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Mapping Trauma as Inheritance in *The Libation Bearers*

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Abstract

The Libation Bearers is a Greek tragic play by Aeschylus, which serves as the second part in the trilogy called *Oresteia*. This paper examines *The Libation Bearers* from hauntological and psychoanalytic theoretical frameworks as the Atreid household becomes a battleground of spectral (in)justice and (un)resolved mourning. In the play, Orestes exacts justice by reinscribing the very violence he seeks to expiate. Similarly, Electra's laments conjure the past as a living wound. The Furies are what the symbolic order couldn't symbolize. Borrowing Jacques Derrida's concept of the revenant and Jacques Lacan's concept of *objet petit a*, the paper seeks to understand how the domestic space in this play serves as a setting for psychological topology, where memory mingles with desire to attain justice. Buried underneath the trauma of the siblings lies a spectral call for justice where trauma isn't merely staged as an event but as a return of the repressed.

Keywords: *Trauma, Memory, Mourning, Hauntology, Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Greek Tragedy*

Introduction

Justice assumes a spectral force in Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers* by remarkably marking its presence as absence, a sense of uncanniness that hovers over the House of Atreus. The past bleeds onto the present, wherein the rites only aggravate a sense of unfulfillment instead of appeasing the deceased. Justice does not remain a static code with boundaries between the avenger and avenged dissolving. The slain Agamemnon's cries echo through the inherited wrath of Orestes, who is compelled to fulfill a destiny that is equally a determination of his own free will. The vision of justice offered by this play is intertwined with trauma, in the sense that (in)justice spectrally returns to claim new sacrifices and unsettle the living.

Originally a part of the *Oresteia* trilogy, *The Libation Bearers* is a middle play that occupies a liminal space not only thematically but also structurally. While the first part of the trilogy, *Agamemnon*, lays bare the bleeding wound of Clytemnestra's murder of the King, which in turn is a response to their daughter Iphigenia's sacrifice by the King. The trilogy's last part, *The Eumenides*, provides a resolution to the conflict between justice and injustice, desire and memory. With the acquittal of Orestes (due to Athena's help), transformation takes place with the Furies becoming the Eumenides, standing guard benevolently, and they pursue justice in its truest sense instead of vengeance as the Greek society becomes more ordered.

Whereas in *The Libation Bearers*, there is a cyclical repetition of ethical as well as psychological forms of inherited violence. Trauma unfurls itself as a legacy of this family, as all its members are caught in a flux of an inescapable pull to the past. The middle play ends up occupying the liminal space wherein there's no origination or resolution but only a quest for retribution tainted with specters of unresolved and inherited trauma.

This paper analyzes the play from the theoretical frameworks of hauntology and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Both these frameworks play a crucial part in illuminating how trauma functions not only as a transmissible but also a persistent force. Hauntology as a concept was coined by the French-Algerian philosopher, Jacques Derrida, in his seminal work, *Specters of Marx*.

Hauntology essentially describes the present condition, which is ruptured with longings of the past, where the “time is out of joint.”¹ The “being-there” of specters of unresolved past (such as longing for justice and resolution) hover over the present. The world inhabited by Orestes is significantly hauntological in nature. Spectrality occurs in both ways, literally and figuratively. For the former, the ghost of Agamemnon appears in a literal sense. Whereas justice itself also assumes a form of spectrality, in a way, as it is deferred by unresolved wounds of previous generations.

In the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, a rupture is marked in the very Symbolic order by trauma. There is a compulsive return of symptoms in the form of dreams and obsessions that cannot be completely symbolized or even assimilated. The paradoxical condition of vengeance, along with the invocations of ancestral guilt by the Chorus, and the maternal archetype of Clytemnestra, follow the Lacanian account of how unresolvable trauma is inherited. Where it haunts the subject and reproduces itself.

Theoretical Foundations

Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* emerged from a lecture series he delivered at the “Whither Marxism?” conference at the University of California on futures (or lack thereof) of Marxism in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The lecture series (and eventually the book) was also a reflection and critique of the neoliberal triumphant attitude shown by the likes of Francis Fukuyama. Derrida’s articulation of hauntology is based on trace and *différance*. According to him, there is just an “always-already absent present”² rather than a temporal point of pure birth.

The structure, subject matter, and fundamental ideas of a play are all included in dramaturgy, which is the art and practice of dramatic composition and theatrical representation. Hauntological dramaturgy is the study of how these components are influenced by the phantom energies of historical and cultural settings. It looks at how plays address unresolved histories, summon the spirits of the past, and develop plots and characters to deal with these

¹ Shakespeare, W., 2015: 35; Papaoikonomou, 2024.

