Orestes and Electra's Prayer Practices as Instructions to the City

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The plot of Orestes and Electra, jointly implementing the revenge plan for the death of their father Agamemnon, is taken as the basis of the tragedy *Libation Bearers* by Aeschylus and the tragedies of the same name *Electra* by Euripides and Sophocles. A divine will and human desires intertwine at the key points of each of these tragedies, where the protagonists demonstrate different practices of the prayer as precepts to the city, which has to accept and justify the crime they are plotting. Orestes and Electra's prayer practices in Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles will be analyzed according to the following questions: To whom do Orestes and Electra pray and why? Have their prayers been heard? What events precede the prayers? In which spaces of the city are the key prayers pronounced and what is the role of the chorus in it? What has the city been instructed to do through these prayers? Both Orestes and Electra assert their right to precept and seek support from the gods as the supreme preceptors in different spatial coordinates of the city. They view the city not only as a space where prayers are pronounced, but as another main character that can speak, for example, through the chorus lines or give tacit instructions through allusions to the details which appear in urban space descriptions. Not only does the city hear the prayers pronounced by the heroes, but it can give additional power for their materialization. For the protagonists, the city is as an open/closed space of crime and punishment, where they could and should claim new statuses of the ruler-mentors.

Keywords: prayer practices, city space, Orestes, Electra, ancient intellectual tradition.

To each of the numerous ancient texts reflecting the specifics of prayer practices, the modern reader can address "the eternal question": why are some prayers heard (such that those who pray receive divine aid) while other prayers remain unanswered? The texts of ancient Greek tragedies are particularly rich material for studying prayers, since prayers in tragedies are not always virtuous requests but often have the hidden nature of a curse. In an effort to earn the support of a given deity (and sometimes to overtly bribe that deity), the heroes of the tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides often regard prayer as a weapon that can and should be directed against the offenders. When two opposing heroes pray for the death of his opponent, their prayers cross like swords on the battlefield. The city, in which the tragic action unfolds, "hear" various prayers, but only a few of them are perceived and built into the city life.

The ancient Greek playwrights, claiming[1] to be mentors for the city and its citizens, relied on Homer, who states that "even the very gods can bend" on hearing the prayer of the one who has mastered "thy proud spirit" (Hom. *Il.* IX. 497), or, on the contrary, chosen not to do that. In Plato's *Respublica*, Socrates repeatedly points out that tragedies have dubious pedagogical value and can do much harm to the cause of educating young people: "nor again must we permit our youth to hear what Aeschylus says — "A god implants the guilty cause in men When he would utterly destroy a house"'[2] (Pl. *Resp*. 380a). For Plato, the ideal city relies not on poets but on philosophers who have the right to instruct the city, because they know that "no prayer… is to be directed to the gods to gain one any special favour which one has not otherwise earned by the practice of virtue, or to exempt one from any penalty to which one may be liable by reason of one's viciousness or futility" [4, p. 9]. This philosophical rule, which supported a didactic function or purpose, had many exceptions in the poetic tradition. Among the heroes who, in directing prayers against the powers that be, put to the forefront their tactical concerns, and not ethical, concerns are Orestes and Elektra. Their prayers sound like instructions to the city, which, in turn, accepts the impending crime and assists in committing it.

The story of Orestes and Electra, who jointly implement a plan of revenge for the murder of their father Agamemnon, is taken as the basis for the tragedy *The Libation Bearers* by Aeschylus and the two *Electra* tragedies by Euripides and Sophocles[3]. Each tragedy follows one broadly shared storyline: the siblings, Orestes and Electra, want to take vengeance on their mother for their father's murder and challenge Aegisthus' right to rule the city. Aegisthus is the cousin of their late father Agamemnon and the new husband of their mother Clytemnestra, which, in turn, complicates the family tragedy. In all three dramatic versions of the story, there is a common idea traced in the chorus: the gods will not abandon the mortals; instead, they will intervene in mortal affairs and help to bring about a justful victory. The brother and sister differ in their understanding of virtue, but together they plot a crime in the name of justice (δίκη) and as a punishment for pride (ὕβρις). Electra considers the murder of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra to be a sacrifice to the gods, but Orestes has some doubts that two, not one, deaths are required to restore justice. On the one hand, Electra does not embody a "morally evil" personality; on the other, "yet even moral rightness cannot justify certain transgressions" [5, p. 380] that Electra commits herself and to which she instigates Orestes[4].

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[1] Tragedians are *didaskaloi*, but we lack so-called "external arguments" which would enable us to suggest that this is not just a technical term (with the exception of Aristophanes' claim in *Frogs* that poets are *didaskaloi*. This claim, nevertheless, extends to all poets, not only to tragedians), with the abundance of "internal arguments" (the content of the tragedies that demonstrate the pedagogical interest of tragedians in a number of issues). Therefore, by the word "claiming" here, we mean not an active attempt of poets to capture the sphere of pedagogical activity, but a deep interest in it and a desire to instruct the audience in the correct understanding of the past or present events. See also: [1–3].

