MICHAEL PASCHALIS

Between Theory and Practice
Etymologizing Proper Names in Plato's *Cratylus* and Athenian tragedy

The present study compares the explicit etymology of the name Ὀρέστης *in Plato's* Cratylus *and its implicit etymology in 5th century Athenian tragedy. In* Cratylus *the etymology in question is included in the group of Pelopid names; the name is associated with* ὄρος (*'mountain'*) *and would have been given to* Ὀρέστης *by chance or some poet in order to indicate the 'wildness' of his nature* (τὸ θηριῶδες τῆς φύσεως καὶ τὸ ἄγριον αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὀρεινὸν). *Differently from Plato, who probably based his etymology of* Ὀρέστης *on the 'savagery' he displayed in the murder of his mother, in the three matricide tragedies* (Aeschylus' Choephori, Sophocles' Electra *and Euripides'* Electra) *the etymological focus is placed on the event of recognition:* Ὀρέστης *is the person 'seen' again* (ὁρᾶν) *and 'recognized' by Electra and other characters. By contrast in Euripides'* Orestes *we encounter all the ingredients of the platonic etymology: Tyndareus compares Orestes to a snake, calls lawless revenge 'bestiality'* (τὸ θηριῶδες), *and condemns the 'wild rage'* (ἠγρίωσ') *which drove him to matricide; the Phrygian slave compares Orestes and Pylades, armed and threatening Helen with death, to 'wild mountain boars'* (ὡς κάπροι δ' ὀρέστεροι); *and later Menelaus refers to them as 'twin lions'.*

Il contributo paragona l'etimologia esplicita del nome Ὀρέστης *nel* Cratilo *platonico con l'etimologia implicita dello stesso nome nella tragedia ateniese del V secolo a.C. Nel* Cratilo *l'etimologia di* Ὀρέστης *è compresa nel gruppo di nomi della stirpe dei Pelopidi; il nome è collegato a* ὄρος (*'montagna'*), *a suggerire la natura 'selvaggia' dell'eroe* (τὸ θηριῶδες τῆς φύσεως καὶ τὸ ἄγριον αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὀρεινὸν). *Diversamente da Platone, il quale ha probabilmente basato la suddetta etimologia sulla ferocia che l'eroe aveva dimostrato nell'uccidere sua madre, le tre tragedie che trattano l'argomento del matricidio* (le Coefore *di Eschilo, l'*Elettra *di Sofocle e l'*Elettra *euripidea*) *mettono l'accento etimologico sul riconoscimento:* Ὀρέστης *sarebbe in principio la persona 'vista' di nuovo* (ὁρᾶν) *e 'riconosciuta' da Elettra e altri personaggi. Invece nell'*Oreste *di Euripide s'incontrano tutti i componenti semantici dell'etimologia platonica: Tindareo paragona Oreste a un serpente, chiama la vendetta senza legge 'bestialità'* (τὸ θηριῶδες) *e condanna la 'rabbia selvaggia'* (ἠγρίωσ') *che ha spinto l'eroe al matricidio; lo schiavo frigio paragona Oreste e Pilade, che sono armati e minacciano di uccidere Elena, a «cinghiali montanari»* (ὡς κάπροι δ' ὀρέστεροι); *e più tardi Menelao descrive la coppia di amici come «due leoni».*

1. *Cratylian etymologies and the literary tradition*

Ancient etymologizing exploited primarily sound similarities between words both in theory (explicit) and in practice (explicit or implicit). Etymologies provided by philosophers, grammarians, scholiasts are limited in number and known to us, and the same applies to explicit or almost explicit etymologies (like Χάρυβδις ἀναρρυβδεῖ, Hom. *Od.* 12.104; Petr. 36.7 *Carpe Carpe*) embedded in literary texts[1]. By contrast, implicit etymologizing is unpredictable and virtually inexhaustible, because it is contextual and context interpretation changes over time. Thus there are always instances which become known only when a competent reader digs them up. Proper names in particular, which are the focus of this paper, constitute

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[1] Etymological surveys like McCartney 1919, Sulzberger 1926, and Woodhead 1928 provide a good idea of this kind of etymologies.

a complex case: depending on the literary context they may unfold existing meanings or generate new ones and in addition these may change or evolve in the course of a narrative. If they are compound names, their semantic components may function independently of each other thus multiplying their generative potential[2].

Coincidence and interaction between etymological theory and practice was not uncommon: literature sometimes exploited the fruit of treatises on etymology and in other cases ancient etymologists constructed explanations out of literary texts, by observing the juxtaposition of similar-sounding words or various contextual features. Conflict between theory and practice was also not uncommon. The etymologies of Plato's *Cratylus*, the most prominent theoretical exposition on the meaning of names in Classical Greece, offer a substantial source of material for comparison with the preceding literary tradition. Platonic 'philosophical' etymologies of names of heroes and gods are in most cases not confirmed by earlier explicit or implicit 'literary' etymologies, in the sense that literary texts do not document them or provide / suggest different etymologies. Implicit etymologizing is far more widespread in poetry than explicit and provides valuable evidence for putting Cratylian etymologies to the test.

Cratylus is a dialogue on the 'correctness' of names, where two opposite views are represented: 'naturalism', according to which each thing has its own natural name, and 'conventionalism', according to which names are determined by convention and in an arbitrary manner. The former is held by Cratylus and the latter by Hermogenes. Though dedicating more space to the refutation of Hermogenes' conventionalism, Socrates criticizes both views and consequently his own view on the subject, if any, is still a debated issue. Another open issue is the character of Socrates's etymologies, whether they are seriously intended or are meant to undermine etymological practice[3].

What is the origin of Cratylian etymologies? According to Socrates, names were given in the past (and it is implied that they are still given) by an unspecified 'lawgiver' (νομοθέτης). As Ademollo points out, this 'lawgiver' is rather a 'species' than an individual: he is mostly anonymous and can be one or many, a poet, men, gods, chance, a divine force; or he can be identified with specific poets (like Homer and Hesiod) and even with 'thought' (διάνοια)[4].

As noted above Socratic 'philosophical' etymologies of proper names differ as a rule from 'literary' etymologies. A notable exception is the etymology of Ἀφροδίτη

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[2] Paschalis 1997, 3-4; also Paschalis 2003, 2020.

[3] Typical exponents of the respective schools of interpretation are Sedley 2003 and Baxter 1992.

[4] Ademollo 2011, 122-123.

(406c7-d1), where Socrates accepts without question the Hesiodic etymology from ἀφρός (*The.* 195-197)[5]. Susan Levin has argued that in the etymological section of *Cratylus* (390e-427d) Plato consciously takes as a central opponent the literary tradition from Homer to Euripides. In this respect she has furthermore observed that Plato's terminology concerning the 'appropriateness' of names, and principally the adverbs ὀρθῶς, ἀληθῶς, δικαίως, καλῶς, parallels that employed in the literary tradition[6].