² Macksey R., Donato E., (ed.), 2007: 254.

haunting presences. As "the forgotten and the forgetters, the buried and the ghosts, the present, the passing"³ Collide, theater becomes a shattered intersection where the living and the dead meet.

The text centers on the figure of the revenant. In old Celtic and Nordic mythology, a revenant was a creature that came back from the dead to visit the living.⁴ Derrida utilized the concept of "revenant" in a deconstructionist philosophical way, where the past apparitions of traumas and injustices kept haunting the present. The revenant here isn't simply what one might consider a metaphor for memory, but it is, by its own inherent nature, an agent of ontological disturbance.

Such hauntings are a rallying cry for an ethicality, a responsibility to those who are not present anymore in a physical sense. Since Derrida, many philosophers like Mark Fisher have adapted the concept of hauntology to media studies and theatre studies. As per hauntological reading of dramaturgy, the stage transforms itself into a site for the return of all that's been repressed, be it social, political, or familial.

By demonstrating how "time is out of joint" in the sense that "no entity can be fully self-sufficient,"⁵ hauntology serves to undermine the idea of presence. Furthermore, no creature may appear in a single, precise moment. Hauntology-influenced stories exhibit non-linear temporality, in which the past, present, and future converge to create an ethereal present. These dramatic decisions highlight the long-lasting effects of past traumas and unresolved social issues. Using techniques like shattered periods, recurrent motifs, and fragmented stories, hauntological dramaturgy regularly deals with memory and trauma.

The murder of Agamemnon produces mandates that are inherited. Ghosts and curses are not only plot devices but also function structurally on the site of stage. The oaths and debts are born from the dead, which in turn illustrates how trauma in tragedy isn't merely psychological but transgenerational. The invocations by the Chorus perform this inheritance, marking violence and justice as phenomena that are bereft of resolution and entirely spectral in nature.

³ Cixous H., "Enter the Theater (in between)", *Modern Drama*, 42: 3, 1999, pp. 301-314.

⁴ Tomaini T., 2018: 24.

⁵ D'Cruz G., 2024: 5.

The concept of *objet petit a* is central to Jacques Lacan's methodology of psychoanalysis. *Objet petit a* can broadly be described as the unattainable object and cause of desire. The end goal desired by the tragic protagonist remains elusive to them as they are manifested as a lost ideal (be it reparation for the wrongs of the past or restoration of the familial household in the context of *The Libation Bearers*). The elusive nature of this unattainable goal leads the protagonist astray and propels them to get trapped in an endless cycle of guilt and lack. Orestes' desire to restore order and settle the score of his father's murder becomes a senseless pursuit, revealing how desire is actually shaped by trauma as a ceaseless void.

Lacan's theorization of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary serves as a supplementary framework to read the visible and invisible forces operating in this tragedy. The Symbolic is encompassed by the language, law, and social mandates that help in structuring subjectivity. "Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together [...] the shape of his destiny."⁶

The Imaginary ends up involving fantasy and a sense of identification (idealizations of justice). "The imaginary is the realm of comprehension, in the Kantian sense, where one takes things in as wholes rather than piecemeal."⁷ However, the Real is the traumatic kernel that resists easy interpretation, and in the only compulsion for cyclical violence, it is found. Desire for immortality, perhaps, "is the real that governs our activities more than any other, and it is psychoanalysis that designates it for us."⁸ The cyclical violence is what pushes the plot of the play forward. Orestes' visions of persecutions and the Furies' irruption insert a form of inherited trauma into the Symbolic order through revenge, ritual, and law, with each act disclosing the limitations that the process has. Further insight into the psychic life of tragedy is provided by the Lacanian tradition's elaboration and reconfiguration of Freud's distinction between melancholia and mourning.

While melancholia is pathological and characterized by the assimilation of the lost object into the ego, which leads to constant

⁶ Lacan J., 1997: 68.

⁷ Lewis M., 2008: 148-201.

⁸ Hurst A., 2008: 213-236.

repetition, mourning involves a processual working-through of loss. Tragedy, especially in *The Libation Bearers*' inherited structures of debt and doom, oscillates between these two reactions: Orestes's actions and the chorus's rituals aim to bury the past and grieve the dead, but the very structure of vengeance necessitates constant repetition, with trauma as inheritance of melancholia.

