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monica centanni

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SOMMARIO

- 7 | ORESTEA 2.0
a cura di Alessandra Pedersoli e Stefania Rimini
- 17 | GHOSTS EVOKING GHOSTS
by Monica Centanni
- 37 | DIONYSUS, A TWOFOLD MASTER OF CEREMONY IN JAN FABRE'S *MOUNT OLYMPUS*
Freddy Decreus
- 49 | IL RISVEGLIO DEL MITO
a cura di Stefania Rimini
- 57 | RELOADING CLITENNESTRA*
Stefania Rimini
- 65 | ORESTE IN BRIANZA
Maddalena Giovannelli
- 69 | GASSMAN, PASOLINI E I FILOLOGI. *ORESTIADE* A SIRACUSA 1960: SAGGIO-DOCUMENTARIO
a cura di Monica Centanni e Margherita Rubino (2005).
- 103 | *MYSTERIUM PASOLINI: TRA PETROLIO E CALDERÓN*
Bruno Roberti

GHOSTS EVOKING GHOSTS

Phantoms of regality on Aeschylean stage, from *Persians* to *Oresteia**

by Monica Centanni

I. DARIUS' PHANTOM (ON STAGE) IN THE *PERSIANS*

The scenic backdrop is Susa, in front of the palace of the King of Kings. The Chorus of old Faithfuls of the Crown and the Queen are on stage, anxious because too much time has passed since Xerxes left for the West to conquer Greece, and they have had no news of the King. In the parodos, the accents are triumphal but the rhythmic step is that of a mournful funeral procession. In the first episode, the Queen tells the Chorus the story of her allegorical dream: the figures of Hellas and Persia, two beautiful women appearing as mares, "blood sisters", but the unruly Hellas rebels against Xerxes' yoke and overturns his wagon. After the Messenger brings the report of the incredible defeat of the immense Persian army – assembled from all the countries of Asia on stage – the Queen, who had retreated into the palace at the announcement of the defeat, returns once again on stage (Aesch. *Pers.*, ll. 607-610*):

τοιγάρ κέλευθον τήνδ' ἄνευ τ' ὀχημάτων
χλιδῆς τε τῆς πάροιθεν ἐκ δόμων πάλιν
ἔστειλα, παιδὸς πατρὶ πρευνεμεῖς χοῶς
φέρουσ', ἅπερ νεκροῖσι μελικτήρια**.

It is for this reason that I, without my chariot / and my former
pomp, have come here from the palace once again, / and bring for the
father of my son propitiatory libations, / offerings that soothe the dead.

The Queen brings what is needed for a ritual process on stage, and prepares the offerings to summon the Shadow of Darius, father of Xerxes: the

center of the stage semanticizes the tomb of the old King. The Queen introduces the list of materials necessary for the offering: all the sacrificial ingredients are fluids, suitable for flowing into earth – milk, honey, pure spring water, wine and oil – and, in addition, floral wreaths (Aesch. *Pers.*, ll. 609-618).

Now the Queen approaches Darius' tomb as a "choefora", a "libation bearer" (Aesch. *Pers.*, vv. 609/610: χοὰς φέρουσ'). Before the Messenger's announcement, the Coriphaeus had advised her to officiate a propitiatory sacrifice to the dead, addressed to the Earth and to all its Dead. Now, the liquid offerings of the Queen do not have the overall objective of making the underground demons benign, but they must reach Darius, so as to ingratiate him and attract and flatter the Shadow at the surface.

Therefore, the Queen urges the chorus to accompany the acts of the ritual she is preparing on stage: the Faithfuls will accompany her propitiatory ritual gestures with their song (Aesch. *Pers.*, ll. 619-622).

ἀλλ', ὦ φίλοι, χοῆσι ταῖσδε νερτέρων
 ὕμνους ἐπευφημεῖτε, τόν τε δαίμονα
 Δαρεῖον ἀνακαλεῖσθε, γαπότους δ' ἐγὼ
 τιμὰς προπέμψω τάσδε νερτέροις θεοῖς.

Come now, my dears, with these libations to the dead / chant solemn
 songs, and the divine spirit / of Darius summon, / while I convey for the
 earth to drink / these offerings in honour of the underground gods.

In the prelude to the song, the Faithfuls take up position in the orchestra with an anapaestic rhythm, and then the Chorus positively responds to the Queen's order, confirming the different roles that have to be assumed – both by the Queen and by the Chorus itself – for a successful ritual (Aesch. *Pers.*, vv. 623-627).

βασιλεία γύναι, πρέσβος Πέρσαις,
 σύ τε πέμπε χοὰς θαλάμους ὑπὸ γῆς,
 ἡμεῖς θ' ὕμνοις αἰτησόμεθα φθιμένων πομπούς
 εὐφρονας εἶναι κατὰ γαίης.

Royal Lady, august Queen of the Persians, / pour these libations down
 to the chambers of the earth, / while we solemnly chant and beseech the
 guides of the dead / to be gracious beneath the earth.

The chorus lyrics, which are the second stasimon of the tragedy, are designed as a prayer to propitiate the appearance of the Shadow. Therefore, to help Darius emerge from the land and favor his rising up to the light, the Chorus calls all of the chthonic gods: Earth, Hermes, and the King of the Underworld, Hades (Aesch. *Pers.*, ll. 627-651).

