

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Stesichorus on Stage

Book Section

How to cite:

Swift, Laura (2015). Stesichorus on Stage. In: Finglass, P. J. and Kelly, A. eds. Stesichorus in Context. Cambridge University Press, pp. 125–144.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2015 Cambridge University Press

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://www.cambridge.org/gb/academic/subjects/classical-studies/classical-literature/stesichorus-context>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Stesichorus on stage

Laura Swift

The influence of Stesichorus on Greek tragedy is generally accepted.¹ Indeed, scholars have gone as far as to call the poems ‘tragedies in embryo’,² or to describe Stesichorean characterisation as ‘a prototype of the tragic principal’.³ Yet most discussions of the relationship between Stesichorus and tragedy suggest little detailed engagement between the texts. Rather, the focus is confined either to the broad shaping of the plot (for example, mythological innovations such as Helen’s absence from Troy), or stylistic devices such as tragic irony, the significance of speeches, or the preponderance of female characters.⁴ To some extent this is an inevitable consequence of the randomness of selection. Even where Stesichorus’ choice of myth overlaps with a tragic version, if only a few lines of the Stesichorean poem survive, we are lucky if there is any visible connection between the texts. In the case of the *Palinode*, for example, our knowledge of the plot enables us to see links with Euripides’ *Helen*, but too little remains to allow us to comment on anything other than the general handling of the myth.⁵ Is it then impossible to identify Stesichorean traces in our close reading of tragedy? This article will argue that it is not, and that a close analysis can shed light on how the tragedians allude to the details of his poetry.

Tragedy’s metrical and thematic flexibility and its tendency towards mimesis make it adept at incorporating other poetic forms. In the main, interactions between lyric and tragedy tend to take the form of allusions to the tropes of lyric genres rather than intertexts with specific pieces.⁶ Tragedy is aimed at a mass audience and to be successful, tragedians must take account of differing levels of knowledge. The use of (say) a *paian*-tag is likely to be more accessible than an allusion to a particular Pindaric *Paian*, since many audience members may not know particular texts, but still have a feeling for what certain genres tend to sound like. While some lyric forms were still performed in Athens, an individual would only know canonical works if they had formed part of his education (reinforced through institutions such as the symposium, which would encourage him to memorise and re-perform famous pieces). Moreover, tragedy (unlike comedy, which can explicitly alert the audience to intertextuality) is confined to its mythological setting, and allusions must be intelligible on their own merits. We find relatively few references to lyric poets compared to allusions to Homer, whose status as the ‘core curriculum’ in a literary education would have made him more widely accessible than other poets.

Yet although tragedy prefers the generic to the specific, we nevertheless find intertextuality with lyric poetry. An example is the evocation of Pindar’s ninth *Paian* in the parodos of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, where the opening words ἀκτὶς ἀελίου are the same.⁷ It seems likely that only a limited section of Sophocles’ audience would have recognised the

¹ See e.g. Bowra (1961) 140 (‘his greatest influence was on the tragedians’), Stephanopoulos (1980) 18.

² Tsitsibakou-Vasalos (1989) 87.

³ Burnett (1988) 129.

⁴ Finglass (forthcoming) argues that verbal connections are not evident in the surviving texts.

⁵ For a recent reconstruction of the poem, see Kelly (2007c).

⁶ Swift (2010) 27.

⁷ See Rutherford (2001) 199–200, Swift (2010) 29–30.

reference, but those who did could appreciate it, while those who did not would not be alienated or made to feel stupid. Tragedy's need to have broad appeal applies to the upper as well as the lower echelons of Athenian society. An astute poet would ensure his play included sophisticated material to challenge and flatter the highly educated spectator, just as he would need to ensure that it contained a good balance of excitement, spectacle, and emotional intensity to appeal to a broad range of tastes. The fact that Aristophanes parodies Stesichorus without naming him suggests that his work was well enough known in fifth-century Athens for it to be worth the trouble.⁸ For a tragedian, Stesichorus would be a fruitful choice: his use of triadic structure creates a natural bridge, as does his combination of mythological narrative and lyric form. Moreover, his abilities as a mythological innovator makes him appealing, since tragedy's competitive framework put pressure on the poets to find new ways of telling familiar stories.⁹ A less informed audience member might be impressed by seeing a myth told in a fashion he had not previously encountered, while a more cultured one might appreciate the Stesichorean allusion.

The surviving corpus preserves two poems where enough remains for us to see detailed overlap with tragedy: the *Oresteia* (in particular frs. 179–81 Finglass) and the *Thebais* (fr. 97).¹⁰ Stesichorus' influence on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* has long been noted, but we can go beyond general issues of plot to see his impact on details of characterisation and imagery.¹¹ The *Thebais* offers a more substantial passage of Stesichorus to work with, and traces of his influence can be seen (at varying levels of detail) in plays dealing with the Labdacids by all three tragedians: Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and Euripides' *Phoenician Women*. The range of plays in which we find these allusions and the differing ways in which the poets draw on Stesichorus confirm his importance as a source for tragedy.

THE *ORESTEIA*

Parallels between Stesichorus' *Oresteia* and tragedy have mostly been discussed in terms of the unfolding of the plot. This is understandable, since much of our information comes from testimonia about the content of Stesichorus' poem rather than from his original lines; however, we can tease out more detailed ways in which Stesichorus influenced characterisation and even imagery. A fragment of an ancient commentary (fr. 181a Finglass) helpfully lists Stesichorean innovations adopted by the tragedians: Orestes was recognised by a lock of his hair (as in Aeschylus), he received a bow from Apollo (as in Euripides), and Iphigenia came to Aulis on the pretence of a marriage to Achilles (as in Euripides, although this was also found in the *Cypria*). The scholiast on *Choephoroi* also tells us that Orestes' nurse played a role (fr. 179, although this seems to have been the case on a Foce del Sele metope too from the middle of the sixth century). Finally, Plutarch quotes two lines showing that Clytemnestra dreamed of a snake like her Aeschylean successor (fr. 180).

⁸ See Bowie, this volume; thus Finglass (forthcoming 1).

⁹ On Stesichorus' mythical innovations, see Finglass (2014a) 32–9.

¹⁰ I follow Finglass (2014c) in using this name to refer to the poem, though the original title is not attested.

¹¹ For Stesichorus' influence on Aeschylus cf. Murray (1897) 103–4, Ferrari (1938), Stephanopoulos (1980) 133–9, Neschke (1986).

