

SHORTER NOTES

THE FURIES IN *CHOE*. AND *AG*.

This note argues that two passages are worthier of the dramatist if the audience has seen the furies than if it has not. Orestes sees the furies (*Choe.* 1048–50, 1053–4, 1057–8); the chorus (1051–2, 1055–6, 1059–60) does not see them. Does the audience see them? K. O. Müller, on philosophical and antiquarian grounds, thought so.¹ Nearly all scholars today believe not.² I agree with Müller from what Orestes now says to the chorus: *ὑμεῖς μὲν οὐχ ὁρᾶτε τάσδ', ἐγὼ δ' ὁρῶ* (1061). If the chorus does not see the furies and the audience does not see them either, the *ὑμεῖς μὲν οὐχ ὁρᾶτε τάσδ'* lacks moment; the chorus cannot find those words of any use and the audience (from what it has heard in the ten lines preceding) cannot find them of interest. There is value in the words only if the audience, seeing what Orestes sees, is being reassured that the chorus does not.³ Line 1058, *καὶ ὁμμάτων στάζουσιν αἶμα δυσφιλέες*, may be regarded as saying something the audience did not know from its own senses,⁴ and the same is true for *ὑμεῖς μὲν οὐχ ὁρᾶτε τάσδ'* in 1061 if it says once more that the furies, though real to Orestes, and to the audience as well, are not real to everyone. The opposite reasoning—that if the audience has seen the furies the *ἐγὼ δ' ὁρῶ* (at the close of the line) is unneeded after Orestes has already said three times that he sees them—is not countervailing. For those words are in the less emphatic position, are fewer, and are of less doubtful usefulness, since they lead to *ἐλαύνομαι δὲ κούκ' ἂν μείναιμ' ἐγώ*.

In *Ag.* 1605, Aegisthus says: *τρίτον γὰρ ὄντα μ' ἐπὶ δέκ' ἀθλίωι πατρί*, 'me the thirteenth with our wretched father'. Is the number reasonable or not? Some scholars think it is. Others, less because the family would be too large than because the meal would be, think the number ought to be 'third'. H. J. Rose takes the *δέκ'* with the

¹ *Dissertations on the Eumenides*, English trans. (Cambridge, 1835), section 3 (pp. 50–52). His argument is philosophical in its premise that the furies are not mere phantoms of a deranged mind but, for those who have rapport with the supernatural world, are truly as present in this locale as in the one of the play to come. The argument is antiquarian in its reference to Pollux (4.132), who remarks that the furies—somewhere, and where else so well as here?—appear from beneath the earth. Gottfried Hermann—in his *Wiener Jahrbücher*, vol. 64, review, reprinted as vol. 6, part 2, of his *Opuscula* (Leipzig, 1835)—impugned but did not refute the testimony: 'Pollux ist ein sehr unzuverlässiger Compiler, der ohne Kenntniss der Sachen seine Nachrichten aus allerlei Schriften zusammengetragen hat...Doch er möge Recht haben' (pp. 133–4). Wilamowitz, *History of Classical Scholarship*, trans. Alan Harris (London, 1982), p. 129, judged that Hermann, though successful in construing, 'either failed to understand, or rejected as uninteresting, Müller's profound observations'.

² For one, H. Lloyd-Jones, in his translation of the *Oresteia* (London, 1979), n. on *Choe.* 1048. Whether the trilogy is more effective if the furies are not seen by the audience until the third play, is moot. To my mind, the whole would be not diminished, but enhanced, if the audience straightway shared in the vision, rather than merely looked upon the visionary.

³ The audience of *Macbeth* 3.4.40–107, similarly, sees the ghost of Banquo, while those on stage, except for the thane of Glamis himself, do not. So A. L. Brown in *JHS* 103 (1983), 13–34, though he holds to the contrary for *Choe*. Compare *Hamlet* 3.4.102–136.

⁴ The question 'Why does the dramatist tell us this?' leads to many a useful judgement. Since no one would ever say 'I hold her head in my left hand', we conclude from 'en impudicum crine contorto caput/laeva reflexi' (Seneca *Hipp.* 707–8) that the 'audience' was reading, not watching; the dramatist was telling what should be 'seen'.

