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Introduction

"Schadenfreude", German for "joy in other people's misfortunes", is one of the emotions of the day.[1] "We live in a golden age of Schadenfreude", journalists and their readers lament.[2] The 2004 musical comedy *Avenue Q* contains a song titled *Schadenfreude*, which funnily reviews mishaps that give rise to this wicked pleasure: a waiter dropping his tray, a figure skater falling on her butt . . . Philosophers, psychologists, sociologists and cultural historians have been studying the emotion with ever-growing interest for a couple of decades. This trend, however, has not caught on among classical scholars, at least not with the same verve. This is curious because, if ever there was a golden age of Schadenfreude, it is probably not the years 2000+ but the centuries of ancient Greek civilisation. The

[1] The term no longer needs to be capitalised or italicised, since it has entered the English language in the middle of the nineteenth century. For economy, I also use the kindred adjective *schadenfroh* without inflecting it.

[2] *The New York Times*, December 2008, in Watt Smith 2018, 11. See also *The Guardian*, February 2022: "The pleasure of a chancer unmasked: why we are living in the age of Schadenfreude"; *The National Geographic*, July 2023: "If you've felt like people are crueler, you may be right".

Greeks were competitive, gossipy, litigious, abusive; and they enjoyed seeing other people fail and fall.

The study of Greek Schadenfreude, as of other emotions, meets with a major challenge: do our terms have exact Greek equivalents?[3] The problem is further complicated in the case of Schadenfreude by strong differences even among its modern definitions. Scholars agree that is a spectator's pleasure, that is, that the person enjoying the misfortune has not contributed to it; but they do not agree on the nature of the latter: for some it must be minor, as in *Avenue Q* and generally in comedy, while others admit major misfortunes. Another bone of contention is whether deservingness comes into play; and, which partly overlaps with this question, whether Schadenfreude is morally acceptable: for a number of scholars it is when it is spurred by a sense of justice, when it helps redress one's self-esteem or reinforce the cohesiveness of a group, while others invariably stigmatise it as an offshoot of envy, which we cover up or mask when we invoke the deservedness of the envied person's predicament.[4] Yet another debated issue is whether Schadenfreude must be fully passive and, as such, innocuous: though it is a contemplative pleasure, some are willing to give it also an active thrust, stressing its release in gossip and in the *desire* to see the targeted individual meet with adversity.[5]

[3] On this difficulty, see especially Konstan 2006.

[4] These issues are variously tackled, for instance, by Portmann (2000), who connects Schadenfreude with justice (see also Ben-Ze'ev 2003 and 2014); Kristjánsson (2006, chapter 3, 95-100) for whom on the contrary Schadenfreude targets undeserved misfortune. Cfr. also Smith 2013; Manca 2019, and several contributions to Van Dijk and Ouwerkerk 2014.

[5] For criticism of Schadenfreude as passive through and through, see especially Smith 2013, 91 and 109-39.

Moving to Greece, we face an additional difficulty: the lack of a word for Schadenfreude until the fourth century, when ἐπιχαιρεκακία and the correlated ἐπιχαιρέκακος appear in Aristotle and in comedy. Aristotle is also the first to define the emotion, consistently as the flip side of envy.[6] But as much as Aristotle is a sharp observer of his world and the keenest analyst of emotions, his definition of Schadenfreude is reductive and does not mirror the spectrum of applications of "joy in the misfortunes of others" in Greek culture at large. Before the appearance of the term ἐπιχαιρεκακία, Greek uses a number of related (and unreletated) verbs and periphrastic expressions to describe manifestations of Schadenfreude – for instance χαίρω, ἐπιχαίρω, γηθέω (rejoice in [evils]), χάρμα or ἐπίχαρμα γενέσθαι (becoming victim of rejoicing), κακόχαρτος (rejoicing in evil) – and the joy in question not only stems from preexisting envy but also from anger and especially hatred. One of the strongest triggers of Schadenfreude is indeed enmity. This is not surprising, since most Greeks divided those around them into friends and enemies; yet Aristotle leaves enmity out of his definition. When targeted at an enemy, Schadenfreude is always acceptable or even laudable because an enemy is always a bad person, and as such he deserves his misfortune and the glee that it brings to his enemies.[7]

Another notable feature of the Greek emotion is its tendency to make itself heard. Many of us consider Schadenfreude a private pleasure, which we prefer not to display be-

[6] *EN* 1107a 8–11; 1108b1–6; *EE* 3.7.1233b16–25; *Rhet.* 1387a1–3; 1388a23–26. See also *Magna moralia* 1 27.2.

[7] Very few Greeks thought that an enemy could be a good man. One of them is in tragedy (Eur. *Hcld.* 998-9). See also Theognis 1079-80 (West); Pindar, *Pyth.* 9.95.

cause we feel ashamed of it, except occasionally in politics and sports. In Greece, by contrast, it can find release even in taunts and mocking laughter. The second-century CE lexicographer Pollux glosses ἐπιχαίρειν with verbs like "laughing at" (ἐπιγελᾶν, ἐπεγγελᾶν, καταγελᾶν), "exulting" (ἐφήδεσθαι, καταχαίρειν), "boasting" (κατεύχεσθαι), "trampling upon" (ἐπεμβαίνειν), "jeering" (ἐπιχλευάζειν). The only name he gives to the emotion is "derision" (πρᾶγμα δὲ μόνον ὁ κατάγελως), while he explains ἐπίχαρτος, "object of malicious joy", as καταγέλαστος, "worthy of derision".[8] The aggressive voice of Schadenfreude, in its turn, strongly qualifies its passive and innocuous nature. Its manifestations more often than not add insult to injury; they are blows to one's honor and are therefore much feared in a society in which a man's value resides in his reputation.

Tragedy largely fits this picture. Characters perceive Schadenfreude as a dangerous force. It often takes the shape of derision and is tightly connected to enmity; in fact, it rouses only from enmity. It is never directed, as in other genres, at neighbours or rivals: these categories of people are too petty to inhabit the world of tragedy; and so is envy, which appears infrequently.[9] Tragic Schadenfreude is rather

[8] Pollux 5.128 and 3.101.7. He does not record *epichairekakia,* probably because the term had not yet spread outside philosophy.

[9] Goldhill (2003) argues that the rivalrous emotions have a minor presence in tragedy and Sanders (2014, 118) observes that *phthonos* narratives are comparatively rare in the genre. Sexual jealousy is however prominent: think of Deianeira, Hermione (in *Andromache*) and Medea. Envy is forefront in the parodos of *Ajax* (157). Stanford (1983, 35) notes both that envy is mainly confined to the gods and that it is involved in several characters' sexual jealousy. He also includes *epichairekakia* among the emotions present on stage.

an expression of hatred, a pre-taste or an after-taste of revenge. The term "enemy", however, in tragedy applies also to family members, who normally should be among one's closest friends. The inclusion problematises the morality of Schadenfreude even against enemies: can a mother's pleasure in the death of her son-turned-enemy be acceptable? How do the other characters on stage respond to her glee? How does the audience? The same questions can be asked about divine Schadenfreude. For gods, too, can act like enemies and rejoice in the demise of mortals who have offended them. Again, do the other characters on stage approve? Does the audience?

This study tackles these and related questions. It investigates the connotations of Schadenfreude, its contributions to a character makeup; where and why one's Schadenfreude is censured, or, alternatively, where and why it is endorsed by other characters, the chorus, and presumably the audience. I also ask whether the emotion can have an aesthetic function in a genre which aims to provide the sympathetic and participatory pleasure of tears, that is, a pleasure which is the furthest from joy in another's pain. Schadenfreude can enhance a feeling of moral satisfaction in justice done, but is this satisfaction part of the tragic pleasure? How does the emotion relate to pity, its opposite and a major ingredient of that pleasure?

Before delving into the topic, however, we have to ask how Schadenfreude plays out specifically in dramatic performances in which violent deaths are recounted on stage, disfigured or dead bodies are often exposed, and characters who display or betray the emotion have interlocutors, internal audiences and external spectators. Malicious glee can arise in a character or a group of characters who have not contributed anything to the targeted misfortune but also in the

agent herself, when she rejoices at the announcement and the recounting of the ruin she has inflicted or at the sight of the sufferer: *un si doux spectacle*, as Corneille's Médée will call it, one without which her success would be imperfect.[10] The doer then becomes a delighted spectator or audience of her deed[11] and manifests her pleasure to other characters or to the chorus. The audience in the theatre, in turn, is called to respond positively or negatively to expressions of Schadenfreude on stage.

But how can we figure out the emotional responses of a fifth-century audience? We cannot pass off our own reactions as those of Athenian spectators, and we should also be wary of conceiving the audience as a single body.[12] Aristotle emphasises how greatly audiences varied in their emotional reactions, according to age, temperament, habits, fortunes.[13] How would such a diverse audience respond,for instance, to exultation in a successful revenge? About Euripides' *Hecuba*, Froma Zeitlin says that revenge on the stage arouses the conflicting emotions of satisfaction and terror in the audience (Zeitlin 1996, 213). Does then a character's outburst of joy,

[10] See *Médée* 4.5.1275-7: "Ma vengeance n'aurait qu'un succès imparfait / Je ne me venge pas, si je n'en vois l'effet / Je dois à mon courroux l'heur d'un si doux spectacle".

[11] Allen-Hornblower (2016, 8-9) mentions Schadenfreude among the possible reactions of a doer who steps back from her action.

[12] On these issues, see Oranje 1984, 25; De Jong 1991, 110; Goldhill 2009, 29; Roselli 2011 (who also stresses the dramatist's addresses to the audience as a united group, though more in comedy than in tragedy); Wohl 2015, xiii: "given that the Athenians rarely agreed about anything, it seems doubtful they were of one mind in their response to tragedy, either with their fellow viewers or . . . even within themselves".

[13] *Rhet.* 2 12-17 (1388b31-1391b3). See Stanford 1983, 48.

like Hecuba's in that play, tilt the balance toward one or the other? Does it enhance the spectators' satisfaction or does it alienate them from the avenger, pushing them to take in the horrific qualities of the revenge and to feel pity for the victim? Spectators might be divided because of disposition, values and life experiences. There are, however, verbal and visual clues that allow us to gauge whether and how the playwright is trying to mold their emotional response. For Schadenfreude, he can rely on the comments of internal audiences, appreciative or critical, shared or split, to displays of it;[14] on the general moral makeup of the gloater and of the victim; on the appraisal of the latter's ruin, as deserved or not; and on the emotive impact of the visual. We shall keep these factors in mind in considering the interplay between episodes of Schadenfreude, either displayed and dissimulated, on the stage and the responses to them expected in the theatre.

[14] Munteanu (2012, 3-4, 14; 142-9; 232), discussing tragic pity, stresses the importance of internal responses to suffering as directions for the external audience. Among similar lines, Allen-Hornblower (2016 passim, e.g. 3) thinks that the reactions of a doer turned spectator of his deed might affect the audience. The question is: how? Will the audience feel the same emotions as the internal spectator? See also Cairns 2017.

Part 1
Schadenfreude Condemned

1.1 Fearing the Enemy's Laughter

The world of tragedy is an ideal setting for Schadenfreude: in addition to being divided into friends and enemies, it is steeped in the traditional values of honor, reputation, and shame. In this aggressive environment, the risk of becoming victim of malicious glee looms large: "It is painful to fall into a disgracing bane, but if it should happen, we must cover it well and keep it hidden, not announce it to the world: such things are a cause of laughter for our enemies", reads a fragment from Euripides' *Cretan Women* (460).[15]

The idea that one's misfortune will bring joy to one's enemies is such a truism that it can be invoked even when it does not apply. In the prologue of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, Athena, who has turned against the Greeks, tells Poseidon: "I want to gladden my former enemies, the Trojans, and inflict a bitter return on the Achaean army" (65-6). The goddess with the help of Poseidon will stir up the sea and cause many bitter returns indeed; but how could these bring joy to the Trojans? Troy will be no more: all the men are dead, the

[15] Translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated. The fragments are taken from *TrGF*, while the the editions of the plays generally are the Oxford Classical Texts.

city will burn and the women will depart with their Greek masters. Rather than rejoicing in their enemies' catastrophic journeys, they will share them, and worse. More important, the Trojan women who in the play constitute what is left of the city have not entered yet. Only Hecuba is on stage, lying on the ground, buried in her grief, presumably hearing nothing of the conversation between Athena and Poseidon. The emotional effect of the goddess' announcement is lost on the Trojan women by the scene's placement,[16] which forestalls even an anticipation of Schadenfreude. However, her words are not lost on the audience. They would also resonate with a great number of tragic characters, who do not doubt for an instant that their failure or fall will gladden their enemies.

Fear of malicious glee, especially as audible laughter, is indeed pervasive in tragedy, nothing short of a leitmotif.[17] Such fear can be a negative stimulus to live up to expectations, for instance in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, with Danaos exhorting his daughters to cultivate modesty, and "not cause shame for us, pleasure for my enemies" (1008-9); or in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis,* where Menelaus bewails the Trojans' laughter at Greece should Agamemnon refuse to sacrifice his daughter (370-2); or again for Clytemnestra in *Eumenides*, who tells the Erinyes, to shake them out of sleep, that Orestes "grandly scoffs at you" (113).[18]

[16] See Scodel 1980, 69. As she notes, in the course of the play the Trojan women don't hear anything of the planned destruction.

[17] Both Arnould (1990, 36) and Dillon (1991) note that the majority of instances of laughter in tragedy are malevolent. See also Alwine 2015, 38.

[18] See also Sophocles, *Oed. Col.* 902-3. Further references in Dillon 1991, 346-8.

This reliance on fear of Schadenfreude as a deterrent against shameful behavior has Homeric precedents. Nestor counts on it in his effort to pacify Agamemnon and Achilles: "Alas, a great pain has come today for Greece! Priam would indeed rejoice and Priam's sons and the other Trojans would be very glad in their heart if they should learn all this about the fighting of the two of you, who surpass the other Greeks in counsel and in war" (*Il.* 1.254-8); Hector rebukes Paris, "a great pain for your father and the entire people, a joy for the enemy, and a shame for yourself" (*Il.* 3.50-1),[19] by further brandishing the enemy's glee at his lack of martial virtue: "And perhaps the long-haired Greeks will exult, saying that you are a great champion, with your good looks but no strength or courage in your heart" (*Il.* 3.43-5). And again, Helenus urges Hector and Aeneas to stop the Trojan troops from fleeing, lest they "become a joy to our enemies" (*Il.* 6. 82); while Nestor preemptively exhorts the Greeks who are keeping watch not to fall asleep, "lest we become a joy to our enemies" (*Il.* 10.193). This disciplinary use of looming Schadenfreude bears witness to the perceived damaging force of the emotion in the heroic world which tragedy inherits.

Even more recurring, however, is the idea that an enemy's Schadenfreude is simply a terrible prospect, a misfortune crowning another. Phaedra fears the emotion from both a

[19] Several commentators, from the scholiasts to Kirk (1985), think that these lines refer to Helen (see 48-9) rather than Paris (both the nominative κατηφείη [Paris], and the accusative κατηφείην [Helen], are transmitted, though the accusative is in the better manuscripts). However, the abuse is more effective if referred to Paris, for it aims at rousing his shame. For the phrase "a great pain . . . a joy", Kirk compares 24.706, "a great joy for the city and all the people", predicated of Hector when he was alive.

deity and a human: "And I will take leave of life on this day and delight Cypris, who is destroying me: I will succumb to hateful love. But with my death I will become a bane also for another, in order that he will learn not to wax proud over my misfortune" (Eur. *Hipp.* 725-30). Polyneices deems his brother's malicious joy as dire an evil as exile: "it is shameful to be in exile and, being the elder, to be laughed at like this by my brother" (Soph. *Oed. Col.* 1422-3; see also 1338-9); while Prometheus wishes he had been thrown into Tartarus and bound in unbreakable chains, "so that neither a god nor any other being would rejoice in my condition. But now, a plaything in the air, I suffer, miserable me, for the joy of my enemies" (Aesch. *PV* 155-9).[20] Cassandra's fear is as far reaching: she has a vision of Apollo watching her as she is made the victim of a universal laughter, coming not even from enemies but from friends. She calls her prophetic insignia her "derision" (καταγέλωτ') and sees the god taking them off, "but after having watched me in these ornaments, copiously mocked (καταγελωμένην μέγα), without exception,[21] by friends who are enemies, and for nothing!" (Aesch. *Ag.* 1264, 1270-2). In Cassandra's imagination, Apollo's punishment is epitomised in the spectacle of her derision.

These outbursts also have a Homeric precedent, in Agamemnon's fantasy of an exultant Trojan prancing on Menelaus' tomb: a more dreadful vision for the dejected king than even his brother's death (*Il.* 4.169-82, quoted below). Tragic characters similarly fear the enemy's laughter more than death itself: "since we must die", says Megara in

[20] On this passage, see further below, 65-6.

[21] μέγα is Hermann's emendation of μέτα. I follow Denniston-Page (1957) in understanding οὐ διχορρόπως as "unanimously."

Euripides' *Heracles*, "we should die without allowing to be tortured by fire and to give our enemies a cause for laughter, which for me is a worse ill than death" (284-6). Megara wants to meet with a speedy end so as to be spared not physical agony but the glee of her enemy. This glee is also Iolaos' only worry: "For me, it does not matter if I have to die, except if by my death I give pleasure to my enemies" (Eur. *Hcld.* 443-4). And Orestes will kill his own enemies to silence their laughter: "show me," he asks Electra, "where we should appear or hide to put an end to our enemies' *laughter* with our coming" (Soph. *El.* 1294-5). Stopping that laughter becomes metonymic for stopping life itself.

Two Sophoclean heroes are visibly consumed with fear of Schadenfreude: Philoctetes and especially Ajax.[22] Philoctetes, cast off on a desert island and deprived of his heroic status by friends who have become enemies, is naturally prone to picture their triumphant and insulting joy. At finding out that Neoptolemus allegedly has not even heard about his abandonment, he imagines with outrage that those who threw him on Lemnos "keep silent and laugh" (*Phil.* 258), that is, they efface his memory and rejoice among themselves in his predicament; robbed of his bow, he cries out to Odysseus that he obtains nothing sweet from the gods but lives among countless sufferings, "mocked by you and the two leaders, the sons of Atreus" (1023-4), and again that Odysseus "laughs" at him, swaying his bow (1125).

[22] Arnould (1990, 37-9) notes that the internalised fear of the enemy's laughter is particularly a Sophoclean theme. See also Miralles 2000. However, Medea is equally obsessed by the fear and Prometheus comes close.

Ajax is even more besieged by the fear. This is consistent both with his nature, of a hero in a Homeric mold, and with a thematic axis of the play: that the principle "Help your friends, harm your enemies" justifies gloating in an enemy's misfortune (see Blundell 1989, 62). A core subject of the opening song of the chorus, which is composed of Ajax's loyal followers, is the imagined Schadenfreude of his enemies: "Such are the rumors that Odysseus fabricates and whispers into the ears of all, and he persuades them fully. What he now says about you gains credibility, and everyone who hears this rejoices more than the speaker in insulting your misfortunes" (*Aj.* 148-53). Ajax's friends imagine Odysseus sowing slander and each informant generating more harrowing Schadenfreude than he himself feels in those who hear him and gloat at the rumors. As Richard Jebb puts it (1898, 151), "as it spreads and gains strength, the spiteful joy of each new hearer is greater than that of his informant". The chorus laments: "oh evil rumor, mother of my shame"! (173-4; see also 185-6, 191); and concludes the song with imagining again all the Greeks "exulting with taunts heavy to bear; and pain has set in me" (198-200). Ajax joins his fear to the chorus' at his first entrance as a sane man: "Ah the laughter! What insult do I suffer" (367); and addressing Odysseus: "How much you must laugh at me from joy!" (382). A scholion on this line has the perceptive comment: "This is what bites Ajax the most, to be a laughing stock for his enemy". Some seventy lines later, he repeats "and they laugh at me, because they have escaped" (454), and again, he discounts the idea of fighting the Trojans single-handedly and then dying because "this way I might give joy to the Atreides" (469).

Ajax's treatment of his enemies conforms to his own fear of Schadenfreude and to the shared belief, endorsed in the

play, that defeated enemies are the emotion's natural and legitimate targets. Just as he abhors the idea of his enemies' joy, he himself finds joy in his imagined torture of Odysseus, the prisoner "who gives me most pleasure", *hêdistos* (105).[23] He won't die yet, but will be tied to a pillar and whipped to death (106-10). Athena makes a show of pleading for Odysseus, then sends Ajax off to his job: "Since it gives you pleasure, go ahead, use your hand, don't spare any of your fantasies" (114-5).

