

*Afterlives at the Tomb of Agamemnon***Introduction**

What were in the *Agamemnon* the merest whispers concerning the afterlife are fully pronounced in the *kommos* scene of the *Choephoroi* (306–509). The extended mourning for Agamemnon transforms entirely the relationships of characters to the dead. Electra and Orestes have been disenfranchised by Agamemnon's murder and face his disgraceful burial. They and the Chorus of Slave Women are unable to honor him as he should have been originally, with a kingly funeral after a death in battle or following a long life at home. Unlike anything until this point in the trilogy, the mourners never speak of peaceful rest or of death as an endpoint. Instead, they alternate conceptualizations of Agamemnon's existence and power in the beyond in a sophisticated dramatic-religious scene. At some points, they focus on glory; at others, on the pitiful nature of his death. At some points, they call on him to rise from the dead or send his power from the tomb; and at others, they refer to his honored place among kings in the underworld. The *kommos* has been widely discussed, and yet the specific afterlives mentioned have not received sufficient attention, and even less has been written about the paradoxes created by cramming these divergent perspectives on the afterlife together.

These views and the contradictions between them, I argue, not only create a variety of dramatic effects but also entail specific ethical relations and political consequences.¹ The *kommos* and its surrounding scenes stand in contrast to previous mentions of the afterlife, which were not clearly relatable to actions on stage and only indirectly relatable to the characterization of speakers. In the *kommos*, the conceptualization of afterlife existence directly demonstrates the ethos and specific desires of the mourning characters. The ritual creation of various roles for Agamemnon speaks to

¹ On the definition of poetics, ethics (including the ethos of characters), and politics as they are used here, see the Introduction.

the ethical problems of the relation of Agamemnon's remaining children to his filicide and Orestes' approaches to the matricide.

Politically, the scene is part of the transition between one coup and the next. The afterlife representations of each of the leaders reflects the rhetoric concerning their rule, as well as the justification for their replacement. The *kommos*, with its ritual call to raise Agamemnon and hints at his superhuman power, is also the transition point between the hesitating human speculation about chthonic forces and their actual manifestation on stage. The first section of this chapter touches on the unique but overlapping perspectives expressed by Electra, Orestes, and the Chorus. The remainder proceeds roughly in the order of the *kommos*. The second section untangles the divergent strands, particularly appeals to Agamemnon's unsettled spirit as opposed to the depiction of him as a king with the glory he deserves. The third section focuses on the most concentrated efforts to raise Agamemnon from the dead. The Summations/Connections section returns to the dramatic, ethical, and political implications of these multiple types of afterlives.

Dramatic Setup and Relations to Agamemnon

The crisis of the kingly household is clear to the audience through Agamemnon's dishonored tomb, the setting for the whole first half of the *Choephoroi*.² The words of Electra, Orestes, and the Slave Women resonate with this distress, seeking a reversal of Agamemnon's fate. Yet this is not as simple as providing him proper rites. The *kommos*, in fact, is the fourth set of mourning and burial rituals for the king. The first was Clytemnestra's improper burial of him between the *Agamemnon* and the start of the *Choephoroi*, from which she excluded the citizens and family.³ The second is Orestes' dedication of a lock of hair to his father at the tomb (*Cho.* 7–9). The third is Electra leading the Slave Women in a set of simple rites (124a[165]–164) after she specifically refuses to propitiate Agamemnon's spirit on behalf of Clytemnestra (84–123). The recurrence of burial rites thus reflects the depth of the predicament. Ritual alone is not enough to resolve the problems of Agamemnon's degradation and the loss of status for the entire family.⁴

² See Garvie (1986), xli–liv, for the staging.

³ *Ag.* 1541–57; *Cho.* 429–33. Hame (2004), 524–7, demonstrates that all of Clytemnestra's actions after Agamemnon's death overturn traditional Greek ritual: his dismembering, making him *akosmos* “disordered,” instead of the usual rite of arranging of the body, the *kosmos*; improper *prothesis*, as she lays him out for all to see; the absence of a funeral procession, the *ekphora*; and the sacrifice of Cassandra at his grave as the *prosphagma*. Cf. Seaford (1984); and McClure (1999), 70–1.

⁴ See Brook (2018), esp. 170–9, on problematic and incomplete rituals in tragedy, indicating a lack of the closure they are meant to provide.

Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus differentiate themselves as characters through the relations they form to the dead king.⁵ In general, the expressions of mourning from each character are appropriate to their primary roles as revenge-seeking son, unmarried daughter, and mourning household slaves.⁶ Yet in the scene, each character simultaneously refines aspects of their individual persona and generates an interlacing web of possible afterlives for Agamemnon. They manifest their desires through their appeals to Agamemnon, their counterfactual wishes concerning his status after death, and their description of his supernatural powers. First, I sketch out the types of statements, character by character, focusing on what their grouping implies about each speaker. I then analyze them further in the following sections, with an emphasis on the mixture of afterlife views and the effects of each.

Orestes, the central character of the *Choephoroi*, presents a narrow range of perspectives on the dead. From his entry to the end of the *kommos* scene, his focus does not waver: Orestes is concerned with the kingly household, his place in it, and its current dishonor. He puts forward both Apollo's oracle and diverse human motivations to justify his act of vengeance (269–305). In the *kommos*, he hails the unnamed ancestors buried before the palace as watchers over the house (†προσθοδόμοις† Ἀτρείδαις, 322), representing the normal state of kingly honor.⁷ Orestes expresses a wish that his father had died in war, in which case he would have a tomb in a foreign land and glory for the household (348–53; cf. *Od.* 1.236–40). Orestes thus focuses on a standard, even heroic form of masculine continuity: A father bequeaths the household to his son and is honored with a place among his ancestors. Orestes uses “two women” (δυσὶν γυναικοῖν, 304, referring to Aegisthus as well as Clytemnestra) and “female” (θῆλεια, 305) as insults.⁸ Orestes' views and character thus emerge in the *kommos* from the alternate

⁵ Lebeck (1971), 93–130, sketches out the development of Agamemnon's children and the Chorus's relationships to them, first as teacher and then as bystander. Cf. Brown (2018), ad 315–422.

⁶ See the Introduction for the ethical aspects of these types of standard roles as part of the larger category of “character.”

⁷ The text and interpretation are disputed. The OCT dagggers the first word; Garvie (1986), ad loc., takes it to be a generalizing plural referring to Agamemnon as a noxious spirit haunting the threshold. Sommerstein (2008b), ad loc., on the other hand, takes it to refer to the ancestors of the house, buried honorably, which is how I translate it as well. Cf. Sier (1988), ad loc. Note that the murderous history of the house of Atreus, which makes multiple appearances in the *Agamemnon*, complicates references to these ancestors.