[2] Further on in this article, all citations are reproduced according to the electronic database of classical texts *The Perseus Digital Library*.

[3] The *Electra* tragedies by Euripides and Sophocles became a kind of melodrama in two parts for researchers: their structure and composition, features of dramatizing the story and characters, correlation with the historical and cultural context of the epoch have been studied. The tragedy of Electra by Aeschylus is more often considered in comparison with the other tragedies of the *Oresteia* trilogy than in comparison with the tragedies of Euripides and Sophocles.

[4] Sophocles uses the word καιρός, by which the playwright implies both the right to perform an act and the timeliness of this act. This word allows Sophocles to give an ironic assessment of the justful deeds of Orestes as a future ruler, who performed an act of vengeance, confusing justice and urgency, possibility and grandeur. See: [6, p. 341–343].

A divine will and human desires intertwine at the key points of each of these tragedies, where the protagonists offer different prayer practices as precepts to the city, which has to accept and justify the crime they are plotting. Indirectly, the pedagogical aspects of the Electra tragedies were touched upon in some research works (see: [7, p. 179–192; 8, p. 401–415; 9; 10; 5, p. 377–388]). However, outside of research attention remains the fact that in all three versions of the tragedies about Electra there is a clear pedagogical position of playwrights, which becomes visible when their characters give instructions to themselves, to others and to their city.

Both Orestes and Electra in different spatial coordinates of the city assert their right to precept and seek support from the gods as the supreme preceptors. The protagonists view the city not only as a space where prayers are pronounced, but as a place where another character can speak, for example, through the chorus' lines or give tacit instructions through allusions to the details which appear in urban space descriptions[5]. Not only does the city hear the prayers pronounced by the heroes, but the city can also give additional power that enable those prayers to come to fulfillment. In *Seven against Thebes*, Aeschylus says that the gods watch over and protect the city in which prayers are constantly uttered (Aesch. *Sept*. 174–178). Aeschylus uses the word ὄργια ("secret rites", "secret worship"), which is "etymologically related to '*erga*', the Greek word for 'actions', just as in the reciprocal process of prayer to the gods one 'act' of human devotion is expected to be repaid by another 'act' of divine assistance" [11, p. 146]. The city becomes a full-scale partner in these acts, since it listens to the prayer and helps to legitimize some of their consequences. The protagonists' desire to instruct the city on the correct understanding of their deeds is, in fact, the desire to enlist the support of the city as an ally.

Orestes and Electra's prayer practices in Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles will be analyzed according to the following questions: To whom do Orestes and Electra pray and why? Have their prayers been heard? What events precede the prayers? In which spaces of the city are the key prayers pronounced and what is the role of the chorus in it? What has the city been instructed to do through these prayers?

In *Libation Bearers*, the story begins in an open space, at the tomb of Agamemnon; here Orestes, in the presence of his friend Pylades, interrupts a speech, an appeal to the gods, when he sees Electra approaching, accompanied by a crowd of weeping women. The link between the present and the heroic past is represented through Agamemnon's tomb, over which Orestes gives the first speech in the tragedy, beginning it with a short prayer addressed to Hermes. Agamemnon's tomb occupies one of the central places in the story. It is not just a meeting point for Orestes and Electra, but a space outside the city walls which receives a symbolic power to become a place where the revenge plan is shaped. Orestes' prayer-speech is as follows: "Hermes of the nether world[6], you who guard the powers that are your father's, prove yourself my savior and ally, I entreat you, now that

[5] The issue of how far we can identify the chorus with the city is one of the most debated among researchers. In our opinion, the "voice" of the city is not only manifested through the chorus, and the chorus even expresses conflicting opinions on the same issue. The three choruses in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides are so different that it might seem that we look at three different heroes who speak in different voices, and, more importantly, fall silent with the equal dramatic effect. The "silence" of the city is manifested in the description of spaces in which key events take place and key decisions are taken.

[6] "Hermes of the nether world…" — it is this appeal that becomes the subject of "the investigation" in Aristophanes' comedy *The Frogs* (1119–1181), where Euripides and Dionysus attack Aeschylus and his strategy of demonstrating prayers to the gods in his tragedies.

I have come to this land and returned from exile…" (Aesch. *Cho*. 1–3). From this speech, it becomes clear that Orestes has returned to this land without a clear plan and only after meeting with Electra does this plan begin to take shape. Orestes, who is hiding behind the tomb, hears the chorus singing that Agamemnon's ghost appears to Clytemnestra in a dream, which means that "those beneath the earth cast furious reproaches and rage against their murderers" (Aesch. *Cho*. 40–41). Electra immediately takes this as a call for an action that must be preceded by a prayer, but Orestes "hesitates and has to be persuaded by the Libation Bearers to pray to Agamemnon for vengeance" [12, p. 215].

