‘METAL MATERIALITY AND DIVINE AGENCY’

TOWARDS A NEW READING OF AESCHYLUS’

SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

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For Giannis, always in our hearts
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Declaration for University of Warwick PhD Thesis

I, Effimia Stavropoulou, hereby confirm that I have read and understood the regulations for plagiarism established by the University of Warwick. I confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. I undertake that any information that has been derived from other sources, published or unpublished, has been indicated and acknowledged in this thesis I present for examination.

Date: 30/12/2020

Signed: Effimia Stavropoulou
ABSTRACT

My PhD thesis offers insight into the ways in which the themes of metal and metallurgy dramatise divine agency in Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes*. Metals and metallic objects have a prominent place in the Greek literary imagination as symbols for ekphrasis and divine creation. In this thesis I argue that both of these aspects are explored in depth in the Aeschylean play, where the motif of weapons becomes the main dramaturgical tool for the representation of the play’s divine agent. Examining the theatricality of the props through the lens of posthumanism and the theories of vibrant materialisms, my study observes the unfolding of the motif of weapons as clanging metals (78-263), imagined shield emblems (375-676) and, finally, as stage props (677-719). I show that through their gradual visualisation onstage, the weapons represent Oedipus’ Erinys and its gradual effect on Eteocles and Polyneices. In doing so, my work offers a new interpretation to the questions about divine agency and human responsibility in the *Seven Against Thebes* in which boundaries of ethical responsibility and freedom of choice are utterly blurred.

Cosmological contemplation cannot be seen separately from the means through which it is explored and the genre in which it is expressed. Following the large-scale appearance of weapons in the Homeric tradition, I show that Aeschylus’ reconfiguration of the motif’s auditory and visual representation in the *Seven Against Thebes*, is the means for the implicit demonstration of tragedy’s superiority in the world of Greek literature. Finally, although the primary intention of my thesis is to shed new light into the significance of weapons in the *Seven Against Thebes*, my study is an equal contribution to the existing literature on metal, its anthropological and religious significance, and also its literary identity as a cross-temporal metaphor for literary creation.
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of the names of ancient authors and their works follow those in the
OCD⁴. Abbreviations of journals in the bibliography are those used in L’Année
Philologique.


passim: everywhere


NOTE ON EDITIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

Extant Aeschylus and Homer are cited from West’s editions by Teubner and de Gruyter. In some problematic passages I choose to follow different editions – this will be indicated. For every other text mentioned in the thesis I have used the latest OCT editions, unless indicated otherwise. All texts consolidated are referenced under ‘Text Editions and Commentaries Consolidated’ in the bibliography section.

All translations of ancient texts are my own.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Tragedy and Materiality: Theoretical Framework and Literary Review

Just over a decade ago, understandings of materiality in the academic world were shaken up when Jane Bennett, in her seminal work *Vibrant Matter*, asked what kind of life exists within a plastic glove, a grain of oak pollen, a dead rat, a bottle cap or a wooden stick. Observing their undisturbed existence on the side of the street, the scholar contemplated the ability of these objects to tell stories about their past and to produce thoughts and emotions by connecting with their environment, whether through their physical contact with the pavement, the reflection of light on their surface or the feel of their texture and shape.\(^1\) By focusing on the vibrancy of the objects’ material substance, this question opened new pathways in the examination of issues of matter, an approach broadly known as ‘political ecology’.\(^2\) As interdisciplinary studies have become increasingly popular over the years, these new approaches to matter have expanded beyond the boundaries of socio-political and philosophical fields. Over time, they have been adopted for the analysis of works in a variety of different fields, including archaeology, cognition and anthropology.\(^3\) Today, ‘New Materialisms’ is the umbrella term that encapsulates all the theories that, deriving from the broader

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1 Bennett (2010).
2 Although Bennett’s work was one of the most influential works of political ecology in breaking the boundaries of socio-political disciplines, the notion of object-individualism had already begun to rise in academic circles in the 1980s. Some of the best-known examples that preceded it include, but are not limited to, Pels (1998) and Appadurai (1986) in the field of anthropology who were among the first to examine objects and society in equal terms as entities that co-produce one another. Around the same time, Ihde’s philosophical approach to human cognition in the late 1990s had set the foundation for future investigations into how objects shape the human brain (Ihde 1999). This was later developed by the post-Heideggerian school of thought referred to as Object Oriented Ontology (OOO), which adopted a more extreme position in favour of the liberation of objects from the anthropocentric lens. In particular, Harman and Morton in their work have sought to eliminate the human factor in the consideration of objects; these anthropocentric views are considered to undermine the objects’ own significant vitality (Harman 2018, 2012 and 2002 and Morton 2015 and 2012).
3 In the field of archaeology, see the example of Hodder (2012), who proposed an approach to findings that is not human-focused but explores objects as truly autonomous entities that mutually affect and are affected by their environment. In the field of cognition and extensive cognition see Malafouris (2013) who has explored the ways in which objects contribute towards the shaping of schemes in the human brain. Finally, Boscagli’s famous Stuff Theory explains the material-focused orientation of the Western civilisation as the result of the charm that objects exercise on humans (Boscagli: 2014).
approach of treating objects as complete, independent entities, examines the objects’ impact on their environment and on humans. Developments in the theories of New Materialisms have important implications for the field of Classics. It is on this theoretical basis that my thesis examines the agency of the weapons in Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes*.

In a society where mass production was not available, in which most objects would have been handmade, where natural phenomena were the result of a god’s temper and statues could see and listen, it is evident that objects possessed roles of great significance. The importance of objects is particularly profound in tragedy, a genre where the nexus of language and ideas was communicated through auditory and visual media. From the scenery that framed the tragic stage, to the human actors in the dramatic action, to the masks and costumes that the actors wore and to the props that they would have used, tragedy utilised materials to create worlds and represent life. The role of theatre’s material assets was already provoking notable interest among scholars from the mid-twentieth century, but since there was a lack of the methodological tools necessary to help establish the appropriate premises for the examination of performance, it was not until recently that their study became systematic. Specifically, the lack of written stage instructions or evidence of staging had for years resulted in a minimalistic approach to ancient theatre. This began to change at the beginning of this century, when cross-disciplinary thinking started to reshape methodological approaches to research. Within Classical scholarship, theatre studies gradually started to provide a new background for the theorising of performative elements, ultimately reframing the way in which ancient tragedy was examined and understood. By the beginning of the 2010s, it had become clear to scholars that

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4 The history of performance studies has been surveyed by many. For the most recent account of the development of the field see Powers (2014) who offers a detailed review of scholarship on theatrical space (11-28), audiences (29-46), props and costumes (79-98) and masks and gestures (79-115) from the last century to the beginning of the twenty-first. See also Revermann (2006: 46-65) whose work on the staging of Aristophanic comedy contains a critical and detailed overview of the most dominant methodological approaches to staging, covering in particular Taftin’s ‘Significant Action Hypothesis’ (1977: 28-39) which was fundamental in the shaping of the scholarly scene in the 1970s. The application of the theory on the *Seven Against Thebes* and its limitations are discussed extensively in the next chapters but see especially 3.3 and 4.1.3.

5 Costumes, props and masks became the new school of thought. Some of the most prominent works on the use of masks are Wiles (2007: *passim*) and Wiles (1991: *passim*), which examine the mask as a point of origin for contemporary theatre and as a sign of the creation of meaning in the Greek and Roman theatre. A few years later, Wyles would offer the first study solely dedicated to the examination of how the use of costumes, from their appearance on the body of the actors to
stage props and costumes did not merely complement the visual spectacle on the ancient stage, but in fact performed significant roles in the creation of meaning both through the symbolisms embedded in them and through their interaction with the human characters. To these discoveries and new patterns of thought, the integration of theories of New Materialisms into Classical scholarship has become a fundamental asset.

New Materialisms have loaded our interpretative toolkit with methodological concepts and tools that have allowed research on the role of theatrical objects to reach new depth. Through the distinction between human and non-human actants in Latour’s anthropological studies, scholarship has been able to discuss for the first time the animate and inanimate components of the theatre in equal terms.\(^6\) Thanks to Gell’s definition of agents and agency, we have been able to articulate the notion of intended action by an actant and apply it to show how different props can exhibit ‘intended agency’.\(^7\) Pongratz-Leisten’s and Sonik’s overview of divine presence and its representation by materials has equipped us with the notions of materials acting as referents to the divine or presencing the divine.\(^8\) Finally, Brown’s ‘Thing Theory’ with its distinction

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\(^6\) The notion of the ‘actant’ as opposed to the more traditional ‘actor’ was used by Latour (2004) as a way of avoiding the connotations of anthropomorphism that the term ‘actor’ might carry. The same term is also adopted by Telò and Mueller (2018: 2), and throughout this thesis.

\(^7\) Here and across the rest of this thesis, I use the term ‘agency’ in accordance with the second part of Gell’s definition of the word. Gell has specifically defined agency as “action as a result of ‘happenings’, a series of physical laws, and as a result of intended action by a thinking, conscious mind” (Gell 1998: 16-19). My use of the term ‘agency’ should not be taken to imply that tragic objects could think for themselves or that they were considered to be able to do so, but rather I address their acquisition of a ‘human mind’ in the way they are represented onstage. Latour would later argue for the need to define the term in a way that dissociates it from the material world, that it could be used to describe the natural assemblage of connections instead (see Latour 2005: 1-17). However, as my work sees the human and the non-human actants of theatrical productions in relation to each other, Gell’s definition is considered suitable.

\(^8\) See Pongratz-Leisten (2015: 10-11). The term presencing will be used in this thesis in a way similar to that of statues or images of gods in temples where the objects become referents to the divine without signifying idolatry. The statues or images are not considered to be divine but, cognitively, the worshippers perceive them as a bridge between the material world in which they exist and out of which they are made on the one hand and the power they represent on the other. For more on the statues of ancient Greece and their links to the divine see Platt (2011: 77-123) who offers an overview of the epiphanic force of statues across the ancient world. See also Johnston (2008) who discusses statues in the context of ritualistic animation, as objects allowed to depict the divine through the work of the priests. She contests socio-anthropological views of statues but invites reconstruction of the ancient object-animation ‘from the inside’.
between *thingness* and *objecthood* has enabled us to differentiate between the material substance of an object and its form respectively, two factors that contribute towards the creation of meaning from different angles.\(^9\) These new discoveries have enabled us to examine tragedy from a different perspective.\(^{10}\) Over time, they have allowed us to explore in greater depth than ever before the ways in which tragedy understands and reflects on its own materiality, using its costumes, masks and props to both create meaning and engage in metapoetic discourse. This step has marked the beginning of a new school of thought where matter matters.

Although the field is very new, a number of pioneering works have already begun to establish the foundation for a new approach to tragedy. One of the most recent examples is Telò’s and Mueller’s volume of collected essays *The Materialities of Greek Tragedy*.\(^{11}\) The various contributions to this volume reveal from different angles the ways in which the human and the non-human are intertwined in ancient tragedy. Notable examples include Bassi’s chapter on the corpse in Euripides’ *Troades* and Shirazi’s chapter on the role of the mirror in Euripides’ *Hecuba*. Bassi examines the meaning and the metapoetic implications of the corpse; focusing on the corpse’s liminality between actor and prop as the body of a living actor resembling the body of a dead person, Bassi discusses the way in which the corpse affects the dramatic context in which it appears, but also how its appearance onstage showcases the power of mimetic enactment.\(^{12}\) Along similar lines, Shirazi offers new insight into the agency of the mirror in the

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\(^{9}\) Brown (2015: 5). For a different approach to the distinction between ‘thing’ and ‘object’ as terms that describe abstract and concrete entities respectively see Hodder (2012: 7).

\(^{10}\) For the application of New Materialisms beyond tragedy see Telò, whose contribution to Foster’s, Kurke’s and Weiss’ volume of collected papers (2019: 271-297) has used ‘Affect Theory’ to underline the physiological and psychological effect of iambus as more significant than the pragmatics of the poetry in the creation of Romantic and contemporary perceptions of Greek lyric. In the field of epic poetry, Canevaro’s monograph (2018) has combined the most recent approaches to materiality with gender studies to explain how objects indicate perceptions of gender and agency in the Homeric epic. Finally, Lather’s upcoming monograph (forthcoming 2021) encompasses applications of New Materialisms in literature and theories of cognition to explain how human cognition in Archaic and Classical Greek poetry is shaped by interactions with things, namely objects in metaphors, artefacts, music and language and, finally, their ability to deceive. Beyond literature, Bassi’s take on material culture (Bassi: 2016) has challenged the traditional division between researchers in literature (Classicists) and researchers in material culture (historians and archaeologists) and has instead promoted the creation of a new dialogue that involves both parties as two integral and irrevocably intertwined aspects of the study of the ancient world.

\(^{11}\) Telò and Mueller (2018).

Hecuba, specifically into the place of the mirror’s physicality, material substance and location in the dramatic action, but also how the play negotiates the experience that the mirror generates as an entity. Prior to this volume, Mueller’s monograph Objects as Actors had used Gell’s theory of ‘distributed personhood’ to explain how props like Ajax’s weapons, Electra’s urns and the textiles in the House of Atreus exercise agency on their owners by evoking the memories of their past lives, an ability that also allows them to reflect on their former lives as literary imagery. Fanfani’s, Harlow’s and Nosch’s volume Spinning Fates and the Song of the Loom has complemented our understanding of how textiles and the process of fabrication create meaning in Greek literature. The contributions by Fletcher and Bakola to this volume show how the imagery of garments is used to signify the enactment of curses in the Greek plays and how the destruction of the tapestries in the Agamemnon dramatises hubris by means of the Atreid oikos’ abuse of the creative and procreative process. In the final days before the submission of the present thesis, Worman’s publication Tragic Bodies: Edges of the Human in Greek Drama has shown how the shape, nakedness, and posture of the body is explored by tragedy. Worman argues that the tragic stage turns the human body into another vehicle for semiotic materialisation, an entity that is treated both as a subject and as an object, as an entity that can be either alive or dead. In this sense, Worman argues for the blurriness in the boundaries between human bodies and props on the Greek stage.

By looking into the way in which objects interact with the human characters, these scholars have all opened the way towards new interpretations of the plays. At the same time, they have also constructed a new framework for approaching the tragic medium. It is within this school of thought that my discussion on the weapons in the Seven Against Thebes is set. Weapons are a very intriguing type of prop in Greek plays. As many scholars before me have pointed out, they are often depicted as objects that are both human and non-human; weapons are objects, but they are also prosthetic extensions of...
the human body, they have genealogies, and they gain mythical glory in battle. In tragedy, they frequently operate as agents that influence the minds of the warriors that bear them. Due to their ability to inflict wounds on the human body, to alter its shape and to turn it from a living organism into a corpse, they also have an irrevocable association with tragedy and its portrayal of pain and death. Finally, their metallic substance is also one of the most prominent symbols for ekphrasis, especially in epic poetry, two of the most notable examples being the Homeric shield of Achilles and the pseudo-Hesiodic shield of Heracles. In both of these cases, the lengthy descriptions of the making of the weapons, especially the way in which the metal on their surfaces is melted and processed, attribute the weapons implications of divine power, while they also evoke reflections on the power of the literary creator. On its turn, this draws attention to metal materiality, itself filled with implications of divine agency in Greek thought.

The Seven Against Thebes of Aeschylus is the earliest surviving play where extensive elaboration on weapons is observed. More importantly, what makes it such a compelling case study for the matter is its equal focus on the thingness and the objecthood of the weapons. As I discuss in detail below, the play’s extensive representation of the objects on the tragic stage and language is unique in drawing equal attention to the weapons as finished products, and to the fabricating process of the metal. Specifically, as we will observe throughout this reading of the play, Aeschylus encompasses both a portrayal of the weapons as agents with impact on their bearers, and their portrayal as ekphrastic metals in-the-making, an element through which the play draws strong associations with the Homeric Iliad. More important, however, than its contribution to our understanding of tragic weapons is the way in which this study can help us apply new lens to the interpretation of the Seven Against Thebes. In the following pages, I introduce my thematic interest in the play’s metallic weapons, and I show that,
to examine their representation in the *Seven Against Thebes* is to observe epic and tragic representations of weapons reconfigured into a dramaturgical mechanism that serves Aeschylus’ dramatic plot and metapoetic discourse alike.

### 1.2 Setting the Scene: Reframing Divine Agency in the *Seven Against Thebes*

Preceded by the now-lost tragedies of *Laius* and *Oedipus*, the *Seven Against Thebes* is the final part of an interconnected trilogy that unfolds the familial catastrophe of the House of the Labdacids.\(^21\) According to the *Seven*, the cause of those troubles was Laius’ disregard of the oracle of Apollo.\(^22\) As the final part of the trilogy, the play brings together the themes of the previous two plays which reach their culmination. Specifically, the *Seven* is centred around the mutual fratricide of Eteocles and Polynices, the third and last generation of the House, as a result of the Curse uttered by an enraged Oedipus against his sons.\(^23\) In the enactment of the Curse, metals and weapons both play a central role.

The exact wording of the Curse does not survive, but it is assumed that it would have been part of the lost *Oedipus*.\(^24\) In the *Seven*, our only surviving evidence lies in the Chorus’ claim that Oedipus had cursed his sons to ‘divide their properties by iron-wielding hand’ (σιδαρονόμωι διὰ χερί ποτε λαχεῖν κτήματα’, 788-790). Although it is unclear whether this wording reflects the original wording of Oedipus or whether it is an interpretation by the Chorus, the statement parallels the women’s earlier narration of Eteocles’ cryptic dream about the division of his paternal property. Although, like the Curse, neither the exact content of the dream nor the identity of the dreamer survive, the Chorus reveal that the dream was about a Chalybian migrant from Scythia who would divide the land between the two brothers (ξένος δὲ κλήρους ἑπινομᾶτι Χάλυβος Σκύθων

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\(^{21}\) The interconnectedness of the trilogies derives from the hypothesis in the M (Pap. Oxy. n. 2256) and it is the scholarly opinio communis. For commentary on the fragments of the papyrus as well as on the surviving evidence about the content of the lost *Laius* and *Oedipus* see Hutchinson (1985: xvii-xxx) and *TrGF* (50-52 and 111).