Original Stesichorean lines survive in only two of these instances, but even the testimonia allow us to go beyond the mere plot outline. We know that Stesichorus included a scene in which Orestes was recognised by the means of a lock of hair. The cutting of a lock indicates a grave offering, which suggests that some of the action took place at Agamemnon's tomb (at the least, Orestes must have visited the tomb to leave the lock), and the recognition may also have taken place there.¹² It is most likely that the person who recognises Orestes is Electra,¹³ in which case we can infer that the poem to some extent explored her changing emotional state. The inclusion of Electra would represent a change to the Homeric version of the myth; while we cannot judge the exact role Stesichorus' poem played in this development, all the tragic versions of the myth adopt her as a significant figure.¹⁴ Moreover, locating the action at the tomb of Agamemnon has a symbolic function, since it connects Orestes' return to the act of vengeance, and foregrounds his motivations for the matricide. Aeschylus makes similar use of this motif in *Choephoroi*, where the setting of the tomb allows the siblings to commune with their dead father and imagine the significance of the coming killings (315–509).

Stesichorus' poem is the earliest text to involve Orestes' Nurse, and her presence sheds light on the themes of his version.¹⁵ Although we do not know what role she played (she may have rescued him when Agamemnon was killed, as in Pindar and Pherecydes, or helped him on his return, as in Aeschylus), the fact that she is given a name suggests that her role was significant.¹⁶ Since we know that the poem presented Clytemnestra as a major character and dwelt on her psychology in some detail (see below), the presence of the Nurse is revealing. In having her help Orestes, Stesichorus creates a contrast between two mother figures: Clytemnestra, who fears her son and is killed by him, and the substitute mother, who supports him. This symbolism is adopted by Aeschylus' portrayal of the Nurse, whose grief acts as a foil for Clytemnestra's relief at her son's death (737–65), while her description of her care for the infant Orestes (749–62) highlights the hollowness of Clytemnestra's appeal to her maternal role (896–8).¹⁷ If the Stesichorean Nurse helped Orestes on his return, the situational parallel with Aeschylus is closer; conversely, if she saved him as a baby, we can see an allusion to this protective role in Aeschylus' description of the infant Orestes' helplessness and the toil she took in raising him.

Nevertheless, Aeschylus seems to alter the characterisation of the Nurse from previous versions of the myth. Pindar, Pherecydes, and possibly the Foce del Sele metopes,

¹² Cf. March (1987) 91, Finglass (forthcoming 1).

¹³ So also Finglass (forthcoming 1).

¹⁴ Electra is attested in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* with her sister Iphimede (fr. 23(a) M–W), but we do not know what role she played in the story. The poet Xanthus, who is said to have influenced Stesichorus, mentioned Electra's fate after the death of her father (fr. 700 *PMG*), and may also have affected the tragedians' versions of the myth.

¹⁵ Stes. fr. 179 Finglass. It is possible that the Nurse appears in the metopes from the temple of Hera at Foce del Sele, which date from the middle of the sixth century and depict a woman carrying an axe, who is grasped from behind by another woman; see Prag (1985) 11, Davies and Finglass (2014) introduction to *Oresteia* (p. 000). If this second woman is the Nurse, both Stesichorus and the sculptor may be drawing on the same tradition that gives her a role in the myth.

¹⁶ Pher. fr. 134 *EGM*, Pind. *Pyth.* 11.17.

¹⁷ The issue is not that using a nurse makes Clytemnestra abnormal (nurses would have been common in wealthy households) but that the Nurse's speech undermines Clytemnestra's claim to deserve Orestes' mercy because it was she who nursed him as an infant.

depict her as active and courageous. The two poets present her as intervening to save the infant Orestes (according to Pherecydes losing her own child in the process), while in the *Foce del Sele* metope, the character identified as the Nurse physically grapples with Clytemnestra to restrain her. Conversely, Aeschylus' Nurse is a more passive figure, who requires instructions from the Chorus to play any useful role in the action (*Cho.* 770–82), while the vulgar content of her speech makes her humorous rather than altruistic. Stesichorus, like Pherecydes, gives the Nurse the aristocratic name Laodameia, while Pindar's Arsinoia is similarly upper-class; conversely Aeschylus uses the typically slavish Cilissa. This might suggest that Stesichorus' Nurse is closer to the other pre-tragic incarnations, and that Aeschylus deliberately changes her usual associations in order to differentiate his version.

The story of Iphigenia's marriage is found in the *Cypria* as well as Stesichorus,¹⁸ but its inclusion confirms his interest in Clytemnestra's characterisation. Iphigenia's death provides Clytemnestra with a motivation to murder Agamemnon. However, the deceit involved in the story of the false marriage casts Agamemnon in a negative light and so increases our sympathy for Clytemnestra.¹⁹ The story also creates pathos by juxtaposing the ultimate goal of a young girl's life with the destruction of that hope, an idea whose power is attested by the pervasive 'marriage to death' motif in Greek literature and art.²⁰ Here too we see a focus on female psychology, echoed in the tragedians' later exploration of these ideas. Since Clytemnestra must have also been a victim of the pretence, the story suggests an interest in exploring the origins of her hatred of Agamemnon, whether or not this was dealt with to the same depth as Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, a play which traces her development from a loyal wife and loving mother into an embittered woman.²¹

In the remaining two fragments, the survival of Stesichorus' actual words allows us to go further. The bow of Apollo is cited for its influence on Euripides' *Orestes*, where Orestes recalls how the god gave it to him to defend himself from the Erinyes.²² The presence of the bow in Stesichorus shows that his Orestes too was tormented by the Erinyes, and that this was a significant plot element, as in Aeschylus. When we examine the Stesichorean lines in more detail, we find a still closer connection:

τό—
 ξα] τάδε δώσω παλά—
 μα|ικιν ἑμαῖσι κεκασμένα
 ..|[ἐ]πικρατέως βάλλειν'

‘I shall give you this bow,
 excellent in my hands ...
 to shoot powerfully.’

¹⁸ *Cypria* arg. 8 *GEF*; Stes. fr. 181a.25-7 Finglass. The false marriage is found in Soph. fr. 305 *TrGF*, Eur. *El.* 1020–3 as well as being the centrepiece of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*.

¹⁹ I agree with the criticism of Finglass (forthcoming) directed at the argument of Neschke (1986) 296 that Iphigenia's sacrifice shows Agamemnon's piety.

