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All about My Mother… Cilissa, Apollo and the Unity of the *Oresteia*

Abstract: The aim of this article is to reveal the connection between Cilissa's speech in the *Choephoroi* and the infamous speech made by Apollo in the *Eumenides.* The analysis shows that if these two passages are treated separately, the former would seem to be a comic interlude that has been randomly inserted into the text, while the latter would seem to be weird, convoluted and even downright outrageous. However, if they are juxtaposed and analysed together as two chapters of Aeschylus' explanation of the nature of motherhood, they become one sensible statement about the fact that mother is much more than a parent in the technical sense of the term.

While the speeches of Cilissa and Apollo simply cast light on the issue of responsible motherhood and also on the harmful effects of 'outsourcing' the care of newborn children in ancient Greece, the fact that the link between these two speeches has been overlooked makes their interpretation very problematic, as do the failings of contemporary criticism, these being the anachronic approach and also the fact that translations are treated on a par with (or, sadly, given preference to) the original text, thus giving Aeschylus the undeserved reputation of being a 'sexist' or 'misogynistic' poet.

Keywords: Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, Cilissa, Orestes, Clytemnestra, Apollo, motherhood

Abstrakt: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest uwidocznienie związku między monologiem Kilissy w *Choeforach* a niesławną mową Apollona w *Eumenidach*. Z analizy tekstu wynika, że gdyby potraktować obie sceny oddzielnie, pierwsza z nich wydawałaby się komicznym interludium, które w tragedii znalazło się przypadkiem, podczas gdy druga wprawiałaby odbiorcę w konsternację i szokowała zagmatwanym wywodem o dość obrazoburczej treści. Jeśli jednak zestawić je ze sobą i przeanalizować razem jako dwie części swoistego wywodu Ajschylosa na temat macierzyństwa, to ich przesłanie jako całości zabrzmi dość sensownie, a mianowicie, że matka to znacznie więcej niż rodzic w technicznym tego słowa znaczeniu.

O ile mowy Kilissy i Apollona po prostu rzucają światło na kwestię odpowiedzialnego macierzyństwa, a także na potencjalnie szkodliwe skutki powierzania opieki nad noworodkami obcym osobom, jak to czyniono w starożytnej Grecji, o tyle fakt, że pomija się związek między rzeczonymi scenami, sprawia, że ich interpretacja nastręcza – niepotrzebnie – wielu trudności. Dodatkowo komplikują sprawę mankamenty współczesnej metodologiii, takie jak podejście

anachroniczne oraz nieadekwatne kulturowo, a także to, że tłumaczenia są traktowane na równi z tekstem oryginalnym (lub, niestety, preferowane), co skutkuje zaszufladkowaniem Ajschylosa jako autora „seksistowskiego" lub „mizoginistycznego".

Słowa kluczowe: Aejschylus, *Oresteja*, Kilissa, Orestes, Klitajmnestra, Apollo, macierzyństwo

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One of the major obstacles to understanding the meaning of some parts of the *Oresteia* is the nature of its poetic language, which abounds in ellipses and riddles. Another problem is posed by the allusive nature of the trilogy, which means that even though it happens to be the only trilogy that has come down to us and should therefore be relatively easier to interpret than other works by Aeschylus, there is still a lot to read and discuss before we can get a full grasp of all that is conveyed between its lines.

The apparently irrelevant speech of Orestes' former wet nurse – to whom he was entrusted as a newborn child – is just such a problematic passage. This episodic character appears only once in the whole trilogy: in a rather untragic episode in the *Choephoroi*. One of the reasons why she makes that appearance – apart from the obvious pretext of having her summon Aegisthus[1] – is the modulation of suspense. Of course, the purely dramatic function of Cilissa's appearance – in the techincal sense – is to give Orestes an opportunity to murder the tyrant, who – having been summoned by her – comes to meet the prince without his bodyguards.[2] However, this is not her only role in the play and, interestingly, it is intertwined with other functions of hers that will be discussed in the present paper.

