aesch. *Cho.* 693-4, 744-5; Soph. *El.* 10-12, 510-15, 1508. Some explicitly mention the feast: Aesch. *Ag.* 1096-7, 1217-24 1241-5 1581-1611; *Cho.* 1065-70, Eur. *Or.* 1008-10, Soph. *Aj.* 1291-4.

⁷⁴ Hom. *Od.* 11.410-13 cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 1390,

⁷⁵ Stes. 26 Campbell, Hom. *Od.* 4.518.

⁷⁶ Hom. *Il.* 2.278-325; *Od.* 1.35-43, 263-75, 304-5; 11.410-13.

⁷⁷ Cf. Ath. *Deipn.* 11.460b= fr.2 Bernabé, which attests a feast with (not of) the dead as guests in the sixth-century epic *Alcmaeonis*.

⁷⁸ Diocles T 1 *PCG* (*Suda* δ 155). Cf. Haley (Accepted and forthcoming in *Ramus*).

⁷⁹ Aesch. *Ag.* 1191-3, 1291-22, (adultery); 1583-1611 (feast).

⁸⁰ Post makes a case for just two Thyestes plays by Sophocles, one with the feast, the other with the later history (1922 pp.23-4).

Thyestes is similarly incomplete, but also seems to have dealt with the feast, given the references to adultery and the stellar reversal in the surviving fragments.⁸¹ Indeed, Euripides consistently presents the reversal of the stars as a result of Thyestes' feast in his other works.⁸² In addition, fragments of Euripides' *Kressai* present Atreus, Thyestes, Aërope and Pleisthenes, incorporating a shaming disaster,⁸³ an infanticide⁸⁴ and a feast.⁸⁵ Thereafter, Euripides alludes to Thyestes' feast in his extant *Electra* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*.⁸⁶ Yet in what is believed to be Euripides' final entry in the Dionysia, his *Orestes*, Electra summarises the feast explicitly both in the prologue and before Orestes' revenge.⁸⁷

We should also note the potential influence of the fourth-century Thyestes tragedies, particularly Carcinus' *Thyestes*,⁸⁸ which may well have dealt with the revenge feast, given that the cause of this revenge seems to have been the subject of his *Aërope* (c.370 BC).⁸⁹ Wright's treatment of *Neglected Tragedians* gives a fuller account of the fourth-century *Thyestes* authors, but for our purposes these plays cannot be sufficiently recovered to reflect the revenge theme.⁹⁰ So although no complete *Thyestes* from the fifth or fourth centuries BC survives, the renditions of the myth by the Greek tragedians established a standard plot that could have been reproduced, dealt with the feast more fully than Homeric epic by exploiting the suitability of the tragic genre, and set a precedent for Roman adaptations of the myth. This influence of the Greek Thyestes tragedies is at evidence in Plato's *Laws*, where Thyestes is listed as a key example of

⁸¹ Eur. 395; 397b Kannicht. Cf. Collard on the festal content (2009 p.312) and also on the dating of Euripides' fragmentary tragedies (2017 p.351), here the *terminus ante quem* is provided by the parody of the play in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*: Σ Ar. *Ach.* 433= Eur. *Kress.* T iv Kannicht.

⁸² Eur. *El.* 726ff.; *IT* 816; *Or.* 1002; Σ Eur. *Or.* 811 Dindorf.

⁸³ Eur. 460 Kannicht.

⁸⁴ Eur. 466 Kannicht.

⁸⁵ Eur. 467 Kannicht.

⁸⁶ Eur. *IT* 811-18, *El.* 718-43.

⁸⁷ Eur. *Or.* 10-15, 1007-1010. See ch. 2 pp.137 ff.

⁸⁸ Arist. *Poet.* 1454b.16.20.

⁸⁹ Plutarch. *De glor. Ath.* 7.

⁹⁰ Diog. Laert. *Vit. Phil.* 7.1; *Zeno* 36, Diog. 6.2.73. See Appendices for full timeline. Cf. Wright 2016 (Phrynichus) p.19, (Agathon) p.80, (Aristias) p.91, p.122, (Diogenes) pp.153-6, p.159, (Cleophon) p.188.

the tragic plot,⁹¹ but more specifically in Plato's *Cratylus* where he mentions the cruelty of Atreus' acts to Thyestes, suggesting a shared knowledge of the revenge feast.⁹²

The introduction of Thyestes' feast in Attic tragedy seems to have been drawn upon heavily in Roman tragedy before Seneca. For example, Ennius deals with Thyestes' flight following the feast and relates both Thyestes' anxieties about pollution and curses against Atreus, which clearly signal a reaction to the cannibalism.⁹³ Accius also treats the feast in detail in his fragmentary tragedy *Atreus*, following the increasingly standard plot of adultery, deception and pollution.⁹⁴ The contents of later adaptations by Cassius of Parma's *Thyestes*, Mamercus Aemilius Scaurus' *Atreus*, Varius' *Thyestes*⁹⁵ and Maternus' alleged *Thyestes*⁹⁶ scarcely remain but reflect the overall popularity of Thyestes' myth in tragedy.⁹⁷

What we do know is that Varius was reportedly commissioned by Augustus, in order to celebrate the conclusion of the Civil Wars at the battle of Actium in 31 BC and produced his *Thyestes* for the occasion.⁹⁸ No ancient source confirms this commission, nor does Thyestes' feast seem suitable for a celebration. But circumstantial evidence can be found in the ancient sources to support the codices' record: for although Varius was not an illustrious tragedian,⁹⁹ both Quintilian and Tacitus attest that he wrote a *Thyestes*.¹⁰⁰ Why might Augustus have commissioned a tragedy from Varius? Varius' career had been built on honouring kings in epic;¹⁰¹ he had edited and circulated the

⁹¹ Pl. *Leg.* 838C; *Plt.* 268E-9B.

⁹² Pl. *Crat.* 395B. See ch.1. p.58 ff.

⁹³ Ennius 11 Ribbeck= Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 1.107 Cf. Cic. *Pis.* 43; Non. p. 405.2-3 M. = 651 L. See ch.3 p.268.

⁹⁴ Accius 3, 6, 7; 11 Ribbeck.

⁹⁵ Pseudacro Σ Hor. *Od.* 1.6.8, Tac. *Dial.* 12.6, Σ Philargyrius *ad Verg. Buc.* 8.6. = Varius T 154-6 in Hollis 2007 p.257.

⁹⁶ Tac. *Dial.* 2.3.

⁹⁷ See Appendices. See Haley (forthcoming) for *Thyestes* in farce. Plaut. *Rud.* 508 We cannot be sure if this jest may have been included in the Greek Comedy of Diphilus, from which Plautus draws (Plaut. *Rud.* 32).

⁹⁸ Cod. Paris. Lat.7530 and Rome Bibl.Casanatense 1086= Varius T 155. Hollis 2007 p.257. cf. Garrod 1916 pp.206-221, Housman and Garrod 1917 pp.42-9 and Jocelyn 1980 pp.387-400 on the textual tradition of Varius' *Thyestes*.

⁹⁹ Mart. 8.18.5-8.

¹⁰⁰ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 3.8, 10.1.98; Tac. *Dial.* 12.5. cf. Σ Pseudacro. *ad Hor. Od.* 1.6.8, Σ Iun. Philarg. *ad Vir. Ec.* 8.6, Σ Acro *ad Horace*, Σ Philargyrius *ad Virgil Ec.* 8.6. = Varius T 154-6 in Hollis 2007 p.257.

¹⁰¹ Hor. *Od.* 6.1-9; *Vir. Ec.* 6; *Ov. Pont.* 4.16.31. Cf. Mart. 8.18.7-8, [anon.] *Laus Pisonis* 238-9 = T 153 Hollis 2007 p.256; praise for Varius as a tragedian occurs in corrupt sources.

Aeneid at Augustus' behest after Virgil's death;¹⁰² were Augustus to commission a tragedy he would need someone who could write a sympathetic king to edify his own agenda, thus Varius is his man.

Why, then, choose a *Thyestes*? The selection of a *Thyestes* seems especially apt if we remember that Cassius of Parma who had previously written a *Thyestes* was one of Caesar's assassins.¹⁰³ Thus Varius' *Thyestes*, staged in the theatre of Pompey that Augustus had renovated, serves as an apt response to Cassius' *Thyestes*.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, given that the 29 BC production date proposed by the codices positions *Thyestes* two-three years after the success at Actium, I suggest that Varius' *Thyestes* would have been, rather than a belated celebration, a justification for the Civil War.

Lefèvre makes the case that Varius dramatised a later portion of the myth, wherein *Thyestes*' son *Aegisthus* comes of age after the feast and seeks to avenge his brothers.¹⁰⁵ However, I agree with Tarrant that this plot would align Augustus, as an avenger, with the cowardly, adulterous *Aegisthus*.¹⁰⁶ This association is incongruous with Augustus' motivation: to commission a play to advance his own image. Like *Atreus*' feast, Augustus' Civil War was recognised by posterity as an exercise in revenge.¹⁰⁷ The Civil War broke out against those who had assassinated Julius Caesar, Augustus' uncle and adoptive father.¹⁰⁸ According to Augustus, it concluded with Mark Antony's defeat at Actium because he had forsaken his marriage to Augustus' sister *Fulvia* and written *Cleopatra* into his will.¹⁰⁹ Thus, *Thyestes*' feast best fits Augustus' desire to align himself with a powerful yet vengeful ruler. Indeed, *Atreus*' two surviving lines from Varius support the assertion that, like the Civil War, *Atreus*' revenge is a necessary evil:

iam fero infandissima, iam facere cogor.

Unspeakable the things I bear, and now am forced to do.¹¹⁰

Therefore, if we consider the date of Varius' *Thyestes* 29 BC as two-three years after Actium it seems to have been an addition to Augustus' other reformation projects, in

¹⁰² Suet. *Vir.* 41.

¹⁰³ Suet. *Iul.* 10.

¹⁰⁴ Suet. *Aug.* 10.

¹⁰⁵ Lefèvre 1976 pp.48ff.

¹⁰⁶ Tarrant 1976 p.150.

¹⁰⁷ Suet. *Aug.* 10.

¹⁰⁸ Plut. *Ant.* 18.

¹⁰⁹ Cass. Dio. 50.3.1ff.

¹¹⁰ Quint. *Inst. Or.* 3.8, tr. Russell. Quintilian attributes these lines to *Atreus*.

order to justify the Civil War as a necessary ‘evil’ whilst showcasing his euergetism in the renovated theatre of Pompey.¹¹¹

In addition to Varius’ single fragment, Ovid also mentions that “Varius and Gracchus furnished cruel words to tyrants” (*Varius Gracchusque darent fera dicta tyrannis*) suggesting the *Thyestes* of each tragedian.¹¹² But only one fragment of Sempronius Gracchus’ *Thyestes* (29-10 BC) survives in Priscian’s grammar:

mersit sequentis umidum plantas humum
Following feet sink in to the moist earth.¹¹³

The grammar does not indicate the dramatic context; nor is there any evidence of the performance of Gracchus’ *Thyestes*. Tacitus similarly claims that Maternus wrote a *Thyestes*;¹¹⁴ and the mythographer Fulgentius claims Pacuvius wrote a *Thyestes*, many refer to Accius’ *Atreus* and Horace discusses Varius’ *Thyestes*;¹¹⁵ moreover, Pomponius’ *Atreus* has been variously attributed to the Imperial tragedian Pomponius Secundus or to Pomponius Bononiensis, author of mythological farce.¹¹⁶ Ultimately these testimonia serve to illustrate the increasing popularity of the *Thyestes* tragedies, particularly among Roman statesmen. So although Seneca’s extant *Thyestes* play is often treated as the definitive presentation of Thyestes’ feast, it tackles a wildly popular myth in Roman tragedy.

Overall, from the now marginalised references in Greek sixth-century poetry, tragedy seems to have focused on the conflict between Atreus and Thyestes to establish it as a key and constant feature of the myth by the Roman period. Although many dramatizations of Thyestes’ feast have barely survived, there are sufficient references to

¹¹¹ *Res. Gest. div. Aug.* 20; *Liv.* 4.20.7; *Hor. Od.* 3; 6,1ff.

¹¹² *Ov. Pont.* 4.16. 31-2. Boyle infers that the plays were produced within a close time frame (2004 p.264 n.6), Erasmo dates Gracchus’ *Thyestes* after Varius’, he consensus seems to place Gracchus’ play after Varius’ but before Seneca’s (2004 p.179). Cf. Soubiran 1987 pp.120-5.

¹¹³ Gracchus 200 tr. Hollis *apud* Priscian. P.719 P. Keil.

¹¹⁴ *Tac. Dial.* 3.4-24. Cf. Soubiran 1987 pp. 124-5 for the case that Gracchus dealt with the rape of Pelopeia.

¹¹⁵ *Fulg. Serm. Ant.* 57; cf. Valsa 1957 p.56.

¹¹⁶ *Quint. Inst. Or.* 1. 98; 8.3.31. Pomponius’ *Atreus* = *Non.* 144, 21-3. Ribbeck attributes this to the Imperial tragedian Pomponius Secundus in his *Tragicorum Romanorum Fragmenta*, but points out that this would be Nonius’ only mention of the tragic Pomponius, having elsewhere praised Pomponius [Bononiensis] the author of *Atellane Farce*. Ribbeck similarly suggests that fragments of this *Atreus* may be misattributed to Accius’ tragic *Atreus*. Cf. Erasmo 2004 n.116, Panayotakis 2015 p.94, Haley (accepted and forthcoming in *Ramus*).

suggest that Atreus' revenge feast was increasingly popular following its inclusion on the Attic stage. Thus by the time Seneca began to write his most celebrated tragedy,¹¹⁷ he was manipulating a myth which was so thoroughly shaped by the tragic genre, it was already a by-word for cuckoldry, conflict and cannibalism.¹¹⁸

Fragments of the Feast

The fragmentary nature of the Attic Thyestes tragedies has often banished them to the footnotes of broader studies.¹¹⁹ To conduct my research I will reconstruct the versions of the myth Sophocles, Euripides, Ennius and Accius each chose to represent, in contrast to Seneca's surviving treatment of Thyestes' feast. Collard suggests that the "reconstructor's only safe assumptions are that the play will have conformed broadly to the formal conventions of tragedy and to the outline of its background myth."¹²⁰ However, I will *also* cross-reference episodes that are similar in phrasing and/or content in the Greek tragedians' extant plays to highlight the idiosyncracies of each. To reconstruct the Greek *Thyestes* tragedies as authentically as possible, I will compare the fragments against each tragedian's corpus to reconstruct by analogy. For the Republican tragedians I will use the context in which the fragment is quoted to support my understanding of the Thyestes play from which it was taken, given that so much of Ennius' *Thyestes* and Accius' *Atreus* survives through quotations in Cicero's prose. Such a methodology is not possible for the Greek fragments as many are from papyri, anthologies, or Athenaeus' *Learned Banqueters* (AD 3C), written seven centuries after Sophocles' and Euripides' tragedies were first performed. Therefore, although these sources present the transmission of Greek tragedies, the quotation of the Republican tragedies presents their reception and thus provides clues as to the content of the tragedies themselves.

This method will prove fruitful in establishing likely themes for comparison. The Greek fragments will be analysed in the context of each tragedian's extant works. I will search the corpus of each tragedian for similarities in tone, metre, vocabulary and content to help consider which character is speaking, what the context of the fragment is

¹¹⁷ Tarrant 2003 esp. p.13, Davis 2003 p.77, Schiesaro 2003 p.1. Cf. Schubert 2014 pp.76-93 for reception of *Thyestes*.

¹¹⁸ Dio Chrys. *Or.* 11.7,52; 15.6; 66.6; 74.12; Opp. *Cyn.* 3. 237-50 (c. 250 AD), Ov. *ib.* 545-8, Petron. *Sat.* 5.7-9 and Tac. *Dial.* 2.3.

¹¹⁹ Tarrant 2003, Schiesaro 2003.

¹²⁰ Collard 2017 p. 352.

and the place of the fragment in the drama. Once this has been established, we can of course hypothesise as to what the fragment suggests in context, but conclusions must be drawn from the theme the fragment presents, especially if its original location in the play cannot be definitively proven.

Performance Contexts

The potential uses of dramaturgy to convey agency, motivation and violence will be central to understanding how revenge was presented in these tragedies. Evidence for possible stagings will be taken from the primary texts, in comparison to each tragedian's other works, to establish how the motives for revenge may have been presented to the audience, how the violence would have been dealt with and how the performance context may have affected how violent tragedy such as this was dramatised.

The fragmentary Greek Thyestes plays would have been performed at either the City Dionysia or the Lenaea in the theatre of Dionysus, on the slopes of the Acropolis where civic assemblies took place.¹²¹ Therefore, the crimes of tragedy are being viewed at a religious festival by a relatively inclusive citizen audience in a civic space, perhaps encouraging the audience to judge the characters against their contemporary standards of morality in addition to the standards set out in the tragedy itself.¹²² Moreover, the theatre of Dionysus was purified with blood before the play, which suggests a contemporary audience would have appreciated the contrast with the miasmatic blood crimes in the Greek Thyestes tragedies.¹²³ So the religious values of the heroic-age characters overlap with those of contemporary spectators, inviting them to judge the tragic action against contemporary values.

Alongside the social implications of public staging stated above, the practical implications on dramaturgy, including the use of masks, props, the *skēnē* building,¹²⁴

¹²¹ Csapo and Slater 1995 pp.79, 103-4.

¹²² The audience may have included women and children: Σ Ar. *Ecc.* 22 (392 BC), Alexis *Gynecocracy*. PCG 42 (c.350-275 BC), Pl. *Grg.* 502d; *Leg.* 658c-d c.360-47 BC, Plut. *Phoc.* 19.2-3 in Csapo and Slater 1995 p.286. Perhaps even subsidising the poor: s.v. Harpocraton *theorika*, Plut. *Pericl.* 9, Luc. *Tim.* 49, Σ Luc. *Tim.* 49, Σ Ulpian ad Dem. *Ol.* 1.1. in Csapo and Slater 1995 p.288.

¹²³ s.v. *katharsion in*: Csapo and Slater 1995 pp.107 and 117. Cf. Rehm 1994 p.17, Powers 2014 p.22.

¹²⁴ Csapo and Slater 1995 p.79 attests *skēnē* building dated from Aeschylus' *Oresteia* onward.

the chorus, music and *cheironomia*.¹²⁵ *Cheironomia* provides a system of choreography and hand gestures that could shape the meaning of the dialogue to convey emotion through body language, where facial expression would be concealed by masked acting. Given the development of such dramatic tools and techniques, the Attic stagings of *Thyestes* could have presented props loaded with symbolism and gestures. Moreover, given the festival setting of the Dionysia which focused on dramatic competition and was hosted in a permanent theatre structure, the Attic *Thyestes* tragedies would have reached a wide audience.¹²⁶ For all the ethical dilemmas presented for judgement within the play, the success of the piece would, as Csapo points out, rely heavily on production to set a play apart from competitors, particularly as the *Thyestes* myth was so suited to a tragic adaptations.¹²⁷

For the performance context of the Roman *Thyestes* plays there is little extant evidence for Hellenistic and Republican productions of *Thyestes* themselves. That said, unlike the Athenian Dionysia, however, the Roman *ludi* at which tragedy was performed used temporary wooden stages and performed alongside a variety of sporting entertainment. Therefore, Republican tragedies competed with other spectacles and had no permanent presence in Rome until the theatre of Pompey was built in 56 BC. When looking beyond the Republic to the performance history of Senecan tragedy scholars dispute whether the plays were staged or recited.¹²⁸ The performance culture in Republican and Imperial Rome was more varied than that of the comedy, tragedy and satyr plays of the Dionysia. Republican theatre incorporated genres such as: historical drama (*praetexta*), Roman-themed comedy (*togata*), Greek-themed comedy (*palliata*), Italian farce (*Atellana*) and unmasked street comedy (*mimus*), which in the Republic also evolved into festival performances. By the Imperial period pantomime, a single-

¹²⁵ s.v. Liddell and Scott χειρονομία. Cf. Demitriou for χειρονομία in Roman drama (2013 pp.784-97).

¹²⁶ Csapo and Slater 1995 pp.103-21.

¹²⁷ Csapo and Slater 1995 p.157. Cf. on prizes for production: Ar. *Ach.* 1224ff.; *Eccl.* 1154-62.

¹²⁸ See ch3 p.232 ff. Many argue that the plays were recited: Zwierlein 1966; Pratt 1983 pp.132-50; Edwards 1994 p.84. cf. Fitch 2000 pp.1-3 for a full outline of this tradition. More recently scholars make a case for production: Hollingsworth 2001 p.137, Fitch 2003 p.11, Boyle 2006 p.192. Fantham recognises that Seneca's tragedies were adaptable to both recitation and staging but concludes that ultimately reading the plays was the only way to fully understand them (1982 pp. 48-9). Whilst Tacitus may provide evidence for dramas being published as texts to be read privately, this individual reception is beyond the scope of this study (Tac. *Dial.* 3.1-9). Cf. On private reading and performance: Harrison 2000 p.138 and Haley 2015 pp.3-16.

actor dance of a mythic episode (*pantomimus*), had become particularly popular.¹²⁹ So although, like the Greeks, festival stagings did form part of the performance culture in Rome, these festivals presented a wider variety of entertainments side by side.

Ennius' *Thyestes* was performed at the *Ludi Apollinares* 169 BC on temporary wooden stages erected for the occasion, it is widely considered to be the last of Ennius' plays to be produced in his lifetime.¹³⁰ As all Romans were invited to the *ludi* at which plays were produced, it would have been staged alongside gladiatorial fights, athletic competitions and vernacular performances such as mimes to please a plebeian audience.¹³¹ Tacitus even suggests that until Pompey's theatre was erected in 55 BC it was typical for audiences to stand, as no seats were provided in the theatre.¹³² This perhaps stemmed from an anxiety about the danger of assembling a crowd, as Beacham suggests that in Rome political assemblies took place without seats in the *comitium*.¹³³ As a result, audiences were able to move freely around the various entertainments of the *Ludi*, rather than settling down to focus on a tragedy in a ritualised competition as a Dionysiac audience would have done.

So overall, the *Ludi Apollinares* at which Ennius' *Thyestes* was produced were publicly commissioned, and were thus less susceptible to the influence or agenda of a single patron than Varius' *Thyestes*.¹³⁴ But both the staged festival performances of Ennius and Varius were competing with contemporary spectacle for the audience's attention. Ennius must have manipulated staging to keep his audience, Varius' production needed to match the spectacle of Augustus' celebrations. Thus both tragedies would have exploited contemporary dramaturgical conventions, within the budgets offered to them for production.¹³⁵ As a result, Ennius' fragments will be considered in the context of a staged performance with a different aesthetic than that of the Greeks.

¹²⁹ The origins of pantomime date from fourth century Greece, but the genre had returned to fashion in Imperial Rome s.v. *pantomime* BNP.

¹³⁰ Cic. *Brut.* 78; Ribbeck 1875 ad 199–204, Jocelyn 1967 pp. 412–26, Boyle 2006 pp.78-83, Manuwald 2011 p.206.

¹³¹ Cic. *Har. resp.* 26.

¹³² Tac. *Ann.* 14.20

¹³³ Beacham 1991 n.35 p.226.

¹³⁴ Liv. 25.12.13-14.

¹³⁵ Cic. *Har. resp.* 26.

Turning to Accius, he is reported to have read his *Atreus* to Pacuvius in Tarentum before his death in 130 BC.¹³⁶ Yet, this reading was most likely a precursor to a staged performance for the *Ludi* because Cicero tells us that Pacuvius and Accius both staged plays under the same *aediles* in the same year.¹³⁷ This suggests that Accius read his *Atreus* to Pacuvius for editorial purposes:

Tum Pacuvium dixisse aiunt sonora quidem esse quae scripsisset et grandia, sed videri tamen ea sibi duriora paulum et acerbiora. “Ita est,” inquit Accius, “uti dicis, neque id me sane paenitet; meliora enim fore spero, quae deinceps scribam.

Then they say that Pacuvius said that what he had written seemed sonorous and full of dignity, but that it seemed to him a little harsh and unfinished. “What you say is true,” replied Accius, “nor do I regret it; for it gives me hope that what I write next will be better.”¹³⁸

Though this testimony makes no reference to staging, it is neither a comprehensive nor first-hand account of Pacuvius’ response. The fact that Accius approached Pacuvius, a tragedian who wrote staged productions, as an editor, suggests that the staging of *Atreus* was a concern in Accius’ writing process.¹³⁹ Indeed, it seems that Accius built his own reputation as a playwright for theatre production, since his *Clytemnestra* was posthumously staged for the opening of Pompey’s permanent theatre in 55 BC, which despite being criticised by Cicero as an ostentatious adaptation, was a prestigious achievement.¹⁴⁰

But given the increasingly esoteric nature of tragedy after the first century AD, what performance context should we place Seneca’s *Thyestes* in?¹⁴¹ The case for Seneca’s tragedies in recitation is largely built on the contemporary evidence, which, suggests that recitation was a popular performance model of the time. Thus, scholars align their case for recitation with Seneca’s training in *declamatio*,¹⁴² despite the fact that *declamatio* training would be equally helpful when writing dialogue for a staged

¹³⁶ Gell. *N.A.* 13. 2. 2. Seneca associates Accius’ *Atreus* with Sulla, which dates the play far later (Sen. *De. Ir.* 1. 20. 4-5). But given the context of disparaging tempestuous rulers, I suggest that this association stretches the later productions of *Atreus* to comment on Roman rule rather than date the play’s composition. Cf. Dangel 1990 p.108, Manuwald 2011 p.223.

¹³⁷ Cic. *Brut.* 64.229.

¹³⁸ Gell. *N.A.* 13.2.2. (My translation) Fulgentius ascribes a *Thyestes* to Pacuvius (*Serm. Ant.* 57) but he is not a particularly trustworthy source; cf. Walsa 1957 p.56.

¹³⁹ Recitation as an edit for staging at evidence in: Pliny. *Epist.* 7.17.

¹⁴⁰ Cic. *Fam.* 7.1.2.

¹⁴¹ Beacham 1992 p.129, Harrison 2000 pp.139-40.

¹⁴² s.v. *OLD declamatio*.

performance.¹⁴³ Yet more recently, critics have suggested that Seneca wrote in such a way as to make performance possible, though perhaps not specifically *for* performance.¹⁴⁴

The most recent arguments against recitation emerge from research into Roman pantomime (*pantomimus*).¹⁴⁵ Erasmo and Zanobi suggest that, like pantomime, Seneca's tragedies forsake structural unity to present a series of climactic episodes, given the diversity of themes and the lack of formal entrance cues.¹⁴⁶ I agree with Erasmo that Nero's performance of an episode of *Thyestes* seems pantomimic, particularly given that he seems to appear on stage alone and deliver episodes of myth.¹⁴⁷ As a result, I suggest that episodic staged performances could be used to perform extracts of some Senecan tragedies, though some scenes lend themselves to performance in tragic dialogue between individuals rather than a pantomimic *libretto* between a dancer and chorus.¹⁴⁸

More importantly, given how the performance context shapes the audience's reception of the content, should we prescribe a single performance mode to Seneca's work based on the limited evidence available? I think not, for three key reasons. The first is that recitation and performance need not be mutually exclusive: there is evidence of Roman tragic recitations as part of an editorial process, as is the case with Accius, as well as of a performance in itself.¹⁴⁹ Secondly, though whole tragedies may have been performed less regularly in Senecan Rome than in Dionysian Athens, tragic extracts proved popular as a tool for actors to display their proficiency in a public performance. As discussed, Nero's performances were focused on intense dramatic episodes, and he too, albeit controversially, is said to have danced as Thyestes to demonstrate his own talents as an actor.¹⁵⁰ For although Nero as an emperor was unusually active in the theatre, the practice of competing performers, rather than productions, was an emerging

¹⁴³ Zwierlein 1966, Pratt 1983 pp.132-50. Cf. Fitch 2000 pp.1-3, Edwards 1994 p.84. for full outline of this tradition.

¹⁴⁴ Hollingsworth 2001 p.137, Fitch 2003 p.11, Boyle 2006 p.192. Fantham favours reading Seneca's plays as the most satisfactory mode (1982 pp.48-9).

¹⁴⁵ See ch.3 p.235 ff.

¹⁴⁶ Erasmo 2004 p.134, Zanobi 2008 p.78. Cf. Motto and Clark 1988 p.70.

¹⁴⁷ Cass. Dio. 62.9.4, 63.22.6, Erasmo 2004 pp.118-20.

¹⁴⁸ For a discussion of a staged Senecan dialogue in *Medea* cf. Haley 2015 pp.7-9.

¹⁴⁹ Juv. *Sat.* 1.1-6, Plin. *Ep.* 3.19.4.

¹⁵⁰ Cass. Dio. 62.9.4; 63.12.6. cf. Bartsch 1994 pp.36-63.

trend in Rome.¹⁵¹ Thirdly, and most crucially, it seems presumptuous to claim that all of Seneca's tragedies were presented in the same way given that some are open to episodic performances, such as the infanticide of *Medea*, whilst others lend themselves to a full recitation, such as *Agamemnon*.¹⁵² Therefore, given the diversification of Roman performance culture, Seneca's *Thyestes* will be considered in the context of recitation, yet the dramatization of Thyestes' feast will be evaluated against Cassius Dio's evidence for Nero's performance as Thyestes.¹⁵³

In sum, we must consider Sophocles' and Euripides' respective adaptations of *Thyestes* for the Dionysian festivals. Ennius' *Thyestes* must be contextualised as a staged performance for the *Ludi Apollinares*, most likely in a temporary wooden theatre. Accius' *Thyestes* will also be considered as a staged performance in the *Ludi*, given that this seems to have been the purpose of the editorial process and is consistent with our records of Accius' career.¹⁵⁴ Seneca's *Thyestes* will be examined as a full recitation tragedy. The challenge now is to develop a reconstruction that will place the fragments in their original context and allow us to draw conclusions about their performance, in order to consider how Atreus' revenge was presented in these different settings.

To that end, I will first consider the dramatization of Aërope's affair with Thyestes as a motive for Atreus. I will then examine the impact of supernatural forces including the role of, the gods, the Golden Fleece, ancestral crimes and the way characters' recollection of these crimes affects their behaviour in the extant plays. Finally, I will consider how Atreus' butchery and Thyestes' cannibalism may have been dramatised to evaluate if and how this violent revenge act offered a sense of resolution at the end of each tragedy.

¹⁵¹ Cic. *Off.* 1.31.114 on actors' selection of material for competition.

¹⁵² Sen. *Med.* 893-1027. Cf. Haley 2015.

¹⁵³ See ch.3 p.232 ff. Sen. *Thy.* 855-1105. See n.64.

¹⁵⁴ Cic. *Brut.* 229.

Chapter 1: Atreus' Autonomy

What motivates Atreus' revenge? To answer this question we must compare the surviving fragments with similar moments in each tragedian's corpus to determine how Atreus' motivation turns to action within each telling of the myth. Thus the issue of Thyestes' adultery as motivation will be discussed first, and then weighed against Atreus' vengeance as the fulfillment of his role as king, to finally consider how autonomy is presented by Atreus himself in his deliberation of the crime.

Each of these themes would have been emphasised differently in the lost plays, depending on their content. The Loeb distinguishes Sophocles' *Atreus* from *Women of Mycenae*.¹⁵⁵ Lesky, Radt and Lloyd-Jones agree that Sophocles wrote three Thyestes plays: one dealing with the adultery, one with Atreus' revenge feast and one on Thyestes' conception of Aegisthus by raping his daughter Pelopeia.¹⁵⁶ Though in the Loeb the plays are identified in this narrative order as *Thyestes A*, *Thyestes B*, *Thyestes Γ*, they were not necessarily produced in this linear narrative order.

Given the fluidity of the Greek titles and the difficulty ordering the production of each tragedy, I name Sophocles' tragedies individually based on the plotline: *Thyestes' Adultery*, *Thyestes' Feast* and *Thyestes at Sicyon*. I will consider Sophocles' Thyestes fragments together and locate them in these different tragedies using evidence from Sophocles' corpus. The present chapter will focus on fragments that could pertain to either *Thyestes' Adultery* or *Thyestes' Feast*, as those tragedies focus on the impact of adultery and Atreus' reaction to it.¹⁵⁷ As a result, this discussion will evaluate how the separate production of Sophocles' Thyestes tragedies may have created narrative discrepancies and a different presentation of the adultery theme.

Turning to Euripides, Kannicht argues that Euripides' *Thyestes* presents Thyestes' second return from exile to attack Atreus after the feast on the basis that Thyestes' address of Atreus as "old man" in fr.396 suggests a later stage in the plot.¹⁵⁸ However, the attribution of these lines to Thyestes is doubtful because the brothers are peers.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, the final fragment of the play includes the cataclysm, which Euripides consistently presents as the result of the feast, and refers back to the feast in

¹⁵⁵ Lloyd-Jones 1983 p.107.

¹⁵⁶ Lesky 1966a pp.519-40, Radt 1977 p.239 and Lloyd-Jones 1983 p.107, see p.8 ff.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Lloyd-Jones 1983 p.106.

¹⁵⁸ Eur. 396 Kannicht.

¹⁵⁹ See ch.2 p.77 ff.

the imperfect tense (ιζόμεν).¹⁶⁰ This all serves to suggest that the feast was the focus of Euripides' *Thyestes*.¹⁶¹ In addition, as Bergk points out, Aristophanes' *Proagon* (422 BC), produced just three years later, seems to parody the feast of Euripides' *Thyestes*:¹⁶²

ἐγευσάμην χορδῆς ὁ δύστηνος τέκνων·
πῶς ἐσίδω ρύγχος περικεκαυμένον;

I've tasted—a wretch!—the guts of my own children.
How can I look upon roast pig-snout now?¹⁶³

Thus I agree with Lesky that Euripides' *Thyestes* dramatised Thyestes' first return from exile and the banquet itself.¹⁶⁴ This seems likely because fragments of Euripides' *Pleisthenes* mention a patricide,¹⁶⁵ which indicates this play dealt with events after the feast, as in the variant later attested by Hyginus' *Fabulae*.¹⁶⁶ Herein Pleisthenes is Atreus' biological son who was fostered by Thyestes in exile and returns with Thyestes to kill Atreus. Ultimately, Euripides' *Thyestes* refers to Atreus' revenge feast, whereas his *Pleisthenes* dealt with events afterwards.

In the earliest surviving Latin fragments of the tragedy, Ennius' *Thyestes* (169 BC) presents Thyestes repelling characters from his pollution.¹⁶⁷ So, although Welcker argues that this play dealt with Thyestes' feast, Thyestes' pollution and the foreign king Thesprotus' presence leads me to agree with Ladewig.¹⁶⁸ Ennius deals with Thyestes' exile following the feast.¹⁶⁹ But Ladewig suggests that Ennius' plot stretches past Aegisthus' conception and exposure, to incorporate his coming of age and recognition

¹⁶⁰ Aesch. *Ag.* 1597 ff.; 1219 ff., Eur. *El.* 726 ff.; *IT* 816; *Or.* 1002; Σ Eur. *Or.* 811 Dindorf.

¹⁶¹ Eur. 397b Kannicht.

¹⁶² Bergk 1840 p.239.

¹⁶³ Ar. 478. Kassel-Austin, tr. Henderson.

¹⁶⁴ Lesky 1966 pp.519-40.

¹⁶⁵ Eur. 625 Kannicht.

¹⁶⁶ Hyg. *Fab.* 86. See pp.9-10 above. Aegisthus was Thyestes' son fostered by Atreus, just as Pleisthenes is Atreus' son fostered by Thyestes here; the subsequent recognition-murders are very similar and it seems likely that the Aegisthus story was sparked by the Pleisthenes story, as the general trend of the myth sees Pleisthenes increasingly marginalised, whilst Aegisthus' role becomes more prominent.

¹⁶⁷ Ennius 8 Ribbeck. Cf. Ennius 356-61 Warmington.

¹⁶⁸ Ladewig 2001 pp.245-7. Cf. Welcker 1839 pp.369-70.

¹⁶⁹ Warmington (1935 p.346) suggests that Ennius' *Thyestes* had two scenes—one at the court of Atreus, the other at the court of Thesprotus; but I disagree because this argument is based on Hyginus' mythography (*Fab.* 88) rather than the evidence available in the fragments.

of his birth father Thyestes, none of which is reflected in the fragments.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, I agree with Jocelyn that Ennius' *Thyestes* only dealt with Pelopeia's rape and betrothal to Atreus.¹⁷¹ For whilst there is no evidence in the extant fragments of Pelopeia having a child, there is evidence of a scheme to marry Pelopeia to Atreus under the pretense of her being Thesprotus' daughter, a variant later reflected in Hyginus' *Fabulae* 88.¹⁷² Thesprotus secures this marriage by reassuring Atreus:

Sin flaccibunt condiciones repudiato et reddito.

But if our terms go lax, then cast her off
And give her back.¹⁷³

This seems to maintain the version of the myth in which Atreus fosters Thyestes and Pelopeia's bastard son Aegisthus.¹⁷⁴ Though Ennius' *Thyestes* provides little evidence for Thyestes' adultery, as it indicates events after the feast, we will return to Ennius' *Thyestes* when we discuss vengeance and kingship, as they seem to establish themes that resonate in Accius' *Atreus*.¹⁷⁵

By contrast, the surviving Latin fragments of Accius' *Atreus* (c.130 BC) are more ostensibly about the feast and also indicate how the adultery figures in this episode. However, the focus of Accius' fragments cannot be viewed in the context with other motivating factors, in the same way that excerpts of Seneca's extant tragedy on the feast can. What is more challenging about the Latin works is that only two lines of Varius' *Thyestes* survive,¹⁷⁶ a play that most likely dealt with the cannibalistic feast, having been commissioned by Augustus to edify his revenge.¹⁷⁷ This clouds our view of the role adultery plays in Seneca's *Thyestes* because, as we shall see, he may be drawing on or reacting to what was most likely a harsh condemnation of Aërope's affair in Varius, given Augustus' approach to family values that later culminated in legal reforms (19 BC).¹⁷⁸

So whilst we can see how adultery is presented in the Latin *Thyestes* tragedies more clearly, we do not have access to how this may have been shaped by Varius'

¹⁷⁰ Ladewig 2001 pp.245-7.

¹⁷¹ Jocelyn 1967 p.414.

¹⁷² Hyg. *Fab.* 88. See p.9 above.

¹⁷³ Ennius 6 Ribbeck.

¹⁷⁴ Hyg. *Fab.* 88. See p.9 above.

¹⁷⁵ See p.55 below.

¹⁷⁶ See p.17-19 above.

¹⁷⁷ Suet. *Aug.* 10. See Intro p.16 ff.

¹⁷⁸ Treggiari 1991 pp.268-70. cf. Val. Max. 6.3.9, Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 14.18.89, [Cato] Gell. *N.A.* 10.23.2-5.

Thyestes. Nonetheless, this chapter will reconstruct the content of the fragmentary plays and discern how adultery, kingship and self-will may have featured in each, by examining clues in each tragedian's extant works and tackling the debates put forward by those compiling the fragments. This enquiry will ultimately enable us to consider how each tragedian may have shaped their presentation of Atreus' revenge motives to appeal to a contemporary audience.

1.1: Adultery

When considering the traditional motivation for the feast, Thyestes' adultery with Aërope, two issues arise. The first issue is the audience's attitude towards adultery and its impact on how they would judge Atreus' response to Thyestes' and Aërope's affair: the revenge feast. The second issue is the threat to Atreus' kingship following both his loss of the Golden Fleece and Thyestes' contamination of the royal bloodline in the heroic-age context of the play. By reconstructing how each audience may have judged Aërope's adultery by contemporary standards and how this adultery may have been presented in each play, I can then focus on how each play's internal and external audiences would expect Atreus to act in a tragic context.

Sophocles & Adultery in Athens

For a fifth-century Athenian audience, the reactions of cuckolds were the subject of civic scrutiny outside the theatre. This was not only a cultural value, but Apollodorus' fourth-century speech against Neaira allegedly quotes the contemporary "Law of adultery" (ΝΟΜΟΣ ΜΟΙΧΕΙΑΣ):

Ἐπειδὴν δὲ ἔλη τὸν μοιχόν, μὴ ἐξέστω τῷ ἐλόντι συνοικεῖν τῇ γυναικί· ἐὰν δὲ συνοικῆ, ἄτος ἔστω. μὴδὲ τῇ γυναικί ἐξέστω εἰσιέναι εἰς τὰ ἱερά τὰ δημοτελεῖ, ἐφ' ἧ ἂν μοιχὸς ἀλῶ· ἐὰν δ' εἰσίῃ, νηποινεῖ πασχέτω ὅ τι ἂν πάσχη, πλὴν θανάτου.

When he has caught the adulterer, it shall not be lawful for the one who has caught him to continue living with his wife, and if he does so, he shall lose his civic rights; and it shall not be lawful for the woman who is taken in adultery to attend public sacrifices; and if she does attend them, she may be made to suffer any punishment whatsoever, short of death, and that with impunity.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ [Dem.] 59.87. Carey disregards the law as an interpolation, but the interpolator would have had access to more ancient texts, so even if it is an interpolation it may still be consistent with contemporary law (1997 pp.190-6). See pp. 40-5 below on adultery and Aërope's extra-marital affair with Thyestes.

Apollodorus quotes this to formally recapitulate points he has already made to disparage Neaira's daughter,¹⁸⁰ which suggests that he is keen to reiterate the law as the jurors knew it, leaving them no option but to agree with him. Indeed, Kapparis' commentary highlights the shift into legalese, given that laws describe 'the woman' in the singular as we see here (τῆ γυναικί) and formulaic expressions such as πλὴν θανάτου are repeated when quoting the law.¹⁸¹ This tells us that an Athenian theatre audience ought not to have tolerated an adulterous woman or a forgiving cuckold.¹⁸² It also reflects contempt for adultery as an injury not only to the family but also the community, leaving no room for forgiveness between spouses. Thus it follows that, though Atreus as a mythical king is not subject to the Athenian law, he would be expected to react brutally to Aërope's transgression if he is to receive sympathy from Sophocles' or Euripides' audiences.

We have already concluded that Sophocles' audience would have known of Aërope's adultery through the references in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.¹⁸³ So we can surmise that it was the basis for Sophocles' *Thyestes' Adultery* and probably also featured in his *Thyestes' Feast*. That said, the surviving fragments give little indication of how Sophocles may have connected this offence with Atreus' revenge feast: Sophocles' Theban plays interpret different episodes of the family myth without assuming continuity, his *Thyestes* plays may have done so, too.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, as with the Theban plays, Sophocles' *Thyestes* plays were probably not staged in narrative order, or in the same festival like an Aeschylean trilogy. This means that *Thyestes' Feast* may have preceded *Thyestes' Adultery*.

Yet irrespective of relative dating, each of Sophocles' *Thyestes* tragedies is structured around Thyestes' adultery, just as all of Sophocles' Theban plays include Oedipus' incest and patricide, despite their different treatments of it.¹⁸⁵ This suggests that *Thyestes' Adultery* highlighted the personal transgression of Thyestes' affair with

¹⁸⁰ [Dem.] 59.85.

¹⁸¹ Kapparis 2012 p.356. cf. [Dem]. 59.86 for πλὴν θανάτου.

¹⁸² Plut. *Phoc.* 19.2-3 (written AD 115, set 350-18 BC) expresses the *choregos*' concern that female audience members might be corrupted. For evidence of audiences including women and children. See p.12 above.

¹⁸³ Aesch. *Ag.* 1096-7, 1190-1, 1217-24 (Cassandra), 1241-5 (Chorus), 1581-1611 (Aegisthus).

¹⁸⁴ Sophocles' *Antigone* (c.442 BC), *Oedipus Tyrannus* (c.430 BC), *Oedipus at Colonus* (401 BC). Cf. Lloyd-Jones 1983 p.119.

¹⁸⁵ Soph. *Ant.* 1-3, 165-9; *OT.* 994-1000, 1180-85; *OC.* 265-75.

Aërope, which would have been referenced more briefly in *Thyestes' Feast*. For even in Sophocles' *Ajax* Aërope's promiscuity is noted in conjunction with Thyestes' feast, as Teucer rebuffs Agamemnon's slur on his lineage:

οὐκ οἶσθα σοῦ πατρὸς μὲν ὃς προῦφου πατὴρ
τὰρχαῖον ὄντα Πέλοπα βάρβαρον Φρύγα;
Ἄτρεα δ', ὃς αὖ σ' ἔσπειρε, δυσσεβέστατον
προθέντ' ἀδελφῶν δεῖπνον οἰκείων τέκνων;
αὐτὸς δὲ μητρὸς ἐξέφυς Κρήσσης, ἐφ' ἣ
λαβὼν ἐπακτὸν ἄνδρ' **ὁ φιλύσας πατὴρ**
ἐφῆκεν ἀλλοῖς ἰχθύσιν διαφθοράν.

Do you not know that the father of your father, Pelops, was by origin a barbarous Phrygian? And that Atreus, your parent, set before his brother a most impious meal, the flesh of his children? And you yourself are the son of a Cretan mother, whom **your father**, finding a lover with her, sent to be destroyed by dumb fishes.¹⁸⁶

Armstrong claims that these lines emphasise shame in the fact that Aërope is Cretan, thus is proverbially deceitful as “Cretans always lie” (Κρηῆτες ἀεὶ ψεῦσται).¹⁸⁷ But this view ignores the version of Aërope's myth alluded to here, which is reflected in the scholion to these lines:

ἡ ἱστορία ἐν ταῖς Κρήσσαις Εὐριπίδου, ὅτι διαφθαρεῖσαν αὐτὴν λάθρα ὑπὸ τοῦ θεράποντος ὁ πατὴρ Ναυπλίῳ παρέδωκεν ἐντειλάμενος καταποντῶσαι· ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ' ἠγγύησε Πλεισθένει.

The story is in Euripides' *Cretan Women*, that when (Aërope) had been secretly violated by her servant, her father handed her over to Nauplius with orders to drown her; Nauplius did not do this, however, but pledged her in marriage to Pleisthenes.¹⁸⁸

Teucer's account could be reflecting or foreshadowing Aërope's infidelity in one or more of Sophocles' *Thyestes* tragedies, depending on the relative dating of *Thyestes' Feast* and *Ajax*. Moreover, Lloyd-Jones's *Ajax* translation cited above neglects φιλύσας, the participle for fathering or birthing.¹⁸⁹ A more faithful translation would therefore read “the sowing father” perhaps implicating Aërope's *own* father (Catreus), from whom these crimes flourish and not Agamemnon's father (Atreus). Moreover, Aërope's promiscuity is not linked as a cause of the feast described in the previous line, which

¹⁸⁶ Soph. *Aj.* 1293-7, tr. Lloyd-Jones.

¹⁸⁷ Armstrong 2006 p.109.

¹⁸⁸ Σ Soph. *Aj.* 1297a= Eur. *Kress*.T.iii a Kannicht, tr. Cropp.

¹⁸⁹ s.v. Liddell and Scott φιλύω.cf. Pl. *Resp.* 461a; *Leg.* 879d; *Criti.* 116c, Hes. *Th.* 986. Burkert reads this as Atreus throwing Aërope into the sea (1972 p.104).

suggests that this refers to Aërope's premarital affair described in the scholion, not her extramarital affair with Thyestes.¹⁹⁰

This promiscuity became a standard feature of Aërope's characterisation. Aërope's premarital sex is alluded to in Sophocles' *Ajax* and dramatised in Euripides' *Kressai* (*Cretan Women* c.438 BC).¹⁹¹ As Ogden points out, the Greeks viewed premarital affairs as a precursor of extramarital affairs to come,¹⁹² and references to her extramarital affair with Thyestes occur in Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*: Sophocles' contemporary.¹⁹³ Thus Aërope is both characterised as a philanderer by Sophocles and judged to be of poor character by the contemporary standards of his audience: when viewing Sophocles' *Thyestes' Feast*, Aërope's traditional promiscuity would have been in the audience's memory irrespective of how we order Sophocles' *Thyestes* plays.

Whilst Aërope's affair may have been presented more sympathetically in Sophocles' play on *Thyestes' Adultery* in which Aërope would have appeared on stage, Armstrong's assumption that Aërope would have appeared in *Thyestes' Feast* seems unlikely.¹⁹⁴ However, Thyestes' return from exile probably featured in Sophocles' *Thyestes' Feast*, as it had been referenced in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and satirised in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*.¹⁹⁵ This exile suggests an interval between the discovery of adultery and the feast, in which Aërope would have been either killed, or exiled with no pretense of fraternal reconciliation to draw *her* back, unlike Thyestes. Thus in *Thyestes' Feast* Sophocles' Atreus would have been able to present the affair unsympathetically, playing on his audience's prejudices. Indeed, the adultery is consistently presented as the impetus for the feast, given that it was an attempt to purge the bloodline of Aërope and Thyestes' illegitimate children, sparing the legitimate Menelaus and Agamemnon.¹⁹⁶

Overall, there is no surviving material from Sophocles' *Thyestes* plays that points directly to Aërope's adultery with her brother-in-law. But we know from the Theban plays that Sophocles emphasised various aspects of the myth in different

¹⁹⁰ Σ Soph. *Aj.* 1297a=T iii a Kannicht.

¹⁹¹ Aeschylus' lost *Kressai* leaves only four fragments. Aesch. 116 Radt. The most substantial of which, as Sommerstein has convinced me, suggests this play covered the story of Glaucus, not the marriage of Aërope (2009 pp.122-3).

¹⁹² Ogden 1997 p.26.

¹⁹³ Eur. *El.* 720-3; *Or.* 16-18, 1007-9.

¹⁹⁴ Armstrong 2006 p.12.

¹⁹⁵ Aesch. *Ag.* 1585-6, Ar. *Ach.* 433.

¹⁹⁶ See ch.3 p.200 ff.

episodes, thus most likely stressing this adultery in at least one of the three plays. Teucer's slur on Aërope's honour in *Ajax*, an accusation which Agamemnon does not deny, also suggests that Catreus' rejection of his daughter for premarital sex was a familiar version of the myth to Sophocles' audience. Thus it seems likely that *Thyestes' Adultery* would have dramatised Aërope's affair with Thyestes, which would have been referred to in *Thyestes' Feast*.

Euripides' Adulteress: Aërope in *Kressai*

Like Sophocles, Euripides composed several separate plays on the Pelopids' demise, including the banquet in his *Thyestes*, before turning to the descendants of the Atreidae in his *Electra*, *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Orestes*. But as we have seen, Euripides dealt with Aërope's *moicheia* in *Kressai* (438 BC).¹⁹⁷ Given its title, *Kressai* initially seems to be set in Aërope's paternal home at Crete.¹⁹⁸ This suggests that *Kressai* relates Aërope's liaison with a slave in Crete as referred to in Sophocles' *Ajax*.¹⁹⁹ But the play somehow includes Atreus²⁰⁰ and Thyestes in rags,²⁰¹ which suggests it features Aërope's affair with Thyestes.

If *Kressai* is set in Crete, then why have these royal brothers come from Mycenae? Wilamowitz surmised that Thyestes might have disguised himself as the slave with whom Aërope has premarital sex in Crete.²⁰² But there is no reason why Thyestes should be in Crete, disguised or otherwise. Collard more straightforwardly deduces from the reference to Thyestes' rags that he must have wandered to Crete in exile.²⁰³ But this is chronologically inconsistent with the cause of his exile: Thyestes is sent away for his affair with Aërope, as indicated by Aeschylus.²⁰⁴ Nor does Collard's theory explain Atreus' presence if Aërope is betrothed to Pleisthenes as the scholion to Sophocles' *Ajax* suggests.²⁰⁵ In this play Pleisthenes would most likely have been

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Carcinus 70 Snell.

¹⁹⁸ Eur. T *v Kannicht.

¹⁹⁹ Σ Soph. *Aj.* 1297a = Eur. T iii a Kannicht.

²⁰⁰ Σ Ar. *Vesp.* 763a = Eur. 465 Kannicht.

²⁰¹ Σ Ar. *Ach.* 433 = Eur. T iv Kannicht.

²⁰² Wilamowitz 1875 p.255. Cf. Collard 2009 p.313.

²⁰³ Collard and Cropp 2009 p.518.

²⁰⁴ Aesch. *Ag.* 1585–6.

²⁰⁵ Σ Soph. *Aj.* 1297a = Eur. T iii a Kannicht.

Atreus' son because the preceding Greek versions of the myth cast him as such, whether they name him as the father of the Atreidae or not.²⁰⁶

It seems more likely that Pleisthenes, Atreus and Thyestes are present because Aërope is to be married in Mycenae. For although Collard suggests the play is set in Crete because the eponymous *Cretan Women* seem to be the chorus, the papyri testimonia suggests that the women have already been sent away by Catreus.²⁰⁷ Euripides' Cretan chorus may have followed Aërope in much the same way when Aërope's father Catreus sent her to her death, much like the chorus of Greek women in Euripides' *Ion* are not indigenous, but follow their mistress to Delphi as her retinue.²⁰⁸ Indeed, if Nauplius is to remove Aërope to be drowned as the scholion suggests, then Aërope's handmaids serve two functions: to convince Aërope that her voyage has a destination where their services will be needed and to punish the female attendants who would have concealed their mistress' affair with the slave in Crete.²⁰⁹ Therefore, the chorus of *Kressai* rather seems to have emphasised the association between Aërope's adultery and the stereotype of Cretan infidelity.²¹⁰ More pressingly, the scholion on Sophocles' *Ajax* also indicates that Nauplius is traditionally ordered to drown Aërope as punishment for her premarital affair, thus transporting her in secret *away* from Crete.²¹¹

Moreover, if we look more closely at the reference to Thyestes' rags in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, there is no clear evidence as to which Euripides play they belong,²¹² nor does the scholion to this passage definitively place them in *Kressai*:

τῶν Θυεστείων ῥακῶν· ἢ τῶν Κρησσῶν ἢ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Θυέστου.

Thyestes' rags': **either** in *Cretan Women* **or** in *Thyestes* itself.²¹³

Based on this hedging, I suggest that *Kressai* recalled Aërope's premarital affair and

²⁰⁶ Hes. 194 West. Though the following claim Atreus is the father of Agamemnon and Menelaus, they do not specify that Pleisthenes is their brother and thus also Atreus' son: Σ Tzetzes *ad Hom. Il.* B 249. Erbse, *Eur. Or.* 15-21.

²⁰⁷ Eur. T v Kannicht. (τὸ γυναικας ἐκ [Κρήτης] ὑπὸ Κατρέ-|ως πέμπεσθαι); cf. Collard 2005 p.54.

²⁰⁸ Eur. *Ion* 184-90, 210-12, 235.

²⁰⁹ Wolpert suggests the role of female attendants in his discussion of Lysias 1; this practice seems logical as the women are typically left at home (2001 p.417).

²¹⁰ Ar. *Ran.* 849-50 and the accompanying scholia enforces the Cretan connection between Euripides' tragic whores. Cf. Armstrong 2006 p.110ff.

²¹¹ Soph. *Aj.* 1293-7, Σ Soph. *Aj.* 1297a= Eur. T iii a Kannicht, tr. Cropp.

²¹² Ar. *Ach.* 433.

²¹³ Σ Ar. *Ach.* 433 = Eur. T iv Kannicht.

dramatised her betrothal to Pleisthenes, her affair with Thyestes and Thyestes' exile.²¹⁴ This plot would explain the presence of her father-in-law, husband and lover, given that her affair with the slave serves as motivation for Nauplius to marry her off to Pleisthenes.²¹⁵ This would not perplex a Euripidean audience, for whom Aërope's marriage to Pleisthenes, not Atreus, was an existing version of the myth.²¹⁶ So, were Thyestes exiled at the very end of *Kressai*, this would explain the hedging in the scholion: in *Kressai* exile is how Thyestes exits, in *Thyestes* he would return bedraggled.

As a result, my reading of Euripides' *Kressai* renders fr.460 as part of Nauplius' resolution to marry off Aërope to Pleisthenes:

λύπη μὲν ἄτη περιπεσεῖν αἰσχρᾶ τι·
εἰ δ' οὖν γένοιτο, χρὴ περιστεῖλαι καλῶς
κρύπτοντα καὶ μὴ πᾶσι κηρύσσειν τάδε·
γέλως γὰρ ἐχθροῖς γίγνεται τὰ τοιάδε.

It is painful to have a shaming disaster befall one; but if it should happen, one must conceal and cover it well, and not proclaim it to all. Such things become a mockery for one's enemies.²¹⁷

Cropp reads this as evidence of Thyestes and Aërope's long-term betrayal and illegitimate children.²¹⁸ But given Nauplius' presence in the play it seems more likely to be a reference to Aërope's previous affair with a slave, which he is now concealing by marrying her to Pleisthenes. Aërope's affair with Thyestes seems to be a consequence of this initial deception: Pleisthenes is being married to a sexual deviant.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ The political impact of their affair when Aërope is instead married to Atreus is emphasised in the later play: Eur. *El.* 720–5.

²¹⁵ Aërope's marriage to Pleisthenes may be a less prominent version of the myth than her marriage to Atreus, but it is alluded to in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1569 and 1602) wherein Agamemnon and Menelaus are Pleisthenes' sons fostered by their grandfather Atreus. As a result, Pleisthenes' appearance as Atreus' son seems far more likely than his appearance as Atreus' brother, a variant which does not emerge until the Alexandrian scholion Σ Pind. *Ol.* 1.144; cf. Lefkowitz 1985 pp.269-81.

²¹⁶ Stes. *PMG* 42, Σ A Hom. *Il.* 1.7 = Hes. *Eh.* 137a Most [Hes. 194 West], Tzetz. *Exeg. Il.* 1.122. = Hes. *Eh.* 137b Most [Hes. 194 West], Σ Tzetzes = Hes. *Eh.* 137c, Most [Hes. 194 West], P.Oxy. 2494A; 1-*Scutum* 5: P.Oxy. 2355 = Hes. *Eh.* 138. Most [Hes. 195.3-7 West], Aesch. *Ag.* 1602, this version was probably later developed in Euripides' *Pleisthenes* in 414 BC.

²¹⁷ Eur. 460 Kannicht, tr. Cropp.

²¹⁸ Cropp 2008 p.518.

²¹⁹ Aërope's behaviour in the play is described by the scholiast on Aristophanes, *Frogs* 849 (Σ Ar. *Ran.* 849.1- 8 = Eur. T iii.b Kannicht) as 'like a whore's'; since *Frogs* 1043 uses the word 'whore' of Phaedra (see *Hippolytus Veiled*) and Stheneboea (*Stheneboea*),

Therefore, I suggest that *Kressai* presented the correlation between Aërope's premarital and extramarital affairs to exploit the prejudices of the Athenian audience who believed premarital sex led to extramarital sex. Indeed, the Greek term for adultery, *μοιχεία*, can apply to premarital or extramarital sex because, as Paoli points out, *μοιχεία* offends the household overall, not simply the marriage.²²⁰ Although Cohen disputes this on the grounds that legislators typically deal with *μοιχεία* in the context of marriage,²²¹ there is a bias of evidence here. It is less likely that charges would be brought against an unwedded daughter who could be coerced into marrying her lover to, as Nauplius puts it in *Kressai*, "conceal and cover it well".²²² Thus Aërope's characterisation as a whore in *Kressai* (438 BC) may resonate with the audience of Euripides' *Thyestes* (c.425 BC).²²³ Aërope is typically absent by the time of the feast in *Thyestes* and thus would be characterised by the dialogue of her cuckolded husband and former lover. However, Euripides' *Thyestes* focuses on the rivalry between Atreus and Thyestes, so Atreus would be Aërope's cuckolded husband here, *not* Pleisthenes as is the case in *Kressai*.

Therefore *Kressai* does not predicate a Thyestean feast. In *Kressai* Euripides characterises Thyestes, Aërope and Atreus within an alternative version of the Pelopid myth. This characterisation sets up an Athenian audience's expectations of key characters that are reimaged in Euripides' *Thyestes*, which could be fulfilled or frustrated in the staging of Thyestes' feast. But given that *Kressai* (438 BC) was staged over a decade before Euripides' *Thyestes* (c.425 BC) and subscribed to a different sequence of marriages, we cannot assume narrative continuity between the two. The only plotline that would support the presence of all these characters would be if Aërope's wedding to Pleisthenes took place and broke down in a single play.²²⁴ In this instance, her affair with Thyestes would have been brief, leaving no time to produce the

who are other 'wicked' women in this early phase of Euripides' career, it looks as if Aërope was an important character here.

²²⁰ Paoli 1950 p.139. Cf. Cohen who refutes this but offers no evidence (1990 p.147); s.v. Liddell & Scott *μοιχεία*.

²²¹ Cohen 1984 p.149.

²²² Eur. 460 Kannicht. See p.12 above. Cf. Cohen for a comprehensive overview of the relationship between legality and reality in the Greek world (1991 pp.133-70).

²²³ Aërope may not have been classed as a *μοιχός* herself because as Todd points out *μοιχεία* is typically a masculine offence (2007 p. 48). But Aërope has been complicit in *μοιχεία* and is therefore termed a "whore" here in line with the comic classification of Euripidean heroines.

²²⁴ This marriage would explain why the brothers from Mycenae and the Cretan retinue appear together, an issue that arises in the papyrus commentary: Eur. T *v Kannicht.

illegitimate children which seem central to Atreus' feast in the plays in which *he* is her husband.²²⁵ Thus according to this reconstruction of Euripides' *Kressai* Aërope's infidelity is condensed into an episode, in which her marriage to Pleisthenes is instigated and terminated by her inappropriate sexual conduct.

As a result, Euripides seems to have eliminated the presence of illegitimate children and focused on the pathos of adultery on a personal level by marginalising the issue of royal lineage. Atreus' apparent discovery of Aërope's affair with Thyestes in *Kressai* reflects this indignation on behalf of his son Pleisthenes:

ATPEΥΣ
<Ἄιδης> κρινεῖ ταῦτ(α) . . .

Atreus
<Hades> will judge this...²²⁶

This reference to the chthonic god is indicated in Aristophanes' scholion and threatens death as a consequence for a crime, which suggests Aërope is being addressed here as the Aristophanic scholion claims.²²⁷ Aërope was originally condemned to death for μοιχεία, so it seems likely that she is now being condemned for her most recent affair with Thyestes.²²⁸ The focus of this rebuke is the religious pollution of the adultery itself rather than its wider implications.

Euripides' fr.463 also seems to present Atreus' gnomic outburst based on Aërope's betrayal of his son Pleisthenes:

οὐ γάρ ποτ' ἄνδρα τὸν σοφὸν γυναικὶ χρή
δοῦναι χαλινοὺς οὐδ' ἀφέντ' ἔαν κρατεῖν·
πιστὸν γὰρ οὐδέν ἐστιν· εἰ δέ τις κυρεῖ
γυναικὸς ἐσθλῆς, εὐτυχεῖ κακὸν λαβῶν.

The wise man should never ease the reins on his wife, nor relax them and let her take control; for there is nothing trustworthy about her. If anyone gets a virtuous wife, he enjoys good fortune from a bad possession.²²⁹

²²⁵ Cf. Euripides' later plays: Eur. *Hel.* 386-94 (412 BC) and *Or.* 16-19 (408 BC).

²²⁶ Eur. 465 Kann nicht, tr. Cropp.

²²⁷ Σ Ar. *Vesp.* 763a = Eur. 465 Kannicht. ὁ Ἄτρεὺς πρὸς τὴν Ἀερόπην <φησὶν· Ἄιδης δια> κρινεῖ ταῦτ(α). N.b. Kannicht supplements Ἄιδης because the scholion comments on *Wasps*: Ἄιδης διακρινεῖ πρότερον ἢ ἴγὼ πείσομαι (Before I do that for you, death will decide between us!) tr. Henderson.

²²⁸ Σ Soph. *Aj.* 1297a = T iii a Kannicht. See p.7 above on Ajax's use of φιλύσας to implicate Catreus' punishment of Aërope which, given that Agamemnon is a grown man in *Ajax*, suggests that Aërope lived long enough to have him with her husband Atreus despite her father's attempt to kill her here.

²²⁹ Eur. 463 Kannicht, tr. Cropp. Cf. Cohen for an outline of Euripides' pairing of wholesome and unwholesome women (1990 pp.149-50).

This again dwells on a sense of personal deceit between man and wife and a resulting mistrust of marriage itself.²³⁰ I suggest that these words are spoken by Atreus because, given the fragments of the wedding feast that follow, he seems to discover the affair between Thyestes and Aërope before Pleisthenes does.

Indeed, *Kressai* fr.464 seems to indicate the moment when Atreus has revealed the affair to Pleisthenes, and has been met with defiance, thus replying:

γαμεῖτε νυν, γαμεῖτε, κᾶτα θνήσκετε
ἢ φαρμάκοισιν ἐκ γυναικὸς ἢ δόλοισι.

Well, go on and get married, get married, and then die either through poison or plot from your wife!²³¹

Here Euripides betroths a young, besotted Pleisthenes to Aërope to focus the tragedy on her deceit. Frr.460-5 and the scholion to Sophocles' *Ajax* support this reconstruction, which is in turn consistent with the inclusion of Thyestes²³² and Atreus suggested by the Artistophanic scholia.²³³ Thus Pleisthenes' character, in his naïvety, seems to forsake the responsibility that lay with the cuckold: to punish Aërope for sleeping with Thyestes and to terminate their betrothal.²³⁴

Given Pleisthenes' apparent determination to go ahead with this marriage in fr.464, Atreus is left to take action and seems to confront Nauplius:

ἐγὼ χάριν σὴν παῖδά σου κατακτάνω;
Am I to kill your child as a favour to you?²³⁵

This suggests that following Aërope's initial affair with the slave Nauplius neglected to kill her to avoid pollution. Thus by betrothing Aërope to Pleisthenes, Nauplius has deferred this responsibility for her behaviour to him. Given that they have both failed to act, it seems Atreus refuses to do so, leaving his son with the opportunity to avenge his own honour.

Indeed, the following fragments indicate a particularly tense wedding feast:

τί γὰρ ποθεῖ τράπεζα; τῷ δ' οὐ βρίθεται;
πλήρης μὲν ὄψων ποντίων, πάρεισι δὲ
μόσχων τέρειναι σάρκες ἀρνεῖα τε δαῖς
καὶ πεπτὰ καὶ κροτητὰ τῆς ξουθοπτέρου
πελάνῳ μελίσσης ἀφθόνως δεδευμένα.

²³⁰ For similar moral generalizations amongst Euripides' kings. Cf. Eur. *IA* 508-12; *Supp.* 429-41 and *Heracl.* 390-2.

²³¹ Eur. 464 Kannicht, tr. Cropp.

²³² Σ Ar. *Ach.* 433 = Eur. T iv Kannicht.

²³³ Σ Ar. *Vesp.* 763a = Eur. 465 Kannicht.

²³⁴ Ogden 1997 p.28.

²³⁵ Eur. 466 Kannicht, tr. Cropp.

What is there missing on the table? What is it not laden with? It's full of broiled seafood, and with it are tender meats of veal and a feast of lamb; and cakes and biscuits, drenched without stint in thick honey from the buzzing bee.²³⁶ Whilst Webster and Gantz read this as the cannibalistic feast of Thyestes,²³⁷ I agree with Van-Looy and Cropp that the variety of dishes suggests a feast for Aërope and Pleisthenes' wedding.²³⁸ But I maintain that the feast would be in Mycenae, not Crete.

Moreover, the affair seems to be disclosed at the feast, as fr.468 suggests that someone is bidding Atreus to keep quiet about his discovery:

τὰ δ' ἄλλα χαῖρε κύλικος ἐρπούσης κύκλω.

Be cheerful about the rest of things while the cup goes round.²³⁹

Fr.469 suggests Atreus is making an underhanded remark likening Aërope to spoils and either her lover Thyestes, or her now husband Pleisthenes, to a dog.²⁴⁰

νόμος δὲ λείψαν' ἐκβάλλειν κυσίν.

It is the custom to throw the leavings . . . to the dogs.²⁴¹

Thus the following fragment indicates a final disclosure, perhaps to the chorus, and confrontation amongst the characters:

†πρὶν ἄν... ἐκφλῆναί με καὶ μαθεῖν λόγον†

†Before I should babble and learn the tale . . . †²⁴²

So the wedding feast not only makes sense of Atreus, Thyestes and Pleisthenes' presence but also reimagines the metaphor of transgressive feasting that runs through different variants of Pelopid myth: from Tantalus' feast for the gods to Atreus' revenge feast.²⁴³

Therefore, although we have no direct reference to the affair in the fragments of Euripides' *Thyestes*, Euripides' *Kressai* focused on Aërope's premarital and "extramarital"²⁴⁴ sex as a moral crime. Whores were clearly associated with Euripides' tragic style, as Aeschylus protests when fighting Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs*: "I certainly created no whores like Phaedra and Stheneboea" (οὐ Φαίδρας ἐποίησεν πόρνας

²³⁶ Eur. 467 Kannicht, tr. Cropp.

²³⁷ Webster 1967 p.39, Gantz 1993 p.546.

²³⁸ Van-Looy 2000 p.294, Cropp 2008 p.518. This extravagant food also indicates a wedding feast rather than a normal meal, as Men fr.238 in Döhm 1964 pp.76-7.

²³⁹ Eur. 468 Kannicht, tr. Cropp.

²⁴⁰ κύων is elsewhere used as an insult in Ath. *Deip.* 697e.

²⁴¹ Eur. 469 Kannicht tr. Cropp.

²⁴² Eur. 470 Kannicht tr. Cropp.

²⁴³ See pp.8-16 for outline of variants.

²⁴⁴ Albeit, the affair at least started before she and Pleisthenes were married according to Eur. 464 Kannicht.

οὐδὲ Σθενεβοΐας).²⁴⁵ Moreover, the scholion to these lines, whilst attempting to explain why Aeschylus describes Euripides' solo lyrics as 'Cretan', adds Aërope to the list of Euripides' whores:

Ἀπολλώνιος δὲ, ὅτι δύναται καὶ εἰς τὴν Ἀερόπην τὴν ἐν ταῖς Κρήσσαις εἰρησθαι· ἦν εἰσήγαγε πορνεύουσαν.

But Apollonius (says) that it is also possible it was said with reference to Aërope as she appears in *Cretans*, who (Euripides) introduced prostituting herself.²⁴⁶

Euripides' Adulteress: Aërope in *Thyestes*

Turning to *Thyestes*, such sexual deception seems reiterated in Euripides' fr.396:

[ΘΥΕΣΤΗΣ πρὸς τὸν Ἀτρέα]
ἀλλ' εἴπερ ἐστὶν ἐν βροτοῖς ψευδῆ, γέρον,
πιθανά, νομίζειν χρή σε καὶ τοῦναντίον,
ἄπιστ' ἀληθῆ πολλὰ συμβαίνειν βροτοῖς.

[THYESTES to Atreus]
But if, old man, there are falsehoods amongst men that are persuasive, you should recognise the opposite—that many truths turn out to be unpersuasive to them.²⁴⁷

Here an anonymous commentary to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* indicates, in a corrupt sentence, that the speaker was Thyestes addressing Atreus.²⁴⁸ Yet it seems unlikely that one brother would address the other as "old man" at any age because they are of the same generation.²⁴⁹ Thus Kannicht argues that Aegisthus would call Atreus an "old man" in fr.396, when Aegisthus realises that Thyestes is his true father and kills his foster father Atreus to avenge the feast.²⁵⁰

However, this seems unlikely because Atreus' reference to the reversal of the stars in Euripides' fr.397b refers to the recent outcome of the feast.²⁵¹

²⁴⁵ Ar. *Ran.* 1043-4.

²⁴⁶ Σ Ar. *Ran.* 849.1- 8= Eur. T iii.b Kannicht, tr. Cropp.

²⁴⁷ Eur. 396 Kannicht, tr. Cropp, Aristot. *Rhet.* 1397a17 with anonymous commentary in *CAG XXI.2.133.21*. See page 2 above for full discussion.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Kannicht n.36= Theodectus' *Alcmaeon* T 72 †ταῦτά φησι πρὸς τὸν Θυέστην, ὅς ταῦτα φησι† πρὸς τὸν Ἀτρέα τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ (†such were the words spoken to Thyestes,† who spoke such words to his own brother Atreus) (My translation).

²⁴⁹ Σ Eur. *Or.* 12 Dindorf, also suggests that Thyestes is the older brother. Cf. Van-Looy 2009 p.290.

²⁵⁰ Kannicht 2004 p.437; for this variant cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 1580-5, Soph. 247 Radt, Σ Eur. *Or.* 14, Ov. *Ib.* 359, Sen. *Ag.* 293, Hyg. *Fab.* 87; 88, Dio Chrys. 66.6, Apollod. *Epit.* 2.14, Dio Chrys. 66.6.

²⁵¹ Aesch. *Ag.* 1597ff.; 1219ff., Eur. *El.* 726ff.; *IT* 816; *Or.* 1002; Σ Eur. *Or.* 811 Dindorf. Though some place the cataclysm after Thyestes steals the Golden Fleece, as

ΑΤΡΕΥΣ

δείξας γὰρ ἄστρον τὴν ἐναντίαν ὁδόν,
δόμους τ' ἔσωσα καὶ τύραννος ἰζόμην.

Atreus

By showing the contrary course of the stars, I saved my house and **established** myself as ruler.²⁵²

The imperfect tense of ἰζόμην may be better translated as “have begun to establish” suggesting that this is an ongoing action that was instigated within Euripides’ *Thyestes*, rather than referring to elements prior to the events of the play.²⁵³ Thus it seems that the deceit in question in Euripides’ *Thyestes* was the affair, which motivates Atreus’ revenge.

So who is the “old man” in Euripides’ *Thyestes* fr.396? The address “old man” is used in three instances in Euripidean tragedy: to address or refer to someone of the older generation,²⁵⁴ in self-reference,²⁵⁵ or to address an otherwise unnamed “Old Man” character.²⁵⁶ The latter seems most likely to apply to fr.396 because the speaker is addressing someone else and there can be no generation older than Atreus and Thyestes; were that the case they would not be arguing over the throne. Moreover, the “Old Man” character in Euripides typically emerges at the crux of the tragedy: in *Electra* he leads Orestes to kill Aegisthus and advises Electra on how to kill Clytemnestra, in *Ion* he encourages Creusa to poison her stepson, and in *Iphigenia at Aulis* his failure to deliver Agamemnon’s retraction letter leads to Iphigenia’s sacrifice.

Therefore, in Euripides’ *Thyestes* it seems Atreus used the “Old Man” as a sounding board for revenge, as Orestes did in *Electra* and Creusa did in *Ion*. So in Euripides’ fr.396 Atreus seems to be validating his suspicions. He encourages his confidant to believe Aërope’s purported chastity to be a “falsehood”, whilst ominously suggesting that he will construct a similar web of lies to trap and punish Thyestes, who will not suspect Atreus’ “true” plans for revenge.

discussed above (p.1), Euripides consistently subscribes to the reversal of the stars being a result of the feast.

²⁵² Eur. 397b Kannicht, tr. Cropp.

²⁵³ See ch.1 p.23 for Bergk’s theory on Aristophanes’ *Proagon* (of 422 BC) as a parody of Euripides’ play on the feast (1840 p.239).

²⁵⁴ Eur. *Heracl.* 556; *Hel.* 702; *Phoen.* 168, 995.

²⁵⁵ Eur. *Bacch.* 175, 193; *Supp.* 1034; *Phoen.* 847, 1088, 1318, 1724; *Andr.* 761, 1205, 1214.

²⁵⁶ Eur. *Ion* 925-1048; *El.* 596-646; *IA* 1-162.

Atreus' resolve for revenge is also demonstrated in Euripides' *Thyestes* fr. 393-5, which emphasise judgment, punishment and deceit:

γνώμης γὰρ οὐδὲν ἀρετὴ μονομένη.
Excellence is worth nothing if it is not combined with **judgment**.²⁵⁷

οὐ πάποτ' ἔργου μᾶλλον εἰλόμην λόγους.
I have never preferred words to **action**.²⁵⁸

πλούτου δ' ἀπορρυέντος ἀσθeneῖς γάμοι·
τὴν μὲν γὰρ εὐγένειαν **αἰνοῦσιν** βροτοί,
μᾶλλον δὲ κηδεύουσι τοῖς εὐδαίμοσιν.

People get weaker marriages when their wealth has drained away. Men **pay lip-service** to nobility, but they prefer to ally themselves with those who are prospering.²⁵⁹

The latter in particular links Atreus' desire to act with the impetus of adultery, whilst the former two demonstrate Atreus' desire to avenge it. When compared to the cataclysm in Euripides' *Thyestes* fr.397b, Thyestes' feast seems to have formed the action and Aërope's adultery the impetus.

Adultery & Athenian Audience Expectations

We can learn more about how adultery may have motivated revenge from a contemporary Greek perspective, by comparing our fragments to Lysias' speech *On the Murder of Eratosthenes* (403-380 BC).²⁶⁰ As Todd advises us, there is no way to know if this defense speech was actually used in court, nor if it was successful.²⁶¹ But given the naming of the defendant Euphiletus (beloved) and the adulterer Eratosthenes (vigorous in love), Porter's view that the speech was given as an example to advertise Lysias' skill seems likely.²⁶² In this speech Euphiletus claims that killing his wife's lover was, rather than a passionate act of revenge, a case of justifiable homicide. Many scholars note Euphiletus' assimilation of the homicide to a state execution.²⁶³ But these discussions of Lysias' speech overlook the details designed, albeit hypothetically, to

²⁵⁷ Eur. 393 Kannicht, tr. Cropp.

²⁵⁸ Eur. 394 Kannicht, tr. Cropp. s.v. Liddell and Scott εἴλω: "to drive violently along, smite, strike".

²⁵⁹ Eur. 395 Kannicht, tr. Cropp.

²⁶⁰ On Aërope's premarital affair (*moicheia*) before her extra-marital affair with Thyestes see pp. 27-8 above.

²⁶¹ Todd 2007 p.4. Cf. Nývlt 2013 p.167.

²⁶² Porter 2007 p.88. Nývlt systematically challenges Porter's claims interestingly, but not always convincingly (2013 pp. 162-5).

²⁶³ Herman 1993 p.408-10, Carey 1997 p.34, Wolpert 2001 p.418, Cohen 2005 p.226 and Todd 2007 p.51.

evoke sympathy from the male judges of the Delphinion, the court for justifiable homicide²⁶⁴ and paternity pledges.²⁶⁵

Euphiletus' case is built on the personal pain caused by the affair on different levels, centering on his wife's betrayal of their child. First, Lysias introduces concerns of intrusion, pollution and ὕβρις:

Ἐρατοσθένης τὴν γυναῖκα τὴν ἐμὴν καὶ ἐκείνην τε διέφθειρε καὶ τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἤσχυνε καὶ ἐμὲ αὐτὸν **ὑβρίσεν** εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τὴν ἐμὴν εἰσιῶν, καὶ οὔτε ἔχθρα ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐκείνῳ.

Eratosthenes had an intrigue with my wife, and not only corrupted her but **inflicted disgrace** upon my children and an outrage on myself by entering my house; that this was the one and only enmity between him and me.²⁶⁶ Secondly, Lysias emphasises Euphiletus' misplaced trust, which despite the social motives for marriage in the Greek world, suggests intimacy:

ἐφύλαττον τε ὡς οἶόν τε ἦν, καὶ προσεῖχον τὸν νοῦν ὥσπερ εἰκὸς ἦν. **ἐπειδὴ δέ μοι παιδίον γίγνεται**, ἐπίστευον ἤδη καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐμαυτοῦ ἐκείνη παρέδωκα, ἠγούμενος ταύτην οἰκειότητα **μεγίστην εἶναι**.

I kept a watch on her as far as possible, with such observation of her as was reasonable. **But when a child was born to me, thenceforward I began to trust her**, and placed all my affairs in her hands, **presuming that we were now in perfect intimacy.**²⁶⁷

Thirdly, Lysias presents the child as the cause for the husband's trust in the wife and, later, the mother's alibi when she accepts her lover into her child's nursery.²⁶⁸

Herman, Todd and Porter claim that Lysias characterises the “naïve” Euphiletus as a comic cuckold.²⁶⁹ Porter in particular successfully outlines the comic structure of Euphiletus' defense, which does omit the witnesses and pleading of a typical defense speech.²⁷⁰ However, this comic focus misses the point of Euphiletus' defense. Euphiletus is on trial for murder, he needs to prove himself to be temperate and give a good reason why his wife would be unsupervised. As Wolpert points out, if he claims to have known about the affair, he is vulnerable to the prosecution's accusation of entrapment.²⁷¹ Thus we must remember that Lysias' skill would have been measured by

²⁶⁴ [Aris.] *Ath. Pol.* 57.3, Dem. 23.74. Cf. Herman 1993 p.406.

²⁶⁵ Isae. 12.9, Dem. 40.11. Cf. Todd 2007 p.45.

²⁶⁶ Lys. 1.4, tr. Lamb.

²⁶⁷ Lys. 1.6-7, tr. Lamb.

²⁶⁸ Lys. 1.25.

²⁶⁹ Herman 1993 pp.408, 414-15, Todd 2007 p.51, Porter 2007 p.77.

²⁷⁰ Porter 2007 p.88

²⁷¹ Wolpert 2001 p.419.

how successfully he could argue for a comic cuckold figure to demonstrate his rhetorical prowess: the sympathetic nature of Lysias' defense and its format indicate that he is not simply presenting a cuckold for comic effect.

As a result, Euphiletus' defense for his negligence suggests that, even if his wife did not respect him enough to be faithful, she would not put her child's legitimacy in doubt for her own sexual gratification. Porter notes that Euphiletus exploits the birth of their legitimate child and his use as a cover for the wife's affair.²⁷² However, Porter fails to recognise how this would appeal to the sympathies of the hypothetical audience: the Delphinion, to whom paternity oaths were sworn and who would be swayed by the ὕβρις of the crime Euphiletus claims to have punished.

If we compare this case to Aërope's betrayal of Atreus in Sophocles' *Thyestes' Adultery* and *Thyestes' Feast*, in addition to Euripides' *Thyestes*, the infanticide of illegitimate children in these plays takes on a new, personal significance.²⁷³ Whilst Lysias casts comic characters in this speech,²⁷⁴ he does so to demonstrate the efficacy of his oratory by impersonating a difficult client.²⁷⁵ Therefore, despite the comic structure, Lysias reflects universal anxieties to create *pathos*.²⁷⁶

For example, the social desire for a strong οἶκος and the punishment of ὕβρις, are reiterated in Euphiletus' defense when he accosts the lovers: "I asked him why he had the **insolence to enter my house**" (ἠρώτων διὰ τί ὕβριζει εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τὴν ἐμὴν εἰσιών).²⁷⁷ But the increased intimacy following the birth of their child discussed above also suggests a sense of personal injury.²⁷⁸ So although Lysias draws on comedy, he does so to underscore his own ability to make a respectable case for even a murderous comic cuckold, by exploiting contemporary anxieties of an Athenian audience. Therefore, Lysias plays on the male Athenian judges' expectation that sharing children

²⁷² Porter 2007 pp.67-9.

²⁷³ See ch.3 pp.200-204 on the illegitimacy of Thyestes' sons.

²⁷⁴ Cf. Ar. *Thesm.* 395-7, 410-13 and 498-501, Ampisias' lost *Moichoi* comedy T 2. Kassel-Austin.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Nývlt 2013 p.167.

²⁷⁶ By "universal" I mean widely held, I do not subscribe to Perotti's allegorical reading of the speech with Euphiletus representing Athens, his wife democracy and Eratosthenes for oligarchy, which seems superimposed (1990 pp.47-8).

²⁷⁷ Lys.1. 25.

²⁷⁸ s.v. Liddell and Scott οἰκειότης; cf. Hdt. 6.54, Th. 3.86.

with a wife ought to secure the marriage: one that the Athenian men watching the Sophocles' and Euripides' *Thyestes* tragedies would have shared.²⁷⁹

Atreus' outrage at the affair may have been further justified by the inclusion of Menelaus and Agamemnon, the famous Atreidae of Homeric epic and Attic tragedy, because Aërope would then have betrayed her own legitimate children when sleeping with Thyestes.²⁸⁰ Indeed, the cannibal banquet attested in Sophocles' *Thyestes' Feast* and indicated in Euripides' *Thyestes* suggests that there must have been illegitimate sons for Atreus to doubt and thus cook.²⁸¹ Therefore, the affair between Thyestes and Aërope was a long-standing one she consented to. To understand this from an Athenian husband's perspective, we return again to Lysias:

βία ὑπὸ τῶν βιασθέντων μισεῖσθαι, τοὺς δὲ πείσαντας οὕτως αὐτῶν τὰς ψυχὰς διαφθεῖρειν, ὥστ' οἰκειοτέρας αὐτοῖς ποιεῖν τὰς ἀλλοτρίας γυναῖκας ἢ τοῖς ἀνδράσι, καὶ πᾶσαν ἐπ' ἐκείνοις τὴν οἰκίαν γεγονέναι, καὶ τοὺς παῖδας ἀδήλους εἶναι ὀποτέρων τυγχάνουσιν ὄντες, τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἢ τῶν μοιχῶν.

Those who achieve their ends by force are hated by the persons forced; while those who used persuasion corrupted thereby their victims' souls, thus **making the wives of others more closely attached to themselves than to their husbands, and got the whole house into their hands, and caused uncertainty as to whose the children really were**, the husbands' or the adulterers'.²⁸²

This extract has been at the centre of debates as to whether seduction was considered worse than rape in antiquity.²⁸³ However, rather than reflecting the letter of the law *per se*, Lysias appeals to the fears of the male Athenian jurors. Thus when these same men view their fears reflected in Atreus, whose wife spurns him, whose brother claims his kingdom, whose children mix with bastards, we can expect a great deal of sympathy for his cause.

Therefore, even if Aërope's affair was mentioned only fleetingly in Sophocles' *Thyestes' Feast*, it would have resonated strongly with his audience, particularly if they had previously seen this theme developed in *Thyestes' Adultery*, though the relative dating of the plays is unknown. We can be more certain that Euripides characterised Aërope as a whore in *Kressai* by implicating her in premarital and extramarital μοιχεία. Euripides' *Kressai* seems to have emphasised Aërope's infidelity so strongly that even

²⁷⁹ Cf. Arist. *NE*. 8.12.1162a. 27-9.

²⁸⁰ Σ Hom. *Il.* A 7a. Erbse.

²⁸¹ Statil. Flacc. *A.P.* 9.98= Soph. T 181 Radt, Eur. 397b Kannicht.

²⁸² Lys.1.33, tr. Lamb.

²⁸³ Harris 1990 p.370, Cohen 1991 pp.175-6, Carey 1995 pp.408-9.

the subtlest reference to her adultery in *Thyestes* would be understood as a sure motive for Atreus. Of course, either Euripides' *Kressai* or *Thyestes* itself must have earned Aërope the title of Euripides' "whore" in Aristophanes *Frogs* (405 BC).²⁸⁴ Thus, the "weaker marriages" (ἀσθενεῖς γάμοι) deplored in Euripides' *Thyestes* fr.396 presents Aërope's adultery as a motive for Atreus' revenge.

Furthermore, we should note that these staged productions would have placed Lysias' true victim of the adultery on centre stage: the οἶκος. The ὕβρις of intruding in a man's house to commit adultery is central to Euphiletus' defense.²⁸⁵ The Cretan *Law of Gortyn* (c.480-460 BC) reflects this taboo, as it had prescribed a doubling of fines for seducing a woman in the house of her guardian (κύριος), be it her father, brother or husband.²⁸⁶ In Athenian tragedy the household would be visually represented by the *skēnē* building, in which the audience may suppose the adultery to have taken place because Thyestes would most likely access Aërope and the Golden Fleece in Atreus' palace. So aside from the ancestral associations of the οἶκος, which will be discussed below, it is centre-stage as a symbol of Thyestes and Aërope's hubristic adultery in both Sophocles' and Euripides' *Thyestes* tragedies.

In sum, the fragments of Euripides' *Kressai* capture Aërope's affairs before Thyestes' exile and without producing the children necessary for the cannibalistic feast. This suggests that Euripides dealt with the feast in *Thyestes*, because he had not dramatised it elsewhere, and fr.397b indicates the recent outcome of the feast itself: "the contrary course of the stars" (ἄστρον τὴν ἐναντίαν ὁδόν).²⁸⁷ So Euripides seems to have used two versions of the myth, "an" adultery with a wedding feast and "the" adultery with the revenge feast. No continuity was maintained and the tragedies were staged over a decade apart, yet Euripides' characterisation of Aërope as a whore seems central to his *Kressai* and is reiterated in his *Thyestes* fr.393-6.²⁸⁸ So when reconciling the Greek fragments with contemporary attitudes toward adultery, we learn that the focus is on the ὕβρις of the adulterer's intrusion and corruption of the οἶκος, which would have been

²⁸⁴ Ar. *Ran.* 849.

²⁸⁵ Wolpert gives an extensive overview of the woman's role in protecting the οἶκος as background to Lysias 1 (2001 p.415-6). cf. Cohen 1991 pp.133-70.

²⁸⁶ Col. 3. In: Willetts 1967 pp.8, 28. s.v. Liddell and Scott κύριος.

²⁸⁷ Eur. 397b Kannicht.

²⁸⁸ This theme may have been taken up by Agathon (c.416-406 BC)-and Carcinus (384-322 BC) in *Aërope* plays but because only one word from each of these named tragedies survives we can make no serious comment on how they may have informed later Roman adaptations of the adultery myth.

represented by the *skēnē* even if references to the adultery were subtle.

Adultery & Accius' Audience Expectations

Roman audiences may have had slightly different expectations of Atreus before the severe terms of *Lex Julia de adulteriis* were introduced by Augustus in 18 BC, over a century after Accius' *Atreus* (c.130 BC). Before these laws were introduced, the family dealt with the condemnation of adulterous women, rather than the state. The problem with this, as Treggiari points out, is that the evidence we have of private adultery trials are "contaminated by the debate on state intervention which began in Cicero's day".²⁸⁹ Nonetheless, the objective of familial punishment seems to be privacy and discretion, to castigate the woman for forsaking her conjugal duty without shaming the family in a public court. So although an adulteress may not have been killed privately in the way that the Augustan sources suggest they had been and Augustan law suggests they should be, she was still punished as a subordinate by her male family members.²⁹⁰

Therefore, Accius' audience may have taken a dim view of Aërope's adultery, based on their own expectations of a wife's conjugal duty. But, unlike Apollonius' alleged "Law of Adultery" which banned adulteresses from public ritual and ostracised forgiving husbands, the Romans were free to judge adulteresses with discretion according to their own agenda at this time. Therefore, the personal affront of adultery and its impact on the family's reputation was perhaps felt more sharply than the religious and cultural transgression felt by the Greeks.

Unlike the Greek *Thyestes* fragments, Accius' *Atreus* clearly reflects Thyestes' crime, because fr.6-7 provide a detailed monologue, attributed to Atreus by Cicero, wherein Atreus describes his brother's affront.²⁹¹ Atreus speaks about the personal betrayal of Thyestes seducing Aërope, claiming "he lured my wife into debauchery" (*habuit coniugem inlexe in stuprum*).²⁹² Atreus thereby calls into question the bloodline:

...quod re in summa summum esse arbitror
periculum, matres coinquinari regias
contaminari stirpem, admisceri genus.

...a thing I hold to be
In matters of high state the height of danger

²⁸⁹ Treggiari 1991 p.268.

²⁹⁰ Treggiari 1991 pp.268-70. cf. Val. Max. 6.3.9, Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 14.18.89, [Cato] Gell. *N.A.* 10.23.2-5.

²⁹¹ Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.26.68.

²⁹² Accius 6 Ribbeck.

When mothers of the royal house are polluted
Their stock defiled, their lineage confused.²⁹³
So far, so Lysianic.

However, Atreus then discusses Thyestes' affair as a personal means of gaining political satisfaction:

At id ipsum quam callide, **qui regnum adulterio quaereret**—²⁹⁴
adde (inquit) huc quod mihi portento caelestum pater
prodigium misit, regni stabilimen mei,
agnum inter pecudes aurea clarum coma
quem clam Thyestem clepere ausum esse e regia;
qua in re adiutricem coniugem cepit sibi.

But how cunningly is this done, **by the very one who sought to gain the kingdom by adultery**—

What is more (he [Atreus] says) the father of the heavens by portent
Sent me a prodigy, an assurance for my realm,—
Among my sheep shone a ram with a Golden Fleece
Which Thyestes dared to steal in secret from the palace;

From where he took my wedded queen as his accomplice.²⁹⁵

This suggests that Accius' Atreus does not lament the attempt against the kingdom more than the personal affront, but the convergence of the two: Thyestes seduced Aërope into betraying her husband both personally and politically. By sleeping with Aërope to obtain the royal insignia, the Golden Fleece, Thyestes tore apart Atreus' family as a political power play. What is worse, this personal and political affront climaxes in the contamination of the bloodline as the paternity of Aërope's children is now in doubt.

Therefore, Accius' *Atreus* clearly sets out the king's motivation to harm his brother in such a way as might garner some sympathy for the eponymous hero. The seduction of Aërope is a polluting crime that demands a polluting revenge, the political affront demands a reassertion of power and the bloodline must be cleansed of illegitimate children. So by setting out Thyestes' crimes in detail, Accius is able to justify the most shocking elements of Atreus' revenge. Indeed, Cicero introduces this passage to offset his own condemnation of Atreus as an infamous villain, adding: "But we must not pass over Thyestes himself" (*Nec tamen ille ipse est praetereundus*).²⁹⁶

This underlines the crucial difference between what survives of Aërope and Thyestes' adultery in Roman tragedy, as opposed to Greek tragedy. In what remains

²⁹³ Accius 7 Ribbeck, tr. Warmington.