Even while a lot of modern criticism has effectively used methodologies of psychoanalysis and hauntology to examine how trauma and violence persist in tragedies, there are still a lot of unanswered questions. Conventional interpretations of hauntology tend to emphasize ghosts, spectrality, and memory politics while ignoring the complex psychodynamic processes through which trauma is internalized and passed down through the generations. In addition to the ghost's carnal apparition, phenomenal body, and fallen and sinful body, the specter also represents the impatient and nostalgic need for redemption and, in this case, for a spirit. "The ghost would be the deferred spirit, the promise or calculation of an expiation."⁹

Psychoanalytic interpretations, on the other hand, may emphasize the individual ego above the community or even undermine the ritualistic and communal elements of tragic performance. In addition, there is a lack of comprehensive research that combines the spectral (hauntological) and structural (psychoanalytic) modalities to explain how trauma functions as both a hereditary compulsion and a shared social tension. By highlighting both the intimate, psychic recurrences mapped by Lacan and the collective, haunted temporality described by Derrida, this paper aims to close this gap by showing how these frameworks overlap and interact when mapping the logic of trauma-as-inheritance in *The Libation Bearers*.

The Haunted Domestic Space

In *The Libation Bearers*, the Atreid household functions not only as a setting, but also as trauma's living topography, where

⁹ Derrida J., 1994: 171; Kakoliris G., 2017.

memory and structure are combined into a psychologically claustrophobic landscape. The house, in Aeschylus' staging, too, is emphasized as a repository of the emotional and ethical impressions, due to cyclical violence. In addition to the actual presence of Agamemnon's ghost, the palace is haunted by the encompassing darkness that the Chorus observes: "O suffering home! O ruined house! Sunless shadows, hateful to men, now cover it entirely, for the master of the house is dead."¹⁰ Every stone and threshold in the house becomes a monument to violence, both predicted and witnessed, as it reflects, absorbs, and intensifies pain.

The points of containment and transition are returned to when a spatial analysis is performed. The threshold between inner and external, along with corridors and doorways, separates the realm of the dead from alive yet remains oddly permeable. The women's quarters, chiefly symbolic of protection in a domesticated sense, are compromised by screams of fear and nightmares. Memory simply does not only functions as an abstract concept but also doubles down as being affixed to physical spaces. This intersection can be observed at the tomb of Agamemnon, which assumes a liminal and central point in the play. The tomb's functionality as a site for death and life, present and past, is in constant negotiation. The offerings at the tomb by Orestes are an act of mnemonic (re)building.

The scene of libation, besides being a ritual, also acts as an attempt to reorganize the psychic landscape of the Atreid household. Though it becomes a container, it leaks with hauntings of horrifying deeds, as "blood once shed upon the earth"¹¹ cannot simply be washed away, and the family's offspring end up inheriting the trauma. At the center of the play is the specter of the father, Agamemnon. A specter whose cries cannot be ignored, and eventually, his demands end up drawing the lines of destiny for his family members. He verily becomes the manifestation as an *objet petit a*, a lost object subjected to compulsion and desire, whose recovery is longed for and simultaneously impossible. What emerges from the subject in anxiety is the *objet petit a*.¹²

¹⁰ Conacher D. J., 1987: 104.

¹¹ Conacher D. J., 1987: 104.

¹² Lacan J., Mehlman J., "Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father Seminar", *October: A Journal of Contemporary Art Criticism and Theory*, 40, 1987, pp. 81-95.

In Lacanian terms, the return to the tomb of his father by Orestes acts as a return to the site of loss. The subsequent desire for justice is structured by the traumatic absence. Paternal law is not only foundational but radically unstable too, as Agamemnon's murder starts a phantasmic regime and an unfurling of the traditional authority. It forces Orestes to become a murderer in turn so that he can restore the fallen order. He appeals, "my great grief for my father, my own lack of substance ... the commands of the god."¹³ The spectral presence in the physical absence of the father becomes stronger and saturates that absence with a demand for retribution and justice.

This spectral regime is enforced by visions and dreams. The Chorus's invocations of the apparitions and the nocturnal terrors of women ripple through the space of the palace by shattering the tranquility of the women's quarters. Such supernatural significations are signals of the violence that is to follow. In the tomb, Orestes's invocation—"Hermes-of-the-earth, you who watch over the father's realms below, be now my savior and my ally..."—represents a deliberate attempt to raise the buried father.¹⁴ He attempts to raise the buried father. Even after his demise, Agamemnon holds the reins of the Atreid household with his spectral governance. There is really no space for reclamation but only for perpetual return, where trauma intensifies and accretes across generations.