ἀλλὰ, χθόνιοι δαίμονες ἄγνοί,
Γῇ τε καὶ Ἑρμῇ, βασιλεῦ τ' ἐνέρων,
πέμψατ' ἐνερθεν ψυχὴν ἐς φῶς.
[...]
ἀλλὰ σύ μοι Γᾶ τε καὶ ἄλλοι χθονίων ἀγεμόνες,
δαίμονα μεγαυχῇ
ἰόντ' αἰνέσατ' ἐκ δόμων, Περσᾶν Σουσιγενῇ θεόν,
πέμπετε δ' ἄνω
οἶον οὐπῶ
Περσίς αἴ' ἐκάλυψεν.
[...]
Αἰδωνεύς δ' ἀναπομπὸς ἀνείης, Αἰδωνεύς,
[Δαρεῖον] θεῖον ἀνάκτορα Δαριᾶνα. ἦέ.

O holy divinities of the nether world, / Earth and Hermes, and you,
Lord of the dead, / send up the spirit, from below to the light. / [...] / O
you Earth, and you other rulers of the nether world, / the glorious spirit
/ I implore, may he quit his abode, the god of the Persians, whom Susa
bore, / him send to the upper world, / him the likes of whom / the Per-
sian Earth has never entombed [...] / O Aidoneus, convey shade to the
upper air, Aidoneus, / may our divine lord Darius come forth!

It is only in the second part of the stasimus that the Chorus speaks directly to the King through a real summoning (Aesch. *Pers.*, ll. 658-663):

βαλλήν, ἀρχαῖος βαλλήν, ἴθι, ἰκοῦ.
ἔλθ' ἐπ' ἄκρον κόρυμβον ὄχθου,
κροκόβαπτον ποδὸς εὐμαριν αἰείρων,
βασιλείου τιάρας φάλαρον πιφαύσκων.
βάσκε πάτερ ἄκακε Δαριάν, οἷ.
[...]
δέσποτα δέσποτ' ὦ φάνηθι.
[...]
βάσκε πάτερ ἄκακε Δαριάν, οἷ.

King, king of old, come forth, draw near! / Rise to the barrow's topmost
point, / your saffron-dyed sandal lift, / the crest of your royal tiara, di-

splay! / Come forth, O blameless father Darius / [...] / O Lord, my Lord,
appear! / Come forth, o blameless father Darius!

As announced by herself and confirmed by the Chorus, the Queen remains on stage during the song, and while the Faithfuls sing and dance the psychagogic anthem, she performs the material part of the rite.

The metrical composition of the song is fragmented, agitated and progressively more disjointed. The Chorus turns to Darius, firstly by invoking him indirectly, and only at the end turning to address the “ancient Sovereign”, the “King of Kings”, directly. The prayer is structured like a litany, playing on continuous counterpoints and anaphoric expressions of exhortation and exclamatory interjections.

From the third stanza, at the point in which the Chorus is speaking directly to Darius, moving from third to second person, the Shadow gradually emerges from the mound on which the Queen is officiating the ceremony and around which the Chorus is dancing, and Darius appears on center stage. The concert summoning ritual, by the Queen and the Chorus, is successful. The progressive appearance of Darius is indicated in the text with the mention of the details of his regal clothes, in reverse order of appearance, from bottom to top, shoes to tiara. The description of the king’s robes on the scene recalls the exotic splendor of the Barbarian king: his crocus yellow dyed shoes and the shining tip of the tiara – the cylindrical headpiece, flared slightly outwards –, are the typical attributes of a Persian Sovereign. At the moment of his appearance, the ghost of the King addresses the Chorus (Aesch. *Pers.*, ll. 681-693):

ὦ πιστὰ πιστῶν ἥλικές θ' ἤβης ἐμῆς
Πέρσαι γεραιοί, τίνα πόλις πονεῖ πόνον;
στένει, κέκοπται, καὶ χαράσσεται πέδον.
λεύσσω δ' ἄκοιτιν τὴν ἐμὴν τάφου πέλας
ταρβῶ. χοῶς δὲ πρευμανῆς ἐδεξάμην.
ὕμεῖς δὲ θρηνεῖτ' ἐγγὺς ἐστῶτες τάφου,
καὶ ψυχαγωγοῖς ὀρθιάζοντες γόοις
οἰκτρῶς καλεῖσθ' ἐμ'. ἐστὶ δ' οὐκ εὐέξοδον,
ἄλλως τε πάντως χοὶ κατὰ χθονὸς θεοὶ
λαβεῖν ἀμείνους εἰσὶν ἢ μεθιέναι.
ὅμως δ' ἐκείνοις ἐνδυναστεύσας ἐγὼ
ἦκω. τάχυνε δ' ὥς ἄμειπτος ὦ χρόνου.
τί ἐστὶ Πέρσαις νεοχμὸν ἐμβριθὲς κακόν;

O most faithful of the faithful, comrades of my youth, / aged Persians,
 what is it that is troubling the state? / It groans and is furrowed by the
 stamp of men – the earth. / I behold my wife by my tomb, I feel alarm,
 and in a kindly mood her libations I accept, / While you make lament,
 standing near my tomb, / and with shrill cries that summon / the spirits
 of the dead, invoke me piteously? Not easy is / the path out of the tomb,
 for this reason above all, the gods beneath the earth / are readier to seize
 than to release. / Nevertheless, since I have obtained dominion among
 them, I / have come. But make haste, so that I may not incur blame
 regarding the time here. / What is this unexpected ill that weighs the
 Persians down?