²⁰ See Seaford (1987), Rehm (1994), Swift (2010) 251–2.

²¹ Cf. Ferrari (1938) 21.

²² Stes. fr. 181a.14-24 Finglass, Eur. *Or.* 268-9.

The poet brings Apollo in as a character; he acts as Orestes' personal guardian, offering him support against his enemies. We find a similar characterisation of the relationship at the start of *Eumenides*, where Apollo appears on stage to emphasise that he will act as Orestes' protector (64–6):

οὔτοι προδώσω, διὰ τέλους δέ σοι φύλαξ
ἔγγυς παρεστῶς καὶ πρόσωθ' ἀποστατῶν
ἐχθροῖσι τοῖς σοῖς οὐ γενήσομαι πέπων.

'I will not betray you, I will be your guardian until the end,
whether I stand close by you or far away,
and I will not be soft towards your enemies.'

Though the verbal details are different, the language of military protection acts as a link. In Stesichorus this protection is offered in literal terms through the bow, which is both a symbol of the god's power and a real weapon. Conversely, the Aeschylean Apollo brandishes his bow against the Erinyes (179–84), but the violence is merely rhetorical, since they are not intimidated and engage in a battle of words with the god. It is significant that Aeschylus' Apollo keeps possession of his weapon. The power of the Erinyes must be broken through human action, specifically the replacement of individual violence with formal justice. Thus the military assistance provided by the god is diverted into the realm of metaphor, since the protection that Apollo can offer is to instruct Orestes on how to seek salvation in Athens, and to speak in his defence at the trial.

Euripides in his *Orestes* returns to the Stesichorean tradition by having Orestes claim that Apollo has given him a bow with which to defend himself from the Erinyes, but presents this motif in a way which fits with the play's broader depiction of a dysfunctional heroic world. The Erinyes whom Orestes fights are figments of his madness, and so his use of the bow is a disturbing delusion rather than affirming that the gods have the power to conquer evil. Indeed, immediately threatening the Erinyes, Orestes recovers his sanity and criticises Apollo for his role in events (285–93):

Λοξία δὲ μέφομαι,
ὅστις μ' ἐπάρατος ἔργον ἀνοσιώτατον†
τοῖς μὲν λόγοις ἠΰφρανε τοῖς δ' ἔργοισιν οὔ.
οἶμαι δὲ πατέρα τὸν ἐμόν, εἰ κατ' ὄμματα
ἐξιτόρουν νιν μητέρ' εἰ κτεῖναί με χρή,
πολλὰς γενεῖου τοῦδ' ἄν ἐκτεῖναι λιτὰς
μήποτε τεκούσης ἐς σφαγὰς ὤσαι ξίφος,
εἰ μήτ' ἐκεῖνος ἀναλαβεῖν ἔμελλε φῶς
ἐγὼ θ' ὁ τλήμων τοιάδ' ἐκπλήσειν κακά.

'I blame Loxias,
who urged me on to a †most unholy deed†
and who supported me in words but not in deeds.
I believe that if I had enquired to my father's face
whether I ought to kill my mother,
he would have implored me with many prayers by my beard

not to thrust a sword into my mother's throat,
since he would not have returned to life
while I, wretch that I am, would carry out such dreadful deeds.'

The accusation that Apollo is a friend in words but not in deeds portrays the gift of the bow as an empty gesture instead of a talisman of protection. Similarly, Orestes' despairing remarks about the futility of his vengeance form a counterpoint to his trust in the oracles of Apollo as he wields the bow in his madness (τὰ Φοίβου δ' αἰτιᾶσθε θέσφατα, 276). This degradation of the bow, and of Apollo's aid, fits with the broader presentation of the matricide throughout the play as a futile and ignoble act rather than a terrible choice.

The final case to examine is Clytemnestra's dream, where we have two lines of the original poem:

τᾶι δὲ δράκων ἐδόκησε μολεῖν κέρα βεβροτωμένος ἄκρον,
ἐκ δ' ἄρα τοῦ βασιλεὺς Πλεισθενίδας ἐφάνη.

A snake seemed to come to her, the crest of its head stained with blood,
and from it appeared a king of Plisthenes' line.

Stes. fr. 180 Finglass

The dream of a snake is adopted by Aeschylus (*Cho.* 523–52), and gives Clytemnestra the motivation to send Electra to Agamemnon's tomb (plausibly the Stesichorean plot as well, since Orestes' lock was found there). Despite Aeschylus' debt to Stesichorus, there are significant differences between the two images. In the Stesichorean version, the snake is Agamemnon, whose head is bloodied by his deadly wound.²³ The dream depicts Clytemnestra's guilty conscience, as she recalls the violence of her actions.²⁴ It is also prophetic, for it anticipates the vengeance of Orestes, the Plisthenid king who emerges from the snake. The spirit of Agamemnon lives on in Orestes, who is born from his father's death, and the paternal bloodline reminds Clytemnestra that her actions will have consequences. Despite the identification of Orestes with his father, however, the matricide is not morally unproblematic, since the involvement of the Erinyes (which we can infer from Apollo's gift of his bow to Orestes: fr. 181a.21-4) shows that its dark side was an important aspect of the poem. Clytemnestra's dream therefore suggests that the poem explored a child's divided loyalty to his parents, a theme which becomes central in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. In *Choephoroi*, the idea that Orestes is his father's child is foregrounded in the siblings' lament, where they call upon the spirit of their father to assist them and identify the success of their plot with the continuance of the bloodline.²⁵ Yet the description of the dream inverts the Stesichorean version by identifying Orestes with his mother instead of with his father. Whereas in Stesichorus the figure who emerges from the dead Agamemnon probably represents

²³ Cf. Bowra (1936) 131–2 ≈ (1961) 116–17. For the association of snakes with the dead and with heroes see Küster (1913) 62–85.

²⁴ This is the interpretation given by Plutarch (*De Sera Numinis Vindicta* 554f–555a) and since he has the full context, we should trust his judgement.

²⁵ Aesch. *Cho.* 315–509, especially 503–4.

