

Competing generic narratives in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

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Ever since Hellenistic scholars and librarians began to sub-divide some collections by genre, it has been a convenient filter through which to view ancient literature. Yet as scholars have increasingly come to recognise, generic boundaries are porous, and Greek writers from the archaic period onwards include material that evokes different literary forms. In this context, the relationship between Greek tragedy and earlier choral poetry is particularly rich, because tragedy is itself a choral genre, and a mimetic one. When a tragic chorus evokes (say) a paeanic or hymenaeal chorus, the choreuts do not merely allude to, but actually perform the other genre. The tragic chorus in some sense really do become the ritual chorus performing the song, and the audience sees a *paian* or *hymenaios* being enacted before their eyes. Thus lyric representations in tragedy are immediate and visceral, in a way that is quite different from literary intertexts such as allusions to famous scenes from Homer. Moreover, allusions to lyric song are more than literary guessing-games for the educated elite, since these forms of poetry are associated with particular events or stages in the life of a community or an individual. In its original performance context, choral lyric can operate as a vehicle for expressing social norms, and exploring how one should react to a significant event, whether sickness, a military victory, a wedding, or the worship of a god. Hence when a piece of ritual lyric is transferred into tragedy, it brings with it a set of shared associations and values rooted in the world beyond the play, and the tragedians can use these generic triggers to explore or test these conventional beliefs, or to show how they map onto (or fail to be compatible with) the world of the play.¹

My previous work on this topic focuses on plays which allude to a single dominant lyric genre, whose performance context relates to the preoccupations of the tragedy itself: for example, *hymenaios* in plays that focus on dysfunctional relationships between the sexes; *paian* in plays that focus on man's relationship with the divine. In these cases, the choral odes tend to show intricate, dense, and sophisticated allusion to the tropes of the chosen lyric genre. This article, however, will approach the topic from a different angle, by looking at how tragedy can incorporate multiple lyric genres simultaneously. As we shall see, generic interaction can be used to create a narrative arc, which runs subtly throughout the play rather than being concentrated in particular odes, and can guide the audience's interpretation of the broader action. Rather than detailed allusion or intertextuality, we find something more like Wagnerian leitmotifs: small-scale references which may not seem noteworthy when taken in isolation, but which over the course of a play build up a pattern of association. Since genres carry different sets of connotations, the poet can create conflicting arcs, and bring them into tension to explore different possible outcomes, or competing motivations on the part of the characters.

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* provides a rich case-study as to how this can work in practice. A number of genres are evoked during the course of the trilogy, but I shall focus on two that recur

¹ I explore this topic in depth in Swift 2010. For discussions of how tragedy can engage with ritual lyric, cf. e.g. Herington 1985; Nagy 1995; Rutherford 1995a; Calame 1995; Carey 2012; Rodighiero 2012.

particularly frequently: *epinikion* and *paian*.² As we shall see, these genres are coded so as to be associated with certain ethical standpoints in the trilogy, and these perspectives form the basis of major moral tensions. Epinician and athletic imagery is repeatedly associated with statements about the morality of tit-for-tat vengeance and the perspective that ‘the doer suffers’. Set against this is another strand of genre-imagery, that of the *paian*, which is used to suggest the possibility of a different approach to questions of justice and retribution. In any given instance, the imagery occurs fleetingly, but as the plays go on, the audience would be in a position to notice the repeating patterns of association. In the first two plays, as the cycle of violence within the house of Atreus continues unfettered, the paeanic imagery is invariably presented in a way which is distorted or undermined. In *Eumenides*, however, the *paian* is presented in an uncorrupted fashion, and ultimately replaces athletic imagery, just as the action of the play itself depicts a new way of dealing with the desire for vengeance.

While features such as the *paian*-cry make paeanic imagery relatively easy to identify, it is harder to make the distinction between imagery which evokes epinician poetry, and that which is simply athletic. Claiming that a piece of athletic imagery counts as ‘epinician’ is a matter of context and how the imagery is used across a play. It would be implausible to claim that a single comparison of a character to an athlete evokes the genre. However, once *epinikion* has been ‘triggered’ for the audience by a clearly-marked reference in an important place, future references to athleticism, even if made only in passing, can be connected back to the genre. In the *Oresteia*, *epinikion* is evoked early, when the Chorus imagine singing *epinikia* to Zeus to celebrate his victory over Cronus, conceived as a wrestling-match (Ag. 167-75). This clear genre-reference is used to assign moral value to athleticism in the trilogy (discussed below). Once *epinikion* has been established as important, further examples of athletic imagery gain resonance. Similarly, the audience is guided to see ‘markers’ such as light imagery or language of salvation as paeanic. Taken in isolation these need not indicate the musical genre, but coming after clear references to the genre such as the ritual refrain they take on new significance.³

Paeanic and epinician language is scattered throughout the trilogy, but the imagery clusters around three key moments, and it is here that the two strands are directly juxtaposed. It is no coincidence that these are also turning points for the trilogy’s action as a whole: Agamemnon’s decision at Aulis, the murder of Agamemnon, and the vengeance of Orestes. As the characters weigh up their decisions, the language they use reinforces the connection between imagery-pattern and moral stance. Yet the way in which the athletic or paeanic imagery is presented also feeds back into the world of the play, helping the audience to encode the genres as relating to a particular standpoint.

Setting up the pattern: the justice of Zeus and Agamemnon’s choice at Aulis

The events at Aulis are presented as crucial for understanding the action of *Agamemnon*, in terms both of character motivation and of the divine framework that underpins the world in

² A similar clash between *epinikion* and *paian* is found in Eur. *Alc.*, where the genres represent different forms of healing and resolution: see Swift 2012. For song in general as a motif in the *Oresteia* see Petrounias 1976, 291-4.