The Atreid household is also occupied by the nearly absent/present maternal shadow of Clytemnestra. She is a constant and compulsive force in the psychic landscape of *The Libation Bearers*. After Agamemnon's death, she is marginalized, yet the narrative structure pervades her presence even during the planning by Orestes. The maternal trauma inflicted on her children by Clytemnestra is hidden and manifest simultaneously. Her murder of her husband is initially positioned as vengeance for Iphigenia, but later it transforms by starting a cycle of inherited violence that even her death cannot exonerate. The narrative structure of the play is foregrounded in such a way.

Clytemnestra herself dispatches the libation bearers (Electra and the slave women) to make offerings for the deceased Agamemnon.

¹³ Conacher D. J., 1987: 108.

¹⁴ Conacher D. J., 1987: 103.

The act is by its inherent nature a palliative one, but it also becomes perverse given that Clytemnestra had him murdered. This act reveals the paradoxical nature of the maternal will, as she seeks to appease the very rules she has violated. The description by the Chorus of the godless woman emerges from a place of not only inexorable attraction but also a fear, a recognition of the fact that pollution of the Atreid household is as much maternal as paternal, it seemed. Clytemnestra's action of sending the women to the tomb for the ritual of libation is representative of the displacement of her own grief and guilt.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, a crucial position is also held by the concept of *jouissance*. This concept refers to when, within the symbolic order, the pleasure far exceeds the limits of satisfaction. Jouissance is an excessive and destructive enjoyment that isn't mere desire, but strictly arises at that point where prohibitions start to fail. The relation women possess in comparison to what the phallic function designates of jouissance, a supplementary jouissance...a jouissance of the body which is...beyond the phallus."¹⁵

It is intrinsic to the drive and the circuitous relation to lack. It gets manifested when the subject hits the realization that they cannot get away with something that isn't mediated or symbolized. Clytemnestra's act of murdering Agamemnon would be called feminine jouissance by Lacan. Following the ritualized sacrifice of her daughter, Iphigenia, Clytemnestra's actions spring from that excess of loss as a surfeit of response to trauma. The violation is a symbolic rupture as it is a clear assault on the sense that her role makes as a mother, wife, and subject within the patriarchal order. Her enjoyment does not lie in the ambit of satisfaction from vengeance, rather it lies in the transgressive pleasure that stems from the very act of annihilation of the law as embodied by the patriarchal order of Agamemnon. It is a borderline mystical communion wherein there is a process of "explosion, diffusion, effervescence, abundance, and one takes pleasure (jouit) in being limitless."¹⁶

Since the mythic narrative of the play and the overall trilogy positions Agamemnon as the sovereign representative of tradition and phallic authority, he upholds that symbolic order through sword and sacrificial altar. Agamemnon's murder in the intimacy

¹⁵ Rose J., (eds.), 1982: 145.

¹⁶ Cixous H., Clément C., 1986: 91.

of the bath, with a net and knife, is an act of inversion of the sacrificial logic. A mother's grief is transformed into a violent pleasure of transgression. Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon doesn't then become an act of retribution or justice. Instead, it ends up assuming what Lacan identifies as the tragic ethic. The refusal to give up one's desire if it means their own demise. Her act thus enacts a logic of the death drive, a compulsion that traverses the psychic economy, where there's no possibility for actual justice or reparation.

Like Antigone, Clytemnestra refuses the work of mourning and persists in her desire against the limitations set by the kin and *polis*. The murderous act by her transforms into a site where pain and pleasure are inextricable, and the annihilation of the other is unavoidable from the dissolution of the self, too. Lacan explains that the transit to desire has to do with a state of Being unto Death that is similar to the state beyond fear and pity in Antigone, the main character in Lacan's Ethics.¹⁷ The suffering of her children results from their melancholic inheritance of Clytemnestra's trauma. The murder of their father is not the only reason for their grieving, but also the inability to fully name the loss or mourn that ends up structuring their identities. As with Agamemnon, Clytemnestra's specter also meanders, not literally, but in the form of commands and the perversion of maternal nurturing. The subject's subjective formation will continue to be based on their association with the lack in the Other.¹⁸

Emblematic of this trauma is the motif of nursing, such as nurturing the lock of hair offered by Orestes to the river Inachos at the tomb, which links the mother's body and the memory of childhood to grief over the murdered and now physically absent father. There is a dark transfiguration here in the context of this primal scene of attachment. The act of nurturing itself transforms into a spectacle as violence and mourning are closely intertwined with maternal beneficence. Neither Orestes nor Electra can completely reject or, at worst, embrace it. The mother casts a shadow over the reclamation of the Atreid household since she is not always visible, yet her actions decide the rest of the course.