The present study compares the etymology of Orestes in *Cratylus* and in 5th century Athenian tragedy. In *Cratylus* the etymology in question is included in the group of Pelopid (Tantalid) names, the listing of which proceeds backwards from son to father: Orestes, Agamemnon, Atreus, Pelops, Tantalus, Zeus, Cronus, Uranus (394ε8-396c2). In order to give an idea of Socratic etymologizing I quote the etymologies of the Pelopids leaving out their divine ancestors[7]:

> Ὀρέστης means 'Mountain-man', a name given to him by chance (τύχη) or some poet in order to indicate the 'wildness' of his nature (τὸ θηριῶδες τῆς φύσεως καὶ τὸ ἄγριον αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὀρεινὸν). Ἀγαμέμνων derives from ἀγαστὸς κατὰ τὴν ἐπιμονήν, 'admirable for holding his ground', because of 'the stay of his army in Troy and his perseverance'. Ἀτρεύς derives simultaneously from ἀτειρές 'stubborness', ἄτρεστον 'boldness', and ἀτηρόν 'destructivess', because of his murder of Chrysippus and his cruelty to Thyestes. Πέλοψ means 'near-sighted' (τὸν τὰ ἐγγὺς ὁρῶντα), because "according to legend, he didn't think about or foresee what the long-term consequences of murdering Myrtilus would be for his entire family, or all the misery that would overwhelm them; in his eagerness to win Hippodameia by any available means, he saw only what was ready to hand and on the spot – that is to say, what was nearby (πέλας)". Τάνταλος was so called because "in Hades, after his death, he had a stone 'suspended' (ταλαντεία) over his head, in wondrous harmony with his name. It's exactly as if someone had wished to name him Ταλάντατος ('Most-weighed upon') but has disguised the name and said 'Τάνταλος' instead".

Is there a quality distinction between this kind of etymologies and literary ones? In Socrates' view names are encoded descriptions, which only the expert etymologist is able to 'extract' from the current form of the name. This is what he says about the meaning of Atreus: «the form of his name is slightly deflected and hidden, so that it does not make the man's nature plain to every one; but to those who understand about names it makes the meaning of Atreus plain enough»

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[5] «As far as Aphrodite is concerned, there's no point in contradicting Hesiod […]».

[6] See Levin 1995, 1996, and 1997.

[7] Text by Duke et al. 1995; translation by Reeve 1998.

(395b5-9). The truth of the matter is that the above-mentioned etymologies do not suggest 'privileged' knowledge. They are evaluations of character or actions and events in the mythical accounts concerning these heroes, which were imposed upon the form of each name not by an original but by an a posteriori name-giver (Socrates). Thus the conception of etymologizing in the above-mentioned names does not differ substantially from what we find in earlier poetry. Furthermore Cratylian etymologies lack the consistency of philosophical thought, which would have set them at a level 'above' ordinary literary etymologizing. For instance, though in 394d-e Socrates argues that a son should have a name ascribing to him the same nature as his father's – unless he is some kind of monster – and though the names of the genealogy of the Pelopids are intended to confirm this rule, in fact each name is analyzed on its own[8]. In addition Socrates, having completed the presentation of these etymologies, in essence retracts what he had said about their 'correctness', when he admits that human names may be deceiving[9].

2. *A note on methodology*

In implicit poetic etymologizing there is no fixed 'correctness' of names. As I noted above, implicit meaning is strictly contextual. In platonic terms the 'law-giver' of etymological meaning is the poetic context, whether one believes that it conveys 'authorial intent' (*intentio auctoris*) or its own 'intent' (*intentio operis*) as understood and interpreted each time by the competent reader. In identifying implicit etymologies there cannot be (absolute) certainty as when the etymology is spelled out loud and clear: «His name shall be Aeneas (Αἰνείας), because I was seized by a terrible grief (αἰνὸν ἄχος), in that I fell into the bed of a mortal man» (*Hom. h.* 5.198-199). There always lurks the risk of mistaking sound similarity for etymological meaning. Furthermore one may be tempted to apply later, and especially allegorical, etymologies to early texts, thus causing readers to believe that they are reading Homer while in fact they are reading Heraclitus' *Homeric Problems* in disguise[10].

There is lesser risk when a name is found inserted in a 'semantic cluster', that is if it is grouped together with one or more semantically related words (synonyms,

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[8] Ademollo 2011, 179.

[9] 397b «The names that heroes and men are said to have might perhaps deceive us. After all, as we saw at the beginning, they are often given because they are the names of ancestors, and some of them are wholly inappropriate. Many, too, are given in the hope that they will prove appropriate».

[10] Cf. Tsitsibakou-Vasalos 2007, with my review in *BMCR* 2008.07.58.

antonyms, hyponyms ad words which the poet tends to associate), which 'gloss', and more properly suggest or evoke, its meaning. When the name is 'transparent' (like 'Astyanax') it is relatively easier to identify its etymology. When it is partially or fully 'opaque' (like 'Sisyphus') any 'segment' of it (= part of a word not recognized by morphology) can 'acquire' meaning in the appropriate semantic environment[11]. In matters concerning the relation of etymology to morphology ancient views differed substantially from ours: in the platonic examples quoted above etymologizing involves arbitrary addition, subtraction or transposition of letters[12]. The same applies in varying degrees to literary etymologizing, with one major difference: Platonic etymologizing functions out of context; literary etymologizing, especially implicit, is context-dependent.

The following passage (Pindar *N*. 10.60-70), treating the mythical fight between the sons of Aphareus, Idas and Lynceus, and the Dioscuri, Castor and Polydeuces, is intended to illustrate the function and significance of semantic clusters in evoking nuances of meaning in the proper names Λυγκεύς and Ἀφαρ-ητίδαι[13]:

<div style="text-align:center">

τὸν γὰρ Ἴδας ἀμφὶ βουσίν πως χολω-   60
    θεὶς **ἔτρωσεν** χαλκέας **λόγχας ἀκμᾷ.**
ἀπὸ Ταϋγέτου **πεδαυγά-**
    ζων ἴδεν Λυγκεὺς δρυὸς ἐν στελέχει
ἡμένους. κείνου γὰρ ἐπιχθονίων πάν-
    των γένετ' **ὀξύτατον**
ὄμμα. λαιψηροῖς δὲ πόδεσσιν **ἄφαρ**
ἐξικέσθαν, καὶ μέγα ἔργον ἐμήσαντ' **ὠκέως**
καὶ πάθον δεινὸν παλάμαις **Ἀφαρ**ητί-   65
    δαι Διός. **αὐτίκα** γὰρ
ἦλθε Λήδας παῖς **διώκων**· τοὶ δ' ἔναν-
    τα στάθεν τύμβῳ σχεδὸν πατρωΐῳ·
ἔνθεν ἁρπάξαντες ἄγαλμ' Ἀΐδα, ξεστὸν πέτρον,
ἔμβαλον στέρνῳ Πολυδεύκεος· ἀλλ' οὔ νιν φλάσαν,
οὐδ' ἀνέχασσαν· ἐφορμαθεὶς δ' ἄρ' **ἄκοντι θοῷ**,
ἤλασε **Λυγκέος** ἐν πλευραῖσι χαλκόν.   70

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<div style="text-align:center">

For Idas, somehow angry about cattle,
    wounded him with the point of his bronze spear.
Watching from Taygetus, Lynceus had seen them
    sitting in the hollow trunk of an oak tree,

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[11] See Paschalis 1997, 4-5; and further Paschalis 2003, 2020.
[12] Sedley 2003, 80-81.
[13] Text and translation by Race 1997.

> for of all mortals
>> he had the sharpest
> eyesight. The sons of Aphareus came at once
> on swift feet and quickly devised a mighty deed,
> and they suffered terribly
>> at the hands of Zeus, for immediately
> the son of Leda came in pursuit, while they took
>> a stand against him beside their father's tomb.
> From it they seized the grave marker of polished stone
> and threw it against Polydeuces' chest, but they did not
>> crush him
> or drive him back. He attacked them then with his swift
>> javelin
> and drove the bronze into Lynceus' side.