³ On ‘epinician’ vs ‘athletic’ imagery see Swift 2010, 118-19.

which the humans operate. In the *parodos*, the Chorus set out the metaphysical background behind Agammenon's decision to sacrifice his daughter, and it is in this context that the language of *paian* and *epinikion* is first juxtaposed.⁴ We are told of Calchas' prayer as he interprets the omen of the two eagles (146-55):⁵

ἰήιον δὲ καλέω Παιῶνα,
μή τινας ἀντιπνόους Δαναοῖς χρονί-
ας ἐχενήιδας ἀπλοίας
τεύξει σπευδομένα θυσίαν ἑτέραν ἄνομόν τιν' ἄδαιτον,
νεικέων τέκτονα σύμφυτον, οὐ δει-
σήνορα· μίμνει γὰρ φοβερὰ παλίνορτος
οἱ κονόμος δολία, μνάμων Μῆνις τεκνόποινος.

I call upon Paian the healer: may she (Artemis) not bring about long-lasting adverse winds that will hold back the Danaan ships and keep them in port, eager as she is for another sacrifice, one that is lawless and comes with no feasting, an inborn architect of strife that fears no man. For a terrifying guileful housekeeper lies in wait and will rise again: a Wrath that remembers and will avenge a child.

Calchas, as a priest of Apollo, turns to his patron deity, and the audience might also expect that Apollo is chosen because he is Artemis' twin and so may be able to influence her.⁶ However, he prays to the god in his capacity of Apollo Paian, and the cult name is reinforced by the ritual epithet ἰήιον, which alludes to the *paian*-cry ἰή παιῶν.⁷ In his role as paeanic Apollo, the god represents healing and purity. He stands in opposition to the cycle of kin-killing and vengeance within the house, and represents a possibility of avoiding this pattern, by preventing the death of Iphigeneia that will lead to Clytemnestra's revenge.⁸ As the trilogy goes on, the *paian* will continue to be associated with the prospect of an end to the horrors within the house, but in *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*, these invocations of the *paian* are invariably futile, or are presented in a distorted fashion, associated with further vengeful feelings which will perpetuate rather than end the cycle. Here, the appeal to Apollo Paian is recalled long after the event, in order to introduce the terrible events at Aulis, and show that the anger of Artemis had exactly the consequences that Calchas feared. Thus the *paian* is invoked only to reinforce the impossibility of preventing blood-letting within the family.⁹

Calchas' appeal to Apollo is followed immediately by the Chorus' own prayer to Zeus, which sets up the play's broader moral outlook, and in particular is used to establish the principle

⁴ For further discussion of the *parodos* see Coward's paper in this volume.

⁵ The Greek text is that of Page's *OCT* (1972). All translations are mine.

⁶ Cf. Raeburn and Thomas 2011, 83.

⁷ On the *paian*-tag as a generic feature see Käppel 1992, 66-7; Rutherford 2001, 68-72; Ford 2006. The refrain was identified in antiquity as a distinctive feature of the genre; cf. Ath. 15.696b-e.

⁸ On the gap between the Chorus' and the audience's ability to make sense of Calchas' words, see Fletcher 1999.

⁹ Cf. Gruber 2009, 291.

that wrongdoing will be punished. In the middle, the Chorus describe how Zeus established his power (167-75):

οὐδ' ὅστις πάροιθεν ἦν μέγας,
παμμάχῳ θράσει βρύων,
οὐδὲ λέξεται πρὶ νῦν.
ὃς δ' ἔπειτ' ἔφυ, τρια-
κτῆρος οἴχεται τυχών.
Ζῆνα δέ τις προφρόνως ἐπινίκια κλάζων
τεύξεται φρενῶν τὸ πᾶν.

He who was great in the past (Uranus) and swelled with conquering boldness will not be spoken of as having ever existed. He who was born afterwards (Cronus) encountered his triple-thrower and is gone. But the man who enthusiastically cries out *epinikia* to Zeus will hit the target of sense perfectly.

Calchas' prayer is therefore answered by an alternative lyric response to the divine order: rather than singing *paianes* to Apollo, the Chorus advocate singing *epinikia* to Zeus. These *epinikia* are to celebrate an athletic triumph, since Zeus' establishment of his reign is presented as a victory in a wrestling match (τριακτῆρος, 171): the third throw is the one by which one wins the match.¹⁰ Yet Zeus' achievement is itself part of a cycle of retaliatory violence that occurs across the generations, and the performance of *epinikia* is therefore associated with individual violent responses to injustice. Zeus' vengeance on Cronus (and Cronus' on Uranus) goes further than the traditional accounts, as the earlier deities are not merely overthrown but cease to exist altogether.¹¹

Retaliatory justice has already been associated with wrestling earlier in the play, since the Chorus previously described the Trojan war as a wrestling match, and connected it to the moral order overseen by Zeus (60-7):

οὔτω δ' Ἀτρέως παῖδας ὀκρέισσων
ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πέμπει ξένιος
Ζεὺς πολυάνορος ἀμφὶ γυναικός,
πολλὰ παλαίσματα καὶ γυιοβαρῆ,
γόνατος κονίαισιν ἐρειδομένου
διακναιομένης τ' ἐν προτελείοις
κάμακος, θήσων Δαναοῖσιν
Τρωσὶ θ' ὁμοίως.