²⁹⁴ Here I accept the introductory line from Warmington's 1936 Loeb, which had not yet been included in the 1871 *TrGF*.

²⁹⁵ Accius 8 Ribbeck (My translation).

²⁹⁶ Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.26.68.

from Sophocles and Euripides we only find character references to Aërope's promiscuity in Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Kressai*, which could have shaped each tragedian's ensuing *Thyestes* plays through cross-reference. So from the Greek fragments we learn about how Aërope's adultery may have been presented as a motive: in what remains of Accius we learn about how Thyestes' adultery provoked the revenge feast specifically; the evidence is direct, not circumstantial.

Though Roman law did not make an official concession of justified homicide for a husband attacking his wife's lover, Plautus' near-contemporary comedies staged corporal punishment and rhetoricians writing shortly after Accius made the case that an *adulter* should be killed by anyone.²⁹⁷ Thus Accius' audience may have classified this act as a justified homicide. Moreover, sleeping with another man's wife was the only way a Roman man could be considered an adulterer, his extramarital affairs with other types of women would not be classed as adultery.²⁹⁸ Thyestes' role as an adulterer in these terms seems to be reflected in Accius' *Atreus*:

Id quod multi inuideant multique expetant inscitia
est postulare, nisi laborem summa cum cura eferas.

What many men do envy, many covet,
Unless you carry out the troublesome task
With greatest diligence.²⁹⁹

Therefore Accius' audience would have been expecting Atreus to avenge Thyestes' affair with Aërope because both his situation and the mythical tradition necessitate it. But could Atreus' revenge feast be justified enough to make him a sympathetic character? Was the indignation that Thyestes seems to show in fr.6-9b a means of aligning the audience's sympathy with Atreus, the eponymous hero?³⁰⁰

Overall, Accius fr.8 above seems to have allowed Atreus to set out his motives clearly to curry favour with his audience. This seems to have worked for Cicero who, when quoting fr.8, believes that Atreus' calculation of revenge will answer Thyestes' similarly calculated crime:

²⁹⁷ Plaut. *Mil.* 1394-427, *Curc.* 25-38, *Poen.* 862-3; Sen. *Controv.* 1.4; Quint. *Inst.* 9. 2. 42. Cf. Treggiari 1991 p.272.

²⁹⁸ Treggiari 1991 p.270.

²⁹⁹ Accius 9b. Ribbeck, tr. Warmington.

³⁰⁰ On trusting Republican tragic titles cf. Manuwald on Accius specifically (2015 and 2011 p.218), though the audience may not have known the title before viewing a production; cf. Slater 2015 p.285. As Dangel points out, Accius' titles favour the aggressor: *Atreus*, *Clytemnestra*; for Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon* (1990 p.114).

Videturne summa inprobitate usus non sine summa esse ratione?

Do you not see that Thyestes practised the greatest dishonour and yet showed perfect rationality?³⁰¹

So although, by cooking Thyestes' bastards and feeding them to him, Atreus' revenge surpasses the most extreme accepted response in Roman culture, to kill the wife and lover, Accius emphasised the effects of the adultery as motivation for the feast to come.³⁰²

Adultery & Seneca's *Thyestes*

Seneca, like Accius, has Atreus discuss the adultery in terms of Thyestes' seduction of Aërope to gain the Golden Fleece:

Fas est in illo quidquid in fratre est nefas.
quid enim reliquit crimine intactum **aut ubi
sceleri pepercit?** coniugem stupro abstulit
regnumque furto; specimen antiquum imperi
fraude est adeptus, **fraude** turbavit domum.

Anything that is wrong in dealing with a brother is right in dealing with him. What has he left untouched by guilt, **when has he refrained from crime?** He stole my wife by adultery and my kingdom by theft; **by deceit** he obtained our ancient symbol of power, **by deceit** he brought turmoil on the house.³⁰³

Here, like Accius' fr.6-7, Seneca alternates between the personal and political aspects of Thyestes' adultery, initially blaming both causes equally.³⁰⁴ But Accius' Atreus denounces Thyestes' villainy, whereas Seneca's Atreus responds less emotively, employing a rhetorical question and anaphora to guide his audience to that conclusion.

Again, like Accius' Atreus, Seneca's Atreus relates the adultery as the impetus of his revenge:

hunc facinus ingens ausus assumpta in scelus
consorte nostri perfidus thalami avehit.
Hinc omne cladis mutuae fluxit malum.

Risking a flagrant crime, and taking the partner of my bed as accomplice, that betrayer carried him off. **From this act flowed all the evil of our mutual**

³⁰¹ Accius 8 Ribbeck tr. Warmington. Ribbeck attributes this to *Atreus*, but the context suggests these words are Cicero's interpretation and accompany Atreus' calculation quoted above at Accius 8 Ribbeck= Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.69.

³⁰² For changes in this law over time cf. Bauman 1996 pp.33-4.

³⁰³ Sen. *Thy.* 220-4 tr. Fitch.

³⁰⁴ *Fas* is divinely sanctioned justice in contrast to *ius* s.v. *OLD fas*. Atreus' self-deification distorts religious references in Seneca, therefore they are not considered here in the same way as Greek *hubris* is above. As a result, Atreus' self-deification will be considered in the detail it deserves at ch.2 pp.238-247.

destruction.³⁰⁵

But whereas the political concerns expressed in Accius fr.8 are offset by the domestic impact of adultery expressed in fr.7, Seneca's Atreus is most offended by the political implications this could have for him as a king:

pars nulla nostri tuta ab insidiis vacat,
corrupta coniunx, imperi quassa est fides,
domus aegra, dubius sanguis; est certi nihil
nisi frater hostis.

no part of what is mine is safe from treachery; **my wife is defiled**, my **confidence in power shaken**, my **house tainted**, its **blood uncertain**; nothing is sure—except my brother's enmity.³⁰⁶

So whereas the remaining fragments suggest that Accius' Atreus seems offended by the deceit of the affair, Seneca's Atreus is more concerned with how the affair compromises his current position as king and its impact on his lineage. Thus Seneca's extant *Thyestes* refashions Greek anxieties about paternity as an Imperial, rather than personal, concern more obviously than Accius' fragmentary *Atreus*.

Therefore Seneca's *Thyestes* (AD 62-4), written almost a century after Augustus' *Lex Julia de adulteriis* (18 BC), pushes the public and political issues surrounding adultery even further than Accius may have.³⁰⁷ Both tragedians were writing a generation or more before notable reforms to adultery law: Accius in 130 BC preceding Augustus' *Lex Julia*, and Seneca before Domitian's revival of these values in the *Correctio Morum* c. AD 80.³⁰⁸ Cicero not only quotes Accius' *Atreus* fr. 8, but also applies themes from Accius' *Atreus* to Rome's recent history (in 45 BC):

Videturne summa inprobitate usus non sine summa esse ratione? Nec vero scaena solum referta est his sceleribus, sed multo vita communis paene maioribus. Sentit domus unius cuiusque, sentit forum, sentit curia campus socii provinciae, ut quem ad modum ratione recte fiat sic ratione peccetur, alterumque et a paucis et raro, alterum et saepe et a plurimis.

Do you see that Thyestes, while acting with extreme wickedness, displayed complete rationality as well? And not only does the stage teem with crimes of

³⁰⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 234-6 tr. Fitch. Cf. Accius 7 Ribbeck.

³⁰⁶ Sen. *Thy.* 237-41, tr. Fitch.

³⁰⁷ Cf. Guastella on adultery in Senecan tragedy (1994 pp130-4). See ch.3 p.234 n.1116 on the dating of Seneca's *Thyestes*.

³⁰⁸ Cf. McGinn 1998 pp.175ff. Despite his own alleged adulteries (Suet. *Dom.* 8.1.1) Domitian prohibited public theatre performances (Suet. *Dom.* 8.7.2) and corrected public morals by striking the name of a Roman knight from the list of jurors, because he had taken back his wife after having divorced and charged her with adultery; he also exercised capital punishment for the unchaste behaviour of Vestal virgins (Suet. *Dom.* 8.8.3-6).

this sort, but ordinary life even more so, and with almost worse crimes. Our private homes; the law-courts, the senate, the hustings; our allies, our provinces—all have cause to know that just as right actions may be guided by reason, so also may wrong ones, and that whereas few men do the former, and on rare occasions, so very many do the latter, and frequently.³⁰⁹

So almost a century after Accius' *Atreus* was written, the tragedy was still quoted to demonstrate how adultery reflects a degenerate state, as was most likely the case in Accius' day.

As Edwards points out, this “association between adultery and disorder continued to be a resonant one for Roman moralists”.³¹⁰ Edwards tracks this trend through Sallust, Horace and Tacitus,³¹¹ but the most pressing example for our purposes can be found in Seneca's own *De Beneficiis*:

Nunc in adulteria magis quam in alia peccabitur, abrumpetque frenos pudicitia; **nunc conviviorum vigebit furor** et foedissimum patrimoniorum exitium, [...] nunc in petulantiam et audaciam erumpet male dispensata libertas; nunc **incrudelitatem privatam ac publicam ibitur bellorumque civilium insaniam**, qua omne sanctum ac sacrum profanetur; habebitur aliquando ebrietati honor, et plurimum meri cepisse virtus erit.

Now adultery will be more common than other sins, and chastity will tear off its reins; now a **furore for feasting** and the most shameful scourge that assails fortunes, [...] and now the **progress will be toward cruelty, on the part both of the state and of the individual**, and to the insanity of Civil War, which desecrates all that is holy and sacred.³¹²

This association between adultery and political chaos seems only natural, as many members of the elite exploited the legal system by denouncing their adversaries for adultery.³¹³ As a result of this emerging trend, Seneca also seems to amplify Atreus' political concerns in his *Thyestes* to appeal to a contemporary audience's anxieties about adultery and thus garner sympathy for Atreus' cause. But despite his intentions, Atreus' exploitation of Thyestes' “furore for feasting” does not necessarily allow him to secure political stability, as we will discuss in our final chapter.

Therefore, both Roman tragedians discuss the political impact of a private affair in response to contemporary anxieties. But whereas Accius' *Atreus* gives a natural, emotional response, Seneca's *Atreus* gives a measured and tactical response. Accius' *Atreus* is justifying his revenge by emphasising Thyestes' crime; Seneca's *Atreus* is

³⁰⁹ Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.69, tr. Rackham.

³¹⁰ Edwards 1993 p.44.

³¹¹ Sall. *Cat.* 25; Hor. *Od.* 4.5.21-4; Tac. *Hist.* 1.2.

³¹² Sen. *Ben.* 1.10. 2, tr. Basore, cf. 3.3.1-2.

³¹³ Val. Max. 8.2-3. Nero himself accuses Octavia of adultery so he can marry Poppaea, following Seneca's death (Suet. *Ner.* 35.2).

determining the extent of his revenge. Furthermore, because Seneca's play is fully extant we can see how scarcely the adultery is referred to in favour of themes such as Atreus' role as king and the impact of supernatural forces, which do not appear in Accius' surviving *Atreus* fragments. Indeed, there is no evidence of supernatural intervention in any of Accius' tragic fragments.

Roman Tragedy & Adultery Mime

Given that both Accius and Seneca were writing in periods when legislating against adultery was less of a priority for their rulers,³¹⁴ what may have led to the increased political focus in Seneca's *Thyestes*? I suggest that this is a response to the performance trend that flourished in the Augustan period between the plays of Accius and Seneca: the Adultery Mime. Mime is a Greek genre inherited by Rome,³¹⁵ Adultery Mime in particular drew on the Hellenistic *zelotypos* (jealous woman stock character) and increasingly used the discovery of adultery to comic effect.³¹⁶ Yet whilst Porter traces some elements of Greek mime in Lysias 1, he admits: "the heyday of the comic adultery tale does not arrive until the Roman period".³¹⁷ For unlike the Greeks, the Romans promoted mime from street performances to festival entertainment at the Floralia in 173 BC.³¹⁸ Thus by Accius' and Seneca's times, mimes were viewed alongside tragedy by a wider audience that included the elite.³¹⁹

However, Adultery Mime enjoyed a revival almost a century *after* Accius and *before* Seneca. Ovid claims that praetors even commissioned stagings of mime at the Augustan games, in addition to the convivial and improvised street performances of them.³²⁰ Ovid suggests that these mimes followed an established formula, in which the

³¹⁴ Accius' *Atreus* was drafted under consules L. Cornelius Lentulus, M. Perperna or Ap. Claudius Pulcher: cf. note 93 above and Manuwald 2011 p 223. Seneca's *Thyestes* could have been written under Calligula (AD 12 -41) or Nero's rule (AD 37 -68).

³¹⁵ Cic. *Rab. Post.* 12.35 claims mimes are from Alexandria, Nývlt rightly points out that Arist. *Poet.* 1447b evidences Syracusan mime, but his claim that Cicero is "false" presumes Cicero is dating the origin of the genre rather than the origins of Roman mime in particular (2013 p.161).

³¹⁶ Herodas. 148.5.8. Cunningham. cf. s.v. *zelotypos* in Fantham 1986 pp.52-4.

³¹⁷ Porter 2007 p.62. Welsh's re-reading of Quint. *Inst. Orat.* 10.1.100 may suggest that Afranius' *fabula togata* exploited similar adultery themes for comic effect (2010 p.122).

³¹⁸ Ov. *Fast.* 5.327ff. for a more thorough chronology of mime than we have space for here consult Panayotakis 2010 pp.16-33.

³¹⁹ Harrison 2015 p.371. E.g. Laberius belonged to the *equites* class: Cic. *Fam.* 7.11.3 and Macrob. *Sat.* 2.3.10. Cf. McKeown 1979 p.71ff, Horsfall 1983 p.294 and Panayotakis 2010 p.43.

³²⁰ Ov. *Trist.* 2.497-514. Cf. Reynolds 1946.

cuckold or *stupidus* is the subject of fun, the *cultus adulter* is glamourised and the unfaithful wife is caught out in her husband's home, concealing her lover.³²¹ As Fantham suggests, the scenes cited in Propertius and Horace confirm Ovid's depiction of Adultery Mime as a genre and in his own work.³²² Moreover, Cicero exploits this Adultery Mime formula in his *Pro Caelio*,³²³ whilst Horace also used this stock scene in his *Satires*.³²⁴ Such light-hearted presentations of adultery remained popular well into the Imperial period in which Seneca wrote.³²⁵

So, Adultery Mime became a more popular and established genre in the Augustan period, exploited in elegy, oratory, satires and novels. But why would Seneca need to distinguish his *tragedy* from it more pointedly than Accius had? Well, by the time of Sulla men of Seneca's *equites* class were composing mime for both stage and recitation, so Seneca, working in the same modes, could have been assimilated to mimographers.³²⁶

Moreover, as Horsfall and McKeown make clear, after Accius' day Ovid and Catullus referenced mime in their epic and elegy in order to parody myth.³²⁷ This intertext worked both ways; Ovid claims his earliest, albeit non mythical, elegies were staged as mimes,³²⁸ and there is an ongoing debate as to whether the poet Catullus became a mimographer after 54 BC, or if this is another poet.³²⁹ Nonetheless, the influence of mime on other genres is particularly important when considering Seneca's *Thyestes* because the scholion to Lucan's *Pharsalia* gives the following summary from Catullus' commentary on mimes:

Atreus Thyestis fratris sui filios ob adulterium Aeropae uxoris suae ad aram

³²¹ Ov. *Trist.* 2.497-514.

³²² Propert. 2.23; Hor. *Sat.* 1.2; Ov. *Am.* 3.4; Fantham 1989 p.158.

³²³ Cic. *Cael.* 27.65.

³²⁴ Hor. *Sat.* 2.7.53.

³²⁵ E.g. Apul. *Met.* 9.27ff; Ath. *Deip.* 697b reflects the popularity of such mimes c190 AD and Juvenal took up this motif in the second century AD, referencing the mimic closet as a euphemism for adultery (Juv. 6.44). Cf. Manuwald 2011 p.179.

³²⁶ Sen. *Eld. Controv.* 4.2, Plut. *Sull.* 2.452, 33.473, 36.474. cf. Wiseman 1985 p.187, Curley 2013 p.36.

³²⁷ McKeown 1979 p.72-3 e.g. Adultery Mime: Ov. *Tr.* 2.497-500, 505-6; *Am.* 3.4; *Ars. Am.* 605-10, Hor. *Sat.* 1.2.127-34; 2.7.59-61, Juv. *Sat.* 6.41-4. Propert. 2.23.10,19-20. Horsfall 1979 p.331-2 e.g. Laberius. 174. Bonaria and Ov. *Met.* 8.260ff. cf. Horsfall 1983 pp.293-4.

³²⁸ Ov. *Tr.* 519-20.

³²⁹ Catullus 93-9 tr. Wiseman. Martial does not distinguish between Catullus the poet and the other mimographer, Juvenal does distinguish between the two, for a full overview of this debate see: Wiseman 1985 pp.186-98, Fantham 1989 p.158.

mactauit simulato sacrificio. uinum sanguine mixtum uisceraque filiorum eius pro epulis Thyesti adposuisse dicitur. quod nefas ne sol aspiceret, nubibus se abscondit, hoc est eclipsin passus est Mycenisque nox fuit. sed hoc fabulosum esse inueni in libro Catulli †quis cribitur permimologiarum†. qui ait <Atreum> primum ciuibus suis solis cursus ueros et ante inauditos ostendisse ac persuasisse illum contrarium signis omnibus ascendere et quod ceterae uagae stellae facere dicuntur: et ob hanc scientiam inclitum summoto frater regnum accepisse. quod in prodigium minores tragoedi conuerterunt.

Because of his wife Aërope's adultery, Atreus slew the sons of his brother Thyestes at the altar in a pretended sacrifice. It is said that at a banquet he served Thyestes with wine mixed with blood and the entrails of his sons. The sun hid himself in clouds so as not to see this horror- that is, the sun was eclipsed, and there was night at Mycenae. But I have found in a book of Catullus entitled [*On Mimes*] that this is a legend. He says that Atreus was the first to explain to his fellow-citizens the true and hitherto unfamiliar courses of the sun, and convince them that it rises opposite the signs [of the Zodiac], and what the other planets are said to do and that becoming famous through his expertise he supplanted his brother and became king. Later tragedians turned this into a prodigy.³³⁰

Wiseman's addition (†*permimologiarum*†)³³¹ suggests that the mimographer Catullus (*fl.c.* AD 41)³³² had developed Thyestes' feast into a mime after Accius' *Atreus* (130 BC), and many others, but shortly before Seneca's *Thyestes* (AD 54-63).³³³ This is consistent with the rationalization of the stellar reversal that follows in the scholion; such rationalisations are typical of the paratragedy that appeared frequently in mime even if the plot itself was not mythological.³³⁴ Therefore, Seneca had to marginalize adultery in his tragedy to distance Thyestes' crime from that of both comic Adultery Mime and mimic treatments of Thyestes himself.³³⁵ Notably, Seneca never names Aërope, thus focuses on Thyestes' transgression rather than Aërope's seduction.

Therefore, the increasing intertextuality between mime and other genres, the emergence of mimographers in Seneca's class, the appearance of mime at public festivals being enjoyed by the elite and the parody of myths in mime, including *Thyestes*, all indicates that mime was growing too close to tragedy for Seneca's comfort. Thus I suggest that Seneca emphasises the political repercussions of adultery, rather

³³⁰ Σ Lucan 1.544. Genthius. (Usener 1869 35-6) in Wiseman 2008 pp.147-8.

³³¹ Cf. Mueller †περὶ μιμολογιῶν† (1869), Ussani †περὶ μίμων λογάριον† (1902-3).

³³² This date is based on evidence that Suetonius places Catullus' *Laureolus* shortly before the death of Caligula. (Suet. *Cal.* 57.4)

³³³ *Thyestes* is widely attributed to the latter half of Seneca's career (AD 54-65) as discussed below (p.55ff.); cf. Fitch 1981 p.305-7, Nisbet 1990 p.309, Tarrant 2003 pp.10-13, Star 2015 p.249.

³³⁴ Cf. Panayotakis 2010 n.20.

³³⁵ The influence of pantomime on Roman *Thyestes* plays will be discussed in Chapter 3: Execution, as the pantomimic evidence treats this episode specifically.

than the details of Aërope's seduction, in order to contrast his *Thyestes* to the tropes of Adultery Mime. Unlike the cuckold of mime, Seneca's Atreus is motivated by political ambition, not sexual jealousy, by masculine reason, not feminine emotion. Unlike the cuckold of mime, Seneca's Atreus will be avenged. Thus the rhetorical thrust of Seneca's Atreus quashes comic effect to treat Thyestes' adultery in a tragic vein, which could be both staged for the masses and circulated among the elite.

Ch 1.1: Conclusion

Having considered the tragic fragments, we can identify a trend in how Aërope and Thyestes' affair may have motivated Atreus' revenge differently in each tragic presentation of the feast. Based on the characterisation of Aërope as promiscuous in Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Kressai*, it seems likely that her infidelity would have been alluded to and harshly judged by the audiences of both Sophocles' and Euripides' respective *Thyestes* tragedies. Turning to the Latin sources, Ennius' *Thyestes* dramatizes Thyestes' exile following the feast, thus does not reflect Atreus' adultery motive in the remaining fragments. However, fr.6-7 of Accius' *Atreus* do relate how Atreus' reaction to the affair both impacted his political position and motivated his attack on Thyestes. So ultimately Aërope's status as a "Cretan whore" seems to have been more popular in Greek tragedy,³³⁶ whereas in Roman tragedy the focus on the political implications of the affair are at the fore, and the sanctity of the marriage itself is secondary.

If we trust a more detailed reconstruction of the plays' contents from the fragments we can see how this trend developed. As discussed, Sophocles seems to have touched on the adultery theme in both *Thyestes' Feast* and *Thyestes' Adultery*. Given that Euripides seems to condense Aërope's illegitimate affairs with both the slave and Thyestes into *Kressai* (438 BC), he forsakes the issue of the children and gives focus to the affair as a crime in itself. Thus when Euripides' audience later viewed *Thyestes* (425 BC) it seems likely that Aërope's reputation as a Cretan whore could replace her

³³⁶ This may well have featured in the lost Aërope plays of Agathon (Snell) and Carcinus (Snell), Wright suggests a similar focus on the adultery given that Agathon's only *Thyestes* fragment (Agathon 3 Snell. tr. Wright 2016 p.222= Athen. *Deipn.* 12.528d) alludes to women with shorn hair (2016 p.80). On Theodorus' moving performance of such an Aërope see Ael. *V.H.* 14.40.

presence, as Atreus traditionally brings Thyestes from exile for the feast.³³⁷ Accius follows in Euripides' footsteps by presenting an emotive reaction to the affair, while Seneca's Atreus gives a more calculated response. Overall Atreus' revenge feast satisfies the unruly appetites that provoke it, but evidence suggests that Atreus' motives for avenging adultery move away from the sanctity of marriage and towards the issue of social standing and political advantage, which is broadly in keeping with changing attitudes to adultery in Greece and Rome.

³³⁷ This is consistent with references to the feast in Aesch. *Ag.* 1191-3, 1291-22, 1583-1611 wherein Agamemnon's arrival may have paralleled Thyestes' return and there is certainly no mention of Aërope's presence at the feast itself.

1.2: Vengeance & Kingship

The focus on kingship when contemplating revenge is not unique to Seneca. If we look at Atreus' role across the fragments as both a tragic hero the audience could recognise and a ruler they could respect, it becomes clear that Atreus' personal revenge is also a means of maintaining his character within the tragic world and his characterisation within the theatre. Picking up from the increasingly political focus on adultery discussed above, attention must now turn to how each tragedian's audience would view the role of a tragic king as one which demands an extreme brand of revenge.

Sophocles' Atreus & Procne

The fragments from Sophocles' *Thyestes* tragedies are difficult to assign to a play, a character or a scenario. For example fr.258 could benefit a chorus leader or minor character reacting to Atreus' discovery of Thyestes' affair with Aërope in *Thyestes' Adultery* or *Thyestes' Feast*:

ἔχει μὲν ἀλγείν', οἶδα· πειρᾶσθαι δὲ χρῆ
ὡς ῥᾴστα τὰναγκαῖα τοῦ βίου φέρειν.
ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων χρῆ τιν' ἴασιν λαβεῖν.

His lot is **painful**, I know; but one **must** try to **bear** as easily as possible the constraints of life. From such things one must find a way of healing.³³⁸

It could equally be applied to Thyestes preparing to rape Pelopeia in *Thyestes in Sicyon*.

However, Sophocles' *Tereus* (468- 414 BC)³³⁹ tells a similar story to *Thyestes' Feast*, thus can be used to help locate the *Thyestes* fragments. A papyrus fragment provides the following hypothesis to Sophocles' *Tereus*:³⁴⁰ King Tereus falls in love with his wife Procne's sister Philomela, he rapes her, cuts out her tongue and abandons her. Philomela then weaves a shroud to tell her sister the story.³⁴¹ Together the sisters resolve to kill Tereus and Procne's child Itys³⁴² and feed him to Tereus,³⁴³ after which they metamorphose into birds.³⁴⁴

³³⁸ Soph. 256 Radt tr. Lloyd-Jones.

³³⁹ Most likely produced before 414 B.C. because Tereus, in his hoopoe form, features in Aristophanes' *Birds* (98-263).

³⁴⁰ P.Oxy.3013=Soph.581 Radt. cf. Finglass 2016 pp.73-4.

³⁴¹ Arist. *Poet.* 1454b. 36-7.

³⁴² Soph. 583 Radt.

³⁴³ Soph. 581 Radt.

³⁴⁴ Soph. 589 Radt.

In addition to the parallel plotlines of sexual deceit and infanticidal unwitting cannibalism, the language of Sophocles' *Thyestes* fragment resonates with that of Sophocles' *Tereus*:

ἀλγεινά, Πρόκνη, δῆλον· ἀλλ' ὅμως χρεῶν
τὰ θεῖα θνητοὺς ὄντας εὐπετῶς φέρειν

This is **painful**, Procne, that is clear; but nonetheless we are mortals and **must put up** with what the gods send us.³⁴⁵

This fragment not only echoes the vocabulary of *Thyestes* fr.258 but is also structurally similar: an admission of pain (ἀλγεινά), concessive interjection (οἶδα /δῆλον) and a conjunction (δὲ /ἀλλ'), asserting the necessity (χρῆ /χρεῶν) of submitting to greater forces. But whereas *Thyestes* fr.258 speaks about the sufferer in the third person, *Tereus* fr.586 addresses Procne directly. This helps us locate the *Thyestes* fragment by analogy in Sophocles' *Thyestes' Feast*. The pain in each fragment seems to reference a sexual betrayal, be it of Procne or Atreus, that is about to provoke infanticidal banquet, the one enduring pain is the character who prepares such a feast. The speaker is most likely a *paidagōgos* or nurse, given that the address suggests intimacy with the protagonist and such a servant could be present in both *Thyestes' Feast* and *Tereus*.

Yet, whatever the scenario, these lines present a bland aphorism. Whichever *Thyestes* tragedy we situate fr.258 in, Sophocles seems to present the moral platitudes of the many being applied to the problems of the few: the tragic royals. So although the recommendation may be wise, wherever we apply it, it is an unreasonable suggestion unconvincingly made. Thus it seems that Sophocles pits the audience's expectations against those of the tragic characters. The tragic speaker here expects his rulers to act wisely; the audience expects the tragic royals to sow chaos. This reading is consistent with Aristotle's reflections on Sophoclean characterisation:

πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἐὰν ἐπιτιμᾶται ὅτι οὐκ ἀληθῆ, ἀλλ' ἴσως ὡς δεῖ, οἶον καὶ
Σοφοκλῆς ἔφη αὐτὸς μὲν οἶους δεῖ ποιεῖν, Εὐριπίδην δὲ οἶοι εἶσιν, ταύτην λυτέον.

In addition, if the criticism is that something is false, well perhaps it is as it ought to be, just as Sophocles said he created characters, as they ought to be created, Euripides as they really are.³⁴⁶

But how should Atreus be? Or, more accurately: how should each of Sophocles' Atreus characters be presented? For we must remember that Sophocles wrote three disjointed plays capturing different moments of the myth, which each present an Atreus character

³⁴⁵ Soph. 586 Radt tr. Lloyd-Jones.

³⁴⁶ Arist. *Poet.* 1460b.30-35 tr. Halliwell.

at a particular stage in his life. The lack of fragments means we can only draw parallels from Oedipus' characterisation across the extant Theban tragedies, in narrative order, and identify changes in his role as a tragic king.

The Oedipus of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, for example, tries to safeguard his people, but is entirely ignorant of his patricide and that incest is the source of the pollution.³⁴⁷ Thus the Atreus of *Thyestes' Adultery* may have been equally admirable and equally ignorant of Thyestes' incest with Atreus' own wife. *Oedipus at Colonus* presents a jaded, blind Oedipus dethroned and seeking vengeance on his ill-begotten sons for their negligence.³⁴⁸ Thus the Atreus of *Thyestes' Feast* may have been equally malevolent following the infidelity of his wife and his consequent desire to avenge this with the slaughter of illegitimate children. By *Antigone*, Oedipus is but a memory of his past crimes, so too may Atreus in *Thyestes at Sicyon* have been reduced to his new role as an infamous infanticide.³⁴⁹ This comparison is imperfect. After all, the Theban plays do not present a revenge sequence, nor is Oedipus alive in all three Theban tragedies, as Atreus seems to have been in Sophocles' *Thyestes* tragedies. But it serves to illustrate the point that Sophocles' Atreus characters would be different in each play, allowing us to now focus in on how he may have been presented as a jaded avenger in *Thyestes' Feast*.

Turning to Sophocles' *Thyestes*, Radt lists fr.140 under the titles *Atreus* or *The Women of Mycenae* rather than listing it under *Thyestes* or *Atreus* alongside fr.247-69. Given that all of these titles overlap, I agree with Lloyd-Jones that all of these plays are attached to the same plot and the titles became interchangeable.³⁵⁰ In the ensuing tradition the titles alternate: Euripides' *Thyestes* and Accius' *Atreus* each dramatise the feast episode. The title *Women of Mycenae* simply indicates that the play took place in Mycenae with a female chorus. Unlike Euripides' eponymous *Cretan Women*, the *Women of Mycenae* could not be Aërope's foreign retinue: Aërope does not leave Mycenae alive.³⁵¹

So there is no reason fr.140 could not belong to the same *Thyestes* tragedy as fr.247-69. Given the festal imagery, I suggest it comes from Sophocles' *Thyestes' Feast*:

μὰ τὴν ἐκείνου δειλίαν, ἧ̃ βόσκειται,

³⁴⁷ Soph. *OT*. 1-13.

³⁴⁸ Soph. *OC*. 1348-69.

³⁴⁹ Soph. *Ant*. 1-2, 192-4, 379-80, 599-601, 1018.

³⁵⁰ Lloyd-Jones 1983 p.106.

³⁵¹ See ch.1 pp.29-35 on the chorus in Euripides' *Kressai*.

θῆλυς μὲν αὐτός, ἄρσενας δ' ἐχθροὺς ἔχων.

No, by his cowardice, which **he feeds on**, he that is female himself but has enemies who are male!³⁵²

There is nothing here to explicitly distinguish between one subject who owns the cowardice in the first clause and another who feeds on it in the second clause, as the subject of the feeding is simply embedded in the verb (βόσκεται). The use of the nominative in the final clauses also suggests that these adjectives describe the subject of the feeding. Therefore, the grammar indicates that each clause discusses the same subject who is cowardly, feeds on his own cowardice and is effeminate.

Now that we have located fr.140 in a particular play and narrowed its content down to one subject, we face the harder task of deducing who this subject is. Given that the fragment clearly discusses a male protagonist and sets up a gender binary which seems to be a product of Atreus and Thyestes' sibling rivalry. Alternatively, the fragment could be spoken by a *paidagōgos* of Atreus' house, either in support or criticism of his master, depending on who the subject is. This business of feeding on one's own cowardice offers an interesting clue, because of the two brothers only Atreus is truly fueled by fear. The structure of the myth suggests Thyestes puts his fears aside to return from exile to his own downfall, whereas Atreus fearing his own ruin resorts to killing his nephews to emerge victorious.

Atreus' feast may not appear to be an act of cowardice, but as McHardy's monograph makes clear, fear fuels revenge.³⁵³ If the subject of fr.140 is Atreus; the speaker must be Thyestes himself or an unsympathetic *paidagōgos* of Atreus' house. If spoken by Thyestes then the arrogance of fr.140 sets Thyestes up for a fall and suggests a sense of dramatic irony because the very effeminacy that Thyestes mocks Atreus for is what enables Atreus' revenge. Lying, infanticide, covert cannibalism, these are all crimes usually committed by female characters to achieve revenge, such as Medea or Procne and Philomela.³⁵⁴ Atreus uses these womanly wiles to catch Thyestes, as Sophocles' audience would already be aware, so Thyestes' machismo offers a sense of dramatic irony here. If Atreus' *paidagōgos* criticises his master in fr.140, then Accius'

³⁵² Soph. 140 Radt. "No" is my addition to Lloyd-Jones' Loeb translation.

³⁵³ McHardy 2008 p.93 and p.101.

³⁵⁴ Herodotus' myth of Harpagus (Hdt. 1.129) does show a male barbarian to commit such crimes, another Greek "other". But these heroines may have been more prominent in the minds of Sophocles' audience, following Neophron's fragmentary *Medea* (consult McHardy 2005 p.140) and perhaps Sophocles' own adaptation of the Procne and Philomela myth (Soph. 581-595b Radt. cf. Ar. *Av.* 93-101; *Lys.* 563 ff.).

Atreus met more at home opposition than the moderate *Satelles* who questions Seneca's Atreus.

Either way, in fr.140 Sophocles genders the crimes of Thyestes and Atreus, which raises interesting questions about how Atreus' feminine brand of vengeance helps secure his masculine role as king. The more complete fragments of Sophocles' *Tereus* should help shed light on this by presenting a similar cannibalistic revenge executed by women. Herein Sophocles presents Procne's motivation as a result of her female plight:³⁵⁵

<ΠΡΟΚΝΗ>

νῦν δ' οὐδέν εἰμι χωρίς· ἀλλὰ πολλάκις
ἔβλεψα ταύτη τὴν γυναικείαν φύσιν,
ὡς οὐδέν ἐσμεν. αἱ νέαι μὲν ἐν πατρὸς
ἡδιστον, οἴμαι, ζῶμεν ἀνθρώπων βίον·
τερπνῶς γὰρ ἀεὶ παῖδας ἀνοία τρέφει.
ὅταν δ' ἐς ἡβὴν ἐξικώμεθ' ἔμφρονες,
ὠθούμεθ' ἔξω καὶ διεμπολώμεθα
θεῶν πατρῶων τῶν τε φυσάντων ἄπο,
αἱ μὲν ξένους πρὸς ἄνδρας, αἱ δὲ βαρβάρους,
αἱ δ' εἰς ἀγηθῆ δώμαθ', αἱ δ' ἐπίρροθα.
**καὶ ταῦτ', ἐπειδὴν εὐφρόνη ζεύξη μία,
χρεῶν ἐπαιεῖν καὶ δοκεῖν καλῶς ἔχειν.**

<Procne>

But now I am nothing on my own. But I have often regarded the nature of women in this way, seeing that we amount to nothing. In childhood in our father's house we live the happiest life, I think, of all mankind; for folly always rears children in happiness. But when we have understanding and have come to youthful vigour, we are pushed out and sold, away from our paternal gods and from our parents, some to foreign husbands, some to barbarians, some to joyless homes, and some to homes that are opprobrious. **And this, once a single night has yoked us, we must approve and consider to be happiness.**³⁵⁶

As Fitzpatrick points out, Procne resents the lot of women to marry cruel husbands like Tereus, particularly because women could not leave their spouses so easily as men could, due to their reliance on a male caretaker.³⁵⁷ We do not have any such reflection from Sophocles' Atreus, but we can reasonably deduce that his motivations were quite different.

³⁵⁵ Both Welcker (1839 p.337) and Fitzpatrick (2001 p.92) agree this is spoken by Procne, though I agree with the latter that is a reaction to, rather than in anticipation of, Tereus' return with Philomela.

³⁵⁶ Soph. 583 Radt; cf. Finglass (2016) for a comprehensive discussion of this fragment.

³⁵⁷ Fitzpatrick 2001 p.92.

Atreus may commit a feminine crime, but he does so for masculine reasons. Like Procne and Philomela, Sophocles' Atreus is motivated by sexual transgression, in his case an ongoing adultery. But unlike Procne and Philomela, Atreus has something to gain from his revenge: it cleanses his bloodline, it asserts his dominance, it reclaims his kingdom. Atreus kills his brother's bastards to assert his role as king, Procne and Philomela kill Procne's own child to hurt Tereus and sever the paternal bond the spouses share. Without Tereus, Procne is nothing, but with Philomela she is an avenger, she only gains the satisfaction of an active role.³⁵⁸ However, Atreus' revenge reclaims his authority as king and the purity of his bloodline. Thus by contrasting Sophocles' Procne and Atreus, we can better understand how Atreus' social role may have been shown to exacerbate his desire for revenge.

Overall, as with Oedipus in Sophocles' Theban plays, Atreus could have been characterised differently across the three tragedies, reflecting different stages of his reign. His potential optimism as a young king in *Thyestes' Adultery* could have set up a poignant reveal of Aërope's adultery, the impetus for his revenge in *Thyestes' Feast*. Fr.140 of *Thyestes' Feast* seems to present Atreus performing a feminine revenge for masculine reasons; it certainly genders the crimes of each brother in relation to one another. So whilst the lack of Sophocles' *Thyestes* fragments suggests almost any characterisation is possible, cross-referencing them with the surviving Sophoclean corpus suggests these changes of character and masculine motives are probable.

Euripides, Plato & the “Tragic” Tyrant

Turning to Euripides' fragments, there seems to be a greater focus on social role in terms of status, rather than gender, reiterating the masculine motives of Atreus' revenge set out by Sophocles, rather than the feminine means.

πλούτου δ' ἀπορρύντος ἀσθενεῖς γάμοι·
τὴν μὲν γὰρ εὐγένειαν αἰνοῦσιν βροτοί,
μᾶλλον δὲ κηδεύουσι τοῖς εὐδαίμοσιν.

People get weaker marriages when their wealth has drained away.
Men pay lip-service to nobility,
but they prefer to ally themselves with those who are prospering.³⁵⁹

This cynical outlook betrays the Euripidean realism described by Aristotle; that “Sophocles said he created characters, as they ought to be, Euripides as they really

³⁵⁸ Such satisfaction was later identified by Aristotle cf. *Arist. Rhet.* 1.1370b.13-14; 1378b.2-5.

³⁵⁹ Eur. 395 Kannicht tr. Collard and Cropp.

are”.³⁶⁰ Though moral platitudes are usually attributed to the chorus, or in Euripides’ plays to an attendant, this slight on nobility and frank take on the adultery as a result of Atreus’ loss of wealth seems too bold and too brave to have been spoken by such characters, were the protagonists on stage. Such characters could, however, have expressed fr.395 by in a prologue, to prime the audience for Atreus’ appearance. Within the action, such a jaded tone could befit either the slighted Atreus or the formerly prospering Thyestes reflecting on the circumstances of the adultery and documenting the reaction of many in the third person plural verb ending (κηδεύουσι), rather than Aërope’s actions.

Therefore Euripides makes it clear that a loss of wealth, perhaps in this instance the loss of the Golden Fleece, and the loss of one’s wife reduces kingship to a title, rather than a position of power. The frankness of fr.395 could suggest that this is spoken by one of the brothers, as it reflects a first-hand appreciation of the damage caused by the adultery and the loss of the Golden Fleece, which must be undone to reclaim kingship.³⁶¹ Whoever the speaker, like Sophocles, Euripides seems to have focused on the desire to regain kingship as a key motivation for revenge and a necessary measure for Atreus to reclaim his place. But there is no surviving evidence as to how Euripides may have distinguished this from the infanticide of female heroines, as we can see with Sophocles’ *Thyestes’ Feast* fr.140 in comparison to *Tereus* fr.583 and fr.586.

What Euripides’ fr.395 does demonstrate, however, is a more critical and realistic view of kingship, as the character speaking here deconstructs the role of the tragic king for the benefit of Euripides’ audience. So whereas Sophocles seems to have distinguished feminine means from masculine motives, which include the desire to secure one’s kingship, Euripides makes what it is to be king much more explicit. This reduces the distance between Euripides’ audience and Atreus as a tragic king because the need for a financially and genetically strong οἶκος with legitimate children is a concern that any Athenian man in the audience could relate to.

Therefore, in fr.395 Euripides’ speaker demystifies Atreus’ role as a heroic age king by stressing the importance of wealth in earning the respect of one’s subjects, rather than a respect for monarchy itself. This is particularly telling if the reference to “wealth” addressed the loss of the Golden Fleece, because such focus on the fleece’s material worth would have diminished its symbolic value as a talisman of kingship. The

³⁶⁰ Arist. *Poet.* 1460b.30-35. See ch.1 p.54 above for Greek.

³⁶¹ Agamemnon also makes such a criticism of kingship in Eur. *IA* 17-20.

role of Euripides' Atreus as a tragic king is also explicitly aligned with the concerns of his audience. Though Sophocles' Atreus most likely faced the same problems to secure kingship, Sophocles' fr.140 aligns Atreus' feminine revenge with tragic heroines rather than focusing on the reality of his dilemma as emphasised by Euripides. Therefore, Euripides' straight-talking character here undoes the tragic distancing that Aristotle came to expect of tragedy.³⁶²

This increased realism in Euripides' *Thyestes* (c.425 BC) seems to be reflected in Plato's association of cannibalism with tyranny in his *Republic* (c.380 BC), which shaped how later tragedians characterised Thyestes and Atreus. As Hook suggests, Plato associates three forms of cannibalism with tyranny, which I term: conscious, irrational and accidental.³⁶³ First, conscious cannibalism is linked with the transformation from protector to tyrant:

τίς ἀρχή οὖν μεταβολῆς ἐκ προστάτου ἐπὶ τύραννον; [...] Ὡς ἄρα ὁ γευσάμενος τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου σπλάγχχνου, ἐν ἄλλοις ἄλλων ἱερείων ἐνὸς ἐγκατατετημημένου, ἀνάγκη δὴ τούτῳ λύκῳ γενέσθαι. [...] Ἄρ' οὖν ἐκπεσῶν μὲν καὶ κατελθῶν | βία τῶν ἐχθρῶν τύραννος ἀπειργασμένος κατέρχεται; Δῆλον. Ἐὰν δὲ ἀδύνατοι ἐκβάλλειν αὐτὸν ὧσιν ἢ ἀποκτεῖναι διαβάλλοντες τῇ πόλει, βιαίῳ δὴ θανάτῳ ἐπιβουλεύουσιν ἀποκτείνουσι λάθρᾳ.

“What begins the change, then, from leader to tyrant?” [...] “The story goes that he who tastes of the one bit of human entrails minced up with those of other victims is inevitably transformed into a wolf”. [...] **“May it not happen that he is driven into exile and, being restored in defiance of his enemies, returns a finished tyrant?”** “Obviously”. “And if they are unable to expel him or bring about his death by calumniating him to the people, they plot to **assassinate him by stealth**”.³⁶⁴

Though this association is initially made using the myth of Lycaon, whereby the cannibalism enables metamorphosis, the latter half suggests an inversion of Thyestes' myth. Thyestes returns from exile and commits cannibalism in a failed attempt to return to the royal palace where he is attacked, albeit not killed, by stealth.

So although the details of the myth are suppressed, Plato does seem to have Thyestes in mind as an example.

Secondly, Plato discusses the irrational part of a tyrant's soul:

μητρί τε γὰρ ἐπιχειρεῖν μείγνυσθαι, ὡς οἶεται, οὐδὲν ὀκνεῖ, ἄλλῳ τε ὄτρωον ἀνθρώπων καὶ θεῶν καὶ θηρίων, μαιφρονεῖν τε ὄτιον, βρώματός τε ἀπέχεσθαι

³⁶² Arist. *Poet.* 1454b.5-11.

³⁶³ Hook's description of “the appetitive part of the tyrannical soul” as “conscious” suggests the act of reasoning runs contrary to this part of the soul's instinctive function, which is restricted by, but independent from, reason (2004 p.25).

³⁶⁴ Pl. *Resp.* 8.565d-566b tr. Emlyn-Jones and Preddy.

μηδενός: καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ οὔτε ἀνοΐας οὐδὲν ἐλλείπει οὔτ' ἀναισχυντίας.

It does not shrink from trying to have sex with a mother, as it fancies, or with any other human being, or god, or wild beast; **it will commit any kind of bloodthirsty murder, and there is no food it won't touch**. In a word, it isn't lacking in any folly or shamelessness.³⁶⁵

Though written euphemistically, the penultimate line is widely acknowledged as a reference to cannibalism because, as Halliwell points out, Plato unusually uses βρώματος, suggesting the eating of meat.³⁶⁶ This reference to Thyestes' cannibalism in particular is confirmed by Hook, who identifies the previous reference to incest as the perennial association of Oedipus and Thyestes: tragic kings suffering the worst of tragic crimes.³⁶⁷ The sexual transgression in this passage could also more broadly allude to Thyestes and Aërope's affair, which precipitates Thyestes' feast in the myth and is presented in Sophocles' *Thyestes' Adultery*. Nonetheless, the susceptibility to cannibalism presented in both Sophocles' and Euripides' plays on Thyestes' feast is demonstrated in the latter half of Plato's passage.

Finally Plato presents accidental cannibalism when discussing a shade's selection of a tyrant's life in the myth of Er:

τὸν πρῶτον λαχόντα ἔφη εὐθὺς ἐπιόντα τὴν **μεγίστην τυραννίδα** ἐλέσθαι, καὶ ὑπὸ ἀφροσύνης τε καὶ λαιμαργίας οὐ πάντα ἱκανῶς ἀνασκεψάμενον ἐλέσθαι, ἀλλ' αὐτὸν λαθεῖν ἐνοῦσαν εἰμαρμένην **παιδῶν αὐτοῦ βρώσεις** καὶ ἄλλα κακά· ἐπειδὴ δὲ κατὰ σχολὴν σκέψασθαι, κόπτεσθαι τε καὶ ὀδύρεσθαι τὴν αἴρεσιν.

The drawer of the first lot at once sprang to seize the **greatest tyranny**, and that in his folly and greed he chose it without sufficient examination, and failed to observe that it involved the fate of **eating his own children**, and other horrors, and that when he inspected it at leisure he beat his breast and bewailed his choice.³⁶⁸

This most closely parallels Thyestes' determination to become king, which leads him to initially overlook the dangers of betraying his brother and subsequently return to feast at the palace. Plato's passage also presents the aspiring tyrant as blinded by ambition, suggesting that Plato understood Thyestes' compliance as a product of his own avarice, rather than his desire to be reconciled with Atreus.

Hook finds the strongest connection between the latter example and Thyestes,

³⁶⁵ Pl. *Resp.* 9.571c-d tr. Emlyn-Jones and Preddy.

³⁶⁶ Halliwell 1988 pp.188, s.v. Liddell and Scott ἢ βρώσις cf. Halliwell (2006 pp.116-17) and Benardete (1989 p.206) rightly conclude that the juxtaposition of murder and meat-eating suggests cannibalism.

³⁶⁷ Pl. *Leg.* 838c; Arist. *Poet.* 1453a. cf. Hook 2004 p.25.

³⁶⁸ Pl. *Resp.* 10. 619c-d tr. Emlyn-Jones and Preddy.

because this ignorance distinguishes Thyestes “from the presumed barbarian practitioners of incest and cannibalism, who would be ignorant only of a sense of taboo, and would lack any horror”.³⁶⁹ But Atreus is not ignorant when he kills and cooks Thyestes’ sons, which, like the cannibalism stated above, is an act of tyranny. Atreus’ role receives no attention in Hook’s discussion of these passages despite being implicit in the Thyestes myth that Plato alludes to. We may even pinpoint Plato’s references to the feast as allusions to Euripides’ *Thyestes* (c.425 BC) and Carcinus’ *Thyestes* (384-22 BC) because they both include the reversal of the stars that Plato mentions in *The Statesman*.³⁷⁰ Yet, what we can more reasonably conclude is that Plato takes Thyestes out of his tragic context in order to deplore ambitions of kingship and associate power with corruption. Thus, given that Atreus is caught up in the same feud for power, Plato’s passages suggest that Atreus is likewise corrupted by his rival desire for kingship, and to that end prepares the banquet of children Plato discusses.

This sparked a trend of philosophers describing tyranny through the example of Oedipus and Thyestes as tragic kings. Before Plato, tragic heroes secured kingship by committing terrible crimes; after Plato, these heroes committed terrible crimes because they were kings: these crimes were no longer a means but an end. Plato divorced “tragic” crimes from the context of the genre and used them to define tyranny in his *Republic*, which creates an overlap between the tyrants of real life and the tyrants on stage. This seems to have been propagated by Diogenes of Sinope (412 BC – 323 BC) who allegedly³⁷¹ wrote a *Republic* and an *Atreus*, which informed one another more ostensibly:

αὐτὸς θ’ ὁ Διογένης ἐν τε τῷ Ἀτρεΐ καὶ τῷ Οἰδίποδι καὶ τῷ Φιλίσκῳ τὰ πλεῖστα τῶν κατὰ τὴν Πολιτείαν αἰσχυρῶν καὶ ἀνοσίων ὡς ἀρέσκοντα καταχωρίζει.

³⁶⁹ Hook 2004 p.25.

³⁷⁰ Pl. *Pol.* 268E-9B, Arist. *Poet.* 1454b.22-3.

³⁷¹ Diog. Laert. 6.2.73, 80. Diogenes the Cynic’s authorship is doubtful, Philodemus attributes the tragedies and a *Republic* to Diogenes (*De. Stoic.* 6.15, 16.29-17.4), but Emperor Julian does not (*Jul. Or.* 7.210D-212A). Marti claims: “Dio Chrysostom who mentions the tragedies several times does not seem to have any doubt as to their genuineness” (1947 4-5). But the references are to Thyestes tragedies in general, rather than Diogenes’ specifically and when writing his biography on Diogenes the Cynic (of Sinope) he does not refer to the tragedies, but instead has Diogenes cite Euripides’ Tantalus (*Eur. Or.* 6) to discuss tyranny, though of course his character’s voice might be drawing on influences for his *Thyestes* (Dio. Chrys. 6.55). That said, the Stoic Zeno allegedly reiterated the connection between tyranny and cannibalism in his *Republic* (Phld. *De Stoic.* 19.23-20.3). cf. Goulet-Cazé 2003 11-13.

In his *Atreus* and *Oedipus* [...] Diogenes himself records most of the things shameful and unholy found in the *Republic* as his doctrines.³⁷² Thus the association of tyranny and tragedy, in so much as tragedy means terrible events within the theatre or without, filtered through Stoic philosophy and shaped Thyestes tragedies.³⁷³

The Republican Atreus & Cicero's Quotation Culture

When we turn our attention to Rome, the link between Atreus' vengeance and his tyranny is evident in the quotation context of the Republican fragments. The fragments of both Ennius' *Thyestes* and Accius' *Atreus* largely survive through Cicero's citations.³⁷⁴ Given that Ennius' *Thyestes* focused on events after the feast and Thyestes' response to it, Cicero uses excerpts of Ennius and Accius as examples of emotional excess when discussing passion in his *Tusculan Disputations*.³⁷⁵ So, like Plato, Cicero uses tragic examples to aid philosophical discussion. However, because Ennius' plot focuses on Thyestes in Epirus, his fragments present characters' reflections on the feast rather than their anticipation of it.³⁷⁶ Although Ennius' characters have the benefit of hindsight and Atreus does not seem to feature, these fragments reflect on Atreus' feast as a grasp for kingship, establishing a theme which, as we shall see, resonates in Accius' *Atreus*.

As a result, Cicero cites a couple of gnomic statements, which King attributes to *Thyestes* in the notes of his Loeb edition owing to their thematic parallels with the story.³⁷⁷ These are published in Ennius' *fragmenta ex incerta fabula*, but introduce possible thematic parallels with the Thyestes myth.³⁷⁸ For example, Cicero uses Ennius to illustrate the danger of avarice in *De Officiis*:

Maxime autem adducuntur plerique, ut eos iustitiae capiat oblivio, cum in imperiorum, honorum, gloriae cupiditatem inciderunt. Quod enim est apud Ennium:

Nulla sancta societas
Nec fides regni est.

The great majority of people, however, when they fall a prey to ambition for either military or civil authority, are carried away by it so completely that they

³⁷² Phld. *De Stoic.* 16.29-17.4= *TrG* fl 88 tr. by Hook 2004 p.30.

³⁷³ Cf. Wright 2016 pp.155-9, see Appendices.

³⁷⁴ See Intro. p.17 above.

³⁷⁵ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 1.107 (Ennius) cf. 3.26 and 39 (Accius); 4.77 (Accius).

³⁷⁶ See Intro. p.9 above.

³⁷⁷ King 1927 *ad Cic. Off.* 1.8.

³⁷⁸ Ennius 38 Ribbeck, Ennius 402-3 Warmington.

quite lose sight of the claims of justice. For Ennius says:
There is no fellowship inviolate,
No faith is kept, when kingship is concerned;³⁷⁹

Cicero quotes this line again when discussing political instability in *De Re Publica*:

numquam constitisse civitatis statum; multo iam id in regnis minus, quorum, ut ait Ennius, nulla sancta societas nec fides est.

the State has never had a stable government, and that such stability is less attainable by far in kingdoms, in which, as Ennius says,
No sacred partnership or honour is.³⁸⁰

When considered in isolation, Ennius' *Thyestes* fr. 402-3 suggest the transgression of a close and sacred bond in favour of nobility. This clearly would match the story of Thyestes' feast, which Ennius' characters would reflect on as his play dealt with Thyestes' consequent rape of Pelopeia to beget an avenging son. When taken in the context of Cicero's *De Officiis*, we see this fragment is used to exemplify a motive for injustice, revenge beyond the bounds of contemporary law and custom. Such avarice causes the political instability Cicero then discusses in *De Republica* as the quote reemerges.³⁸¹ Again, this places the fragment as a reflection on the feast of Thyestes spoken in Ennius' *Thyestes*, because, as we concluded above, the feast far surpasses Roman penalties for adultery.³⁸²

Cicero then goes on to cite Ennius fr.410 as evidence of the destructive force of hate, which secures the downfall of the tyrant:

Omnium autem rerum nec aptius est quicquam ad opes tuendas ac tenendas quam diligi nec alienius quam timeri. Praeclare enim Ennius:

**Quem metuunt, oderunt; quem quisque odit,
periisse expetit.**

Multorum autem odiis nullas opes posse obsistere, si antea fuit ignotum, nuper est cognitum.

But, of all motives, none is better adapted to secure influence and hold it fast than love; nothing is more foreign to that end than fear. For Ennius says admirably:

**Whom they fear they hate. And whom one hates,
one hopes to see him dead.**

And we recently discovered, if it was not known before, that no amount of

³⁷⁹ Ennius 38 Ribbeck *apud. Cic. Off.* 1.8 tr. Miller.

³⁸⁰ Ennius 38 Ribbeck *apud. Cic. Rep.* 1.32.49 tr. Keyes.

³⁸¹ The lack of *regni* in *De Republica* suggests that Cicero may be quoting from memory here, given that the line no longer scans and the two texts each date to 44 BC.

³⁸² See ch.1 pp.51-53 above.

power can withstand the hatred of the many.³⁸³ Ennius' fr.410 clearly resonates in the most famous line of Accius' *Atreus*: *oderint dum metuant* (let them hate so long as they fear).³⁸⁴ Accius' line is quoted more frequently and is regularly attributed to Atreus, as we will discuss next, but seems to be a direct adaptation of Ennius' less crisp *Quem metuunt, oderunt*, which in turn suggests this is a line of Ennius' *Thyestes*. Moreover, because the second line of Ennius fr.410 suggests a threat to a hated authority figure, it seems that Thyestes says this line while reflecting on his brother's reign after the feast. Therefore Ennius' *fragmenta incerta* fr.410 resonates in Accius' Atreus' dialogue, but seems to have been spoken by Thyestes after the feast; the very episode Ennius' *Thyestes* reflects.

If we trust this placement of Ennius' fragments, Accius verifies the reflections of Ennius' Thyestes character when presenting the motives of his own Atreus, as Accius' *Atreus* deals with the feast itself. Accius' Atreus understands and asserts the implications his revenge will have on his people's view of him as king, as Cicero points out:

ut, si Aeacus aut Minos diceret: **oderint, dum metuant**, aut:
 natis sepulchro ipse est parens,
 indecorum videretur, quod eos fuisse iustos accepimus; at Atreo dicente plausus
 excitantur; est enim digna persona oratio.

If Aeacus or Minos were to say '**Let them hate, so long as they fear**' or—³⁸⁵
 The sons have for their tomb
 No other than a parent,³⁸⁶
 it would appear disgraceful, because tradition tells us that they were righteous.
 But when Atreus says the words, they excite applause, for the statement is
 worthy of the character.³⁸⁷

Accius presents Atreus' infanticide as a reason his people would submit to his tyranny, as suggested in the plural subject of the verbs (*oderint, metuant*). But Cicero emphasises the association between Atreus' tyranny and his revenge by juxtaposing this against fr.14 from after the feast.

Therefore, Accius seems to have presented Atreus' revenge as a feature of his tyranny, a characterisation that is reflected in the transmission of the fragments and is consistent with Cicero's analysis of Ennius' *Thyestes* at Warmington fr.402-3 and

³⁸³ Ennius 36 Ribbeck, Ennius 410 Warmington. *apud* Cic. *Off.* 2.7 tr. Miller. Cf. Ov. *Am.* 2.2.10.

³⁸⁴ Accius 5 Ribbeck. *apud* Cic. *Off.* 1.28.97 tr. Miller.

³⁸⁵ Accius 5 Ribbeck.

³⁸⁶ Accius 14 Ribbeck.

³⁸⁷ Cic. *Off.* 1.28.97 tr. Miller.

fr.410. Cicero's focus on the despotism of Atreus is sustained, as he quotes Accius' *Atreus* following the feast:

Deinde illud etiam apud Accium:
<Thyestes>
Fregistin fidem?
<Atreus>
Neque dedi neque do infideli cuiquam
quamquam ab **impio rege** dicitur, luculente tamen dicitur.

Then even that passage in Accius—
<Thyestes>
You have broken faith.
<Atreus>
I neither gave nor give it to any faithless man
though it is spoken by an **impious king**, is nevertheless splendidly said.³⁸⁸

Seneca & Atreus Imperator

The link between Atreus' crimes and his kingship has been well established. Seneca himself associates it with contemporary tyranny in his own philosophical treatise *De Ira* (AD 41-65):

“Quid ergo? Non aliquae voces ab iratis emittuntur quae magno emissae videantur animo?” Immo veram ignorantibus magnitudinem, qualis illa dira et abominanda: **“Oderint, dum metuant”. Sullano scias saeculo scriptam.** Nescio utrum sibi peius optaverit, ut odio esset, an ut timori. [...] **Magno hoc dictum spiritu putas? Falleris; nec enim magnitudo ista est sed immanitas.**

“What then?” you cry; “do not the utterances of angry men sometimes seem to be the utterances of a great soul?” Yes, to those who do not know what true greatness is. Take the famous words: **“Let them hate if only they fear,” which are so dread and shocking that you might know that they were written in the times of Sulla.** I am not sure which wish was worse—that he should be hated, or that he should be feared. [...] **You think this the utterance of a great soul? You deceive yourself; for there is nothing great in it—it is monstrous.**³⁸⁹

Though Accius' *Atreus* was drafted before 130 BC, here Seneca aligns Atreus' maxim to Sulla's similiarly shocking reign (97-78 BC).

³⁸⁸ Cic. *Off.* 3.28.102; cf. 3.29. 106. Religious references in Seneca are distorted by Atreus' self-deification, as reflected in the use of *impio rege* here. This will be discussed when considering the gods in ch.2 pp.184-196.

³⁸⁹ Sen. *De. Ir.* 1.20.4-5 tr. Basore. Whereas Cicero and Accius had used *rex*, Seneca uses *tyrannus* perhaps because under the Republic the ruling classes had charged upstarts with *regnum* (monarchism) and therefore rulers after Julius Caesar avoided the term *rex*. s.v. *OCD rex*. In Thyestes, therefore, Seneca frequently uses *rex, regnum*; cf. Mader 1982 pp.74-5.

As Leigh points out, this allows Seneca to disparage Sulla's tyranny with the monstrous character of Accius' *Atreus*,³⁹⁰ just as I suggest he does when defining kingship in *De Clementia* (AD 55-6):

“Quid ergo? Non reges quoque occidere solent?” Sed quotiens id fieri publica utilitas persuadet; **tyrannis saevitia cordi est.** Tyrannus autem a rege factis distat, non nomine; nam et Dionysius maior iure meritoque praeferris multis regibus potest, **et L. Sullam tyrannum appellari quid prohibet, cui occidendi finem fecit inopia hostium? Descenderit licet e dictatura sua et se togae reddiderit, quis tamen umquam tyrannus tam avide humanum sanguinem bibit quam ille?**

“What then?” you say; “do not kings also often kill?” Yes, but only when they are induced to do so for the good of the state. **Tyrants take delight in cruelty.** But the difference between a tyrant and a king is one of deeds, not of name; for while the elder Dionysius may justly and deservedly be counted better than many kings, **what keeps Lucius Sulla from being styled a tyrant, whose killing was stopped only by a dearth of foes? Though he abdicated the dictatorship and returned to private life, yet what tyrant ever drank so greedily of human blood as he?**³⁹¹

Therefore Seneca's quotation of Accius' *Atreus* bolsters his rhetoric against Sulla's regime. Accius' play would have been written and already in circulation in Sulla's time.

Indeed it seems that Accius' infamous line became an old adage. When describing the cruelty of Caligula, Suetonius claims:

Tragicum illud subinde iactabat:
Oderint, dum metuant.

He often uttered the familiar line of the tragic poet:

Let them hate me, so they but fear me.³⁹²

This seems an embellishment on Suetonius' part, particularly when we consider the Thyestean imagery he uses to describe a feast with Sulla, Antony and Marcellus:

Fastidit vinum, quia iam sitit iste cruorem; tam bibit hunc avide, quam bibit ante merum. Aspice felicem sibi, non tibi, Romule, Sullam et Marium, si vis, aspice, sed reducem, nec non **Antoni civilia bella moventis nec semel infectas aspice caede manus,** et dic: Roma perit! **regnavit sanguine multo, Ad regnum quisquis venit ab exilio.** Quae primo, quasi ab impatientibus remediorum ac non tam ex animi sententia quam bile et stomacho fingerentur, volebat accipi dicebatque identidem: **“Oderint, dum probent”**.

That man does not care for wine, since now he is thirsty for blood; he drinks it as greedily as he drank undiluted wine before. Look, Roman citizen, upon Sulla, blessed for himself but not for you, Marius too, if you will, but after he took Rome; see the hands of an **Antony, rousing the strife of the**

³⁹⁰ Leigh 1996 p.187.

³⁹¹ Sen. *Clem.* 1.12.4.

³⁹² Suet. *Calig.* 30 tr. Rolfe. cf. *Tib.* 59.

people, hands stained with blood not once, but again and again; then say: Rome is no more! He has always reigned with great bloodshed whosoever has come to kingship out of exile. These at first he wished to be taken as the work of those who were impatient of his reforms, voicing not so much their real feelings as their anger and vexation; and he used to say from time to time: **“Let them hate me, provided they respect my conduct”**.³⁹³

In this passage Suetonius exploits Thyestean themes of drinking blood here spoken by Antony (not Sulla, as in Seneca’s *De Clementia*) returning to rule from exile before closing with a play on Accius’ *oderint dum metuant* maxim.³⁹⁴

Suetonius was not alone in using Accius’ *Atreus* to defame Antony. Cicero used this maxim he praised in *De Officiis* as a warning for Mark Antony in his *Phillippics*:

Quod videmus etiam in fabula illi ipsi qui “oderint, dum metuant” dixerit perniciosum fuisse.

Even in the play we see that it was ruinous to the very character who said “Let them hate me, so long as they fear me”. Ah, Marcus Antonius, would that you remembered your grandfather!³⁹⁵

Therefore, both Suetonius’ biographical embellishments and Cicero’s tactical quotations demonstrate the link between sanguine acts and tyranny using King Atreus’ preparation of the revenge feast as a tool for political commentary, as reflected in Seneca’s prose.

Seneca not only drew on previous versions of Atreus when composing his *Thyestes*, but also revised earlier treatises when writing his *De Ira* and characterising his tragic kings.³⁹⁶ Philodemus’ *De Ira* (c.70 BC) discusses how anger affects despots, creating an important precedent for Seneca,³⁹⁷ particularly because Philodemus focused on the danger of anger in rulers:

ἐπακολουθεῖ δὲ τοῖς ἔχουσιν αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ δεσποτικοῖς γίνεσθαι καὶ καχυπόνοις καὶ ψεύσταις καὶ ἀνελευθέροις καὶ δολίοις καὶ ὑπόλοις καὶ ἀχαρίστοις καὶ φιλαύτοις.

Neither a judge nor a senator nor an assemblyman nor a magistrate nor in short anyone can be just when he is in the grip of angry passions. The angry become despotic, suspicious, liars, treacherous, dishonest, deceitful, ungrateful and egotistical.³⁹⁸

Seneca’s *De Ira* took on these warnings by giving case studies of the treachery of kings,

³⁹³ Suet. *Tiber.* 59.2 tr. Rolfe.

³⁹⁴ Sen. *Clem.* 2.2, 12.4.

³⁹⁵ Cic. *Phil.* 1.14.34 tr. Shackleton-Bailey. cf. Cic. *Off.* 1.28.97.

³⁹⁶ This intertext is perfectly possible: as Tsouna points out, he would have had access to the Imperial library (2011 p.184).

³⁹⁷ For an overview of the nuances between Philodemus’ philosophy, in contrast to other Stoics and Epicureans, cf. Tsouna 2011 pp.186-203.

³⁹⁸ Phl. *De. Ir.* 5.30.15-28. tr. by Harrison 2001 p.200.

including the cannibalistic feast of Harpagus.³⁹⁹ Yet these qualities also filtered into Seneca's characterisation of his Atreus who rules by fear,⁴⁰⁰ suspects Thyestes of the crime Atreus himself commits,⁴⁰¹ lies to ensure his brother will eat his own sons,⁴⁰² ungratefully dismisses the concerns of the *Satelles* and believes his revenge to surpass all others.⁴⁰³ Beyond the basic structure of the myth, Seneca's characterisation of Atreus encapsulates the qualities set out in Philodemus' treatise and developed in Seneca's prose.

Yet, puzzlingly Seneca continued to reference Accius' *Atreus* in his *De Ira*. Was this before or after Seneca wrote his own *Thyestes*? Once again Seneca aligns Accius' Atreus with the tyrant in *De Clementia* (AD 55-6), which Seneca dedicated to Nero, allegedly *in opposition* to the character of the emperor himself:

Praeter id, quod bene factis dictisque tuis quam familiarissimum esse te cupio, ut, quod nunc natura et impetus est, fiat iudicium, illud mecum considero multas voces magnas, **sed detestabiles, in vitam humanam pervenisse celebresque vulgo ferri, ut illam: "Oderint, dum metuant,"** cui Graecus versus similis est, qui se mortuo terram misceri ignibus iubet, et alia huius notae.

Besides wishing you to be as familiar as possible with your own good deeds and words in order that what is now a natural impulse may become a principle, I reflect upon this, **that many striking but odious sayings have made their entry into human life and are bandied about as famous; as for example, "Let them hate if only they fear,"** and the Greek verse similar to it, in which a man would have the earth convulsed with flame when once he is dead, and others of this type.⁴⁰⁴

If Seneca was so taken with Accius' demonstration of Atreus' tyranny, then what compelled him to write his *Thyestes*?⁴⁰⁵ Perhaps, since Accius' *Atreus* came to be synonymous with Sulla, Seneca saw fit to write an Atreus for his own tyrant: Nero. This would place Seneca's *Thyestes* in the later portion of his career, following his rivalry

³⁹⁹ Sen. *De. Ir.* 14.4; 15.1-4; 17.1-4; 20.1, 4; 22.1-5.

⁴⁰⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 205-15.

⁴⁰¹ Sen. *Thy.* 237-42.

⁴⁰² Sen. *Thy.* 288-304.

⁴⁰³ Sen. *Thy.* 249-53.

⁴⁰⁴ Sen. *Clem.* 2.2.2 tr. Basore. Cf. 1.12.4 where, as Braund points out, Seneca quotes this line when discussing Sulla (2009 *ad loc*). By this point in the treatise, then, Seneca himself is bandying about the famous words, proving his own point.

⁴⁰⁵ Given that Cicero was lambasted for self-referencing in his forensic speeches, we should not expect Seneca to quote his own *Thyestes*, but his familiarity with Accius' *Atreus* is striking. Cf. Paterson 2004 pp.79-97.

with Caligula and the breakdown of his relationship with Nero.⁴⁰⁶ Indeed, Dio Cassius summarises the discrepancy between Seneca's presentation of tyranny in his philosophical works and his role as Nero's tutor:

καὶ γὰρ τυραννίδος κατηγορῶν τυραννοδιδάσκαλος ἐγένετο, καὶ τῶν συνόντων τοῖς δυνάσταις κατατρέχων οὐκ ἀφίστατο τοῦ παλατίου

For [Seneca] while denouncing tyranny, he was making himself the teacher of a tyrant; while inveighing against the associates of the powerful, he did not hold aloof from the palace himself;⁴⁰⁷

But, as we have seen, Seneca associates Atreus' character with tyrants, appropriating tragic kings for political commentary and carefully dissociating Nero from his philosophical critique of tyranny. Based on this evidence: if Seneca wanted to criticise Nero's tyranny, a Thyestes tragedy is the place to do it and his disengagement with Nero is the time to do it.⁴⁰⁸ So the key difference between Accius' *Atreus* and Seneca's *Thyestes* is that, when Seneca was creating his Atreus, the tyrant was not just an academic concern, but a *real* concern in the Imperial period.

This imperial anxiety is reflected in the second act of Seneca's *Thyestes* when Atreus makes his first entrance. His resolve for revenge is foregrounded and associated with his role as king:

Ignave, iners, enervis et (**quod maximum probrum tyranno rebus in summis reor**)
inulte, post tot scelera, post fratris dolos
fasque omne ruptum questibus vanis agis
iratus Atreus?

Idle, inert, impotent, **and (what I count the greatest reproach for a tyrant in high matters) unavenged:** after so many crimes, after your brother's treachery and the breaking of every principle, do you act with futile complaints—you, Atreus in anger?⁴⁰⁹

Atreus then goes on to implicate his kingdom in his revenge in such a way as is unprecedented in the fragments of the earlier tragedies:

relictis bellicum totus canat
populus Mycenis. quisquis invisum caput

⁴⁰⁶ Cass. Dio. 59.19.7; Suet. *Calig.* 53.2. See ch.3 n.1116 p.234.

⁴⁰⁷ Cass. Dio. 61.10.2.

⁴⁰⁸ Nero's pantomimic performance of Thyestes need not have been based on Seneca's play, several titles Nero danced have no Senecan paradigm e.g. *Alcmaeon*, *Canace in Labour*, *Turnus*, *Antigone* and *Melanippe* (Suet. *Ner.* 6.21, *Juv.* 8.225). Lucian's description of a Thyestean pantomime, albeit written a century later, suggests Aegisthus' coming of age and revenge, rather than the feast itself being portrayed (Lucian. *Salt.* 67). See ch3 pp. 235-238.

⁴⁰⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 176-80 tr. Fitch.

tegit ac tuetur, clade funesta occidat.

Let the whole populace leave Mycenae and sound the trumpets for war. Let all who hide and protect that hated creature perish in a blood bath.⁴¹⁰ So whereas Accius' Atreus expects his people to fear him as a result of the feast, Seneca's Atreus implicates his people in his revenge plot and explicitly threatens those who may hinder it in his hyperbole.

In Seneca's *Thyestes*, this leads into Atreus' lengthier definition of kingship, developing Accius' *oderint dum metuant* maxim:⁴¹¹

Atreus:

Maximum hoc regni bonum est,
quod facta domini **cogitur** populus sui
tam **ferre** quam **laudare**.

Satelles:

Quos cogit metus
laudare, **eisdem reddit inimicos metus**.
at qui favoris gloriam veri petit
animo magis quam voce laudari volet.

Atreus:

This is the greatest value of kingship: that the people are **compelled to praise** as well as **endure** their master's actions.

Satelles:

When fear compels them to praise, **fear also turns them into enemies**. But one who seeks the tribute of sincere support will want praise from the heart rather than the tongue.⁴¹²

Despite the *Satelles*' warning, echoing Ennius' *Quem metuunt, oderunt*,⁴¹³ Seneca's Atreus puts his demonstration of power above the happiness of his people, aligning his definition of kingship with that of tyranny, which developed in philosophical treatises from Plato and was embodied in the cruelty of imperial rule.

What follows strongly echoes Seneca's criticism of the "monstrous" *oderint dum metuant* maxim in his *De Ira*:

Atreus:

Laus vera et humili saepe contingit viro,
non nisi potenti falsa. quod nolunt velint.

Satelles:

Rex velit honesta: nemo non eadem volet.

Atreus:

ubicumque tantum honesta dominantanti licent,
precario regnatur.

⁴¹⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 187-90 tr. Fitch.

⁴¹¹ Accius 5 Ribbeck.

⁴¹² Sen. *Thy.* 205-10 tr. Fitch.

⁴¹³ Ennius 36 Ribbeck.

Atreus:

Sincere praise often comes even to a lowly man; **false praise comes only to the mighty**. They must want what they do not want!

Satelles:

Let a king want what is honorable: everyone will want the same.

Atreus:

Where a sovereign is permitted only what is honorable, **he rules on sufferance**.⁴¹⁴

Here Atreus refuses to shoulder the responsibilities of kingship because it means his power is mitigated by the needs and desires of his people. For Seneca's Atreus kingship is not responsibility but tyranny: absolute power.

The *Satelles*, though ineffective, provides the voice of reason, warning Atreus:

Satelles:

ubi non est pudor
nec cura iuris sanctitas pietas fides,
instabile regnum est.

Atreus:

Sanctitas pietas fides
privata bona sunt: **qua iuvat** reges eant.

Satelles:

Where there is no shame, no concern for the law, no righteousness, goodness, loyalty, **rule is unstable**.

Atreus:

Righteousness, goodness, loyalty are private values: kings should go **where they please**.⁴¹⁵

Here Atreus distinguishes private concerns from his political concerns, suggesting that, as king everything he does is public and above the law, so private values that may portray weakness are not viable options for him.

This ambiguity between private and political motivations may work in Seneca's favour. Atreus' enforcing of cannibalism not only makes him a feared king politically but also fulfills his personal desire for revenge, which comes to the fore when Atreus explains his revenge plans:

De fine poenae loqueris; **ego poenam volo.**
perimat tyrannus lenis; in regno meo
mors impetratur.

You talk about punishment's conclusion: **I want the punishment! Slaying is for a lenient tyrant**; in my kingdom death is something people beg for.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁴ Sen. *Thy.* 211-15 tr. Fitch.

⁴¹⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 216-19 tr. Fitch.

⁴¹⁶ Sen. *Thy.* 246-8 tr. Fitch.

In *De Clementia*, Seneca claimed that “Tyrants take delight in cruelty” (*tyrannis saevitia cordi est*) using Sulla, allegedly Accius’ Atreus incarnate, as an example.⁴¹⁷ In *Thyestes*, Seneca’s Atreus also revels in cruelty, following the example set by Seneca’s pupil turned persecutor: Nero. Therefore, Seneca’s *Thyestes* develops a tradition of using Thyestean tragedies for political commentary, by using his Thyestes and Atreus characters to explore the psychology of tyranny.

Ch 1.2: Conclusion

In sum, having surveyed both the Greek and the Latin fragments, it seems that the association between violence and kingship changes through different tragic adaptations of the Thyestes myth. The surviving Sophocles fragments invite a gendered reading of Atreus’ revenge in contrast to the similar revenge of Procne and Philomela in Sophocles’ *Tereus* which, by analogy, highlights Atreus’ masculine motives: securing kingship and cleansing his bloodline irrespective of who the speaker is. These motives are demystified by Euripides’ fr.395, which makes the brothers’ dispute over kingship accessible to a contemporary audience. Plato then furthers Euripides’ realism by decontextualizing Thyestes from tragedy and using his story to define tyranny, in turn associating Atreus’ violent crimes with tyranny.

So by the time Accius and Seneca were writing, Atreus was no longer a tragic king in the mythical sense, but a “tragic” tyrant with contemporary accessibility. Ennius’ now fragmentary *Thyestes* established this theme and resonates in Accius’ work. Seneca then used Accius’ *oderint dum metuant* maxim to define tyranny before being compelled to write an Atreus character of his own. Ultimately, following the philosophical use of Atreus to define tyranny and Accius’ much quoted *oderint dum metuant* maxim, Seneca’s Atreus is shaped not only by Seneca’s relationship with Nero but also by the constraints of Atreus’ character and his role, as Atreus himself admits of his sons:

Ut nemo doceat fraudis et sceleris vias,
regnum docebit. ne mali fiant times?
nascuntur.

Though no one teaches them the ways of deceit and crime, kingship will teach it.
You fear their becoming evil? They are born so.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁷ Sen. *Clem.* 1.12.4 tr. Basore.

⁴¹⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 312-15.

1.3: Deliberation

The social role discussed above is something Seneca's Atreus crafts through speech. The relationship between Atreus' deliberation and action will have featured differently in the Attic plays than in the Roman works of Accius and Seneca. We must now turn to the role deliberation plays as an impetus for the revenge feast in each play, in order to finally evaluate the extent to which Atreus' revenge is a product of his free will.

Sophoclean Dialogue

As ever, the elusiveness of the Attic fragments compels us to compare them to the existing corpus for a fuller understanding. Sophocles' fr.259, though attributed by Stobaeus to one of the Thyestes plays, seems generic in isolation:

ἔνεστι γὰρ τις καὶ λόγοισιν ἡδονή,
λήθην ὅταν ποιῶσι τῶν ὄντων κακῶν

For there is a certain pleasure in words, if they cause one to forget the troubles that one has.⁴¹⁹

Yet, when speech-acts like this are discussed elsewhere in the Sophoclean corpus, it is always in the context of an exchange, not a monologue. Typically a speaker's anxiety about the ability of words to communicate with others is expressed to another character.

These exchanges consider: the trustworthiness of speech,⁴²⁰ the relationship between words and action,⁴²¹ the approval of words and action,⁴²² insults,⁴²³ reported speech,⁴²⁴ taboo utterances,⁴²⁵ silencing,⁴²⁶ brevity,⁴²⁷ speech triggering a demise,⁴²⁸

⁴¹⁹ Soph. 259 Radt= Stob. 4. 48. 27 (Σοφοκλέους Θυέστη).

⁴²⁰ Soph. *El.* 671-2, 369-71, 1453; *Trach.* 60-71; *Antig.* 1192-5; *OT.* 625, 1419, 863-5, 543-6; *Phil.* 1290, 110-11, 1193-5, 628-30, 1373-5, 130-1, 319-21, 1110-5, 319-21, 662, 1350-1; *OC.* 115-16, 493; fr.64, fr.269d, fr.314.298.

⁴²¹ Soph. *Ai.* 813-14, 1159-62, 1175-9; *El.* 621-5, 357; *Antig.* 542-3; *OT.* 71-2, 216-20, 296, 517, 883-4; *Phil.* 1246, 1268-72, 55-60, 79-80, 1400-1, 1305-7; *OC.* 872-3, 936, 1580-3, 143-4, 1185-9, 658-60, 382-4, 720-1, 1034-5, 985-90; fr.201a.

⁴²² Soph. *El.* 29-31, 61, 401, 464-5, 921, 1044, 1050-1, 1055-7, 1456; *Trach.* 230-31, 622-3; *Antig.* 499-501; *OT.* 936-7; *Phil.* 1400; fr.693a.

⁴²³ Asterisks signify duplication: Soph. *Ai.* 280, 490-505, 773-7, 1226-8, 1322-3; *El.* 289-300*, 1470-1; *Antig.* 259-60, 316; *OT.* 339-40, 429-34, 514, 783-4.

⁴²⁴ Soph. *Ai.* 288-301, 1153; *Antig.* 11-12, 227-30, 1210-18*; *OT.* 289-300*, 1270-4, 1289-91*; *Phil.* 363-6; *OC.* 550, 1645.

⁴²⁵ Soph. *El.* 637-43, 1003-4, 1009-12, 1174-5, 1253-6; *OT.* 726-8, 1056-7, 1289-91*; *Phil.* 387-8, 963-4, 1237-41; *OC.* 154-69*; fr.444, 221.

⁴²⁶ Soph. *Ai.* 1145-9; *El.* 226-32, 905-6, 1288, 1353; *Antig.* 1244-5; *OT.* 1145-8; *Phil.* 896-9; *OC.* 731; fr.82.

⁴²⁷ Soph. *El.* 673, 1482; *OT.* 810-13.

persuasion,⁴²⁹ recollection⁴³⁰ and supernatural exchanges such as prophecies, curses and oaths.⁴³¹ Each of these concerns reflects the characters viewing speech as an interaction amongst the *dramatis personae*, in contrast to lengthy monologues.⁴³² As a result, we can place fr.259 as part of an exchange.

Looking at the different classes of speech-acts in Sophocles more closely, they reveal two significant findings. Firstly, trends in such descriptions of speech identify the social structure of the play. For example, eleven of twenty-five speech-references in *Philoctetes* pertain to trust because of Odysseus' reputation as a liar, and eight of thirty-two references in *Oedipus Tyrannus* treat supernatural speech-acts because the action hinges on the way prophecy impacts the family. Though we cannot identify such trends in Sophocles' *Thyestes* fragments, we can conclude that Sophocles uses these trends to describe *relationships*. This suggests that the social structure of Sophocles' *Thyestes* plays included an attempt to suppress violence with soothing words.

Secondly, the Messenger's description of pleasure in words in *Oedipus Tyrannus* calls into question whether the soothing words in *Thyestes* fr.259 are effective:

τὸ δ' ἔπος οὐξερῶ—τάχα
ἦδοιο μὲν, πῶς δ' οὐκ ἄν; ἀσχάλλοις δ' ἴσως.

and the word I shall soon speak will bring you pleasure—of course—but perhaps also sorrow.⁴³³

Unlike Sophocles' *Thyestes* fr.259, which presents an indefinite utterance (τις) in a hypothetical scenario, indicated by the subjunctive mood (λόγοισιν [...] ὅταν ποιῶσι), this passage anticipates the outcome of a specific message in the future tense (οὐξερῶ). So in *Thyestes* fr.259 the speaker is recommending the cathartic process of talking, rather than a specific revelation or report that the messenger brings in *Oedipus*

⁴²⁸ Soph. *Ai.* 1093-5, 1107-10; *El.* 566-9; *Trach.* 61-4, 741-2, 837-40; *Antig.* 685-90, 1350-2; *OT.* 848-50.

⁴²⁹ Soph. *Ai.* 148-9, 525-6, 543, 731, 1069-70, 1140-1; *El.* 1438-9; *OT.* 670-2; *Phil.* 435-6, 1278-80; *OC.* 550, 772-4, 1161-3, 1273-9, 1284-90, 1615-16.

⁴³⁰ Soph. *El.* 1478-80; 688-90; fr.597.

⁴³¹ Soph. *Ai.* 864-5, 801-2, 929-32, 127-8; *El.* 126-7, 1182; 637-43; *Trach.* 239, 258-9; *Antig.* 1178, 1046-7, 1210-18*; *OT.* 84-6, 363-70, 390-2, 408-10, 439, 473-6, 274-5 (prophecies), 404-7 (vow); *OC.* 74, 129-31, 1208-10, 1766-7, 625-6 and 650-1, 154-69*, 101-14.

⁴³² E.g. Soph. *Ai.* 430-80; *El.* 86-120, 254-309, 341-68, 431-63; *Trach.* 1-48, 141-77, 531-87, 672-22, 994-116; *Antig.* 162-210, 639-82; *OT.* 14-57, 216-79, 771-833, *Phil.* 254-316, 343-90, 468-518; *OC.* 761-99.

⁴³³ Soph. *OT.* 936-7 tr. Lloyd-Jones.

Tyrranus. Therefore, *Thyestes* fr.259 merely expresses the hope that deliberation will replace action.

However, this hope was most likely unfulfilled, because in Sophocles' tragedies such deliberation is made public and acted upon.⁴³⁴ In *Ajax* for example, Tecmessa proclaims to the chorus that Ajax will lash out following his frenzied raid:

καὶ δῆλός ἐστιν ὧς τι δρασείων κακόν.
[τοιαῦτα γὰρ πῶς καὶ λέγει κῶδύρεται.]

it is clear that he plans to do some evil [, for such are his words and such his lamentations].⁴³⁵

As in our *Thyestes* fragment, Ajax presents an abortive attempt to soothe the tragic hero out of action:

ἀλλ', ὦ φίλοι, τούτων γὰρ οὔνεκ' ἐστάλην,
ἄρηξάτ' εἰσελθόντες, εἰ δύνασθέ τι.
φίλων γὰρ οἱ τοιοῖδε νικῶνται λόγοις.

Come, friends, for this is why I came, go in and help him, if you have any power to do so! For such men are won over by the words of friends.⁴³⁶ There is no other reference to soothing words in Sophocles' extant works besides this and *Thyestes* fr.259. From this passage of *Ajax* follows an *ekkyklema* scene of slaughtered cattle and a frenzied Ajax,⁴³⁷ Ajax's monologue and deliberation of suicide,⁴³⁸ Tecmessa's monologue in response,⁴³⁹ stichomythia to call in Ajax's child,⁴⁴⁰ Ajax's monologue to his son.⁴⁴¹ He does not kill himself until line 865.

Thus, if we compare the use of soothing words in Sophocles' *Ajax* to *Thyestes* fr.259 it may help us to locate it at the beginning of *Thyestes' Feast*. Both Ajax and Atreus have lost their identity as a result of being wronged. Atreus has lost his claim to kingship through the loss of both the Golden Fleece and the assurance of legitimate heirs, Ajax has lost his heroic status through the loss of war spoils and his deception by Athena, who forces him to kill livestock in place of his enemies. Both *Thyestes' Feast* and *Ajax* present a male protagonist about to commit an unparalleled crime for a character of their status and gender: suicide and an infanticidal, cannibal banquet. Both

⁴³⁴ Soph. *Ai.* 481-2; *Antig.* 227-30.

⁴³⁵ Soph. *Ai.* 326-7 tr. Lloyd-Jones.

⁴³⁶ Soph. *Ai.* 328-30 tr. Lloyd-Jones.

⁴³⁷ Soph. *Ai.* 429-56.

⁴³⁸ Soph. *Ai.* 456-480.

⁴³⁹ Soph. *Ai.* 481-522.

⁴⁴⁰ Soph. *Ai.* 522-44.

⁴⁴¹ Soph. *Ai.* 545-82.

Ajax and *Thyestes' Feast* seem to create pathos by incorporating children, just as Atreus typically spares his sons, so does Ajax prepare his son for his own suicide. As a result, the thematic comparisons may allow us to place fr.259 in *Thyestes' Feast*, most likely in the context of the chorus or an interlocutor placating Atreus' anger, which is the closest possible parallel to Ajax's anger at the outset of the play.

Therefore, if we subscribe to the location of fr.259 at the very start of *Thyestes' Feast* it presents a failed attempt to placate Atreus, whose deliberation of revenge would have been both public and successful. What we can conclude more securely is that *Thyestes* fr.259 reflects public attempts at consolation, which typically predicates public deliberation in Sophocles. This is in keeping with the characters' broader identification of language as a social function in Sophocles' tragedies, as opposed to the inward monologues we see in later tragedians.

Euripidean Action

Turning to Euripides' *Thyestes* fr.394 we are faced with a similar problem:

οὐ πόποτ' ἔργου μᾶλλον εἰλόμην λόγους.
I have never preferred words to action.⁴⁴²

Whereas Sophocles' *Thyestes* fr.295 praises the soothing "pleasure in words," Euripides reveals their inadequacy. This contrast of words and action occurs twenty seven times in Sophoclean drama⁴⁴³ and thirty-five times in Euripides' more complete tragedies.⁴⁴⁴ This is unsurprising, as the discussion of speech-acts in Euripides' plays largely echoes those in Sophocles. They discuss: trust,⁴⁴⁵ the relationship between words and action,⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴² Eur. 394 Kannicht tr. Collard and Cropp.

⁴⁴³ Soph. *Ai.* 813-14, 1159-62, 1175-9; *El.* 621-5, 357; *Antig.* 542-3; *OT.* 71-2, 216-20, 296, 517, 883-4; *Phil.* 1246, 1268-72, 55-60, 79-80, 1400-1, 1305-7; *OC.* 872-3, 1580-3, 143-4, 1185-9, 658-60, 382-4, 720-1, 1034-5, 985-90; fr.201a Radt.

⁴⁴⁴ Eur. *Med.* 964-5; *El.* 891-3; *HF.* 112-13, 238-9*; *Phoen.* 313, 499- 503*, 588-9, 716; *Or.* 285-7*, *Rhes.* 86-7; *IT* 793-4; *Alc.* 339; *Ion* 959, 1298; *Supp.* 605-6, 748-9, 902-8; *Andr.* 745-6; *IA* 1115-16*; *Hipp.* 490-3, 500-2, 503-6*, 971-2, 1182*; *Hec.* 372-4, 1187-91; *Hel.* 1157-9; fr.282. 23-8; fr.78; fr.61; fr.528; fr.**813a; fr.898; fr.757.831-5; fr.234; fr.789d.9 Kannicht.

⁴⁴⁵ Eur. *Med.* 316-18, 579-81, 584-6, 927, 1351-3; *El.* 110-11; *Rhes.* 149-50 (eavesdropping), 420-23, 663-4, 745-6, 834-5; *IT* 669-70, 714-15, *Alc.* 537; *Ion* 1002; *Supp.* 334, 892-3 (verbosity), 932; *Andr.* 289-92*; *Heracl.* 356-60; *IA* 837-8, 845-6, 112-13, 1115-16*, 1133*, 1346; *Hipp.* 9*, 413-14, 934-5, 956-7, 1289-91*, 1307-9*, 1334-7*; *Troi.* 966-9, 989-90; *Hel.* 639-41, 622-4, 710, 1147-50; fr.61*; fr.206; fr.286.1-3; fr.773.120; fr.978 Kannicht.

⁴⁴⁶ See n.444.

the approval of words and action,⁴⁴⁷ insults,⁴⁴⁸ reported speech,⁴⁴⁹ taboo utterances,⁴⁵⁰ silencing,⁴⁵¹ brevity,⁴⁵² speech triggering a demise,⁴⁵³ persuasion,⁴⁵⁴ recollection,⁴⁵⁵ soothing⁴⁵⁶ and supernatural exchanges such as prophecies, curses and oaths.⁴⁵⁷ Yet given the more extensive Euripidean corpus, it incorporates some extra descriptions of

⁴⁴⁷ Eur. *El.* 231; *Phoen.* 930, 1235; *Rhes.* 455-7*; *IT* 1075; *Ion* 563; *Supp.* 332-3; *Heracl.* 333, 435-8, 535-6, 541-2, 558, 642-3, 552-5; *IA* 1024, 1407-9.

⁴⁴⁸ Eur. *Med.* 223-4, 453-4, 545-6; *El.* 346-7; *HF.* 238-9*, 218-19; *Phoen.* 179-80; *Or.* 101, 891-3; *Rhes.* 469; *Alc.* 679-80; *Supp.* 456, 476-7, 581-3, *Andr.* 234-5, 251-2, 645-9, 744; *Heracl.* 983-5; *IA* 377-80*; *Hipp.* 991-3, 1265-6; *Hec.* 576-82*, 1276, 1283; *Troi.* 408-9; *Hel.* 481-2*; fr.654 Kannicht.

⁴⁴⁹ Eur. *Med.* 1132 (goadng messenger), *El.* 228 (messenger) 847-53; *Phoen.* 1177-80, 1220-35, 1248-51; *IT* 364-71, 779-85*, 1358-63; *Alc.* 1002-5; *Supp.* 79 (lack of message), 365-8, 659, 930-4, 1090-5; *IA* 450-64, 465-6*, 1166-70, 1231-2, 1449, 1560-61; *Hipp.* 1182*; *Hec.* 542-5, 556-65, 576-82*, 929-32; *Troi.* 1881-5; *Hel.* 447; *Bacch.* 210-14 (speaking report); fr.286.1-3 Kannicht.

⁴⁵⁰ Eur. *Med.* 1306-7; *Phoen.* 891; *Or.* 1130, 557-60; *IT* 759-65; *Ion* 682-3, 1189*; *Supp.* 295-6; *Hipp.* 243-4, 345, 352-3, 881-5.

⁴⁵¹ Eur. *Med.* 325, 964, 1404, 1244; *HF.* 534-5; *Phoen.* 1584-6, *IT* 723-4*, 904-6; fr.126 Kannicht.

⁴⁵² Eur. *Or.* 446, 687; *Andr.* 691-2; *Hipp.* 212-14, 498-9, 704, 724; *Hec.* 1179; fr.28 Kannicht.