¹⁷ Kirshner L. A., "Toward an Ethics of Psychoanalysis: A Critical Reading of Lacan's Ethics", *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 60: 6, 2012, pp. 1223-1242.

¹⁸ Fink A., 1997: 130.

Instead of viewing it as a constitutive lack, the melancholic subject believes that they have once found the lacking object before losing it. To put it another way, the melancholic subject perceives this loss as a real one. According to Lacan, melancholia occurs when the entire Real of the object is present, but mourning is a state in which one experiences a portion of the Real and eventually conveys it to the symbolic.¹⁹

Orestes and the Compulsion for Repetition

The cyclical dynamic of inherited violence as trauma is not just a psychological engine but also a cultural feature. Repetition is central to the structure of this play, as even faintest glimmers of hope and reclamation end up giving way to darkness again, with Orestes enacting matricide. The entire text speaks a language of return. The dead exert influence over the living—"Ares will fight Ares and Justice Justice"—reinforcing the principle of retaliatory justice, in which murder is avenged by murder.²⁰ This act of compulsion refracts the agency even after Orestes apparently breaks the cycle by murdering Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. The Kindly Ones (a euphemistic term for the Furies) appears then, demanding more retribution. The pressure of inherited trauma is markedly more overwhelming than Orestes' own conscious volition. The ultimate sanction for Clytemnestra's murder is provided by the edict of Apollo. It also ends up providing a means for Orestes to exonerate himself from this crime by calling it an inspiration from the divine. Orestes remarks, "If I do not pursue ... life for life ..."²¹

This leaves the readers then with a crucial question: does Orestes have any agency of his own, or is he a mere instrument of the divinity who has been sent to restore order? This sense of ambiguity pervading here is essential in dramatizing the uncanny force via which trauma compels, circulates, and repeats itself with the psychic landscapes of all characters. What Freud called "repetition compulsion" then haunts the tragic law as this structure of repeti-

¹⁹ Grigg R., "Remembering and forgetting", *Lacanian Compass Express*, 3: 2, 2016, pp. 1-8.

²⁰ Conacher D. J., 1987: 123.

²¹ Conacher D. J., 1987: 107.

tion compulsion refashions the present in the reflection of a traumatized past. The repetition of violence is quite inseparable from this drive for justice, as each act of purification breeds only more pollution, also evident in the ceremonial choreography of violence and blood imagery.

This play can be mapped onto the terrains of the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework of the return of the repressed. The exile back to Argos is not only the journey undertaken by Orestes, but he also travels into the center of primal trauma that has never been symbolically worked out. In Lacanian terms, the Real (or the unspeakable) insists upon repetition as a means of discharge, even if that repetition entrenches the trauma more. This repetition does not purify and ends up polluting more, as the Chorus acknowledges that no purifying streams can cleanse. The confrontation of Clytemnestra with Orestes is also marked by a sense of maternal nurturance, “respect for the mother’s breast that nourished him.”²² This nurturing claim is countered by Agamemnon’s specter and Apollo’s divine creed.

The drive that dominates in this case is simply not desire as lack, rather it is the traumatic kernel, the Real, that resists interpretation and any symbolization. Orestes is “like a man driving his team of horses far off-course.”²³ He is overwhelmed by visions and beset by a creeping madness and guilt. The Furies, far from being mere mythic creatures, end up becoming the compulsive force of the repressed. As they arise in the consciousness of the subject’s field, their supposedly feminine attributes (Gorgon-like, black, serpentine) recall the monstrous and maternal aspect of what was denied once and now returns in a horrifying form. The futility of suppressing trauma through violent discharge can then be found in Orestes’ desperate pleas to fellow citizens, to the Sun, and to Apollo himself. The function of the real as encounter, “insofar as it is essentially the missed encounter—first presented itself in the history of psychoanalysis in a form that was in itself already enough to rouse our attention, that of trauma.”²⁴

The psychic tension mirrors the larger crisis of masculine identity that Orestes experiences, as well as the succession within both

²² Conacher D. J., 1987: 123.

²³ Conacher D. J., 1987: 125.