Darius is not a phantasm – a projection of the Queen's and Chorus' fantasy and anguish – nor a vision – the materialization of the Athenian spectators' (the fighters of Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea) imagination, who most likely had never seen the Great King, Darius. It is the eidolon of Darius which appears: in the Underworld there still remains a "real" rarefied material residue of the body of the revered and feared King of the Persians. In Hades – the dimension of the deprivation of life –, a weak, hypo-physical profile formally persists. And it is this form, with a pale weak but deep voice, that echoes a historical prophecy on the stage of the theater of Dionysus, which is the wisdom of Past and Future.

The appearance of the Shadow on the scene is a big coup de théâtre. But more importantly, besides the spectacular invention, Aeschylus also invented a character for the ghost: the Phantom of the King appears on the scene despite himself, declaring that he had to make a tremendous effort to escape Hades, even if only for a short time. Having just emerged from the Darkness, Darius asks the Faithfuls to account for their groans and cries, for their distressed accents and for the alarming presence of the Queen on his grave. The Shadow tells of all the trouble and discomfort he had to endure on the way, and then urges the Chorus to make haste (Aesch. *Pers.*, l. 692).

Faced with the hesitation of the Chorus, intimidated by its reverence for the old King, Darius shifts (also metrically) to a more intimate and peremptory tone, again reminding the Chorus of the urgency of the situation and at this point (Aesch. *Pers.*, l. 692, l. 697) the Shadow appeals to the Queen, in order to substitute the role of dialogue that the Chorus has refused (Aesch. *Pers.*, ll. 709-ss.)

The Phantom opens the first dialogue that we know of between two actors: the Shadow of Darius recuperates the thread of complicity with the Queen, appealing to her as “old bedmate, thou, my noble wife” (Aesch. *Pers.*, l. 704). The Shadow knows nothing about what happened and asks for information – as if to remind us that Hades is the absolute dimension of confinement from the world, where there is complete ignorance and cold forgetfulness of all worldly events. In an impassioned dialogue with the Shadow, the Queen gives an account of her invocation and tells Darius the news of the disaster: despite the mother’s justifications, the Xerxes’ total responsibility for the defeat of the Persian army emerges.

As a severe judge, the Phantom gives all responsibility for the defeat to his son, Xerxes, who believed himself to be a god, to be more powerful than Poseidon himself, and who had the arrogance to symbolically brand the sea and chain the rebel waves of the Hellespont (Aesch. *Pers.*, vv. 745-ss.). While the Queen responds promptly to requests for clarification from the Shadow, the Darius’ Phantom speaks of what happened in an unfriendly, detached tone that sounds inappropriate to the anguished demands of the Faithfuls. The King avoids responding to the urgency of the events and to the Chorus’ painful “why?” (Aesch. *Pers.*, vv. 787-799).

From a historical point of view, the Shadow’s dramatic role is just that of providing a formal interpretation of the events: on stage, the Phantom echoes a reading of the Past and a prophecy of the Future destiny of the Persians. Darius’ voice, from the distance of his condition, provides an interpretation of the Queen’s allegorical dream and sets the display for its realization.

From a psychological perspective, the Phantom is the shape of perfect regality, imposed on the son as an incapacitating model. Darius, the old King, prudent, and therefore protected by Fate and Fortune, was replaced by a young King who is insane and therefore punished by the Gods and Fate. On the other hand, the Queen is Xerxes’ mother, above all, and in her motherly heart and mind the disastrous temerity of Xerxes is the result of the continuous confrontation with Darius that has discouraged her child and pushed him to resume the expedition against Greece to match the achievements of his father (Aesch. *Pers.*, ll. 753-758).

At the end of his last rhesis, the Shadow descends back into the mound. His haste and impatience reveal the radical distan-

ce of the ghost from the anguish and the events of the world: the Shadow is in a hurry to return to his dimension of Death. While the Shadow disappears again, swallowed by the Earth, the episode ends with the Queen announcing that she is retiring into the palace to bring new clothes to her son, in order to restore dignity to the body of the King (Aesch. *Pers.*, ll. 846-851).

From the first superb and spectacular Aeschylean invention, the Phantom on stage is the Phantom of the Father, with whom the Son must deal. The first ghost in theater history that tells a truth designed to withstand in the symbolic imaginary and to reverberate his suggestion in the history of Western thought: the Father's ghost says that the son is inept, inadequate in his role.

But in the surviving Aeschylean tragedies there is another ghost Father: a ghost upon which Aeschylus plays meta-theatrically with his own dramas. A ghost not on stage.