Electra's appeal to the chorus takes the form of a series of rhetorical questions asking "what shall I say and what prayer shall I make?" Electra concludes that it is very difficult to find the appropriate words (Aesch. *Cho*. 90–91). All of her questions to herself about the need to avenge her father are, in fact, addressed to the chorus[7]. Janette Auer refers to Plato's claim in the *Laws* that the prayer is a carefully formulated request to the gods, arguing that Electra "knows exactly how to formulate a prayer," and that she skillfully manipulates the chorus, forcing them to give the desired answer [15, p. 254]. J. Auer disputes the assertion that Electra in *Libation Bearers* is a colourless and weak woman who can only beg for sympathy from the chorus (see, e. g.: [16, p. 23–47]). She knows perfectly well what to say and do. Striving only to enlist the support of the chorus, she offers a choice of three strategies: to speak the prayer words as her mother wishes, to say the prayer words about righteous vengeance, or just to keep silent.

Electra's dialogue with the Chorus Leader is a careful clarification of the intentions of the other party with some features of precepts. "Then for myself and for you also shall I make this prayer? / That is for you, using your judgment, to consider now for yourself" (Aesch. *Cho.* 112–113). Electra keeps asking to be taught exactly what to say (δίδασκ' ἄπειρον ἐξηγουμένη, Aesch. *Cho.* 118), gradually turning the chorus from advisers into allies. In the end, the chorus offer to pray that Electra's father's murderers be taken by death. In turn, Electra speaks words on both her own behalf and that of Orestes, of whose presence she is unaware: "I utter these prayers on our behalf, but I ask that your avenger appear to our foes, father, and that your killers may be killed in just retribution. So I interrupt my prayer for good" (Aesch. *Cho.* 141–145). On one hand, Aeschylus' audience knew that "praying for the death of one who seriously transgressed was not immoral," but, on the other hand, the audience also knew that prayerful supplication "did not relieve characters from their moral responsibility" [1, p. 90, 25]. In other words, a prayer for death demanded a clear rationale why death is a fair punishment for a particular crime[8].

The hesitant tone of the female slave chorus is replaced by belligerence, which proves that Electra is capable of forcing anyone to act in her interests. Electra will do the next

[7] A speech of questions, as S. Nooter [13, p. 195] assumes, allows Electra not only to draw attention to the essence of the prayer, but also to create a "soundplay additionally to ring in the ears of the audience". L. McClure [14, p. 223], by contrast, believes that Electra's speech of questions "suggesting, perhaps, that she has never before performed funeral rites for her father".

[8] For example, when, in *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra makes a similar prayer request to Zeus ("O Zeus, Zeus, you who bring things to fulfillment, fulfill my prayers! May you see to that which you mean to fulfill!", Aesch. *Ag.* 972–974), it is not a thirst for righteous vengeance, but her personal anger with her husband. Listing Agamemnon's crimes after his death, Clytemnestra speaks not about the satisfaction, but about the pleasure she received from such a turn of events (Aesch. *Ag.* 1445–1447). Probably hinting at this, Electra, in her prayer request, says the following phrase, "…I pray to you, father: Oh, hearkentome! And as for myself, grant that I may prove far more circumspect than my mother and more reverent in deed" (Aesch. *Choeph*. 138–140).

work to convince Orestes, who throughout the tragedy has unsuccessfully argued that "wishing" and "waiting" for revenge are not the same thing. Electra convinces him that he is not waiting, but longing, and thus pushes him to kill for the sake of vengeance. Even during their first meeting, Orestes feels slightly bewildered as he has to prove to Electra that he is her brother: she argues too aggressively and demonstrates her inner strength too vividly. She is not at all afraid of a stranger who suddenly appears from behind her father's grave, demanding from him an answer to the question, "Then how have I found an answer to my prayers?" (Aesch. *Cho*. 218).

The action in *Libation Bearers* begins with the meeting of two heroes of equal status– the brother and sister — in an open space, where there are no borders but only the open perspective of their future joint decisions and activities. Aeschylus nevertheless demonstrates how the brother and sister's motivations differ via their prayers to the gods about the future of the royal house. Electra appeals to Hermes, Hades, and her late father[9]: "Have pity both on me and on dear Orestes! How shall we rule our own house?…" (Aesch. *Cho*. 130–131) Orestes appeals to Zeus, mentioning only their father and the need "to raise our house from low estate to great, though now it seems utterly overthrown" (Aesch. *Cho*. 261–263). Electra addresses in particular Hermes, because it is he who patronizes the sensible, dexterous, and eloquent (this is herself), helps the travelers (this is Orestes), and keeps in touch with the souls of the dead (this is their father Agamemnon). Orestes appeals to Zeus as the supreme power and a force of vengeance, the one who established the power of kings and guards the family and the house. Orestes' prayer to Zeus is a request not so much on his behalf as on behalf of the treacherously murdered king Agamemnon. Hades also appears in the prayers of Orestes and Electra, since he and Hermes are "the powers of the world below" (Aesch. *Cho*. 405) and "the gods beneath the earth" (Aesch. *Cho*. 475).