Orestes,²⁶ in Aeschylus, it is Clytemnestra who gives birth to him (527). The image of the Orestes-snake biting the breast that suckles it (532–3) presents the killing as an act of betrayal rather than simple vengeance, and so foreshadows the moral complexity of the play’s final scenes. An audience member who recognised the Stesichorean allusion would appreciate how the changes to the dream highlight Orestes’ dilemma. The image of the snake itself takes on additional symbolism as it becomes part of the broader chain of serpent-themed imagery in the trilogy.²⁷

The *Thebais*

In comparison to the scarce remains of the *Oresteia*, Stesichorus’ *Thebais* provides us with many lines of his own poetry. Yet when we scour the text for parallels, it is hard to find anything as distinctive. The surviving section (fr. 97 Finglass) describes the settlement made between Eteocles and Polynices over the inheritance of Oedipus. Responding to a prophecy by Tiresias of troubles to come, the boys’ mother proposes that they divide their inheritance by lot, so that one brother will receive the kingship of Thebes, and the other the moveable goods (lines 201–31). In the damaged second part of the fragment, Tiresias expresses his approval of this plan, and speaks to each brother in turn, prophesying Polynices’ welcome in Argos and his marriage, and warning Eteocles of a potential disaster (254–90). The surviving section ends with a description of Polynices’ journey (291–303).

The identity of the unnamed woman is potentially significant for the poem’s relationship with tragedy, since she could be either the mother-wife of Oedipus (as in tragic versions of the myth), in which case Eteocles and Polynices would be the products of incest, or his second wife (in accordance with the epic tradition).²⁸ Having the incestuous Queen bear Oedipus children and live on after the discovery of the incest would be a radical step for Stesichorus, since Polynices and Eteocles are not named elsewhere as the products of incest before the fifth century, and even in tragic versions, it is only in Euripides’ *Phoenissae* that the mother-wife lives on. Nevertheless, it remains a possibility. The silence of Homer and the *Oedipodeia* on the subject of incestuous children may be on grounds of taste or audience; it is also not inconceivable that Stesichorus invented this aspect of the myth. The same could be said of the survival of the mother-wife, since the surviving fragments of Stesichorus suggest that his poems liked to challenge audience expectations and to rework myth radically (Helen’s absence from the Trojan war in the *Palinode*, for example, or the sympathetic portrayal of the monster Geryon). Since Oedipus is allowed to live on as king in the *Odyssey* tradition despite his terrible deeds, it does not seem impossible for an archaic audience to accept his wife doing so. On the other hand, tragedy’s focus on dysfunctional families and extreme trauma makes it appealing to imagine the incestuous children as a tragic innovation.

²⁶ See Davies and Finglass (2014) *ad loc.*

²⁷ A much discussed theme: see Catenaccio (2011) 215–19.

²⁸ Epicaste in the Odyssean version probably kills herself before she can produce incestuous children (none are mentioned), though this partly depends on how we understand ἄφραρ at *Od.* 11.274 (see Tsitsibakou-Vasalos (1989) and Finglass (2014c) 000 n. 18, who concludes that it ‘need not mean “immediately” . . . but it would hardly be consistent with a period long enough to allow the completion of a pregnancy’). In the *Oedipodeia* it is Euryganeia, the second wife, who is the mother of Oedipus’ children (cf. *Oedipodeia* fr. 1 *GEF*, Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.5.8, and the Pisander scholium, *PEG* I 17–19), while in Pherecydes (fr. 95 *EGM*) Jocasta does bear Oedipus incestuous children, but they are killed, and Eteocles and Polynices are the sons of Euryganeia.

In the absence of any clues in the poem itself, I refer to the woman simply as ‘the Queen’ in what follows, and my argument does not rely on her identity.

Though it is likely that Stesichorus’ *Thebais* narrated the Argive attack on Thebes, the surviving portion offers no direct overlap with the action of Aeschylus’ *Seven*. Nevertheless, Stesichorus foreshadows the conflict to come, while Aeschylus refers back to the dispute over Oedipus’ inheritance to make sense of the fratricide. Both poets emphasise how the seeds of the future are contained in the original quarrel, and stress the role of fate and divinity in bringing events to pass. Moreover, both poets draw on the same strand of imagery to explore these ideas, division by lot. The origins of this imagery can be found in Stesichorus (218–31):

ἀλλ’ ἄγε παῖδες ἐμοῖς μύθοις, φίλα [αῶααα]
τᾶιδε γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐγὼν τέλος προφα[ίνω
220 τὸν μὲν ἔχοντα δόμους ναίειν πα[αῶαααα,
τὸν δ’ ἀπίμεν κτεάνη
καὶ χρυσὸν ἔχοντα φίλου σύμπαντα [πατρός,
κλαροπαληδὸν ὃς ἄν
πρᾶτος λάχηι ἕκατι Μοιρᾶν.

225 τοῦτο γὰρ ἄν, δοκέω,
λυτήριον ὑμῖν κακοῦ γένοιτο πότμο[υ,
μάντιος φραδαῖσι θείου,
αἴτε νέον Κρονίδας γένος τε καὶ ἄστυ [αῶα
Κάδμου ἄνακτος,
230 ἀμβάλλων κακότητα πολὺν χρόνον [αῶααα]ς
πέπρωται γεν[.].αἰ.”

But come, my sons, [my dear children, obey] my words,
for this is how I reveal the outcome to you:
one of you is to have the house and dwell [in Thebes];
the other is to leave
with all the herds and gold of his dear father,
according to whoever obtains his portion first
when the lots are shaken, by the will of the Fates.
For this, I think,
may be a release from the wretched fate
in the warnings of the holy prophet,
if the son of Cronus [will preserve] the newest generation and the city
of lord Cadmus,
by postponing the woes for a long time
. . . is fated.