⁴⁵³ Eur. *Med.* 801; *El.* 757, 1301-2; *HF.* 460-61, 1219; *Phoen.* 884-5 (preventing), 917, 1343 (reflecting); *Or.* 855-6, 1583, 249-51; *Rhes.* 50-1; *Alc.* 814; *Ion* 925-30, 1406; *Supp.* 409-11, 435-6 (equality of written law), 802-3, 1154*, 1160-1; *Andr.* 326, 426, 909; *Heracl.* 478-9, 496-9; *IA* 479, 725, 1350; *Hipp.* 342, 486-9, 503-6*, 520, 601-2*, 881, 1088-9, 1289-91*, 1334-7*; *Hec.* 357-8, 663-4*, 181; *Hel.* 779; fr.816; fr.938 Kannicht.

⁴⁵⁴ Eur. *Med.* 612, 1040-55 (*psychomachia*); *HF.* 204-6, 298; *Phoen.* 452-60; *Or.* 622, 674-6*, 692-3, 712-13, 1190; *Rhes.* 340-1; *IT* 93-4, 734-5, 1052-5; *Alc.* 256-7; *Ion* 940; *Supp.* 346-7; *Andr.* 869-70*, 154; *Heracl.* 118-19, 236-7; *IA* 320, 1240; *Hipp.* 478-9*; *Hec.* 250; *Troi.* 966-8; *Hel.* 1662; *Bacch.* 325, 787; fr.661.8-9*; fr.899 Kannicht.

⁴⁵⁵ Eur. *HF.* 116-17; *Phoen.* 444-5, 568, 1259-60.

⁴⁵⁶ Eur. *Med.* 140-4, 172-5; *Supp.* 1154*; *IA* 1449; *Hipp.* 288-93, 301-3*, 1257-60; *Bacch.* 177-8; fr.140; fr.962; fr.1065.

⁴⁵⁷ Eur. *Med.* 675 (prophecy), 737-40 (oaths); *HF.* 490-93; *Phoen.* 666-8, 1210; *Or.* 1174-6, 245-6 (pledge), 285-7*, 329-31, 674-6*, *Rhes.* 340-1, 455-7*, 875-6; *IA* 607-8; *IT* 723-4*, 1492-6, 574-5, 779-85*, 1435-6, 1475; *Alc.* 38*; *Ion* 98-9, 179-81, 401-2, 690-91, 1189*, 1445-6; *Supp.* 201-4 (god given speech), 600-2, 958-9, 1183; *Andr.* 289-92*, 936; *Heracl.* 718-20; *IA* 362-3 (divine witness written word), 460-4 (supplication)*, 528-31 (divine oath); *Hipp.* 9*, 99, 114-17, 478-9* (spells), 503-6*, 601-2*, 1055-6, 1307-9* (oath), 1320-4, 1443; *Hec.* 663-4* (ill-omened) and 181*; *Troi.* 51-2 (dialogue between gods), 428-30, 989-90; *Hel.* 959-61 (words for the dead); *Bacch.* 328-9, 296-8; fr.370.64; fr.795; fr.923 Kannicht.

speech: secrets,⁴⁵⁸ reporting reputation,⁴⁵⁹ displeasing speech,⁴⁶⁰ last words,⁴⁶¹ the inadequacy of words,⁴⁶² and interjecting.⁴⁶³

In the context of the Euripidean corpus, action is typically valued above words, at a turning point in the drama, marking the end of deliberation.⁴⁶⁴ In the examples from Euripides' extant plays, it is typically key characters such as Orestes or Medea who claim that actions speak louder than words, in order to terminate a monologue or discussion.⁴⁶⁵ As a result, we can attribute Euripides' fr.394 by analogy to a central character such as Thyestes or Atreus, in contrast to Sophocles' conciliatory interlocutor in fr.259.

In the context of Euripides' *Thyestes*, the action in question appears to be the feast, which would attribute this fragment to Atreus as, like Orestes and Medea, he drives the revenge. However, this must be reconciled with Atreus' deliberation of his revenge in dialogue with the Old Man character we identified in fr.396.⁴⁶⁶ As with Orestes and Electra in *Electra* and Creusa in *Ion*, Atreus used the Old Man as a sounding board for revenge in Euripides' *Thyestes*.⁴⁶⁷ So I suggest that in fr.394 Atreus later caps his discussion with the Old Man, presented in fr.396, preferring to act. This fragment is likely to have been spoken by Atreus at this point because Creusa, Electra,

⁴⁵⁸ Eur. *El.* 272-3; *Ion* 947, 1520; *IA* 1106-8; *Hipp.* 714-21; *Hel.* 481-2*; fr.411 Kannicht.

⁴⁵⁹ Eur. *El.* 718-26; *Andr.* 459-61; fr.5 Kannicht.

⁴⁶⁰ Eur. *Med.* 772-3, 922-5; *El.* 127-91, 292-3, 1013-14; *Heracl.* 682; *IA* 1133*; *Hipp.* 484-5, 232-3 (frenzy), 1045; *Hec.* 516-17, 670-1; *Hel.* 441-2, 1198; fr.223.61; fr.334 Kannicht.

⁴⁶¹ Eur. *El.* 1055-6; *Heracl.* 572-3; *Hec.* 413-14, 555-6.

⁴⁶² Eur. *H.* 916; *Phoen.* 407, 499- 503*, 1335; *Or.* 758, 1393-4, *Rhes.* 39-40, *IT* 837, 900-1, 1162 (Thoas unclear); *Ion* 256-7 (Creusa unclear); *Supp.* 844-5; *Andr.* 869-70*; *Heracl.* 116-17, 693; *IA* 317, 465-6*, 641-3, 977-80; *Hipp.* 301-3*, 571-3 (unclear spch), 670-1; *Hec.* 714; *Hel.* 788 (riddling); fr.327; fr.1044 Kannicht.

⁴⁶³ Eur. *Or.* 1221; *Ion* 223-4; *IA* 377-80*, 819-20; *Hipp.* 88-9

⁴⁶⁴ Eur. *Med.* 964-5; *El.* 891-3; *HF.* 112-13, 238-9*; *Phoen.* 313, 588-9, 716; *Or.* 285-7*, *Rhes.* 86-7; *IT* 793-4; *Alc.* 339; *Ion* 1298; *Supp.* 605-6, 902-8; *Andr.* 745-6; *IA* 1115-16*; *Hipp.* 490-3, 500-2, 503-6*, 971-2, 1182*; *Hec.* 1187-91; fr.61; fr.528; fr.757.831-5; fr.**813a; fr.890; fr.898 Kannicht.

⁴⁶⁵ Eur. *Med.* 964-5; *El.* 891-3; *HF.* 238-9*; *Phoen.* 588-9, 716; *Or.* 285-7*; *IT* 793-4; *Ion* 1298; *Supp.* 605-6.

⁴⁶⁶ See ch.1 n.158 p.22.

⁴⁶⁷ Eur. 396 Kannicht, Aristot. *Rhet.* 1397a17, with anonymous commentary in *CAG* XXI.2. 133.21; the commentary seems to indicate (in a corrupt sentence) that the speaker was Thyestes addressing Atreus.

Orestes and even Agamemnon in *Iphigenia at Aulis* terminate their plotting with Euripides' Old Man and move to act.⁴⁶⁸

Thus Euripides seems to characterise Atreus as a man of action. Mastronarde rightly points out that such an active characterisation, as demonstrated by “an Achilles, Heracles or Ajax,” reflects “a primary model of masculinity”.⁴⁶⁹ If we apply this theory of masculinity to Atreus' active role reported in Euripides' *Electra*, it may betray an attempt to earn Atreus' character respect from the audience. The chorus recalls:

μολπαὶ δ' ἠϋξονθ' ἕτεραι
 χρυσέας ἀρνὸς ἀμφὶ **λόγοις**
Θυέστου· κρυφίαις γὰρ εὐ-
 ναῖς πείσας ἄλοχον φίλαν
 Ἀτρέως, τέρας ἐκκομί-
 ζει πρὸς δῶματα, νεόμενος δ'
 εἰς ἀγόρους **ἄυτεῖ**
 τὰν κερόεσσαν ἔχειν
 χρυσεόμαλλον κατὰ δῶμα ποιίμανν.

But other were the songs that swelled in praise
 of the golden lamb because of **the words**
of Thyestes: for with illicit love
 he won over the dear wife
 of Atreus and removed
 this portent to his own house, and then coming
 into the assembly **he cried out**
 that he had in his house
 the horned lamb with fleece of gold.⁴⁷⁰

Having deceived his brother, Thyestes proclaims (ἄυτεῖ) himself king. Here Thyestes reports his seizing of the Golden Fleece rather than displaying it, he reports his kingship, whereas Atreus' feast will *show* his revenge. Atreus' slaughter of Thyestes' sons is an action that will illustrate his power. So whilst the action that Atreus favours, indeed that many of Euripides' tragic heroes favour may be repulsive, it is a necessary means of restoring honour, of becoming a man of his word.

Moreover, if we trust the trend that the presence of the Old Man indicates, we may also rule out the possibility of Atreus having a lengthy monologue before killing the children, as for example Euripides' Medea did.⁴⁷¹ For in *Electra*, *Ion* and *Iphigenia at Aulis* the dialogue with the Old Man seems to replace the emotive *psychomachia*

⁴⁶⁸ Eur. *Ion* 1029-38; *El.* 269-72; *IA* 155-60.

⁴⁶⁹ Mastronarde 2010 p.281.

⁴⁷⁰ Eur. *El.* 720-9 tr. Kovacs.

⁴⁷¹ Eur. *Med.* 764-810, 1021-80.

Euripides presents in *Medea* (431 BC) and *Hippolytus* (428 BC).⁴⁷² By contrast, after an emotional disclosure has been made, the discussions with the Old Man typically become rational and turn to logistical issues, giving the overall impression that the ensuing violence will be calculated and necessary.⁴⁷³ Thus if we subscribe to this trend, we may conclude that Euripides distanced Atreus' violence from the rash crimes of his heroines.

Therefore, the Greek Thyestes fragments are largely in keeping with recurring themes in their respective corpuses. Sophocles' fr.259 reflects an attempt to calm a raging character, which if we subscribe to its location based on its similarities with *Ajax*,⁴⁷⁴ is an interlocutor's attempt to calm Atreus at the outset of *Thyestes' Feast*. Euripides' fragment reflects a shift from deliberation to action that recurs frequently in both Sophocles' and Euripides' plays, but in Euripides is typically spoken by the protagonist in order to bring deliberation to a close. When considering the preference for action in Euripides' fr.394 in comparison with the deliberation with the Old Man in fr.396, it seems that Atreus repeats the pattern of other Euripidean characters, thus is motivated by the Old Man but resolves to act on his own terms. In sum, deliberation of revenge in the Greek tragedies probably would have been public, it would have been reasoned in dialogue and it would have been fulfilled.

Accian Monologue

When turning to Rome, Accius' staged performance also seems to have conveyed Atreus' deliberation before the chorus and other characters on stage. Yet unlike the remaining Greek fragments, Accius' Atreus seems to deliver an opening monologue before defending his revenge plan in dialogue. Cicero provides us with fr.3 of Atreus' deliberation in his *De Oratore*:

Atreus
Iterum Thyestes Atreum adtrectatum advenit;
iterum iam adgreditur me et quietum suscitatur.
Maior mihi moles, maius miscendumst malum,
qui illius acerbum cor contundam et comprimam.

Atreus
Again Thyestes comes to grapple Atreus,
Again he approaches to disturb my peace.
More misery, more misfortune must I brew,

⁴⁷² Eur. *Med.* 764-810, 1021-80; *Hipp.* 373-430. cf. Mastronarde 2008 p.281.

⁴⁷³ Eur. *Ion* 971-1048; *El.* 612-70; *IA* 124-62.

⁴⁷⁴ Soph. *Ai.* 326-7.

With which to check and crush his cruel heart.⁴⁷⁵
 The first three lines of Accius' fr.3 give us Atreus' anticipation of his brother's arrival. At a glance, Atreus seems to hypothesise about why Thyestes is coming and anticipates some further injury from his brother, as he emphasises in his repetition of "again" (*iterum*) and his use of the supine to convey a purpose clause (*adtrectatum advenit*) "approaches to rouse". As Schiesaro points out, Atreus insinuates that Thyestes is arriving uninvited, suggesting that Thyestes returns due to his own vicious motives.⁴⁷⁶

However, upon reading the following lines it becomes clear that Atreus is actually revelling in the opportunity to torture his brother. The alliterated "m" and the emphasis on the first syllable of the comparative adjectives *maior/ maius* (greater), each stressed at the start of the line and following the caesura, emphasises Atreus' desire to supersede his brother's crimes. This wish rolls off Atreus' tongue and is then underscored with the alliteration of the plosive "c" in the final half line, which assimilates the heart (*cor*) with verbs of crushing (*contundam*) and crunching (*comprimam*). In addition to the alliteration, almost every syllable of these words begins with a hard consonant creating a decisive and violent *staccato* pace. The revenge presented in these lines and the relish with which they are expressed suggests that Atreus' attack is premeditated.

Moreover, according to Cicero's citation of fr.3 in *De Oratore*, Atreus is the voice of violence, conveying an "impressive energy", while in *Natura Deorum* Cicero introduces fr.3 as Atreus designing "the direful banquet".⁴⁷⁷ If we compare this to our conclusion that Atreus anticipates Thyestes to grapple (*adtrectatum*) and rouse him (*adgreditur*), then Atreus seems to anticipate his own emotional response to Thyestes' arrival rather than any future injury from Thyestes himself. Thyestes has not come "to grapple" as the supine suggests, but he will rouse Atreus with his very presence because of his former affair with Aërope. Therefore, by anticipating Thyestes' arrival as an occasion for Thyestes to injure him again, Atreus attempts to present his infanticidal banquet as a preventative measure. But Accius' subsequent emphasis on Atreus' desire for revenge undermines these initial lines. Despite what Atreus' character may have us

⁴⁷⁵ Accius 3 Ribbeck *apud*. Cic. *De. or.* 3.58.219 (My translation).

⁴⁷⁶ Schiesaro 2003 p.142. Here Schiesaro compares this to Varius 1 Ribbeck² *apud* Quint. 3.8.45, presuming that Varius' lines are spoken by Atreus. Schiesaro goes on to suggest that Seneca "transforms Accius' (and presumably Varius' version [in which Thyestes returns voluntarily] into a powerful subplot". Problematically, Schiesaro attributes Varius' fragment to Atreus based on Seneca's text.

⁴⁷⁷ Cic. *De or.* 3.58.219; *Tusc. Disp.* 4.36.77; *Nat. D.* 3.26.68.

believe, fr.3 is not about Thyestes creating new wounds; it is about Atreus reopening old ones.

Indeed, Cicero cites the final two lines of fr.3 again when considering anger in *Tusculan Disputations*:

Atrei [...] eius qui meditatur poenam in fratrem novam [...] Eorum viscera apponit. Quid est enim quo non progrediatur eodem ira quo furor? Itaque **iratos proprie dicimus exisse de potestate, id est, de consilio, de ratione, de mente**; horum enim potestas in totum animum esse debet.

Atreus who plots an unheard of penalty for his brother [...] He sets their flesh before him. For in what direction will not anger go to the same lengths as madness? And so we say appropriately that **angry men have passed beyond control, that is, beyond consideration, beyond reason, beyond intelligence**; for these should exercise authority over the entire soul.⁴⁷⁸

Thus for Cicero, as for us, the unruly emotions of Accius' Atreus are clear in the final lines of Accius' fr.3, despite Atreus' attempts to rationalise them in the preceding lines. Cicero's multiple quoting of fr.3 uncovers two possible interpretations of these lines, as evidence of passionate plotting in *De Oratore* and *Natura Deorum*, or of madness in *Tusculan Disputations*.⁴⁷⁹ These interpretations need not be mutually exclusive; rather the whole fragment could mark a transition from Atreus' measured rhetoric that suggests Thyestes will inflict new injuries, to Atreus revelling in the prospect of his own attack. This could be the turning point of Atreus' descent into madness, whereby the preceding lines would have Atreus present a calculated argument, which degenerates into an unbridled emotional response as Thyestes approaches. Alternatively, Accius could have presented an erratic Atreus whose change from manipulation to madness, from rational to irrational, could be representative of his inconsistent deliberation throughout the play. Not enough of the play survives to indicate whether this shift is consistent or intermittent.

However, I favour a consistent change because, whilst Cicero cites this passage in *De Oratore*, he uses it as an example of "voice-strained, vehement, threatening".⁴⁸⁰ So, although Accius' Atreus manipulates his presentation of why Thyestes is approaching in fr.3, this may not be a conscious misrepresentation of events to those listening but a reflection of his own delusion. Atreus' fears about Thyestes' arrival may have rhetorical force not because Atreus is trying to deceive his listeners, but because

⁴⁷⁸ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 4.36 tr. King.

⁴⁷⁹ Cic. *De or.* 3.58.219; *Tusc. Disp.* 4.36.77; *Nat. D.* 3.26.68.

⁴⁸⁰ Cic. *De or.* 3.58.219.

Accius' Atreus believes Thyestes' threat is real.

If Atreus' prediction of Thyestes' return is not presented as calculated, but a symptom of his illogical, emotional response, then his descent into madness seems authentic. Therefore, having set out his motives, Atreus' madness could then be triggered by his brother's approach. This means that by the time Thyestes arrived, Atreus would have justified his revenge and worked himself to such an emotional pitch that his *furor* would diminish his responsibility for the violence. So despite the delay between Thyestes' offence and Atreus' revenge, Atreus' crimes will not be in cold blood.

This theory is consistent with Accius' fr.4, as Atreus' emotional response intensifies in what seems to be a heated response to another character:

Atreus
Ego incipio; conata exequar.

Atreus
I, I am but beginning; the attempts
I make I'll carry through.⁴⁸¹

Again, as with the Sophoclean and the Euripidean fragments discussed above, it seems that Atreus' public deliberation will be fulfilled. The emphatic use of *ego* suggests that Atreus is responding to a challenge from an interlocutor regarding his plans, which seem to be bound up with his own identity. Like Sophocles (fr.410) and Euripides (fr.396) before him, Accius seems to have used an interlocutor to provoke Atreus by trying to deter him. But here Accius' Atreus stresses the personal pronoun to remind the interlocutor who he is and what he is capable of, to distinguish his crimes from the retaliations of lesser men. Thus, Atreus' conviction in his cause and commitment to restoring his reputation is reflected in this curt and decisive line.

The furious conviction of Accius' Atreus contrasts the allegedly cold calculation of Accius' Thyestes in *Atreus*. As discussed above, Atreus' explanation of Thyestes' affair in Accius fr.8 suggests to Cicero that Thyestes' adultery was not a crime of passion:

Videturne summa inprobitate usus non sine summa esse ratione?

Do you not see that Thyestes practised the greatest dishonour and yet showed perfect rationality?⁴⁸²

⁴⁸¹ Accius 4 Ribbeck =Non. 202.13 tr. Warmington.

⁴⁸² Accius 8 Ribbeck tr. Warmington. Ribbeck attributes this to Atreus, but the context suggests these words are Cicero's interpretation: Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.69.

By contrast, Accius presents Atreus' schemes as motivated by *furor* and a desire to restore the honour lost by Aërope's shameful affair. Atreus' emotions are stirred by his reflections on the crime and suspicions of crimes to come, which uncovers his sense of vulnerability. In turn, Atreus' vulnerability fuels his determination to avenge this injury and prevent future ones.

Accius' Atreus in *Fragmenta Adespota*?

Indeed, Atreus' conviction seems to be at evidence in Cicero's citation when discussing cowardice in *Tusculan Disputations*:

in quem autem metus, in eundem formido, timiditas, pavor, ignavia: ergo ut idem vincatur interdum nec putet ad se praeceptum illud Atrei pertinere:

Proinde ita parent se in vita, ut vinci nesciant.

moreover the man who is susceptible of fear is also susceptible of fright, timidity, terror, cowardice; he must expect then sometimes to be defeated, and cannot think that the well-known maxim of Atreus is made for him:

In life let men learn not to know defeat.⁴⁸³

This is not specifically attributed to a particular tragedian, but Cicero does not discuss a *Thyestes/Atreus* written by any other tragedian than Ennius/Accius across his works. Although Cicero quotes Ennius' *Thyestes* repeatedly within *Tusculan Disputations*,⁴⁸⁴ *adespota* fr.60 seems unlikely to be taken from Ennius' *Thyestes*, which is set after the feast when Thyestes flees to Epirus.⁴⁸⁵ For not only would Atreus probably not have appeared for the majority of the action but also Atreus is the one about to be defeated in Ennius' plot.⁴⁸⁶ Thus I suggest that this quote is from Accius' *Atreus*.

But Warmington pins Ribbeck's *adespota* fr.60 to Ribbeck's *adespota* fr.57 and 64, which clearly deal with Ennius' *Thyestes* in exile, numbering this conglomerate fr.69-71:

En impero Argis, scepra mihi liquit Pelops,
qua ponto ab Helles atque ab Ionio mari
urgetur Isthmus

Proinde ita parent se in vita ut vinci nesciant.

ubi nec Pelopidarum nomen nec facta aut famam
audiam.⁴⁸⁷

See, over Argos I do rule; Pelops
Bequeathed to me a kingdom where the

⁴⁸³ Accius 60 Ribbeck=Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 5.52 tr. King. See p.31 above.

⁴⁸⁴ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 1.107; 3.26, 44; 4.55, 77.

⁴⁸⁵ See Intro. p.9 above.

⁴⁸⁶ See Intro. pp.3-4 above.

⁴⁸⁷ Listed together: Accius 69-71. Warmington.

Isthmus⁴⁸⁸

Is narrowed in, by Helle's sea beset
And by the Ionian waves.

Then let them so in life prepare themselves

That they know not defeat.⁴⁸⁹

Where I may not hear of the name or the deeds or the disrepute of the house of Pelops.⁴⁹⁰

Soubiran attributes this assimilated passage to Sempronius Gracchus' *Thyestes* to argue that this play dealt with the rape of Pelopeia.⁴⁹¹ The extensive description of Argos in fr.57 does indicate that Thyestes is introducing himself in Epirus. But Cicero only names Ennius' *Thyestes* or Accius' *Atreus*: not Gracchus' *Thyestes*.⁴⁹²

Fr.60 cannot follow in sequence, because Atreus speaks as a decisive avenger in preparation for the feast, which seems to inform the resolution of Accius' *Atreus*. Nor can Ribbeck fr.64 complete the passage, as this recurs in Cicero's *Letters*, which never explicitly quotes Accius' *Atreus* or Ennius' *Thyestes*.⁴⁹³ Thus Warmington's compilation falters when compared with trends in Cicero's quotation and the fragments come from separate plots.

Overall, Accius' *Atreus* seems to deliberate his revenge motives publicly and Accius' manipulation of the language suggests Atreus' increasing emotion and submission to *furor*. Though we cannot be certain that this descent into madness is permanent and not fleeting, evidence from Accius' fr.4 suggests that Atreus' resolution to kill the children and prepare the feast was motivated by the *furor* introduced in Accius' fr.3. Moreover, the fact that Cicero quoted these lines repeatedly may also suggest that they signified a memorable turning point in Accius' play.⁴⁹⁴ The transformation of Accius' *Atreus* and the frequency with which he is quoted suggest that he was a well-developed character afforded much of the dialogue, which for a Roman audience signifies Atreus' power as a protagonist, in contrast to Sophocles' and Euripides' "men of action". Therefore, Accius' *Atreus* was a tragic hero whose deliberation made clear his descent into madness, not only outlining his motives, but

⁴⁸⁸ Anon. 57 Ribbeck. These 3 lines.

⁴⁸⁹ Anon. 60 Ribbeck This line alone.

⁴⁹⁰ Anon. 64 Ribbeck. Remaining 2 lines.

⁴⁹¹ Soubiran seems to exclude Anon. 65-6 Ribbeck, which refer to Thesprotus on the grounds that these fragments are not quoted in Cicero (1987 p.121).

⁴⁹² For Cicero's quotation of tragedy in *De Oratore* cf. Fantham 2004 pp.141-6.

⁴⁹³ Cic. *Fam.* 7. 28.2; 30.1, *ad. Att.* 14.8.1; 14.12.2; 15.11.3. cf. Haley (forthcoming) where I suggest *ubi nec Pelopidarum nomen nec facta aut famam audiam* (Incerta 64 Ribbeck) is quoted from Pomponius Bononiensis' Atellan farce *Atreus*.

⁴⁹⁴ Cf. Haley (forthcoming in De Gruyter) on Cicero quoting from memory.

also conveying the emotional impact Thyestes' crimes had on him. Indeed, Atreus is Accius' eponymous hero, whether Accius entitled the work, or whether it was preserved as *Atreus* thereafter, the hero's prevalence is either prescribed or described in Republican titles, which are fixed in texts.

Senecan Monologue

Turning to Seneca, we have a complete picture of Atreus' deliberation leading up to his revenge feast. Previously when considering the topic of adultery, I discussed Atreus' outburst at the *Satelles*.⁴⁹⁵ When considering the impact of Atreus' role as king, I used evidence from Atreus' earlier monologue and ensuing dispute with the *Satelles*.⁴⁹⁶ Now I shall return to the latter half of Atreus' monologue to examine his final deliberation before he turns to the practicalities of how to attack his brother.⁴⁹⁷

Like Accius' Atreus, Seneca's Atreus delivers a monologue, but Seneca's Atreus' also discusses the issue with the *Satelles* extensively.⁴⁹⁸ So despite Atreus' frustration at his own inaction,⁴⁹⁹ there are one hundred and fifty three lines between his call to action (*tandem incipe*) and his final exit.⁵⁰⁰ Thus, the dispute with the *Satelles* to which we now turn forms part of a lengthy deliberation. Like Accius' Atreus, Seneca's Atreus is not emasculated by inaction, but is given space to outline his motives and emotions.

By line 236 Seneca's Atreus has delivered his monologue, asserted his role as king and explained the tale of his brother's adultery to the *Satelles*. So far Seneca has presented Atreus' retaliation to Thyestes' crime as a question of restoring his political position and ensuring the legitimacy of his lineage. Having concluded that Thyestes' crimes have severed their fraternal bond and warranted revenge, Atreus goes on to appropriate Thyestes' demise as his own:

per regna trepidus exul erravi mea
pars nulla **nostr**i tuta ab insidiis vacat

Throughout my kingdom have I wandered fearfully in exile;
No part of **my family** is safe and free from snares.⁵⁰¹

Here Miller's translation of *nostr*i (my own) as "my family" is most likely referring to

⁴⁹⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 220-36. See ch.1 pp.45-48.

⁴⁹⁶ Sen. *Thy.* 176-219.

⁴⁹⁷ Sen. *Thy.* 236-95.

⁴⁹⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 220-44, 249-54, 260-7, 269-86, 288-94, 296-304, 321-333.

⁴⁹⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 176.

⁵⁰⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 240, 393.

⁵⁰¹ Sen. *Thy.* 237-8 (tr. by Miller 1917).

Atreus' own legitimate children. Moreover, the exile Atreus describes must be metaphorical, as he specifies that this exile was within the kingdom. Therefore, the imminent threat to one's children and the reflections on "exile" suggest that Atreus is appropriating the punishments he has and will inflict on his brother. By anticipating his revenge in this way, Seneca presents Atreus' revenge feast as a pre-emptive strike to neutralise Thyestes' threat to Atreus' children and a necessary step beyond the exile of Thyestes, which was due punishment for the emotional exile of Atreus following Thyestes' affair with Aërope.

Therefore, Seneca's Atreus, like Accius' Atreus (fr.3), still claims to feel threatened by Thyestes despite having invited him back to the palace. Like Accius' Atreus (fr.3), Seneca's Atreus presents himself as the victim, here by alluding to an emotional exile and viewing Thyestes as a threat to his sons. On first reading, Atreus' fear that Thyestes will hurt his legitimate sons appears ridiculous. Seneca's audience on hearing this may well have felt the same: after all they would have known this story from either public performances or written copies of Accius' and Ennius' versions, among others.⁵⁰² But Atreus' character does not know how the story ends yet; he has not yet decided and, given the "tumult of frenzy" (*tumultus pectora attonitus*) that follows, Atreus' fears that Thyestes may harm his sons appear real, to him at least.⁵⁰³

Yet is this a question of paranoia, or justified fear? To what extent could Seneca's audience identify Atreus' anxieties as just motivation to attack Thyestes? As far as a public Roman audience is concerned, Thyestes' biggest threat to Atreus' children is calling their paternity into question. In Roman culture a *pater familias* could kill an illegitimate infant,⁵⁰⁴ according to their "right to life and death" (*ius vitae necisque*), whereas the Greeks could only expose an illegitimate child.⁵⁰⁵ Following

⁵⁰² See Appendices.

⁵⁰³ Sen. *Thy.* 260.

⁵⁰⁴ According to Cicero, Roman fathers could refuse to raise a suspected illegitimate son: Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 3.1.2; *De. Div.* 1.21.42; *Ep ad Att.* 11.9.3; *De. Har. Resp.* 27; *Phil.* 3.17, 13.23. Shaw challenges whether this matter of "raising" meant a *Tollere liberos* ritual of acknowledging a newborn and favours a translation of raising as rearing (2001 pp.34-6).

⁵⁰⁵ Sen. *Eld. Controv.* 2.3.11; 9.5.7, Sen. *De. Clem.* 1.15.1; [Quint.] *Decl. Mai.* 3.17, Val. Max. 3.1.3; 5.8.5. Cf. Watson 1967 pp.77-81, Harris 1986 pp.81-95, Saller 1994 pp. 102-32. Again Shaw refutes claims that a father could legitimately kill a son (2001 pp. 56-76). But Shaw does not explain how this could apply to illegitimate children and only refutes it as a legal practice, not a Roman principle, which would still resonate with Republican and Imperial audiences for our purposes.

Atreus' realization that not all of Aërope's children are his, he does devise a test so that Agamemnon and Menelaus can prove they are his sons, thus be spared from the feast, but this implicates Atreus as the threat.⁵⁰⁶

By contrast Thyestes is in exile, far away from the palace, thus presenting no real threat to the children at all, until Atreus invites him back. However, we need not expect such a sound rationale from Atreus. As far as his character is concerned, Thyestes' affair with Aërope and their resulting bastards not only threaten Atreus' legacy, but also sever their fraternal bond and thus their trust.⁵⁰⁷ As a result, Atreus' anxieties that Thyestes will harm his children are real to him; Seneca's audience might not agree with Atreus' fear of Thyestes, but they could perhaps sympathise with Atreus' paranoia. Therefore Seneca is presenting Atreus' perceived threat rather than Thyestes' real threat.

Seneca continues to emphasise the irrationality of Atreus' anxieties by suggesting that Atreus' soul is governed by madness,⁵⁰⁸ as the *Satelles* asks:

Quid novi rabidus struis?

What strange design does thy mad soul intend?⁵⁰⁹

As far as an elite Roman audience is concerned, this allows Seneca to distinguish Atreus' anxieties from what a Stoic audience may recognise as *praemeditatio*, a process of anticipating pain in order to prepare for it.⁵¹⁰ Seneca distinguishes between *praemeditatio* and anxiety in his *Epistles*, as he warns against harbouring an uncontrolled anxiety about the future.⁵¹¹ By presenting Atreus' fears as the product of a rabid mind, Seneca emphasises Atreus' reaction as irrational and emotional, building on Accius' example to distinguish Atreus' anxiety from Stoic rationality.

From either a public or an elite audience's perspective, Atreus' concerns for the safety of his family have another meaning, which becomes clearer during the lines that follow. Initially when Atreus claims "No part of my family is safe and free from **snare**s",⁵¹² he seems to be referring to Thyestes as a snare, having just laid out the adultery story. But in the dialogue that follows, Atreus places these lines into a bigger

⁵⁰⁶ Sen. *Thy.* 295-333.

⁵⁰⁷ Sen. *Thy.* 220-4.

⁵⁰⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 249-54.

⁵⁰⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 255 tr. Fitch.

⁵¹⁰ Sen. *Ep.* 91, 76.34.

⁵¹¹ Sen. *Ep.* 13.4-5, 74.33-4. Cf. Armisen-Marchetti 2008 pp.103-9 for full discussion.

⁵¹² Sen. *Thy.* 237-8 tr. Miller. Here Miller provides a punchier translation of: *pars nulla nostril tuta ab insidiis vacat.*

picture of ancestral guilt:

Excede, Pietas, si modo in **nostra domo**
umquam fuisti. dira Furiarum cohors
discorsque Erinys veniat et geminas faces
Megaera quatiens: non satis magno meum
ardet furore pectus, impleri iuvat
maiore monstro.

Begone, Affection, if ever you existed at all in **our house!** Let the dread band of Furies come, and the Erinys of strife and Megaera brandishing her twin torches. The madness firing my heart is not big enough, I want to be filled with some greater monstrosity.⁵¹³

Thus Atreus' anxieties for his family refer to snares set for Thyestes, not by him, as Atreus' deliberation breaks down supernatural forces appear to take hold.

Atreus' submission to his *furor* becomes apparent because, whereas his deliberation is delivered publicly to the chorus and an interlocutor, as is the case in Sophocles (fr.259) and Euripides (fr.396), Seneca's Atreus later employs more asides to the audience suggesting his withdrawal from society and introspective.⁵¹⁴ Be it staged or recited, Atreus' deliberation could be set out for the audience clearly, and unlike Accius' fragments we know the deliberation of Seneca's Atreus follows a supernatural prologue, which provides a subtext for Atreus' anxious asides. As a result, though Accius may mitigate Atreus' revenge with a display of vulnerability and emotion, we know that Seneca's Atreus explicitly identifies his emotions as supernaturally inflicted, as we shall see in the next chapter.⁵¹⁵ Following the prologue, Seneca's audience would understand Atreus' deliberation as the work of the Furies who, according to Cicero, could be internalised symptoms of a troubled conscience.⁵¹⁶

Ultimately, Seneca's *Thyestes* presents us with the fullest account of Atreus' deliberation and its degeneration into a revenge plot. By the time Seneca's Atreus begins to plan his revenge, he has laid out the political implications of his brother's adultery, displayed his own personal anxiety as a result of it and slipped into a frenzy that mitigates his crime. In many respects, Seneca's Atreus is reminiscent of Accius'. But with Seneca we have the benefit of context, Atreus sets out the adultery and his anxieties in a monologue, becomes more emotional when in dialogue with the

⁵¹³ Sen *Thy.* 249-54 tr. Fitch.

⁵¹⁴ Sen. *Thy.* 491-507.

⁵¹⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 260-6, 268-284.

⁵¹⁶ Cic. *Pis.* 46.365.44-6. Euripides' Orestes serves as a precedent for this in Greek tragedy (Eur. *Or.* 35-45).

frustratingly rational *Satelles* and evokes the issue of ancestral guilt in asides. The space afforded to Atreus' deliberation cannot be compared to a full account from Accius' *Atreus*. However, Seneca's Atreus' extensive and energetic dialogue would be particularly well suited to replace stage action in a recited performance, whereas Accius' *Atreus* was staged in its entirety, thus could supplement dialogue with stage action.

Ch 1.3: Conclusion

In sum, all of the Thyestes tragedies seem to show Atreus setting out his complaint about Thyestes publicly and deliberating his revenge with an interlocutor, in front of a chorus. This holds true for the staged performances of Sophocles, Euripides and Accius, and also seems possible for Seneca's *Thyestes*, which, even if recited, employed both choral songs and *stichomythia* to signify public speech. The Greek fragments reflect abortive attempts to suppress revenge with speech, placing speech and action in opposition, whereas the Roman works exploit speech to present Atreus' emotional reaction, creating tension between rational and irrational thought. In all cases the plan seems to have been set out early on, paving the way for dramatic irony, as Atreus orchestrates his revenge in the ensuing action.

Ch1: Conclusion

In each Thyestes play Atreus is motivated by his brother's affair with Atreus' wife. In Sophocles' and Accius' plays Atreus asserts his revenge plans in defiance of his interlocutor's suggestions, whereas in Euripides' *Thyestes* the Old Man character may have become an accomplice as he does elsewhere in Euripidean tragedy, much like Seneca's yielding *Satelles*. In each case the audience would have identified with Atreus' sense of injustice following the adultery; and in extenuating circumstances both Greek and Roman law might have acquitted Atreus had he murdered Thyestes for it. It is clear in each case that Atreus craves revenge beyond the death of Aërope, who never features as a character at Thyestes' feast and seems to have already been killed, in line with the punishment due to her for premarital sex in Euripides' *Kressai*.

Again in each case, Atreus' desire for revenge is tempered by his role as a tragic king. So although Atreus is unfettered by law in his kingdom, he is bound to calamity, not only because he is a tragic character but also because he needs to assert his dominance and his defiance of the various "voices of reason" that occur in each play. When Atreus deliberates his revenge in each case, he does so in public, so when Atreus defies his interlocutor in Sophocles', Accius' and Seneca's work he does so not simply as an assertion of his will but also as a public display of strength to the chorus and the audience. When Atreus caps his dialogue with the Old Man in Euripides, he marks the transition from speech to action, which is at the centre of Euripidean tragedy. So Atreus' desire for revenge is at evidence in references to Thyestes' affair but is amplified by the fact that his revenge is a matter of law and order, an exertion of his strength as king and restoration of his bloodline. In that respect Atreus' will is consistently shaped by his role as king, which necessitates a harsher revenge plan.

However, each tragedian presents Atreus' role in accordance with a different focus, addressing a slightly different set of standards. Sophocles dealt with *Thyestes' Adultery* in a play of its own, perhaps complementing but not prefacing *Thyestes' Feast*. Thus he dealt with the pathos of the adultery in detail and presented Atreus at different stages in his reign, most likely contrasting Atreus' rational, political motives against the emotional infanticide of Procne displayed in his *Tereus*. Euripides presented Aërope's adultery in *Kressai*, a different variant of the myth in which she had no children with Thyestes, focussing on the personal pathos of Aërope betraying her husband Pleisthenes. Having cast Aërope amongst his Cretan whores in this version of the myth,

Euripides then focuses on the fickleness of women and the precariousness of kingship in his *Thyestes*, and thus, like Sophocles, presents adultery as an affront to the sanctity of marriage with political implications attached.

By contrast, Accius and Seneca pull the political focus to the fore. Neither writes about Aërope's adultery in a separate tragedy, but they both condense the events of the adultery in Atreus' opening monologue. Whilst Accius' Atreus betrays a sense of personal injury, Seneca's Atreus looks to his political precariousness following his discovery of the illegitimate children. This increased concern with how others view the adultery, rather than with the principle of a broken marriage vow, reflects the privatization of adultery penalties in Rome. Nonetheless, in each case Atreus' deliberation reveals a sense of vulnerability and paranoia, which seems to be fuelled by the fact that he views Thyestes as volatile. Thyestes' adultery is presented as a transgression that puts him beyond Atreus' control and Atreus' increasing fury in Accius' and Seneca's works reflects a craving to reclaim this control. Thus, whilst the Greek plays show Atreus' desire for action, the Roman playwrights reveal Atreus' emotional disposition as he begins his plan. Seneca in particular amplifies Atreus' emotional state, internalizing such Furies as the one who appeared in the prologue to connect Atreus' emotional response to external supernatural forces.

Ultimately, in all of the *Thyestes* plays, Atreus' desire for revenge begins as a natural response to Thyestes' injury. As a result, Atreus is motivated by a loss of honour (τιμωρία), a sense of personal betrayal and jealousy (φθόρος) for the Greeks; and a sense of vulnerability, a need to save face which pushes Atreus to fever pitch (*furor*) for the Romans. Though Atreus' role as king shapes his behaviour in the Greek plays, there is no evidence to suggest that the pressure of maintaining this role unravels his mental state, as appears to be the case in the Roman plays. Therefore, Atreus' revenge in the Greek plays is a means of maintaining his kingship and an abortive attempt at closure, whereas Atreus' revenge in the Roman plays is a product of his kingship, a tyrannical impulse that can never be satisfied. This association between kingship and violence culminates in Seneca's representation of inherent guilt, which distills the now familiar Pelopid myth in a series of references and mitigates Atreus' free will with supernatural influence.

Chapter 2: Supernatural Influence

As we have discovered, across the tragedies Atreus kills Thyestes' sons to preserve his bloodline and safeguard Agamemnon, his legitimate heir, motivated by Thyestes' personal and political affront when sleeping with Aërope. But in doing so Atreus upholds the legacy of ancestral crimes that preceded him, repeating a violent pattern that spans generations. As a result of these patrilineal crimes and the burden of kingship, inherent guilt figures differently in the tradition of each tragedian and, thus, in the subtext of each Thyestes play.

Therefore, I shall now unpick the variants of the Tantalus and Pelops myth each dramatised, reconstructing Sophocles' *Tantalus*, Euripides' *Pleisthenes* and *Chrysippus* in addition to Accius' *Pelopidae* and *Agamemnonidae*.⁵¹⁷ These reconstructions will then be compared to Seneca's supernatural prologue, featuring Tantalus' ghost and a Fury. This will allow me to uncover the variants of the Tantalid myth that serve as a backdrop to each tragedy, whilst highlighting potential intertexts between Euripides', Sophocles' and Accius' plays, and in Seneca's case begin to understand how this myth was manipulated in *Thyestes* itself.

However, only Ennius' *Thyestes* provides evidence of a reflection on ancestry; little in the fragments of Sophocles, Euripides and Accius indicates how ancestral crimes may have been presented in the *Thyestes* plays themselves. Therefore, we must turn to their extant works on later Tantalid generations to establish how, when and by whom the crimes of this family are recalled, in order to determine trends in how each tragedian incorporates inherent guilt as a genesis of violence.

To that end, the second part of the present chapter will turn to Sophocles' and Euripides' *Electra*, Euripides' *Orestes*, *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*, alongside any references in their fragments. This analysis will further develop Meinel's study on ancestral myth and pollution in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, by considering the potential intertext between the fragmentary Pelopid dramas and Euripides' extant tragedies, thus exploring a wider range of tragedies than Meinel.⁵¹⁸

Whilst more recently Gagné has collated some extant Euripidean examples to consider the role of 'ancestral guilt' in these tragedies, the way these plays engage with

⁵¹⁷ No other title on the Tantalids survives from Ennius' corpus than his *Thyestes* itself, which is set in Epirus.

⁵¹⁸ Meinel 2015 pp.140-61.

the fragmentary tradition is beyond the scope of his study; thus only two of our fragmentary Thyestes plays appear in his footnotes.⁵¹⁹ Therefore, I will survey a wider range of references across extant and fragmentary tragedies of both Euripides and Sophocles. Moreover, I will differentiate what Gagné deems ‘ancestral guilt’ into two symbiotic categories: ancestral crimes, as the mythic episode the *tragedian presents*, and inherent guilt, as the *characters’ reaction* to those crimes. My analysis of Sophocles’ *Electra* will explore the use of memory with reference to the fragmentary Tantalid plays I outline. This approach will develop Sewell-Rutter’s isolated reading of Sophocles’ *Electra*, which surveys a limited sample of ancestral references and suggests that what he terms ‘ancestral guilt’ follows a self-contained logic in this play.⁵²⁰ This will allow me to establish how each tragedian employs inherent guilt as a narrative device and then apply these trends to the fragmentary Thyestes plays.

For Accius, no complete play survives similar to the Greek Tantalid tragedies and only one of Accius’ *Atreus* fragments discusses the supernatural. I will compare Accius’ *Atreus* fragment to those found in Accius’ *Agamemnonidae* and *Pelopidae*, as no fragment referring to ancestral crimes survives from Accius’ *Clytemnestra*, which dramatised the death of Agamemnon.⁵²¹ I will examine the four fragments reflecting ancestral crimes that survive from Ennius’ *Thyestes*, set after the feast, though no further fragment on ancestral crimes survives in Ennius’ tragedies as a basis for comparison.

This analysis will lead to the heart of my discussion, as I begin to ask: how are characters’ recollections of ancestral crimes presented to affect their actions? Having compared the role of the Agamemnonidae’s recall in Sophocles’ and Euripides’ Tantalid plays, I will analyse the memories of previous generations in Accius’ *Atreus* and Seneca’s *Thyestes*. This section will establish different modes of memory, such as history, legacy and nostalgia, to determine which characters recall ancestral crimes and how these memories affect their behaviour. Ultimately, this will allow me to evaluate to what extent inherent guilt functions as a supernatural influence on Atreus’ revenge on the one hand, and on the other as an aspect of Atreus’ self-identification that prescribes his revenge feast.

⁵¹⁹ Gagné 2013 pp.428-9, cf. Sewell-Rutter 2007 p.130 n. 46.

⁵²⁰ Sewell-Rutter 2007 pp.130-4.

⁵²¹ Cic. *Fam.* 7.1.2.

Finally, with the tension between the ancestral crimes introduced by the poet and the inherent guilt imagined by his characters established, attention will turn to how the divine features in the fragmentary tragedies themselves. This section will distinguish and explore the role of prophecies, curses, divine invocations and, crucially, the role of the Golden Fleece as a god-sent gift.

Overall, by uncovering how ancestral crimes were recalled in each play, on both a supernatural and a psychological level, and by unravelling how the divine functions in the world of each tragedy I will assess how supernatural influence shapes Atreus' revenge in each play.

2.1: Ancestral Crimes

In extant tragedy, characters recall the actions of earlier generations, or ancestral crimes, and sometimes blame these actions for the demise of the descendants, suggesting they are being punished through inherent guilt. Thyestes' feast is often recalled as an ancestral crime rather than enacted within the play, recurring in both Greek and Roman tragedies about Agamemnon and his children. The notable exception to this pattern is Seneca's extant *Thyestes*, in which various references to ancestral crimes are made and, most famously, where the ghost of Tantalus appears in the prologue.

However, the infamy of the Tantalid's ancestral crimes was already well established in Greek tragedy and adapted by Accius, as Sophocles and Euripides each dramatised Pelops' crime in their *Oenomaus*, and Sophocles' *Tantalus* staged the eponymous hero's crime. Therefore, if we reconstruct the lost Tantalid plays we can establish trends in the mythical variants. What we cannot do based on these reconstructions is establish intertextual links that rely on the relative dating of Sophocles' performances, nor can we simply assume that Seneca's use of the Tantalid myths reflects their use in the lost Thyestes plays. With this in mind, we should examine the fragmentary Tantalid dramas to see which stories were employed in each tragedy and consider how these ancestral crimes of the Tantalids were staged, before turning to the extant plays to see how each tragedian reflects these stories as sources of inherent guilt in the plots of later generations.

Tantalus in Greece

Tantalus, Pelops' father, seems to be the earliest ancestor of his house to have been dramatised. Five plays with his name are attested, by Phrynichus (511-476 BC),⁵²² Pratinas (467 BC),⁵²³ Aristias (460s BC), Aristarchus (454-406 BC) and, most notably for our purposes, Sophocles (468-406 BC) because we have his extant corpus for comparison.⁵²⁴ Only two fragments of Sophocles' *Tantalus* survive. Fr.57 indicates the punishment of Tantalus in the Underworld, which is consistent across the mythical variants:

⁵²² Phrynichus 7 Snell. Cf. Wright's discussion of Phrynichus rightly refuses to assume that this Tantalus dealt with cannibalizing Pelops as in Apollodorus (*Epit.* 2.1-3) (2017 pp.18-19). Indeed this need not be the case, given the earlier trends in the myth, see pp.5-16.

⁵²³ Pratinas 2 Snell. Listed with titles: *Perseus*, *Tantalus* and *Wrestling Satyrs*.

⁵²⁴ Cf. Wright 2016 p.91 and Appendices.

ΧΟΡΟΣ
βιοτῆς μὲν γὰρ χρόνος ἐστὶ βραχύς,
κρυφθεὶς δ' ὑπὸ γῆς κεῖται θνητὸς
τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον

Chorus

For the time of life is short, and once a mortal is hidden beneath the earth he lies there for all time.⁵²⁵

What this fragment does not reveal is the crime that Tantalus is being punished for, nor which punishment he receives.

The crimes of Tantalus in his mythical tradition include telling divine secrets he had learnt at the Olympian dinner table,⁵²⁶ wishing to be a god,⁵²⁷ stealing ambrosia from the Olympian dinner table,⁵²⁸ serving the flesh of his son Pelops to the Olympians,⁵²⁹ or hiding the golden dog that Pandareus had stolen from Zeus.⁵³⁰ Although, as previously suggested, no chain of causation can be traced across Sophocles' disparate Tantalid plays, the focus on the feasting motif in Tantalus' myth is clearly echoed in Thyestes' feast. So were Sophocles' *Tantalus* to stage any of Tantalus' transgressions at a feast, the thematic connection between Thyestes' punishment and Tantalus' crime would be difficult to dissociate, particularly if Tantalus' cannibalistic cooking of Pelops was the festal crime staged here.

However, Sophocles' *Tantalus* fr.573 points to a different crime:

Ἑρμῆς ἐδήλου τήνδε χρησμοδὸν φάτιν.

Hermes revealed this message of the oracle.⁵³¹

The *Lexicon Messanense* claims this fragment presents the prophecy of Sophocles' *Tantalus* (χρησμοδός σὺν τῷ Σοφοκλῆς Ταντάλω).⁵³² The involvement of Hermes, Pandareus' father, may indicate that this play dramatized either Pandareus' theft of

⁵²⁵ Soph. 572 Radt= Stobaeus. *Anthology*. 4. 53. 1.

⁵²⁶ Diod. Sic. 4. 74.1.

⁵²⁷ Hes. *Nostoi*. 9 Most, Aesch. *Niob*. 158 Nauck= Plut. *Mor*. 605-10, Claudian 614, Lucian *De Sac*. 9, Hermesianax col.ii.

⁵²⁸ Pind. *Ol*. 1.60-5.

⁵²⁹ Lucian *Salt*. 54, Apoll. *Epit* 3. Stat. *Theb*. 1.245.

⁵³⁰ Eustath *ad Hom. Od*. 19.519. Stallbaum, Paus. 10.30.2, Ant. Lib. 36, Σ Pind. *Ol*. 1. 91a.

⁵³¹ Soph. 573 Radt.

⁵³² Rabe 1892 p.410. N.b. The *Lexicon Messanense* is the part of the *codex Messinensis graecus*, which contains a fragment of the Byzantine lexographer Oros of Alexander concerning the use of the iota subscript, from which this fragment is taken.

Zeus' golden dog,⁵³³ which Tantalus then hid from Zeus, or Tantalus' punishment for that crime.⁵³⁴

Therefore, we should consider the potential plotline of Sophocles' *Tantalus* in light of fifth-century trends in the variants of Tantalus' myth. For example, in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* the eponymous heroine disbelieves the cooking of Pelops.⁵³⁵ Similarly Pindar discredits the cooking of Pelops as a rumour developed to explain Pelops' absence once he had been abducted by Poseidon.⁵³⁶ The cooking of Pelops does not emerge again until Apollodorus' *Epitome* and had become popular in Roman literature even before Seneca's *Thyestes*.⁵³⁷ So when Sophocles was writing his *Tantalus*, the feast of Pelops was not necessarily the most prominent mythical crime associated with his character.

Pandareus' theft of the golden dog and Tantalus' harbouring of the stolen animal is described in Pausanias' description of Crete. A late source for the myth, Pausanias cites the story as a mythical detail in his description of Polygnotus' fifth-century painting of Pandareus' daughters:

τὸν δὲ Πανδάρεων Μιλήσιόν τε ἐκ Μιλήτου τῆς Κρητικῆς ὄντα ἴστω τις καὶ
ἀδικήματος ἐς τὴν κλοπὴν Ταντάλω καὶ τοῦ ἐπὶ τῷ
ὄρκῳ μετασχόντα σοφίσματος.

I must tell you that Pandareus was a Milesian from Miletus in Crete, and implicated in the theft of Tantalus and in the trick of the oath.⁵³⁸

⁵³³ Soph. 573 Radt could equally be attributed to Sophocles' other Tantalid plays. Hermes could appear as Myrtilus' father (Σ Apoll. Rhod. 1,752), in Sophocles' *Oenomaus* with the oracle prophesying Oenomaus' death at the hands of his son-in-law (Σ Ar. 1.752=3F37a). Alternatively, Soph. 573 Radt could appear in *Thyestes in Sicyon* with Apollo's oracle prophesying Thyestes' rape child by his daughter Pelopeia, Aegisthus, will become the avenger of his brothers. Lloyd-Jones cites the *Lexicon Messanese* as the source of the *Tantalus* fragment in the Loeb but does not raise the issue of its lateness (1996 p.286). However, the AD 8C lexicon was most likely drawn on a Hellenistic source, which attributed the fragment to *Tantalus*.

⁵³⁴ Eustath *ad Hom. Od.* 19.519. Stallbaum.

⁵³⁵ Eur. *IT* 386-9.

⁵³⁶ Pindar. *Ol.* 1. 46-59. I do not believe Pelops' myth is reflected on the fifth-century hand mirror *LIMC*. Tantalus. 23, which more ostensibly shows a cauldron scene with Jason, Medea, king Pelias and one of his daughters, women who would not have been present at the cooking of Pelops. Cf. Dodson-Robinson 2010 p.50, Littlewood 2016 pp 265-6.

⁵³⁷ Apollod. *Epit.* 2.3, Lucian *Salt.* 54, Stat. *Theb.* 247.

⁵³⁸ Paus.10.30.2.

The fact that Pausanias adds this detail suggests that he is drawing on far earlier material associated with the region, in line with Pausanias' archaistic nostalgia as a Greek living under Roman rule.⁵³⁹

The story recurs in Antoninus Liberalis' mythography *The Metamorphoses*.⁵⁴⁰ Interestingly, here the theft of the golden dog is associated with the punishment of a suspended rock as opposed to the more famous unobtainable feast of Tantalus in the underworld.⁵⁴¹ The suspended rock is cited as early as the sixth century in Archilochus and Alcaeus; it then appears in Pindar, albeit as a punishment for eating ambrosia, and recurs again in Plato's *Cratylus*.⁵⁴² Thus there is a strong tradition of Tantalus enduring a punishment that is not thematically linked with feasting both before and after Sophocles wrote his *Tantalus*.⁵⁴³

There are two components to Sophocles' *Tantalus* that could introduce the banquet theme apparent in *Thyestes' Feast*: Tantalus committing a crime at the gods' table and Tantalus being punished by an unobtainable feast. Though sources relating the golden dog crime are second-century mythographical compilations, the pre-Sophoclean tradition strongly suggests that the suspension of a rock over Tantalus is more likely to have been taken up by Sophocles than the unobtainable feast. Homer provides the first reference to Tantalus' unobtainable feast grasping for water and fruit in the underworld, whilst on a fourth-century red figure vase (see Fig.3) Tantalus grasps for water alone.⁵⁴⁴

⁵³⁹ Cf. Bowie 1996 pp. 216-29, Alcock 1996 pp.245-7; 2002 pp. 38-41 and Porter 2001 pp.68-70.

⁵⁴⁰ Ant. Lib. 36. Cf. Arafat 1996 pp.26-30 for the case that Pausanias' "attention to matters dating before the fifth century is considerable" which sets him apart from other writers of the Second Sophistic who focus on the fifth and fourth century classical period. With this in mind, Pandareus' myth dates at least from the classical period Antonius Liberalis was focusing on, if not an earlier tradition known to Pausanias. On the archaism of Second Sophistic writers see Alcock 1996 pp.246-7; 2002 pp.38-41, Porter 2001 pp. 68-70, Pretzler 2007 pp. 28-31 and 115.

⁵⁴¹ Antonius. Lib. 36.

⁵⁴² Archil. 91.14 = P.Oxy. xxii.2313. fr10. Gerber, Alc. 365. =Σ Pind. *Ol.* 1. 57. Campbell, Pind. *Isth.* 8, 10. Cf. Eur. *Or.* 4-10 has Tantalus hanging in the air himself.

⁵⁴³ the myth endured thereafter in [Apollodorus'] *Epitome* 2C AD, which conflates the two punishments of starving under a suspended rock that will fall if Tantalus eats. 1C AD Dio Chrysostom quotes Euripides (*Or.* 4-10) to facilitate discourse on the precarious position of politicians (6.55), though the starvation variant also emerges (64.7).

⁵⁴⁴ Hom. *Od.* 11. 581-92, see Fig 3.

Six pre-Sophoclean references exist for the suspension of the boulder.⁵⁴⁵ It is not until the Roman period that Tantalus' unobtainable food becomes predominant, as we shall see later.

In sum, the mention of Hermes specifically in Sophocles' *Tantalus* fragment suggests the play may have included Hermes' son Pandareus and his theft of the dog then hidden by Tantalus. This story is linked to the punishment of a suspended boulder by Antoninus Liberalis, but had already been attached to the, albeit non-cannibalistic, festal crime of eating ambrosia by Pindar, so no combination of festal/ non-festal crime and punishment is fixed. Nonetheless, the extant evidence suggests that the suspended boulder punishment was a prominent myth by the time Sophocles wrote his *Tantalus*.

From this analysis we learn two key things about how inherent guilt may have worked in Sophocles' Tantalid plays. Firstly, just as we cannot trace cause and effect across Sophocles' individual tragedies,⁵⁴⁶ so too should we avoid imposing thematic links on Sophocles' plays because they occur in later tragic adaptations. Secondly, whether Sophocles' *Tantalus* was staged before or after his *Thyestes' Feast*, his audience would not have assumed a thematic connection between Thyestes' feast and Tantalus' crime as readily as a Roman audience, because the feast of Pelops and the starvation punishment seem to have been less prominent.

Pelops in Greece

Turning to Tantalus' son, Pelops is the next potential source of inherent guilt in the *Thyestes* plays. Despite his marginalization in Seneca's *Thyestes*, in their *Oenomaus* tragedies both Sophocles and Euripides developed the story of how Pelops met Hippodamia. Sophocles' *Oenomaus* fragments incorporate a contest of speed, horses,⁵⁴⁷ and an explicit declaration of Hippodamia's love for Pelops:

ΙΠΠΟΔΑΜΕΙΑ
τοίαν Πέλοψ ἕγγα θηρατηρίαν

⁵⁴⁵ Archil. 91.14 = P.Oxy. xxii.2313. fr10. Gerber, Alc. 365. =Σ Pind. *Ol.* 1. 57.

Campbell, Pind. *Ol.* 1.57, *Isth.* 8, 10. Plutarch cites Tantalus' lines from Aeschylus' *Niobe* (603a), claiming that Tantalus is punished under the suspended rock (*Mor.*170f, 803a, 937e), that he is prolifically wealthy (498b, 759f) and suffers for his folly at the hands of the gods (1059d, 607f), and Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* claims that Tantalus wishes to be a god and is punished with a boulder suspended above his head in *The Returns of the Atreidae* (*Nost.* 4 Bernabé. =Ath. *Deipn.* 7.281.b); if we trust Athenaeus' citation of the epic, this shows that the combination of festal imagery was not very emphatic in the poetry predating Sophocles and Euripides' tragedies.

⁵⁴⁶ Lloyd-Jones 1983 p.119, Sewell-Rutter 2007 pp.123, 130.

⁵⁴⁷ Soph. 471, 473 Radt.

ἔρωτος, ἀστραπὴν τιν' ὀμμάτων, ἔχει·
ἧ θάλλεται μὲν αὐτός, ἐξοπτᾷ δ' ἐμέ,
ἴσον μετρῶν ὀφθαλμόν, ὥστε τέκτονος
παρὰ στάθμην ἰόντος ὀρθοῦται κανῶν

Hippodamia

Such is the magic charm of love, a kind of lightning of the eyes, that Pelops has; by this he himself is warmed and I am inflamed; he scans with responsive vision as closely as the craftsman's straight-driven plumbline clings to its level.⁵⁴⁸

A testimonium also confirms Oenomaus' scalping of suitors.⁵⁴⁹ The contest for Hippodamia itself is narrated in Pindar's *Olympian Odes* and later became widely represented in Greek art in the fourth century.⁵⁵⁰

But most importantly, Sophocles' *Oenomaus* seems to have included Pelops' deception of Myrtilus, the charioteer who jeopardised Oenomaus' chariot in order to win a night with Hippodamia:

ὄρκου δὲ προστεθέντος ἐπιμελεστέρα
ψυχὴ κατέστη· διςσὰ γὰρ φυλάσσεται,
φίλων τε μέμψιν κείς θεοῦς ἀμαρτάνειν

But when an oath is taken in addition, the mind is more attentive; for it guards against two things, the reproach of friends and offence against the gods.⁵⁵¹ In the preceding tradition Pherecydes indicated such a pledge for Myrtilus to help Pelops.⁵⁵² This pledge anticipates Pelops' murder of Myrtilus to prevent his night with Hippodamia, thus incurring either Myrtilus' curse or his father Hermes' wrath. Indeed, Myrtilus' deception is anticipated in the final line of fr.472: Pelops will reproach his friend Myrtilus and offend Hermes as a result.

In sum, in Sophocles' *Oenomaus*, Atreus and Thyestes' father Pelops commits a crime in order to marry their mother, a guilt that Pelops does not seem to pay for in his lifetime, but rather that Atreus and Thyestes inherit. Sophocles' *Oenomaus* and *Thyestes' Feast* are difficult to date in relation to one another. Aristophanes' *Birds* provides a

⁵⁴⁸ Soph. 474 Radt.

⁵⁴⁹ Soph. 473a Radt = Σ Pind. *Isthm.* 4.92a. Cf. Soph. 475 Radt. Sophocles' *Oenomaus* preceded Aristophanes' *Birds* of 414 BC (Soph. 476 Radt = Ar. *Av.* 1337–9).

⁵⁵⁰ An Erinys attends these characters at: *LIMC* Hippodamia 5 (4C BC); 13 (c.340 BC); 14 (4C BC); 20 (c.330 BC); 21 (c.330 BC), Myrtilus 13 (late 4C BC); 15 (c.330 BC); 25 (mid-4C BC). The chariot race is depicted at: *LIMC* Hippodamia 10-16, *LIMC* Myrtilus 8-18. The death of Myrtilus appears at *LIMC* Myrtilus 25. cf. Hurwit on the East Pediment at the Temple of Zeus at Olympia (1987 pp.6-15).

⁵⁵¹ Soph. 472 Radt.

⁵⁵² Pherecydes 3 F 37. Jacoby. cf. [Hesiod] F 259(a), Soph. *El.* 505-15, Eur. *Or.* 988-96; *IT* 192-8, [Apollod]. *Epit.* 2.4-9; Hyg. *Fab.* 84. cf. Fowler 2013 p.429

terminus ante quem of 414 BC for Sophocles' *Oenomaus*,⁵⁵³ and the Parian Marble confirms this date. But the Parian Marble only records one of Sophocles' Thyestes plays, simply suggesting that *Thyestes* predated Sophocles' final competition in 406 BC.⁵⁵⁴ Yet it is widely accepted that Sophocles wrote three Thyestes plays, staged at different times; thus it is unclear whether Sophocles' *Oenomaus* predated his *Thyestes' Feast*.⁵⁵⁵ Nonetheless, the deception of Myrtilus was an engrained feature of a popular myth; thus Myrtilus' curse or Hermes' wrath may have featured in Sophocles' *Thyestes' Feast* itself or at least in the minds of its audience members.

Turning to Euripides' *Oenomaus* we find no such oath or implication of Myrtilus in the extant fragments. In contrast to Sophocles' cruel Oenomaus, surrounded by the scalps of Hippodamia's suitors, Euripides' Oenomaus is presented as a caring and protective father:

<OINOMAOΣ?>
 ἀμηχανῶ δ' ἔγωγε κοῦκ ἔχω μαθεῖν,
 εἴτ' οὖν ἄμεινόν ἐστι γίγνεσθαι τέκνα
 θνητοῖσιν εἴτ' ἄπαιδα καρποῦσθαι βίον.
 ὁρῶ γὰρ οἷς μὲν οὐκ ἔφυσαν, ἀθλίους,
 ὅσοισι δ' εἰσὶν, οὐδὲν εὐτυχεστέρους·
 καὶ γὰρ κακοὶ γεγῶτες ἐχθίστη νόσος,
 καὶ αὖ γένωνται σώφρονες—κακὸν μέγα—λυποῦσι
 τὸν φύσαντα μὴ πάθωσί τι.

<Oenomaus?>

I myself am uncertain and cannot learn for sure whether it is indeed better for men to get children, or to enjoy a childless life. For I see that those who have no children are miserable, while all those who have them are in no way more fortunate: if their children turn out bad, they are a most hateful affliction, and if on the other hand they are well behaved—a great distress, this—they make their father anxious that something may happen to them.⁵⁵⁶

This suggests the focus of Euripides' *Oenomaus* was different from Sophocles'. In Sophocles' tragedy the villainous Oenomaus is defeated by Pelops, whom Hippodamia clearly loves: thus pathos would be seated in the demise of Myrtilus because Oenomaus' demise evokes less sympathy. This is not the case for Euripides. As Collard and Cropp point out, Euripides' characterisation of Oenomaus has led some to believe that he juxtaposed this sympathetic Oenomaus with a necessarily unsympathetic Pelops

⁵⁵³ Soph. 476 Radt. = Ar. Av. 1337–9.

⁵⁵⁴ Mar. Par. 72. Jacoby.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf Radt 1999 p.239.

⁵⁵⁶ Eur. 571 Kannicht.

to appeal to “anti-Peloponnesian sentiment at Athens”.⁵⁵⁷

I suggest that this view is consistent with the fr.572-3, which deal sympathetically with loss and male lamentation, triggered by Pelops:

ἔν ἐστι πάντων πρῶτον εἰδέναι τόδε,
φέρειν τὰ συμπίπτοντα μὴ παλιγκότως·
χοῦτός γ' ἀνήρ ἄριστος, αἶ τε συμφοραὶ
ἦσσαν δάκνουσιν. ἀλλὰ ταῦτα γὰρ λέγειν
ἐπιστάμεσθα, δρᾶν δ' ἀμηχάνως ἔχει.

This one thing is the most important of all to know: to bear the things that befall us without resentment. Such a man excels in virtue, and his misfortunes torment him less. But of course, though we know how to say this, we cannot do it.

ἀλλ' ἔστι γὰρ δὴ κἂν κακοῖσιν ἡδονὴ
θνητοῖς, ὀδυρμοὶ δακρύων τ' ἐπιρροαί·
ἀλγηδόνας δὲ ταῦτα κουφίζει φρενῶν,
καὶ καρδίας ἔλυσε τοὺς ἄγαν πόνους.

Yet there is a pleasure that men can take in their woes, the pleasure of lamentation and floods of tears. These things lighten the pains within their minds and ease the excessive suffering of their hearts.⁵⁵⁸

Frr.572-3 do not logically befit Pelops' speech for he is consistently the winner of this mythic episode. Only two male ‘losers’ remain: Oenomaus who speaks fr.571 and Myrtilus, who is not explicitly named in the fragments.

However, fr.572-3 and 575-6 indicate the fall of Oenomaus and his resignation to Hippodamia's new husband:

ὅστις δὲ θνητῶν βούλεται δυσώνυμον
εἰς γῆρας ἐλθεῖν, οὐ λογίζεται καλῶς·
μακρὸς γὰρ αἰὼν μυρίουσ τίκτει πόνους.

Anyone who wants to reach ill-famed old age is not thinking straight; for a long life begets innumerable troubles.

ὁ πλεῖστα πράσσων πλεῖσθ' ἀμαρτάνει βροτῶν.

The man who tries to do most makes the most mistakes.⁵⁵⁹

The indication of old age marks Oenomaus' role as Hippodamia's father, whilst the fall through trial and error suggests Oenomaus' races with the many suitors. Thus I suggest that Oenomaus speaks fr.572-3 rather than Myrtilus, because the dejected tone they present parallels that of fr.575-6, which can be more clearly attributed to Oenomaus. Moreover, the speaker's resignation in fr.575-6 is inconsistent with Myrtilus'

⁵⁵⁷ Collard 2009 p.41.

⁵⁵⁸ Eur. 572-3 Kannicht.

⁵⁵⁹ Eur. 575-6 Kannicht.

indignation at being deceived and Pelops' consequent need to kill him – a consistent feature of Myrtilus' myth.

But if we subscribe to the view that Euripides characterised Pelops as an insidious suitor, as I suggest we should, why would Euripides not capitalise on Pelops' deception of Myrtilus to that end? The gnomic statement of fr.577 seems to anticipate the curse against Pelops:

ἐγὼ μὲν εὖτ' ἂν τοὺς κακοὺς ὀρῶ βροτῶν
πίπτοντας, εἶναί φημι δαιμόνων γένος.

Whenever I see **a bad man fall**, I affirm that the race of gods indeed exists.⁵⁶⁰ This is perhaps a comment on Oenomaus' preventing his daughter from marrying. However, this would conflict with Euripides' sympathetic characterisation of Oenomaus as a good man in fr.571. Perhaps then, it is a double-edged comment on the fall of Myrtilus who betrays his master and is betrayed in turn by Pelops, an irony that is made more salient by the plural noun (τοὺς κακοὺς) “bad men” which is not reflected in Kovacs' translation “a bad man”.⁵⁶¹ This *double entendre* condemns both competitors in the chariot race: thus a character outside the action without a vested interest in the outcome must speak it. Thus I suggest that the chorus speaks this line, because they are unlikely to side with either competitor as both betray the chorus' king Oenomaus. Thus it seems that Euripides equates Myrtilus and Pelops as warring traitors, to leave a bleak outlook on the surviving generation at the end of his *Oenomaus*.⁵⁶²

Therefore, the deception of Myrtilus and the wrath it incurred, be it induced by a curse or his father Hermes' reaction, was an established tradition that Sophocles and Euripides exploited for tragic effect. Sophocles contrasts a cruel Oenomaus against a Pelops whom Hippodamia loves, positioning Myrtilus between them as the tragic dupe whose oath is forsaken despite the risk he takes in betraying his master. Euripides presents a benevolent Oenomaus; though his actions in the tragedy are untenable, his good intentions are reflected in the surviving fragments. As a result, the “bad men” the chorus reproach seem to include Myrtilus the fallen traitor and Pelops the doomed traitor, alluding to the guilt Pelops has incurred for future generations and the tragic

⁵⁶⁰ Eur. 577 Kannicht.

⁵⁶¹ κάκος (s.v. Liddell and Scott) can have a social, rather than moral meaning, i.e. “unfortunate,” here I favour the moral meaning given the suggestion of divine justice in the fragment.

⁵⁶² Given that Electra describes Myrtilus' as a source of inherent guilt in Euripides' later *Orestes*, our reconstruction may be in keeping with contemporary trends in the myth (Eur. *Or.* 990). See ch.2 pp.137-145.

chorus' belief in the gods' role.

In terms of how these adaptations would have affected the reception of the *Thyestes* tragedies, Sophocles' *Oenomaus* is parodied in Aristophanes' *Birds* of 414 BC, thus must have been composed before.⁵⁶³ This suggests that it was probably produced before Euripides' *Oenomaus*, which is contentiously dated to 409 BC.⁵⁶⁴ Unfortunately, there is no way to precisely date either Sophocles' and Euripides' *Thyestes* plays or Sophocles' *Tantalus* within that tradition, though the general trend in their dating places them before Euripides' *Oenomaus* of 409-10 BC.⁵⁶⁵ What we can infer from Euripides' *Oenomaus* is that he retained the wrath of Myrtilus and reinvented its effect, suggesting that Myrtilus' wrath was an engrained part of the tragic tradition.

Chrysippus & Pleisthenes in Greece

What is more striking for Euripides' audience, is how the curse of Myrtilus may have played a part in Euripides' seemingly unprecedented Tantalid tragedy *Chrysippus*. For although there are trends in the myth, not all elements would be evoked in each play dramatizing the same family. But we can deduce how Euripides dramatised Chrysippus' myth and uncover what he contributed to the tradition inherited by Ennius, Accius and Seneca.

Chrysippus is Pelops' son, usually by his lover Axioche and never by his wife Hippodamia.⁵⁶⁶ Chrysippus is killed by his half-brothers Atreus and Thyestes in fifth-century literature, such as Hellanicus' and Thucydides' histories, and reemerges in the

⁵⁶³ Soph. 476 Radt. = Ar. *Av.* 1337–9. in August 330 BC Demosthenes mentions a restaging of Sophocles' *Oenomaus*, in which he mentions Aeschines' performance. Dem.18.180. Cf. O'Connor assumes that this was a reperformance of Euripides' *Oenomaus*, overlooking Hesychius' attribution of the production to Sophocles (1908 pp.74-7). s.v. Hesychius ἀρουραῖος Οἰνόμαος.

⁵⁶⁴ Though the papyrus hypothesis to *Phoenissae* lists *Oenomaus*, *Chrysippus* and *Phoenissae* sequentially (Musgrave 1778 pp.2-3), causing Zielinski to believe they were staged as a trilogy (1924 189-205), Mastronarde points out that trilogies are typically listed in the dative to attribute them to the same tragedian, whereas here they appear in the nominative (1994 p. 37-8). Collard and Cropp also claim "The metrical style of the *Oenomaus* fragments, with no resolutions in 24 trimeters, makes a date as late as *Phoenician Women* (c. 409) seem unlikely" (2009 p.40). As a result, examining the juxtaposition of Pelops the father in *Chrysippus* and the suitor in *Oenomaus* may be tempting, but cannot be sufficiently supported by the papyrus evidence.

⁵⁶⁵ Eur. T i= Σ Aristoph. Byz. argum *Phoen*, suggests this play was produced alongside *Phoenissae* and *Chrysippus*, which the Aristophanic scholia date 410-09 BC Σ Ar. *Ran.* 53; *Av.* 348.

⁵⁶⁶ Σ Pind. *Ol.* 1.89, Σ Eur. *Or.* 4, Plut. *Mor.* 313E. Chrysippus is identified as a bastard in Σ Hom. *Il.* B105, but as the child of a previous marriage in Hellan. 157 Fowler.

scholia to Euripides' *Orestes* as a child from a previous marriage rather than a result of Pelops' infidelity.⁵⁶⁷ Indeed, Plato's Socrates in particular blames Atreus alone for the murder of Chrysippus, to explain the etymology of Atreus' name as "ruinous" (ἀτηρά).⁵⁶⁸

However, Euripides' *Chrysippus* fragments suggest that the plot developed Laius' abduction of the youth Chrysippus, as the fragments are attributed to Laius, the testimonia outline this plot and the fragments themselves reflect the anxieties of the abductor king.⁵⁶⁹ In this context, the only curse we might expect is Pelops' curse for Laius in response to the abduction, though this does not survive in Euripides' fragments.⁵⁷⁰

Therefore, both Sophocles and Euripides develop plays on different Tantalid generations with a focus on novelty rather than a cohesive Tantalid narrative across the tragedies. Euripides created a sympathetic Oenomaus, whereas Sophocles' Oenomaus collected the scalps of the suitors. Sophocles' *Tantalus* seems to have included the Pandareus story given that Hermes, who traditionally recovers Zeus' golden dog, appears and, according to contemporary mythological trends, need not have included the unobtainable feast as a punishment.⁵⁷¹ Euripides goes even further in this respect, devoting tragedies to otherwise marginalised characters such as Chrysippus. More radical still is Euripides' decision to stage Atreus' and Thyestes' 'father' in his *Pleisthenes*, which, like Sophocles' *Oenomaus*, must have been produced before its parody in Aristophanes *Birds* (414 BC).⁵⁷²

Pleisthenes is described as Atreus' son and the father of Agamemnon and Menelaus in Hesiod, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the tragic scholia, and Tzetzes' commentary on the *Iliad*.⁵⁷³ Tzetzes' commentary indicates that Homer also presented

⁵⁶⁷ Hellan. 157 Fowler; Thuc. 1,9, Σ Eur. *Or.* 5. cf. Fowler 2013 p. 432.

⁵⁶⁸ Plat. *Crat.* 395b-c. s.v. Liddell and Scott ἀτηρά.

⁵⁶⁹ Eur. T 4a-c, 839, 839a, 840-3 Kannicht. the testimonia indicate paederastic relationships, whilst fragments 839a-841 are spoken by Laius himself and 842 indicates an unattractive yet cunning man, perhaps the abductor Laius. Cf. Lesky on Aeschylus' *Laius* as a precedent (p.121).

⁵⁷⁰ Eur T iv.6.c Kannicht =argum. Eur. *Phoen.* 8; Eur T iv.6.d Kannicht =argum. Aesch. *Sept.* 3.

⁵⁷¹ Eustath *ad Hom.* 19.518 (2.216.8-11 Stallbaum).

⁵⁷² Eur. 628 Kannicht= Ar. *Av.* 1232.

⁵⁷³ Aesch. *Ag.* 1569, 1602, Σ Eur. *Or.* 4, Σ Soph. *Aj.* 1297. Hes.137a West= Σ D Hom. *Il.* 1.7 (p. 6 van Thiel); Σ Tzetz. *ad Hom. Il.* 1. 122; Hes.137b West= Tzetz. Exeg. *Iliad.* 1.122 (p. 68.19 Hermann). cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 3.15.

Pleisthenes as Atreus' son, but describes Atreus as Agamemnon and Menelaus' father.⁵⁷⁴ Pleisthenes appears as Atreus and Thyestes' brother in a scholion to Pindar's first *Olympian*, perhaps in an attempt to explain Pleisthenes' fathering of Agamemnon and Menelaus and Atreus' fostering of the brothers.⁵⁷⁵

In Euripides' *Kressai*, Pleisthenes would most likely have been Atreus' son. He is regularly described as such and the tragic scholia name Pleisthenes as Aërope's husband specifically.⁵⁷⁶ Indeed, Pleisthenes' appearance as a suitor for the unfaithful Aërope, who is in turn scolded by Atreus in *Kressai*, suggests a scenario where a father would chide his son's bride rather than a son chiding a father's bride.⁵⁷⁷ Pleisthenes' appearance as Atreus and Thyestes' brother seems imposed by later commentators to explain the confused paternity of Agamemnon and Menelaus.⁵⁷⁸

As discussed in chapter one, Euripides' *Pleisthenes* casts Pleisthenes as Atreus' son, which I suggest is also the case in Euripides' *Kressai*.⁵⁷⁹ *Pleisthenes* fr.625 suggests that two rivals from the same generation, such as Atreus and Thyestes, are explaining the dispute to one of their own sons:

οὐ τὸν σὸν ἔκταν πατέρα, πολέμιόν γε μὴν.

I did not kill your father, but rather an enemy.⁵⁸⁰

This son must be the eponymous Pleisthenes, as Thyestes' avenging son Aegisthus never appears alongside Pleisthenes, but instead of him.⁵⁸¹ Moreover, Pleisthenes himself never takes issue with a peer in any existing tradition; his enemy in our reconstruction of *Kressai* is his own uncle.⁵⁸² It is harder to pinpoint who is the killer and who is the murdered father, for although Hyginus identifies Pleisthenes as Atreus' son, not Thyestes', Pleisthenes is fostered by Thyestes in exile and estranged from

⁵⁷⁴ Σ Tzetz. *ad* Hom. *Il.* 1. 122.

⁵⁷⁵ Σ Pind. *Ol.* 1.144.

⁵⁷⁶ Σ Eur. *Or.* 4, cf. Σ Soph. *Aj.* 1297.

⁵⁷⁷ See n.226 p.33.

⁵⁷⁸ Bowra makes a convincing case for Stesichorus having replaced Atreus with Pleisthenes altogether in his *Oresteia* in order to dissociate the house from Atreus (Stes.15. Finglass), whose grave was situated at Mycenae, thus allowing Stesichorus to appropriate the myth for a Spartan audience (1934 p.118). Were Stesichorus to have done this, later mythographers may have made Pleisthenes a brother to justify Atreus' and Pleisthenes' presence in the story.

⁵⁷⁹ See ch.1 pp.29-35 above. Cf. Fraenkel makes reasonable conjecture that Pleisthenes' position in the *genos* shifted according to need (1950 p.740).

⁵⁸⁰ Eur. 625 Kannicht.

⁵⁸¹ See ch.1 n.166 p.23 above.

⁵⁸² Σ Eur. *Or.* 4. See ch.1 p.31 above.

Atreus.⁵⁸³ Therefore Atreus, Pleisthenes' estranged biological father, could be justifying his murder of Thyestes, Pleisthenes' foster father, by claiming that Thyestes is merely an enemy of Pleisthenes' biological father Atreus and should not be considered as a father figure.

Musgrave explains the younger Pleisthenes' role in this story using Hyginus' *Fabula* 86, which suggests that Thyestes fosters Atreus' son Pleisthenes and while in exile sends Pleisthenes to kill Atreus, resulting in Atreus' murder of Pleisthenes.⁵⁸⁴ Elements of this story are indeed reflected in fr.626, which outlines the political implications of exiling a popular figure:

δήμῳ δὲ μήτε πᾶν ἀναρτήσης κράτος,
μήτ' αὖ κακώσης, πλοῦτον ἔντιμον τιθείς.
μηδ' ἄνδρα δήμῳ πιστὸν ἐκβάλης ποτὲ
μηδ' αὖξε καιροῦ μείζον', οὐ γὰρ ἀσφαλές,
μή σοι τύραννος λαμπρὸς ἐξ αὐτοῦ φανῆ.
κώλυε δ' ἄνδρα παρὰ δίκην τιμώμενον·
πόλει γὰρ εὐτυχοῦντες οἱ κακοὶ νόσος.

Do not attach power wholly to the people, nor on the other hand degrade them by privileging wealth. **Never expel a man who is trusted by the people, and do not let him grow greater than he should be, for that is unsafe, in case he should turn into a manifest tyrant.** Check a man who gains esteem unjustly, for base men prospering are an affliction to a city.⁵⁸⁵

This certainly would benefit Atreus' justifications for exiling Thyestes, though no explicit reference to the affair with Aërope is made.

Furthermore, fr.631 presents a euphemism associating banquets with sex:

πολὺς δὲ κοσσάβων ἀραγμὸς
Κύπριδος προσφθὸν ἀχεῖ
μέλος ἐν δόμοισιν.

Much ringing of wine-drops made a song appealing to Cypris resound through the house.⁵⁸⁶

Here Collard and Cropp suggest that this ringing is caused by the sympotic game *kottabos*, yet associate a hit with sexual success.⁵⁸⁷ This analysis indicates a euphemism for extramarital sex, perhaps suggesting that Aërope and Thyestes' affair was alluded to in *Pleisthenes*. For although women of Aërope's class would not typically attend symposia, her infamous *moicheia* both before and after marriage could align her with

⁵⁸³ Hyg. *Fab.* 86. See p.7 above.

⁵⁸⁴ Musgrave 1778 p.583.

⁵⁸⁵ Eur. 626 Kannicht.

⁵⁸⁶ Eur. 631 Kannicht.

⁵⁸⁷ Collard 2009 p.87 n.1.

the female sex-workers of the symposium (*hetaerae*).

Fr.630 may allude to the exile of Pleisthenes with his foster-father Thyestes:

ἐγὼ δὲ Σαρδιανός, οὐκέτ' Ἀργόλας.
I am a Sardinian, no longer an Argive.⁵⁸⁸

The specificity of Sardis, the ancestral home of Pelops, suggests a retreat not only to one's ancestral home, but specifically the home that predates the ancestral crimes that led Pelops and his descendants to Argos.⁵⁸⁹ This defiant character from Argos is professing a new eastern nationality, thus the fact that the speaker does not stake a claim to the throne in Argos suggests the dispute is personal, as one might expect of an estranged son Pleisthenes confronting his father Atreus.

However, the remaining fragments do not support Musgrave's reconstruction of Euripides' *Pleisthenes* with Hyginus' *fabula* 86, but suggest more disparate motivations for strife:

εἰσὶν γὰρ εἰσὶ διφθέραι μελεγγραφεῖς
πολλῶν γέμουσαι Λοξίου γηρυμάτων.

There are, truly there are, parchments inscribed with song, laden with many utterances of Loxias.⁵⁹⁰

πολλῶν δὲ χρήματ' αἴτι' ἀνθρώποις κακῶν.
Money is the cause of many evils for men.⁵⁹¹

Here we have the influence of prophecy, and a gnomic statement on the dangers of wealth. So, across the *Pleisthenes* fr.627 and fr.632 present a confused picture of the motives at work as we lack context. Thus Musgrave's wholesale imposition of Hyginus' details is insupportable. Whilst I concede that Pleisthenes features as the son of Atreus or Thyestes, he arrives from exile with Thyestes and is caught between the brothers' dispute; nothing in the fragments suggests that he is the one killed, as the invitation of death is unattributed:

... καὶ κάταιθε χῶτι λῆς ποίει.

⁵⁸⁸ Eur. 630 Kannicht.

⁵⁸⁹ Pelops is variously attributed to either Lydia (Pind. *Ol.* 1. 24), or Phrygia (Hdt. 7.8, 11; Soph. *Ai.* 1291-2), both in Asia Minor; though Sardis is close to the border, the territories seem to have undergone the same conflation as Argos and Mycenae. Cf. Fowler 2013 pp. 426-7 and Powers 1930 pp.111-29.

⁵⁹⁰ Eur. 627 Kannicht.

⁵⁹¹ Eur. 632 Kannicht. cf. Eur. 628 Kannicht indicates sheep sacrifice, suggesting a small assembly and perhaps signaling an arrival, but also paralleling the sheep sacrifices Clytemnestra uses to commemorate the murder of Agamemnon in Euripides' *Electra* (280) cf. Faraone and Naiden 2012 p.185. As a result, fr.628 could be linked to fr.629 to suggest a ritualistic killing.

. . . and burn (me?), and do (to me?) what you will.⁵⁹²

What we can learn from Euripides' *Pleisthenes* is that, as in *Kressai*, Euripides adds a generation to the Tantalid genealogy: a younger Pleisthenes, father of Agamemnon and Menelaus. But in Euripides' *Pleisthenes* the eponymous hero is caught in the conflict between his estranged father Atreus and his uncle Thyestes, whereas in *Kressai* he seemed to be more directly implicated: Aërope seems to have been his wife in *Kressai*, whereas in *Pleisthenes* she may have been his mother.⁵⁹³ As with the *Chrysippus*, in *Pleisthenes* Euripides develops a neglected element of the myth into its own tragic episode.

The examples in this section suggest that Sophocles and Euripides adapted tragedies for each generation of the Tantalids to focus on variants that do not necessarily anticipate the Thyestes plays in production date, narrative order, or theme. Sophocles does not seem to have adapted Tantalus' feast of Pelops or his unobtainable feast. Euripides' adaptation of *Oenomaus* is contrasted with his innovation of *Chrysippus*, a tragedy that is not focused on his role in Pelops' family, but rather on his removal from it. Euripides' *Pleisthenes* reintroduces the character from *Kressai*, but rather than being Aërope's suitor, here he appears as her son as the fragments suggest a conflict between Atreus and his estranged son Pleisthenes. The only consistency we might find is the curse of Myrtilus' wrath as a feature of inherent guilt evoked by Pelops, though the circumstantial evidence suggests that Myrtilus was characterised quite differently: as a victim by Sophocles and a villain by Euripides.

Tantalus in Rome

In Ribbeck's *ex incertis incertorum fabulis* we find the following reference to Tantalus' punishment:

Quam vim mali significantes poëtae impendere apud inferos saxum Tantalos
faciunt

Ob scelera animique impotentiam et superbiloquentiam.

And it is as a symbol of this power of evil that the poets imagine the rock hanging over Tantalus in the world below:

Punishing his sin and want of self-control and boastful tongue.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹² Eur. 629 Kannicht.

⁵⁹³ This is not improbable, for example Sterope is variously cited as either Oenomaus' wife or mother cf. Fowler 2013 p.429.

⁵⁹⁴ Accius 58 Ribbeck= Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 4.16.35.

La Penna and Baldarelli attribute this fragment to Accius' *Atreus*, based on the parallel with Tantalus' appearance in Seneca's *Thyestes*.⁵⁹⁵ Both assume this to have been spoken by Tantalus' ghost, despite the fact that fr.58 is not related in the first person, nor is there any circumstantial evidence to suggest that Tantalus' ghost appeared in Accius' *Atreus*. Cicero does not specifically cite Accius here, and his *Tusculan Disputations* quotes both Accius and Ennius repeatedly,⁵⁹⁶ citing Accius' *Atreus* repeatedly within the fourth book in which fr. 58 appears, not Ennius' *Thyestes*.⁵⁹⁷ Should we agree with La Penna and Baldarelli's assumption that this fragment is from Accius' works, I suggest that this best befits Accius' *Oenomaus*, given that the motifs of boastfulness and lack of restraint suit Pelops' challenge of Oenomaus and murder of Myrtilus respectively.

But regardless of where we position this fragment, Baldarelli and La Penna overlook the fact that Tantalus' non-festal crimes persisted in Roman drama. Moreover, fr.58 recalls Tantalus' ancestral crime in a drama on a subsequent generation, despite the fact that Tantalus' crime and punishment does not preempt the feast as those of Seneca's Tantalus do.

Pelops in Rome

Having considered how ancestral crimes of the Tantalids may have been dramatised in Greek tragedy, we shall now turn to Accius' adaptation of this mythical tradition. Though no Roman tragedy devoted to Tantalus survives, Accius did write an *Oenomaus* on Pelops' wooing of Hippodamia, the most consistent mythical variant staged by both Sophocles and Euripides.

Like Sophocles' scalps, Accius includes Oenomaus' collection of heads:

Nonius: 'Honestitudino' pro honestas...

Horrida honestitudino Europae principum primo ex loco...

Nonius: '*Honestitudo*' for '*honestas*' . . .

The bristling row of valiant heads of Europe's chieftains...⁵⁹⁸

So again we have a cruel king, but as Warmington suggests in his Loeb edition, Oenomaus' violence is perhaps defensive, given the prophecy of a fatal son-in-law:

Oenomaus:

atque ea coniectura auguro.

⁵⁹⁵ La Penna 1972 p.366, Baldarelli 2004 p.151.

⁵⁹⁶ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 1.44.105, 2.5.13, 3.9.20, 3.26.62, 4.25.55, 4.36.77 (Accius); 1.12.27-8, 1.44.107, 1.49.117, 3.3.5, 3.27.64, 4.8.19, 4.23.52, 4.33.70 (Ennius).

⁵⁹⁷ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 4.25.55, 4.36.77 (Accius).

⁵⁹⁸ Accius 5 Ribbeck.

Oenomaus:

And that is what by surmise I foretell.⁵⁹⁹

As Baldarelli points out, the compound *coniectura auguro* comes from Ennius and Pacuvius, explaining that *auguro* suggests oracular prophecy.⁶⁰⁰ In this instance, I suggest that an oracular prophecy seems likely as it is first mentioned in the extant texts by Diodorus Siculus, a near contemporary of Accius himself.⁶⁰¹ Thus in Accius' first Pelopid play divine providence is introduced.

There is clearly a preliminary discourse between Oenomaus and Pelops in fr.3 where I suggest Pelops' intentions are explained:

[Pelops]: Praesto etiam adsum.

[Oenomaus]: Exprome quid fers, nam te longo <ab> itere cerno <huc> vadere.

[Pelops]: Here even now am I at hand.

[Oenomaus]: Out with your message; for I see that you do come

After a long journey.⁶⁰²

Here I attribute the lines of the speaker who has arrived in Pisa to Pelops and the lines of he who is demanding a message to Oenomaus, the king of Pisa and most likely recipient.

These speakers match the logic of the narrative and the content of fr.4, which explains that Pelops has arrived in Pisa and is asking for Hippodamia's hand in marriage.⁶⁰³

[Pelops]:

coniugium Pisis petere, ad te itiner tendere.

[Pelops]:

Marriage to seek at Pisa, and to you

Direct my journey.⁶⁰⁴

The overall effect of fr.2-5 suggests that Accius placed the interests of the two men in conflict, rather than especially vilifying one or the other. Oenomaus is willing to listen

⁵⁹⁹ Accius 2 Ribbeck= Accius 494. Warmington *ad loc.*

⁶⁰⁰ Ennius *Melannipa* 1. Ribbeck and Pacuvius *Chryses* 2. Ribbeck (*coniectura de errore eius augurat*), Non 469.8, Baldarelli 2014 p.60.

⁶⁰¹ Diod. Sic. 4.73.2.

⁶⁰² Accius 3 Ribbeck.

⁶⁰³ Though Baldarelli positions this fragment in the prologue on the basis that it imitates Pindar's *Olympian* (1.69-71), the direct second person pronoun (*te*) suggests to me that this is part of direct speech (2004 p.59).

⁶⁰⁴ Accius 4 Ribbeck.

to Pelops and sympathises with his struggle to reach Pisa,⁶⁰⁵ but allowing him to marry Hippodamia would prove fatal according to the prophecy. When considered in this way, the heads of the suitors serve as a practical deterrent for prospective suitors, rather than a personal trophy. The same cannot be said of Sophocles' Oenomaus' scalp collection because no fatal prophecy survives in the fragments to suggest the suitors were a threat in his *Oenomaus*.

This reverence for prophecy seems reiterated in the build up to the race as the community is asked to hold ritual silence to ensure a victory, presumably for their king Oenomaus:

Vos ite actutum atque opere magno edicite
Per urbem ut omnes, qui arcem Alpheimque accolunt,
Cives ominibus faustis augustam adhibeant
Faventiam, ore obscena dictu segregent.

Now all of you go at once and proclaim with great dispatch
Throughout the town that all its people who live near Alpheus,
All those citizens must observe a solemn and propitious
Silence, and must forbid ill-boding words from their tongues.⁶⁰⁶

Baldarelli more specifically suggests that this fragment presents Oenomaus' habitual sacrifice of a ram.⁶⁰⁷ Though the ram might foreshadow the implication of the Golden Ram later in the saga, an animal sacrifice would be difficult to stage and the symbolism of the sacrificial animal being led to sacrifice in the *skēne* would have to suffice. Nonetheless, Accius associates the clash between characters with the role of sacrifice before the race takes place.