The lines concerning Lynceus (ἀπὸ Ταϋγέτου […] ὄμμα) are organized around the notion of 'sight', highlighting specifically the 'sharpness' of his vision and thus suggesting the association of his name with 'lynx' (λύγξ), a wildcat with an eyesight so strong that enables it to spot a small animal from a long distance. Furthermore Lynceus' ὀξύτατον ὄμμα interacts semantically with the literal meaning of ὀξύς as applied to the 'point' of a weapon (as in Hom. *Il.* 10.335 ὀξὺν ἄκοντα) and suggested by λόγχας ἀκμᾷ, Ida's 'spearpoint' that killed Castor[14]. In the next section (λαιψηροῖς […] διώκων) the name Ἀφαρητίδαι is surrounded by words indicating 'speed' and 'immediacy'. The latter include 'ἄφαρ' at the end of line 63, which 'glosses' a segment of Ἀφαρητί- /δαι placed at the end of line 66, probably suggesting that the swift end of the sons of Aphareus is inherent in their patronymic. The end of 'Lynceus' (69-70) is highly ironic: the hero with the 'sharpest' eyesight that had spotted the Dioscuri from a great distance is killed ἄκοντι θοῷ, that is by the 'pointed head' of a spear that strikes him from afar, while his 'swift' death brings his earlier 'rush' to battle to a bitter conclusion. His end had been semantically 'prefigured' by the interaction of his ὀξύτατον ὄμμα with λόγχας ἀκμᾷ, the 'spearpoint' that killed Castor.

3. Ὀρέστης *in tragedy: Aeschylus'* Choephori*, Sophocles'* Electra*, and Euripides'* Electra

The myths relating to the Pelopids were a favorite theme of Athenian tragedy and it is obviously there that one should look for confirmation of relative Cra-

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[14] Cf. the meanings of Latin *acies*, 'edge or point of a weapon'; 'vision'.

tylian etymologies, though Socrates does not mention any of the three tragedians and his pronouncements about tragedy are negative[15]. The most common of the Pelopid names is Orestes: he appears as a character in seven plays and is mentioned in two more[16]. The etymological treatment of the name is not, however, uniform. No explicit etymology is provided in any of them but there are probable or possible implicit etymologies. Taking into account what I believe to be the most significant instances[17], these plays can be divided into two groups. The first group contains the three matricide plays: Aeschylus' *Choephori*, Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Electra*; the second group includes only Euripides' *Orestes*.

I start with the first group. The most prominent and conspicuous semantic association of the name Ὀρέστης in this group, based on the semantic clusters in which it is found, is with the verb ὁρᾶν ('see'), cognates, synonyms and terms belonging to the semantic field of vision and light[18]. The grouping of the name with such terms in conjunction with the poetic context impart meaning to the segment Ὀρ- by exploiting the sound similarity with ὁρᾶν.

Here is the poetic context that explains this association. The secret return of Orestes to Argos (Mycenae) and his recognition by Electra is the pivotal prerequisite of the main event with which he became associated, the killing of his

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[15] 408c5-9 «Well, the true part is smooth and divine and dwells among the gods above, while the false part dwells below among the human masses, and is rough and goatish (τραγικόν); for it is here, in the tragic life (τραγικόν), that one finds the vast majority of myths and falsehoods»; 425d5-7 «Unless you want us to behave like tragic poets, who introduce a *deus ex machina* whenever they're perplexed».

[16] He appears in Aeschylus' *Choephori* and *Eumenides*; in Sophocles' *Electra*; and in Euripides' *Electra*, *Orestes*, *Andromache*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*. He is mentioned in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

[17] I do not consider minor ancient and modern suggestions. In antiquity there was also Proclus' etymology, 47.22-24 Pasquali: καλείτω τοίνυν ὁ Ἀγαμέμνων τὸν παῖδα Ὀ ρ έ σ τ η ν μὴ διὰ τὴν ἀγριότητα τοῦ ἤθους, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ὁρμὴν καὶ τὴν εὐκινησίαν παρὰ τὸ ὁ ρ ο ύ ε ι ν («So let us suppose that Agamemnon calls his son "Orestes" not for his wildness of character but for his vigor and quickness of movement deriving his name from ὁρούειν [to rush forward]», tr. by Duvick 2007). I also leave out minor modern etymological suggestions, like: Fuochi 1898, 309 on Eur. *Or.* 1644, from ὅρος; Willink 1986, 140 on Eur. *Or.* 328, from ὁρεχθεὶς.

[18] Tsitsibakou-Vasalos 2007, 216-221, offers the most extensive modern discussion of the name Orestes but her treatment is unconvincing and somewhat chaotic from a methodological viewpoint: she takes into consideration, simultaneously and without distinction, all possible etymologies (including Proclus') and assigns to Orestes a multiple etymological identity derived from all the other Pelopids. Her discussion of 'vision' is unfocused and confusing, leaving out, except for a brief and marginal mention (218), the pivotal recognition scenes.

mother Clytemnestra (and Aegisthus) in revenge for his father's murder. The recognition of Orestes follows the same pattern in the three tragedians: Orestes makes offerings in secret at the tomb of Agamemnon; the tokens of his presence are noticed by Electra or a third party; Orestes is eventually recognized by Electra either directly or through the mediation of a third party. Unlike Plato, who most probably based his etymology of Ὀρέστης on an evaluation of the hero's 'savagery' displayed in the murder of his mother, the three tragedians became mainly interested in the event of recognition: Ὀρέστης is the person 'seen' again (ὁρᾶν) and 'recognized' by Electra[19].

Though the circumstances of recognition are different each time, the name Ὀρέστης is always inserted in clusters of verbs and nouns indicating 'sight' – *unlike* the mutual recognition of Orestes and Iphigenia in *Iphigenia in Tauris*[20]. Most importantly, Ὀρέστης and ὁρᾶν are always found at the climax of the recognition scene and thus in the three tragedians the identity and the etymology of Ὀρέστης are established at the same time. All things considered, the association of the name with ὁρᾶν is neither accidental nor self-evident; and thus it cannot be intended merely to exploit an acoustic similarity but very probably to create meaning.

3.1. *Aeschylus'* Choephori: Ὀρέστης *'recognized' as* τερπνὸν ὄμμα

In the first epeisodion of Aeschylus' *Choephori* (84-305) Electra, accompanied by the chorus of women, has come to the tomb of Agamemnon at Argos, close to the royal palace. She prays to Hermes to carry her message to her father and then calls upon him to have pity on herself and Orestes. In 131-139 she prays for her brother's return[21] using a striking metaphor: «kindle a light in your house in the shape of my Orestes» (φίλον τ' Ὀρέστην φῶς ἄναψον ἐν δόμοις)[22]. Having poured libations at Agamemnon's tomb she notices (and picks up) a lock of hair – previously placed there by her brother (7) – which resembles her own and could belong to «the person [she] most love[s] in the world, Orestes» (193-194 τοῦ φιλτάτου / βροτῶν Ὀρέστου). In a mental state of confusion and hope she makes another appeal to the gods (201). Then she notices «footprints that are similar to her own» (206). She follows the prints away from the tomb until she comes to Orestes'

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[19] I am not concerned here with sporadic juxtapositions of Ὀρέστης with ὁρᾶν which occur in several tragedies.