Sortition is well attested as a mechanism for making a decision or dividing a portion: for example, the practice was used for deciding who should join a colonisation expedition as well as to divide an inheritance or material goods.²⁹ Yet whatever the practicalities of using the lot

²⁹ Colonisation: Hdt. 4.153. Lottery is frequently used in epic to divide paternal inheritance, e.g. the division of the world between Zeus, Poseidon and Hades (Hom. *Il.* 15.187–93), Odysseus’ lying tale at *Od.* 14.208–9, and

or its familiarity to Stesichorus' audience, we should not overlook its symbolism. The Queen divides the inheritance according to kind: one son is to receive the kingship while the other takes the material wealth.³⁰ This separation between practical and symbolic power raises questions as to where authority truly resides, and so whether the distribution is fair or can be expected to last.³¹

Its instability is signalled by Tiresias' speech, which, although badly damaged, suggests that both brothers may feel aggrieved by the distribution. Tiresias lists the property that Polynices has received (272), emphasises its value (265 πολλα[, 269 πολλά), and dwells on the benefits he will receive through exile (275–80). The implication is that the seer is trying to placate Polynices for the loss of his kingship by focusing on the advantages of wealth. Tiresias also appears to direct a warning at Eteocles, plausibly an admonition that he should accept Polynices' possession of the material goods (281–7). This would suggest a grievance on Eteocles' part as well, and the negative language used (σπήθεσσιν αἰνώ[, 282) may foreshadow his role in the breakdown of the arrangement.³² Tiresias' speech highlights for the audience how the settlement will bring about the very conflict it is intended to avoid. This irony is signalled by the mention of ancestral gold (222; cf. 239), which evokes the story that Polynices used the necklace of Harmonia to bribe Eriphyle (a myth told elsewhere by Stesichorus) and links his portion of the inheritance to the raising of the army against his homeland.

Moreover, the motif of the lot affirms that humans cannot avoid their fate, since the act of drawing lots is under the control of the gods, as the Queen observes.³³ The role of the divine is significant to her rhetoric, as the lottery is introduced to circumvent the disaster prophesied by Tiresias. The mention of the Moirai picks up on her earlier reference to these goddesses in the description of the fate she hopes to ward off (211–17):

αἰ δέ με παῖδας ἰδέσθαι ὑπ' ἀλλάλοισι δαμέντας
 μόρσιμόν ἐστιν, ἐπεκλώσαν δὲ Μοῖρα[ι,
 αὐτίκα μοι θανάτου τέλος στυγερο[ῖο] γέν[οιτο,
 πρίν ποκα ταύτ' ἐσιδεῖν
 215 †ἀλγεσι† πολύστονα δακρυόεντα[ρα,
 παῖδας ἐνὶ μεγάροισι
 θανόντας ἢ πόλιν ἀλοῖσαν.

Hesiod and Perses' division at Hes. *Op.* 37. See Hutchinson (2001) 130–1, Kelly (2008) 264–71, Finglass (2014c) on 220–4.

³⁰ The same division of goods is used by Hellanicus (fr. 98 *EGM*). However, since Eteocles is allowed to choose first, and takes the kingdom, it is clear that this is the better portion. On different versions of the inheritance myth see Meillier (1978).

³¹ Parsons (1977) 24 interprets the lines as meaning that the man whose lot jumps out first will receive the worse portion, but sortition can be used to select individuals for a desirable as well as for an unfortunate activity: see Thalmann (1982) 386–7. The Queen does not simply suggest using the lot to send one brother into exile, but to settle between two portions, both of which contain attractive elements, and the implication seems to be that she thinks they are to be considered equivalent in value. The fact that this equivalence is far from clear is central to the poem's dramatic tension. I therefore disagree with Bakker (2012) 5 n. 9 that both brothers ought to be happy with the terms of the settlement (cf. Finglass (2013b) 10 n. 9 on Polynices' distress).

³² Parsons (1977) 32 rejects this on the grounds that Polynices should be the brother responsible for the conflict, but there is no reason that Stesichorus should not apportion blame as he wishes, and he need not be bound by other tellings of the myth; see Beck (1988), Finglass (2014c) on 283, and further below.

³³ 224 ἕκατι Μοιρᾶν; cf. Bremer (1987) 167, who cites Pl. *Leg.* 741b ὁ νεῖμας κληρὸς ὦν θεός.

But if it is destined for me to see my sons slain by one another,
and the Fates have spun it, may the end of hateful death be mine straightaway,
before I see these things
of lamentation and tears . . .
my sons dead in the palace
or the city captured.

The use of the lot is an attempt to control the power of the Moirai, by channelling it into the division of two fixed portions. While ἕκαστι Μοιρᾶν in 224 still alludes to their unpredictability, the Queen hopes that by limiting the parameters it may be possible to defer the ruin of the house to a future generation (230–1). Yet the lottery will ultimately fail to prevent the conflict between the brothers, and the audience can appreciate the irony that the Moirai will find a way to make destiny come to pass.

Stesichorus' innovation in using lottery to divide an inheritance into kingship and wealth, then, is not simply a plot element but is connected to broader theological and ethical questions. It is no coincidence that Aeschylus' *Septem* draws extensively on this imagery and uses it to similar ends.³⁴ Sortition is the recurring image of the play; it is used to symbolise the power of fate and the gods and to refer back to the original settlement between Eteocles and Polynices. In choosing this imagery, Aeschylus alludes to the use that Stesichorus made of it, and this intertextuality would have enriched the experience of the drama for audience members familiar with Stesichorus' work.

Aeschylus introduces the lot as a plot device, since we learn early in the play that the Argive captains draw lots to assign themselves to the gates of Thebes (55–6):

κληρουμένους δ' ἔλειπον, ὡς πάλωι λαχῶν
ἕκαστος αὐτῶν πρὸς πύλας ἄγοι λόχον.

'I left them as they were drawing lots, so that according to his lot
each of them should lead his company against the gates.'

Just as the drawing of lots in Stesichorus is the foundational act that determines the brothers' fate, so too here it is an act of sortition that defines the action. The significance of this moment is emphasised by the repetition of κληρουμένους and πάλωι λαχῶν, while the half-rhyme created by λαχῶν / λόχον at the line-ends suggests the connection between the lottery and the battle to come.³⁵ The importance of the lot is reinforced later, as the Scout begins the first three descriptions of the Argive warriors with the detail that they were allotted to their particular gate (375–6, 423, 458–9). The process of drawing lots is emphasised at 376 (εἴληχεν πάλον) and still more so at 458–9, where the Scout imagines the moment at which the lot leapt from the helmet (τρίτῳ γὰρ Ἐτεόκλωι τρίτος πάλος | ἐξ ὑπτίου ἠήδησεν εὐχάλκου κράνου). Though the Scout does not use the language of lottery in what follows, it is latent in his descriptions, since the verbs used of the next three postings indicates that they are there as a result of allocation rather than free choice (486 ἔχων, 527 προταχθέντα, 570 τεταγμένος). This sense of a controlling fate prepares us for the

³⁴ See Manton (1961) 78–9, Cameron (1971) 24–5, Thalmann (1978) 69–79, (1982), Wick (2003).