II. AGAMEMNON'S PHANTOM (NOT ON STAGE) IN THE *LIBATIONS BEARERS*

Aeschylus opens the second act of his *Oresteia* with a scene connoting a strong ritual atmosphere. In center stage the tomb of Agamemnon stands out "as an altar" (at line 106). Entering the scene, Orestes turns to the gods of the Underworld and speaks (Aesch. *Cho.*, ll. 1-19):

Ἑρμῆ χθόνιε, πατρῷ' ἐποπτεύων κράτη,
 σωτήρ γενοῦ μοι ξύμμαχος τ' αἰτουμένῳ.
 ἦκω γὰρ ἐς γῆν τήνδε καὶ κατέρχομαι
 [...]
 τύμβου δ' ἐπ' ὄχθῳ τῷδε κηρύσσω πατρὶ
 κλύειν, ἀκοῦσαι [...].
 [...]
 οὐ γὰρ παρ<ὼν> ῥῶμαξα σόν, πάτερ, μόρον
 οὐδ' ἐξέτεινα χεῖρ' ἐπ' ἐκφορᾷ νεκροῦ.
 [...]
 [...] ὦ Ζεῦ, δός με τεύσασθαι μόρον
 πατρός, γενοῦ δὲ ξύμμαχος θέλων ἐμοί.

Hermes of the nether world, you who guard the powers that are my father's, / prove yourself my saviour and ally, I entreat you, / now that I have come to this land and returned / [...]. / On this mounded grave I cry out to my father / to hearken, to hear me. / [...] / For I was not present, father, to lament your death, / nor did I stretch my arms to bear

your corpse. / [...] / [...] O Zeus, grant me to avenge my father's / death,
and may you be my willing ally.

In his first cue, Orestes turns to “chthonic Hermes”, the psychopomp god, who escorts souls in the passage between Life and Death, invoked as “one who oversees” his dead father, to implore the god for the necessary intermediation to have contact with his father's soul.

Orestes came to Argos from his exile in Phocis, accompanied by his friend Pylades. The son of Agamemnon invokes his father in a sort of “second” rite, not having been able to honour him properly during the impromptu and humiliating funeral performed by his murderous mother: he cuts his hair for the second time, after having already cut it a first time in the rite of passage from *ephoebia* to youth. The act of Orestes is, therefore, both a ritual of homage to his dead father (which echoes Achilles' homage to Patroclus in the *Iliad*: Hom., *Il.* XXIII, 46, 150-ss.), and a repetition of the rite of passage that entrenches the full maturity of the protagonist.

Orestes and his friend Pylades take refuge behind the funerary stele, sheltered from the view of a procession of women coming towards the tomb from the Palace (Aesch. *Cho.*, ll. 16-ss.). Electra presents herself as a member of the Chorus, albeit the most prominent one, composed of Trojan slaves. So Orestes sees his sister: he does not report a difference in her role, but only in her demeanor. Dressed like the other slaves, Electra leads the Chorus of Choephorai and is, herself, “choephora” (so Orestes calls her at l. 15, and the Chorus at l. 23). Having arrived at the tomb, Electra begins her ritual, pouring libations onto the Earth (Aesch. *Cho.*, ll. 165-166 / 125-151):

κῆρυξ μέγιστε τῶν ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω,
<ἄρηξον,> Ἑρμῇ χθόνιε, κηρύξας ἐμοὶ
τοὺς γῆς ἔνερθε δαίμονας κλύειν ἐμᾶς
εὐχάς, πατρῶων δωμάτων ἐπισκόπους,
καὶ Γαῖαν αὐτήν, ἣ τὰ πάντα τίκτεται,
θρέψασά τ' αὐθις τῶνδε κῦμα λαμβάνει.
κάγῳ χέουσα τάσδε χέρνιβας βροτοῖς
λέγω καλοῦσα πατέρ'. ἐποίκτηρόν τ' ἐμὲ
φίλον τ' Ὀρέστην [...]
[...]
ἐλθεῖν δ' Ὀρέστην δεῦρο σὺν τύχῃ τινί
κατεύχομαί σοι, καὶ σὺ κλυθί μου, πάτερ.
αὐτῇ τέ μοι δὸς σωφρονεστέραν πολὺ

μητρὸς γενέσθαι χεῖρά τ' εὐσεβεστέραν.
[...]
τοιαῖσδ' ἐπ' εὐχαῖς τάσδ' ἐπισπένδω χοάς.
ὕμᾱς δὲ κωκυτοῖς ἐπανθίζειν νόμος,
παιᾶνα τοῦ θανόντος ἐξαυδωμένας.

Supreme herald of the realm above and the realm below, / come to my aid, o Hermes of the nether world, summon to me / the spirits beneath the earth to hear my / prayers, spirits that watch over my father's house, / and Earth herself, who gives birth to all things, /and having nurtured



The ritual performed by Elektra (Federica Sandrini) on Agamemnon's tomb. Scene from *Oresteia*, directed by Luca De Fusco (Teatro Stabile di Napoli production, 2015/2016).

them receives their increase in turn. / And meanwhile, as I pour these lustral offerings to the dead, / I invoke my father: "Have pity both of me / and of your dear Orestes! [...] / [...] / But that Orestes may come home with good fortune / I pray to you: oh, hearken to me, my father! / And as for myself, grant that I may prove far more honest / than my mother and my hand remain pure. / [...] / Such are my prayers, and over them I pour out these libations. / [To the Chorus] It is up to you now, by rite, to crown them with lamentations, / raising your voices in a chant for the dead.