Electra and Orestes also understand their futures differently: she wants to restore the power for only herself and her brother, but he wants to restore power and status for all family members; she wants righteous retribution in the face of all their contemporaries, but he wants recognition from their descendants. It is significant that in Aeschylus' tragedy, Electra and Orestes do not pray to Apollo, who could also act as a guarantor of justice. For them, the justice of punishment is solely the justice of Zeus and Hermes, since "the audience might have thought of the Cassandra scene, in which the prophetic power of Apollo was emphasized over his art of healing" [1, p. 92–93]. Orestes only mentions that Apollo ordered him to punish his father's murderers (Aesch. *Cho*. 269–305): the "god's command" and "grief for my father" infused him with determination. Orestes' direct appeal to Apollo would not only have suggested a problematic analogy between himself and Cassandra, but would inevitably have lead to the question of whether Apollo could have forced Orestes to kill Clytemnestra. The chorus of *Libation Bearers* emotionally respond to the prayers of the brother and sister, constantly encouraging their decisions and actions.

Orestes and Electra pronounce the next prayer together with the chorus, who has at last become their ally in the murder of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. This prayer is an appeal to the gods and Agamemnon; it occupies a significant part of the tragedy (Aesch. *Cho*. 306–513). This prayer reveals the "learning by suffering" trope, which is so often

[9] The most striking aspect of the prayer, as S. Nooter suggests, is Electra's insistent echoing of Orestes' opening speech [13, p. 196].

manifested in *Oresteia*[10] and accompanied by a request for divine permission to respond with a crime to a crime: "Our house has a cure to heal these woes, a cure not from outside, from the hands of others, but from itself, by fierce, bloody strife. This hymn is for the gods beneath the earth" (Aesch. *Cho*. 471–475).

This prayer again reveals the differing motives of the siblings, who are beginning to implement their plan to seize power. Orestes tells Electra and the chorus in a rather cowardly manner that it would have been better if Agamemnon had been killed in the battle of Troy, so that his children would have enjoyed eternal glory (Aesch. *Cho*. 344–349). Electra responds that she would rather her father had survived in the battle of Troy, had died as he did, but his murderers had been punished (Aesch. *Cho*. 362–370). In this dialogue-prayer, Orestes becomes similar to Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, confessing that he himself would have been glad to gain the glory of Agamemnon without making any special efforts. Electra pretends not to have noticed this revelation. She knows very well that "for without Orestes, nothing is going to happen", and his "resolve needed heightening" [15, p. 252], not humiliation. She and the chorus strive for the speedy implementation of the plan for revenge, reminding Orestes that "doom has long been waiting, but it will come in answer to those who pray" (Aesch. *Cho*. 464–465). Electra and Orestes are constantly asking their late father for help, convincing the chorus that it is Agamemnon who instructs them. Indirectly, Orestes and Electra admit that they are weaker than Agamemnon, but stronger than Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. The chorus instructively note that anger will prompt both of them how to act (Aesch. *Cho*. 451–455).

At the very beginning of the tragedy, the heroine offers an unusual prayer, begging the gods to send Orestes to help her, but at the same time she does not want to soil her hands with the crime that follows (Aesch. *Cho*. 124–151). The unfolding events show that everything will go exactly like this: Electra is not present during the murders of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, committed by Orestes and Pylades. Electra's prayers of, therefore, appear to be a program of righteous vengeance, which the city has to accept. For Electra, as once for her father, the demand for justice is often a cover for personal desire, because "the desire for justice is not usually so passionate, so willing to stop at nothing (not even more injustice), as that" [17, p. 221]. The chorus utters the prayers several times, each time stating through them that murder is a worthy act in this situation, that Orestes is absolutely right and saving the royal house. Immediately before the murder of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, the chorus offers a prayer that resembles Electra's speech at the beginning of the tragedy: "O Zeus, O Zeus, what should I say? Where shall I begin this prayer of mine, this appeal to the gods? How in my loyal zeal can I succeed in finding words to match need?" (Aesch. *Cho*. 855–857). Thus, the chorus simulate the presence of Electra at the moment of revenge, since Electra herself does not appear onstage any more[11]. Through this simulated presence, we might conclude that Electra's prayer asking for all the bloody crimes not to concern her directly, but to indirectly bring consolation, has been heard by the gods. The gods have also heard the prayers of Orestes, who is just about to accomplish his plan. However, once Orestes kills Clytemnestra, he sees the Erinyes who want to avenge his murdered mother, and Orestes decides to flee and ask for help from Apollo, appealing to the god in his last short prayer in the tragedy (Aesch. *Cho*. 1057). The

[10] A study by Brett M. Rogers [3, p. 126–193] proves that learning by suffering in *Oresteia* is associated with power (including pedagogical power), which usurped Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.