We might not consider Ajax's disposition Schadenfreude because he is relishing the prospect of his own revenge. As I have indicated in the introduction, modern scholars tend to stress the emotion's passivity. The vengeful person, it is argued, anticipates pleasure from actively harming another, while the *Schadenfroh* from the mere contemplation of a misfortune which he has not contributed to cause. But we can point out that already Nietzsche had intertwined the two by calling *Schadenfreude* "an imaginary revenge" or "a vengefulness of the impotent" (Seip et al. 2014, 236). The ancient Greeks themselves do not distinguish neatly the joy in anticipation of revenge from Schadenfreude;[24] and, I think, correctly so, for a vision of revenge is indeed a contemplative pleasure, with the avenger become spectator. Looking forward to sucking Orestes' blood, the vampiric Erinyes say:[25] "The smell of human blood smiles at me" (*Eum.* 253), still from a distance. And Zeus, after he tells Prometheus that he will

[23] On the reciprocity, see Blundell 1989, 62.

[24] For Aristotle, anger, *orgê*, has a *schadenfroh* component. It is aroused by an "apparent slight" (φαινομένη ὀλιγωρία) and anticipates *with pleasure* the retribution it seeks (*de an.* 403a25-b19; *Rhet.* 1378a30-b34).

[25] "Vampiric" is inspired by Moreau 2000, 254: Erinyes '*vampires*'.

fashion Pandora, a great evils for mortals, laughs out loud (ἐκ δ'ἐγέλασσε, Hes. *Op.* 59), rejoicing at the very thought that they will embrace "their own ruin" (58).[26] However we define Ajax's pleasure (sadistic?),[27] what matters here is that he feels the same cruel delight that he fears from his enemies. Now he indulges in fantasies of revenge, and, once he believes it accomplished, he insults and laughs a big laughter (γέλων πολύν) to celebrate it (303-4).

As this review demonstrates, tragedy underscores the perceived harming power of Schadenfreude, especially when it takes the shape of an ugly laughter. The chorus of *Ajax* expressly couples malicious laughter and active harm in describing Menelaus as one "laughing at our ills *like an evil-doer* (κακοῖς/γελῶν ἃ δὴ κακοῦργος, 1042-3)". The emotion's damaging force is forefront in Megara's despair as she prepares for her death and her children's: "I bore you and raised you so that my enemies can insult you, rejoice and destroy you!" (ὕβρισμα κἀπίχαρμα καὶ διαφθοράν)" (Eur. *Her.* 458-9). Megara sandwiches *epicharma,* literally "object of glee", between verbally and physically hurtful actions.

The last passage also brings out the kinship of Schadenfreude with *hybris*.[28] To be sure, the two mental states differ in that the pleasure of Schadenfreude comes from the sight of an insulted or injured person, while *hybris* consists in performing an offense for sheer pleasure. But where Schadenfreude itself can translate into harmful laughter

[26] Zeus also gives Promethus tit for tat, for the Titan laughed as he offered him the choice of sacrifical portion (*Theog.* 545-7). See Miralles 1993, 13n10.

[27] For the intertwine of activity and contemplation in a sadist's enjoyment of suffering, see Boltanski 1999, 103-6, 109.

[28] See schol. on Soph. *Aj.* 153: <καθυβρίζων:> χαίρων, ἐπεγγελῶν.

and words, how can it be fully separated from *hybris*? The *hybris* that targets a victim of misfortune (as opposed to indiscriminate insults or physical attacks) is an outlet for the emotion, especially when, as in several passages from *Ajax*, the enemy who (supposedly) displays *hybris* by laughing is not the agent of the misfortune.[29] In fact, laughter, *hybris* and Schadenfreude form a cluster: the laughter is the insulting expression of the joy felt at the target's predicament. In *Ajax* the chorus imagines that Odysseus "triumphs insolently (ἐφυβρίζει) in his black heart and laughs a big laugh at these sorrows born of madness" (955-8); and Tecmessa rejoins: "let them laugh and rejoice in his ills (οἱ δ'οὖν γελώντων κἀπιχαιρόντων κακοῖς)" (961-2).[30] Ajax has died having met the death he wanted: "let Odysseus *hybrizein*: empty insults!" (971). *Hybrizô, epichairô* and *gelaô* belong together.

1.2 A Mark of Odiousness

As an insulting, derisive, hostile emotion, Schadenfreude displayed often adds to a character's hatefulness. In Euripides' *Andromache* and in Sophocles' *Ajax*, the only human who indulges in Schadenfreude is the most odious figure in the play, Menelaus both times. In *Andromache* the chorus, at hearing the protagonist's moving review of her past and present calamities, which ends with a last farewell to her child, comments: "I felt pity listening, for misfortunes are objects of pity for all mortals, even strangers" (421-2). This

[29] See *Aj.* 150-3; 196-200; 367; 961-2; 955-60; 971. On *hybris* as mockery, see Blundell 1989, 62-3.

[30] The term ἐπιχαιρεκακία is here i*n nuce*.

generalising pronouncement about the correct response to suffering meets not only with Menelaus' deafness but with undisguised glee: "she will not like the words she will hear" (426). In light of the chorus' comment, Menelaus is not even a human being. Andromache accuses him of Schadenfreude and reminds him of his own vulnerability: "if I am faring badly, do not gloat over this (μηδὲν τόδ'αὔχει), for you could experience the same" (462-3). Menelaus is ignoring shifting fortune, which, at least since sapiential wisdom, should work as a powerful warning against Schadenfreude.[31] We can imagine Andromache's words, which end the *agôn*, to set the stage for Menelaus' smug deportment as his prisoners condemned to death utter their pitiful lament (501-36).

Menelaus' Schadenfreude shares traits with the same character's in *Ajax*. The chorus expresses fear of his laughter at the first sight of him: "But I see an enemy, and he probably comes laughing at our ills" (1042-3). Menelaus does not quite laugh but he does betray Schadenfreude: "Let us not imagine that we can do as we please without paying back with our suffering. These things come in turns. Before, this man was blazing with insolence, and now it is my turn to be haughty" (1085-8). The lesson Menelaus learns from the alternatives of fortune is not, as should be and as Athena puts it in this very play, "avoid waxing proud when fortune smiles" (127-30), but, on the contrary, "now the power is mine". He exults in it, "complacently relishing the change of fortunes".[32] Teucer interprets his insulting posture as gleeful *hybris*, applying

[31] See the passages in Stobaeus 4.48a. Andromache's reproach is included.

[32] Fisher 1992, 315. See also Burian 2012, 78.

the parable *The Malicious Gloater* to him:[33] "And I once saw a man full of stupidity, who grew insolent (ὕβριζε) at his neighbours' ills" (1150-1). Agamemnon has the same feelings as his brother: "now that [Ajax] is dead, isn't it the time to set your foot on his body?", he asks Odysseus (1348), urging him to act upon the proverbial maxim, "all men love to laugh at the dead, as they lie on the ground" (988-9);[34] but he is stopped by the man who could not laugh at his enemy even when he was alive and the exhortation to laugh came from divine authority (79), and who now challenges that maxim: "Don't rejoice, son of Atreus, in gains that are not beautiful" (1349). Odysseus' words initiate a conversation that leads Agamemnon, if not to change his views, to give in. Menelaus thus turns out to be the true villain of the play (see 1159-60, his threatening exit words). There is no doubt that his Schadenfreude, exhibited in front of Ajax's dead body and to the unanimous disapproval of those present, insensified the audience's antipathy for him.[35]

Expressions and accusations of Schadenfreude are geared to enhance a character's odiousness also in the case of Clytemnestra and especially Aegisthus in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* and Sophocles' *Electra*. Both plays set the joy of the adulterous couple at the fake news of Orestes' death up against the suffering of sympathetic characters. In *Choephoroi*, the Nurse tearfully reminisces about the baby Orestes whereas Clytemnestra, she says, is putting on a sad face before the servants but "hiding a smile (γέλων) inside her eyes" (738-9); and she

[33] The title is Holzberg's (2002, 12).

[34] According to the scholion on line 988, the sentence is a *gnômê*.

[35] On the audience's bias against Menelaus, see Heath 1987, 173 and 200.

imagines that Aegisthus, "that one, at the news will be glad in his heart, when he hears the story. But wretched me!" (742-3). The effect of the Nurse's emphasis on the couple's real or imagined Schadenfreude in contrast with her own touching words is to fully alienate the audience's sympathies from the soon-to-be-murdered pair. The spectators will enjoy Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus' supposed gladness – but against them, not with them, relishing its blind misplacement.

Sophocles expands on the Aeschylean scene, heightening both the dramatic irony and the contrast between glee and despair at the news of Orestes' death, and further exploiting Schadenfreude to disparage Clytemnestra and especially Aegisthus. Orestes himself imagines that the news will be pleasant (ἡδεῖαν φάτιν, 56) for the couple; and so does his pedagogue, who brings it: "Greetings, queen! I come with pleasant tidings (λόγους/ἡδεῖς) from a friend, for Aegisthus as for you" (666-7). The enjambement puts a premium on Clytemnestra's expected delight by stressing "pleasant". And indeed, at the announcement "Orestes is dead", against Electra's desperate cry ("Wretched me! I am done with today!") there sounds Clytemnestra's thrilled question: "what do you say, what do you say, stranger? Don't listen to her" (675). The scholiast does not fail to spot Clytemnestra's Schadenfreude: " 'what do you say, what do you say?': those who hear a pleasant piece of news, even if they hear it very clearly, want to hear the same thing two and three times".

The powerful messenger's speech has the immediate effect of slackening Clytemnestra's joy, but not of taking it away. She expresses mixed emotions – "O Zeus, what is this? Can I call it a happy or a terrible but profitable event?" (766-7) – and feels a maternal stirring – "a strange thing it is to be a mother" (770) –, but quickly recovers her confidence and again

welcomes the development, celebrating her deliverance from her son and her daughter. Electra's renewed lament, "wretched me! Now I can weep over your misfortune, Orestes, when you are so insulted (ὑβρίζῃ) by such a mother. Am I well?", meets with the rejoinder: "Not you. With him, as it is, all is well" (788-91). In these few words Clytemnestra lets out her joy in Electra's predicament, her complacency in her own increased power, which will allow her to make Electra's life even more miserable, and a cruel irony in playing with the commonplace "death is the end of suffering". After further savoring the happy turn of fortune at Electra's expense, the definitive end of her plans and her cries, she leaves her to "scream over her own ills and her friends' " (802-3). Then she goes inside, never to reappear alive. The last picture the audience is given of her is of a mother rejoicing in the death of her son: "What do you think?" Electra tells the chorus; "Does she suffer? Is she in pain? What strange way she has, wretched one, of crying and lamenting over a son who died as he did! She goes away, laughing. Wretched me!" (804-7).

There is no indication that Clytemnestra has laughed. Electra is, as Simon Goldhill notes, a problematic audience, whose role will raise for the audience in the theatre a self-reflexive concern about its own role: "is she accurately describing her mother's arrant and finely performed hypocrisy? Or is she quick to find an emotionally overwrought and aggressive slant on her hated mother's more complex feelings?"[36] By emphasising Clytemnestra's joy, Electra might

[36] Goldhill 2009, 38. In contrast, Miralles (2000, 417) thinks that Electra's description of Clytemnestra's laughter corresponds to the truth, and Allen-Hornblower (2016, 216) that she displays "precisely the sort of incriminating response that the messenger had anticipated."

seek to heighten her mother's cruelty in opposition to her own despair, especially with the antithesis ἐγγελῶσα . . . ὦ τάλαιν' ἐγώ in the last line. The audience will notice that she has discounted her mother's stirring and will also remember her almost identical accusation earlier in the play: Clytemnestra, "as though laughing (ἐγγελῶσα) over what she had done, finds the day in which she had treacherously killed my father and on it she sets up dances and slaughters victims in monthly sacrifices to the savior gods. And I, wretched me, watching this, weep in the palace, waste away and bewail alone to myself this horrible feast named after my father!" (277-85). The mother drawing pleasure from her murder of her husband and publicly commemorating it is made to appear all the more horrible through the contrast with her sorrowing daughter; the same contrast, in the later charge, serves to underscore the mother's odious glee at the news of her son's death.

However, just as Electra's first accusation must have a kernel of truth (at least the monthly celebration is a fact[37]), her second certainly does: all the spectators will agree that Clytemnestra's Schadenfreude, no matter how complicated by contrary feelings, pervades the scene until she exits.[38] Electra wants her damning picture to stick and resonate; she keeps at her job, telling her sister that the messenger who brought the news "is in the house, a pleasure for my mother, not a pain" (929). Later, holding the urn with the ashes she thinks are Orestes', she charges again: "our enemies are laughing; my un-motherly mother raves from pleasure" (1153-4). Electra

[37] Not historically, but in the setting of the play.

[38] Burnett (1998, 133-4) has no doubt that Clytemnestra "is jeering at her husband's would-be avengers in her last stage moment" and seems to agree with Electra's accusation. See also note 36.

once again exaggerates, but the overstatement will remind the spectators of Clytemnestra's perceptible Schadenfreude in her last stage appearance. Her countenance is likely to intensify their pity for Electra, who does not know that she is shedding tears for the wrong reason, and to block any sympathy a spectactor might feel for her mother as a human being.[39] It will also work towards rousing anticipatory Schadenfreude at the expense of Clytemnestra herself, whose joy is as unknowingly misguided as are Electra's tears.

Aegisthus displays malicious glee more openly and less ambivalently than Clytemnestra. The emotion is painted on his face as soon as he approaches: "he is walking from the outskirts to us, full of joy", observes Electra (1431-2), drawing the audience's attention to an expression of Schadenfreude that could not be visible on the mask but might have been conveyed by posture and gestures, no matter how stylised. For Electra this time does not exaggerate, as her rapid exchange with Aegisthus instantly demonstrates: Ηλ. πάρεστι δῆτα καὶ μάλ' ἄζηλος θέα. / Αι. ἦ πολλὰ χαίρειν μ' εἶπας οὐκ εἰωθότως. / Ηλ. χαίροις ἄν, εἴ σοι χαρτὰ τυγχάνει τάδε (1455-7; "Electra You can indeed see a spectacle least to be envied. / Aegisthus You give me much joy with your words, contrary to your habit. / Electra Rejoice as you please, if you find in this a matter for joy"). Aegisthus comes across as the archvillain who exults in the face of Electra's suffering; but blindly, for Electra is no longer suffering but is in a position of power: she knows whose corpse is about to be exposed. Her knowledge allows her to play with Aegisthus' glee from a higher vantage point. He takes "if you find in this a matter for joy" to mean "if you can rejoice in the death of Orestes";

[39] On the last point, see Burnett 1998, 135.

but for her and for the audience the phrase means "if you can rejoice in the death of Clytemnestra". The spectacle Aegisthus is so eager to hear announced is indeed the "least to be envied" for him. His Schadenfreude, even more jarringly misplaced than Clytemnestra's, will again kindle the audience's own in his coming doom as he solemnly orders to open the doors and show the dead body that will consolidate his absolute power, he proclaims, adding that the spectacle before his eyes "has not happened without the envy of the gods" (1466-7): yet another show of smug Schadenfreude, which fosters more dramatic irony at his expense.[40]

Euripides brings the besmirching function of Schadenfreude forefront in two of his revenge plays, where he utilises accusations of it to startling effects. One of the most damning pictures of a *Schadenfroh* character in all of tragedy is Clytemnestra's according to his Electra: "I know only you, of all Greek women, who rejoiced when Troy was fortunate, and when it was defeated, you wore a dark look, because you did not want Agamemnon to come back from Troy" (*El.* 1076-9). This description conjures up Poseidon's picture of Achilles in *Iliad* 14: "Agamemnon, now perhaps Achilles' ruinous heart rejoices in his chest, as he watches the slaughter and the panic of the Greeks, since he has no sense, not the slightest!" (139-41). Like Achilles, Clytemnestra is charged with an invariably unacceptable kind of Schadenfreude: in the disaster of a whole nation of friends.[41] Electra's accusation, however, is likely not to be believed, for she prefaces

[40] Aegisthus then backpedals (1467), but guardedly and from fear.

[41] Demosthenes will bring the same charge against Midias in the homonymous speech (203), and especially against Aeschines in *On the Crown* (198, 217, 244, 263-4, 291-2).

it by saying: "People do not know you as well as I" (1067): that is, her contention could not be verified because she has exclusive knowledge. Furthermore, whether truthful or not, in the present confrontation her indictment is countered by her mother's admission of her wrongs (1105-6; 1109-10) and more generally by her sympathetic behavior. Whereas in Sophocles Clytemnestra's and Aegisthus' Schadenfreude confirms hostile perceptions of them, in Euripides Electra's accusation might have the effect of making herself, rather than her mother, odious to the spectators, who additionally could easily imagine her to be savoring the confrontation from her position of power, for she is luring Clytemnestra into her murderous trap.[42]

Schadenfreude as a hallmark of hatefulness is targeted for sheer playful use in *Orestes*. The title character and his friend are planning the murder of Helen: Pylades: "We'll lament to her over our sufferings". Orestes: "So that she will weep but rejoice inside". P.: "And then we'll be in the same disposition as she" (1121-3). Why do the avengers-to-be imagine Helen to be gleeful? Their supposition is not justified, for in her one stage appearance, in spite of her opening catty remark (72: "Electra, virgin for a very long time"),[43] she has shown great sympathy for the unfortunate siblings (see 73-4, 90, 119-21). As Charles Willink notes, the charge serves to bring out the murderers' own gloating, their excited mood (1986 on 1121-3). But I think there is more at stake: the charge is predictable because Helen is a universal object of detestation

[42] Further to cast Electra in a bad light is her announcement "I shall kill you" (1094), which, given her controlling position, will appear cruelly gratuitous to the audience.

[43] Electra does not fail to pay her back (99). Winnington-Ingram (1969, 133) calls this scene "a gem of felinity".

in this play and Schadenfreude is a conventional feature of hatefulness, especially in revenge plots, of which the one of *Orestes* is a parodic refashioning. Helen imitates Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in Sophocles and especially Clytemnestra in *Choephoroi*, who, like her, is accused of dissembling and hiding her joy inside at the announcement of Orestes' supposed death. Now the announcement of the same character's death sentence will give Helen the same dissimulated joy. A significant difference, however, is that, once again, in the case of a Clytemnestra or an Aegisthus the accusation hits the mark, whereas in Helen's not at all. The charge is dissonant with her behavior but perfectly consonant with the shared hatred for her that pervades the play. By the end of the fifth century an experienced audience might identify her alleged glee as a canonical dramatic indicator of hatefulness and enjoy Euripides' ostentatious display, in *Orestes*, of this micro-dramatic convention as of other and more spectacular ones.[44]

1.3 Exultation Challenged: *Medea* and *Hippolytus*

Schadenfreude is a staple of hatefulness also in Medea's behavior and serves to alienate her from the audience in the theatre. Medea speaks like a traditional hero.[45] She prides herself in helping her friends and harming her enemies: "no one shall judge me worthless, weak or indolent, but of the opposite character: heavy to my enemies, well disposed to my

[44] For this characteristic of *Orestes*, see Burnett 1998, chapter 10. An excellent comprehensive essay on Euripides' clever play with dramatic conventions is Winnington-Ingram 1969.

[45] See Knox 1979, 295-322; Bongie 1977; Burnett 1998, chapter 8.

friends. To such people belongs the most glorious life" (807-10). Like an Ajax, she lives in terror of her enemies' laughter.[46] She chooses to make her own life miserable in order to avert Jason's glee: "Know it well: my pain is gone if you cannot laugh", she tells him, their dead children by her side (1362). Medea is ruined; but she would have been even more utterly ruined if she had not killed her children and instead endured the Schadenfreude of her enemy. Fear of it is a major driving force in the shaping and timing of her revenge.

What if she is caught in her attempt to stab Jason and his bride? she wonders, as she reviews possible ways of killing them. "Then my death will give my enemies a cause for laughter" (383). It is not fear of death that stops her but of the joy that it will bring to those she hates. From its inception, her revenge aims first and foremost to prevent Schadenfreude, as she makes clear in the same speech: "None of my enemies will have the happiness of making my heart suffer" (398); "you should not, you born of a noble father and descending from the Sun, become a laughing stock for the marriage of the progeny of Sisyphus with Jason" (404-6). Jealousy or treason do not torment her as much as the prospect of being mocked. It is this nightmare that spurs her on and boosts her courage, helping her to consolidate her resolve to kill her children. The nightmare is already on her mind when she first discloses her plan to the chorus: "to be laughed at by my enemies? It cannot be borne, friends" (797); and after losing heart, she rebukes herself: "what are these feelings? do I want to become a laughing stock by leaving my enemies unpunished?" (1049-50).