In her humorous imitation of Clytemnestra's two-faced behaviour, Cilissa gives an amusing performance that is reminiscent of the one given by the watchman in *Agamemnon.* As her appearance and behaviour diverge greatly from those of the other characters in the play, this contrast makes her come across as a rather comic figure. Like the watchman, the nurse is a simple woman and an outsider in the sophisticated world of the aristocracy. However, her natural perspicacity allows her to see through all the crafty schemes devised by Clytemnestra. It is no wonder that – over time – these simple, clumsy and somewhat ill-mannered (yet surprisingly intelligent) slaves and servants who provided some light relief in the

[1] Marshall 2017, 104.

[2] Cf. lines 766–767. Cf.: 730–82. "The Chorus-leader intercepts the Nurse, Cilissa, on her way to fetch Aegisthus, and persuades her to change her message, thereby ensuring that Aegisthus will come without his bodyguard. The Chorus is obeying Orestes' orders (cf. 581–582 n.), but its interference in the plot is still a surprising and unusually bold use of the Chorus as an actor in the drama. Aeschylus could have avoided any reference to the bodyguard at all. He raises the question not to show us that Clytaemestra is suspicious of the messengers […], but to explain and to draw attention to Aegisthus' appearance at 838 without the bodyguard which would be normal for a man in his position (cf. 675 n.). At the same time Aeschylus suggests that the weak Aegisthus requires such protection, as at the end of Ag. the Chorus, like Orestes himself, are practising the deceit for which they had prayed at 726 (cf. 556). Clytaemestra's sending of the Nurse has a different result from that which she intended; for it brings Aegisthus to his death; for a similar περιπέτεια earlier in the play see p. 54." (Garvie 1986, 243).

solemn Athenian tragedies evolved into the main characters of the New Comedy and were later developed even further by the Latin author Plautus.

Although Cilissa (significantly) appears only once, right in the middle of the whole trilogy, not long after another rather un-tragic scene (that of the misunderstanding or *qui pro quo* between Orestes and Electra)[3] – thus bringing about a temporary relaxation of the dramatic tension – she plays another role in the trilogy that is no less important. Her seemingly episodic entrance, whose only justification would appear to be the fact that it is a convenient tool for modulating suspense, serves more than one purpose. Firstly, as R. Drew Griffith has observed, her account of Orestes' childhood *belies the demonstration of the very maternal bond with Orestes that Clytaemnestra by her gesture seeks to show.*[4] Later on, in the *Eumenides*, we have Apollo's apparently misogynous speech[5] containing the outrageous statement that a mother is not a parent, but is the 'nurse' of the new life conceived inside her by the father of the child:

οὔκ ἔστι μήτηρ ἡ κεκλημένου τέκνου
τοκεύς, τροφὸς δὲ κύματος νεοσπόρου·
(*Eum*. 658–659)

These lines, which seem to berate the role of mothers, are highly ambiguous, as their proper meaning depends on our interpretation of the word τροφός. If by the term τροφός Aeschylus means 'merely a nurse', then Apollo does indeed blatantly deprecate the role of the mother in the life of a child. However, if τροφός means 'a nurse', i.e. 'a person who cares for a child that has been entrusted to her' and not merely 'a hired wet nurse', then this passage has a different meaning. Objectively – taken out of context – τροφός just means 'a nurse'.

This term may be an important clue that can help us gain a fuller (and more correct) understanding not only of Apollo's speech, but also of the whole trial in the *Eumenides*. As the consecutive parts of the *Oresteia* consistute a whole trilogy, the best way to interpret it is to read it as a whole, without overlooking any inconspicuous links or allusions to previous parts.[6] Orestes' trial in the *Eumenides* is a similar case and the key to its full meaning may lie in the mysteriously random scene featuring Cilissa in the *Choephoroi*.