[11] The actor who plays Electra is to play Clytemnestra. See, e. g.: [18, p. 257–274].

last monologue in the tragedy belongs to the chorus who sings about the family curse on the royal house, suggesting that further strong shocks can be expected in the future. If we believe that this monologue is spoken on behalf of the city, then we must agree that the city sympathizes with Orestes (even if the city is also glad at his departure). The city, then, is forced to receive instructions rather than willingly accept them.

In Euripides' *Electra*, the action begins in a poor farmer's hut[12], a closed space, located far from the palace and "any heroic association the heroic associations" [19, p. 15] associated with it. A chorus of Argos women comes to invite Electra to a feast in honor of Hera, offering Electra a beautiful dress and gold jewelry to wear. Electra proudly refuses. Having started complaining to the chorus about her fate and calling her brother the heir to their "father's glory", she is interrupted by the appearance of Orestes, who is accompanied by Pylades. The chorus only manages to say several phrases with the opposite meaning to her: "Do you think to rule over your enemies by tears, if you do not revere the gods? Honoring the gods not by lamentation but by prayers, you will have good fortune, child" (Eur. *El.* 194–198). At first, the chorus asserts that tears will not help her become stronger than the enemy, cautiously hinting that it is impossible to remain inactive, modest, and pious under such circumstances. Then the chorus says that the best thing in Electra's situation is to submit and pray. Ragged, submissive Electra and her husband, then, stand in stark contrast to richly dressed and resolute Orestes and Pylades. Thus, at the very beginning of the tragedy, Euripides puts on display the inequality of the protagonists, their self-absorption, distrust of each other, and most importantly, Electra's desire to see what she is willing to see[13], which will inevitably manifest itself in prayers and a joint plan for revenge. The difference in the motivations of Electra and Orestes can again be seen through comparing their prayers, which somebody or something keeps preventing Euripides' heroes saying. At the beginning of the tragedy, Electra's husband sets the tone for the discussion of all subsequent prayers of the heroes: "For no idler, though he has the gods' names always on his lips, can gather a livelihood without hard work" (Eur. *El.* 80–81). Next the chorus offers Electra to pray (Eur. *El.* 190–197), but the arrival of Orestes interferes with the process. The Mentor (Eur. *El.* 563) addresses her with the same offer, but Electra wants to clarify whether she should pray for the living or for the dead, and, again, the appearance of Orestes interferes with her prayer. Finally, when the siblings finally meet, the chorus suggest that they pray together (Eur. *El.* 593–594), but Orestes is too eager to get to the palace to be distracted by such prayer. At last, after elaborating the revenge plan and listening to the instructions from the old attendant, Orestes and Electra say a joint prayer to Zeus and Hera, reminding them that they are blood kin (Eur. *El.* 671–684). This prayer is interesting in two aspects: first, Orestes and Electra demonstrate greater unity appealing first to Zeus, and then to Hera; second, Electra, who had previously refused to attend the celebration in honour of Hera, now appeals to that same goddess, and nothing interferes with her intention (neither "filthy hair", nor "the rags" as her dress).

[12] Note that the tomb of Agamemnon is mentioned several times in the tragedy (Eur. *El.* 288–289, 323–331, 509–519) and is also a place outside the city walls which symbolizes the need for righteous vengeance, that is, active actions in relation to those who are in the city/palace.

[13] W. Geoffrey Arnott [7, p. 182] asserts that Electra views Orestes and Clytemnestra in a very specific way: "It is always a prejudiced and distorted view, interpreting the world from behind the blinkers of a naive heroic vision which simplifies issues in terms of the obsolete values."

When Electra and Orestes make a subsequent appeal to the gods, the brother and sister are not as united as it might seem. The disunity between them arises at the moment when Electra informs Orestes that she will kill their mother Clytemnestra, and he, accordingly, takes upon himself the murder of her new husband, Aegisthus. The accomplices believe that Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are "the criminals [who] violated the sanctity of marriage, destroyed the tie between parent and child" [19, p. 25]. However, after murdering Aegisthus and before putting into motion the plan to murder Clytemnestra, Orestes wavers in his decision and tells Electra that he will not be able to raise a hand to their mother. Electra retorts that he should learn from her since she once raised a hand to their father. At this point, Orestes appeals to Apollo[14]: "O Phoebus, you prophesied a great folly," to which Electra responds, "Where Apollo is a fool, who are the wise?" (Eur. *El*. 971–972). This disagreement in the midst of the prayer, which O'Brill calls an "attack on the Delphic oracle" [20, p. 38], shows that Orestes is afraid of committing another murder through folly, but Electra sees it as a wise and just punishment to their mother. I would call it an "attack on the prayer": the prayer functions as didactic instruction between Electra and Orestes, but at the moment when the moral schism between the siblings becomes especially obvious to them (most often, this obviousness becomes "visible" due to the presence of the chorus), such didacticism is problematized.

