

striert, auf welche Weise eine Tragödie den Zuschauer in Eleos und Phobos versetzen soll. Durch die überlegene Wissensperspektive gegenüber den handelnden Personen ist der Zuschauer zudem immer in der Lage, deren Fehlperspektive genau zu diagnostizieren, und kann so erkennen, wie gerade daraus der unangemessene Affekt und das tragische Scheitern ihres Handelns hervorgehen.

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TANTALUS IN EURIPIDES' ORESTES*)

The Euripidean prologue commonly begins with a summary of past events, and when this concerns the ancestors of the principal characters it may extend back for several generations. In Euripides' five plays about the house of Atreus the remote background of family history is the same, yet these plays differ greatly in their choice of introductory detail. *Electra*, for example, begins with Agamemnon and the Trojan war, *I.T.* with Pelops and his courtship of Hippodameia, and *Orestes* with the punishment of Tantalus, a figure scarcely mentioned in the other four prologues. Reasons can be found for each of these choices, but in this paper I propose to examine only the last example¹). I will argue that Tantalus enters so prominently into the opening monologue of *Orestes*

*) The main argument of this paper was presented before a meeting of the Classical Association of Canada in Toronto on June 5, 1974. This written version has been notably improved by the comments of the editor. Quotations from *Orestes* conform to the text of G. Murray, 2nd ed. (Oxford 1913).

1) *Helen* and *I.A.* are special cases, but for different reasons. In *Helen*, Atreid history is understandably only a secondary theme, and its appearance is postponed until Menelaus enters at line 386. He begins his genealogy with an address to Pelops and continues with an expository monologue designed solely for the audience, in the manner of a second prologue. In *I.A.*, there is no agreement about the relation between the transmitted text of lines 1-163 and what Euripides wrote. See D. Bain, *The Prologues of Euripides' Iphigeneia in Aulis*, CQ 27 (1977) 10-26. I intend to make the opening lines of *I.T.* the subject of a later paper and will there attempt some general conclusions about Euripides' use of mythical paradigms in the construction of plots. (Now forthcoming in CQ 38 [1988].)

because the story of his punishment prefigures the action of that play.

Except in one respect, Euripides' decision to begin *Orestes* with an allusion to the Tantalus myth has caused no extensive comment or controversy. Krieg and Webster dismiss the myth as irrelevant to Euripides' main intentions in the play, and this opinion is tacitly accepted by most scholars²). Some of them may share the impatience with apparently redundant detail which caused Flickinger to condemn the "long genealogies and other jejune matter" in Euripidean prologues and Méridier to speak of those of *Ion* and *I.T.* as "véritables hors d'oeuvre"³). An argument against using such language about Or. 1–10 is available in the presence of other references to Tantalus in the play, including a striking reintroduction of the myth of his punishment in the lyric at 982 ff., at a time of emotional crisis. In spite of this, the only aspect of these passages that has greatly interested scholars is the possible influence upon them of Anaxagorean theories. This is a subject of independent interest, but the controversies surrounding it will fall largely outside the scope of this paper⁴). What is missing in com-

2) W. Krieg, *De Euripidis Oreste* (Halle 1934) 68–69; T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London 1967) 252. Cf. S. L. Schein, *Mythical Illusion and Historical Reality in Euripides' Orestes*, *WS N. F.* 9 (1975) 51; C. Wolff, *Orestes*, in Erich Segal ed., *Euripides, A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs 1968) 132. Literary precedents for the *Orestes* plot are discussed by G. Perrotta, *Studi Euripidei*, II, *L'Oreste*, *SIFC* 6 (1928) 101 ff., 127–138, and by E. Rawson, *Aspects of Euripides' Orestes*, *Arethusa* 5 (1972) 155–156; neither one refers to the Tantalus myth. On the other hand, L. Méridier, *Le Prologue dans la Tragédie d'Euripide* (Bordeaux 1911) 50, sees in the review of ancestral misfortunes at Or. 1 ff. the "action persistante d'une même fatalité." A similar theme is pursued by C. Fuqua, *The World of Myth in Euripides' Orestes*, *Traditio* 34 (1978) 1–28. See also his *Studies in the Use of Myth in Sophocles' Philoctetes and the Orestes of Euripides*, *Traditio* 32 (1976) 81 n. 108, and W. D. Smith, *Disease in Euripides' Orestes*, *Hermes* 95 (1967) 293, 297, 301. Among editors of the play, Richard Porson shows unusual interest in the myth, but even he treats it as a tangential matter. See his *Orestes*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig 1824) 11–15.

3) R. C. Flickinger, *The Greek Theater and its Drama* (Chicago 1918) 300; Méridier (supra, n. 2) 58. Contrast H. Erbse, *Studien zum Prolog der euripideischen Tragödie* (Berlin, New York 1984) 250.

4) See n. 16 infra. C. W. Willink, *Prodikos, 'Meteorosophists' and the 'Tantalos' Paradigm*, *CQ* 33 (1983) 25–33, maintains that Or. 4–10 is a disparaging allusion to "meteorosophists" of the late fifth century (cf. *Clouds* 360–362) and especially to Prodicus, for whom he supposes a preexistent popular connection with Tantalus (33). In support of this latter view, he points out that at Plato *Prot.* 315c Socrates identifies Prodicus as "Tantalus". The exact point of this Socratic witticism is admittedly elusive; perhaps only that Prodicus had spoken memorably of life's troubles (cf. pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus* 366). It may, on the other hand,

mentary on lines 1–10 is a satisfactory explanation of their relation to the play that they introduce, one that takes account of the singular prominence given to Tantalus in this alone of all of Euripides' introductions to plays about the house of Atreus.