That said, Oenomaus is not a consistently sympathetic character, as he seems to threaten Pelops:

Atque hanc postremam solis usuram cape!
And take this last enjoyment of the sun!⁶⁰⁸

By the end of the race, Pelops asserts himself as a more sympathetic character, as he claims:

Pelops:
Ego ut essem adfinis tibi, non ut te extinguerem
tuam petii gnatam; numero te expugnat timor.

⁶⁰⁵ Cf. Accius 5 Ribbeck: *Quemcumque institeram grumum aut praecisumiugum* (Whatever hillock or sheer mountain-chain I had set foot on).

⁶⁰⁶ Accius 10 Ribbeck (My translation). On ritual silence s.v. Liddell and Scott εὐφημεῖτε and *OLD favete linguis*

⁶⁰⁷ Diod. 4.73.3-4, Σ Pind. *Ol.* 1.14, Baldarelli 2014 pp.73-4.

⁶⁰⁸ Accius 9 Ribbeck.

Pelops:
To be your kinsman, not your murderer—
That's why I sought your daughter; in too
full number
Dread takes your heart by storm.⁶⁰⁹

Therefore the fragments we inherit from Accius suggest a well-developed rivalry between Pelops and Oenomaus, fr.6 emphasises Pelops' determination to marry Hippodamia in the length of his journey and Oenomaus' perception of a fatal augury (*auguro*). What we have not yet found in Accius' *Oenomaus* fragments is a clear impression of Myrtilus' role, which traditionally condemns the Pelopid line through either his curse or Hermes' wrath.

However, fr.7 seems to suggest the role of Myrtilus through a cryptic metaphor:
Saxum it facit angustitatem, et sub eo saxo exuberans
Scatebra fluviae radit rupem.

That stone forms narrow slit, and under that same stone the gushing,
Spouting of the water wears down the rock.⁶¹⁰

The allusion to water, albeit a chthonic spring here, may evoke the Euripidean tradition of associating the Myrtoan sea with Pelops' drowning of Myrtilus, or could simply suggest chthonic waters from the underworld.⁶¹¹ But as Warmington points out, an additional layer of meaning can be deduced if we look at how Cicero appropriated these lines in his *Letters to Friends*.⁶¹²

In a discussion of his position and increasing proximity to Caesar, Cicero alludes to Accius' *Oenomaus*:

Quam ob rem Oenomaos **tu**o nihil utor; etsi posuisti loco
versus Accianos.

So I don't need **your** Oenomaus; though **your Accian lines** come apropos.⁶¹³ The pronoun demonstrates direct speech, whilst the ensuing accusative removes the possibility that Cicero is addressing Accius for emphasis, but rather the recipient Paetus himself. Cicero's ensuing manipulation of the metaphor makes this clear:

illam Acci similitudinem non modo iam **ad invidiam** sed ad Fortunam
transferam, quam **existimo** levem et imbecillam ab animo firmo et gravi
tamquam fluctum a saxo frangi oportere.

I may apply that simile of Accius' to Fortune instead of merely **to envy**; fickle

⁶⁰⁹ Accius 6 Ribbeck.

⁶¹⁰ Accius 7 Ribbeck (My translation).

⁶¹¹ Eur. *Or.* 988-1000, Σ Eur. *Or.* 990.

⁶¹² Warmington 1936 n.a p.500.

⁶¹³ Cic. *Fam.* 9.16 5 (My translation).

and feeble as she is, **I hold** that she must break against a firm, constant mind
like a wave against a rock.⁶¹⁴

As Warmington points out in his note, Cicero emphasises the wave of envy breaking apart on the rock of a sound mind, whereas Accius demonstrates the wave eroding the rock: thus envy damages an unsound mind.⁶¹⁵ Warmington fails to recognise that this is no error, Cicero is responding to his friend's advisory adaptation of the lines.

Meanwhile Shackleton Bailey claims Cicero's lines "should not be identified with the only surviving fragment of the play, in which there happens to be mention of a rock".⁶¹⁶ Of course, Cicero's citation should not replace the fragment related by Nonius' grammar, as Cicero so clearly deals with an adapted fragment, exchanging *invidia* for *fortuna*, as Baldarelli points out.⁶¹⁷ What is more, once Cicero turns to apply Accius' fragment to Fortune, he reiterates that the wave against a rock simile is his own imagery (*existimo*); thus whether Cicero is adapting Accian sea imagery or imposing the Roman *topos* of Fortuna as the fluctuating sea is unclear.

However, Cicero's identification of these lines as a simile (*similitudinem*) tells us that the passage illustrates a precise emotion or action in the play, and the inversion of Accius' chthonic water simile reveals the symbolic significance of the rock and the sea as a sound mind blasted by envy, though with a different result. Cicero's lines should not be identified as Accius' *Oenomaus* fr.7, but they should help us to understand how Myrtilus may have featured in Accius' *Oenomaus*. When reviewed in light of Cicero's appropriation of the line we learn that Accius' eroding rock is a natural monument to a mind blasted by envy, when compared with the Euripidean tradition Accius' fragment suggests the death of the jealous, drowned Myrtilus.

So, like the Greek tragedians before him, Accius seems to have included the wrath of Myrtilus in his *Oenomaus* by use of a water simile to demonstrate Myrtilus' envy, following the Euripidean tradition in which Pelops drowns Myrtilus. Accius follows the Euripidean tradition once again when writing his *Chrysippus*, in which Atreus and Thyestes' brother is clearly under threat.

Chrysippus in Rome

Accius seems to describe Chrysippus' abduction:

⁶¹⁴ Cic. *Fam.* 9.16.6.

⁶¹⁵ Warmington 1936 n.a p.500.

⁶¹⁶ Shackleton Bailey 2001 n. 5 p.201.

⁶¹⁷ Baldarelli 2004 p.67.

...neque **quisquam** a telis vacuus, sed uti cui quicque
obuiam
Fuerat, <ita> ferrum alius, <alius> saxi raudus m<iserat.>

...nor was **any** empty-handed
Of missiles, but, as each thing met his grasp,
So one hurled iron, one a lump of stone.⁶¹⁸

The use of *quisquam* as opposed to *alter* or *uter* suggests more than two kidnappers, thus we can rule out the possibility that Atreus and Thyestes alone stole away with their brother in this play.

Moreover, we can suppose these weapons are used in a forceful abduction rather than a murderous attack on Chrysippus, as fr.3 expresses the hope of recovering a hostage:

Quoi si hinc superescit, Spartam atque Amyclas trado
<ego>.

But if he hence survives, I will surrender
Both Sparta and Amyclae.⁶¹⁹

Warmington's attribution of the fragment to Pelops is fairly secure, as only a king may offer territories, and given that the abduction central to the tragedy must be that of the eponymous hero, Pelops' son.⁶²⁰ Indeed, concerns about Chrysippus' inheritance of Pelops' famed wealth arise in fr.2:

...aeternabilem
Diuitiam partissent.

...everlasting
wealth they would have shared.⁶²¹

The attempt to reclaim a hostage may again be reflected in a reluctance to act rashly:

Melius pigrasse quam deproperasse est nefas.
Better it is to have slackened than to have hastened a wicked act.⁶²²

More specifically, we seem to have an attempted rescue:

[Pelops]:
Quid agam? Vox illius est.
[Anon]:
Certe id quidem omnes cernimus.

⁶¹⁸ Accius 1 Ribbeck.

⁶¹⁹ Accius 3 Ribbeck.

⁶²⁰ Accius 231. Warmington. Titles of Republican tragedies were fixed by the tragedians and cited in quotations. As Manuwald points out, some titles are from adaptations of Greek epic and scholia, rather than stemming from the "Greek dramatic tradition," thus have a slightly different focus (2011 p.219).

⁶²¹ Accius 2 Ribbeck.

⁶²² Accius 4 Ribbeck.

[Pelops]:
What should I do? It is his voice.

[Anon]:
Indeed, so much at least we all perceive.⁶²³

There is no suggestion in the mythical tradition that Pelops hopes to rescue Chrysippus from Thyestes and Atreus, but Pelops does try to reclaim Chrysippus from Laius and curses Laius in the process.⁶²⁴ Therefore Accius, like Euripides, seems to have written a *Chrysippus* to focus on his abduction by Laius and highlight the inherent guilt of the Labdacids.⁶²⁵

Turning to Accius' *Pelopidae*, Baldarelli reconstructs the tragedy according to the fourth-century amphora of Aegisthus killing Atreus, mapping Accius' plot according to Hyginus 87.⁶²⁶ Baldarelli's reconstruction overlooks the precedent for Accius' *Pelopidae*: Lycophron's *Pelopidae*, written in the Hellenistic period (*post* 285 BC).⁶²⁷ Only one fragment of his tragedy survives:

Ἄλλ' ἤνικ' ἄν μὲν ἦ πρόσω τὸ καθαναεῖν,
Ἄιδης ποθεῖται τοῖς δεδυστυχηκόσιν,
ὄταν δ' ἐφέρπη κῶμα λοίσθιον βίου,
τὸ ζῆν ποθοῦμεν, οὐ γὰρ ἔστ' αὐτοῦ κόρος.

But if death is remote,
unhappy people long for Hades.
When life's last wave nears,
we desire life more; never having enough of it.⁶²⁸

At first glance, fr.5 could apply to Baldarelli's reconstruction: Aegisthus' murder of his elder Atreus. Indeed, the retreating waters of life in the final two lines also reflect the dehydration punishment of Pelops' father Tantalus, suggesting the dramatization of revenge in this cycle.⁶²⁹ However, Accius' title *Pelopidae* suggests an adaptation of

⁶²³ Accius 5 Ribbeck. I retain attributed speakers at: Accius 233. Warmington.

⁶²⁴ Σ Eur. *Pho.* 60.

⁶²⁵ Cf. Manuwald 2011 pp.22, 218-19 on the use of Greek precedents in tragedy of the Roman Republic.

⁶²⁶ Cf. Vermeule suggested that Sophocles' Thyestes tragedies included Aegisthus' revenge see p.7 and Fig. 2.

⁶²⁷ He is listed amongst the tragic Pleiads (T1= Tz. Σ Lyc.20.25, T3=Suda s.v. Kotlińska-Toma). There is also evidence to suggest that he was living at Alexandria under Ptolemy II Philadelphus (ruled 285-246 BC), who apparently entrusted him with the correction of the copies of comedies held in the Library (Lycophron. T2=Tz. *Chil.*8.204.474-7; T3=Tz. Σ *Prolegomena de comoedia Aristophanis*, 22-38. Kotlińska-Toma).

⁶²⁸ Lycophron 5. Kotlińska-Toma= Stob. 4.52.4.

⁶²⁹ See Fig. 3 and ch.1 pp.97-101.

Lycophron's in which Atreus and Thyestes kill their half-brother Chrysippus on the orders of their jealous mother Hippodamia.⁶³⁰

Aside from the title, which illustrates a conflict between Pelops' sons and is distinct from the preexisting titles associated with different stories (*Atreus* with the feast, *Thyestes* with either the feast or the rape of Pelopeia, and *Chrysippus* with Laius' abduction episode), the *Pelopidae* fragments allude to the conflict between the three brothers.⁶³¹ The arrival of a half-brother seems to be set up in a recognition scene:

...nam me uti credam ex tuo esse conceptum satu
multa argumenta redigunt animum et connovent.

... for your proofs stir my mind
And bring me to believe that I am a man
Conceived from your own sowing.⁶³²

Pelops' estranged bastard Chrysippus may speak this, whilst Hippodamia's sons would live in the family palace. Chrysippus' arrival also provides an impetus for his demise; if he was already living in the palace, an additional trigger for his murder would be necessary.

Indeed, fr.2 suggests Pelops reveals the news of his third son to Hippodamia:

...et te ut triplici laetarem bono.
...and that you I might gladden with a threefold blessing.⁶³³

This suggests the appearance of a third son, a benefit to the household from Pelops' perspective as a father honoured with male heirs, but a threat for Hippodamia as a rival to her own sons for the throne if Chrysippus was an older, premarital child; as a scourge on her pride if Chrysippus was an extramarital bastard.

Hippodamia's reaction to the news may be reflected here:

...nec tibi me in hac re **gratari decet**.
...nor is it **fit** I should be **pleased** with you.⁶³⁴

The restrained tone suggests a reaction to Chrysippus' arrival rather than Pelops' reaction to his son's murder, which would demand a more emotional outburst; this line rather suggests that the speaker should be pleased, as Pelops expects Hippodamia to be in fr.2. Hippodamia's motivations are thus related, as is her punishment in fr.6:

⁶³⁰ Hellanic. 157; Thuc. 1.9 (5C BC); Hyg. *Fab.* 85 cf. Σ Eur. *Or.*5.

⁶³¹ s.v. *BNP* Thyestes. Wolfram-Aslan claims: "The revenge of T. was described by Sophocles ('T. on Sicyon', *TrGF* 4 F 247-269) and Accius (*Pelopidae*)," (2006). However, Accius' fragments clearly include Pelops and Hippodamia as the paternal figures, whilst Atreus and Thyestes seem to be youths here.

⁶³² Accius 4 Ribbeck.

⁶³³ Accius 2 Ribbeck.

⁶³⁴ Accius 3 Ribbeck.

Cesso hinc ire et capere lucti vestem in leto coniugis?

Why do I dally to go hence and take
In my wife's death a garb of mourning?⁶³⁵

Here Pelops seems to question his grief for his wife which suggests she was involved in the murder of Chrysippus, most likely implicating Thyestes and Atreus in the deed, given that the title focuses on the meeting of the three brothers, thus vilifying both brothers involved in the later feast episode.

As with Accius' *Oenomaus*, his *Pelopidae* incorporates imagery to underscore a key theme in the tragedy:

eius serpentis squamae squalido auro et purpura pertextae
That serpent's scales with scaly gold and purple interwoven...⁶³⁶

Gellius cites this fragment in order to illustrate the degeneration of *squalor* from overcrowded (*incuteret*) to filthy (*solis*).⁶³⁷ The purple evokes the notoriously expensive purple murex dye, which symbolizes kingship in the heroic Greek setting and the negative connotations of kingship for Accius' audience.⁶³⁸ Though we cannot recover what item fr.5 describes,⁶³⁹ the combination of purple and gold seems to symbolise obscene wealth of Pelops as a motive for eliminating Chrysippus as a rival to the throne.

These luxury items may also signify effeminate opulence to Accius' audience (186-40 BC), given that women's access to purple dye and gold had been restricted in the *Lex Oppia* of 215 BC, which had been repealed in 195 BC.⁶⁴⁰ Indeed, at the founding of the Republic, Lucius Junius Brutus restricted the wearing of gold and

⁶³⁵ Accius 6 Ribbeck. Accius 1 Ribbeck suggests an emotional reaction or an act of daring, but it is impossible to attribute to any character as it fits so many elements of the story: *stimulove meum cor* (or I goad my heart).

⁶³⁶ Accius 5 Ribbeck. In Seneca's *Thyestes* Thyestes reclines on purple and gold having been tempted into sharing the throne and having unknowingly eaten his own children, reiterating the idea of dangerous wealth that Accius' serpentine imagery conveys here (Sen. *Thy.* 909).

⁶³⁷ Cf. '*Squalere*' . . . *dictum a squamarum crebritate asperitateque*. . . . Accius in *Pelopidis* . . . —('Squalere' . . . is a term derived from dense quantity and roughness of 'squamae.' . . . Accius in *Pelops' Sons* . . . —) (Gell. *N.A.* 2. 6. 23).

⁶³⁸ In Homer's *Iliad* King Agamemnon wears purple (Hom. *Il.* 8. 221; 24. 796) cf. Reinhold 1970 p.16.

⁶³⁹ Baldarelli suggests that this fragment describes the scabbard of the sword Thyestes dropped when raping Pelopeia, which provided a recognition token for Aegisthus. But the item cannot be recovered. Whilst Baldarelli's suggestion of a recognition token seems likely given its preciousness, this could just as easily be a description of Chrysippus' recognition token when reunited with Pelops (2004 p. 278).

⁶⁴⁰ Livy. 34.1; 31.4-8. Cf. Reinhold 1970 p.41.

purple to feast days having abolished the royal insignia.⁶⁴¹ As Reinhold points out, the Imperial stigma associated with purple persisted throughout the second century.⁶⁴² Therefore the gold and purple scales in Accius' fragment associate the insidious snake with the dangers of royal power.

Moreover, as Knox made clear when discussing the *Aeneid*, Latin literature associates snakes not only with violent attacks⁶⁴³ and striking out from hiding,⁶⁴⁴ but also with rebirth, due to the sloughing of their skin.⁶⁴⁵ Therefore fr.513 suggests an insidious form of violence that renews itself. The purple and gold scales reflect the ancestral burden of kingship, which also generates a new king, rather than specifying either king Pelops or Chrysippus alone. The preciousness of the scales in fr.513 becomes a literary trope; as Ogden points out *drakontes* themselves serve as treasure, which suggests that the serpent here could serve as an analogy for dangerous wealth.⁶⁴⁶

Thus far, the most consistent feature of Atreus and Thyestes' inherent guilt is the wrath of Myrtilus. Myrtilus seems to appear in Sophocles', Euripides' and Accius' *Oenomaus* alike, whilst Myrtilus' chariot race for Hippodameia was depicted in fourth-century Greek art that intervened.⁶⁴⁷ Grandfather Tantalus' guilt is staged by Sophocles alone and seems thematically detached from the Thyestean feast because Hermes' oracle suggests the tale of Pandareus' dog, the punishment of the suspended boulder appears more popular in that period and Tantalus dehydrates rather than starves.

But from Euripides on, questions also arise about the guilt of Atreus and Thyestes themselves. Euripides' *Pleisthenes* suggests a dispute after the feast and *Chrysippus* does not seem to include Thyestes and Atreus. What these plays do illustrate is the wide and varied tradition the Thyestes tragedies were a part of; as the Tantalid myth developed, so did the backstory of Atreus and Thyestes as they conspire to kill Chrysippus in the *Pelopidae* tragedies of Lycophron and Accius. In the fragments

⁶⁴¹ Dion. Hal. 4.74. Cf. Olson 2017 p.125f.

⁶⁴² Reinhold 1970 p.42. Cf. Cic. *Verr.* 2.2.13.31; 33.86-7; 52. 137-8; *Cat.* 2.5; *Pro Cael.* 77 cf. Plin. *HN.* 9.63. 137, Plut. *Tib Gracch.* 14.

⁶⁴³ Knox 1963 p.380 e.g. Luc. 9.730-892, Stat. *Theb.* 5.520 ff., Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.101, Ov. *Met.* 3.77 ff.; 11.56, *Her.* 6.98; 7.163.

⁶⁴⁴ Knox 1963 p. 380 e.g Cic. *Vat.* 2, Vir. *Ecl.* 3.93; *Georg.* 2.216; 3.544, Ov. *Met.* 3.31; 4.601; 11.775, *Pont.* 3.3.102, Luc. 9.837.

⁶⁴⁵ Knox 1963 p. 380 e.g. Ov. *Met.* 9.266; *Ars. Am.* 3.77, Lucr. 3.614, Tibull. 1.4.35, Luc. 9.718.

⁶⁴⁶ E.g. Vir. *Aen.* 5.87, Ov. *Met.* 3.32; 15. 669, Stat. *Theb.* 5.510-11. Cf. Ogden 2012 pp.176-7.

⁶⁴⁷ See ch.2 pp.101-106.

of both *Pelopidae* tragedies the dangerous position of kingship is emphasised, a motif that clearly applies to Thyestes' *cena*.⁶⁴⁸

Pelops in Accius' *Atreus: Fragmentum ex Fabula Incerta*

Having considered each of Accius' Tantalid plays, we are now well placed to consider an unattributed fragment of Accius. For Accius not only adapted Pelops' crime in his *Oenomaus*, but he also recapitulates it in a separate play dealing with the Tantalids:

quinam Tantalidarum internecioni modus paretur,
aut quaenam umquam ob mortem Myrtili
poenis luendis dabitur satias supplici?

Where shall the Tantalids' vendetta end?
What penalty for Myrtilus' murder
Shall ever glut the appetite of vengeance?⁶⁴⁹

Warmington suggests that this fragment could befit *Atreus*, *Pelopidae* or *Oenomaus*, presumably based on the mythological content,⁶⁵⁰ whilst Baldarelli suggests the mention of Myrtilus' curse best fits *Oenomaus*.⁶⁵¹ However, should fr.7 come from *Oenomaus* it would need to appear at the end of the play in order to reflect back on Pelops' murder of Myrtilus. According to the myth of *Oenomaus*, Pelops typically wins Pelopeia's hand and prospers; thus this lament is ill-suited to the ending of Accius' *Oenomaus*.

As Gagné points out, however, this lament could appear in Accius' *Atreus* or *Pelopidae*.⁶⁵² Yet, Cicero's interlocutor Cotta introduces fr.7 when making the case that divine justice perpetuates revenge:

Quem vos praeclare defenditis, cum dicitis eam vim deorum esse ut etiamsi quis
morte poenas sceleris effugerit expetantur eae poenae a liberis a nepotibus a
posteris. O miram aequitatem deorum: ferretne civitas ulla latorem istius modi
legis, ut condemnaretur filius aut nepos si pater aut avus deliquisset?

And how remarkably you champion his cause, when you declare that the divine power is such that even if a person has escaped punishment by dying, the punishment is visited on his children and grandchildren and their descendants! What a remarkable instance of the divine justice! Would any state tolerate a lawgiver who should enact that a son or grandson was to be sentenced for the transgression of a father or grandfather?⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁸ Chrysippus is never named in Seneca's *Thyestes*, though Antoniadis suggests that Seneca's *Atreus* and *Thyestes* are twins who have already killed Chrysippus at Sen. *Thy.* 220-44, this is not fully supported by the text (2016 p.535).

⁶⁴⁹ Ribbeck² 7 (*Pelop.*4)= Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.90.

⁶⁵⁰ Accius 19-21 Warmington.

⁶⁵¹ Baldarelli 2004 p. 49.

⁶⁵² Gagné 2013 p.51.

⁶⁵³ Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.90.

I suggest Accius' *Pelopidae* is no such revenge drama because the murder of Chrysippus apparent in fr.2-6 is a tactical killing ordered by his stepmother Hippodamia.

Instead, fr.7 better suits a revenge tragedy such as Accius' *Atreus*, which the audience know will be answered with Thyestes' rape of Pelopeia and the birth of Aegisthus following Ennius' *Thyestes*. Moreover, Atreus features as the king of Mycenae, thus his revenge is framed as justice by virtue of his status, which better reflects Cotta's critique of unjust lawgivers. Moreover, fr.7 presents a thematic link with the feast in *satis* (enough/ ample): Warmington's translation "glut the appetite of vengeance," captures the connection between satisfaction and satiety.⁶⁵⁴ Thus I suggest that fr.7 befits the revenger cycle set out in Accius' *Atreus* and the ancestral crime of Pelops.

Overall, in the Roman *ludi* Accius not only drew on Greek sources to stage *Chrysippus* and *Oenomaus*, but also related the guilt of Atreus and Thyestes as fratricides in his *Pelopidae*, drawing inspiration from Lycophron. As a result, we can assert that Myrtilus' wrath was the steadfast feature of inherent guilt in the Tantalid tradition and may have featured in *Atreus*, whilst the remaining plays exploited the range of variants at hand.

Seneca's Prologue

On the other hand, references to inherent guilt in Seneca's famous *Thyestes* prologue take a completely different tone. The prologue is an exchange between Tantalus' ghost and a Fury dragging him from the underworld to plague his household, casting him as an active agent in the ensuing action:

iam nostra subit
e stirpe turba quae suum vincat genus
ac me innocentem faciat et inausa audeat. regione quidquid impia cessat loci
complebo; numquam stante Pelopea domo
Minos vacabit.

Now from my stock there is rising a crew that will outdo its own family,
make me innocent and dare the undared.
Any space unused in the quarter of unnatural crimes I shall fill up; while the
House of Pelops stands, Minos will never be empty-handed.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵⁴ s.v. *OLD satis*.

⁶⁵⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 18-22.

Tantalus' Ghost explains his own role as the origin of the family's guilt, describing it as the house of Pelops to implicate his son's crime in addition to his own and allude to the characters as Pelops' sons.

To that end, Seneca's Fury also alludes to the variants of Tantalus' crime that thematically foreshadow Thyestes' feast, Tantalus' cooking of Pelops and his starvation punishment:⁶⁵⁶

patrios polluat sanguis focus,
epulae instruantur. **non novi sceleris tibi
conviva venies.**
iterum dedimus diem
tuamque ad istas solvimus mensas famem:
ieiunia exple!

Now let cauldrons foam with fires lit beneath them, let rent limbs go piece by piece, let blood pollute the ancestral hearth, let a banquet be furnished. You will **join the diners at a crime that is not new to you.** We have given you a day of freedom, and released your hunger for this meal: **fill up your fasting!**⁶⁵⁷

The cooking of Pelops is introduced as a crime to be repeated in the jussive subjunctives of the sequence. Tantalus witnesses Thyestes' feast as a twisted respite from his starvation punishment: a punishment for the same type of infanticidal forced cannibalism. In contrast to the disparate plays that Sophocles, Euripides and Accius staged on each generation, Seneca assimilates Tantalus' cooking of Pelops to Atreus' infanticidal feast in his "dramatically detached" yet programmatic prologue.⁶⁵⁸

The festal variant of the myth Seneca chooses to dramatise draws heavily on the preceding tradition of Latin poetry, allowing him to flout poetic convention in the medium of recitation drama. Statius revived Tantalus' cooking of Pelops,⁶⁵⁹ while Tantalus' starvation punishment had become wildly popular with pseudo-Lucilius who confounds the two myths to have Tantalus reach an unobtainable *cena* as opposed to the traditional fruit tree and water.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁶ The thematic connection has been well noted: Braginton 1933 p.30, Boyle 1997 p.54, Davis 2003 p.93, Schiesaro 2003 pp.45ff, Erasmo 2006 p.197, Boyle 2017 p.ciii.

⁶⁵⁷ Sen. *Thy.* 59-63.

⁶⁵⁸ Sampson 2018 p.16. cf. Hine 1981 p.272, Schiesaro 1994 pp.196-205.

⁶⁵⁹ Stat. *Theb.* 1.246-7; 11. 126-9 1C AD cf. Greek predecessors Polybius. 4.7 (2C BC), and contemporaries Apoll. T 13.31. Jones, [Phaed] *Fab.* T 7.5. Perotti. (1C AD)

⁶⁶⁰ 1C BC Elegy: Propert. 2.64-6 (food); 4.24 (water), Tibull. 1.77 (water), so too Hor. *Sat.* 1.68 (water); *Ep.* 17.65-6 (food) and Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 1.10 (water) 1C AD epic: Stat. *Theb.* 7.51 (water); 6. 281 (water and fruit) [Lucilius] *Aetna.* 80-3 (drink and banquet), Ov. *Her.* 18.181-2, *Met.* 4. 458-60 (water and fruit) 10.41-2 (water) and *Ars.*

Here Seneca has already connected the feast of Pelops to Thyestes' *cena* and reiterates the starvation motif as a traditional *locus horridus* of the retreating pool and fruit tree as Tantalus pines:

Ad stagna et amnes et recedentes aquas
labrisque ab ipsis arboris plenae fugas.
abire in atrum carceris liceat mei
cubile;

To the pools and rivers and retreating waters, and the full tree's recoil from my very lips. Give me leave to return to my prison's black lair,⁶⁶¹ Tantalus considers the canonised *locus horridus* of the underworld preferable to Atreus' cannibalistic *cena*, thus Atreus' grandfather Tantalus amplifies the repulsiveness of Atreus' revenge by speaking from experience. In this way, Seneca is able to add authority to this established mythical variant by having the Fury relate Tantalus' cooking of Pelops and having Tantalus reflect on his punishment when faced with the prospect of things to come. Here Seneca relates the poetic motif of Tantalus' cannibalistic crime and starvation punishment through *suasoria*-style dialogues of Tantalus and the Fury themselves, in order to entertain an elite recitation audience.

Moreover, Tantalus incorporates a second canonical crime when resisting his role in the demise of his house:

Me pati **poenas** decet,
non esse **poenam!** mittor ut dirus vapor
tellure rupta vel gravem populis luem
sparsura pestis? ducam in horrendum nefas
avus nepotes? **magne divorum parens
nosterque (quamvis pudeat), ingenti licet
taxata poena lingua crucietur loquax,
nec hoc tacebo.** Moneo, ne sacra manus
violare caede neve furiali malo
aspergite aras. stabo et arcebo scelus.

My proper role is to suffer **punishments**, not to *be* a **punishment!** Am I sent forth like some dread exhalation from a fissure in the earth, or as a plague to scatter foul contagion among the nations? As grandfather am I to lead my grandchildren into terrible evil? **Great father of the gods—my father too, even if ashamed of it: though my tongue is assessed a huge penalty and tortured for being talkative, I shall not keep quiet about *this* either.** I warn you, do not defile your hands with accursed bloodshed, and do not sprinkle the altars with the evil of avenging fury. I shall stand and block the crime.⁶⁶²

Am. 605-6 (water and fruit); *Am.* 2.2.43-4 (water and fruit). 1C AD novel: *Pet. Sat.* 82 (water and fruit).

⁶⁶¹ *Sen. Thy.* 68-70.

⁶⁶² *Sen. Thy.* 87-95.

Here Tantalus struggles against the cycle of inherent guilt he has initiated with rhetorical flourishes such as the polyptoton (*poenas/ poenam*) to reflect the antithesis of punisher and punished alongside rhetorical questions. As Schiesaro notes, Tantalus introduces another of his crimes to reason his position by contraries, claiming that he is being punished for disclosing the gods' secrets as suggested in Euripides' *Orestes*; yet Seneca's Tantalus promises to repeat this crime in order to save his family from punishment.⁶⁶³ Thus Seneca introduces another Tantalid crime to add rhetorical effect and novelty for his listeners and to position Atreus under the rule of divine forces, which we will consider in more detail at the end of this chapter.

Ch 2.1: Conclusion

Having considered the dramatisation of ancestral crimes in the Tantalid tragedies, it becomes clear that the Greek tragedians drew on different strands of myth in each tragedy to offer novel takes on well-known myths. Euripides developed plays on lesser-known characters such as *Pleisthenes* and *Chrysippus*, whilst Accius developed not only Chrysippus' abduction but also Chrysippus' murder by Thyestes and Atreus in *Pelopidae*. Sophocles, Euripides, Ennius and Accius all staged the death of Myrtilus in their respective *Oenomaus* plays, a variant canonised in tragedy. By contrast, Seneca prioritises the crimes of Tantalus by having his Ghost appear in the prologue, recalling the crimes that best fit the upcoming action of his children and Tantalus' own rhetoric against the gods. This reflects the new tradition Seneca draws on and the recitation/episodic performance modes he is working in: in Seneca's *Thyestes* Tantalus' crimes beget Atreus' revenge feast first and foremost, with scant references to Myrtilus which we will discuss in the next chapter, whereas in the pre-Senecan tragedies the guilt from Myrtilus' death is more prominent.

⁶⁶³ Eur. *Or.* 1-4, Schiesaro 1994 p.204.

2.2 Inherent Guilt

The curse of Myrtilus seems to have been the most consistently dramatised ancestral crime in Greco-Roman tragedy before Seneca. It would thus be prominent in the minds of a pre-Senecan audience. However, tragedians not only dramatised ancestral crimes as plots, but also alluded to them to characterise the criminals' descendants. Therefore, attention will now turn to how these ancestral crimes are recalled as inherent guilt in extant tragedies on Thyestes' descendants to advance the action and reflect the motives of their characters. I shall then compare how tragedians introduce inherent guilt and apply these trends to both the fragmentary Thyestes plays and Seneca's extant *Thyestes*.

Sophocles' *Electra*

Sophocles' *Electra*, for example, deals with the consequences of Atreus' son Agamemnon's death. The action centres on Orestes' return from Phocis and his plotting with Electra to avenge their father Agamemnon, by killing their mother Clytemnestra. The Old Slave's prologue introduces Orestes' return and emphasises the theme of revenge as an ancestral duty:

ὦ τοῦ στρατηγήσαντος ἐν Τροίᾳ ποτὲ
Ἀγαμέμνονος παῖ, νῦν ἐκεῖν' ἔξεστί σοι
παρόντι λεύσσειν, ὦν πρόθυμος ἦσθ' ἀεί.
τὸ γὰρ παλαιὸν Ἄργος οὐπόθεις τόδε,
[...]οἶ δ' ἰκάνομεν,
φάσκειν Μυκῆνας τὰς πολυχρύσους ὄρᾶν,
πολύφθορόν τε δῶμα Πελοπιδῶν τόδε,
ὅθεν σε πατρός ἐκ φονῶν ἐγὼ ποτε
πρὸς σῆς ὀμαίμου καὶ κασιγνήτης λαβῶν
ἦνεγκα κάξέσωσα κάξεθρεψάμην
τοσόνδ' ἐς ἥβης, πατρὶ τιμωρὸν φόνου.

Son of Agamemnon who once led the army before Troy, now you can gaze with your own eyes on what you have always longed to see! This is the **ancient Argos** for which you used to long, [...] **you may say that you see Mycenae, rich in gold, and the house of the sons of Pelops here, rich in disasters**, from which I once carried you, after your father's murder, receiving you from your own sister, and kept you safe and raised you up to this stage of youthful vigour, **to avenge your father's murder**.⁶⁶⁴

The Old Slave addresses Orestes by his lineage before his name, he introduces the estranged homeland conflating Argos and Mycenae,⁶⁶⁵ he associates the wealth of the family with their suffering and, finally, he tasks Orestes with the duty of avenging his

⁶⁶⁴ Soph. *El.* 1-14.

⁶⁶⁵ Cf. Soph. *El.* 651, 1458-9.

father. All of these elements set up the theme of ancestral suffering without revealing detail, as we might expect a character close to the family to do, but the final challenge is the most interesting element.

The Old Slave's challenge for Orestes to avenge his father is particularly gendered. Though daughters may defend the honour of their families, as indeed Electra goes on to do, this is a warrior's challenge. The only other such ultimatum in Sophocles' extant tragedies emerges at the outset of *Philoctetes*. Here Odysseus addresses Neoptolemus by his lineage before his name:

ἔνθ', ὃ κρᾶτίστου πατρὸς Ἑλλήνων τραφεῖς
Ἀχιλλέως παῖ Νεοπτόλεμε

Here it was, you who were reared as the son of the noblest father among the Greeks, son of Achilles, Neoptolemus⁶⁶⁶
Having introduced Neoptolemus to his childhood home of Lemnos and in so doing emphasised the paternal nobility Neoptolemus must uphold, Odysseus has primed Neoptolemus to then task him with stealing Philoctetes' bow.⁶⁶⁷ Therefore thematically Orestes' challenge introduces inherent guilt, but structurally it provides a warrior's challenge, gendering his paternal duty as a warrior king's son.

Indeed, Orestes and Neoptolemus are not only both evoked by their fathers' names but they are both also tasked at a young age, allowing the Old Slave and Odysseus to manipulate the young warriors with a coming-of-age trial. Falkner has made the case that the elder manipulating the youth in Euripides' *Orestes* was inspired by Odysseus' manipulation of the young Neoptolemus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, but fails to recognise the same manipulation motif in Sophocles' own *Electra*.⁶⁶⁸ Yet in both Sophocles' *Electra* and his *Philoctetes*, the young warriors are persuaded by the voice of experience; Odysseus is a Trojan war veteran and prolific manipulator,⁶⁶⁹ whilst the Old Slave is Orestes' family tutor (παιδαγωγός), and as such seems to be a precursor for Euripides' Old Man, a stock character who arranges revenge.⁶⁷⁰

Though the older characters are both manipulators, their own experience pertains to each challenge. Odysseus tasks Neoptolemus with the theft of Philoctetes'

⁶⁶⁶ Soph. *Phil.* 3-4.

⁶⁶⁷ Soph. *Phil.* 1-25.

⁶⁶⁸ Falkner 1983 p.290.

⁶⁶⁹ Cf. Kirkwood's discussion of Odysseus' persuasion as an unheroic character trait, nonetheless this is a challenge for Neoptolemus to prove himself as a hero (1994 pp.429-30).

⁶⁷⁰ See ch.1 p.22 e.g. Eur. *Ion* 925-1048; *El.* 596-646; *IA* 1-162.

bow, a deceit in war that runs contrary to Neoptolemus' nature and his father's nature before him,⁶⁷¹ but befits Odysseus' character.⁶⁷² By contrast, the Old Slave is a "veteran" of the House of Atreus, thus he tasks Orestes with his blood-duty to avenge his father's murder, whilst leaving the details to Orestes himself as future king.⁶⁷³ Odysseus coerces Neoptolemus against his nature, whereas the Old Slave bids Orestes fulfil his familial role as avenger and thus, as an Atreid.

Sophocles then contrasts this scene with a female view of inherent guilt as Electra defends her grief to the chorus:

νήπιος ὃς τῶν οἰκτρῶς
οἰχομένων γονέων ἐπιλάθεται.
ἀλλ' ἐμέ γ' ἄστονόεσσ' ἄραρεν φρένας,
~~ἂ~~ Ἴτυν αἰὲν Ἴτυν ὀλοφύρεται,
ὄρνις ἀτυζομένα, Διὸς ἄγγελος.
ὦ παντλάμων Νιόβα, σὲ δ' ἔγωγε νέμω θεόν,
ἄτ' ἐν τάφῳ πετραίῳ,
αἰαῖ, δακρύεις.

Foolish is he who forgets the piteous end of parents! Ever in my mind is the lamenting one, **she who mourns always for Itys, for Itys, she the bird distraught**, the messenger of Zeus! **Ah, Niobe who endured every sorrow, I regard you as a goddess, you who in your rocky tomb**, alas, lament!⁶⁷⁴

Electra's evocation of the nightingale recalls Procne's metamorphosis having cooked her son Itys and served his flesh to her husband Tereus, a female parallel of Atreus' infanticidal forced cannibalism, which, as discussed above, was adapted by Sophocles in his *Tereus*.⁶⁷⁵ Though the maternal imagery that Procne and Niobe suggest has been noted, many neglect to mention both how Procne's infanticidal forced cannibalism recalls Electra's grandfather Atreus' feast for Thyestes and Electra's relation to Niobe, Tantalus' daughter who lost her children through hubris.⁶⁷⁶

Thus Sophocles genders Electra's view of inherent guilt by drawing parallels between her father's demise and the punishment of these mothers, whilst Electra seems oblivious to the infanticidal connection between these women's crimes and her

⁶⁷¹ Soph. *Phil.* 89.

⁶⁷² Soph. *Phil.* 96-9.

⁶⁷³ Soph. *El.* 20-3.

⁶⁷⁴ Soph. *El.* 145-52.

⁶⁷⁵ The chorus proceed to refer to Electra as a nightingale Soph. *El.* 106-7; 1077-80.

⁶⁷⁶ Cf. Sorum 1982 pp.207-9, Wheeler 2003 pp.381-2.

grandfather Atreus' crime.⁶⁷⁷ Instead, Electra focuses on the loss of the child and, as Mueller points out, Electra assumes the maternal role of Niobe when cradling her little brother Orestes' urn and wishing to join him in death.⁶⁷⁸ Nor does Electra realise the ancestral significance of Clytemnestra's victory feast: "the abominable feast that bears my father's [Agamemnon's] name" (πατρός τὴν δυστάλαιναν δαῖτ' ἐπωνομασμένην).⁶⁷⁹ Though the perverse feasting and revenge motifs allude to Atreus' revenge feast, rather than recognizing the frame of inherent guilt Electra focuses on her mother's maternal malpractice and her own role as an *ersatz* mother for Orestes: her view is domestic and immediate.

The chorus of Argive women underscores this gendered view, by emphasising the domestic context of Electra's inherent guilt:

οὔτοι σοὶ μούνα,
τέκνον, ἄχος ἐφάνη βροτῶν,
πρὸς ὃ τι σὺ τῶν ἔνδον εἶ περισσά,
οἷς ὁμόθεν εἶ καὶ γονᾶ ξύναιμος,
οἷα Χρυσόθεμις ζῶει καὶ Ἰφιάνασσα,
κρυπτᾶ τ' ἀγέων ἐν ἦβᾳ
ὄλβιος, ὃν ἀ κλεινὰ
γᾶ ποτε Μυκηναίων
δέξεται **εὐπατρίδαν**, Διὸς εὐφροني
βήματι μολόντα τάνδε γᾶν Ὀρέσταν.

Not to you alone among mortals, my child, has sorrow been made manifest, a **sorrow that you suffer beyond others in the house with whom you share your lineage and your blood**, such as Chrysothemis and Iphianassa—and Orestes, he who is happy in his youth concealed from painful things, he whom the famous land of the Mycenaeans shall receive, **glorious in his ancestry**, when he comes to this land, brought by the kindly aid of Zeus.⁶⁸⁰

Here the chorus unpacks the various symbolic associations of the family: the *oikos* as a physical house and a household of relatives, the concept of lineage and the ties of familial blood. So, whilst Orestes' view of inherent guilt triggers action, Electra's view of inherent guilt is reflective and domestic. Electra discusses cannibalism and

⁶⁷⁷ This is characteristic of what Torrance describes as Electra's "failure to engage with or "recognise" her own mythological role," as Electra complains at having to weave her own clothes (2011 p.181).

⁶⁷⁸ Soph. *El.* 150-2, 1165, 1145; Mueller 2015 p.123. cf. Finkelberg considers Electra's maternal role in light of the textual variant at Soph.*El.*187 which can be read as: *τεκέων* distinguishing Electra as a parent or *τοκέων* distinguishing Electra as an orphan (2003 pp.368-76).

⁶⁷⁹ Soph. *El.* 282-6.

⁶⁸⁰ Soph. *El.* 153-63. cf. Soph. *El.* 1070-3, again the chorus focus on the sickness of the *οἶκος* and its impact on the children.

infanticide without acknowledging their thematic connections to her ancestors' crimes and is encouraged to endure with her sisters by the female chorus.

Again we see Orestes unwittingly incorporating ancestral crimes in his own actions when devising a lie about his death:

ἄγγελλε δ' ὄρκον προστιθεὶς ὀθοῦνεκα
τέθνηκ' Ὀρέστης ἐξ ἀναγκαίας τύχης,
ἄθλοισι Πυθικοῖσιν ἐκ τροχηλάτων

and tell them, speaking on oath, that Orestes is dead by an accident, having fallen from his moving chariot in the Pythian games.⁶⁸¹

Here Orestes' lie not only alludes to his visit to Delphi where, as he has just explained, Apollo prophesised Agamemnon's revenge,⁶⁸² but also evokes the Oenomaus story. Here Orestes unknowingly assumes the role of his great-grandfather Oenomaus and, just as his grandfather Pelops betrayed Myrtilus with a false oath, so does Orestes secure the tale of his death with a false oath. Orestes uses the story of his ancestor's crime to avenge his own father, begetting more bloodshed.

Indeed, having dissuaded Chrysothemis from making Clytemnestra's libations, the chorus explicitly cites Pelops' murder of Myrtilus as the cause of current strife:

ὦ Πέλοπος ἄ πρόσθεν
πολύπονός ἰππεία,
ὡς ἔμολες αἰανῆς
τᾷδε γᾶ.
εὔτε γὰρ ὁ ποντισθεὶς
Μυρτίλος ἐκοιμάθη,
παγχρύσων δίφρων
δυστάνοις αἰκείαις
πρόρριζος ἐκριφθεὶς,
οὔ τί πω
ἔλιπεν ἐκ τοῦδ' οἴκου
πολύπονός αἰκεία.

O ride of Pelops long ago, **bringer of many sorrows**, how dire was your effect upon this land! **For since Myrtilus fell asleep, plunged into the sea**, hurled headlong from the golden chariot with cruel torment, **never yet has the torment of many troubles departed from this house.**⁶⁸³

As Parker points out, “no moral conclusion or interpretation is offered” but I suggest the impact of inherent guilt becomes clear when Clytemnestra appears to confront Electra.⁶⁸⁴ From this moment onwards the chariot racing is also compounded with the

⁶⁸¹ Soph. *El.* 44-50.

⁶⁸² Soph. *El.* 32-4.

⁶⁸³ Soph. *El.* 504-15.

⁶⁸⁴ Parker 1993 p.18.

imagery of a family tree, which, according to Chrysothemis, emerged in Clytemnestra's dream and compelled her to send out the libations.

Chrysothemis describes the dream as follows:

λόγος τις αὐτήν ἐστὶν εἰσιδεῖν πατρὸς
τοῦ σοῦ τε κάμοῦ δευτέραν ὀμιλίαν
ἐλθόντος ἐς φῶς· εἶτα τόνδ' ἐφέστιον
πῆξαι λαβόντα σκῆπτρον οὐφόρει ποτὲ
αὐτός, τανῦν δ' Αἴγισθος· ἔκ τε τοῦδ' ἄνω
βλαστεῖν βρύοντα θαλλόν, ᾧ κατάσκιον
πᾶσαν γενέσθαι τὴν Μυκηναίων χθόνα.
τοιαῦτά του παρόντος, ἠνίχ' Ἥλιω
δείκνυσι τοῦναρ, ἔκλυον ἐξηγουμένου.
πλείω δὲ τούτων οὐ κάτοιδα, πλὴν ὅτι
πέμπει μ' ἐκείνη τοῦδε τοῦ φόβου χάριν.

They say that she was once more in company with your father and mine, who had come to the world of light; and then he took the staff which he used to carry, and which Aegisthus carries now, and planted it beside the hearth; and from it grew up a fruitful bough, which overshadowed all the land of the Mycenaeans. That is the story I heard from someone who was present when she told her dream to the Sun. But I know no more than this, except that it is because of this fear that she is sending me.⁶⁸⁵

Here Clytemnestra's guilt is evident in the dream, which, like Clytemnestra's dream in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, is allegedly sent by the gods. But unlike Aeschylus, Sophocles includes Chrysothemis to relate the content of her mother's dream; she describes how Agamemnon's ancestral sceptre flourishes. The sceptre symbolises the royal family's ancestral crimes and foreboding power, yet sprouts anew, suggesting that future generations will repeat these crimes. It provides a warning to Clytemnestra and, once reported, signals the trajectory of inherent guilt.⁶⁸⁶ This may have been particularly clear to Sophocles' audience given the aetiology of Agamemnon's sceptre in the *Iliad*, which traces its trajectory from Hephaestus to each generation in turn, without burdening it with the crimes of each owner.⁶⁸⁷

The content of the dream sets Sophocles' Clytemnestra apart from Aeschylus', by attaching her fears to a prop that will be seen on stage; when Aegisthus enters with the sceptre Clytemnestra's fears are made manifest.⁶⁸⁸ Bowman compares this dream with Astyages' dream in Herodotus' *Histories* in which Astyages' daughter grows a

⁶⁸⁵ Soph. *El.* 417-27.

⁶⁸⁶ Hom. *Il.* 2.100-09.

⁶⁸⁷ Hom. *Il.* 2.100-09. Cf. Brown on the correlation between Agamemnon's sceptre and the use of his patronymic to mark his authority in the *Iliad* (2006 pp.21-36).

⁶⁸⁸ Soph. *El.* 420; 1448.

vine from her genitals that overshadows his kingdom.⁶⁸⁹ In each case, Bowman equates the vine to a progeny of the female genitals or Agamemnon's family sceptre, a progeny that threatens the dreamer as Orestes and Electra will due to their paternal loyalty.⁶⁹⁰ Though Bowman goes on to compare Clytemnestra's and Astyages' view of the children as political threats rather than family members, she neglects to mention the parallels between Astyages' story and that of Agamemnon's father Atreus, former owner of the sceptre.⁶⁹¹

Harpagus fails to expose Astyages' grandson: Thyestes fails to expose Aegisthus successfully.⁶⁹² Astyages forces Harpagus to eat his son as a punishment: Atreus forces Thyestes to eat his sons.⁶⁹³ The narrative parallels are inexact, but the shared themes are clearly reflected in the image of the sceptre itself, particularly given that the *Iliad* names Atreus and Thyestes as previous owners of the sceptre.⁶⁹⁴ The sprouting sceptre particularly recalls Achilles' description of it in the *Iliad*:

ναὶ μὰ τὸδε σκῆπτρον, τὸ μὲν οὐ ποτε φύλλα καὶ ὄζους
 φύσει, [...] νῦν αὐτὲ μιν νῆες Ἀχαιῶν
 ἐν παλάμῃς φορέουσι δικασπόλοι, οἳ τε θέμιστας
 πρὸς Διὸς εἰρύεται·

In the name of this sceptre, which will never again bear leaf nor branch [...] now at last the sons of the Achaians carry it in their hands in state when they administer the justice of Zeus.⁶⁹⁵

Grethlein notes the dichotomy of nature and culture this description represents, but does not explore its subversion in the sprouting sceptre of tragedy, nor does he address the association of the sceptre with administering justice as Hammer does.⁶⁹⁶ Yet Sophocles' sprouting sceptre suggests a reversion to the original creation and use of the sceptre: the justice that Clytemnestra will receive at the hands of her children.

Indeed, once the sceptre dream has been related and the fictitious death race of Orestes has been heard,⁶⁹⁷ the chorus conflates the natural origins of the sceptre with the familial justice it now stands for, responding:

φεῦ φεῦ: τὸ πᾶν δὴ δεσπότηταισι τοῖς πάλαι

⁶⁸⁹ Bowman 1997 pp.139-40.

⁶⁹⁰ Bowman 1997 pp.140-1.

⁶⁹¹ Bowman 1997 p.142.

⁶⁹² See p.7.

⁶⁹³ Hdt. 1.119.

⁶⁹⁴ Hom. *Il.* 2.100-09.

⁶⁹⁵ Hom. *Il.* 1.234-9.

⁶⁹⁶ Grethlein 2008 pp.36-7, Hammer 1998 p.14.

⁶⁹⁷ Soph. *El.* 680-763.

πρόρριζον, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἔφθαρται γένος.

Alas, alas! The whole family of our ancient masters, it seems, is destroyed **root and branch**.⁶⁹⁸

The chorus continues to punctuate the action, deferring blame for Clytemnestra's offstage death by claiming:

τελοῦσ' ἀραί· ζῶσιν οἱ
γᾶς ὑπαὶ κείμενοι.
παλίρρυτον γὰρ αἴμ' ὑπεξαιροῦσι τῶν
κτανόντων
οἱ πάλαι θανόντες.
καὶ μὴν ἀρείσιν οἶδε· φοινία δὲ χεῖρ
στάζει θηγλῆς Ἄρεος, οὐδ' ἔχω ψέγειν.

The curses are at work! Those who lie beneath the ground are living, for the blood of the killers flows in turn, drained by those who perished long ago! Look, they are here! And a bloody hand drips with a sacrifice to Ares, nor can I find fault with it!⁶⁹⁹

Here the origin of the curses is at issue. Lloyd-Jones suggests that the curse refers to that of Myrtilus, though he admits that this episode is the origin of “woes” rather than a spoken curse.⁷⁰⁰ Sewell-Rutter has counter-argued that the curse refers to that spoken by Electra shortly before the *parodos*:

ὦ δῶμ' Αἴδου καὶ Περσεφόνης,
ὦ χθόνι' Ἑρμῆ καὶ πότνι' Ἄρά,
σεμναί τε θεῶν παῖδες Ἐρινύες,
αἱ τοὺς ἀδίκως θνήσκοντας ὀρᾶθ',

O house of Hades and Persephone, **O Hermes of the underworld and powerful Curse**, and Erinyes, revered children of the gods who look upon those wrongfully done to death,⁷⁰¹

However, here Electra seems to be evoking a far older curse than her own, distinguishing it from the Erinyes and Clytemnestra's adultery that follows. The mention of this Curse with Hermes in the same line emphasises his role, not only a chthonic god in the list, but more specifically as Myrtilus' father: a story already well known to Sophocles' audience.⁷⁰²

Thus Sewell-Rutter's evidence supports Lloyd-Jones' point; the Myrtilus episode is associated with Electra's explicitly spoken curse because she lists Hermes

⁶⁹⁸ Soph. *El.* 764-5. cf. Soph. *El.* 1508.

⁶⁹⁹ Soph. *El.* 1418-24.

⁷⁰⁰ Lloyd-Jones 1971 p.113.

⁷⁰¹ Soph. *El.* 110-13, Sewell-Rutter 2007 p.133.

⁷⁰² Soph. *El.* 505-15. See ch.2. pp.101-106.

and the Curse together in the list of chthonic deities.⁷⁰³ Electra invokes Hermes not simply as a guide to the underworld, but lists him among gods who avenge those killed unjustly (ἀδίκως θνήσκοντας), recalling Pelops' deception of Myrtilus and thus the inherent guilt that is passed down the generations to Electra herself. At the same time, Electra's failure to name Myrtilus affirms her characterisation as the unknowing Pelopid. She does not fully recognise Myrtilus' story as the chorus has and again seems unaware of references to her own ancestors' crimes.

Therefore, Sophocles consistently uses the choral odes to introduce themes of inherent guilt and contrast the chorus' awareness with Electra's ignorance. But more importantly, Sophocles' chorus of Argive women emphasises the domestic impact of inherent guilt, they develop their vision of it when they hear of Clytemnestra's dream, and they refer to Pelops' race yet fail to see its resonance in Orestes' lie. As a result, when the chorus of Argive women professes the curses to be "at work" in Orestes' slaughter of Clytemnestra, the audience is aware that this is the interpretation of a group of women, not an omniscient epic narrator. Thus the chorus' voice competes with Orestes' and Electra's perceptions of ancestral guilt as they contemplate the murder of Clytemnestra themselves.

Overall, Sophocles' *Electra* introduces a gendered view of inherent guilt, contrasting Electra's initial inaction with Orestes' action. Electra's concerns are domestic, she introduces ancestral crimes to the audience unwittingly and they do not spark action, but rather reflect her position in the troubled house. Orestes is introduced as an agent of his father's revenge, Orestes must kill Thyestes' son Aegisthus to avenge the murder of his father Agamemnon. The chorus, meanwhile, frame the plot with references to inherent guilt which develop following their exchanges with the characters, as they appropriate the tree image of Clytemnestra's dream and identify Electra as the Odrysian nightingale she compares herself to.⁷⁰⁴

Euripides' *Electra*

In contrast to Sophocles' gendered presentation of inherent guilt, Euripides' *Electra* focuses on the actions of its characters, often marginalizing inherent guilt to fleeting references. At the outset of the play the Farmer, Electra's husband, sketches the

⁷⁰³ Lloyd-Jones 1971 p.113; Sewell-Rutter 2007 p.133.

⁷⁰⁴ Cf. Suksi for an outline of the nightingale in Sophoclean tragedy, though Suksi associates the nightingale's tragic song with the tragic poet's work, she overlooks the immediate connection between Procne and Atreus' banquets (2001 pp.646-58).

preceding action:

κάκει μὲν ηἰτύχησεν· ἐν δὲ δώμασιν
θνήσκει γυναικὸς πρὸς Κλυταιμῆστρας δόλῳ
καὶ τοῦ Θυέστου παιδὸς Αἰγίσθου χερί.
χῶ μὲν παλαιὰ σκῆπτρα Ταντάλου λιπῶν
ὄλωλεν, Αἰγισθος δὲ βασιλεύει χθονός,
ἄλοχον ἐκείνου Τυνδαρίδα κόρην ἔχων.
οὗς δ' ἐν δόμοισιν ἔλιφ' ὄτ' ἐς Τροίαν ἔπλει,
ἄρσενά τ' Ὀρέστην θῆλύ τ' Ἥλέκτρας θάλος,
τὸν μὲν πατρὸς γεραῖος ἐκκλέπτει τροφεὺς
μέλλοντ' Ὀρέστην χερὸς ὑπ' Αἰγίσθου θανεῖν
Στροφίῳ τ' ἔδωκε Φωκέων ἐς γῆν τρέφειν·

In Troy his fortunes were good, but at home he was treacherously slain by his wife Clytaemestra and by the hand of **Thyestes' son, Aegisthus**. Now he has relinquished **the ancient sceptre of Tantalus** and is gone, and Aegisthus rules the land, having married Agamemnon's wife, **the daughter of Tyndareus**. As for the children he left behind when he sailed to Troy, his son Orestes and his daughter Electra, the old servant who raised Agamemnon **snatched Orestes away as Aegisthus was about to kill him**, sending him to Strophius in Phocis to raise.⁷⁰⁵

Here the events are linked with ancestral crimes through the reference to Aegisthus' father Thyestes, which anticipates Aegisthus' attack on Orestes as a response to Atreus' slaughter of Aegisthus' siblings.⁷⁰⁶ Clytemnestra is also evoked through the *kurios* she shares with Helen, as Tyndareus matched both his biological daughter Clytemnestra and his adopted daughter Helen to their husbands Agamemnon and Menelaus. Thus, the patronym alludes to the treachery of Orestes' maternal ancestry and emphasises the Farmer's distance as an outsider, relating the crimes of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus with loaded references to ancestral crimes rather than condemning royalty openly.

The most pressing reference to inherent guilt is the passing of Tantalus' sceptre to Aegisthus, which not only transfers the right to rule but also, unlike in Sophocles' *Electra*, is explicitly burdened with the demises of its previous owners. Thus Euripides uses the Farmer's prologue to evoke inherent guilt efficiently. The Farmer recalls the symbolic significance of the sceptre whilst outlining Aegisthus' and anticipating Orestes' revenge, neatly telescoping several generations' crimes and anticipating their impact.

Electra develops this association in a similarly efficient reference:

⁷⁰⁵ Eur. *El.* 9-19.

⁷⁰⁶ Cf. Electra's identification of Aegisthus as Thyestes' son: Eur. *El.* 771-3.

τεκοῦσα δ' ἄλλους παῖδας Αἰγίσθῳ πάρα
πάρεργ' Ὀρέστην κάμῃ ποιεῖται δόμων.

Begetting other children by Aegisthus, she treats Orestes and me as the house's illegitimate offspring.⁷⁰⁷

Euripides introduces the theme of illegitimate offspring threatening the place of legitimate children, clearly evoking Thyestes' bastards by Aërope.⁷⁰⁸ As with Sophocles' Electra, Euripides' Electra seems unaware of the significance of this reference. Though Electra's displacement is not developed with the introduction of the other children here, Electra is discarded from the royal line through her marriage to the Farmer, which is reflected in her destitute appearance with a withered body and cropped hair.⁷⁰⁹ Once more Euripides associates visual detail with inherent guilt in the briefest of references.

The chorus of Argive women also takes up such references following the murder of Clytemnestra, compounding the *miasma* of her bloodshed with the guilt that came before in a visual display:

ἀλλ' οἶδε μητρὸς νεοφόνους ἐν αἵμασιν
πεφυρμένοι βαίνουσιν ἐξ οἴκων πόδα.
[...] οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεὶς οἶκος ἀθλιώτερος
τῶν Τανταλείων οὐδ' ἔφυ ποτ' ἐκγόνων.

But here they are: **stained with their mother's newly shed blood**, they are coming out of the house!

[...] There is not—nor has there ever been—a house more wretched than the **offspring of Tantalus**.⁷¹⁰

Here the blood that covers the characters not only reflects their matricidal pollution, but their blighted *genos*. Therefore, Euripides does not gender responses to ancestral crime as Sophocles does, but rather evokes ancestral crime to add symbolic significance to visual cues on stage.

This technique culminates in the appearance of *dei ex machina* as the Dioscuri appear to assert the role of Apollo in Orestes' matricide and the role of Zeus hereafter.⁷¹¹ But most notably the god positions inherent guilt in a wider context of fate:

⁷⁰⁷ Eur. *El.* 62-3.

⁷⁰⁸ See ch.3. pp. 200-204.

⁷⁰⁹ Eur. *El.* 239-41.

⁷¹⁰ Eur. *El.* 1170-6. Cf. Electra evokes Zeus to ask him to pity his descendants Eur. *El.* 673.

⁷¹¹ Eur. *El.* 1245-9.

ΚΑΣΤΩΡ

κοινὰ πράξεις, κοινὸ δὲ πότμοι,
μία δ' ἀμφοτέρους
ἄτη πατέρων διέκναισεν.

Castor

Just as your acts were in common, so too were your **fates**, and it was a single ruin derived from your ancestors that has crushed you both.⁷¹²

This is the only instance in the play where πότμος is used and it carries a slightly different meaning from other words for fate in *Electra*. The Dioscuri use μοῖρα to interpret the role of the gods,⁷¹³ whilst both the characters and the chorus use τύχη to suggest happenstance.⁷¹⁴ Euripides' use of πότμος here calls to mind its epic use, invariably meaning “evil destiny” or “death,” particularly as the Dioscuri are epic heroes whose appearance underscores the mythical context of the tragedy.⁷¹⁵

So, in Euripides' *Electra* characters refer to the names of their ancestors at significant points in the action without fully revealing the details. They rely on the audience's ability to interpret the impact of Thyestes and Tantalus' crimes by adding symbolic significance to stage props such as the sceptre, and also the appearance of the Dioscuri. However, this does not mark a definitive shift in Euripides' presentation of inherent guilt, but rather shows Euripides introducing inherent guilt to bolster a particular narrative. For example, Euripides' *Electra* focuses on the injustice of how the children are displaced from their lineage and suffer under Aegisthus' rule, motivating Orestes' matricide. Euripides' *Orestes*, however, focuses on the immorality of Orestes' matricide within the family revenge cycle.

Euripides' *Orestes*

The prologue of *Orestes* is delivered by Electra and outlines the cycles of inherent guilt in far more detail than the Farmer's prologue in Euripides' *Electra* or the Old Slave's prologue in Sophocles' *Electra*:

ὁ γὰρ μακάριος (κοῦκ ὄνειδίζω τύχας)
Διὸς πεφυκῶς, ὡς λέγουσι, Τάνταλος
κορυφῆς ὑπερτέλλοντα δειμαίνων πέτρον
ἄερί ποτᾶται· καὶ τίνει ταύτην δίκην,
ὡς μὲν λέγουσιν, ὅτι θεοῖς ἄνθρωπος ὢν

⁷¹² Eur. *El.* 1305-7.

⁷¹³ Eur. *El.* 1248, 1301.

⁷¹⁴ Eur. *El.* 890, 892 (*Orestes*) 403, 758, 1185 (chorus).

⁷¹⁵ Hom. *Il.* 2.359; 4.170, 396; 6.412; 7.52; 11.197, 263; 20.337; *Od.* 2.250; 4.562; 19.550.

κοινῆς τραπέζης ἀξίωμ' ἔχων ἴσον,
 ἀκόλαστον ἔσχε γλῶσσαν, αἰσχίστην νόσον.
 οὗτος φυτεύει Πέλοπα, τοῦ δ' Ἄτρεὺς ἔφνυ,
 ᾧ στέμματα ξήνασ' ἐπέκλωσεν θεὰ
 ἔριν, Θυέστη πόλεμον ὄντι συγγόνῳ
 θέσθαι· τί τάρρητ' ἀναμετρήσασθαί με δεῖ;
 [ἔδαισε δ' οὖν νιν τέκν' ἀποκτείνας Ἄτρεὺς.]
 Ἄτρεως δέ (τὰς γὰρ ἐν μέσῳ σιγῶ τύχας)
 ὁ κλεινός, εἰ δὴ κλεινός, Ἀγαμέμνων ἔφνυ
 Μενελεύς τε Κρήσσης μητρὸς Ἀερόπης ἄπο.

Tantalus was a prosperous man (and I do not reproach him with his good fortune), the son of Zeus, **they say**: now he is **suspended in the clouds, in constant fear of a rock hanging above his head**. He pays this penalty, **so men say**, because though enjoying, as a mortal, **equal rank with the gods at their shared table, he had an unbridled tongue**, a most disgraceful malady. **This man begot Pelops, who was the father of Atreus**. For Atreus the Goddess, carding out her tufts of wool, spun **a destiny of strife**, that he should **make war on his brother Thyestes**. But why should I go over the shocking tale? [At any rate, Atreus killed Thyestes' children and made a feast for him.] To Atreus (I pass over intervening events) were born Agamemnon the glorious, if indeed glorious he is, and Menelaus: their mother was the Cretan Aërope.⁷¹⁶

Euripides' *Electra*, speaking as a Tantalid herself, traces her own ancestry and reveals Tantalus' crimes and punishment, neither of which are thematically associated with Thyestes' feast as we saw earlier.⁷¹⁷ Pelops' betrayal of Myrtilus is glossed to focus on Atreus in line 15, but many editors suggest this line is an interpolation, suggesting that *Electra* skims over the Thyestean feast and defers the blame for it to the fates.⁷¹⁸ Thus in *Electra*'s narrative each generation is less accountable than the last, as she states Tantalus' insult of the gods as an impetus of supernatural punishment for the house.

At the same time, *Electra* undermines this chain of causation with skeptical interjections (ὡς λέγουσι [...] ὡς μὲν λέγουσιν) treating her ancestors' crimes as hearsay rather than history. Whilst Wright points out that Euripides highlights characters' awareness of mythical variants, he discusses this on a narrative level rather than at character level, and thus typifies this as Euripidean metamythology without

⁷¹⁶ Eur. *Or.* 1-18.

⁷¹⁷ See ch.2. p.135.

⁷¹⁸ Murray (1913 p.192), Willink (1986 p.83) and Kovacs (2002 p.415-15) suggest this line 15 is an interpolation. West makes the case that the preceding line sets up the mention of this, despite labelling them unspeakable (1997 p.181). But the surrounding lines must have sufficiently alluded to the feast to provoke such an interpolation from a contemporary reader, thus the allusion to the feast in Euripides was clearly successful whether these lines were part of the original or added.

explaining precisely why each character undermines their ancestral story.⁷¹⁹ In *Iphigenia in Tauris* Orestes hedges his report of Calchas' prophecy because he is distanced in space; in *Helen* she doubts the stories others tell about her because she is isolated by her infamy, whereas in *Orestes* Electra is removed from her family history in time.⁷²⁰ Thus Electra's uncertainty reveals both her tragic lack of paternal figures to relate her ancestry and her reluctance to diminish her mother's responsibility for the murder of her father with supernatural input.

Yet Electra does recognise Helen's character flaws, rather than inherent guilt. Having manipulated Helen into sending her daughter Hermione away, Electra comments:

ὦ φύσις, ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ὡς μέγ' εἶ κακόν
 O inborn nature, what a curse you are to mankind! ⁷²¹

This opens her disparaging remarks on Helen's vanity, for failing to shave her hair in mourning for her sister Clytemnestra's death, but the gnomic statement itself reveals traits of Electra's belief that one's nature (φύσις), governs one's actions. This parallels the first lines of her prologue before she maps the genealogy:

Οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν δεινόν, ὃδ' εἰπεῖν ἔπος,
 οὐδὲ πάθος οὐδὲ ξυμφορὰ θεήλατος,
 ἦς οὐκ ἂν ἄραιτ' ἄχθος ἀνθρώπου φύσις.

There is virtually nothing horrific, no suffering, no god-sent affliction, whose burden man, being what he is, might not shoulder.⁷²²

Electra's focus is on φύσις rather than the unclear and uncertain imposition of divine punishment (ξυμφορὰ θεήλατος): she initially privileges both personal traits, like Helen's vanity and human nature in general (ἀνθρώπου φύσις), over inherent guilt.

But as in his *Electra*, Euripides attaches ancestral deeds to stage props and costume in his *Orestes*, developing the chorus' presentation of inherent guilt and as a result, changing Electra's mind. Euripides juxtaposes Orestes' fits of madness and the chorus' long reflection on the house blasted by the gods with the arrival of the prospering Atreid Menelaus, as the chorus cries:

τίνα ἴγάρ ἐτιῖ πάρος οἶκον ἄλ-

⁷¹⁹ Wright 2005 p.133. E.g. Eur. *IT* 534-6; *Hel.* 17-21, 926-8. metamythology is a term coined by Wright to describe Euripides' awareness of his position with regard to myth and his characters' engagement in their own mythmaking within and beyond the events of their tragedies (pp.133-58).

⁷²⁰ Eur. *IT* 534-6; *Hel.* 17-21, 926-8.

⁷²¹ Eur. *Or.* 126-7.

⁷²² Eur. *Or.* 1-2.

λον ἕτερον ἢ τὸν ἀπὸ θεογόνων γάμων,
τὸν ἀπὸ Ταντάλου, σέβεσθαί με χρή;
—καὶ μὴν βασιλεὺς ὄδε δὴ στείχει
Μενέλαος ἄναξ, πολὺς ἀβροσύνη,
δῆλος ὀρᾶσθαι τοῦ Τανταλιδῶν
ἐξ αἵματος ὄν.

But what other house
shall I rather honor than this, the house of Tantalus,
descended from marriage with the gods? But look, here comes king Menelaus,
resplendent in luxury: his looks mark him plainly as from the blood of the sons
of Tantalus.⁷²³

Euripides associates not only the family, but also the household with divine wrath, citing Tantalus as the impetus of the troubles to associate Menelaus' appearance, be it a family resemblance or regalia, with the troubled Tantalus.⁷²⁴ Here the reference to blood could work to distinguish Menelaus' physical appearance or royal status, to mark him with the stain of inherent crime despite his apparent prosperity.

Menelaus himself builds on this association when he encounters Orestes and realises the perverted state of rule:

MENEΛΑΟΣ
Ἀγαμέμνονος δὲ σκῆπτρ' ἐᾷ σ' ἔχειν πόλις;

ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ
πῶς, οἴτινες ζῆν οὐκ ἐῶσ' ἡμᾶς ἔτι;

Menelaus:
Does the city allow you to hold Agamemnon's sceptre?

Orestes:
Sceptre? They will not allow me even to live!⁷²⁵

Here the heirloom of the sceptre reemerges as a token of Orestes' blood right as Agamemnon's son and heir, while Menelaus fails to identify its role as a token of doom: every generation who held the sceptre suffered as did their progenies. Although in Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes* the sceptre never seems to feature on stage, given that Aegisthus does not enter alive, Euripides is able to make its absence conspicuous here and use it as shorthand for destructive power and wealth of the family. Therefore, with this reference, Euripides has Menelaus unwittingly emphasise the association between

⁷²³ Eur. *Or.* 345-51.

⁷²⁴ οἶκός extends beyond the physical palace to include the γένος, whereas δόμος is used to describe the physical house exclusively e.g. when Menelaus discovers the house is on fire, he does not simply identify with the building's symbolic associations but identifies it as a δόμος Eur. *Or.* 1574. s.v. Liddell and Scott οἶκός.

⁷²⁵ Eur. *Or.* 438-9.

the family's prolific wealth, status and suffering as he himself stands in royal dress.

Indeed, the chorus reiterates the ominous nature of the palace, the sceptre and the royal wealth after Menelaus has forsaken Orestes:

ὁ μέγας ὄλβος ἅ τ' ἀρετὰ
μέγα φρονοῦσ' ἀν' Ἑλλάδα καὶ
παρὰ Σιμωντίοις ὄχετοῖς
πάλιν ἀνῆλθ' ἐξ εὐτυχίας Ἀτρείδαις
πάλαι παλαιᾶς ἀπὸ συμφορᾶς δόμων,
ὅποτε χρυσέας ἔρις ἀρ-
νὸς ἦλθε Τανταλίδαις,
οἰκτρότατα θοινάματα καὶ
σφάγια γενναίων τεκέων·
ὄθεν πόνος πόνος ἐξαμεί-
βων δι' αἵματος οὐ προλεί-
πει δισσοῖσιν Ἀτρείδαις.

Great **wealth** and prowess,
thinking proud thoughts throughout Greece
and by Simois' waters,
has now been reversed—their good fortune vanished—for
the house of **Atreus**,
because of an age-old woe in the house,
when strife about a golden lamb
came over the **Tantalids**,
feastings most grim
and slaughtering of high-born children:
from this source trouble in exchange for trouble
runs never failing throughout **the bloodline**
of the two sons of Atreus.⁷²⁶

Here ὄλβος could simply mean “happiness” but Kovacs' translation as “wealth” anticipates the arrival of the “golden lamb”, a gift that causes strife, subverting the meaning of ὄλβος as a foreboding happiness. The anticipation of doom is made clear by the repeated use of ancestral names Ἀτρείδαις and Τανταλίδαις, which associates wealth with royal lineage and the royal lineage with inherent guilt.

This nexus of wealth, royalty, ancestry and calamity climaxes with a reference to the Thyestean feast, distinguishing Thyestes' bastards as γενναίων.⁷²⁷ It seems unlikely that the slaughtering of highborn children (σφάγια γενναίων τεκέων) is referring to a different crime, given that the final line cites Atreus and Thyestes' conflict as an

⁷²⁶ Eur. *Or.* 807-18.

⁷²⁷ Eur. *Or.* 854-4. The ambivalence of the Messenger delivering Electra's suicide ultimatum: ἠὺγένεια δὲ οὐδὲν σ' ἐπωφέλησεν, Kovacs translates as “your noble birth has done you no good,” which could mean “your noble birth has not saved you” or “your noble birth has harmed you” reflecting a similar tension.

impetus of blood crime. Moreover, feasting (θοινάματα) is nestled between the patronymic of Tantalus, and the slaughtering of highborn children. This associates Atreus' slaughter of Thyestes' bastards with Tantalus' previous cooking of Pelops and Agamemnon's subsequent sacrifice of Iphigenia: telescoping several generations of infanticide.⁷²⁸ Ultimately, the chorus of Argive women recognise the dangers of inherent guilt and royal status, which is visually reflected in the palace.

Menelaus' wealth is not only ominous, but more specifically signifies his prosperity as a sign of his indebtedness to his brother Agamemnon, to whom he owes his current happiness and whose orphans he fails to assist. Kyriakou suggests that Euripides has Electra explicitly blame Pelops for the cause of the family's plight to mirror the betrayals of "Myrtilus [who] helped Pelops win his bride and Agamemnon [who] helped Menelaus win back his wife".⁷²⁹ Though the parallel between Pelops' and Menelaus' perilous preoccupation with their wives is thematically clear, Kyriakou's case that Tantalus is therefore not the "first sinner" of Electra's family is less convincing.⁷³⁰ As Dunn points out, Tantalus is named more often in *Orestes* than in any other play.⁷³¹ In fact, Electra not only repeatedly evokes Tantalus in her ancestral speeches, but she also identifies him as the progenitor of suffering in her final ancestral digression.⁷³²

By the end of the play Electra, having received her suicide ultimatum, is far less skeptical about the role of her ancestors in her response to the chorus' lament of the whole clan of Pelops (πρόπασα γέννα Πέλοπος):⁷³³

μόλοιμι τὰν οὐρανοῦ
μέσον χθονός <τε> τεταμέναν
αιωρήμασιν
πέτρων ἀλύσεσιν χρυσέαις,
φερομέναν δίναισι
βῶλον ἐξ Ὀλύμπου,
ἴν' ἐν θρήνοισιν ἀναβοάσω
γέροντι πατέρι Ταντάλω,
ὃς ἔτεκεν ἔτεκε γενέτορας ἐμέθεν, δόμων
ἄς κατεῖδον ἄτας·
ποτανὸν μὲν δίωγμα πῶλων,

⁷²⁸ Tantalus' cannibalistic feasting is a rare variant for the Greeks. See p.6 and ch.2 pp.97-101 for a full overview.

⁷²⁹ Kyriakou 1998 p.294.

⁷³⁰ Kyriakou 1998 p.288.

⁷³¹ Dunn 1996 p.164.

⁷³² Eur. *Or.* 985.

⁷³³ Eur. *Or.* 971.

τεθριπποβάμονι στόλω
Πέλωψ ὄτ' ἐπὶ πελάγεσι διε-
δίφρευσε Μυρτίλου φόνον
δικὸν ἐς οἶδμα πόντου,
λευκοκύμοσιν πρὸς Γεραιστίας
ποντίων σάλων
αἰόσιν ἀρματεύσας·
ᾧθεν δόμοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖς
ἦλθ' ἀρὰ πολύστονος,
λόγευμα ποιμνίοισι Μαιάδος τόκου,
τὸ χρυσόμαλλον ἀρνὸς ὁπότε
ἐγένετο τέρας ὀλοὸν Ἀτρέος
<ἀγροῖς ἐν> ἱπποβώτα·

O that I might go
to the rock hung aloft
between heaven <and> earth
from golden chains,
a rocky mass from Olympus
borne on the heavens' rotation!
There in lamentation would I loudly proclaim
to old Tantalus, my ancestor,
who sired, who sired my forefathers,
what ruin I have seen in the house.
First, the flight of winged colts
when with chariot and four
Pelops rode over the waves
and threw Myrtilus to his death
in the swelling deep,
driving his chariot
from the surf
by the white-waved beach of Geraestus.
From this deed for my house
came a curse laden with groaning,
when, brought to birth in the flocks of the son of Maia,
there came the famous lamb with fleece of gold,
a portent of ruin
<in the fields> of horse-pasturing Atreus.⁷³⁴

⁷³⁴ Eur. *Or.* 982-96. There is some debate as to whether this section is continued by the chorus. West compares the motif to parallels in which “a singing female character or chorus expresses the wish to take wing and fly away to some distant place, usually to escape a distressing situation (*Hipp.* 732; *IT* 1138ff; *Bacch.* 402 ff)”. The examples he gives are widely attributed to the chorus, but he attributes these lines to Electra (1987 p.252). Moreover, despite only allocating the speech to Electra in his notes, Willink suggests the metre shifts into the iambo-trochaic of Euripidean monody (1986 p.246). Given that the passage befits Electra in both form and content, I agree with West, that the flight motif is “ingeniously used to create the fantasy of the last member of the family finding her way to the first and reciting to him the tale of his descendants” (1987 p.252).

Electra reasserts Tantalus' punishment under a suspended rock that she presented in her prologue, but with no skepticism or uncertainty here. She then emphasises Tantalus' role as progenitor of both her family and their plight with the repetition of ἔτεκεν ἔτεκε and the possessive pronoun ἐμέθεν. As an example, she evokes the story of Pelops and Myrtilus, introducing the bane (ἄρα) of Myrtilus' murder as the cause for the Golden Fleece and subsequent Thyestean feast, narrating the crimes of each generation to the imagined interlocutor of the first.

Electra, faced with death, blames the inherent guilt of which she was so skeptical at the outset of the play, and recognises its impact on Clytemnestra's revenge with Aegisthus:

τῶνδ' ἑ τ' ἄμειβει θανάτους θανάτων
 τά τ' ἐπώνυμα δεῖπνα Θυέστου
 λέκτρα τε Κρήσσης Ἀερόπας δολί-
 ας δολίοισι γάμοις.

And now she brings deaths in requital for deaths,
 the feast named for Thyestes,
 and the Cretan Aërope's bed of love,
crafty woman in a crafty marriage.⁷³⁵

Furthermore, before the intervention of Apollo, the chorus validates Electra's new view of the curse as a cause:

τέλος ἔχει δαίμων βροτοῖς,
 τέλος ὅπα θέλη.
 μεγάλα δέ τις ἄ δύναμις καὶ ἀλαστόρων·
 ἔπεσ' ἔπεσε μέλαθρα τάδε δι' αἱμάτων
 διὰ τὸ Μυρτίλου πέσημ' ἐκ δίφρου.

The outcome for mortals is sent by God,
 the outcome as he wishes.
 But great too is the power of **avenging spirits**.
 This house has **been thrown, been thrown into the midst
 of blood**
by Myrtilus' fall from the chariot.⁷³⁶

Here the chorus cite avenging spirits as agents of Myrtilus' revenge, rather than specifying his Olympian father Hermes as Electra does at line 998, and mirror the casting of Myrtilus from the chariot with the casting of the house into bloodshed: using repetition (ἔπεσ' ἔπεσε) to mirror the crime and revenge. Therefore, when reflecting as a victim Electra doubts her ancestors' crimes, dismissing them as the type of hearsay the chorus of Argive women may share. But when facing the consequences of her own

⁷³⁵ Eur. *Or.* 1007-1010.

⁷³⁶ Eur. *Or.* 1545-8.

crimes, Electra emphasises the role of inherent guilt as the chorus do. Thus Euripides changes Electra's views on the rule of inherent guilt to show a development in her character from a skeptic to a believer of inherent guilt, when it might diminish her own responsibility at the end of the play.

Therefore, Euripides focuses less on the gendered reception of inherent guilt than Sophocles and more on associating ancestral crimes with visual cues on stage, such as the sceptre. In Euripides' *Orestes* specifically, reflections on inherent guilt are more extended owing to the judgment of Orestes' crime as the final demise of the Tantalids. As a result, Euripides shows Electra's perception of the influence of inherent guilt to change, marking her shifting perspective from victim to criminal.

Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*

As with his *Electra* and *Orestes*, Euripides also wrote two plays on Iphigenia: one dealing with the cause of her sacrifice, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the other dealing with the effect, *Iphigenia in Tauris*. *Iphigenia at Aulis* reflects Atreus' son Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his daughter to secure the Greeks' safe passage to Troy from Aulis. Unlike the plays discussed above, the Iphigenia plays are both set away from the ancestral palace and Mycenae itself.⁷³⁷

As a result, in *Iphigenia at Aulis* the references to hereditary guilt focus less on the *oikos* and more on paternal characters in a military rather than a domestic setting. At the very outset of this play Agamemnon is grappling with the dilemma of whether to sacrifice his daughter for the good of his men. Agamemnon, having lamented how his duty impinges on his paternal role, is motivated to strengthen his resolve by the Old Man:

οὐκ ἄγαμαι ταῦτ' ἀνδρὸς ἀριστέως·
οὐκ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν σ' ἐφύτευσ' ἀγαθοῖς,
Ἀγάμεμνον, Ἄτρεός. δεῖ δέ σε χαίρειν
καὶ λυπεῖσθαι· θνητὸς γὰρ ἔφυς.
κἂν μὴ σὺ θέλῃς, τὰ θεῶν οὕτω
βουλόμεν' ἔσται.

I don't approve of such sentiments in a **prince. Atreus did not beget you for a life of all blessings, Agamemnon.** You must feel pain as well as pleasure: you are a mortal. Though you do not like it that is the will of the gods.⁷³⁸

Euripides has the Old Man remind Agamemnon of his role and his status as a royal

⁷³⁷ Euripides' *Electra* is set at the rustic hut of Electra's farmer husband due to her displacement, but is still set within Mycenae, the fatherland (Eur. *El.* 34-5).

⁷³⁸ Eur. *IA* 28-34.

general (ἀριστεύς), whilst imposing an expectation of moral excellence.⁷³⁹ The Old Man emphasises Agamemnon's royal lineage as an Atreid to persuade him to sacrifice Iphigenia for the good of his people. This is laced with dramatic irony, for the audience would recognise the kind of suffering Atreus had endured and caused, as well as how this violence would be repeated on Agamemnon's return by Thyestes' son Aegisthus.⁷⁴⁰ But this significance is quickly glossed in the dialogue with a gnomic statement broadening the theme of inherent suffering to universal human suffering, emphasising the worldly wisdom of the Old Man character entrusted to correspond with Argos.

The Old Man is not the only character who uses ancestral references to manipulate Agamemnon. As in Euripides' *Orestes*, in *Iphigenia at Aulis* Menelaus introduces a visual representation of their ancestry, but here it is because Menelaus carries his own sceptre,⁷⁴¹ and refers to Agamemnon's sceptre to condemn him for refusing to sacrifice his daughter to retrieve Helen:

ἐς κοινὸν ἀλγεῖν τοῖς φίλοισι χρὴ φίλους.
 [...] **σκῆπτρῳ νυν αὔχει**, σὸν κασίγνητον προδοῦς.
 ἐγὼ δ' ἐπ' ἄλλας εἶμι μηχανάς τινας
 φίλους τ' ἐπ' ἄλλους.

Kinsmen ought to **have their griefs in common**.

[...]

Feel pride in your sceptre, then, when you have betrayed your brother! I shall turn to other means and to other friends.⁷⁴²

As with the Old Man's speech, Menelaus' first line introduces dramatic irony because whilst pleading for his brother to share his suffering in an attempt to resolve the issue, he also evokes the pattern of shared crimes passed down from Tantalus, to Pelops, to Atreus and now to Agamemnon himself.

Thus this first line might be better translated as: "Kinsmen ought to suffer kindred [griefs] in common". My translation reflects the sense of enduring, rather than resolving a problem suggested by ἀλγεῖν, emphasising the cycle of crimes in each generation of the Atreid's family.⁷⁴³ Indeed, whilst Menelaus is referring to griefs caused by Paris and the Trojan War, the polyptoton of φίλοισι χρὴ φίλους and the negative meaning of the verb ἀλγεῖν assimilates the ancestral crime of Atreus' past

⁷³⁹ s.v. Liddell and Scott ἀριστεός.

⁷⁴⁰ See p.7, Vermeule 1987 p.129.

⁷⁴¹ Eur. *IA* 312.

⁷⁴² Eur. *IA* 408; 412-14.

⁷⁴³ s.v. Liddell and Scott ἀλγεῖν.

feast, Agamemnon's imminent sacrifice and Orestes' future matricide to an audience familiar with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, emphasising the motif of inherent guilt.⁷⁴⁴

Moreover, the generational suffering alluded to here is visually depicted in the sceptre. As in the Pelopid plays above and the *Iliad*, here the sceptre is presented as a family heirloom rather than merely a mark of military rank. Menelaus describes the sceptre as a mark of Agamemnon's guilt for betraying his brother, not his fleet. So when Euripides decides to stage the sceptre of Agamemnon, the military setting of *Iphigenia at Aulis* conflates the Iliadic symbolism of the sceptre, as a symbol of both status and the right to speak,⁷⁴⁵ with the tragic associations of inherent guilt. Euripides exploits these semiotics by contrasting Agamemnon's with Menelaus' sceptre, which has no ancestral symbolism and is first introduced as a mere weapon.⁷⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Menelaus' sceptre provides him the right to speak as an equal with Agamemnon and thus facilitates the *agōn* of the brothers that follows the *stichomythia*.⁷⁴⁷ So Euripides uses two sceptres to exploit an epic convention that facilitates a tragic family quarrel and twins the Atreidae.⁷⁴⁸ Just as this allusion to ancestral suffering is made clear, Iphigenia arrives.

Hereafter, Euripides' characters exploit Agamemnon's ancestry in the same way, for the opposite effect. Menelaus retracts his argument:

**Πέλοπα κατόμνυμ', ὃς πατήρ τοῦμοῦ πατρὸς
τοῦ σοῦ τ' ἐκλήθη, τὸν τεκόντα τ' Ἄτρεα,
ἧ μὴν ἐρεῖν σοι τὰπὸ καρδίας σαφῶς
καὶ μὴ ἴπιτηδες μηδέν, ἀλλ' ὅσον φρονῶ.
ἐγὼ σ' ἀπ' ὅσσων ἐκβαλόντ' ἰδὼν δάκρυ
ῥῆκτιρα καὶτὸς ἀνταφῆκά σοι πάλιν**

I swear by Pelops, who is called the father of my father and yours, I swear by Atreus our father, that I shall say plainly what is in my heart, no word in craftiness but only what I think. When I saw you weeping, I myself felt pity and shed tears in my turn for you: I step back from my former words no longer threatening you. I stand now where you stand. I advise you not to kill your children, nor to take mine in their stead.⁷⁴⁹

Again, Euripides' Menelaus emphasises the blood bond of the brothers with polyptoton (φίλοισι χρῆ φίλους/ πατήρ τοῦμοῦ πατρὸς) to reflect his sympathy for Agamemnon

⁷⁴⁴ Aesch. *Ag.* 1217-22, 203-227; *Cho.* 1025-8.

⁷⁴⁵ Cf. Easterling 1989 pp.105-7, Hammer 1998 p.19 and Brown 2006 pp.21-5.

⁷⁴⁶ Eur. *IA* 312.

⁷⁴⁷ Eur. *IA* 318, 320 (Menelaus' claims); 316-34 (*stichomythia*) and 334-402 (*agōn*).

⁷⁴⁸ Cf. Sorum on Euripides' conflation of epic and tragic precedents in *Iphigenia at Aulis* more broadly (1992 pp. 529-30).

⁷⁴⁹ Eur. *IA* 473-82.

rather than to provoke sympathy from Agamemnon. So although, like the Old Man, Menelaus refers to Agamemnon's ancestors to manipulate him, unlike the Old Man, Menelaus' sentimentality when doing so reflects his bond with his brother and his passionate character.

The chorus of Euboean women in turn approves Menelaus' speech:

γενναῖ' ἔλεξας Ταντάλω τε τῷ Διὸς
πρέποντα· προγόνους οὐ καταισχύνεις σέθεν.

What you have said is noble and worthy of Tantalus, the son of Zeus: you do not bring disgrace upon your ancestors.⁷⁵⁰

The chorus, as outsiders, seems to focus on the divine lineage and prestige of Menelaus' ancestry, overlooking the infanticidal past of Atreus and, in some variants, Tantalus. So too does Iphigenia beg Agamemnon by Pelops and Atreus not to kill her, as though it would besmirch their family line of murderous liars.⁷⁵¹ In each case the women's ignorance, be it the chorus of outsiders or Agamemnon's young daughter, is conveyed by the irony of how they celebrate this ancestry.

Even Clytemnestra maintains this fallacy of noble ancestry when disparaging Agamemnon for luring Iphigenia to her death under false pretenses, claiming he was to marry her to Achilles, "By a trick: that was ignoble and unworthy of Atreus" (δόλω δ', ἀγεννῶς Ἀτρώος τ' οὐκ ἀξίως).⁷⁵² This is particularly ironic, given that Atreus is known for luring Thyestes from exile to a feast of slaughtered sons under false pretenses; thus the trick is particularly worthy of Atreus.

However, this seems to be a question of audience, as Clytemnestra presents Agamemnon's crime as an isolated incident against a sanitised family history to her young daughter. For when she is addressing Agamemnon alone, Clytemnestra seems fully aware of how Agamemnon views himself in light of his family's legacy and his duty, as she chides:

ἴν' αὐτῶν προσέμενος κτάνης τινά;
ταῦτ' ἤλθες ἤδη διὰ λόγων, ἢ σκῆπτρά σοι
μόνον διαφέρειν καὶ στρατηλατεῖν μέλει;

Will they (your children) want you to pull one of them away for slaughter? Have you considered these things, or is your only thought to carry the sceptre and be general?⁷⁵³

⁷⁵⁰ Eur. *IA* 504-5.

⁷⁵¹ Eur. *IA* 1233-4.

⁷⁵² Eur. *IA* 1457.

⁷⁵³ Eur. *IA* 1194-5.

Clytemnestra pits Agamemnon's progeny against his legacy and recognises his sceptre as a symbol of his duty to his brother, inadvertently recalling the ancestral associations of the sceptre suggested in Menelaus' earlier invective.

However, the most puzzling evocation of Agamemnon's blighted bloodline comes in Clytemnestra's rebuff:

[πρῶτον μὲν, ἵνα σοι πρῶτα τοῦτ' ὀνειδίσω,
ἔγημας ἄκουσάν με κάλαβες βία,
τὸν πρόσθεν ἄνδρα Τάνταλον κατακτανών·
βρέφος τε τοῦμόν ἴσῳ προσούρισας πάλω†,
μαστῶν βιαίως τῶν ἐμῶν ἀποσπάσας.]

[My first reproach to you is this, that you married me against my will and took me by force, killing my former husband Tantalus. My baby you hurled to the ground, tearing it violently from my breast.]⁷⁵⁴

Kovacs' Loeb edition treats lines 1141-1187 as an actor's interpolation from the fourth century, in spite of Page's claim that "there is not sufficient evidence to justify any deletions here".⁷⁵⁵ But crucially, no interpretation of these lines suggests that the tradition is any later than the fourth-century interpolation suggested by Kovacs, and the *Odyssey* scholia that attest this variant directly quote these lines from Euripides' play.⁷⁵⁶ Therefore, these lines would have appeared in the manuscript tradition from 330 BC and thus could have affected later tragedians' receptions of this myth.

Those who consider these lines to be Euripidean debate whether the myth is a Stesichorean or a Euripidean innovation.⁷⁵⁷ Stesichorus' fr.223 rather suggests that this mythical variant is derived from a sixth-century tradition:

οὔνεκα Τυνδάρεος
ῥέζων ποκὰ πᾶσι θεοῖς μόνας λάθει' ἠπιοδώρου
Κύπριδος· κείνα δὲ Τυνδαρέου κόρας
χολωσαμένα διγάμους τε καὶ τριγάμους ἐτίθει
καὶ λιπесάνορας.

because Tyndareus when sacrificing one day to all the gods forgot the Cyprian only, kindly in her giving; and she in anger made the daughters of Tyndareus twice-wed and thrice-wed and husband-deserters.⁷⁵⁸

This could reflect the Homeric myth that Helen marries Menelaus, Paris and Deiphobus,

⁷⁵⁴ Eur. *IA* 1148-51.

⁷⁵⁵ Kovacs 2002 pp158-9 and Page 1934 p.160.

⁷⁵⁶ Σ Q. Hom. *Od.* 11. 430, Eustathius ad Homer. *Od.* 11.429.

⁷⁵⁷ Robert 1921 pp.1023, 1148-52, Severyns 1928 p.421, Mayer 1883 pp.28-9 and Jouan 1966 pp. 248, 276.

⁷⁵⁸ Stes. 223 Campbell. = Σ Eur. *Or.* 249.

while Clytemnestra marries Agamemnon and Aegisthus.⁷⁵⁹ Dio Chrysostom attests that Stesichorus does follow the Homeric tradition in his first poem on Helen.⁷⁶⁰ Yet in the second Helen poem, Stesichorus tells the story in which Helen married neither Deiphobus nor Paris, but instead goes to Egypt where she may have married Proteus. We cannot contextualise Stesichorus' fragment in either poem to determine whether Clytemnestra or Helen is thrice married and, as Finglass points out in his commentary to this fragment, “‘twice and thrice’ can be a rhetorical device implying a large but indeterminate number [...] the point is not that Tyndareus' daughters had precisely two or three husbands each, but that they were afflicted with promiscuity”.⁷⁶¹ Thus, the only clear-cut reference to the thrice married Clytemnestra is in the allegedly Euripidean lines: to Tantalus the younger, to Agamemnon and finally to Aegisthus.