Just as in Aeschylus' tragedy, Electra is not present during the murder of Aegisthus, which is committed by Orestes and Pylades. When the Messenger describes the events preceding the murder, he mentions that Aegisthus and Orestes make a joint prayer together. Aegisthus prayed aloud that his enemies should suffer, but Orestes "prayed for the opposite, not speaking the words aloud, that he might win his father's house" (Eur. *El*. 808–810). Since prayers were usually spoken aloud, "Orestes' silent prayer would have been in keeping with the ancient Greek view that silent requests of the gods indicated sinister intent" [21, p. 193].

At last, Electra and Orestes commit the intended matricide together. At this juncture, Orestes makes short prayers, first to Zeus (Eur. *El*. 1179–1181) and then to Apollo (Eur. *El*. 1190–1195); Electra offers comments accompanying his prayers that strongly suggest the siblings feel remorse only about the matricide. So, when Orestes appeals to Zeus and regrets that two corpses were the result of revenge, Electra retorts: "Too many tears, my brother, and I am the cause. Unhappy, that I came to fiery rage against this woman, who was my mother!" (Eur. *El*. 1182–1184). When Orestes appeals to Apollo and says that now he will not find shelter anywhere because he has killed his mother, Electra echoes him saying that because of this she will never get married (Eur. *El*. 1198–1200). She does not pray, but comments on Orestes' prayer, because after the implementation of the revenge plan, she is no longer interested in communication with the gods. In light of these events, the chorus conclude that they have reached "[a]n end of great troubles for the house" (Eur. *El*. 1231), which conclusion is immediately undercut by the sudden appearance of the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux. Castor proceeds to give instructions to the siblings: Orestes must flee, such that he names Pylades as Electra's husband. The tragedy concludes with the chorus declaring that only those who did not know misfortune are happy, hinting that the

[14] In Euripides, appeals to Apollo are also important for Orestes and Electra. When Electra says at the beginning of the tragedy, "O Phoebus Apollo! I beseech you to spare my life", Orestes responds, "May I kill others more hated than you!" (Eur. *El*. 221–222). The main point of his answer is not irony, but the fact that he accepts Electra's offer to appeal particularly to Apollo.

heroes of this tragedy cannot be considered as such. This is a rather unusual ending for a tragedy[15], in strong contrast to the more typical situation in which the chorus concludes with a brief formulaic prayer or moral. Instead we witness here in *Electra* how "the action drags on, and the characters insist upon asking the god impertinent questions" [22, p. 16]. Castor ends the dispute between Orestes and Electra regarding Apollo's wisdom: "Phoebus, Phoebus — but I am silent, for he is my lord; although he is wise, he gave you oracles that were not. But it is necessary to accept these things" (Eur. *El.* 1245–1248). Exhorting the young matricides to obey Zeus then condemning Apollo once again, Castor gives a signal to Orestes to flee, his final words might be perceived as a lesson by the audience: "And so, let no one wish to act unjustly, or set sail with perjurers; as a god, I give this address to mortals" (Eur. *El.* 1354–1356). The last words belong to the chorus who regret what happened, probably expressing the position of the city, which the heroes did not manage to instruct on the righteousness of the crimes committed.

In Sophocles' *Electra*, the action begins with a description of the open scenic spaces in Argos to which Zeus has commanded Orestes to return, but it is Apollo whom both Orestes and Electra will be asking for help. The tragedy begins with the monologue of the paedagogus Talthybius, who, without going into long discussions about royal power, immediately exhorts Orestes to regain his power. The chorus are not present for this initial dialogue, and enter only after woeful speech of Electra, who has long been praying for Orestes' return. According to J. T. Sheppard, this prayer "is the method of Sophocles to state the moral issue at the outset" [23, p. 84]. The chorus instructs Electra against exhibiting excessive grief: "But never by weeping nor by prayer will you resurrect your father" (Soph. *El.* 137–138). This chorus thus advises against making prayers that function as regrets about what has already happened, while they still assert the necessity of prayer for an action to be effective.

The chorus believes that the murder of Agamemnon is such a serious crime that one cannot be certain about the judgment: "Deceit was the plotter, Lust the slayer, two dread parents of a dreadful phantom, whether it was god or mortal that did this deed" (Soph. *El.* 197–200). In other words, even such a strong man as Agamemnon is not able to escape if the act against him has been predetermined. The chorus sings that it is impossible to justify this crime, but they do not make clear who this unnamed god is and which mortals committed this crime. Since the names of the mortals are obvious to the audience, it may be assumed that the god can be named too. According to A. Maria van Erp Taalman Kip, it is possible to reconstruct from the context that we are talking about Eros [24, p. 288], since Agamemnon was murdered because of the affair between Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Thus, the further development of events is connected with the divine conflict between Eros and Apollo: the killing of Agamemnon was permitted by Eros, and the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus was mandated by Apollo.