⁸ By contrast, Orestes does mention Electra's struggles at 16–19 and 252–4, and Brown (2018), ad 301, posits including a line with her suffering among his motives for vengeance. Nooter (2017), 205–9, in her careful examination of the structure and sound effects, claims that, although Orestes begins the six parts of the *kommos*, he is drowned out in “the overwhelming harmony of female voices.”

picture he paints for Agamemnon, how he relates to the other mourners, and his attitude to his mother.⁹

Orestes' ethical dilemma is that, in order to reestablish the heroic, political, masculine structure, he must involve himself in a repetition of unheroic, plotting wrong.¹⁰ He appears to frame his upcoming action as heroic when he speaks of a clash of Ares against Ares (461). This reference to the god of war is a feeble recharacterization of the coming killings, as Orestes himself reveals thereafter. The course of the vengeance follows Apollo's injunction to plot rather than to come with an army (554–9). Orestes thus mirrors the worst traits of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, the subterfuge that leads to kin-killing for which each was marked for death, rather than the great deeds of war that should have been his father's legacy and led to his proper burial (e.g. *Ag.* 574[572]–581, 1545–6).

Orestes' connection to the dark, vengeful forces that Clytemnestra invoked are evident in his establishing relationships with underworld divinities. Orestes begins the play by invoking Chthonic Hermes as an ally and referring to his father's power in the afterlife.¹¹ Instead of praying for rest or honor for Agamemnon's spirit, he addresses it directly for help (4–5), continuing to do so throughout the *kommos* (315–19, 479–80, 483–5, 497–9, 503–5). Orestes calls on Zeus to grant him vengeance and be an ally (18–19), with the hint that this is Zeus of the Underworld.¹² Orestes' continual invocations of divinities of vengeance undercuts his claims to finality and justice. This is reinforced by Orestes' declaration that, after correcting the dishonor to his father through killing his mother, he will be ready to die (434–8). Ostensibly, this would bring him peace after he has discharged his function as avenger (Chapter 5).

Rather than a glorious warrior, Orestes is a “fulfiller” in the *Choephoroi*, linked to ritual and supernatural occurrences. Cassandra has prophesied his return, whereas Orestes calls himself the answer to Electra's prayers (212–19) and later prays that he will be the referent of Clytemnestra's symbolic snake

⁹ Lebeck (1971), 116–23, highlights the avoidance of the word “mother” by both Electra and Orestes in the *kommos*. Orestes uses the disdainful plural and other ambiguous words of parentage until finally facing the act of killing Clytemnestra in verse 899. Cf. Goldhill (1984a), 141–2.

¹⁰ In his mentions of the curses lined up against him (269–97), there are hints of the tremendous personal and political stakes and even of his ethical impasse concerning the matricide. For Orestes' ethical deliberation concerning killing his mother, see, among others, Zeitlin (1965), 496; Vellacott (1984a), 145–57; and Lawrence (2013), 89–100.

¹¹ Ἐρμῆ χθόνιε, πατρῶ' ἐποπτεῦων κρᾶτη, 1–2. For the restoration of the opening, missing in the manuscripts, from Aristophanes' *Frogs* and other sources, see Garvie (1970); Griffith (1987); and West (1990), 229–33. On Chthonic Hermes, see Chapter 1.

¹² Referred to repeatedly in the *kommos* (382–85 and 405–9; and cf. *Ag.* 1386–7). On the relation of Zeus to Hades, see Chapter 7.

dream (540–50). Orestes' fulfilling of Electra's prayers raises the dramatic expectation for the similar prayers in the *kommos*. Specifically, Orestes attempts to reach Agamemnon (315–19) and even return him somehow to the world (456, 489, 491, 493, 495). Will Agamemnon appear as Orestes had? Will he demonstrate his power from the grave?

The *kommos* shows Orestes to be a youth lacking parental guidance, under immeasurable ethical pressure, and attempting to act in the heroic mold. However, the forces Orestes activates are not his father's militaristic ones but his mother's deceptive ones. He invokes underworld powers of entrapment, effective in familial murder, and eventually repeats her crime. These elements complicate any simple justification of Orestes' vengeance through reference to Apollo's oracle. Orestes' alternation among direct appeals to Agamemnon in the *kommos*, disappointment thereafter, and interpretation of the dream illustrate the uncertainty and tensions in his own mind. The *kommos* thus provides a complex and even compromised background for his ethical choice.

Electra, by contrast, focuses on the burial ritual, her own marriage, and the amplification of Orestes. She demonstrates far more concern with feminine beings and claims. She is the first to worry about possible ethical transgression when she wonders whether wishing harm for kin is a pious act (εὐσεβῆ, *eusebē*, 122) and whether one should not ask for a judge, rather than an avenger (120).¹³ As an unmarried young woman, she seeks guidance from the Chorus, who help her initiate the first formal mourning scene. There she unknowingly echoes Orestes' earlier prayer to Chthonic Hermes (124a–b, cf. 1), which she intensifies in the *kommos* with references to Zeus of the Underworld and the chthonic gods (394–9, cf. 382–3, 462, 540). She seeks an avenger from the gods below and the return of Agamemnon himself (140–5, 146–9, 332–6). To her prayers for herself, she adds concern with Orestes' loss of property (135–7), and in the *kommos* she emphasizes the lot of his two children (332–6), long after Orestes seems to have focused solely on himself. Electra groups Orestes and herself through references to her marriage, reuse of his vocabulary, and augmentation of his claims (479–80, 481–2, 486–9, 492, 494, 500, 508–9).

Electra demonstrates growth through the process of mourning. Schooled by the Chorus, Electra heads the first ritual.¹⁴ She pours the drink offerings (149), commands the Chorus to bewail Agamemnon (150–1), and closes the ritual after one stanza of their lament (164). In the *kommos*, Electra declares her pain at the king's lack of proper burial (429–33, 444–50). To deal with

¹³ Goldhill (1986), 22–3. ¹⁴ This is a male responsibility in Greek culture, Hame (2004), 516–17.

the losses of family members, Electra grants Orestes three additional familial roles besides brother. He symbolically replaces their mother, sacrificed sister, and father (238–43; cf. *Il.* 6.429–30). Electra not only echoes Orestes' lines concerning the raising of the dead (457 and 496), she outstrips him, for instead of glory for death abroad she wishes that Agamemnon were not even dead (363–71). The Chorus, in response, imply that Electra's youthful speech needs to be moderated (372–4). Yet her movement in the scene is not toward restraint, but toward murderous vengeance: She calls for the splitting of the heads of Aegisthus and her mother (394–9). The mourning for Agamemnon thus gives Electra the opportunity to speak for herself, take action, and even mature, but the bloody circumstances also warp her development.

The Chorus of Slave Women differ from the main characters in their generalizing statements, emphasis on the spiritual powers of the dead, and references to more divergent afterlife possibilities. Before the *kommos*, they sing an ambiguous and highly allusive stanza that refers to punishment after death for those prospering without justice (61–5).¹⁵ The Slave Women also ask Agamemnon to hear prayers for vengeance (157–64). They revere Agamemnon's tomb, dishonored as it is, as an altar (106), hinting at the notion of a hero cult.¹⁶ In the *kommos*, the Chorus supplement the speeches of Orestes and Electra with far more universal language. They begin the group mourning with prayers to the Fates, Zeus, and Justice, gods who support the ancient precept, "blood for blood" (306–14). They thus weave vengeance into even the first elements of the *kommos*. They add further references to chthonic gods and Fate (463–78) and possible references to the family curse (466–75). In terms of Agamemnon himself, the Chorus refer most directly to the continuation of the spirit of the dead and the role of lament in bringing him back to the world (324–31, cf. 400–4). On the other hand, they are also the only ones in the scene to depict Agamemnon in the underworld, as an honored king (354–62).