In Euripides' lines the name Tantalus suggests Clytemnestra's husband is a child of the Pelopid line, and later sources that name Thyestes as the father of this younger Tantalus may well reflect or adapt an archaic tradition of paternal names.⁷⁶² However, we should avoid imposing Seneca's younger Tantalus on this reference in Euripides. Gibert suggests that Priam's infanticide in Iphigenia's aria reiterates the motif of infanticide and claims that the younger Tantalus, like Aegisthus, is Agamemnon's cousin, thus foreshadows the revenge to come. But Gibert's attempts to embed Clytemnestra's first marriage into the play rely on two suppositions. First that Orestes appears onstage as a babe in arms to emphasise the parallel with Clytemnestra's first-born.⁷⁶³ Second, that the younger Tantalus is Thyestes' son as in the Senecan tradition.⁷⁶⁴ So given that Clytemnestra's first marriage is not referred to explicitly elsewhere in the play, I agree with Kovacs that these lines are an early interpolation.

But the mythographical evidence suggests that this variant entangled Agamemnon in the inherent guilt of his ancestors as he, like Thyestes, coveted another's

⁷⁵⁹ Hom. *Od.* 4.274ff. cf. *Il.* Parv. PEG1. West= Procl. *Chrest. suppleta ex Apollod. Epit.* 5.6–16; Dictys 4.22, Σ Tzetz. Lycoph. 168.

⁷⁶⁰ Dio Chrys. *Or.* 11.40. cf. Stes. T 190. Campbell= Σ Hom. *Il.* 2. 339.

⁷⁶¹ Finglass 2014 p.323 E.g. Aesch. *Cho.* 790-2, Soph. *Aj.* 432 405a -408.

⁷⁶² [Apoll]. *Epit.* 2.15-16, Paus 1.18.2. Tzetzes. *Chil.* 1.456-65 Eustathius Hom. *Od.* 11.429-32, Paus. 2.22.3 and Σ Eur. *Or.* 5 attest that Tantalus junior's father is Broteas, the son of Tantalus senior and brother to Niobe and Pelops, which would make Tantalus junior a generation older than Clytemnestra, a cousin of Atreus and Thyestes.

⁷⁶³ Gibert 2005 pp.239-40.

⁷⁶⁴ Gibert 2005 p.234.

wife, and like Atreus kills a kindred child to satisfy his own desires.⁷⁶⁵ It is possible then, that this was a sixth-century variant from Stesichorus, which a fourth-century actor recalls to embellish his role. Nonetheless, the interpolated lines dated to the fourth century certainly introduce a new layer to Agamemnon's guilt.

Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*

Iphigenia in Tauris evokes ancestry in a different way as a result of its fantastical setting and, as discussed above, its happy ending; as Iphigenia and Orestes evade punishment in this play. Thus, references to the names of ancestors are used to facilitate a recognition scene between Iphigenia and Orestes,⁷⁶⁶ unusually including reference to maternal ties.⁷⁶⁷ Iphigenia makes her lineage clear in the prologue:

Πέλοψ ὁ Ταντάλειος ἐς Πῖσαν μολῶν
 θοαῖσιν ἵπποις Οἰνομάου γαμεῖ κόρην,
 ἐξ ἧς Ἀτρεὺς ἔβλασεν· Ἀτρέως δὲ παῖς
 Μενέλαος Ἀγαμέμνων τε· τοῦ δ' ἔφυν ἐγώ,
 τῆς Τυνδαρείας θυγατρὸς Ἰφιγένεια παῖς

Pelops the son of Tantalus went to Pisa and with his swift horses won as his bride the daughter of Oenomaus. She gave birth to Atreus, whose sons in turn were Menelaus and Agamemnon. It is from this last that I was begotten, I, Iphigenia, daughter of Tyndareus' daughter Clytemnestra.⁷⁶⁸

Whereas Electra in *Orestes* begins her prologue with Tantalus' crime and fleshes out in detail the stories of her ancestor's crimes, Iphigenia focuses on Pelops' wooing of Hippodamia, neglecting the deception of Myrtilus but tracing her origins from the chariot race.

However, as in Euripides' *Orestes*, the chorus of *Iphigenia in Tauris* develops the theme of inherent guilt set out in the prologue:

οἴμοι, τῶν Ἀτρειδᾶν οἴκων
 ἔρρει φῶς σκῆπτρόν <τ'>, οἴμοι
 [πατρῶων οἴκων]·
 ἦν ἐκ τῶν εὐόλβων Ἄργει
 βασιλέων <τᾶς νῦν ἄτας> ἀρχά,
μόχθος δ' ἐκ **μόχθων** ἄσσει,
 δινευούσαις ἵπποισιν <ἐπει>
 πταναῖς ἀλλάξας ἐξ ἔδρας
 ἱερὸν <μετέβασ'> ὄμμ' ἀγᾶς

⁷⁶⁵ Gibert distinguishes Agamemnon's wife snatching from adultery, as the former was specifically a Spartan marital practice employed by Clytemnestra's brothers the Dioscuri (2005 pp.234-5).

⁷⁶⁶ Eur. *IT* 143; 545; 807; 821-6; 983-6. See. p.10.

⁷⁶⁷ Eur. *IT* 806-7; 918.

⁷⁶⁸ Eur. *IT* 1-5.

Ἄλιος, ἄλλοτε δ' ἄλλα προσέβα
 χρυσέας ἀρνὸς μελάθροις ὀδύνα
 †φόνος ἐπὶ φόνῳ ἄγεα ἄχεσιν†·
 ἔνθεν τῶν πρόσθεν δμαθέντων
 ἐκβαίνει ποινὰ Τανταλιδᾶν
 εἰς οἴκους, σπεύδει δ' ἀσπούδαστ'
 ἐπὶ σοὶ **δαίμων** <δυσδαίμων>.

Ah me, the light of the house of the Atridae
 and its sceptre have perished, ah me
 [of my ancestral home]!
 From the blessed kings in Argos
 <this disaster> took its beginning,
 and **trouble** from **trouble** came,
 <ever since> with his whirling winged steeds
 Helios changed from its station
 the sun's holy radiant face,
 and now at one time, now at another there came to the
 house
 woe from the golden lamb,
 †**slaughter** upon **slaughter**, **grief** upon **grief**.†
 Hence from those long dead sons
 of Tantalus breaks out affliction
 against the house, and not to be pushed forward are the
 designs
 against you that your <ill-starred> **fate** is hastening on.⁷⁶⁹

Here the chorus implicates earlier generations, they evoke the familiar image of the family sceptre seen on stage in *Iphigenia at Aulis*, to then trace the chain of cause and effect through the paternal line of kings (ἐκ τῶν εὐόλβων Ἄργει βασιλέων). Once more Euripides introduces ὄλβος in a foreboding sense by juxtaposing it with the image of the sceptre and the Golden Fleece, again associating inherent wealth with inherent guilt.⁷⁷⁰ Yet amidst these foreboding symbols of wealth the chorus alludes to Thyestes' feast, describing Helios' reversal of the sun, a traditional result of the cannibalistic banquet.⁷⁷¹ There is no reason to consider the curse of Myrtilus as a factor in *Iphigenia in Tauris* based on the remainder of the play.⁷⁷²

⁷⁶⁹ Eur. *IT* 186-202.

⁷⁷⁰ Cf. Eur. *Or.* 807-18. s.v. Liddell and Scott ὄλβος.

⁷⁷¹ Murray's text imposes "whirling winged steeds" by supplementing ἵπποισιν <ρίφαι Πέλοπος> πταναῖς at lines 192-3, perhaps suggesting the race of Pelops for Hippodamia, but no other edition supports this conjecture. Nonetheless, any potential account of the race would then be undercut in the next line with the implication of Helios' winged horses retreating away from Thyestes' cannibalistic banquet.
 for an overview of Since this supplement is conjectural, so too is Pelops' chariot race. conjectures on this corrupted passage (ed. 1913).

⁷⁷² Cf. O'Brien 1988 p.105.

The reciprocity of inherent crime begetting crime is more clearly reiterated in the polyptoton of μόχθος/ μόχθων, which recurs in the spurious line φόνος/ φόνω, ἄχαια/ ἄχαισιν. This patterning emphasises inherent guilt from one generation to the next, which is underscored in the final word δαίμων. Though Kovacs translates this as “fate” as though it were μοῖρα, δαίμων more specifically denotes “*the good or evil genius of a family or person*,”⁷⁷³ as suggested in this context and by its use elsewhere in tragedy.⁷⁷⁴ Therefore, the structure and semantics of this passage also emphasises the reciprocity of inherent guilt.

Yet, just as the crimes of the household are not fully related in the prologue, they are also skimmed over in the recognition scene.⁷⁷⁵ For example, Orestes glosses over an ancestral crime when referring to a symbolic heirloom:

ἄ δ' εἶδον αὐτός, τάδε φράσω τεκμήρια·
 Πέλοπος παλαιὰν ἐν δόμοις λόγχην πατρός,
 ἦν χερσὶ πάλλων παρθένον Πισάτιδα
 ἐκτίσαθ' Ἴπποδάμειαν, Οἰνόμαον κτανών,
 ἐν παρθενῶσι τοῖσι σοῖς κεκρυμμένην.

And now I will tell you for proof these things I saw myself: I saw the ancient spear of Pelops our ancestor in the house—which he brandished when he killed Oenomaus and won the maid of Pisa, Hippodamia—hidden in your bedroom.⁷⁷⁶ Here Orestes cites the spear as a recognition token, thus the specific nature of its use as an heirloom is necessary to the dialogue, but it also suggests that Pelops defeated Oenomaus without deceiving Myrtilus or incurring his wrath. Yet to an Athenian audience the spear also served as a symbol of revenge: family members would hold vigil with a spear for their murdered relatives and it appeared in artwork as Agamemnon’s weapon, thus it is often considered as interchangeable with the ancestral sceptre we have discussed above.⁷⁷⁷ So despite not recognizing the deception of Myrtilus, by associating Pelops’ race with the spear, Orestes again traces the source of his family’s revenge cycle to Pelops.⁷⁷⁸

Indeed, ancestral crimes are often set in a remote past. As Gagné suggests, the inclusion of Thyestes’ feast as a woven tapestry distances the event as a “harmless” tale

⁷⁷³ s.v. Liddell and Scott δαίμων.

⁷⁷⁴ E.g. Aesch. *Ag.* 1569, Soph. *OT.* 1194. Cf. Gagné’s translation of δαίμων as an “indeterminate divine force” (2013 p.419).

⁷⁷⁵ Eur. *IT* 810ff. See. p.10.

⁷⁷⁶ Eur. *IT.* 821-6.

⁷⁷⁷ Macdowell 1963 p.16. See *LIMC.* Agamemnon. 43; 52 61; 62; 63 91; 92 cf. Prag 1985.

⁷⁷⁸ Eur. *IT.* 983-6. Cf. the messenger Eur. *IT.* 1414-16.

from a bygone time.⁷⁷⁹ Whilst I agree that Thyestes' feast is distanced, as I have discussed above, the sanitised account of it in Iphigenia's tapestry suggests that Thyestes' feast is not harmless, but unspeakable.⁷⁸⁰ By contrast, when disregarding the cannibalism of an earlier generation, Iphigenia describes the cannibalism candidly:

ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν
τὰ Ταντάλου θεοῖσιν ἐστιάματα
ἄπιστα κρίνω, παιδὸς ἠσθῆναι βορᾶ,
τοὺς δ' ἐνθάδ', αὐτοὺς ὄντας ἀνθρωποκτόνους,

Now just as I find it incredible that the gods at Tantalus' feast enjoyed the flesh of his son, so I believe that people here, themselves murderous, ascribe their own fault to the goddess.⁷⁸¹

This suggests that whilst the Thyestes' feast is unspeakable, the feast of Pelops is "harmless" because it can be dismissed as the distant past and because Pelops was resurrected by the gods. However, in both cases the cannibalism is sidelined in favour of Pelops's race, which is associated with the sceptre or spear carried by Agamemnon.

Therefore, whereas in *Iphigenia at Aulis* Euripides adds tragic significance to the epic sceptre of Agamemnon to underscore his dual responsibility as father and general in the military camp, in *Iphigenia in Tauris* his offspring refer to their family and its plight through reference to the *oikos*, from which they have been displaced. The two converge when Orestes locates the spear in Iphigenia's chambers. This exchanges Iphigenia's presence in the *παρθενῶνες* with a symbol of her father, his inherent guilt and his role as general, which provoked him to sacrifice Iphigenia and invited his own demise. This association is particularly clear because, as Gagné points out, this "is the same room which Iphigenia escapes in her dream:"⁷⁸²

ἔδοξ' ἐν ὑπνω τῆσδ' ἀπαλλαχθεῖσα γῆς
οἰκεῖν ἐν Ἄργει, παρθενῶσι δ' ἐν μέσοις
εὔδειν, χθονὸς δὲ νῶτα σεισθῆναι σάλω,
φεύγειν δὲ κᾶξω στᾶσα θριγκὸν εἰσιδεῖν
δόμων πίτνοντα, πᾶν δ' ἐρείψιμον στέγος
βεβλημένον πρὸς οὐδας ἐξ ἄκρων σταθμῶν.
δόμων πατρώων, ἐκ δ' ἐπικράνων κόμας
ξανθὰς καθεῖναι, φθέγμα δ' ἀνθρώπου λαβεῖν,
κἀγὼ τέχνην τήνδ' ἦν ἔχω ξενοκτόνον
τιμῶσ' ὑδραίνειν αὐτὸν ὡς θανούμενον,
κλαίουσα. **τοῦναρ δ' ὧδε συμβάλλω τόδε·
τέθνηκ' Ὀρέστης**

⁷⁷⁹ Gagné 2013 p.423.

⁷⁸⁰ See. p.10 above.

⁷⁸¹ Eur. *IT*. 386-9.

⁷⁸² Gagné 2013 p. 423.

οὐ̃ κατηρξάμην ἐγώ.
στῦλοι γὰρ οἴκων παῖδες εἰσιν ἄρσενες,
θνήσκουσι δ' οὐ̃ς ἂν χέρνιβες βάλωσ' ἐμαί.

I dreamt that I had **escaped** from this land and lived in Argos, and that as I slept within my maiden chamber the flat expanse of earth began to heave and roll. I fled the house and, when I stood outside, I saw the cornice of the palace topple and all the house, from its column tops down, cast in ruins to the ground. Only one pillar of my ancestral home, it seemed, was left standing, and from its capital it seemed to grow a head of blond hair and to take on human speech. And I, honoring this office I have of killing foreigners, sprinkled it with water to consign it to death, weeping as I did so. **This is how I interpret the dream: Orestes is dead**—it is he I consecrated for sacrifice—for the **pillars of a house are its male children**, and those who are sprinkled by my lustral basin are killed.⁷⁸³

Here Iphigenia is confessing her dream to the dawn alone, thus her speech seems to reveal her character's true emotions, rather than appeasing another character on stage. As a result, Iphigenia's opening lines betray her homesickness because she describes herself returning to Argos from Tauris in her dream, rather than simply having never left Argos. She reminisces about her own quarters, contrasting her troubled state of sleep in Tauris with her comfortable sleep in the family home. Thus Euripides emphasises the role of the *oikos* not only as a house, but also as a home for the young maiden, in stark contrast to the treatment of the house as Tantalus' palace (Δόμος... Τανταλείους), which the children plan to burn down in Euripides' *Orestes*.⁷⁸⁴

This is immediately undercut with the collapse of the house. Despite Iphigenia's initial desire to return home, in the dream she escapes to see the house collapse, implying that she will escape the downfall of the Atreidae by being in Tauris. But according to Iphigenia, Orestes has not escaped. Her misinterpretation of the crumbling house as the downfall of her brother both builds pathos for the recognition scene by conveying her anxiety and emphasises the inherent guilt passed down through the paternal line. Thus the *oikos* for Iphigenia signifies her home, her family and its legacy.

This homesickness is reasserted when Iphigenia and Orestes are finally reunited, as she exclaims:

ὦ Κυκλωπὶς ἐστία· ἰὼ πατρίς,
Μυκήνα φίλα,
χάριν ἔχω ζόας, χάριν ἔχω τροφᾶς,
ὅτι μοι συνομαίμονα **τόνδε δόμοις**
ἐξεθρέψω φάος.

⁷⁸³ Eur. *IT*. 44-9; 55-6.

⁷⁸⁴ Eur. *Or*. 1537-48. Cf. Gagné 2013 p. 433.

O hearth built by the Cyclopes, O homeland,
dear Mycenae,
I feel gratitude for his life, for his nurture,
that you raised to manhood this brother of mine
to be a **beacon to the house!**⁷⁸⁵

Again, Iphigenia displays nostalgia by citing the fantastical aetiology of her home, allegedly built by the Cyclopes. Again, Iphigenia associates her brother with a physical part of the household, here a beacon of hope rather than the foresaken pillar she feared he had become.⁷⁸⁶ Iphigenia presents Orestes' coming of age as a public gain whilst emphasising her private loss of her estranged brother.

Thus, as far as Iphigenia is concerned, Orestes' role is clear: the fate of the household rests with him as she recognises that the house is diseased,⁷⁸⁷ and envisages that with Orestes alive, this cycle of inherent guilt can be brought to an end:

οὐχὶ τῷ κτανόντι με
θυμουμένη, πατρῶον ὀρθῶσαι †θέλω†·
σφαγῆς τε γὰρ σῆς χεῖρ' ἀπαλλάξαιμεν ἄν
σώσαιμί τ' οἴκους.

I feel no anger at the man who killed me and want to restore the troubled house of our fathers. By rescuing you I would keep my hand from shedding your blood and also save our house.⁷⁸⁸

Having considered Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* alongside Euripides' extant Tantalid plays, I conclude that inherent guilt is manipulated as a literary device to befit the narrative and aid character development, rather than present a consistent ideology about the supernatural impact of ancestry. Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes* are both set following the death of Agamemnon at the palace, the ancestral *oikos*, both plays associate ancestral crimes with visual cues: Electra's visible destitution, Menelaus' regal appearance and the royal sceptre. The sceptre appears again in the military camp of *Iphigenia at Aulis*, whereas the spear of Pelops is recalled as a recognition token in *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Though the visual symbolism is consistent across the plays, the references to previous generations vary according to the action and the speaker.

⁷⁸⁵ Eur. *IT*. 845-9.

⁷⁸⁶ In contrast to the λαμπάδος at Aesch. *Ag.* 8, or λαμπάδων Eur. *Or.* 1573, φάος need not be an architectural feature, as it can also mean daylight (s.v. Liddell and Scott), thus with the dative δόμοις it introduces an ambiguity. It could mean a possessive dative as a beacon of the house, or a dative of advantage as a new dawn for the household.

⁷⁸⁷ Eur. *IT*. 930.

⁷⁸⁸ Eur. *IT*. 992-5.

In Euripides' *Electra*, her Farmer husband appears and traces the ancestral crimes efficiently using names alone to set the pace of the action and convey the urgency with which Orestes will overthrow Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' rule. In Euripides' *Orestes*, Electra delivers a skeptical genealogical story at the outset that she revises when held accountable for her own crimes. The Iphigenia plays incorporate inherent guilt far less extensively; in Aulis, characters cite Agamemnon's ancestors as a means of manipulating his decision, in Tauris the references are introduced to facilitate the siblings' recognition.

Ennius' *Thyestes* (in Epirus)

Turning to the Roman tragedies, we have direct evidence of ancestral crimes in the Thyestes tragedies in the fragments of both Ennius' *Thyestes* and Accius' *Atreus*. The remains of Ennius' *Thyestes* reflect events after the feast but before the later generations of the Greek tragedies we have discussed above; thus the following fragment shows Thyestes introducing his family history and reflecting on the banquet itself as a source of pollution:

Thyestes:
 Tantalo prognatus Pelope natus qui quondam a socru
 Oenomao rege Hippodameam raptis nactus nuptiis,
 Iovis iste quidem pronepos. Tamne ergo abiectus tamque fractus?—
 Nolite hospites ad me adire, ilico istic!
 Ne contagio mea bonis umbrave obsit.
 Meo tanta vis sceleris in corpore haeret!
 Tu te Thyesta damnabis orbabisque luce propter vim sceleris alieni?

Thyestes:
 I, sprung from Tantalus, begotten of Pelops,
 Who having once gained Hippodamia,
 A ravished wife from King Oenomaus,
 The father of my bride,⁷⁸⁹
 Well, he was a great-grandson of Jupiter! And then was he so downcast, so
 broken? Says he—
 Strangers, draw you not near to me! Back there, back! Lest a tainted
 touch from me, lest my very shadow harm you that are sound. Oh, such a
 deadly violence of sin [crime] clings to my body!⁷⁹⁰
 What, will you, Thyestes, utter your own doom, and rob yourself of the light of
 day, because of the 'violence' of another's crime?⁷⁹¹

Here Ennius, like his Greek predecessors, focuses on the chariot race in what seems to

⁷⁸⁹ Incert. 57 Ribbeck.

⁷⁹⁰ Ennius 8 Ribbeck.

⁷⁹¹ Ennius 356-60 Warmington= Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 3.11.25. I have amended the Loeb translation to avoid the Christian values imposed by "sin".

be a prologue spoken by Thyestes himself. For not only does Cicero attribute the speaker, but also the warning to strangers in the later lines, indicated by *tamne*, suggests that Thyestes has just arrived in Epirus, positioning this fragment at the outset of the play.

Cicero's interjection, explaining Thyestes' divine ancestry, matches the tone of the first few lines glorifying Thyestes' ancestors to contrast his inglorious pollution as he fends off his hosts (*hospites*), seemingly a chorus of locals in Epirus. Despite Cicero's interjection, there seems to be no reason to expect a lacuna in the prologue as the Oenomaus' story traces down to Thyestes' own generation and, had Thyestes already explained the feast, the warning about his pollution would be redundant. Therefore, Thyestes' prologue in Ennius' *Thyestes* initially interrupts Thyestes relating his proud ancestry, with the reality of his current pollution having cannibalised his own children.

It is clear from Cicero's citation of the chorus' response, that an explanation of the feast immediately follows Thyestes' prologue:

Quidnam est obsecro quod te adiri abnutas?

Melius esset 'vetas' 'prohibes' 'absterres,' quoniam ille dixerat 'ilico
istic,

Ne contagio mea bonis umbrave obsit...

Why then is it, I pray you, that you nod men back from approaching you?

'Do you forbid' or 'debar' or 'scare away' would be better, since the
other speaker had said just before: 'Back there, so that my touch or
shadow does not harm the righteous...'⁷⁹²

Cicero's criticism of the chorus' failure to repeat Thyestes' phrasing clearly suggests that this passage comes immediately after Thyestes' warnings and invites an explanation of the banquet.

Indeed, if we imagine fr.8 in performance, it becomes clear that Thyestes is addressing both the chorus and the audience to seek asylum in a foreign land; whereas the Greek Tantalid prologues do not need to curry favour with their insider chorus of attendant slaves,⁷⁹³ local women⁷⁹⁴ or female tourists.⁷⁹⁵ Thus in Epirus, Thyestes

⁷⁹² Ennius 8 Ribbeck, but again see Warmington's conglomeration, Ennius 361. Warmington. *apud. Cic. De or.* 3. 41. 164. (I have added the final phrase from Rackham's more complete, yet more archaic, English translation of Cicero to Warmington's translation of Ennius' fragments).

⁷⁹³ Eur. *IT.* 144.

⁷⁹⁴ Soph. *El.* 251-4, Eur. *El.* 178-80; *Or.* 131-2.

⁷⁹⁵ Eur. *IA* 164-8, 231-2.

appears as a victim and neglects the role of inherent guilt in his brother's feast to avoid diminishing Atreus' responsibility and to ingratiate himself with the locals.

By contrast, when Ennius' Thyestes presents his own plight, blaming fortune for provoking his pollution and exile, rather than his own transgressions:

Eheu mea fortuna ut omnia in me conglomeras mala!

Alas, my fortune, how you do roll all
And every ill upon me!⁷⁹⁶

Thus we can see that supernatural forces feature, but only in the perception and self-interest of Thyestes' character. Moreover, we have a distinctively Roman view of fortune, which, unlike the Greek *μοῖρα*, suggests good luck is followed by bad.⁷⁹⁷ The image of fortune's wheel is clear in Nonius' citation of fr.9 to define *conglomerare* as *involvere, superaddere* (to roll upon, to add over and above). Though this may initially indicate that Thyestes' troubles are compounded, it may more reasonably suggest that Thyestes' circumstances will improve as he is about to beget his avenger Aegisthus in Ennius' play. Thus in context, *fortuna* here not only captures the Greek sense of *μοῖρα*, but also reflects the reciprocity of revenge as retribution (*ποινή*); capturing two Greek concepts in a Roman image of fortune.

The impersonal cycle of fate and retribution is also distinguished from inherent guilt in Ennius fr.30:

Pol mihi fortuna magis nunc deficit quam genus.
namque regnum suppetebat mi, ut scias quanto e loco,
quantis opibus quibus de rebus lapsa **fortuna accidat.**

by Pollux, **my fortune fails me more than my noble birth.**
That you may know from what great pride of place,
what wealth, what worldly goods my fortune
Has slipped and fallen—I **once did have a kingdom.**⁷⁹⁸

Fr.30 suits Thyestes given that he is the only displaced king and Cicero comments on Thyestes' despair when introducing fr.30:

⁷⁹⁶ Ennius 9 Ribbeck = Nonius. 90.13.

⁷⁹⁷ s.v. *OLD fortuna*.

⁷⁹⁸ Ennius 30 Ribbeck. Ribbeck's second edition lists this under *Incerti Nominis Reliquae* Ennius 30 (*Hec*.12). Ribbeck², but it appears immediately after Cicero's discussion of Ennius' *Thyestes* with an explicit reference to a tragic Thyestes in exile (Ennius 8 Ribbeck= *Tusc. Disp.* 3.12). Warmington's Loeb lists this fragment under Ennius' *Thyestes* (Ennius 363–5 Warmington. *apud. Cic. Tusc. Disp.* 3. 19) with the puzzling caveat (n.1) that the speaker is an exemplum rather than a quote from either of the heroes mentioned. This seems unlikely, given Cicero's surrounding discussion of Ennius' *Thyestes*. See ch.2. p.85.

quid ergo? huiusne vitae propositio et cogitatio aut Thyestem levare poterit aut Aetam, de quo paulo ante dixi aut Telamonem pulsum patria, exulantem atque egentem?...quaerendum igitur quem ad modum aegritudine privemus eum qui ita dicat

What then? Could the idea and thought of such a life relieve Thyestes or Aetes, about whom I spoke a little earlier, or Telamon, expelled from his country, an exile, and in want?...Therefore one has to ask in what way we can free him from distress, who speaks thus⁷⁹⁹

So Cicero comments on the incurable scale of Thyestes' suffering, as he did when introducing fr.8 in *Tusculan Disputations*.⁸⁰⁰ Thus, whereas emphasising inherent guilt would conflate the brothers' roles and draw attention to Thyestes' crimes, Thyestes styles Atreus as the aggressor and himself as the unfortunate victim. The second line in particular associates fortune with material wealth, much like the ominous use of ὄλβος in Euripides' *Orestes*, neglecting the issue of his bastard children and focusing on his lost status.⁸⁰¹ Therefore, though ancestral crimes are marginalised in Ennius' *Thyestes* fragments, both the reciprocity of one crime begetting another and the dangerous wealth of the royal family are introduced through Thyestes' focus on fortune.

Accius' Atreus

Turning to Accius' *Atreus*, we find inherent guilt in a play that dealt with Thyestes' feast, as fr.2 reflects Pelops' race for Hippodamia:

Simul et Pisaea praemia arrepta a socio possedit suo

So soon as he had gained the prize of Pisa,
Torn from his own bride's father⁸⁰²

The speaker and the timing of fr.2 are unclear, though its attribution to Accius' *Atreus* is secured by two ancient sources.⁸⁰³

Indeed, Servius' testimony reveals clues as to the other generations that may have been included in Accius' genealogy:

alii ita tradunt Steropes et Atlantis filios Oenomaum et Maiam fuisse, Oenomai Hippodamiam filiam, unde Atreus natus; at Maiiae filius Mercurius, ex quo Arcades, de quibus Evander, quod Accius in Atreo plenius refert.

⁷⁹⁹ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 3. 19. 44.

⁸⁰⁰ See ch.2 p.158 n.792. Ennius 363–5 Warmington. *apud.* Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 3. 19. 44. *Quid? Huic calix mulsi impingendus est ut plorare desinat, aut aliquid eius modi?* (Well? Must we tip him a cup of mead to make him stop wailing, or something of that kind?)

⁸⁰¹ Eur. *Or.* 807-18 see ch.2 p.141.

⁸⁰² Accius 2 Ribbeck. *apud.* Σ Serv. Dan. *Aen.* 8.130.

⁸⁰³ Σ Serv. Dan. *Aen.* 8.130; Priscian P 638. Keil.

Others relate that Oenomaus and Maia were the children of Sterope and Atlas, that Hippodamia was the daughter of Oenomaus, of whom Atreus was born; also, Mercury was the son of Maia, from whom were the Arcadians, among whom was Evander, which Accius relates fully in the *Atreus*.⁸⁰⁴

The appearance of Mercury, the Roman transposition of Hermes, implicates Hermes' son Myrtilus, while Accius' use of *simul* suggests an imminent result of the wooing of Hippodamia. Taken together, the evidence suggests that Pelops' betrayal and murder of Myrtilus is the action introduced by *simul*, rather than simply Oenomaus' loss of his daughter, which is self-evident, or Oenomaus' fall from the chariot, which is only made possible by Myrtilus' sabotage of the chariot.

Therefore, though the context of fr.2 is indiscernible, Pelops' murder of Myrtilus seems to occur as a source of inherent guilt for both Atreus and Thyestes. Though this ancestral crime may not have been the only one referred to in the play, as mention of Tantalus' crimes may simply not have survived, its inclusion suggests Accius was following the Greek example.⁸⁰⁵ As we have discovered, Oenomaus' story recurred in Greek tragedy before Tantalus' crimes became popular in Latin poetry.⁸⁰⁶ We cannot be certain if Accius, caught between these two trends, included Tantalus' festal crimes, or if he included Tantalus' crimes at all.

Like the Greek Tantalid tragedies considered above, Accius' fragments allow us to compare references to ancestral crimes in the plays of later Tantalid generations. Accius' *Agamemnonidae* gives an inclusive title, which suggests it includes Agamemnon's children, as *Pelopidae* includes Atreus, Thyestes and Chrysippus.⁸⁰⁷ Thus, both Orestes and Electra should be reunited with Iphigenia. Hyginus' variant includes all of the Agamemnonidae: Electra pursues Iphigenia under false reports that Orestes has been killed, but neither testimonia nor fragments support this plotline.⁸⁰⁸

Nonetheless, the fragments do reveal clues about the evocation of ancestral crimes in Accius' Pelopid plays. The first example draws on the crime of Atreus and Tantalus directly, though the speaker could be any one of the Agamemnonidae:

...inimicitias Pelopidum

⁸⁰⁴ Σ Serv. Dan. *Aen.* 8.130.

⁸⁰⁵ I would not go as far as Baldarelli in suggesting that Tantalus probably appeared in Accius' tragedy, after comparison with Seneca's *Thyestes* (122-4, 132, 139-42) (2004 p.127).

⁸⁰⁶ See ch.2. pp.125-126.

⁸⁰⁷ We can only date Accius' works within the scope of his career (140-86 BC), as there is no evidence for the specific dating of each tragedy.

⁸⁰⁸ Cf. Warmington 1936 pp.330-1.

Extinctas iam atque oblitteratas memoria
Renouare

...the enmities of Pelops' sons—
already smothered and blotted from memory
to renew⁸⁰⁹

Here the subject of the sentence is lost, who or what governs the infinitive is unclear, but it is clear that the ancestral crimes are begetting fresh crimes in the play. There are three possible ancestral crimes that could be alluded to here: the traditional seduction of Aërope and the consequent Thyestean feast, the post-Hellenistic tradition of Atreus and Thyestes' murder of their brother Chrysippus, or both episodes.⁸¹⁰

The fratricide of Chrysippus is not directly alluded to but is made possible by the less specific use of the patronym, unlike Euripides' more direct allusion to Thyestes' feast in *Iphigenia in Tauris*.⁸¹¹ In contrast to Euripides' singular strife (ἔριν), Accius' plural use of enmities (*inimicitias*) suggests Atreus and Thyestes' enmity with Chrysippus and one another, as the enmity between Atreus and Thyestes is singular and mutual, though it manifests in many reciprocal acts; the adultery, the exile and the feast.⁸¹² As a result, I suggest Accius' character is alluding to both episodes here, providing an interesting divergence from the focus on Pelops' race in the earlier fragments, though of course such reference may simply not have survived from this play.

Should we read this fragment as an allusion to not only Thyestes' feast but also the death of Chrysippus, the episode Accius seems to have related in his *Pelopidae*, then Accius is drawing on the classical and Hellenistic traditions to establish thematic expectations of tragedies on infighting between the children themselves, rather than between children and parents. Yet more intriguingly, Accius fr.16-19 provides a commentary on the role these ancestral stories play:

Sic
multi, animus quorum atroci vinctus malitia est,
composita dicta e pectore evolvunt suo,
quae cum **componas dicta** factis discrepant.

⁸⁰⁹ Accius 1 Ribbeck (My translation).

⁸¹⁰ See ch.2 p.117.

⁸¹¹ Eur. *IT*. 811: Ἀτρέως Θυέστου τ' οἴσθα γενομένην ἔριν; (Do you know of the strife that occurred between Atreus and Thyestes?)

⁸¹² s.v. *OLD inimicitia*. Adams and Mayer point out that poetic plurals can be used to aggrandise the concept or "recognise a plurality of components or adjuncts in the singular concept" (1999 34.3). Here I suggest the latter.

Thus many,
Whose souls are in the bonds of hideous spite,
Roll out from their own hearts **some trumped-up tale**
Which tallies not when you do balance it
Against the facts.⁸¹³

Fr.2 discredits tragic protagonists as illogical, critiquing the stories they concoct as from the heart, the seat of passion. Thus fr.2 could be attributed to the chorus or an attendant character as someone outside the action. But as there are three siblings, one sibling could be mediating a dispute between the other two with a more logical approach. The repetition of *composita dicta* (trumped up) *componas dicta* (balance) might be better translated as a “measured” tale that does not “measure up” to reflect the antanaclasis and convey the tone of skepticism. The *dicta*, of course, could mean any story concocted from rumours or reports, but may more directly apply to the ancestral stories evident in the other fragment of Accius’ *Agamemnonidae* as a family-centred tragedy.

Therefore, what survives of Accius’ *Agamemnonidae* reveals which ancestral crimes may have been related and how such stories may have been viewed. The first fragment may indicate that the brothers’ murder of Chrysippus was incorporated, in addition to the feast of Thyestes, and that these ancestral crimes will be “renewed” to impact upon the action of the play.⁸¹⁴ This suggests that Accius’ *Atreus* may have incorporated Thyestes and Atreus’ murder of Chrysippus to heighten each brother’s fear of the other, drawing on Lycophron’s Hellenistic *Pelopidae*, a play Accius adapted himself. The second fragment introduces the Euripidean skepticism we saw in the *Orestes*, where characters’ stories, ancestral or otherwise, must be doubted. But whereas Euripides’ *Electra* doubts what the community say about her own family, Accius’ speaker here challenges the stories told by people directly affected by calamity: the tragic protagonists.

Overall, the Republican fragments vary in content: both Ennius’ *Thyestes* and Accius’ *Atreus* reflect Pelops’ race, albeit at different points in Thyestes’ story, whereas Accius’ *Agamemnonidae* alludes to the feast and the murder of Chrysippus among later generations. Nonetheless, both Ennius’ *Thyestes* and Accius’ *Agamemnonidae* suggest that ancestral crimes will beget future crimes and demonstrate the manipulation of ancestral stories according to characters’ agendas.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹³ Accius 2 Ribbeck.

⁸¹⁴ Accius 1 Ribbeck.

⁸¹⁵ Varius’ *Thyestes* fragment may reflect the programmatic nature of ancestral crimes if we consider the *infandissima* (unspeakable crimes) to be handed down through the

This mistrust of storytelling makes the audience aware of how each character affects and is affected by the ancestral crime they choose to relate. We have seen this more clearly in the complete Greek tragedies because we can assign speech to characters and compare their representations, yet Accius' *Agamemnonidae* questions ancestral stories and Ennius' *Thyestes* shows Thyestes sanitizing his family history to curry favour in Epirus. This trend of competing histories is also used by Seneca to characterise the two brothers and contrast their views against those of a local male chorus. Whilst we cannot view Republican fragments in the context of each original tragedy, we know that Seneca's complete *Thyestes* contrasts characters' views against the supernatural prologue, which provides a seemingly objective measure of how inherent guilt will impact events within the play.

Seneca's *Thyestes*

Indeed, many focus on the unusual two-speaker prologue of Seneca's *Thyestes* as an interpretive tool for the remainder of the play.⁸¹⁶ Yet after the prologue, the ways in which Atreus, Thyestes and the chorus remember ancestral crimes are idiosyncratic, thus develop their characterisation. The chorus present ancestral crimes as local history and formulate their opening song as a prayer to save Argos:⁸¹⁷

alternae scelerum ne redeant vices
nec succedat avo deterior nepos
et maior placeat culpa minoribus.

that a cycle of answering crimes return,
that grandsire be followed by worse grandchild
and the young strive to be elders in evil.⁸¹⁸

So here the chorus makes clear their fear of the reciprocal nature of revenge, particularly in a family setting where each generation aims to surpass the crimes of the predecessor.⁸¹⁹ Whilst the cycle may evoke the image of Fortune's wheel that Ennius' *Thyestes* alludes to, it is not associated with the goddess but is presented as a result of

generations as inherent guilt. Of course this could demonstrate a response to provocation and suggests some sort of diminished responsibility, as discussed above. Nonetheless, the reciprocity seen in the other Republican fragments is echoed here.

⁸¹⁶ E.g. Schiesaro "The central action of the play- Atreus' revenge- will have to be perceived by the audience within the alienating frame provided by the prologue, with its discordant attempts at establishing responsibility and causal connections" (2003 p.37). Cf. *op. cit.* pp.30-2, pp.45-9, Braginton 1933 p.31, Boyle 1983 pp.199-200.

⁸¹⁷ Sen. *Thy.* 121.

⁸¹⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 133-5.

⁸¹⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 176-204, 249-53.

the progeny's desire to surpass ancestral crimes presenting them as a manifest destiny.

The chorus cites "parched Tantalus' impious issue" (*sicci progenies impia Tantalii*) as the *impetus* for inherent guilt,⁸²⁰ to then set out Pelops' murder of Myrtilus:

fas valuit nihil
aut commune nefas. proditus occidit
deceptor domini Myrtilus, et fide
vectus qua tulerat nobile reddidit
mutato pelagus nomine: notior
nulla est Ioniis fabula navibus.

Right achieved nothing—
nor collective wrong. Myrtilus, his master's
betrayed, fell betrayed; conveyed as disloyally
as he conveyed others, he made the sea
renowned through its changed name; no tale
is better known on Ionian ships.⁸²¹

Yet here the chorus fails to blame Pelops, they name neither him nor Hippodamia, nor Oenomaus. Instead, Seneca capitalises on the popularity of the myth to centralize Myrtilus' role and present his death as deserved. Thus Seneca's chorus does not condemn the father of their current king but deflects blame away both in space, as Myrtilus is not a local royal, and in time, as Tantalus ruled before the living memory of characters on stage.

This deflection allows the chorus to add pathos to Pelops' role as a victim of his father's cannibalistic feast:

exceptus gladio parvulus impio
dum currit patrium natus ad osculum,
immatura focis victima concidit
divisusque tua est, Tantale, dextera,
mensas ut strueres hospitibus deis.
hos aeterna fames persequitur cibos,
hos aeterna sitis; nec dapibus feris
decerni potuit poena decentior.
Stat lassus vacuo gutture Tantalus.

A little boy caught by an impious sword
as he ran to his own father's kiss,
and fell at the hearth, an unripe victim;
your hand, Tantalus, sectioned him
to furnish the table for your guests the gods.
Such food is avenged by eternal hunger,
eternal thirst; for that savage feast
no apter penalty could have been appointed.

⁸²⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 135-6 (My translation).

⁸²¹ Sen. *Thy.* 137- 42.

Tantalus stands spent and empty-throated.⁸²²
 Here Pelops is again unnamed, and is described instead as an infant. The chorus has built up to the most shocking example of ancestral crime, to give a distanced event as a climax. As above, Seneca withholds naming a character, this time until part way through the story itself, and places *Tantale* between caesurae for dramatic effect. Seneca draws on Tantalus' cooking of Pelops, a variant typically discredited in extant Greek myth,⁸²³ and connects the festal crime with the starvation punishment, whereas Greek sources only attest dehydration.⁸²⁴

Of course, Seneca's audience is already aware of this crime, the Fury recalled the cooking of Pelops in the prologue and explicitly linked it to Thyestes' feast:

ignibus iam subditis
 spument aena, membra per partes eant
 discerpta, patrios polluat sanguis focos,
 epulae instruantur. non novi sceleris tibi
 conviva venies.

Now let cauldrons foam with fires lit beneath them, let rent limbs go piece by piece, let blood pollute the ancestral hearth, let a banquet be furnished. You will join the diners at a crime that is not new to you.⁸²⁵
 Thus the chorus' build up to the story and reluctance to name Pelops as an aggressor, lest he be victimised, suggests that while the story is not new to the audience, the chorus' sanitization of it is. Thus the chorus censors ancestral crimes in their collective memory to canonize Argos' history within the tragedy.

Later on, when Atreus sends his assistant to deceive Thyestes, the chorus appeals to his sense of family honour to try to dissuade him:

Tandem regia nobilis,
 antiqui genus Inachi,
fratrum composuit minas.
 Quis vos exagitat furor,
alternis dare sanguinem
et sceptrum scelere aggredi?
 nescitis, cupidi arcium,
 regnum quo iaceat loco.
 Regem non faciunt opes,
 non vestis Tyriae color,

⁸²² Sen. *Thy.* 143-53. I have substituted the first two lines of the Loeb (The little son running for his father's kiss| was received with a cold-blooded sword), with my own translation to better reflect the suspense of the Latin syntax, which separates the young boy and the father figure.

⁸²³ E.g. Pindar. *Ol.* 1. 46-59. See ch.2. p.99.

⁸²⁴ See ch.2 p.118.

⁸²⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 59-63.

non frontis nota regia,
non auro nitidae trabes.

At last this famed royal house,
issue of ancient Inachus,
has arranged the brothers' threats.

What is this frenzy that drives you

**to spill your blood by turns
and beset the sceptre with crime?**

In your greed for strongholds, you mistake
the place where kingship lies.

A king is not made by wealth
nor the colour of Tyrian robes
nor the sign of royalty on his brow
nor roofbeams gleaming with gold.⁸²⁶

The chorus views Atreus' threats as the work of the household, not only diminishing his responsibility, but also his power and agency, to ultimately belittle his decision. They appeal to the familiar image of the sceptre, which as we have seen above is symbolically loaded with the wealth and the infamy of the family.⁸²⁷ This image is extended to the foreboding nature of wealth as a mark of depravity, as they draw on familiar heroic age status symbols: the purple cloth and the golden treasure, seen in Accius' *Pelopidae*.⁸²⁸

Thus the chorus of Seneca's *Thyestes* attributes blame to Tantalus. This not only reiterates the ancestral crime that the audience has already heard about in the prologue, but also filters this story through the chorus' collective memory. Seneca then contrasts this public history with Atreus' personal recollection of his ancestors' crimes as his legacy, handed down just as the crime-ridden sceptre (*sceptrum scelere aggre**di*) has been.

Atreus associates his ancestry with another heirloom:

haec ipsa pollens incliti Pelopis domus
ruat vel in me, dummodo in fratrem ruat.

This mighty house of famous Pelops itself—let it fall even on me, so long as it
falls on my brother.⁸²⁹

Here the house is attributed to Pelops, who traditionally came from Phrygia but settled in Argos after wooing Hippodamia.⁸³⁰ This suggests that the house itself has not yet hosted an ancestral crime, but suffers inherent guilt from Pelops' crime, as is suggested

⁸²⁶ Sen. *Thy.* 336-52.

⁸²⁷ See ch.2. pp.131-141,146-147.

⁸²⁸ Accius 5 Ribbeck. See above ch.2 p.119.

⁸²⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 191-2.

⁸³⁰ Euphor. 106, Diod. Sic.4.74.1, Lycoph. *Alex.* 150, Pind. *Ol.* 1.24; 9.9.

by Atreus' willingness to be crushed alongwith his brother, irrespective of their different ranking and their own crimes.

Indeed, Atreus is not only willing to be a victim of his household for the sake of his revenge but feels compelled to take an active role to emulate his ancestors:

Tantalum et Pelopem aspice;
ad haec manus exempla poscuntur meae

Look to Tantalus and Pelops: my hands are called to follow their examples.⁸³¹ Here Atreus recalls crimes committed outside of Argos by remembering Tantalus; Atreus will emulate both the infanticidal forced cannibalism of Tantalus and the false promises Pelops made to Myrtilus, when he lures Thyestes to the feast. Unlike the chorus, Atreus does not undermine Pelops' crime but celebrates it as an example; he does not explain these references to others, but they punctuate his own deliberation. So, for Atreus, ancestral references are more dynamic because they spur him to act and less sanitised because they are embraced as an empowering legacy, rather than lamented as a macabre history.

Having viewed himself as a victim of his house and as an agent compelled by his ancestors, Atreus finally assumes an active role as the head of the household and the new generation:

hoc, anime, occupa.
dignum est Thyeste facinus et **dignum** Atreo:
uterque faciat! vidit infandas domus
Odrysia mensas—fateor, immane est scelus,
sed occupatum: maius hoc aliquid dolor
dignum est Thyeste facinus et dignum Atreo:
uterque faciat!
inveniat. animum **Daulis** inspira **parens**
sororque; causa est similis: assiste et manum
impelle nostram. liberos avidus pater
gaudensque laceret et **suos** artus edat.
bene est, abunde est: hic placet poenae modus
tantisper.

The deed is **worthy** of Thyestes and worthy of Atreus: **let each perform it**. **The Odrysian house saw an unspeakable feast**—that crime is monstrous, admittedly, but already taken. My bitterness must find something **greater** than this. Breathe your spirit into me, you **Daulian mother and sister**: our cause is comparable. Stand by me, drive my hand. Let the father rend **his children** avidly, **gleefully**, and eat his own flesh. This is good, this is ample. This measure of revenge pleases me—for the present.⁸³²

⁸³¹ Sen. *Thy.* 242-3.

⁸³² Sen. *Thy.* 269-80.

Here Atreus once more equates himself with his brother, playing on the suitability (*dignum*) of both punishments they *deserve* to be victims of and the crimes they are *apt* to commit. This captures the pollution of both the punisher Atreus' who will pollute himself nepoticide and the punished Thyestes' endocannibalism as, like Tereus, Thyestes eats his *own* sons. Thus the brothers assume a more active role in their own downfall than Atreus suggested in lines 191-2.

Seneca's Atreus then looks beyond ancestral crimes to the feast of Procne and Philomela as a paradigm, the same myth Sophocles related in his *Tereus* and referenced in his *Electra*.⁸³³ Yet, unlike Sophocles' *Electra*, Seneca's Atreus is fully aware of the parallels between Procne's feast and his own; he anticipates the feast by comparing the rape of Philomela to the seduction of Aërope and aims to somehow surpass this crime.⁸³⁴ Atreus' feast seems to exceed Procne's because he includes more than one child and pretends to serve a reconciliation dinner, thus an especially festive (*gaudens*) occasion. Therefore, Atreus evokes the supernatural influence of the Daulian *anima* as he establishes his role within the family tradition and aims to have his house outstrip all others in crime.

Ultimately Atreus remembers the legacy of his house as a reputation to uphold, just as we might recall Atreus equating inherent kingship with inherent guilt in the previous chapter:

Ut nemo doceat fraudis et sceleris vias,
regnum docebit. ne mali fiant times?
nascuntur.

Though no one teaches them the ways of deceit and crime, kingship will teach it. You fear their becoming evil? They are born so.⁸³⁵ Though the Greek tragedians presented the wealthy status of this family as dangerous through choral songs and stage props, Seneca's self-aware and self-motivating Atreus takes pride in these crimes as his inheritance and views them as a manifest destiny.

Thyestes is a very different brother. Whereas Atreus strives to fulfill that role as the rightful heir by reflecting on ancestral crimes, Thyestes the exiled usurper reflects nostalgically on his childhood:

tractum soli natalis et patrios deos
(si sunt tamen di) cerno, Cyclopum sacras

⁸³³ See ch.2 pp. 53-58.

⁸³⁴ Cf. Littlewood's close comparison of Seneca's Atreus and Philomela in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2000 pp.253-9).

⁸³⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 312-15.

turres, labore maius humano decus,
celebrata iuveni stadia, per quae nobilis
palmam paterno non semel curru tuli.
occurret Argos, populus occurret frequens—
sed nempe et Atreus.

the reaches of my native soil and the gods of my fathers (if there really *are* gods); the Cyclopes' sacred towers, a glory too great for human labour, and the racetrack I frequented in youth, through which I carried the palm in glory more than once on my father's chariot. Argos will come to meet me, the people will come in crowds—but so will Atreus, of course.⁸³⁶

Fundamentally, Thyestes is the only character who remembers his own lived experience rather than those of earlier generations. Speaking as a humbled exile, Thyestes is sentimental; he does not focus on the power of the *domus* and ancestral crimes, but rather on the surrounding land and ancestral gods. Thyestes also views his home with childlike affection and remembers playing there: before Aërope and the Golden Fleece, before women and power.⁸³⁷

This nostalgic gloss allows for dramatic irony as Thyestes recalls playing on his father's chariot, which we of course know is a relic of ancestral crime as Pelops deceived Myrtilus, just as Atreus has vowed to deceive Thyestes. Unlike Atreus, Thyestes does not name Pelops but uses the familial address *paterno* as he does with other familial terms such as “native” (*natalis*) and “fathers” (*patrios*) to emphasise the personal significance of his homecoming and create pathos for his deception.

Overall, Seneca's supernatural prologue serves as a foil for the different facets of memory at work in his tragedy: the chorus' local history, Atreus' ancestral pride and Thyestes' nostalgia. Seneca's chorus describe the ancestral tale, which is typically related in a character prologue in the Greek Tantalid plays, to exonerate Pelops of deceiving Myrtilus and establish Atreus' ancestry as regional history. Like Euripides' *Electra* and *Iphigenia* tragedies Seneca's Atreus conflates ancestral wealth and power with inherent guilt, but unlike Euripides' Agamemnon and Orestes, Seneca's Atreus embraces his role voluntarily, calculating the worth of his crime. Like Sophocles' *Electra*, Seneca's Atreus looks to Procne as an example, given the popularity of the

⁸³⁶ Sen. *Thy.* 406-12. Cf. Iphigenia's similarly infantile nostalgia Eur. *IT* 845-6: ἰὼ Κυκλωπῆς ἐστία | ἰὼ πατρίς, Μυκῆνα φίλα (O hearth built by the Cyclopes, O homeland, dear Mycenae!) See. ch.2. p.785 above.

⁸³⁷ cf. Rose's claim that Thyestes rejects power (1987 pp.122-5).

Tereus myth in their respective eras.⁸³⁸ But unlike Sophocles' *Electra*, Seneca's Atreus plays an active, male role and understands the parallels between his feast and Procne's fully. Seneca's Thyestes, meanwhile, remembers his childhood without recalling the significance of symbols such as Pelops' chariot, demonstrating his naivety and vulnerability to attack. Thus, Seneca's Atreus embraces his ancestors' crimes to become an avenger, while Thyestes ignores them and becomes a victim.

Ch 2.2: Conclusion

Having considered how recalling ancestral crimes establishes each character's perception of their inherent guilt, several trends emerge. Tragedies dealing with Atreus' grandchildren suggest these characters mistrust stories about their ancestors, such as *Electra* in the prologue of Euripides' *Orestes*, and an unknown character, probably a Pelopid, in Accius' *Agamemnonidae*. Inversely, both Menelaus and Clytemnestra exploit Agamemnon's ancestry to manipulate his treatment of Iphigenia in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and in Ennius' *Thyestes* Thyestes misrepresents his family history after the feast to gain support in Epirus.

Inherent guilt is also regularly represented through both staged and unstaged heirlooms such as the spear/ sceptre of Pelops in both Sophocles' and Euripides' *Electra*, Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Iphigenia in Tauris* and Seneca's *Thyestes*. This association of inherent guilt with inherent royalty is perpetuated through the male heirs' pride in continuing the family violence: as Orestes is ordered to in Sophocles' *Electra*, as Agamemnon is asked to in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and as Atreus strives to in Seneca's *Thyestes*. Indeed, even in the Republican fragments repaying one's own revenge and repeating ancestral crimes is achieved through the same act of violence: the reciprocity of meeting crime with crime and fulfilling a legacy of inherent guilt is alluded to in each Greek Tantalid play, emphasised in all of the Republican Thyestes fragments and exploited in Seneca's *Thyestes*.

Like the eponymous heroine of Sophocles' *Electra*, Sophocles' Atreus in *Thyestes' Feast* may have expressed skepticism about the role of inherent guilt when judging Thyestes' adultery and an increased belief in the role of inherent guilt in his own crime: in Atreus case, the infanticide. But unlike Sophocles' *Electra*, we might

⁸³⁸ Sophocles' *Tereus* suggests the myth was becoming popular in his period, though we cannot pinpoint the relative dating of his plays. Seneca also inherited Accius' *Tereus*, in addition to the tradition of Procne in Augustan poetry: *Ov. Am.* 2.6.7; *Pont.* 3.1 .119; *Met.* 6.424-674. cf. Littlewood 2000 pp.253-9.

expect Atreus as a male character to be more aware of the similarities between ancestral crimes and his own crimes, most likely referring to Pelops' deception or again looking to Procne as an example, given that Tantalus' festal crimes were not popular in fifth-century myth. Though Tantalus is repeatedly invoked in *Orestes*, it is his transgressive speech, not his feasting that is emphasised. Euripides' *Thyestes* most likely made use of symbolic heirlooms such as Pelops' spear/ sceptre as many of his other plays had, referring to or perhaps even staging the Golden Fleece as an image of dangerous ancestral wealth, such as he depicts in Menelaus' armour in *Orestes*.

Whereas the extant Greek Tantalid plays provide circumstantial evidence as to how characters' recollection and revision of ancestral crimes shape their actions in the play, the Republican fragments present direct but decontextualised evidence of how ancestral guilt featured in Accius' *Atreus* and Ennius' *Thyestes*.⁸³⁹ Ennius' *Thyestes* evidences Thyestes manipulating his ancestor's crimes to curry favour in Epirus and, like Accius' *Atreus*, emphasises the motif of reciprocity that is part of being an avenger and a Tantalid heir. In Seneca's *Thyestes* the new festal variants of Tantalus' myth are exploited in a supernatural prologue and the brothers' memories distinguish each of them as a victim or as an aggressor. Thus, unlike the Greek heroes, Seneca's Atreus does not develop or revise his memory of ancestral crimes but increasingly uses them as an impetus for the tragic climax: Thyestes' feast.

⁸³⁹ In Ennius' case, this is due to Cicero's use of the *Thyestes* fragments to discuss distress and anger in *Tusculan Disputations*. E.g. Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 3.11; 3.12; 3.19.

2.3: Divine Intervention

As we have seen, the symbolic associations of heirlooms as tokens of inherent guilt are emphasised in both Greek and Roman tragedy. Moreover in both Euripides' *Electra* and Seneca's *Thyestes* the dead appear in a divine capacity; the deified Dioscuri appear *ex machina* whereas Tantalus' ghost appears with a Fury to oversee the action. Therefore, in order to fully understand how supernatural forces in the fragmentary *Thyestes* tragedies influenced Atreus' revenge; we must now compare the role of the Golden Fleece and the intervention of the gods in the extant works of each tragedian.

The Golden Fleece in Greece

At the heart of Atreus and Thyestes' feud lies the Golden Fleece, the token of kingship in Mycenae. The Golden Lamb is variously described as a Golden Fleece, the image of the Golden Lamb on a phiale and a sceptre, but remains a divine treasure in each case.⁸⁴⁰ As Gernet has demonstrated, sacrificial objects such as the Golden Lamb were often reproduced in precious metal as an *anathema*.⁸⁴¹ This suggests that objects such as the phiale and sceptre would represent the Golden Lamb in place of the fleece, since the gods tend to give the lamb to Atreus alive and such *anathema* can be more conveniently used as props. According to Pherecydes, Artemis planted the Golden Lamb in Atreus' flocks to cause strife,⁸⁴² which is echoed in Artemis' alleged wrath against Atreus' son Agamemnon in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.⁸⁴³ However, according to Euripides' *Orestes*, it was Hermes who planted the Golden Lamb in Atreus' flocks, having been invoked by his son Myrtilus in response to Pelops' betrayal.⁸⁴⁴

Editors debate whether *Electra* or the chorus sing lines 990-1000 of Euripides' *Orestes*, despite the fact that the shift into the iambo-trochaic is typical of Euripidean monody.⁸⁴⁵ Moreover, the personal address "old Tantalus, my ancestor" (γέροντι πατέρι Ταντάλω) and claims of a first hand account of "what ruin **I have seen** in the house" (δόμων ἄς **κατεῖδον** ἄτας), albeit of events that occurred before *Electra* was born, suggest that *Electra* is singing about her ancestors. As discussed above, *Electra* describes Hermes, son of Maia, sending the Golden Lamb in retaliation to his son's

⁸⁴⁰ Σ Eur. *Or.* 995= *Alcmaeonis*. 6. West, Pher.132-3.

⁸⁴¹ Gernet 1981 p.138.

⁸⁴² Pher. 132-3 cf. Σ Eur. *Or.* 811 Dindorf.

⁸⁴³ Aesch. *Ag.* 202-4.

⁸⁴⁴ Eur. *Or.* 990-1000.

⁸⁴⁵ See ch.2 p.138 n.718 above.

death as a clear chain of cause and effect.⁸⁴⁶ This sequence of crimes then traces down to Thyestes' feast:

ὄθεν Ἔρις τό τε πτερωτὸν
άλιου μετέβαλεν ἄρμα
τὰν πρὸς ἑσπέραν κέλευθον
οὐρανοῦ, προσαρμόσασα
χιονόπῳλον Ἄω,
ἑπταπόρου τε δράμημα
Πλειάδος εἰς ὁδὸν ἄλλαν [Ζεὺς μεταβάλλει].
†τῶνδὲ τ'† ἀμείβει θανάτους θανάτων
τά τ' ἐπώνυμα δεῖπνα Θυέστου
λέκτρα τε Κρήσσης Ἀερόπας δολί-
ας δολίοισι γάμοις· τὰ πανύστατα δ' εἰς ἐμὲ συγγενέταν τ' ἐμὸν ἦλθε δόμων
πολυπόνοις ἀνάγκαις.

Thereupon **Strife** changed
the sun's winged car
to a westward course,
yoking to it
Dawn with her snowy horses,
changed the path of the seven-starred
Pleiades onto a different road [Zeus changed it].
And now she brings deaths in requital for deaths,
the feast named for Thyestes,
and the Cretan Aërope's bed of love,
crafty woman in a crafty marriage. Last,
against me and my brother has it come
by the toil-laden doom of our house.⁸⁴⁷

Here blame for Thyestes and Atreus' crimes is referred to Strife and Dawn, inverting the reversal of the stars to be a cause of Thyestes' cannibalistic banquet, rather than a result of it as in Euripides' *Thyestes* fr.397b.⁸⁴⁸ This suggests that we should not expect absolute consistency when considering the role of the Golden Fleece in Euripides' tragedies, because Electra is trusting a publicly held version of events: despite her claims to have seen "ruin in the house" Electra cannot possibly have seen events before she was born.

By contrast, in Euripides' *Electra* the chorus takes a more critical stance when presenting a different variant of the myth:

ἄταλὰν ὑπὸ †ματέρος Ἀργείων†
ὀρέων ποτὲ κληδῶν
ἐν πολιαῖσι μένει φήμαις
εὐαρμόστοις ἐν καλάμοις

⁸⁴⁶ Eur. *Or.* 990-1000.

⁸⁴⁷ Eur. *Or.* 1000-1010.

⁸⁴⁸ See ch.1 p.23.

Πᾶνα μοῦσαν ἠδύθροον
 πνέοντ', ἀγρῶν ταμίαν,
 χρυσεῖαν ἄρνα καλλίποκον
 πορευῆσαι. πετρίνοις δ' ἐπι-
 στάς κᾶρυξ ἴαχεν βάθροις·
 Ἀγορὰν ἀγοράν, Μυκη-
 ναῖοι, στείχετε μακαρίων
 ὀψόμενοι τυράννων
 φάσματα δεινά· χοροὶ δ'
 <αὐτίκ'> Ἀτρεϊδῶν ἐγέραιρον οἴκου

Once on a time a tender lamb taken from its mother
 in the Argive mountains
 (so runs the tale in our age-old legends)
 did Pan, warder of the fields,
 breathing sweet-voiced music
 on well-joined reeds,
 bring forth, a lamb with lovely fleece of gold.
 And standing on a platform
 of stone a herald shouted,
 "To assembly, to assembly,
 men of Mycenae,
 to see the august portent
 of your blessed rulers!" And choruses
 <straightway> hailed the house of the Atridae.⁸⁴⁹

Here it is Pan, the rural god of flocks and son of Hermes, who introduces the
 Golden Lamb to the royal house.

This is presented as an alternative to the widely held variant of the myth:

μολπαὶ δ' ἠϋξονθ' ἕτεραι
 χρυσεῖας ἄρνός ἀμφὶ λόγοις
 Θυέστου· κρυφίαις γὰρ εὐ-
 ναῖς πείσας ἄλοχον φίλαν
 Ἀτρέως, τέρας ἐκκομί-
 ζει πρὸς δώματα, νεόμενος δ'
 εἰς ἀγόρους αὐτεῖ
 τὰν κερόεσσαν ἔχειν
 χρυσεόμαλλον κατὰ δῶμα ποιίμαναν.
 τότε δὴ τότε <τάς> φαεν-
 νὰς ἄστρον μετέβασ' ὁδοῦς
 [...]
 λέγεται <τάδε>, τὰν δὲ πί-
 στιν σμικρὰν παρ' ἔμοιγ' ἔχει,

But other were the songs that swelled in praise
 of the golden lamb because of the words
 of Thyestes: for with illicit love
 he won over the dear wife

⁸⁴⁹ Eur. *El.* 699-712.

of Atreus and removed
 this portent to his own house, and then coming
 into the assembly he cried out
 that he had in his house
 the horned lamb with fleece of gold.
 Then, then it was
 that Zeus changed the bright courses of the stars,
 [...]
 That is the story men tell, but the credit
 it receives from me is but slight,
 that the gold-visaged sun should turn,
 altering its torrid station
 to cause mortals grief
 for the punishment of their wrongdoing.⁸⁵⁰

In the chorus' account the divine origin of the Golden Lamb is secondary to its impact upon the family. But, given the consistency with which Myrtilus' death features as an ancestral crime in the extant Greek Pelopid plays and the *Oenomaus* of both Euripides and Sophocles, the popular version of the myth that men tell (λέγεται) in Euripides' *Orestes*, is that in which Hermes sends the Golden Lamb to avenge his son Myrtilus as distinguished from the previous story of Pan giving Atreus the fleece.⁸⁵¹

Whereas in *Orestes*, Electra presents Hermes' giving the Golden Lamb as an historical fact that she reiterates in her prologue and her monody,⁸⁵² in *Electra*, the chorus of Argive women claim the rural god Pan is the benefactor, a variant that appeals to their rural community.⁸⁵³ But as Rosivach points out, Pan's intervention is a seemingly lesser-known story for Euripides' audience.⁸⁵⁴ Again, unlike Electra in *Orestes*, the chorus of rural Argive women in *Electra* are critical of the cataclysm story because as a group they have heard and compared different mythical variants. Therefore, Euripides not only introduces the Golden Fleece as a token of the family's plight but also as a tool for characterisation, because the rural community of *Electra* presents the tale differently from Electra herself in *Orestes*.

Indeed, Hermes' intervention is presented as an established version of the myth in a scholion to the above passage of Euripides' *Orestes*:

ἀκολουθεῖν ἂν δόξειεν τῷ τὴν Ἀλκμαιωνίδα πεποιηκότι εἰς τὰ περὶ τὴν ἄρνα,

⁸⁵⁰ Eur. *El.* 716-28, 737-8. Burkert mistakes the omission of Thyestes' feast in this passage to mean that Euripides' stellar reversal took place before the feast, but the feast is glossed over from cause (Golden Fleece) to effect (stellar reversal) here (1983 p.106).

⁸⁵¹ See ch2. p.143.

⁸⁵² Eur. *Or.* 1-27, 982-1000.

⁸⁵³ Eur. *El.* 716-28, 737-8.

⁸⁵⁴ Rosivach 1978 p.189.

ὡς καὶ Διονύσιος ὁ κυκλογράφος φησί. **Φερεκύδης δὲ οὐ καθ' Ἑρμοῦ μῆνιν φησι** τὴν ἄρνα ὑποβληθῆναι **ἀλλὰ Ἀρτέμιδος**. ὁ δὲ τὴν Ἀλκμαιωνίδα γράψας τὸν ποιμένα τὸν προσαγαγόντα τὸ ποίμνιον τῷ Ἀτρεΐ Ἀντίοχον καλεῖ.

Euripides would appear to be following the author of the *Alcmeonis* in regard to the story about the lamb, as Dionysius the Cyclographer also says. **Pherecydes says that it was not from Hermes' wrath that the lamb was put into the flock, but from Artemis'.** And the writer of the *Alcmeonis* calls the shepherd who brought the lamb to Atreus Antiochus.⁸⁵⁵

This implies that Hermes' intervention with the Golden Lamb was included in the c.7C BC epic *Alcmeonis* and suggests that Pherecydes distinguished Artemis' imposition of the Golden Lamb as a variant on Hermes' better-known intervention. Hermes' role as the god of shepherds and giver of the Golden Lamb derives from its origin myth, as Hermes typically gives the Golden Lamb to Nephele, Athamas' wife, who uses the lamb to send her children Helle and Phrixus to safety, from their murderous stepmother.⁸⁵⁶

Therefore, the Golden Lamb could have featured in Sophocles *Thyestes' Feast* and Euripides *Thyestes* as a symbol of Hermes' wrath and thus as a deferred punishment for Pelops' deception of Hermes' son Myrtilus, particularly given that Myrtilus' death seems to have featured in both Sophocles' and Euripides' *Oenomaus*. Although Euripides' *Electra* suggests that Pan may have given the Golden Lamb to Agamemnon, this seems to highlight the malleability of mythical variants and justify the chorus' uncertainty. Whilst the Pan variant *may* have been familiar to Euripides' audience, the fact that not only is the Golden Lamb given by a different god, but to a different king, Agamemnon and not Atreus, suggests Euripides concocted this variant and contrasted it with the more familiar tale of Thyestes that follows. Nonetheless, what is consistent is that the Golden Lamb is given to the family, suggesting that the gift's role in the Thyestean feast was at least symbolically significant.

Though Gernet argues that the Golden Fleece “is presented to us by different terms that amount to the same thing,” the Golden Lamb when alive bears a different significance to the Golden Fleece it becomes once killed.⁸⁵⁷ The scholia on the *Iliad* and Apollodorus' mythography suggest that a god gave the Golden Lamb to Atreus while it was still alive and Atreus choked it to death in a non-sacrificial killing:

ὁ δὲ Ἀτρεὺς εὐζάμενός ποτε τῶν αὐτοῦ ποιμνίων, ὅπερ ἂν κάλλιστον γένηται, τοῦτο **θῦσαι Ἀρτέμιδι**, λέγουσιν ἄρνος φανείσης χρυσοῦς ὅτι κατημέλησε τῆς εὐχῆς· πνίξας δὲ αὐτὴν εἰς λάρνακα κατέθετο κάκει ἐφύλασσε ταύτην· ἦν

⁸⁵⁵ Σ Eur. *Or.* 995 = *Alcmeonis*. 6. West.

⁸⁵⁶ Herod. 38 A Fowler, Pher. 98-9, 105 Fowler.

⁸⁵⁷ Gernet 1981 p.131.

Ἀερόπη δίδωσι τῷ Θυέστη μοιχευθεῖσα ὑπ' αὐτοῦ. χρησιμοῦ γὰρ γεγονότος τοῖς Μυκηναίοις ἐλέσθαι βασιλέα Πελοπίδην, μετεπέμψαντο Ἀτρέα καὶ Θυέστην. λόγου δὲ γενομένου περὶ τῆς βασιλείας ἐξεῖπε Θυέστης τῷ πλήθει τὴν βασιλείαν δεῖν ἔχειν τὸν ἔχοντα τὴν ἄρνα τὴν χρυσοῦν· συνθεμένου δὲ τοῦ Ἀτρέως δεῖξας ἐβασίλευσε. Ζεὺς δὲ **Ἑρμῆν πέμπει πρὸς Ἀτρέα** καὶ λέγει συνθέσθαι πρὸς Θυέστην περὶ τοῦ βασιλεῦσαι Ἀτρέα, εἰ τὴν ἐναντίαν ὀδεύσει ὁ Ἥλιος· Θυέστου δὲ συνθεμένου τὴν δύσιν εἰς ἀνατολὰς ὁ Ἥλιος ἐποιήσατο· ὅθεν ἐκμαρτυρήσαντος τοῦ δαίμονος τὴν Θυέστου πλεονεξίαν, τὴν βασιλείαν Ἀτρεὺς παρέλαβε καὶ Θυέστην ἐφυγάδευσεν.

And Atreus once vowed **to sacrifice to Artemis** the finest of his flocks; but when a golden lamb appeared, they say that he neglected to perform his vow, and having choked the lamb, he deposited it in a box and kept it there, and Aerope gave it to Thyestes, by whom she had been debauched. For the Mycenaeans had received an oracle, which bade them choose a Pelopid for their king, and they had sent for Atreus and Thyestes. And when a discussion took place concerning the kingdom, Thyestes declared to the multitude that the kingdom ought to belong to him who owned the golden lamb, and when Atreus agreed, Thyestes produced the lamb and was made king. But Zeus **sent Hermes to Atreus** and told him to stipulate with Thyestes that Atreus should be king if the sun should go backward; and when Thyestes agreed, the sun set in the east; hence the deity having plainly attested the usurpation of Thyestes, Atreus got the kingdom and banished Thyestes.⁸⁵⁸

As Fowler points out, “it makes sense that Hermes, god of shepherds, would cause the Golden Lamb to be born in Atreus’ flocks”.⁸⁵⁹ Moreover, when Apollodorus suggests Hermes intervenes advising Atreus in order to change the course of the stars he seems to be reconciling the two separate divine gift-givers Artemis and Hermes, each of which is attested in the Euripides scholion, by setting up a test with two gods.⁸⁶⁰ But the Golden Lamb was most likely sent alive by one god alone to test Atreus in earlier versions, given that the Euripides scholia distinguish Artemis and Hermes as variants.

If we look beyond Hermes’ role as a benefactor and return to the myth of Nephele, we find that the Golden Lamb is sent alive as either a means for Nephele’s children to escape being killed by their father Athamas’ new wife Ino, or as a substitution for Nephele’s son Phrixus, who offers himself up to be sacrificed by his father Athamas.⁸⁶¹ One child, Phrixus, survives whilst the other, Helle, drowns. When sent by a god, the Golden Lamb appears as a living symbol of salvation for one child in

⁸⁵⁸ Apollod. *Epit.* 2.10-13, cf. Σ D. *Il.*2.106. Erbse.

⁸⁵⁹ Fowler 2013 p.436. Though Plato does not name Hermes specifically, he records a similar intervention to reverse the stars in response to the theft of the Golden Lamb (Plat. *Stat.* 268e-269a).

⁸⁶⁰ Σ Eur. *Or.* 995 = *Alcmeonis.* 6. West.

⁸⁶¹ Hes. 68. West, Pind. *Pyth.* 4.68, 231; Pher. 103 Fowler; Eur. *Med.* 5, *Hyps.* 22-3 Kannicht.

a myth that was staged not only in Aeschylus' and Sophocles' *Athamas* but also in Euripides' *Phrixus A.*⁸⁶² Thus, if the Golden Lamb was sent alive, as in the *Athamas* plays, it would signify the condemnation of one son, Thyestes, and the salvation of another, Atreus. Were it then killed by Atreus, as Apollodorus suggests, then it would signify Atreus' hubris and symbolize the death of innocents to come.

Indeed, the association between the Golden Fleece and the death of children features in Aeschylus' *Athamas* where there is a poignant reference to cooking:

τὸν μὲν τρίπους ἐδέξατ' οἰκεῖος λέβησαιεὶ φυλάσσων τὴν ὑπὲρ πυρὸς στάσιν

One of them was swallowed up by a three-legged household cauldron, which always kept its place over the fire.⁸⁶³

χαλκείοισιν ἐξαστήρσι(ν) †χειρούμενοι†
Taking it out with bronze flesh-hooks.⁸⁶⁴

There is no clear suggestion of cannibalism here and if this references a human being cooked, the cauldron, or *labes* tripod, may have been big enough to accommodate an adult.⁸⁶⁵ That said, two children are under threat in the *Athamas* story, and the article (τὸν) distinguishes one masculine subject of an aforementioned group. Indeed, Bremmer points out that Zeus Laphystios (the Devourer) appears in both Herodotus and Euripides' *Phrixos A.*⁸⁶⁶ This suggests that Euripides' tragedy told the version of *Athamas*' myth in which Phrixus is offered as a sacrifice to an anthropophagic Zeus and replaced with the Golden Lamb. Given the flesh hooks in Aeschylus fr.2, it seems reasonable to suggest that Aeschylus' *Athamas* followed this plotline, though the fragments do not provide enough detail irrefutably to assert that *Athamas*' son is cooked and not replaced by the Golden Lamb. That said, Aeschylus' fragments evoke two other tragic episodes in the Golden Fleece saga: the cooking of Thyestes' children and Medea's use of a cauldron ritual to trick Pelias' daughters into killing their father.

The similarities between Medea's attack on Pelias and these fragments emerge in art before Aeschylus' *Athamas*, and in Euripides' later references to the slaughter of Pelias in his *Medea*.⁸⁶⁷ The sixth and fifth-century vase paintings consistently depict a

⁸⁶² Eur. 822 Kannicht.

⁸⁶³ Aesch. 1 Radt.

⁸⁶⁴ Aesch. 2 Radt.

⁸⁶⁵ Benton's systematic review of *labes* demonstrates that "By the sixth century, or at any rate by the fifth, the tripod stand had superseded or coalesced with the tripod cauldron," which could be "double human size" s.v. *tripod* BNP.

⁸⁶⁶ Hdt. 7.197.3, Eur. T ii b Kannicht, Bremmer 2006 pp.13-14.

⁸⁶⁷ Eur. *Med.* 1-10.

tripod cauldron and a live ram, which Medea substitutes with a lamb to demonstrate the rejuvenation ritual she promises Pelias.⁸⁶⁸ So the death in the cauldron in Aeschylus' *Athamas* fragments, which seems to reflect the sacrifice of Athamas' son Phrixus, may have paralleled the cooking of Thyestes' children, but more clearly evokes the slaughter of Pelias.⁸⁶⁹ Each Golden Lamb narrative results in a death in a cauldron. As in Apollodorus' account of Atreus' slaughtering the Golden Lamb, Medea's slaughter of a ram (albeit an ordinary one) is analogous with her slaughter of Pelias having helped Jason win the Golden Fleece.⁸⁷⁰ This suggests that the death of the Golden Lamb was symbolically significant and that it pre-figured a similar crime: murder in a cauldron.

Once the Lamb is dead, the Golden Fleece takes on a different, perhaps more familiar, set of symbolic associations. As a skinned fleece, the Golden Fleece resembles the *kursa*; a Hittite cult object, this goatskin or sheepskin was taken to war as a token of kingship.⁸⁷¹ As Dräger points out, the Golden Fleece comes to signal Phrixus' tomb in the *Argonautica* and may have been used as a burial shroud in place of the oxhide used in Colchian ritual; thus the distinction between lamb and fleece reflects an omen of death.⁸⁷² Therefore the material worth of the Golden Fleece and its value as a symbol of kingship mean it is Atreus' property. Thus, as Lyons suggests, when Aërope hands this token over to Thyestes it underscores her sexual betrayal, whilst securing Thyestes' downfall by evidencing their affair.⁸⁷³ Therefore, once killed, the Golden Lamb takes on a new significance as the Golden Fleece because it is a different gift, given by a different benefactor. On the one hand, when the Golden Lamb is given by a god, usually Hermes, to Atreus it seems to provide a temptation to kill for himself what should be sacrificed to the gods, the failure of which has terrible results.⁸⁷⁴ On the other hand, when the female lover Aërope gives the Golden Fleece, it presents female betrayal and Thyestes' avarice. Thus the Golden Lamb provides a test for Atreus and the Golden Fleece tempts Thyestes to his downfall, evidencing his treasonous affair.

So were Euripides' and Sophocles' *Thyestes* plays to have referenced the Golden

⁸⁶⁸ *LIMC* Pelias 4 (c.510-500 BC); 5 (c.480 BC); 6a-d (6C BC); 7 (470-60 BC); 8 (c.500 BC); 10 (520 BC); 11 (420 BC); 12 (450 BC); 16c (500 BC); 18 (440 BC); 19 (430 BC).

⁸⁶⁹ Cf. Dräger 1993 pp.312-14.

⁸⁷⁰ Cf. Dräger 1993 pp.146-7.

⁸⁷¹ Bremmer 2006 p.26, cf. Popko 1978 pp.108-11 and McMahon 1991 pp.250-4.

⁸⁷² Dräger 1993 p.314. cf. Apoll. *Argo*. 3.200-9.

⁸⁷³ Lyons 2003 p.110.

⁸⁷⁴ Lyons 2003 p.97.

Fleece, it seems that the lamb would have been sent as a test by Hermes, killed by Atreus and stolen by Thyestes. Thus the Golden Lamb seems to be imposed by Hermes in revenge for Pelops' avarice when killing Myrtilus to prevent him from bedding Hippodamia and threatening the royal bloodline. Hermes' gift proves that Pelops' vices persist in his sons, as Atreus seems to have killed the lamb to conceal and protect it as a token of his own kingship, whilst Thyestes stole it for his own political gain. Therefore, given that Euripides and Sophocles each told the story of Myrtilus' death in their Oenomaus tragedies and the significance of the Golden Lamb when alive was presented in Aeschylus' *Athamas* and Euripides' *Phrixus* plays, the Golden Fleece telescopes a sequence of ancestral crimes and suggests the intervention of Hermes.

What remains less clear is how the Golden Fleece may have been introduced in Sophocles and Euripides' *Thyestes* plays. However, in Euripides' extant Pelopid plays the Golden Fleece appears in two forms: either a female character in monologue reports it,⁸⁷⁵ or it is represented as an *anathema*, a treasure representing a god-given gift, such as the phiale or sceptre that represent the Golden Fleece. Such an *anathema* may be found in the sceptre of the Pelopid king that recurs in Euripides' tragedies.⁸⁷⁶ Therefore, it seems that in the male-dominated tragedy of Euripides' *Thyestes*, the sceptre would most likely have appeared if the Golden Fleece were recalled in the play. The sceptre that reappears in Euripides seems to be just such a reproduction of the Golden Fleece, given its role as a symbol of ancestral guilt and kingship.

So although the Golden Fleece is not referred to in Sophocles' *Electra*, the use of the sceptre as an *anathema* for the Golden Fleece in Euripides' Pelopid plays suggests that the sceptre in Clytemnestra's dream in Sophocles' *Electra* functions in the same way. Ultimately, the Golden Fleece would have most likely appeared in Euripides' and Sophocles' *Thyestes* plays as an *anathema*, not a Golden Lamb, and seems to have been associated with Hermes' intervention.

The Golden Fleece in Rome

Following Euripides' likely representation of the Golden Fleece as a sceptre, or *anathema*, attention turns from the significance of the Golden Fleece as a god-sent gift that is stolen by a woman, to its more fundamental significance as a token of kingship. Though there is no direct reference to the Golden Fleece in what remains of Ennius'

⁸⁷⁵ Eur. *El.* 716-28, 737-8; *IA* 408; 412-14, 1194-5; *Or.* 990-1010.

⁸⁷⁶ Eur. *Or.* 437. See. ch.2 pp.131-132 (Sophocles), 135, 140, 144-153 (Euripides).

Thyestes, it does occur in Accius' *Atreus*, whilst Accius' *Brutus* also reveals how the story of the Golden Fleece was politicised for a Roman audience.

As discussed in chapter one, Accius' *Atreus* introduces the Golden Fleece in Atreus' monologue, as the speaker takes ownership of the Golden Fleece and disparages Thyestes:

Adde huc quod mihi portento **caelestum pater**
prodigium misit, regni stabilimen mei,
agnum inter pecudes aurea clarum coma
quem clam Thyestem clepere ausum esse e regia;
qua in re adiutricem coniugem cepit sibi.

Thereto withal the **lord of heaven** by portent
Sent me a **prodigy, for my realm a stay**,—
A **lamb** of Golden Fleece among my sheep
Shone brilliant; him Thyestes durst by stealth
Purloin from out the palace; and in this deed
He took my wedded queen for his accomplice.⁸⁷⁷

As Boyle points out when he compares this fragment to Seneca's *Thyestes*,⁸⁷⁸ Accius names Jupiter as the divine benefactor, as opposed to Hermes.⁸⁷⁹ This suggests that rather than focussing on Pelops' ancestral crime, Accius emphasises the Golden Lamb's role as a token of kingship: bestowed by Jove, the king of Olympus. But like his Greek predecessors, Accius has a god send the Golden Lamb alive; here omitting its transition from the flocks into the palace from which it is stolen, to perhaps allow Atreus to gloss over his slaughter of the animal. Moreover, Boyle points out that unlike the Golden Ram in Seneca's *Thyestes*, Accius' *Atreus* features the traditional Golden Lamb; though Boyle neglects to note the origin and significance of this variant, which first appears in Accius' *Brutus*.

Accius' *Brutus* seems to have related Lucius Junius Brutus' usurpation of King Tarquin, perhaps provoked by the rape of Lucretia, which led to the establishment of the Roman republic in 509 BC. The most interesting passage for our purposes is that of King Tarquin's dream:

Quoniam quieti corpus nocturno impetu
dedi sopore placans artus languidos,
visust in somnis pastor ad me adpellere

⁸⁷⁷ Accius 8 Ribbeck. Note I alter the Loeb translation of *agnum* from "ram" to "lamb" as this distinction marks a development in the myth.

⁸⁷⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 225-35.

⁸⁷⁹ Boyle 2017 *ad* 220-4 No explicit reference to Hermes survives in Accius' *Oenomaus* fragments, though Pelops' deception of Myrtilus appears see ch.1. pp. 111-116.

**pecus lanigerum eximia pulchritudine;
 duos consanguineos arietes inde eligi
 praeclarioremque alterum inmolare me.
 Deinde eius germanum cornibus conitier,
 in me arietare, eoque ictu me ad casum dari.**
 Exin prostratum terra, graviter saucium,
 resupinum in caelo contueri maximum ac
 mirificum facinus: **dextrorsum orbem flammeum
 radiatum solis liquier cursu novo.**

When now at night's onset I duly gave my body to rest, soothing weary limbs with sleep, I saw a vision in a dream—a shepherd drove towards me a **woolly flock of surpassing beauty; two brother-rams were chosen from among them, and I sacrificed the nobler of the two. Then its own brother butted with its horns, and rammed at me, and with that blow I was brought to a fall**; then thrown on the ground and sorely hurt, as I lay on my back I saw in the sky a thing most mighty and most wonderful—the **sun's flame-beaming orb melted away to the right hand in a new course.**⁸⁸⁰

The rams of Tarquin's dream are described as extraordinary, albeit not golden, thus they seem to allude to the special status of the Golden Lamb. The significance of two brother rams departs from the mythical conflict between Atreus and his brother Thyestes and seems to reflect Brutus and his brother, whom Tarquin had killed, just as he sacrifices the "nobler" ram here. The attack of the surviving ram, Brutus,⁸⁸¹ causes Tarquin's fall, confirming that the slaughter of the ram was an unsuccessful sacrifice, in much the same way as Atreus' improper slaughter of the Golden Lamb seems to secure his downfall in the Greek sources discussed above. The analogy between the wondrous rams of Tarquin's dream and the role of the Golden Lamb in Thyestes' myth is of course underscored by the final stellar reversal which, after Thyestes' feast, asserts a new world order incited by violence.

So, although the rams of Tarquin's dream are not an exact parallel for the Golden Lamb, the slaughter of the nobler ram secures the attack of the surviving ram, Brutus. Thus Tarquins' rams perform the same narrative function as Atreus' Golden Lamb: they secure the downfall of a king. Whilst I concede that in an historical drama such as *Brutus* the Golden Fleece story is tailored to a political, non-mythical narrative, its appearance after Plato's use of the Thyestes myth to define tyranny in the *Republic*

⁸⁸⁰ Accius 1 Ribbeck. *apud* Cic. *Att.* 16.2.

⁸⁸¹ That Brutus "the fool" is the surviving ram is immediately underscored by the seer's interpretation of the dream: *Proin vide ne quem tu esse hebetem deputes aequaeac pecusis sapientia munitum pectus egregie gerat, teque regno expellat.* (Take care then, lest the man who you think is as dull as any sheep, bears a heart notably fortified with wisdom; take care lest he thrust you out of your domains.) Accius 2 Ribbeck.

and Cicero's quotation of Thyestes tragedies in his political discourse seems to have led to more politically focused Thyestes tragedies.⁸⁸² Thus the politicising of the Golden Lamb in Accius' *Atreus* (fr.8) as rams in Tarquin's Thyestean dream seems to recur with Seneca's Golden Ram.

Seneca's *Thyestes* also introduces the Golden Ram as a token of kingship, rather than a gift associated with a particular god, as Atreus states:

Est Pelopis altis nobile in stabulis pecus,
arcanus aries, ductor opulenti gregis,
cuius per omne corpus effuso coma
dependet auro, cuius e tergo novi
aurata reges sceptrata Tantalici gerunt;
possessor huius regnat, hunc tantae domus
 fortuna sequitur. tuta seposita sacer
 in parte carpit prata, quae claudit lapis
 fatale saxeo pascuum muro tegens.
hunc facinus ingens ausus assumpta in scelus
consorte nostri perfidus thalami avehit.

In Pelops' high stalls there is a purebred beast, **a mysterious ram**, leader of a prosperous flock. **All over his body there hangs down a luxuriant fleece of gold, and from this coat new Tantalid kings have their sceptres gilded. The one who possesses him reigns**, the fortune of this great house follows him. Hallowed, he grazes on safe meadows in a secluded area, enclosed by a rocky stone wall that conceals the fateful pasture. **Risking a flagrant crime, and taking the partner of my bed as accomplice, that betrayer carried him off.**⁸⁸³

Here Seneca's Golden Ram, like the ram of Tarquin's dream, is a horned male animal capable of violence, perhaps better embodying the increasingly violent role of the king that the animal represents. Moreover, if Atreus' account is to be believed, the ram was alive when taken by Thyestes; thus Atreus has not offended the gods by killing the animal for himself.

Seneca also rationalises the golden sceptre that occurs in Sophocles and recurs in Euripides as an *anathema*, by claiming that each sceptre is gilded using gold from the fleece, which in turn suggests the animal is kept alive for the gold to be harvested. Once Atreus has explained the sceptre's origin, the sceptre is referred to once by each brother and twice by the chorus as an analogy for the kingship that Thyestes rejects, that Atreus' feast strengthens and that the chorus views as precarious.⁸⁸⁴ Though Seneca's *Thyestes* would most likely have been recited in full, these references to the sceptre

⁸⁸² See ch.1 pp. 62-65 above.

⁸⁸³ Sen. *Thy.* 225-35.

⁸⁸⁴ Sen. *Thy.* 339-41, 531-3, 604, 971-2.

clearly relate kingship back to control of the Golden Ram, without a demand for a visual cue.

In sum, the Roman tragedies seem to dissociate the Golden Lamb from its divine benefactor Hermes and instead focus on its role as a status symbol, rather than a divine gift. Both Accius' *Brutus* and Seneca's *Thyestes* include rams, rather than a Golden Lamb, associating the role of kingship with masculine violence. But whereas Accius' *Brutus* includes the slaughter of a ram leading to King Tarquin's downfall, Seneca's Atreus claims his Golden Ram is kept alive, which suggests Atreus has not killed the ram for himself. The Golden Ram of Roman tragedy reflects the politicizing of the Thyestean myth that follows its use as an exemplum in political discourse. Ultimately, Accius and Seneca dissociate the Golden Ram from its role in the Greek tradition, where it carries different symbolic meanings from its role in Nephele's myth, to instead amplify the Golden Ram's role as a status symbol.

The Gods in Sophocles' Tragedies

Turning from the divine gift to the divine, we find that both Sophocles' and Euripides' *Thyestes* fragments discuss the role of the gods in delivering justice and supporting the success of a tragic hero. Sophocles' fr.247 runs as follows:

σοφὸς γὰρ οὐδεὶς πλὴν ὃς ἂν τιμᾶ θεοῦς.
ἀλλ' εἰς θεοὺς ὀρῶντα, κἂν ἔξω δίκης
χωρεῖν κελεύη, κεῖσ' ὁδοιπορεῖν χρεῶν·
αἰσχρὸν γὰρ οὐδὲν ὧν ὑφηγοῦνται θεοί

For no one is wise but he who honours the gods; but you must look to the gods, and even if you are ordered to go **outside justice**, you must go that way; for no guidance that the gods give is shameful.⁸⁸⁵

Here the phrase "outside justice" offers three possible locations for this fragment within Sophocles' *Thyestes* plays: Thyestes' seduction of Aërope to acquire the Golden Fleece, Atreus' revenge feast, or Thyestes' rape of his daughter Pelopeia to beget the incestuous avenger Aegisthus.⁸⁸⁶ In order to locate the fragment, we must compare the use of "justice" in Sophocles' other plays to determine whether it is a term relating to transgressing sexual concord, with Aërope or Pelopeia, or to revenge.

In Sophocles' extant plays the characters refer to the personified Dikē (δίκη) as a goddess who oversees vengeance for the death of a loved one,⁸⁸⁷ often associated with

⁸⁸⁵ Soph. 247 Radt.

⁸⁸⁶ Lloyd-Jones 1983 pp.106-7.

⁸⁸⁷ Soph. *Aj.* 390-1, *Antig.* 451, *OT.* 273-5, *Trach.* 807-10.

the Erinyes.⁸⁸⁸ Justice (δίκη) also features in Oedipus' curse against his sons at Colonus, as he bids that they die for foregoing their duty and not taking care of him.⁸⁸⁹ According to this pattern of Justice in Sophocles' tragedies, we might locate the fragment as a reference to Thyestes' incestuous begetting of Aegisthus to avenge him, particularly because as Post points out, in Hyginus' later account the Delphic oracle advises this.⁸⁹⁰ But whilst the incest may be shameful, this revenge is not truly "outside justice," in the same way that Atreus' feast is. If we look to Sophocles' *Electra* we find Electra reproaching Clytemnestra for going "beyond justice" (πέρα δίκης) when killing Agamemnon, suggesting that surpassing *dikē* is a feature of perpetuating revenge.⁸⁹¹ Thus fr.247 best reflects Atreus' revenge feast the moment where sexual transgression turns to murder, whereas Aegisthus is born to kill the sons of the man that killed his siblings—a punishment fitting the crime.

Yet if we are to locate the fragment in *Thyestes' Feast*, then we have to consider whether the gods inspired Atreus' feast. The verse is in the iambics of spoken dialogue, which suggests that fr.247 is not a choral generalization but a direct address dealing with this specific scenario.⁸⁹² The advisory tone raises the question- who says this, to whom and why? The obvious candidate is the chorus leader given the advisory tone, but given the pollution caused by Atreus' infanticide and Thyestes' cannibalistic feast, it seems unlikely that the chorus leader of the Mycenaean Women, as indicated by the alternative title, would advocate this revenge. Moreover, as Parker demonstrates, Sophocles' characters typically trust divine support in this way, such as the eponymous heroine in *Electra*, Neoptolemus in *Philoctetes* and Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*.⁸⁹³

In particular, Oedipus' speech advocates belief in the gods' will, using a similar advisory tone to that of fr.247:

ἡγεῖσθε δὲ
 βλέπειν μὲν αὐτοὺς πρὸς τὸν εὐσεβῆ βροτῶν,
 βλέπειν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς δυσσεβεῖς, φυγῆν δέ του

⁸⁸⁸ Soph. *Aj.* 390-1, *Antig.* 451, *OT.* 273-5, *Trach.* 807-10, Soph. 696 Radt.

⁸⁸⁹ Soph. *OC.* 1380-2.

⁸⁹⁰ Hyginus. *Fab.* 88, Post 1922 p. 25.