So it was that Zeus god of hospitality, the mighty one, sent the sons of Atreus against Alexandros. For the sake of a woman with many men he would impose on Danaans and

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. *Il.* 23.733; *Suda* τ 944 (iv.586.26 Adler). On the significance of wrestling imagery and the triple-throw in the *Oresteia* see Poliakoff 1980.

¹¹ Cf. Bowie 1993, 12-13, who also notes that this version of events is softened in the kinder world of *Eumenides*, where redemption is a possibility.

Trojans alike many limb-wearing wrestling matches, the knee pressing down into the dust, the spear-shaft shattered in the pre-nuptial ceremonies.

Presenting war as an athletic struggle is a common metaphor, and on this first encounter, the audience would be unlikely to perceive the imagery as important. When the wrestling language recurs, however, and again describes Zeus' will, its significance becomes clearer, while the mention of *epinikia* ties it more closely to a lyric genre. The *epinikion*, and henceforth athletic language in general, symbolises the concept of justice as reciprocal violence, and the cardinal principle that wrongdoers will be punished. In the case of the Trojans, the 'wrestling' is justified vengeance for the abduction of Helen, and Zeus' intervention forms the cornerstone of the Chorus' confidence that he will maintain justice.¹² In Zeus' case, his wrestling throw is the punishment for Cronus' treatment of his children, as well as being the foundational act that establishes his new order.

This initial contrast between the *paian* and the *epinikion* sets the tone for what each strand of imagery will represent, for as the action continues we see athletic imagery repeatedly used in connection with the drive for vengeance, while the *paian* is used to suggest a way of ending the cycle, whether or not this is presented as attainable. The Chorus reinforce this distinction a little later in the *parodos*, as they describe the events at Aulis that pave the way for the action of the play. As Iphigeneia is sacrificed, the Achaean chieftains who support the killing are described as 'umpires' (βραβῆς, 230), while the gag used to silence her is called a 'bit', as though she were a racehorse (χαλινῶν, 238). Similarly, when Agamemnon decides to carry out the sacrifice, he takes on the 'yoke of necessity' (ἀνάγκας λέπαδνον, 219), which presents him too as an animal harnessed for a race. In all these cases, athletic language describes the desire for violent action which will perpetuate the cycle of vengeance.

Conversely, Iphigeneia's silent plea for mercy is described through the image of her earlier performances of the *paian* in her father's house (243-7):

ἐπεὶ πολλάκις
πατρὸς κατ' ἀνδρῶνας εὐτραπέζους
ἔμελψεν, ἀγνῆι δ' ἀταύρωτος αὐδᾶ πατρὸς
φίλου τριτόσπονδον εὐποτμον παι-
ῶνα φίλως ἐτίμα.

Since she had often sung in her father's richly-laden banquetting chambers, and, a virgin with pure voice, she lovingly performed her father's *paian* for good fortune at the third libation.

¹² Cf. 362-402, an extended discussion of the role of Zeus and justice in the Trojan war.

As with Calchas' appeal to Apollo, we find a stark juxtaposition between the ideals of the paeanic performance and the reality of what is taking place. The *paian* is once again corrupted, as its audience have become the umpires who approve her death.¹³

Calchas' prayer is echoed in the Herald's speech, where he prays for Apollo to look kindly upon the returning Argives (510-13):

τόξοις ἰάπτων μηκέτ' εἰς ἡμᾶς βέλη·
ἄλις παρὰ Σκάμανδρον ἦσθ' ἀνάρσιος·
νῦν δ' αὔτε σωτῆρ ἴσθι καὶ παιώνιος,
ἄναξ Ἄπολλον·

Shoot missiles from your bow at us no longer – you were hostile enough to us beside the Scamander. No, now become a saviour and paeanic again, lord Apollo.

The Herald alludes to the Homeric tradition that Apollo was a pro-Trojan god, and contrasts the hostile Apollo of epic with the kindly god of ritual practice, invoking him as Apollo παιώνιος. Like Calchas' prayer, however, this is doomed to fail, since the legacy of the Trojan war is not yet over.¹⁴ Similarly, the Herald warns of the dangers of marring good fortune with bad news by describing it as singing a *paian* to the Erinyes (παιῶνα τόνδ' Ἐρινύων, 645), and in so doing foreshadows the way in which the *paian* is contaminated through most of the trilogy.

Clytemnestra's revenge

Imagery associated with lyric genres is thus introduced early in the trilogy, and embedded in the passages that establish its moral framework. The climax of *Agamemnon* is Clytemnestra's murder of her husband, and we find a cluster of paeanic and epinician language used to anticipate the killing and explore its significance. This is first signalled by the motif of the beacon that symbolises Agamemnon's return, which at the start of the play is greeted by the Watchman in terms that evoke paeanic salvation (22-9):

ὦ χαῖρε λαμπτήρ νυκτός ἡμερήσιον
φάος πιφάυσκων καὶ χορῶν κατάστασιν
πολλῶν ἐν Ἄργει τῆσδε συμφορᾶς χάριν.
ἰοὐ ἰοὐ·

¹³ This passage is often discussed with reference to whether or not it is plausible that Iphigeneia would have performed the *paian* at an all-male *symposium* (which would certainly not have been the case in a fifth-century Athenian context): e.g. Fraenkel 1950, ii.140-1; Denniston and Page 1957, 91; Raeburn and Thomas 2011, 95. The purpose of the passage, however, seems to me more symbolic, as Iphigeneia's performance of the *paian*, as well as providing pathos, introduces the motif of the 'third libation' and the perversion of the *paian*'s powers of healing and communality (discussed further below).