In another contrast, the Chorus heavily stress the physical. They tear their clothes and cheeks three times.¹⁷ Their lament mixes their own loss of freedom and family, long ago, with the disasters of their masters.¹⁸ They also graphically describe Clytemnestra's mutilation of Agamemnon (439–43). Toward the end

¹⁵ This corresponds to the hint concerning afterlife punishment by the *Agamemnon's* Chorus (*Ag.* 461–8), and later that of the *Eumenides* (*Eum.* 267–75). See Chapters 2 and 7.

¹⁶ For the tomb as a prop in performance, see e.g. Brown (2018), 15–16.

¹⁷ 24–31, 152–5, 422–8. On the violent stage action implied in their words, see Conacher (1987), 112. On their swing from intense emotion ("like the Furies . . . they are frenzied by the justice of their cause") to detachment from the vengeance at the end of the play, see Rosenmeyer (1982), 163–73.

¹⁸ 75–83. On their slavery and the double nature of themes of slavery in the *Choephoroi*, see Patterson (1991), 111–15. On their voices and grief, particularly marked as Eastern, see Nooter (2017), 214. On the issue of slavery in tragedy more generally, see Hall (1997), 110–18; and Hunt (2011), 32–5.

of the *kommos*, they join the voices of the children in the attempted raising of the dead (458–60). Through their numerous perspectives on possible afterlives for Agamemnon, the Chorus focus on ways of activating the living. Specifically, they use both references to supernatural forces and their emphasis on the physical in service of transforming the political situation. These contrasting divine and physical aspects of Agamemnon's afterlife in their mourning, we will see, are directed at pushing the children toward vengeance.

Dramatically speaking, the Slave Women are the foil, internal audience, and teachers of the children. Through guiding the mourning ritual, they help repair the severed relationship between children and father. Significantly, it is the Chorus who close off the *kommos*, by approving the honoring of Agamemnon (510–11). They thus urge the children to turn from emphasizing the dead toward enacting their roles in the vengeful plot. Despite all their references to the afterlife, the Chorus also quash the expectation of Agamemnon's literal rising. They further imply that help from below is not forthcoming. Yet this is not the final word. Instead, the Chorus are one voice in this interwoven song, to whose themes we now turn more closely.¹⁹

Envisioning Agamemnon's Afterlives: Enraged Spirit, August King

The relations to dead Agamemnon that his mourners create are manifold and contradictory. They include overlapping character desires, differing conceptions of supernatural influence, and conflicting depictions of the dead with consequences for living action. Analyzing in order, we begin by parsing the conceptualizations of Agamemnon's spirit and its interaction with the world. This will draw out the implicit conflict between two views of Agamemnon's afterlife.

At the start of the *kommos*, Orestes refers more concretely to the afterlife than any character previously. Bolstering the Chorus's prayers to the gods for vengeance (306–14), in his first laments to his father he uses physical imagery (*Cho.* 315–18):

ὦ πάτερ αἰνόπατερ, τί σοι
φάμενος ἢ τί ῥέξας
τύχοιμι ἄγκαθεν οὐρίσας
ἔνθα σ' ἔχουσιν εὐναί;

¹⁹ On the polyphony of voices and ideas from characters on different social levels, especially slaves, in Greek tragedy, see Hall (1997), 118–24.

Oh father, father of misery,
 saying or doing what
 could I succeed in wafting (you)
 here from afar where your bed holds you?

It is a point of contention among scholars whether Orestes at first seeks to waft words to where Agamemnon is lying, or whether he wishes to bring Agamemnon up to the world, as translated above.²⁰ Regardless of how this particular line is interpreted, Orestes uses more corporeal language than was found in earlier appeals. He addresses Agamemnon as held in his bed (ἔχουσιν εὐνάι, 318), a phrasing reminiscent of that used for the dead of the Trojan War, who are held by the land (*Ag.* 452–5, Chapter 2), with no indication that they can respond. The Herald actively denied that these dead care to rise from their graves (*Ag.* 567–9), although the very negation indicates the possibility. Orestes, however, revises the notion of death as sleep that the Herald and the Chorus treat as eternal oblivion (Chapters 1 and 2). Rather, Orestes seeks the right words in prayer to wake Agamemnon, and even to cause his return.

Later in the scene, the theme of raising the dead recurs, but several other ideas intervene. The continual interruption obstructs easy interpretation, leaving the audience guessing at the start whether anything more than the standard language of lament is truly meant. The first intervening theme is Agamemnon's blocked honor, due to his lack of proper mourning rites. Orestes directs the second half of his stanza to returning it (*Cho.* 320–2):

χάριτες δ' ὁμοίως
 κέκληνται γόος εὐκλεῆς
 †προσθοδόμοις† Ἀτρειδαίς.

glorifying lamentation is likewise said to be grace
 for the race of Atreus before the palace.

Responding to his father's misery and begetting of misery (both senses of αἰνόπατερ, 315; cf. Sier (1988), ad loc.), Orestes declares that honoring the dead gives glory (εὐκλεῆς, *eukleēs*, 321) and thus bestows grace (χάριτες, *kharites*, 320) on the family, past and present. We have seen how in the *Oresteia* both glory and grace have already been problematic terms in relation to those violently murdered, such as Cassandra and even the

²⁰ See Lebeck (1971), 103–4; Goldhill (1986), esp. 21–3; Sier (1988), ad loc.; Brown (2018), ad 317; and Garvie (1986), ad loc., with a breakdown of the textual issues and bibliography on the difficulty of reaching the dead with the right words. Garvie also distinguishes two forms of thinking about Agamemnon's soul, at the tomb and away in Hades (xxxiii); cf. Schlatter (2018), 60–7.

Trojan War dead.²¹ Exacerbating the issue, Agamemnon has not died in Homeric battle, as Orestes soon wishes he had (345–53). A “high-heaped tomb in a land across the sea” (πολύχωστον . . . τάφον διαποντίου γᾶς, 351–2) would have enabled the valorization of Agamemnon as a war hero at his mourning. The *kommos* only mentions such an honorable burial obliquely, with counterfactual wishes. Expressions of grace and honor in front of what may have been staged as an unworthy tomb draw additional attention to the difficulty of reversing Agamemnon's dishonor. Pouring libations and singing laments seem not to be enough, for thereafter the mourners suggest much more radical means.

In the first of these more extreme elements of the *kommos*, the Chorus activate Agamemnon's spirit for vengeance. They rebut Orestes' emphasis on honoring the dead by changing the focus to the enmity of the one murdered (*Cho.* 324–31):

τέκνον, φρόνημα τοῦ θανόντος οὐ δαμά-
 ζει πυρός μαλερὰ γνάθος,
 φαίνει δ' ὕστερον ὄργας·
 ὀτοτύζεται δ' ὁ θνήσκων,
 ἀναφαίνεται δ' ὁ βλάπτων,
 πατέρων δὲ καὶ τεκόντων
 γόος ἔνδικος ματεύει,
 τὸ πᾶν ἀμφιλαφῆς ταραχθεῖς.²²

Child, the fire's raging jaw does not
 destroy the spirit of the dead man,
 but afterwards he reveals his anger.
 The dead man is bewailed;
 the harming man is revealed,
 justified lament
 of parents and children seeks [him] out,
 when it is agitated and abundant in every way.