"Sophocles was not the man to cast doubt on the validity of the oracle, in the manner of Euripides" [25, p. 77], therefore, Apollo plays a significant role in his tragedy. When Orestes hears Electra's voice, he immediately wants to listen to her speeches. The Paedagogus stops him from the unnecessary act by reminding him that "…before all else, let us strive

[15] It is very important for Euripides that the divine order should be established in human affairs, that he does not even want to end this tragedy with a prayer for his victory in the theater *agon*, as, for instance, in the tragedy *Iphigenia in Tauris*, "Greatly revered Victory, may you occupy my life and never cease to crown me!" (Eur. *IT.* 1496).

to obey the commands of Loxias". The Pedadogus then suggests a prayer "for such actions bring victory within our grasp and give us mastery in all our doings" (Soph. *El*. 84–85). Electra beseeches Hermes and Erinyes to allow Orestes to return and help her avenge Agamemnon's death. Electra's prayer demonstrates that she needs "the constant renewal of her grief" and her calls for righteous vengeance: "The same quality which makes her speak of 'my own father' and of 'my own mother' makes her also pray for the return of 'my own brother'" (Soph. *El*. 117)" [23, p. 83].

The meeting of the brother and sister is preceded by many events and dialogues, among which are Electra's dialogues with her sister and mother, two of which are associated with the prayer practices. In the first dialogue, Chrysothemis says their mother Clytemnestra has sent her to pray for their father[16]. Having learned that Clytemnestra had a terrible dream about Agamemnon, Electra forbids her sister Chrysothemis from carrying Clytemnestra's offerings to their father's tomb, instead suggests that she bring small offerings from them and praying for the return of Orestes [26, p. 143]. Electra virtually dictates to Chrysothemis the text of the prayer she wants Chrysothemis to make: "Then fall down and pray that he himself may come in kindness to us from the world below, a helper against our enemies; and that young Orestes may live to set his foot upon our enemies in superior might, so that hereafter we may crown our father's tomb with wealthier hands than those with which we honor him now" (Soph. *El*. 453–458). Electra's dialogue with the mother, which is the second dialogue that interests us, is a chain of mutual recriminations. Tired of listening to her daughter, Clytemnestra asks Electra to stop speaking so that Clytemnestra can pray to Apollo (Soph. *El*. 630–655)[17]. Since Electra is nearby, Clytemnestra cannot say everything she wants, therefore, the final part of her prayer is somewhat reminiscent of Orestes' silent prayer in the presence of Aegisthus (Eur. *El*. 808–810): "O Lycean Apollo, hear these prayers with favor, and grant them to us all just as we ask! As for all my other prayers, though I am silent, I judge that you, a god, must know them, since it is appropriate that Zeus's children see all" (Soph. *El*. 655–659). According to P. J. Finglass, "Clytemnestra's prayer forms a central set-piece for the drama", around which the long second episode unfolds; Clytemnestra "conceals the meaning of her words (that is, her request for Orestes' death) from Electra to prevent her from revealing it to the city" [8, p. 203][18]. Clytemnestra performs a guarded prayer and asks that everything go on as it is Apollo has heard her prayer, since the Paedagogus appears at once and tells her about the fake death of Orestes: "We expect this kind of misdirection from Apollo, the great riddler, of whom the early philosopher Heraclitus said, 'The god at Delphi does not say; he does not conceal; he gives a sign'" [29, p. 19].

In contrast to the Aeschylean and Euripidean versions of this plot, Sophocles places the first meeting of the siblings almost at the end of the tragedy and without an accompanying joint prayer. When they first meet, brother and sister speak to each other like strangers, albeit strangers equal in status. Orestes tells Electra that his return was wanted by a god, and she answers him that "[y]ou have told me of a grace higher still than the

[16] Sophocles, like Euripides, mentions the tomb of Agamemnon, but, unlike Aeschylus, does not make it a focal point.

[17] Since it is Clytemnestra who says the prayer, this can be considered as another hidden indication of the divine conflict between Eros and Apollo, which we have mentioned above.

[18] Many researchers consider Electra's behavior disrespectful, and her speeches and prayers unseemly [5, p. 378–380; 27, p. 122–130; etc.], but Virginia M. Liwis [28, p. 228] asserts that Electra's patterns of speech "conform to those of other female characters in Sophocles' plays".

first, if a god brought you to our house" (Soph. *El.* 1265). In both cases, the god's name is not mentioned. At the beginning of the tragedy, Orestes had explained that he returned to his native land by Apollo's command (Soph. *El.* 35), but at that moment in the drama the chorus suggest that Orestes was guided by Zeus (Soph. *El.* 163). However, now, at the climax of the drama, it is Apollo to whom Clytemnestra appeals, tortured by nightmares; and it is also Apollo to whom Electra addresses her prayers as she strives to help Orestes with the act of retribution (Soph. *El.* 1376). Electra's prayer is organized around one key point: the gods must show mortals that it is through Electra and Orestes that the guilty will be punished. J. T. Sheppard assumes that Electra's appeal to Apollo is "the dramatic change in Electra": her passionate love to Orestes is revealed in в her prayer to Apollo Lykeios [23, p. 87]. This prayer indicates that Electra heard the chorus' advice given to her at the beginning of the tragedy: no to make prayers that function as regrets, but pray молиться for an action to be effective (Soph. *El.* 1376–1383). Interestingly, Orestes does not address Apollo directly, only giving Apollo passing thanks for helping to kill his mother (Soph. *El.* 1425). Though Electra asked Apollo to "be *our* ready champion", he becomes a champion only for Orestes: Orestes murders Clytemnestra and Aegisthus without Electra's help.