²⁴ Lacan J., 1998: 55.

the *oikos* and *polis*. At its core, the revenge plot mirrors an Oedipal drama where the son wants to reclaim the paternal order and simultaneously supplant the deceased father. Drawing on classical Athenian structures, the play captures how father-son relations were treated publicly, too. The Athenian *oikos*, with its monarchical model, places the father as lord of power, name, and wealth.²⁵ In psychoanalytic terms, the Oedipal dynamic disrupts and sustains this order. Where the son has to differentiate himself yet, at some stage identify with the father too, to become an autonomous subject. His coming back home is to inherit that trauma and, through vengeance, to share in the father's abominable fate. This error is exactly what gives the sad incident its horrific, unmemorable character. For this reason, Lacan would argue that the trauma is unrecognizable in itself and can only be remembered through repetition.

In *Logique du Fantasme*, Lacan makes the case that homeostatic processes and the desire to repeat do not follow the same discharge logic. A realm that is entirely distinct from the one pertaining to homeostatic pleasure seeking is established by repetition; it is a properly subjective realm where the mark "stands for," "takes the place of," and what we have ventured to refer to as "an event" is what only the movement of return, or what Lacan refers to as a "thinking of repetition," confirms and continually reconfirms this point of no return, which is also a qualitative cut and a structural loss.²⁶

The murders of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are not simply a staged attempt at reclaiming masculine power but violence's anguished repetition, which tore any semblance of paternal order in the first place. Orestes referring to himself as "the brood of the eagle"²⁷ Combines his on-the-verge-of-collapse personal identity with familial legacy. In accordance with the Athenian social and

²⁵ For more about the structure of the patriarchal and monarchical life of the Athenian *oikos* (or the *private realm*), see: Arendt, H. 1998. *The Human Condition*. Chicago University Press, 27-9, 45; Theodosiadis, M. 2025. *Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism: Prometheus in Political Thought*. Edinburgh University Press, 31

²⁶ Van de Vijver G., Bazan A., Detandt S., "The Mark, the Thing, and the Object: On What Commands Repetition in Freud and Lacan", *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2017.

²⁷ Conacher D. J., 1987: 107.

aristocratic norms, failure is deemed as effeminacy (Aegisthus's woman's heart), exclusion from society, and social devaluation. Orestes has to grapple with that anxiety of this identification as his ascension is inseparable from the violent displacement of his origins, along with that of his mother and her consort.

Lacan's metaphor of "symbolic castration" is an apt description of the situation faced by Orestes, where the murder of Clytemnestra is an action that enacts and actualizes that castration itself. Orestes, by obeying the Apollonian law, wounds his own subjectivity and tries to emerge as the faux pas head of the house. His authority is immediately challenged by the Furies, who act as phalanxes of the maternal. They erupt at that very point where the masculine order has to be restored. At every turn, thus the symbolic is marked by trauma and loss without any act of reparation, which can recover the masculine identity haunted by the threat of the return of the feminine/monstrous. The pursuit of the Furies of Orestes shows the inadequacy of the old order that is crumbling apart.

Electra's Lament and Politics of Mourning

The Libation Bearers begins with ritual grief but not overt violence. Agamemnon's tomb emerges as a site of not only ritualized mourning but also an evocation to avenge the loss of a father figure. Electra, unlike Orestes, reveals herself as a liminal figure who bears witness, taking on the task of a mourner and eventually becoming a co-conspirator. Electra's actions of grieving are highlighted even before Orestes arrives, and they are evocative of Antigone's insistence on burying her brother. Lacan does refer to them both together, referring to Electra as "Antigone's double."²⁸ Because of her unrelenting grief and sacrifice for the Name-of-the-Father, which are in line with Antigone's ethics of desire.

The lamentations of Electra follow the gendered conventional norms of ancient Greek society, where threnos (formal song) and goos (personal lament) are specifically women's duties. These laments destabilize the boundaries set by societal order on women's agency. Their lamentations become something more than mere channelization of grief. The lament of grief is already feminine in

²⁸ Lacan J., 1997: 217.

this culture, and “as Archilochus’s famous poem exhorts, it must be banished.”²⁹ The prohibition is intended to address the possible harm that women’s grieving poses to public order; while its manifestation is not pleonastic in and of itself, from the perspective of the citizen, it is.