The Chorus emphasize the divide between the body – here having been burned away – and “spirit” (φρόνημα, *phronēma*, 324; cf. *Od.* II.219–22). They are the first to speak of the dead man's anger (ὄργας, 326) and ability to harm (ὁ βλάπτων, 328).²³ Crucially, they declare that the spirit is activated through ritual. The manner in which the dead might be able to intervene, however, is left unstated. Playing off of Orestes' “glory-giving

²¹ See Chapters 1–3. ²² Using Garvie's text (1986), 131–3, which follows M, over Page's OCT.

²³ For the controversies over the meaning of ὁ βλάπτων and its connection to ὁ θνήσκων, see Sier (1988), 111–12.

lament” (γῶος εὐκλεής, *goos eukleēs*, 321), which implies a pacific condition, the Chorus substitute “justified lament” (γῶος ἔνδικος, *goos endikos*, 330). The switch to justification taps into the key theme of plotting and vengeance in the *Oresteia*. The Chorus themselves had introduced the lament by calling on Justice (τὸ δίκαιον, *to dikaion*, 308 and Δίκη, *Dikē*, 311), in addition to the Fates and Zeus, to help in the bloody requital against the murderers. Whereas family lament may honor and give rest to the dead, it is justice – specifically as it implies vengeance – that rouses them.

The mixture of elements in the early part of the *kommos* demonstrates two major themes concerning the relations of the living to the dead. On the one hand, the Chorus imagine Agamemnon in the underworld; on the other, the children attempt to literally return their father from the dead or to access his power in other ways. We now examine each of these, in turn, to understand more clearly the views of the afterlife, their interplay, and their role in the plot.

In a radical deviation from any other view in the *kommos*, the Chorus at this point depict Agamemnon in a Homeric Hades. Whereas Orestes’ unfulfillable wish was for a heroic death for Agamemnon that would benefit the household, the Chorus portray a strikingly royal existence in the underworld (*Cho.* 354–62):

φίλος φίλοισι τοῖς ἐκεῖ καλῶς θανοῦ-
 σιν, κατὰ χθονὸς ἐμπρέπων
 σεμνότιμος ἀνάκτωρ,
 πρόπολός τε τῶν μεγίστων
 χθονίων ἐκεῖ τυράννων·
 βασιλεὺς γὰρ ἦσθ’ ὄφρ’ ἔζης
 μόριμον λάχος †πιμπλάντων
 χεροῖν πεισίβροτόν τε βάκτρον†.

Dear to the dear ones who nobly died over there,
 being prominent
 as an august lord under the earth
 and an attendant of the greatest
 chthonic rulers there.
 For when you lived you were king
 of those wielding in their hands destined fate
 and the mortal-persuading scepter.²⁴

In this brief passage, the Slave Women locate Agamemnon specifically in the underworld (κατὰ χθονός, *kata khthonos*, 355; χθονίων ἐκεῖ, *khthoniōn*

²⁴ For the textual problems in this passage, see Garvie (1986), ad 360–2; and Sier (1988), ad 361. The sense remains the same in most emendations.

ekei, 359). They distance Agamemnon's spirit from his shameful tomb so as to create for him a place of honor. The Chorus do so by packing these eight verses with far more pronounced references to his kingship than anywhere else in the *kommos*: "prominent as an august lord," "the greatest chthonic rulers," "for when you lived you were king," "wielding . . . the mortal-persuading scepter." Each phrase reinforces the idea that Agamemnon's afterlife rewards follow from his political position on earth. Nevertheless, the Chorus subtly hint at Agamemnon's gruesome death through an implicit contrast to his *philoi* who "died nobly (*kalōs*) over there" (φιλοισι τοῖς ἐκεῖ καλῶς θανοῦσιν, 354–5), that is, in war. The tension between the appropriate kingly honor and the current disgrace is evident in this exceptional and understudied image of Agamemnon's afterlife.²⁵

Audiences might draw on two previous literary depictions of Agamemnon in the underworld as background for this passage. First, the theme of the honored king below bears similarities to the mention of kings in the underworld in *Odyssey* II, and thus the *Oresteia's* passage may seem to be merely a normative picture. Fascinatingly, however, the only parallel in the *Odyssey* is to Minos, who sits in judgment and honor in the afterlife as he did in life, surrounded by other souls and holding a scepter (*Od.* II.568–71). Odysseus also describes Achilles as blessed and having great power among the dead, a description Achilles thoroughly denies.²⁶ The passage in the *kommos* is, in fact, nothing like the picture of Agamemnon himself in the *Odyssey's* underworld. In Book II, he is an anxious figure who repeatedly laments the dishonor of his murder and awaits any news of Orestes (*Od.* II.387–466). In Book 24 (most likely added later, but still earlier than the *Oresteia*), the soul of Achilles explicitly contrasts Agamemnon's lordship in life with his pitiful death at home and lost honor. Agamemnon concurs by praising Achilles' death and lamenting his own again (*Od.* 24.19–97). Thus, the Slave Women's reference to Agamemnon in the afterlife conflicts significantly with his Homeric depiction.

Aeschylus' previous depiction of a ruler in the underworld presents the second literary contrast. In the *Persians*, King Darius both rises in response to barbarian magic and declares that he is powerful below (*Pers.* 686–92).²⁷ Yet his situation differs from Agamemnon's in terms of his

²⁵ *Contra* Garvie (1986), ad 354–62, who, following Lesky (1967), denies that there is any possibility that a king would be deprived of honor in the afterlife because of a dishonored death.

²⁶ *Od.* II.478–91, a passage that illustrates the problematic nature of political power in the afterlife already in Homer. For further on this passage, see the Introduction.

²⁷ Muntz (2011), 257–71, analyzes the raising scene as a mixture between a necromantic ritual and the worship of Darius as divine; and cf. Martin (2020), 67–76. See further Chapter 6.

uninterrupted honors, proper burial, and continued cult. Moreover, Darius is the one who refers to his own afterlife – it is not left to others to depict it.

Within the *Oresteia*, the audience has already heard one perspective on Agamemnon in the underworld, also antithetical to the one in the *kommos*. Having killed him, Clytemnestra declares that Agamemnon “should not boast gloriously in Hades (*en Hadou*)” (μηδὲν ἐν Ἅιδου μεγαλαυχεῖτω, *Ag.* 1525–9; cf. 1555–9), for Iphigenia waits to hug and kiss him down below. Here, Clytemnestra specifically undermines Agamemnon’s heroic bragging rights through reference to a reunion in Hades with the daughter he murdered. The *kommos* thus would not only reverse Clytemnestra’s burial tactics but even overturn her description of Agamemnon below. If the Chorus’s depiction were true, it would break the connection between Agamemnon’s disgrace at death and his status in the underworld. They would instead return to him the rewards for kingship, simultaneously erasing his familial transgression and dishonored death.