ἀθλίωι,⁵ which might yield 'me, the third with our tenfold wretched father'. But even if the words could mean 'third' in this way, they would still mean 'thirteenth' also,⁶ the ἐπί doing double service and the two senses being heard together. Is there any way, from the work itself, to decide which number is the better? There is no connection with the other threes (such as the third libation, *Ag.* 246). The connection is with another thirteen, or twelve plus one. The butchered children (*Ag.* 1097, 1219) are somehow furies (1190); the furies will, as the chorus, number twelve in *Eum.*; and I believe they have appeared already (at *Ag.* 1072, 1076; on the roof, see 1087, 1217), as the audience was given to share in the vision of Cassandra. By this hypothesis, the furies avenging the children are not distinguished, to the eye or in character, from those later avenging Clytemnestra. Seeing the agueus, the audience can sense that Cassandra sees Apollo; but there is no corresponding replica for the furies, and the audience, unless I am mistaken, sees them directly, in *Ag.* as in *Choe.*

If the furies are seen by the audience in *Choe.* and *Ag.*, the *Oresteia* will more closely than otherwise resemble the *Supplices* in its pageantry of groups. The armed men, who had evidently been the contingent of Agamemnon (*Ag.* 782–957) and had certainly been the guard of Aegisthus (*Ag.* 1577–close), will accordingly seem the likelier to reappear also: first as the companions of Orestes (*Choe.* 653–718, in harmony with ὀπισθόπους, 713, and with αὐτόφορτον, 675, in a passage of lies),⁷ then as the guard of Aegisthus in *Choe.* (838–54, a surprise prepared for at 770–7), and finally as the torch-bearers of the procession (*Eum.* 1005).⁸ All four groups—old men, women, furies, and armed men—may in this way have appeared in all three plays. If the four groups appeared in all four plays, what was the role of the furies in the *Proteus*? They might, in other costume, have been the satyrs. The furies are likened to dogs (*Choe.* 924, 1054) and to dogs whimpering with keenness for the chase (*Eum.* 132),⁹ and the satyrs of Soph. *Ichneutae* (e.g. 44, 75, 88, 91) track like dogs.¹⁰ I would look for a comparable similarity between the furies and the satyrs of the *Oresteia*. Not in appearance but in gesture and dance they could have been the same.¹¹

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⁵ *A Commentary on the Surviving Plays of Aeschylus* (Amsterdam, 1958), v. 2, p. 114. As an alternative explanation of the ἐπί, H. Neitzel—*Hermes* 113 (1985), 369—suggests that Aegisthus, in swaddling clothes (line 1606), was borne upon (the back of) his father into exile.

⁶ In the note on the line in his edition, E. Fraenkel cites quite a few like instances, and *LSJ* s.v. ἐπί+dat. adds Plu., *Publ.* 20, τρισχιλίουζ ἐπὶ μυρίοιζ. *PV* 774, τρίτος γε γένναν πρὸς δέκ' ἄλλαισιν γοναῖς, also means thirteenth in a roundabout way; the scholiast lists the thirteen generations.

⁷ To the contrary see A. F. Garvie's notes on lines 713 and 675 in his edition (Oxford, 1986). The plural rather than a dual at 668 and 734 may be remarked.

⁸ M. L. West, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Stuttgart, 1990) 293, would have the torches borne by the Areopagites; I believe the Areopagites are old men—the chorus of *Ag.* and the citizens who stretch out the murder robe at *Choe.* 983.

⁹ Cassandra too is εὖρις... κυνὸς δίκην (*Ag.* 1093) and the watchman has been reposing κυνὸς δίκην (3).

¹⁰ See F. R. Walton, 'A Problem in the *Ichneutae* of Sophocles', *HSCP* 46 (1935), 167–89, esp. 167–9.

¹¹ On the groups throughout the trilogy (tetralogy) see my *Problem and Spectacle* (Heidelberg, 1980), pp. 88–98.