\(^{23}\) Sept. 654-655, 709, 785-791.

\(^{24}\) Like in the case of the lost oracle of Laius, attempts to reconstruct the original wording bring scholars face to face with the limitation of the lack of evidence. For the relevant discussions see Poli-Palladini (2016: 155-169), Kyriakou (2009: 41-42), Hutchinson (1985: xxiv-xxx), Thalmann (1978: 17-20), Burnett (1973: 365-366), and Cameron (1971: 22-29).
The Chalybes were a Pontic people known for their metallurgical skills, especially their ability to manufacture iron. In this sense, the Chalybian migrant is interpreted as a personification of the iron, the metal that would kill the two brothers in battle once fabricated into a weapon. The fears of the women are finally confirmed in the entrance of the Messenger who announces that the two kings did indeed kill each other with weapons made of Scythian iron (διέλαχον σφυρηλάτων Σκόθη σιδήρων κτημάτων παμπησίαν; 816-817). In that verse, σφυρηλάτων Σκόθη σιδήρων forges the link between the death of the two brothers and Eteocles’ dream, thereby attributing the event to the realisation of the Curse.

The association of metal, metallurgy and weapons with divine punishment is not a motif that appears uniquely in the Seven. Metals, especially iron and

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25 See also Sept. 941-944. Eteocles’ dream is the only potential instance of divine revelation in the play, however, as is the case of the Curse and the oracle of Apollo’s, numerous missing elements prevent us from drawing secure conclusions about the content of the dream. See Poli-Palladini (2016: 169-174), Torrance (2007: 12-13, 61-62), Hutchinson (1985: xxvii), Burnett (1973: 365-366). The dream is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 as part of Eteocles’ physical and mental transformation. See especially section 4.1.8. and 4.2.1.

26 For the historical and mythological background of the Chalybes see Poli-Palladini (2016: 201-209), Boardman (1999 [1964]: 245 and 255) and Roebuck (1984 [1959]: 103).

27 The variety of texts, regions and, in certain occasions, cultures referenced in this thesis calls for a term that balances the acknowledgement of a supernatural agent on one hand and cultural neutrality on the other. For this reason, I consider ‘divine’ to be the most suitable term to facilitate the discussions in my thesis where emphasis needs to be laid on the divine nature of the agency rather than on the identity of the agent. The term in the same sense -as a way to neutralise the supernatural- was also adopted by Pongratz-Leisten and Sonik (2015: 7) with regards to Mesopotamia and by Gradel (2002: 26) with regards to Rome. When the identity of the agent needs to be emphasised, the terms ‘god’ and ‘daimon’ will be used in accordance with their original use in the ancient text. When the identity of the agent needs to be specified but the text does not characterise the divine as a god or daimon, I prefer ‘god’ as a distinction based on the neutral binary of possession of power and use of power. Specifically, ‘god’ will be used when the emphasis is on the identity of an agent with divine power, whereas ‘daimon’ will be used when there is an emphasis on the intended use of that power by the agent. A similar approach was adopted by De Jong (1987: 158) and then followed by Bremmer (1994: 11-12) who, however, did not manage to avoid the connection of ‘god’ with anthropomorphism. Finally, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Roberts offered a definition for the term ‘daimon’ as “a performer of more or less unexpected and intrusive events in human life” (2005: 200). Overall, this distinction between ‘god’ and ‘daimon’ as words that emphasise identity and exercise of power respectively has been considered preferable to the origin-based polarisation of the ‘divine’ as Olympian/chthonic gods and the hierarchical connotation of ‘god’ and ‘daimon’ as more/less divinities that scholarship had adopted in the past. That binary had been originally introduced in the seventeenth century by Creuzer and later, in a more nuanced way, by Muller; their theories were criticised extensively in the early twentieth century, especially in Stengel (1972 [1910]: 126-145). In later years, the debate was revived by Scullion (1994: 75-119) who argued in favour of the polarity as a way to define the terms ‘god’ and ‘daimon’, and by Renate Schleiser (1992: 38-51) who rejected it. Whether it is valid or not, the application of this binary to tragedy would be complicated: there, gods and daimones have very similar functions in the texts as agents with power and influence over the lives of the mortals. As such there is no consistency in the way in which the terms ‘god’ and ‘daimon’ are deployed to describe specific divinities. See Schein (1997: 123-137) and Mikalson (1991: 22-29). For the dominant contemporary views on the differences
bronze, have had a long, cross-cultural history of being associated with divine power.\textsuperscript{28} This notion adhered to a broader tradition that linked metallurgy and perceptions of the divine in the Greek thought, often attributing to metallurgists cunning powers and divine skills.\textsuperscript{29} This is indicated by, alongside other evidence, the number of daimones who are linked to metal and metal-working in Greek mythology, such as the Korybantes, Chalybes, Daktyloi, Telchines and Cabeiroi.\textsuperscript{30}

Other ancient literary texts show metallurgy as a form of craftsmanship that is linked to either divine assistance or punishment; in the \textit{Iliad}, Hephaestus is seen to be beating and melting four different metals in order to craft the weapons of Achilles, whilst in the \textit{Theogony}, Earth gives birth to \textit{adamas} out of which she later crafts the sickle that will castrate Ouranos.\textsuperscript{31} In Greek tragedy meanwhile there are links between iron, metallurgy and the Erinyes in the later plays of the \textit{Libation Bearers} and Sophocles’ \textit{Ajax}. In the \textit{Libation Bearers}, the Chorus sing of the Erinyes (βυσσόφρον Ἐρινός, 652) that will punish Orestes through the sword (τόδ’ […] ξίφος, 639) that is crafted by Justice: προχαλκεύει δ’ Ἀδα φασγανουργός· (647-8). Similarly, in the \textit{Ajax}, the Erinyes is the daimon who has crafted the iron of the

\hspace{1cm} between gods and daimones in Greek religion see Kindt (2016: 12-34), Graziosi (2016: 35-61), Parker (2011: 80-84), Henrichs (2010: 19-39).

\textsuperscript{28} The cross-cultural significance of iron and bronze has been delineated in several anthropological works: as part of her monograph on \textit{Myth, Ritual and Metallurgy}, Blakeley explored the association of iron with religious rituals and power in modern Africa (2006: 55-78 and 166-191). Rendu Loisel (2015: 211-227) examined the use of brazen tools and prayers in exorcisms in Mesopotamia in the first millennium BC. Prior to these works, Eliade’s monograph had studied several myths and rituals connected with metallurgy from around the world, extending from Africa to Indonesia and to Siberia: from the mines of Belgium to Indian and Chinese Alchemy, Eliade has delineated the different kinds of power attributed to iron and bronze in mythology around the world (1978 [1962]; for iron and its ambivalent character, as well as perceptions regarding iron metallurgists see especially p. 23-28, then for the importance of the divine metallurgist cross-culturally see p. 97-108). Finally, for a historic overview of the role of iron in the economy, society and technology of Central Europe and the Middle East see Pleiner and Bjorkman (1974: 283-313) who explore the history of the metal and its processing from the time of the Assyrian civilisation.

\textsuperscript{29} For detailed insight into iron and iron working in ancient Greece see Pleiner (1969); there, see p.7-9 for the mythologies that concern the invention of iron, p. 12-13, for its import into Greece and p. 20-23 for the first technological advancements on its manufacturing and specialisations. A more holistic overview of the significance of metals and metallurgy in Greece is encountered in Blakeley (2006: 13-54), where the author offers a historical overview of the geographical and cultural elements that set the foundations for the perception of metals as mythological elements in the country, especially bronze and iron. Finally, for an examination of the depiction of iron in Hesiod’s \textit{Age of Men} as an indication of both the perception of the metal in antiquity and potentially also of an older literary tradition, see Griffiths (1956: 109-119).

\textsuperscript{30} For the mythological traditions of the different categories of daimones-metallurgists see Bremmer (2010: 196-198), Blakeley (2006: 13-54) and Pleiner (1969: 7-9).

\textsuperscript{31} If. 18.478-608. Hes. \textit{Theog}. 161-162. Although there is a difference in intention between the two cases, as the Homeric shield is made with the purpose of divine assistance, whereas the second case encapsulates divine punishment.
hero’s sword: ἅρ’ οὖκ Ἐρινύς τοὔτ’ ἐχάλκευσε ξίφος (wasn’t it the Erinys who fashioned this sword?, 1034).32 In both these cases, the deaths of Clytemnestra and Ajax are brought about by swords and they are attributed to the workings of the divine that is portrayed as the metaphorical manufacturer of the weapons.33 In this light, the reference to the Chalybian stranger in the Seven Against Thebes can be interpreted as part of the literary and cultural tradition that encapsulated the relationship between the immortals and the humans in literature in the motif of metal. However, what distinguishes the motif in the Seven Against Thebes from other tragedies and what is crucial to the interpretation of the play is that it brings us face-to-face with a major interpretative problem: for all the implicit links between the Curse and the weapons through prophecies and dream interpretations, there is no evidence in the text of an enforcement of the Curse.34 This is one of the main issues that have tormented critics of the Seven since the last century.

Until he hears about his brother’s presence at the seventh gate, Eteocles is presented as the confident leader of the army (Πειθαρχία γὰρ ἔστι, τῆς Εὐπρεπίας μήτηρ, γυνὴ Σωτῆρος (for Discipline is the mother of Success, the wife of [Zeus] Saviour, 224-225). However, just before leaving to confront Polyneices on the battlefield, the hero claims that his death is the order of the Erinys (φίλου γὰρ ἐχθρά μοι πατρὸς ἔπεφεβῆ ἄρα ξηροῖς ἀκλαύτοις δῆμασιν προσιζάνει, 695-696).35 Similarly, to the Chorus’ pleas to stay, Eteocles responds that he cannot avoid his predetermined fate, but that he wishes to die with glory (μόνον γὰρ κέρδος ἐν τεθνηκόσιν. κακὸν δὲ καϊσχρῶν οὐσίν εὐκλείαν ἔρειξ, 684-685). Within the scope of a single scene, the king’s words turn a civic problem into a family one, while the identity of the enemy beyond the walls is redefined as the Erinys instead of the

32 For Ajax’s sword as a non-human actant with intended agency see Mueller (2016: 15-41).
33 Evocation of metal and metalworking through sight and sound also possesses a crucial role in the Prometheus Bound, for which see Bakola (2019: 225-251) and Mossman (1996: 58-67). For broader insight into the Chalybes and the role of the Black Sea in Greek theatre, see the various contributions to Braund, Hall and Wyles (2019), in which Wyles (2019: 252-266) examines the Greek fragmentary plays set in the region of the Black Sea, whilst Hall (2019: 267-288) examines the role of the Black Sea in Euripides’ Medea. Finally, Vakhtina’s chapter (2019: 331-361) examines the common rituals, music and dance between the Greeks and the Scythians as the result of the Scythians’ influence on the Greeks.
34 See also Burnett (1973: 346) according to whom “the agent of death here is literally the victim himself”.
35 Here, like elsewhere in Aeschylus, the Curse (Ἀρά) and the Erinys are one entity and appear interchangeably. Cf. Aesch. Eum. 417. See also Sewell-Rutter (2007: 78-79) and Torrance (2007: 42). For the identification of the Erinyes with Curses in tragedy more broadly see Burkert (1985: 181).
army of the Argives. However, there is nothing in the text either to ascertain Eteocles’ state of mind or to indicate that Eteocles’ decision to fight is forced by the Erinys; there is no Erinys haunting Eteocles onstage and there are no ghosts or divinities appearing to suggest that the events had been orchestrated by a daimon. At the same time, the multiple prayers of the Chorus to the gods of the city are never addressed. Overall, for all that they are called upon, summoned, or begged for mercy, neither the Curse nor the gods nor any other divinities actively appear in the dramatic action; no machina brings a god onstage, nor do any prophecy or priests deliver a god-sent message to the citizens of Thebes. In the end, the mortal agents of the play appear to be left alone. Taking this as its main starting point, scholarship has thus far interpreted Aeschylus’ philosophical thinking in the Seven Against Thebes in two main ways: either as indication of the tragedian’s condemnation of the destructive power of fatalism or as part of his broader interest in matters of inherited guilt and familial past.

In this study, I will take a different approach. I argue that not only is the divine intervention of the Erinys actively at work the Seven, but that its progressive takeover of the war and inevitable fulfilment are also portrayed

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36 The difference is very notable particularly when one compares Eteocles’ behaviour in the Seven to Orestes’ situation in the Oresteia, in which Orestes is physically haunted by the Erinys in the Choephoroi (1048-1062), then the ghost of Clytemnestra sends the Erinys after him in the Eumenides (94-116).

37 Examples of prayers and references to the divine include but are not limited to Sept. 45, 69-70, 105, 116, 129, 138, 655, 695-697, 699-701, 720-726, 785-791.


39 See Rader (2015: 56-89) and Rader (2009: 1-44) for whom the play is a depiction of Aeschylus’ view of the catastrophic consequences of fatalism. Another point of view is offered in Kyriakou’s monograph, which is a comparative study of Aeschylus and Sophocles in terms of the influence of the familial past on the decision-making process of the main heroes; for discussion on the Seven Against Thebes see Kyriakou (2009: 48-62). Finally, Sewell-Rutter (2007: passim but especially 26-32) and Lawrence (2007: 335-353) have discussed inherited guilt in Aeschylus in terms of Eteocles’ relation to the Curse.
elaborately throughout the play. All of this, I argue, is encapsulated in the play’s
dramaturgy, namely in the motif of the weapons and their interaction with the
human actants of the play.

1.3 Making Staging Speak: Argument and Methodology

Previous explorations of the play’s imagery have focused on the motif of iron as a
symbol of the division that appears for the first time in the climax of the play.\textsuperscript{40}
Although it is true that the word ‘iron’ only appears in the text after Eteocles’
departure at verse 719, it has a prominent place in the text in the form of
weapons.\textsuperscript{41} Indeed, absence from the language does not however necessarily
signify absence from the performance. From the beginning of the play and until
the end, weapons pervade the stage in different forms as sound, imagery and
props. Furthermore, the play’s dramatic action is structured almost entirely around
the interaction between the characters and their weapons. The continuous
presence of weapons on the dramatic stage of a play about war is not surprising;
however, I argue that the way in which the weapons are portrayed through their
interaction with the human characters displays the destructive and monstrous
nature of the enemy force they represent, long before the Chorus identify Iron as
the enactor of the Curse. Overall, the manifestation of the weapons is the
theatrical symbolism for the approach and operation of the Erinys.

Throughout the play, iron and spears are used interchangeably in the
dramatic language as metaphors for wrathful minds. In the prologue, the Argives
outside the walls are characterised by an iron-minded spirit, σιδηρόφρων γάρ
θυμὸς (52). Similarly, in the parodos, the wind is reported to be going mad at the

\textsuperscript{40} Thalmann (1978: 72).
\textsuperscript{41} The text does not give an explicit indication as to whether the iron divider of the dream is the
sword, as Poli-Palladinì (2016: 159), Chaston (2010: 115), and Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 101) have
assumed, the spear (Bacon, 1964: 36), or both. However, in Sept. 962, the Chorus refer to the
spear as the weapon that murdered the two brothers (δορὶ δ’ ἐκανες. /δορὶ δ’ ἐθανες). Even if we
take the spear to be a synecdoche for the weapons that performed the murders, the multitude of
compound words in the play taken to mean ‘pain’ or ‘suffering’ that have spear as the first
compound contradicts the seeming lack of references to swords in the play. Overall, I see no
reason to assume the sword is the weapon behind the Scythian Iron in Eteocles’ dream.
Throughout this dissertation, I consider the fulfilment of the Curse as the product of the ‘ominous
spear-duet’, according to the Chorus’ declaration (ἠ δύσορνις ἅδε ξυναυλία δορός, 838-9). A
compelling parallel for this is encountered in the later literary tradition of Herodotus where
Croesus dreams of an iron spear that would kill Atys (Hdt. 1.34-46), even though no indication of
Aeschylean influence or relevance to the Aeschylean tragedy has been proved.
sound of the shaking of the enemy’s spears (δορυτίνακτος {δ’} αἰθήρ, 155), while the women pray to the gods that they will not let the city suffer amid the toil of spear-inflicted evils of war (πόλιν δορίπον μὴ προδῶθ’, 169-170). More striking is the way in which weapons appear in the dramatic action; for the most part they appear either to depict images of daimones or to inflict pain and disorder. In the parodos and the first episode, the sounds of shields and spears invade the stage causing an uproar in the city (ἀκούετ’ ἢ οὐκ ἀκούετ’ ἀσπίδων κτύπων; [do you hear or do you not hear the clatter of shields?], 100; κτύπων δέδορκα· πάταγος οὐχ ένός δορός [I see the sound; it is the clatter of more than one spear], 103). There, the song of the Chorus is a maddened reaction to the destructive effect of the sound. The Chorus’ madness is further underlined when later in the first episode, it is juxtaposed with Eteocles’ discipline as the king is determined to counteract the effect of the sound (Πειθαρχία γάρ ἐστι, τῆς Εὐπραξίας μήτηρ, γυνὴ Σωτῆρος· [for Discipline is the mother of Success, the wife of [Zeus] Saviour], 224-225). In the second episode, the Messenger’s report on the location of the Argive leaders is a synecdochic description of the emblems on their shields. In the sieben Redepeaare (or simply Redepeaare throughout this thesis), the emblems of the Argives fill the scene with the presence of daimones (Τυφῶν’, 493; Σφίγγ’, 541; Δίκη, 646). Through the depictions on the emblems, the shields ‘speak’ on behalf of their owners to Eteocles (χρυσοῖς δὲ φωνεῖ γράμμασιν “πρήσω πολιν” [and with golden letters it proclaims, “I will burn the city”], 434), who assigns his selected champions at the gates. After verse 675, Eteocles asks for his armour to be

42 The sounds also include those of chariots, horses and rocks. See also Sept. 84, 114-115, 151 and the analysis in section 2.3.2. The works of Weiss, Nooter and Trieschnigg have offered some of the first elaborate examinations of the sounds that pervade the text: these include not only the Chorus’ cries, prayers and dance, but also the variety of offstage noises produced by the enemy’s army and their weapons. Specifically, Nooter is interested in how voices in Aeschylean drama act as reminders of the fragility of human mortality (Nooter 2017, 5-153 for the analysis of sound as a device in early Aeschylean drama; for the materiality of voice and sound in the Seven Against Thebes in particular see 65-68, 74-77, 94-96, 107-115). Weiss (2018: 169-184) and Trieschnigg (2016: 217-237) focus more on the performance of the Chorus which is used to highlight Aeschylus’ dramaturgical superiority. Neither scholar, however, considers the sound of the metals as a factor that contributes to the creation of meaning in the scene (Weiss 2018: 173-174 and Trieschnigg 2016: 224); instead, they focus on the visualisation of the enemy through the mimetics of the Chorus. Their points will be discussed separately in section 2.3.1.