Electra’s mourning for her father also acts as an alternative form of justice that closely aligns more with inherited trauma as memory than a civic procedure. The role of “professional mourner” is inherited by gender, but it ends up giving Electra both social precarity and expressive power as she performs the libation. “She is trapped in a liminal space where both her mind and body are adversely affected by her excessive mourning.”³⁰ Comprehending the mentality of mourning requires a knowledge of “the ancient Greek mentality of amnesty.”³¹ The connection between grief and rage is a clear place to start. Anger, as well as rage, is a byproduct of the feelings of sadness, which are the source of lament. Her lament is saturated with hues of ethical and political tension, too. The speech she delivers at her father’s tomb questions both piety and blasphemy simultaneously. She asks, “Am I to ask this, the customary prayer of mortals, that equal requital be given to those sending these offerings?”³²

The request put forth by her in the form of speech assumes a property of seeking help, even though it is centered in bodily memory. She begs of the Chorus, “O teach my inexperience,”³³ exposing the emotional displacement she herself faces in the wake of this traumatic inheritance. The moral purpose of tragedy is to draw attention to the political logos’ warped temporality. On the other hand, the tragic voice reveals that the only infinity that mortal creatures have is the infinity of grief and sorrow.³⁴ Electra breaks in joy upon recognizing her brother: “O blessed sight, who must for me be father, mother, sister, brother, all in one!”³⁵ This

²⁹ Loraux N., 1998: 11.

³⁰ Bakogianni A., “Performing Grief: Mourning Does Indeed Become Electra”, *Thersites*, 9, 2017, pp. 45-69.

³¹ Loraux N., (ed.), 1998: xi.

³² Conacher D. J., 1987: 105.

³³ Conacher D. J., 1987: 105.

³⁴ Nikolopoulou K., “Tragedy without Action? Reading Sophocles after Loraux”, *Epoché*, 2021, pp. 21-46.

³⁵ Conacher D. J., 1987: 106.

suggests, from a psychoanalytic framework, that there is a complete collapse of all relational categories, suggesting familial longing and a psychic regression. For Electra, there is no singular form of longing for justice; rather, there is a multitude that longs for the return of unity, which neither revenge nor the Symbolic Order's fantasy can fulfill.

The function of mourning by Electra is revealed by the collapse of this kinship as an ontological crisis and the inheritance of trauma as memory. Her joint lamentation with the Chorus, the kommos, serves more as a theatrical symptomatology than as a mere ritual closure. An oscillating structure is formed where trauma, instead of simply being mourned and processed, gets reiterated. In Lacanian terms, Electra flirts with the Symbolic and Imaginary registers to get close to the Real, the unmediated trauma that cannot quite be forgotten or called so. Her grief, articulated from an engendered ritual, stands at the edge of what can be uttered, yet remains unspeakable. Electra's femininity is not just a sociological posture, but it is rooted firmly in the lack, marked by mourning. Yet it becomes tragically voiceless when patricide and institutions of justice take over. If Electra lends a voice to trauma, then the Furies give it a solid shape by bursting at the end of *The Libation Bearers*.

In psychoanalysis, the forgotten origin of neurosis and the foundation for neurotic repetition are formed by the missed encounter with the Real, which remembers the impacts of trauma that is inassimilable to consciousness. "The real exceeds systems of signification, generating an excess or a remainder in relation to which desire inscribes its object."³⁶ The Furies are not to be interpreted as agents of justice ordained; rather, they are the irruptions of what Lacan calls the Real. The trauma that is elusive of any containment, which cannot be domesticated by ritualization, and also exceeds any form of interpretation. Their arrival tears down all structures of supposed normalcy, such as prophecy and kinship.

The Real resists any symbolization for Lacan and returns as violence, anxiety, and repetition by escaping the clutches of the Symbolic Order. The play is populated by otherworldly figures such as gods, oracles, and ghosts, yet the Furies are remarkably

³⁶ Botting F., "Relations of the Real in Lacan, Bataille and Blanchot", *Sub-Stance*, 23: 1, 1994, p. 24.

distinct. They are the primal force that emerges when justice is failed. Guilt alone does not push Orestes towards madness, but the direct spectral presences of the unbearable, outside the reach of institutional reason. A culmination of logic is marked by the Furies since the final defiance of Clytemnestra, “By guile we perish, as by guile we slew!”³⁷ She almost forewarns the cyclical form of vengeance as each act is recursively justified, yet each one generates more chaos and disorder. Orestes might claim that his act, divinely ordained, is supposed to bring an end to this cycle.