[20] 725-901, esp. 827-933. In this play there is only an *after the fact* confirmation of the event by Pylades in 902-903 τὸ μὲν φίλους ἐλθόντας **εἰς ὄψιν** φίλων, / **Ὀρέστα**, χειρῶν περιβολὰς εἰκὸς λαβεῖν·

[21] 138-139 ἐλθεῖν δ' Ὀρέστην δεῦρο σὺν τύχη τινὶ / κατεύχομαί σοι, καὶ σὺ κλῦθί μου, πάτερ·

[22] On the text see Garvie 1986, 77-78.

hiding-place; she is in state of extreme anguish, when Orestes steps out from his hiding place and identifies himself (212-239)[23]:

OP.	εὔχου τὰ λοιπά, τοῖς θεοῖς τελεσφόρους
	εὐχὰς ἐπαγγέλλουσα, τυγχάνειν καλῶς.
ΗΛ.	ἐπεὶ τί νῦν ἔκατι δαιμόνων κυρῶ;
OP.	**εἰς ὄψιν ἥκεις** ὧνπερ ἐξηύχου πάλαι. 215
ΗΛ.	καὶ τίνα σύνοισθά μοι καλουμένη βροτῶν;
OP.	σύνοιδ᾽ Ὀρέστην πολλά σ᾽ ἐκπαγλουμένην.
ΗΛ.	καὶ πρὸς τί δῆτα τυγχάνω κατευγμάτων;
OP.	ὅδ᾽ εἰμί· μὴ μάστευ᾽ ἐμοῦ μᾶλλον φίλον.
ΗΛ.	ἀλλ᾽ ἦ δόλον τιν᾽ ὦ ξέν᾽ ἀμφί μοι πλέκεις; 220
OP.	αὐτὸς κατ᾽ αὐτοῦ τἄρα μηχανορραφῶ.
ΗΛ.	ἀλλ᾽ ἐν κακοῖσι τοῖς ἐμοῖς γελᾶν θέλεις;
OP.	κἀν τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἄρ᾽, εἴπερ ἔν γε τοῖσι σοῖς.
ΗΛ.	**ὡς ὄντ᾽ Ὀρέστην** γάρ σ᾽ ἐγὼ προσεννέπω;
<OP.>	αὐτὸν μὲν οὖν **ὁρῶσα** δυσμαθεῖς ἐμέ, 225
	κουρὰν δ᾽ **ἰδοῦσα** τήνδε κηδείου τριχὸς
	ἀνεπτερώθης κἀδόκεις **ὁρᾶν** ἐμέ,
	ἰχνοσκοποῦσά τ᾽ ἐν στίβοισι τοῖς ἐμοῖς
	<. . . . .>
	σαυτῆς ἀδελφοῦ ξυμμέτρου τῷ σῷ κάρᾳ·
	σκέψαι τομῇ προσθεῖσα βόστρυχον τριχός. 230
	ἰδοῦ δ᾽ ὕφασμα τοῦτο, σῆς ἔργον χερός,
	σπάθης τε πληγὰς ἠδὲ θήρειον γραφήν –
	[…]
ΗΛ.	ὦ φίλτατον μέλημα δώμασιν πατρός,
	δακρυτὸς ἐλπὶς σπέρματος σωτηρίου·
	ὦ τερπνὸν **ὄμμα**, τέσσαρας μοίρας ἔχον
	ἐμοί·

OR.	Pray to the gods for continued success, proclaiming to them
	that your previous prayers have been fulfilled!
EL.	Why, what success have the gods now granted me?
OR.	You have come face to face with the one you have long prayed for.
EL.	How can you know who I've been crying for?
OR.	I'm aware that you were very much extolling Orestes.
EL.	And in what way, may I ask, have I now gained what I prayed for?
OR.	I am he. Don't try to find one that's more your friend than I am.
EL.	Look here, stranger, are you trying to weave some web of trickery around me?
OR.	If I am, then I must be hatching plots against myself!

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[23] Text by West 1998; translation by Sommerstein 2009 (slightly modified).

EL.   What, will you laugh at my sufferings?
OR.   If I'm laughing at yours, then I'm also laughing at my own.
EL.   You mean —should I be addressing you as Orestes?
OR.   So when you see me in person you're reluctant to recognize me
       — whereas when you saw this cut lock of mourning,
       your heart took wing and you imagined you could see me,
       and when you were examining the tracks of my feet
       < . . . . >
       it's your own brother's, and it matches that of your own head.
       Put the lock of hair next to the place it was cut from,
       and take a look. And look at this piece of weaving,
       the work of your hands, the strokes of the batten
        and the picture of a beast.
       […]
EL.   Dearest one, treasure of your father's house!
       The seed we wept for, in the hope it would sprout and save us!
       O joyful light, you fill four roles for me[24].

Orestes identifies himself with an expression of vision: εἰς ὄψιν ἥκεις («you have come face to face», «you have before your eyes»), but Electra remains unconvinced and suspicious, even when her brother utters his own name (217). When she utters the name of Ὀρέστης herself (224), her brother replies using ὁρῶσα and ὁρᾶν. Next Orestes invites his sister to 'examine' (σκέψαι) his lock of hair and 'look' (ἰδοῦ) at a piece of cloth, which she had woven and embroidered long ago. Having recognized Orestes Electra addresses him as ὦ τερπνὸν ὄμμα (238).

Garvie takes ὄμμα (lit. 'eye') to refer to Orestes' beloved 'face' and metaphorically to the eye as a source of 'saving light'[25]. Beyond the poetic metaphor, the association of Ὀρέστης with ὄμμα may be etymologically significant: in the context of recognition he represents a beloved 'sight'. Furthermore, the eye functions by means of light (φῶς), with which Ὀρέστης was identified by Electra in 131. All things considered, in the recognition scene the name Ὀρέστης is firmly embedded in the semantic field of 'sight' and 'light'. To be noted that Orestes is also the person who in the eyes of the chorus is expected to «kindle fire and light for freedom» (863-864 πῦρ καὶ φῶς ἐπ᾽ ἐλευθερίᾳ / δαίων). According to Garvie, the literal reference is probably to a celebration sacrifice – to be offered after the success of his vengeance plans – and the metaphorical to «a signal-beacon that will carry the good news of liberation»[26].

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[24] Those of father, mother, sister, and brother.

[25] 1986, 104.

[26] Garvie 1986, 282. In connection with this passage he also reminds the reader that «The

3.2. *Sophocles'* Electra

3.2.1. *Chrysothemis and 'the mental recognition' of* Ὀρέστης

In Sophocles' *Electra* the recognition of Orestes is split between Chrysothemis and Electra: the former notices the tokens of Orestes' visit to Agamemnon's tomb and Electra is involved in the actual recognition of Orestes. In the third epeisodion (871-1057) Chrysothemis has just come back from her visit to Agamemnon's tomb and announces to Electra in an excited and joyful mood that Orestes has returned to Mycenae (877-878)[27]:

> **πάρεστ᾽ Ὀρέστης** ἡμίν, ἴσθι τοῦτ᾽ ἐμοῦ
> κλύουσ᾽, ἐναργῶς, ὥσπερ **εἰσορᾷς** ἐμέ.
>
> He's here with us! Orestes! Listen to me:
> He's here, as sure as you're seeing me now.