43 As seen in the distorted metre of the song that entails astatic anapaests throughout its first part. See the analysis in 2.2.1.

44 The Redepaare and the significance of the emblems are discussed extensively in Chapter 2.

45 The shields of the Redepaare have over the years fuelled a large number of discussions that have scrutinised the scene both as a system of semiotics and as a literary means for ekphrasis. The key works on the matter which are those of Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 33-102), Chaston (2010: 85-117) and Uhlig (2019: 127-160). Zeitlin’s work has offered one of the most influential reading of the shields...
brought onstage (φέρ᾿ ὡς τάχος κνημίδας, αἰχμῆς καὶ πτερῶν προβλήματα [Bring me at once my greaves, protectors against spear and shafts], 675-676); as Eteocles dons his armour, the language of the women as they react to his decision emphasises connections between his weapons and his behaviour (μὴ τί σε θυμοπληθής δορίμαργος ἄτα φερέτω [Do not let yourself be guided by this spear-mad wrath that fills your spirit], 686-687). Finally, once the battle is over, Eteocles’ dead body is laid side by side with that of Polyneices after the second stasimon. It is at their sight that the Chorus mourn the fulfilment of the Curse (τάδ᾿ αὐτόδηλα· πρεπτὸς ἀγγέλου λόγος [it is plain to see; the Messenger’s words are visible reality], 848). This is all then crowned by the Chorus’ remark on the iron as the executioner of the Curse.46

Although each of the scenes differs greatly in dramaturgy and content from its preceding and following scenes, weapons are characterised throughout with a structural and behavioural unity as they are progressively approaching the Thebans inside the walls, provoking confusion. To this day, although scholarly analysis of Aeschylus’ dramaturgy and metapoetic reflection has often taken individual scenes as its focus, the unity of this motif as one element, an actant that develops throughout the dramatic action, has by and large been ignored. With the exception of Bacon and Schadewaldt who suggested that Eteocles’ arming in 675-719 is symbolic of his internal embodiment of the paternal curse, no other work has treated the weapons as actors, central components in the dramatic action.47 This can be partly attributed to the influence of older attitudes towards stagecraft which have repeatedly challenged the enactment of the war-noises in the parodos and in Eteocles’ arming scene in 675-719.48 However, as performance studies as a system of semiotics that encapsulates the whole history of the House of the Labdacids. Chaston has used theories of cognitive function to explain what mental schemes would be activated by the descriptions of the emblems in the minds of the audience, while Uhlig has looked into the metapoetic connotations of the shields and their materiality as the main factor to which the weapons owe their ‘voice’. More detailed overview and engagement with the literature on the scenes can be found in the individual chapters.46 Schadewalt (1961: 105-116) and Bacon (1964: 34-36).

47 Mueller briefly discusses the connection between Eteocles’ armour and the Chalybian stranger as a riddle regarding the role of the weapons in the play. Yet, she does not draw links between Eteocles’ arming and his words in the same scene (2016: 32-33). As for the parodos, scholars by and large have avoided discussing sound enactment as a result of the lack of evidence; examples include Nooter (2017: 75, footnote 37), (Trieschnigg 2016: 224), Weiss (2018: 173-174)..

48 The enactment of sounds was first disputed by Stanford (1983: 55-56), then followed by Weiss (2018: 173-174). The arming of Eteocles was first disputed in length by Groeneboom (1938: 197-198), Taplin (1977: 158-163) and Hutchinson (1985: 152-153). For the staging of the two scenes see sections 2.3.1 and 4.1.2 respectively.
have now moved in a new direction, it is time to examine the play with fresh eyes. I argue that both the noises-off and Eteocles’ arming were most likely enacted.\(^{49}\) With that in mind, I will revisit the representation of the weapons both onstage and in the dramatic language, and argue that the way their interaction with the human characters of the play is portrayed encapsulates the double identity of the enemy that is both human and divine.

I argue that, as we follow the descriptions of the weapons of the *Seven Against Thebes*, we observe a movement from the outside to the inside, an invasion that begins as an auditory threat from the human enemy but results in the visual invasion of a daimon. In terms of how this invasion takes place, the representation is structured as a system of antithetical pairs. These range from conceptions of senses and space (inside/outside, visible/invisible, sight/hearing) to the play’s characters (city/family, one/many, male/female, Polyneices/Eteocles, Thebans/Argives etc.). The use of the theatrical space as the defining line between the visible defenders inside the walls and the invisible attackers outside the walls sets up the principal spatial and conceptual parameters of the play. As a result, the notions of inside and outside, and visible and invisible, play the most fundamental role.\(^{50}\) Indeed, as Thalmann has noted, there is no other Aeschylean play where terms that signify ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are deployed as frequently as in the *Seven*.\(^{51}\) However, as the threat outside gradually invades the theatrical space, the boundaries between the antithetical pairs are blurred. Emerging from the invisible external space into the visible internal space of the theatre, weapons become the tragic symbol through which, constantly reshaped, the stage dramatises the progressive approach of the enemy and Eteocles’ gradual transition from oblivion to awareness.\(^{52}\) Eventually, the weapons bring together the union between the outside and the inside, turning the invisible into the visible. By the time the bodies of Eteocles and Polyneices are brought onstage, the boundaries between city and family, Thebes and Argos, inside and outside, and visible and invisible, have been dissolved. Through their progressive visualisation, the weapons gradually reveal

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\(^{49}\) Here as well as throughout this thesis, the term *noises-off* is used to describe the noises of the enemy that pervade the stage from the extramural space. See also 2.3.1.

\(^{50}\) See Rehm (2012: 312) who describes the invasion as a horizontal invasion of the enemy and a vertical invasion of the divine punishment.

\(^{51}\) Thalmann (1978: 39).

\(^{52}\) See also Bacon (1964: 27) who links Eteocles’ progression from ignorance to understanding with the broader significance of knowledge in the trilogy.
the unity of the human threat of the Argives and the non-human threat of the Erinys, of Argos and Thebes and, finally, of Eteocles and Polyneices. Overall, the weapons operate as non-human actants that exercise agency throughout the play. The impact of this agency is as formative for the play’s characters as it is for the unfolding of the play’s dramatic action.

Beyond their central role in the dramatic action of the Seven, antithetical pairs and the union of opposites are a fundamental notion of Presocratic thought. Whilst the primary intention of this thesis is to offer insight into the role of metal materiality in the variety of forms it undertakes in the Seven, my emphasis on the role of antitheses and duality means that my reading of the play also adheres to the existing school of scholars who read Aeschylus through the lens of Presocratic philosophy, and traces influence on Aeschylean thought to philosophers such as Empedocles, Heraclitus and Pythagoras. So far, most of this scholarship has centred around the Oresteia, although the Seven Against Thebes contains the highest number of antithetical pairs encountered in Aeschylean tragedy. However, bibliography on the matter is not yet extensive. The most recent work on the play’s antitheses is Allison’s article ‘Antithesis and the One/Many in Aeschylus’ Septem’, in which she emphasises the different types of antitheses and their union in the play to show their relevance to the theories of Empedocles and Pythagoras. A year prior to the publication of Allison’s article, Seaford had also described the fulfilment of the Curse as an economic transaction where iron is the reconciler of the two opposites, Eteocles and Polyneices, but also the polis and the oikos: for Seaford, the union lies between the Heracleitean holistic cyclical union

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53 One of the best-known examples here is the work of Richard Seaford who has argued that the verbal and dramaturgical action of the Oresteia represents the move from the Heraclitan unity of opposites to the Pythagorean reconciliation (Seaford 2003: 141-163). Seaford’s argument is in agreement with Thomson’s older attempt to connect Pythagoreanism with Aeschylus (Thomson: 1966 [1938]), an argument which, at the time, was accused of vagueness and lack of concrete evidence (Rössler 1970: 36-37). Later, in 2012, Seaford’s analysis of the Seven argued for the use of city as confrontational space, the main chronotope that brings the union of opposites (Seaford 2012: 158-177, 227-230 and 244-246). Later, Seaford took his argument further and elaborated on the influence of Pythagoreanism on Aeschylus and the significance of the number three in both thinkers (Seaford 2013: 17-33). Finally, the most recent publication on pre-Socratic influence on Aeschylus is Scapin’s insight into the Oresteia (Scapin [2020]) who offers us a new reading of the trilogy in the light of presocratic ideas, focusing on the treatment of Zeus and Justice by Aeschylus and arguing that the trilogy exemplifies the influence from the philosophies of Anaximander, Xenophanes, Heraclitus and Parmenides upon Aeschylus.

54 Allison (2013: 566-592).
of opposites and the Parmeneidean spatial-temporal limitedness.\textsuperscript{55} Although the aim of this thesis is not to link Aeschylus to a specific pre-Socratic thinker, my work contributes to these intriguing arguments by exploring the portrayal of the gradual union of antitheses through the visual and auditory media of the play. The extent to which this union is indeed germane to Empedoclean and Pythagorean cosmologies, as Allison and Seaford have argued, is something I will leave open for discussion in a future publication.

Finally, the polymorphous representation of the weapons in the \textit{Seven} is compelling not only due to the dramaturgical complexity and hermeneutics it entails for its staging, but also because it allows us to discover the ways in which the play positions itself in relation to its preceding literary heritage. In the next section, I explain how the individual study of each of the play’s scenes reveals an implicit comparison between the Aeschylean weapons and their Iliadic counterparts. Specifically, I show that, in each of the scenes, the tragedian uses the motif as a way of negotiating the different aspects of his tragedy’s own materiality. By demonstrating the power of representation, through which he provokes thought and emotional response, Aeschylus ultimately showcases his literary superiority.

1.4 Weapons, Tragic Stage and Aeschylus’ Literary Discourse

I have already mentioned that, by using iron and the Chalybes as the symbols of the Erinys, Aeschylus engages with a cross-cultural tradition that regards metal as a material associated with divine power. Even stronger, however, are the literary allusions in the representation of weapons in the \textit{Seven}, especially to the Homeric tradition. Sound emanating from weapons, shield emblems with ekphrastic roles, and arming scenes are all repeated motifs in the \textit{Iliad}. Throughout the epic, weapons and shields clang, chariots shriek and spears send ominous messages through the sound of their wielding.\textsuperscript{56} The preparation of important warriors for battle is marked by lengthy arming scenes, where heroes like Paris, Agamemnon,

\textsuperscript{55} Seaford (2012: 251-252). Seaford’s work was preceded by another article of Allison’s (2009: 129-147), where the scholar examined the cosmological implications of the number seven in the play. Allison treated the prominent role of the number as indication for Aeschylus’ fascination with the principles of mathematical ideas and images.

\textsuperscript{56} On dissonance in Homer more broadly see also Gurd (2016: 1-4, 27-32, 48, 58-62, 75, 118 and 119).
Patroclus and Achilles are observed donning each piece of their armour. Finally, the association between metals, weapons, divine power and the power of the metallurgist are important for the metapoetic reference to the making of epic poetry. One of the most famous ekphrastic scenes in literature, the forging of the shield of Achilles by Hephaestus, is paradigmatic as a metaphor for the splendour of literary creation: this lengthy scene gives a detailed description of Hephaestus who is beating and melting four different types of metal in order to create the images on the shield’s crest. The scene is one of the most elaborate metaphors for the unsurpassable art of the literary creation; once Hephaestus’ work is completed, the divine armour arouses fear, astonishment and admiration in those who gaze on it.

However, Aeschylus does not simply reproduce the Iliadic model in his adoption of the Homeric motifs. By bringing weapons into the staging and language of the Seven Against Thebes, he adds a new dimension to their meaning. Tragedy’s nature as a textual and performative medium means that the capacity of the armour to provoke thoughts and emotions in the characters who interact with them, as well as to awaken old memories and provoke new reactions in the audience, is the combined effect of the visual spectacle and the words that accompany it. By bringing the three motifs together and presenting them as one multi-dimensional entity, the Seven Against Thebes tells a double story. As well as unfolding the dramatic action, the metallic weapons become a medium for metapoetic discourse, a mechanism that allows Aeschylus not only to convey the power of the Erinys, but also to negotiate his own place in the literary tradition. By reshaping the representation of metals from one form to another throughout the play, Aeschylus displays the different ways in which tragedy can create presence, underlining an implicit comparison with the Iliad. In other words, weapons perform simultaneously a double role by both advancing the dramatic action through their contact with the human actants and raising questions about the value and power of the tragic medium, including the comparison to its preceding literature. The best way to see how this reconfiguration of the weapons works is to look at some examples.

58 Il. 18.478-608.
My first example of the difference between the epic representation of the weapons in the *Iliad* and that of their tragic counterparts, is when the sound of weapons operates as an ominous sign:

\[ \text{τόν δ’, ὡς τε δρυτόμων ἀνδρῶν ὄρμαγδός ὅρωρεν}
\[ \text{οὐρεος ἐν βήσσης, ἐκαθεν δὲ τε γίνετ’ ἀκουή,}
\[ \text{ὡς τόν ὄρνυτο δοῦπος ἄπο χθονὸς εὐρωδεῖης}
\[ \text{χαλκοῦ τε ρινοῦ τε βοῶν τ’ εὐποιήτατων,}
\[ \text{νυσσομένων ξίφεσίν τε καὶ ἔγχεσιν ἀμφιγύσιν.}

And from them, just like the din [that] arises from wood cutters in the mountain glades, and from afar the sound of it is heard, so from them went up a clanging from the broad-wayed earth, of bronze and of leather and of well-made shields, as they thrust at one another with swords and two-edged spears.

*II. 16.633-637*

In this scene from *Iliad* 16, the clanging of spears, shields and swords foretells death, and their ominous sound is described to the audience via an elaborate simile. First, the very fabric of the sound, its tone as well as its volume is formed in the listener’s ear-mind through a simile (\( ὡς τε δρυτόμων […] άκουή \)). Subsequently, the sound is relocated and attributed to the shields of the warriors (\( χαλκοῦ τε ρινοῦ τε βοῶν τ’ εὐποιήτατων \)). Finally, the cause of the noise is revealed: it is the encounter of the weapons in battle (\( νυσσομένων ξίφεσίν τε καὶ ἔγχεσιν \)). From this triple phrase, the audience of the epic hear the sound and visualise its source in their minds; as the only tool of representation, the words of the literary description are the only medium through which this process can take place. The theatre however offers the depiction of battle new possibilities through a variety of media.

To recreate the sound of battle on the theatrical stage is not to only *speak* of sound, but also to expose the characters and the audience alike to its effect.\(^60\) This creates a multi-layered interaction as the audiences both experience the volume and

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\(^60\) The staging of sound has received some scholarly doubt over the years. In 2.3.1, I address the matter to show that the representation of the sounds onstage in the parodos and the first episode is the most probable scenario.
the tone of the sound, and are also exposed to the characters’ reaction to it. Subsequently, their own emotional reaction is both shaped and reflected back to them through the characters’ discourse. In the first episode of the Seven Against Thebes, sounds of horses, chariots, shields and spears break into the stage. To this auditory invasion, the Chorus and the king have very different responses:

ΧΟΡΟΣ
δέδουκ’ ἀραγμὸς δ᾿ ἐν πύλαις όφέλλεται.

ΕΤΕΟΚΛΗΣ
οὐ σίγα μηδὲν τῶνδ᾿ ἐρεῖς κατὰ πτόλιν;

CHORUS
I am scared; and the clatter on the gates is increasing.

ETEOCLES
Will you not be silent and not say these things in front of the city?

*Sept. 249-250*

In this example, not only is Aeschylus exposing his audience to both human and non-human sound, but he is also making them the implicit judges of the dispute between the play’s characters when the Chorus highlight the escalation of the noise (ὅφελλεται) alongside the declaration of their emotional reaction to it (δέδουκ’). In doing so, the Chorus voice their emotional reaction to the sounds, reactions which may or may not reflect those of the audience, and they also connect the noises-off to their song in a cause-effect link. Eteocles’ response counteracts the extramural sound by ignoring it, directing attention towards the distinction between the human and the non-human sounds. The hero thus poses a question about tragedy’s own destructive power as a product of its representational nature. Through Eteocles’ response to the sound, Aeschylus is therefore raising broader matters about the tragic effect. Similar effects are also achieved by the remainder of the play’s scenes.
To create a shield in the *Iliad* is to have a divine craftsman fabricate the universe on the shield of Achilles, ultimately leading to one of the most famous ekphrastic objects in Greek literature:

εν μὲν γαῖαν ἔτευξ’ ἐν δ’ ὦρανόν ἐν δὲ θάλασσαν,  
ἡμέλιον τ’ ἀκάμαντα σελήνην τε πλῆθουσαν,  
ἐν δὲ τὰ τείρεα πάντα, τὰ τ’ ὦρανος ἐστεφάνωται,  
Πληϊῦδας θ’ Ὁὔδας τε τὸ τε σθένος Ὄριωνος  
Ἄρκτον θ’, ἢν καὶ Ἀμαξαν ἐπίκλησιν καλέσσαν,  
ἡ τ’ αὐτὸν στρέφεται καὶ τ’ Ὄριωνα δοκεῖ,  
οὐ μὲν ἀμμορός ἐστι λοετρῶν Ὁκεανοί.