[46] See Arnould 1990, 40-1; Burnett 1998, 207; Allan 2002, 83; Sokolon 2021, 31.

Medea is all the more obsessed with her enemies' Schadenfreude because she has no real friend or even connection. The foreign woman speaks like a traditional hero but does not belong, like Ajax, in a network of peers with its system of values, but is an isolated individual, who claims to be far different from most humans (579) and time and again laments that she has no family, country or friends: no one to partake in her joys and sorrows, that is. "I rejoice when you prosper", say Ajax's loyal followers as as soon as they appear on stage (*Aj.* 136), stressing their emotional solidarity with him. Ajax's fear of Schadenfreude is accordingly shared by them as well as by Tecmessa. In contrast, Medea's is shared by no one, for all she sees around her are enemies. As the Nurse says in the prologue, "now everything is inimical to her and what is dearest to her is failing" (16).[47] Her only friend is herself, hence the principle that she so proudly brandishes, "I am heavy to my enemies and well disposed to my friends", in her case is empty.[48] Her fear of Schadenfreude is amplified by her isolation.

Just as she dreads a universal glee should she lose, Medea savors the emotion herself as she gains more and more confidence. After obtaining from Creon the permission to stay in Corinth one more day, in a surge of strength she boasts that on that very day "I will make corpses of three of my enemies: the father, the daughter and my husband" (374-5); and she imagines with relish how to go about killing them: "I have many ways of death against them and I do not know which one to attempt first, friends: whether I should set fire to the nuptial

[47] Medea's offstage cries prove the Nurse right: see especially 112-4.

[48] See Pucci 1980, 114, noting that the action Medea justifies with the principle is the killing of her children, her very own. On the subversion of the code "help your friends, harm your enemies" in the play, see also Sokolon 2021, 27-33.

chamber or thrust a sharpened sword into their livers, having entered in silence the room where their bed is spread" (376-80). The excited narrative, which displays an embarrassement of riches from which Medea can choose and culminates with an action of graphically described violence, betrays her pleasure in dwelling on the scenarios of her enemies' death.[49] But at this time fear of being caught and of her enemies' laughter stops her from fantasising about a direct attack (381-3), and the awareness of lacking a haven detains her. It is after she secures the protection of Aegeus that she can fully revel in the coming true of her revenge. As soon as he departs, she sees herself as a victor, "a glorious athlete" (καλλίνικοι), in her exalted hope "that my enemies will pay the penalty" (765 and 767). Medea's joy in anticipation of revenge prepares the audience for her explosion of Schadenfreude at the messenger's announcement of its accomplishment:

Μη. κάλλιστον εἶπας μῦθον, ἐν δ' εὐεργέταις
τὸ λοιπὸν ἤδη καὶ φίλοις ἐμοῖς ἔσηι.
Αγ. τί φήις; φρονεῖς μὲν ὀρθὰ κοὐ μαίνηι, γύναι,
ἥτις, τυράννων ἑστίαν ἡικισμένη,
χαίρεις κλύουσα κοὐ φοβῆι τὰ τοιάδε;
Μη. ἔχω τι κἀγὼ τοῖσι σοῖς ἐναντίον
λόγοισιν εἰπεῖν. ἀλλὰ μὴ σπέρχου, φίλος,
λέξον δέ· πῶς ὤλοντο; δὶς τόσον γὰρ ἂν
τέρψειας ἡμᾶς, εἰ τεθνᾶσι παγκάκως.
(1127-35)

[49] See also Allan 2002, 83: "[Medea] presents this feeling of Schadenfreude from both sides, as it were, for as well as her fear of her enemies' laughter she also expresses her own pleasure at their imagined death as she appraises the various methods she might use to kill them".

> [MEDEA Wonderful news you bring, and from now on you will number among my benefactors and my friends. / MESSENGER What do you say? Are you in your right mind? Are you not crazy, woman? After the outrage you have done to the royal house, you rejoice at the news and are not afraid? / MEDEA I also have an answer to your words. But don't rush, friend, speak: how did they die? You will delight me twice as much, if they died most miserably.]

Medea's unchecked joy is yet another expression of her isolation: she has nothing to lose or fear. By requesting a leisurely narrative explicitly to satisfy her Schadenfreude and in response to the messenger's disapproval of it, she gives the gleeful emotion, defiantly, even freer rein. She wants to savor, word by word, a detailed account of her victims' agonies, which comes the closest she can get to the sight of them. "May I one day see him [Jason] and his bride in pieces with the palace itself!", she had said (163-4); and, as we have noted, she had enjoyed imagining various ways of killing them (376-80). For lack of the desired spectacle, now an auditory replacement will do. How will the audience respond?

Medea's Schadenfreude meets with the indignation of the messenger and with no appreciative comment. Therefore, it very likely roused in the audience a dislike for her and pity for her victims even before the messenger's speech (see De Jong 1990, 9; 1991, 111). To a later Greek spectator well versed in tragedy her glee might even have appeared as a markedly barbarian trait of the non-Greek heroine, for the only other instance of a tragic messenger issuing a stark criticism of a character's Schadenfreude is in a parallel scene in *Bacchae,* where the gloaters are the Asian women of the chorus (see below, 46-54). The messenger's speech, in turn, is geared to

intensify both the spectators' dislike for the protagonist and their pity for her victims. Euripides' very choice of entrusting a messenger with recounting Medea's revenge alienates the audience from her, for a way of redeeming avengers and softening their act is to avoid having it narrated (see Burnett 1973, 4). This particular account, furthermore, grips its listeners by dwelling in lavish and harrowing detail on the young princess' being eaten alive by the precious garments that she has handled with childish wonderment,[50] and, if the text is sound, by zooming in at the end on the pitiful calamity of a double death: "they lie dead, the daughter and the old father, side by side, a misfortune that desires many tears" (1220-1).[51] The narrative's vividness and its closing words overexpose, as it were, the avenger and her deed, asking the audience to appreciate their cruelty. Medea's failure to show even the slightest hint of a stirring at the end of the speech might work toward reinforcing the audience's alienation from her.

The women of the chorus, however, re-direct our attention toward the justice of Jason's punishment (1231-2). It is true that their last comment shows them sensitised to the pathos of the narrative and of the calamity: "Oh, unfortunate one! How do we pity your misfortunes, daughter of Creon! You go to the doors of Hades because of Jason's marriage" (1233-5). Most editors, however, consider these lines a sentimental interpolation.[52] Whether we retain them or not matters a

[50] Burnett (1973, 17) notices the richness of the description.

[51] Diggle in the OCT accepts Reeve's deletion of 1221 but prints 1220.

[52] So Diggle in the OCT and Page 2001 (and already Wilamowitz, referenced by Page), whereas Méridier in the Belles Lettres keeps the lines and De Jong is inclined to do so (1990, 9). Two reasons militate in their favor: first, the chorus has already expressed pity for the girl

good deal for the response expected of the audience: if we do, they will keep it aligned with the pity and horror expressed by the messenger; if we do not, it will have more points of view to identify with: it could be affected by the overexposure of Medea's crime or on the contrary remain focused, with the chorus, on Jason's deserts.[53] But no voice on stage encourages the audience to celebrate with Medea, no matter how much Jason has earned his ruin.[54]

Theseus' callous response to the messenger's announcement of Hippolytus' fatal and disfiguring accident likewise isolates him from the other characters on stage. He shares with Medea a vengeful desire to redress an offence (in his case presumed) to his bed, the reliance on extraordinary powers to do so, and an unrestrained Schadenfreude. At hearing that Hippolytus died as a result of his curses, Theseus exultantly invokes his

in the 4th stasimon, in words that almost anticipate the content of the messenger's speech (978-88); second, Jason's bride is in the focal position (for the concept, see Heath 1987, 91-5), as such bound to elicit a sympathetic response from the chorus.

[53] On the chorus' bias in favor of Medea, see Mastronarde, 2010, 118. Pucci (1980, 148) spots blame of Jason also in the messenger's speech. He thinks that the lines "I will say without fear that those of mortals who appear to be wise and to meditate speeches earn the greatest punishment" (1225-7, reading ζημίαν with the manuscripts) refer to Jason, and he might be right, for the messenger's words echo Medea's own accusation against Jason at 580-83. Contra: Page 2001 (1938). Whatever the case, the messenger blames also Medea: "You will know yourself the turnaround of punishment" (1223; the text is debated but the scholia assume this meaning. See also Diggle's adoption of Lenting's emendation ἐπιστροφήν for the transmitted ἀποστροφήν).

[54] An additional factor working against the spectators' emotional solidarity with Medea is their knowledge of the approaching filicide.

divine father: "Gods, and you, Poseidon! You were truly my father, since you have listened to my curses!" (1169-70); then, like Medea, he asks for detail, with an excited and expansive question that exhibits Schadenfreude: "how did he die? Tell! How did the club of Justice hit the one who disgraced my bed?" (1171-2). Not content with expelling his son, Theseus had thrown pitilessness in his face: "no pity, none, comes upon me for your exile" (1089); now pitilessness climaxes to joy at the news of the final disaster.

The messenger's vivid and emotive speech re-awakens Theseus to his paternity: "for hatred of the man who suffered this, I rejoiced (ἥσθην) at those words; but now in respect to the gods and this man, who is my son, I neither rejoice nor feel pain in these misfortunes" (1257-60). The powerful narrative has caused Theseus' Schadenfreude to relent though not pity to take over. The emotional coldness that replaces his gloating is as far as Theseus can go in softening his hatred, for he has no evidence that Hippolytus is innocent.[55] But even so, the messenger warns Theseus that he should not be cruel (1264) and Artemis prefaces her revelation with a charge of Schadenfreude: "Theseus, why do you rejoice (συνήδῃ), wretched one, in these events, having killed your son in a unholy manner, persuaded by the lying words of your wife to believe in things unseen?" (1286-9).

The response of the audience to Theseus' Schadenfreude will be more complex and nuanced than in the parallel episode of *Medea*: before the messenger's speech, increased pity for Hippolytus and horror at Theseus' boastful and misplaced enthusiasm in proclaiming the coming true of his

[55] See De Jong 1991, 108-9. Heath (1987, 157) notes Theseus' softening, but seems to think that he could have gone further.

imprecations and of Justice, and with so much assurance as to leave no room for a contrary emotion, like a paternal stirring; but also understanding, respect, and perhaps even sympathy for him, at least if the messenger's response serves as a cue. For he issues no condemnation of Theseus' glee. While the spectators are instantly and forcefully directed against Medea's, their attention is not drawn to Theseus'. Throughout the scene, they will keep sympathising with his ignorance, which deafens him to criticisms of his callousness; and they will be filled with both terror and pity in anticipation of his discovery of the truth, a discovery all the more ghastly because of his unknowing exultation in the workings of justice.[56]

1.4 Singing to Pentheus' Death: a Barbarian Pleasure

A sharp criticism of Schadenfreude marks a climactic moment also in *Bacchae,* where the words of the messenger again function as an emotional diapason for the audience in the theatre, distancing it from the gloaters and fostering a sympathetic or parapathic emotion.[57]

Pentheus' dismemberment meets with a malicious glee that lasts from its preparation to its aftermath. At the prospect of being decked out in a woman's clothes and taken to spy

[56] A parallel is in *Trachiniae,* when Hyllus tells Heracles (1118-9) "[if you don't listen to me] you cannot know in which circumstances [the prospect of killing Deianeira] you mistakenly wish to rejoice". The audience will feel both alienated from Heracles because of his heartlessness and sorry for him because of his ignorance.

[57] The term 'parapathic' is used by Fagan 2011. 'Feeling along' or 'sympathy' are better descriptions of the desirable audience response than 'empathy'. See Cairns 2017, 72-3.

on the Bacchants, Pentheus worries about becoming a laughing-stock: "how shall I go unseen through the city of the Cadmeians?", he asks Dionysus. "-We'll take solitary roads. And I will lead you. -Anything is better than that the Bacchants should make fun of me (πᾶν κρεῖσσον ὥστε μὴ 'γγελᾶν βάκ χας ἐμοί)" (840-2).

Pentheus' anxiety befits his makeup both as a typical tragic hero steeped in a shame-culture[58] and as one who has himself wielded ridicule profusely, at Cadmus and Tiresias wearing their Bacchic apparel (250) and especially and more ominously at Dionysus and his rites.[59] Both the belittled god and the audience will appreciate a twofold dramatic irony in Pentheus' fear of laughter.[60] First, it foreshadows a due reversal, from subject to object of mockery.[61] Shortly after Pentheus' request, Dionysus indeed offers him up to the laughter of the whole city: "I want him to become a laughing stock for the Thebans, as he is led through the city in a woman's appearance, after all the threats with which he showed his power" (854-6). Dionysus' revenge begins as retributive ridicule; but of course it will not stop at that. The knowledge of this truth allows the audience to enjoy a second shade of dramatic irony: Pentheus' fear of mockery will ring as a chilling understatement, for the Theban Bacchants will do much worse than making fun of him.[62] The promenade

[58] This aspect of Pentheus is noted by Segal 1997, 199.

[59] ὃν σὺ διαγελᾷς, 272, 322; καταγελᾷς νιν, 286; see also 1080-1.

[60] On the pervasiveness of tragic irony in *Bacchae,* see Oranje 1984, 20.

[61] For the retribution, see especially Halliwell 2008, 136-8. See also Segal 1997, 199, 290-1.

[62] This point holds if 842 is sane and in this position. It has been suspected because Pentheus fears the laughter of the Thebans, not

about to rouse laughter through the city escorts the laughee to his death.

Another laughter, this time the god's, will physically thrust Pentheus into his death-trap. "Come, Bacchus," prays the chorus, "with laughter on your face throw a noose of death over the beast-hunter of the Bacchants, when he falls among the herd of the meanads" (1020-3). The laughter that the chorus envisions recalls the enigmatic laughter with which the "gentle beast" surrendered to his captors (436-9). Both express supreme ease and aloofness. But the second marks a frightening crescendo.[63] It is not the countenance of the serenely confident god who knows that his human jailor has no power over him but of the avenger launching with an icy detachment or even with joy the final act of his revenge; a laughter which not only heralds death but adds to its ignonimity by celebrating it in advance.[64]

The celebration continues and grows louder. For Pentheus' death is an even greater source of delight for the Asian Bacchants once it is accomplished and a messenger rushes in to tell it:

> Αγ. Πενθεὺς ὄλωλε, παῖς Ἐχίονος πατρός.
> Χο. †ὦναξ Βρόμιε, θεὸς φαίνηι μέγας.†
> Αγ. πῶς φήις; τί τοῦτ' ἔλεξας; ἦ 'πὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖς
> χαίρεις κακῶς πράσσουσι δεσπόταις, γύναι;

of the Bacchants: see Oranje 1984 with a review of the proposed emendations. But the best editions (Dodds, Diggle, Guidorizzi) keep the line as is and in this position. I follow Guidorizzi in reading ἐγγελᾶν in a translated sense.

[63] Podlecky (1989, on 560-1) compares Dionysus' laughter to the *daimôn*'s at *Eumenides* 560-1, on which see below, 54.

[64] Guidorizzi (2020, on 1020-3) reads true joy in Dionysus' laughter.

Χο. εὐάζω ξένα μέλεσι βαρβάροις·
οὐκέτι γὰρ δεσμῶν ὑπὸ φόβωι πτήσσω.
Αγ. Θήβας δ' ἀνάνδρους ὧδ' ἄγεις <×–˘–
×–˘– ×–˘– ×–˘–>;
Χο. ὁ Διόνυσος ὁ Διόνυσος οὐ Θῆβαι
κράτος ἔχουσ' ἐμόν.
Αγ. συγγνωστὰ μέν σοι, πλὴν ἐπ' ἐξειργασμένοις
κακοῖσι χαίρειν, ὦ γυναῖκες, οὐ καλόν.
(1030-40)

[Messenger Pentheus is dead, the son of Echion. / Chorus Lord Bromios, you show yourself a great god! / Messenger How do you say? What is it that you said? Do you rejoice, woman, in the sad events of my masters? / Chorus I, a stranger, cry *evoe* in barbarian songs, for no longer will I crouch down for fear of chains. / Messenger Do you think that Thebes is so poor in men [that you'll go unpunished?] / Chorus Dionysus, Dionysus, not Thebes has power over me. / Messenger You are forgivable, but to rejoice in sad events, women, is not beautiful.]

The messenger speaks a language which, in Eric Dodd's words, corresponds to "civilized Greek sentiment". Indeed, the principle he defends is widespread in Greek culture, as the collection of passages in Stobaeus, under the heading "one ought not to rejoice over those in misfortune" (4. 48a: ὅτι οὐ χρὴ ἐπιχαίρειν τοῖς ἀποτυχοῦσι), amply demonstrates.[65] The dialogue builds an expressive contrast between the women's gloating and the messenger's somewhat condescending forgiveness (see Guidorizzi 2020 on 1039-40). He, the

[65] Dodds (1986) adduces *Od.* 22.412 and Pittacus in Stob. 3.1.172. See also Guidorizzi 2020 on 1039-40.

"civilized Greek", understands their relief from fear; they, the primitive barbarians, remain fully absorbed in their unfettered happiness. In response to his condemnation of Schadenfreude, the first time they hail Bacchus with his ritual cry and, drawing attention to the un-Greekness of their song, they wax lyrical with joy, not speaking in iambics but singing in the highly emotional dochmiacs, as they probably do already at the announcement of Pentheus' death[66] and as they continue to do through their exchange with the messenger, who speaks in iambics all along. The rhythmic discordance brings the lack of communication between the parties to the audience's ears, the messenger's reasonableness clashing with the women's exalted mood and with their deafness to his sensible objection to their gloating. The civilised maxim, far from restraining their exultation, meets with more of the same ecstatic mood, which drives and shapes their request to hear how Pentheus perished: "tell me, explain, how did the unjust man die when he was trying unjust deeds?" (1041-2). The emphasis on Pentheus' unrighteous character and actions conveys the women's satisfaction with his punishment, while the phrase "tell me, explain", with the redundance that is a recognisable marker of Schadenfreude, reveals their eagerness to hear every detail of it. Like Medea, the Bacchants request a full account of the killing in order to satisfy their glee.

[66] Line 1031 is corrupt but see Dodds' note. He gives as parallel *Phoen.* 1335-41, where the emotion that causes the metrical switch is however sorrow. Guidorizzi (2020) calls the chorus' dochmiac exclamation in *Bacchae* "un sussulto di trionfo davanti alla notizia della morte del nemico." More generally, Oranje notes that in the 4th and 5th stasima Euripides uses dochmiacs not to mark the chorus' extreme agitation, as is typical with this tragic meter, "but their aggression, triumph, and joy" (1984, 170).

Their excited anticipation invites us to imagine a stage-action communicating their relish with gestures and movements while they listen to the messenger's speech.

The narrative further intensifies the women's joy, as proven by their outburst after the messenger's exit: "Let us lift our feet (ἀναχορεύσωμεν) for Lord Bacchus, Let us lift our voice (ἀναβοάσωμεν) for the doom fallen on Pentheus, the dragon's child".[67] The women greet Dionysus' power and Pentheus' death with equal jubilation; they take to dancing in celebration of the first and to singing in celebration of the second. The equivalence of two sources of happiness is made heard in the patterning of the first two lines, ἀναχορεύσωμεν Βάκχιον,/ ἀναβοάσωμεν ξυμφοράν, which are in unison: the rhythm is the same, and the two corresponding verbs have the same prefix, are isosyllabic and morphologically identical. The women's audibly undifferentiated exultation over their god's glory and over the cruel death of his victim suggests that they have savored every detail of the narrative they were so eager to hear, including the account of Pentheus' dismemberment, whereas they have not been sensitised to the compassionate tones, to the numerous expressions of pity with which the messenger has sprinkled his speech: "Pentheus, the wretched one" (1058); "unhappy target" (1100); "the wretched one" (1102); "with countless wailings" (1112); "unhappy Agave" (1117); "miserable head" (1139).