As we have noted, Cilissa appears on the stage only once, seemingly just to summon Aegisthus and also to criticize Clytemnestra while emphasizing her own emotional attachment to Orestes. She relates how she took him from his biological mother Clytemnestra and brought him up, disclosing the details of his infancy and the care that he received from her.[7] The verb ἐξέθρεψα, which is an aorist from τρέφω, matches the noun τροφός, which is used by Apollo in opposition to τοκεύς ('parent'). Leaving aside the definition of the word 'parent', Aeschylus offers a new definition of motherhood: it is not just being *a parent*, but is

[3] Marshall 2017, 107–110.
[4] Griffith 1995, 92.
[5] Delivered in reply to the interrogations by the Chorus (lines 652–657).
[6] Which is why I consider A. F. Garvie's style of interpretation to be the most reliable, cf. Garvie 1986, 243–244.
[7] Griffith 1998, 235.

much more, for the mother should not see herself as being 'a mere parent', but as a τροφός like the nurse Cilissa – a nurse, a guardian and a friend whose universe revolves around the child who has been entrusted into her care.

φίλον δ' Ὀρέστην, τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς τριβήν,
ὃν ἐξέθρεψα μητρόθεν δεδεγμένη,—
(Choe. 749–750)

Interestingly, in the Choephoroi Cilissa is both a 'professional' τροφός and a mother figure to Orestes, and – even more interestingly – both Cilissa and Apollo use the word 'mother' in the driest and most technical sense possible, defining a μήτηρ as a person who has given birth to a child. By contrast, it is the τροφός who nourishes and brings up the child (as is the case with Cilissa), eventually becoming the real mother figure in place of the 'technical' mother.

Thus, Clytemnestra – depicted in the *Oresteia* as being a cold and scheming character – is indeed Orestes' μήτηρ, i.e. his 'mother' in the basic sense of the word, whereas it is the nurse Cilissa that is his τροφός in the meaning of 'mother figure'. Such an interpretation of the aforementioned passages becomes even more convincing in the light of a passage in the *Choephoroi* where Orestes himself reveals the dark side of his relationship with Clytemnestra, accusing her not only of having abandoned him as soon as he was born, but also of selling him in exchange for Aegisthus' love.[8] Electra's bitter statement in lines 132–134 is followed by Orestes' own words, which are no less bitter.

πεπραμένοι γὰρ νῦν γέ πως ἁλώμεθα
πρὸς τῆς τεκούσης, ἄνδρα δ' ἀντηλλάξατο
Αἴγισθον, ὅσπερ σοῦ φόνου μεταίτιος.
(*Choe.* 132–134)

τεκοῦσα γάρ μ' ἔρριψας ἐς τὸ δυστυχές.
(*Choe*. 913)

αἰκῶς ἐπράθην ὢν ἐλευθέρου πατρός.
(*Choe.* 915)

If one compares this passage with the aforementioned fragment of Cilissa's speech – the very same Cilissa who is called a τροφός in the previous part of the *Oresteia* – then this throws new light on the supposedly extremely 'patriarchal'[9] character of Apollo's speech. In the context of Cilissa's moving account of Orestes' infancy and her love for him – which was much greater than that of his biological mother Clytemnestra – Apollo's words acquire a different meaning, i.e. that the real mother is not the person who gives birth to a child, but the person who actually takes care of it, raises it and genuinely loves it.[10]

Apollo thus shifts part of Orestes' guilt onto Clytemnestra, who failed Orestes as his biological mother. Furthermore, it transpires that emotional bonds do not

[8] Pontani 2007 at 208. Cf. Bees 2009, 225. Cf. Garvie 1986, 78.

[9] I use this totally anachronic term deliberately in order to be able to confront the equally anachronic interpretations (cf. Zeitlin 1965, 150).

[10] Garvie 1986, 297.

depend on biological bonds, as a woman who fails to nurture the blood relationship with her own child actually stops being its mother.[11] It would therefore seem that these two passages should be correlated and interpreted together as being two parts of the same syllogism (a simple logical device for which Aeschylus seems to have had a particular fondness).