On it he fashioned the earth, on it the heavens, on it the sea, and the tireless sun, and the full moon, and on it all the constellations with which the sky is crowned the Pleiades and the Hyades and mighty Orion and the Bear, which men call also the Waggon, that always circles in its place, and looks across Orion, and this [constellation] alone takes no part in the baths of Ocean.

*Il.* 18.483-489

In this passage, Hephaestus’ craftsmanship (ἔτευξ’) encapsulates the cosmos on the first layer of the shield of Achilles. On it are the sun, the moon and the stars, all reflected in the gleam of the metal.61 His creative power is indisputable; as the audience listens to the description, they are bound to the only reaction possible to it, which is marvel at the spectacle. When the Messenger of the *Seven Against Thebes*, however, offers the descriptions of the emblems on the shields of the Argives outside the walls, the shield becomes an actant in the tragic scene; its description is both integral to the advancement of the dramatic action and invites engagement with its depiction in the theatre. The closest comparandum to the Iliadic passage here is that of the first shield, the shield of Tydeus.

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61 For the cosmological aspect and the ekphrasis of the first layer of the shield of Achilles see Becker (1995: 101-106). For the resonance of the starry shield of Achilles in early Greek poetry, including the shield of Tydeus in the *Seven Against Thebes*, see Hardie (1985: 11-13).
In the *Seven Against Thebes*, much like the shield of Achilles, the shield of Tydeus is not visible. Opening the Messenger’s seven-fold report of the enemy’s shields, the tragic weapon conjures up its epic counterpart through its representation of the cosmos:

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ἐχει δ’ ὑπέρφρον σήμ’ ἐπ’ ἀσπίδος τόδε,
φλέγονθ’ ὑπ’ ἀστροις οὐρανὸν τετυμένον’
λαμπρὰ δὲ πανσέληνος ἐν μέσωι σάκει,
πρέσβιστον ἀστρον, νυκτὸς ὀρθαλμός, πρέπει.
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And he bears this proud device on the shield,
a fashioned blazing sky, full of stars.
Eminent stands in the centre of the shield the bright full moon,
the eldest of the stars, the eye of night.

*Sept. 387-390*

Just as in the case of Achilles, the cosmic representation and the gleam of the shield is also a sign of the ominous future that awaits. In this description, however, the poet’s audiences are not expected to interpret the sign alone, but they are exposed to the commentary of Eteocles, since the description is part of a dialogic discourse with the Messenger. As such, reacting to the Messenger’s narrative, Eteocles offers his own interpretation of the ominous emblem of the shield:

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ΕΤΕΟΚΛΗΣ
κόσμον μὲν ἄνδρὸς οὔτινʼ ἂν τρέσαιμʼ ἐγὼ,
οὐδ’ ἐλκοποῦ ἀντεῖ διὰ τὰ σήματα;
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**ETEOCLES**
Neither shall I tremble at the embellishment of any man,
nor can shield emblems inflict wounds.

*Sept. 397-398*
In his desire to counteract the destructive power of the enemy, Eteocles ignores the ominous messages of the shield. As far as the dramatic action is concerned, the character will thus proceed with positioning his selected champion at the Proteid gate, a process to be followed throughout the Redepaare until it is his turn to face Polyneices at the seventh gate. However, his interpretation overlooks another layer of meaning. By focusing on its inability to provoke physical harm (οὐδὲ ἐλκυστώ), Eteocles overlooks the emblem of the shield as something suggestive of his own ‘night’ and therefore death, and instead foresees the ‘night’ and death of Tydeus in battle. As the action unfolds, a broader question is raised by Eteocles’ failure to interpret the emblems: if neither the Messenger nor the hero can be considered impartial and objective interpreters of the emblems, then how can we speak of a correct interpretation? In other words, how do we avoid the fatal blindness of Eteocles? Such are the questions that Aeschylus provokes through the enactment of objects in this play.

Finally, the tragic weapons differ from their epic past in the way the relationship between the warrior and his weapons is portrayed. For Homer to speak of divine weapons and the warrior’s body in the *Iliad* is for him to verbally describe their splendour and impact on the hero. The channelling of the divine power of the armour onto the warrior’s body takes place through the poet’s ability to create imagery in the eye of the mind. In this imagery, the relationship between the warrior’s body and the metal is conjured through words that would draw the listener’s attention to Achilles’ interaction with his armour:

\[\text{ἡ δ’ ἀστήρ ὡς ἀπέλαμπεν}
\text{Ὑπονοιας τριφάλειας, περισσείόντο δ’ ἐδειχα}
\text{χρύσεαι, ἀς Ἄχιλλε, ὥστε ὁ λόφον ὠμφρι θαμείας.}
\text{πειρήθη δὲ ἓ αὐτῷ ἐν ἑντεσί διὸς Ἀχιλλεύς,}
\text{εἰ οἱ ἑφαρμόσειε καὶ ἑντρέχοι ἀγλαύ γυῖα.}
\text{τῶν δ’ εὑτε πτερὰ γίνετ’, ἀείρε δὲ ποιμένα λαῖν.}\]
And it shone like a star,
the helmet with crest of horsecorn, and above it waved the plumes
of gold that Hephaestus had lavished thickly on the crest.
And godlike Achilles tried himself in the armour
to see if it fitted him and if it allowed his splendid limbs free movement.
and it became like wings to him, and elevated the shepherd of men.

_II_. 19.381-386

In this passage, the agency of the armour on Achilles is described in a three-step
process: first, the shine of the metal (ἀπέλαμπτεν), together with the movement and
shine of the golden plumes (περισσεύοντο δ’ ἔθεσεν χρύσει) are the markers of the
ominous future that awaits Achilles.62 The divine skills of Hephaestus are then
mentioned to highlight the intention with which the armour had been made, crafted
out of the metal to protect Achilles (ἂς Ἡφαίστος ἂι λόφον ἀμφὶ θαμείᾶς). Finally,
the way in which Achilles embodies his upcoming death and his divine assistance is
revealed through his fitting into the armour: πειρήθη δ’ ἐο αὐτῷ ἐν ἑντέσι [...] εἰ ὁ ἔφαρμόςσε. The process is completed once the text indicates that the armour has
both fitted perfectly (ἐντρέχει άγλα ἱνα), but it has also become an extension of
the hero’s body: τῷ δ’ ἐδέ πτερὰ γίνετ’.

In the _Seven Against Thebes_, supernatural power is also transferred to the
hero’s psyche as a result of his physical contact with the armour. In the Arming
Scene, Eteocles’ merging with the Erinys is expressed in terms of the metallic
substance of the weapons. However, in this instance, spectacle replaces verbal
imagery; instead of only hearing about it as reflected in the text, the audience also
witness the process of his body’s assimilation with the armour. In the scene, as
soon as his arming has been completed the hero comments on his metaphorical
transformation into iron:

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62 In the _Iliad_, gleam in the battlefield forecasts death. Later in the twenty-second book, Priam
observes Achilles run and, in his eyes, his armour makes him shine like Sirius or the Dog of Orion
Already from before Homer’s time, the star has a long literary tradition of direct connection with
negative omens and death. Further examples of references to Sirius in such a capacity include Hes.
_Sc._ 151-153. In later years, Apollonius Rhodius also mentions the star in _Arg_., 2.517. Finally, for a
broader historic insight into the negativity attributed to Sirius see Theodosiou, Manimanis,
I am whetted and your words shall not blunt me

Sept. 715

In this metaphor, the participle τεθηγμένον draws attention to the past life of the armour as metal and to the processing that turned it into a weapon; indeed, the same term will be used later again when the Chorus name iron as the Scythian stranger in Eteocles’ dream (θηκτὸς Σίδαρος, 944). However, in this instance it is also an invitation to the audience to regard the actor’s body as a metal weapon: when the hero refers to himself as iron, his body would have been holding the iron objects in the same moment, thus linking the associations of the processed metal with the associations of the deathly weapon. In this sentence, the powers of performance and language are shown fully synchronised as the power of the armour is crystallised in the technical terms of the metal. More importantly, the transformation of the hero is elucidated through the re-enactment of the process of the creation of tragedy. If tragic characters receive their identity through their costumes and masks, then are we not to assume Eteocles’ transformation into the Erinys through his onstage arming? In light of this, τεθηγμένον represents a two-fold meaning. On one level, the armour is processed iron, the executioner of the paternal Erinys. On another level, however, it is an indication of the assimilation of Eteocles’ own body with the metallic armour on the theatrical stage.

Overall, for all their elaborate usage in epic poetry, the weapons of the Seven Against Thebes are shown to embody a different entity. The noise of the weapons, the achievements of the divine creator and the splendour of the warrior preparing for fight are no longer just heard of, they are experienced. This experience goes two ways, as it is shared between the characters of the play who interact with and are influenced by the weapons on the one hand, and with the audience on the other. In its turn, the internal interaction between the characters and the weapons is the dramaturgical mechanism that visualises the Erinys: it is through the sound of the metal and the horrified cries of the women that the

63 Note a similar use of the word in verse 584 of the Sophoclean Ajax, where the character’s tongue is characterised as τεθηγμένη right when the hero has entered with his sword just before he gives his deception speech.
spectators would have sensed the elements of fear and madness. Through the Messenger’s description of the enemy’s emblems and the comparison with the visible emblems of the Thebans onstage, the identification between the Argives and their divine alliances would have been revealed to an audience who would also have become uncertain about their own ability to interpret the signs correctly. Finally, through both Eteocles’ costuming and his debate with the Chorus we see how the Curse slowly overtakes the mind of the combatant in a symbolic manifestation of his internal hardening. By the time the two bodies are brought onto the stage and laid down, side by side, the question about how the Curse of Oedipus has been fulfilled is answered. In this thesis, it is my aim to show how this double discourse simultaneously develops in Aeschylus’ play. In so doing, I am hoping to not only address long-debated matters in the Seven, but also to shed new light on the ways in which Aeschylean tragedy explores its own materiality.

1.5 Thesis Structure and Challenges

As this thesis is an examination of the unfolding of the metallic weapons in the dramaturgy of the Seven Against Thebes, the most suitable way to read the text is in a linear way. For the purpose of methodological clarity, my thesis is divided into three chapters, each corresponding to each of the three forms that weapons take in the play as sound-producing instruments, images and visual props. This methodology, by definition, also necessitates the use of different theoretical frameworks in each scene. In each chapter, my first task is to elucidate matters of staging and present the reconstructed scene in accordance with the textual indications. Following this, I will observe the role of the weapons in the play in relation to their interaction with the characters.

Chapter 2 examines the parodos (78-181) and the first episode (182-286), where weapons exhibit an auditory presence. Challenging older approaches to the play that saw the weapons as mere verbal imagery in the song, I show that the approach of the daimonic presence is portrayed through the contrast of the terrifying noises that invade the theatrical space and the song of the Chorus, itself

64 The staging of the Redepaare and the presence of the Thebans are discussed extensively in section 3.3.
a discordant harmony. Altogether, these two elements create a fearful effect that prepares the ground for the atmosphere of indeterminacy that frames the play. Aeschylean tragedy, and the *Seven Against Thebes* in particular, is obsessed with the destructive effect of sound. This will become particularly evident in the first episode, where we encounter the most explicit and direct Aeschylean reflection on tragedy’s powerful sonic effects through the king’s dialogue with the Chorus.

Chapter 3 analyses the Redepaare (375-676), the main part of the second episode (375-719), where the shields have both a visual presence through the onstage appearance of Eteocles’ selected champions but, even more prominently, in the Messenger’s description of the enemy’s shields outside the walls. Here, I argue that the shields overtake the scene as visualised imagery and operate as synecdoches for their owners. Through the increasingly nuanced emblems on their surface, the objects become vehicles for the assimilation between the human threat of the Argives and the non-human threat of the operating daimon. This happens through the progressive development of their depictions that transition from reflecting the warriors’ intentions to manifesting their daimonic alliances. At the same time, the scene explicitly evokes Achilles’ shield in *Iliad* 18 and the power of the literary creator. By prompting comparison with his epic predecessor, Aeschylus ultimately poses the question: who is the more skilful craftsman? Overall, Aeschylus is inviting us to reflect on the power of tragedy to provoke an emotional and ethical response, a power it acquires through its capacity to construct and represent worlds.

The thesis concludes with Chapter 4, which focuses on the visual representation of the weapons in Eteocles’ Arming Scene (675-719) and the subsequent mourning of the Chorus, when the armed bodies of Eteocles and Polyneices are brought onstage dead (848-end of the play). Theories of the symbolism of costuming and the ability of props to conjure their literary past are the focus of this part of my interpretation. This chapter explores how, drawing from the literary past of Homer’s arming scenes and the warrior’s thirst for glory, Aeschylus deploys armour as the tragic medium that dramatises Eteocles’ understanding of and submission to the Curse through his physical contact with the armour. The end of the play brings the riddle to its conclusion: lying dead onstage as the double of each other, the Chorus ponder on the inescapability of the Erinys. Through a verbal journey to the past, Eteocles’ and Polyneices’ fates
become one as part of the Curse of their House. By the time the weapons and the two brothers have been brought onstage, antitheses between visible and invisible, inside and outside, Thebans and Argives, one and many, have dissolved.

Embarking on the mission of comparing the cosmological contemplation of the *Seven* with its simultaneous reflection on its literary identity is not without challenges. The lost content of both *Laius* and *Oedipus*, as well as the interpolations that the play has undergone over the years, mean that we might never be able to fully experience and understand the play in the way that its ancient audiences did. However, the richness of the dramatic language and stage action of the *Seven* together with the recent methodological innovation in the field of performance mean that we are now able to shed new light into some of the main issues that have been occupying scholarship over the years. To do so is more than to offer a new reading of the *Seven Against Thebes*: above all, it is to contribute towards our understanding of the ways in which Aeschylean dramaturgy deploys tragedy’s materiality to experiment with its boundaries through an exploration of the genre’s capacity to visualise action.
CHAPTER 2

The Parodos and the First Episode (78-286): An Auditory Invasion

2.1 Chapter Introduction

The slow development of dramatic action in Aeschylus’ plays does not allow for his thematic motifs to be fully developed from the beginning. Rather, starting from a minor role in the dramatic action and language, they gradually grow in complexity and significance until their full dramaturgical role is unravelled. We can see this in action in the case of metal in the Seven Against Thebes.

In the first part of the play, the presence of metals in the dramatic language is limited. With the exception of the metaphorical characterisation of the Argives as of steel-minded spirit in the prologue (σιδηρόφρων γὰρ θυμός, 52) and a mention of the enemy’s bronze-rimmed shields in the parodos (χαλκοδέτων σακέων, 161), there is no reference to bronze or iron until the Redepaare. However, absence from the language does not necessarily signify absence from the dramatic action. In the parodos and the first episode of the Seven Against Thebes, the weapons play a prominent role in the dramaturgy through their auditory presence. Specifically, although they have yet to become the focus of dramatic action, they are part of the broader effect of the noises-off, the war noises of the Argives that invade the stage from the extramural space, infusing fear in the women of the Chorus. Structured as an antithesis between noises from the inside and the outside, created by the visible Chorus and the invisible enemy respectively, I argue that the two scenes do more than stage a siege; they primarily manifest daimonic invasion. The multitude of sounds in the scene and their synaesthetic effect as auditory and visual spectacle onstage and as auditory invasion from offstage are the main dramaturgical mechanisms through which this effect is achieved.

In the parodos, the clashing weapons of the enemy resonate inside the city, filling the air with their metallic clang: “do you hear, or do you not hear, the clatter of shields?” (ἀκούετ’ ἢ οὐκ ἀκούετ’ ἀσπίδων κτόπον;) ask some of the women of the Chorus during their frenetic entrance onstage in verse 100. “I see the noise; it is the rattle of more than one spear”, (κτόπον δέδορκα· πάταγος οὐχ ἐνός
Δορός, 103) the others respond. The sounds of the weapons are accompanied by sounds of horses (πεδί’ ὀπλόκτυπ’ ὄρι χρυμπτει βοάν· [the sound of horse hooves is sending the noise to my ear, 84]), chariots (ἐλακον ἀξόνων βριθομένων χνόαι [the sockets of the loads of the axles are squealing, 153]) and stones (ἅκροβόλος δ’ ἐπάλξεων λιθάς ἔρχεται· [the bombardment of stones on the battlements is approaching, 159]). The powerful presence of the noises-off in the parodos as well as the implications for the theatrical spectacle have caught the attention of scholars several times. In a very vivid and firm statement that dates all the way back to 1935, Gilbert Murray in his commentary on the Seven Against Thebes made a special reference to the noises-off in its preface: “…there seems almost certainly to have been a whole series of crashes and ‘noises off’. The stage carpenter must have been kept busy. […] It seems clear that Aeschylus during this Chorus tried to produce the actual noises of an assault upon the gates”. More recently, Lowell Edmunds in his overview of sounds offstage and onstage in the Seven Against Thebes made a similar claim, although it was framed in a more nuanced way that expressed the scholar’s hesitations about the challenges of the scene’s staging: “The Chorus’ ‘καί μήν’ might, then, indicate its perception of a real sound produced off-stage. How the sound of the horse would have been produced is another question”.