⁸⁹¹ Blundell hits on the reciprocity of revenge in Sophocles' *Electra* but describes it using the Latin *talio*, which is anachronistic and suggests a punishment befitting, rather than surpassing the crime (1991 pp.180-3). s.v. *OLD talio*.

⁸⁹² Wecklein explains this unsignalled shift of address from second to third person with θεοὺς <σ'> ὀρῶντα (1886), which is accepted by Pearson (1917).

⁸⁹³ Parker 1993 p.15. Soph. *El.* 459-60, 1379-83 (*Electra*); *Phil.* 601-2 (Neoptolemus), 1035-9; *OC.* 279-81 (*Oedipus*).

μήπω γενέσθαι φωτὸς ἀνοσίου ποτέ.

But believe that they look upon the mortal who shows reverence, and look upon the impious, and that no unholy fellow has ever yet escaped!⁸⁹⁴ Like the speaker of fr.247, Oedipus orders his listeners (the chorus) to believe in divine judgement. So we need not consider the advisory tone of fr.247 to indicate that it was spoken by the chorus leader, but should rather consider which character may have advocated for entrusting divine judgement in each play's narrative.

For example, if we compare this fragment to the speech of Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone*, who like Atreus is contemplating revenge against his kin, we notice that he defends his burial of Antigone in much the same way as the speaker of *Thyestes* fr.247. Creon opens with a moral platitude:

ἀλλ' ἴσθι τοι τὰ σκλήρ' ἄγαν φρονήματα πίπτειν μάλιστα

Why, know that over-stubborn wills are the most apt to fall.⁸⁹⁵

This sets up his position for the case at hand, as he relates the deeds Antigone should not have done, just as Sophocles' fr.247 relates what the listener should do. Thus the authoritative tone and the justification for offending kin, which Creon expands upon in the *Antigone*, suggests the fragment is spoken by a king to the chorus and beyond, to the audience. By comparison, the speaker of fr.247 could be Atreus, given the sense of resolve regarding the revenge feast; this fragment may have formed part of an attempt for the character to justify his actions to the chorus prior to the feast.

So Sophocles' fr.247 is probably from *Thyestes' Feast* and seems to show Atreus the avenger defending the feast to come to the chorus as an internal public audience. This reconstruction suggests that Atreus undertakes his revenge with a rational mindset, obediently following divine advice, perhaps from the avenging goddesses or Apollo. Apollo seems a likely candidate given how traditionally problematic his advice is.⁸⁹⁶ Yet what this fragment does not fully reveal is the extent to which the feast itself is a divine decree or Atreus' initiative because no specific details are given, except that the act should be "beyond justice". That said, Aristotle describes vengeance as just in his *Rhetoric*:

καὶ τὸ τοῦς ἐχθροὺς **τιμωρεῖσθαι** μᾶλλον καὶ μὴ καταλλάττεσθαι. τὸ τε γὰρ **ἀνταποδιδόναι δίκαιον**, τὸ δὲ δίκαιον καλόν

To take **vengeance** on one's enemies is nobler than to come to terms

⁸⁹⁴ Soph. *OC*. 279-81.

⁸⁹⁵ Soph. *Antig.* 473-96.

⁸⁹⁶ Such is the case for Orestes: Aesch. *Cho.* 558-60.

with them; for to **retaliate is just**, and that which is just is noble.⁸⁹⁷ Thus if Aristotle defines revenge as a form of reciprocal justice (ἀνταποδιδόναι), then fr.247 suggests that an excessive retaliation may be sanctioned by the gods in Sophocles' *Thyestes*. But what we can more confidently conclude is that fr.247 is spoken from a position of power, be it Atreus or Thyestes, and establishes a vicarious presence of the gods with which the Athenian audience would sympathise, thereby adding pathos by mitigating the crimes of *Thyestes' Feast*.

In all of the remaining fragments of Sophocles' *Thyestes* plays the role of the gods seems to be related by mortal characters, reflecting Mikalson's suggestion that Sophocles' "dominant concern was the individual human hero, and to that he subordinated everything, including popular religion".⁸⁹⁸ Yet in Sophocles' seven extant tragedies Athena is staged in the prologue of *Ajax* and the deified Hercules appears *ex machina* as an arbiter of Zeus' justice in *Philoctetes*.⁸⁹⁹ Among Sophocles' fragments we also find Thetis appearing in *Syndeipnoi*⁹⁰⁰ to reconcile Achilles and Agamemnon and Athena in *Ajax the Locrian* to scold the Greeks for the rape of Cassandra; both seem to appear *ex machina*.⁹⁰¹ We also seem to find the appearance of a *deus ex machina* in *Tereus* to provoke the characters' metamorphoses into birds⁹⁰² and the intervention of Apollo in *Niobe*, whereby he encourages his sister Artemis to shoot Niobe's children.⁹⁰³

However, no Olympian seems to feature in Thyestes' story to resolve the tragedy *ex machina* and Sophocles' gods, unlike Euripides' Lyssa and Dionysus, do not inspire mortals with violent madness. For although Parker suggests that the divine intervention in the fragments of *Niobe* and *Ajax the Locrian* "seem to represent dramatic intervention by an angry god mid-play,"⁹⁰⁴ there is no evidence to indicate that

⁸⁹⁷ Aristot. *Rhet.* 1367a. 24-5.

⁸⁹⁸ Mikalson 1991 p.224.

⁸⁹⁹ Soph. *Ai.* 1-133; *Phil.* 1409-44. Pucci makes the case that Athena is referred to as ἄποπτος (*Ai.* 15), which could mean on stage "at a distance" or offstage "out of sight" and concludes that Athena is invisible (1994 p.19). Either way, Athena's intervention is explicit, not reported.

⁹⁰⁰ Soph. 562 Radt.

⁹⁰¹ Soph. 10C Radt. cf. Dunn suggests that amongst Sophocles' fragmentary tragedies Thetis appeared *ex machina* in *Syndeipnoi*, *Demeter* in Triptolemus (1996 n.30).

⁹⁰² Soph. 581 Radt. cf. Lloyd Jones 1996 p.297, Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 p. 486.

⁹⁰³ Soph. 441a Radt.

⁹⁰⁴ Parker 1996 p.12. Parker compares the interventions of Sophocles' Apollo and Athena to that of the messenger in *Oedipus at Colonus*, suggesting that they do not compel subsequent action. cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 p.485.

Sophocles' Athena and Apollo would spur the mortal characters to madness as Euripides' Lyssa and Dionysus do. Sourvinou-Inwood suggests that Sophocles presents his gods to be distanced from mortals in his earlier plays in Aeschylean fashion, and increasingly involved with mortals in his later plays, as Euripides does.⁹⁰⁵ But, Sourvinou-Inwood's argument hinges on relative dating and suggests that Sophocles followed the fashion set by other tragedians, rather than considering how Sophocles' gods are introduced differently to shape the tragic narrative of each play.

Thus to me it seems unlikely that a god was staged as an impetus in any of Sophocles' Thyestes plays because Atreus' violence is motivated by revenge, not madness, and the revenge cycle is not resolved in either Mycenae or Sicyon. Instead, the will of the gods is consistently interpreted as violent:

πρὸς τήν <δ'>ἀνάγκην οὐδ' Ἄρης ἀνθίσταται

Against this constraint not even the war-god (Ares) resists.⁹⁰⁶

Fr.256 suggests a war-like revenge scene. In the context of Sophocles' extant tragedies, Ares is invoked across the Theban saga: once as a local cult god in *Oedipus at Colonus*, once as a scourge on Thebes in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and as part of a mythical digression in *Antigone*.⁹⁰⁷ But in Sophocles' *Electra* Ares is referred to twice as an instigator of revenge, when Electra claims Aegisthus' blood is an offering for Ares, and again as the chorus watch the characters leave to kill Clytemnestra they identify the murderers with Ares:

ἴδεθ' ὅπου προνέμεται τὸ δυσέριστον αἶμα φουσῶν Ἄρης.

See where Ares advances, breathing blood born of strife!⁹⁰⁸

Thus, when compared to Sophocles' extant Tantalid play, fr.256 seems to refer to a revenge act: either Atreus' preparation of the feast, or Thyestes' rape of his daughter to beget his avenger Aegisthus.

Moreover, fr.260a includes an unusual invocation of Zeus as the god of trophies suggesting a recent victory:

καὶ Ζεὺς τροπαῖος εἰσεκόμασεν τόποις

And Zeus the god of trophies has stormed into the place.⁹⁰⁹

This could refer to events from earlier on in the saga, either Thyestes' initial coup when stealing the Golden Fleece using Aërope, or perhaps from Atreus' reclamation of the throne following the cannibalistic banquet. Given that Zeus' *tropaion* is typically a

⁹⁰⁵ Sourvinou-Inwood 2003 p.486.

⁹⁰⁶ Soph. 256 Radt.

⁹⁰⁷ Soph. *Antig.* 970-5, *OT.* 190, *OC.* 948.

⁹⁰⁸ Soph. *El.* 1384-5.

⁹⁰⁹ Soph. 260a Radt.

military invocation of Zeus' thunderbolt securing a victory, again this fragment may best reflect the violent feast rather than Thyestes' adultery, given its military associations.⁹¹⁰ Of course, neither Sophocles' fr.256 nor 260a suggest that the gods sanctioned or intervened with the revenge plot, but they do suggest that the personal conflict between the brothers was associated with a military conflict by the mortals on stage, be it the chorus or a character.⁹¹¹

The Gods in Euripides' Tragedies

Turning to Euripides, we find a similar assertion of the power of divine will. Euripides' fr.391 presents mankind's choices as a blind struggle to please the gods:

οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲν χωρὶς ἀνθρώποις θεῶν·
σπουδάζομεν δὲ πόλλ' ὑπ' ἐλπίδων, μάτην
πόνους ἔχοντες, οὐδὲν εἰδότες σαφές.

Nothing in human affairs is independent of the gods. Prompted by hopes we pursue many schemes, but our toils are in vain since we have no sure knowledge.⁹¹²

Unlike the speaker of Sophocles' fr.247, who advises following divine advice at all costs, Euripides' speaker in fr.391 identifies himself as one among mortals and is less clear about what the gods will him to do. But in Euripides' extant tragedies it is the chorus, not a single character, who typically expresses such aphorisms about the role of the gods.

In *Hippolytus*, for example, the chorus muses on the uncertainty of divine intervention:

ἦ μέγα μοι τὰ θεῶν μελεδήμαθ', ὅταν φρένας ἔλθῃ
λύπας παραιρεῖ· ζύνεσιν δέ τις ἐλπίδι κεύθων
λείπεται ἐν τε τύχαις θνατῶν καὶ ἐν ἔργμασι λεύσσω·
ἄλλα γὰρ ἄλλοθεν ἀμεί-
βεται, μετὰ δ' ἴσταται ἀνδράσιν αἰὼν
πολυπλάνητος αἰεὶ

Whenever thoughts about the gods come into my mind, they greatly relieve my pain. But anyone who hopes for understanding fails to find it as he looks amid the fortunes and the deeds of mortals. From one quarter comes one thing and from another another, and men's life is a shifting thing, ever unstable.⁹¹³

⁹¹⁰ E.g. Pindar. *Ol.* 10.78-83; Soph. *Antig.* 141-3, *Trach.* 303-5. Cf. Mikalson 2012 p.434 and Dowden 2006 p.64.

⁹¹¹ In Euripides' *Orestes*, Orestes prays to Zeus *tropaios* to secure his revenge over Aegisthus (*Or.* 671).

⁹¹² Eur. 391 Kannicht.

⁹¹³ Eur. *Hipp.* 1104-7.

The chorus sings these lines just before Theseus discovers that he has cursed his son Hippolytus, condemning him to die. Indeed, the chorus of *Heraclidae* expresses similar sentiments immediately before the return of Heracles' children with Iolaus:

οὔτινά φημι θεῶν ἄτερ ὄλβιον, οὐ βαρύποτμον,
ἄνδρα γενέσθαι·
οὐδὲ τὸν αὐτὸν ἀεὶ ἴμβεβάναι δόμον
εὐτυχίᾳ· [...]

No man, I say, is blessed or cursed with disaster without the will of the gods.

The same house does not always tread the path of prosperity.⁹¹⁴

Contrary to Kannicht's suggestion that fr.391 may be from the prologue of *Thyestes*, in similar choruses' reflections from *Hippolytus* and *Heraclidae* the aphorisms prefigure the arrival of the doomed child, or children, albeit all but one of Heracles' children are saved whereas Hippolytus is not. So by analogy, Euripides' fr.391 would most likely have been spoken by the chorus and may have prefigured the arrival of Thyestes' doomed children.

Meanwhile, fr.392 of Euripides' *Thyestes* suggests a comment on the role of the gods from a single character perspective:

εἰ δ' ἄτερ πόνων
δοκεῖς ἔσεσθαι, μῶρος εἶ, θνητὸς γεγώς.

If you expect to be free of troubles you are a fool, seeing that you are mortal.⁹¹⁵ Such a statement defining mortality (θνητὸς) is consistently spoken by one mortal character to another in Euripides' eighteen extant works, appearing nine times across eight plays.⁹¹⁶ The closest parallels for our purposes include Helen's rebuke of Menelaus in *Troades*, which, like fr.392, thwarts mortal expectations in a conditional clause:

εἰ δὲ τῶν θεῶν κρατεῖν
βούλη, τὸ χρήζειν ἀμαθές ἐστὶ σου τόδε.

If you wish to defeat the gods, your desire is a foolish one.⁹¹⁷

On the other hand, the Old Man's rebuke of Menelaus in *Iphigenia at Aulis* emphasises the same theme of mortal suffering at the hands of the gods found in fr.392:

δεῖ δέ σε χαίρειν
καὶ λυπεῖσθαι· θνητὸς γὰρ ἔφυς.

⁹¹⁴ Eur. *Heracl.* 610-13.

⁹¹⁵ Eur. 392 Kannicht.

⁹¹⁶ Eur. *Troi.* 964-5; *IA* 30-4; *Alc.* 799; *Phoen.* 1763; *HF.* 282-3, 315-21; *Med.* 1228; *Andr.* 100-2; *Heracl.* 258.

⁹¹⁷ Eur. *Troi.* 964-5.

κἄν μὴ σὺ θέλῃς, τὰ θεῶν οὔτω
βουλόμεν' ἔσται.

You must feel pain as well as pleasure: you are a mortal
Though you do not like it, that is the will of the gods.⁹¹⁸

Therefore, whereas fr.391 presents aphorisms spoken by the chorus, fr.392 presents a mortal character's speech in dialogue with another mortal, reflecting on their role under divine rule. When compared with *Iphigenia at Aulis*, it seems that the Old Man identified in Euripides' *Thyestes* fr.396 is speaking in fr.391, most likely urging Atreus to act, given that Euripides' Old Man instigates revenge.⁹¹⁹ Nonetheless, Euripides presents a mortal's reflection on the gods' role rather than a divine intervention here.

The final fragment on the role of the gods emphasises the power of divine will:

θεοῦ θέλοντος κἄν ἐπὶ ῥίπῳ πλέοις.

If God willed it, you could sail even on a straw mat.⁹²⁰

This appears to have been a proverbial phrase by the time Euripides was writing, because Plutarch doubts that Pindar wrote the phrase:

οὐ γὰρ εἶχεν Ὅμηρος τὴν αὐτὴν Πινδάρῳ διάνοιαν, εἴ γε Πίνδαρος ἦν ὁ ποιήσας
θεοῦ θέλοντος, κἄν ἐπὶ ῥίπῳ πλέοις·
ἀλλ' ἐγίγνωσκεν ἄλλας πρὸς ἄλλα δυνάμεις καὶ φύσεις γεγενημένας, ὧν ἐκάστη
κινεῖται διαφόρως, κἄν ἐν ἧ τὸ κινουῦν ἀπάσας.

The fact is that Homer did not have the same idea as Pindar, if it really was Pindar who wrote

God willing, you may voyage on a mat;

but Homer recognised the fact that some faculties and natures are created for some purposes and others for others, and each one of these is moved to action in a different way, even if the power that moves them all be one and the same.⁹²¹

This testimony not only suggests that the line is not unique to Euripides, but also affirms the meaning of the aphorism: divine intervention allows one to perform improbable and uncharacteristic acts.

Having uncovered the proverbial nature of the line we need not expect it to refer to an instance of sailing in Thyestes' myth, such as his journey to or from exile. What we might expect this line to refer to is a character undertaking an improbable act with divine support, though this cannot be ratified with evidence from the fragments. That said, what the fragment may suggest is that the success of the improbable feast reflects its divine support.

⁹¹⁸ Eur. *IA* 30-4.

⁹¹⁹ See ch.1 n.158 p.22.

⁹²⁰ Eur. 397 Kannicht.

⁹²¹ Plut. *Mor.* 405b.

Aside from the fragments themselves, eleven of eighteen extant Euripides tragedies stage gods as characters: five plays use a divine prologue,⁹²² two stage goddesses enabling a murder,⁹²³ and a further five use a *deus ex machina*.⁹²⁴ Euripides' divine prologues present the gods' vested interests in the action that follows: Dionysus plans to assert his power by punishing Pentheus in *Bacchae*, Hermes explains his exposure of his nephew Ion and Aphrodite explains her intervention to punish Hippolytus. Moreover, in the divine dialogues Apollo defends the house of Admetus, with whom Zeus condemned Apollo to live as a mortal servant, against Death in *Alcestis* and Poseidon tries to defend Troy against Athena at the outset of *Trojan Women*.

According to the mythical tradition of Thyestes, the only god we might expect to intervene at the outset of the play is Hermes, on behalf of his son Myrtilus, whom Pelops killed. Hermes' vendetta against Pelops' children, Atreus and Thyestes, may have formed a supernatural prologue to Euripides' *Thyestes*, much like Dionysus' grudge against Pentheus in *Bacchae* and Aphrodite's attack on Hippolytus. But, whilst Aphrodite and Dionysus appear to punish non-believers, there is no example in Euripides' corpus of a divine prologue that promises to avenge a mortal child by attacking his killer's children. Therefore, Hermes' appearance in the prologue of *Thyestes* seems highly unlikely and the prologue seems more likely to have been spoken by mortal character.

But, could Euripides' *Thyestes* have had a god appear on stage in order to instigate violence? For example, Athena distracts soldiers to allow Diomedes to kill Rhesus and Odysseus to steal Rhesus' horses, whilst Lyssa and Iris incense Heracles with madness so that he will kill his children.⁹²⁵ The latter may provide a closer parallel to the Thyestes story both because *Heracles* is accepted as Euripidean, whereas *Rhesus*' authorship is widely rejected and because, like Heracles, Atreus kills children. But whereas Heracles is provoked by divine madness to kill his own children, Atreus is motivated by revenge to kill Thyestes' children and thus safeguard his own legitimate sons: Agamemnon and Menelaus. Unlike Euripides' Heracles, who stirs from his madness to regret his infanticide,⁹²⁶ Euripides' Atreus celebrates his infanticide as a victory.⁹²⁷ Thus no god seems to instigate Atreus' violence.

⁹²² Eur. *Alc.* 1-76, *Bacch.* 1-63, *Troi.* 1-97, *Hipp.* 1-57, *Ion.* 1-81.

⁹²³ Eur. *HF.* 822-74, *Rhes.* 595-674.

⁹²⁴ Eur. *El.* 1238-1347, *Rhes.* 962-82, *Supp.* 1183-1226, *Or.* 1625-90, *IT* 1435-91.

⁹²⁵ Eur. *HF.* 822-74, *Rhes.* 595-674.

⁹²⁶ Eur. *HF.* 1089-1108, 1131-40.

⁹²⁷ Eur. 397b Kannicht.

The only other instance in which we might expect Euripides to stage a god is as a *deus ex machina*, a device which often resolves tragic discord, as Dunn points out, by imposing order in the earlier plays or removing threat in the later tragedies.⁹²⁸ In the earlier plays, for example: Castor absolves Electra and Orestes of Clytemnestra's murder by blaming Apollo at the end of *Electra* and advising them how to build new lives, the Muse enables the deification of her son Rhesus, Athena advises Theseus on the ritual purification of the city at the end of *Suppliant Women*.⁹²⁹ Yet in the later plays Apollo appears *ex machina* to prevent Orestes' slaughter of Hermione with arranged marriages in *Orestes*, and Athena enables Iphigenia and Orestes to leave Tauris with Thoas' approval.⁹³⁰ It seems unlikely that Euripides' *Thyestes*, having climaxed with Atreus' revenge feast, could be concluded so neatly. For although both *Electra* and *Orestes* are resolved by a *deus ex machina*, their matricide is never avenged, whereas Atreus' feast will be avenged by Aegisthus. Thus, no such resolution would befit the end of Euripides' *Thyestes*, based on Euripides' restorative gods *ex machina* we would not expect a god to invite the rape of Pelopeia at the end of Euripides' *Thyestes*.

Ultimately, although the staging of a god in Euripides' *Thyestes* seems probable, given that eleven of eighteen extant plays stage gods, Euripides' *Thyestes* does not lend itself to a divine prologue, a divine intervention inciting violence, or a *deus ex machina*. A divine prologue seems unlikely given that Hermes was slighted by Atreus and Thyestes' father, his influence is recalled through inherent guilt rather than an on-stage intervention. Given Atreus' motives for revenge and apparent lack of remorse for the infanticide, his violence does not seem to be instigated by divine intervention. The resolution offered by a *deus ex machina* seems improbable, given that Thyestes' feast was known by Euripides' audience to be an impetus for Thyestes' rape of Pelopeia to beget his avenger Aegisthus: an unlikely call to action for a Euripidean *deus ex machina*.

The Gods in the Roman Tragedies

Turning to the Roman tragedies, the Republican fragments offer little insight into the role of the gods in Thyestes' feast.⁹³¹ Ennius' *Thyestes*, however, which deals with

⁹²⁸ Dunn 1996 pp.36-7. cf. Lefkowitz 2016 pp.90-3, 113-15.

⁹²⁹ Eur. *El.* 128. ff, *Rh.* 890. ff, *Supp.* 1183 ff.

⁹³⁰ Eur. *Or.* 1625 ff., *IT* 1457 ff.

⁹³¹ Baldarelli makes a case for the appearance of a fury in Accius' *Atreus* as in Seneca's *Thyestes*, based on the Euripidean precedent of Iris and Lyssa and adapted in line with Virgil's Allecto in *Aeneid* 7 (2004 pp.133-7). However, Accius' fragments do not support this. Moreover, whereas Lyssa and Allecto make Hercules and Turnus mad,

Thyestes' rape of his estranged daughter Pelopeia in Epirus, clearly suggests that Thyestes is acting on oracular advice:

Set me Apollo spe delectate, ductat <dictis> Delphicus.
and Apollo himself of Delphi charms and draws me on.⁹³²

This suggests that Ennius followed the Greek tradition, both by implicating Apollo in Thyestes' rape of Pelopeia and having his characters intuit the role of the gods as Euripides had. But fr.353 does not reveal the gods' influence on Thyestes' feast in Republican tragedy.

In Accius' *Atreus*, which does deal with Thyestes' feast, only one of the surviving fragments alludes to the gods:

Sed quid tonitru turbida toruo
Concussa repente aequora caeli
Sensimus sonere?

But why did we suddenly **perceive** heaven's plains
Grown stormy, rocking, roaring with grim thunder?⁹³³

The chorus' question, indicated by the first person plural, suggests that the storm emerged as a result of an offstage action, such as Atreus' murder of the children, rather than supposing the storm was instigated by divine intervention.

We find a similar storm in Seneca's *Thyestes*, but here it seems to prefigure both the infanticide and the feast as Atreus' temper stirs:

Atreus:
Fateor. tumultus pectora attonitus quatit
penitusque volvit; rapior et quo nescio,
sed rapior.—imo mugit e fundo solum,
tonat dies serenus ac totis domus
ut fracta tectis crepuit et moti Lares
vertere vultum. fiat hoc, fiat nefas
quod, di, timetis!

Atreus:
I admit it. A tumult of frenzy is shaking my breast, and churning it deep within. I am swept along, and know not where, but I am swept along. —The ground moans from its lowest depths, **the sky thunders though cloudless**, the house cracks throughout its structure as if shattered, and the housegods shake and avert their faces. Let it be done, let it be done, this outrage that makes you gods afraid!⁹³⁴

Seneca's fury is not engrained into the structure of the play, thus is less influential. As a result, Baldarelli imposes an instrumental fury onto Accius' *Atreus*, undermining the autonomy of his protagonist with circumstantial evidence.

⁹³² Ennius 1 Ribbeck.

⁹³³ Accius 8 Ribbeck.

⁹³⁴ Sen. *Thy.* 260-66.

Unlike Accius' chorus, Seneca's Atreus recognises the significance of the storm before the feast takes place. Boyle even claims that the thunder would have been produced as a sound effect, assuming a staged production, on the basis that the supernatural prologue before this passage and the messenger speech that follows include *adynata*.⁹³⁵

Although Boyle is right to compare these *loci horridi* and associate them with the onstage crimes, they do not provide sound evidence for stage effects. The Fury's retreating river, dispersing clouds and paling trees seem impossible to produce, should we assume that this episode was performed. The Messenger's report of wild winds, the shaking earth and the catasterism is just that: a report of off-stage action, perhaps a descriptive piece for recitation. So, even if we assume with Boyle that Seneca's *Thyestes* was staged in its entirety, which seems unlikely, there is insufficient evidence to suggest sound effects were used for the storm.⁹³⁶ There is evidence, however, that Atreus is imagining the *adynata* altogether in what he confesses is an otherwise "cloudless" (*serenus*) sky.⁹³⁷ Therefore, Boyle's reading diminishes Atreus' frenzied perspective; Atreus imagines the *adynata* as the gods' fearful reaction and thus internalises the gods' role as a reflection of his own desire for revenge.

But, like Accius, Seneca leaves Jove's association with thunder in the subtext, associating the storm with the gods' reaction two lines later. Rather than explicitly signposting the divine intervention of the chthonic groaning below and Jove thundering above, Seneca uses the storm to allude to the gods' displeasure to then trap Atreus between the discord of earth and sky: before the household gods, the *lares*, shuddering at the prospective filicide and fraternal pollution.

Indeed, when Atreus does call Jove by name, he seems to use the god as an analogy for his own power to attack Thyestes as king:

Non poterat capi, nisi capere vellet. regna nunc sperat mea: hac spe minanti
fulmen occurret Iovi, hac spe subibit gurgitis tumidi minas dubiumque Libycae
Syrtes intrabit fretum, hac spe, quod esse maximum retur malum, fratrem videbit.

He could not be caught, unless he wanted to catch others. But as it is, he desires my kingdom. In this desire he will confront Jove's threat of the thunderbolt; in this desire he will face the threats of the swelling flood, or enter the treacherous straits of the Libyan Syrtes; in this desire he will do what he thinks the greatest evil: see his brother.⁹³⁸

⁹³⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 106-21, 637-8, 697-703, 776-884, 985-95, Boyle 2017 *ad* 262-6.

⁹³⁶ Cf. Haley 2018 (accepted and forthcoming in *JRS*).

⁹³⁷ Sen. *Thy.* 261.

⁹³⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 288-93.

The list of consequences begins with the threat of Jove's thunder, yet climaxes with Atreus' power to confront his brother, so rather than presenting Jove as an external influence; Atreus aligns his own fury against Thyestes with the justice of Jove.

Seneca's *Thyestes* introduces supernatural figures that belong to the cycle of ancestral guilt, placing Tantalus in dialogue with an avenging fury in the prologue and diminishing Olympian gods to an expression of the characters' own interests. This is made explicit following the feast when Thyestes and Atreus each call to the gods for aid:

Thyestes:
Piorum praesides testor deos.

Atreus:
Quid coniugales?

Thyestes:
I call to witness the gods that protect the righteous.

Atreus:
What about the marriage gods?⁹³⁹

Again, Seneca's characters call on the gods not by name or in an explicit prayer formula, but rather as an expression of their own motives.

Ch 2.3: Conclusion

Overall the god-sent gift, the Golden Fleece, and the gods' own influence on Atreus' revenge shifts from the universal to the personal. References to the sceptre in Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' Pelopid plays suggest that it was staged as an *anathema* for the Golden Fleece in the Greek Thyestes plays, in much the same way as it appears as a status symbol in Homer's *Iliad*. But Sophocles' and Euripides' *Oenomaus* plays suggest that, unlike Homer's *Iliad*, Euripides would have presented Hermes, Myrtilus' vengeful father, as the giver of the Golden Fleece, whereas the Roman tragedies amplify the sceptre as a token of Atreus' kingship.

Moreover, all of the surviving *Thyestes* fragments present divine influence through the speech of mortal characters. In Sophocles' *Thyestes* the divine will is evoked as an assurance for selecting or celebrating a particular course of action, whereas Euripides' *Thyestes* emphasises the overriding will of the gods to which mortal characters must conform. Though Ennius' *Thyestes* affirms the role of Apollo's prophecy in Thyestes' rape of Pelopeia, what remains of Accius' *Atreus* suggests that

⁹³⁹ Sen. *Thy.*1103-4.

the chorus intuits a divine reaction to Thyestes' feast when asking about the storm. Atreus' imagined storm in Seneca's *Thyestes*, however, focuses on ancestral gods rather than Olympian gods and reflects Atreus' own motivation rather than divine intervention.

Therefore, it seems that across the Thyestes fragments there is no evidence to suggest that a god appeared on stage to instigate the feast, but rather mortal characters associated their own motives with the gods: to legitimise their actions in Sophocles, to mitigate their actions in Euripides, and to express their own desires in Seneca.

Ch 2: Conclusion

In sum, the extent to which Atreus' revenge was motivated by supernatural influence developed with the mythical trends associated with the Tantalids, the way tragedians presented individual memories to characterise each Tantalid, and the mode in which each tragedian introduced the gods. In Sophocles' and Euripides' *Thyestes* plays the inherent guilt from Pelops' murder of Myrtilus may have been more prominent, given that each tragedian had staged an *Oenomaus* telling this story. Electra in Sophocles' *Electra* reflects on ancestral crimes, without fully comprehending their significance for Electra's own designs and considers inherent guilt to blame for her own actions, but not her enemies'. Euripides' characters fetishise the ancestral spear, which becomes a symbol for the reciprocity of inherent guilt: handed down from Pelops' insult to Hermes. Nonetheless, neither Sophocles nor Euripides seems to have staged a god in their *Thyestes*; instead, Sophocles' characters seem to intuit divine will whilst Euripides' characters submit to it.

The Republican fragments maintain the tradition of Pelops' ancestral crime, since Ennius and Accius staged the death of Myrtilus in their *Oenomaus* tragedies, though Accius' *Pelopidae* also related Atreus and Thyestes' own guilt through their murder of Chrysippus. In the Republican fragments of both Ennius' *Thyestes* and Accius' *Atreus* the speaker does not only reflect on ancestral crimes, but also alters how the story is told to manipulate other characters and position themselves in an inevitable revenge cycle. The appearance of the Golden Ram in Accius' *Brutus* revises the Golden Lamb myth in Accius' *Atreus*, reflecting the politicizing of the myth in historical drama before Seneca. Accius' remaining fragments suggest that the gods, most likely Jove, sent a storm in reaction to the infanticide or feast that is being reported, rather than presenting a divine impetus.

Seneca foregrounds the inherent guilt of Tantalus, who by now is famous for his festal crime and punishment: feeding Pelops to the gods and being denied a feast in the underworld as a result. Though Tantalus appears in a supernatural prologue with the Fury, the two appear as voyeurs; neither seems to have any agency over Atreus' revenge. But Seneca uses their intervention as a narrative tool to align his audience's perspective with that of Atreus; following the prologue we understand Atreus' clipped reference to Tantalus as a source of motivation for him and he refers to the gods to express his own will.

Therefore, each tragedian introduces different ancestral crimes, attaches different semiotics to the Golden Fleece. The characters reflect on their inherent guilt and the gods' role in different ways. No tragedian besides Seneca seems to have staged a supernatural character in their Thyestes tragedy. What survives of Republican tragedy indicates the gods did not appear on stage.

Chapter 3.1: Execution

Having considered Atreus' motives for revenge and the role of both the gods and inherent guilt as a catalyst for each tragic plot, I will now consider how Atreus' revenge would have been dramatised. So far the evidence has suggested that Atreus' motives became increasingly politicised in Greece and Rome alike and that supernatural figures only appeared as characters in the prologue of Seneca's *Thyestes*, and do not appear in the rest of the play. Atreus' motives for revenge will now be compared with the revenge act itself and how it would be presented to a contemporary audience either on- or offstage.

To that end, I will now consider whether Atreus' butchery may have been either staged or reported in Sophocles' *Thyestes' Feast* by comparing it with death scenes in Sophocles' extant tragedies and *fragmenta incerta*. What cannot be recovered is whether Sophocles staged Thyestes' recognition at the feast itself and thus displayed the cannibalism. Although fragments of Sophocles' *Tereus* clearly suggest Tereus eating Itys triggered the metamorphosis, not enough remains to suggest that Sophocles staged the cannibalism itself.⁹⁴⁰

Then I will examine whether Euripides' *Thyestes* staged or reported Atreus' nepoticide by comparing the treatment of filicide in Euripides' *Bacchae*, *Heracles* and *Medea* respectively. However, in order to determine how Euripides may have staged Thyestes' cannibalism, Euripides' filicide tragedies must be compared to the anthropophagy scene in Euripides' satyr play *Cyclops*. Although the Cyclops does not eat men from his own species, it does provide an example of humans being cooked in Euripidean stage play. If we first consider how Euripides presents the Cyclops man-eating for comic effect, we can then examine, by antithesis, how Euripides might have displayed endocannibalism for tragic effect in his *Thyestes*. I will compare how Euripides dramatises violence in *Bacchae*, *Heracles* and *Medea*, to how he presents anthropophagy in *Cyclops* in order to examine possible presentations of Atreus' crime in *Thyestes*.

As ever, when reconstructing Accius' *Atreus* we will examine the fragments in their quotation context, to assess how his butchery and Thyestes' endocannibalism may

⁹⁴⁰ Cf. P.Oxy. 3013= Soph. 581 Radt.

have been staged.⁹⁴¹ But as with Sophocles, the feast scene of Accius' *Tereus* does not survive, though the infanticide is clearly plotted.⁹⁴² Ennius' *Thyestes* in Epirus will be considered when examining irresolution, as it dramatises Thyestes' exile following the feast and his reaction to it.

I will then contemplate how Thyestes' feast was performed in Roman genres such as pantomime, which began to flourish in Rome after Accius' career but before Seneca's.⁹⁴³ Finally, we will compare these reconstructions and trends in performance to Seneca's complete *Thyestes* and evaluate whether Thyestes' feast is better suited to staging or recitation. I have elsewhere concluded that the filicide episode of Seneca's *Medea* might well be staged.⁹⁴⁴ But here I will consider if a play with such political resonance as *Thyestes* could be produced safely under Nero and whether either the reported filicide or the recognition dialogue demand visual support in contrast with the "onstage" son-killing of Seneca's *Medea*.

Thyestes' Sons

Though on a human level Thyestes' loss of his children evokes sympathy, the fact that the tradition consistently describes Atreus' slaughter of Thyestes' sons, not daughters, suggests that the significance of their deaths must also be evaluated in light of their status and value as heirs.⁹⁴⁵ The scholion to Euripides' *Orestes* names Thyestes' sons Orchomenos, Kalaos and Agalos as the legitimate children of Laodameia.⁹⁴⁶ Euripides' *Orestes* describes Thyestes' sons as high-born (γενναίων) heirs,⁹⁴⁷ but does this indicate that Thyestes' sons were legitimate in the tragedies as this scholion suggests?

Thyestes' wife Laodameia is never indicated in the tragic fragments, whereas Aërope's premarital and extramarital affairs were dramatised in Sophocles' *Thyestes*'

⁹⁴¹ the notoriety of Accius' *Tereus* instead of the anticipated *Brutus*, much to the delight of Brutus' descendant Marcus Junius Brutus: Cic, *ad Att.* 16. 2. 3, 5.1; *Phil.* 1. 15. 36. Cf. Coulter's suggestion that "Tereus contained enough lines applicable to the present situation (presumably the rape) so that Brutus was satisfied with the demonstration that this made," despite having ordered *Brutus* to be performed himself (1940 p.469). Cf. Goldberg 2005 p.124.

⁹⁴² Accius 4, 9 Ribbeck. cf. Accius 651 Warmington.

⁹⁴³ s.v. *BNP pantomime* dates the heyday of Roman pantomime from 22BC. Hall claims 20BC (2009, pp.9-10).

⁹⁴⁴ Haley 2015 p.12.

⁹⁴⁵ Sons are killed in revenge myths such as Medea's unnamed boys and Procne's son Itys, whereas Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia is sacrificed; her value is supernaturally determined and not inherent to the family as she does not continue the family name.

⁹⁴⁶ Σ Eur. *Or.* 5 Dindorf.

⁹⁴⁷ Eur. *Or.* 816.

Adultery and Euripides' *Kressai* in addition to Carcinus' and Agathon's *Aërope*.⁹⁴⁸ Aërope's adultery is frequently mentioned in Greek tragedy, Thyestes' incestuous seed is emphasised by Aeschylus, and in the myth Thyestes' sons remain in the palace throughout Thyestes' exile: suggesting that they are bastards assumed to be Atreus' sons.⁹⁴⁹ Indeed this changeling motif becomes prevalent in Hyginus' *fabulae* where following the feast Thyestes' biological son, be it Aegisthus or Pleisthenes, is fostered by Atreus, and realising this, kills Atreus to avenge the biological father Thyestes.⁹⁵⁰

The legitimacy of Thyestes' sons is questioned in Accius' *Atreus*:

matres coinquinari regias
contaminari stirpem, admisceri genus.

When mothers of the royal house are polluted
Their stock defiled, their lineage confused.⁹⁵¹

Lucilius' *Satires* mock the contemporary relevance of Accius' lines in Rome,⁹⁵² and the illegitimacy of Aërope's children is reiterated in the scholia to Ovid's *Ibis*:

Thyestes cum uxore fratris sui Atrei concubuit **et genuit ex ea filios** quos Atreus dedit ipsi Thyesti ad comedendum; quod scelus sol videns retro fugit, ut dicit Seneca in Tragoediis et Ovidius *Metamorphoses*. [sic]

Thyestes lay with the wife of his brother Atreus and **by her begat sons** whom Atreus gave to Thyestes himself to eat. The sun, when he saw this villainy, turned back and fled. This is according to Seneca in his tragedies, and Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*.⁹⁵³

As Dodson-Robinson suggests, in Seneca's *Thyestes* Atreus' identity is "deeply vested in the legitimacy of his offspring," thus Atreus tests Agamemnon and Menelaus to ensure they are his own, through his perverted logic.⁹⁵⁴

...prolis incertae fides
ex hoc petatur scelere: si bella abnuunt
et gerere nolunt odia, si patrum vocant,

⁹⁴⁸ See Appendices.

⁹⁴⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 322-30, cf. Schiesaro 2003 p.88.

⁹⁵⁰ Hyg. *Fab.* 86, 87-8. See pp.29, 40-44 and ch.2. p.108.

⁹⁵¹ Accius 7 Ribbeck. See ch.2 pp.200-204.

⁹⁵² Lucilius 639. Warmington. *coniugem infidamque pathicam familiam impuram domum*. (a wife, an unfaithful debauched household, a defiled home).

⁹⁵³ Σ Ov. *Ib.* 427. cf. Σ Ov. *Ib.* 433 The thirteenth-century scholiast stretches the content of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which devotes just two lines to Thyestes' banquet in which the interlocutor Pythagoras equates carnivorousness with cannibalism, making no mention of the children in particular (Ov. *Met.* 15. 59-61). Accius' *Atreus* seems to have focused on Atreus' ancestors cf. Servius *ad Aen.* 8. 130.

⁹⁵⁴ Sen. *Thy.* 1098-9, Dodson-Robinson 2010 pp.52, 55-6. Cf. Littlewood 2000 pp.246-7.

pater est.

Let me gain assurance about my questionable issue from this crime: if they refuse to engage in this war of hatred, if they call him uncle, he is their father.⁹⁵⁵ So whilst the *Orestes* scholion names Thyestes' legitimate sons, across the Greek and Roman tragic tradition Thyestes' sons are often illegitimate and Roman writers underscore the danger of rearing an enemy's changeling bastards.

Seneca also introduces an adult son to tie in Tantalus' ancestral role. Tantalus is the only son of Thyestes named in Seneca's tragic dialogue, though the A branch of Seneca's manuscripts suggest that Thyestes' second son in Seneca is named Pleisthenes.⁹⁵⁶ Of course, Thyestes' son Tantalus is named after his paternal grandfather, emphasising his role as an heir.⁹⁵⁷ But the younger Tantalus' name is only revealed to the audience once he has received his true birthright, by feeding his father:

Primus locus (ne desse pietatem putes) avo dicatur: Tantalus prima hostia est.

First place (lest you think him lacking in family feeling) is dedicated to his grandfather: Tantalus is the first victim.⁹⁵⁸

There is no reason to suppose that Sophocles and Euripides staged Thyestes with an adult son as Seneca does; indeed, Aeschylus describes Thyestes' sons as babes (βρέφοι), children (παῖδες) or young ones (νεαροί).⁹⁵⁹ Though Agave's adult son Pentheus is ripped apart in Euripides' *Bacchae*, he is punished for his own transgression, whereas Thyestes' seemingly younger sons parallel those of Heracles or Medea inasmuch as they are killed for others' crimes. Yet, as we shall discuss when turning to Euripides' tragedies, the children are afforded dialogue either offstage in *Medea* or via a messenger report of their speech in *Heracles*. Therefore, like Tantalus the younger in Seneca's

⁹⁵⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 326-30, cf. Guastella 1994 pp. 138-44.

⁹⁵⁶ Lefèvre 1973 pp.97-9, Tarrant 2003 n.142, Baldarelli 2004 p.270, Fitch 2018 p.231, Boyle 2017 ad 716-43. Boyle also affords Pleisthenes a speaking role but he is never clearly named or introduced as a new speaker in the dialogue itself (2017pp.80-7).

⁹⁵⁷ This is not a complete innovation on Seneca's part; a fourth-century interpolation in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* (1148-51) suggests a younger Tantalus was married to Clytemnestra (see ch.2. p.149 above). All three of Thyestes' sons have inherited names (Pleisthenes, Tantalus and Chrysippus) in Hyginus 87, cf. Guastella 1994 p.136.

⁹⁵⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 719.

⁹⁵⁹ Aesch. *Ag.* 328, 1219, 1096, 1220, 1242. See ch.2. p.149 above on Tantalus the younger in the interpolated lines of *Iphigenia at Aulis*, noting that in order to marry Clytemnestra as suggested here, he must have survived Atreus' cannibalistic feast. Cf. Delattre simply suggests Thyestes' sons cannot "brephoi", without focusing on a particular text (2012 p.75).

Thyestes, some of the children to be killed in Euripides' tragedies are old enough to speak.

Lefèvre overlooks the differentiation of the sons' ages, arguing that in Seneca's *Thyestes* only Tantalus and Pleisthenes are killed.⁹⁶⁰ Lefèvre rejects the idea of an unnamed non-speaking infant, suggesting that the final blow is struck on Pleisthenes' body, despite the fact that the chorus identifies that Atreus has already accomplished two murders (*Quid deinde gemina caede perfunctus facit?*).⁹⁶¹ Here I prefer to translate *caede* as "murder," rather than Lefèvre's "blow," because the messenger has reported Atreus beheading Pleisthenes at the altar with Tantalus and thus the chorus' subsequent question: "Did he spare the boy?" (*puerone parcit?*) cannot possibly refer back to the headless Pleisthenes.⁹⁶²

Instead, the two wounds from which the unnamed boy dies (*per utrumque vulnus moritur*) include the entrance wound in his chest (*pectore*) and the exit wound in the back (*tergo*).⁹⁶³ Whereas Lefèvre suggests Seneca's failure to name a third child could be "negligence",⁹⁶⁴ the children in both the *Medea* and *Heracles* of Euripides and Seneca are unnamed and the run-through wound Seneca's Atreus inflicts characterises the boy as a small infant in contrast to his older, named brothers. Thus, Seneca's *Thyestes* had three sons, like the preceding Greek *Thyestes*. Therefore, in each case the age of the children will be considered as an opportunity to create pathos for an ancient audience who, as Golden points out, would be accustomed to the death and exposure of babies, and thus may have more empathy for older children.⁹⁶⁵

Although such natural deaths or deaths through exposure are less violent, the loss of an older child may have been more shocking for an ancient audience. The relationship between a parent and an older child is more developed, an older child is better integrated into the family and the community, and the parents would presumably be older and thus less able to replace the deceased child. In *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero challenges what seems to be the common view that the older the child is, the more tragic their death:

⁹⁶⁰ Lefèvre 1973 pp.97-108.

⁹⁶¹ Lefèvre 1973 p.100.

⁹⁶² s.v. *OLD caedes*, Lefèvre suggests that Pleisthenes' trunk is technically still alive as it stands, but Atreus' subsequent blow with a sword soaked in two killings (*ferrumque gemina caede*) at 738 is struck after Pleisthenes' body falls at 727-9 (1973 pp.99-101).

⁹⁶³ Sen. *Thy.* 740-3.

⁹⁶⁴ Lefèvre 1973 p.104.

⁹⁶⁵ Golden 1988 p.154.

Idem, si puer parvus occidit, aequo animo ferendum putant: si vero in cunis, ne querendum quidem. Atqui ab hoc acerbius exegit natura quod dederat. “Nondum gustaverat,” inquit, “vitae suavitatem: hic autem iam sperabat magna, quibus frui coeperat”. At id quidem in ceteris rebus melius putatur, aliquam partem quam nullam attingere: cur in vita secus?

The same grumblers think that if a small child dies, the loss must be borne calmly; if an infant in the cradle, there must not even be a lament. And yet in this latter case nature has called in her gift with greater cruelty. “The infant had not yet tasted the sweetness of life,” they say: “but the other was already forming high hopes, which he was beginning to enjoy”. But in all other matters this is counted better—to get a part rather than nothing: why otherwise in life?⁹⁶⁶ Of course, Cicero is discussing an average child dying a natural death. When we apply this argument to Thyestes’ children it is clear that the very reason they are killed is because, tactically, Thyestes’ sons may lay claim to the throne and perpetuate Thyestes’ line as the royal line, thus killing them will hurt Thyestes both emotionally and politically.

In sum, Thyestes’ sons are often presented as heirs and bastards who are, with the exception of Seneca’s Tantalus, too young to join their father in exile, yet still old enough to be mourned as a tragic loss. As a result, Atreus’ slaughter of Thyestes’ sons is often framed as infanticide, but is best termed nepoticide as Atreus may kill adult sons. Therefore, Atreus kills Thyestes’ sons before they can come of age and become a threat to his own sons Agamemnon and Menelaus, thus the age and status of Thyestes’ sons presents both a threat to Atreus and a grave loss for Thyestes. Both of these factors are, of course, reiterated by Thyestes’ crime against his own daughter Pelopeia: raping her to father Aegisthus as an avenger of the feast.

Nepoticide in Sophocles’ *Thyestes’ Feast*

The fragments attributed to Sophocles by Lloyd-Jones and Radt are not specifically assigned to *Thyestes’ Feast*.⁹⁶⁷ But amongst the *fragmenta ex incerta fabula* we find Sophocles’ fr.892, which fits *Thyestes’ Feast*:

παῖδας γὰρ οὓς ἔφυσ’ ἀναλώσας ἔχει.

For he has destroyed the children I begot.⁹⁶⁸

This clearly suggests a ‘begetting’ father (ἔφυσ’) is blaming the murder of his children on another man. Lloyd-Jones suggests that this is “perhaps said by Priam of Achilles”,

⁹⁶⁶ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 39.93. cf. Accius 9 Ribbeck= Cic. *Planc.* 24.59. Here Cicero appropriates Thyestes’ advice to his son(s), in order to advise his own son; providing clues as to the age of these characters.

⁹⁶⁷ Lloyd-Jones 1983 and Radt 1999.

⁹⁶⁸ Soph. 892 Radt = Σ B Eur. *Med.* 33 Dindorf.

presumably in Sophocles' lost *Priam*, and then acknowledges the various other tragedies in which these lines could fit.⁹⁶⁹ From the surviving titles of Sophocles' tragedies only a select few could involve the death of children, including: *Athamas*, *Niobe*, *Tereus* and *Thyestes' Feast*.

That said the phrasing of fr.892 does not fit *Tereus*, in which only one child (Itys) is killed and by two women, not one man. Nor does it fit *Athamas*, in which again only one son (Larchus) appears, and it is his own 'begetting' father (Athamas) who kills him.⁹⁷⁰ By contrast, if we assume fr.892 refers to Apollo's slaughter of Niobe's children, then Niobe's husband Amphion as the 'begetting' father could speak about Apollo in fr.892.

But, given that both Apollo and Artemis together kill Amphion's children, whereas fr.892 presents a single perpetrator, fr.892 could refer to either Achilles' or Neoptolemus' murder of Priam's sons, or Atreus' slaughter of Thyestes children. Should we attribute fr.892 to Sophocles' Thyestes plays, as Welcker does, it could appear, I suggest, as Thyestes' reflection in *Thyestes in Sicyon* or immediate reaction in *Thyestes' Feast*: in either case it demonstrates Thyestes' awareness and suggests a recognition scene following the banquet.⁹⁷¹ Since Sophocles dramatises both *Thyestes' Feast* and the aftermath of the banquet in *Thyestes in Sicyon*, Sophocles' Thyestes must recognise Atreus' murder of his sons. So, in order to consider how Atreus' revenge reaches fulfillment in *Thyestes' Feast* we must use Sophocles' extant corpus to first determine whether Atreus' filicide and Thyestes' feast may have been staged and then consider how the children's corpses were displayed in *Thyestes' Feast*.

Across Sophocles' extant plays, corpses are typically displayed onstage using the *ekkyklema* after offstage violence.⁹⁷² Heracles' suffering is staged in *Trachiniae* as he is wounded, but he dies offstage.⁹⁷³ In *Oedipus Tyrannus* Oedipus' blinding is reported as a response to Jocasta's offstage suicide and he appears mutilated onstage.⁹⁷⁴ In *Antigone* the heroine's suicide is also reported, as are the suicides of Eurydice and

⁹⁶⁹ Lloyd-Jones 1983 fr.892 n. a.

⁹⁷⁰ Σ Ar. *Nub.* 257c Radt. See ch.2 p.177.

⁹⁷¹ Welcker (Gr. Tr. 362, 364) attributes this to Sophocles' *Atreus*, the most likely to correspond with my title *Thyestes' Feast* see ch.1 pp.22-25 on Sophocles' titles.

⁹⁷² Soph. *Ai.* 898-9.

⁹⁷³ Soph. *Trach.* 1256.

⁹⁷⁴ Soph. *OT.* 1265-85,1297.

Haemon whose corpses are brought on stage.⁹⁷⁵ In Sophocles' *Electra* Clytemnestra is killed offstage, but her body is displayed to Aegisthus using the *ekkyklema*. This is the most interesting example for our purposes because Orestes' display of his mother's corpse is echoed in the way Seneca's Atreus reveals Thyestes' children:

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

ἀλλ' εὖ παραινεῖς, κάπιπέισομαι· σὺ δέ, εἴ που κατ' οἶκον ἢ Κλυταιμῆστρα,
κάλει.

ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ

αὐτὴ πέλας σοῦ· μηκέτ' ἄλλοσε σκόπει.

ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ

οἴμοι, τί λεύσσω;

ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ

τίνα φοβῆ; τίν' ἀγνοεῖς;

Aegisthus:

Your advice is good, and I shall take it; but do you call Clytemnestra, if she is in the house!

Orestes:

She is here near you; cease to look elsewhere!

Aegisthus:

Ah, what do I see?

Orestes:

Whom are you afraid of? Whom do you not recognise?⁹⁷⁶

In Sophocles' *Electra*, as in Seneca's *Thyestes*, the unsuspecting survivor asks for his dead loved one,⁹⁷⁷ the murderer claims they are present⁹⁷⁸ before he reveals the corpse(s), and finally forces the survivor to recognise both the victim and murderer.⁹⁷⁹ In both Sophocles' *Electra* and Seneca's *Thyestes* the murders are not staged: Sophocles has the murder take place within the *skēnē*, from which we hear the screams, and Seneca has a messenger report Atreus' filicide.⁹⁸⁰ So, like the murderer the audience knows about the deaths and understands the *double entendres*. But like the survivor, the audience also "sees" the corpses for the first time on stage, creating empathy for both characters.

Putting Seneca's *Thyestes* aside, of Sophocles' seven extant tragedies, there is only one debated instance of onstage death in Sophocles' *Ajax*, whereas corpses are staged twice.⁹⁸¹ In Sophocles' *Antigone* the chorus introduce the displays of onstage

⁹⁷⁵ Soph. *Antig.* 1257-60, 1299.

⁹⁷⁶ Soph. *El.* 1472-6.

⁹⁷⁷ Sen. *Thy.* 973-5.

⁹⁷⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 976-7.

⁹⁷⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 1005-6.

⁹⁸⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 623. ff. See ch.3 pp.238-247.

⁹⁸¹ Unusually, Ajax's suicide seems to be performed and discovered on stage, but the issue of how Ajax's body could be removed from the stage remains under debate, cf.

corpses,⁹⁸² whereas in *Electra* the avenger presents the remains.⁹⁸³ By analogy, I suggest the remains of Thyestes' children were most likely revealed in a similar way, though whether this was during a staged feast remains unclear because neither Sophocles' *Thyestes' Feast* nor Sophocles' *Tereus* provide evidence for on-stage cannibalism. Whereas in comedy two separate episodes of killing and feasting with a period for cooking between might prove effective, in tragedy this would create two ungainly crises: a reported killing and onstage corpses best suit Sophocles' style.

What emerges more clearly from our comparison with Seneca is the similarity between Sophocles' Orestes and Seneca's taunting Atreus. This persists in Orestes' desire to maximise the pain of Aegisthus' punishment:

ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ

μη μὲν οὖν καθ' ἡδονὴν
θάνης· φυλάξαι δεῖ με τοῦτό σοι πικρόν.
χρῆν δ' εὐθὺς εἶναι τήνδε τοῖς πᾶσιν δίκην,
ὅστις πέρα πράσσειν γε τῶν νόμων θέλοι,
κτείνειν· τὸ γὰρ πανοῦργον οὐκ ἂν ᾔν πολὺ.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ὦ σπέρμ' Ἀτρέως, ὡς πολλὰ παθὼν
δι' ἐλευθερίας μόλις ἐξῆλθες
τῇ νῦν ὀρμῇ τελεωθέν.

Orestes:

No, in case you should die where you please; I have to see that this tastes bitter for you. This punishment should come at once to all who would act outside the laws—death. Then crime would not abound!

Chorus:

Seed of Atreus, after many sufferings you have at last emerged in freedom, made complete by this day's enterprise!⁹⁸⁴

Of course, we can only compare Orestes to Seneca's extant Atreus, but Sophocles' chorus recognises the similarity between Orestes and his ancestor Atreus. This is the only time Atreus is used as a patronymic in *Electra* and it caps Orestes' triumph with a false sense of "completeness" (τελεωθέν). Having killed his mother, Orestes now vows to kill Aegisthus and repeat a cycle of vengeance initiated by Atreus. Therefore, though we cannot project the final scene of Seneca's *Thyestes* onto Sophocles' *Thyestes' Feast*, Sophocles' reference to Atreus in the closing lines of *Electra* suggests that Orestes resembles a fifth-century, Greek Atreus familiar to Sophocles' audience.

Heath & OKell for the case that Ajax killed himself offstage and his corpse was subsequently displayed (2007 pp. 372-3).

⁹⁸² Soph. *Ant.* 1293, 1260.

⁹⁸⁴ Soph. *El.* 1503-10; Sen. *Thy.* 1097.

In sum, whether we attribute fr.892 to Sophocles' *Priam* or the *Thyestes* plays, the fact that Sophocles dramatises not only *Thyestes' Feast* but also his reaction to it as he departs to spawn his own avenger by raping his daughter, suggests that Sophocles' *Thyestes* undergoes a recognition scene. Sophocles' extant corpus provides circumstantial evidence to suggest that Atreus presented Thyestes with the remains of his sons.

Nepoticide in Euripides' *Thyestes*

The revenge scene in Euripides' *Electra* draws a similar parallel between Atreus and Orestes, yet far more briefly. When Orestes plans to kill Aegisthus, he does so at a festal setting:

ΠΡΕΣΒΥΣ
 ὄθεν <γ'> ἰδὼν σε δαιτὶ κοινῶν καλεῖ.
 ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ
 πικρὸν γε συνθoinάτορ', ἦν θεὸς θέλη.

Old Man:

Yes, and from there he will invite you to share in his feast.

Orestes:

And an unwelcome fellow feaster I shall prove, if god is willing!⁹⁸⁵

We find yet more circumstantial evidence for how Atreus' filicide may have been presented by turning to the filicide scenes in Euripides' *Bacchae*, *Heracles* and *Medea*.⁹⁸⁶ None of these plays present filicide on stage; in *Bacchae* and *Heracles* a messenger reports each frenzied parent to have killed their son(s) under false pretences, before each parent's sanity is restored on stage and they recognise their sons' corpses. Euripides' *Medea* calculates the murder of her children whilst sane,⁹⁸⁷ but even she withdraws into the *skēne* to kill the children who call out from within.⁹⁸⁸

In this respect Euripides' *Medea* provides the closest parallel with *Thyestes*. Just as Medea kills Jason's children to avenge his new marriage, Atreus kills Thyestes' children to avenge Thyestes' adultery with Aërope and attempt on the throne. Since, like Medea, Atreus kills Thyestes' sons deliberately, this suggests he would kill them secretly, in order to reveal their corpses to Thyestes just as Medea presents her sons'

⁹⁸⁵ Eur. *El.* 637-8 (My translation).

⁹⁸⁶ Eur. *Bacch.* 1024-1152, 1167-1327; *HF.* 922-1015, 1089-1162; *Med.* 1231-1414. 'filicide' here marks the inclusion of Agave's adult son Pentheus.

⁹⁸⁷ Aristot. *Poet.* 1453b. 25-30.

⁹⁸⁸ Eur. *Med.* 1270-9. The infanticide was less clear in Carcinus' *Medea* because she sent the children off stage, Aristotle relays the questions of the onstage characters (Aristot. *Rh.* 2.400b.28).

corpses to their father Jason. But in *Medea*, the pathos of her filicide is emphasised in the juxtaposition of her onstage interaction with her *own* sons and their retreat into the family home to be killed. By contrast, Atreus' preparation of Thyestes' sons as meat is where the pathos of the feast is seated, given that, as we shall see, it is unlikely that the feast itself was staged. Therefore, Atreus' nepoticide would be best described by a messenger to the chorus like Agave's *sparagmos* in *Bacchae* and Heracles' filicide in *Heracles*.⁹⁸⁹ The details of this report will be compared to killing, cooking and anthropophagy reported in *Cyclops*.

In terms of Thyestes' reaction, like Euripides' Jason, Euripides' Thyestes must recognise not only his sons' corpses, but also his own role in provoking their death. Moreover, like both Euripides' Heracles and Agave, Euripides' Thyestes must also recognise his involuntary role in the mutilation of his sons' bodies. As a result, the extant evidence suggests that Atreus would reveal the boys' remains to Thyestes to that end. Though we have no fragments from Euripides' *Thyestes* to suggest that this recognition would have happened during the feast, Aristophanes' parody of Euripides' *Thyestes* in *Proagon* suggests that Euripides staged Thyestes at the feast or emerging from it:

οἷμοι τάλας, τί μου στρέφει τὴν γαστέρα;
βάλλ' ἐς κόρακας· πόθεν ἄν λάσανα γένοιτό μοι;

Alas, poor me! What's making my stomach turn?
Go to hell! Where's a toilet?⁹⁹⁰

Aristophanes' *Proagon* is based on the practice of previewing plays that will be displayed at the Dionysia and, given that Euripides was allegedly brought on stage in this play, it seems Aristophanes mocks Euripides' *Thyestes* in fr.477.⁹⁹¹ Here Aristophanes has a comic character role-play a tragic Thyestes incompetently, adding toilet humour to Thyestes' sufferings.

Nonetheless, Thyestes' initial question suggests that he asks about his children during or immediately after he feasts on them. This suggests that Aristophanes is mocking Euripides' *Thyestes*, a play that included the feast, and our comparison with Euripides' *Heracles* and *Bacchae* suggests that Thyestes bursts on stage in pain, owing to the

⁹⁸⁹ Eur. *Bacch.* 1024-1152; *HF.* 910-1015.

⁹⁹⁰ Ar. 477 Kassel-Austin (My translation), cf. Haley forthcoming in *Ramus*, for full discussion.

⁹⁹¹ Σ Arist. *Vesp.* 61. cf. Bergk 1840 239.

unusual meat, as Heracles and Agave do in madness.⁹⁹² Indeed, indigestion initiates recognition in Seneca's *Thyestes*, though this is exploited for grotesque comic effect with Thyestes' belch.⁹⁹³

Aristophanes' parody escalates to a recognition scene in *Proagon* fr.478:

ἐγευσάμην χορδῆς ὁ δύστηνος τέκνων·
πῶς ἐσίδω ῥύγχος περικεκαυμένον;

I've tasted—a wretch!—the guts of my own children.

How can I look upon roast pig-snout now?⁹⁹⁴

Here it seems the same 'Thyestes' speaks as he discovers he has eaten his children. Though Aristophanes mocks the scene with mundane detail, referring to a toilet and a pig snout, the premise of Aristophanes' parody is Euripides' Thyestean feast and tragic recognition scene. Indeed, we find similarities with Euripides' extant recognition scenes which, as we have already seen, present the dramatic irony of the parent looking for their child(ren)⁹⁹⁵ and the horror of discovering their mutilated corpse(s).⁹⁹⁶ More specifically, the snout mentioned in Aristophanes' *Proagon* suggests a parody of Thyestes' recognising his children's heads in Euripides' *Thyestes*, as Agave recognises Pentheus' head in *Bacchae*.⁹⁹⁷ Thus when compared to Euripides' recognition scenes in *Heracles* and *Bacchae*, Aristophanes' *Proagon* presents indirect evidence for Thyestes recognising his sons' heads, having emerged onstage from the feast.

The dramatic irony leading up to this recognition is consistent in both *Bacchae* and *Heracles*, and is also amplified for comic effect in Aristophanes' *Proagon*. Yet whilst the gods inflict madness on parents to allow for this irony, as Dionysus does in *Bacchae* and Lyssa does in *Heracles*, it is Atreus who orchestrates the recognition scene

⁹⁹² Damet applies the divine madness of Agave (inspired by Dionysus) and Hercules (inspired by Lyssa) to Euripides' Atreus, despite the fact that Atreus' murders another's sons in revenge, rather than his own in madness (2012 pp.323-5).

⁹⁹³ Sen. *Thy.* 999-1003 cf. Meltzer 1988 pp.7-8.

⁹⁹⁴ Ar. 478. Kassel-Austin.

⁹⁹⁵ Eur. *Bacch.* 1212, 1252-3.

⁹⁹⁶ Eur. *Bacch.* 1299-1300; *HF.* 1097.

⁹⁹⁷ Burkert suggests that the details of the Astyages and Harpagus story in Herodotus (1.108-19) "were probably taken from the feast of Thyestes, for we know that Herodotus was preceded by versions in the *Alkmaionis*, Pherekydes, and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*" (1983 p.109). But, <and the heads, he set aside; the rest of their flesh> (<κεφαλὰς τε σώσας, τὰπίλοιπα τῶν κρεῶν>) at Aesch. *Ag.* 1595 is an editorial conjecture. Similarly *Alcm.* 2 West= Ath. 460b includes the displaying of the dead *whilst* laying out a banquet, which suggests either a funeral banquet or a cannibalistic feast in which the eater is aware of his own cannibalism. Only Philocles 5 Snell presents an instance of encephalophagy though this is *ex fabula incerta*.

in *Thyestes*. As discussed above, there is no evidence to indicate any such divine intervention in *Thyestes*.⁹⁹⁸ Therefore I propose Euripides' Atreus emulates a Euripidean god of chaos by killing the children and, as Aristophanes' *Proagon* suggests, implicating Thyestes in the mutilation of their corpses through the feast. According to Aristophanes' parody, Euripides' *Thyestes* included a recognition scene casting Atreus not only as the punishing 'god' but also, perversely, as the family member who reveals the crime: just as Amphitryon does for Heracles and Cadmus for Agave.

Overall Euripides' extant works suggest that Euripides' Atreus killed the children and fed them to Thyestes off-stage, but Aristophanes' *Proagon* fragments suggest that Euripides' Thyestes recognised his sons' remains on-stage. Thus Euripides' Atreus implicates Thyestes in the mutilation of his children like a god and coaches Thyestes through the revelation in the guise of a loving relative, such as Amphitryon in *Heracles* or Cadmus in *Bacchae*. But unlike Sophocles' extant corpus, Euripides' works do provide us with an example of an anthropophagic feast: Euripides' *Cyclops*.

Killing & Cooking: Euripides' *Cyclops*

If we look beyond the filicide and child mutilation of Euripidean tragedy we find a detailed account of the monster Polyphemus' eating Odysseus' men in Euripides' satyr play. Two challenges remain: to evaluate both how helpful a satyr play may prove when reconstructing the cannibalism of Euripides' lost tragedy and how well the monstrous Polyphemus' feast on Odysseus' men maps on to the unwitting Thyestes' feast on his own children. Euripides' *Cyclops* is set in a fantastical land of one-eyed giants, with a chorus of satyrs; thus the Cyclops' anthropophagy is distanced further from reality than the realm of kings and heroes *Thyestes* occupies. Nonetheless, satyr drama was recognised in antiquity as "tragedy at play"⁹⁹⁹ and thus *Cyclops* provides a useful example of anthropophagy from which to reconstruct tragic cannibalism. Indeed, key themes that O'Sullivan identifies in *Cyclops* such as "hospitality and friendship (and transgressions thereof), impiety and its consequences, gluttony, drunkenness" can all be found in the Thyestes myth.¹⁰⁰⁰ Though not strictly comic, given its mythological content and distinctness as a separate genre, the satyr chorus' phallic costume indicates the levity of the genre and this seems in keeping with Euripides' depiction of anthropophagy in *Cyclops*.

⁹⁹⁸ See ch. 2 pp.196-199.

⁹⁹⁹ Demetrius *Eloc.*169 (τις τραγωδίαν παίζουσιν).

¹⁰⁰⁰ O'Sullivan 2017 p.319.

Before falling prey to Polyphemus, for example, Odysseus' men are neither named nor individualised, but rather appear as silent extras to facilitate Odysseus' retaliation as he blinds the cyclops.¹⁰⁰¹ Similarly, though Odysseus' crew enters the Cyclops' cave (*skēne*) in which Odysseus informs us they were killed, there are no screams from within that might spark sympathy from the audience.¹⁰⁰² Indeed, Odysseus claims to have cried within the cave yet emerges to provide a relatively unemotional account of how Polyphemus cooked his companions.¹⁰⁰³ Ultimately, Odysseus' men serve as props to advance the plot, and Euripides avoids dampening the humour of Odysseus' deception and the Dionysiac revelry by not evoking any pathos from the crew's death.

Even more so than Odysseus' men, we might expect Thyestes' children to appear onstage before they are killed. Indeed, in tragedy the respective children of Medea¹⁰⁰⁴ and Heracles¹⁰⁰⁵ appear alive onstage, which increased the pathos of their subsequent deaths. Like Odysseus' men, the children in these tragedies are unnamed and do not interact on stage. However, unlike the crew in *Cyclops* and the children in Euripides' *Heracles*, the children in Euripides' *Medea* cry out from inside the *skēnē*.¹⁰⁰⁶ Therefore, given the strong parallel between Atreus' and Medea's *private* revenge killings, we might expect Thyestes' children to have cried in anguish when murdered by Atreus, whereas Amphitryon reports Heracles' public filicide.¹⁰⁰⁷ Atreus commits the crime of the mad Heracles, but Atreus' desire for revenge most aligns him with Medea; thus his nepoticide may have been staged in a similar way.

So it seems that Euripides' *Cyclops* reports both off-stage murder and anthropophagy, as Euripides' tragedies report off-stage filicide. Euripides does not allow either the child victims in *Heracles* and *Medea*, or the adult victims in *Cyclops*, to speak onstage. This consistency suggests that the action is determined by stage convention, rather than by design. Given the number of speaking characters on stage with the victims: two in *Heracles*,¹⁰⁰⁸ one during the monologue of Euripides' *Medea*

¹⁰⁰¹ Eur. *Cyc.* 222.

¹⁰⁰² Eur. *Cyc.* 355.

¹⁰⁰³ Eur. *Cyc.* 382-407.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Eur. *Med.* 48.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Eur. *HF.* 893.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Eur. *Med.* 1271-80.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Eur. *HF.* 894-5; 976: βoῦ δὲ πρέσβυς οἰκετῶν τ' ὄχλος (Old Amphitryon and the throng of servants shouted too).

¹⁰⁰⁸ Eur. *HF.* 820-893.

and three in *Cyclops*,¹⁰⁰⁹ this rather suggests that only Medea's child victims could speak according to the three-actor rule which applied to the whole tetralogy, including tragedy and satyr drama.¹⁰¹⁰ But more pressingly, as Sifakis points out, children would have to speak in the tragic metre and diction of their on-stage parents, undermining the verisimilitude of an on-stage child.¹⁰¹¹ Unusually, the off-stage cries in Euripides' *Medea* circumvent this restriction, with small off-stage interjections from the children.¹⁰¹²

Thus, victims are killed offstage in both Euripides' *Cyclops* and his extant tragedies. Moreover, despite the comic setting of the satyr play, Euripides' cyclops cooks and eats Odysseus' men offstage.¹⁰¹³ Once again, this seems to be determined by stage convention. Though feasting featured prominently in comedy, banquet scenes would require furniture to be brought on and offstage, provoking Konstantakos to claim that feasts in Greek comedy could thus occur as a closing scene to avoid the removal of furniture, as comic feasts often do.¹⁰¹⁴ But, the dislocated festal fragments from Greek comedy provide no paradigm for the "final feast" Plautus favoured.¹⁰¹⁵ In extant Greek Old Comedy it is rather the case that onstage characters typically sell food for, travel to,¹⁰¹⁶ or describe offstage feasts; whereas in Middle and New comedy onstage symposia seem focused on drinking and dainties, rather than substantial banquets.¹⁰¹⁷ Thus it is unlikely that Thyestes' feast would have been staged as the final scene of a tragedy.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Eur. *Med.* 1019-80; *Cyc.* 313-355.

¹⁰¹⁰ Csapo and Slater 1995 p.222.

¹⁰¹¹ Sifakis 1979 pp.68-9.

¹⁰¹² Eur. *Med.* 1019-80.

¹⁰¹³ Eur. *Cyc.* 382-407.

¹⁰¹⁴ Konstantakos 2005 197-8. Anomalies such as Plautus' *Mostellaria*, *Cistellaria* and Menander's *Synaristosai*, in which the feasting scenes appear early on.

¹⁰¹⁵ E.g. Pherecrates 73, Klearchos 4, Eubulus 44. Kassel-Austin ask for "dainties" specifically, as Konstantakos puts it, his remaining examples refer to wine drinking, rather than feasting (2005 pp.188-9).

¹⁰¹⁶ E.g. Ar. *Ach.* 1203, 1227, *Pax* 1193-7, 1314-7, *Av.* 1579 ff.; *Eccl.* 1128-43. cf. Arnott 2010 p.282 for comparison with Middle Comedy.

¹⁰¹⁷ E.g. Pl. *St.* 683-775, *Mos.* 295-309, *Per.* 758-76; Men. *Synaristosai.* 4, 10 Arnott. cf. Konstantakos "certain sequences of scenes in Plautus, which present staged banquets, could not have been performed as they are on the Greek comic stage, because they involve four or five speaking actors" E.g. *As.* 851-941, *Mos.* 310-406, *Per.* 777-857 (2015 p.193).

Reporting Cannibalism: Euripides' *Cyclops*

So just as Euripides' Odysseus describes the feast, we might expect an offstage feast to be described in Euripides' *Thyestes* before the closing scene. As we have seen in our first chapter, Aristophanes' 'Thyestes' in *Proagon* seems to emerge after the feast for a parody of the recognition scene which replaces severed heads for "roast pig-snout" (ρύγχος).¹⁰¹⁸ So whereas in *Cyclops* Odysseus provides an eyewitness account of the anthropophagy, in *Thyestes* we might expect a messenger to report Atreus' nepoticide and Atreus to report Thyestes' endocannibalism before Thyestes finally appears onstage to recognise his children's remains, as suggested in *Proagon*.¹⁰¹⁹

Logistically, Euripides' *Cyclops* mirrors the tragedies by dealing with the violence offstage and not having the victims speak onstage, suggesting that Euripides' *Thyestes* would also have reported Atreus' offstage nepoticide and Thyestes' offstage endocannibalism. Stylistically, however, we may expect the man-eating to be described quite differently in Euripides' *Cyclops* and *Thyestes*, given that satyr drama evokes comic bathos, not tragic pathos.

For example, Sutton claims that Polyphemus' blinding in *Cyclops* presents a comic revision of Polymestor's blinding in *Hecuba* and concludes that *Cyclops* presents "a tale of a villain receiving a richly merited punishment".¹⁰²⁰ If we apply Sutton's comparison of blinding in tragedy and satyr drama to a thematic comparison of man-eating in *Thyestes* and *Cyclops*, we find that unlike Aristophanes' *Proagon*, Polyphemus' anthropophagy is not a comic revision of Thyestes' cannibalism. The feasts function differently in each plot: anthropophagy is the original crime in *Cyclops* and endocannibalism is the punishment in *Thyestes*.¹⁰²¹ Thus we must consider how cannibalism in *Thyestes* would be presented to evoke pathos, and if Atreus' revenge

¹⁰¹⁸ Ar. 478 Kassel-Austin. See ch1 p.163 above.

¹⁰¹⁹ Cf. Haley accepted and forthcoming in *Ramus*, for full discussion.

¹⁰²⁰ Sutton 1980 p.170. Sutton suggests that *Hecuba* and *Cyclops* were produced in the same tetralogy on this basis, whereas my comparison between *Cyclops* and *Thyestes* is purely typological. Similarly, Wright identifies a strong verbal echo of *Andromeda* fr.125 in *Cyclops* (Eur. *Cycl.* 222-7) and suggests they were staged together in 412 BC (2006 pp.2-5). I will make no attempt to reconstruct a tetralogy here.

¹⁰²¹ Though Odysseus provokes Polyphemus by trading his goods with the resident satyr Silenus, Odysseus does not steal the cheese or lamb but trades them for wine and offers gold only to be called a thief by Silenus (Eur. *Cyc.* 160-3; 222-30). Note also that, whilst Odysseus paid Silenus for Polyphemus' goods, anthropophagy need not be provoked: οὐδεις μολῶν δεῦρ' ὅστις οὐ κατεσφάγη. (Everyone who has come here has been slaughtered) (Eur. *Cyc.*128).

feast for Thyestes is “merited,” as Sutton suggests Odysseus’ blinding of Polyphemus is.¹⁰²²

Moreover, morality in *Cyclops* is polarised between man and monster: Polyphemus is responsible for the killing, cooking and anthropophagy, which Odysseus avenges. By contrast, *Thyestes* divides this action between two morally ambivalent human characters: Atreus kills and cooks the children, feeding them to an unknowing Thyestes in revenge. Polyphemus’ feast is provoked by the satyr Silenus’ willingness to trade his master’s goods in *Cyclops* and instigates Odysseus’ revenge as he blinds Polyphemus, whereas Atreus’ feast is an act of revenge for Thyestes’ initial adultery.¹⁰²³ Therefore, we might expect the report of Thyestes’ cannibalism to differ from that of Polyphemus’ anthropophagy, both because it is designed to evoke tragic pathos and because it is a monstrous crime shared by *men*.

Odysseus foregrounds Polyphemus’ monstrosity by at once emphasising the horror of the anthropophagy to the audience of satyrs and distancing the violence as fantasy for Euripides’ audience, adding:

ὦ Ζεῦ, τί λέξω, δεινὸν ἰδὼν ἄντρων ἔσω
κοῦ πιστά, μύθοις εἰκότ’ οὐδ’ ἔργοις βροτῶν;

Oh Zeus, what am I to say when I have seen in the cave terrible things,
incredible things such as one meets only in stories, not in the deeds of
mortals?¹⁰²⁴

This is reiterated in references to Polyphemus’ monstrous size, lifting men in his hands and using giant utensils.¹⁰²⁵ Again, we must note the narrative function of anthropophagy for the cyclops, a monster for whom man-eating is carnivorousism and not a taboo: it is the crime for which he is punished, not the punishment. Thus Polyphemus’ anthropophagy serves a different function in the plot than Thyestes’ cannibalism and is a repulsive feature of Polyphemus’ monstrosity.

By contrast, Thyestes’ endocannibalism is a taboo: he eats not only his own species, but his own sons as a punishment marking his transition from unpolluted to polluted. Lévi-Strauss has noted the transformative function of endocannibalism in Cariri myth, whereby women eat their husbands, display their husbands’ heads and

¹⁰²² Sutton 1980 p.170.

¹⁰²³ Eur. *Cyc.* 190-4.

¹⁰²⁴ Eur. *Cyc.* 375-6.

¹⁰²⁵ Eur. *Cyc.* 379-80, 384, 389-93.

transform into jaguars, marking a transition from human to beast.¹⁰²⁶ For cannibalism, a classicist need look no further than the myth of Lycaon, which demonstrates a man turned to a wolf having eaten human flesh.¹⁰²⁷ Segal uses the example of Homer's cyclops to make a case for the "double opposition" of "man *versus* beast and man *versus* god".¹⁰²⁸ Yet Mader reminds us that in Seneca's *Thyestes*, Atreus conflates the roles of "god celebrant and beast".¹⁰²⁹ Indeed if we apply Segal's oppositions to Thyestes' story we find that these categories no longer work in antithesis.

Though "man *versus* god" is clearly expressed in Tantalus' serving his son Pelops' flesh to the gods, Atreus' feast for his brother is served to neither beast nor god but a mortal man.¹⁰³⁰ Through the feast Thyestes seems to be elevated to the role of a king but is actually polluted with the flesh of his own sons. In Thyestes' story, Segal's antithesis of "vegetarianism/ cannibalism" does not correlate with the moral antitheses of "justice/ injustice, kindness/ rudeness, hospitality/ violence" because Atreus' character affects the former values to conceal the latter.¹⁰³¹ Atreus cooks the meat to disguise the cannibalism and extends kind hospitality to facilitate rude violence.¹⁰³² The balance of justice *versus* injustice is split between the brothers: for Atreus the justice is the endocannibalism disguised with the unjust feast, for Thyestes the reverse is true. Therefore, we would not expect Thyestes to be distanced as a monster in Euripides' *Thyestes*, as Polyphemus is in *Cyclops*, because Thyestes' humanity emphasises both the perversity and pollution of his unwitting endocannibalism, much like the unwitting filicide of Euripides' Agave and Heracles provoked by the gods.

¹⁰²⁶ Lévi-Strauss 1969 pp.104-106. Littlewood (2000 pp.248-9) and Carpanelli (2014 p.14) have each found these categories in the hunting imagery of Thyestes' feast in Seneca (Sen. *Thy.* 185-7, 491, 685-90).

¹⁰²⁷ Paus. 8.2.2-4, Ov. *Met.*1.163-252, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.8.

¹⁰²⁸ Segal 1974 p.291. Cf. Pucci for the application of such structure to the Argonautic saga (1971 pp. 104-7).

¹⁰²⁹ Mader 2000 p.161.

¹⁰³⁰ Walcot makes the case that Mycenaean kings were revered as gods around 1600 BC (1967 pp.54-5). Nonetheless, I suggest that for audiences of Greek tragedy in the fifth-century Thyestes would be distinct from Segal's category of Olympian gods (1974 p.291).

¹⁰³¹ Segal 1974 p.291.

¹⁰³² The motif of forced cannibalism appears in Tantalus' myth in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* (Eur. *IT* 386-9), we can also find forced cannibalism in earlier Greek literature which touches on similar themes; such as Astyages' revenge on Harpagus in Herodotus and Busiris' human sacrifice in Isocrates (Hdt. 1.129, Isocr. *Busiris* 7.31). Certainly, when compared with Aegisthus' description of Thyestes' feast in *Agamemnon* 1592 (κρεουργὸν ἤμαρ), it seems the feast held sacrificial connotations in fifth-century tragedy.

However, some elements of Odysseus' description in Euripides' *Cyclops* may well suit Atreus' preparation of Thyestes' feast. For example, the building of the fire before the butchery is ominous and introduces the various cooking methods,¹⁰³³ both boiling in a cauldron (χάλκεον λέβητ' ἐπέζεσεν πυρί) and roasting on spits (ὀβελούς).¹⁰³⁴ We might expect a similar description in Euripides' *Thyestes*, for not only does Aristophanes' *Proagon* suggest the comic culinary preparation of the children as sausages (χορδῆς [...] τέκνων) but Atreus' preparation of the children must also be convincing enough to deceive Thyestes.¹⁰³⁵ Moreover, this butchery could evoke pathos when framed as a family tragedy: as an uncle cooking nephews to feed to their father, rather than a cyclops eating strangers.

Similarly, Polyphemus' butchery of his first two victims can offer insight into Atreus' slaughter of Thyestes' children:

ὡς δ' ἦν ἔτοιμα πάντα τῷ θεοστυγεῖ
 Ἄιδου μαγεῖρω, φῶτε συμμάρψας δύο
 τὸν μὲν λέβητος ἐς κύτος χαλκήλατον
 ἔσφαζ' ἑταίρων τῶν ἐμῶν ῥυθμῶ τινι,
 τὸν δ' αὖ, τένοντος ἀρπάσας ἄκρου ποδός,
 παίων πρὸς ὄξυν στόνυχα πετραίου λίθου
 ἐγκέφαλον ἐξέρρανε· καὶ διαρταμῶν
 λάβρω μαχαίρα σάρκας ἐξώπτα πυρί,
 τὰ δ' ἐς λέβητ' ἐφῆκεν ἔψεσθαι μέλη.

When that **vile and murderous cook** had everything ready, he snatched up two of my companions. He cut the throat of the first over the cauldron with a sweep of the arm and drained him of blood, the second he seized by the tendon at the end of his foot, struck him against the sharp edge of a rock, and dashed out his brains. Then butchering them with a fierce blade he roasted their fleshy parts in the fire and put their arms and legs in the cauldron to boil.¹⁰³⁶

This passage reiterates the different deaths to emphasise the attack on multiple victims and reflects a variety of cooking methods that correspond to each cut of meat from the sacrifice: the blood is drained,¹⁰³⁷ the innards (σπλάγχνα) are roasted,¹⁰³⁸ the joints of meat are boiled from the bones.¹⁰³⁹ More specifically, this passage encapsulates the dual

¹⁰³³ Eur. *Cyc.* 382-3.

¹⁰³⁴ Eur. *Cyc.* 392, 393. See ch.2 p.178 above for possible parallels with Pelias and Athamas in the use of a cauldron and flesh-hooks (Aesch. 2 Radt.).

¹⁰³⁵ Ar. 478. Kassel-Austin.

¹⁰³⁶ Eur. *Cyc.* 396-404.

¹⁰³⁷ E.g. Aesch. *Sept.* 275, Bacch.11.111. Snell.

¹⁰³⁸ E.g. s.v. σπλάγχνα Liddel & Scott, Eur. *El.* 838-9.

¹⁰³⁹ Hom. *Od.* 9.292-3, Hes. *Th.* 311, 773, Hdt. 1. 119.3, Eur. *Cyc.* 403-4. Cf. Drew Griffith 2016 p.136.

role of the *mageiros*: as a cook and a butcher who, as Döhm points out, may appear as an expert on stage even if the cooking scene takes place elsewhere.¹⁰⁴⁰

Indeed, Döhm categorises Polyphemus as an expert *mageiros* yet overlooks Odysseus' association of the Cyclops with Hades, the god of death.¹⁰⁴¹ Odysseus makes clear that meat is murder by contrasting the comic cook against the tragic deaths of his men. But this tragic reference is undercut by an oxymoron, for where Kovacs translates “vile and murderous cook”, a more literal translation would read: “a damned/god-hating cook of Hades,” disassociating and then associating Polyphemus with a god.¹⁰⁴² This oxymoron, alongside the impossible scale of Polyphemus as he snatches up a victim, undercuts the tension of a passage that would otherwise befit tragedy; as Seaford notes, it emphasises that the killing of the men is not sacrificial, despite the sacrificial language.¹⁰⁴³ Euripides invokes Hades across his tragedies as a byword for death, and the variety of murder and mutilation would befit Atreus' slaughter of Thyestes' sons.

Furthermore, the description of Polyphemus eating the men only to then be duped by Odysseus provides a point for comparison with Thyestes, duped by the feast itself:

ἐπεὶ δ' ἑταίρων τῶν ἐμῶν πλησθεὶς βορᾶς
ἀνέπεσε, φάρυγος αἰθέρ' ἐξανεὶς βαρύν,
ἔσηλθέ μοι τι θεῖον· ἐμπλήσας σκύφος
Μάρωνος αὐτῷ τοῦδε προσφέρω πιεῖν,
[...]
ὁ δ' ἔκπλεως ὦν τῆς ἀναισχύντου βορᾶς
ἐδέξατ' ἔσπασέν <τ'> ἄμυστιν ἐλκύσας
κάπηνεσ' ἄρας χεῖρα· Φίλιτατε ξένων,
καλὸν τὸ πῶμα δαιτὶ πρὸς καλῆ δίδως.
ἡσθέντα δ' αὐτὸν ὡς ἐπισηθόμην ἐγώ,
ἄλλην ἔδωκα κύλικα, γινώσκων ὅτι
τρώσει νιν οἶνος καὶ δίκην δώσει τάχα.
καὶ δὴ πρὸς ᾧδᾶς εἶρπ'. ἐγὼ δ' ἐπεγγέων
ἄλλην ἐπ' ἄλλη σπλάγχν' ἐθέρμαινον ποτῶ.

But when, sated with the meal he had made of my companions, he fell on his back and belched a foul stench from his maw, I was struck with a heaven-sent thought. I filled a cup with this Maron wine and offered it to him to drink [...] And he, his belly full to bursting with that execrable meal, took it and downed it in one long draught, then raising his hand in admiration he said, “Dearest friend, you give me fine drink on top of a fine meal”. Seeing it had given him pleasure, I gave him another cup, knowing that wine would be his undoing and he would

¹⁰⁴⁰ Döhm 1964 p.59.

¹⁰⁴¹ Döhm 1964 p.29.

¹⁰⁴² Eur. *Cyc.* 395-99. I agree with Seaford that θεοστυγεῖ could be read as both passive and active to suggest mutual hatred (1984 p. 182).

¹⁰⁴³ Seaford 1984 p.183.

soon pay the penalty. In due course he proceeded to sing, and I plied him with one cup after another and heated his heart with drink.¹⁰⁴⁴ In *Thyestes*, as in *Cyclops*, we would expect this description to come from the deceiving avenger himself: thus whereas a messenger would describe Atreus' slaughter of Thyestes' sons, Atreus would most likely describe Thyestes in a monologue before Thyestes' arrival onstage. As we will explore later, Atreus' description of Thyestes' drunkenness features prominently in Seneca's play. But, as Sutton points out, drunkenness always gives rise to comedy on stage and so whilst it may be appropriate to stage a drunken Polyphemus, I suggest that a drunken Thyestes seems less likely.¹⁰⁴⁵ The *Proagon* fragments in particular suggest that Thyestes emerges onstage after the feast for a recognition scene. Therefore, Euripides' *Thyestes* would have included a description of Thyestes' gluttony, but limited the comedic effect of Thyestes' drunkenness. It seems more likely that the recognition scene sobered a tipsy Thyestes, just as Heracles and Agave are restored to sanity when faced with their sons' remains.

Killing & Cooking: The Messenger Report in Euripides' *Thyestes*

Having established that Atreus' killing and cooking would most likely be reported to the chorus, as the filicide scenes are in Euripides' *Bacchae* and *Heracles*, we must now consider how Thyestes' tragic cannibalism would have been reported in contrast to Odysseus' account of Polyphemus' comic anthropophagy. In order to reconstruct the cannibalism of Euripides' *Thyestes*, using his extant tragedies, we must first reconstruct how Atreus killed Thyestes' sons, a crime for which we do have tragic parallels, to then consider if and how the cannibalism could have been dealt with in the same report.

It is likely that Atreus' filicide and Thyestes' cannibalism would have been reported, because twelve of Euripides' sixteen surviving tragedies include a tragic messenger; of those *Heraclidae*, *Phoenissae*, *Orestes*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Helen*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and *Bacchae* include two.¹⁰⁴⁶ In terms of content, the most interesting parallels for our purposes include the messenger speeches of *Heracles* and *Bacchae*, which each report the protagonist's filicide.¹⁰⁴⁷ In both speeches a family

¹⁰⁴⁴ Eur. *Cyc.* 409-13, 416-24. Seneca's *Thyestes* is strongly reminiscent of Euripides' *Cyclops* here (*Thy.* 909-19, 973-5).

¹⁰⁴⁵ Sutton 1980 p.34.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Eur. *Med.* 1121-1230; *Heracl.* 784-866, 882-92; *Hipp.* 1153-1266; *Andr.* 1070; *HF.* 910-1015; *Supp.* 633-777; *El.* 760-859; *Phoen.* 1090-1284, 1335-1479; *Or.* 852-956, 1368-1502; *IT* 260-339, 1284- 1496; *Hel.* 622-4, 1512-1618; *IA* 4141, 1537; *Bacch.* 660-774, 1024-1152.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Eur. *HF.* 909-1015, *Bacch.* 1024-1152.

slave reports the filicide and several shared themes emerge:¹⁰⁴⁸ parents kill their sons in a religious setting,¹⁰⁴⁹ the messengers quote a son begging their parent not to kill them,¹⁰⁵⁰ both parents display a severed head,¹⁰⁵¹ and both messengers rush away to avoid the murderers.¹⁰⁵² These themes may indicate that a household slave, serving as an eyewitness, also reports Atreus' filicide, relates a son's reaction in detail and prepares the audience for the display of severed heads that Aristophanes' seems to allude to in *Proagon*. Though the role of the gods in *Thyestes* is less clear than their intervention in *Heracles* and *Bacchae*, if Atreus slaughtered Thyestes' children it seems most likely that, like Heracles, he does so at the family home. Indeed, Aeschylus had already associated Atreus' nepoticide with sacrifice in the *Agamemnon*, when Aegisthus recalls the "day of sacrifice" (κρεουργὸν ἡμᾶρ) on which his father Thyestes was invited home for the feast.¹⁰⁵³

The most instructive feature in these passages when trying to recapture Atreus' butchery is the gore: the variety of ways in which Heracles kills his sons and the detail of Pentheus' dismemberment. Heracles' infanticide provides a tragic model for the murder of multiple children, and this is emphasised in their individual reactions:

... ὁ δὲ νιν Εὐρυσθέως δοκῶν
πατέρα προταρβοῦνθ' ἰκέσιον ψαύειν χερδός
ὠθεῖ, φαρέτραν δ' εὐτρεπῆ σκευάζεται
καὶ τόξ' ἑαυτοῦ παισί, τοὺς Εὐρυσθέως
δοκῶν φονεύειν. οἱ δὲ ταρβοῦντες φόβῳ
ἄρουρον ἄλλος ἄλλοσ', ἐς πέπλους ὁ μὲν
μητρὸς ταλαίνης, ὁ δ' ὑπὸ κίονος σκιάν,
ἄλλος δὲ βωμὸν ὄρνις ὡς ἔπτηξ' ὕπο.
βοᾷ δὲ μήτηρ· ὦ τεκῶν, τί δρᾷς; τέκνα
κτείνεις;

But thinking that Eurystheus' father was grasping his hand in fear as a suppliant, Heracles pushed him away and prepared arrows and bow against his own children, believing that he was killing Eurystheus' children. These in fear rushed in different directions, one to his poor mother's skirts, another to the shelter of a column, another cowering like a bird under the protection of the altar. Their mother cried out, "Ah, what are you doing? You are their father: will you kill the

¹⁰⁴⁸ Eur. *Bacch.* 1043, *HF.* 913.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Eur. *Bacch.* 1089-94, *HF.* 922-7.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Eur. *Bacch.* 118-21, *HF.* 988-9.

¹⁰⁵¹ Eur. *Bacch.* 1139-42, *HF.* 939. Cf. Perris' case for the historic present suggesting an eyewitness messenger in *Bacchae* (2011 p.41).

¹⁰⁵² Eur. *Bacch.* 1148-9, *HF.* 1009-90.

¹⁰⁵³ Aesch. *Ag.* 1592. Cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 2.13, Baldarelli 2004 p.228.

children?¹⁰⁵⁴

I suggest that Euripides presents sons of different ages here: the youngest rushing to his mother, the older two seeking protection from the gods or taking shelter outside the family home. This provides a more fruitful model than Odysseus' men in *Cyclops*, because the three sons parallel those of Thyestes and are characterised to create pathos as well as emphasise the extent of the crime.