The legend of Tantalus took more than one shape, but a few elements recurred to form a simple common pattern. In all versions he is a man who enjoys extraordinary good fortune but who offends the gods and is severely punished. In a fragment of Aeschylus' *Niobe* he comments on his own fall from grace and draws from it the appropriate lesson about human limitations⁵). His offense is variously described, and so is his punishment. In *Odyssey* 11.582 ff. he is tormented by hunger and thirst, which are cunningly kept aroused; but Alcman, Archilochus, Alcaeus, and Pindar mention another punishment, that Zeus hung over his head a great stone and that he lives forever in fear that it will fall. This is the version chosen by Euripides⁶). The threat of an overhanging stone is not merely the exotic product of an early poet's imagination. The fact that the Greeks and their Anatolian neighbors inhabited mountainous lands subject to frequent earthquakes and rockslides probably accounts for this detail of the legend, and some scholars have tried to fix its source more particularly in a seismic catastrophe in the region of Mt. Sipylus in Lydia⁷).

refer to the comfort and luxury of Prodicus' lecture-station in the house of Callias and to his wealth (for this see Willink, 30–31). In any case, the Platonic passage in itself would hardly require that we posit a long-standing identification of Prodicus and Tantalus in the popular mind. Willink, however, claims to find evidence to reinforce this hypothesis in Or. 4–10. For example, ἀέρι ποτάται is said to be connected with the satirical image of the airborne intelligentsia at Clouds 225 and 1503 (32), and by implication with “the uniquely famous Prodikos” (26); κοινήσ τραπέζης with sophistic parasitism (31); and ἀκόλαστον γλώσσαν with various complaints against sophistic verbal ἀσέβεια and with the association of Prodicus with “babblers” (τῶν ἀδολεσχῶν) at Aristoph. fr. 506 [PCG] (31–32, 25). But the claim that these phrases must have a topical reference is open to question, since all of them can be explained in other ways. The first is discussed in n. 16 *infra*. The second refers to the gesture of divine condescension to Tantalus already implicit in Pindar Ol. 1.63–64. The third may allude to his insolent request recorded at Nosti frag. 10 (Allen).

5) Aesch. frag. 159 (TrGF = 278D Mette). Versions and sources of the Tantalus legend are discussed in J. E. Hylén, *De Tantalō* (Uppsala 1896).

6) Alcman frag. 79 (PMG), Archilochus frag. 91 (West), Alcaeus frag. 365 (PLF), Pindar Ol. 1.57–58 and Isth. 8.10–11. Cf. Nosti frag. 10 (Allen). Polygnotus' painting of Tantalus and the stone (at Delphi) is described at Pausanias 10.31.12. Euripides may have been the first to place Tantalus in the air, a detail discussed *infra*, n. 16.

7) References in W. Scheuer's “Tantalos” entry in W. H. Roscher ed., *Aus-*

Though this latter theory may be open to question, it seems probable that at the very least a general familiarity with the dangers of mountainous terrain is implied in the legend and was an important reason for its continuing hold on the imaginations of Greeks. The mountain boulder, ready to be shaken loose, is the closest natural analogue and likeliest inspiration for the mythical stone of Tantalus.

A less exact analogy, however, might always be drawn by poets between the punishment of Tantalus and any state of helpless fear. So it is that for both Archilochus and Pindar a cause of prolonged anxiety is a "stone of Tantalus", a usage in which "stone" is only a metaphor⁸). But there were occasions, even apart from the natural perils mentioned above, on which a Greek might actually have had reason to fear being struck or crushed by stones. These will prove of some relevance to an analysis of Euripides' use of the Tantalus myth. In the first place, death by stoning was a penalty that Greek society imposed on offenders guilty of certain extreme outrages against the community or religion. In fifth-century Greece executions of this form were not common, but they still kept a place in literature and in the popular imagination. Stoning is the sanction attached to Creon's edict in *Antigone* and the ultimate threat pronounced by the chorus of *Agamemnon* against Aegisthus. There are other examples from the tragic authors and some from the historians, such as the attempt of the Argives to stone Thrasyllus in 418 B.C. In the second place, stones were used as weapons in warfare, both in legend and in life. The warriors of the *Iliad* and the ogres of the *Odyssey* toss mighty stones at their adversaries, and stone-throwing remains in tragedy a normal way of attacking one's enemies. That this is not merely a literary convention in the fifth century can be seen from Thucydides' narratives of battles in the Peloponnesian War. Siege warfare offered special opportunities. In two descriptions of sieges in tragedy large stones are among the missiles used by the defenders; in *Phoenissae*, Parthenopaeus is crushed by one "big enough to fill a wagon." Here again Thucydides provides a contemporary parallel in his account of the defense of Torone⁹). It would have required only a

führliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie (Leipzig 1916–1924) 5.80–82.

8) Archilochus frag. 91.14–15 (West), Pindar Isth. 8.9–12 (Snell-Maehler). These passages are discussed in the text *infra*.