The Chorus’s image of Agamemnon as honored in the afterlife overturns audience expectation from the rest of the *kommos* and from previous representations of him. Audiences must decide what to make of its framing, for the depiction is not clearly marked as a fact. Aeschylus has not given the Chorus a main verb, and thus there is a grammatical debate concerning which form of the verb “to be” to fill in.²⁸ One possible translation supplies an indicative verb (“he *is* dear”), in which case the Slave Women are claiming that Agamemnon actually exists in a kingly position below.²⁹ On the other hand, in the absence of a marked switch of construction, the Chorus might be responding to Orestes’ previous unfulfillable wish about death at Troy, in which case Agamemnon “*would* be dear.”³⁰ The ambiguity (preserved in the above translation by retaining the elision of the verb from the Greek) is not only grammatical.³¹ It also fits with the theme of choral speculation on the structure of life and death, for the Slave Women do not speak with any religious authority or support from the divine.³²

²⁸ On the grammatical debate, see Garvie (1986), ad 354–62.

²⁹ Conacher (1987), III, has the Chorus address Agamemnon with “illustrious are you now.” This overtranslation promotes the idea that the Chorus convert the children’s “unpromising laments to something more positive . . . a reminder that, even murdered, the King is still a power beneath the earth.”

³⁰ Lattimore (1953), 105, puts it in the past counterfactual, “he would have held state”; and Meineck (1998), 83, in the present counterfactual, “he’d be welcomed.”

³¹ Translators who elide the verb include Collard (2002), 61; and Sommerstein (2008b), 257.

³² Note the availability of actual divine speech and interpretation throughout the *Oresteia*: Calchas, Cassandra, the oracle of Apollo given to Orestes, the Pythia, the Erinyes, Apollo himself, and

The ambiguity is resolvable through careful attention to context, but this does not dissolve the complexity of the passage, only increases it. The peaceful image of reverence and power in no way comports with the distress over Agamemnon's ignominious burial, the reported threats from the oracle of Apollo, or the two previous choral references to punishment for offenders in the afterlife.³³ Similarly, every other address to Agamemnon in the *kommos* indicates that the characters understand his situation to be agitated or dishonored. Context, therefore, marks Agamemnon's pacific condition in Hades as wishful. The Chorus are immediately responding to Orestes' longing for military honor for his father. In this stanza, the Chorus create an image of the afterlife commensurate with Agamemnon's living status as king, not with his death. It is imagination as a product of desire.

A sophisticated and self-aware poetics surrounds this image. The missing verb, in context, should demand that audience members supply its potential form. But the fraught circumstances and competing mourning songs might well preserve the uncertainty for listeners; within the flow of performance, there might be little time for audience members to interpret the Chorus's phrase. The lack of verb thus may reaccentuate the possibility of a positive afterlife for Agamemnon, like the image of an empty throne awaiting a king. The divergence of the Chorus's vision from the fantasies of the children has consequences for its interpretation as well. Orestes began this counterfactual section of the *kommos* by imagining an alternate, heroic death for his father, with consequent benefits for his family in life (*Cho.* 345–53). Electra succeeds the Chorus by going further, imagining a scenario in which Agamemnon had not even died at Troy, but instead his killers were slain “thus” (οὕτω, 363–8).³⁴ In chastising her, the Chorus engage in an act of literary criticism – they claim that her speech is beyond the bounds of possibility.³⁵ By quickly discrediting Electra's fantasy, the

Athena. All speak of extrahuman affairs with more authority than does either human Chorus. On the issues attending the authoritative status of even divine speech in Aeschylus, see Parker (2009).

³³ The dishonored burial: *Cho.* 434, 443, 495; the “Erinyes generated from paternal blood” and a lengthy list of attacks against Orestes: *Cho.* 269–97, 925. The Choruses of all three plays refer to punishment in the afterlife in *Ag.* 461–8, *Cho.* 59–65, *Eum.* 267–75, on which see Chapter 7. Note also Agamemnon's role in haunting his killer, Clytemnestra, in the underworld in *Eum.* 96–7, on which see Chapter 6.

³⁴ Rather than Electra meaning that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus should have been killed “in battle at Troy,” when she uses “thus” spectators might understand either “far from home,” as suggested by Sommerstein (2008b), 258 n. 79, or “the dishonored way Agamemnon actually was,” which an actor could indicate with a gesture toward the tomb, and which is what subsequently occurs.

³⁵ μεγάλης δὲ τύχης καὶ ὑπερβόρου μείζονα φωνεῖς; δύνασαι γάρ, *Cho.* 373–4; cf. *Supp.* 1059–61; and Conacher (1987), III.

Chorus draw attention back to their own picture of Agamemnon. The implication is that they themselves must be speaking about something that can be attained. Their representation of the afterlife is meant to interact with the world not as comfort – since it is far from the perceived present state of Agamemnon – but precisely as a fulfillable result.

This suggestion that Agamemnon could regain his status as exalted king targets the major tension within the scene. Mourning is not enough to return honor to Agamemnon; he is unable to gain his rightful prestige in the afterlife until he is avenged. Hence, the Chorus contrast Agamemnon's potential position with his appalling death and mutilation, some of which they reveal only after this stanza. The Chorus thus heightens their pressure to help motivate the needed action.³⁶ First, they offer a further gnomic statement concerning retribution: "But [there is] a law that drops of blood flowing to the ground demand other blood" (*Cho.* 400–2, cf. 309–14). This use of fallen blood differs greatly from the use of the same image by the Chorus of the *Agamemnon* (1019–24). There, it illustrated the irreversibility of death; here, shed blood is an imperative to kill. This naturalizes vendetta, a thrice-old story.³⁷ Orestes responds by vowing vengeance openly for the first time (435–7), after which the Slave Women push again, recounting the horrific mutilation of Agamemnon's corpse (439–43). The contrast between the dead king's potential position in the underworld and his maimed burial crystallizes his deprivation, both of agency and honor. The Chorus motivate Orestes' dire act through this afterlife disparity.

Raising Agamemnon from the Dead

The image of Agamemnon in Hades is both brief and singular in the *kommos*. Its emphasis on kingship and glorious deeds is supplanted by a vastly different theme, the children's almost frenzied attempts at connecting with their father. In what has been called the most complexly

³⁶ The debate between those who believe that the *kommos* motivates Orestes to vengeance and those who believe that his mind was made up already goes back to the start of German philology and is covered in Garvie (1986), ad 306–478. He describes the decision as paratactic, with aspects of it occurring in different scenes, which are understood by the audience as simultaneous. He does not, however, find any parallels to this poetics in tragedy, only epic, on which front Brown (2018), 33–4, critiques him. Goldhill (1984a), 137–8, denies any easy opposition between the scene's rituals and psychological motivation. McClure (1999), 44–5, reads this scene as Electra and the Slave Women using the inherently dangerous, feminine speech-genre of mourning to motivate vengeance. Bacon (2001), 52–3, draws out the similarities between the Slave Women and the Erinyes themselves. Cf. Zeitlin (1965), 496; and Conacher (1987), 113.