Electra also addresses the same "chthonic" Hermes, to whom Orestes had turned to on entering the scene (l. 166: cf. l. 1): the daughter implores the god as a herald and an intermediary who can enable communication with the Underworld. After this, Electra turns to her father and speaks to him directly.

The ritual that involves the pouring of liquid offerings onto the land, performed by the Chorus and Electra in the role of coryphaea, begins. It is a "paean of the dead" with which the Chorus accompanies the sacrifice (Aesch. *Cho.*, ll. 157-8):

κλύε δέ μοι, κλύε, σέβας
κλύ' ὦ δέσποτ', ἐξ ἁμαυρᾶς φρενός.

Hear me, hear me, o honoured Lord, / hear me, out of the darkness of
your spirit.

The scene is quite similar to that performed by the Chorus and the Queen in the *Persians* (at ll. 609-ff.). Even in this case, the actor (in the *Persians*: the Queen; here: Electra) is officiating the rite at the tomb of the king (Darius: see Aesch., *Pers.* ll. 621-622, 624; now Agamemnon: see Aesch. *Cho.*, l. 164), pouring liquid offerings onto the land; even in the *Persians*, the Chorus is expressly invited by the actor to sing a "hymn" to the genius of the Dead (Aesch. *Pers.*, 619-621).

Furthermore, in the *Libation Bearers*, as in the *Persians*, an impressive allegorical dream of the Queen had given away the dramatic action, the apotropaic rite in particular. The thematic, lexical and dramatic proximity between the scene at the tomb of Agamemnon and the scene of the invocation of Darius is an Aeschylean self-quotation, but also contributes, in this context, to making a major impact on the audience. Aeschylus plays, meta-theatrically, with the ghosts. In fact, the summoning ritual in the *Persians* was successful and, at the end of the song, Darius' Shadow appears from the tomb. Because of the analogy of the dramatic situation, dramatic suspense is triggered even in the *Libation Bearers*: the audience expects the Shadow of Agamemnon to appear.

However, the second invocation of Agamemnon's Shadow, begun by Electra (the first having been started by Orestes) is interrupted by Electra herself, surprised at seeing the marks left by her brother on and around the tomb (Aesch. *Cho.*, ll. 164-211).

At this point, instead of her father's ghost, it is Orestes who appears: he comes out of hiding and urges Electra to be confident in the signals that attest to his identity, introducing the recognition scene (anagnoris) between the siblings who had long been separated because of Orestes' exile in Phocis.



The *anagnorisis* between Orestes (Giacinto Palmarini) and Elektra (Federica Sandrini). Scene from *Oresteia*, directed by Luca De Fusco (Teatro Stabile di Napoli production, 2015/2016).

The third invocation of the Shadow, the most intense, can now begin: in a long lyrical *amoebeus*, the voices of the children and the Chorus alternate and blend in a piece of poetic virtuosity (Aesch., *Cho.*, ll. 306-477): the song is the longest *kommos* in all of the surviving tragedies and is very elaborate in terms of metrics and composition.

The Chorus stages the entire repertoire of the funeral ritual gestures: hands pounding on heads, the pulling of hair, the scratching of faces (Aesch. *Cho.*, vv. 425-427), accompanying the song with the oriental funeral melodies that the Trojans carry as dowry of their native heritage (Aesch. *Cho.*, vv. 423-424; on oriental rhythms typical of funeral lamentation also see Aesch. *Pers.*, l. 121).

It is a *threnos*, a funerary song (as defined both by Electra and the Chorus): the rhythmic writing and the execution confirms the mournful tone of the song that also has the function of staging a posthumous funeral to Agamemnon, celebrated late in respect to the first dishonorable burial carried out by his assassin bride. But the primary intention of the song is the invocation of their father's Shadow (Aesch. *Cho.*, ll. 315-496):

ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ

ὦ πάτερ αἰνόπατερ, τί σοι
φάμενος ἢ τί ῥέξας
τύχοιμ' ἂν ἔκαθεν οὐρίσας,

ἐνθα σ' ἔχουσιν εὐναί;
 σκότῳ φάος ἀντίμοιρον, χάριτες δ' ὁμοίως
 κέκληνται γόος εὐκλεῆς
 προσθοδόμοις Ἀτρείδαις.

[...]

ΗΛΕΚΤΡΑ

κλυθί νυν, ὦ πάτερ, ἐν μέρει
 πολυδάκρυτα πένθη.
 δίπαις τοί σ' ἐπιτύμβιος
 θρήνος ἀναστενάζει.

[...]

ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ σὲ τοι λέγω, ξυγγενοῦ, πάτερ, φίλοις.

ΗΛΕΚΤΡΑ ἐγὼ δ' ἐπιφθέγγομαι κεκλαυμένα.

ΧΟΡΟΣ

στάσις δὲ πάγκοινος ἅδ' ἐπιρροθεῖ.

ἄκουσον εἰς φάος μολών,
 ξὺν δὲ γενοῦ πρὸς ἐχθρούς.

[...]