¹⁴ Leahy 1974 suggests a contrast between 'epic' and 'realistic' depictions of the Trojan war, though his view of the 'realistic' focuses on the grittiness of real-life warfare. I would add to this the contrast between 'epic' and 'cultic' views of the gods' role in this war.

Ἀγαμέμνωνος γυναικὶ σημαίνω τορῶα
εὐνῆς ἐπαντείλασαν ὡς τάχος δόμοις
ὄλολυγμὸν εὐφημοῦντα τῆιδε λαμπάδι
ἐπορθιάζειν,

Hail beacon, which brings the light of day in the night and will cause many choral dances in Argos in thanks for this good fortune. Iou, iou! I announce clearly to Agamemnon's wife that she should rise from her bed as quickly as she can, and lift up her voice in the auspicious *olulugmos* for the house in response to this beacon.

Light imagery is common in *paianes*, and is connected with the songs' healing function and the association between light and safety in Greek thought.¹⁵ Here the light really exists, in the form of the beacon whose appearance signals the fall of Troy.¹⁶ The formal greeting ὦχᾶί ρε (22), the ritual cries of ἰ οὐ ἰ οὐ (25), and the expectation of choral dances (23) create the mood of a religious occasion; this is amplified by the announcement at 28-9 that Clytemnestra will perform an *olulugê*: the female equivalent of the *paian*.¹⁷ The Watchman's opening words were a prayer for divine release from suffering (θεοῦς μὲν αἰ τῶπῶν ἀπαλλαγῆν πόνων, 'I beg the gods for release from these toils', 1), while immediately before the appearance of the beacon he connects this with the appearance of light in the darkness (εὐτυχῆς γένοιτ' ἀπαλλαγῆ πόνων, 'may there be an auspicious release from toils' 20). Thus the appearance of the beacon is already charged with religious imagery, and its association with the *paian*, a song performed to celebrate release from evil, is appropriate.

In their response to the beacon, the Chorus draw on paeanic imagery to hope for an end to their worries. Rather than the beacon itself or the gods, however, it is Clytemnestra they ask to be a *paian* to them and release them from trouble (παιῶν τε γενοῦ | τῆσδε μερίμνης, 98-9). As with the earlier evocations of the *paian*, there is an ironic gap between the characters' naive and optimistic invocation of the genre, and the audience's knowledge of the true state of events, since we know that the 'healing' Clytemnestra will bring is far from what the Chorus has in mind.¹⁸ Indeed, Clytemnestra's response to the beacon redefines the paeanic language into epinician mode, by imagining the light as an athletic torch race (312-14):

τοιοῖδε τοί μοι λαμπαδηφόρων νόμοι,
ἄλλος παρ' ἄλλου διαδοχαῖς πληρούμενοι·
νικᾶ δ' ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος δραμῶν.

¹⁵ Cf. Pind. *Pa.* 12.15, 3.1, 3.5, 7c(a).2 S-M; Sim. *PMG* 519 fr. 120(b). See Haldane 1963; Rutherford 2001, 76; Swift 2010, 68-9.

¹⁶ For light imagery more broadly in the trilogy, see Peradotto 1964, 388-93.

¹⁷ See Pulleyn 1997, 178-83. Descriptions of paeanic singing often include a group of women performing the *olulugê/ololugmos*: e.g. Sapph. fr. 44.31-3 V; Bacch. 17.124-9. On the importance of the *ololugê* in the *Oresteia* see Moritz 1979, 195; Garvie 1986, 146.

¹⁸ Cf. Haldane 1965, 38.

Such were my arrangements for this torch-relay, and each was fulfilled one after the other in succession; the first runner and the last are both victorious.

The first and last runner are victorious in the sense that a relay victory is shared by all the members of the team; however, I agree with Sommerstein's view that there is a sinister subtext.¹⁹ The first runner represents Agamemnon ordering the torch to be lit, and it is his victory that is being celebrated, but his return to Argos will facilitate the ultimate victory of Clytemnestra. The imagery of the torch race picks up on the earlier description of the Trojan war as wrestling, and hints at how the cycle of violence will continue, as the paeanic beacon-light is turned into vengeful fire. The association between athletic language and vengeance is made clearer as Clytemnestra's speech continues, where she imagines the terrible fate that awaits the army if the spirits of the dead cannot be placated (341-7):

ἔρωσ δὲ μή τις πρότερον ἐμπίπτῃ στρατῶ
πορθεῖν ἄμῃχρή, κέρδεσιν νικωμένους·
δεῖ γὰρ πρὸς οἴκουσ νοστήμου σωτηρίας,
κάμψαι διαύλου θάτερον κῶλον πάλιν.
θεοῖσ δ' ἀναμπλάκτησ εἰ μόλοι στρατός,
παρήγορον τὸ πῆμα τῶν ὀλωλότων
γένοιτ' ἄν, εἰ πρόσπαια μὴ τύχοι κακά.

But may no lust fall upon the army to plunder what they should not, defeated by greed. They still have to make a safe homecoming, turning the bend and returning for the second leg of the double run. If the army should return without committing a crime against the gods, the pain of the dead may be able to be calmed, if no stroke of bad luck occurs.