The joy with which Dionysus' worshippers receive the news of Pentheus' death, the excitement with which they anticipate, then listen to the narrative of it is the climax of their growing relish as they see in their mind and describe "in clairvoyant vision" (Dodds 1986, 198) the coming true

[67] 1153-5, Dodds' translation (1986, 220), modified.

of Dionysus' revenge. The choral song following the departure of the principals, which ends with the invocation of Dionysus' laughter, vividly dwells on the beginning of the attack (981-6). The Asian women are, as it were, present at the action, to which they contribute by issuing exhortations in the imperative mood: "go, swift bitches of madness, go to the mountains" (977); "appear, bull . . . Come, Bacchus, with a laughter on your face throw a noose of death over the beast-hunter of the Bacchants" (1016-22); "let justice come, manifest, let justice, sworded, come to stab, cutting through his throat, the godless, lawless, unrighteous earthborn, the progeny of Echion" (992-6=1011-5). This is the ode's refrain, which harks back to the one of the previous song, a celebration of the beauty and fairness of revenge: "What is wisdom? What gift from the gods is more beautiful in the eyes of mortals than holding a more powerful hand over your enemies? What is beautiful is always dear" (877-81=897-901). In the later song this principle is no longer upheld in the abstract but summoned, as it were ("come . . . come"), as it is materialising or about to materialise and as "holding a more powerful hand over the enemy" is taking or about to take the concrete shape of killing. The song is not just a commentary on Dionysus' deeds; its actively participatory tone casts it as its equivalent, as the substitute for the revenge that the women themselves would take if they did not constitute a Euripidean chorus.[68]

[68] Aeschylus' *Eumenides* imposes the qualification "Euripidean". Aristotle's distinction between Sophocles' choruses, which share in the action (on Sophocles' choruses, see Murnaghan 2012, 220-35), and Euripides', detached from it (*Poetics* 18, 1456a25-9), is the least applicable to the *Bacchae*.

Reginald Winnington-Ingram notes that the Asian Bacchants embody Dionysiac ritual at its purest and fullest, but that, as a chorus, they are limited in their action:

> As the Chorus of a Greek tragedy . . . their circumstances neither demand nor allow displays of physical violence. Yet violent they become to the point of mania in their emotional reaction to Pentheus, with a lyric violence which is the counterpart of the physical activity to which his interference leads the Theban Maenads. (1948, 154)

The women, in other words, do in song the killing they cannot do in deed. Their excited anticipation or clairvoyance is their contribution to the violence itself, and their rejoicing at the news prolongs and adds more gruesome accents to the "laughing face" with which they exhort Dionysus to throw his victim to his death. They listen with pleasure to deeds in which they would have joined but for their dramatic role. Their exultation on the surface is Schadenfreude but deeply it is the triumphant joy of the victor.

The women's glee matches Dionysus' earlier boasting over his own *hybris* in playing with Pentheus: "that was the laugh I threw at him (καθύβρισ᾽αὐτόν),[69] because he thought he bound you . . . " (616). This is a conspicuous case of a god "revelling in triumph and toying distastefully with his victim", as Nick Fisher remarks (1992, 414).[70] The censured, yet unrelenting exultation that greets his revenge furthers the shift of sympathy away from this boastful god

[69] The reference is to Dionysus' laughter at 439, hence my translation of καθυβρίζειν.

[70] Athena in *Ajax* is, however, another case in point. See below, 54-6.

and his acolytes and towards his victims;[71] it is the pivot that accelerates the shift. The messenger's comments steer the audience away from Schadenfreude and once again invite the opposite emotion: pity. The "civilized Greek", as every spectator will like to see himself, will embrace the maxim condemning Schadenfreude and reject the chorus' disposition, perhaps even with a smug feeling of moral superiority to the "uncivilized barbarians" who loudly and callously express such a sentiment and even wax lyrical with it. The women's deafness to the maxim and their eagerness to hear how justice was done does not present the audience with an alternative mode of listening to the coming account of Pentheus' death, as the just punishment of an unjust man, but on the contrary their unfeeling behavior, cast in an unquestionably negative light, will distance those in the theatre from them and provide the messenger with the sympathetic ear that normally characters in this role find on stage. Unlike the Asian women, the spectators will be sensitised to the numerous expressions of pity scattered in his narrative; they will also feel uneasy, to say the least, with the celebratory singing and dancing that follows it, for their attention is all feverishly projected toward Agave's inevitable recognition (see Lanza 1988, 30).

[71] On the progressive change, see Winnington-Ingram 1948, 143, 160 and passim; Dodds 1986, 206. See also Bremmer 1969, 183-6; Oranje 1984, 94, 169-70.

1.5 Divine Schadenfreude as a Foil for the Spectators' Pity: the Opening of Sophocles' *Ajax*

While in *Bacchae* the worshippers' exultation in the killing engineered by their god increases the audience's pity for his victim, in *Ajax* it is the pleasure of the deity herself in the spectacle of the ruin she has contrived that steers the human spectators toward pity.

The play almost begins with an incitement to Schadenfreude and public shaming on the part of Athena: "I will show you (δείξω)", she tells Odysseus, "this conspicuous (περιφανῆ) sickness, so that, having seen it (εἰσιδών), you will tell it out (θροῇς) to all the Greeks" (66-7). The triple emphasis on displaying and seeing aims at an exposure of Ajax's derangement as glaring as the derangement itself. Athena expects Odysseus, as Ajax's enemy, to enjoy the sorry sight and to be eager to advertise it. In fact, a scholion takes the goddess' offer as a friendly gesture to her favorite hero: οὕτω δὲ καὶ ἡ εὔνοια τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ἐνδείκνυται εἰς τὸν Ὀδυσσέα (Schol. on 66; "in this way, Athena's goodwill for Odysseus shows"). She further tickles his Schadenfreude, and more invitingly, with the well-known line: "Isn't laughing at the enemy the sweetest laughter?" (79). Athena is encouraging Odysseus to indulge in a legitimate and much-cherished pleasure, in spite of the scholiast's somewhat contradictory observation: σκληρὸν μὲν τὸ λέγειν <ἥδιστον τὸ> ἐπεγγελᾶν τοῖς ἐχθροῖς, ἀλλὰ θεός ἐστιν οὐκ εὐλαβουμένη τὸ νεμεσητόν. ἄλλως τε καὶ παροξύνουσα τὸν Ὀδυσσέα τοῦτό φησιν (Schol. on 79; "It is harsh to say that the sweetest thing is laughing at the enemy, but she is a deity and does not have to beware of retribution. In addition, she says this to spur Odysseus").

The comment suggests both that the dictum should entice Odysseus and that it is cruel, applying a moralistic bias (as scholia often do) that clashes with many an endorsement, in and outside tragedy, of the pleasure provided by the sight of an enemy suffering or dying.

At a closer look, however, it turns out that Athena puts on the spectacle for her own delight rather than for Odysseus'. At the end of the performance she does not even ask him whether he has enjoyed it and instead exults in her own power to harm Ajax: "Do you see, Odysseus, the power of the gods, how great it is?" (118); and, not content with this, she mentions Ajax's former greatness (119-20) to draw more satisfaction from his downfall at her hands (see Falkner 1993, 37; 1999, 192). From the outset, it was she who took pleasure in displaying Ajax's madness and in the expectation of hearing it broadcast. For her invitation to Odysseus comes at the end of a vivid and detailed narrative of Ajax's delusional slaughter (51-65), over which the goddess lingers "with apparent delight".[72] Her disposition has conjured up the laughter of heaven endorsed by the Erinyes in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (see Grossmann 1968, 79): "a god roars with laughter (γελᾷ δὲ δαίμων) at the sight of the hot-tempered man who used to boast he'd never be worn out by hopeless distress or be unable to rise above the crest of the wave" (560-2); a man who recklessly disregarded all justice and is now drowning in a storm and calling for help in vain. The *daimôn*'s vindictive exultation indeed matches Athena's, who anticipates that the spectacle of her formerly boastful

[72] See Burian 2012, 71. On Athena's pleasure in Ajax's madness, see also Kullmann 1985, 20.

challenger, now destroyed, will bring her more pleasure and flatter her power.

Famously, the same spectacle gives Odysseus neither pleasure nor a sense of security but on the contrary pushes him to pity the madman who right before his eyes is showing no mercy for the captive he believes to be Odysseus:[73] "I pity him, the wretched man, though he is my enemy, because he is a yoke-fellow to evil ruin. I think no more about him than about myself: for I know that we, as many as are alive, are nothing but phantoms or unsubstantial shadows" (121-6). After these words, the chorus' stress on Odysseus' malicious glee (148-53, above) will strike the spectators as ironically misplaced.

Athena reinforces Odysseus' sentiment of his human fragility, warning him not to be haughty when he is at advantage, for "a day can rise and bring down again all human things" (131-2). Awareness of this truth is shared by man and goddess, but it elicits opposite emotional responses: in Athena, a complacency in her divine power; in Odysseus, a sympathetic identification with a specimen of human vulnerability and a meditation on the shadowy frailty of life.[74]

While the goddess can afford to revel in the prospect, then in the sight, of Ajax's humiliation, the mortal Odysseus does the right thing not to follow her prompt. By "the right thing" I don't mean that he upholds higher moral standards[75] but

[73] On the contrast, see Johnson and Clapp 2005, 127.

[74] On opposing ways of viewing the same spectacle, see Falkner 1999, 176-8.

[75] See Knox 1979, 130: "[Athena's] rigid adherence to the traditional code and the added refinement of mockery of her victim seem all the more repellent by contrast with the enlightened attitude

that he acts in his own interest as a human: the sight of the deranged Ajax prevents his Schadenfreude by confronting him with his own susceptibility to reversals of fortune and to retribution. Odysseus does not object to the maxim "laughing at your enemy is the sweetest laughter;" he evades it. He also knows that the demise of a foe is always a potential reminder of the insecurity of one's own position (see Heath 1987, 169-71). We find Athena's behavior brutal by comparison with Odysseus' humanity, but the difference is not one of principle but of position: while Odysseus, like Ajax and the *schadenfroh* Menelaus, could become the laughee, Athena can laugh without fear. The scholion's note "she is a deity and does not have to beware of retribution" hits the mark. Just as her revenge against Ajax is harsher than a human's would be because, as a goddess, she escapes reprisals,[76] she can safely exult in seeing her victim fallen because he cannot counterattack and because the restraining maxim "fortune can blast you" does not apply to her.

The dialogue between goddess and mortal guides the response of the audience in the theatre. As has been noted, the prologue of *Ajax* suggests a play within the play, with Athena in the role of the author and director and Odysseus of the audience, which like him sees without being

of Odysseus." Likewise Dillon argues that Odysseus, by stressing the common bond of humanity that transcends the traditional division friends/enemies, sets higher ethical standards than the gods (1991, 350). I used to agree with such readings but now I rather think, with Heath (1987, chapter 5), that Odysseus does not abandon the traditional moral code. As Heath notes (203), his stand against insulting a dead enemy (1344-5; 1349) has precedents in the *Odyssey* (22. 412) and in Archilochus (fr. 134 West).

[76] McHardy (2008, 93) applies this idea to divine revenge at large.

seen.[77] Athena writes and stages a script that conforms to extra-theatrical values, which a real-life Odysseus would endorse. But Odysseus responds as spectator to a tragedy, not to a real-life event.[78] The implicit addressees are the spectators in the theatre, whom Odysseus, the focaliser,[79] invites to share his disposition. Like Odysseus, the external spectator can watch the madman without danger, but like him he will not enjoy the miserable sight from his position of security but will pity the sufferer, a vulnerable human like himself.[80]

[77] See Easterling 1993, 82 and especially Falkner 1993 and 1999; Munteanu 2012, 186-90.

[78] See Falkner 1993, 38: "Athena offers Odysseus 'reality' and he turns it into literature".

[79] See Heath 1987, 172; Goldhill 2009, 30-1.

[80] See especially Falkner 1999, 192 and 178: "the true tragic spectator, though placed in the position of empowered spectator, declines the invitation to take pleasure from his vantage of authority and control and assumes a subject position that sees from the object's perspective of suffering and powerlessness". See also Pucci 1980, 173; Parker 1997, 153; Loraux 2002, 52; Johnson and Clapp 2005, 129. For a similarly sympathetic response of another internal spectator, Deianeira, to suffering, see Falkner 2005; Allen-Hornblower 2016, 107-12, 119, who also contrasts Deianeira's pity with Aphrodite's "delighted contemplation" (143) of the suffering she has caused (*Trach.* 860-1, though the goddess' delight is not made explicit).

Part 2
Schadenfreude as Audience Response

2.1 From Fearing to Wielding Schadenfreude: Prometheus

In the episodes we have considered so far, a character's Schadenfreude will meet with the audience's censure. As an almost conventional staple of human odiousness or a pleasure indulged risk-free by cruel gods or their acolytes, it further alienates the spectators in the theatre from the gleeful character and draws them nearer to the victim. In *Bacchae, Medea* and, though less starkly, in *Hippolytus*, displays of indignation against the emotion serve to reinforce the response expected of the audience: pity for the unfortunate target.

Expressions of Schadenfreude, however, are not always challenged. They can be in the mouth of characters who attract sympathy on stage. The protagonist of *Prometheus Bound* is one such character.[81] Like Medea, Prometheus moves from fearing his enemies' Schadenfreude to indulging the emotion himself; but his expressions of glee, contrary to Medea's, do not alienate him from the audience.

[81] The questions of the play's date and paternity fall beyond the scope of this study. Recent bibliography is in Bierl 2022, 289n10. As Yoon notes (2016, 257n1), discussion of these issues has been less sanguine in recent years than in the 1970s and 1980s.

The opening of the play sets Prometheus up as a potential target of malicious pleasure: he silently submits to violence, letting his body become a spectacle for all to see: for Kratos and Hephaestus on stage, for Zeus in the heavens, for humans in the theatre.[82] Zeus' gaze is the first to be forefront:

> Κρ. οὔκουν ἐπείξῃ τῶιδε δεσμὰ περιβαλεῖν,
> ὡς μή σ' ἐλινύοντα προσδερχθῆι πατήρ;
> Ηφ. καὶ δὴ πρόχειρα ψάλια δέρκεσθαι πάρα.
> (52-4)
>
> [KRATOS Won't you hurry to throw chains around him, so that the father will not see you procrastinate? / HEPHAESTUS Well, he can see the bonds in my hands.]

In response to Kratos' threat, Hephaestus imagines to satisfy Zeus' eyes by pointing to the chains he is holding, ready to be applied. Both he and Hephaestus assume that Zeus will be pleased to *see* the execution of Prometheus' punishment.[83] Far above the theatre, there hovers the gleeful eye of the Titan's chief enemy waiting to watch Hephaestus at his racking job.

This picture is in Kratos' and Hephaestus' imagination, and perhaps in the spectators'. But something that spectators and characters will mark as real is Kratos' own pleasure in the punishment, which compounds Zeus' imaginable one. For he urges Hephaestus on with a string of imperatives

[82] On Prometheus as spectacle, see Létoublon 1986, especially 28-9; Tarkow 1986; Papadopoulou-Belmehdi 2003; Villacèque 2007; Bierl 2022.

[83] See also Villacèque 2007, 278. Zeus lacks pity and pathos: see Papadopoulou-Belmehdi 2003, 50 and 56.

that displays and invites Schadenfreude: "Beat harder, bind tightly, don't slacken!" (58); and he continues in this vein (61, 64-5). Hephaestus obliges, but not without suffering and pitying Prometheus (66). Midway through the binding, he offers the victim as a spectacle, calling him a *theama* and involving the audience in it: "you see a spectacle painful for eyes to see".[84] To which Kratos replies: "I see that he has the lot he deserves" (69-70). Two viewers, two opposite reactions to the sight of Prometheus' miseries: pity and satisfaction. Or rather, pity and Schadenfreude, for Kratos again asks for harder blows: "beat with all your strength on the pierced shackles: harsh is the appraiser of this job" (76-7). Zeus' "thug" and mouthpiece thinks and feels in unison with him.[85]

(In passing, we might object to calling Kratos' disposition Schadenfreude, as he is issuing orders to Hephaestus rather than passively witnessing the binding. But he does not move a finger himself (see already line 3). More important, he is set up as spectator (69-70); in fact, he is the closest spectator of Hephaestus' reluctant application of violence. His orders betray a strong desire to see Prometheus' tortured, step by step: a desire, we surmise, that finds fulfilment as the torture proceeds).

Prometheus is thus presented with two contrasting reactions to the spectacle of his punished body. He fears Schadenfreude, as transpires from his opening words, which once again draw visual attention to his plight but aim to foster sympathy: "see (ἴδεσθε) what I, a god, suffer

[84] See Griffith 1983 on 69; Villacèque 2007.

[85] Long (1958 on 42), referencing line 240 and the scholia, calls Kratos "an extension of the personality of Zeus".

from the gods. Look (δέρχθηθ') at the outrages that wear me down, and which I will endure for countless years!" (92-5). The addressees are all the elements, aether, rivers, sea, earth and sky, which Prometheus invokes as legal witnesses (see Griffith 1983 on 93) to the treatment he has been inflicted. The whole universe should look at him and denounce the outrage, sharing in his suffering and indignation. Promethus, however, is far from certain that it will be so, for he has heard Kratos' gleeful orders and cannot count on the sympathy of the new generation of gods (see 120-2). His fear of yet another display of Schadenfreude lurks behind his renewed emphasis, as he hears someone (it turns out to be the chorus) nearing, on the spectacular quality of his miseries: "has he come . . . as a spectator (θεωρός) of my sufferings, or what does he want?" (117-8). The first reason Prometheus can think of for visiting him is the desire to contemplate his torment. But will he meet with benevolent eyes?, he seems to wonder: "spectator" does not mean "sympathetic spectator". His apprehension can explain the effort he puts into trying to elicit compassion from the newcomers: "You see me here, in chains, a miserable god, Zeus' enemy, the one who has incurred the hatred of all the gods . . . because he has loved humans too much" (119-23). "You see me" is an expression of distress. As Mark Griffith observes, "Prometheus now realizes that more than one visitor is approaching, and he is painfully conscious of his humiliating position" (1983 on 119-20). He reacts to their coming by calling attention to his pitiful state and isolation, hoping to rouse their sympathy. But fear keeps besieging him: "Every approach scares me" (127) are his last words.

Prometheus' worries this time are misplaced. The chorus of the Oceanids instantly dispels them (128), stresses

its friendship, and amply fulfils Prometheus' hope for a sympathetic gaze. To his eager calling, "look, see (δέρχθητ', ἐσίδεσθ') by what bonds I am fastened to the top of this rocky crag and due to hold an unenviable guard", the Oceanids reply: "I see, Prometheus. And a fearful haze, filled with tears, mounts to my eyes at the sight of your body drying up on this stone, with the outrageous maltreatment of these metal chains" (141-7). His fear is theirs, with tears added: his unqualified "bond" (δεσμῷ) becomes an "outrage" (λύμαις) (see Long 1958 on 148). But even the Oceanids' sorrowful and indignant participation cannot reassure Prometheus against the Schadenfreude of potential viewers. Their comment, "With new laws Zeus rules despotically, and now he destroys (ἀϊστοῖ) the mighty powers of yore" (149-51), triggers his outburst:

> εἰ γάρ μ' ὑπὸ γῆν νέρθεν θ' Αἴδου
> τοῦ νεκροδέγμονος εἰς ἀπέραντον
> Τάρταρον ἦκεν
> δεσμοῖς ἀλύτοις ἀγρίως πελάσας,
> ὡς μήτε θεὸς μήτε τις ἄλλος
> τοῖσδ' ἐγεγήθει·
> νῦν δ' αἰθέριον κίνυγμ' ὁ τάλας
> ἐχθροῖς ἐπίχαρτα πέπονθα.
> (152-9)
>
> [If only he had thrown me under the earth, below Hades hospitable to the dead, into boundless Tartarus, having fixed me fiercely in chains that cannot be loosened, so that neither a god nor any other being would rejoice in my condition. But now, a plaything in the air, I suffer, miserable me, for the delight of my enemies.]

The allusion to the burying of the Titans' and, more pointedly, the verb ἀϊστόω at the end of line 151, revive Prometheus' resentment for being a spectacle: to the verb, literally "make invisible," responds the kindred Ἀΐδου, "the sightless realm", symmetrically placed at the end of the next line. But the invisibility offered by Hades will not do; Prometheus desires to be cast into even deeper darkness. The reason: to prevent his enemies' glee, which the proud hero abhors more than an eternity of punishment or physical pain.[86] His anxiety has no borders. In his wish to stop his enemies' Schadenfreude he uses a formula, "neither a god nor any other being", which means "nobody at all": a traditional "polar" formula (see Griffith 1983 on 156-7), but hyperbolic here, for Prometheus cannot possibly conceive that humans would rejoice in his miseries. This is why he leaves μήτε τις ἄλλος undeterminate. Even so, a scholiast (156a) did not like the phrasing: μήτε τις ἄλλος] "he did not do well to add 'neither a human' [the explication of "neither anyone else"], for these would not rejoice at him but would rather sympathize (οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐπέχαιρον οὗτοι αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ καὶ συνέπασχον)". But logic will not do: the all-inclusive phrase is driven by a surge of emotion and spells out the extent of Prometheus' fear. A fear which, once again, meets with the reassurance of the chorus: "which of the gods would be so hard-hearted to rejoice in this? Which one would not feel like us indignation at your toils, except Zeus?" (160-63).