ἀλλὰ κλύοντες, μάκαρες χθόνιοι, τῆσδε κατευχῆς
 πέμπετ' ἄρωγ' ἡν παισὶν προφρόνως ἐπὶ νίκη

[...]

ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ ὦ Γαῖ', ἄνες μοι πατέρ' ἐποπτεῦσαι μάχην.

ΗΛΕΚΤΡΑ ὦ Φερσέφασσα, δὸς δέ γ' εὐμορφον κράτος.

ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ μέμνησο λουτρῶν οἷς ἐνοσφίσθης, πάτερ.

ΗΛΕΚΤΡΑ μέμνησο δ' ἀμφίβληστρον ὡς ἐκαίνισαν.

ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ πέδαις δ' ἀχαλκεύτοις ἐθηρεύθης πάτερ.

ΗΛΕΚΤΡΑ αἰσchrῶς τε βουλευτοῖσιν ἐν καλύμμασιν.

ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ ἄρ' ἐξεγείρη τοῖσδ' ὄνειδεσιν, πάτερ;

ΗΛΕΚΤΡΑ ἄρ' ὀρθὸν αἶρεις φίλτατον τὸ σὸν κᾶρα;

ORESTES

O father, unhappy father, / by what word or deed of mine can I succeed
 / in sailing from far away to you, / where your resting-place holds you?
 / There is a light that opposes your darkness / yet these grateful laments
 in honour of / the Atreidae / in front of our house.

[...]

ELECTRA

Hear then, o father, as in turn / we mourn with plentiful tears. / Look,
 your two children mourn you in a dirge over your tomb.

[...]

ORESTES Father, I call on you: side with your loved ones!

ELECTRA And I in tears join my voice to his.

CHORUS

And let all our company blend our voices to echo the prayer. / Hear!

Come to the light! / Side with us against our enemies! / [...] / O you blessed powers below, / hear this supplication of ours, and with a favourable will send forth to these children your aid for victory!

[...]

ORESTES O Earth, send up my father to watch my battle!

ELECTRA O Persephone, grant us indeed your beautiful power!

ORESTES Remember the bath where you were robbed of your life, o father.

ELECTRA And remember how they devised a net to cast about you.

ORESTES You were caught in immaterial fetters, my father.

ELECTRA Shamefully, and in a devised fabric.

ORESTES Are you not roused by taunts such as these, father?

ELECTRA Are you not raising that dearest head of yours?



The invocation rite of Agamemnon's Phantom. Scene from *Oresteia*, directed by Luca De Fusco (Teatro Stabile di Napoli production, 2015/2016).

The chthonic goddesses – Earth and Persephone in particular – are summoned in order to give the strength required to the Dead to materialize himself (Aesch. *Cho.*, at lines 489-496; Oreste vocative – *πάτερ* –, at line 479, is recalled by Electra at line 481). The children remind their father of the atrocity of the murder: maybe Agamemnon, veiled in the oblivion of Hades, has forgotten what had happened.

The siblings try to capture Agamemnon's Shadow with the effective use of impressive words: their bond of affection may cause the "beloved" king to come to the rescue "of his beloved" (Aesch. *Cho.*, l. 355). But the rhetorical strategy used to draw the Shadow from Hades also uses the obsessi-

ve re-call to *atimia*, the dishonor that struck the king: the lack of honour and the funeral rites denied to the king by his murderers; death by treachery, unworthy of a Sovereign (Aesch. *Cho.*, l. 479); the dishonorable end that procures a status of lowered prestige, even among the Dead, for Agamemnon. The Chorus itself contributes to provoking the Shadow, recalling the massacre inflicted on the king's body (especially the degrading rite of *maschalismos*, amputation of the limbs) as the ultimate form of dishonor (Aesch. *Cho.*, l. 444).

The rhythmic *crescendo* of the three voice song prepares for the apparition of Agamemnon's Shadow. The scene has the effect of triggering an expectation that combines the hope of the children with the spectators' same investment in the spectacular scenic event they are awaiting themselves.

But even this rite fails, even though the song is very long and rhetorically orchestrated: not satisfying the expectations of a public that cannot forget the impressive appearance of Darius' ghost in the *Persians* (see also the specific references to the ritual invocation of the Persians, in particular the reference to the headpiece that rose from the tomb of Darius), no ghost raises his head from this tomb. The children are now alone.

At this point, the purpose of the song shifts. The father denies his children the epiphany of his *eidolon* and Orestes, consequently, conceives another plan (Aesch. *Cho.*, ll. 479-499:

πάτερ, τρόποισιν οὐ τυραννικοῖς θανών,
αἰτουμένῳ μοι δὸς κράτος τῶν σῶν δόμων.
[...]
ἤτοι Δίκην ἢ ἄλλε σύμμαχον φίλοις,
ἢ τὰς ὁμοίας ἀντίδος λαβὰς λαβεῖν,
εἴπερ κρατηθεῖς γ' ἀντινικήσαι θέλεις.

O father, who perished by a death unbefitting a king, / in answer to my prayer grant the lordship over your halls! / [...] / Either send Justice to battle for those dear to you, / or grant us in turn to get a similar grip on them, if indeed after defeat you would in turn win victory.