This is a unique case of play on both segments of Ὀρ-έστης. It does not, however, create meaning but exploits sound similarity. Chrysothemis cannot announce that she has 'seen' Orestes because she has not. By contrast, the passage in which she reports to her sister the tokens of his presence at the tomb (886 σημεῖ᾽ ἰδοῦσα) creates a familiar and at the same time unexpectedly original semantic environment for Ὀρέστης. Here it is (892-906):

> καὶ δὴ λέγω σοι πᾶν ὅσον **κατειδόμην**.
> ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἦλθον πατρὸς ἀρχαῖον τάφον,
> **ὁρῶ** κολώνης ἐξ ἄκρας νεορρύτους
> πηγὰς γάλακτος καὶ περιστεφῆ κύκλῳ   895
> πάντων ὅσ᾽ ἔστιν ἀνθέων θήκην πατρός.
> **ἰδοῦσα** δ᾽ ἔσχον θαῦμα, καὶ **περισκοπῶ**
> μή πού τις ἡμῖν ἐγγὺς ἐγχρίμπτει βροτῶν.
> ὡς δ᾽ ἐν γαλήνῃ πάντ᾽ **ἐδερκόμην** τόπον,
> τύμβου προσεῖρπον ἆσσον· ἐσχάτης δ᾽ **ὁρῶ**   900
> πυρᾶς νεώρη βόστρυχον τετμημένον·
> κεὐθὺς τάλαιν᾽ ὡς **εἶδον**, ἐμπαίει τί μοι
> ψυχῇ σύνηθες **ὄμμα**, φιλτάτου βροτῶν
> πάντων **Ὀρέστου** τοῦθ᾽ **ὁρᾶν** τεκμήριον·

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idea belongs to a recurring image of the trilogy, which develops from the beacons of Agamemnon and the fires of sacrifice to the torch-light procession at the end of Eumenides».

[27] Text by Lloyd-Jones - Wilson 1990; translation by Meineck - Woodruff 2007.

καὶ χερσὶ βαστάσασα δυσφημῶ μὲν οὔ,   905
χαρᾷ δὲ πίμπλημ᾽ εὐθὺς **ὄμμα** δακρύων.

> All right, I'll tell you exactly everything I saw.
> When I came to Father's tomb on the ancient mound,
> I saw fresh streams of milk springing from the top,
> And all the flowers that are in bloom
> Were twisted in a wreath to crown Father's grave.
> I saw this and I was amazed. I looked around,
> Thinking someone else might be there with me.
> But stillness was all I could find in that place,
> So I crept up on the tomb, and at the edge I saw,
> On the burial site, a freshly cut lock of hair.
> Then immediately my poor soul was struck
> With a long-familiar precious sight – the man I love
> More than anyone, Orestes. This was evidence of him!
> I took and felt it with my hands, not daring to say a word,
> But joy immediately filled my eyes with tears.

As evidence of Orestes' visit to the tomb of Agamemnon, Chrysothemis lists the following tokens: a milk libation, a wreath of flowers, and a lock of hair. Her account reaches its climax with exactly the same terms of vision as in the respective *Choephori* scene: ὄμμα, Ὀρέστου, and ὁρᾶν. This is not, however, an actual recognition: unlike Electra, Chrysothemis does not see and recognize her brother in the flesh. What she does is recall a 'mental image' (ψυχῇ σύνηθες ὄμμα)[28] of her beloved Ὀρέστης, which is activated by the 'sight' (ὁρᾶν) of the freshly cut lock of hair.

3.2.2. *Electra and* Ὀρέστης: *the return of 'light' and 'life'*

The recognition of Orestes by Electra takes place in the fourth epeisodion (1098-1383) before the royal palace of Mycenae. Two factors are crucial for the evaluation of the recognition from a semantic viewpoint. First, Electra has the ultimate proof that her brother is dead: she is holding in her hands the urn supposedly containing the ashes of Orestes and has just mourned him with one of the most pathetic laments in Greek tragedy (1126-1170). The stranger (Orestes) insists that she give the urn back to him before he reveals the truth (1205-1206), but Electra passionately clings to it. It is not clear when she gives back or sets down (?) the urn, but obviously she cannot be holding it when she embraces him[29]. Sec-

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[28] Cf. the scholia, *ad l.*: ὅραμα, ὃ ἀεὶ ἐφανταζόμην κατὰ ψυχήν.
[29] Cf. Dunn 1996, 150; Ringer 1998, 191-192.

ondly, the recognition occurs when the direction of gaze eventually shifts from Electra to Ὀρέστης. Before the recognition it was Electra who was 'seen' by the stranger (Orestes), in whose eyes she presented a pitiful and painful 'sight' (five occasions)[30]. Then the gaze is turned from Electra to the token of recognition: the stranger reveals that Orestes is living and identifies himself, Electra wonders if this is true (1222a ἦ γὰρ σὺ κεῖνος;), and then he invites her to 'have a look' (προσβλέψασα) at their father's signet ring as proof of his identity (1222b-1223). At the moment of recognition it is Ὀρέστης who becomes the object of Electra's joyful gaze as she exclaims «Oh my light» (1224 ὦ φίλτατον φῶς) and then invites the chorus of women to «look at Orestes» (1227-1231):

ΗΛ. ὦ φίλταται γυναῖκες, ὦ πολίτιδες,
     ὁρᾶτ᾽ Ὀρέστην τόνδε, μηχαναῖσι μὲν
     θανόντα, νῦν δὲ μηχαναῖς σεσωμένον.
ΧΟ. **ὁρῶμεν**, ὦ παῖ, κἀπὶ συμφοραῖσί μοι
     γεγηθὸς ἕρπει δάκρυον **ὀμμάτων** ἄπο.

EL.: Dearest women, women of the city,
      Look, here's Orestes. It was only a trick
      That he was dead, and that trick has kept him alive!
CH: We see him, dear child. Such good luck!
      Joy brings tears to our eyes.

The exclamation ὦ φίλτατον φῶς varies ὦ τερπνὸν ὄμμα (*Cho.* 238) discussed above and identifies the 'sight' of Ὀρέστης with 'light'. Here the light metaphor probably involves also the more specific sense of 'life', which was common in poetry since Homer (*Il.* 18.61 ζώει καὶ ὁρᾷ φάος ἠελίοιο). The combination of 'sight' and 'life' is made explicit in Electra's elated 'recognition' not only of the 'sight' of Ὀρέστης but also of the sound of his voice (1225a ὦ φθέγμ᾽, ἀφίκου;) and of his touch (1226a ἔχω σε χερσίν;). As in the previous instances the identity and the etymology of Ὀρέστης are established at the same time. In this particular case, however, Electra's jubilant and triumphant ὁρᾶτ᾽ Ὀρέστην τόνδε marks the return of life as well.

3.3. *Euripides'* Electra*: Ὀρέστης 'inspected'*

In Aeschylus it is Electra who pours libations on Agamemnon's tomb and spots the tokens of Orestes's visit and offerings, and the recognition is the outcome of a

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[30] 1184 **ἐπισκοπῶν** στένεις; / 1187 **ὁρῶν** σε πολλοῖς ἐμπρέπουσαν ἄλγεσιν / 1188 καὶ μὴν **ὁρᾷς** γε παῦρα τῶν ἐμῶν κακῶν / 1189 καὶ πῶς γένοιτ᾽ ἂν τῶνδ᾽ ἔτ᾽ ἐχθίω **βλέπειν**; / 1199 ὦ δύσποτμ᾽, ὡς **ὁρῶν** σ᾽ ἐπικτοίρω πάλαι.

conversation between her and Orestes. In Sophocles the event is split in two parts: the visit to the tomb is assigned to Chrysothemis, while the actual recognition is left as usual to Electra. In Euripides' *Electra everything* is done by the Old Man: it is he who visits the tomb and pours libations (second epeisodion, 509-512), discovers the tokens of Orestes' visit (513-515 a sacrificial lamb, locks of blond hair), and argues that only Electra's brother is likely to have made the offerings (516-519). It is also he who invites Electra to (visit the tomb and) compare the color of the shorn locks with her hair (520-523) and match her foot with a possible footprint (532-533), and furthermore to identify as her own a piece of cloth that Orestes may have been carrying (539-540). All Electra does is dispute the Old Man's assumptions and reject his suggestions. The most crucial modification vis-à-vis the earlier recognition scenes, is that the Old Man is the *only* person who could recognize Orestes[31], because he is Agamemnon's old *paidagogo*s, had known the boy while still in his father's palace and had rescued him from the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. In other words Electra is a priori *excluded* from her key role as the sister who recognizes her brother. I quote lines 555-581 of the recognition scene[32]:

ΗΛ.	οὗτος τὸν ἁμὸν πατέρ᾽ ἔθρεψεν, ὦ ξένε.	555
ΟΡ.	τί φής; ὅδ᾽ ὃς σὸν ἐξέκλεψε σύγγονον;	
ΗΛ.	ὅδ᾽ ἔσθ᾽ ὁ σώσας κεῖνον, εἴπερ ἔστ᾽ ἔτι.	
ΟΡ.	ἔα·	
	τί μ᾽ **ἐσδέδορκεν** ὥσπερ ἀργύρου **σκοπῶν**	
	λαμπρὸν χαρακτῆρ᾽; ἢ προσεικάζει μέ τῳ;	
ΗΛ.	ἴσως Ὀρέστου σ᾽ ἥλιχ᾽ ἥδεται **βλέπων**.	560
ΟΡ.	φίλου γε φωτός. τί δὲ κυκλεῖ πέριξ πόδα;	
ΗΛ.	καὐτὴ τόδ᾽ **εἰσορῶσα** θαυμάζω, ξένε.	
ΠΡ.	ὦ πότνι᾽, εὔχου, θύγατερ Ἠλέκτρα, θεοῖς.	
ΗΛ.	τί τῶν ἀπόντων ἢ τί τῶν ὄντων πέρι;	
ΠΡ.	λαβεῖν φίλον θησαυρόν, ὃν φαίνει θεός	565
ΗΛ.	ἰδού· καλῶ θεούς. ἢ τί δὴ λέγεις, γέρον;	
ΠΡ.	**βλέψον** νυν ἐς τόνδ᾽, ὦ τέκνον, τὸν φίλτατον.	
ΗΛ.	πάλαι **δέδορκα**· μὴ σύ γ᾽ οὐκέτ᾽ εὖ φρονεῖς;	
ΠΡ.	οὐκ εὖ φρονῶ 'γὼ σὸν κασίγνητον **βλέπων**;	
ΗΛ.	πῶς εἶπας, ὦ γεραί᾽, ἀνέλπιστον λόγον;	570
ΠΛ.	**ὁρᾶν Ὀρέστην** τόνδε τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονος.	
ΗΛ.	ποῖον χαρακτῆρ᾽ **εἰσιδών**, ᾧ πείσομαι;	
ΠΡ.	οὐλὴν παρ᾽ ὀφρύν, ἥν ποτ᾽ ἐν πατρὸς δόμοις	
	νεβρὸν διώκων σοῦ μέθ᾽ ἡμάχθη πεσών.	

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[31] The only other exception is an elderly servant of Aegisthus (852-853).
[32] Text by Diggle 1981; translation by Kovacs 1998 (O.M. = 'Old man').

ΗΛ.   πῶς φῄς; **ὁρῶ** μὲν πτώματος τεκμήριον.   575
ΠΡ.   ἔπειτα μέλλεις προσπίτνειν τοῖς φιλτάτοις;
ΗΛ.   ἀλλ᾽ οὐκέτ᾽, ὦ γεραιέ· συμβόλοισι γὰρ
        τοῖς σοῖς πέπεισμαι θυμόν. ὦ χρόνῳ φανείς,
        ἔχω σ᾽ ἀέλπτως   ΟΡ. κἀξ ἐμοῦ γ᾽ ἔχῃ χρόνῳ.
ΗΛ.   οὐδέποτε δόξασ᾽. ΟΡ. οὐδ᾽ ἐγὼ γὰρ ἤλπισα.   580
ΗΛ.   **ἐκεῖνος εἶ σύ;**

EL.   This is the man who reared my father, stranger.
OR.   What? The man who spirited your brother away?
EL.   This is the man who saved his life, if life he still has.
OR.   What's this? Why is he staring at me as if he were looking
        at the hallmark on silver? Does he think I look like someone else?
EL.   Perhaps he is happy to see a man Orestes' age.
OR.   The man we love. But why is he circling around me?
EL.   I see this too and wonder at it, stranger.
O.M.   Daughter Electra, my lady, offer prayers to the gods!
EL.   For what? Something I lack or something I have?
O.M.   Pray you may grasp the precious treasure the god is showing you!
EL.   All right: I call on the gods. Or did you mean something
        different, old man?
O.M.   Then look, my daughter, at this man you love best.
EL.   I have been looking for some time: have you gone mad?
O.M.   Am I mad if I see your brother?
EL.   What do you mean, old man, by this extraordinary claim?
O.M.   That I see Orestes, Agamemnon's son.
EL.   What mark have you seen that deserves my trust?
O.M.   The scar next to his eyebrow: once in your father's house
        he fell and cut it as you and he chased a fawn.
EL.   What is this you say? I see the evidence of his fa11.
O.M.   Then can you hesitate to fling yourself into your dear
        brother's embrace?
O.M.   I hesitate no longer, old man. My heart is persuaded
        by the tally you point out.
        O brother long in coming, I embrace you though
        I no longer hoped to …
OR.   And at long last I too embrace you!
EL.   … and never thought this would happen!
OR.   No, for not even I had hope.
EL.   Are you the very man?

As in Aeschylus and Sophocles, Ὀρέστης is the person 'seen' and 'recognized',
but here this is done by the Old Man, who had previously asked to 'see' Ὀρέστης

(547 βούλομαι εἰσιδών). Furthermore, Agamemnon's son is not just 'seen': the Old Man 'inspects' him carefully (558), by walking around him, as if he were a silver coin (558-559) and he had to establish if it were genuine or 'counterfeit' (cf. his comment on Orestes and Pylades in 550: ἀλλ' εὐγενεῖς μέν, ἐν δὲ κιβδήλῳ τόδε)[33]. The 'scar' (οὐλήν) on Orestes' forehead becomes the 'stamp' (572 χαρακτῆρ'), which proves that the 'coin' is a 'treasure' (565 θησαυρόν), Electra's 'genuine' brother (571 ὁρᾶν Ὀρέστην)[34]. Thus the identity and etymology of Ὀρέστης are once again established at the same time; but now this is done not by 'inspecting' objects, footprints or a lock of hair but by 'inspecting' Orestes himself. There comes a moment in intertextuality when the uses of a motif are exhausted and the search for innovation ends up in what looks like parody.

What about Electra? While the Old Man has been 'inspecting' Orestes carefully, her gaze has been turned elsewhere and it never actually focuses on Orestes. Initially she 'looks' in wonder at the Old man who is 'inspecting' Orestes (562). When next the Old man invites her to «look at the man he loves best» (567), she fails to 'recognize' her brother in the eloquent allusion: instead she replies that "she has been looking for some time" (568) and concludes that he has gone mad – apparently she had been 'looking' without 'seeing'. The Old Man retorts that he cannot be called mad for "seeing her brother" (569). When he becomes as specific as it gets by naming Orestes (571 ὁρᾶν Ὀρέστην), Electra questions his eyesight and asks for evidence (572 ποῖον χαρακτῆρ' ἐσιδών) in order to be convinced. Then the Old man points to the scar next to Orestes' eyebrow[35]: again Electra does not look at Orestes but strictly at the «evidence of the fall» (575), something which triggers what may be a mocking reply on the part of the Old Man[36]. Eventually Electra says that she is convinced and embraces her brother, but she never 'recognizes' Ὀρέστης with her own eyes: her final comment consists in the intriguing ἐκεῖνος εἶ σύ[37]; (581a). In the celebratory Ode that follows the reunion (585-595), the chorus compare Orestes' arrival to a torch that brings light to the city (585-587)[38], but Electra has not even 'seen' Ὀρέστης, let alone identify him with φῶς, as in Sophocles.