The column behind which the older boy hides also provides a vantage point that allows the messenger to see Heracles kill this son:

ὁ δ' ἐξελίσσω κίονος κύκλω πόδα
τόρνευμα δεινὸν παῖδ' ἐναντίον σταθεῖς
βάλλει πρὸς ἦπαρ· ὕπτιος δὲ λαΐνους
ὀρθοστάτας ἔδευσεν ἐκπνέων βίον.
ὁ δ' ἠλάλαξε κάπεκόμπασεν τάδε·
Εἷς μὲν νεοσσὸς ὄδε θανὼν Εὐρυσθέως
ἔχθραν πατρῶαν ἐκτίνων πέπτωκέ μοι.

But he, circling a grim turn around the column, stood facing the boy and shot him through the heart. The boy fell on his back, and as he breathed out his life he drenched the stone pillars with his blood. Heracles shouted in triumph and uttered this boast: “Here’s one fledgling of Eurystheus dead: **his death is payment to me for his father’s hostility!**”¹⁰⁵⁵

Despite Heracles’ use of the bow, the pivot round a column suggests the boy was killed at close range, particularly as the impact to his chest knocks him back. The violence of Heracles’ filicide is matched by his enthusiasm and his final boast would equally suit Atreus’ sane filicide because Heracles too believes he is killing his enemy’s sons. The messenger’s report of the close-range slaughter of the children and the killer’s boasts, would suit a messenger report of Atreus’ nepoticide.

The second murder characterises the remaining older son who is old enough to speak and thus beg for his life:

ἄλλω δ' ἐπεῖχε τόξ', ὃς ἀμφὶ βωμίαν
ἔπτηξε κρηπῖδ' ὡς λεληθέναι δοκῶν.
φθάνει δ' ὁ τλήμων γόνασι προσπεσῶν πατρὸς
καὶ πρὸς γένειον χεῖρα καὶ δέρην βαλὼν
᾿Ω φίλτατ', ἀδᾶ, μή μ' ἀποκτείνης, πάτερ·
σὸς εἰμι· σὸν παῖδ', οὐ τὸν Εὐρυσθέως, ὀλεῖς.

He aimed his bow at a second, who was cowering near the base of the altar, thinking he escaped notice. But before Heracles could shoot, the poor boy fell at his father’s knees and thrust his hand at his chin and his neck; “Dearest father,” he said, “do not kill me. I am yours! It is your son, not Eurystheus’ child, you

¹⁰⁵⁴ Eur. *HF*. 967-76.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Eur. *HF*. 977-83.

are going to slay!”¹⁰⁵⁶

Of course, Thyestes’ sons could make no such entreaty to Atreus as they are the sons of his enemy; but one may have begged for mercy from his uncle to characterise the child as kin and increase the audience’s ability to sympathise with them, whereas Odysseus’ crew function as silent extras in *Cyclops*.

Moreover, whilst Heracles’ madness inspires mistaken identity, he is motivated to kill the children because he thinks that they are the sons of his relative and enemy, thus Heracles and Atreus are both motivated by familial vengeance. Thus we may expect a similar response from a sane Atreus to that of the insane Heracles:

ὁ δ’ ἀγριωπὸν ὄμμα Γοργόνοσ στρέφων,
ὡς ἐντὸς ἔσθη παῖσ λυγροῦ τοξεύματος
μυδροκτύπον μίμημ’ ὑπὲρ κάρα βαλῶν
ξύλον καθῆκε παιδὸς ἐς ξανθὸν κάρα
ἔρρηξε δ’ ὀστέα. δεύτερον δὲ παῖδ’ ἐλῶν
χωρεῖ τρίτον θῦμ’ ὡς ἐπισφάξων δυοῖν.
ἀλλὰ φθάνει νιν ἢ τάλαιν’ ἔσω δόμων
μήτηρ ὑπεκλαβοῦσα καὶ κλῆει πύλας.
ὁ δ’ ὡς ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς δὴ Κυκλωπίοισιν ὦν
σκάπτει μοχλεῦει θύρετρα κάκβαλὼν σταθμὰ
δάμαρτα καὶ παῖδ’ ἐνὶ κατέστρωσεν βέλει.

But he merely turned his fierce Gorgon gaze upon him and, since the boy stood too close for the deadly bow shot, lifted his club above his head and—just like a smith forging iron—**brought it down on the boy’s blond head and smashed his skull. Having killed his second son, he went off to sacrifice a third victim on top of the other two.** But before he could do so the boy’s mother snatched him up, took him inside the chamber, and barred the door. Heracles, just as if he were besieging Mycenae, dug under the door, pried it up, pulled out the doorposts, **and with a single arrow felled both wife and child.**¹⁰⁵⁷

Thus the boy’s supplication does not prevent his death, but makes it more gruesome as Heracles must resort to bludgeoning him at close range. This bloodlust is underscored as Heracles finally turns to the youngest child, who is thus characterised by retreating to his mother and being killed along with her, as though he were still in her womb.¹⁰⁵⁸ The presence of the boys’ mother could not have featured in *Thyestes* as Aërope’s infidelity would have been punished by death when Thyestes went into exile; the exile from which he returns for the feast.¹⁰⁵⁹ Nonetheless, we might expect just such a variety of age groups

¹⁰⁵⁶ Eur. *HF*. 984-9.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Eur. *HF*. 990-1000.

¹⁰⁵⁸ As Busch points out, we meet a similar age distinction in Seneca: “Plisthenes is younger than Tantalus- he is a *puer*- and so his panic is understandable” (2009 p.267). See ch.3 p.245.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Σ Eur. *Or.* 12, cf. Boyle 2017 p.lxxi.

in the messenger speech of Thyestes to characterise the children and treat their deaths tragically. For although like Odysseus' crew in *Cyclops*, Heracles' children are killed in many ways, they are characterised with dialogue and individual reactions, unlike the crew.

Turning to *Bacchae*, we can offset our reading of Heracles' slaughter of his children with an insight into how dismemberment is reported in Euripidean tragedy. Although, like Polyphemus, Agave possesses superhuman strength due to Dionysus' intervention,¹⁰⁶⁰ she is no monster and her role as a mortal mother is again underscored by her son's pleas:

Ἐγώ τοι, μήτηρ, εἰμί, παῖς σέθεν
 Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες ἐν δόμοις Ἐχίονος·
 οἴκτιρε δ' ὦ μήτηρ με μηδὲ ταῖς ἐμαῖς
 ἀμαρτίαισι παῖδα σὸν κατακτάνης.
 ἢ δ' ἀφρὸν ἐξιείσα καὶ διαστρόφους
 κόρας ἐλίσσοις, οὐ φρονοῦς ἄ χρῆ φρονεῖν,
 ἐκ Βακχίου κατείχεται, οὐδ' ἔπειθέ νιν.
λαβοῦσα δ' ὠλέναις ἀριστερὰν χέρα,
πλευραῖσιν ἀντιβᾶσα τοῦ δυσδαίμονος
ἀπεσπάραξεν ὦμον, οὐχ ὑπὸ σθένους
 ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς εὐμάρειαν ἐπεδίδου χεροῖν·
 Ἴνῳ δὲ τὰπὶ θάτερ' ἐξηργάζετο,
ῥηγνῦσα σάρκας, Αὐτονόη τ' ὄχλος τε πᾶς
 ἐπεῖχε βακχῶν· ἦν δὲ πᾶσ' ὁμοῦ βοή,
 ὁ μὲν στενάζων ὅσον ἐτύγγαν' ἐμπνέων,
 αἱ δ' ὠλόλυζον. ἔφερε δ' ἡ μὲν ὠλένην,
ἢ δ' ἵχνος αὐταῖς ἀρβύλαις, γυμνοῦντο δὲ
πλευραὶ σπαραγμοῖς· πᾶσα δ' ἡματωμένη
χεῖρας διεσφαίριζε σάρκα Πενθέως.

“It’s me, mother, Pentheus, the son you bore in Echion’s house! Have pity on me, mother! I have sinned, but do not kill your son!” But her mouth dripped foam and her eyes rolled: she was not in her right mind but possessed by the Bacchic god, and his entreaty did not move her. **Taking his right hand in her grip and planting her foot against the poor man’s flank, she tore out his arm at the shoulder,** using a strength not her own but put in her hands by the god. Ino was destroying his other side, **tearing his flesh,** and Autonoe and the rest of the Bacchic throng attacked him. The air was filled with cries: Pentheus moaned with all the breath he had in him, and the women raised the sacrificial shout. **One woman was carrying an arm, another a foot still in its boot, his flanks were stripped bare, the flesh torn from them, and every woman, hands red with blood, hurled Pentheus’ flesh about like a ball.**¹⁰⁶¹

¹⁰⁶⁰ Eur. *Bacch.* 1127-8.

¹⁰⁶¹ Eur. *Bacch.* 1118-1136.

Here Pentheus' vulnerability does not lie in his infancy, but in his isolation as he is torn apart by the mob. Atreus does not outnumber Thyestes' children, but as in Heracles, the dismemberment of many victims could add horror in the same way the many attackers do in *Bacchae*. Indeed the listing of body parts such as the shoulder (ὠλένην),¹⁰⁶² and the foot (ἴχνοσ),¹⁰⁶³ recur in Euripides' filicide tragedies; thus we might expect the report of Atreus' butchery.

In *Bacchae*, this list climaxes with σάρκα,¹⁰⁶⁴ denoting either a piece of flesh or a whole body.¹⁰⁶⁵ Though in *Bacchae* σάρκα denotes parts of Pentheus, in *Cyclops* the dual meaning of σάρκα as a human body and flesh for food provides a pun:

πῦρ καὶ πατρῶον ἄλα λέβητά θ', ὃς ζέσας
σὴν σάρκα δυσφάρωτον ἀμφέξει καλῶς.

fire to warm you, salt inherited from my father, and a **bronze pot**, which when it has reached a boil will **clothe** your ill-clad **body** nicely.¹⁰⁶⁶ Yet this pun is possible because of Polyphemus' fantastical size, since he can cook a body whole, whereas Atreus must divide the bodies into cuts of flesh. Thus in Euripides' *Thyestes* the messenger might emphasise the division of the parts from the whole, to highlight the traditionally grisly dismemberment of Thyestes' sons, reflected by their ghosts in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*:

παῖδες θανόντες, ὡσπερὶ πρὸς οὐ φίλων,
χεῖρας κρεῶν πλήθοντες, οἰκείας βορᾶς,
σὺν ἐντέροις τε σπλάγχν', ἐποίκτιστον γέμος,
πρέπουσ' ἔχοντες, ὧν πατὴρ ἐγεύσατο.

Children dead, as if at the hands of enemies, their hands conspicuously filled with the flesh on which their close kin fed, holding the offals and entrails—a most pitiable burden—which their father tasted.¹⁰⁶⁷

¹⁰⁶² Aesch. *PB.* 60, Soph. *Trach.* 926; Eur. *HF.* 1381; *Bacch.* 1125, 1238; *IT* 283, 1158; *Phoen.* 165, 307, 311, 1375; *Med.* 902; *Tr.* 1142.

¹⁰⁶³ Aesch. *Ag.* 695, Soph. *OT.* 109; *Aj.* 32, Eur. *Hec.* 1059; *Hel.* 108; *IT* 752; *Or.* 140, 234.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Eur. *Med.* 1189, 1200; *Bacch.* 746, 1136; *HF.* 1269.

¹⁰⁶⁵ s.v. Liddell & Scott σάρκος.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Eur. *Cycl.* 344-5.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Aesch. *Ag.* 1219-22 cf. 1590-5, Hdt. 1.73. 109-119. Iles-Johston highlights the restriction of corpse-mutilation on the avenging ghost of the untimely dead, with a particular focus on *maschalismos*; cutting off the hands and stringing them around the victim's neck (1999 pp.158-60). As the bodies are cannibalised here, I will instead focus on the significance of ingestion.

Cannibalism: Reports or Recognition in Euripides' *Thyestes*?

The closing lines of the messenger speech in *Bacchae* may form a useful frame of reference to consider Thyestes' recognition scene after the feast:

κεῖται δὲ χωρὶς σῶμα, τὸ μὲν ὑπὸ στύφλοις
πέτραις, τὸ δ' ὕλης ἐν βαθυξύλω φόβη,
οὐ ῥάδιον ζήτημα· **κράτα δ' ἄθλιον,**
ἔπερ λαβοῦσα τυγχάνει μήτηρ χεροῖν,
πήξασ' ἐπ' ἄκρον θύρσον ὡς ὀρεστέρου
φέρει λέοντος διὰ Κιθαιρῶνος μέσου,
λιποῦσ' ἀδελφὰς ἐν χοροῖσι μαινάδων.

His body lies scattered, some of it under the rough cliffs, other parts in thick-growing woods, no easy thing to look for. **As for his luckless head, which his mother happened to take in her hands,** she has fixed it on the point of her Bacchic wand and is carrying it, as if it were the head of a mountain lion, through the midst of Cithaeron, leaving her sisters with the maenad companies.¹⁰⁶⁸

Thematically, this anticipates the appearance of the head as a recognition token onstage, suggesting that during the report of Atreus' dismembering of Thyestes' sons, the presentation of their heads would have been mentioned. But structurally, the killing and dismemberment of Pentheus is dealt with in the second report from one eyewitness in *Bacchae*, whereas Atreus must prepare the feast without Thyestes nearby in order to deceive him: thus the butchery and cannibalism would be separated in space or time and must be related by someone else if they are to be an eyewitness.

Based on Euripides' extant tragedies, there are three ways in which Atreus' filicide and Thyestes' subsequent cannibalism could be reported: through two speeches from separate messengers,¹⁰⁶⁹ through one messenger speech which conflates past and recent events,¹⁰⁷⁰ or through a single messenger on the filicide and the revelation of the feast through Atreus' plotting and Thyestes' recognition.¹⁰⁷¹ The neatest solution is to suggest that Euripides' *Thyestes* included two messenger speeches from different eyewitnesses, as we see in Euripides' *Bacchae* and *Orestes*.¹⁰⁷² In *Bacchae* the first

¹⁰⁶⁸ Eur. *Bacch.* 1137-43. Agave also plans a celebratory feast (Eur. *Bacch.* 1183).

¹⁰⁶⁹ Eur. *Heracl.* 784-866, 882-92; *Phoen.* 1090-1284, 1335-1479; *Or.* 852-956, 1368-1502; *Hel.* 1512-1618; *IA* 414, 1537; *Bacch.* 660-774, 1024-1152.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Eur. *Hipp.* 1153-1266; *Andr.* 1070; *Supp.* 633-777.

¹⁰⁷¹ Eur. *Med.* 1231-1414; *HF.* 910-1015, 1089-1162; *El.* 760-859, 1174.

¹⁰⁷² Double messengers appear in the escape tragedies, but given that within this subgenre and the second speech describes the escape I have not included them: Eur. *IT* 260-339, 1284-1419; *Hel.* 622-4, 1512-1617. Unlike de Jong, I do not class Oedipus' appearance in *Phoenissae* as a messenger speech given his role as a central character: Eur.

messenger reports the women tearing apart animals to Pentheus, the second reports them tearing apart Pentheus to the chorus.¹⁰⁷³ In *Orestes*, the first messenger relates the trial condemning Orestes and Electra, whereas the Phrygian describes Orestes' attack on Helen.¹⁰⁷⁴ As de Jong points out, both *Orestes* and *Bacchae* introduce a messenger in the third epeisodion and exodus.¹⁰⁷⁵ In both cases the first speech describes the dangerous circumstances building up to the violent climax, which is then reported in the second messenger report.

Yet whilst *Orestes* presents a Pelopid revenge play and *Bacchae* presents the motifs of filicide, mutilation and recognition we might expect of *Thyestes*, it seems unlikely that a second messenger would report Thyestes' cannibalism. Given that Atreus' nepoticide provides a violent messenger report, a second report on the feast seems hyperbolic. Thus we should consider how these crimes might be effectively reported in a tragedy with one messenger speech on the butchery and a subsequent reveal of the cannibalism, in Thyestes' recognition and Atreus' retaliation.

Euripides' single messenger speeches fall into two categories. The first is those describing military coups such as the capture of Eurystheus in *Heraclidae* and an unusual speech in *Suppliants* that reports the battle in Thebes and Theseus' subsequent collection of the corpses, which is built on in a later dialogue: an eyewitness account recalling past and recent events.¹⁰⁷⁶ Though this reflective messenger speech could have been used in *Thyestes* to recall the killing of Thyestes' sons and his cannibalism, the messenger's reflection is rare and in *Suppliants* is used to recall military events from epic poetry: it seems less suited to the domestic setting of *Thyestes*.

The second model of messenger speech describes harm to a central character, including the bull's attack on Hippolytus, Orestes' slaughter of Aegisthus in *Electra*, and Creusa's attempt to poison Ion.¹⁰⁷⁷ In these instances, the report occurs in the third or fourth epeisodion and provides a turn in the action of each play: Artemis convinces Theseus of Hippolytus' innocence, Clytemnestra is killed and Ion is recognised. The messenger speeches of *Heracles* in the fifth epeisodion and *Medea* in the sixth precede

Phoen. 1685-1763 (1991 pp.120-1). The authenticity of the two messengers in *Iphigenia at Aulis* is suspect and thus omitted here cf. Kovacs 2003 pp.160-1.

¹⁰⁷³ Eur. *Bacch.* 660-774, 1024-1152.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Eur. *Or.* 851-956, 1365-1502.

¹⁰⁷⁵ de Jong 1991 pp.120-1.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Eur. *Heracl.* 799- 882; *Supp.* 650-730.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Eur. *Hipp.* 1173-1254; *El.* 774-859; *Ion* 1122-28.

the father's recognition of his dead children, priming Heracles' return to sanity and Jason's arrival from the palace as Glauce has been poisoned.¹⁰⁷⁸ Lyssa and Medea plot the filicide before these late messenger speeches; Amphitryon and Medea report the crime again in their recognition scenes. So, had Atreus' nepoticide been told in a single messenger report, Atreus could plot Thyestes' cannibalism beforehand and reveal the remains in a subsequent recognition scene. I suggest that Atreus' nepoticide was reported in a single messenger speech and the resulting feast dealt with in later dialogue between Thyestes and Atreus in order to present one crisis point in the confrontation between the brothers.

Therefore, although there is little extant evidence in Euripides' *Thyestes* fragments to indicate how Atreus' nepoticide and Thyestes' cannibalism may have been presented, we can find clues in Euripides' extant work to offer possible reconstructions. Euripides' *Cyclops* suggests that man-eating would be reported rather than represented and highlights the difficulty of having the victims appear as speaking characters on stage before their demise. The gore of Odysseus' account in *Cyclops*, when compared to Pentheus' dismemberment in *Bacchae*, suggests that a messenger could describe Atreus' butchery of Thyestes' sons to the chorus in detail for tragic effect, provided that the victims were not dehumanised as Odysseus' crew are for the humour of the satyr drama to work.

When we consider Euripides' extant messenger reports we find that they, like Odysseus, provide eyewitness accounts, and thus it is unlikely that Atreus' nepoticide and Thyestes' feast were reported at once. The messenger speeches of *Heracles* and *Medea* are preceded by the murderers' plots and followed by the recognition scenes. These extant tragedies, when paired with the Thyestean recognition scene parodied in Aristophanes' *Proagon*, suggest that Atreus' killing and cooking of the children would be reported, whereas Thyestes' cannibalism would be plotted and revealed by Atreus himself.

Infanticide in Accius' *Atreus: Fragmentum ex Incertis Fabulis*

One clue as to the age and status of Thyestes' children can be found in Accius' *fragmenta ex incertis fabulis*. Ribbeck suggests that fr.9 could fit Accius' *Clytemnestra*, *Pelopidae* or *Atreus*. But Cicero's use of this fragment in *Pro Plancio* to advise his own son suggests it is displaced paternal advice from Thyestes to his sons:

¹⁰⁷⁸ Eur. *Med.* 1121-1230; *HF.* 909-1015.

Quin etiam, ne forte ille sibi me potius peperisse iam honores quam iter demonstrasse adipiscendorum putet, haec illi soleo praecipere... quae ille a Iove ortus suis praecipit filiis—

vigilandum est semper: multae insidiae sunt bonis;
id quod multi inuideant...

So he should not think that I have already won his honours for him, rather than showing him the way to win honours in the future, I am accustomed to give him the advice (though advice is somewhat beyond him at his present years) which that king who was himself sprung from Jupiter gave to his sons—

Be watchful always, many snares are set for the good;¹⁰⁷⁹
What many men do envy...¹⁰⁸⁰

The quotation context reveals several key themes of fr.9 itself, Cicero uses this quote to advise against feeling secure in “honours” won by elders, suggesting Thyestes is aware of the precariousness of his position, having attempted to usurp Atreus. The way the advice is pitched by Cicero as too advanced for his twelve-year-old son might suggest that Thyestes’ sons were older. But, given that Thyestes’ sons do not benefit from this advice, I suggest that this fragment presents a reply to a son’s youthful exuberance, proposing that at least one of the sons was old enough to speak and thus be characterised before his death.

In the following line of *Pro Plancio* Cicero skims over fr.9a, stopping at *inuideant* to instead consider the didactic purpose of Accius’ lines:

Nostis cetera. Nonne, quae scripsit gravis ille et ingeniosus poëta, scripsit non ut illos regios pueros, qui iam nusquam erant, sed ut nos et nostros liberos ad laborem et laudem excitaret.

No doubt you recall the rest of the passage. These lines were written by an earnest and gifted poet, whose object in writing them was to kindle the spirit of industry and ambition, not in those young princes who were merely the figments of his imagination, but in us and in our children.¹⁰⁸¹

Thyestes’ advice in fr.9 is sound, but it is ignored due to the very aspiration Cicero advocates. Here Cicero hypothesises that Accius’ lines kindle ambition, despite Thyestes’ demise and the death of his children: a punishment for his own avarice. But more importantly, Cicero recognises Thyestes’ advice as a warning to posterity and thus invites the reader to identify with Thyestes’ onstage son(s) in Accius’ *Atreus*, suggesting that at least one of the sons was introduced as a character, not simply a prop. So despite the

¹⁰⁷⁹ Accius 9 Ribbeck= Cic. *Planc.* 24. 59. I have used Watt’s translation of Cicero and modified it with Warmington’s translation of the Accius fragment.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Accius 9a Ribbeck= Cic. *Planc.* 24. 59.

¹⁰⁸¹ Cic. *Planc.* 24. 59.

outcome of Accius' *Atreus*, Cicero sympathises with Thyestes as a father and advisor in fr.9.

Cicero's partial inclusion of fr.9a is more problematic. Baldarelli suggests that the proximity of these fragments in Cicero presents their appearance in Thyestes' narrative reflecting on his former adultery and desire to usurp Atreus, suspecting his brother to have the same destructive appetite upon his return.¹⁰⁸² But I concede with those who suggest that Cicero's quotation of these fragments could equally reflect Thyestes' warning (fr.9) for his sons, juxtaposed against (fr.9a) Atreus' angry exultations earlier in the play, given that in *Pro Sestio* these fragments are quoted alongside Atreus' famous *oderint dum metuant* maxim (fr.5), that Cicero attributes these lines to the same poet but not the same character:¹⁰⁸³

pericula magna, fateor,
multae insidiae sunt bonis
verissime dictum est; sed te
id, quod multi inuideant multique expetant, inscitia est,
inquit,
postulare, nisi laborem summa cum cura ecferas.
Nollem idem alio loco dixisset, quod exciperent improbi cives:
oderint, dum metuant;
praeclara enim illa praecepta dederat iuventuti. Sed tamen haec via ac ratio rei
publicae capessendae olim erat magis pertimescenda, cum multis in rebus
multitudinis studium ac populi commodum ab utilitate rei publicae discrepabat.

Most truly has it been said,
Many the snares that for the good are set,¹⁰⁸⁴
but the poet adds:
What many men do envy, many covet,
Unless you carry out the troublesome task
With greatest diligence.¹⁰⁸⁵
I could wish that the same poet had not elsewhere used words for wicked men to
lay hold of:
Let them hate, so but they fear;¹⁰⁸⁶
for in those others he had given the young excellent advice. But formerly those
who followed this path and principle in affairs of state had far more to fear, for
in many ways the desire of the masses and the advantage of the People did not
agree with the public interest.¹⁰⁸⁷

¹⁰⁸² Baldarelli 2004 p.226.

¹⁰⁸³ La Penna 1972 p.360. See ch.1. pp.64-65 above.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Accius 9 Ribbeck.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Accius 9a Ribbeck.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Accius 5 Ribbeck.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Cic. *Sest.* 48. 102-3. I have altered the Loeb translation from "evil-minded" to "wicked" in order to avoid imposing Christian morality onto the text and standardise the translation of the fragments with Warmington's above, see ch.1. pp.64-65 above.

Here Cicero applies Thyestes' advice (fr.9-9a) to his own methodology of using dramatic quotes for didactic purposes and contrasts the ill-advised edict of Atreus (fr.5). Cicero highlights the value of Thyestes' advice, albeit out of context, against the damaging advice of Atreus.

Therefore, although Accius' *Atreus* fragments do not tell us how Thyestes' children were killed, Cicero gives us clues as to how Accius presented the sons. Cicero's quotation of fr.9 in *Pro Plancio* indicates that Thyestes advised his onstage son(s), suggesting that at least one son would be old enough to speak and could plausibly heed this advice. Cicero's quotation of fr.9 in *Pro Sestio* presents Cicero's sympathetic reception of Thyestes as a parent in contrast to his condemnation of Atreus as a ruler. Ultimately, Cicero's reception of these lines leaves us with the impression that Thyestes' bond with his sons was well developed in Accius' *Atreus*; that the sons were more than instrumental.

Cannibalism in Accius' *Atreus*

Though there is very little evidence as to how and where Atreus killed Thyestes' children in Accius' *Atreus*, there are several fragments that reflect the subsequent feast. Fr.11 indicates that Atreus butchered the children's corpses:

Nuntius:
Epularum actor, scelerum fratris delitor.

Messenger:
Maker of a feast.
Outblotter of a brother's crimes.¹⁰⁸⁸

Though this epithet could be given to Atreus at any point after the feast, when introducing this fragment Priscian contextualises it as a messenger describing the dreadful preparations. This suggests that the butchery of the children would have been related in this messenger report and most likely followed a description of their preceding slaughter.

Nonetheless, Accius' messenger seems to report the gruesome detail of Atreus' butchery in fr.12:

Concoquit partem vapore flammae, veribus in focus
lacerti tribuit.

With the flame's heat he boils a part, the arms
He puts about the hearths on spits.¹⁰⁸⁹

¹⁰⁸⁸ Accius 11 Ribbeck= Priscian 2. 490. 8. Keil.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Accius 12 Ribbeck.

As in Euripides' *Cyclops*, we find a variety of cooking methods emphasising the division of the bodies and the sacrificial preparation of different cuts.¹⁰⁹⁰ However Accius' fr.12 focuses not on the innards but the *lacerti* later used to describe Tantalus' cooking of Pelops' shoulder in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹⁰⁹¹ Accius emphasises the ancestral association more explicitly by having the children roasted at the hearth (*focos*) the centre of the paternal home. So, although we find a similar variety of cooking methods, Accius' messenger frames the butchery as the reiteration of an ancestral crime and a polluting blood crime, as the uncle butchers his nephews to feed to their father.

However, in Accius' *Atreus* we also find evidence of a sacred feast:

Ne cum tyranno quisquam epulandi gratia
Accumbat mensam aut eandem vescatur dapem.

Let none take seat at table with the king
For feasting's sake, or eat of the same banquet
As he.¹⁰⁹²

Here the cannibal must dine alone, as at the banquet Astyages and Harpagus in Herodotus.¹⁰⁹³ Leigh suggests that fr.10 is taken from Thyestes' lament after the feast.¹⁰⁹⁴ But the speaker warns against eating of the same (*eandem*) banquet from which the tyrant eats and, as Burkert points out, Atreus never eats the children: the pollution of cannibalism is reserved for Thyestes under the guise of an honour.¹⁰⁹⁵ Thus I suggest that Atreus speaks fr.10 before the feast to ensure Thyestes dines alone to avoid anyone else being polluted by the cannibalistic feast. The address of Thyestes as king (*tyranno*) emphasises this deception and, if spoken by Atreus, implies that he is addressing onstage and offstage audiences before retreating into the *skēne* for the feast. Thus fr.10 presents Atreus stage-managing a ritual feast, with both brothers present.

¹⁰⁹⁰ In his commentary to Euripides' *Cyclops*, Seaford suggests that the cuts are prepared differently to aid digestion: "μέλη (404) are tougher than σάρκες (403) and so are best boiled" (1984 p.184). cf. Arist. *Meteor.* 381b.

¹⁰⁹¹ Ov. *Met.* 1. 409-12: *qui locus est iuguli medius summique lacerti| defuit: inpositum est non conparentis in usum| partis ebur, factoque Pelops fuit integer illo.* (one part was lacking where the neck and upper arm unite. A piece of ivory was made to take the place of the part which could not be found; and so Pelops was made whole again). s.v. *OLD lacerti* cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 2.3, Hyg. *Fab.* 83. See ch.2 p.99 above.

¹⁰⁹² Accius 10 Ribbeck= Nonius, 415, 23.

¹⁰⁹³ Hdt. 1.129.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Leigh 1996 p.185.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Burkert 1983 p.104.

Accius fr.16 reflects the onstage recognition following the feast, particularly in combination with fr.18:

Thyestes:

Ipsus hortatur me frater, ut meos malis miser
manderem natos!

Atreus:

Ecquis hoc animadvortet? Vincite!

Thyestes:

Yes, my own brother—he exhorts me
To chew my children with my jaws—poor me!¹⁰⁹⁶

Atreus:

Will some one pay heed to this? Bind him!¹⁰⁹⁷

The vivid present tense *hortatur* suggests that Thyestes is emerging from the recent feast, whilst Atreus' orders indicate that other characters have served as onstage spectators and could have furnished the stage with props for the feast. But Cicero introduces the fragment for linguistic reasons: *Aliud vocis genus sibi sumat iracundia, acutum, incitatum, crebro incidens*— (Let wrath claim for itself another kind of voice, sharp, hurried, using emphasis again and again).¹⁰⁹⁸ Thyestes' disgust is framed through the bilabial alliteration *meos malis miser manderem*, which provides an onomatopoeic chewing sound, much like Atreus' earlier plosive promise to crunch Thyestes: *cor contundam et comprimam*.¹⁰⁹⁹ According to fr.10, then, Accius' Atreus excludes the chorus and other characters from the feast, whilst Accius' Thyestes mirrors Atreus' earlier plosive threat by chewing his words in horror: Atreus' promise is fulfilled.

Fr.16 and 18 also presents a shift in the power dynamic on stage. Though Baldarelli reads *vindicite* instead of *vincite* based on Seneca's *Thyestes* to assert that Thyestes speaks both of these fragments, plural imperative (*vincite*) in the transmitted text rather suggests that Atreus' is ordering onstage characters, most likely an attendant, to seize Thyestes. This imperative can be immediately acted upon on stage and Atreus has far more authority even as the infanticidal king than the polluted exile Thyestes: it is

¹⁰⁹⁶ Accius 16 Ribbeck= Cic. *De or.* 3. 58. 217; *Tusc. Disp.* 4. 36. 77. I have adapted the Loeb translation to maintain the vivid present of *hortatur*, as I believe Thyestes is describing the recently staged feast of fr.10. I have also removed the archaic "ye".

¹⁰⁹⁷ Accius 18 Ribbeck= Cic. *De or.* 3. 58. 217; *Tusc. Disp.* 2. 5. 3. Like Warmington (fr.196-8), I print the two fragments in dialogue because Cicero quotes them in tandem in *De Oratore*.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Cic. *De or.* 3. 58. 217. cf. *Tusc. Disp.* 4. 25. 55.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Accius 16 Ribbeck; Accius 3 Ribbeck. the bilabial is also found in fr.3 (*maior mihi moles*) see ch.1 p.81 above. Cf. Dangel contrasts Seneca's use of plosive syllables with Accius', though Accius' plosive fr.16 seems to contradict this (1990 pp.109-10).

unlikely Thyestes would presume to make orders and it is unnecessary to change the verb in the transmitted text. Given that fr.12 suggests a messenger speech detailing Atreus' butchery of the children and fr.10 suggests a feast in the *skēnē* away from the excluded onstage characters, Atreus' outrage in fr.18 must stem from his conviction that the feast is just, rather than an attempt to deny Thyestes' claims.

In sum, fragments of Accius' *Atreus* indicate that a messenger reported the butchery and presumably the preceding filicide; Atreus signalled the feast before retreating into the *skēne* whereas Thyestes recognition was staged with an onstage audience. Therefore, the crisis of Accius' *Atreus* was stage managed by the avenging Atreus: ordering no one to join Thyestes at the table and allowing Thyestes to play the role of king before then recognising the meat.

Performing Seneca's *Thyestes*

As I considered in the introduction, the performance of Senecan tragedy is an ongoing debate; the performance of Seneca's *Thyestes* is particularly problematic.¹¹⁰⁰ Most recent approaches to Seneca in performance have considered the potential for both full recitation performances and staged episodes,¹¹⁰¹ acknowledging that the tragedies are structured as stage plays.¹¹⁰² Nero's theatrical career has similarly received much attention,¹¹⁰³ with Erasmo noting that "Thyestes was among Nero's most frequently acted roles".¹¹⁰⁴

But by the time Seneca wrote his *Thyestes* the myth was famously associated with political commentary.¹¹⁰⁵ Seneca himself had accused Caligula of serving a Roman knight

¹¹⁰⁰ Kohn provides a reconstruction of how Seneca's *Thyestes* may have been dramatised (2012 pp.124-33). Tempting though it is, I do not consider private or convivial performances of *Thyestes*, given that Plutarch deems tragedies inappropriate at dinner and Pliny neglects tragedy in his list of convivial performances (Plut. *Mor.*711.E, Plin. *Ep.*1.15.2). Similarly in Petronius' *Satyrical* the host Trimalchio has tragic actors perform outside their genre, underlining the incongruity of tragedy at dinner (Petr. *Sat.*30, 36, 39). cf. Tarrant 2003 pp.13-16, Jones 1991pp.186-93, Davis 2003 p.27, Goddard 1994 pp.71-2.

¹¹⁰¹ Fitch 2003 p.11, Boyle 2006 p.192, Haley 2015 p.3. See pp.16-22 above.

¹¹⁰² Hor. *Ars.*178-88. cf. Harrison 2000 pp.137-8, Kragelund 2008 pp.181-94, Trinacty and Sampson 2018 p.3.

¹¹⁰³ Suet. *Nero.* 21, Tac. *Ann.*16.4-5; 16.5.2-3, Dio.61.20.3-5 and Suet. *Vesp.*4.4. cf. Plin. *Pan.* 46.4, Philost. *Vit. Apoll.*5.7. 2.7-21; 3.14-20 Cf. Beacham 1992 p.180, Bartsch 1994 pp.4-6, Erasmo 2004 l.2855-2930.

¹¹⁰⁴ Erasmo 2004 n. 130. cf. Dio Cassius. 62.9.4; 63.22.6, noting that all roles except for Thyestes are verified at Suet. *Nero.* 21.5-10; 24.6-10

¹¹⁰⁵ Cf. Bishop 1985 p.345-50, Mader 1998 pp.44-6; 1993 pp.99-101, Davis 2015 pp.155-6.

his own son's blood and had associated the cruelty of Accius' Atreus with Sulla.¹¹⁰⁶ Suetonius had claimed that Sulla used the *oderint dum metuant* maxim of Accius' Atreus.¹¹⁰⁷ Cicero had quoted Ennius' *Thyestes* (in Epirus) to comment on Caesar's assassination.¹¹⁰⁸ Tacitus had claimed that Maternus intended to write an anti-Imperial Atreus.¹¹⁰⁹ Cassius Dio suggests that Tiberius had convicted Aemilius Scaurus in 35 AD for offending the emperor in his Atreus.¹¹¹⁰ Bartsch rightly reminds us that the actual charges against Scaurus included adultery and magical practice, but Dio's ability to pinpoint the very line suggests the tragedy was sufficiently provocative to tarnish Scaurus' reputation if not secure his demise.¹¹¹¹ Thus whether Seneca intended his *Thyestes* to disparage Nero's tyranny or not, this political reception of the play was inevitable and is certainly reflected in the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*, which dramatises Nero's divorce in AD 62.¹¹¹² Yet, as we have seen, Seneca's prose suggests that he, like Maternus, was aware of the anti-Imperial potential of *Thyestes*.¹¹¹³

So whilst Nero may have performed as Thyestes, we need not assume that this allowed Seneca to stage a *Thyestes* without risking punishment.¹¹¹⁴ Firstly, Dio does not indicate what part of Thyestes' myth Nero performed, though Zanobi's catalogue of violent myths in pantomime may provide circumstantial evidence for the feast.¹¹¹⁵ Secondly, even if the performance dealt with the feast Nero danced as the victim Thyestes not the tyrant Atreus. But most importantly, Seneca's *Thyestes* is widely dated as one of the later plays (c.AD 62-4) on stylistic grounds, shortly before Nero condemns Seneca to suicide in AD 65.¹¹¹⁶ Thus it is unlikely that Seneca would have the resources

¹¹⁰⁶ Sen. *De Ira*. 2.33; *Clem.* 1.12.4. cf. Mader 1998 p.40.

¹¹⁰⁷ Suet. *Calig.* 30; *Tiber.* 59.2. Cf. Ahl 1976 p. 27, Bishop 1985 p.345, Lefèvre 1997 pp.71-4.

¹¹⁰⁸ Ennius 36 Ribbeck *apud Cic. Off.* 2.7.

¹¹⁰⁹ Tac. 3.3. Gowers notes that for all of Maternus' plays (*Domitus*, *Cato*, *Medea* and *Thyestes*) "Risk is the operative word: all these plots [...] had the potential to be understood as anti-tyrannical" (2016 p.559). cf. Mader 2002 pp.340-1.

¹¹¹⁰ Cassius Dio 58.24.3, Tac. *Ann.* 6.29.3. See p.13 and Appendices. cf. Bishop 1985 p.19, Erasmo 2004 l.2721, Gowers 2016 p.557.

¹¹¹¹ Bartsch 1994 p.106. cf. La Penna 1972 p.371, Champlin 2003 p.304.

¹¹¹² This is a *fabula praetexta*, rather than a tragedy. Cf. Kragelund 1988, Williams 1994, Ferri 2003, Erasmo 2004 l.2766 and Boyle 2008.

¹¹¹³ Sen. *De. Ir.* 1. 20. 4-5. See ch.1 p.13 above.

¹¹¹⁴ Nero exiled an Atellan actor for alluding to family murders (Suet. *Ner.* 39.3).

¹¹¹⁵ Zanobi 2014 p.21.

¹¹¹⁶ Fitch 1981 pp.289-90, Tarrant 2003 p.11, Nisbet 1990 pp.293-312, Davis 2003 p.16, Marshall 2014 pp.40-42, Torre 2014 p.501, Boyle 2017 pp.xviii-xix.

to stage such a politically sensitive tragedy as *Thyestes*.¹¹¹⁷ As we have seen, Atreus is most frequently attributed with tyranny both before Seneca and after: as Juvenal satirises the late Domitian as an Atreid, using the name as a synonym for tyranny.¹¹¹⁸

Moreover, Seneca's *Thyestes* includes Imperial anachronisms that set the play in a Neronian context. Unruh draws parallels between Atreus' palace and Nero's own *domus aurea*.¹¹¹⁹ Davis points out references to Roman geography, such as river Tagus in the West and Libya in the South.¹¹²⁰ As Trinacty and Sampson also point out, Atreus' kingdom fights Roman enemies: tribes of Medes, Parthians and Dahae.¹¹²¹ Therefore, I doubt that Seneca's *Thyestes* would have been performed publicly. For although simply writing the play could provoke Nero, the late dating of *Thyestes* suggests it was written at a time when even if Seneca had little to lose he would have had few resources to produce the tragedy in Rome.¹¹²² Instead, I suggest that *Thyestes* was recited for a private audience and circulated as a text in Seneca's time, which would incur fewer risks; my analysis will proceed with this mode in mind.

Thyestes, Atreus & Roman Pantomime

Before turning to the presentation of Thyestes' feast in Seneca, we should examine how Thyestes' story was told in pantomime. Zanobi considers pantomime's influence on Senecan tragedy by turning to Lucian, and we should examine how Lucian recalls Thyestes in pantomime specifically.¹¹²³ Moreover, the mode of single-person-performance, albeit in dance, can help us analyze how a single orator could recite Seneca's *Thyestes*, tasked with presenting both Atreus the avenger and Thyestes the victim.

Danced to musical accompaniment, with a single performer shifting roles, pantomime allowed fluidity between characters and mythic episodes in a story:

Ἐπὶ τούτοις τὰ Πελοπιδῶν καὶ Μυκῆναι καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐταῖς καὶ πρὸ αὐτῶν, Ἴναχος καὶ Ἴω καὶ ὁ φρουρὸς αὐτῆς Ἄργος καὶ Ἄτρεὺς καὶ Θυέστης καὶ Ἀερόπη, καὶ τὸ

¹¹¹⁷ Cf. On reading Atreus as Nero: Schiesaro on 1994 p.196, Volk 2006 p.197.

¹¹¹⁸ Juv. *Sat.* 4.65. cf. Lefèvre 1997 p. 71.

¹¹¹⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 455-65, 650-70, Unruh 2014 pp.14-21 cf. Henry 1985 p.39.

¹¹²⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 354-6; Davis 2015 p.162.

¹¹²¹ Sen. *Thy.* 396-84, Trinacty & Sampson 2018 p.11 C.f. Tarrant 2003 *ad* 602-3, Davis 2003 p.15; 2015 pp.162-3, Schiesaro 2003 p.153.

¹¹²² Seneca was in favour at Nero's court A.D. 50-64: Calder 1976 p.3. cf. Fantham 1982 p.47.

¹¹²³ Zanobi 2014 pp.12-52. Zanobi mentions *Thyestes* briefly as an example of set choreography (2014 p.19). cf. On the popularity of Imperial pantomime Jory (1981 p.151) and Panayotakis (1995 p.64).

χρυσοῦν ἀρνίον καὶ Πελοπείας γάμος καὶ Ἀγαμέμνωνος σφαγὴ καὶ
Κλυταιμήστρας τιμωρία·

Next is the story of the descendants of Pelops, with Mycenae and what happened there, and previously—Inachus, Io, and her warder Argus; Atreus, Thyestes, Aërope, and the golden lamb; the defloration of Pelopeia; the slaying of Agamemnon, and the punishment of Clytemnestra.¹¹²⁴

Here Lucian is not describing a performance, but recommending the stories that should be in a dancer's repertoire. Nonetheless, the expansiveness of Lucian's list does not limit pantomime performances to relating one mythic episode, suggesting that it could form causal relationships between ancestors' crimes and descendants' plight. This also suggests that pantomime focused less on the myth of Tantalus and the variant in which Atreus and Thyestes kill Chrysippus, for although Tantalus' and Chrysippus' stories may have been performed, Lucian does not recommend them to be an integral part of the family story.

When discussing performance itself, Lucian emphasises the fluidity between mythic episodes:

Τὸ δὲ ὅλον ἦθη καὶ πάθη δεῖξειν καὶ ὑποκρινεῖσθαι ἢ ὄρχησις ἐπαγγέλλεται, νῦν μὲν ἐρῶντα, νῦν δὲ ὀργιζόμενον τινα εἰσάγουσα, καὶ ἄλλον μεμνηνῶτα καὶ ἄλλον λελυπημένον, καὶ ἅπαντα ταῦτα μεμετρημένως. τὸ γοῦν παραδοξότατον, τῆς αὐτῆς ἡμέρας ἄρτι μὲν Ἀθάμας μεμνηνῶς, ἄρτι δὲ Ἰνὸ φοβουμένη δείκνυται, καὶ ἄλλοτε Ἀτρεὺς ὁ αὐτός, καὶ μετὰ μικρὸν Θυέστης, εἶτα Αἴγισθος ἢ Ἀερόπη· καὶ πάντα ταῦτα εἰς ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν.

In general, the dancer undertakes to present and enact characters and emotions, introducing now a lover and now an angry person, one man afflicted with madness, another with grief, and all this within fixed bounds. Indeed, the most surprising part of it is that within the selfsame day at one moment we are shown Athamas in a frenzy, at another Ino in terror; presently the same person is Atreus, and after a little, Thyestes; then Aegisthus, or Aërope; yet they all are but a single man.¹¹²⁵

The pause (μετὰ μικρὸν) between Thyestes and Atreus suggests an opportunity for the dancer to make the character change clear, by altering costume and position on stage, to show the brothers both acting and *reacting* to one another.¹¹²⁶ How might a single dancer differentiate the brothers in the *agōn*?

As Wyles points out, character masks may be rare, since the material evidence

¹¹²⁴ Lucian. *De Salt.* 43.

¹¹²⁵ Lucian. *De Salt.* 67.

¹¹²⁶ E.g. Plautus' *Menaechmi* staged the reunion of estranged twins who were both named Menaechmus, thus would need to be distinguishable to the audience by some subtleties in costume to allow for the dramatic irony of mistaken identity to work (Plaut. *Men.* 18-21).

suggests the masks differentiated age, status and gender, which Thyestes and Atreus share. The distinction could be made using an open-mouthed mask for Thyestes, since his cannibalism may be danced, in contrast to a closed-mouth mask for Atreus, though this is my conjecture. Jory catalogues examples of closed and open-mouthed masks, but categorises the latter as tragic.¹¹²⁷ A significant change in costume is equally unlikely because, as Beacham reminds us, this would halt the action whilst the dancer leaves the stage.¹¹²⁸ Therefore Atreus and Thyestes must be differentiated by a subtle costume change that could be completed on stage. Atreus may, for example, be crowned to distinguish his rank and highlight their conflict over kingship.¹¹²⁹ Moreover, Lucian suggests the on-stage role change would be prompted, thus may be signaled to both audience and performer by the cue in addition to a change in stance or posture, despite the use of the same mask.¹¹³⁰ Indeed, in his *Apologia*, Apuleius describes Thyestes' mask as notoriously ugly, presumably because of the furrows (*sulcos*) it shares with Aemilianus, the target of Apuleius' invective.¹¹³¹ This suggests that whilst Atreus' mask may be less expressive, Thyestes' could display a tortured reaction to mark such a contrast, perhaps the open-mouthed grimace of the tragic mask.

Moreover, shifting from one brother's actions to another's would work better for an extended period and would be less effective for the *stichomythia* we find in Seneca's *Thyestes*.¹¹³² Were Seneca's *Thyestes* recited, the speaker may have to rely on a change in intonation and the content of the line to differentiate the brothers. Though pantomime does not include tragic dialogue and permits more bodily expression than would befit a recitation. As Webb suggests, changes in posture could differentiate gender, whilst shifts gesture and use of props could distinguish different characters.¹¹³³ This suggests that the brothers' conflict following the feast could be represented by a single performer, twinning the adulteress and the cuckold, the victim and avenger.

Lucian also presents occasions when the fluidity of the performance can mislead

¹¹²⁷ Jory 2001 pp.7-11.

¹¹²⁸ Lucian. *De Salt.* 66. Wyles surveys evidence for on-stage mask changes, (2008 p.70) Cf. Lada-Richards 2013 pp.52, 96. Beacham notes the difficulty of a full-scale costume change (1999 p.143).

¹¹²⁹ Such a change of headwear is possible according to the Trier Ivory (Fig.4), but this is of course speculation.

¹¹³⁰ Lucian. *De Salt.* 19. Cf. Lucian. *De Salt.* 36 on postures.

¹¹³¹ Apul. *Ap.* 16.7.

¹¹³² *Stichomythia* were used effectively in Imperial satire, written to be read rather than recited. E.g. Persius. *Sat.* 1. 1-5.

¹¹³³ Webb 2008 pp.70-1, 78-81.

a dancer from one myth to another, by straying from the prescriptive choreography of the story:

οἱ δὲ εὐρυθμα μὲν, τὰ πράγματα δὲ μετάχρονα ἢ πρόχρονα, οἷον ἐγὼ ποτε ἰδὼν μέμνημαι. τὰς γὰρ Διὸς γονὰς ὀρχούμενός τις καὶ τὴν τοῦ Κρόνου τεκνοφαγίαν παρωρχεῖτοτὰς Θυέστου συμφορὰς, τῷ ὁμοίῳ παρηγμένους.

Others suit their movements to the music, but bring in their themes too late or too soon, as in a case, which I remember to have seen one time. A dancer who was presenting the birth of Zeus, with Cronus eating his children, went off into presenting the misfortunes of Thyestes because the similarity led him astray.¹¹³⁴ This tells us that in pantomime teknophagy could be represented onstage. As Zanobi suggests “dismemberment, teknophagy, killings, and both self-mutilation and mutilation of others” featured heavily in pantomime.¹¹³⁵ Thus, when Seneca wrote his *description* of Thyestes’ meal, his tragedy was in competition with onstage pantomimic *depictions* not only of the dismemberment, but also the cannibalism that Nero himself was likely to have danced.

From these passages of Lucian we can now consider how pantomime influenced Seneca’s *Thyestes* in three key ways. Firstly, pantomime set a precedent for both brothers being played by a single performer, which suggests that visually twinning the brothers onstage could be effective. Secondly, the violent pantomime repertoire thematically connected Thyestes’ endocannibalism with that of others, such as his ancestor Cronus, through similar yet distinctive choreography. Thirdly, the subtle costume changes and the sung narrative in pantomime could present the conflict between the two brothers through dance, particularly given the prescriptive nature of the gestures which even differentiate cannibal Cronus from Thyestes. Finally, pantomime performances staged violence through dance, thus Seneca’s tragedy had to achieve verbally what pantomime had achieved physically to satisfy contemporary tastes.

Nepoticide in Seneca’s *Thyestes*

At the climax of Seneca’s *Thyestes* an eyewitness messenger appears to relate Atreus’ nepoticide of Thyestes’ sons.¹¹³⁶ The messenger device is familiar from Greek tragedy and Atreus roles as: “playwright, spectator and an actor [...] high priest of his own

¹¹³⁴ Lucian. *De Salt.* 80.

¹¹³⁵ Zanobi 2014 p.21. E.g. Lucian. *De Salt.* 39-41, 53, 80; Sid. Apoll. *Carm.* 23, 277-99.

¹¹³⁶ Sen. *Thy.* 623ff. cf. François-Garelli for the implausibility of the messenger being able to enter the inner sanctum of the house unnoticed (1998 p.20).

rites” have been well noted.¹¹³⁷ Schiesaro in particular draws parallels with Greek sacrifice, comparing Seneca’s Atreus to the Dionysiac *sparagmos* and the prophetic *vates* Tiresias, noting the overlap between Atreus and Lucan’s subsequent Erictho.¹¹³⁸ Yet I will demonstrate that Atreus’ Roman sacrifice as a *haruspex* is in tension with the familiar tropes of the night-witch in Latin literature that recur in the description of Atreus’ ritual and the *locus horridus* in which it takes place. For although Schiesaro suggests that the *locus horridus* of Atreus’ sacrifice resembles that of Teiresias’ in *Oedipus*, unlike the mythological prophet Teiresias, Atreus is only associated with sacrificial divination in this scene—he acts outside of popular religion.¹¹³⁹ By uncovering this intertext, we can examine how Seneca exploits the motif of the night-witch to forebode Atreus’ violence in the absence of violent choreography an Imperial audience could expect from pantomime.

On arrival, the messenger wishes to be carried away by a storm, introducing the pathetic fallacy of an imagined tempest, to avoid the outrage of the feast.¹¹⁴⁰ More specifically, the messenger situates Atreus’ *locus horridus* in the inner sanctum of the ancestral home. This remote space is emphasised in layers: the palace is atop a citadel above a “populace defiant to its kings” (*contumacem regibus populum suis habet sub ictu*), “behind these public rooms, where whole peoples pay court” (*post ista vulgo nota, quae populi colunt*).¹¹⁴¹ At the heart of this Imperial façade of ostentatious wealth distanced from an unhappy people, we find a *locus horridus* fit for a night-witch:

arcana in imo regio secessu iacet,
 alta vetustum valle compescens nemus,
 penetrare regni, nulla qua laetos solet
 praebere ramos arbor aut ferro coli,
 sed taxus et cupressus et nigra ilice
 obscura nutat silva, quam supra eminens
 despectat alte quercus et vincit nemus.
 hinc auspicari regna Tantalidae solent,
 hinc petere lassis rebus ac dubiis opem.

¹¹³⁷ Schiesaro 2003 p.85 cf. Bukert 1983 104-6; Tarrant 2003 p.180; McCreight 1993 pp.37-8, Putnam 1995 p.275, François-Garelli 1998 p.28, Mader 2000 p.161, Clark 2001 p.204, Torre 2014 p.508 and Boyle 2017 *ad* 62-7.

¹¹³⁸ Schiesaro 2003 pp.85-7. See Ch.3 p.237 above on sacrificial language in Greek drama.

¹¹³⁹ Schiesaro 2003 pp.87-8.

¹¹⁴⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 623. cf. On storm imagery in Seneca’s *Thyestes* Poe *ad* 828-32 (1969 p.374), Schiesaro *ad* 224-5 (2009 pp.224-5) and Lowrie *ad* 536-7 (2016 pp.436-7).

¹¹⁴¹ Sen. *Thy.* 645, 649.

At the farthest and lowest remove there lies a secret area that confines an age-old woodland in a deep vale—the inner sanctum of the realm. There are no trees here such as stretch out healthy branches and are tended with the knife, but yews and cypresses and a darkly stirring thicket of black ilex, above which a towering oak looks down from its height and masters the grove. Tantalid kings regularly inaugurate their reigns here, and seek help here in disasters and dilemmas.¹¹⁴²

The grove builds on the suggestion of the dark storm the messenger opened with and is tailored to Atreus through the reference to the ancestral inaugurations here. This underscores the symbolic significance of Atreus' filicide as an act that will reclaim his kingship and transform him into an avenger. Indeed, the infanticidal theme is particularly clear through the use of Tantalus' patronymic, rather than Pelops'.

The framing of Pelops' heirlooms as votive offerings reintroduces his deception of Myrtilus as an ancestral crime whilst emphasising the perversity of the family, given that Pelops displayed the tools of his deception as an offering to the gods.¹¹⁴³ But, the religious connotations of the grove are in tension with its chthonic associations:¹¹⁴⁴

fons stat sub umbra tristis et nigra piger
haeret palude: talis est dirae Stygis
deformis unda quae facit caelo fidem.
hinc nocte caeca gemere ferales deos
fama est, catenis lucus excussis sonat
ululantque manes. **quidquid audire est metus
illic videtur.** errat antiquis vetus
emissa bustis turba et insultant loco
maiora notis monstra.

In the gloom is a dismal stagnant spring, oozing slowly in the black swamp. Such is the unsightly stream of dread Styx, which generates trust in heaven. Here in the blind darkness rumour has it that death gods groan; the grove resounds to the rattling of chains, and ghosts howl. **Anything fearful to hear can be seen there.** A hoary crowd walks abroad, released from their ancient tombs, and things more monstrous than any known caper about the place.¹¹⁴⁵

Zanobi has noted the interplay of sight and sound in Seneca's description here, yet deems the explicit mention of sight and sound an "awkward statement".¹¹⁴⁶ But I suggest that Seneca explicitly prompts his listeners to imagine a scene of supernatural soundscape; for whether the play were staged, recited or read, Atreus' nepoticide would not be dramatised. As a result, the *locus horridus* that the messenger describes sets up

¹¹⁴² Sen. *Thy.* 650-58.

¹¹⁴³ Sen. *Thy.* 658-64.

¹¹⁴⁴ Cf. Erasmo on the blurred distinction between the upper and lower worlds associating Atreus' crime with Tantalus' cooking of Pelops (2006 p. 197), and Riemer on the similarity between the grove and Tantalus' underworld (2007 pp.434-8).

¹¹⁴⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 664-76.

¹¹⁴⁶ Zanobi 2014 p.170.

an expectation of violence and the use of supernatural sounds would add foreboding to a recitation performance, whereas pantomime would dramatise violence visually through choreography. For although the pantomime *libretti* are descriptive, as demonstrated by the Barcelona *Alcestis*, which Hall posits to be an example of a *libretto*; the description is not multi-sensory as Seneca's is.¹¹⁴⁷ The remaining evidence suggests that whilst pantomime *libretti* focus on visual description, supported by choreography, Seneca focuses on multi-sensory descriptions to engross a reader or listener.

In the pathetic fallacy of the *locus horridus*, the messenger reintroduces Tantalus' ghost in such a manner as does not diminish Atreus' autonomy:

quin tota solet
micare silva flamma, et excelsae trabes
ardent sine igne. saepe latratu nemus
trino remugit, **saepe simulacris domus
attonita magnis.** nec dies sedat metum:
nox propria luco est, et superstitione inferum
in luce media regnat. hinc orantibus
responsa dantur certa, cum ingenti sono
laxantur adyto fata et immugit specus
vocem deo solvente.

In addition, flames repeatedly flicker throughout the wood, and the lofty tree trunks burn without fire. Often the grove booms with threefold barking, **often the house is awed by huge apparitions.** Daytime does not allay the fear: the grove has a night all its own, and an eerie sense of the underworld reigns in broad daylight. Here those seeking oracles are granted infallible answers; words of destiny are loosed from the sanctuary amidst thunderous noise, and the hollow space booms as a god unleashes his voice.¹¹⁴⁸

Here the messenger refers again to the apparition of ancestral ghosts at the house, connecting Tantalus' prologue to the scene of Atreus' crime. Indeed, the inner grove is framed as a point of contact with the upper and lower world with a stream like the Styx and is associated with witchcraft through the *adynata* with flameless trees burning and night during daylight, compounded with the reference to the threefold barking of Hecate.¹¹⁴⁹ So although Schiesaro reads this *locus* as an analogy for Aërope's womb,¹¹⁵⁰ Seneca's messenger emphasises the paternal connections with Tantalus and Pelops

¹¹⁴⁷ Hall 2008 pp.258-83, T40. Sen. Eld. *Suas.* 2.19.

¹¹⁴⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 677-82.

¹¹⁴⁹ Cf. Schneider on pseudo-Senecan epigram (*A.L.* 438 SB= [Seneca] 76 Baehrens) using *adynata* for political commentary (2007 pp.142-4). Compare with politicised boy-sacrifice and *haruspicium* in *A.L.* 402 = [Seneca] 16 Baehrens. See ch.3 p.249 below.

¹¹⁵⁰ Schiesaro 2003 pp.88-9 N.b Problematically, Schiesaro supports this interpretation with the anachronistic analogy of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, whereas Seneca's audience would be familiar with the Latin night-witch.

more explicitly, whilst Atreus' *locus horridus* associates Atreus' nepoticide with the infanticide of the female, heinous Latin night-witch.¹¹⁵¹ As a result, Seneca ventriloquises his messenger, exploiting intertextuality in order to: appeal to the taste of an educated listener, to foreshadow linguistically the violence pantomime could demonstrate physically and to characterize Atreus as a Latin night-witch.¹¹⁵²

This characterization of Atreus is in tension with the sacrificial imagery of the scene:

Quo postquam furens
intravit Atreus liberos fratris trahens,
ornantur arae. quis queat digne eloqui?
**post terga iuvenum nobiles revocat manus
et maesta vitta capita purpurea ligat.**
non tura desunt, non sacer Bacchi liquor
tangensve salsa victimam culter mola.
servatur omnis ordo, ne tantum nefas
non rite fiat.

Once Atreus enters the place in frenzy, dragging his brother's children, the altar is fitted out. Who could express it properly? **He pulls the youths' princely hands behind their backs, and binds their sorrowful heads with a purple band of wool.** The incense is not missing, nor Bacchus' holy liquid nor the knife that touches the victims with salted meal. Every part of the ritual is kept, to ensure that such an outrage is performed by the rules.¹¹⁵³

Here the altar, wine, knife and incense that indicate sacrifice are in tension with the dual function of the wool bands as both sacrificial and apotropaic garlands, an occult association which is reiterated in the wine's transformation into libations of blood.¹¹⁵⁴

As McCreight points out, Thyestes' sons are perversely *unwilling* sacrificial victims, which I suggest aligns them with the victims of witchcraft.¹¹⁵⁵ Indeed, Atreus wrenches the boys' heads back to bind them like *defixiones* using Thyestes' sons as personal

¹¹⁵¹ Hor. *Ep.* 5. Here I use the term "night-witch" to allude to the more famous female witches of Latin literature such as Canidia and later Lucan's Erictho, defined at Ov. *Fast.* 6.137 ff.; Ov. *Met.* 1.8. On the gender of magical practitioners outside of literature cf. Dickie 2001 pp.162-202.

¹¹⁵² Cf. Zanobi "even though at the very beginning of his speech the messenger shows fear, horror, and disgust for what he saw, as his speech moves forward all signs of his initial frightened attitude have disappeared and he has just become a mouthpiece of the story" (2014 p. 168).

¹¹⁵³ Sen. *Thy.* 683-90.

¹¹⁵⁴ Sen. *Thy.* 700-1. cf. Schultz on the scarcity of human sacrifice in Rome (2010 pp.516-41).

¹¹⁵⁵ McCreight 1993 p.43 Cf. Scheid 2007 p. 266.

property (*ousia*) which can be manipulated to restrict Thyestes' power: an objective their murder will fulfill.¹¹⁵⁶

As with Medea's prayers when creating poison for Creusa, Seneca puts Atreus' ritual nepoticide in tension with religious principles.¹¹⁵⁷ Atreus undertakes the sacrifice alone (*ipse...ipse*), rather than with attendants, in place of prayer he sings a death chant (*letale carmen*);¹¹⁵⁸ so although Atreus is presented as a priest (*sacerdos*) performing ritual (*sacri*) his isolation associates it with the occult rather than popular religion.¹¹⁵⁹ Atreus' characterisation as a night-witch is emphasised in the *adynata* at the climax of the sacrifice, when a sinister comet appears from the left, libations of wine flow to blood, and statues cry.¹¹⁶⁰ Most strikingly Atreus' behaviour mimics what we might expect from Seneca's Medea who invokes the gods to do her bidding:¹¹⁶¹

movere cunctos monstra, sed solus sibi
immutus Atreus constat, atque ultro deos
terret minantes.

All are affected by these prodigies, but Atreus alone remains unaffected and constant; he counter-threatens the menacing gods.¹¹⁶² But whereas Medea's invocation is to secure the poisoning of Creusa, and her filicide is framed as a non-magical sacrifice to her brother and father,¹¹⁶³ Atreus' ritual nepoticide is tainted with magical practice that inverts sacrificial ritual. As Littlewood suggests in his comparison of Seneca's Atreus and Ovid's Procne, Atreus revenge is feminine.¹¹⁶⁴ Yet unlike Medea and Procne, Seneca's Atreus does not kill his *own* sons and he explicitly

¹¹⁵⁶ See ch.3 pp.200-204 on Thyestes' sons as potential heirs. Cf. Gager on the use of bound dolls as instruments for curses, styled like Thyestes' sons with "their hands tied behind their backs; others were deliberately mutilated," and combined with personal effects, or *ousia*, such as hair (1992 pp.15-18). s.v. *defixiones* and *ousia* Luck, Scheid 2007 p. 269.

¹¹⁵⁷ Sen. *Med.* 740-817. cf. Motto and Clark's comparison of Atreus' filicide to Medea's "black mass" (1995 p.137).

¹¹⁵⁸ As Pillinger points out "Only Canidia gets to chant in the *Epodes*, to assert her power in her own voice," I suggest Atreus' *Carmen* presents a similar assertion of power here despite his solitude (2012 p.50).

¹¹⁵⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 692-6. cf. Sen. *Med.* 754-67.

¹¹⁶⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 697-703.

¹¹⁶¹ Sen. *Med.* 740 ff.

¹¹⁶² Sen. *Thy.* 704-5.

¹¹⁶³ Sen. *Med.* 957, 975. "With this sacrifice I placate your shade" (*tuum quoque ipsa corpus hinc mecum aveham*)

¹¹⁶⁴ Littlewood 2000 pp.253-9.

aims to surpass the “unspeakable crimes of the Odrysian house”.¹¹⁶⁵ Atreus’ occult killing achieves this and demands comparison with a new species of violent female.

Recent studies have considered Seneca’s interaction with Horace; Trinacty compares Seneca’s *Thyestes* with the Civil War motif in Horace’s *Epode* 7.¹¹⁶⁶ Cowan in particular has noted that Seneca’s Medea presents a reception of Horace’s Canidia in *Epode* 5.¹¹⁶⁷ But I suggest that Seneca’s Atreus resembles Horace’s night-witches more closely than Seneca’s own Medea does. Horace’s *Epode* 5 introduced the festal themes Seneca emphasises in his own *Thyestes* as the witches Sagana, Folia and Canidia bury a young, high-born¹¹⁶⁸ boy up to his face to “suffer a slow death gazing at food” (*dapis | inemori spectaculo*) after Tantalus’ fashion.¹¹⁶⁹ Folia “charms the moon and stars” (*lunamque caelo deripit*), much like Atreus’ filicide provokes the sinister comet.¹¹⁷⁰ Though Canidia aligns herself with Medea,¹¹⁷¹ her victim swears revenge by hurling “curses worthy of Thyestes” (*misit Thyesteas preces*).¹¹⁷² Therefore, Seneca emphasises the violence of Atreus’ nepoticide by aligning his character with the Latin night-witch. By drawing on poetic precedents, Seneca is thus able to represent verbally the violent nepoticide that pantomime could show physically, whilst appealing to an elite audience should *Thyestes* be recited.

Moreover, the allusions to witchcraft characterise Atreus as a traditional literary infanticide, despite the fact that Tantalus junior is old enough to have been exiled with his father. Paule’s study on Canidia has emphasised her association with pre-existing tradition of the infanticidal female demon Lilith, the *strix* and Lamia united in their “unnatural aggression”.¹¹⁷³ So although Tantalus junior is an adult, Atreus’ infanticide

¹¹⁶⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 271-3.

¹¹⁶⁶ Trinacty 2017 pp.134-35.

¹¹⁶⁷ Cowan 2018 p.102. cf. Trinacty and Sampson on Sen. *Thy.* 596-614 overlapping with Horace’s presentation of fortune at Hor. *Od.* 1.34.12f. (2018 p. 12), Littlewood on Thyestes’ grove as an exclusive, insular *locus* like that of Hor. *Od.* 1.1.30-2 (2016 p.371).

¹¹⁶⁸ Hor. *Ep.* 5. 7 The child swears “By this useless purple robe” (*per hoc inane purpurae decus precor*), indicating his wealth, youth and thus his purity. cf. *PDM* xiv.150-231, 856-75. Betz.

¹¹⁶⁹ Hor. *Ep.* 5. 33-4. See ch.3 pp.272-278 for Horace’s influence on Seneca.

¹¹⁷⁰ Hor. *Ep.* 5. 46.

¹¹⁷¹ Hor. *Ep.* 5. 61-6.

¹¹⁷² Hor. *Ep.* 5. 86. cf. Ennius 11 Ribbeck on p.268 below for an extant precedent of Thyestes’ curses in exile, though of course Thyestes could have cursed Atreus following the feast in Accius *Atreus* and many of the minor tragedians’ *Thyestes*.

¹¹⁷³ Paule 2017 p.65 cf. pp. 64-75.

of Thyestes' younger sons is emphasised through his alignment with Canidia and genders him as a supernatural female, marking his transition from victim to avenger.

For although Seneca presents Atreus as a *sacerdos*, Atreus' ritual also imitates witchcraft: his anger is "godless" (*impiae...irae*) and his motives are self-serving:

quem prius mactet **sibi**
dubitat, secunda deinde quem caede immolet.
nec interest, sed dubitat et saevum scelus iuvat ordinare.

He hesitates: which shall he sacrifice first **to himself**, then which shall he offer up as the second killing? It makes no difference, yet he hesitates and takes pleasure in ordering the savage crime.¹¹⁷⁴

As Trinacty comments when discussing Seneca's *Medea*, "there is something frightfully sadistic about 'taking one's time' with one's revenge".¹¹⁷⁵ Here again, we find that Seneca's Atreus takes pleasure in killing another's children for his own advancement, just as Horace's Canidia harvests the boy's liver for her own love spell.¹¹⁷⁶ Yet, like Medea, Atreus' infanticide will serve as a revenge spectacle.¹¹⁷⁷ Thus, Seneca satisfies contemporary appetites for violence by casting Atreus as the Latin night-witch of Roman poetry.

Turning to Atreus' victims, we find that Thyestes' sons are characterised more fully than those of Seneca's *Medea* or *Hercules*, for their children have no dialogue.¹¹⁷⁸ Recalling the Ghost's appearance in the prologue, the younger Tantalus is killed first, and though he has spoken previously, he now refuses "to waste breath on futile prayers" (*non est preces | perire frustra passus*) in contrast to the younger children slain by Hercules and Atreus whose entreaties are related by Amphitryon and the messenger

¹¹⁷⁴ Sen. *Thy.* 713-16. Here I maintain the Loeb translation with the dative of advantage (sacrifices for himself), rather than the ethic dative (considers to himself), as do Hine 1981 p.266, Schiesaro 2003 p.151, Boyle 2017 *ad* 716. Cf. Traiana for a survey of European editions that suggest an ethical dative and others who maintain the dative of advantage by adding a comma after *sibi*, though Traiana concludes that "La pausa di fine verso da fi per sé gravitare il dativo sul verbo precedente: l'ordine *mactet sibi* al posto del normale e prosastico *sibi mactet* e dovuto al condizionamento della clausola giambica" (1981 p.152).

¹¹⁷⁵ Trinacty 2018 p.189 *ad* Sen. *Med.* 1016.

¹¹⁷⁶ Hor. *Ep.* 5. 37.

¹¹⁷⁷ Sen. *Med.* 976-7.

¹¹⁷⁸ Sen. *Med.* 923-1001; *HF.* 987-1020.

respectively.¹¹⁷⁹ Seneca's graphic description of Tantalus' death is not only typical of his tragic style,¹¹⁸⁰ but allows Seneca to describe the violence pantomime could portray:

ast illi ferus
in vulnere ensem abscondit, et penitus premensi
ugulo manum commisit: educto stetit
fero cadaver, cumque dubitasset diu
hac parte an illa caderet, **in patruum cadit.**

The brute buried his sword in the wound he made, the hand meeting the throat as it thrust deep. When the steel was pulled out the corpse stayed upright; after long hesitation whether to fall this way or that, **it fell on its uncle.**¹¹⁸¹ The sudden depersonalisation of Tantalus as a corpse is undercut with the familial *patruum*, juxtaposing the impersonal *ast/ cadaver* with the personal. Thus Atreus' attacks are graphically violent and his victims are characterised.

Though such Senecan descriptions of violence are often dismissed as hyperbole¹¹⁸² or Senecan rhetoric,¹¹⁸³ with each death Seneca develops Atreus' characterisation. For example, like Virgil's Neoptolemus Atreus buries his sword to the hilt in his vulnerable victim,¹¹⁸⁴ and many features of Pleisthenes' death resemble the death of Priam in Virgil's *Aeneid*:¹¹⁸⁵

Tunc ille ad aras Pleisthenem saevus trahit
adicitque fratri. colla percussa amputate;
cervice caesa truncus in pronum ruit,
querulum cucurrit murmure incerto caput.

Then that savage drags Pleisthenes to the altar, and adds him to his brother. With a mortal stroke he chops off the head; with the neck severed the trunk falls forward, while the head rolls away, mumbling some unintelligible protest.¹¹⁸⁶ Both Neoptolemus and Atreus drag their victim to the altar,¹¹⁸⁷ near the corpse of their loved one,¹¹⁸⁸ both decapitate their victims letting the trunk of each body fall and,¹¹⁸⁹ of

¹¹⁷⁹ Sen. *HF*. 1003; *Thy*. 720-43.

¹¹⁸⁰ Cf. Richardson-Hay 2009 p. 75.

¹¹⁸¹ Sen. *Thy*. 720-5. s.v. *OLD patruus* "paternal uncle".

¹¹⁸² Poe 1969 p.359, Seidensticker 1985 pp.116-17, Lefèvre 1985 p.1269 and Littlewood 2016 p.363.

¹¹⁸³ Mans 1984 p.414.

¹¹⁸⁴ Vir. *Aen*. 2.553. *coruscum extulit ac lateri capulo tenus abdidit ensem*. (he raised high the flashing sword and buried it to the hilt in his side).

¹¹⁸⁵ Cf. Putnam for the influence of Virgil's *Aeneid* on Senecan tragedy more broadly. (1995 pp.246-85)

¹¹⁸⁶ Sen. *Thy*. 726-9.

¹¹⁸⁷ Vir. *Aen*. 2. 550.

¹¹⁸⁸ Vir. *Aen*. 2. 551.

course, both attacks take place in the inner sanctum.¹¹⁹⁰ Yet Seneca emphasises the speed of Atreus' attack by having Pleisthenes' severed head protest. Severed heads recur in Seneca's works: Cadmus is decapitated, Hercules crushes the skulls of his wife and child, Orpheus' head floats through the underworld and Medea decapitates Apsyrtus.¹¹⁹¹ Most notably, as Most points out, whereas in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* Agamemnon's head is split by the axe, Seneca's Agamemnon is decapitated and, like Pleisthenes, his severed head grumbles.¹¹⁹² Thus through tragic dialogue, Seneca is able to describe graphic violence that pantomime could depict physically.

The graphic violence of the killings persists in Atreus' final blow:

ferrumque gemina caede perfusum tenens,
oblitus in quem fureret, infesta manu
exegit ultra corpus; ac pueri statim
pectore receptus ensis e tergo exstitit.
cadit ille et aras sanguine extinguens suo
per utrumque vulnus moritur.

Holding a blade soaked in two killings, and regardless of the target of his rage, he drives it violently out beyond the body: taken on the chest, the sword projects at once from the boy's back. He falls, and dies from both wounds as his blood douses the altar fire.¹¹⁹³

The boy's name is secondary to Atreus' wrath and he remains unnamed, run through much like Tantalus and, like Virgil's Priam, the boy extinguishes the altar fire with his blood.¹¹⁹⁴ Therefore, Seneca not only varies the killing methods but also satisfies the

¹¹⁸⁹ Vir. *Aen.* 2. 557-8. *iacet ingens litore truncus, avulsumque umeris caput et sine nomine corpus.* (He lies, a huge trunk upon the shore, a head severed from the neck, a corpse without a name!) Virgil's *Aeneid* is drawn on for the death of Priam in Seneca's *Trojan Women*. 46-8: "bending back the king's head by the hair twisted in his cruel hand, buried his wicked blade in a deep wound. After he willingly received the deeply driven sword" (*saeva manu coma reflectens regium torta caput, alto nefandum vulneri ferrum abdidit*), "wound his left hand in his hair, while with the right he raised high the flashing sword and buried it to the hilt in his side" (*dextraque coruscum extulit ac lateri capulo tenus abdidit ensem*). cf. *Phaed.* 707-8 "my left hand has twisted her hair and bent her wanton head back" (*en impudicum crine contorto caput laeva reflexi*).

¹¹⁹⁰ Vir. *Aen.* 2. 486, 507, 511-14.

¹¹⁹¹ Sen. *HF.* 256, 1006-7; *Med.* 631, 911.

¹¹⁹² Sen. *Ag.* 901-3, Most 1992 p.396. cf. On amputation in Imperial literature before Seneca: Silius. *Pun.* 5. 416-17; Petr. *Sat.* 36, 48, 79-80, 102, 208, 119-32, 129, 132 and 141.

¹¹⁹³ Sen. *Thy.* 738-43.

¹¹⁹⁴ Vir. *Aen.* 2. 502-3. "Priam, polluting with his blood the fires he himself had hallowed". (*Priamumque per aras sanguine foedantem quos ipse sacrauerat ignis.*)

appetite for violent spectacle generated by pantomime through descriptions that characterise Atreus through intertext.

Like the night-witch, Atreus restrains his victims, reverses the order of nature and desecrates ritual practice by challenging the gods. Like Neoptolemus, Atreus slaughters his victims at the altar in the sacred grove of their home, dragging, decapitating and driving through his victims with the sword. Like the ‘new warrior’ Neoptolemus, Atreus’ nepoticide asserts a new political regime, for although Atreus remains king this crime changes him and invites another revenge cycle. But, unlike Neoptolemus, Atreus attacks his own nephews, and though Neoptolemus avenges his father Achilles by slaughtering Priam, this befits the epic context, whereas Atreus’ attack is domestic.

Overall, Atreus’ perverted ritualistic killing aligns him with Horace’s infanticidal night-witch Canidia, whilst the violence of Atreus’ nepoticide characterises him as Virgil’s vengeful warrior Neoptolemus. Thus, Seneca creates intertext with Horace and Virgil to appeal to an elite audience in recitation, depict verbally the violence that pantomime could present physically, and by association, characterise Atreus’ nepoticide as both an insidious, self-serving act and the start of a new era.

Cannibalism in Seneca’s *Thyestes*

Turning to the preparation of the feast itself, we find a similar graphic description which supplements visual cues. Again, the gore of Atreus’ preparation is not mere hyperbole, but rather develops his role as an avenger through intertext. Again, the traditional reading of Atreus’ “murder-as-sacrifice” can be applied to the preparation of the corpses, which, as Schiesaro suggests, “shows that Atreus is the incarnation of Imperial power at a much more radical and discomfoting level”.¹¹⁹⁵ But what seems more discomfoting is the potential to read Atreus’ butchery as a murder-as-necromancy, which becomes apparent if we look beyond a comparison between Seneca and Attic tragedy and return to Latin literature.

Gunderson notes the repeated appearance of Tantalus’ ghost in the prologue of *Thyestes* and Cassandra’s vision of Tantalus’ ghost in *Agamemnon*,¹¹⁹⁶ deeming this a “species of necromancy”.¹¹⁹⁷ Whereas Gunderson focuses on the appearance of ghosts, here I focus on Atreus’ sacrificial killing of Thyestes’ children and inspection of their

¹¹⁹⁵ Schiesaro 2003 p.97.

¹¹⁹⁶ Sen. *Ag.* 769-772.

¹¹⁹⁷ Gunderson 2018 pp.119, 133. cf. Guastella 1994 p.113.

innards (*haruspicium*), which is described as a necromantic ritual (*necromantia*). From there I will explore how this ritual characterises Atreus as a male, Imperial tyrant on the one hand and a female, Latin night-witch on the other. I make no suggestion that Atreus literally performs a necromancy, but I rather suggest he does so that from a narrative point of view by repeating Tantalus' infanticidal feast in the manner of a necromantic ritual.

For example, having acted as a perverse *sacerdos*, Atreus assumes the role of a *haruspex*:

erepta vivis exta pectoribus tremunt
spirantque venae corque adhuc pavidum salit;
at ille fibras tractat ac fata inspicit
et adhuc calentes viscerum venas notat.
Postquam hostiae placuere, securus vacat
iam fratris epulis.

Torn from the living chests the organs are still trembling, the veins pulsing and the hearts throbbing in terror. But he handles the entrails and looks into destiny and takes note of the still-hot veins on the viscera. Once the victims prove satisfactory, he relaxes and takes time for his brother's feast.¹¹⁹⁸

As with Pleisthenes' protests upon decapitation, Seneca emphasises Atreus' swift violence by suggesting the corpses are living (*vivis*) with beating hearts. The perversity of the throbbing hearts and living chests may be pleasing to Atreus, who will orchestrate the ensuing chaos, yet in Seneca's *Oedipus*, Tiresias' daughter Manto reads the violent shaking of cows' organs as an ill-omen.¹¹⁹⁹ So at best, Atreus' *haruspicium* aligns him with a form of divination that was regulated under Augustus and Tiberius,¹²⁰⁰ yet embraced by Nero.¹²⁰¹ But at worst, we are reminded that despite Atreus' role as a *sacerdos* at an altar (*arae*) his victims are unwilling boys: Atreus aligns his nepoticide with necromancy as he reads their organs.¹²⁰²

Such use of boys for necromancy became a criminal charge in Rome, for example Cicero accuses Vatinius of making sacrifice: "to make sacrifices to the ghosts of the dead

¹¹⁹⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 755-8.

¹¹⁹⁹ Sen. *Oed.* 353-4. cf. Sampson 2018 p.18.

¹²⁰⁰ Cass. Dio. 56.25, Suet. *Tib.* 63.

¹²⁰¹ Suet. *Ner.* 46.

¹²⁰² Sen. *Thy.* 684, 692. Schiesaro points out that "Human sacrifice is considered un-Roman (Livy 22.57.6) though occasionally attested Suet. *Aug.* 15)" (2003 p.85 n. 31) cf. Ogden 2001 pp. 191-202 for an overview of the use of boys as seers and in some instances, sacrificial victims for necromancy.

with the entrails of boys” (*cum puerorum extis deos manes mactare soleas*).¹²⁰³ Juvenal later conflates the two roles in *Satire 6* for comic effect, suggesting that a *haruspex* would read a boy’s entrails should an animal’s be unclear.¹²⁰⁴ A pseudo-Senecan epigram reiterates the use of entrails for necromancy in a political context:

Fata per humanas solitus praenoscere fibras
 Impius infandae religionis apex,
 Pectoris ingenui salientia uiscera flammis
 Ut posuit, magico carmine rupit humum,
 Ausus ab Elysiis Pompeium ducere campis:
 Pro pudor, hoc sacrum Magnus ut aspiceret!
 Stulte, quid infernis Pompeium quaeris in umbris?
 Non potuit terris spiritus ille premi!

The impious chief of an unspeakable region, accustomed to learning the fates in advance through spasming entrails laid the spasming guts of a free-born breast in the flames and broke the ground with a magical incantation. He dared to draw Pompey from the Elysian fields. For shame! That a Magus should look upon this rite! Stupid man, why do you seek Pompey among the shades of the underworld? His spirit could not be confined by the earth.¹²⁰⁵

Several features of Atreus’ nepoticide particularly point to such necromancy. Atreus the *impius apex* threatens the gods,¹²⁰⁶ as in the epigram he sings a death chant,¹²⁰⁷ as in the epigram blood offerings enter the fire;¹²⁰⁸ the sacrifice is made at night,¹²⁰⁹ before the ancestral spirits and *manes*,¹²¹⁰ in the house where Tantalus’ ghost has, like Pompey, already risen.¹²¹¹ Thus, the way Seneca’s Atreus not only kills Thyestes’ sons but uses their entrails for divination before cooking them aligns him with necromancy that Nero was later scorned for.¹²¹²

Returning to the eating of the bodies specifically, we again find that Seneca’s description of Atreus’ divination associates him with occult practice. For example, in *Natural History*, Pliny discusses the *magi*’s use of moles for divination:

ut si quis **cor eius recens palpitansque** devoret divinationis et rerum efficiendarum eventus promittant.

¹²⁰³ Cic. *Vat.* 14 (tr. Ogden 2001 p. 149).

¹²⁰⁴ Juv. 6. 550, cf. Ogden 2001 p.198.

¹²⁰⁵ *A.L.* 402 =[Seneca] Epigram 16 Baehrens (tr. Ogden 2001 p.147).

¹²⁰⁶ Sen. *Thy.* 704-5. cf. Ogden 2001 p.175.

¹²⁰⁷ Sen. *Thy.* 692; *Oed.* 561. cf. Stat. *Theb.* 4 .473-87.

¹²⁰⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 700-1, 743; *Oed.* 563-5. cf. Ogden 2001 p.174.

¹²⁰⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 665-6; *Oed.* 559. cf. McCreight 1993 p.39, Scheid 2007 p. 263.

¹²¹⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 668-73; *Oed.* 559-60.

¹²¹¹ Sen. *Thy.* 103-4.

¹²¹² Plin. *HN.* 30.15.

so that if anyone **eats its heart, fresh and still beating**, they promise powers of divination and of foretelling the issue of matters in hand.¹²¹³ Here we find the same grim emphasis on beating hearts that Seneca focuses on in his description of Atreus' divination; a feature that outside of Seneca's *Oedipus* is not emphasised when discussing the portents of a *haruspex*, where the outcome of the divination receives more attention than the process.¹²¹⁴ So although Pliny discusses a feast on animals, not children, the distinction between the raw organs of the *magi* and the cooked entrails of the *haruspex* is exploited by Seneca: the animated organs appear in divination scenes of Seneca's *Oedipus* and *Thyestes*, yet Atreus cooks them to deceive Thyestes and the organs writhe again before Thyestes' recognition.¹²¹⁵

Moreover, Seneca emphasises Atreus' isolation when "he himself" (*ipse*) dismembers the bodies, whilst the plosive syllables resemble the sound of chopping: *amputat trunco tenus*.¹²¹⁶ Thus the perversity of the ritual is reiterated, as Atreus is not assisted, and the action is conveyed through onomatopoeia. Having butchered the bodies, Atreus keeps "the faces and hands given in trust" (*tantum ora servat et datas fidei manus*).¹²¹⁷ As a result, Seneca sets up the recognition scene that Aristophanes' *Proagon* seems to have parodied, most likely mocking the recognition scene from Euripides' *Thyestes*.¹²¹⁸

However, Seneca's presentation of the severed heads takes on a different nuance in the context of Imperial Rome. Whereas in Greek myth heads are revealed to victims at dinner, in Roman historiography heads are revealed to tyrants at dinner.¹²¹⁹ For example, Valerius Maximus illustrates Sulla's cruelty with such a scene:

abscisa miserorum capita modo non vultum ac spiritum retinentia in conspectum suum adferri voluit, ut oculis illa, quia ore nefas erat, manderet.

he wanted the severed heads of wretches to be brought to his sight while they still had the expression and the breath with which they died, so that he might

¹²¹³ Plin. *HN*. 30.19-20. cf. Frazer suggests that the fresher the blood or meat, the more potent the magic (1970 pp.648-54) and Ogden 2001 p.199.

¹²¹⁴ E.g. Plin. *HN*. 2.57; 15. 40; 11.71,75.

¹²¹⁵ Sen. *Thy*. 1000 *quid tremuit intus?* (What trembles inside me?)

¹²¹⁶ Sen. *Thy*. 761.

¹²¹⁷ Sen. *Thy*. 764. cf. Burkert suggests head and feet were devoted to the god (1983 p.105 n.11).

¹²¹⁸ See p.23 and ch.3 pp.209-210.

¹²¹⁹ Luc. *Phars*. 2.118-24, Plut. *Crass*. 33.3, Tac. *Ann* 14.57, Dio Cass 47.8, Cf. Leigh "Plutarch thus moves from the cannibal's thirst for blood to the tyrant at dinner when presented with the head of his victim". (1996 p.180), Sen. *Epist*. 83.25 Leigh claims that "Seneca is surely thinking of the case of Cicero himself" (1996 56).

chew with his eyes those things that it was unholy for him to chew with his mouth.¹²²⁰

Leigh cites this example to suggest that Varius' *Thyestes* aligned Antony with the tyrant Atreus, conflating Atreus the killer with Thyestes the eater.¹²²¹ Seneca's dating of Accius' *Atreus* in the reign of Sulla, his focus on the animation of corpses in *Thyestes* and Valerius' evocative use of *manderet* suggest that tyranny and cannibalism were conflated in history and divided between the tragic Atreus and Thyestes in tragedy.¹²²² So perversely in Seneca's recognition scene Atreus does fulfil his promise to share kingship with Thyestes- Roman rulers do view heads of their own victims; but Thyestes cannot stomach this tyrannical gesture. Thyestes wants a role he cannot handle, as Atreus puts it: *quod nolunt velint*.¹²²³ Thus Atreus at once shows Thyestes' culpability for having eaten the children and Atreus' own power having killed them. Again, the brothers are twinned as the active and passive tyrant.

In terms of the cooking itself, Boyle points out the parallel between Thyestes' feast and that of Virgil's Cyclops.¹²²⁴ But we should note that in Virgil "the warm joints quivered beneath his teeth" (*tepidi tremarent sub dentibus artus*) whereas here Atreus prepares the macabre feast for the deception and reveal.¹²²⁵ Seneca's Atreus rather mirrors Euripides' Cyclops who both roasts flesh on spits and boils flesh in a cauldron,¹²²⁶ emphasising the quantity of the meat and stressing the confused nature of human sacrifice. For, as Scheid suggests, cow organs would be boiled and pig/ sheep organs would be roasted,¹²²⁷ yet we should note that in *Thyestes* the cooking method for humans cannot be specified.¹²²⁸

Thus Seneca emphasises the perversity of Atreus' cannibalistic feast through the preparation: the fire leaps past the flesh (*transiluit ignis*) and "burns grudgingly" (*invitus ardet*).¹²²⁹ Again, Seneca creates a soundscape to emphasise the gore in lieu of visual dramatization:

¹²²⁰ VM .9.2.1 (tr. Leigh 1996).

¹²²¹ Leigh 1996 pp.185-7.

¹²²² Cf. Accius 16 Ribbeck, Sen. *Thy.* 779.

¹²²³ Sen. *Thy.* 212. cf. Mader for close analysis of this type of doublespeak at Sen. *Thy* 334-5 (1998 pp.31-47).

¹²²⁴ Boyle 2017 *ad* 778-82.

¹²²⁵ Vir. *Aen.* 3.627.

¹²²⁶ Eur. *Cyc.* 403-4, Sen. *Thy.* 765.

¹²²⁷ Scheid 2007 p.266.

¹²²⁸ Eur. *Cyc.* 403-4.

¹²²⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 770.

stridet in veribus iecur;
nec facile dicam corpora an flammae magis
gemuere

The liver hisses on the spit; I could not easily say whether the bodies or flames
groan more loudly.¹²³⁰

This cacophony reanimates Thyestes' sons with screams they did not have chance to let out when killed, as the killings took place offstage. By delaying their "groans" Seneca is able to present the cooking of their flesh as a second death. As Kyle points out, most Romans believed that "the spirit retained its identity and memory," which allows Seneca to play on the tension between their dead bodies and suffering spirits.¹²³¹ Thus again, Seneca surpasses the violence pantomime could portray by using sound to reiterate the deaths in recitation and evoking the Cyclops' feast to appeal to a well-read, elite audience.

Finally, Seneca's messenger reports that the palace is engulfed by smoke that "smothers the very house gods" (*ipsos penates [...] obsidet*).¹²³² Thus Seneca imposes the ancestral cult of Roman religion, polluting the *penates* physically whilst recalling grandfather Tantalus' ancestral crime: the cooking of Pelops.¹²³³ The messenger describes Thyestes' appearance to anticipate his arrival:

...lancinat **natos pater**
artusque mandit ore funesto suos.
nitet fluente madidus unguento comam
gravisque vino est; saepe praeclusae cibum
tenuere fauces.

The father is mangling his sons, gnawing his own limbs with entombing teeth. He is glistening, with hair soaked in flowing unguent, and he is heavy with wine. Often his blocked throat holds the food.¹²³⁴

Again, Seneca creates a sound effect, repeating the dental *-at-* to reflect Thyestes' chewing, whilst juxtaposing father and sons (*natos pater*). Seneca then places *funesto* and *suos* in apposition to implicate Thyestes in the destruction of his sons, despite his own ignorance and his throat's reluctance to swallow, resounding Accius' *quem ore funesto alloquar*. Torre claims that "Thyestes' character is tragic above all from Aristotle's point of view," yet I suggest that this only holds true for the Greek Thyestes that Aristotle

¹²³⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 770-3.

¹²³¹ E.g. Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 1.13.29-30, Sen. *Dial.* 18.4. Cf. Kyle suggests "the soul or spirit [...] since it remained individual and conscious, it could suffer psychologically, enduring the shame of a dishonourable death or the longing for vengeance" (1998 p.129).

¹²³² Sen. *Thy.* 774.

¹²³³ Sen. *Thy.* 145-8.

¹²³⁴ Sen. *Thy.* 778-82.

names.¹²³⁵ Seneca instead primes the audience for Thyestes' debauched appearance, as, despite his initial show of reluctance,¹²³⁶ Seneca's Thyestes appears as the hedonistic glutton of satire.¹²³⁷

For example, Cowan has remarked that Seneca's Thyestes "is close kin to Persius' glutton Natta," a character adopted from Horace's *Satires*, inasmuch as their gluttony reflects their "moral insensibility".¹²³⁸ This reading can be developed in comparison to the attitudes set out in Seneca's prose. As Boyle points out, "Thyestes is Pleasure Incarnate", as like the personified Pleasure in *De Vita Beata*, Thyestes is oiled and in *Thyestes* "the profusion of language suggests the profusion of oils".¹²³⁹ If we look at Seneca's description of pleasure in full, we find that it also suggests depravity, diminishing our sympathy for the hedonist Thyestes as a victim:

voluptatem latitantem saepius ac tenebras captantem circa balinea ac sudatoria
ac loca aedilem metuentia, mollem, enervem, mero atque unguento madentem,
pallidam aut fucatam et medicamentis pollinctam.

pleasure you will more often find lurking out of sight, and in search of darkness,
around the public baths and the sweating-rooms and the places that fear the
police—soft, enervated, reeking with wine and perfume, and pallid, or else
painted and made up with cosmetics like a corpse.¹²⁴⁰

Thus, rather than simplifying the morality of Atreus' revenge, Seneca presents Thyestes as a former rebel, a would-be tyrant with the greed of a satiric glutton.¹²⁴¹

It is well noted that food in satire has a "moralising focus"¹²⁴² and, as Richardson-Hay demonstrates, Seneca frequently associates gluttony with immorality in his prose

¹²³⁵ Torre 2014 p.505 cf. Ar. *Rhet.* 1453a Collard suggests that Aristotle refers to fifth-century tragedy exclusively (2009 p.313).

¹²³⁶ Much has been made of Thyestes' initial reluctance (Sen. *Thy.* 446-70). Some suggest it is a sign of Thyestes' Stoicism: Hine 1981 pp.272-3, Mader 2000 p.164; 2002 p.244, Schiesaro 2003 pp.148-51, Mader 2014 p.153. Others question Thyestes' true intentions: Boyle 1983 p.216, Tarrant 2003 pp.155-6. I agree with Dupont that Thyestes' deference to Tantalus the younger's suggestions shows an inversion of authority (1995 p.193). But here my focus will be on Thyestes' behaviour in the feast scene itself.