Clytemnestra's neglect (which resulted in Cilissa becoming Orestes' real mother)[12] and the initial oracle predicting that Orestes will commit the crime of matricide are two factors which somehow justify the murder and make it possible for Apollo to defend Orestes on the grounds that the mother he murders failed both as a mother and as a wife (by having an affair with Aegisthus). Similarly, Clytemnestra murdered Agamemnon (one generation earlier), while Agamemnon's father Atreus murdered his own nephews and Agamemnon himself killed his own daughter during a corrupted sacrifice.[13] The mechanism on which the *Oresteia* would seem to be based is that there is always an earlier crime: one violent death precedes another. This is why, when Clytemnestra is committing her crime, she is fully aware that she is not merely a murderer, but also a tool of retribution within a (literally) vicious circle:

αὐχεῖς εἶναι τόδε τοὔργον ἐμόν;
μηδ' ἐπιλεχθῇς Ἀγαμεμνονίαν εἶναί μ' ἄλοχον·φανταζόμενος δὲ γυναικὶ νεκροῦ
τοῦδ' ὁ παλαιὸς δριμὺς ἀλάστωρ
Ἀτρέως χαλεποῦ θοινατῆρος
τόνδ' ἀπέτεισεν, τέλεον νεαροῖς ἐπιθύσας.
*(*Agam*. 1497–1604)*

In accordance with this pattern, her crime – being itself (as she declares) part of the guilt-revenge cycle – is in its turn avenged by Orestes (who says a very similar thing to Clytemnestra: ἔκανες ὃν οὐ χρῆν, καὶ τὸ μὴ χρεὼν πάθε, *Choe.* 930). The family curse goes back to the murder of Pelops – a horrible deed that was committed by Tantalus and that tainted all subsequent generations of the family.

Orestes' crime is somewhat different, however. Although he is also part of an old *perpetuum mobile*, unlike his predecessors (Clytemnestra, for example, who – apart from having a very strong motive for killing Agamemnon, i.e. her grief for the sacrificed Iphigenia[14] – betrays her husband, thus becoming morally impure herself), Orestes remains morally intact until the moment when he stains himself with matricide. Without being involved in any unacceptable activities or any kind of deceit, he simply carries out an act of revenge. Part of the responsibility for his crime results from the curse hanging over the family, while another part lies with his victim, who neglected him as a child. As one who is not entirely guilty and as one who cannot act otherwise, Orestes therefore becomes the last broken link in a disastrous chain of murderers.

Apart from being a substantial element of the *deus ex machina* maneouvre, Apollo's speech also clarifies the situation and explains how Orestes was driven

[11] Garvie 1986, 232; Lebeck 1971, 126.
[12] Garvie 1986, 297.
[13] Cf. Zeitlin 1965.
[14] Cf. Finglass 2018, 135.

to committing matricide. Apollo uses a whole arsenal of rhetorical devices just in order to show his protégé's case in a different light and shift the onus of guilt onto Clytemnestra: Orestes did indeed murder his mother, but what kind of mother was she? Does the fact of having given birth to a child automatically confer the status of being its mother? Or rather is it not true that the title of mother must be earned? And is it not true that the task of being a mother carries with it much more responsibility than that of being a father?

Apollo interprets fatherhood as the act of becoming a τοκεύς in the technical sense of the word. In his opinion, however, the role of a mother goes far beyond that of bringing a baby into the world (which is the meaning of τοκεύς) and is a long, daunting process. According to this way of reasoning, the word 'mother' is more a title than a purely biological term (unlike the word 'father') and is earned rather than granted. A woman begins her journey by performing the duties of a τροφός – the person who feeds the baby and takes care of it. Then, and only then – after proving herself to be a kind and responsible person – does she deserve to be called a μήτηρ.