Again, the Greek army's vengeance against the Trojans is conceived of as an athletic event, but this time it is one that is not yet complete, as the second leg of the race still has to be run. While the return leg could refer simply to the journey back to Greece, the previous association of athleticism with violence primes us to expect that the 'second leg' will involve more bloodletting. Moreover, the audience can recognise that Clytemnestra's reference to calming the pain of the dead is a veiled reference to Iphigeneia, as well as the dead of Troy, and so to her own motivation for vengeance.²⁰

As the action continues, Clytemnestra continues to appropriate the paeanic mode to her own agenda. She announces that she has performed the *ololugê* as the Watchman anticipated (587, 595), but while this purports to be to celebrate the end of war, it anticipates her own triumph over Agamemnon. This distortion of the *paian* is reinforced in her description of Agamemnon's murder, which she presents as a form of paeanic libation (1385-7):

καὶ πεπτωκότι

¹⁹Sommerstein 2008, 39 n.71, though for a counter-view see Raeburn and Thomas 2011, 105.

²⁰ Cf. Raeburn and Thomas 2011, 107.

τρίτην ἐπενδίδωμι, τοῦ κατὰχθονὸς
Διὸς νεκρῶν σωτῆρος εὐκταίαν χάριν.

And when he had fallen I put in a third stroke, in thanksgiving to Zeus of the underworld,
saviour of the dead.

The libation to Zeus Sôtêr was the third libation to be poured before the drinking began at a symposium, and was accompanied by a *paian*.²¹ Clytemnestra's language alludes to the similar imagery used of Iphigeneia's death, where we were reminded of her performance of the *paian* at the third libation (τριτόσπονδον εὔποτμον παι-|ῶνα, 246-7). The correspondence between the two passages is clear: Clytemnestra kills to avenge Iphigeneia. Yet the way in which she applies the image demonstrates her misuse of the *paian*'s generic associations, for she describes her libation as offered to Διὸς νεκρῶν σωτῆρος. The common tragic oxymoron of a *paian* to the dead is combined with the idea that Zeus Sôtêr, whose function is usually to protect the living, is concerned for the interests of the dead.²² This dysphemic distortion echoes Clytemnestra's corruption of symbolism of the *paian*, as she turns something normally associated with communality and salvation into a tool of vengeance.²³

Orestes' vengeance

Another cluster of paeanic and athletic imagery is located around the vengeance of Orestes in *Choephoroi*. By this stage in the trilogy, the role of the Curse has been acknowledged by the characters. As the action becomes more sinister, the imagery of the triple-throw in wrestling, originally introduced to represent the justice of Zeus, comes to represent the power of the Curse, and its ability to perpetuate violence. Conversely, the *paian* continues to be associated with the possibility of peace, but in a way which distorts its true function. Thus Electra asks in her despair 'is ruin not impossible to throw three times?' (οὐκ ἀτρίακτος ἄτα, 339), to which the Chorus respond that it is possible to have a *paian* in the house instead of her songs of lament (ἄντι δὲ θρήνων ἐπιτυμβιδίων | παιῶν μελάθροις ἐν βασιλείοις, 342-3). The Chorus reject Electra's suggestion that no good outcome can be achieved, and use the *paian* as a marker of hope. However, like Clytemnestra they conceptualise it as corresponding to successful vengeance. This misapplication of the *paian* is shown by its proximity to the θρήνων it is said to replace, which again suggests the '*paian* of death' motif.²⁴

²¹ Σ Pind. *Isth.* 6 (iii.251.24 Dr); Aesch. fr. 55 R; Ath. 15.692f-693c; Xen. *Symp.* 2.1; Plut. *Mor.* 615b and see Rutherford 2001, 50. The first two libations were to Olympian Zeus and to heroes or chthonic deities. Aeschylus also uses this order in the prayers at *Suppl.* 21-6.

²² Cf. Raeburn and Thomas 2011, 214. On the '*paian* of death' in tragedy, see Rutherford 2001, 118-21; Loraux 2002, 65; Swift 2010, 71-2.

²³ Cf. Haldane 1965, 37; Goldhill 1984, 89. On the problematic connotations of the *ololugê* throughout the trilogy (until the closing lines of *Eum.*), see Moritz 1979, 210-11.

²⁴ Also suggested by Electra at 151, where she describes the lament for Agamemnon as a '*paian* for the dead man' (παιῶνα τοῦ θανόντος).

The association between vengeance, the Curse, and athletic imagery continues throughout *Choephoroi*. Clytemnestra, who had hoped at the end of *Agamemnon* that her own acts of violence would not be subject to the Curse (1569-76), now laments that it is a deadly wrestling opponent (ὤδυσπάλαιστε τῶνδε δωμάτων Ἄρα, 692), while the Chorus imagine Orestes' vengeance as an athletic *agôn* (ξιφοδηλήτοισιν ἄγῳν, 729) and present Orestes himself as a horse running in a chariot race (794-9). The Chorus, in their support for the vengeance, continue to depict it as an act which will inspire paeanic song. They imagine performing the *ololugmos* over the deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (386-7), and later fulfil this promise, when Orestes returns to the stage after killing his mother (942-5):

ἔπολλούξατ' ὤδεσποσύνων δόμῳ
 ἀναφυγαῖ κακῶν καὶ κτεάνων τριβᾶς
 ὑπὸ δυοῖν μιστόροισιν,
 δυσοίμου τύχας.

Cry out the *ololugê*, for the house of our masters has escaped evil and the wasting of its goods at the hands of this polluted pair, a wretched fate.

The language of the *paian* is corrupted once more. This underscores the Chorus' mistake in supposing that the murders will end the troubles of the house, for this is an *ololugê* expressed in dysphemic language that expresses pollution and destruction (κακῶν, μιστόροισιν, δυσοίμου τύχας). As Orestes descends into madness, seeing visions of the Furies, we are soon shown the futility of the Chorus' optimism. Moreover, we are reminded that it is athletic rather than paeanic language that is more appropriate to describe the ongoing cycle of violence, as Orestes describes himself as a charioteer who has lost control of his team and is veering off the track (ὤπερ ξὺν ἵπποις ἠνιοστροφῶδρόμου | ἐξωτέρῳ, 1022-3).²⁵ As the Curse claims another victim, this image of an athletic triumph aborted recalls Clytemnestra's warning in the previous play of the runner unable to complete the return leg of his race (*Ag.* 343-4).