³⁷ *Cho.* 314; cf. Clay (1969).

structured lyric in extant tragedy, the mourners resume accosting Agamemnon with three voices, begging him to arise in some way. The desperation for Agamemnon's presence rises to such a pitch that their calls nearly morph into a ritual raising of the dead.

The language of two sections of the *kommos* suggests that the children are working toward Agamemnon's literal reappearance. In the first (*Cho.* 456–65), the mourners mix demands for his actual presence with language that draws attention to calling and voices. Orestes addresses Agamemnon in the second person and uses the verb συγγίγνομαι (*sungignomai*), ambiguous between “to be with” and “to come to help”: σέ τοι λέγω, ξυγγενοῦ πάτερ φίλοις (“I call *you (se)*, father, *help/be with (sungenou)* your loved ones!” 456). Electra adds (ἐπι-) her voice (ἐπιφθέγγομαι, 457) as do the Chorus, joining (again ἐπι-) their voice to the din (ἐπιπροθεῖ, 458), creating a three-part harmony.³⁸ The Chorus sing of raising the dead, “hear [us] by coming into the light” (ἄκουσον ἐς φάος μολῶν, 459), again using this metaphor for life to indicate a return from the darkness and separateness of death (cf. *Ag.* 522 and Chapter 1). They continue to demand that Agamemnon join them against their enemies, this time by separating the elements of the compound συγγίγνομαι: ξὺν δὲ γενοῦ (*xun . . . genou*, “be with us/assist us,” 460). In this section, the children never use any word for spirit or soul (as the Chorus did in 324–6) but persistently address Agamemnon as their father. Thus, the theme of children who never knew their father gives an emotional charge to this longing for his return.³⁹

The beseeching of Agamemnon seems to override prior references to him as distant. Between the two sections of raising language, the children offer feasts and honor to his tomb (e.g. 483–8), asking for his help in a variety of ways. But their calls are far more personal than prayers and supplications to a hero or a dead ancestor; they desire that Agamemnon himself return. At the end of the *kommos*, the children resume the emphatic language of raising up Agamemnon: ὦ γαῖ', ἄνες μοι πατέρ' ἐποπτεῦσαι μάχην (“Oh Earth, send up to me my father to oversee the battle!” 489); and ὦ Περσέφασσα, δὸς δέ γ' εὖμορφον κράτος (“Oh Persephone, give [us] his beautiful power (*kratos*)!” 490).⁴⁰ Even more

³⁸ See Nooter (2017), 219–20, on the intertwining of voices here and in the *kommos* more generally.

³⁹ See Goldhill (1984a), 137–53, on the importance of the father in the *Choephoroi*, in part using the Lacanian theory of the absent father.

⁴⁰ Sommerstein (2008b) translates, “give him to us in his beauty and power”; and Garvie (1986), “grant us his power in all the beauty of his form.” Regardless of which translation is used here, the imperative δός and noun κράτος connect with the earlier lines in the *kommos*, “give me the power of your house” (μοι δὸς κράτος τῶν σῶν δόμων, *Cho.* 480, cf. 1). For the ambiguity of *kratos* in the first verses and here, see Goldhill (1984a), 103–4, 151–2; cf. Schlatter (2018), 67–73; and Chapter 5.

literally, they sing of Agamemnon coming in physical terms: ἄρ' ἐξεγείρη τοῖσδ' ὄνειδεσιν, πάτερ; ("Father, are you not awakened by these disgraces (*oneidesin*)?" 495) and ἄρ' ὀρθὸν αἶρεις φίλτατον τὸ σὸν κάρα; ("Are you raising your beloved head erect?" 496). Through their intense need, the children create an almost palpable expectation of Agamemnon's bodily or spiritual reappearance.

These calls reinforce the dangerous proposition that the afterlife is not, after all, much sequestered from this life. It suggests that characters we have seen on stage can, in some way, rise again. This is consonant with the *Persians*, in which the act of raising the deceased king is central.⁴¹ Yet, as many commentators have noted, the earlier play dramatizes foreigners engaging in magic, for which they are known.⁴² In Greek culture, the very attempt might be seen as transgressive. A reference to such an attitude is contained within the trilogy itself: The Chorus of the *Agamemnon* has already sung of Asclepius resurrecting the dead, seen as a singular act that entailed punishment from Zeus (*Ag.* 1020–4).⁴³ Despite their differences from the *kommos*, both these precedents in Aeschylus create an expectation that Agamemnon might be literally brought back in some form. They also demonstrate that the *kommos* is far from normal funerary ritual, but a possible trespass in and of itself.⁴⁴

This desire for Agamemnon's literal return conversely draws attention to attempts to smother the power of the dead in the trilogy. Having foreseen the danger from Agamemnon, Clytemnestra has already tried to impede his rising by mutilating him (*Cho.* 439) and suppressing his burial rites. Once her nightmare indicates that this might not have worked – since she regards the dream as emanating from Agamemnon's anger – Clytemnestra reverses course. By sending libations, Clytemnestra intends to calm Agamemnon's spirit.⁴⁵ By the end of the *kommos*, however, there is no indication that any supplications whatsoever have actually affected the dead man.

⁴¹ *Pers.* 607–842, esp. the address of chthonic powers: ἀλλά, χθόνιοι δαίμονες ἄγνοϊ, Γῆ τε καὶ Ἑρμῆ, βασιλεῦ τ' ἐνέρων, πέμψατ' ἔνερθεν ψυχὴν ἐς φῶς, *Pers.* 628–30; Γᾶ τε καὶ ἄλλοι χθονίων ἀγεμόνες, *Pers.* 640–1; and ἄνειης, Ἄιδωνεύς, *Pers.* 650; cf. *Cho.* 125–8. See Garvie, ad *Cho.* 489 and *Cho.* 1, where he notes that ἐποπτεύω is often used by Aeschylus "to describe divine, or semi-divine, superintendence of human affairs."

⁴² On the non-Greekness of raising Darius and calling him a *theos*, see Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 224–5.

⁴³ See the Introduction and Chapter 2.

⁴⁴ See Lebeck (1988); Herington (1988), esp. 133; and further bibliography in Garvie (1986), ad 306–478. *Contra* Sier (1988), ad 459, who differentiates between the raising in the *Persians* as a ritual act and in this scene as a "symbolic" act, not intended to bring back Agamemnon.

⁴⁵ The libations she sends are precisely the type that were used in funeral rituals and festivals to the dead, Johnston (1999), 46.

The ritual ends with a whimper. The characters make no mention of having received Agamemnon's power, of having seen a sign from him, or of being changed in any way. Scholars have suggested that Agamemnon somehow inhabits Orestes from this point on.⁴⁶ The desire to internalize at least the spiritual force of Agamemnon could certainly be one meaning of "give us your power" (490). Yet nothing in the text indicates, here or later, that Orestes carries his father within him. Orestes continues to refer to Agamemnon as separate from himself and gives his reasons for killing Clytemnestra at a number of places without mention of being possessed.⁴⁷ Instead, the *kommos* is declared ended through reference to the completion of ritual obligation. The Chorus announce that the honoring (τίμημα, *timēma*) of Agamemnon's tomb is over and that now is the time for action (*Cho.* 510–13). The mourners have returned a modicum of honor to the tomb in a secret, private ritual, repurposing the libations from Clytemnestra and promising future honors for Agamemnon. Despite their cries, however, no spirit arises, no voice comes from the grave.