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[33] «Well, they are gentlemen, to be sure, but that's a deceptive matter». The epithet κίβδηλος was literally used of 'adulterated' coin metal.

[34] On the coinage metaphor in the present recognition see Roisman - Luschnig 2011, 168-169; Baechle 2020, 106-114.

[35] That is next to one of his eyes, which are the source of vision.

[36] In replying to Electra's ὁρῶ πτώματος τεκμήριον, the Old Man invites her to 'embrace' her brother by using a cognate of πτώματος: προσπίτνειν ('fall upon a person's neck', 'embrace'), a poetic compound of πίπτω.

[37] For possible interpretations see Roisman - Luschnig 2011, 171.

[38] Cf. Aesch. *Cho.* 863-864 discussed above and further Roisman - Luschnig 2011, 172.

3.4. *Euripides'* Orestes: Ὀρέστης *and Pylades as* κάπροι ὀρέστεροι

ΣΩ. Ὥσπερ γε καὶ ὁ " Ὀρέστης", ὦ Ἑρμόγενες, κινδυνεύει ὀρθῶς ἔχειν, εἴτε τις τύχη ἔθετο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα εἴτε καὶ ποιητής τις, τὸ θηριῶδες τῆς φύσεως καὶ τὸ ἄγριον αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὀ ρ ε ι ν ὸ ν ἐνδεικνύμενος τῷ ὀνόματι. (394e8-11)

SOCRATES: Thus the name 'Orestes' ('Mountain-man') is surely correct, Hermogenes, whether it was given to him by chance or by some poet, who displayed in his name the brutality, savagery, and ruggedness of his nature.

The platonic association of Ὀρέστης with ὄρος (mountain), attributed to his 'wild' character, was embraced by ancient grammarians, lexicographers and others[39]. It is furthermore endorsed by modern specialists in etymology, though not for the reasons adduced by Socrates[40]. From a modern perspective the meaning of his name has been explained as follows: «Like other ephebes, Orestes is exiled and remains outside the polis in the wilds wandering astray in the nature, a feature that may be referred to in his name».[41] Socrates suggests that the 'lawgiver' as regards the meaning of Orestes may have been 'chance'[42] or 'some poet'[43]. Is there any evidence in tragedy that confirms the platonic etymology?

The linguistic elements that 'construct' the Platonic etymology of Ὀρέστης (θηριώδης, ἄγριος) are either not mentioned in the tragedies of the first group (θηριώδης) or do not concern Orestes (ἄγριος)[44]; and furthermore there is no association of Ὀρέστης with ὄρος or derivatives. A probable association with a derivative of ὄρος occurs in the exodos of Euripides' *Orestes* (first part, 1366-1536). Orestes and Pylades have entered the palace of the Atreidae at Argos and have seized Hermione as hostage, in order to force Menelaus to rescue them from death (the penalty im-

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[39] See e.g. *Lexicon quod Theaeteti vocatur*, 31 Pintaudi; Gregory of Corinth, *Commentarium in Hermogenis* περὶ μεθόδου δεινότητος, vol. 7.2, p.1095.7-8 Walz; Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 11.6.21.4-5 Mras - des Places. Cf. also Phot. *Lex.* III.101.457 ὀρέστης: ἐν ὄρεσι διαιτώμενος («Orestes: he who dwells on mountains»); *Suid.* 784 Bekker.

[40] According to Frisk 1960, 426, and Chantraine 1999, 826, s.v. ὄρος, Ὀρέστης means 'mountain dweller'.

[41] Bierl, 1994, 86.

[42] Socrates makes τύχη the 'lawgiver' also in the case of Τάνταλος, 395e4-5 τοιοῦτόν τι καὶ τούτῳ τὸ ὄνομα ἔοικεν ἐκπορίσαι ἡ τύχη τῆς φήμης («In some such way, in any case, the chance of legend supplied him with this name»).

[43] Cf. e.g. on Hesiod and Aphrodite, 406c7-d1, mentioned above; also on Homer and Hector, 393a1-2 Ἀλλ᾽ ἄρα, ὦγαθέ, καὶ τῷ Ἕκτορι αὐτὸς ἔθετο τὸ ὄνομα Ὅμηρος; («But, my good friend, didn't Homer also give Hector his name?»).

[44] See further below.

posed on Orestes and Electra by the assembly); a Phrygian slave escapes from the palace and narrates in an excited song their assault against Helen (1454b-1472a)[45]:

Ἰδαία μᾶτερ μᾶτερ,
ὀβρίμα ὀβρίμα, αἰαὶ <αἰαῖ>
φονίων παθέων ἀνόμων τε κακῶν   1455
ἅπερ ἔδρακον ἔδρακον ἐν δόμοις τυράννων.
ἀμφιπορφύρων πέπλων
ὑπὸ σκότου ξίφη σπάσαν-
τες ἐν χεροῖν ἄλλοσ᾽ ἄλ-
λοθεν δίνευον ὄμ-
μα, μή τις παρὼν τύχοι.
ὡς κάπροι δ᾽ ὀρέστεροι   1460
γυναικὸς ἀντίοι σταθέν-
τες ἐννέπουσι· Κατθανῇ κατθανῇ·
κακός σ᾽ ἀποκτείνει πόσις,
κασιγνήτου προδοὺς
ἐν Ἄργει θανεῖν γόνον.
ἁ δ᾽ ἀνίαχεν ἴαχεν·Ὤμοι μοι.   1465
λευκὸν δ᾽ ἐμβαλοῦσα πῆχυν στέρνα
κτύπησεν κάρα <τε> μέλεον πλαγάν,
φυγάδι δὲ ποδὶ τὸ χρυσεοσάμβαλον ἴχνος
ἔφερεν ἔφερεν· ἐς κόμας δὲ δακτύλους
δικὼν **Ὀρέστας**, Μυκηνίδ᾽ ἀρβύλαν   1470
προβάς, ὤμοις ἀρι-
στεροῖσιν ἀνακλάσας δέραν,
παίειν λαιμῶν ἔμελ-
λεν εἴσω μέλαν ξίφος.

Mother, mother of Ida,
mighty, mighty goddess, alas <alas>
for the murderous sufferings, the lawless woes
I have seen, have seen in the royal palace!
From beneath the concealment
of purple-bordered robes
they took swords in their hands
and whirled their glances from one side to the other
to see that no one was there.
Like wild boars of the mountain
they halted before the woman
and said, "You will die, you will die!

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[45] Text and translation by Kovacs 2002.

Your slayer is your cowardly husband,
who abandoned his brother's son
to death in Argos".
And she cried out, cried out, "Ah, ah me!"
And plying her pale forearm she made
her chest <and> head resound with a pitiable blow,
then with fleeing foot her gold-sandaled step
she bore away, away. But Orestes
darted his fingers to her hair,
putting his Mycenean boot ahead,
and yanking her neck back to his left shoulder
meant to thrust his dark
sword into her throat.