The increasing darkness of the athletic language prepares the way for the arrival of the Erinyes, and in *Eumenides* it is associated entirely with their desire to punish Orestes. Thus the Erinyes boast of how they trip up runners in a race (372-6), referring to their ability to destroy those who have committed acts of violence, while as they assert their power in preparation for the trial, they mix a metaphor of wrestling into their description of the unjust man shipwrecked by his arrogance (δυσπαλεῖ τε δίναϊ, 559). Once the trial begins, the wrestling imagery comes more strongly to the fore: when he admits killing his mother, the Erinyes claim that they have thrown him for the first time (ἔν μὲν τόδ' ἤδη τῶν τριῶν παλαισμάτων, 589). However, the defeat of the Erinyes marks a shift in the nature of vengeance and justice, and this is reflected by a transformation of the wrestling imagery. As Orestes blesses Athens before leaving the stage, he imagines the Athenians' power over their

²⁵ See Myrick 1993; Fowler 2007 on this strand of imagery.

enemies as a wrestling-trick that cannot be defeated (πάλαισμ' ἄφικτον, 776), presenting wrestling as a positive and protective image. Equally, the Erinyes accuse the gods of being wrestlers hard to compete against (δυσπάλαμοι, 846), and so highlight how the Olympians have redefined the nature of justice.²⁶ The language of athleticism is finally removed from personalised vengeance and the Curse, and can be applied to the future order, into which the vengeful powers of the Erinyes will be harnessed for communal good.

Interpreting generic narratives

Throughout the first two plays in the trilogy, then, Aeschylus not only makes rich use of language which evokes *epinikion* and *paian*, but brings the two strands into juxtaposition at key moments in the plot. Athletic language is introduced alongside the *epinikion* to Zeus, and first stands for the ethics of *talio* vengeance; as the plays go on, this strand of imagery becomes increasingly dark and is associated with individual acts of violence and with the Curse on the house of Atreus, as well as the destructive and inescapable nature of this approach. Conversely, the *paian* is originally introduced to suggest a way of ending the cycle and achieving peace, but it too is either misappropriated for vengeance or presented in a distorted way. Thus it is invoked in support of an idea that the audience knows is unattainable, or presented as corrupted, by being juxtaposed with anathematic elements such as death and suffering. It is only in *Eumenides* that this paeanic language is allowed to return to its unsullied and positive nature. This begins early in the play, when the Pythia introduces Apollo (60-3):

τάντεῦθεν ἤδη τῶνδε δεσπότηι δόμων
αὐτῷ μελέσθω Λοξίαι μεγασθενεῖ·
ἰατρόμαντις δ' ἔστι καὶ τερασκόπος
καὶ τοῖσιν ἄλλοις δωμάτων καθάρσιος.

From now on let this be the concern of powerful Loxias himself, the master of this house. He is a healing seer, a diviner, and one who purifies the houses of others.

Apollo's presence in the play and his role as protector of Orestes reinforces this new image of the relationship man can have with the divine. The language of purification and healing is dense throughout *Eumenides*,²⁷ but its association with ritual choral song becomes clear at the end of the play, where the Processional Escort sing paeanic and euphemic cries to celebrate the conversion of the Erinyes into beneficent spirits. At 1035 and 1038 the citizens are invited to participate in the ritual celebration (εὐφραμεῖ τε δέ, χωρῖται, 1035; εὐφραμεῖ τε δὲ πανδαμεί, 1038); in the second strophe and antistrophe, this becomes an explicit invitation to join in the singing of an *ololugê* (ὀλολύξατέ νυν ἐπὶ μολπαῖς, 1042, 1047). The final words of the trilogy are therefore an uncorrupted and joyful paeanic performance in which the wider

²⁶ As Garvie 1986, 134 notes, *Eum.* 776 is the first time in the trilogy that wrestling imagery appears in a propitious context.

²⁷ On healing as a theme in the trilogy, see Petrounias 1976, 255-8.

community (perhaps including the audience) is conceptualised as participants, to celebrate the restoration of harmony within the community.²⁸ The *paian* is ultimately reinstated in its proper ritual place, and is used to symbolise the establishment of a new moral order.²⁹

The contrast between *epinikion* and *paian* that runs through the trilogy is crystallised in the corresponding images of the triple throw in the wrestling and the triple libation.³⁰ As we have already seen, the *paian* performed at the third libation is a motif that connects the killings of Iphigeneia and Agamemnon (Ag. 246-7, 1385-7). Electra hints at it in her recognition of Orestes, when she addresses him as a saviour (σωτηρίου, 236) and then prays to a triple sequence of divinities culminating in Zeus (τρίτωι πάντων μεγίστωι Ζηνί, 244-5). While the paeanic imagery is not made explicit, the pattern of three connected with Zeus Sôtêr connects it to the previous sequences, but shows us that Electra, like her mother, imagines this *paian* of salvation as achievable through the successful realisation of vengeance. Similarly, Orestes describes the killing of Aegisthus as the third libation (τρίτην πόσιν, 578), linking the murder to the killings of Agamemnon and the children of Thyestes, and presenting it as a perverted act of religious worship.³¹ The motif recurs in the final lines of *Choephoroi*, where it acts as a bridge between the vengeful cycle of the past and the possibility of a brighter future (1068-76):