Yet the structure of order falls apart as the Furies appear since their justice is not the justice of Zeus or Apollo. Rather, it is much older and present as the primal urge of man. The stage ends up rendering what psychoanalytic framework recognizes as a symptom, where Orestes observes the Furies as “females like to Gorgons, sable-stoled, entwined with many dragons...”³⁸ The Furies are but an externalization of the unconscious dread of Orestes. The Real’s very pulsating kernel that erupts onto perception once there is complete disintegration of the Symbolic order. He cannot explain his vision, nor can he integrate it, let alone appeal to it for clemency. “In *The Eumenides*, Aeschylus chose to depict the underworld goddesses, the Furies, as preternaturally ugly.”³⁹

The Furies are elevated beyond their mythic function in the form of their representation. Unlike Apollo, who counsels, the Furies shriek and react. Their monstrous, feminine, and serpentine form is a signifier of a pre-Olympia regime where justice was not measured in the form of persuasion, but reciprocity and blood. “The Furies themselves represent the image in extreme. For their basic role (they call themselves “Curses”) is to objectify the vicious bite of conscience.”⁴⁰ The logic that emerges here is not one of Aristotelian catharsis, but one of psychological horror. The fulfillment of desire produces ruptures instead of balance. The prayers offered to Apollo and the Sun cannot hide the fact that justice has

³⁷ Conacher D. J., 1987: 123.

³⁸ Conacher D. J., 1987: 126.

³⁹ Schavrien J., “War and Nature in Classical Athens and Today: Demoting and Restoring the Underground Goddesses”, *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 29: 2, 2010, p. 154.

⁴⁰ Burke K., “Form and Persecution in the Oresteia”, *The Sewanee Review*, 1945, p. 383.

caught hold of a semblance of insanity and horror. The mother, even in death, returns to haunt him.

The difference due to gendered expression is crucial here as Electra internalizes the mother, whereas Orestes externalizes her. However, both fail spectacularly in transforming her legacy into something truly reparative. The Furies open the wound of inherited trauma even more. Orestes' role changes into an object of punishment from a self-prescribed agent of justice. The murder of Clytemnestra, which Orestes justifies in his speeches, is rendered null by the arrival of the Furies. The impasse of trauma is revealed here, as something that once has been done cannot be undone; some wounds return as presence, and the horror refuses to become reduced to a narrative form entirely.

The lament of Electra and the hunt by the Furies together comprise the trauma that is unsymbolizable in *The Libation Bearers*. The presence of the Furies also makes the plot progress for the third part of the trilogy, *The Eumenides*, where trauma has to enter the *polis* for an adjudication. The Real cannot be exorcised by a mere confession or some murder. Its trials and tribulations must be faced as Orestes has to face his own pursuit, not with speech, but by navigating the inner corridors of his own psyche, the trauma that demands to be observed.

Conclusion: Inheritance and the Spectral Future

Through the recursive violence of the Atreid household, *The Libation Bearers* sketches out a tragic tale of inherited trauma. The argument put forward by this paper is that the play's absent-present father and mother figures, domestic spaces, and its psychological economy end up enacting a drama of spectral inheritance. Fully spectral justice, compelled by forces that are neither rational nor completely visible. The Atreid household operates as a site in which trauma gets spatialized and transmitted, with the tomb doubling up as a threshold for memory and return. Orestes, compelled by divine, familial, and personal imperatives, finds himself at the end of a traumatic repetition compulsion which ensures that vengeance is always cyclical in nature.

Electra performs the affective labor of loss and grief as the voice of mourning. The unsymbolizable Real is given a solid shape by

the Furies, who crystallize the trauma, as some wounds can never be healed nor can they be properly articulated in any way. Application of hauntological and psychoanalytic frameworks opens up questions even for contemporary trauma scholarship: How does trauma become something inheritable besides can mourning ever reach Symbolic completion, and what happens when inherited trauma becomes uninterpretable?

Hauntology and Lacanian psychoanalysis reveal how the dead continue to haunt the living via intrapsychic conflicts that color and animate the ritualistic and familial drama. The Real shapes both the individual and collective destinies in tragedy. Tragedy here is about the unsettling persistence of that which should have been resolved.

This hauntological-psychoanalytic approach can also be extended to more Greek tragedies in future studies, examining how ritual and memory influence tragedy within the logic of the Imaginary. Multidisciplinary discussions involving trauma studies and memory studies would enhance both classical studies and modern cultural analyses, providing access to the spectral futures of Greek tragedy and unexplored forms of critical inheritance.

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