¹²³⁷ Cf. Cowan for an overview of Seneca's appropriation of satiric themes and his depiction of tragedy as defined by satire. (2018) cf. Coffey 1996 pp.81-6.

¹²³⁸ Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.124, Cowan 2018 p.112 cf. Gowers 1993 p.185, Reckford 1998 p.344, Miller 1998 pp.258-9 and Bocchi 2004 p.235.

¹²³⁹ Boyle 2017 ad 778-82.

¹²⁴⁰ Sen. *Vit. Beat.* 7.7.3.

¹²⁴¹ Coffey has already discussed Seneca's use of satire in *Thyestes* (460-6) but without a close reading of the passage and its implications for Thyestes' character, which I suggest here (1996 pp.81-6). cf. Cowan 2018 p.79 n. 20.

¹²⁴² Gowers 2003 p.121. Cf. Corbeill 1997 pp.101-4, Rimmell 2005 p.84.

works.¹²⁴³ I suggest that Seneca characterises his Thyestes as a satiric glutton; given that his excess presents his immorality, as Atreus describes Thyestes:

resupinus ipse purpurae atque auro incubat,
vino gravatum fulciens laeva caput. eructat.

He is lying on purple and gold, sprawled backwards, propping his wine-heavy head on his left hand. He belches!¹²⁴⁴

Meltzer views the significance of Thyestes' belch in juxtaposition with the luxury of the couch as a sign of his barbarity.¹²⁴⁵ Mader develops this view to suggest Thyestes' belch "signals also his loss of self-control," which he demonstrates by analogy with Cicero's invective against Marc Antony in *Philippics*.¹²⁴⁶

However, the first line of Cicero's *Philippics* passage that Mader omits pushes this case further still:

Sed haec quae robustioris improbitatis sunt, omittamus: loquamur potius de nequissimo genere levitatis.

But let us leave aside such acts of sturdy wickedness, and speak rather of the lowest kind of irresponsibility.¹²⁴⁷

Cicero's distinction applies to the opposition between Atreus' *robustior improbitas* as an avenger and Thyestes' *genere levitates* as a dupe. For though Atreus enters as "peer of the stars" (*aequalis astris gradior*) having, like Medea, reclaimed his kingdom through violence; Thyestes reclines "feasting with a carefree, cheerful expression" (*conviva securo iaces hilarique vultu*).¹²⁴⁸ Thus the brothers play different roles within the drama: Atreus the tragic villain, versus Thyestes the satiric glutton.

Moreover, Seneca's moralising use of satiric gluttony is particularly well illustrated if we look to his own *Epistles*:

Quam foedi itaque pestilentesque ructus sunt, quantum fastidium sui exhalantibus crapulam veterem! Scias putrescere sumpta, non concoqui.

¹²⁴³ Richardson-Hay 2009. E.g. Sen. *Epp.* 5.1.6; 18.2-4; 47.2-4; 51.4; 60.3; 66.16; 78.23-5; 83.16; 90.19; 95.18; 95.21; 95.25; 110.13; 114. 25; 119-14, *Ad. Helv.* 10.1; 10.2-8; 10.10; 10.11; 11.4; 11.13, *Vit. Bea.* 11.4.

¹²⁴⁴ Sen. *Thy.* 909-11.

¹²⁴⁵ Meltzer 1988 p.314.

¹²⁴⁶ Cic. *Phil.* 2. 63, Mader 2003 p.635 cf. Sen. *Thy.* 918-19.

¹²⁴⁷ Cic. *Phil.* 2. 63.

¹²⁴⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 885, 898-9. cf. Sen. *Med.* 982. (*Iam iam recepi sceptra germanum patrem*). cf. Altman on Seneca's edification of god-like emperors in his prose which, unlike Seneca's tragic Atreus, relies on the ruler's virtue. (1938 pp.201-4). See Volk for a comparison of Atreus with sun-god emperors (2006 pp.198-200). See Tarrant for a comparison with Hor. *Od.* 1.1.36, (2017 pp.94-105).

How repulsive, then, and how unhealthy are their belchings, and how disgusted men are with themselves when they breathe forth the fumes of yesterday's debauch! You may be sure that their food is not being digested, but is rotting.¹²⁴⁹ This description underscores the immorality of lavish feasts, much like Trimalchio's in Petronius' *Satyrica*, but the themes in Seneca's phrasing can clearly be applied to his Thyestes in a tragic setting.¹²⁵⁰ The belching, indigestion and drunkenness are all reiterated in Thyestes' final scene and Seneca is clearly aware of the immorality these tropes represent.

The generic distinction Seneca imposes on the tragic Atreus and the satiric Thyestes is well expressed in near-contemporary satire itself.¹²⁵¹ For example, Persius ventriloquises a tragic actor in his satires, to differentiate his work from tragedy:

grande locuturi nebulas Helicone legunto,
 si quibus aut Procnes aut si quibus olla Thyestae
 fervebit saepe insulso cenanda Glyconi.
 [...]
 hinc trahe quae dicis mensasque relinque Mycenis cum capite et pedibus
 plebeiaque prandia noris.

Let those about to declaim grandiosely gather fogs from Helicon, if there are any who want to boil the pot of Procne or of Thyestes for boring Glyco's frequent feasts.

[...]
 Draw your talk from here and leave Mycenae to its banquets, heads and feet, and make yourself familiar with ordinary meals.¹²⁵²

Thus we see Thyestes' banquet alluded to as a point of contrast to the feasts of satire, a genre that Seneca imposes on his Thyestes character to contrast his low-order gluttony against Atreus' high-order malice, placing tragic and satiric tyranny¹²⁵³ in competition.¹²⁵⁴

¹²⁴⁹ Sen. *Ep.* 95. 25.

¹²⁵⁰ Cf. Motto for a comparison of gluttony in Seneca's prose and Petronius' *Satyrica* (2001 pp.170-1).

¹²⁵¹ Cf. Cowan on the relative dating of Seneca and satire (2018 p. 91 esp. n.50). Here I subscribe to his chronological reading of intertextuality, placing Persius as a near-contemporary of Seneca and noting Juvenal as an example of satire's developing features.

¹²⁵² Persius. *Sat.* 5. 7-9, 17-18. cf. Cowan on the "satiric idea of tragedy" that this passage depicts (2018 p. 81). Giordano Rampioni (1983 p.105) and Bocchi (2004 p.237) suggest that this passage was written in response to Seneca's *Thyestes* specifically.

¹²⁵³ E.g. Juv. *Sat.* 4.

¹²⁵⁴ Cf. Rimmell for a reading of the satiric glutton as a commentary on the expanse of the Roman Empire (2005 p.84).

In addition to Thyestes' belch presenting his loss of control, Seneca uses Atreus' aside to describe Thyestes' reaction as a means of focalisation. Atreus will stage-manage Thyestes' own recognition scene and similarly presents Thyestes to Seneca's listeners:

libet videre, capita natorum intuens
quos det colores, verba quae primus dolor
effundat aut ut spiritu expulso stupens
corpus rigescat. fructus hic operis mei est.
miserum videre nolo, sed dum fit **miser**.

I long to see what colour he turns as he looks on his sons' heads, what words his first torment pours forth, how his body stiffens, breathless with shock. This is the fruit of my work: I do not want to see him **broken**, but to see him **being broken**.¹²⁵⁵

Though Richardson-Hay characterises Seneca's descriptions by their "graphic nature," "length" and "specificity," here Atreus' fantasy is strikingly multi-sensory.¹²⁵⁶ Mader suggests that the colour imagery in this passage presents Atreus as a voyeur of his revenge masterpiece.¹²⁵⁷ Yet, for Seneca's listener, Atreus also anticipates Thyestes' visual, auditory and physical reactions in lieu of dramatization, priming the listener for the climactic recognition scene through polyptoton (*miserum... miser*). Thus Seneca replaces the physical expression of pantomime through Atreus' multi-sensory description. Seneca's listeners view Thyestes through Atreus' eyes, as the tragic tyrant controls not only Thyestes' recognition, but also the listener's perspective of it: assuming the ultimate power as an avenger.

When Thyestes is seemingly brought into Atreus' view he drinks his son's blood from a silver cup, a family treasure,¹²⁵⁸ which primes Thyestes' drunken appearance:

...hoc, hoc mensa claudatur scypho.
mixtum suorum sanguinem genitor bibat:
meum bibisset. ecce, iam cantus ciet
festasque voces, nec satis menti imperat.

Yes, let this be the cup to close the feast! Let the father drink the blended blood of his sons: he would have drunk mine. See, now he is raising his voice in festive songs, with little control over his wits.¹²⁵⁹

Atreus reminds the listener that his revenge is a pre-emptive strike; that having stolen the fleece and debauched Aërope, Thyestes is an adversary but, due to his appetite, an unworthy one. The increasingly theatrical setting of the Roman *cena* introduces what

¹²⁵⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 903-6.

¹²⁵⁶ Richardson-Hay 2009 p.75.

¹²⁵⁷ Mader 2010 p.279.

¹²⁵⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 908-13; 981-2.

¹²⁵⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 916-19.

Richardson-Hay describes as “gorging participants- people without the will, the courage or the moral insight not to become part of the show”.¹²⁶⁰ Thyestes’ fulfils just such a role as an immoral, satiric glutton as he drunkenly sings in his lyric monody.

The song is incongruous, but as Thyestes himself points out, his revelry is interrupted:

quid me revocas
festumque vetas celebrare diem,
quid flere iubes,
nulla surgens dolor ex causa?
quis me prohibet
flore decenti vincire comam,
prohibet, prohibet?
vernae capiti fluxere rosae,
pingui madidus crinis amomo
inter subitos stetit horrores,
imber vultu nolente cadit,
venit in medias voces gemitus

Why hold me back
and forbid my celebrating this festive day,
why bid me weep,
pain arising without a cause?
Who prevents me
from binding my hair properly with flowers,
prevents me, prevents me?
The roses of spring slide from my head,
my hair, though soaked in heavy myrrh,
bristles in sudden shivering fits,
teardrops fall from my eyes unbidden,
amidst my words there comes a groan.¹²⁶¹

As Staley suggests, many debated the protagonist in Seneca’s *Thyestes*, when in fact, the action hinges on the tension between the two.¹²⁶² Here, despite the drunken delivery, Thyestes’ appearance serves to twin him with his brother as their similarities underscore the different forms of tyranny they represent.¹²⁶³ Like Atreus, Thyestes self-

¹²⁶⁰ Richardson-Hay 2009 p. 86. E.g. Sen. *Epp.* 5.6; 18.4 on the spectacle of one’s behaviour in a convivial setting.

¹²⁶¹ Sen. *Thy.* 942-51.

¹²⁶² Staley 1981 pp. 234-6.cf. Marti 1947 (Thyestes); Knoche 1941 (Atreus), Torre 2014 p.504 and Lefèvre makes a case for the equal status of the brothers (1997 pp.1276 and 1279).

¹²⁶³ Schiesaro has already pointed out that “Atreus and Thyestes are never polar opposites, representing two well defined sides of an ethical debate [...] had it been his turn, Thyestes- Thyestes’ revenge would have been every bit as gory” (2003 p.140). But this seems to be based on Atreus’ suspicions about Thyestes as a potential threat, that are symptomatic of Atreus’ paranoia, see ch.1 p.88 above.

apostrophises.¹²⁶⁴ Like Atreus, Thyestes repeats himself.¹²⁶⁵ Like Atreus' ancestral crown, Thyestes' festival garland slips.¹²⁶⁶ Like Atreus, Thyestes sings.¹²⁶⁷ Whereas Atreus anticipates Thyestes' physical reaction, Thyestes cannot explain it.¹²⁶⁸ All that Atreus does in a controlled effort to exact revenge; Thyestes does in an uncontrolled reaction. Atreus' tyranny exerts might, whereas Thyestes' tyranny is led by appetite. Thus Seneca's *Thyestes* is a tragedy with two protagonists, but only one "tragic hero".

What Schiesaro deems the "uncanny" doubling of the brothers in my view emphasises the contrast between the tragic Atreus and the satiric Thyestes, whilst demonstrating the immorality of both.¹²⁶⁹ Seneca twins the brothers just as a single pantomime performer could have done, allowing one speaker to compare two characters, in turn emphasising their differences as Atreus himself suggests:

consensu pari celebremus
we must celebrate this festive day in mutual harmony.¹²⁷⁰

Seneca presents a pledge of harmony that underscores the disharmony apparent to his listeners, through dramatic irony. The outrageousness of Atreus' dramatic irony has been well noted,¹²⁷¹ but the grotesque effect underlines the clash of tyrannical ideologies the two brothers present. Thyestes is the satiric reveller but suffers: Atreus is the tragic hero and revels in it. Therefore, Seneca's mixing of high and low genres is not a sign of Seneca's ineptitude as a tragedian, but Thyestes' ineptitude as a tragic hero: the satiric drunk is unequal to the night-witch warrior Atreus.

Now Atreus takes control delighting in his own jokes:

Hic esse natos crede in amplexu patris.
hic sunt eruntque; nulla pars prolis tuae
tibi subtrahetur. ora quae exoptas dabo
totumque turba iam sua implebo patrem.

Consider your sons as here in their father's embrace. Here they are, and will stay. No portion of your offspring will be taken from you. I shall show you shortly the faces you long for, and give the father his fill of his own dear

¹²⁶⁴ Sen. *Thy.* 179-80, 221-2; 942-7.

¹²⁶⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 906; 946.

¹²⁶⁶ Sen. *Thy.* 701-2; 947. cf. Mader's comparison with the same trope at Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 5.62, Hor. *Od.* 3.1.17-21 (2016 p. 134).

¹²⁶⁷ Sen. *Thy.* 692-3; 920-69.

¹²⁶⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 903-6; 945.

¹²⁶⁹ Schiesaro 2003 p.140-51. cf. Dodson-Robinson 2010 p.55.

¹²⁷⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 970-1.

¹²⁷¹ Tarrant 2003 *ad* 970-83, Mader 2002 pp.242-5, Davis 2003 pp.59-60, Schiesaro 2003 p.57, Sideri-Tolia 2004 p.180, Mader 2010 pp.277-80, Boyle 2017 *ad* 970.

throng.¹²⁷²

The dramatic irony here builds up to a spectacular reveal. This theatrical reveal is not typical of staged feasts, but parallels Trimalchio's banquet in Petronius' *Satyrical*. In the novel, the ostentatious host Trimalchio incorporates spectacles for his guests and stages the discipline of a slave who, having allegedly forgotten to gut the pig, is ordered to clean it at the table.¹²⁷³ The pig turns out to have been gutted and is instead stuffed with sausages and black puddings to the delight of onlookers, thus the staged conflict with the cook is defused. So Seneca's Atreus, like Petronius' Trimalchio, stage-manages a festal reveal, but whereas Trimalchio reveals delicacies and thus resolves a false quarrel, Atreus reveals the boys' heads and thus exposes his revenge.¹²⁷⁴ Both Seneca and Petronius present the host as the ruler of the house, both exploit the spectacle culture of the Imperial period in which they write. But whereas Petronius does so for comic effect, Seneca does so to focalise the reveal for a reader, encouraging them to see it through Atreus' eyes.

Atreus' metatheatrical role and status as a night-witch come together in the recognition scene as he reiterates the messenger report:

illa lentis ignibus
stillare iussi; membra nervosque abscidi
viventibus, gracilque traiectas veru
mugire fibras vidi es aggressi manu
mea ipse flammam—omnia haec melius pater
fecisse potuit, cecidit in cassum dolor:
scidit ore natos impio, sed nesciens,
sed nescientes.

I cut away limbs and sinews from the living bodies, pierced the organs with thin spits and watched them moan, piled up fires with my own hands: all this the father could have done better. My anger was to no avail. **He tore his sons in his sacrilegious mouth**, but he did not know it, they did not know it.¹²⁷⁵

Whilst Atreus harvests and inspects the organs, like the Canidia of Horace's fifth *Epode*, Thyestes butchers his sons with his teeth, like Canidia's night witches in Horatian *Satire*:

scalpere terram unguibus et pullam divellere mordicus agnam coeperunt;

¹²⁷² Sen. *Thy.* 976-9.

¹²⁷³ Petr. *Sat.* 49.4-10.

¹²⁷⁴ Trimalchio selects the oldest pig of the living three (Petr. *Sat.* 47.11), just as Atreus kills Thyestes' oldest son of the three first (Sen. *Thy.* 718). Both Trimalchio's pigs (Petr. *Sat.* 47.8) and Thyestes' sons wear apotropaic garlands (Sen. *Thy.* 686) cf. Panayotakis on the *porcus Troianus* (1995 p.79) and Bocchi on Trimalchio's zodiac dishes and Atreus' stellar reversal (2004 pp.248-50).

¹²⁷⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 1061-8. cf. Most 1992 p. 395, Star for the inversion of this passage in the will of Petronius' Eumolpus (2012 p.101).

Then they began to dig up the earth with their nails, and to tear a black lamb to pieces with their teeth;¹²⁷⁶

Thus Seneca's Atreus not only recapitulates the filicide scene presented in the messenger report, but also underscores the brothers' respective roles as the tragic aggressor and the satiric victim.

Therefore, Seneca fulfils the appetite for violence created by pantomime using multi-sensory description. The conflict is heightened through intertext with the motifs particular to Latin literature. Atreus' filicide is described like Neoptolemus' attack on Priam in Virgil's *Aeneid*, his cooking of the children is presented as the ritual of a Latin-night witch such as Horace's Canidia. Thyestes is portrayed as a satiric glutton, presenting the Imperial appetite explored in Persius and later Juvenal. As a result, the brothers are twinned by antithesis, presenting similar behaviour in opposing roles. Ultimately, Seneca's engagement with 'off-stage' Latin texts twins Atreus and Thyestes' tyrannical immorality: one tragic and powerful, the other satiric and impotent, but both equally repulsive.

Ch 3.1: Conclusion

Overall, there is little evidence in either the Greek or Roman fragments to suggest that Thyestes' feast itself was staged. For Sophocles, not enough remains from either the *Thyestes* itself or the *Tereus* by analogy to determine whether the recognition would have occurred onstage like the presentation of corpses in *Antigone*, *Electra* and *Trachiniae*, or offstage within the feast itself, from which Thyestes could emerge, like Oedipus emerges blinded in *Oedipus Tyrannus*.¹²⁷⁷

For Euripides, it also seems to be the case that the filicide and cannibalism would take place off-stage. Euripides' *Cyclops* provides a model for how man-eating could be reported in satyr drama, which raises the issue of to what extent Thyestes' children would be characterised before their deaths in contrast to Odysseus' voiceless crew. Euripides' *Bacchae* and *Heracles* suggest that an eyewitness messenger could relate the murder and dismemberment in detail, humanising the victims by relating their reactions to the attack. Aristophanes' *Proagon* presents a (now fragmentary) parody of Euripides' Thyestean recognition scene in which the heads are displayed. This, alongside the extant parallels found in Agave's recognition of Pentheus' head in *Bacchae*, Heracles recognition of his

¹²⁷⁶ Hor. *Sat.* 1. 26-8. cf. Freudenberg for comic analogies between the witch and the cook in Plaut. *Pseud.* 868-72 and Hor. *Sat.* 2.8.95 (1995 pp.215-17).

¹²⁷⁷ Soph. *OT.* 1297-1306.

own sons' corpses and Medea's presentation of her sons' bodies to their father suggest that Thyestes' recognition took place on stage.

By contrast, Accius provides no extant passages in his corpus from which to draw parallels, but Cicero's reception of Thyestes' paternal advice in Accius' *Atreus* suggests that the son(s) could interact with their father and would have been humanised before Atreus' filicide. Moreover, Accius' *Atreus* stipulates that Thyestes must eat alone, suggesting the feast took place offstage and introducing sacrificial connotations. Seneca's *cena* deviates from the traditional staged performances of Attic and Republican tragedy. For although both Atreus' nepoticide and Thyestes' cannibalism are reported as offstage events, Atreus is cast as a night-witch by the messenger and stage-manages the recognition scene like Petronius' host Trimalchio, whilst Thyestes similarly appears as the satiric glutton. Thus Seneca draws on Latin literature that was not primarily intended for performance to fulfil the demand for violent action created by contemporary pantomime, making his *Thyestes* suitable for recitation, despite its dramatic structure.¹²⁷⁸

¹²⁷⁸ Virgil's *Aeneid* does seem to have been performed in part as a pantomimic libretto, given Nero's alleged appearance as Turnus (Suet. *Ner.* 54).

3.2: Irresolution

Having examined Atreus' motives, considered the potential supernatural influences and reconstructed the presentation of the feast, we should now weigh the presentation of Atreus as an avenger against the efficacy of his revenge. To what extent are the audiences of the Thyestes tragedies encouraged to sympathise, even revel, with Atreus? How might the stellar reversal vindicate or condemn Atreus' revenge?

Sophocles' *Fragmenta ex Incerta Fabula*

The stellar reversal following the feast of Thyestes is a perpetuating part of the mythical tradition.¹²⁷⁹ Despite being catalogued amongst Sophocles' *Incertarum Fabularum*, fr.738 not only refers to the reversal of the sun, but also associates it with kingship:

...κάνταῦθα πᾶς
προσκυνεῖ σφε τὸν στρέφοντα κύκλον ἡλίου...

...here also everyone bows down before him who reversed the circuit of the sun...¹²⁸⁰

The astronomer Achilles Tatius introduces fr.260a as from Sophocles' *Atreus*, which is consistent with Sophocles' stellar reversal described *The Greek Anthology* as the outcome of Atreus' revenge feast. Though fragments Sophocles' three Thyestes tragedies are listed under *Women of Mycenae*, *Thyestes in Sicyon* and *Atreus* interchangeably in later sources, whatever the original title, Achilles Tatius is describing Sophocles' dramatization of *Thyestes' Feast*.¹²⁸¹ But given that fr.738 the retrospective suggests that the chorus or a minor character is identifying the new location to a newcomer, I suggest this fragment is from *Thyestes in Sicyon*. This suggests that Sophocles' audience would know the cosmic impact of *Thyestes' Feast*, even if the theme were not underscored within *Thyestes' Feast* itself.

Sophocles' *Thyestes' Feast*

Returning to the fragments attributed to Sophocles' Thyestes plays, fr.260a seems to indicate a military coup:

ἦ Ἄτρεϊ:

¹²⁷⁹ Aesch. *Ag.* 1597ff., 1219ff.; Eur. *El.* 726ff., *IT* 816, *Or.* 1002.

¹²⁸⁰ Soph. 738 Radt.

¹²⁸¹ The fragment is attributed to Sophocles' *Atreus* in Ach. Tat. *Isag.* 28, 17 Maass= Soph. 738 Radt.) Σοφοκλῆς δὲ εἰς Ἄτρεα τὴν εὔρεσιν (sc. τῆς ἀστρονομίας) ἀναφέρει λέγων 'κάνταῦθα. . .' κτλ, Statil. Flacc. *A.P.* 9.98= Soph. T 181 Radt. 9.98, cf. Jebb, Headlam and Pearson 1917 p.93. See Introduction pp.9-14 above.

†μόνῳ†καὶ Ζεὺς τροπαῖος εἰσεκόμασεν τόποις

or Atreus:

And Zeus the god of trophies has stormed into the place.¹²⁸²

As suggested in chapter two, the military associations of this fragment may reflect the clash between the two brothers, rather than the adultery with Aërope and the rape of Pelopeia, which seem to be covered in Sophocles' other Thyestes tragedies.¹²⁸³ This is consistent with a victorious Atreus, indicating the finale of *Thyestes' Feast* and gendering Atreus' revenge as a male, military triumph. When compared with Sophocles' references to Zeus *tropaion* in *Trachiniae* and *Antigone*, it becomes clear just how problematic this victory is. For unlike these post-war tragedies, *Thyestes' Feast* is preoccupied with a domestic conflict exclusively, not with the domestic fallout of war, and the reference to Zeus *tropaios* underscores the perversity of this feud.

Elsewhere in Sophocles' tragedies, Zeus *tropaios* is invoked when Deianeira prays that Zeus does not orphan her children in war and is referred to by the chorus when they recall the clash of the brothers among the Seven against Thebes:

...ὦ πατὸς ἑνὸς
μητρός τε μιᾶς φύντε καθ' αὐτοῖν

the unhappy two, who, sprung of one father and one mother¹²⁸⁴

Thus Zeus *tropaios* may have military associations, but Sophocles introduces the god to underscore the domestic impact of war on orphaned children and feuding brothers: motifs that have a clear, if imperfect, overlap with Atreus' slaughter of Thyestes' sons. Structurally, fr.260a differs from the invocations in *Trachiniae* and *Antigone* because whereas their references to Zeus *tropaios* appear early on, to set the tone for the post-war setting, fr.260a suggests the arrival of Zeus *tropaios*, marking a climax in the brothers' conflict in *Thyestes' Feast*.

Thus if we locate this fr.260a at the climax of *Thyestes' Feast*, then the reference to Zeus *tropaios* suggests the fallout of Thyestes and Atreus' conflict is to come, as it does in *Trachiniae* and *Antigone*. But of course, the fallout of *Thyestes' Feast* must appear in a separate tragedy and Sophocles does deal with Thyestes' rape of Pelopeia in Sicyon. Though, as with Sophocles' Theban tragedies, we must not presume that

¹²⁸² Soph. 260a Radt.

¹²⁸³ E.g. Pindar. *Ol.* 10.78-83; Soph. *Antig.* 141-3, *Trach.* 303-5. Cf. Mikalson 2012 p.434 and Dowden 2006 p.64. cf. ch.2 p.188 above.

¹²⁸⁴ Soph. *Trach.* 302-6. Cf. Sophocles makes the same association in *Antigone*, introducing Zeus *Tropaios* (143) and repeating the exact phrase found in *Trachiniae* to describe Eteocles and Polyneices at (144-5).

Sophocles' Thyestes tragedies formed a cohesive trilogy, it is feasible that the closure of *Thyestes' Feast* would indicate the next cycle of revenge. For example, in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the first of the Theban tragedies according to the narrative of the myth, the chorus close the tragedy by summarising Oedipus' downfall¹²⁸⁵ followed by a gnomic statement on perpetual suffering,¹²⁸⁶ as does Sophocles' *Antigone*.¹²⁸⁷

So whilst fr.260a does not indicate a gnomic statement at the final closure of the play, the evocation of Zeus *tropaios* indicates that Atreus and Thyestes' conflict will provoke a tragic reaction. When compared with the closure of the Theban tragedies, Sophocles summarises the crisis of each tragedy and alludes to the perpetuation of suffering despite the disconnected nature of his Theban tragedies. But the tragedies of the Thyestean saga are part of a revenge cycle and thus *may* have had a closer causal connection than the Theban plays, given the reciprocity of revenge.

What we can conclude more securely is that Sophocles' three Thyestes plays, even if not connected as a trilogy, present the cycle of revenge in the popular myth and thus *Thyestes' Feast* would present an unresolved conflict for Sophocles' audience. Therefore, although Atreus' vengeance is fulfilled, the feud is not resolved.

Euripides' Thyestes

Turning to Euripides' *Thyestes*, we have a clear indication of Atreus' feast in the stellar reversal of fr.397b:

ΑΤΡΕΥΣ
δείξας γὰρ ἄστρον τὴν ἐναντίαν ὁδόν, δόμους τ' ἔσωσα καὶ τύραννος ἰζόμεν.

Atreus
By showing the contrary course of the stars, I saved my house and established myself as ruler.¹²⁸⁸

From Atreus' perspective the stellar reversal suggests that the revenge feast has established his rule definitively, rather than presenting a divine indication of his unnatural feast for Thyestes. Though the fragment indicates the reversal of the stars alone, this was most likely in combination with the reversal of the sun itself, as indicated in Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*.¹²⁸⁹ Moreover, in Euripides' *Electra* Zeus is credited with the

¹²⁸⁵ Soph. *OT*. 1524-7.

¹²⁸⁶ Soph. *OT*. 1528-30.

¹²⁸⁷ Soph. *Antig.* 1336, 1346-53.

¹²⁸⁸ Eur. 397b Kannicht.

¹²⁸⁹ Eur. *El.* 727-31; *Or.* 1001-6. Cf. Achilles cites fr.397b as showing that Euripides credited Atreus with discovering the retrograde 'movement' along the ecliptic of the sun and planets ('stars' here). Loeb editor suggests: He may have described the same

reversal, whereas in *Orestes* Strife is responsible.¹²⁹⁰ This suggests that Atreus casts himself in a divine role, whereas the later generations of Pelopids credit the gods with a reversal.

However, Euripides' tragedies often end with a reflection from the victim and a gnomic statement from the chorus, thus fr.397b was most likely not the final word in Euripides' *Thyestes*. For example, in *Medea* Jason laments his misfortune and invokes Zeus, in *Andromache* Peleus laments Andromache, and in *Phoenissae* Oedipus retreats into exile.¹²⁹¹ Euripides' unwitting filicides Heracles and Agave lament their own actions and go into exile.¹²⁹² Characters *ex machina* close two plays: Castor bids Orestes and Electra flee the Furies, Apollo closes *Orestes* with a clear resolution and suggestion of prosperity, and Theseus orchestrates an oath with Adrastus following Athena's intervention *ex machina*.¹²⁹³ In *Hecuba* and *Heraclidae* the remaining rulers orchestrate the exile of enemies: Agamemnon dismisses Polymestor and Hecuba, and Alcmene dismisses Eurystheus.¹²⁹⁴

Of these examples, the closest parallel with *Thyestes* is *Medea*, given that Medea kills and reveals her children to Jason knowingly, much like Atreus does to Thyestes. As discussed, the resolution of a *deus ex machina* does not befit the tragedy and the filicides (Heracles and Agave) are the victims of madness, unlike Atreus.¹²⁹⁵ Therefore, the revenge of Euripides' Atreus is thematically analogous with Medea, and if we subscribe to his thematic this parallel then *Thyestes* most likely ended with a reflection from Thyestes and a gnomic statement from the chorus.

Jason, however, makes no vow for revenge as Medea leaves, whereas Thyestes traditionally fathers Aegisthus to avenge the feast. Given that Thyestes leaves the feast to enter into exile, we might thus expect his speech to resemble Oedipus' departure in *Phoenissae*:

νῦν ἄτιμος αὐτὸς οἰκτρὸς ἐξελαύνομαι χθονός
being driven from the land all unhonoured and in piteous state¹²⁹⁶

phenomenon as brought about by Zeus on Atreus' behalf in *Electra* 727–36 and *Orestes* 1001–06, but the texts of these passages are corrupt and their sense uncertain.

¹²⁹⁰ Eur. *El.* 727-31; *Or.* 1001-6.

¹²⁹¹ Eur. *Med.* 1405-20; *Andr.* 1274-87; *Phoen.* 1758-63.

¹²⁹² Eur. *Bacch.* 1381-92; *Heracl.* 1421-6.

¹²⁹³ Eur. *El.* 1342-59; *Or.* 1682-93; *Supp.* 1227-34.

¹²⁹⁴ Eur. *Hec.* 1284-92; *Heracl.* 1045-55.

¹²⁹⁵ cf. Schiesaro's comparison of Seneca's Atreus with Medea, "another avenger acting as playwright" (2003 p.90).

¹²⁹⁶ Eur. *Phoen.* 1761.

That said, at this point Oedipus has nothing to avenge, his cursed sons have attacked one another, thus the parallel with the exile Thyestes is imperfect. Similarly, in Euripides' Pelopid plays *Electra* and *Orestes* characters appear *ex machina* to resolve the crises of these plays, which seems an unlikely end to *Thyestes*.

Though we have no analogous ending to help us reconstruct Thyestes' final words, Atreus' reflection on the stellar reversal suggests an ominous ending to *Thyestes*. For a thematic parallel we must return to Euripides' *Medea*, where the avenger takes control of tragic timing by escaping on Helios' chariot. Though Euripides' Medea does not reverse the cycle of night and day, she controls the closure of the tragic day following her revenge.¹²⁹⁷ The tragic timing of a single day is particularly pointed in Euripides' *Medea*: she negotiates a final day in Corinth from Creon,¹²⁹⁸ which Medea defines as her day of vengeance,¹²⁹⁹ the chorus suggests this day will seal Jason's fate,¹³⁰⁰ and Medea emotionally detaches herself from her children for a day of revenge.¹³⁰¹ So although Euripides' Medea does not reverse cosmic order as his Atreus does, she controls the time restriction Creon imposes on her by using her final day in Corinth to execute revenge and escape *ex machina* on the dawning sun in Helios' chariot.¹³⁰²

But, Medea escapes to Athens in exile from her homeland in Colchis and Corinth, and using her grandfather's chariot underscores her supernatural potency allowing her to transcend space and command the time Creon allotted to her. By contrast, Atreus does not flee, he has no supernatural genealogy and his revenge was designed to secure his kingship in Mycenae. Therefore, whereas Medea uses Helios' chariot to escape, Atreus' stellar reversal reorders the tragic world around him; unlike Medea, Atreus is unmoved. Whereas Medea's flight on the chariot demonstrates her *use* of time, Atreus' stellar reversal asserts his role as king and reverses time itself. As a result, in both cases the avenger controls the closure of the tragedy, Medea's crimes will not be avenged whereas Atreus' crimes will be addressed by the next generation.

¹²⁹⁷ *Ar. Poet.* 1449b13 cf. Trinacty on the time frame of a single day in Seneca's *Medea* (2018 p.187-90).

¹²⁹⁸ *Eur. Med.* 340, 355-6.

¹²⁹⁹ *Eur. Med.* 373-4.

¹³⁰⁰ *Eur. Med.* 1231.

¹³⁰¹ *Eur. Med.* 1248. Cf. Soph.748 Radt, Ennius 9 Ribbeck for the one-day timeframe suggested in his *Medea*.

¹³⁰² *Eur. Med.* 1321-2.

Ennius' *Thyestes* (in Epirus)

When considering irresolution in the Republican *Thyestes* tragedies, Ennius' *Thyestes* provides a starting point because its fragments present Thyestes' retrospective on the feast when arriving in Epirus. Thus Ennius' presentation of the consequences of Thyestes' banquet would have served as a backdrop to the feast Accius presented in his *Atreus* forty years later, be it through the reperformance of Ennius or circulation of his written tragedies.

Thyestes' arrival in Epirus is marked in fr. 2 and 4:

sed sonitus auris meas pedum pulsu increpat
But beats upon my ears a patter of footsteps.¹³⁰³

quemnam te esse dicam, qui tarda in senectute

And who pray shall I say you are, who thus
With aged lagging steps . . .¹³⁰⁴

Fr.2 and 4 seem to present the chorus' reaction to Thyestes' arrival on stage, suggesting his bedraggled appearance in exile.

As discussed above, Ennius' *Thyestes* is polluted by his cannibalism and withdraws from the chorus' approach. At his lowest ebb Ennius' *Thyestes* plots revenge:

Tu te Thyesta damnabis orbabisque luce propter vim sceleris alieni?

What, will you, Thyestes, utter your own doom, and rob yourself of the light of day, because of the violence of another's crime?¹³⁰⁵

Given that *Thyestes* (in Epirus) most likely included Thyestes' rape of Pelopeia to father Aegisthus, the play itself could not include Aegisthus' coming-of-age and murder of Atreus: the plot we find in later mythographers and on the vase of the Darius painter.¹³⁰⁶

As a result, Thyestes' intentions against Atreus seem to climax in his curses:

exsecratur luculentis sane versibus apud Ennium Thyestes primum ut naufragio pereat Atreus. durum hoc sane; talis enim interitus non est sine gravi sensu. illa inania:

ipse summis saxis fixus asperis, evisceratus,
latere pendens, saxa spargens tabo, sanie et sanguine atro
non ipsa saxa magis sensu omni vacabunt quam ille "latere pendens," cui se hic cruciatum censet optare. quam essent dura, si sentiret! nulla <autem> [Giusta]

¹³⁰³ Ennius 2 Ribbeck.

¹³⁰⁴ Ennius 4 Ribbeck.

¹³⁰⁵ Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 3.11.25. I have amended the Loeb translation to avoid the Christian values imposed by "sin".

¹³⁰⁶ See Fig. 2.

sine sensu. illud vero perquam inane:
neque sepulchrum quo recipiat habeat, portum corporis,
ubi remissa humana vita corpus requiescat malis
vides quanto haec in errore versentur: portum esse corporis et requiescere in
sepulcro putat mortuum; magna culpa Pelopis, qui non erudierit filium nec
docuerit quatenus esset quidque curandum.

In Ennius Thyestes utters curses in quite magnificent verses, praying first that
Atreus may die by shipwreck: a cruel prayer this no doubt; for such an end
involves grievous consciousness of death: the following means nothing:

Right on the top of rugged rocks transfixed and burst asunder,
Hung by the flank, the rocks with filth, gore and black blood he spatters.
The very rocks will not be more destitute of sensation than he “hung by the
flank”; for whom Thyestes imagines he is desiring torments. They would have
been cruel, had the victim the power of sensation; without sensation they are
non-existent. The following is perfectly meaningless:

Let him have no tomb to hide in like a haven for the body
Where, resigned when human life is, respite he may find from evils.
You see how deep the deception in which they live: he thinks the grave is the
body’s haven and that the dead man finds peace in the grave, to the great
discredit of Pelops for not having instructed his son and taught him what were
the limits of anxiety in each particular situation.¹³⁰⁷

Here Thyestes curses Atreus with an inglorious death, rather than plotting an imminent
revenge. Thus Ennius underscores the ‘left-overs’ from Thyestes’ feast, as Thyestes is
not only left alive to avenge the feast, but also extends the story by incriminating the
next generation, fathering Aegisthus rather than plotting his own revenge. Cicero’s
objections that the tortures are “meaningless” seem grounded in the fact that they occur
post mortem, thus cannot be felt. They are also meaningless on the grounds that
Thyestes is praying and not plotting; thus in no version of the myth does Atreus die in
this way.

Cicero reiterates this distinction that Thyestes prays rather than plans, when he
quotes this passage again in his speech against Piso:

in fortuna quadam est illa mors, non in poena putanda. Quae est igitur poena?
Quod supplicium? Quae saxa? Quae cruces?

A death like his must be set down to chance, not to retribution. What then is
retribution? What is punishment? What is stoning? What is the cross?¹³⁰⁸
Ennius’ Thyestes, then, is motivated if not efficient, and the fathering of Aegisthus in
Epirus implicates the next generation under the auspices of Atreus’ feast.

¹³⁰⁷ Ennius 11 Ribbeck= Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 1.107 Cf. Cic. *Pis.* 43; Non., p. 405.2–3 M. =
651 L.

¹³⁰⁸ Cic. *Pis.* 19. 44.

Ennius' *Thyestes: Incerti Nominis Reliquiae*

Ribbeck catalogues fr.34 in the *Incerti Nominis Reliquiae* section,¹³⁰⁹ though the Roman grammarian Festus attributes it to Ennius' *Thyestes*.¹³¹⁰ In fr.34 the stars are referred to as the province of Jove, though the stellar reversal is not made explicit:

—hunc igitur Ennius ut supra dixi nuncupat ita dicens:
aspice hoc sublime candens quem invocant omnes Iovem,
planus quam alio loco idem:
cur quod in me est exsecrabor hoc quod lucet quicquid est; hunc etiam
augures nostri, cum dicunt 'Iove fulgente, tonante': dicunt enim 'caelo
fulgente et tonante.'

it is he then who is addressed by Ennius in the following terms, as I said before:
Behold this dazzling vault of heaven, which all mankind as Jove
invoke—¹³¹¹

more explicitly than in another passage of the same poet:

Now by whatever power it be that sheds
This light of day, I'll lay my curse upon him!¹³¹²

It is he also whom our augurs mean by their formula 'should Jove lighten and
thunder,' meaning 'should the sky lighten and thunder.'¹³¹³

Cicero quotes this passage three times across *Natura Deorum* as evidence of divine presence.¹³¹⁴ In this instance, he compares the reference to the stars with Thyestes' curses, suggesting that both passages are from Ennius' *Thyestes*, though Cicero does not assert this explicitly. Thus it seems that Ennius included the stellar reversal, not only as a manifestation of Atreus' revenge but also as a reflection on divine providence in Epirus.

Accius' *Atreus*

Returning to Accius' tragedy, which deals with the feast itself, we find one clear reference to the recognition scene in the fragments Ribbeck attributes to Accius' *Atreus*,

¹³⁰⁹ Ennius 34 Ribbeck = Cic. *Nat. D.* 2. 2. 4 Cicero quotes a Latin translation of Eur. 941 Kannicht in the following lines, prompting Jocelyn and Valcknaer to attribute the Euripidean fragment to his *Thyestes*, despite its reference to *aither* (αἰθέρα), rather than stars (ἄστρον), as Cropp points out in his Loeb edition of Euripides' Fragments (2009 n.1).

¹³¹⁰ The quotation of Ennius' fragments also follows a rationalization of Saturn's teknophagy, explaining: "the fable is that he was in the habit of devouring his sons" (*ex se enim natos comesse fingitur solitus*), thus the continued quoting of Ennius' *Thyestes* seems thematically logical. Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.25.

¹³¹¹ Ennius 7 (1) Ribbeck²= Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.2.4.

¹³¹² Ennius 34 Ribbeck.

¹³¹³ Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.25.

¹³¹⁴ Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.4; 2.25; 3.4.

as Thyestes reappears on stage.¹³¹⁵ Yet the messenger's report of Atreus' nepoticide, which must have occurred before Thyestes' return, offers a false sense of finality:

Nuntius:
Epularum fidor, scelerum fratris **delitor**.

Messenger:
Maker of a feast. **Outblotter** of a brother's crimes.¹³¹⁶
The messenger's report focuses on Atreus' feast as a response Thyestes' adultery, rather than an impetus for a new cycle of revenge.¹³¹⁷

Atreus' reflection on the feast, most likely in dialogue with an onstage Thyestes, also suggests a resolution:

Atreus:
Natis sepulchro ipse est parens

Atreus
The sons have for their tomb
No other than a parent¹³¹⁸

Atreus makes clear that there is nothing to be done, emphasising the irreversible pollution created by the feast. Of course, these fragments arrive out of context and Thyestes' lost dialogue may have vowed revenge. Nonetheless, from Atreus and the messenger's perspective in these fragments the feast is final and there is no anticipation of an ongoing feud with the polluted Thyestes, nor does Accius seem to have written about Thyestes in Epirus.

Accius' Atreus: *Fragmentum ex Incerta Fabula*

More clues as to the ongoing feud of Tantalus' house can be found in Accius' *Fragmenta ex Incerta Fabula*. Such fragments cannot be securely attributed because they discuss the Tantalid household at large. Thus as Ribbeck suggests, they could fit *Clytemnestra*, *Pelopidae* or *Atreus*.¹³¹⁹ However, when compared to Cicero's quotation of the fragments we do find clues that attribute these lines to *Atreus*.

I have advocated the inclusion of fr.7 (*Pelop.* 4) in *Atreus* above, which emphasises the chain of inherent guilt in the Tantalid saga.¹³²⁰ Another such example

¹³¹⁵ Accius 16 Ribbeck= Cic. *De or.* 3. 58. 217; *Tusc. Disp.* 4. 36. 77. See ch.3 p.231.

¹³¹⁶ Accius 11 Ribbeck.

¹³¹⁷ Schiesaro "Atreus' retribution is especially apt in light of the firmly held belief that incest and cannibalism are homologous acts" (2003 p.94). cf. Pl. *Resp.* 571d, Parker 1983 p.98 and p.326, Burkert 1983 p.104.

¹³¹⁸ Accius 14 Ribbeck= Cic. *Off.* 3. 21. 84.

¹³¹⁹ Ribbeck² n. *ad I (Atr.16)*.

¹³²⁰ Ribbeck² 7 (*Pelop.4*)= Cic. *Nat. D.* 3. 90. See ch.2 pp.121-122 above.

can be found in fr.1 (*Atr.* 16), which Cicero uses in *De Officiis* to draw parallels between the ruler of Pelops' house and the ruler of Rome:

Possunt . . . cuiquam esse utiles angores, sollicitudines, diurni et nocturni metus, vita insidiarum periculorumque plenissima?—

Multi iniqui atque infideles regno, pauci benivoli;
inquit Accius. At cui regno? Quod a Tantalo et Pelope proditum iure obtinebatur.

Can worry, anxieties, fears by day and fears by night, and a life very full of plots and perils be advantageous for any man? Says Accius—

Many there are unfriendly and unfaithful

Unto a kingdom; few who wish it well;

But what kingdom? One which, handed down by Tantalus and Pelops, was rightfully held in possession.¹³²¹

Cicero's final comment on rightful possession alludes to Atreus' kingship, which Thyestes has usurped, particularly given that Atreus is the next in the succession Cicero presents, as the son of Pelops and grandson of Tantalus. If quoted from the *Pelopidae* or *Clyemnestra*, as Ribbeck suggests in his second edition, this allusion to rightful kingship would not be so clear-cut. In *Pelopidae* Atreus sons' do not attack the king himself, but rather his eldest bastard, in *Clytemnestra* Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are already wrongly holding the throne, two generations later than Pelops.

At this point in *De Officiis* Cicero quotes fr.16 to criticise Caesar, just as he repeatedly quotes Accius' *Atreus* to criticise Marc Antony in his *Phillipics*:¹³²²

Nam quanto pluris ei regi putas, qui exercitu populi Romani populum ipsum Romanum oppressisset civitatemque non modo liberam, sed etiam gentibus imperantem servire sibi coëgisset?

but how many more foes, think you, had that king who with the Roman People's army brought the Roman People themselves into subjection and compelled a state that not only had been free but had been mistress of the world to be his slave?¹³²³

Therefore, Accius' *fragmenta adespta* indicate the perpetuation of ancestral guilt in the Pelopid line (fr.7 (*Pelop.* 4)) and the precariousness of kingship (fr.1 (*Atr.* 16)). Though we cannot definitively attribute these fragments to Accius' *Atreus*, thematically speaking they suggest that Atreus' revenge will perpetuate, rather than resolve his conflict with Thyestes because of his ancestry and his role as king. In sum, the extant fragments attributed to Accius' *Atreus*, spoken by Atreus and the messenger, give a

¹³²¹ Ribbeck² I (*Atr.*16)= Cic. *Off.* 3. 21. 84. cf. *Ex Incertis Incertorum Fabulis* Accius 54-7 Ribbeck, for Pelops' line in Republican fragments.

¹³²² Cic. *Phil.* 1.34.

¹³²³ Ribbeck² I (*Atr.*16)= Cic. *Off.* 3. 21. 84.

false sense of closure, whereas the *fragmenta ex incerta fabula* reflect the revenge cycle that runs through the family line and the claim to kingship that leaves Atreus vulnerable to attack.

Irresolution and the Intervening Tradition: Horace Epode 5

Having compared Seneca's Atreus to Horace's Canidia and examined Thyestes' curses in Ennius' *Thyestes* (in Epirus), we should now consider how the Thyestean curses of the child in *Epode 5* draw on the Republican tragedians and contribute to Seneca's *Thyestes*. The child victim of *Epode 5*, buried and starved before an unobtainable feast, after Tantalus' fashion, hurls "curses worthy of Thyestes" (*Thyesteas preces*) against Canidia.¹³²⁴

At first sight, this suggests that like Ennius' Thyestes, Horace's child victim will exact revenge through curses rather than plotting his own attack, which the child is of course unable to do. But, *Thyesteas preces* uses the cannibal's name as a complementary adjective, thus may be better translated as "Thyestean curses," containing Thyestean themes without being modelled on a tragic Thyestes' maledictions against Atreus.

So though, like Ennius' Thyestes, Horace's child victim curses, he introduces Thyestean motifs rather than reiterating the curse of shipwreck suggested in Ennius fr.11:

venena maga non fas nefasque, non valent
convertere humanam **vicem**;
diris agam vos; dira detestatio
nulla expiatur victima;
quin, ubi perire iussus exspiravero,
nocturnus occurram Furor
petamque vultus umbra curvis unguibus,
quae vis deorum est Manium,
et inquietis adsidens praecordiis
pavore somnos auferam:
vos turba vicatim hinc et hinc saxis petens
contundet obscenas anus;
post insepulta membra different lupi
et Esquilinae alites;
neque hoc parentes heu mihi superstites
effugerit spectaculum.

Magic poisons have no power to alter right and wrong or to change the **vengeance** that overtakes men. I shall pursue you with curses; no sacrificial victim can bring release from a terrible malediction. More than that, when I have been forced to die and have breathed my last, **I shall haunt you by night as a Fury; my ghost will attack your faces with its hooklike claws—such a power**

¹³²⁴ Hor. *Ep.* 5. 86.

belongs to the spirits of the dead; and I shall squat on your tormented heart, banishing sleep and bringing you terror. In every street, from every side, the crowd will pelt you with stones until they have battered you to death, you filthy hags. Then the wolves and vultures of the Esquiline will scatter your **unburied limbs, and my parents, who will, alas, outlive me, will not fail to relish that sight.**¹³²⁵

Having advocated the potency of revenge, the boy promises to become an avenging Fury and a ghost: the very characters Seneca subsequently begins his *Thyestes* with. The death of the witches also presents an inversion of Thyestes' recognition scene. Whereas Seneca's Thyestes discovers his own sons' extremities to his horror, the boy's parents will be appeased with the limbs of their son's killers. Thus Horace's passage not only takes the form of Thyestes' curses in Ennius' tragedy, but its contents also distort the themes of the Thyestean myth to befit the horrific setting of *Epode 5*.

In sum, Horace's use of Thyestean curses in *Epode 5* draws on the irresolution Ennius emphasises in his *Thyestes* (in Epirus). As Horace's victim makes clear, revenge has a power of its own, and unlike Ennius' Thyestes, the curses of Horace's child promise to be particularly efficacious because he curses the witches as he is about to die. Moreover, the horror of *Epode 5* introduces supernatural avengers, the ghost and the Fury, whom Seneca adopts in his tragedy.

Seneca's *Thyestes*

Many have noted the lack of resolution in the closing acts of Senecan drama, not least because they never afford the chorus a concluding song.¹³²⁶ Returning to Seneca's *Thyestes* specifically we find, amidst the dramatic irony of Thyestes' recognition scene, clear indications that the feast will perpetuate a new revenge cycle. Schiesaro has noted the scope for continuity in the plot, given "Atreus' obsession with the repetition of revenge" in the text and Thyestes' survival.¹³²⁷ But the perpetuation of revenge is also clear from Seneca's subtext, as the imagery and characterisation within the scene recall the supernatural prologue.¹³²⁸

For example, Thyestes in his drunken state and not yet having recognised his sons' bodies, assumes the role of Tantalus:

Capio fraternae dapis
donum paternis vina libentur deis.

¹³²⁵ Hor. *Ep.* 5. 83-102.

¹³²⁶ Putnam 1995 p.277, Boyle 2011 *ad* 1061, Schiesaro 2003 pp.178, 189.

¹³²⁷ Schiesaro 2003 p.96 e.g. Sen. *Thy.* 246-8, 1112.

¹³²⁸ Cf. Schiesaro on Thyestes as a "drama of re-enactment," noting Seneca's use of again (*iterum*) throughout the prologue (2003 pp.27-8).

tunc hauriantur. sed quid hoc? nolunt manus
 parere, crescit pondus et dextram gravat
admotus ipsis Bacchus a labris fugit
circaque rictus ore decepto fluit
 et ipsa trepido mensa sibiluit solo.

I take the gift, as part of my brother's feast. The wine shall be poured to our fathers' gods, then drained. —But what is this? My hands will not obey, the weight increases and burdens my hand. **When raised, the wine flees from my very lips, cheats my mouth and swirls around my open jaws.** The table itself jumps with the ground's trembling.¹³²⁹

Just as Thyestes prepares a libation to his ancestral gods, the wine retreats, much like the unobtainable feast Tantalus is punished within the underworld.¹³³⁰ This presents Atreus' feast as a reiteration of Tantalus' cooking of Pelops and associates Thyestes' cannibalism with Tantalus' punishment. This thematic connection is bound in blood, given that Thyestes' wine, as Atreus has reminded the audience, is laced with *cruor* | *tot hostiarum*: Thyestes thus unwittingly offers his sons' blood to their own ancestor.¹³³¹ So, much like Accius' reference to the "Tantalid's vendetta" (*Tantalidarum interneconi*) in fr.7, Seneca positions the finale of his Thyestes in a cycle of ancestral guilt but with an explicit allusion to Tantalus' festal crime and punishment, as Thyestes himself claims:

stare circa Tantalum
 uterque iam debuimus

We two should have been set long ago on each side of Tantalus.¹³³²

Moreover, Seneca incorporates the stellar reversal as a reaction to the Thyestean *cena*, as Thyestes' realises "all the stars are in flight" (*fugit omne sidus*).¹³³³ Whereas in Euripides' fr.397b it is Atreus who claims to have caused the stars to flee, Seneca's Thyestes recognises the stellar reversal as a result of his cannibal feast:

Atreus:
 Epulatis ipse es impia natos dape
 Thyestes:
 Hoc est deos quod puduit hoc egit diem

¹³²⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 983-9.

¹³³⁰ In Latin mythology Tantalus' inability to grasp fruit became more prevalent, whereas in Greek myth only water fled his lips, note Horace (*Ep.* 17. 66) in particular where Tantalus is himself faced with a *cena*. See ch.2 p.123 above.

¹³³¹ Sen. *Thy.* 914-15. cf. Kyle on cult worship of dead ancestors: "Even ancestral ghosts (*manes paterni*) were seen as fearsome gods demanding attention" (1998 p. 130).

¹³³² Sen. *Thy.* 1011-12.

¹³³³ Sen. *Thy.* 995.

aversum in ortus

Atreus:

You yourself banqueted on your sons—a sacrilegious meal.

Thyestes:

This was what shamed the gods, this drove the day back to where it rises.¹³³⁴

Seneca conflates the reversal of the stars seen in Euripides' fr.397b with the retreating dawn, by describing Phoebus as "leader of stars" (*dux astrorum*), and Atreus as their peer.¹³³⁵ Schiesaro claims that the reversal of the sun in Seneca lasts for just a single day, concluding that "it was credited with a fundamental cosmological function" in the preceding Greek tradition.¹³³⁶ But, there is no indication of this reversal turning back within Seneca's *Thyestes*, rather suggesting "the order of things radically and permanently disjointed".¹³³⁷

Seneca presents just such a reversal of time in *Hercules Furens*: Hercules first apologises to Phoebus for bringing Cerberus up from the underworld and, having killed his family, questions:

unde tot stellae polum
implent diurnae?

Why are so many stars filling the heavens in daytime?¹³³⁸

This suggests that Seneca draws a causal connection between filicide and twilight, as the horrors associated with the underworld must not contaminate the light of day. Not only is Atreus' feast described as an affront to the gods, but it also distorts the closure of the tragic day. The sun never sets on Atreus and Thyestes' feud, which, as Schiesaro suggests, denies Thyestes' inauguration as king:

noctem quotiens summovet Eos,
regem totiens credite nasci.

Each time the dawn supplants the night,
each time consider a king newborn.¹³³⁹

But the reversal of the sun also suggests a return to the dawn at which Tantalus and the Fury appeared.

¹³³⁴ Sen. *Thy.* 1034-6; 885.

¹³³⁵ Sen. *Thy.* 836. cf. Lucian 48.12.

¹³³⁶ Schiesaro 2003 p. 95.

¹³³⁷ Trinacty 2018 p.193. Cf. Rosenmeyer on the role of the sun in Senecan tragedy (1989 p.160).

¹³³⁸ Sen. *HF.* 595-8; 911. Cf. Mader 1990 pp.20-25 and Sampson 2018 p.18 on *Oedipus*.

¹³³⁹ Sen. *Thy.* 613-14, Schiesaro 2003 p.169.

The chorus recognise this return to the start of the tragedy, longing for the night (*utinam nox sit*).¹³⁴⁰ Therefore, Seneca's stellar reversal distorts the tragic timing and emphasises the cyclical nature of the family's crimes by returning to the time of Tantalus' prologue. More immediately of course, we can see the price paid by *iratus Atreus* to exact his revenge.¹³⁴¹ Though Boyle suggests *ira* is an "other-destructive rather than a self-destructive force,"¹³⁴² as Schiesaro points out, Atreus is not satisfied by his revenge.¹³⁴³ Star concludes that the plotting in Seneca's "revenge tragedies" (*Agamemnon*, *Thyestes* and *Medea*) present the "clearest" examples of characters' consistent "self-defining".¹³⁴⁴ I suggest that the self-fashioning of Seneca's avengers surpasses a metatheatrical stage-management of their victims,¹³⁴⁵ and rather presents their irreversible initiation into their own role as avenger following the fulfilment of their revenge plans. Seneca himself emphasises the self-destructive nature of revenge in his opening of *De Ira*, culminating in the polyptoton typical of *Thyestes*:

hic totus concitatus et in impetu doloris est, armorum sanguinis suppliciorum
minime humana furens cupiditate, dum alteri noceat sui neglegens, in ipsa
irruens tela et **ultionis** secum **ultorem** tracturae avidus.

raging with a most inhuman lust for weapons, blood, and punishment, giving no thought to itself if only it can hurt another, hurling itself upon the very point of the dagger, and eager for **revenge** though it may drag down the **avenger** along with it.¹³⁴⁶

In this respect the *ira* of Seneca's Atreus is self-destructive, for though it is necessary, the characteristics of witchcraft Atreus espouses to furnish the feast transform his character. This transformation is reflected in the landscape, as the *adynata* of the *locus horridus* culminate in the stellar reversal, returning the scene to the dawn at

¹³⁴⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 827. Cf. Schiesaro 2003 p.172.

¹³⁴¹ As Inwood points out, self-address appears as an expression of will and self-fashioning in *De Ira*. 2.21.3-4 (2008 p.127). This is of course consistent with Atreus' repeated self-apostrophising throughout *Thyestes*, cf. Fitch and McElduff 2002 pp.19, 25 and Star 2012 p.76 n.50.

¹³⁴² Boyle 2017 ad 25-9.

¹³⁴³ Sen. *Thy.* 1112, Schiesaro 2003 pp.169-10. Cf. Henry on the similar self-destruction of Seneca's Hercules (1985 p.50).

¹³⁴⁴ Star 2012 p.69. Cf. Hook on the overt emotions of Seneca's characters, with specific reference to avenger Atreus and Medea (2000 pp.62-5) and Motto "most of Seneca's evil characters are adept actors" (2001 p.203).

¹³⁴⁵ cf. Boyle 1996 p.114, Erasmo 2004 l.2941.

¹³⁴⁶ Sen. *De Ira*. 3. 1-2, cf. Sen. *Thy.* 40-1, 87-95, 903-6. Boyle 2017 xlv.

which Tantalus' ghost appeared and fulfilling the promises made by the Fury.¹³⁴⁷ So although some associate Seneca's stellar reversal with Stoic cosmology, it is not as Mader suggests "the end of the world," but rather a reversion to the world of Seneca's supernatural prologue.¹³⁴⁸

Indeed, the final conflict between the aggressor Atreus and the punished Thyestes mirrors the dialogic prologue of the Fury and Tantalus. Boyle and Segal have each pointed out the verbal similarities between Tantalus and Thyestes,¹³⁴⁹ whilst Mader indicates that both are coerced into new roles.¹³⁵⁰ But we should also note that like the Fury, Atreus advocates his crime without limit and like Tantalus, Thyestes challenges the cruelty of the feast.¹³⁵¹ Structurally the dialogue between the warring brothers is more frenetic than that of the supernatural characters, given the use of *stichomythia* to convey the emotional pitch of the confrontation. Yet as Staley points out, whereas in Ennius' *Thyestes*, Thyestes clearly curses Atreus when in Epirus, Seneca's Thyestes refuses to curse Atreus after the feast.¹³⁵² Staley suggests that this presents Thyestes as a "Stoic father" rather than a "criminal brother," Seneca's Thyestes behaves stoically having eaten his son, just as Seneca suggests Harpagus should have done in *De Ira*.¹³⁵³ But in tragedy Thyestes' passivity prevents him from becoming a tragic hero with which an audience can sympathise.

The comparison between the dialogue of the supernatural prologue and the brothers' dialogue in the closing act is highlighted by the five-act structure of Seneca's tragedy.¹³⁵⁴ Schiesaro suggests that following the prologue the action of the play has been concluded within three internal acts.¹³⁵⁵ Trinacitty similarly argues that the hundred

¹³⁴⁷ Sen. *Thy.* 25-48a.

¹³⁴⁸ Mader 1983 p.67. cf. Mader 2003 p. 220, Volk 2006 p.187, Konstan 2016 pp.413-16.

¹³⁴⁹ Boyle 1997 p.55, Segal 2008 p.138 cf. Busch on the twinning of Tantalus' groaning ghost and the groans of Tantalus the younger once eaten (2009 p.269).

¹³⁵⁰ Mader 2014 p.156.

¹³⁵¹ Sen. *Thy.* 59-66, 89-95, 1050-1, 1052-68, 1100.

¹³⁵² Sen. *Thy.* 1074. Cf. Staley 1981 pp.244 -5. this is all the more striking in contrast to Horace *Epode* 5 where "The force of Thyestean oaths then conveys an almost proverbial sense of impassioned outrage" (Paule 2017 p.88).

¹³⁵³ Staley 2018 p.235, Sen. *De Ira* 3.15.1-2. Also that Seneca may be rejecting Ennius' characterisation for Thyestes, given his purported distaste for Ennius. Gell.*N.A.* 12.2.3-9. cf. Lefèvre 1985 p.1271.

¹³⁵⁴ Schiesaro's act structure resembles Greek Old comedy but not Greek tragedy (2003 p.65 n. 98 5) cf. Hor. *AP.* 189-90, Tarrant 1978 pp.218-21, Kohn 2012 p.124.

¹³⁵⁵ Schiesaro 2003 p.65.

lines of dialogue following Thyestes' recognition of the heads "problematizes the very act of closure".¹³⁵⁶ However, the recognition scene of the fifth act is essential to the fulfilment of both Atreus' revenge and the Fury's orders.¹³⁵⁷ Thus the fifth act is an exposition that mirrors the prologue.

In the end, Thyestes is twinned with Tantalus yet invokes the Furies, and Atreus is twinned with the Fury yet commits Thyestes to his descendants:

Thyestes:
Vindices aderunt dei: his puniendum vota te tradunt mea.
Atreus:
Te puniendum liberis trado tuis.

Thyestes:
The gods of vengeance will come: my prayers consign you to them for punishment.

Atreus:
I consign you to your children for punishment.¹³⁵⁸

Though Schiesaro describes Atreus' retort as "mocking disillusionment," Boyle rightly points out Atreus' last line foreshadows the next cycle of revenge, as Thyestes will rape his daughter Pelopeia to father an avenging son Aegisthus.¹³⁵⁹ Therefore, the brothers switch roles inasmuch as Atreus the avenger, having earlier invoked the furies himself, is now positioned as both the target of their revenge and the dupe of his own *double entendres*.¹³⁶⁰

In sum, Seneca uses the stellar reversal to frustrate tragic timing and position Atreus and Thyestes in the twilight dialogue of Tantalus and Fury, emphasising the cyclical nature of revenge. Though Seneca's Aegisthus attacks Agamemnon, not Atreus, Thyestes connects his son's crimes with those of Atreus in the prologue to Seneca's *Agamemnon*, claiming:

hic epulis locus.

¹³⁵⁶ Trinacty 2018 p.192 cf. Ov. *Met.* 6. 659, is followed by just fifteen lines of reaction and metamorphoses after Procne throws Itys' head.

¹³⁵⁷ Sen. *Thy.* 59-66.

¹³⁵⁸ Sen. *Thy.* 1111-13. Thyestes' twinning with Tantalus begins, as Schiesaro points out at Sen. *Thy.* 488-9, 100 (*sequor*), where he is led to the feast as Tantalus is led by the Fury (2003 p. 47), but is also reflected in the corporeal suffering of both Thyestes and Tantalus' ghost (Dodson-Robinson 2010 p.49).

¹³⁵⁹ Schiesaro 2003 p.68 and Boyle 1983 pp.217-28. Cf. Schiesaro 2009 p.228.

¹³⁶⁰ Sen. *Thy.* 250-4. cf. Schiesaro 2003 p.46.

this is the place for feasts.¹³⁶¹

Ch. 3.2: Conclusion

In sum, though it is unwise to pinpoint the final lines from any collection of fragments, the extant plays provide an expectation of the chorus' closing a Greek tragedy. The Republican tradition similarly suggests that Thyestes and Atreus would perceive the closure of the feast quite differently. fr.186 and 190 of Accius' *Atreus* offer a sense of completion, whereas Ennius' *Thyestes* (in Epirus) reflects the fall out of the feast explicitly.

Sophocles' *Thyestes* fragments cannot be definitively attributed to a tragedy on the adultery, the feast or Thyestes' exile in Sicyon; thus the closure of *Thyestes' Feast* remains particularly elusive. The evocation of Zeus *tropaios* at fr.260a, when compared with the same evocation to discuss Eteocles and Polyneices' fraternal feud in *Trachiniae*, introduces a motif of Civil War despite the domestic nature of the conflict. This, alongside the testimonia for three Thyestes plays, suggests that Thyestes will avenge Atreus' feast.

By contrast, Euripides wrote just one *Thyestes* on the feast, and whilst fr.397b suggests Atreus has resolved the conflict, this of course presents Atreus' expectation of resolution. We cannot offset Atreus' expectations with Thyestes' reaction or the chorus' concluding aphorism, for though we would expect these lines based on Euripides' extant works; no such lines from his *Thyestes* survive. Yet the stellar reversal in fr.397b, when compared to Euripides' *Medea*, suggests that Atreus too controls tragic timing despite not leaving his kingdom. For although the Pelopid feud continues, Atreus, like Medea, is rarely punished in the mythical tradition; the punishment is most frequently deferred to Agamemnon.¹³⁶²

Like Sophocles, Ennius wrote on Thyestes' rape of Pelopeia. Thus Ennius provides an example of Thyestes' retrospective on the feast and staged the consequences of Atreus' banquet. In particular, Ennius introduces Thyestes' reflection on the stellar reversal and introduces Thyestes' curses against Atreus, a motif that Horace exploits in the Thyestean curses of *Epode 5* and that Seneca's Thyestes explicitly rejects when faced with Atreus. Accius' *Atreus*, like Euripides' *Atreus*, suggests a false sense of closure in

¹³⁶¹ Sen. *Ag.* 12. For more detail on the structural unity between Seneca's *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon* consult: Boyle 1983 pp. 222-34, Boyle 1996 pp.34-43, Sampson 2018 p.16-17, Gunderson 2018 p.119, 123 and Shelton 1983 pp.159-61.

¹³⁶² See pp.5-8.

fr.16 when describing Thyestes as a tomb for his sons, as do the chorus in fr.11 when suggesting Atreus has outblotted his brother's crimes. But, the *fragmenta adespota* fr.7 (*Pelop.* 4) and fr.1 (*Atr.* 16) suggest that Atreus as a Tantalid king remains in a precarious position.

Only in Seneca's extant work do we find a clear juxtaposition of Atreus and Thyestes' expectations of closure. Whereas in the Greek tragedies we might expect a chorus to conclude, Seneca's Atreus steals the last line emphasising the outcome of his revenge and alluding to Thyestes' revenge to come. Though only Sophocles and Ennius dramatize the consequences of the feast, in Sicyon and Epirus respectively, Euripides, Accius and Seneca, dramatize the feast with an awareness of the aftermath. Though Atreus' satisfaction following the feast is apparent in Euripides' fr.397b and Accius' fr.190, Seneca's extant work reminds us: it is not the cycle of revenge that has come to an end, but Atreus' role as an avenger.

Ch 3: Conclusion

Having considered Sophocles' and Euripides' presentations of Thyestes' feast by analogy with their extant Greek dramas, the evidence suggests that the feast was unlikely to have been staged. But whereas Sophocles staged corpses on the *ekkyklema*, Euripides relates similar murders in *Heracles* and *Bacchae* through vivid messenger speeches and *Bacchae* in particular presents a precedent for the recognition of severed heads onstage. Sophocles' *Thyestes* suggests a lack of resolution, both in Sophocles' decision to dramatise other episodes of the revenge cycle and in the Civil War theme introduced by Zeus *tropaios* fr.260, which represents the warring brothers in *Trachiniae*. Euripides' *Thyestes* fr.397b presents Atreus' stellar reversal and thus, like Euripides' *Medea*, gives a horrifying sense of closure by suggesting that Atreus' crimes have changed the natural order: that he will go unpunished.

The Republican tragedies leave few clues as to how Atreus' butchery was executed. Accius' *Atreus* fr.10 suggests Thyestes must eat alone, indicating a sacrificial, offstage meal. Ennius' *Thyestes*, however, presents Thyestes' retaliation as he travels to Epirus to rape his daughter Pelopeia and father an avenging son: Aegisthus. So Accius' audience would be aware of Atreus' feast as a precursor to Thyestes' revenge in the mythical tradition, though little evidence survives in Accius' attributed fragments to suggest how the play ended. Nonetheless, the fragments from Ribbeck's *Incerti Nominis Reliquiae* (fr.34) and *Fragmentum ex Incerta Fabula* (fr.18) each indicate the perpetual suffering following Thyestes' feast and on those grounds, I have attributed them to Ennius' *Thyestes* and Accius' *Atreus* respectively.

What can be more readily asserted is that Atreus' feast resonated in Latin poetry, as demonstrated in Horace's use of Thyestean curses and references to Thyestes in Imperial satire, such as Persius. So when compared with the Greek tradition, Euripides' extant works indicate that Atreus' butchery could be reported and Thyestes' recognition of the feast could be staged, as is the case in Seneca. Thus Seneca's *Thyestes* is thus not uniquely violent or bloody, but Seneca's descriptions of the feast also draw inspiration from the night-witch scenes in Horace, the gluttons in satire and the occult crimes of the emperors. Though in the closing lines Seneca's Thyestes promises revenge, Atreus does not recognise the threat but closes the tragedy by underscoring his own success and unwittingly anticipates Thyestes' fathering of Aegisthus.

Main Conclusion

Having considered the dramatization of both Atreus' motives and his revenge across the fragments of Sophocles, Euripides, Ennius and Accius, in comparison to Seneca's extant *Thyestes*, I will first summarise my findings. Then I will evaluate my findings in light of the revenge terms set out in the introduction: ποινή, τιμωρός, *ultor* and *vindex*. Finally, I will consider the contribution this thesis makes to the study of Greek tragedy, tragic fragments, and Roman drama, especially Senecan tragedy.

Unlike previous studies my thesis has reconstructed the Thyestes tragedies, in addition to other tragedies from the family myth. To do this I have examined the sources of the fragments, analogous stories, the idiosyncrasies of the Attic tragedians and the quotations of the Republican plays. I have included, where necessary, the *fragmenta ex incertis fabulis* that pertain to Thyestes' feast and make a case for their attribution to the various Thyestes tragedies. My methodology reconstructed the fragments using the available evidence for each author, rather than recreating one Thyestes with that of another tragedian. This has allowed me to contextualise each tragedian's fragments not only within the tragic action but also within the performance context, political climate, mythical trend and literary canon of their own time, to ultimately evaluate how an Attic king could be accepted as an avenger.

Summary of Findings

This thesis has reconstructed the motivation and execution of Atreus' revenge in Sophocles', Euripides', Ennius' and Accius' lost Thyestes tragedies, in order to examine how the dramatization of Thyestes' feast and related myths may reflect the anxieties of contemporary audiences. The tripartite structure has weighed character motives against supernatural influences and considered the representation of violence. I have made the case that Thyestes tragedies in their mythical subtexts, characters and conventions can vary wildly from Seneca's. In so doing, I hope to have challenged the use of Seneca's *Thyestes* as a model for reconstructing preceding dramatizations.

In chapter one I first compared my reconstructions based on my above methodology against contemporary views of adultery and dramatizations of Aërope's affair, to uncover how the increasingly politicised view of infidelity among audiences rewrote Atreus the avenging cuckold to Atreus the avenging tyrant. This uncovered how Atreus deliberated his revenge before the audience in dialogue with an accomplice in Euripides' *Thyestes*, and a servant in Sophocles' and Accius' plays. This allowed me to

reconstruct Atreus' deliberation of revenge as a response to the personal adultery in the Greek plays and the political affront in what survives of the Roman tragedies, which in Accius' *Atreus* suggests a submission to *furor*.¹³⁶³ Such deliberation in dialogue also gendered Atreus' revenge plan as motivated by male concerns such as kingship and paternity, in contrast to the monologues of female avengers such as Sophocles' Procne and Euripides' Medea, who also punish sexual transgression for female motives such as displacement through marriage.

Much of the thesis considered the influence of the supernatural in each tragedian's Thyestes and, in turn, the impact of Thyestes' crime on the plots of extant Pelopid plays. This differentiated Seneca's divine prologue from the Greek examples, in which the extant evidence suggests no supernatural impetus appeared on stage and Tantalus' crime was less thematically relevant. The extant tragedies allowed me to differentiate stories of ancestral crimes presented to the audience on the one hand, and characters' reflections on inherent guilt on the other, as extrinsic and intrinsic motivators for the characters in the drama.

By reconstructing the fragmentary Tantalid plays and examining each tragedian's references to ancestral crimes in the extant tragedies, I made the case that Seneca's prologue is uniquely programmatic by presenting Tantalus as enduring a festal punishment for a festal crime, which was not the case in the preceding mythical tradition. Though Sophocles wrote a *Tantalus*, there is no evidence to suggest that the Greek Thyestes tragedies would have featured Tantalus, nor is there evidence in the Greek mythical tradition to indicate that Tantalus' crime and/or punishment were typically festal, and thus thematically relevant to Atreus' revenge banquet. Instead, the Greek tragic tradition emphasised the crime of Thyestes' father Pelops, who kills the charioteer Myrtilus, despite having promised him a night with his bride. Sophocles and Euripides each dramatise this episode in their *Oenomaus* tragedies and allude to it in their Tantalid plays: Sophocles' *Electra*, Euripides' *Electra*, *Orestes*, *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*. So, unlike Seneca's Atreus, a Greek Atreus would not be presented with a family tradition of transgressive feasts, nor would he aim to surpass such an ancestor, as the desire to surpass ancestral crimes does not appear in Greek tragic presentations of inherent guilt.

¹³⁶³ Accius 3 Ribbeck.

Similarly, both Ennius and Accius dramatised the ancestral crime of Pelops in their *Oenomaus* tragedies, and the fragments of both Ennius' *Thyestes* and Accius' *Atreus* reflect on the ancestral crime of Pelops. Tantalus' "boastful tongue" is, however mentioned in Accius' *fragmenta ex fabula incerta* (fr.58), suggesting that Tantalus' crimes were recalled in the tragedy of a later generation: I suggest Accius' *Atreus*.¹³⁶⁴ Unlike the Attic tragedians, Accius' *Pelopidae* also dramatised Atreus and Thyestes' murder of Chrysippus based on Lycophron's Hellenistic *Pelopidae*, emphasising the brothers' bloodguilt. In keeping with the appropriation of Thyestes fragments in political commentary and Roman historiography, we find the Golden Ram from Accius' *Atreus* as a symbol of a fraternal power struggle in *Brutus*, Accius' *fabula praetexta*. So whereas the Golden Fleece has a broader tradition in Greek myth outside of Thyestes' story, the symbolism of the Golden Ram is particularly Thyestean given the tyrannical feud it initiates between Atreus and Thyestes, and thus the male Golden Ram is readily applied to the clash between Tarquin and Brutus' political drama.

In chapter three I challenged the assumption that Seneca's *Thyestes* was uniquely bloody by reconstructing Sophocles' and Euripides' *Thyestes* in accordance with their extant depictions of violence. When turning to Latin examples, I examined not only the fragments of Accius' *Atreus* and Ennius' *Thyestes* (in Epirus), but also their legacy in Horace. From there, I explored intertextuality with both pantomime and non-performative Latin literature to understand Seneca's theatre of violence, re-reading Seneca's *Thyestes* as a tragedy that is innovative but not incongruous in comparison with what survives of the fragmentary Thyestes tragedies.

Reconstructing Revenge

As discussed in the introduction, the Greek revenge terms focus on reciprocity, justice fitting the crime (δική) or recompense (ποινή). Thyestes' adultery was more frequently dramatised in Greek tragedy, appearing in Euripides' *Aërope* and, I suggest, in one of Sophocles' Thyestes plays named here as *Thyestes' Adultery*. Thus for Euripides' and Sophocles' audiences the initial crime was well emphasised, and thus demanded such recompense in the Thyestes plays.

Aërope's adultery also demands the restoration of Atreus' honour (τιμωρία), another concept rooted in the Greek concept of revenge. Thus Atreus' pollution of Thyestes through the cannibalistic banquet reasserts Atreus' role as king. In all extant

¹³⁶⁴ Accius 58 Ribbeck.

variants of the myth Aërope is killed, the Golden Fleece is returned and Thyestes is exiled *before* Atreus cooks Thyestes' sons. Therefore, Atreus' revenge feast primarily satisfies the need to restore honour, and this is reflected both in the way Atreus plots the revenge publicly with an interlocutor and the way Atreus' banquet initiates the stellar reversal in both Sophocles' and Euripides' *Thyestes*.

When considered out of context the Greek revenge terms seem dispassionate, suggesting a methodical reaction. Yet, when we compare the Greek fragments to the extant texts this is clearly not the case. Sophocles' *Thyestes* fr.247 indicates that one must go "beyond justice" on a gods' recommendation, surpassing the initial injury, which suggests that spite has its place in the Greek concept of revenge.¹³⁶⁵ Indeed, as we saw in Sophocles' *Electra*, Orestes, having avenged the murder of his father, displays the body of his mother to her lover with relish. Similarly, in Euripides' extant dramas we find graphic depictions of violence and in Aristophanes' *Proagon* the parody of *Thyestes* suggests that Euripides' Atreus enjoyed a triumphant recognition scene.

By contrast, the Latin terms for revenge became more indicative of personal spite and excessive violence in the Republican period.¹³⁶⁶ For example *ultor*, which is particularly associated with Civil War following Augustus' establishment of the temple to Mars Ultor, glorifies the violence of war presenting revenge in a military context. Atreus' revenge is presented as just such an assertion of strength and dominance, not only in the fragments of Accius' *Atreus*, but also in the way his Atreus' *oderint dum metuant* maxim was allegedly quoted by Roman despots and certainly used by Cicero to provide political commentary.¹³⁶⁷ *Vindex* reflects interpersonal spite, which is best reflected in the curses hurled by Thyestes in Ennius' *Thyestes* (in Epirus), but can also be found in the alliteration of Accius' *Atreus* who chews his revenge plan: *meos malis miser manderem*.¹³⁶⁸

Therefore, the *Thyestes* tragedies satisfy the appetite for revenge on stage in Greece and Rome. The Greek vocabulary for revenge does not fully reflect the spite and spectacle we find in either the extant tragedies or the fragments of Euripides and Sophocles. However, the Republican tragedies reflect both the personal (*vindex*) and

¹³⁶⁵ Soph. 247 Radt.

¹³⁶⁶ See Intro. p.4 above.

¹³⁶⁷ Accius 5 Ribbeck.

¹³⁶⁸ Accius 16 Ribbeck.

martial (*ultor*) revenge suggested in the Latin, given the content of the fragments and their quotation outside the drama.

Contribution and Recommendations

Until now little space in scholarship has been afforded to a reconstruction of the Attic Thyestes tragedies, which has limited the methods of reconstruction to a comparison with Seneca. As indicated in the introduction, preceding versions of the myth have been outlined in introductions to editions of Seneca's *Thyestes*, and articles have considered the political applications of the Republican Thyestes plays individually.

However, this thesis has provided the space to reconstruct the tragedians on their own terms, using their own works and quotations of the texts. It has allowed for the *fragmenta ex incertis fabulis* with Thyestean content to be considered and compared to the attributed fragments in order to give a fuller impression of the tragedies and the tragedians' idiosyncrasies. Reconstructing the Thyestean tragedies together has enabled me to compare and contrast dramatizations not only of the feast, but the myth as a whole, by reconstructing tragedies on other elements of the myth such as Sophocles' *Tantalus*, Euripides' *Kressai* and the *Oenomaus* plays of each. This has presented key trends in the myth such as Euripides' dramatization of Aërope as a whore in *Kressai*, emphasising her adultery with Thyestes and the prominence of Pelops' non-thematic ancestral crimes in *Oenomaus*, given that Sophocles' *Tantalus* dramatises a non-festal crime.

Therefore, the range of texts included has allowed me to highlight points of contrast with Seneca's thematically compressed tragedy. Whereas Seneca's Tantalus returns from his starvation punishment to watch the feast at the outset, the Greek Tantalus performed non-festal crimes, suffered non-festal punishments and is rarely alluded to in the extant plays of his family, whereas Pelops is regularly recalled. Although Aërope is not mentioned by name in Seneca's complete *Thyestes*, she is characterised as a whore throughout Greek tragedy such as Euripides' *Kressai* and Sophocles' *Ajax*, thus the affront of Aërope's adultery appears more prominent in the Greek tradition. Whilst the Fury appears in the prologue of Seneca's *Thyestes*, the extant Greek tragedies do suggest that a revenge goddess must appear in the action, as Aeschylus' *Eumenides* or Euripides' *Lyssa* do, and thus diminish Atreus' responsibility, a structural problem that would equally apply to Accius' *Atreus* whose protagonist is credited with full responsibility by Cicero.

As discussed in the introduction, to give a complete impression of the lost Thyestes tragedies the next phase of this research will include the fourth-century Thyestes tragedies considered by Wright and the Thyestes tragedies of minor Republican tragedians explored by Erasmo.¹³⁶⁹ Space has not been made for these examples here because the surviving fragments do not clearly pertain to the revenge theme, nor is there a wealth of material to reconstruct by analogy. Within a monograph the fragments could be incorporated to provide context between the Greek and Republican fragments. This would allow for an exploration of developments in fourth-century drama and a biographical reading of the politician-tragedians writing Thyestes tragedies in Rome.

Instead, the methodology developed here could be applied to reconstruct other fragmentary plays of Euripides and Sophocles by analogy with their extant tragedies, giving a fuller picture of their tragic works. My analysis of the quotation context of the Republican tragedies, for example, unpacks the *apparatus criticus* of Ribbeck's editions in contrast to *Warmington's Remains of Old Latin*, to use Cicero's appropriation as a means of reconstruction and challenge the presentation of the fragments in reference texts. The incorporation of Roman performance genres such as mime, pantomime and *fabula praetexta* have allowed me to consider the shape of Roman tragedy in the performance contexts of both the Republican and the Imperial periods in direct contrast to the Attic tragedies.

As a result, having appraised most recent advancements in the study of fragments and Seneca, this thesis has developed a new approach to reconstructing lost tragedy and presents a re-examination of Seneca's role in the classical canon. Seneca's *Thyestes* has earned him a reputation for violence and hyperbole presumed to be unprecedented by Greek and Republican authors. Yet this study has shown that the surviving *Thyestes* is not uniquely bloody but rather that, much like his Atreus, Seneca uses every tool at his disposal to outdo the violence of his forebears.

¹³⁶⁹ See n.5 p.2.

Appendices

List of Fragmentary Plays

511-476 BC Phrynichus *Tantalus*

467 BC Pratinas *Tantalus*

c 460s BC Aristias *Tantalus*

454-406 BC Aristarchus *Tantalus*

468-14 BC Sophocles *Oenomaus*

468-406 BC Sophocles *Tantalus*

410 BC Sophocles *Thyestes Adultery* (A), *Thyestes Feast* (B), *Thyestes at Sicyon* (Γ)

c. 438 BC Euripides *Kressai*

c. 425 BC Euripides *Thyestes*

c.409 BC Euripides *Oenomaus*

416-406 BC Agathon *Aërope*

416-406 BC Agathon *Thyestes*

c. 400BC Diocles *Thyestes*

380-340 BC Apollodorus *Thyestes*

403-323 BC Diogenes of Sinope *Thyestes*

384-22 BC Carcinus *Aërope*

384-22 BC Carcinus *Thyestes*

c.370 BC Chaeremon *Thyestes*

380-40 BC Theodectes [*Thyestes*]

c.365 BC Aeschines *Thyestes*

364-322 BC Cleophon *Thyestes*

362-321 BC Diogenes of Sinope *Atreus* or *Thyestes*

c. 285 BC Lycophron *Pelopidae*

169 BC Ennius *Thyestes* (in Epirus)

130 BC Accius *Atreus*

140-86 BC Accius *Brutus*

140-86 BC Accius *Pelopidae*

pre 90 BC Pomponius Bononiesis *Atreus*

40s/ 30s BC Cassius Parmensis *Thyestes*

29 BC Varius *Thyestes*

19-13 BC Sempronius Gracchus *Thyestes*

pre AD 34 Mamercus Aemilius Scaurus *Atreus*

pre AD 60 Pomponius Secundus *Thyestes*

AD 69-79 Curiatius Maternus *Thyestes*

Thyestes Dramas of the Fifth and Fourth Centuries

454-406 BC Aristarchus *Tantalus*

καὶ ταῦτα ἴσον δὲ μὴ
ἴσον δ' ἔρευνᾶν, ἐξ ἴσου δὲ μὴ εἰδέναι.
πλέον γὰρ οὐδεν οἱ σοφοὶ τῶν μὴ σοφῶν
εἰς ταῦτα γινώσκουσιν. εἰ δ' ἄλλοθ' λέγει
ἄμεινον ἄλλος, τῷ λέγειν ὑπερφέρει

In this matter it makes no difference
whether you speak well or whether you
don't. Whether you try to find things out
or fail to find out anything at all, it's all the same.
Wise men do not understand any
more about these matters than those who
are not wise. If anyone claims to be better
than anyone else, he is an excellent speaker [but]...

Aristarchus 1b. Snell.

416-406 BC Agathon *Thyestes*

κόμας ἐχειράμεσθα μάρτυρας τρυφῆς,
ἧ που ποθυμεινὸν χρῆμα παιζούση φρενί.
ἐπώνθμοω γοῦν εὐθὺς ἔσχομεν κλέος,
Κούρητες εἶναι, κουρίμου χάριν τριχός.

We sheared our hair witness to our love of luxury,
a thing, I suppose that is desirable to a playful mind,
Immediately, when we gained a reputation in accordance with the name
that is to say we are Kouretes, named after our shorn hair.

Agathon 3. Snell.

c.370 BC Chaeremon *Thyestes*

ρόδ' ὄξυφεγγῆ κρίνεσιν ἀργεννοῖς ὁμοῦ
A bright shining rose together with white lillies.

Chaeremon 8. Snell.

362-321 BC Diogenes of Sinope *Atreus or Thyestes*

ΑΤΡΕΥΣ
ἀνθρωποφαγία

Atreus:
Man-eating

Diogenes of Sinope 1. Snell.

μηδ' ἀνόσιον εἶναι τὸ καὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπέων κρεῶν ἄψασθαι, ὡς δῆλον ἐκ τῶν ἀλλοτρίων
ἔθῶν, καὶ τῷ ὀρθῷ λόγῳ πάντ' ἐν πᾶσι καὶ διὰ πάντων εἶναι λέγων. καὶ γάρ <τι> ἐν τῷ

ἄρτω κρέως εἶναι καὶ ἐν τῷ λαχάνῳ ἄρτου καὶ τῶν σωμάτων τῶν λοιπῶν ἐν πᾶσι διά τινων ἀδήλων πόρων καὶ ὄγκων εἰσκρινομένων καὶ συνατμιζομένων, ὡς δῆλον ἐν τῷ Θυέστη ποιεῖ, εἴ γε αὐτοῦ αἱ τραγωδίαί καὶ μὴ Φιλίσκου τοῦ Αἰγινήτου ἐκείνοθ γνωρίμου ἢ Πασιφῶντος τοῦ †Λουκιανοῦ, ὃν φησι Φαβωρῖνος ἐν Παντοδαπῇ ἱστορία μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν αὐτοῦ συγγράψαι.

And he saw no impropriety either in stealing anything from a temple or in eating the flesh of any animal; nor even anything impious in touching human flesh, this, he said, being clear from the custom of some foreign nations. Moreover, according to right reason, as he put it, all elements are contained in all things and pervade everything: since not only is meat a constituent of bread, but bread of vegetables; and all other bodies also, by means of certain invisible passages and particles, find their way in and unite with all substances in the form of vapour. This he makes plain in the Thyestes, if the tragedies are really his and not the work of his friend Philiscus of Aegina or of Pasiphon, the son of †Lucian, who according to Favorinus in his Miscellaneous History wrote them after the death of Diogenes.

Diogenes of Sinope 1d. Snell= Diog. L. 6.3.73. tr. by Hicks 1925.

380-40 BC Theodectes [*Thyestes*]

ἀλλ' ὃ τάλαν Θυέστα, καρτέρει δάκνων
ὀργῆς χαλινόν, παρακελεύομαι δέ σοι
τεθηγμένῳ νῦν, ἀλλ' ὁ μυρίος χρόνος
τὰ πάντ' ἀμουροῖ χυπὸ χεῖρα λαμβάνει

But, oh wretched Thyestes, bear up with
fortitude, taking anger's bit between your
teeth. At this moment your rage is a
keenly-whetted knife, but I give you this advice:
measureless time brings all things
to obscurity and takes them in its grip.

Theodectes 9 Snell.

List of Figures



Fig.1

Apulian calyx-krater, ca. 330s BC, Darius painter. Boston 1987.53.

Thyestes is exposing the child Aegisthus, or perhaps trying to pull the child back from exposure, as suggested by Taplin. The personification of Sicyon sits in the upper right-hand corner. Aegisthus is a product of Thyestes having raped his daughter Pelopeia, depicted on the right. Pelopeia is being comforted by Amphithea, queen in Sicyon. Above is Apollo, the god who prophesied the rape of Pelopeia and the Erinys, depicting the revenge cycle to which this story belongs. Pan and Artemis sit in the top left corner.

Taplin 2007 pp.105-7.



Fig. 2:

Apulian red figure amphora. ca. 330- 310 BC. Darius Painter. Boston 1991. 437b.

Either Thyestes or Aegisthus (Thyestes' son by his daughter Pelopeia) has killed Atreus. Thyestes carries a sword; Aegisthus stands to the left of Thyestes with his spear erect and a sword in hand. Aegisthus' sword is presumably the one that Thyestes dropped when he raped Pelopeia, which in turn facilitated recognition between Thyestes and his estranged son Aegisthus who was exposed and possibly fostered by Atreus. Aegisthus looks to his mother Pelopeia on the far left. To the right of Atreus' corpse, which is upended on the throne, Poinē (punishment/ revenge) hovers and looks to two maidservants.

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Fig. 3:

Apulian calyx crater. ca. 330- 310 BC. Darius Painter. Munich. 3297.

Hades and Persephone in their palace (centre) the judges of the underworld sit to the right of the palace (top right), Orpheus is present with his lyre (top left) Sisyphus pushing the stone taunted by Hermes (bottom left), Cerberus taunted by Hecate (bottom centre) Tantalus grasping for water (bottom right, enlarged above).

Available: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/imbrowser> [Accessed: 19/08/18]



Fig. 4:

AD 5-6 C. Berlin. 2497.

Carved ivory plaque from Trier, Germany depicting a pantomime dancer holding at least three closed-mouth pantomime masks

Available: <http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus> [Accessed: 21/08/18]

List of Abbreviations

- A.L.* = Baehrens, A. 1886. *Anthologia Latina. In: Fragmenta poetarum Romanorum.* Lipsiae: Teubner.
- BNP*= eds. Salazar, C.F. and Gentry, F.G. 2012. *Brill's New Pauly.* Leiden: Brill.
- CAG* = ed. Reimeri, G. 1882. *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca.* Berolini.
- FGrH*= ed. Jacoby, F. 1923. *Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker.* Leiden: Brill.
- Liddell and Scott = eds. Liddell, H.G. and Scott, R. 2006. *Greek-English Lexicon.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- LIMC*= eds. Ackermann, H.C. et. al. 1981. *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae.* Zürich: Artemis-Verl.
- Mar. Par.* = ed. Jacoby, F. 1904. *Das Marmor Parium.* Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchandlung.
- OCD* = eds. Hornblower, S. and Spawforth, A. 1996. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary.* 3. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- OCEL*= ed. Birch, D. 2009. *Oxford Companion to English Literature.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- OLD* = ed. Glare, P.G.W. 1969. *The Oxford Latin Dictionary.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- PCG* = eds. Kassel, R. and Austin, C. 1985. *Poetae Comici Graeci.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- PDM*= ed. Betz, H.D. 1992. *Papyri Demotici Magici. In: The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- PEG*= ed. Bernabé, A. 2004. *Poetae Epici Graeci. Testimonia et fragmenta.* Walter de Gruyter.
- PEG*= ed. West, M.L. 2003. *Poetae Epici Graeci. Testimonia et fragmenta.* Harvard. Harvard University Press.
- PGM*= ed. Betz, H.D. 1992. *Papyri Graeci Magici. In: The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- P.Oxy*= eds. Grenfell, P and Hunt, S. 1871-1934. *Oxyrhyncus Papyri.* London.
- TrGF*= eds. Snell, B, Radt, R and Kannicht, R. 1986-2004. *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Ribbeck=ed. Ribbeck, O. 1871. *Tragicorum Romanorum Fragmenta.* Lipsiae: Teubner.
- Ribbeck²= ed. Ribbeck, O. 1907. *Tragicorum Romanorum Fragmenta.* 2 edn. Lipsiae: Teubner.

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