9) The attempt to stone Thrasyllus is found at Thuc. 5.60.6. There is another example of the stoning of offenders by society at Herod. 9.5. The examples from

modest stretch of the imagination for a poet to see a potential analogy between the plight of Tantalus and that of either a criminal under sentence of public stoning or an assailant threatened with stoning by a beleaguered enemy from atop the walls of a city or the roof of a house. To recognize this is to begin to account for the prominence of Tantalus in *Orestes*, a play in which the principal character is at first a criminal awaiting punishment and later a fugitive besieged in his father's house and prepared to retaliate.

A full explanation of the place of the Tantalus legend in *Orestes* will require a closer look at the play, beginning with the prologue. The tragedy is one of those that begin with a tableau of affliction, and the prologue opens with Electra's general comment, "There is no word so fearful to speak, no suffering, no god-sent misfortune, the burden of which human nature could not bear"¹⁰). She is standing watch over the unconscious Orestes, and her words are therefore naturally taken, when first heard, as a comment on what the audience sees. But instead of speaking immediately about her brother and herself, she supports her generalization by referring to Tantalus, whose burden is evidently his fear of the stone suspended over his head (4–7).

ὁ γὰρ μακάριος – κοῦκ ὀνειδίζω τύχας –
 Διὸς πεφυκῶς, ὡς λέγουσι, Τάνταλος
 κορυφῆς ὑπερτέλλοντα δειμαίνων πέτρον
 ἄερί ποτᾶται . . .

The reason for his predicament, she goes on, is that he, a man invited to share the gods' table, did not discipline his tongue. Once introduced, Tantalus becomes the first step in the roll call of generations in the house of Atreus, a predecessor of Pelops, Atreus,

tragedy mentioned in the text are Agam. 1616 and Antig. 36. Cf. Septem 199, Ajax 728, O.C. 435, and see n. 13 *infra*. Fuller discussions can be found in A.S. Pease, *Stoning among the Greeks and Romans*, TAPA 38 (1907) 5–18; R. Hirzel, *Die Strafe der Steinigung*, Abh. phil.-hist. Kl. d. königl. Sächs. Gesellschaft d. Wiss. 27.7 (Leipzig 1909) 223–266, esp. 238, 261 (reprinted separately at Darmstadt, 1967); G. Glotz, *Lapidatio: Grèce*, in *Daremberg-Saglio* 3.2; and W. Schadewaldt, *Aischylos' Achilleis*, *Hermes* 71 (1936) 25–69, esp. 29–30, 53–55. On the other hand, stoning as a method of fighting is exemplified by Il. 5.302, 7.268, 11.265, 20.285; Od. 9.481 and 537, 10.121. In tragedy, not to look beyond Euripides, we have: Andr. 1128, 1153, Hel. 1122–1123, Ba. 1096, Cycl. 51, Phoen. 1143, 1177, 1401, I.T. 318–332, 1376, Or. 1476, and the special cases of H.F. 1004 and Phoen. 663. Cf. Thuc. 4.43.3, 6.69.2. Stones for defense in sieges are mentioned at Eur. Suppl. 503, Phoen. 1157 ff., and at Thuc. 4.115.2.

10) For the translation of line 1 see V. Di Benedetto ed. *Orestes* (Florence 1965) ad loc.

Thyestes, Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Orestes. But he was first mentioned as an example of affliction, i.e. as an analogue, not an ancestor, of the principal character. That this analogy is closer than it first appears becomes apparent later in her speech, when Orestes' own predicament is explained. We learn of two threats to his well-being: his mother's Furies, who terrify him (38)¹¹), and the hostility of the city, which may condemn him to be stoned (46–50). During the first episode, after he has awakened, there is evidence of the first cause of his distress in the apparition of the Furies at 253 ff. Their effect on him, madness, is also spoken of as an attack of fright (270, 312). The second cause, the menace from the city, will weigh on him until the moment midway through the play when he is caught up in the enthusiasm of his plan for revenge. During most of that time he, like Electra, is under the threat of stoning. The references to a punishment of this type are so numerous and so emphatic¹²) that a reader may be surprised to find that in the end Orestes' enemies are willing to let him commit suicide. This concession, of course, is dramatically necessary; otherwise the plans for revenge and escape could not easily be developed. The threat to stone a person for heinous offenses is found elsewhere in Euripides and is, for various reasons, not carried out. But nowhere else does repetition keep it so steadily before our eyes throughout the greater part of a play¹³). Its intimidating effect on Orestes is clearest in the Tyndareus scene, where it is reinforced by his natural sense of shame before his offended grandfather. He wants to hide his face when Tyndareus first appears (467–9); he then falls silent for 75 lines; and when he breaks this silence he begins by saying he is afraid of Tyndareus. The latter is abusive and threatening throughout the scene, and he announces three times that Orestes must die by public stoning

11) Nauck, followed by Di Benedetto (*supra*, n. 10) deleted 38. It arguably contradicts 37 (Electra names those whose name she is supposedly avoiding), and Murray's expedient of writing εὐμενίδας with a small ε involves inventing an adjective. But A. L. Brown, *Eumenides in Greek Tragedy*, CQ 34 (1984) 267, points out that "Eumenides" is at least not their proper name and that these "goddesses" so suddenly introduced in 37 need to be identified in some way.

12) Lines 50, 442, 536, 564, 614, 625, 863, 914; cf. 946.