In the tragedy's finale, the chorus sings happily: "O seed of Atreus, through how many sufferings have you sprouted up at last in freedom, fulfilled by this day's enterprise!" (Soph. *El.* 1509–1510). The happiness from this "enterprise" — the murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus — is quite questionable, but Orestes and Electra regard this deed as such. Sophocles does not allow the audience to see the underlying motives of their actions through prayers. Sophocles' heroes may request support from the gods as mentors, but these prayers are quite brief[19] and performed out of necessity rather than with sincere feeling. Electra's prayer demonstrates that she is more dependent on the opinion of the city than Orestes, who did not have to endure the oppression. The last words in the tragedy belong to the chorus, who probably speak on behalf of the whole city, rejoicing at the long-awaited denouement and the fact that for some time, the city had to play the role of a disciple receiving instructions.

At the end of the last century, J. H. Kells outlined three lines of interpretation of Sophocles' *Electra*: 1) "the amoral theory" (i. e., that it is a cruel revenge drama); 2) "the justificatory theory" (i. e. that it is a righteous vengeance drama); 3) "the ironic theory" (i. e., that it is a profitable revenge drama) (see: [30]). I assume that if we apply Kells' theories to describe the Electra tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides we should also add a fourth theory: the "instruction theory" — namely, that these are dramas of the prayers for revenge. The living and the dead in the Electra tragedies by Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles are linked together not only through the complex relationships, but through the numerous crimes, which make it impossible to answer unambiguously the question as to which form of instruction or punishment is justified and which is not.

In the three Electra tragedies, we can trace substantial differences in how protagonists use prayer practices. These differences begin when the heroes first appear on stage, which event is closely observed by the chorus. In all three tragedies, Electra and Orestes' joint plan for vengeance is carried out in full view of the Chorus that in part represents the city. The Chorus in each tragedy, however, offers a different assessment of this plan: in *Libation Bearers*, the Chorus is tuned in for the joint actions with the heroes; in Euripides' *Electra*,

[19] If we compare them with the prayers of Electra and Orestes from the tragedies by Aeschylus and Euripides.

the Chorus watches the protagonists with curiosity; in Sophocles' *Electra*, the Chorus carefully directs their actions. The desire of the main heroes to offer prayers as a form of precept-making is largely due to their desire to free themselves from their social circumstances that have become a burden to them. The city where the tragic action unfolds either shrinks to a single family, where everyone fancies himself a mentor for the others, or expands to an intellectual-political community of citizens who can be instructed by the example of their rulers. Both Orestes and Electra view the city as an open or closed space of crime and punishment, where they could and should claim a new status as ruler-mentors. This becomes especially apparent when analyzing the final parts of these tragedies, once it becomes clear which of their prayers has been heard. The words with which the characters and the Chorus leave the stage are their final instructions to each other and the city.

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Молитвенные практики Ореста и Электры как наставления городу

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Сюжет об Оресте и Электре, совместно реализующих план мести за смерть их отца Агамемнона, взят за основу трагедии Эсхила «Жертва у гроба» и одноименных трагедий Еврипида и Софокла «Электра». Божественная воля и человеческие желания переплетаются в ключевых точках каждой из трагедий, где главные герои демонстрируют разные молитвенные практики как наставления городу, который должен принять и оправдать замышляемое ими преступление. Молитвенные практики Ореста и Электры, присутствующие в указанных трех трагедиях, проанализированы по следующим вопросам: кому молятся Орест и Электра и почему? услышаны ли их молитвы? какие события предшествуют молитвам? в каких пространствах города произносятся ключевые молитвы и какова в этом роль хора? в чем наставлен город через эти молитвы? Орест и Электра заявляют о своем праве наставлять и искать поддержки у богов как верховных наставников в разных пространственных координатах города. Они рассма-

тривают город не только как пространство, где произносятся молитвы, но и как еще одного главного героя, который может говорить, например, через партии хора или давать скрытые наставления через детали, которые появляются в описаниях городского пространства. Город не только слышит произносимые героями молитвы, но и может дать дополнительную силу для их осуществления. Для главных героев город — это открытое/закрытое пространство преступления и наказания, где они могут и должны претендовать на новые статусы — статусы правителей-наставников.

Ключевые слова: молитвенные практики, пространство города, Орест, Электра, античная интеллектуальная традиция.

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