Cilissa's emotional speech about the aspects of motherhood not only perfectly matches the definition given by Apollo, but also serves as its illustration. Similarly, Clytemnestra is a person who does not deserve to be called a 'mother' because she has failed to meet the requirements that this role demands. Cilissa therefore speaks out as Orestes' τροφός (i.e. his real mother) and – citing her own example and her own personal experience – explains the duties of a mother and at the same time gives a holistic description of the ideal τροφός, who – according to Apollo (and Aeschylus) – is the real mother of a child:

ὃν ἐξέθρεψα μητρόθεν δεδεγμένη,
κἀκ' νυκτιπλάγκτων ὀρθίων κελευμάτων
καὶ πολλὰ καὶ μοχθήρ' ἀνωφέλητ' ἐμοὶ
τλάσηι·—τὸ μὴ φρονοῦν γὰρ ὡσπερεὶ βοτὸν
τρέφειν ἀνάγκη, πῶς γὰρ οὔ; τρόπῳ φρενός·
οὐ γάρ τι φωνεῖ παῖς ἔτ' ὢν ἐν σπαργάνοις,
εἰ λιμός, ἢ δίψη τις, ἢ λιψουρία
ἔχει: νέα δὲ νηδὺς αὐτάρκης τέκνων.
τούτων πρόμαντις οὖσα, πολλὰ δ', οἶομαι
ψευσθεῖσα παιδὸς σπαργάνων φαιδρύντρια,
κναφεὺς τροφεύς τε ταὐτὸν εἰχέτην τέλος.
(*Choe.* 750–760)

Cilissa talks about prosaic things such as getting up at night to feed and comfort a wailing newborn (κἀκ' νυκτιπλάγκτων ὀρθίων κελευμάτων), adding that a baby resembles a mindless beast, and so one has to somehow guess its needs and feed it (τὸ μὴ φρονοῦν γὰρ ὡσπερεὶ βοτὸν / τρέφειν ἀνάγκη). Although such duties might not befit a proud queen, they play a decisive role in the formation of a bond between a mother and her baby.

We can therefore see that – notwithstanding his seemingly cruel and disparaging assessment of the status of mothers – Aeschylus (through the mouth of Cilissa, later confirmed by Apollo) shows the work of full-time nannies in a new

light, amply demonstrating that by performing every kind of motherly duty they can eventually earn the title of mother and therefore deserve to be treated as such.

Thus a passage which has so often been dismissed as being 'sexist'[15] and unfair to women is actually one of the few passages in world literature that gives a full definition of motherhood. Aristotle's weird[16] theories on the human anatomy (such as the famous claim that a female is a mutilated male, echoed in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*) are partly to blame for this confusion,[17] as they have coloured the way in which many scholars read all ancient Greek texts dealing with women and their role in Society.

Although he preceded Aristotle, Aeschylus actually makes statements that on closer examination do not make him a misogynist at all.[18] Through the mouth of Apollo, he underlines the psychological dimension of motherhood as a bond between two people – something that is earned and achieved, deserved and cherished – thus giving it a status that is higher than the purely technical status of being a biological parent (such being the role of the father, who is referred to as being a τοκεύς, 'the one who mounts': πατὴρ μὲν ἂν γένοιτ᾽).

Part of the problem regarding the interpretation of Apollo's speech lies with popular translations that often distort the meaning of the original text. A case in point is the otherwise excellent translation made by Richmond Lattimore:

> *οὔκ ἔστι μήτηρ ἡ κεκλημένου τέκνου*
> *τοκεύς, τροφός δὲ κύματος νεοσπόρου·*
> *τίκτει δ᾽ ὁ θρῴσκων* […].
> (*Eum.* 658–660)

> The mother is no parent of that which is called
> Her child, but **only** nurse of the new-planted seed
> That grows. The parent is he who mounts. […]

In the original text we have: 'οὔκ ἔστι μήτηρ ἡ … τοκεύς, τροφός δὲ …'[19] (*The mother is not a parent…, but a nurse…*), whereas the translation gives us "The mother is no parent… but *only* nurse …'. This one little word added to the text – 'only' – drastically changes its original meaning, turning a neutral statement into a blatantly arrogant one. And, what is even worse, the word τροφός – which these lines would seem to unduly glorify – becomes a derogatory term for a lower-category servant. As a result, many scholars add this 'only' into their summaries of Apollo's speech.[20]

Further on in the same passage, Apollo gives the example of Pallas Athena, who had only one biological parent – her father Zeus:

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[15] Freeman 2004, 273.