Sound is a powerful phenomenon, an invisible entity that moves through the air to mark presence and movement without offering visual evidence of its source. Instead, it prompts the listener to engage with its texture and volume and visualise its source in their mind’s eye. Depending on its nature, it can fill its receptor with harmony, relief, anxiety, fear or horror. The invisible, threatening nature of the materiality of sound has resulted in an essential connection made between sound and manifestations of the supernatural throughout the history of mankind. Furthermore, the involvement of different kinds of sounds in rituals appears to have been part of the religious practices of several ancient civilisations. Ancient Greece is not an exception to this pattern. The sound of

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65 Edmunds (2002: 108), referring to verse 245 of the first episode where noises-off break out anew. For more on the enactment of the sounds see section 2.3.1 below.
66 The most prominent example is Mesopotamia for which see p. 71.
metal in particular had a prominent role in processional and worship rituals, where divine presence would be assumed.\footnote{For which see section 2.3.3.}

In theatre, auditory and visual effects coexist with human speech. All together, these elements coordinate in the creation of the dramatic time, space and meaning. Language – the way that actors sound words, their pauses and the tone of their voices – therefore has its own auditory effect. Depending on their volume, pitch, source or connotation, words can acquire different meanings, shaping the audience’s perception of the dramatic world that the text describes. On its turn, this adds to the scene’s music, imitation of noises and all the other non-verbal sounds produced by the play’s actors. The same is true for the parodos of the \textit{Seven} where, for all their importance, the noises-off are not the only components of the scene; the auditory invasion of the Argives takes place simultaneously to a visual and auditory invasion of the Chorus into the theatrical space. The Chorus’ language, from the sounds of its letters to its metre and content, together with the spectacle of dance and music, is instrumental to the creation of an atmosphere of panic and to the representation of ritual alike.

The women enter the orchestra in a panic, dancing in a frenzy and praying for protection from their potential capture by the Argives (\textit{iō \textit{iō theoi theai τ’}, ὄρομενον κακὸν ἄλεσσατε [ο, o, gods and goddesses, keep away the surge of evil, 87-88]).\footnote{See Weiss (2018: 171-176) and Trieschnigg (2016: 220-224), who argue that the choral dance would have been a mimesis of the attack of the Argives. The performance of the Chorus is discussed extensively in section 2.2.1 below.} In their panic, the women both describe and react to the noises-off, and this ties them together into a cause-effect relation (δορυτίνακτος {δ’} αἰθήρ ἐπιμαίνεται. τι πόλας ἄμμι πάσχει; τε γενήσεται; [the air is driven mad by the brandishing of spears. What is our city suffering from? What is going to happen? 155-156]). This connection between onstage and offstage sounds is at the core of what this chapter examines. Altogether, I argue that the Chorus’ performance, interrupted and fuelled by the noises-off, \textit{presences} the divine.\footnote{On the use of the term in materiality studies see n.8.}

In her volume \textit{Hearing Things}, Angela Leighton discusses the power of literary sound, namely the unique agency of the sound of literature, the importance of ‘reading with the ear’ and the possibilities it opens up when it comes to the interpretation of literary texts. To read with the ear, Leighton argues,
turns reading texts into an exercise of hearing as the ear transforms “from a passive faculty into an active worker”. When it comes to divine manifestation in the *Seven Against Thebes*, what is heard onstage is just as important as what is being seen. As sound is the core dramaturgical mechanism of the parodos, my reading of the two scenes will therefore focus on the reconstruction and consideration of the sonic spectacle. Following a linear analysis of the text, I show how each of the different sounds in the parodos individually pave the way for the workings of the daimon, unfolding throughout the play.

The chapter is divided into two parts; the first (and main) part examines the parodos, while the second examines the first episode. In the first part, I observe the effect of the different kinds of sounds as they are progressively added to the scene. I begin with a close examination of the entrance of the Chorus into the orchestra and show that, from the content of their words to their dance and singing, their entrance indicates a daimonic-inflicted disorder and madness. Then, the text draws attention to the extramural space of the theatre and to the outbreak of the noises-off, an element that results in further fear and panic for the women. I argue that the combined effect of human and non-human sounds enhances the sensation of disorder and violent invasion of the walls of Thebes, bringing together onstage and offstage sound in a cause-effect relation. Finally, the noises of the Argives’ weapons crystallise the scene’s tragic effect, which is reflected in

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70 Leighton (2018: 4-6). Leighton’s view is shared by earlier authors who had already written about the power of literary sound years before ‘Hearing Things’ was published: Roland Barthes, for example, stated in the 80s that “the listener’s silence will be as active as the locutor’s speech” (Barthes 1985: 252); in more recent years, Frost made a similar observation when he argued that “the ear calibrates the work of sound in the text in all its varied, changing, imaginable effects. By hearing nothing literally, it makes a summons, and creates a proliferation of ghosts” (Frost 2007: 642). Finally, David Toop was also fascinated by the materiality of sound as he noted that “sound is a haunting, a ghost, a presence whose location in space is ambiguous and whose existence in time is transitory” (Toop, 2010: xv).

71 Scholars worldwide have developed a variety of classificatory systems for the different kinds of sounds that appear in the song. One example is Edmunds, who has sought to address the matter of whether the extramural noises were enacted in the parodos of the *Seven Against Thebes* or not. Edmunds makes a distinction between verbal and non-verbal sounds, and then further distinguishes non-verbal sounds as either vocal or non-vocal (Edmunds 2002: 105 and 114-115). A few decades before Edmunds’ work, Haldane (1965: 33), whose study excluded the noises-off, created a similar distinction between music on the one hand and sounds made by the Chorus on the other. Based on an older suggestion made by Goheen (referenced by Haldane [1965: 33]), the latter category was further divided by Haldane into two categories: verbal symbolisms (references of the Chorus to a sound) and symbolisms of action (the sounds that were produced by the Chorus’ songs). As this study goes into in-depth examination of the individual meanings and symbolisms conveyed in each type of sound, systems that categorise sounds into groups are redundant. The only categorisation of sounds deployed in this chapter will refer to the location of their production as onstage or offstage.
the progressive shaping of the song into a strophic, ritualistic prayer soon after the sounds of the weapons break into the stage. From that moment onwards, the divine acquires a central role both in both the language and the performance of the scene.

To examine sound and its effect in the *Seven Against Thebes* is to examine a multi-layered phenomenon that unravels its different levels of manifestation progressively. Following my close reading of the parodos, I will examine the first episode in which, as Eteocles enters the stage (182), the dualistic representation of events in the parodos as happenings on- and off-stage acquires an additional dimension. Firstly, the disorder of the Chorus is highlighted by their contrast with the calmness and discipline of Eteocles, and at the same time, Eteocles’ reaction is seen in relation to the noises. This creates a double effect: the king tries to ignore the sounds in order to counteract their destructive effect, however as a result his fatal flaw, the metaphorical blindness to the operation of the Curse, makes its first appearance. On another level, as Eteocles repeatedly condemns the Chorus for the catastrophic effect of their cries, Aeschylus uses the opportunity to raise broader questions about the fabric of tragedy and its consequences. Through Eteocles’ angry discourse with the Chorus, Aeschylus asks his audience an indirect question: how destructive is the tragic experience for the mind after all?

2.2 Parodos: Setting the Scene (78-83)

2.2.1 Song, Dance and Music (78-80)

The Chorus’ language sets the threatening tone and atmosphere of the parodos through its powerful sonic effects before the noises-off are even heard for the first time. Spectacular linguistic sound is something that Aeschylean tragedy in general and the *Seven Against Thebes* in particular deploy extensively. As a matter of fact, there seems to have been a widespread perception that Aeschylus was prone to producing linguistic spectacle together with visual spectacle to astound his audiences. An excellent example that showcases this is the famous passage of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, where the poet parodies him thus: ῥῆματ’ ἂν βόεια δόδεκ’ ἐπεν, ὄφρῳς ἔχοντα καὶ λόφους, δεῖν’ ἅπα μορμοροπά, ἄγνωτα τοῖς ἔωμενοις (he’d come out with a dozen words as big as an ox with crests and beetling brows,
formidable bogey-faced things unknown to the audience). This is hardly the only reference that the play makes to Aeschylean language; the comedy offers a lengthy unpackaging of Aeschylean language, which is repeatedly attributed more ‘weight’ and ‘gravity’ than the language of Euripides. Interestingly, a specific joke is made in relation to the Seven Against Thebes in Frogs. Aeschylus brags about having made the play so full of Ares that all the men in the audience sought to fight in war once they had watched it, a potential marker of the linguistic and/or dramaturgical intensity that characterised the production. The first verses of the parodos exemplify this:

\[< > \text{ θρόομαι φοβερὰ μεγάλ’ ἄχη·} \]
\[\text{ μεθεῖται στρατὸς στρατόπεδον λιπῶν·} \]
\[\text{ ῥεῖ πολὺς ὁδὲ λεώς πρόδρομος ἵππας·} \]

I cry for the terrifying, terrible sufferings;
Having departed the camp, the army has been released;
This great number of horse-riders is pouring forward at the gallop;

\textit{Sept. 78-80}

As soon as the Chorus enter the stage in verse 84, their song accurately reveals the emotional state of the women as one of great fear: \textit{θρόομαι φοβερὰ μεγάλ’ ἄχη} (78). These opening words are crucial in the unfolding of the song. As a vivid declaration of the Chorus’ fear, the language becomes a quasi-programmatic marker of the tragic experience itself. By talking about their own fear, the women make their entrance verse a starting point for the audience to consider the nature of their own emotional response to the song. This is a result not only of the content of the words, but also of their syntax and sound. The

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72 Ar. \textit{Ran.} 924-926.
73 Examples are \textit{Ran.} 1386-1388 and 1393-1394, where Aeschylus’ words are declared to be literally heavier than those of Euripides for having conjured a river and death as opposed to the wings and persuasion that Euripides deploys. Along the same lines, in Ar. \textit{Nub.} 1366-1367 Aeschylus is also parodied as a poet who is full of noise, unevenness, pompousness and boulder-heaving.
74 \textit{Ran.} 1021-1023.
75 The accuracy with which this line encapsulates the feelings of the Chorus in the parodos has been repeatedly commented on in the past. The most recent reference is made by Nooter (2017: 65) who characterises the line as ‘accurate and significant’, while Edmunds (2002: 106) refers to this line as a ‘tantamount of a motto’.
position of the verb θρόομαι at the beginning of the sentence places fear at the core of the discussion, while the emphatic accumulation of φοβερά (terrifying) and μεγάλα (terrible/great) reveals the passive and active aspects of their misfortune, with the second adjective commenting on its importance, and the first on its effect on the Chorus. The despair of the women would also have been reflected in the performance of the word: θρόομαι denotes a high shriek. The crying tone of the Chorus’ voices is combined with the powerful effect of the assonance and accentuation of α in the verse: θρόομαί φοβερά μεγάλα ἄχη. A similar effect is deployed later in the song when the Chorus are praying; there, their despair is magnified by the overwhelming cries, a characteristic example being the Ἐ Ἐ Ἐ Ἐ in the second strophe and antistrophe (150 and 158). Altogether, their crying tones and powerful use of vowels would have filled the stage with fright.

Immediately after expressing their fear, the women identify the source of their suffering: the army of the Argives (στρατὸς, 79). In a very elaborate description of their approach, the verb ῥεῖ (flowing/pouring) transforms the army into a wave that is rushing to Thebes with great speed: ῥεῖ πολὺς ὅδε λεῖς πρόδρομος ἵππας (79). The vividness of this image leaves no uncertainty as to the army’s wild and threatening character. This has a prominent effect on the women of the Chorus, since threat and chaos are thus no longer limited to the happenings in the external space beyond the walls. The metre reveals the disorderly entrance of the Chorus, an indication of inner chaos in the city and in their minds. The role of the Chorus usually entailed instilling reason in the maddened or ‘disordered’ minds of the characters through paced, ordered songs. In the Seven Against Thebes, we will see a very sympathetic and rational Chorus trying to change Eteocles’ frenetic mind later in the play (τί μέμονας, 687), when he is preparing to depart for the seventh gate. In the parodos, however, it is the women who are portrayed in a frenetic state of mind.79

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76 Gurd (2016: 75).
77 See also Katz (2018) whose theory of acoustics sees a connection between vowels and the Gods in religions worldwide. For Archaic Greece specifically, see p. 163-170, where the author examines the poetry of Hesiod and Homer.
78 Imagery of water has a prominent role in the description of the enemy in the Seven Against Thebes, where it serves as a metaphor for an unstoppable threat. See Thalmann (1978: 32-38) and Cameron (1971: 58-73).
79 This will further manifest in the first episode, where the Chorus’ response to the noises will form the basis for their argument with Eteocles as we will see later in this chapter. Functionally, the argument will serve the manifestation of Eteocles’ ‘madness’ when the roles will be reversed in the Arming Scene, for which see Chapter 4.
The first indication of frenzy lies in the pace of the choral language since the spoken anapaests, which typically frame the entrance-lines of the Chorus, are replaced with dochmiac lyrics up until line 149. In ancient Greek thought, metre was a reflection of the level of structure and order within a character’s mind. In fact, immersion in rhythm and harmony is essential to the formation of a noble mind in Plato’s Republic. According to the philosopher, these elements cultivate the human λόγος, if one is trained properly, giving them the ability to reason. On the contrary, a person who has not been correctly trained in melody and rhythm is destined to become the opposite. Tragedy is written in metre, therefore it is rhythmical, however confused minds are often depicted precisely through the metre shifting from orderly to disorderly, showcasing one of the main reasons why Plato is sceptical about the often-disorderly alluring ways of the genre. In Euripides’ Hippolytus, when Phaedra is delirious from desire, the Chorus encourages her to not be ‘unrhythmical’ (ἄρρυθμος). In the Prometheus Bound, when Io enters the stage in a maddened state, she speaks in lyrics, whereas when she later talks with sanity, she adopts the metre of common dialogue. Following the above, the dochmiacs in the parodos of the Seven Against Thebes, themselves a sign of the Chorus’ disorderly minds, are astrophic and divided into asyndetic sections up until 108, a pattern that further conveys great emotional distress. In its turn, that distress would have further been reflected in the visual spectacle of their entrance and dance. Indeed, the metrical pattern is highly suggestive of a σποράδην (disordered) entrance of the Chorus, something that would have

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80 The word ‘metre’ is in fact derived from the Greek word ‘μέτρον’ which means measure, balance. For Eteocles’ characterisation of the song and pleas of the Chorus as destruction of the civil order, see below.
82 Eur. Hipp. 529.
83 Specifically, Io enters speaking in anapaests in Aesch. PV: 561-565, then 566-573 are astrophic iambics and dochmiacs. In 613-630 her stichomythia with Prometheus is symmetrical, followed by her balanced narrative in 640-686 (iambic trimeter). Then, in 877-886 when Io is overwhelmed with frenzy again just before her departure, the metre changes back to anapaests. For more on metrical patterns across the play see Griffith (1983: 21-29).
84 Dochmiacs were invented by Aeschylus, and the Seven is the first extant example of their extensive use. For a metrical analysis of this passage see West (1990a: 467-468) and Hutchinson (1985: 57-59). For a proposition that addresses the matter of the astrophic lyrics by amending the text of the Septem see West (1990b: 103-108). Marinis (2012: 36 n. 47) however, disagrees with West’s amendment and sees the text as indicative of progress from astrophic to strophic lyrics between 108-149. For a contextual analysis on anapaests more broadly see Brown (1977b: 45-77).
surprised an audience who would usually have been introduced to the Chorus through a harmonious group entrance.  

The choral language is complemented by music and the visual spectacle of dance. These three elements create a performative triptych that contributes as a whole towards the depiction of the play’s underlying tensions. A scattered entrance means that the dance would have been frenetic, as the twelve women would have been invading the orchestra in a disorderly manner, running, dancing and jumping. Although we do not know the precise movements that they would have danced, more and more scholars are agreeing that the dance would most probably be mimetic of the Argives’ attack of the city. Just as in the case of metre, in Greek thought frenetic dance did not only signify emotional distress, but there was a deeper association between one’s dance and their state of mind. In his Laws, Plato considers harmonious, orderly dance a natural inclination of all human beings, and he sees an essential alignment of music and dance with the high artistic and moral notions; as such, the philosopher argues that dance should be an integral part of the education of men. Dance is an external movement that reflects an inner movement; it is the mirror of one’s emotional state. A structured choral dance is the reflection of sanity, a promise of the temporary nature of the darkness that is blurring the minds of the tragedy’s protagonists; to quote Ruth Padel, “the danced song comments on, but also counterpoints, the tragedy’s disordered

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85 The matter of a scattered entry was raised for the first time in the nineteenth century and found support among the works of Murray (1935: 11-13), Flagg (1894: 56), Verrall (1887: 131) and Paley (1879: 267). In the years that followed, Taplin argued in favour of the scattered entrance of the Chorus drawing among others from the evidence of Pollux over a similar entry in the Eumenides (Taplin 1977: 141-142). Prior to this, Pickard-Cambridge had also accepted that the Chorus of the Seven “probably” entered in a non-orderly way (1968 [1953]: 240). Following Taplin’s work, Scott’s approach to the variety and peculiarity of the metrical patterns of the Seven mentioned the debate while avoiding taking sides on the matter of the scattered entry (1984: 158-160), while Hutchinson rejected it primarily on the ground of lack of evidence (1985: 57). A similar point had been made by Hermann (1852: 273). However, the context of the parodos makes it clear that the tension onstage would have been as turbulent as possible. In 1990, the acceptance of the Chorus’ division by West marked a pause to the debate as the majority of contemporary editors appear to have accepted West’s decision (West 1990b: 102-103).