παιδοβόροι μὲν πρῶτον ὑπῆρξαν
μόχθοι τάλανες,
δεύτερον ἀνδρὸς βασιλεία πάθη,
λουτροδάικτος δ' ὤλετ' Ἀχαιῶν
πολέμαρχος ἀνὴρ,
νῦν δ' αὖ τρίτος ἦλθέ ποθεν σωτήρ –
ἦ μόρον εἶπω;
ποῖ δῆτα κρανεῖ, ποῖ καταλήξει
μετακοιμισθὲν μένος ἄτης;

It first began with the wretched pain of child-eating; second it was the royal sufferings of a man, and the war-leader of the Achaeans died, killed in his bath. Now there is a third come from somewhere, a saviour, or should I say doom? Where will it end? Where will the power of Ruin fall asleep and cease?

The play ends in ambiguity as to whether Orestes' actions will lead to another perverted *paian* of destruction (μόρον), or whether there is scope for a true *paian* of salvation (σωτήρ). This question paves the way for *Eumenides*, where the imagery of healing and purification will lead to an uncorrupted *paian* and a release from evil. Thus the imagery of the triple libation moves from something dark and distorted towards an optimistic resolution.

²⁸ See Sommerstein 2008, 285. On the real-life evocations of this scene cf. Scott 1984, 17.

²⁹ As Moritz 1979, 195 notes, the ritual *ololugê* echoes the refrain αἴ λινον αἴ λινον εἰ πί, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω of the *Agamemnon* parodos (121, 139, 159), and so reinforces the movement from fear to optimism.

³⁰ For a discussion of each of these strands of imagery, see Poliakoff 1980; Burian 1986.

³¹ On the corruption of religious and sacrificial imagery in the trilogy, see Zeitlin 1965.

Conversely, the imagery of the triple wrestling throw moves from the positive to the negative. Originally associated with the justice of Zeus (Ag. 168-75), it then moves to describing the Curse (*Cho.* 339) and the Erinyes (ἔν μὲν τόδ' ἤδη τῶν τριῶν παλαισμάτων, *Eum.* 589). Yet just as the *paian* is contaminated in the first two plays, here it is the athletic language that falls short, since the Furies' anticipated triumph is not completed, and it is only the first throw that they obtain. The final resolution of these patterns of three comes when Orestes, after being acquitted, gives a triple thanks to Athena, Apollo, and thirdly Zeus Sôtêr (τρίτου Σωτήρος, 759-60). The pattern echoes the triple libation, but the other deities thanked are now those who have helped free Orestes from the Erinyes, and the praise of Zeus Sôtêr finally comes in a context of true release from evils. Thus these correspondences of 'three' follow an opposing trajectory, which reflect the broader narrative attached to their respective lyric genre. The triple-throw moves from reflecting an established moral system to exposing the horrors of that system, until it is finally stopped by the trial of Orestes, and integrated into a more positive future. The third libation begins as a horrible distortion, but is ultimately allowed to succeed, since the Chorus' hope at the end of *Choephoroi* for a saviour is reflected in *Eumenides*, where Apollo acts as the protector of Orestes, and ushers in a new order overseen by the other gods.

Wider meanings: why *paian* and *epinikion*?

We have seen, then, that Aeschylus makes dense use of imagery derived from lyric poetry throughout the *Oresteia*, and that these strands of imagery represent a narrative arc in the plays. It remains, however, to consider why *epinikion* and *paian* are chosen to take on these meanings, and the broader cultural connotations of these genres in an Athenian context.

The use of epinician motifs is particularly relevant to *Agamemnon* as a *nostos* play, since one function of an *epinikion* is to facilitate the re-entry of the victor into his community after completing a deed which sets him apart from it.³² Winning at the Games was an alienating act as well as a glorious one, and real-life *epinikia* attempt to minimise the risks by presenting the victory in communal terms, while also offering warnings to the victor not to allow his new status to corrupt him.³³ In tragedy, we often find epinician language surrounding a problematic *nostos*, where it can explore the broader tragic theme of how to balance the needs of the powerful individual with that of the community.³⁴ In *Agamemnon*'s case, he has committed two problematic acts: the sack of Troy, and the killing of Iphigeneia. As we have seen, both are described using athletic language. Moreover, the Chorus adopt a tone of warning when describing both acts, and raise the possibility that they will bring about danger in the future (250-4, 472-4). When *Agamemnon* appears on the chariot, itself a hint that he is

³² See Kurke 1991, 15-34.

³³ Strategies of communality include telling a local myth or foundation story and presenting the *polis* as sharing the praise. For warning motifs, cf. e.g. Pind. *Ol.* 1.30-4, *Pyth.* 3.80-3, 7.14-18, 10.19-29, *Isth.* 3.1-6, 17-28, 4.33-7, 5.13-16, 8.14-16; Bacch. 3.74-82, 5.50-5, 9.88-92, 10.45-7, 14.1-6.

³⁴ Epinician language is found densely in Soph. *Trach.*, Eur. *Her.* and *Or.*, all of which present a hero's return. For more detailed discussion of *epinikion* and *nostos* in tragedy see Swift 2010, 150-1.

presented in the mould of an athletic victor, he is greeted by a choral song which makes use of many of the tropes of *epinikion*.³⁵ The Chorus begin by greeting the victor with mention of his father and city, a common trope in *epinikia*.³⁶ They then explicitly refer to the dangers of praise, and the need to moderate one's language (785-7):

πῶς σε προσείπω; πῶς σε σεβίξω
μήθ' ὑπεράρας μήθ' ὑποκάμψας
καιρὸν χάριτος;

How should I address you? How should I honour you without overshooting or falling short of the right point of favour?