[16] Weird according to our understanding as non-native speakers of ancient Greek.

[17] Cf. Arist. GA 2.3.737a, 24-28; Th.Aq. S.T. I, 92, 1, ob.1). Cf. Mayhew 2004, 56; Horowitz 1976, 185; Smith 1983; Peradotto and Sullivan 1984, 2.

[18] Cf.: "Apollo's argument was however, irremediably sexist." (Freeman 2004, 273). Cf. Rehm 2003, 93 ff.

[19] For the adversative δέ here see: Denniston 1954, 165.

[20] Cf. Föllinger 2009, 159. Alan H. Sommerstein even undermines Aeschylus' use of the term τοκεύς ("Apollo does violence to the normal usage of the noun tokeús", Sommerstein 1989, 207).

πατὴρ μὲν ἂν γένοιτ' ἄνευ μητρός: πέλας
μάρτυς πάρεστι παῖς Ὀλυμπίου Διός,
(*Eum.* 663–664)

Significantly, Apollo tells Athena that Orestes is actually in the same situation: he did have a mother, but – as Orestes himself declares in *Choe.* 913 – she forsook him as soon as he was born. Therefore – according to Apollo (*Eum.* 667–663) – given that Orestes and Athena have this much in common, they might as well become good friends. The important point made by Apollo (and Aeschylus) is that no matter how a child is born in the technical sense, it always has a father, but – unfortunately – it does not always have a mother, or at least the mother to whom it is entitled. And – what is worse – not even a mother figure can fully compensate for this loss, which is why Orestes bears such an immense grudge against Clytemnestra, notwithstanding his apparentlycloser bond with Cilissa (as it appears from the latter's monologue, at least).[21]

In other words, Apollo makes a distinction between the purely biological function of a parent (which in his opinion is reserved for the father) and the much more complex task entrusted to the mother – a task which goes far beyond biology, as it involves love, care, support, upbringing and friendship. Actually, if anyone is discriminated against in this regard, it is the father, to whom Apollo assigns a very simple, limited and purely mechanical role!

Leaving aside ideological disputes and Aeschylus' views on motherhood and fatherhood, from a purely technical point of view the main purpose of Apollo's speech is to unify the *Oresteia* and to resolve its plot. The poet therefore invokes all the circumstances that make it possible for Orestes' guilt to be absolved, one of these being his childhood trauma of having been rejected by his biological mother. The wound proved to be so deep that even the person who substituted for the real mother could not heal it with all her kindness and personal sacrifice.

As Giulia Maria Chesi has observed, Orestes is eventually acquitted on the principle *in dubio pro reo*.[22] The main character of the play is redeemed and the *circulus vitiosus* is broken thanks to the skilful argumentation used during the trial,[23] for in the mouth of Apollo some words lose their old meanings and acquire new or modified meanings. The word μήτηρ is no longer merely the name of a family member, but becomes a title of honour that has to be earned, while the word τροφός no longer denotes a mere 'wet nurse', but acquires the broader meaning of 'mother figure'.

[21] Although it was normal for such children to develop a very strong emotional bond with a *paidagogos* or a wet nurse (cf. Beaumont 2012, 118).

[22] Cf. Chesi 2014, 162.

[23] "Orestes', Apollo's, Athena's and the Erinyes' rhetoric of appropriation of words such as φίλος, ἐχθρός, μήτηρ, πατήρ, τρέφειν and τίκτειν in their excited dispute on the role of mother and father pinpoints substantial differences among their discourses on genealogy and authority. Given that Orestes is acquitted in dubio pro reo, these differences make us wonder whether we have to assign the authority of birth and origins to the father figure and/or to the mother figure. […] Now, for Apollo consanguinity with the father suppresses consanguinity with the mother." (Chesi 2014, 162).