³⁵ Cf. Burnett (1973) 362.

revelation that Polynices is at the seventh gate, and the inevitability of the conflict between the brothers. This sense of destiny is enhanced by the system of kledonancy Eteocles uses to allocate his own captains, as though he must find mystical means to counteract the workings of the lot that has brought him into conflict with his brother.³⁶ As in Stesichorus, the outcome of the lottery is attributed to divine workings, in this case to the curse of Oedipus (ὤμοι πατρὸς δὴ νῦν ἀραὶ τελεεφόροι, 655), and this further suggests the irony that mortal attempts to avoid fate are doomed to failure.

After the posting of the Argive captains is revealed, the lot shifts from reflecting a real event to taking on a symbolic meaning, as sortition is repeatedly used to describe the meeting of the brothers. The image is central to the curse, for Oedipus is said to have predicted that his sons would allot his property between them with an iron-wielding hand (καὶ σφεσιδαρονόμῳ | διὰ χερί ποτε λαχεῖν | κτήματα, 788–90), and the lot becomes a metaphor for this conflict (acknowledged by Eteocles at 711). After their death, Eteocles and Polynices are said to have obtained death as their lot (816–17, 906–7, 944–8), a metaphor that plays upon the associations of sortition with fairness to highlight the brothers’ reconciliation in death. The ‘equal portion’ they are said to obtain (κτήμαθ’ ὤστ’ ἴσον λαχεῖν, 907) turns out to be the equality of a tomb (τάφων πατρῴων λαχαί, 914), where the echoing of λαχεῖν by λαχαί highlights the irony that death is the only way for them to achieve fair distribution. The language of lottery also emphasises the gulf between the brothers’ ambitions and the outcome of their quarrel. At 816–18 the Messenger remarks:

διέλαχον σφυρηλάτῳ
Σκύθησι σιδήρῳ κτημάτων παμπησίαν·
ἔξουσι δ’ ἦν λάβωσιν ἐν ταφῇ χθόνα

‘They divided by lot the
entirety of their possessions using wrought Scythian iron.
But the land they will obtain is what they take for their burial.’

The reference to the entirety of the possessions (κτημάτων παμπησίαν) recalls the original quarrel over the inheritance and the difficulty of dividing it. While we do not know exactly how Aeschylus presented this issue (or whether it was directly represented in the trilogy), there is no particular reason to think that the settlement involved a real drawing of lots; though if the brothers did use lottery, the parallel with Stesichorus would be still stronger.³⁷ Aeschylus has therefore adapted the Stesichorean motif of the lot from being a real part of the myth into a driving metaphor. Similarly, the semi-chorus contrasts the allotted fate of the brothers (ἔχουσι μοῖραν λαχόντες, 947) with the ‘boundless wealth of land’ (γαῖα | πλοῦτος ἄβυσσος, 949–50) that their corpses will lie upon. This image suggests the indivisibility of Oedipus’ inheritance, and so recalls the disastrous division into portions.³⁸

If Stesichorean influence is widespread in *Seven*, it is found in a more concentrated but less pervasive fashion in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus*, particularly in the characterisation of Jocasta. She appears in response to the argument between Oedipus and

³⁶ See Zeitlin (1982) 46–9.

³⁷ See Hutchinson (1985) on 631–52.

³⁸ For discussion of the quarrel and culpability, cf. e.g. Golden (1964), Podlecki (1964), Cameron (1968).

Creon and her first action is to criticise the two men for quarreling and to try to diffuse their anger (634–8). While the details are different, in the figure of the powerful Theban queen who tries to mediate in a conflict between her menfolk, and who speaks with authority, we have an echo of the Stesichorean Queen. Moreover, the context which prompts Jocasta’s intervention is an argument over who has the right to rule Thebes: while Creon has denied wishing to usurp Oedipus, in the last few lines of the *agôn* we have hints of a power struggle, as Creon challenges Oedipus’ right to kingship if he rules badly (629) and claims that he too has a share in the city (630). Like her Stesichorean counterpart, Jocasta is taken seriously by her male relatives. Creon immediately appeals to her as mediator (639–41), and her plea to Oedipus at 646–8 plays a critical role in resolving the quarrel; indeed, Oedipus comments that he has more respect for her than for the Chorus of Theban elders (700).

Up to this point the Stesichorean echoes are faint, but they come more clearly to the fore in the scene that follows, where Jocasta expresses her scepticism on the subject of oracles and tells the story of the failed oracle received by Laius (707–25). Jocasta combines deference towards the god with confidence that prophets can be manipulated to make their message more palatable, in a way that recalls the stance taken by the Stesichorean Queen.³⁹ The distinction Jocasta makes between Apollo and his prophets (χρησμὸς γὰρ ἦλθε Λαίῳ ποτ’, οὐκ ἐρῶ | Φοίβου γ’ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, τῶν δ’ ὑπηρετῶν ἄπο, 711–12) reflects the Queen’s attempt in Stesichorus to distinguish between the will of Apollo and the prophecies uttered by Tiresias (μαντοσύνας δὲ τεὰς ἀναξ ἐκἀεργος Ἀπόλλων | μὴ πάσας τελέσσαι, 209–10). In both cases the speaker tries to avoid impiety by making it clear that she is not doubting the power of the god, yet uses the gap between the deity and the means by which his will is revealed on earth to suggest that unpleasant prophecies can be averted. In *OT*, Jocasta reports the strategy Laius adopted to circumvent the prophecy, while in Stesichorus we see the Queen proposing her own scheme. While the details of Tiresias’ prophecy are not preserved, her distress at the start of her speech would make little sense if his prophecy was not an unconditional prediction of trouble to come.⁴⁰ The settlement that she proposes is a way of introducing conditionality into the prophecy, as we see from αἰ δὲ . . . μόρσιμόν ἐστιν (211–12), picked up by the later and more positive condition at αἴτε νέον Κρονίδας γένος τε καὶ ἄστυ [wqq (228),⁴¹ where she suggests that doom may be avoided. Similarly, Jocasta in *OT* presents the prophecy given to her and Laius as a prediction which failed to come true, since she believes the royal house did avoid its fate.

Jocasta’s later advice on the unpredictability of human fortune is also evocative of her Stesichorean counterpart. She responds to Oedipus’ anxiety that he remains at risk as long as Merope remains alive by emphasising the changeability inherent to the human condition (977–9):

τί δ’ ἂν φοβοῖτ’ ἄνθρωπος ὦι τὰ τῆς τύχης
κρατεῖ, πρόνοια δ’ ἐστὶν οὐδενὸς σαφής;
εἰκῆ κράτιστον ζῆν, ὅπως δύναϊτό τις.