13) The parallels I find are Hcl. 60, Ba. 356, I.A. 1350, Tro. 1039, and Ion 1112, 1237 ff. There is some doubt about the nature of the threat made against Creusa in Ion. See Hirzel (*supra*, n. 9) 227–228, and A. S. Owen ed. *Ion* (Oxford 1939) ad loc. O. Longo, *Proposte di Lettura per l'Oreste di Euripide*, Maia 27 (1975) 281 ff., says that the choice of stoning is meant to suggest the "inhumana ferocia" of those who propose it. This explanation is true but incomplete.

(536, 614, 625). When he leaves, Orestes comments again on the fright he inspired (630).

By line 630, then, there have been two scenes in which Orestes' alarming situation has been dramatized at length and his reaction observed. His assailants have been, successively, the Furies and Tyndareus. These scenes put into dramatic form Electra's introductory summary at 34–50, where the Furies and after them the threat of stoning were first mentioned. But they are also related to the first lines of that opening monologue, with its general reference to human affliction and its example from family history. The encounters with the Furies and with Tyndareus serve to dramatize the analogy implied in those lines. They justify it not only in the general terms that Orestes, like his ancestor, endures a δεινὸν πάθος, but also by the particular nature of Tyndareus' threat and by the consequence, repeatedly stressed, that Orestes is terrified¹⁴).

After defending himself without success before Tyndareus, Orestes appeals to Menelaus and then to the Argive assembly. He fails each time. The messenger's account of the assembly's decision is followed at 960 ff. by Electra's lament for her own ruin and that of the house. This includes a review of family misfortunes (982 ff.) which Wilamowitz called a bizarre variation of the escape wish common in dramatic lyric¹⁵). The passage begins

μόλοιμι τὰν οὐρανοῦ
 μέσον χθονός (τε) τεταμένην
 αἰωρήμασι πέτρων,
 ἀλύσειν χρυσέαισι φερομένην δίναισι,
 βῶλον ἐξ Ὀλύμπου,
 ἔν' ἐν θρήνοισιν ἀναβοάσω
 γέροντι πατρὶ Ταντάλῳ . . .

Since there is apparently no more hope for Orestes or for her, a lament is in order, and she will prolong it by including the misadventures of Pelops, Atreus, and Thyestes. The passage, however, also very nearly marks the end of that section of the play in which she and Orestes are on the defensive; this lyric ends at 1012, and the plan for revenge and escape will begin to form at 1097. This

14) There is also a possibly significant verbal echo at line 85 (τὰ τούτου δ' οὐκ ὀνειδίζω κακά) of line 4 (κοῦκ ὀνειδίζω τύχας); one is said about Orestes, the other about Tantalus. See H. Parry, Euripides' Orestes: the Quest for Salvation, TAPA 100 (1969) 340.

15) Lesefrüchte, Hermes 45 (1910) 390–391.

long period of mere anxiety and ineffectual pleas, which began at line 1, is therefore framed by two inventories of ancestral misfortunes, each of which begins with mention of the forever uneasy Tantalus¹⁶).

Tantalus, who was once μακάριος (4), is also the ancestor of Menelaus, to whom Electra attaches the same adjective in order to contrast him with Orestes (86). Both Menelaus and Helen are unscathed by the war and its aftermath. This good luck, combined with their indifference, will make them the objects of fierce resentment and the eventual targets of a revenge plan. Euripides chooses the moment of Menelaus' first entrance to emphasize this great good fortune and to link it with his ancestry. His prosperous state is made to seem more striking because his entrance immediately follows the first stasimon, a doleful meditation on the distress of Orestes and the trials of the family to which both he and Menelaus belong (316–347). In these events the chorus have seen the general truth that great happiness does not endure among mortals (340); it is as vulnerable before divine assault as a ship in a storm. They have expressed their own grief for Orestes and have concluded the ode with the question: What house should they revere more than

16) The scholia at Or. 982 (cf. schol. Pindar Ol. 1.57) say that Euripides here embraces Anaxagorean doctrine and identifies the stone of Tantalus with the sun (cf. Vorsokr. 59 A 42). This would account for a detail not found in earlier texts, the suspension of Tantalus in the sky, which brings him close to the threatening mass and allows him to be made to trail along beneath it. V.J. Rosivach, Euripides *Orestes* 5–7, *Maia* 29/30 (1977–78) 77–79, wishes to emend away the “improbable” ἀέρι ποτᾶται at line 7, but he overlooks the fact that Electra must fly aloft in order to address Tantalus at 982–985. On these points see Willink (supra, n. 4) 32 n. 47. The identification of stone with sun also helps to explain the choice of the term ὑπερτέλλοντα at line 6 and is at least consistent with the use of βῶλον at 983 (cf. Euripides frag. 783 TGF²). This much granted, it is hard to believe that Tantalus was first put into these palpably Anaxagorean surroundings in *Orestes*. If that were so, the picture at lines 4–7 would be too abbreviated for an audience to decipher the novel intention, and even 982–985 would leave many in the dark. It is more likely that the Anaxagoreans (who included the egregious Metrodorus of Lampsacus [Vorsokr. 61]) had allegorized Tantalus within an Anaxagorean scheme and that Euripides alludes to this in a fashion to which frags. 839 and 944 (TGF²) show he was prone. See N. J. Richardson, Homeric Professor in the Age of the Sophists, *PCPS* 201 (1975) 70, and Di Benedetto (supra, n. 10) 196. Beyond that, one can only speculate. R. Scodel, Tantalus and Anaxagoras, *HSCP* 88 (1984) 22, surmises a preexisting allegory in which Tantalus was the earth and the stone was “one of the Anaxagorean heavenly bodies, and a potential meteorite. . . .” If some such borrowed fancy underlies Or. 4 ff. and 982 ff., there will, of course, be no way to coordinate its allegorized space with that in which the action of the play occurs. We cannot chart a path for the flight desiderated in μόλοιμι κτλ. (982).

this one, descended from Tantalus (345–7)? At this moment they observe Menelaus approaching with what must be some display of luxury, for they speak of him in the anapests that mark his entry as one “who by his visible splendor is very clearly of Tantalid blood” (349–51)¹⁷). They go on to greet him as a man conversant with good fortune, who has won all he prayed for from the gods.