The chorus' words will resonate with the spectators' own sympathy for the victim of pitiless Zeus. There is hardly any need to steer them away from Schadenfreude. It is true that they have heard Hephaestus' and Kratos' opposite reactions

[86] See Long 1958 on 154, and Griffith 1983 on 158-9.

to Prometheus' punishment, but it is obvious from the start that no human being can align his feeling to Kratos'. If there should be any doubt, the first words inviting the audience to watch Prometheus will wipe it off: "you see a spectacle painful for eyes to see" (69). The audience will go along with the compassionate Hephaestus and later with the equally compassionate chorus, which as often functions as transmitter of emotions.[87]

To be sure, the almost cinematic description of Prometheus' binding could have roused a voyeuristic pleasure in the spectators. Kratos' orders and Hephaestus' obedient, if unwilling, execution of them move along Prometheus' body from top to bottom, zooming in first on his hands (55), then on one arm (60), the other arm (61), then down to the chest (65), the sides (71), and the legs (74).[88] The spectators, however, cannot enjoy the detailed nailing process without a tear, for the "painful spectacle" in which Hephaestus involves them is precisely the nailing. The sight of the torture can be pleasurable only in a tragic sense: by rousing fear and especially pity, as similar sights might not do in real life.[89]

[87] See Villacèque 2007, 277; and Bierl 2022, 293.

[88] On the richness of detail with which words show the torture, see Papadopoulou- Belmehdi 2003, 45.

[89] On pity as the prevailing emotion, see Papadopoulou-Belmehdi 2003, 51-2. I agree with Villacèque where she says that Prometheus "incarne à lui seul le spectacle tragique, suscitant pitié et crainte" (2007, 207), but not where she considers the spectator as "a voyeur qui jouit de ce spectacle atroce qu'il domine du regard du haut des gradins" (278), unless by "jouir" we mean "as in a tragedy". Bierl likewise leaves the *schadenfroh* reading open: "the visual and acoustic impressions of a spectacle of pathos can be enjoyed and the victim can even be ridiculed . . . On the other hand, Prometheus can also be pitied" (2022, 291).

At least some members of the audience will think of the *apotympanismos,* a kind of bloodless crucifixion which consisted in leaving the condemned tied to a board by his hands, feet and neck until he died. Slaves were the chief victims, but free men could be executed by the same piece of machinery if caught *in flagrante.*[90] Stephen Todd argues that the *apotympanismos* was a theatrical performance, and an attractive one at that: "The process itself was likely a public and lengthy one, as the slave expired over the course of several painful days, no doubt an object of morbid curiosity to the local townspeople and slaves".[91] It seems that the device was employed also for non-capital punishment;[92] and the victim was probably subject to jeering in the process. Peter Hunt suggests that the torture which the Sophoclean Ajax thinks he is inflicting on Odysseus vaguely resembles an *apotympanismos*, and that his laughter might conjure up the response of onlookers in real life: "the victim of apotumpanismos is exposed as an object of public indignation and cruel laughter" (Hunt 2016, 157). Prometheus' torture has also called to mind the *apotympanismos.*[93] The reference,

[90] On the torture and its victims, see Gernet 1968; Cantarella 2000, 35-40; Kucharski 2015; Hunt 2016, 147. Klees (1998, 203n219; 183n64) is slightly skeptical about the infliction of the torture on free men, but gives a number of supporting sources.

[91] Todd 2000, 48. For the publicity of the execution, Todd gives as evidence Ar. *Rhet* 2.6.27 (1385a10-13): the poet Antiphon, as he was walking out the city gate to be executed, told the other condemned, "why cover your face? Is it for fear that someone will see you tomorrow?". On the public nature of the *apotympanismos*, see also Allen 2000, 200-1; Cantarella 2000, 39.

[92] See Allen 2000, 200-201. Desmond (2004, 35) finds evidence of this in Ar. *Rhet.* 2.5.14 (1583a5).

[93] See already Keramopoullos (1923), in Gernet 1968, 194. More

if active, brings out the distance between tragedy and life: the Titan's *apotympanismos* elicits compassionate and apprehensive participation, not taunts and laughter.

The Oceanids' comforting answer to Prometheus' dread of Schadenfreude will thus have the effect of reinforcing the audience's already sympathetic disposition. The same holds true for the similar words with which later on they forcefully state the incompatibility between Schadenfreude and the experience of a tragic spectacle: "iron-hearted and made of stone, Prometheus, would anyone be who should not feel like us indignation at your toils. I would have wished never to see them, and at seeing them my heart was pained" (242-5). Referred to the spectators' sentiments, these words mean: since you have come to watch the dreadful spectacle of Prometheus' suffering, you can only watch it with great sympathy and sorrow, for you are not iron-hearted. Prometheus sends the spectators, his "friends", the same message in the next line: "Yes, indeed, for my friends I am pitiful to see".

In addition to strengthening the audience's sympathy, the chorus' response to Prometheus' outburst aims to lift his spirits: and it succeeds. His fear of Schadenfreude is completely cured after this episode. Encouraged by this friendly internal audience, he becomes more confident.[94] It is the chorus that feels apprehensive for him (181-2), whereas he repeatedly boasts that there is nothing he will or can fear (174, 995, 1003). From perceiving himself as an object of enmity (120-22, 159), he becomes an active hater,

recently, Saïd 1985, 49-50; Létoublon 1986, 33; Papadopoulou- Belmehdi 2003, 45; Gargiulo 2012-2013, 118; Kucharski 2015, 26; Bierl 2022, 291.

[94] So Long 1958 on 168f., on 506, and on 1093.

with Zeus and the gods turned object (864, 972-3, 975, 1004); and he defends the principle of hating one's enemy (978) even if he should suffer from it. In reply to Hermes' insults and threats, he brashly pronounces: "that an enemy should be handled badly by an enemy is no infamy" (1041-2). He denies Zeus' treatment the power to shame him.[95]

Prometheus' increased boldness translates into another reversal: from fearing Schadenfreude he expresses the emotion himself in anticipation of Zeus' downfall. A hint of malicious glee may be intended already in his comment: Zeus is a harsh ruler now, "but, I think, his mind will soften when he has been shattered in this way" (187-9). That "I think" seems to convey his savoring the prospect.[96] Soon Prometheus dares more, by calling his pitiless treatment "a sight that brings infamy to Zeus" (Ζηνὶ δυσκλεὴς θέα, 241): it is not he who suffers disrepute from the spectacle of his misfortunes but his torturer. This fantasy sets the stage for an open display of Schadenfreude: "you would be pleased, I think", he tells Io, "to see this happening [Zeus' dethronement].- Of course I would, since it is from Zeus that I suffer badly - Then you can rejoice,[97] knowing that this is the case" (758-60). Prometheus' Schadenfreude does not abate but shapes another fantasy, of Zeus fallen from ruler to slave (927). At the chorus' slight

[95] See Long 1958 on 142 (Prometheus accepts his torments as normal). For Griffith, on the other hand, Prometheus is saying that no moral blame attaches to himself (1983 on 1041-2).

[96] Long (1958, on 187) speaks downright of Schadenfreude, ἐπιχαιρεκακία. ὀίω is deleted in Murray's OCT but kept in Mazon's Belles Lettres edition.

[97] Reading γαθεῖν, Murray's emendation of the transmitted μαθεῖν. γαθεῖν is amost certainly right: see Long 1958 and Griffith 1983, on 760.

reproach that this is wishful thinking, he fires back: "I say what will happen, but also what I desire" (929). Zeus in the heavens has heard this wish for his ruin; but Prometheus has no fear (see 932-3). How will the audience respond to this repeated wielding of Schadenfreude against the supreme god?

The spectators who follow strict logic and dispassionate observation will not share Prometheus' pleasure both because, regardless of the play's sequel,[98] they know that Zeus' fall has not occurred and because, as mythology tells them, the Zeus who reigns above their heads is no longer a tyrant. Within the play, however, they will sympathise with Prometheus' gleeful stance as it targets the tyrannical ruler of yore, who furthermore is torturing the friend of the human race. The crowded references, in the opening scene, to Prometheus' *philanthrôpia* as the cause of his punishment (see 8, 11, 28, 30, 38), set the audience's mood once and for all.

But the play rouses more unsettling feelings, which might push the spectators to identify, rather than just sympathise, with Prometheus' Schadenfreude. The almost total absence of human beings from the stage highlights the helplessness of the human race in the clashing of divine forces (see Papadopoullou-Belmehdi 2003, 50). Time and again the audience hears that humans could not succor their benefactor: "Such profit did you gain from your man-loving disposition" (Hephaestus, 28); "Now be insolent, rob the gods of their prerogatives and give them to the creatures of a day (ἐφημέροισι): what relief from these toils can mortals bring you? (Kratos, 82-4); "Tell me: where is there any aid, which help is there from the creatures of a day (ἐφαμερίων)? Don't

[98] That *Prometheus Bound* was the first play of a trilogy is still the prevailing opinion, but see Yoon 2016.

you see the feebleness, the powerlessness, similar to a dream, which binds the blind race of humans?" (the chorus, 546-50). This shared musing on the ephemerality and frailty of our life could cause the humans who make up the audience to become painfully aware of it and could incite them to blame it on Zeus "the tyrant".[99] Perhaps Zeus is not just after all, since he has done nothing to improve human existence as he did nothing – "he had no thought for the unhappy mortals" (231-2) – when Prometheus came to the rescue. These hammering reminders of human misery and of Zeus' indifference to it leave scope for the spectators' reveling with Prometheus in the fantasy of the all-powerful god, to whom they are also subjected and under whom they live powerless lives, fallen from his throne.

2.2 Applauding the murder of Aegisthus in Euripides' *Electra*

While the audience of *Prometheus Bound* sides with the protagonist's pleasure in anticipating his enemy's fall, those of Euripides' *Electra, Heraclidae, Hecuba,* and especially *Heracles* are free to join characters indulging Schadenfreude in the strongest sense, at their enemy's *actual* defeat or death. Because in those plays the emotion finds no opposition on stage, the option of sharing it is fully open for the audience.

[99] Along similar lines, Munteanu (2012, 180) thinks that through pity for Prometheus the spectator may rebel against the misery of the human condition, questioning whether it is inevitable or whether it follows from the whim of a tyrannical god.

In *Electra,* Aegisthus' death is recounted by an exulting messenger and the news rouses more joy in his immediate listeners. His preface to the speech is a call for celebration:

Αγ. ὦ καλλίνικοι παρθένοι Μυκηνίδες,
νικῶντ' Ὀρέστην πᾶσιν ἀγγέλλω φίλοις,
Ἀγαμέμνονος δὲ φονέα κείμενον πέδωι
Αἴγισθον· ἀλλὰ θεοῖσιν εὔχεσθαι χρεών.
Ηλ. τίς δ' εἶ σύ; πῶς μοι πιστὰ σημαίνεις τάδε;
Αγ. οὐκ οἶσθ' ἀδελφοῦ μ' εἰσορῶσα πρόσπολον;
Ηλ. ὦ φίλτατ', ἔκ τοι δείματος δυσγνωσίαν
εἶχον προσώπου· νῦν δὲ γιγνώσκω σε δή.
τί φήις; τέθνηκε πατρὸς ἐμοῦ στυγνὸς φονεύς;
Αγ. τέθνηκε· δίς σοι ταὔθ', ἃ γοῦν βούλει, λέγω.
Ηλ. ὦ θεοί, Δίκη τε πάνθ' ὁρῶσ', ἦλθές ποτε.
ποίωι τρόπωι δὲ καὶ τίνι ῥυθμῶι φόνου
κτείνει Θυέστου παῖδα; βούλομαι μαθεῖν.
(761-73)

[Messenger Triumphant maidens of Mycenae, I announce the victory of Orestes to all his friends, and that the killer of Agamemnon, Aegisthus, lies on the ground. Hail to the gods! / Electra Who are you? How can I believe what you say? / Messenger Don't you recognise the servant of your brother? Look! / Electra Dearest, it was certainly from fear that I did not recognise your face. Now I do well. What do you say? The hateful killer of my father is dead? / Messenger He is dead. I give you twice this news, as you want it. / Electra Gods and Justice who see all, you have come, at last! But in what way, by what form of death did he kill the son of Thyestes? I want to know.]

The messenger sets the stage for collective joy by addressing the women of the chorus as athletic victors and by thanking

the gods; then, lending support to the observation "those who hear a pleasant news, even of they hear it very clearly, want to hear the same thing two and three times" (scholion on Soph. *El.* 675), he stresses his eagerness to repeat his announcement as well as Electra's eagerness to hear it; and she proves him right, for she asks for a thorough account with the expressive emphasis ("in what way, by what form of death") familiar from other maliciously gleeful questions. Her emotional disposition does not clash with the messenger's feelings, as does Medea's or the Lydian Bacchants', but is attuned to them. We can imagine that the audience feels the same way, for Aegisthus, though he has never appeared on stage, has been presented as an embodiment of evil.

The messenger recounts the murder in rich detail, preparing for Orestes' entrance with Aegisthus' head as trophy. He concludes:

> Αγ. στέφουσι δ' εὐθὺς σοῦ κασιγνήτου κάρα
> χαίροντες ἀλαλάζοντες. ἔρχεται δὲ σοὶ
> κάρα 'πιδείξων, οὐχὶ Γοργόνος φέρων
> ἀλλ' ὃν στυγεῖς Αἴγισθον. αἷμα δ' αἵματος
> πικρὸς δανεισμὸς ἦλθε τῶι θανόντι νῦν.
> (854-8)
>
> [MESSENGER Instantly they [Aegisthus' servants] crown your brother's head, exulting, with shouts of joy. He is coming and bringing to show you not the head of the Gorgon but the one you hate, Aegisthus. Blood for blood, a bitter return has come now for the one who has died.]

At this announcement, the women of the chorus display even greater Schadenfreude than before, inviting Electra to join in a dance, and she, after celebrating her newly found freedom,

goes in to prepare a garland for her brother, while the women keep singing, dancing and shouting. "With joy", χαρᾷ (879), is the last word heard in the theatre before Orestes' appearance. Will the spectators still share in the mood? Will they dance along, as it were?

Several modern critics have been disturbed by the content of the messenger's speech. Aegisthus, they note, is in the focal position, that is, at the center of sympathetic attention (see De Jong 1990, 19); and he comes out as a pious king and a kind host, who warmly invites Orestes and his friend to stay for the night and share in the sacrifice he is celebrating to the Nymphs – only to become the sacrificial victim and to be treacherously butchered in cold blood. Since Aegisthus has never been on stage, it is argued, as the speech unfolds the spectators are likely to turn their sympathies away from Orestes and to feel unsettled. A spokesman for this view is Diego Lanza: "*L'évocation d'un homme égorgé comme un animal sacrificiel devait . . . accroître sinistrement le trouble des spectateurs*".[100]

The graphic style in which the execution is described has also been taken to convey its disturbing cruelty.[101] Consider especially the culminating moment: "your brother standing on tip-toe struck him on the spine and smashed his vertebrae; his whole body from head to toe heaved, quivered (ἤσπαιρεν ἐλέλιζε). He died in an agony of blood" (840-3). ἤσπαιρεν ἐλέλιζε form an asyndeton, "a figure which heightens excitement or pathos" (Cropp 2013 on 843), making us almost

[100] Lanza 1988, 24. See also De Jong, 1991, 111-2, referencing Kitto: "Orestes and Pylades kill Aegisthus with every circumstance of dishonour". More scholarship along these lines is found in Burnett 1998, 233n32.

[101] De Jong 1990, 19; further bibliography in Burnett 1998, 235n39.

feel the body's spasms. The audience will certainly shudder. But will it find the manner of death unnecessarily cruel?

Aegisthus is committing sacrilege when he is killed, for as a murderer he carries uncleanliness (see 683) and should be barred from sacred places, let alone from sacrificing to the Nymphs, deities of purity (see Burnett 1998, 233-4). The shape of his execution, as sacrifice, is appropriate atonement for his crime, responding as it does to Agamemnon's sacrificial butchery in Aeschylus,[102] while the harrowing detail of his quivering body conjures up the hanging, willed by Telemachus, of Odysseus' unloyal maids, whose feet also quiver, ἤσπαιρον δὲ πόδεσσι (*Od.* 22.473).[103] To the audience of *Electra,* this parallel will have stressed not the excessiveness but the appropriateness of Aegisthus' manner of death. For Telemachus' choice of punishment satisfies not only his hatred, but also the expectations of the audience, which would have been frustrated with a "clean death", by the sword (*Od.* 22.462-3). The likely allusion to this episode serves to remind the spectators that Aegisthus does not deserve a clean death either, and the messenger's lingering over the gory details of his agony aims not to disgust but to please the ears of his listeners in the theatre as of his direct addressees.

The audience's Schadenfreude will further increase in the following episode, in which Electra showers Aegisthus' dead body with insults. But first, we need to clarify the conditions under which insults on the tragic stage are

[102] See Cropp 2013, 154, referring to *Ag.* 1118, 1433, 1504.

[103] Burnett (1998, 234-5) adds *Il.* 13.570-5 and views both allusions as a way of heroicising Orestes' killing. The maids' hanging is perhaps the better comparandum because it is an act of revenge.

likely to rouse Schadenfreude in the theatre. In theory all abusive confrontation could kindle the emotion because for a Greek being seen as a target of abuse is a great misfortune. The audience could enjoy hearing and watching a disliked character like Clytemnestra (especially in Sophocles' *Electra*) or Menelaus (in Euripides' *Andromache*), or again Jason (in *Medea*) being insulted. However, in *agônes* or shorter and fast-paced exchanges a Jason or a Clytemnestra is empowered to fire back at the more sympathetic character. The two contenders are on equal footing, whereas Schadenfreude thrives best when the less likable one is also at disadvantage: covered with abuse but not able to reply. This is obviously the case in Euripides' *Electra*, since Aegisthus is dead.