³⁹ For the Stesichorean Queen’s scepticism as innovative see Maingon (1989) 53–5.

⁴⁰ So Hutchinson (2001) on 216–17, MacInnes (2007) 98, and Finglass, this volume. Conversely, Bremer (1987) on 217 cautiously suggests that the prophecy is a conditional one between two options, but this makes less good sense.

⁴¹ Supplements include *σάωσει*, *ρύοιτο*, and *φυλάξει* (by various scholars *ap. Meillier* (1976) 299).

What should a man fear, when for him it is the events of chance
that have power, and there is no clear foreknowledge of anything?
It is best to live at random, as one may.

The principle that underlies Jocasta's scepticism is her belief that human life is governed by a sequence of rapidly changing events: τὰ τῆς τύχης suggests not only the dominance of chance but also the idea that there is a succession of incidents, each different from the last.⁴² Similarly, Stesichorus' Queen justifies her scepticism that Tiresias' prophecies are immutable by reflecting on the changeability of human life (204–8):

οὔτε γὰρ αἰὲν ὁμῶς
205 θεοὶ θέσαν ἀθανάτοι κατ' αἶαν ἱράν
νεῖκος ἔμπεδον βροτοῖσιν
οὔδέ γα μὰν φιλότατ', ἐπὶ δ' ἀμ.α. νόον ἀνδρῶν
θεοὶ τιθεῖσι.

For the immortal gods
did not establish strife to be immovable for all time alike
over the holy earth for mortals,
no, nor friendship either, but the gods set the mind of men
for a day.

The idea that human fortune is unstable is common, but the fact that both poets put the thought in the mouth of an outspoken wife of Oedipus to criticise prophets for their fallibility suggests a connection between the two. Indeed, in both cases the conventionality of the thought is essential to appreciating the irony, for both women bolster their argument by drawing on accepted wisdom. Yet, however convincing the underlying premise, the audience can appreciate that both are deluded in their hope that this means their own fate can be avoided.⁴³

The Stesichorean Queen's views on the impermanence of fortune are also echoed by the Jocasta of the *Phoenician Women*. Like her lyric counterpart, the Euripidean Jocasta seeks to arrange a settlement between her two quarrelling sons, and draws on this trope to express her hopes that it will succeed (84–7):

ἀλλ', ὦ φαεινὰς οὐρανοῦ ναίων πτυχὰς
Ζεῦ, σῶσον ἡμᾶς, δὸς δὲ σύμβασιν τέκνοισι.
χρῆν δ', εἰ σοφὸς πέφυκας, οὐκ ἔαν βροτῶν
τὸν αὐτὸν αἰεὶ δυστυχῆ καθεστάναι.

Zeus, you who inhabit the shining folds of heaven, save us and grant a settlement to my sons.
If you are wise, you ought not allow the same mortal always to remain wretched.

⁴² Cf. Jebb (1893) on 977, who distinguishes it from simply τύχη.

⁴³ For similar ideas cf. Hom. *Od.* 18.132–7, Archil. fr. 131 *IEG*, Soph. *Aj.* 677–83, *OC* 607–23.

While the *topos* is traditional, as in Sophocles, the similarity of character and situation should alert us to a possible connection with Stesichorus.⁴⁴ Indeed, the case for Stesichorean influence is still stronger than in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, since in both passages the sentiment is put into the mouth of the mother of Eteocles and Polynices in the context of a mediation, and used to justify her belief that a happy outcome can be reached despite present troubles. As in the Sophoclean passage, the conventionality of the *topos* is set against the audience's knowledge that the hope it offers is a false one. There is a degree of defensiveness to the manner in which both women offer the *gnômê*: Stesichorus' Queen is questioning Tiresias' prophecies, while Jocasta is aware of the curse (66–8) and attempting to negotiate between armed enemies. Though the direct questioning of Zeus (εἰ κοφὸς πέφυκας) is characteristically Euripidean,⁴⁵ Jocasta's mixture of faith and criticism of the gods picks up on the way in which the Stesichorean Queen combines respect for divine will with an attempt to renegotiate the terms on which it acts.

In general, the role played by this Jocasta owes much to Stesichorus, for it is no coincidence that the mother of Eteocles and Polynices is presented as a powerful female who has a right to participate in political life, and who takes the initiative to try to mediate between her sons.⁴⁶ The details of this intervention are not identical, for the Euripidean Jocasta intervenes immediately before the war rather than at the time of the original conflict. However, we would not expect Euripides (or any creative poet) to follow Stesichorus exactly. Having Jocasta intervene at a later stage emphasises her desperate desire to reconcile her sons even when they are far gone in their hatred, and so shows the depth of her motherly love. In any case, the convention that tragic action is contained within a single day means that if Jocasta's intervention is to happen as part of the play, it must occur just before the battle. The subsequent trajectory of Jocasta's story also echoes Stesichorus, since on learning of the impending duel between her sons, she follows the Theban Queen in expressing a wish to die if she cannot prevent their deaths (1280–3).⁴⁷ As in Stesichorus, this is presented in the form of a conditional, where the speaker wishes for her death in the event that her fears come true, but leaves open the possibility of a better outcome. Yet while the Stesichorean Queen merely wishes for death (αὐτίκα μοι θανάτου τέλος στυγερο[ῖο] γένη[οιτο], 213), Jocasta actively predicts it (θανοῦσι δ' αὐτοῖς συνθανοῦσα κείομαι, 1283), and we are later told of how she carries out her wish (1455–9), following the conventions of tragedy where suicide is a common response to distressing events.⁴⁸

The dominant role played by Jocasta is one area where we can see echoes of Stesichorus in the *Phoenician Women*, but the traces do not end there. Euripides' account of the settlement between Eteocles and Polynices differs from that of Stesichorus: the brothers

⁴⁴ Cf. Mueller-Goldingen (1985) 34 and *pace* Mastronarde (1994) 26 n. 1, who objects on the grounds that the maxim is conventional, but does not consider the contextual similarity that creates the parallel.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Hipp.* 120, *Ion* 436–40.