In 1460 Orestes and Pylades, armed and threatening Helen with death, are compared to 'wild mountain boars' (ὡς κάπροι δ' ὀρέστεροι), and below (1470) Ὀρέστας is mentioned *by name* as he is pulling Helen's head back by the hair and is about to thrust his sword into her neck. The epithet ὀρέστεροι, a derivative of ὄρος, indicates boars 'living in the mountains'; the name Ὀρέστης, also a derivative of ὄρος, originally had the same meaning (cf. also ὀρεστιάδες, 'mountain nymphs'). It is true that ὀρέστεροι and Ὀρέστας stand eleven lines apart, but ὡς κάπροι δ' ὀρέστεροι is itself a reference to Ὀρέστης (and Pylades), considering that (a) it is a comparison, and (b) ὀρέστερος is a synonym of Ὀρέστης from an etymological viewpoint and thus it functions as a *substitute* of the proper name.[46] Furthermore, the Phrygian slave's narration abounds in pejorative comparisons of Orestes and Pylades with wild animals: they are also called 'twin lions' (1401ab λέοντεςἝλλανες / δύο διδύμῳ <ῥυθμῷ>); and individually Pylades is referred to as a 'deadly snake' (1406 φόνιός τε δράκων) and Orestes as a 'matricidal snake' (1424b ματροφόντας δράκων). The epic flavor of these characterizations has been repeatedly recognized, especially as regards the intertextual association of Orestes and Pylades with the Iliadic pair Odysseus and Diomedes (cf *Il.* XI 324 twin boars; *Il.* X 297 twin lions).

There is a lot in the slave's song that sounds like epic and tragic parody and a 'comic' re-enactment of the Trojan war[47], and the reader might be inclined to

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[46] On names as *substitutable* semantic units see Paschalis 1997, 4. It was first Mario Fuochi, 1898, 309, who associated ὀρέστεροι with Ὀρέστης, though without pointing to the occurrence of the name in 1470 and without any further comment. See also Biehl 1965, 157, independently of Fuochi: «In ὀρέστεροι wurde vermutlich die etymologische Beziehung zu Ὀρέστης […] empfunden»; Willink 1986, 322, on ὀρέστεροι: «possibly playing on the name 'Orestes' […]; but the 'mountain' point is routine».

[47] See e.g. Fuqua 1978, 22; Zeitlin 1980; Wolff 1983, 348-349.

dismiss the 'bestial' characterizations as exaggerated talk of a ludicrous character. It should be noted, however, that they coincide in part with what other characters of the play have to say about Orestes and Pylades. Commenting on their 'terrible actions', Menelaus will later refer to them as follows: «these twin lions: I do not call them men» (1555 δισσοῖν λεόντοιν· οὐ γὰρ ἄνδρ' αὐτὼ καλῶ); and earlier Tyndareus, upon catching sight of Orestes, had exclaimed in horror (479-480): «Here is a mother-killing snake before the palace, with sickness in his darting glance: how I loathe him!» (ὁ μητροφόντης ὅδε πρὸ δωμάτων δράκων / στίλβει νοσώδεις ἀστραπάς, στύγημ' ἐμόν.)

What is the significance of these characterizations? According to Christian Wolff, they describe «animal savagery, what Tyndareus, referring to lawless revenge, had called 'bestiality', τὸ θηριῶδες (524)»[48]. Here is the *Orestes* passage in question (518-524):

> Ἐγὼ δὲ μισῶ μὲν γυναῖκας ἀνοσίους,
> πρώτην δὲ θυγατέρ', ἢ πόσιν κατέκτανεν·
> Ἑλένην τε, τὴν σὴν ἄλοχον, οὔποτ' αἰνέσω
> οὐδ' ἂν προσείποιμ'· οὐδὲ σὲ ζηλῶ κακῆς
> γυναικὸς ἐλθόνθ' οὕνεκ' ἐς Τροίας πέδον.
> ἀμυνῶ δ' ὅσονπερ δυνατός εἰμι **τῷ νόμῳ**,
> **τὸ θηριῶδες** τοῦτο καὶ **μιαιφόνον**
> παύων, ὃ καὶ γῆν καὶ πόλεις ὄλλυσ' ἀεί.

> Now I hate ungodly women, and before all others
> my daughter who killed her husband.
> I shall never praise your wife Helen,
> never speak to her, and I pity you for going to Troy
> to get back such a wicked creature.
> But as far as in me lies I will come to the aid of the law
> by trying to curb subhuman and murderous conduct
> like this, which always bring countries and cities to ruin.

Tyndareus' target in the immediate context are his two daughters: Clytemnestra who started the series of killings by murdering her husband and his adulterous daughter Helen who caused the bloody Trojan war; but the overall argument is that bloodshed should be purified by exile not by retaliatory killing, which leads to a chain of killings; and the hypothetical example of Orestes getting killed by his wife and his son killing his mother in retaliation and his son's son seeking blood vengeance (508-511), suggests that Orestes is first and foremost in his mind.

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[48] Wolff 1983, 348.

Tyndareus' τὸ θηριῶδες with reference to 'lawless killings' (τὸ μιαφόνον) alludes to the 'feral' life of men before laws (νόμοι) were instituted[49]. The Phrygian slave will later use similar language in order to set the context for the comparison of Orestes and Pylades to wild mountain boars: «the murderous sufferings, the lawless woes» (1455 φονίων παθέων ἀνόμων τε κακῶν). Indeed the comparison appears at the moment when the pair are about to exact lawless revenge on Helen.

Of the three linguistic elements that 'construct' the platonic etymology of Ὀρέστης we have encountered ὀρέστερος (ὀρεινός is a prose term) embedded in a poetic context that illustrates what Tyndareus had earlier called τὸ θηριῶδες ('bestiality') with reference to retaliatory bloodshed. The epithet θηριώδης does not occur in poetry before Euripides. Ἄγριος and ἀγριόω occur four times in *Orestes*, *always* in reference to Agamemnon's son[50]: once in relation to his madness (34-35), twice in relation to his filthy hair (226-387), and once more to describe his 'wild rage' against his mother (615-617): «She [Electra] put you in a mad rage against your mother by always whispering stories in your ear to make you hate her» (μᾶλλον δ᾽ ἐκείνη σοῦ θανεῖν ἐστ᾽ ἀξία, / ἣ τῇ τεκούσῃ σ᾽ ἠγρίωσ᾽, ἐς οὓς ἀεὶ / πέμπουσα μύθους ἐπὶ τὸ δυσμενέστερον).

Putting together the pieces of the puzzle, the κάπροι ὀρέστεροι and Ὀρέστης, the wild beast metaphors used by Tyndareus, the Phrygian slave, and Menelaus to characterize Orestes and Pylades, Tyndareus' labelling of lawless revenge as τὸ θηριῶδες, and finally Orestes' 'wild rage' (ἠγρίωσ᾽) which drove him to matricide, we have all the ingredients of the platonic etymology. To be specific, we do not have the etymology itself but *a poetic context* for it, a tragic antecedent. This does not necessarily mean that Plato 'extracted' his etymology of Orestes from Euripides' play[51].

Universy of Crete
michael.paschalis@gmail.com

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[49] Willink 1986, 524.

[50] By contrast, none of the three cases of ἄγριος and ἀγριόω occurring in the tragedies of the first group concerns Orestes. There is one occurrence of ἄγριος in the *Choephori* (280), none in Sophocles' *Electra*, and two occurrences of ἀγριόω (1031) and ἄγριος (1116) in Euripides' *Electra*.

[51] Tsibakou-Vasalos 2007, 221, believes that Plato's etymology «is in all probability modelled on the Euripidean», though she has not conducted a thorough study: she bases her conclusion solely on Tyndareus' τὸ θηριῶδες and the 'wild' appearance of Orestes' filthy hair (*Or.* 387 ὡς ἠγρίωσαι πλόκαμον αὐχμηρόν, τάλας).

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