This stasimon and the choral anapests that follow it are noteworthy for two reasons. In the first place, the ode itself construes Orestes' affliction as an example of the mutability of great happiness (μέγας ὄλβος), even though the last term is not easy to apply to any part of Orestes' own life. The chorus, however, make it clear that they think of him as a representative of the once happy line of Tantalus, the ancestor who had brought good fortune to the house by his marriage alliance with the gods. In that capacity alone Orestes exemplifies the instability of fortune, which Tantalus had illustrated within his own lifetime. In the second place, Menelaus is also introduced as a descendant of Tantalus, but one for whom the family's original good fortune remains intact. In saying this, the chorus praise him with the same lack of moderation found elsewhere in greetings addressed to those heading for a fall. One purpose of this convention is to identify such victims as ὄλβιοι and to bring their cases more clearly within the scope of such rules as γίγνωσκε τάνθρώπεια μὴ σέβειν ἄγαν¹⁸). It is a fair inference that an experienced audience would recognize the tempting of fortune implicit in lines like Or. 348–55 as a sign of impending danger. The two men are therefore linked in two ways, by the reference to their Tantalid ancestry and by the relevance to both of the gnomic wisdom of line 340. Menelaus has not yet spoken or taken any action, but a pattern has already been intimated for his future, and we shall not be surprised if he begins to follow it¹⁹).

17) Read πολὺ at line 349. See Di Benedetto (supra, n. 10) *ad loc.*

18) Aesch. Niobe frag. 159 (TrGF = 278 D Mette). Greetings laced with inordinate praise and followed by a reversal of fortune can be found at Eur. I.A. 590–597, Eur. El. 988–997, and Aesch. Agam. 895–904. In the last two examples there is disguised hostility and a probable intention to provoke φθόνος. See E. Fraenkel ed. Agam. (Oxford, 1950), commentary to line 904.

19) Lines 348–355 constitute one argument against a view often seen in earlier scholarship and still not quite put to rest, that the revenge action of 1099–1624 does not grow naturally out of what precedes it. See, e.g., F. A. Paley, Euripides, with an English Commentary, vol. 3 (London 1860) 226–228. Even G. Perrotta, an early defender of the play (supra, n. 2), can imagine acceptable alternative endings in which the intrigue against Menelaus' family is omitted (96–97). So can F. Daraio, L' 'Oreste' di Euripide, Dioniso N. S. 12 (1949) 95, and

In the next episode, Menelaus declines to help Orestes, though he disguises his refusal under the pretense that he is only waiting for an opportunity (699 ff.). This evasion of responsibility provides a motive for the attack on his fortunes, and the intrigue of Orestes, Pylades, and Electra provides the means. When Menelaus makes his second and last entrance (1554), his fortunes have already received a setback in the capture of Hermione, and his distress is compounded by his belief that Orestes has succeeded in killing Helen. He enters energetically, announcing his contempt for his enemy and commanding that the doors of the palace be forcibly opened. He is taken by surprise when Orestes speaks from the roof. This scene is notable in several ways. In the first place, it marks an exchange of ascendancy between two antagonists of a kind that also occurs in *Hecuba*, *Medea*, and *Bacchae*. This second entrance of Menelaus, moreover, seems intended to remind the audience visually and verbally of the first and so to dramatize how different is the relation between the two men now. In his book "Greek Tragedy in Action" Oliver Taplin has discussed this technique under the rubric "Mirror Scenes"²⁰. His examples are drawn from other plays, but he might have found equally illustrative detail here. For instance, at each of Menelaus' two entrances the chorus announce the arrival of a "fortunate man" (354, 1552); the second time, of course, their intentions are hostile and their words ironic. Each scene begins with Menelaus looking for Orestes, then recoiling when he has found him (375, 385; 1561, 1573). The contrast in their relation is dramatized by Orestes' position and demeanor at the beginnings of the two scenes: in the first, he crouches in suppliant posture before Menelaus; in the

K. Reinhardt, *Die Sinneskrise bei Euripides*, *Die Neue Rundschau* 68 (1957) 640–641. But the peril to Menelaus is already foreshadowed by 355; his disloyal behavior will provide a motive. Even earlier, we can recognize in the appearance of Helen a spectacle of undeserved prosperity. She is vain (128–129), unrepentant (79), and insensitive (Hermione can be excused from an unmaidenlike errand at 108, but not Electra; cf. 72, 92, 94). Her provocative behavior here and Electra's reaction at 130–131 amply foreshadow the revenge action.