I anticipate an objection: the spectators might not appreciate Electra's abuse of a dead man. They were certainly sensitive to the tensions in their culture between the recognition of people's natural urge to insult a dead enemy or to gloat over him and the condemnation of such conduct.[104] The two opposite drives regularly surface, with the restraining "it is impious to exult over the dead" prevailing as a principle but the desire to exult being admitted and even attributed to all men. Tragedy itself bears witness to the two impulses. Orestes is unwilling to reveal his identity to the priestess of Artemis from fear of being mocked once dead: "if I die nameless I will not be laughed at" (Eur. *I. T.* 502). We shall also remember Teucer's

[104] See already *Od.* 22.412. On the conflict between theory and practice, see Halliwell 2008, 27-30. In relation to Electra, Cropp (2013 on 902), in addition to *Od.* 22.412, refers to Archilochus fr. 134 West; Cratinus fr. 102 K-A; Aesch. *Ag.* 1393-1406, which is the most relevant passage. See below, 80-1.

pronouncement, "all men love to laugh at the dead lying on the ground" (Soph. *Aj.* 988-9), which according to the scholiast is a proverb (*gnôme*), and Agamemnon's invitation to apply it to the dead Ajax in the same play where the behavior, however, meets with a stark reproach (1348-9). We can add a Sophoclean fragment (210) in which the mother of the killed Eurypylus asks the messenger whether the Argives maltreat his son's body, "laughing a terrible laughter" (γέλωτ'ἔχοντες α<ἰν>όν), and is reassured that they do not.[105] The Euripidean Electra likewise shows religious and social scruples, as one "ashamed" of "insulting the dead", for the citizens "love censure". But Orestes reassures her that "there is no one who would blame you" and that the enmity they bear Aegisthus "knows no truce" (900-4). Orestes predisposes the spectators to enjoy the abuse by preemptively clearing it of all objections; he gives them carte blanche to appreciate Electra's violent language without any moral or religious quandary even as citizens, by claiming that there is no one who will reproach her and by

[105] Schadenfreude seems to underlie also these words over an urn containing an enemy's ashes in a fragment of Patrocles (*TrGF* I 57): καὶ νῦν τὰ δεινὰ ταῦτα καὶ τὰ πόλλ' ἔπη / εἰς ὦδε μικρὸν τεῦχος ἤθροισεν τύχη. / τί δῆτα θνητοὶ πόλλ' ἀπειλοῦμεν μάτην / δεινοὺς ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισι πέμποντες λόγους, / καὶ πάντα συννοοῦμεν ἐκπράξειν χερί, / πρόσω βλέποντες; τὴν δὲ πλησίον τύχην / οὐκ ἴσμεν οὐδ' ὁρῶμεν ἀθλίου μόρου. [And now fortune has gathered all those dreadful words in such a small receptacle. Why indeed do we mortals make many threats in vain, hurling dreadful words at each other, and plan to exact revenge, looking far ahead? We do not know or see that our near fortune is of a wretched death]. According to Liapis and Stephanopoulos (2018, 30), "the obvious Schadenfreude with which the words are uttered . . . suggests that it comes . . . from a speech of gleeful relief." The meditation, however, transcends the individual case.

appealing to the right of "harming one's enemy", a weighty principle for an Athenian.[106]

Yet, in spite of this legitimising frame, Electra's speech has appeared gratuitous, a display of bad taste likely to alienate the emotional sympathies from the couple in preparation for the horrific matricide.[107] To this reading, however, one could object that even the nastiest abuse of Aegisthus' body is fully justified because he himself had displayed worse behavior against his own dead enemy. As Electra reports, in addition to flaunting (γαυροῦται) his appropriation of Agamemnon's scepter (321-2), Aegisthus used to dance over his ashes and to smash his tomb:

> Ηλ. μέθηι δὲ βρεχθεὶς τῆς ἐμῆς μητρὸς πόσις
> ὁ κλεινός, ὡς λέγουσιν, ἐνθρώισκει τάφωι
> πέτροις τε λεύει μνῆμα λάϊνον πατρός,
> καὶ τοῦτο τολμᾶι τοὔπος εἰς ἡμᾶς λέγειν·
> Ποῦ παῖς Ὀρέστης; ἦρά σοι τύμβωι καλῶς
> παρὼν ἀμύνει; ταῦτ' ἀπὼν ὑβρίζεται.
> (326-31)
>
> [Electra When drenched in wine, they say, my mother's husband, that glorious man, leaps on the tomb and pelts my father's marble monument with stones, and against us dares to say these words: "where is your child Orestes? Surely he isn't here, bravely protecting your tomb!" Thus is the absent mocked.]

Aegisthus' offensive exultation recalls the euphoria of the imaginary Trojan leaping on Menelaus' grave in the paranoid

[106] On the last point, see Cropp 2013 on 906.
[107] See De Romilly 1961, 24; Cropp 2013, 158.

fantasy of Homer's Agamemnon: "And someone will say, one of the arrogant Trojans, stamping on the grave of the famous Menelaus: 'May the anger of Agamemnon always end this way, as he now led here an army of Greeks in vain, then went back home, to his fatherland, empy handed, having left the brave Menelaus.'" (*Il.* 4.176-9).

Like the Trojan, Aegisthus insults both the dead, by celebrating his demise on his very tomb and desecrating the monument, and the living, by taunting his helplessness. Now he is paid back. Electra extends Orestes' revenge by means of words that punish not only Aegisthus' overall behavior but specifically his treatment of Orestes and of their father's tomb. The spectators are asked to go along and to take pleasure in the heap of abuse. Their enjoyment is not spoiled by a derogatory comment even at the scene's closing. On the contrary, the chorus expresses cool approval: "terrible were his deeds, and terrible payment has he made to you and to this man. For great is the strength of justice" (957-8).

We can contrast the sequence in *Agamemnon* in which Clytemnestra and Aegisthus boast over Agamemnon's corpse. Clyemnestra proudly dwells on the three times she struck, on the pleasure (χαίρουσαν) that Agamemnon's black blood gave her, like morning dew; and she presses further, hitting the chorus with an ironic comment even while she repeats how glad *she* is: "This is how things sit, old men of Argos. You can be pleased, if you are pleased, but I exult (ἐπεύχομαι)!" (1393-4).[108] Agamemnon, she charges, deserved to drink to

[108] Denniston-Page (1957) prefer "I utter imprecations" for ἐπεύχομαι, arguing that boasting over the dead violates the moral code expressed in *Od.* 22.412 and Archilochus fr. 65. But Clytemnestra is not moderate. Mazon translates: "*Je m'en fais gloire*!" On her glee, see Allen-Hornblower 2016, 181.

the very last drop the crater of curses he has himself filled (1397-8). But the old men of the chorus object to the gloating: "We are astounded by your language, so bold! To boast over a husband with such words!" (1399-1400). As Denniston and Page note, the first dominant feeling in the men's mind is "amazement at the murderess's effrontery" rather than horror at the nature of the crime. The chorus' priority will orient the audience's. Aegisthus also vents his happiness, invoking justice: "I have seen, to my joy (φίλως ἐμοί), this man lying in these veils woven by the Erinyes, paying for the ruses of his father's hand" (1580-2). His joy, however, is recast as *hybris* by the chorus-leader: "I have no respect for one who triumphs insolently (ὑβρίζοντ᾽) amid misfortunes" (1612, translation Denniston-Page). For the desired audience response it matters a great deal that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus meet with the chorus' indignation while the chorus of Euripides' *Electra* spurs more celebrations of Aegisthus' murder at the end of the messenger's speech, then reacts to Electra's insults detachedly, calling on the rule of reciprocity and the power of justice with words that hark back to the messenger's own (see 857-8). The spectators are not invited to question the rationale or the manner of Aegisthus' sacrificial execution, as they are of Agamemnon's, but to consider it unquestionably deserved and enjoyable, in all its ugliness.

2.3 Joy in the downfall of Eurystheus and of Polymestor

Equally dictated by justice is the collective Schadenfreude that targets Eurystheus toward the end of Euripides' *Heraclidae*. Hyllus, Demophon and Iolaus defeat Eurystheus

in battle, securing life and liberty for Alcmena and the children of Heracles. Eurystheus has been spared and is being led in chains, "his misfortune a clear broadcasting to all mortals" (864) that one should not be envied ere one dies, that "fortune is ephemeral" (866). He has remained off-stage until now but his power, his unthinking arrogance and assuredness in his superior position and fortune have been a leitmotif in his presentation (22, 99-100, 156-7, 360-1, 386-8, 745-7); now that he is about to appear, it is as living proof of the beatings of fortune he has haughtily ignored. Alcmena, however, does not understand why he wasn't killed. "In your honor", answers the messenger, "so that with your eyes you could see him powerful and then subjected to your hand" (883-4).[109] Eurystheus resisted the treatment: "he refused to come before your eyes alive and pay the penalty" (886-7). The messenger implies that the prisoner was spared because being seen in chains by the enemy is a greater suffering than death.[110]

The old men who constitute the chorus take to dancing (892) in anticipation of Eurystheus' appearance. They rejoice in the good fortune of friends and in the workings of justice; they celebrate Heracles' proven divinity and end with another hint at Eurystheus' excesses: "may pride and an insatiable spirit never be my lot!" (926-7) The stage is set for the appearance of the man guilty of "pride and an insatiable spirit", now fallen. Enter a servant: "Mistress, you see, yet I

[109] κρατοῦντα, however, is probably corrupt.

[110] We shall discover that the true reason is that in Athens it is unlawful to kill prisoners who have been captured alive (965-6), but Alcmena is not told so now. On the spectacle of punishment as a cure of anger and an expression of power in tragedy, see Allen 2000, 83; 86-8.

will tell you: we come bringing here Eurystheus, a spectacle unexpected for him no less than his blow of fortune" (928-30). The reinforcing of the visual ("you see") with the verbal ("I will tell you") cannot be to the benefit of the spectators, who are already prepared for Eurystheus' appearance. Rather, the doubling of the sensorial channel serve to double his exposure. To heighten it further is the marked position of his name at the beginning of line 929, while the stress on his unpreparedness to misfortune, much attuned to his character, is geered to entice Schadenfreude in the audience ("see, here is the one who thought he'd never sink"). The servant ends his announcement by giving free rein to the emotion: "they [Hyllus and Iolaus] charged me with bringing this man to you. They want to gladden (τέρψαι) your heart, for nothing is more pleasant than seeing an enemy fallen from good fortune to misfortune" (938-40). The exposure, once again emphasised – the last word in the Greek is ὁρᾶν, "to see" – is being staged for the delight of Alcmena, who at Eurystheus' appearance instantly bursts out: "Monster, you have come? Justice has finally caught you?" But the spectators are also involved in the enjoyment of the sight by the maxim "nothing is more pleasant . . . ", with which many of them will agree, and which, as a maxim, is addressed also to them.[111] The enjoyment extends or should extend to everyone. The unison between the servant, the chorus and Alcmena further pushes the audience to indulge in Schadenfreude at the ruin of a character who has been presented in an entirely bad light.

Like Eurystheus, the punished Polymestor suffers the additional humiliation of exposure; but the expected audience

[111] On maxims as forms of address to the audience, see Villacèque 2007, 267-8.

response to Hecuba's unabashed joy in her enemy's ruin is less clear-cut. After discovering the body of her son Polydorus, she avenges herself by blinding his killer and slaying his two children. The audience hears Polymestor's off-stage cries (1035, 1037), which echo the dying Agamemnon's in Aeschylus (*Ag.* 1343-5), then hears his threats (1039-41); and finally Hecuba appears and fires back: "Smash, don't spare anything, strike the door open! You will never give back the light to your eyes, you will not see (ὄψῃ) your children alive: I (ἐγώ) have killed them!" (1044-6). While Polymestor cannot see, the women of the chorus will take a good look at him, for Hecuba insistently puts his sightless victim before their eyes: "You will soon see (ὄψῃ) him in front of the tent, blind, advancing with a blind, reeling foot, and you will see the bodies of his two children, whom I (ἐγώ) have killed with the help of these brave Trojan women. He has paid the penalty. Here he comes, as you see (ὡς ὁρᾷς), from the tent. But I will move aside, away from the flood of his Thracian anger, hard to fight against" (1049-55).

Hecuba exhibits the blind man to all seeing eyes, stressing his blindness with relish, and proudly proclaims that *she* – with the emphatic subject pronoun placed twice in the emphatic position at the end of a line – has killed his children. Will her gloating and his exposure incite Schadenfreude in the audience?

Spectators are likely to sympathise with Hecuba's display of aggressive energy, which redresses the balance of her misfortunes. The discovery of Polydorus' body sinks her to the bottom (681-720), but this last stroke, instead of killing her literally or psychologically, revives her. She becomes self-confident, cunning and creative, and her renewed strength

culminates in her flaunting her success.[112] Polymestor's raging anger, both heard and stressed, will further work toward preventing the audience from feeling sympathy for him. But on the other hand, the echoing of Agamemnon's cries in Polymestor's works in the opposite direction, challenging the justice of Hecuba's revenge (see Wohl 2015, 154n31); while her own gleeful portrait and exhibition of her victim sensitises spectators to the miserable tableau about to appear before their eyes: a man with bloody eye sockets, staggering. And in fact, Polymestor's first words draw the spectators' attention to his disorientation and groping: "Ai me! Where shall I go, where shall I stand, where shall I find a haven? On all fours like a mountain beast, putting my feet after my hands, on their tracks!" (1056-9).

The content of Polymestor's song, however, undermines the pitifulness of his appearance by its predominantly aggressive slant. He chases his enemies left and right like the Cyclops; but a Cyclops without a ram, inspiring no tenderness.[113] His song is mostly an extension, gorier than ever, of his earlier threats: "Where can I dash, so that I can have my fill of their flesh and bones, making a wild beast's banquet?" (1070-2). A wish like this will not foster the audience's fellow-feeling.[114]

[112] Defenders of Hecuba's action include Mossman 1995, Zeitlin 1996, Burnett 1998 and McHardy 2008, 42-4. In contrast, Wohl (2015, 60) thinks that "two sons for one" makes Hecuba's revenge look like an act of savagery. Likewise Fisher (1992, 431) considers Hecuba's punishment of Polymestor excessive. For a further review of the positions, see Mastronarde 2010, 202-3, who himself argues for an "aporetic stance" (203n98).

[113] See Mossman 1995, 191, and Zeitlin 1996, 195.

[114] See Burnett 1998, 170: "the rest of Polymestor's lines . . . are filled not with grief but with rage and a hatred that becomes a longing for

Furthermore, by calling his maiming a dismemberment (1076: διαμοιρᾶσαι), Polymestor makes it appear a perfectly commensurate retribution for his murder of Polydorus, which Hecuba had called a dismemberment (716: διεμοιράσω).[115] But even so, the chorus is moved by the scene: "Wretched one, how unbearable the treatment you have endured! Terrible punishment for your shameful acts" (1085-6). The reminder that the punishment fits the crime serves as a corrective, as it were, of the surge of pity that the women of the chorus feel at the spectacle. Since they have sided with Hecuba before Polymestor's appearance and song, their pity might alienate the audience's sympathies from her and her previous gloating.[116] The sequence starting with it and ending with the chorus' comment thus seems geared to produce a mixed or, perhaps better, undecided response in the audience: not Schadenfreude in solidarity with Hecuba but not support for Polymestor either. Soon, however, the balance is tilted again in favor of Hecuba; and when she again displays her joy, quite likely she rouses the audience's own Schadenfreude.

Victim and avenger plead each their case in front of Agamemnon, who takes Hecuba's side and indicts Polymestor: "since you have dared commit an infamous action, you must endure hostile treatment" (1250-1). Agamemnon's verdict and

the taste of human flesh – emotions that are understandable, but not conducive to sympathy".

[115] On the parallel, see Segal 1993, 180-1.

[116] Fisher (1992, 431) thinks that the audience pities Polymestor. Even Mossman, who argues that Euripides intends Hecuba's revenge to be approved, recognises that Polymestor's appearance might have been aimed at rousing pity (1995, 188). Burnett, in contrast, thinks that he elicits horror because the emotional thrust of his words and movements is fury, not pain (1998, 166-72).

Polymestor's protest meet with Hecuba's loud expression of joy in her revenge:

> Πο. οἴμοι, γυναικός, ὡς ἔοιχ', ἡσσώμενος
> δούλης ὑφέξω τοῖς κακίοσιν δίκην.
> Εκ. οὔκουν δικαίως, εἴπερ εἰργάσω κακά;
> Πο. οἴμοι τέκνων τῶνδ' ὀμμάτων τ' ἐμῶν τάλας.
> Εκ. ἀλγεῖς; τί δ'; ἦ 'μὲ παιδὸς οὐκ ἀλγεῖν δοκεῖς;
> Πο. χαίρεις ὑβρίζουσ' εἰς ἔμ', ὦ πανοῦργε σύ.
> Εκ. οὐ γάρ με χαίρειν χρή σε τιμωρουμένην;
> (1252-8)
>
> [Polymestor Alas, as it seems, defeated by a slave woman I will pay the penalty to one who is worse. / Hecuba Isn't it fair, since you have done evils? / Polymestor Ai, my children and my eyes, alas! / Hecuba You suffer? What about me? Don't you think I suffer for my child? / Polymestor You rejoice insulting me, wicked one? / Hecuba Why should I not rejoice, since I have avenged myself?]

It is true that here, as opposed to *Heraclidae* or *Electra*, the audience is presented with an objection to malicious glee, in Polymestor's question "do you rejoice insulting me?" His reproach, though self-serving, not issuing from a third party as for instance in *Bacchae* and *Medea*, could still have the effect of drawing attention to the cruelty of Hecuba's joy; and so could her own emphasis on it in her answer: she is far from denying or disguising her emotion. But I think that the opposite is the case. Hecuba's unhesitating exultation probably this time incited the spectators to Schadenfreude because Polymestor has made himself even more odious in the debate that follows his pitiful appearance and precedes Hecuba's exhibition of glee. He has blatantly lied to

Agamemnon about his motive for killing Polydorus and has not claimed that Hecuba's revenge was excessive but that he did not deserve any punishment at all, because by murdering Polydorus he has served Agamemnon's interests (see Mossman 1995, 193). We can imagine Hecuba's silence as she listens to his plea to be accompanied by impatient gestures and movements expressing her mounting anger at his outrageous lies and claims. The audience will watch Hecuba with sympathy, then listen impressed to her forceful and winning speech, the good speech, as the chorus comments, of one who has done good (1238-9). Her final gloating will appear as the crowning expression of her success in inflicting a fully deserved punishment.

Furthermore, the audience is probably no longer moved by the sorry sight of the victim. The initially pitiful spectacle must have lost its effectiveness by the time Hecuba lets her exultation out, because Polymestor is no longer the only focus of attention in the *agôn* that precedes her rejoicing. His own plea contributes to the waning of his body's emotional impact not only by its mendacious odiousness but also because it partly functions as a messenger- speech – it details his blinding and the killing of his children – but is in the wrong position. Messenger-speeches normally *prepare* for the appearence of the victim, the climax, and build to it, whereas Polymestor's narrative *follows* the spectacle of his maimed body, deflating its emotive power. Hecuba's glee at the end of the debate meets with no opposing force, either verbal or visual. The audience is implicitly invited to enjoy the sight of the hateful man being gloated over by the old woman who has found strength in her despair, gained the upper hand and paid him back in full.

2.4 Let Us Dance! Lycus Is Dead

The murder of Lycus in *Heracles* is welcomed by a universal, unquestioned and unclouded manifestation of Schadenfreude, perhaps the least morally problematic in tragedy. This befits the target's makeup: an usurper, a killer, a tyrant, unrelentingly abusing his power over helpless children, an old man and a woman. He is even more odious than Aegisthus because the latter has at least a score to settle with Agamemnon by reason of their fathers. Fisher calls Lycus "a character, if any in Greek tragedy, who can be seen as a full-blown villain, unmitigatedly exhibiting the features of tyrannical hybris" (1992, 434). As he walks to his death, Amphitryo, who had reproached him his *hybris* (708: ὕβριν θ' ὑβρίζεις), says: "If you have done ill, you must expect to fare ill" (727-8). The chorus of old Theban men joins in, stressing, in the same words, Lycus' *hybris* (741: ὕβρεις ὑβρίζων), for which he now meets with retribution (740).

Amphitryo will not miss the spectacle of the execution: "I shall go in to see him fall. There is pleasure when an enemy dies paying the penalty for his misdeeds" (731-3). While the wish to see one's enemy suffering or dying is commonplace in tragedy,[117] here it comes true. Amphitryo's gleeful voyeurism is unique in the genre, where normally the carrying out of anticipated murders is followed from outside with trepidation[118] but no one peeps in to enjoy the

[117] See Bond 1989 on the passage: "It is important to see the suffering of one's enemies, as Page remarks on *Med.* 163; to his parallels add *Hcld.* 939f.; Soph. *Tr.* 1037 (Heracles) 'May I see her dead in the same way she killed me'; *Phil.* 1113 (Phil.): 'may I see him, who has contrived these things, meet with my same sufferings'; Aesch. *Cho* 267 (chorus) 'may I see them [Clytemnestra and Aegisthus] dead'".

[118] So for instance the murders of Aegisthus in Aeschylus (*Cho.*

proceedings. Here the spectators are involved in the voyeur's delight by the manner of its expression, once again a maxim with which many Athenians will agree.

Amphitryo's emphasis on the pleasure that comes from a wrongdoer's execution will further resonate with the audience's extra-theatrical experience, since the law allowed a prosecutor to watch a murderer being put to death.[119] Lycus' victorious opponent is entitled to enjoy the execution of the would-be murderer who was about to exterminate his family and himself. His watching is doubled by the chorus' own: "Old men, let us look what happens inside the house, if a certain someone is faring as I wish" (747-8). The men "watch" by lending their ears to the doings inside the house and add their exultation to Amphitryo's as soon as they catch the scream of death: "How sweet it is to hear this song that begins in the house! Death is not far off" (751-2). They themselves contribute to the song by joining the dying tyrant in a duet and by playing with his own last words, picking up and reshuffling, as it were, ἀπόλλυμαι δόλῳ ("I am slain treacherously") in καὶ γὰρ διώλλυς ("For you slew" 754-5).[120]

The chorus' celebratory echoing of Lycus' last words is not countered by the sight of the dying Lycus, by a sorrowful spectacle which perhaps, as in the case of Polymestor, would have had an emotive force in spite of this character's odiousness and would have excited the audience's pity for

855-70) and in Euripides (*El.* 751-60) and of Medea's children (*Med.* 1270a-76). The killing of Clytemnestra in the Sophoclean *Electra* comes the closest to Lycus' because Electra *is pleased* with what she hears off-stage (1406, 1409, 1415).