However, Chesi goes too far in claiming that "According to Apollo, the father's genealogical authority of birth eliminates the consanguinity with the mother. For this reason, it legitimises the definition of blood ties as based both on the law of the father-*tokeus* and on the mother's position in the family as wife of the children's father."[24] Apollo also states that whereas the role of the father is to give life, the role of the mother is to nourish and take care of this life. While the case of Athena indeed proves that it is possible to be born without a father, Athena is not a human being, but a goddess, which sets her apart from Orestes. Also, Apollo's denial of any blood relation between a mother and a child,[25] including the one between Clytemnestra and Orestes, logically (on the same principle) renders Clytemnestra a physical stranger to Orestes, which in turn (in this particular context) makes her practically equal to Cilissa as regards her role in the boy's life and her responsibilities concerning his person. The only difference is that while Clytemnestra nourished the baby Orestes in her womb, Cilissa nourished him after he was born.

Although, according to Apollo, Clytemnestra and Cilissa have a similar status, the contrast between their attitudes to the baby Orestes is all the more striking. Clytemnestra "sold' Orestes in exchange for Aegisthus' love (πεπραμένοι γὰρ νῦν γέ πως ἀλώμεθα / πρὸς τῆς τεκούσης, ἄνδρα δ' ἀντηλλάξατο / Αἴγισθον, ὅσπερ σοῦ φόνου μεταίτιος. Choe. 132–134), while Cilissa took care of him as if she was his real mother:

φίλον δ' Ὀρέστην, τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς τριβήν,
ὃν ἐξέθρεψα μητρόθεν δεδεγμένη,
(*Choe.* 749–750)

The dispute between Apollo, Athene and the Erinyes in the *Eumenides* is hardly comprehensible if it is read or heard outside the context of Cilissa's speech and the emotional confessions of the raging Orestes in *Choephoroi*, i.e. the previous part of the *Oresteia*. Outside this specific context, Apollo's remarks on the nature of motherhood and fatherhood appear to be obscure, or even outrageously unfair.

Our analysis has shown that however 'misogynistic' Apollo's speech seems to be when read or heard in translation or with an anachronic mindset, Aeschylus does not disparage mothers, but rather stresses the fact that motherhood is a responsibility and not merely a biological function. By demonstrating the harmful effects of being rejected or even neglected by one's biological mother and also by highlighting a mother's duties (in Cilissa's speech), he firmly brings home the point that while fatherhood just 'happens' – despite the well-known strong position of fathers in Athenian society – motherhood is a very difficult, albeit rewarding role. Far from underrating the role of mothers, Aeschylus actually emphasizes

[24] Chesi 2014, 163.

[25] Cf.: "Similarly, in Apollo's speech in defence of Orestes (Eum. 660–666), the god's rhetoric of appropriation of the verbs τρέφειν and τίκτειν and the word πατήρ links consanguinity to the father and not to the mother. The father – as Apollo maintains – gives life (Eum. 660: τίκτει δ' ὁ θρώισκων; 666: ἀλλ' οἷον ἔρνος οὔτις ἂν τέκοι θεά)." (Chesi 2014, 163).

their importance as guardians of the new life that has been entrusted into their care.

Our analysis has also brought to light another hidden message that is conveyed in the *Oresteia* under the guise of an ancient myth, namely a critique of the custom – then prevalent among aristocratic and wealthy families – of 'outsourcing' the care of newborn children.[26] By portraying the distress and psychological trauma experienced by such a child – who grows up to become a disturbed and vengeful adult bearing a terrible grudge against his biological mother – Aeschylus (via Cilissa) brings this particular social issue into the light of day.

We have therefore seen that some parts of the trilogy appear to be difficult to interpret when taken out of their proper context – a context which consists of various significant passages that are scattered throughout the three plays and which makes the whole trilogy much more coherent and thus easier to understand. If read outside the context of Apollo's speech, Cilissa's monologue is of little importance and can be considered to be a mere interlude.[27] Without the context of Cilissa, however, the verdict meted out by Apollo sounds unjust and somewhat irrational, to say nothing of the fact that – (not only) from a modern point of view – it smacks of misogyny.