20) (London 1978) 122–139. G. W. Bond ed., *Heracles* (Oxford 1981), in his note to line 1424, comments on a similar use of visual and verbal parallelism in that play. Numerous other examples of significant stage business in tragedy, often in the form of ironically contrasted parallel actions, can be found in W. Steidle, *Studien zum Antiken Drama unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Bühnenspiels* (Munich 1968). Euripides is his prime source of these. He discusses on p. 106 the visual contrast in the appearance of Orestes in the prologue and in the exodos of this play.

second, he stands on the roof declaiming threats²¹). If we read the later scene as one in which the tables are turned we have certainly grasped one important aspect of it. It is important to note that Euripides has used visual effects to reinforce this impression.

There is another, equally important aspect to Menelaus' setback and Orestes' present ascendancy. This second meeting between the two men fulfills what the chorus said at line 340 about the transience of prosperity, shortly before it complimented Menelaus on his own current good fortune. In that context, the chorus connected Menelaus' luck and luxury with his Tantalid blood, inviting a more particular association of his fortunes with those of his ancestor, ὁ μακάριος. At the beginning of the later scene, immediately before Menelaus' arrival, the "house of Tantalus" is mentioned again (1543–44), but now it is about to be burned, and its members are coming into deadly conflict. Then, when Orestes appears on the roof, his first words are (1567–70):

οὗτος σύ, κλήθρων τῶνδε μὴ ψαύσης χειρὶ
 Μενέλαον εἶπον, ὃς πεπύργωσαι θράσει·
 ἢ τῶνδε θριγκῶ κρᾶτα συνθραύσω σέθεν,
 ῥήξας παλαιὰ γεῖσα, τεκτόνων πόνον.

This threat to cast a coping-stone upon Menelaus' head unless he moves back seems needless. The door is barred, as Orestes immediately points out, and there is a knife to be held at Hermione's throat. Menelaus can easily be held at bay, and there is strictly no need for Orestes to adopt this tactic of siege warfare. In spite of its singularity and apparent superfluity, his gesture has received very little attention and has never been satisfactorily explained²²). I suggest that it is best understood as one element in an extended parallel action designed to be set against the second episode and to accentuate the present overturn of Menelaus' fortunes. The stoning that Orestes faced in that episode was there only in the form of

21) The statement of M. R. Halleran, *Stagecraft in Euripides* (London and Sydney 1985) 43, that a "visual turnabout" is achieved is substantially correct, but it is wrong to say that "Orestes lay on the ground as Menelaos entered. . . ." Orestes lay down on his pallet at 311, and Electra told him to stay there. When he next speaks, he is grasping Menelaus by the knees as a suppliant (382).

22) Perrotta (*supra*, n. 2), 113, calls it merely a warning to Menelaus that Orestes can strike him at will. W. Biehl, *Zur Darstellung des Menschen in Euripides' Orestes*, *Helikon* 8 (1968) 217, says it is a bit of primitive farce. For W. Burkert, *Die Absurdität der Gewalt und das Ende der Tragödie: Euripides' Orestes*, *A & A* 20 (1974) 105, it is a grotesque gesture in a generally grotesque play.

a verbal menace, and the physical threat against Menelaus at 1569 ff. is a brief one. But in this pair of scenes each man in turn is subjected to prolonged and effective bullying, and the threat to stone is one aspect of this²³). This duplicated action has its prototype in the image of Tantalus at lines 4–7. This use of Tantalus is fully appropriate, since he is the ancestor of both men and a familiar model of good fortune lost.

All this helps to show that the Tantalus myth in *Orestes* has a claim to interest independent of its possible link with the doctrines of Anaxagoras and his followers. Attention to the myth allows a reader to see a connection between details of plot, staging, and lyric that has not previously been noticed. The case is further strengthened by observation of one other important feature of the play: if one leaves out of account a few slaves who never appear on stage (1486–9), no one in the story is physically harmed. Instead of bloodshed there is a series of enactments and reports of fierce intimidation. In successive scenes, the agents of menace are the Furies against Orestes, Tyndareus against Orestes, Orestes against Helen, Orestes against the Phrygian, Orestes against Menelaus and Hermione. In each case the threat comes to nothing; the play is a highly varied spectacle of merely impending disasters.

In reflecting on the aptness of lines 1–10 as an emblematic preamble to such a story, one can hardly do better than quote Welcker, who in 1856, in an article in *Rheinisches Museum*, said this about the Tantalus myth: *Saxum superne imminens etiam per se et ex fabulae quam vidimus tenore avulsum apta est imago et quasi tessera perturbationis, metus, terroris, periculi...*²⁴).

23) The *θρυγκός* of 1569 is certainly a stone. Whatever the real material of the stage-building, it represents a palace with architectural elements of stone, like the stone architrave of Pentheus' palace at Ba. 591–592 and the stone *θρυγκοί* of Agamemnon's palace at Eur. El. 1150. In spite of this, J. Jannoray, *Nouvelles Inscriptions de Lébadée*, BCH 64–65 (1940–41) 39 n. 3, concludes that this *θρυγκός* must be thought of as wooden. His argument is that the scholia to Or. 1569 and Tro. 489 make *θρυγκός* and *γείσων* equivalent terms, while the order to burn the *γείσα* at Or. 1620 implies that these are wooden. But the same *Orestes* scholion refers to *θρυγκοί* as *λίθοι*. Jannoray is using the scholiast as a witness against himself, let alone against the ordinary meaning of *θρυγκός*. What the text of Or. 1569 and 1620 actually shows is that *θρυγκός* and *γείσων* were sometimes distinguished. This is the view of Chapouthier, in F. Chapouthier ed., *L. Méridier trans.*, Euripide: *Oreste* (Paris 1959) 95 n. 2, and also that of Di Benedetto (*supra*, n. 10) ad loc. A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens* (Oxford 1946) 125, implies his agreement when he speaks of “the coping-stone which Orestes threatens to hurl down...”