[119] Dem. *in Arist.* 69; Aesch. *de falsa leg.* 182.

[120] See Bond (1989) on διώλλυς: "[it] picks up ἀπόλλυμαι". But we also hear δόλῳ.

human suffering as such (see Heath 1987, 83). Instead of seeing a man in death throes, the audience hears the musical jubilation of the chorus, who takes to dancing and hails the power of the gods, manifest in the tyrant's downfall (757-9). The exultation over Lycus' death will increase the disposition Aristotle calls *to philanthrôpon*, which I take to mean "moral sentiment".[121] All the ways to pity are barred and the Schadenfreude shared by the Thebans and Amphitryo remains unchallenged. This observation, by the psychologist Dolf Zillmann, perfectly fits the response to Lycus' death: "There can be little doubt . . . that righteous violence, however brutal but justified by the ends, will prompt gloriously intense euphoric reactions the more it is preceded by patently unjust and similarly brutal violence" (1998, 208).

In conclusion to this section, I would like to stress that the few episodes in which the audience is spurred to join in a character's Schadenfreude share a feature: the gloater

[121] *to philanthrôpon* (Ar. *Poetics* 1452b38; 1453a2; 1456a21) is often read as "fellow-feeling" or "humanity" (see, e.g., Halliwell 1987; Segal 1993, 26; Konstan 2006, 215-6; Munteanu 2012, 131). On this interpretation, one would be expected to feel at least some pain at the suffering even of those who deserve their fate, that is, in our case, the audience of *Heracles* would not fully go along with the chorus' reactions but feel a tinge of humanity: so Konstan (above). The meaning "moral sentiment" is preferred by Lucas (1968 on 52b38), Moles (1984), Lanza (1987, 157), Fisher (1992, 506), and Destrée (2014, 25, n. 10), who notes that it was the reading of Renaissance commentators. I agree with Moles that "moral sentiment" fits better the use of the term at *Poetics* 1456a 21: *to philanthrôpon* is roused for an unscrupulous but clever man deceived or for a brave but wicked man worsted.

and his victim are never close relations.[122] Either they have no family connection at all (Amphitryo and Lycus, Alcmena and Eurystheus) or they are distantly tied by blood (Orestes is Aegisthus' second nephew) or by marriage (Polymestor is Hecuba's son in law). The episodes are few perhaps because a central element of tragic plots, as opposed to epic, is harm done to close relatives (see Belfiore 1998); and, as it seems, exultation in the destruction of a family member cannot rouse an unproblematic applause in the theatre. On the contrary, emphasis on a character's joy at the violent death of a close relative is meant to alienate the audience fully. A point in having Clytemnestra gloat at length over her husband's dead body (in *Agamemnon*), and meet with the chorus' indignation before Aegisthus steps in to exhibit his own joy and receive his own share of blame, is to disaffect the audience first and foremost from the murderous wife, the breaker of marital *philotês*.

[122] Prometheus and Zeus are cousins, but the Titan's Schadenfreude is no exception because it does not target an existing misfortune but one that is not bound to materalise. Furthermore, the two relations are gods, who are rarely unrelated.

Part 3
Schadenfreude and the Tragic Pleasure

3.1 An Aesthetic Enticement

The foregoing analysis suggests that Schadenfreude, though not infrequent on the tragic stage, is rarely a desirable audience response. Tragedy tends to bar the audience from the emotion even when it would be normal outside the theatre. Thomas Falkner has drawn attention to the extra-theatrical resonance of such maxims as "all men love to laugh at the dead as they lie on the ground" in *Ajax* (988-9) or "laughing at the enemy is the sweetest laughter" in the same play: "the reference to this kind of Schadenfreude," he comments, "reminds us that the spectator cannot be understood apart from the mechanisms of honor and shame in the larger social world: when viewed in a public rather than a 'tragic' context, the prosperity of the great men may arouse envy rather than admiration, their suffering satisfaction as readily as pity" (1999, 186). Members of the audience are also citizens of a competitive polis, where the emotion so much feared in *Ajax* could easily be a common response to a powerful man's downfall. Substitute a contemporary political figure for an Ajax, and Schadenfreude might substitute pity. But, as again Falkner stresses, the theatrical space is not simply an extension of social space. It is Odysseus' pity that models the audience's response in Sophocles' play.[123]

[123] See Falkner 1999, 192, and here above, 58-9.

As in *Ajax*, a powerful deterrent against Schadenfreude is the sight of suffering, especially when an internal spectator like Odysseus underscores the pitifulness of the spectacle. In *Hecuba*, the chorus' stirring at the sight of the blind Polymestor might have affected the audience in the same way. An even stronger obstacle to Schadenfreude must have been the appearance of another blind man, Oedipus, as framed by the messenger's announcement: "soon you will see a spectacle that would cause pity even in an enemy" (1295-6). And indeed the man whom Oedipus had treated as an enemy, Creon (*Oed. Rex* 546, 672), proves the messenger right: "I have not come here to laugh at you, Oedipus" (*Oed. Rex* 1422). These words, like those of the chorus at *Prometheus Bound* 242-5, can be taken to describe or prescribe the default disposition of a tragic audience to a spectacle of pain, forestalling Schadenfreude.

A character's or the chorus' Schadenfreude is applauded by the audience only when the target is a vicious person who undergoes unquestionably adequate retribution.[124] In such cases, a maxim stressing the pleasure of seeing a fall-

[124] Munteanu (2012, 119) thinks that Aristotle could not have conceived a Greek audience that would delight in watching the misfortunes of others, based on this passage (*Rhet.* 2.1379b17-19): "People become angry at those rejoicing and generally taking pleasure in the misfortunes of others, for it is a sign of being either an enemy or a despising person; and they become angry with those who do not care if they suffer". The point here, however, is how to arouse anger in a courtroom audience. Rather, Aristotle implicitly rules out Schadenfreude as a correct response to tragedy because he puts pity and fear at the core of the tragic experience. But, as we know, he often prescribes rather than describes. I hope to have shown that Greek audiences could and did applaud a character's misfortune if they were led to think it deserved.

en enemy (as for instance in Eur. *Hcld.* 939-40 or *Her.* 731-3) does not meet with a dissonant response but reinforces the spectators' satisfaction at the sight of the punished body. But even so, does Schadenfreude contribute anything to the enjoyment of a play? The emotion seems to be much at variance with the tragic pleasure, which, as the ancients themselves describe it, consists not in moral gratification but in a feeling of emotional closeness to the suffering character. The fate of a Lycus, a thoroughly bad man who falls from good fortune to misfortune, is not even tragic in Aristotelian terms because it satisfies our moral sentiment (*to philanthrôpon*) but not pity and fear, which constitute the tragic pleasure.[125] In Gorgias' equally well-known formulation, this pleasure is an "ultra-fearful shuddering and much-weeping pity and grief-loving longing":[126] a delightful pain, not a delight in someone else's pain; a parapathic emotion, not an adversarial one. "The best of us", Plato chimes in, in listening to poetic lamentations "feel pleasure (χαίρομεν), and abandoning ourselves follow these characters, sympathising with them (συμπάσχοντες) . . ." (*Resp.* 10.605c10-d4). The spectator is sad at what happens to a character and enjoys the sadness;[127] he

[125] *Poetics* 1453a1-7; 1453b11-14. For Aristotle *to philanthrôpon* is necessary for the tragic effect, but subsidiary to the rousing of pity and fear: see Moles 1984, especially 334.

[126] *Helen* 9, translation by Taplin 1978, 168. Taplin considers Gorgias' words a guide to the desired audience response. On Gorgias' statement in connection to tragedy, see also Munteanu 2012, chapter 2; Cairns 2017; Saadi Liebert 2017, 108-11.

[127] Taplin calls this pleasure "such sweet sorrow" (1978, 168). See also Heath 1987, 35: "the primary pleasure appropriate to tragedy is that which accompanies the excitation . . . of those emotions which are ordinarily found distressing". This is not tantamount to saying that antipathetic emotions have no room in tragedy; on the contrary,

delights in his own distress rather than in that character's. Expressions of Schadenfreude, as we have seen, often have the effect of rousing in the audience precisely the distressing and identificatory emotions that are typical of tragedy. This power can be considered a first aesthetic function of Schadenfreude, which is noticeable, for instance, in Sophocles' *Electra,* and especially in Euripidides' *Medea, Hippolytus* and *Bacchae.*

Another shared feature of these plays brings out a second aesthetic potential of Schadenfreude: as an enhancer of the spectators' excitement. The eager request of the gleeful character for a narrative of misfortune that skips no detail pushes the external audience to look forward to a craftily constructed tale and to the enjoyable tears that it will bring. The exultation of Clytemnestra, Medea, Theseus and the Asian Bacchants in the dire news serves to heighten the expectancy of pleasure in the messenger's speech. Audience, enjoy! the playwright implies through those thrilled listeners. The speech is going to be riveting. It will make you shudder and cry.

These workings of Schadenfreude are most manifest in *Medea*, where the protagonist's jubilation at announcement of the double death and her desire to hear the whole story

as again Heath says (16), they are engaged "when the plot has an adversarial structure". But they do not constitute the tragic pleasure. Belfiore (1992, 228) relates the pleasurability of painful emotions in the theatre to the common Greek view that there is delight in them, as already in the Homeric "there is joy in lamentation" (or this maxim in relation to tragedy, see Diano 1968, 255). Munteanu (2012, ch. 4) also connects the tragic pleasure to the enjoyment the Greeks drew from the memory of sad events. A critical review of the most important interpretations of the tragic pleasure is in Destrée 2014. See also Saadi Liebert 2017.

are compounded by the hope that it will be a story filled with horrific details. Medea's thirst for a thorough and leisurely account of her victims' death is an invitation to the audience to listen keenly to the messenger's masterful narrative, to savor each and every word, while her statement "you will delight me twice as much, if they died most miserably", speaks to the audience's craving for narratives of miseries. The keenness to hear one such narrative belongs in the so-called "tragic paradox", the pleasure we draw from calamities that occur on the stage.[128] Medea exults in the real death of Jason's bride and the Asian Bacchants in the dismemberment of Pentheus; the audience looks forward to weeping with pity and shaking with horror at the vividly described death of a character in a play. The internal addressees' joy in the ruin of the victim and their anticipated and self-regarding delight in the narrative about to dwell on that ruin will encourage the audience's self-expanding "pleasure of tears" in listening to a beautiful tale of sorrows, the pleasure that is typical of tragedy.[129]

The workings of Clytemnestra's Schadenfreude in Sophocles' *Electra* do not quite fit this description. Since the spectators know that Orestes has not died, her eagerness to hear how he met his death will not intensify their desire for a sorrowful narrative. Spurred by her impatient question "what do you say, what do you say?", they will look forward

[128] The bibliography on the paradox is vast. A recent discussion with a thorough review of sources ancient and modern is in Kidd 2019, especially chapter 3.

[129] The pity that tragedy stirs in the spectator is not selfless, for it is inextricable from a growing awareness of one's vulnerability. See Munteanu 2012, 136. But I agree with Saadi Liebert (2017) that tragedy allows us to expand our emotional capabilities and to transcend our limitations as individual subjects.

to the tale but as a virtuoso piece of fiction with no "real" referent. As in the case of *Medea*, *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae*, the spectators' aesthetic pleasure is both stirred by and removed from the malicious pleasure of the character who asks for the narrative; but here they also know that the reactions of the immediate listeners are misplaced because the story is not true. Consequently, they will experience mixed emotions: delight in a masterful tale that affects them only with its beauty; pity for its focal audience, Electra, who cannot enjoy the tale at any level but weeps in ignorance; and, as I have suggested, a tinge of Schadenfreude for Clytemnestra, who does not know that Orestes is around the corner, ready to kill her. In spite of these differences, however, in *Electra* as in *Bacchae, Medea* and *Hippolytus* a character's Schadenfreude gives advance praise, as it were, to the artistry and effectiveness of the messenger's speech.

On the other hand, where expressions of Schadenfreude are not meant to rouse pity in the audience but to build solidarity with the gleeful characters, the identification will increase the audience's pleasure in a rightful punishment. This pleasure, however, in itself is not aesthetic but moral; and it is never final and unclouded in a Greek tragedy, for otherwise the dénoument would implement an ideal that Greek dramatists and audiences felt as un-tragic: the victory of justice. The plotline that typically would elicit Schadenfreude at its outcome is "good people win, bad people lose", as in the *Odyssey*, which (almost) ends with the triumph of the rightful hero and a flicker of exultation over the massacre of his offenders; and this development does not seem to belong in fifth-century tragedy. The sequence "revenge carried out, avenger satisfied" might have shaped primitive plots, its attractiveness probably lying, as Anne Burnett argues, "in

the appropriateness with which the new crime was fitted to the old . . . - 'the quaintness of malice'-, as the Jacobeans said (*Revenger's Tragedy* III v. 108) . . . but by the 5th century the fashion had changed".[130] Schadenfreude is not un-tragic in absolute terms – "Where the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good", reads another line from *Revenger's Tragedy* – but the pattern does not seem to have appealed to a Sophocles or a Euripides and their audiences.

I anticipate a challenge: Euripides' happy-ending tragedies have a double outcome, fortunate for the good, unfortunate for the bad; and two of them bring about the downfall of an evil man and the cunning victory of his former victim, *Odyssey*-wise. The endings of *Helen* and *Iphigenia in Tauris* fully satisfy our moral sentiment: Helen, the loving and faithful wife, is reunited with her husband and escape with him from the clutches of Theoclymenos, her tyrannical suitor; Orestes and Iphigenia, likewise reunited, run away from the threatening king Thoas. But no one on stage responds with Schadenfreude to the doom of the negative character, who, furthermore, in conclusion corrects his disposition and ranges himself to the side of his former victim or rather of the events, accepting the will of destiny. For these morally satisfying endings do not come about because they are moral but because they are fated. Athena reveals to Thoas that it was Orestes' destiny (πεπρωμένον) to come to Tauris and bring back his sister and Athena's own statue to Greece (*I. T.* 1438-41), while Theoclymenos is told, by the Dioscuri, that his

[130] Burnett 1973, 2. See also Burnett 1998, 99. This scholar calls the simple plot of achieved revenge 'fundamentally antitragic' for 5th-century Greek audiences; it could more suitably be used for a satyr drama like the *Cyclops* (65, 73-9).

marriage with Helen was not destined (οὐ . . . πεπρομένοισιν) to be (*Hel.* 1646).[131] The spectators will not feel Schadenfreude at the defeat of Theoclymenos or Thoas because it is cast as inevitable, not as a comeuppance, and because the play ends in a mood of general reconciliation, appeasement and acceptance of divine will.[132]

When instead the audience does experience the kind of Schadenfreude that comes from the satisfactory punishment of a bad man, the emotion responds to an event *within* the tragedy rather than to its ending, and its effect is to underscore a transition to a tenser mood or to a gloomier development. This is a third aesthetic function of Schadenfreude, which calls to mind the joyful choral dances that occur right before the catastrophe in Sophocles, for instance in *Oedipus Rex*.[133] The comparable and sometimes related "Schadenfreude before the catastrophe" is especially apparent in *Heracles*, where the celebration of a just death serves to increase the audience's apprehension for Heracles' anticipated doom, to launch the main tragic development with its opposite emotional tones and to highlight the injustice of Heracles' destruction.

The chorus that rejoices in Lycus' death thinks that the tragedy is over but the audience knows that it is not, in fact,

[131] On the emphasis on destiny and the will of Zeus at the end of Helen, see Burnett 1971, 99.

[132] These effects are brought about by the *deus ex machina*: see Lanza 1988, 36, who also notes that the deity corrects wrong decisions or dispositions. On the *deus ex machina* as the voice of fate, see Mastronarde 2010, 188. Sophocles' *Tyro* probably ended with the rightful killing of Sidero, Tyro's tormentor, but we cannot know the responses to it.

[133] See Henrichs 1994-5; Loraux 2002, 90-1; Murnaghan 2012, 229-30.

that it has not started. *Heracles* is highly innovative with respect to the transmitted myth: Lycus is Euripides' invention, as is the role of Theseus and the placing of Heracles' madness after his last labor (see Bond 1989, xviii-xxx). The audience, however, does expect Heracles to be driven mad and to kill wife and children, and, therefore, will follow the celebration of Lycus' murder with anxiety.[134] The celebration indeed turns out to be the foil to the core tragedy;[135] a foil both in tone, the general happiness breaking into panic (815-6, 818-9), and in moral content, for the immediate answer to the last words of the ode, "and now it will be seen in this struggle between sworded warriors whether justice still finds favor with the gods" (811-4), is the chilling apperarance of Lyssa and Iris, who turns the action on a dime, instantly overthrowing all theodicy.[136]

Iris casts Hera's punishment of Heracles as proof of the power of the gods but not of their justice: "the gods will be nothing and it is mortals who will be great if he is not punished" (841-2).[137] Lyssa's reluctance to destroy a hero and Iris' pressure to obey orders demonstrate that the punishment is a sheer victory of Hera, regardless of her victim's deserts. Amphitryo's cries (ἰώ μοι μέλεος, 886)

[134] Mastronarde (2010, 111-2) speaks of "a frisson of anticipation of evil".

[135] For the reversal, see Henrichs 1996, 61; Griffith 2006, 53. In *Heracles* the chorus does not misread events (as Sophoclean choruses do when they joyfully dance) but knows less than the audience, which expects a turn for the worse.

[136] See Griffith 2006, 82; Mastronarde 2010, 168.

[137] On the disjunction between power and morality in the behavior of the Euripidean gods, see Schein 2009, 124, whose remarks are particularly valid for *Heracles.*

repeat Lycus' in substance and sound (ἰώ μοί μοι, with the chorus calling them a μέλος, 751); and both are caused by the murderous Heracles, who, furthermore, has not appeared after his killing of Lycus. As a result of his absence, the audience in a tight sequence hears two almost identical cries from offstage, experiencing almost a collapsing of the two scenes, of a rightful death and "an unrightful punishment" (888).[138] The merging and the reversal extend to Heracles imagining that Hera will celebrate his destruction as the chorus did Lycus': "May the illustrious wife of Zeus dance!" (1303). The old men danced to applaud a just death; Heracles, the rightful killer, is then brought low by the unequal power of a goddess, whom he imagines to dance after she has accomplished her own unjust deed. A vision of Hera's spiteful celebration superseeds a morally satisfying Schadenfreude. With hindsight, the chorus' and Amphitryo's exultation over a rightful murder serves to heighten the most disturbing features of this play: what has the hero Heracles done to deserve murderous madness? And why do the gods let Hera have her way (see Griffith 2006, 45)?

In the other three plays in which the audience is spurred to align itself with a character's Schadenfreude, the emotion likewise yields to a darker mood. In *Electra*, the celebration of Aegisthus' death provides a foil for the tragic climax. The collective jubilation, which the chorus takes as evidence that "great is the strength of Justice" (958), quickly gives way to the questioning of justice in relation to the matricide (967-

[138] On the significance of Heracles' absence from the stage for the audience's experience, see Griffith 2006, 54. The chorus' calling the murderous madness a dance (889) further connects the scenes. Bond (1989 on 886-909) notes other significant echoes of the ode sung after the killing of Lycus.

87), ending with the departure of the former *kallinikos* for "a contest (ἀγώνισμα) that will be bitter for me, not sweet" (987). The athletic victor will not win the next match. Orestes' words, his last, orient the audience's disposition vis-à-vis the murder that he is about to carry out: pity for the victim, horror for its execution. These two emotions sound the dominant notes in the killing of Clytemnestra and in the response to it, culminating in a long-drawn joint lament, filled with pity for all the parties, while Aegisthus' violent death inspired choral Schadenfreude without a tear.