87 Pl. Leg. II. 654a-d- and VII. 798a-d. See also Pl. Ti. 40C where the formations of the heavenly bodies are paralleled with a dance-circle. For the prominent role of choreia in the Laws and its relation to the pursuits of education see Prauscello (2014: 105-151) and Calame (2013: 87-108). For Plato’s opposition to broken rhythms and unrythmical dance see Kowalzig (2013: 177-211) and Peponi (2013: 212-239) and for his objection to tragic metre and dance see Murray (2013: 294-312) in the same volume.
passions: mainly those of individual characters. [...] Single, mad, or impassioned minds ‘move out’ of their right place, alone and at risk, while plural concerted bodies move in patterns emblematic of right place and security. The musical structure, violent and orderly, expressed through the interplay of individual actor and plural Chorus, is the basis of tragic tension” 88

One of the most prominent examples in this category is that of the maenads of Dionysus who, according to the Greek mythology, were his group of female followers, traditionally depicted dancing in frenzy. The tragic stage depicts this kind of dance in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, when Dionysus turns the Theban women into maenads, running wildly through the mountains. 89 For all that there are not enough examples of distorted choral dances in our corpus of surviving Greek tragedies to come to a solid conclusion on the relationship between dance and daimonic agency, it is worth noting that, alongside the *Eumenides*, the parodos of the *Seven Against Thebes* is the only example where we have clear indications of a disorderly choral dance. 90 In the *Eumenides*, which like the *Seven* is the final play of a trilogy, the role of the Chorus is overtaken by the Erinyes themselves and their dance is a mirror of their nature as invokers of madness. Although the Chorus of the *Seven* is not daimonic, the power of the Erinyes is brought onstage through their disorderly dance. 91 In addition to this, the divine element also manifests onstage through the statues of the gods in the space of the orchestra, which would have provided a constant reminder of the watchful eye of the gods throughout the play. 92 In the parodos, the frenetic movements and cries

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89 Eur. *Bacch.* 21, 114, 190, 207. There the song resembles a public Dionysiac processional ritual as Seaford has very convincingly argued (Seaford 1981: 270-271). For depictions of the Maenads in vases between the sixth and the fourth century and their connection to the Euripidean tragedy, see Taplin (2007: 156-158).
90 Aesch. *Eum.* 140-177. For a comparison between the two plays and the argument in favour of disorderly entrances see Taplin (1977: 141-142). Hutchinson rejects the σποράδην entrance as a possibility in both the *Seven* and the *Eumenides* (Hutchinson 1985: 57). For the appearance of the Erinyes in the *Eumenides* see also Brown (1983: 22-26).
91 See also Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 98), where the author considers the Chorus of the *Seven* as the representation of the Erinyes “in response to which Eteokles had finally and fatefully stationed himself as the seventh warrior”.
92 As indicated later in the song in verses 95-96, 101-102, 185-186, 211 and 214-215. The Chorus’ second person σῦ addresses to the Chorus to the gods in verses 129, 136, 146 and 147 further testify in favour of the use of the statues as referents for the gods. The text gives no clear indication of the number of the statues onstage. Torrance (2007: 39) has argued that, due to the significance of the number seven in the play, it is most likely that the divine statues were also seven. Following this, out of the eight gods that are summoned in the prayer of the Chorus, the scholar speculates that Hera was the one who is more likely to not have been represented by a statue. Torrance’s point is partially met by Hecht and Bacon (1973: 27 and 73), whose translation
of the women would have contrasted with the calm stativity of the statues, enhancing the sense of madness and disorder that does not belong to the sphere of the gods.

Finally, the song would probably have also been accompanied by the music of the *aulos*, a structurally complex mimetic instrument that was also associated with the ‘divine otherness’. The aulos was frequently used in Greek drama due to its mimetic abilities; specifically, its sound was heavily associated with disorder, daimonic presence and the disruption of law and civic order. Plato in particular criticises it in his *Republic* by banishing the instrument and those who play it from the ideal city as a result of the instrument’s multi-chorded construction that makes it less measured and less orderly than the lyre. In the same work, the philosopher draws a very intriguing parallel between the human spirit and iron, claiming that while engagement with a harmonious μέλος allows the man to “temper his passion like iron” (εἰ τι θυμοειδές εἶχεν, ὅσπερ σιδηρον ἐμάλαξεν), bewitchment by continuous exposure to alluring melody will make the spirit melt until he becomes a “fainthearted spearman” (μαλθακὸν αἰχμητήν). In poetry, the aulos is often linked to the presence of the Erinyes and related daimonic entities, like the Gorgons, and it is also associated with the loss of self-control, discipline and structure. One testimony for this comes from Pindar, who narrates the invention of the aulos by Athena in the *Pythian* 12; there, the goddess

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95 *Rep.* 399d-e.

96 *Rep.* 411a-b, on which see Peponi (2018: 172-174).
is said to have created the instrument in order to imitate the wailing of the Gorgons.97 The same notion is also encountered in the later version of the same myth found in Melanippides, where the goddess refers to it as ‘injury to the body’.98 Finally, in the works of Herodotus we see that the aulos was used by ancient Greeks in sacrificial rituals.99 The daimonic connotations of the aulos are linked to the broader matter of distorted melody in tragedy, itself perceived as a sign of supernatural intervention.

In the ancient theatre, music was one of the central components of performance, not only in terms of its contribution to the creation of spectacle, but more importantly in the communication of messages from the minds of the characters that were not revealed in their language. Aristotle himself notes that music (melopoeia) is one of the six essential elements in a tragic mimesis, equal in its importance to the visual spectacle, the opsis.100 Not only this, but music is also “the greatest of the linguistic adornments”.101 Yet, in Greek thought and literature, melody is also seen as deceitful, a tool frequently used by daimonic entities to disrupt the human mind. In the Odyssey, the song of the Sirens captivates and hypnotises the passing sailors, while in Euripides’ Hercules, Lyssa pipes madness into Heracles.102 In Aeschylus, even more so than in the work of other poets, music has a very elaborate role as an indication of the presence of the Erinyes, something that is especially evident in the Oresteia.103 In the Agamemnon, as the Chorus appears in front of Clytemnestra, they argue that their

98 PMG 758, even though matters of melody and harmony vary greatly in the works of the two poets. For more on the myth, see Nooter (2017: 12) and compare Wilson (1999: 60-69).
100 Arist. Poet. 1450b7-10. Aristotle’s perception of sound and music more broadly is discussed in Kidd (2018), see especially p. 80-84 where the author offers an overview of the philosopher’s relevant works and sound classifications.
101 Poet. 1450b16.
103 Some of the most prominent works on the significance of music in Aeschylus include but are not limited to: Fleming (1977: 222-233), one of the first works to take matters of theatrical sound beyond metre and to draw attention to the musical nomos; Prins (1991: 177-195), who wrote on the interplay between vision and sound in the song of the Erinyes, and Wilson and Taplin (1994: 169-180), who discuss the connection between social order and the musical nomoi in the trilogy. For a broader insight into music in Aeschylean tragedy, see Haldane (1965: 33-41) who examines how musical themes relate to imagery, as well as Scott’s monograph which revisits the musical patterns in all of his surviving tragedies, including the early plays (Scott 1984: passim).
soul “is singing the lyre-less hymn of the Erinys” (τὸν δ᾿ ἄνευ λύρας δόμως ὑμνοδοθέα θρήνον Ἐρινύ<ο>ς αὐτοδίδακτος ἔσωθεν). Later in the same play, Cassandra speaks of the Erinyes and their song of “a ruinous folly” (ὑμνοῦσι δ᾿ ὑμνον δόμαισιν προσήμεναι πρῶταρχον ἄτην). The motif unravels fully in the Eumenides, where the Chorus of the Erinyes refer to their own ‘lyre-less song’ which is attributed the power to bind and twist the mind, infusing insanity into mortals. We hear them sing:

ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς τεθυμένωι
tόδε μέλος, παρακοπά,
παραφορά, φρενοδαλής
δόμως ἔξ Ἐρινύων,
δέσμιος φρενόν, ἀφόρ-
μιγκτος, αὐνά βροτοῖς.

And for the sacrificial victim
this is my song: insanity,
misplacement, the mind-destroying
hymn of the Erinyes
that binds the mind, sung
without lyre, a song to shrivel men up
Eum. 328-333

Even when music is not discussed in the texts in the elaborate way that it is in the Oresteia, its presence, pace and melody would have had an important role in the production of mental imagery by triggering the senses and memories of the audiences. Indeed, whereas the eye offers solid, unquestionable evidence about one’s surroundings, the need to process sound and identify its source means that the ear engages the brain in a process of image production. Such processing can either be a conscious effort or it can occur automatically through the sound’s association with existing memories. To quote Eric Csapo, “the preference for

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104 Aesch. Ag. 990-991.
105 Ag. 1190-1191.
images to concepts is typically combined with an appeal to the senses, especially to the ears and to the eye of the mind”. In this way, in the *Seven Against Thebes*, the musical performance of the choral song would have implicitly created a visualisation of the accumulated pain from the lost *Laius* and *Oedipus*, in which plays the Curse of the *oikos* of the Labdacids would have had a central role.

Overall, alongside the Chorus’ frenetic dance and dochmias, the music of the parodos prepares the audience for the climax of the accumulating inherited pain and death that had been known and present throughout the trilogy.108

In conclusion, from the first two verses, Aeschylus has already set the scene for the fearful revelations of the play, optimising the tragic convention of portraying a war and *presencing* the divine. This is further enhanced by the noises-off invading the stage. As of verse 81, the focus of the language begins to move from the actors inside to the sounds outside, and from the defenders to the attackers. It is precisely this element, the antithesis between the visible and the invisible, that the text draws attention to next.

### 2.2.2 Introducing the External: Sight and Hearing (81-82)

> αἰθερία κόνις με πείθει φανείσι’
> ἀναυδός σαιρῆς ἔτυμος ἄγγελος.

The dust that appears in the air is making me certain of that,

a voiceless, clear, certain messenger

*Sept. 81-82*

If verses 78-80 introduce the atmosphere of fear and divine presence through the Chorus’ cries, verses 81-82 constitute a liminal space where we encounter the paradoxical collision of presence and lack of sound simultaneously. Following the Chorus’ frenetic entrance in the previous verses, this part of the text creates a temporary pause in the tension onstage, turning the audience’s attention outwards,

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107 Csapo (2004: 227), discussing New Music.

108 For more on the role of the Curse of the *oikos* in the previous parts of the trilogy see Sommerstein (1996: 121-130) who gives a thorough review of the surviving evidence, mainly the papyri and iconography. See also Poli-Palladini (2016: 163-174).
inviting them to observe the space beyond as a vibrant element that contains life within it.

In 81-82, the women give the audience a glimpse of the extramural space by drawing attention to the sight of dust raised up in the air by the enemy’s horses (αἰθρία κόνις με πείθει φανεῖσ’), at the same time emphasising the silence that comes with it (ἀναυδοῖς). Contrast the imagery of the powerful wave in verse 80, the silence in 82 both turns attention to the extramural space and prepares the audience for the outbreak of the noises-off which will make a fierce entrance by breaking the silence. The play’s emphasis on spatial borders has already been established in the prologue, when Eteocles repeatedly drew the audience’s attention to the limits of the visible space of the theatre. The first line of the play was an address to the city made by Eteocles, Κάδμου πολίται (citizens of Cadmus), directed towards the group of silent actors onstage by drawing attention to their shared space, the land of Thebes. In that speech, Eteocles had emphasised the city’s walls as the markers that distinguish between the inside and the outside armies. He thus characterised the Thebans in terms of their geographical position as placed inside the walls (πυργηρούμενοι), and the enemy in contrast as ἐπίθηλοδες, which literally translates as “those who have come in”. Following that, the king had ordered the army to make an outward movement in 30-34 from the centre of the

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109 It is interesting that the Chorus cannot see beyond the walls in spite of the fact that the play is imagined to be taking place on the acropolis of Thebes. However, Trieschnigg (2016: 221) argues that the Athenian audience would probably have known that the acropolis of Thebes was not as high as the one of Athens (on which see also Schoder 1974: 220-222). For references to the topography of Thebes according to the Seven Against Thebes, see Poli-Palladini (2016: 53-58). For the influence of the mythological past of Thebes on the representation of its topography in Greek myth and literature more broadly, see Berman (2015: 122-140; for the representation of Thebes onstage, see 75-121).


111 Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1988 [1981]: 278) consider the expression ‘somewhat paradoxical’, however Hutchinson points out that the use of the term Καδμιόι in verse is as frequently encountered as Θηβαῖοι (1985: 42). The verse has also provoked questions over the years about whether Eteocles is supposed to be addressing the theatrical audience in this verse - who would have functioned as the surrogate audience to his speech - or whether the line signifies the presence of mute actors onstage. Whereas Rehm (2012: 311) is open to the first possibility, the more concrete arguments of Taplin (1977: 129-134) and Bain (1975: 22 n.1) mean that such statements need to be treated with caution.

112 Sept. 22 and 34.
city towards the walls of Thebes. Those five verses were filled with vocabulary of space and movement.\textsuperscript{113}

\begin{verbatim}
ἀλλ’ εἶς τ’ ἐπάλξεις καὶ πύλας πυργομάτων
ὀρμάσθε πάντες, σοῦσθε σὺν παντευχίᾳ
πληροῦτε θωρακεία, κάπι σέλμασιν
πύργων στάθητε, καὶ πυλών ἐπ’ ἔξοδοις
μίμοντες εὖ θαρσεῖτε
\end{verbatim}

But hurry to the battlements and the gates of the walls,
all of you, rush, equipped with all your armour;
fill the parapets, stand on the platforms of the walls,
and stand brave on the exits of the gates

\textit{Sept. 30-34}

By drawing attention to the assumed borders of Thebes on the one hand and emphasising the dust in the air as the only visible element of the extramural space in 81-82 on the other, both the prologue and the parodos draw attention to the extended theatrical space. This includes not only the part that is visible to the audience, but also the invisible space beyond. However, as opposed to Eteocles who saw the city’s borders as the destination of the Theban soldiers, the Chorus’ reference to the extramural space is made from an inside perspective, marking it as an entity moving towards Thebes. As of verse 84 onwards, the extramural space, initially empty and silent, is filled with noise as horses’ hooves and other offstage auditory emissions become the auditory counterpart to the visible elements. In this sense, the invisible external acquires material representation through language and sound, something that gives it an active role in the song, indicating that it is a space from which invisible theatrical actants are acting. This is all introduced in verses 81-82.

\textsuperscript{113} Matters of space in the prologue have also been raised by Rehm, according to whom Eteocles’ performance of the verses would have probably been accompanied by gestures. Through those gestures, the actor would have pointed towards the walls and gates of Athens which would have been visible to the audience of the theatre of Dionysus. In its turn, this would expand the theatre’s spatial limits by creating an interplay between the tragic world and the world of the spectators. Rehm (2012: 311). For the morphology of the theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus in general, see also Poli-Palladini (2016: 49-51) and Kampourelli (2016: 39-61).
Contrasting the absolute silence outside, the concentration of vowels in 81 and 82, especially the alliteration of α in φανεῖσ᾿ ἀναυδός σαφής, fill the theatrical and sonic space with the sensation of vastness and power. Indeed, silence does not mean lack of presence; it is rather an illusion, a lack of the ear’s ability to capture beyond or below certain frequencies. This is something that the Chorus confirms. Preceding the outbreak of the noises, the women are made certain (πείθει) about the approach of the enemy by the dust that is raised in the air by the horses of the army, only for one brief moment before the sound of the horses finally reaches their ears. Even though the dust is voiceless (ἄναυδος), the fact that the Chorus is able to see it (φανεῖσ᾿) makes it a definite messenger (σαφής ἔτυμος ἄγγελος), foreshadowing the significant role that the interplay between sight and hearing will perform throughout the song.

This is not the only case in which the language of sight is used to validate testimonies of hearing. As the paternal Curse evolves from an invisible threat at the beginning of the play to its symbolic visible appearance as Eteocles’ armour in the Arming Scene, the Seven Against Thebes is filled with the language of sight, an indicator of certainty of knowledge. Matters of space and visibility are briefly introduced in the prologue, where the entrance of the Scout from the outside establishes him as the most reliable source of information: ἥκω σαφῆ τάκειθεν ἐκ στρατοῦ φέρων (I bring definite news from the army out there, 40). As in the case of the Chorus, the news brought by the Scout is considered to be beyond doubt (σαφῆ) due to his physical presence in the external space (ἥκω). The news is crucial to the safety of the city, as the Scout, witnessing the events, is able keep the citizens safe by giving them a clear idea of the developments outside: εἰδῶς τὰ τῶν θύραθεν ἀβλαβῆς ἔση (knowing what is happening outside you will not come to harm, lines 66-68). The validity of the Scout’s testimony is linked twice to his visual contact with the enemy, as he is referred to as an eyewitness (κατόπτης, 41) that...
would literally keep an eye on the developments beyond the walls (καταφυγο [...]
ὄφθαλμον ἔξω [literally translated as ‘I will bring an eye’], 67).

Sight was perceived as more accurate than hearing in Greek thought, as we
can see reflected in Classical philosophy. One example is Plato’s *Timaeus* where, in
accordance with older writings by Empedocles, the eye is conceptualised as an
individual’s ‘torch’, luminous rays that are produced from the inside rather than
received from the outside in order to create knowledge and thought.\(^{117}\) The motif of
the eye as an organ that externalises rather than internalises is common in tragedy,
where we see eyes flashing fire and daimones dripping black liquid from their
eyes.\(^{118}\) Eyes also have a particularly important role in the myth of the Labdacids as
Oedipus’ blindness is linked to the realisation of his incestuous marriage.\(^{119}\)

In the parodos, the metaphorical blindness of Eteocles to the presence of the
paternal Curse overlaps with the literal inability of the Chorus and the audience to
see the enemy. The only commentator on the enemy’s presence in the external
space is the Chorus, a group of women who are located inside the walls and whose
direct contact with the outside is limited to the sight of dust in the air. Here, sight is
emphasised by its absence: the inability of the Chorus to see the enemy and
therefore to describe it in detail. Instead, sight is predominantly substituted by
hearing, as the sounds of the enemy are the main tool for conveying imagery to the
eye of the Chorus’ and the audience’s mind. Truly, the silence in the external space
only lasts one moment before the text is filled with reports from the Chorus on the
sounds they are hearing from offstage. The auditory effects result in synaesthesia, a
continuous interplay between sounds heard and the visualisation of their source by
the Chorus in their song.\(^{120}\) Altogether, the Chorus’ descriptive language, filled with
sight and vision, would have complemented the auditory input of the noises,
creating an image of the invisible enemy that is both frightful and unstoppable.