24) F. T. Welcker, *Alcmanis fragmentum de Tantalō*, RhM N. F. 10 (1856) 247. *Orestes* is mentioned on p. 250.

Welcker's comment was embedded in a wide-ranging discussion which, though it gave scant attention to the play *Orestes*, revealed a broad basis in Greek poetic tradition for those details of its action and imagery discussed above. He maintained, in fact, that the Tantalus myth had so penetrated the Greek imagination that a vestige of it ought to be assumed in certain metaphors containing compounds of κρεμάννυμι in which the subject is a noun like "death", "old age", or ἄτη. For modern readers, this alleged derivation would be obscured by the more familiar story of the sword of Damocles. Welcker's examples are taken from Simonides, Theognis, and Mimnermus and are of a kind exemplified by Simonides frag. 520 (PMG): ὁ δ' ἄφυκτος ὁμῶς ἐπικρέμαται θάνατος²⁵). His argument that the Tantalus myth has left its trace on these passages is given some support by the fact that elsewhere the phrase "the stone of Tantalus" is found as a metaphor for danger, and here a reference to the myth cannot be in doubt. This is true of Archilochus frag. 91.14 f. (West): μηδ' ὁ Ταντάλου λίθος / τῆσδ' ὑπὲρ νήσου κρεμάσθω. It is also true of Pindar Isth. 8.9–12 (Snell-Maehler; v. infra). Nevertheless, Welcker no doubt went too far in his broad assumption that metaphors of overhanging ruin, death, and the like also have their origin in the myth. It seems enough to say that the myth and the metaphor translate the idea of danger into similar terms and that for a Greek each readily suggested the other. In at least one passage, however, an implied allusion to the myth seems certain. At Isth. 8.9 ff. Pindar wrote these lines about the defeat of the Persians and their departure from Greece:

τὸν ὑπὲρ κεφαλᾶς
10 γεῖ Ταντάλου λίθον παρὰ
τις ἔτρεψεν ἄμμι θεός,
ἀτόλματον Ἑλλάδι μόν-

25) Welcker's other examples (*supra*, n. 24), 247, include Theognis 205–206, οὐδὲ φίλοισιν / ἄτην ἐξοπίασιν παισὶν ἐπεκρέμασεν, and Mimnermus 5.6 (West), γῆρας ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς αὐτίχ' ὑπεκρέμαται. There is a slight variant of the latter at Theognis 1022. One can add to his list Theognis 1184, ἄνδρ' . . . ᾧ μὴ μῶμος ἐπικρέμαται. The example he cites from Hipp. De Morbis 2.60 seems to me of doubtful relevance. H. W. Smyth's note to Simonides 520 (PMG = XV Smyth), with its Horatian parallel *dstrictus ensis super cervice pendens* (Odes 3.1.17), shows how readily Damocles displaces Tantalus in modern commentary on metaphors of this type (Greek Melic Poets [London 1904] 325). The influence of Od. 11. 582–592 is no doubt one cause of this. See D. Comparetti, *Die Strafe des Tantalus nach Pindar* (Ol. 1,56 ff.), *Philologus* 32 (1873) 245.

χθον. ἀλλ' ἔμοι δεῖμα μὲν παροιχομένων
καρτερὰν ἔπαυσε μέριμναν· τὸ δὲ πρὸ ποδῶς
ἄρειον αἰεὶ βλέπειν
χρῆμα πᾶν· δόλιος γὰρ αἰ-
ὼν ἐπ' ἀνδράσι κρέματαί,

15 ἔλίσσων βίου πόρον . . .

Here lines 9–12 explicitly refer to Tantalus in the manner of Archilochus, frag. 91, whereas line 14 is no more explicit than Simonides frag. 520. But there seems little room for doubt that the second expression grows out of the first. On the other hand, at Ol. 6.74 it is harder to say whether we ought to see in the abuse of the envious that “hangs over” the victors an attenuated reference to Tantalus²⁶). The same may be said of certain metaphors in Herodotus and Thucydides. Of these the most striking are found at Herod. 9.33.5 (δείματος μεγάλου ἐπικρεμαμένου) and Thuc. 1.18.2 (μεγάλου κινδύνου ἐπικρεμασθέντος). Both are references to Xerxes' invasion which duplicate, if they are not actually reminiscences of, Pindar's image of the Persians as a stone of Tantalus poised over Greece. This way of speaking of danger is found several times in Thucydides, and it is surprising not to find examples from that author (or from Herodotus, for that matter) in Welcker's argument. Death from the plague is visualized as an object poised and ready to fall on its victim (2.53.4); so is the threat to Athens from the Mitylenian rebellion (3.40.7) and the danger to the Athenian army in its retreat from Syracuse (7.75.7).

Of more immediate interest to students of Euripides is a passage from *I.T.* (288–90). The context is a reported speech of Orestes during which he cries out that the Furies are chasing him and trying to kill him. One of these Furies, he says,

πῦρ πνέουσα καὶ φόνον
περοῖς ἐρέσσει, μητέρ' ἀγκάλαις ἐμὴν
ἔχουσα, πέτρινον ἄχθος, ὡς ἐπεμβάλη.