The instance of a physical appearance of his father by his side is un-realized, and so Orestes diverts this invocation in another direction: to attract Agamemnon's power and enlist his father in the revenge party. This can also be a chance for Agamemnon to "save himself" from Death, preser-

ving the race in which his blood line can continue. Confined to Hades, Agamemnon may have only one interest in this enterprise: through the seed of his sons, Agamemnon, though dead, will not be dead forever. In order to give figurative evidence to this act of “rescuing” their father that the children can carry out, Orestes uses the metaphor of the net that reveals itself to be inexhaustibly polysemic: the figure of Agamemnon’s net, which had been used in a completely different sense by Clytemnestra in the first act of the drama, now returns as a net brought to the surface from the bottom of the sea by his sons, and is depicted as cork. Agamemnon will emerge from Hades, not as a ghost-like presence, but as an inspiration and support in his son’s undertaking.

The strongest reason for Orestes now seems to be the restitution of glory – the *kleos* that his father had won and that was taken from him through a dishonorable death. He takes on the responsibility of making light, dispelling the darkness around the father figure. First, his aim is to restore the honour of the offended Agamemnon but at the same time recuperating what belongs to him. Now Agamemnon’s son is no longer “the helpless little Eagle-chick”, curled up on his father’s grave as if to seek shelter in the nest. The non-appearance of the ghost convinced Orestes that he is now the hero and protagonist of the drama: he has to be ready for action.

And it is only at this point that Orestes urges the Chorus to report the contents of Clytemnestra’s dream. The Queen’s night-terror is finally revealed in detail: an allegorical nightmare which woke up the terrified Queen, who, however, had not yet realized its prophetic potential. The dream is promptly interpreted by Orestes as a vision of his plan for revenge. It is Clytemnestra, with her nightmare, who tells her child that it will be him – and no other – that kills her. Orestes recognizes himself in the monstrous serpent sucking a blood clot from his mother’s breast that appeared in the dream: and, recognizing himself as the beast of the allegorical dream, Orestes transforms into that serpent. The metamorphosis takes place in a symbolic scene, in which Orestes utters the fatal formula of auto-identification with the snake: “Behold! I am that dragon”. The women of the Chorus hound Orestes not to waste time and to follow his words with action. Finally, Orestes does formalize his decision: as preached by the Chorus, Orestes does not surrender to the pain but he “has learned from his anger” and is ready for action.



Clytemnestra (Elisabetta Pozzi) exhibits her breast in front of Orestes (Giacinto Palmarini) in the act of murdering her. Scene from *Oresteia*, directed by Luca De Fusco (Teatro Stabile di Napoli production, 2015/2016).

The father's ghost does not make an appearance. But, thanks to this subtraction, Agamemnon's son has now actually come home. He is a son who has grown up and who claims his father's throne for himself. Orestes is alone and is now the director of his undertaking – the undisputed protagonist of the dramatic action of an “Oresteia” –, a tragic saga that no longer has the father at its core, but the son of the king.

III. CLYTEMNESTRA'S (UNEXPECTED) PHANTOM IN THE *EUMENIDES*

At the beginning of the third part of the *Oresteia*, the Pythia, after introducing herself, runs away in horror at the sight of the sleeping Furies who surround the *omphalos*, onto which Orestes, the matricide, is clinging to.

Clytemnestra's *eidolon* suddenly appears, rising perhaps from the trap-room under the scene. Indeed, the hypothesis of an appearance of the Shadow *e machina* from the Earth seems impossible by the reference to a sudden apparition, which differentiates this scenic entrance from the slow and progressive appearance of Darius' Shadow (see. *Pers.*, ll. 661-ss. and cfr. to the non-appearance of the ghost of Agamemnon in *The Libation Bearers*, which should have been progressive: *Cho.*, ll. 479-ss.: “Do you not lift your head ...?”). All of the hideous Furies – “decrepit old girls” (so Apollo describes them in Aesch. *Eum.*, ll. 69-72) who live in the shadows of Tartarus and whom no one, neither man nor beast nor god, ever approached – are the demonic mask of the Mother.

The Shadow appears “like a dream” and introduces itself with the name ‘Clytemnestra’ only at the end of the first *rhesis* (Aesch. *Eum.*, l. 116):

ὄναρ γὰρ ὑμᾶς νῦν Κλυταμῆστρα καλῶ.

Dream am I, Clytemnestra – now I invoke you.

The Shadow claims to come from the world of the Dead in which she is wandering, vilified and disgraced. In Hades, between the weak eidola of the Dead, the value of honour and dishonour still maintain their power: because Electra and Orestes had complained about the *atimia* Agamemnon suffered among the Dead (Aesch. *Cho.*, l. 96, l. 409, ll. 434-ss.), the ghost of Clytemnestra rebukes the demons for the pain she suffers, dishonored and adrift in Hades and in her words you hear the echo of the reprimand of Patroclus's Phantom that reminds Achilles of his wandering because he is yet without funeral rites (Hom. *Il.*, XXIII, ll. 65-ss.). These Clytemnestra Phantom's first cues (Aesch. *Eum.*, ll. 95-ss):

εὔδοιτ' ἄν, ὦή, καὶ καθευδουσῶν τί δεῖ;
 ἐγὼ δ' ὑφ' ὑμῶν ὥδ' ἀπητμασμένη
 ἄλλοισιν ἐν νεκροῖσιν, ὧν μὲν ἔκτανον
 ὄνειδος ἐν φθιτοῖσιν οὐκ ἐκλείπεται,
 αἰσχροῦ δ' ἄλῶμαι [...].