\(^{119}\) In tragedy, this is found in Soph. *OT*. 1183 and 1275-1277.
\(^{120}\) For the role of synaesthesia in the parodos see Marinis (2012: for the Chorus’ perception of
reality in particular, see 35-38).
2.3 Introduction of Sounds from Offstage (84-181)

2.3.1 Noises-off and Theatrical Enactment

Moments after the dust in the air is noticed by the Chorus, the sound of the horses finally breaks out from the back side of the skene, or the changing building/backdrop of the theatre in verse 84.\(^{121}\) The noise reaches the ears of the Chorus immediately, proving the dust in 82 to truly have been a “voiceless but definite messenger”: \(\text{πεδί’ όπλοκτοπ’ ότι χρίμπτει βοάν}\) (the sound of horse hooves is sending the noise to my ear), exclaim the women. The introduction of powerful stage effects is characteristic of Aeschylus whom Taplin refers to as “by far the most spectacular dramatist”.\(^ {122}\) This is further attested by his anonymous biographer in §7 of the Life of Aeschylus, according to whom the poet created spectacle “…\(\text{πρός ἐκλεξθὲν τερατώδη μᾶλλον ἢ πρὸς ἀπάτην}\)” (for the sake of portentous shock rather than for the sake of beguiling the audience).\(^ {123}\) War-themed scenes offer ample opportunities for the creation of terrifying spectacle, both visual and auditory. Considering the frequent occurrence of references to

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\(^{121}\) The existence of the skene in the early plays has repeatedly been contested in scholarship, especially by Taplin who was the first to suggest that the Oresteia is the terminus post quem for the implementation of the skene. See Taplin (1977: 452-459, in particular for the skene in the Seven, see p. 453). However, Taplin’s argument has found lots of resistance in several scholarly works since then for reasons and to degrees that vary among scholars. Such works include but are not limited to Kampourelli (2016: 46-52), Poli-Palladini (2016: 49-50), Bakola (2014), Seaford (2012: 337–9), Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), Rehm (2002: 239-241), Pöhlmann (1995), Bees (1995), and Hamilton (1987). The majority of these scholars have disagreed with Taplin either because of archaeological evidence that favours the existence of the skene prior to the production of the Oresteia, or because of textual evidence for the use of the skene for entrances and exits in earlier plays. Today, the communis opinio believes the skene to have been in use in the early productions. Either way, our archaeological evidence supports the existence of some sort of background space in which the actors would have been able to change and leave their property, on which see Kampourelli (2016: 47) and Poli-Palladini (2016: 48-51). Details of relevant archaeological evidence can be found in Moretti (1999: 377-398) and Bees (1995: 93-95).

\(^{122}\) I am quoting here Taplin (1977: 39).

\(^{123}\) There has been extensive debate about the authenticity of the Life of Aeschylus over the years which means that the text needs to be treated with care. As the Life was considered by many to be an unreliable source in the previous decades, it has been excluded from many discussions on the life of the poet, recent or older, like Sommerstein (1996), Rosenmeyer (1982) and Griffith (1978). However, as more and more evidence has been emerging recently in its support, there has been an increasing tendency to accept the information provided by Aeschylus’ anonymous biographer as a reliable source. The most recent case is found in Bakola’s comprehensive overview of the cult of Aeschylus (2018a: 123-145); see especially p. 126 and 137-138 for the debate on the Life. Further analyses that accept the biography’s authenticity can be found in Wilson (2007: 356-371), Kowalzig (2008: 130) and Poli-Palladini (2013: 285-296).
trumpets in his plays, an instrument that was used in war to mark the initiation of a battle, it appears that Aeschylus was aware of these opportunities.\textsuperscript{124} The effect of war-scenes is amplified in the \textit{Seven Against Thebes}, where we see a multitude of sounds invading the stage in the middle of the choral performance, filling the air with the auditory signs of the enemy. The spectacle would no doubt have been fearful as the presence of the enemy manifests here for the first time. However, its importance is rarely explored in scholarship. The reason for this is perfectly summarised in Edmunds’ statement: “The Chorus’ “καί μήν” might, then, indicate its perception of a real sound produced off-stage; how the sound of the horse would have been produced is another question”.\textsuperscript{125}

To this day Edmunds’ work remains one of the firmest supporters of the enactment of sounds in the play, although he has acknowledged his own uncertainty about the technical details of that enactment. This uncertainty is shared by the works of many scholars and it has resulted in an awkward silence around the noises and their effect. In order to avoid addressing the matter of staging, many scholars have either omitted the noises-off from their approaches to the parodos altogether or have merged their dramaturgical and linguistic presence by suggesting that the choral language would function as a surrogate for the actual noises.\textsuperscript{126} At the same time, however, the argument for the enactment of noises-

\textsuperscript{124} Examples are Aesch. \textit{Pers}. 395 and the more famous passage of the \textit{Eum}. 566-569 where Athena is referring to the trumpet of the Etruscans (Tyrrenians). See also Life §14 according to which trumpets formed part of the visual spectacle of the \textit{Oresteia}. Nooter (2019) offers a thorough examination of the literary use of the war-trumpet across a range of Archaic and Classical texts and proposes an association between the instrument and the divine. For the importance of the trumpet in the Greek culture more broadly see Nordquist (1996: 241-256) and for the marching paean in different regions of Greece see Pritchett (1971: 105-108). Aeschylus’ own experience of the battlefield might have been an additional factor of why war-representation is so commonly encountered in his plays. For a historical account of Aeschylus’ participation in the battles of Marathon and Salamis (490 BC and 480 BC) see Storey and Alan (2005: 108-109).

\textsuperscript{125} Edmunds (2002: 108), referring to verse 245.

\textsuperscript{126} One of the most recent examples is Nooter’s volume where, in the chapter on the \textit{Seven Against Thebes}, the author declares that there is a lack of evidence regarding the enactment of the sounds, and therefore an inability to make any firm assumptions on the subject matter (2017: 75 n. 37). Similarly, Trieschnigg has avoided engaging into discussion about the enactment of the sounds in the parodos but, noting the ongoing debate on the matter, she has asserted that, had the sounds been enacted, they would have only served the effect of fear (Trieschnigg 2016: 224). Other scholars like Scott (1984: 160) and Thalmann (1978: 58) have expressed a positive opinion on the enactment of sounds; Scott has claimed that “sounds of warfare from offstage break into the entrance song of the women” and Thalmann that “the Argives have on their horses and chariots noise-making devices which produce a grotesque distortion of music and which are themselves described as musical instruments”; however, no further explanation is provided in any of their works on what those sounds signified or how they had been produced. A few decades earlier, Haldane (1965: 37-38) had also elaborated on the effect of the description of the sounds on the audience but there is no comment on whether they would be enacted or not. Interestingly,
off in the parodos of the *Seven Against Thebes* has encountered very little concrete resistance. The works of Stanford and Weiss are the only ones to have explicitly rejected the possibility of the enactment of the sounds. In those cases, the scepticism of the scholars does not derive from textual evidence but, rather, it is based on their uncertainty about the technological and/or spatial capacities of the Greek theatre to produce offstage noises. Specifically, Stanford’s scepticism is rooted in the lack of attested equipment in the theatre to facilitate this kind of auditory effects, especially since the existence of *bronteion* (also known as the ‘thunder-maker’) is not documented before the first century BC. Similarly, Weiss has argued that there was a lack of “recorded background noise of the sort we might expect in a modern production”. It is true that we know very little about machines that would have produced sounds in the theatre of Classical antiquity. However, when it comes to the parodos of the *Seven Against Thebes* in particular, it might be worth thinking about whether such machines would have even been necessary.

The production of the sounds referenced in the parodos and the first episode of the *Seven Against Thebes* does not require complex technology. Broadly speaking, the sounds of the incoming Argive army are divided into three categories: horses, weapons and stones. The exact techniques that the Greeks would have used to create these sounds are difficult to speculate upon. However, it seems unlikely that the lack of a *bronteion*, or of any technologically advanced and specialised sound-making machine for that matter, would have restricted the

however, prior to the development of more nuanced insights into staging, scholarship had rarely doubted the enactment of sounds. See Ferguson (1972: 52), Moutsopoulos (1959: 53 fn. 17) and Murray (1935: 12-13).


128 However, Stanford references two instances in Greek tragedy where we encounter references to the sound of a thunder, namely in *PV*. 1044-5 and 1082-3 and in Soph. OC. 1456 and 1514. Sadly, unlike the case of the *Seven*, the shortness of these references does not leave much space for debate regarding the enactment of the sounds of thunder in these plays.


130 Taplin (1977: 442-447) offers a detailed analysis of all textual evidence known to us regarding the use of tragedy’s machines, namely the *ekkykléma* and the *mechane*. The exact time of their introduction to the theatre is not known. However, textual evidence indicates that the *mechane* is deployed in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*. Line 379 in the *Eumenides* could be taken as an implication of Athena’s flying entrance which would have required the use of the crane (*deus ex machina*), but this is only a speculation and Taplin argues that Athena’s entrance here happens on foot (1977: 446). However, the author accepts that the use of a crane is almost undeniable in terms of the flying entrances referenced in the *Prometheus Bound*, namely those of Chorus (129), Oceanus (284-287) and Hermes (944). However, matters of authenticity and of the extent to which the play has stayed close to the Aeschylean realism are raised in this case.

131 For the corresponding analyses see the sections below.
production of a specific auditory effect in the play. Out of these three types of sound, those of stones and weapons would have easily been accessible for the actors offstage to recreate. The sounds that might have been challenging to reproduce are those of horses. However, unlike visual representation, the imitation of sound does not have to physically resemble the actual source; different sources and combinations of objects can result in the production of realistic sounds. Even today, major theatres across the UK continue to deploy more traditional means for the production of auditory effects, including the ‘thunder run’, a construction of wooden cannonballs that run through wooden channels above the auditorium ceiling, in order to produce a highly effective combination of sound and vibration.132 When it comes to the sound of running horses, a clattering can easily be produced by methods as simple as beating hollow rounded wooden objects against a hard surface. Overall, it appears that the realistic representation of sounds in the parodos would have been a matter of the dramatist’s choice rather than a matter of the available technology.

In the introduction to his monograph, Taplin comments “it would be a good start if it could be broadly accepted that the words, if we know how to use them, give the significant action”. Later, he adds: “I shall also persevere in my supposition that most ‘active’ staging was fairly realistic, until I am made aware of good reasons for thinking otherwise”.133 Although we should not assume that every piece of action described in the texts was enacted, Taplin rightly suggests that if we are to reject the presence of an element that is explicitly indicated by the text, we need a positive reason to do so. In the case of the Seven Against Thebes, 102 lines of the parodos repeatedly provide us with indications of war-noises penetrating the stage. In verse 245, the text conveys vivid auditory imagery: καὶ μὴν ἀκούω γ´ ἱππικῶν φρυγμάτων (and yet I can hear horses whinnying, 245). In this verse, the present tense suggests the outbreak of noises taking place at that very moment.134 Whilst we could argue that the audience was expected to imagine the

132 I am referring to three theatres specifically, the Bristol Old Vic, Her Majesty’s Theatre in London and the Playhouse Theatre in Charring Cross, London. Information about the use of this medium in theatrical productions is accessible online. See ‘Online sources’ section in the Bibliography.
133 Taplin (1977: 28).
134 Edmunds argues that the καὶ μὴν refers to “something that has just been seen or heard” (2002: 108). Support for this argument can be found in Denniston (1934: 351-352), where the scholar considers the use of καὶ μὴν as an introduction “for a new argument, a new item in a series, or a
noises as Stanford and Weiss have suggested, an increasing number of scholars today support the opinion that Greek tragedies made extensive use of contemporary technology for the purpose of offering their audiences more realistic and more intense experience. Interestingly, centuries later, in a reference from the third book of Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates would include horse-sounds to his list of noises that the theatre should not imitate, something that indicates that theatrical audiences would probably be familiar with this kind of sound-imitation in theatrical productions, at least in Plato’s time. Whether there is any connection between the staging of the *Seven Against Thebes* and Plato’s example in the *Republic*, we will never know. However, all evidence, from the text of the *Seven* to scattered evidence for the representation of sound in performative genres, testifies in favour of the theatrical enactment of the noises-off, while nothing contradicts it. All evidence considered, it is time for such doubts to end.

The argument against the production of offstage sounds in this instance lacks convincing evidence. The noises-off are not a mere theatrical adornment but play a substantial role in the prologue that adds a new layer of dramaturgical complexity to the parodos, as the sounds initiate the invasion of the space by the threatening external enemy. Through their vibrancy, they give life to the extramural space; through their terrifying nature, they affect the emotional state of the characters. Greek theatre was very resourceful, and scholarship’s minimalistic approach to its staging in earlier decades is not reflective of what the ancient texts indicate. As scholarship is now moving in a new direction in the examination of performance, it is time that the noises-off and their role in the dramatic action of the *Seven* be re-examined; to not do so would mean leaving an important aspect of the play’s opening unexamined. In the sections that follow, I analyse the noises that the Chorus report to be hearing from afar. Maintaining a close reading of the text whilst focusing on the impact of these noises on the Chorus, I show how each sound contributes towards the manifestation of the divine that the Chorus’ song has already begun to build up.

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new point of any kind”. However, it could be argued that this construction is employed to describe a preceding thought or in reference to the sounds that are only meant to be imagined.

135 *Rep.* 395a1-6.
2.3.2 Horses, Chariots and the Creation of Space (84-86)

πεδί᾽ ὀπλότυπα ὀτι χρίμπτει βοάν,
ποτάμα, βρέμει δ᾽ ἀμαχέτου δίκαν
ὦδατος ὀροτύπου.

The sound of horse hooves is sending the noise to my ear
It is flying, it is roaring like an unbridled river
clashing on a mountain

Sept. 84-86

In the modern everyday world, sound is mainly perceived as the triggering of the sense of hearing and is therefore exclusively associated with the ear. However, sound also has visual and haptic dimensions that become particularly evident in the context of the theatre, where the theatrical assets and their ability to create illusion invite the listener to produce a mental image of its source. In turn, the ‘mind’s eye’ of the audience creates an association between the image viewed on stage and the image viewed in the brain upon hearing the sound. This complements the theatrical spectacle with the imagery and action that are implicit in the sound, the source of which might be missing from the visible space of the stage. In this sense, the sound gives the eye a dimension that, as Deleuze and Guattari phrase it, “is haptic rather than optical”; it materialises the invisible.\textsuperscript{136} In the case of the parodos, the sounds of the horses, as they emerge from the invisible outside, make the enemy as theatrically present as the frightened Chorus in the internal space.

The sound would have been sudden and would have also had significant implications for the dramatic action. In Greece, Argos was renowned for its breeding of strong horses, whilst Athens did not have a strong cavalry in 467 when the play was first performed.\textsuperscript{137} This had resulted in a very challenging war when Athens had to face the extensive Persian cavalry in the battle of the Plataea a few years earlier, where, according to Herodotus, the Athenian army was

\textsuperscript{136} Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 494).
\textsuperscript{137} Implications of this are found in literary passages including \textit{Il.} 2.287, 5.415 and \textit{Ag.} 824-825. Horse imagery appears in abundance throughout the \textit{Seven Against Thebes}, on which see Cameron (1971: 74-84).
harassed by the Persian horse-riders.\textsuperscript{138} The reports and sounds of the horse-hooves could have potentially evoked memories from that war, thus magnifying the impact of the theatrical effect by creating an association between the Argives and the Persians. The emotional impact of the sounds on the women of the chorus is reflected in the text; from verse 84 onwards, as the scene becomes richer in sound, the choral language grows richer in elements of sight, and the tension climbs.

In verse 85, with the assistance of the Chorus, the horse-hooves turn into an elaborate image of a wild river: \textit{ποτάται, βρέμει δ’ ἄμαχετοι δίκαν ὀξύτος ὀρούποιο} (it is flying, it is roaring like an unbridled river clashing on a mountain, 84-85). Here, both the content and the aural properties of the language underline the agency of the sound; the verb βρέμω is normally used to describe low-pitched, loud voices, reflecting the clashing of a powerful wave. At the same time, the accumulation of ο, π and τ sounds at the beginning and end of the verse creates an effect of roughness that generates the crashing sound of the waves, while the continued alliteration of α from the previous two verses denotes the noise’s chaotic expansion into the space beyond. Evoking an Iliadic simile, the words ἄμαχετοι and ὀρούποι suggest a wildness and an aggression that move beyond the river and describe the intension of the enemy outside the gates, the aggressive spirit that is leading the horses to the Theban walls.\textsuperscript{139}

Whilst sound is tied to the haptic and physical, its invisibility makes it a dangerous entity that can also be elusive and cunning. Sound shows presence, but it can be deceitful when it comes to revealing the location and identity of its source. It is also an entity that is irresistible; as opposed to eyes, which can close to avoid a fearful spectacle, ears have no ability to resist sound. This is the effect of the πεδί᾽ ὀπλόκτυπ᾽, as sound that is both uncontrollable and autonomous, which the Chorus underscores when the women say that the enemy outside “is sending noise to their ear” (ὠτὶ χρίμπτει βοάν·, 84). Here, the verb χρίμπτει emphasises the process of the movement of the sound, while the mention of the ear (ὠτὶ) refers to the status of the Thebans onstage as passive receptors of that noise. In the prologue, Eteocles’

\textsuperscript{138} Hdt. 9.49-57. According to the same passage, attempts to strengthen the Athenian cavalry had repeatedly been made before the Persian wars, however cities like Boeotia and Thessaly continued to retain a stronger horse-force. For more on the historical events see Poll-Palladini (2016: 94).

\textsuperscript{139} Compare with the Iliadic simile in \textit{Il.} 4.452-6, where the sounds of war are compared to winter torrents coming down mountains. See also Hutchinson (1985: 60).
language orders an outward movement to the walls (30-34). Here, shifting the point of view from that of the attacker to that of the defender, the Chorus’ ὄτι χρίμπτει βοάν indicates a movement with an inwards direction, depicting an invasion that is initiated by the armed men of the Argive army. Continuous movement and invisibility are fundamental characteristics of sound. However, as sound does not have its own body, it needs air to travel. In the text, the sound of the horse-hooves is ‘flying’ (ποτᾶται); much like the ‘αιθερία’ dust, the noise exists within the wind. The choice of words is important as the element of the wind contains implications about the nature of the sound’s agency.