This self-conscious concern to control and moderate the praise is reminiscent of Pindaric *epinikia*, where the poet dwells on his own role, and his ability to praise his client while avoiding *phthonos*. In response comes Clytemnestra's welcome speech, where she praises Agamemnon in excessive terms (896-903).³⁷ Clytemnestra, like an epinician poet, breaks off her praise to warn of the dangers of *phthonos* (φθόνος δ' ἀπέστω, 904), but her insistence in the lines that immediately follow that Agamemnon must walk on the purple tapestries highlights the hollowness of her warning.³⁸ By walking on the tapestries, Agamemnon fails to touch the soil of Argos, and so his *nostos* is never completed. Whereas a successful *epinikion* defuses the potential tension in athletic victory, the praise directed at Agamemnon is presented as troubling, and the dangers of his past actions are not averted but lead directly to his downfall.

Connected to the dangers of *nostos* is the individualistic strand that runs through *epinikion*, since this is a genre whose purpose is to celebrate personal achievement. It is therefore not surprising that *epinikion* and athletic language are connected in the trilogy with the individualistic ethical code of personalised vengeance. From a fifth-century Athenian perspective, *epinikion* is also associated with an old-fashioned and aristocratic world-view. The audience at the *Oresteia* in 458 may have been familiar with contemporary *epinikia* in a way that later tragic audiences would not have been, but the last securely datable *epinikion* for an Athenian victor was from 486, and it is often supposed that *epinikia* were no longer considered suitable after the radicalisation of the democracy.³⁹ We should not go too far in presuming that *epinikia* were unacceptable in democratic Athens, but there certainly seems to have been a shift in taste during the fifth century, as attested directly by Eupolis (fr. 398 K-

³⁵ The Pindaric resonance in this scene was first noted by Harriott 1982, 10. For fuller discussions of the epinician resonance in this scene, see Sailor and Stroup 1999; Steiner 2010; Carey 2012. For athletic victors entering on chariots, see Sinos 1993, 78.

³⁶ On genealogy as a feature in *epinikion*, see Golden 1998, 108-9.

³⁷ The exaggerated levels of praise here led Dindorf 1879 xcii to condemn the lines, though most modern scholars have rightly taken it as a deliberate rhetorical strategy of Clytemnestra's.

³⁸ This abrupt cessation of the praise is also reminiscent of the Pindaric 'Abbruchsformel', where the poet breaks away from the topic, usually to avoid incurring divine anger or *phthonos*: see Mackie 2003, ch. 1.

³⁹ See Golden 1998, 86, though for a more cautious view see Hornblower 2004, 252-4. For a more detailed discussion of this issue see Swift 2010, 106-15.

A), who associates *epinikia* with a former age. For Aeschylus' audience, who had recently lived through political change to a radical democracy, *epinikion*'s association with times past may have been particularly marked.⁴⁰ The trilogy's overarching movement is from individual action towards a communal way of resolving problems. While individual retaliation is set up at the start as the divinely-ordained order, the characters' actions increasingly highlight the flaws of a personally-based justice system. As part of this process, the athletic language associated with such actions becomes darker, associated more with the Curse and the Erinyes, and with images of athletes crushed or failing, until it is finally redeemed by Orestes' acquittal.

Conversely, the *paian* is associated with healing and divine beneficence, and this makes it a particularly evocative choice in a trilogy that deals first with the inability to reach harmony and then with its imposition. Paeanic imagery is often found in plays with a strong divine presence, or where the religious order is explored or questioned.⁴¹ The *paian* is also associated with the community and with an organised response to triumph or disaster.⁴² In public *paianes*, the chorus not only represent the *polis* but often symbolise a group response to an event which affects their community as a whole. Similarly, military *paianes* signify the unity of the army, and when choruses from different Greek cities each perform a *paian* at a panhellenic sanctuary, the singing of the *paian* affirms the unity of the local group. Since one of the fundamental movements of the *Oresteia* is the journey from personalised violence to a communal system of justice, validated by society as a whole, the generic narrative reflects this journey on the musico-cultural level.

This discussion has only attempted to scratch the surface of a topic. Many tragedies refer to more than one lyric genre, while even within the *Oresteia*, we can see the influence of hymenaeal, threnodic, and other types of hymnic song, as well as *paian* and *epinikion*. Nevertheless, this chapter has aimed to show how the dramatic and poetic potential associated with a lyric genre can be multiplied when genres are juxtaposed, and how a tragedian can make use of this lyric imagery, not just to intensify a particular choral ode, but as a narratological device to guide the audience's interpretation. These generic narratives operate in a similar manner to the much-discussed chains of imagery in Aeschylean drama, yet they have the advantage, from the poet's perspective, that generic narratives already have their own encoded set of cultural expectations, on which a skilled poet can build. For the audience, lyric genres are not merely decorative imagery but represent a vivid part of their society's way of understanding and responding to the world, and thus these generic narratives offer them a uniquely rich and emotive experience.

⁴⁰ A detailed discussion of the trilogy's relationship to Ephialtes' reforms and to contemporary politics is outside the scope of this paper: see Macleod 1982; Podlecki 1999, 63-100; Pelling 2000, 167-77; Sommerstein 2008, 25-32.

⁴¹ Eg., Soph. *OT*; Eur. *Alc. Ion*: see Swift 2010, ch. 3

⁴² Cf. Rutherford 2001, 9, 61-3.

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