⁴⁶ Stesichorean influence was noted by Meillier (1976) 328; see also Maingon (1989) 52, Zeitlin (2008) 329, Lamari (2010) 125–6. For a general discussion of Stesichorus' influence on *Phoenissae* see Ercoles and Fiorentini (2011), though like Finglass (forthcoming 1) I am not convinced by the specific verbal parallels that they suggest, which seem too loose to be plausible intertexts.

⁴⁷ Cf. Mueller-Goldingen (1985) 35.

⁴⁸ It is possible that the Stesichorean Queen too kills herself upon the death of her sons, in which case her words at 213 would foreshadow her fate later in the poem as with the Euripidean Jocasta; see Segal (1985) 199, Finglass (2014c) on 211–17. Burnett (1988) 115 sees the sentiment as a heroic one that demonstrates her ability to operate in the male sphere.

agreed to take turns to rule Thebes, but Eteocles broke the agreement when he refused to give up power after his year (69–76). Placing Eteocles so definitively in the wrong is usually held to be a Euripidean innovation. However, Stesichorus also appears to make him responsible for the failure of the settlement: Tiresias' speech directed at Eteocles is expressed in critical terms (].εν στήθεσσιν αἰνώ[, 282), which suggests either Tiresias' fear of what Eteocles will do, or the dangers of Eteocles' own emotional state. Connected to this is Tiresias' warning that Eteocles will withhold what is owed to Polynices (ἔχεν Πολυνεΐκεος, 283). The section of the speech directed at Polynices contains reassurance but no admonition or fear, and it seems that the original fault lies with Eteocles. While we cannot be sure how culpability was presented in pre-Stesichorean versions of the myth, the brothers' names suggest that originally Eteocles was the righteous brother and Polynices the wrongdoer, and it seems plausible that the shift is a Stesichorean development, yet another striking redirection in the audience's sympathy.⁴⁹

Euripides' handling of the brothers' culpability may also contain a more specific allusion to Stesichorus' representation of the original division. During the *agôn*, Jocasta criticises Eteocles for avarice, and implies that the quarrel was provoked by his desire to possess wealth (549–67). In the context of the play this seems illogical, since the wealth comes with the kingship, and it is the latter which is the primary cause of dispute, but Jocasta's insistence that Eteocles is motivated by financial gain makes sense if we understand her remarks in the light of a tradition that the material possessions were meant to be Polynices' share.⁵⁰ Tiresias' role is also influenced by Stesichorus, since at 878–80 the prophet alludes to an attempt to mediate in the original quarrel, just as in Stesichorus he seems to offer advice to both sons (270–83).⁵¹ It is hinted that this intervention led to particular resentment between Tiresias and Eteocles (772–3, 865–6), which evokes the warning directed at him by the Stesichorean Tiresias.

CONCLUSION

A case for intertextuality with Stesichorus can be made for all three tragedians and across a range of plays. While Stesichorus' influence can most easily be seen at the level of the shaping of myth, on analysis the tragedians draw on these points of plot to bring out aspects of characterisation, or to highlight significant themes in their treatment of the story. Stesichorus shows a marked interest in female characters, and this has an impact on the development of these myths by the tragedians. Thus the emphasis Aeschylus places on

⁴⁹ Cf. n. 31 above, and see also Eur. *Suppl.* 153–4, where Eteocles is said to have robbed Polynices of his property. This suggests a version close to Stesichorus; see Gostoli (1978) 26–7. Culpability in Aeschylus' *Septem* is unclear; Mastronarde (1994) 26–7 argues that the image of Dikê on Polynices' shield shows Eteocles is in the wrong, but this represents only Polynices' perspective, and Eteocles disputes this claim (658–71). Nevertheless, it suggests a more nuanced situation than that Polynices is simply the wicked brother. For the symbolism see Zeitlin (1982) 135–49.

⁵⁰ The apparent irrelevance of wealth led Kovacs (1982) 42–5 to class the lines as spurious; for a defence of their authenticity see Mastronarde (1994) 307–8, who notes the association of tyranny and avarice in contemporary thought. The division of the inheritance into wealth and power is also found in Hellanicus, though he may be adapting a Stesichorean innovation. It is possible that it is attested in the *Thebaid*, where Polynices possesses the necklace of Harmonia, but this detail does not necessarily suggest that Polynices was entitled to all the goods.

⁵¹ I follow Mastronarde and Kovacs in taking this passage to be genuine, though Fraenkel (followed by Reeve and Diggle) delete it.

Clytemnestra's state of mind can be traced back to Stesichorus' descriptions, which included both how she is deceived over Iphigenia and her fearful anticipation of Orestes' vengeance. Similarly, the Sophoclean and Euripidean representations of Jocasta as a strong-minded woman in a position of power have their origins in Stesichorus' Queen. The Sophoclean Jocasta's scepticism echoes the Queen's attempt to negotiate with Fate, while the Euripidean one is still closer to Stesichorus in character and situation. With other characters too, Stesichorean innovation is used by the tragedians to bring out different aspects of the myth. The motif of Apollo's bow is handled differently by Aeschylus and Euripides to reflect on the relationship between mortals and gods, and the role of the divine in mediating in human affairs, while Clytemnestra's dream is used to symbolise a central issue of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*: marital relationships and a child's duty to his parents.

In the case of Aeschylus, Stesichorus' influence can be seen at the level of imagery and symbolism. Thus the snake imagery in Clytemnestra's dream of *Choephoroi* adapts a Stesichorean original, but expands it to fit with a broader pattern of imagery that runs across the trilogy. Similarly, a major pattern of imagery in the *Seven* (sortition) bears a striking resemblance to a key innovation in Stesichorus' handling of the same myth. An audience member who knew the Stesichorean poem would be in a position to appreciate how Aeschylus develops both examples and how it grows from a plot device to a systematic pattern of imagery which underpins the play.

More generally, this chapter has attempted to show how Stesichorus' influence on tragedy can be recognised at the level of characterisation, theme, and imagery as well as narrative shaping. While an individual allusion could be put down to coincidence or attributed to a broad tradition rather than to Stesichorus specifically, when we look at the Orestes and Theban plays as a group, the case for Stesichorean influence is strong. The evidence of these tragedies, taken in connection with Aristophanes, suggest that a significant section of Athenian society had a good knowledge of Stesichorus, and were in a position to appreciate quite subtle forms of intertextuality. This not only gives us valuable information on the reception of Stesichorus, but also offers an insight into the relationship the tragedians created between their work and forms of lyric, and tragedy's status as a vehicle for high as well as mass forms of entertainment.