This is the sort of vision one gets in a dream, said Wecklein, who did not think it was too bizarre for its context. We can judge the strain placed on the sensibilities of other scholars by glancing at the several emendations designed to eliminate πέτρινον or other-

26) Tantalus appears elsewhere at Ol. 1.55 ff. The view I take of Isth. 8.14 is that of J. B. Bury ed., *The Isthmian Odes of Pindar* (London and New York 1892) ad loc.

wise reduce the apparition to a more rational form²⁷). But the offending details belong in the text. They illustrate, in the form of hallucination rather than metaphor, a common Greek way of imagining an object of great fear. Euripides would fully exploit this image in *Orestes*, but it is instructive to find this passing use of it in a play written a few years earlier.

This assortment of passages from various authors shows that certain details in *Orestes* for which I have claimed significance have parallels in earlier Greek literature. It forms the last step in an argument that can now be summed up as follows. It is a commonplace in Greek poetry and vivid prose to speak of peril in one of these three ways: (1) as an overhanging object that threatens to fall, (2) as an overhanging stone, (3) as the stone of Tantalus. We should probably not assume a covert reference to Tantalus in all metaphors of the first and second kinds, or derive all of them from his myth (*pace* Welcker). If, however, his name has been mentioned in a neighboring context, as in Pindar *Isth.* 8.14, it will be reasonable to assume a connection. In dealing with tragedy, where the evidence is likely to be plot and gesture rather than verbal metaphor, we should observe the same caution and enjoy the same licence. In *Orestes*, the passages that mention Tantalus have never had an explanation that would give them a place in the design of the play, even though he is more than once identified with some emphasis as the ancestor and prototype of the principal characters. Since their ordeals, like his, consist mainly in the fear of impending peril, and since this parallelism extends to particular details of language, plot, and staging, it seems reasonable to assume that his fate is mentioned at the beginning of the play in order to serve as a

27) See N. Wecklein ed., *I.T.*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig 1904) ad loc. Proposed emendations can be inspected in the appendix to Wecklein's earlier critical ed. (Leipzig 1898); four of these are designed to remove *πέτρῳνον*. The version I have given is that of J. Diggle, *Euripidis Fabulae*, vol. 2 (Oxford 1981), which prints Greverus' emendation ἄχθος for ὄχθον. One could also defend ὄγκον (Heimsoeth). To leave the manuscript reading unaltered would require taking ὄχθον as acc. of the goal after ἐρέσσει, in defiance of word order, or accepting the version of LSJ⁹ s.v. ἐπεμβάλλω, with the notation "(dub. constr.)": "that she may dash [her] upon it." But Orestes is afraid she will throw her burden upon *him*. The main difficulties are well discussed in the notes to M. Platnauer's edition (Oxford 1938). The argument of A. W. Verrall, *Iphigenia in Taurica*, *CR* 27 (1913) 225–226, includes a harsh attempt to retain ὄχθον and construe it as a stonelike, tomblike missile. Welcker (*supra*, n. 24), 252 n. 6, also reads ὄχθον, apparently as a direct object. He cites the passage while discussing the legend that Zeus punished Tantalus by placing Mt. Sipylos over him.

paradigm of the dramatic action that follows²⁸). The paradigmatic use of his legend is as old as Archilochus, and it is clearly suitable in a drama about his descendants. Euripides, like Aeschylus, believed that in the history of a family the present may imitate the past²⁹), and he was not at a loss to find dramatically arresting ways of expressing this.

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28) What follows the appearance of Apollo at line 1625 is, of course, not part of the pattern. The tragedy requires as a resolution either death or salvation, and at this point the paradigm must be left behind. It is worth noting that we do not know what place *Orestes* occupied in its tetralogy. A play in which the principal characters escape harm and find happiness in the end is suitable by one important criterion for fourth position in a Euripidean production; for that the case of *Alcestis* stands as a precedent. The proposal to put *Orestes* fourth has recently been revived by C. W. Müller as a corollary to his main argument in *Zur Datierung des sophokleischen Ödipus*, *Abhandlungen der Akad. der Wiss. und der Lit. Mainz, Geistes- und sozialwiss. Kl.*, 5 (1984), 66–69. A similar suggestion has been made, on different grounds, for two other Euripidean plays with happy endings, by D. F. Sutton in *Satyrical Qualities in Euripides' Iphigenia at Tauris and Helen*, *RSC* 20 (1972) 321–330.

29) Some examples from his *Electra* are noted in M. J. O'Brien, *Orestes and the Gorgon: Euripides' Electra*, *AJP* 85 (1964) 30–31. For the parallels drawn by Aeschylus between the revenge of Clytemnestra and that of Orestes, see A. Lesky, *Die tragische Dichtung der Hellenen*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen 1972) 123–124. These have to do mainly with plot. Other ways of establishing the parallelism of present and past in Aeschylus are examined by Anne Lebeck, *The Oresteia* (Washington, D.C. 1971) 59 ff.

C. W. Willink's ed. of *Orestes* (Oxford 1986) became available after this paper was completed. His commentary extends the conception, which he had earlier applied to line 4 ff. (supra, n. 4), of *Orestes* as a play with a high degree of "topicality" (xxiii and passim). His view that the frustrated killing of Helen is the actual cornerstone of the plot (xxviii–xxix) also deserves mention in contrast to some of the views cited in n. 19 supra. On Tantalus in Pindar, see now R. D. Griffith, *GRBS* 27 (1986) 5–13.