The characters themselves recognize this failure, as a reversal of a specific term demonstrates. The Chorus began the *kommos* by declaring that the dead man can still be an agent of vengeance, particularly emphasizing that his spirit (φρόνημα, *phronēma*) is not destroyed by fire (*Cho.* 324–5). Yet immediately after the end of the *kommos*, Orestes speaks about his dead father as unable to receive the offerings of Clytemnestra (*Cho.* 517–18):

θανόντι δ' οὐ φρονοῦντι δειλαία χάρις
ἐπέμπετ'.

And it was a sorry grace that was sent to a dead man,
one without any spirit (*ou phronounti*).

The implication is that not only were Clytemnestra's libations useless but so were all of the children's appeals to Agamemnon, since he has no spirit after death (using the participle from the same root, φρονοῦντι, *phronounti*).⁴⁸ Orestes thus indicates that the living characters have abandoned their

⁴⁶ Deforge (1986), 276–7; McCall (1990), 21–7; and North (1992), 52–3.

⁴⁷ Note his mention of the external forces of his father's Erinyes before and after the *kommos* (*Cho.* 269–97, 925) and the much-later appeal to Agamemnon by name (*Eum.* 598, on which see Chapter 5).

⁴⁸ Goldhill (1984a), 153–5, discusses this contradiction as a deliberate linguistic strategy. Johnston (1999), 7–8, notes that Homeric dead have no mind: "They are, in a word, *aphradeis*, lacking all those qualities expressed by that complex notion *phrade* and its cognates that make converse between intelligent creatures possible: wit, reflection, and complexity of expression." Cf. Sullivan (1997), 1–64, esp. 61–3. *Contra* Garvie (1986), ad loc., who denies that there could be any such idea in an extensive note that commences: "Most scholars agree that . . . it is out of the question that, after

dependence on help from their father.⁴⁹ By the end of the nearly 200 lines of the *kommos*, which heightened the dramatic tension, the children's expectation of literal return or even a sign from the supernatural disperses. Now, the living remnants of the house must plot their vengeance, leaving the dead to rest.

This fizzling of expectations indicates that the characters of the *Choephoroi* create their relationships to the dead not from a real understanding of supernatural continuation, but purely from their desires.⁵⁰ Further action supports the notion that their human knowledge is lacking, but in an unexpected way, for the characters' disappointment is almost immediately reversed. After the apparent impotence of the ritual, Orestes inquires as to the motivation for sending libations. When told of Clytemnestra's dream, he interprets it as referring to his vengeance and immediately prays to the earth and his father's tomb for its fulfillment (ἀλλ' εὐχομαι γῆ τῆδε καὶ πατρός τ' ἄφω, *Cho.* 540). That is, having been told by the Chorus to move on, and seeming about to start the action itself, Orestes abruptly returns attention to the grave as an aid to his own discharging of the prophecy (ἐμοὶ τελεσφόρον, 541). The audience is guided back to the possibility that the prayers for Agamemnon's help were successful after all. The characters hint that this is so when the Chorus declares (551–2): "I certainly choose you as my divine-sign-interpreter in this matter, may it be as you say!" The Slave Women want the dream, traditionally linked to the dead, to be capable of consummation by Orestes. Yet they emphasize interpretation rather than certainty. In the denouement to the *kommos*, the mourners only hesitatingly attribute supernatural power to Agamemnon's spirit.

The *kommos* taps into the *Oresteia*'s self-awareness concerning issues of prayer and fulfillment throughout. This can be seen in a related example from earlier in the *Choephoroi*: Electra only learns of Orestes' return after her staged prayers seeking him. Orestes himself frames his arrival as a response to her prayers (*Cho.* 212–13). The point is that Electra's entreaty was effective, creating a template for other prayers in the future (τὰ λοιπά, 212). Yet the spectators have actually been privy to Orestes' return preceding the onstage ritual that requested it. They can thus challenge the effectiveness of this particular ritual through the timeline of the action,

the *kommos* has established that Agamemnon's φρένες are intact . . . Orestes should here state the opposite." Cf. Fraenkel (1950), ad *Ag.* 739; and Brown (2018), ad *Cho.* 517.

⁴⁹ The ineffective *kharis* here also indicates the failure on the same terms as the attempts at *kleos* in *Cho.* 320; cf. *Ag.* 550, 1305, 1543–6, discussed in Chapters 1–3.

⁵⁰ For a list of hypothetical reasons why Agamemnon may not respond, see Martin (2020), 82–3; and for the argument that he does, through the reciprocal agency of Orestes, 163–75.

keeping an ironic distance from Electra's prayers as they happen and are "fulfilled."

The sequel to the *kommos* displays a similar dynamic concerning Agamemnon's spirit. When the rituals and intense prayers appear to go unanswered, Orestes evinces disappointment. Once Clytemnestra's dream is recounted, however, Orestes turns to Agamemnon's tomb immediately. Orestes recants his declaration that the dead man has no spirit. The suggestion (never enunciated) is that the prayers to Agamemnon worked. Yet, chronologically speaking, the dream occurred the night before the ritual. It is the very reason the Slave Women and Electra were sent to the tomb in the first place. Aeschylus gives the spectators enough information in both of these proleptic fulfillments to question the effectiveness of ritual. In the absence of a sure divine sign, the relationships to the dead at this point are ambiguous. Did the prayers reach Agamemnon? Or is the *kommos* a purely human ritual without supernatural consummation?

Summations/Connections

The interweaving of afterlife views in the *kommos* can be understood in different ways: for its effects on the audience, for understanding the characters, and for human continuation after death throughout the trilogy. Concerning the first of these, it is up to each audience member to connect the sundry types of afterlife to each other, since they are segregated in the text. For instance, the counterfactual wishes for Agamemnon's glory from each of the mourners are sectioned off from wishes that Agamemnon return as a vengeful spirit. The experience of deeply divergent perspectives within the three-part polyphony of this emotional and ritual scene has numerous potential effects. It might come off as an artistically crafted funeral lament, lengthy and elevated, in line with its importance in the plot. Alternatively, the juxtaposition might feel insignificant. However, for audience members who do perceive the contradictions between views, their quick alternation might generate whiplash. Similarly, if raising the dead is felt to be a transgressive act (as the Chorus of the *Agamemnon* have already asserted), there might be a sense that the characters are going too far. Some audience members might dread, and others delight at, the prospect of a ghost appearing (as the Ghost of Darius does in the *Persians*, and the Ghost of Clytemnestra does in the *Eumenides*). The dynamic ritual, the *mélange* of afterlife possibilities, and the deep uncertainty as to the outcome are the poetic underpinnings of the *kommos*.