Wake up! Aha! Yet what need is there of sleepers? / It is due to you that I am thus dishonoured / among the dead; because of those I killed / they never cease to reproach me, / and I wander in shame [...]

Clytemnestra blames the Furies for their ingratitude, reminding them of the sacrifices that she used to officiate at night: the evocation of the image of the Queen engaged in nocturnal rites with demons adds blood to the scene, and lends a murky and witch-like coloring to the character of Clytemnestra's Shadow (Aesch., *Eum.*, vv. 106-109).

The appearance of the Phantom is justified by an urgent and precise dramaturgical motive: Clytemnestra must awaken the demons from their sleep. The Shadow urgently needs to perform her task, and rouses the demons: her wounds, on display, are a jolt that shakes the demons to their core (mentions of the Shadow's wounds are at line 103, and then lines 135-136). Clytemnestra reaffirms the link that once bound her to her son, but now she only sees Orestes as her murderer, the matricide against whom she demands revenge (Aesch. *Eum.*, ll. 100-102).

παθοῦσα δ' οὕτω δεινὰ πρὸς τῶν φιλάτων
οὐδείς ὑπέρ μου δαιμόνων μὴνίεται,
κατασφαγείσης πρὸς χερῶν μητροκτόνων.

And yet, although I have suffered cruelly in this way from my nearest kin, / no divine power is angry on my behalf, / slaughtered as I have been by the hands of a matricide.

The power of the Furies sleeps, in a deep slumber, and from that sleep, which neutralizes their evil virtues, the Ghost of Clytemnestra tries to wake them. Gradually, the hideous females are shaken from their slumber: the first mutterings of the Chorus just mimic a dream of a chase scene, on the trail of a prey (Aesch. *Eum.*, ll. 130-139): the dog barks, panting at its prey, following it closely. Finally, we hear the moans of the demons that begin to wake up, urged to resume the hunt by the Phantom.

The demons are now awake: the Phantom of the mother can return to the Shadow. The Furies, in her place and on her behalf, are ready to return to hunting the matricide.

IV. GHOSTS THAT PLAY GHOST

Darius' specter was able to weave Past and Future in the form of a prophecy: in the *Persians*, the Phantom's voice was deep and wise but totally ineffective in the course of events: in actual fact, it resonated as a symbol of the failure of his son, Xerxes.

The absence of Agamemnon's ghost suggests that it is time for his son to take his place because the "truth" is now all in the drama: the role which Orestes can occupy in his father's absence. Only if the Father's ghost remains in the shadow, can the son finally – tragically – embark upon his own undertaking. Alone, without his paternal specter to incite him and project his old resentments on his young will, Orestes can act out his drama without losing himself – at least for now – in any Hamletic hesitations. Straight into the heart of the drama – to matricide.

In the *Libation Bearers* the appearance of Agamemnon's ghost, promised by a summoning ritual made by his children on the tomb, did not come to be, and the public was directed by Aeschylus to invest not in the resentment of the spirit of the hero-father, but in the new heroism of his son Orestes, acted out on stage. In the *Eumenides*, in an unexpected twist, the Shadow of the murdered mother does appear: the absence of the fa-

ther's ghost is offset by the dramatic weight of the fantastic scene of the mother's apparition. In the dramaturgical composition of the *Oresteia*, the paternal spirit is unable to access scenic reality but it is the mother's spirit that instead is able to generate ghosts.

And so Aeschylus, after having invented the dramatic character of the Father's Ghost in the *Persians* – the same Father's Ghost that will be invoked in vain in the *Libation Bearers* –, introduces the far more terrible and unexpected apparition: the Mother's Phantom in the last act of the *Oresteia*.

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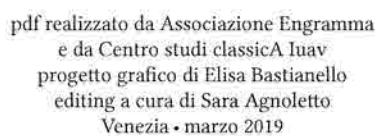
ENGLISH ABSTRACT

In *Persians*, Aeschylus introduces the first appearance of a ghost on the theatrical stage. Darius' specter is able to weave Past and Future in the form of a prophecy: the Phan-

tom's voice is deep and wise and, in actual fact, it resonates as a symbol of the failure of Xerxes, his son. In *Libation Bearers* the dramatic situation is similar to the *Persians*, and the audience expects to see the Phantom of Agamemnon, invoked by a summoning ritual made by his children and the Chorus on his tomb. But the promised apparition of Agamemnon's ghost did not come to be: so, the public was directed by Aeschylus to invest not in the resentment of the spirit of the hero-father, but in the new heroism of his son Orestes, who is going to act out as the main character in his own drama. In *Eumenides*, with an unexpected twist, the Shadow of the murdered mother does appear: the absence of the father's ghost is offset by the dramatic weight of the fantastic scene of a far more terrible and unexpected apparition: the Phantom of the Mother.

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**For all the Aeschylean tragedies quotations, I adopted the text established by Martin West, Teubner, Leipzig 1990, 1998.



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