In *Heraclidae* and *Hecuba* as well, Schadenfreude is replaced by a mournful or somber mood. When, after enduring Alcmena's abuse and threats for forty lines (*Hcld.* 940-80), Eurystheus opens his mouth, he speaks like a good man, saying that Hera has forced him into enmity with Heracles and that he has played his part as any honorable man would. His words "provide a direct contrast to the rage of Alcmene" (Visser 1982, 412). The messenger has presented him as a coward, but on stage he proves himself composed and brave.[139] He even praises Heracles: "though he is my enemy, I will say good things about him, since he was noble" (998-9). Finally he reveals an oracle predicting that his death on Athenian soil will protect the city against Argos and the ungrateful descendants of Heracles' children. Schadenfreude at Eurystheus' humiliating exposure is deflated by his unexpectedly admirable behavior and by his pronouncement

[139] See De Jong 1991, 113-4; Mossman 1995, 186n51: "The unexpected dignity and decency of Eurystheus contrasts favourably with Alcmene's implacability at the end of *Hcld.*" On Eurystheus' rehabilitation, see also Mastronarde 2010, 258. Burnett (1998, 154n 51), in contrast, is not convinced that Eurystheus' speech inspires sympathy.

that his dead body will help Athens, while the progeny of the woman who is now sending him off to die will become the city's enemy.[140]

In *Hecuba* the spectators' enjoyment of the protagonist's gloating is even more short-lived. For her self-confident question: "Why should I not rejoice, since I have avenged myself?", meets with Polymestor's rejoinder: "Soon you will not . . ." (1258-9). His answer turns the tables around: Hecuba becomes the victim again, of his prophecies, which look to the misfortunes destined for her, for her daughter Cassandra, and with her for Agamemnon. Hecuba's Schadenfreude and the audience's likely solidarity with it applaud the rightful revenge that redresses the balance of her misfortunes; but new misfortunes lie ahead and the old ones do not move into the background, on the contrary, they are stressed again at the very end of the play, which elicits pity for her ("You, unhappy Hecuba, go bury your two bodies", 1287-8) and for the women of the chorus departing to bear up with "the toils of slavery" in obedience to "inflexible necessity" (1293-5). Both the audience and Hecuba will have forgotten their Schadenfreude when presented with these mournful prospects.

An apparent exception is Sophocles' *Electra*, where the emotion does not seem to give way at the end. As we have seen, the audience anticipates with relish the killing of both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, who themselves display glee at the announcement of Orestes' death. The spectators' Schadenfreude targeted at the characters' own calls to mind the possible Schadenfreude of a Homeric audience at the suitors' blindness, as they revel in the bloody defeat of Irus (*Od.* 18. 100) without knowing that it foreshadows their own much bloodier death. As in that episode, in *Electra* the

[140] On the shift of sympathy at the end of the play, see Wohl 2015, 2.

spectators' emotion feeds off dramatic irony and is spurred by the malicious and misplaced joy of the unknowing couple. Aegisthus, whose display of joy is more open than his companion's and whose murder is morally unquestionable, will rouse an even keener Schadenfreude than Clytemnestra. The audience will be delighted to see him fall into the trap (he exhibits triumphant complacency right before) and will happily follow the revengeful killers who escort him to his execution. The ending features the chorus proclaiming Orestes and Electra free of suffering, "fulfilled by today's enterprise". The play's last word, τελεωθέν (fulfilled), seems to put a definitive stop to the family's misfortunes, countering the last words of *Choephoroi*: "when will the rage of Ate ever stop, put to sleep?" But Sophocles has his characters say "the end" because he and his audience know that it isn't.[141] The spectators will anticipate the sufferings ahead rather than relishing the finality of Aegisthus' murder. Schadenfreude will not be with them when, as it were, the curtain falls.

3.2 In and out of the Theatre: the Special Case of Aeschylus' *Persians*

The one tragedy where Schadenfreude might have participated in the final mood of the audience is Aeschylus' *Persians*.

[141] See Winnington-Ingram 1980, 225-6. This critic (227-8) also points out that the ending is not happier than in Aeschylus: the Erinyes do not appear because the protagonist is Electra and their absence also means no resolution. On the unease yet lingering at the end of the play, see also Burnett 1998, 140-1. In contrast, Allen-Hornblower thinks that Sophocles disposes of any ambivalence surrounding the matricide in *Choephoroi* (2016, 210-1).

Toward the end of the long lament that concludes the play, Xerxes imagines the Persian debacle to delight the Athenians:

> Χο. παπαῖ παπαῖ.
> Ξε. καὶ πλέον ἢ παπαῖ μὲν οὖν.
> Χο. δίδυμα γάρ ἐστι καὶ τριπλᾶ.
> Ξε. λυπρά, χάρματα δ' ἐχθροῖς.
> (1031-4)
>
> [CHORUS Alas, alas! / XERXES No, more than alas! / CHORUS Yes, twofold and threefold are our ills! / XERXES Sorrows for us, but joys for our enemies.]

Xerxes speaks Homeric language: the antithesis "sorrow for us, but joy for the enemy" is Iliadic, as is the term *charma* in this context.[142] The phrase both raises the Greek victory to epic proportions, perhaps enhancing the audience's sense of heroic achievement (see Rosenbloom 206, 134), and brings out Xerxes' fallen status, his failure, as it were, to abide by the originally Homeric motto "don't give joy to your enemy". For Xerxes speaks the Homeric phrase not as a warning against behaviors that could rouse Schadenfreude, but to describe himself when he is utterly and visibly ruined and his ruin could indeed be a source of delight for the enemy. The possibility is real because Xerxes' enemy is right there, in the theatre. The play was produced in 472, eight years after the end of the war, and therefore the dual identity of the spectators, as citizens-soldiers and as tragic audience, must have played a crucial role in determining their emotional reactions. Did they respond as war enemies? Did Xerxes' imagining cue them to bask in their heroic feat, indulge in Schadenfreude and savor the downfall

[142] See *Il.* 3.51; 6.82; 10.193; 23.342. See also Hes. *Op.* 701.

of the Persians? Or did they lament with him as they followed a tragedy that resonated with their own sufferings and could even be their own?

Critics have been split on this issue. "Some", writes Christopher Pelling, "have taken this [episode] as an exercise in *Schadenfreude*, with Athenians revelling in the discomfiture and humiliation of a hated enemy", Xerxes' own words *charmata d'echthrois* serving as motto for this approach.[143] But now the tide has turned. Scholars tend to answer either "no, the spectators will not experience Schadenfreude but will identify with the defeated enemy", or "some will, others won't", or even "contrary emotions will coexist in the same spectator".[144]

The possibility that members of the audience felt a tinge of Schadenfreude should be left open.[145] The statement "sorrows for us but joys for our enemies" comes shortly after a praise

[143] Pelling 1997, 13-4, with a review of scholarship. Reviews are also in Hall (1989, 70-72) and Rosenbloom (2006, 143).

[144] No: Loraux 2002, 134; Dué 2002, chapter 2, especially p. 60; Garvie 2009, on the passage; variety of responses in the audience or within the same spectator: Stanford 1983, 59; Goldhill 1988, 193; Pelling 1997, 13-7; 2007, 149; Pucci 2002, xi; Rosenbloom 2006, 141-45 (though this scholar leans toward "no" on pp. 134-5); Munteanu 2012 ch. 6. On coexisting emotions in tragic audiences, see Wohl 2015, xiii. Hall's reading (1989, 70-100) accommodates Greek proud self-fashioning in opposition to the "barbarian", identified especially by linguistic and psychological markers (hierarchicalism, luxuriousness, emotionalism) and political system, with the "genuinely tragic *pathos*" (100) of the play, which precludes 19th-century interpretations of it as self-congratulatory. The most sanguine advocate of its patriotism in recent scholarship is Harrison 2000, especially 51-7. Harrison (2000, 55) takes Xerxes' fear as hinting to the audience's actual delight.

[145] See Heath 1987, 67, who refers to the scholia on the play.

of Greek valor: (Chorus) "the people of Ionia do not fly from battle. (Xerxes) They are extremely warlike" (1025-6). Some in the audience will enjoy hearing Xerxes vent his sorrow right after hearing their military strength extolled. They will already have been stirred to patriotic pride by the praise of Athenian freedom ("not being slaves or subjects to any man", 242), by the reminder of their democratic institutions (213) and by the description of Athens' army, "which did much harm to the Medes" (236), and formidable power: "terrible is Athens for its enemies" (286);[146] and of course by the long narrative of their victory and the vivid account of the Persian collapse.[147] At hearing of the Persians' innumerable misfortunes (429-30) and of the "ignominious death" of their noblemen (444), the audience was likely pleased. The relish with which the ghost of the dead Darius anticipated more Persian blood to flow – there will be another "clotted libation of slain men's blood" at Plataea (816-7) – might have been yet another kindling of delight.

Furthermore, Xerxes is an embodiment of *hybris*, a behavior that strongly militates against rousing the pity and sympathy that audiences normally feel for the suffering of tragic heroes.[148] The ghost of Darius, whose perspective on the disaster guides the audience's because of his experience and his position of moral and intellectual superiority in upholding values that would be recognised as Greek,[149] puts great emphasis on his son's uncontainable ambition and trespassing of limits, stirring the audience to believe

[146] On δαΐοις as "the enemies" rather than "us wretched", see Garvie 2009, while Broadhead (1960) prefers the latter.

[147] On these patriotic elements, see Harrison 2000, 51-7.

[148] I am echoing Fisher 1992, 327.

[149] See Hall 1989, 70; Pelling 1997, 15; Rosenbloom 2006, 103.

that the Persian defeat was deserved. The same holds true for the sufferings still to come, which, as Darius states from the depths of his wisdom, are the retribution for Xerxes' arrogance and the Persians' lawless actions, the plunder of Athens' sacred statues and the destruction of its temples (809-15).

To others, however, or simultaneously to the same spectator, the very mention of the sacking, burning and forced evacuation of their city will have revived the memory of the incommensurable loss that shortly preceded the Athenian victory.[150] As David Rosenbloom puts it, "remembering the victory at Salamis from the perspective of the Persian disaster allows the Athenians to celebrate their greatest victory in their history and to lament their greatest defeat" (2006, 82). Persian losses resonate with Athenian losses. The image of "the harvest of tears" that has ripened from Xerxes' *hybris* (821-2) unites Persians and Athenians: figuratively it applies to the Persians mourning their young, literally to the Athenians mourning the destruction of their land (124). Or rather: to the Athenians both literally and figuratively, for many in the audience will be stirred to remember the death of their own young.[151]

A further incitement to pity and identification with the defeated Persians is the collective nature of the disaster: the tragedy's protagonist is the chorus of old men, not Xerxes;[152] and their songs lament the helplessness of the

[150] On the debated questions surrounding the evacuations, see recently Garland 2017.

[151] See Munteanu 2012, 153. Rosenbloom (2006, 126) adds the observation that the Athenians likely lost more men in battle between 480 and 472 than in previous history.

[152] See Perrotta 1931, 55, and Loraux 2002, 89.

most vulnerable population, wives, mothers and old men like themselves, who have lost protection with the young men gone. The repeated evocation of collective Persian mourning and of bereaved mothers and wives (62-4; 133-9; 288-9; 537-45) cannot but have moved the audience. And so probably did Xerxes' gesture of putting his disaster before the eyes of the spectators as of the chorus–"-see what is left of the army?- I see, I see" (1017-8) – in the final lament (see Munteanu 2012, 161). A lament, it is worth noting, from which condemnation of Xerxes' audacity and limitless ambition disappears, and praise of Greek valor almost. As Vincenzo di Benedetto observes, the baricenter of the tragedy shifts from a "fault/punishment" pattern in the Darius episode to the mode of an unjudgmental lamentation (1991, 18-9). The change suggests that Aeschylus does not want to leave the audience with the satisfied feeling that Xerxes' disaster was deserved and that Athens has achieved a great victory. As A. F. Garvie further notes, while in Athenian funeral speeches the enemy's lamentation is part of the praise of Athens, in the play's lament "all the emphasis is on the pain" (2009 on 1034).

The song draws the audience nearer to Xerxes also by its antiphonal structure, which unites his suffering with the chorus' own, making him part of the collective disaster, and by its agitated rhythm, its strong and recurring phonic effects, and especially its loud wails, which increase toward the end. The audience hears, more and more intensified until in the final lines it predominates, the alogical and cacophonic voice of despair:

Χο. ἰὼ ἰὼ Περσὶς αἶα δύσβατος.
Ξε. ἰωὰ δὴ κατ' ἄστυ.

Χο. ἰωὰ δῆτα, ναὶ ναί.
Ξε. γοᾶσθ' ἁβροβάται.
Χο. ἰὼ ἰὼ Περσὶς αἶα δύσβατος.
Ξε. ἠὴ ἠὴ τρισκάλμοισιν
ἠὴ ἠὴ βάρισιν ὀλόμενοι.
Χο. πέμψω τοί σε δυσθρόοις γόοις.
(1070-7)

[Chorus *Iô, iô* Persian soil, hard for our steps. / Xerxes *Iôa* indeed, through the city! / Chorus *Iôa* indeed, indeed! / Xerxes Wail, stepping languidly. / Chorus *Iô, iô* Persian soil, hard for our steps. / Xerxes *Ê ê ê ê* – with our boats – / *Ê ê ê ê* – of three rows of oars, they have died! / Chorus I will escort you with my ill-sounding wails!]

This increasingly irrational lament, with its hyperemotional and self-absorbed cries, has appeared "oriental" to some critics: nothing like a Greek public lament.[153] To this argument, however, others have replied that an Athenian audience recognised in Xerxes' lament its own funeral practices, its own exerience of mourning, the voices and sounds of its own laments.[154] And there is more: the lament probably roused pity as such, regardless of its ethnic colouring. We can agree with Nicole Loraux that "in the cries of the defeated enemy, tragedy taught them [the Athenians

[153] See Hall 1989, 83-4; Holst-Warhaft 1992, 133; Rosenbloom 2006, 125.

[154] Pelling 1997, 14. More generally on the Greek content and emotional force of the Persian elders' songs, see Dué 2002, chapter 2, and on the enduring practice of wailing and screaming in Greek laments, Alexiou 1974, chapter 1. A crucial difference must however be stressed, with Pelling (above) and Hall (1989, 84): that in the play the dirges are performed by men.

in the audience] to recognise something that touched them above and beyond their identity as Athenians".[155]

A final deterrent against Schadenfreude, one more grounded in contemporary history, could be the resonance of Xerxes' downfall for Athenian citizens in the late 470s, when the city was successfully embarking on its imperial expansion. As again Rosenbloom has stressed, the punishment of Xerxes' *hybris* could have issued a warning against Athens' own nascent imperial *hybris*.[156] On this reading, his words "our sorrows are joys for our enemies" might have pushed those in the audience sensitive to the dangers of expansionism to anticipate the delight of Athens' own prospective enemies should its imperial efforts meet with disaster. I can picture Xerxes' outcry to work as a restraining force similar to fear of Schadenfreude in Homer: not for him, for it is too late, but for (some of) his "imitators", the Athenians: now they hear their enemy imagining their joy, but if they keep on with their own aggressive imperial policies they might become the ruined Xerxes, "a joy for the enemy". Indeed, the implicit warning, if

[155] 2002, 48. See also Parker 1997, 149 (referencing Vidal-Naquet): "the Athenian spectator could . . . [not] survey the errors and disasters of not-Athens with a detached complacency, without a sense that the afflictions of not-Athenians could also be his own." Di Benedetto (1991, 19) speaks of a "pre-political" dimension, in which the distinction Greek/barbarian is superseeded. The audience's pity for Xerxes shows that Aristotle's requirement that a misfortune must be underserved to arouse pity is too restrictive (and not universally shared in Greece): see Heath 1987, 81-3. Xerxes is undeserving of misfortune in a non-moral sense, because of the huge contrast between his prosperity and his disaster.

[156] 2006, 97, 134-5, 141 and *passim*. This is perhaps the core argument of Rosenbloom's book. The argument was already advanced by Thalmann 1980, 281-2.

any, turned out to hit the mark, at least if we believe Isocrates where he states that during the Peloponnesian War non-Athenians often came to attend the public funerals in the city "not as fellow-mourners but to rejoice over our calamities" (συνησθησόμενοι ταῖς ἡμετέραις συμφοραῖς, *Peace* 87). Isocrates is attacking Athenian democratic clichés and institutions (see Michelini 1998), but the hostile sentiments, especially envy and hatred, inspired by Athenian power even prior to the war, make it not unlikely that his extraordinary claim bears some truth.[157] For the elites of Isocrates' time, his real adressees, the specter of anti-Athenian Schadenfreude during the Peloponnesian War should function as a red flag against renewing a policy of aggression, lest the other Greeks rejoice again in the city's losses as they allegedly have done in the war. To some of the Athenians watching the *Persians* in 472, Xerxes' mental picture of Athenian Schadenfreude might have awakened similar worries rather than allowing them to indulge smugly in the emotion attributed to them by their ruined enemy.

[157] Foreigners could participate in the public rituals in honor of those who died in war (Thuc. 2.34.4) and they were present at the funeral speech of Pericles in Thucydides (2.36.4). Michelini (1998, 124-5) takes Isocrates' passage as descriptive. On envy for Athens, see, e.g., Thucydides 2.11.2; 2.8.5; 2.63.1; 5.95, 2.64.3-5, with Orwin 1994, 22. See also Lysias *Funeral Oration* [2], 48; Plato *Menexenus* 242a, 243b.

Epilogue

In conclusion, I will briefly ask whether Schadenfreude retains the same connotations, shades of meaning and applications throughout the tragic genre.

All three playwrights exploit it as a by-product of enmity and an enhancer of odiousness; it is also a consistent object of fear, though proportionally more so for Sophoclean heroes than for other figures; and characters manifest it across the board, but its loudest and brashest expressions are in Euripides. This tragedian is also the one who makes the most of Schadenfreude to draw attention to the artfulness of his messenger's speeches. He does so in three plays, while the only other tragedy that relies on the gleeful emotion to this effect is Sophocles' *Electra.* Of course we cannot draw firm conclusions from this ratio because many of Sophocles' plays are lost and we have more by Euripides. But it would not be surprising if this tragedian, the master in the sub-genre of the messenger-speech, had mobilised this emotional device more often than his colleague in order to whet the audience's appetite for one such speech.

Another inflection of Schadenfreude seems uniquely Euripidean: as exultation in justice done, which the audience is invited to share with the rightfully successful party. The plays I have assembled in the section "Schadenfreude as Audience Response" are all by Euripides except *Prometheus*

Bound, where the emotion, however, does not target an actual punishment but a hoped-for one. Consequently, Euripidean is also the exploitation of this celebratory Schadenfreude for the aesthetic purpose of heightening a transition to the gloomier events and moods which run to the end of the play.

On the other hand, Euripides does not let Schadenfreude crown the final victory of the sympathetic characters in his happy-ending tragedies. In this he agrees with his fellow-dramatists, for the emotion, whether expressed on stage or roused in the theatre, always subsides before the play concludes. Even the final lines of the *Persians,* in which Xerxes vents his fear of the enemy's glee, aim to draw the spectators close to his suffering rather than to incite a burst of rejoicing in the defeat of a hated foe, and one guilty of *hybris* at that. No extant tragedy ends with characters delighting in the destruction of an enemy and transmitting their delight to the audience. Schadenfreude in celebration of punishment only responds to a development, never to the plot as a whole, apparently because the pattern "avenger satisfied" was felt as un-tragic. The few morally rewarding endings in the genre rather bring about a general resolution or pacification.

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Schadenfreude, a German term but largely used in English as in other languages, means "joy in other people's misfortunes". It is a special emotion, which provides a malicious pleasure; it is tied up with envy, though it can also help improve one's self-esteem or reinforce group cohesion. Schadenfreude is universal and existed already among the ancient Greeks, who also had a word for it. Starting with an analysis of the Greek lexicon related to Schadenfreude, Silvia Montiglio in this book tackels the question systematically for the first time, with a specific focus on tragedy. The examination of numerous scenes from the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides shows how Schadenfreude in tragedy is mostly perceived as a dangerous force, which often takes the shape of derision. It is kindred to enmity and expresses hatred; it accompanies a pre-taste or an after-taste of revenge. Tragic poets invite reflections about the morality of the emotion: is it acceptable for a mother to rejoice in the death of her son turned enemy? Or for a god to exult in the ruin of a human being who has offended him? And how was the audience supposed to respond? This study deals with these and related questions: it examines the psychological, anthropological and dramaturgical connotations of Schadenfreude, its contribution to the characterisation of several characters, the reactions, of approval or censure, manifested for instance by the chorus or by the messenger, and the relationship that can be established with the tragic emotions par excellence, that is, pity and fear.

Silvia Montiglio (*Doctorat*, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales), has taught at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and at the Johns Hopkins University. Her research interests span Greek and Roman literature, the history of ideas, and the reception of classical texts. She is the author of numerous books, the latest of which is an edition, translation and commentary of Heliodorus' novel *Aethiopica*, in two volumes (Fondazione Lorenzo Valla-Mondadori, 2023 and 2024).

Cover:
Slab with six theatrical masks,
probably from the decoration of the
Theatre of Dionysos, 2nd cent. BC

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