Concerning the dramatization of the characters, the scene is a high point of longing. The children pine for the absent father in their laments. They send their words to him, ask for his aid, and (at points) even seek his physical return. The rituals that the children offer the dead focus on Agamemnon's role as father, referring to the ancestors before the house and to Electra's future wedding. The theme of Orestes' replacement of family members – both dead and condemned to death – plays directly into this: The children are in emotional need. The Chorus, too, lament their lost family members, simultaneously with their protector, Agamemnon. Familial loss is thus the affective background for the poetic force of the scene. This serves as a contrast to the political characterization of Agamemnon in the previous play, in which warfare and the citizens played a major role. Clytemnestra has, to a certain extent, already undercut Agamemnon's political role after death, and the emphasis on family in the *kommos* actually continues this trend. We will return to this contrast in the following chapter.

Theoretically, the laments in the scene could have offered the feeling of closure that ritual is meant to provide. The first mourning, before the *kommos*, is meant to release the dramatic and religious tension by correcting Agamemnon's dishonored burial. This is precisely how the Chorus also summarize the ending of the *kommos*: The honoring of Agamemnon's grave is accomplished. Yet the elaborate lyrics (and, presumably, theatrically compelling choreography) in the *kommos* were meant to do more, they call for Agamemnon either to rise or to give some demonstration of his power. The results are unsatisfactory. Orestes labels Agamemnon "a dead man lacking spirit," dramatically reinforcing the feeling of inefficacy. At that point, it is clear that the characters lack sure knowledge of which, if any, relationships to the dead are true.

The reversal of this disappointment is immediate, yet it also demonstrates a problem with human knowledge of the beyond. Once the dream of Clytemnestra is interpreted on stage, Orestes' prayer to Agamemnon's tomb operates on two dramatic levels. First, he appears to take the dream as an indication that the appeals to Agamemnon worked. Secondly, the audience members are now privy to multiple events (Orestes' arrival, the dream of Clytemnestra) that have preceded the prayers for them. This prolepsis enables the audience to retain their distance from the literal language of the prayers, simultaneously keeping open the possibility of their fulfillment. Thus, despite the continual appeals to Agamemnon and the chthonic gods, the scene maintains uncertainty concerning the continuity and effectiveness of prayers to the dead.

From the evidence in the chapters up to this point, I posit that the *Oresteia* sets up an extremely constrained relationship of human knowledge to the beyond. The effect is that contradictory views of the afterlife reach a dramatic culmination in the *kommos*. Were Agamemnon's ghost actually to arise, many of the other human perspectives on the unknown afterlife would show themselves redundant or ungrounded. Instead, the tension between views is maintained precisely because the appeals to Agamemnon are met first with silence, then with an ambiguous response. On a local level, the *kommos* is the capstone of uncertainty about the beyond.

Concerning the broader ethical aspects of the *Choephoroi*, the *kommos* is doubly problematic due to the interrelated issues of how it portrays Agamemnon and what it justifies. Ethically, Orestes' (and Electra's) dilemma has been heavily discussed. However, generally missing from scholarship have been the effects of their conflicting conceptualizations of Agamemnon after death, which are integral to justifications for killing Clytemnestra. The children repaint Agamemnon positively through a replacement of Iphigeneia (Chapter 5). In death, he is no longer the child-killer but the blank figure of a father they never really knew. Even more strikingly, beyond the ancestor to whom they will sacrifice at family events, the *kommos* presents, in part, the children ritually summoning Agamemnon as a superhuman avenging force. Since the children's repeated calling out for their father's afterlife power does not raise him, is not responsible for the dream, and offers no described supernatural benefit, what does it accomplish? Among the other strands, the process of forging Agamemnon as powerful from beyond the grave demonstrates the children's attempt to actively shore up the imperative for the murder of their mother.

On the political level, the mourning for Agamemnon includes the symbolic replacement of the dead king with his heir. It prepares for the second *coup d'état*, which will place Orestes on the throne. The political problems associated with Agamemnon's afterlife are double: his connection with the dead of the Trojan War and his passing along the kingly household to Orestes. In terms of the first, the Chorus of the *Agamemnon* specifically indicate that he is subject to curses above and punishment below (Chapter 2). This is then a further, political reason to consider Agamemnon's death and afterlife as negative. Orestes touches on the issue of war in the *kommos* when he wishes Agamemnon had solidified his glory by dying at Troy. The Chorus also address this problem by immediately following Orestes' wish with the image of glory in the

afterlife, which prominently includes those who did receive the glory of a battlefield death. The valorization of Agamemnon is thus the template for Orestes' heroism later, as a kin-killer freed from guilt. Yet, as we will see in the next chapter, this political move into the afterlife does not follow the expectations from the lives of either Agamemnon or Orestes.

The *kommos* mixes the need to gain power from Agamemnon's spirit with the second political issue, that of succession. After both scenes of lament for Agamemnon, the Chorus insist that he must be left behind in order to move on with pressing action. Changing the focus from the dead to the living connects powerfully to the theme in the speech of the Herald about the casualties of the Trojan War: One must suppress the profound effects that violent death can have in order to get on with life. However, because ritual alone does not return the dishonor that Agamemnon lost, the tension continues. In the *kommos*, the Slave Women press Orestes to act through the imagined picture of Agamemnon as honored king in Hades, which stands in contrast to the mutilation of his corpse. Instead of rest and closure, it is, in fact, Agamemnon's dishonor that goads the coup. The *kommos* thus presents the first instance in the *Oresteia* – and perhaps even in extant Greek literature – in which a fictional depiction of the afterlife motivates extreme political action.

The variety of perspectives on the afterlife in the *kommos* presents a trenchant example of the poetics of multiplicity. First, the mourners manifest distinct characters through the concerns that their views demonstrate. Secondly, the *kommos* is the central human example of the afterlife used for specific goals: not only honoring, but regaining domestic and political power, and even motivating kin-murder. Thirdly, the individual speculations and prayers concerning the dead are each acceptable within Greek religion and literature, yet the condensed polyphony presents aesthetic, thematic, and religious contradictions that cannot be resolved. Finally, the human views of the afterlife provide crucial background for the undead and superhuman ending of the *Oresteia*.

In the rest of the *Choephoroi*, direct appeals to Agamemnon disappear. Instead, the justified act of vengeance leads to Orestes' blood-madness, ambiguously either within him or divinely imposed.⁵¹ The *Eumenides* then replaces human uncertainty with superhuman access to the afterlife. Clytemnestra's Ghost appears on stage, giving what seems to be a first-person account of the realm of the undead. Yet even in her speech the strain between conflicting ideas of the afterlife is a powerful rhetorical tool for the

⁵¹ See Brown (1983).

manipulative queen (Chapter 6). The Erinyes voice another account of the afterlife of humans, which the Choruses of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* had hinted at, but which the *kommos* utterly ignores: eternal punishment after death (Chapters 2 and 7). Lastly, Orestes is never punished for his crime but transforms into a civic hero (Chapter 5). Thus, the many human perspectives in the *kommos* do not even touch on the divine possibilities beyond death so prominent later in the *Oresteia*. Instead, the *kommos* is a turning point in the trilogy toward the greater dramatic and supernatural effects of the afterlife.