However, to interpret the *Oresteia* or any other ancient text with reference to the categories of 'misogyny', 'chauvinism' or 'sexism' would surely be to greatly misunderstand it. Like their authors, these texts are rooted in particular periods of history – in societies and cultures whose values, outlooks and gender roles did not necessarily meet the norms and standards of today's world (and the Western world in particular). The best example of a play which is a product of its times are the *Ecclesiazousae* by Aristophanes, in which women – though culturally deprived of having any say in politics (and 'hilariously' given a political voice by Aristophanes in his totally utopian idea of a female assembly) – turn out to be much wiser than their politically engaged husbands. The fact that Aristophanes considered a female parliament to be something almost surreal does not prove that he was a misogynist, but merely reflects the fact that he was an Athenian who lived in the fifth century B.C.

Both Cilissa's monologue and Apollo's verdict lose much of their meaning when read independently of the emotional dialogue that takes place between Orestes and Clytemnestra, in which Orestes reminds his mother that she disposed

[26] Cf. Dasen 2011, 307–308.

[27] Cf.: "The nurse is traditional (see Intro., pp. xxi-xxiv), but Aeschylus has made of her, like the Watchman and the Herald in *Ag*., a memorable minor character. Her speech, like the Herald's, is a curious mixture of elevated poetic language (749 ff., 756; cf.653 n.) and almost incoherent anacolutha which characterize her as an ordinary humble person under emotional strain. And she talks of ordinary things which nowhere else find a place in extant Greek tragedy. But it would be wrong to suppose that Aeschylus introduces such realism for its own sake, and realism should not be confused with characterization of Cilissa as an individual (see Mannsperger, in *Bauformen*, 168 f.). Her obvious role as messenger might have been filled by any servant (in real life doubtless by one more sympathetic to Clytaemestra). But Cilissa has three dramatic functions which only she can perform. (1) She shows us an ordinary person's attitude to Orestes as well as to the present masters in the house. Except for the Recognition-scene there has been little love or warm affection in the play." (Garvie 1986, 243–244)

of him at an early age, after which he murders her together with Aegisthus, for whose love (he believes) she forsook her own son.[28] Apart from providing clever rhetoric that allows Orestes to escape punishment for the terrible crime of matricide, the speeches of Apollo and Cilissa highlight the importance of motherhood and the enormous responsibilities and challenges that it brings.

One could of course say that the original Athenian audience – consisting of various people having various memories, various degrees of education and various perceptive skills – could hardly have been able to make the connection between Cilissa's utterances and Apollo's judgement, which is delivered much later and even in a different part of the trilogy. However, given the fact that the *Oresteia* is indeed a whole, and especially given the fact that the original audience's ability to concentrate[29] would almost certainly have been far better than those of audiences nowadays, this does seem possible. Also, Cilissa's hilarious eccentricity, which – (together with her common background) makes her so different from all the other *dramatis personae* – makes her easy to remember, together with everything that she says. In a theatrical context, the very fact that – behaving like a character from a comedy – Cilissa is such a misfit in this tragedy (apart from the rather obvious function of providing a short respite from the dramatic tension) is surely intended to make her and all her utterences stand out in the audience's memory for as long as is necessary, i.e. at least until Apollo appears on the stage in the next part of the trilogy.

The example in question shows just how extremely important it is to treat the *Oresteia* as one textual (and dramatic) body whose parts cannot exist independently of each another. Analysed separately, these parts lose most of their meaning, becoming weird, obscure and at times even comic, outrageous or absurd. Sadly, this also shows just how difficult it is to interpret the other Greek plays that have come down to us, but only as surviving parts of lost (and therefore incomplete) trilogies. Passages that have been taken out of context and/or have been translated too liberally can easily become dangerously incomprehensible and – as a result – often fall prey to misinterpretation.

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[28] Cf. (*Choe*. 132–134).

[29] More on the subject of ancient audiences' ability to concentrate in: Honzl 2016, 157–164, at 159.

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