In the Seven Against Thebes, as well as in Greek thought more broadly, the wind is perceived as an indication of divine presence. This is primarily due to its invisible movement, itself an ability only possessed by non-human entities, as well as because of its roots in breathing, a sign of life that only gods can bestow to their creations.140 In the Oresteia, the fate of the house of Atreus was determined by the wind, and in particular the fate of Agamemnon, who was sent to Troy on the commands of the blowing wind, which was a cause of pain and suffering.141 Similarly, in the Seven Against Thebes, the presence of the Erinys is compared in the Arming Scene to the blowing wind (θελεμωτέρων πνεύματι, 707-708).142 Earlier in the prologue, the Argives had been attributed a wrathful spirit breathing within them (θυμὸς ἀνδρεάθαι φλέγων ἑπνεῖ, 52-53). As for the parodos, aside from the sound of the horses, we also see that the brandishing of spears makes the air go mad (αἰθήρ ἑπιμαίνεται, 155). All things considered, the association between the movement of the enemy and the movement of the wind in 84-85 introduces a broader association between the noises-off and the enemy in the extramural space, and daimonic movement.

The wind is not the only element that foretells the presence of the daimon; links between horses, death and the Erinys are drawn from the start of the prologue.

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141 References to wind abound across the trilogy. See Ag. 148, 192-195, 214-215, Cho. 33, 1065-1067, Eum. 137 and 840.

142 See also Sept. 691-692 for a similar notion, where the house of Laius shall be “let run before the wind” (ὁτα κατ’ οὐρον).
There, the Scout says that the Argives beyond the walls were seen adorning the chariot of Adrastus (50) while “the lungs of their horses were dripping foam and staining the ground” (ἀφρός χραίνει σταλαγμοῖς ἱππικῶν ἐκ πλευμῶν, 60-61). The choice of words in this passage is again significant as the terms χραίνει and σταλαγμοῖς evoke an association with the miasma, the pollution that is central to the trilogy. When it comes to the house of the Labdacids specifically, the miasma is spread across generations, from the patricide of Laius, to the spousal bed of Oedipus and, later in this play, to the fratricide. At the same time, the term ἀφρός also bears an association with the Erinyes because it evokes blood that is drunk.

Finally, as we see later in the parodos, the bits in the cheeks of the horses operate as the foretellers of slaughter (διάδετοι δὲ < - > γενοῦν ἵππων μινύροντι φόνον χαλινοί, 122-123).

The Chorus respond to the daimonic presence implied by the noises with prayers. As such, the noises-off and the interior noises from the Chorus are linked in a cause-effect relationship as the choral song becomes a response to the invasion of the sounds, a plea for divine intervention as the only means of salvation from the evil that is pursuing the city (κακὸν, 88). The spectacle would not only have been auditory but would have also had a visual dimension in the prayer, as the women begin to fall in front of the images of the gods onstage as suppliants. The intensity of the Chorus’ prayers is reflected in their language, which becomes shortened and repetitive; the non-verbal exclamation of the double-vocative ἰὼ ἰὼ in 87 amplifies the communication of fear, while the double repetition of the address to the gods (θεοὶ θεαῖ) and the aorist imperative ἀλεύσατε mark the prayer as urgent. Similarly, when the loud shouts of the army invade the walls later in 89, signalling the addition of infantry to the sound of the cavalry, the Chorus respond again with a repetitive address to the gods and a rhetorical question divided into two symmetrical sections: τίς ἄρα ῥύσεται, τίς ἄρ’ ἐπαρκέσει θεῶν ἢ θεᾶν; (who will protect us, who will send them away from our gods or goddesses?, 92-143 Cameron (1971: 79).

Eum. 183.

As indicated by ποτιπέσω βρέτη δαιμόνων, 95 and άκμάζει βρετέων ἔχεσθαι· 96; then later again, in 101-102, 185-186, 211 and 214-215. The second person σό addresses by the Chorus to the gods in lines 127, 135, 145 and 149 further testify in favour of the use of the statues as referents for the gods. See also Hutchinson (1985: 55-56) and Thalmann (1978: 88).

On the use of double vocatives and repeated addresses in prayers see Pulleyn (1997: 133-134) and for the use of the aorist imperative as a marker of urgency see pp.134-135. For the effect of non-verbal, vocal exclamations see Nooter (2017: 94-96).
However, in verse 100, the prayers of the Chorus temporarily stop as the women are distracted by the sound of weapons that are entering the scene, namely those of shields (ἀσπίδων κτύπον [clattering of shields, 100]) and those of spears (πτέραγος ούχ ἐνὸς δορὸς [the rattle of more than one spears, 103]). The distraction it creates is further indicated by the change in metre as the dochmiacs of verses 78-99, which had until this point been undisrupted, are replaced by iambic trimeters in verses 100 and 103. The use of tragedy’s ‘spoken’ metre in the middle of the astrophic song creates a temporary pause in the frenzy of the Chorus, drawing attention to the catalytic power of the new sound.

Sommerstein (2008: 163), West (1990a: 68) and Hutchinson (1985: 61) accept the lacuna in 89 (βοῶι < > ὑπὲρ τειχών·) placed by Schroeder and suppose the verse to have been regarding an ‘even louder noise’ or ‘the cry of the warriors’. Another question about the verses 89-90 regards the λεύκασις in relation to the Chorus’ lack of visible access to the extramural space. Hutchinson’s comment argues in favour of the Chorus’ inability to see beyond the walls and assume the image to only exist in the imagination of the women. However, it is possible that, as Edmunds (2002: 107) has pointed out, the Chorus would have been able to catch glimpses of the enemy from the openings on the walls (Edmunds considers the ὁδὲ of verse 80 to be a deictic indicative of the ability of the Chorus’ ability to see). For the opposite view that denies the deictic use of ὁδὲ and considers the image to only be perceived in the Chorus’ mind see Centanni (1995: 132). Considering the fact that the Chorus have already stated that they have seen dust getting raised up in the air in 81, I am more inclined to agree with Edmunds about the Chorus’ limited visibility from the Chorus’ perspective, especially since the λεύκασις can be read along similar lines as verse 81 as the sight of a reflection of light that reaches the acropolis of the city.

Verses 100, 103 and 106 are the only ones written in 3 ia. in the entire song. It is not clear whether the verses are sung by different members of the Chorus or whether the same member would sing both. Marinis (2012: 32) and Hutchinson (1985: 56-57) are in favour of the distribution of the verses to multiple individuals, opposing older scholarship that favoured the opinion of the Coryphaeus; that proposition was initially made by Wilamowitz and was later supported by Lupas and Petre (1981: 49, 51-53) and Dale (1968 [1948]: 86). Due to the structure of the song as one of a scattered entrance, I am more inclined to agree with Marinis and Hutchinson and assume a choral exchange in occasional dialectic form.
2.3.3 Metal and the Voice of the Daimon (100-103)

ἀκούετ’ ἢ οὐκ ἀκούετ’ ἀσπίδων κτόπον;
πέπλων καὶ στεφέων <πότε> ποτ’ ἐὰν μὴ νῦν
ἀμφὶ λιταν<ά> βαλεῖν χρείαιν ἐξομεν;
κτόπον δέδορκα’ πάταγος οὐχ ἕνός δορός.

Do you hear or do you not hear the clatter of shields?
When, when if not now shall we place
robes and garlands as prayer-offerings [to adorn the gods]?
I hear the sound; it is the rattle of more than one spears.

_Sept._ 100-103

Aeschylus’ tragedies are not our first extant literary representation of the sound of weapons. We have already seen that it held a prominent place in the _Iliad_, where references to metallic sounds abound. These sounds indicate the agency of the weapons which, much like in the _Seven_, are surrogates for the destructive desire of the enemies. Bows make a terrible noise that is reflective of the anger of their carrier,^{150} armours and bronze both clang to indicate the death of a warrior,^{151} corselets resound when the enemy’s spears reach them,^{152} and spears ring shields as part of a harsh attack.^153 Aeschylus’ influence from the Homeric epic in the _Seven Against Thebes_ is evident throughout the play. However, by deploying the Iliadic sounds of war, he is not just creating an additional layer of realism in his representation of the battle. For Aeschylus, to enact the sound of weapons means to expose one’s audience to its effects. After verse 100 in the _Seven Against Thebes_, the theatrical space is filled with metallic clangs. It is precisely this materiality of the sound, its loudness and metallic texture as well as its theatrical representation, that the textual language draws attention to.

In a theatrical production, the audience becomes as much a receptor of the theatrical sounds as the play’s characters. It is this participation of the audience’s

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^{150} _Il._ 1.46.
^{152} _Il._ 13.497-9.
ear that the Chorus emphasise when the women pause to underline the acoustics of the scene. In verse 100, the change of metre from dochmiacs to trimeters intervenes in the frenetic flow of the choral song creating a pause that shifts attention from the tension of the Chorus to the noises-off: ἀκούετ’ ὡς ἀκούετ’ ἀσπίδων κτύπον? The placement of the verb for hearing (ἀκούετ’) at the beginning of the sentence, as well as its double repetition in the form of a rhetorical question (ἀκούετ’ ὡς ἀκούετ’) draw the audience’s attention to their own status as receptors of sound. As for the source of the Chorus’ fear and concern, this comes primarily from the clatter itself, as the accusative κτύπον indicates, and secondarily from the source which appears in the genitive (ἀσπίδων). This is all enhanced in verse 103 below: κτύπον δέδορκα: πάταγος οὕς ἑνὸς δορός (I see the noise; it is the rattle of more than one spear, 103). In that verse, the interrogative ἀκούετ’ ὡς ἀκούετ’ is replaced by the more definite κτύπον δέδορκα, in which the language of sight is intertwined with the language of hearing in one of the most synesthetic verses of the play. \[154\] Whereas the shields produce a loud noise, the sound of the spears is so strong that it is conceptualised as sound materialising, acquiring bodily substance as a result of its increasing volume outside the walls. The sense of growth is further highlighted through the replacement of κτύπον by the onomatopoetic πάταγος in verse 103, a product of not one (οὕς ἑνὸς) but multiple spears, and an indication of the kind of deafening sound that is reaching the ears of the Chorus. \[155\] Both πάταγος and κτύπος are attributed to the weapons, the spear and the shield, which exercise agency on behalf of their warriors. Through this synecdoche that removes the human element from the verbal representation of the enemy, the weapons become the central figure of the image. This motif will be further explored later, in the Redepaare, when we will see the emblems on the Argive shields operating as surrogates for the description of their owners. \[156\] Sounds of shields and spears clashing have a long history of usage in battle as a means of demonstrating power and inducing fear in the enemy. Accompanied by the sound of instruments like trumpets and drums, metallic weapons would be clashed by warriors worldwide in order to intimidate their opponents who would

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\[154\] For Hutchinson (1985: 63) no other contrast between sound and sight is as strongly presented in the play as that in verse 103. For a detailed analysis of verses 100-103, see Marinis (2012: 31-33).

\[155\] κτύπος is itself a noun that declares strong sound, but which is more low-pitched than the πάταγος. See Schmidt (1879: 319).

\[156\] See the discussion in the next chapter.
have interpreted the sound as resonant of threat and as premonition for their approaching death. “As the voice cannot be heard in battle, drums and bells are used”, says the sixth century BC Chinese military strategist and philosopher Sun Tzu in his *Art of War*.\(^{157}\) Greece was no exception but, in the formation of ranks, it was common practice for soldiers to beat their shields and swords to cause a din, while they would also sing marching paeans and play trumpets in order to keep the army encouraged and to intimidate the enemy.\(^{158}\) Beyond the fearful visualisation of the army created in the enemy’s minds by this sound, the sound of the metal as an entity also had significant implications as it was perceived as materialised power. To quote Vernant’s apt phrase, the Greeks believed that “the sound of bronze against bronze, the φωνή that reveals its true nature as living, animated metal, wards off the witchcraft of the enemy”.\(^{159}\)

In ancient Greece, the sound of metal was linked to divine power. Specifically, the awe inspired by its loud sound meant that the Greeks considered metallic clanging to be the material’s voice, a marker of life existing within the metal.\(^{160}\) In literature, bronze is encountered frequently in relation to supernatural entities and heroes as a metaphor for their loud, unbreakable sound, especially in the epic poetry of Hesiod and Homer. In the *Theogony*, the powerful sound of the dog of Hades is a bronze voice (Κέρβερον ὀμηστήν, Αἰδέω κόνα χαλκεόφωνον, 311). Similarly, in the *Iliad*, metal appears in the only mention of the author’s poetic voice, where the poet describes his inability to sing of all those who came to Troy to fight, claiming that he would not have been able to do so even if he had an unbreakable voice and a breast of bronze inside him (φωνὴ δ’ ἀμφηκτος, χάλκεον δὲ μου ἡτορ ἐνείη [an unbreakable voice and, inside me, a bronze heart], 2.490).\(^{161}\) Later in the same poem, Hera shouts like Stentor with a brazen voice

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\(^{157}\) *The Art of War* §17 (ed. and transl. Griffith 1963: 106); Sun Tzu is quoting *The Book of Military Administration.*


\(^{159}\) Vernant (1983: 13).

\(^{160}\) For the different words that signified voice in the ancient world like φωνή and αὐδή, their connotations and different meanings see Butler and Nooter (2018: 4-5).

\(^{161}\) The implication here is that the strength of the voice is linked to the strength of the heart. Interestingly, Homer’s phrase “χάλκεον δὲ μοι ἡτορ ἐνείη” is only one letter away from the equivalent expression used by Hesiod to describe death in *Theog.* 764., “τοῦ δὲ σώθησά μὲν κραδί, χάλκεον δὲ αἱ ἡτορ νῆλαζε ἐν στήθοσιν” (Ford 1992: 85). As West (1966: 369) notes, the metal deployed in metaphors for harsh hearts tends to be iron or steel instead of bronze, to declare pitilessness (examples for iron can be found in *Il.* 22.357, 24.205, 24.521, *Od.* 4.293. For
(Στέντορι εἰσαμένη μεγαλήτορι χαλκεοφώνῳ, 7.985) the sound of which is considered equivalent to that of fifty men (ὅσον ἄλλοι πεντήκοντα, 5.986). Finally, just before Achilles receives his divine armour, he terrifies the Trojans with a brazen voice (ὅσον χάλκου, 18.222), clear as that of trumpet (ὅτε τ` ἱσε σάλπιγξ, 18.219). In the text of the Seven Against Thebes, there is no explicit reference to the sound of the metal as something that is inherently daimonic. However, the tragedy’s close observation of the Homeric motifs hints on an additional interpretative level of the operation of the metallic sound in the choral song.

Apart from Homer’s poetry, the material’s association with the divine was also often the subject of Classical philosophical and religious discourse, especially related to Presocratic thought, which scholarship more and more considers influential in the shaping of Aeschylean thought. The power of sound intrigued the pre-Socratic thinkers, especially the Pythagoreans according to an Aristotelian fragment; Aristotle discusses the Pythagorean theory that the daimones communicate through ringing sounds, and a special mention is made to bronze and the life inside it as “the sound that comes from clashing bronze is the voice of the daimon that is trapped within the bronze” (τὸν δ´ ἐκ χαλκοῦ κροοομένου γινόμενον ἥχον φωνήν εἶναι τῶν δαίμονων ἐναπειλημμένην τῷ χαλκῷ). As well as Aristotle’s fragment, we have further evidence linking daimonic entities with the sound of bronze in Greek thought. The clashing of bronze held a primary role in several cultic rituals; according to Apollodorus, sound held a key role in the Eleusinian Mysteries. For all that the exact sounds and their sources are unspecified, Apollodorus makes specific mention to the clanging of a bronze gong when Kore is summoned. Possibly related to this is the place of bronze in Demeter’s cult; Demeter is given the adjective χαλκόκροτος (bronze-clashing) in Pindaric lyric as, according to the myth, the goddess had beaten bronze cymbals and drums in her quest for Kore. Demeter is not the only goddess who was linked to rituals involving bronze by Hellenistic sources; Apollodorus’ passage helps us
interpret a verse in Theocritus where he encourages Thestylis to “clash the bronze as quickly as possible, for Artemis is at the crossroad”: ἁθεὸς ἐν τριόδοισιν τὸ χάλκεον ὡς τάχος ἀψει. 

Although Theocritus’ verse appeared much later than the production of the *Seven Against Thebes*, it adds to a broader scope of evidence that reveals the perception of the sound of the metal as an animate being, rooted both very deeply and cross-temporally in Greek thought. Because of its association with the divine, this sound could at once be threatening yet also useful as a way of protecting oneself from threatening forces. In fact, this is not something that is encountered within ancient Greek thought alone; evidence for the cultural implications of the sound of metal date back as early as the third millennium BC in inscriptions from Mesopotamia testifying to the involvement of the sound of bronze in rituals involving daimonic exorcisms. Although there is no indication that the Greeks were in any way aware of that ancient practice, or that their perception of the metallic sound was influenced by the civilisation of Mesopotamia, evidence from Greece suggests that bronze bells were placed on children’s graves to protect them from daimonic entities, while in the later years of the Roman empire, bells of bronze would ring in order to protect households from the dead in case of return.

Finally, in Greece, metals, weapons, daimones and dance belonged to the same conceptual scheme. Villing has pointed out a close link between bronze bells and the Dionysiac cult, specifically that the beating of tympana and bells was associated with Dionysiac activities, while some vases from fourth-century BC Southern Italy represent Dionysus and his thiasos holding bells or with them attached to their wrists. In addition to this, a passage from Strabo makes reference to the Korybantes, which appear in mythology interchangeably with the

166 Theoc. *Idyll*. 2.36.
167 The involvement of bronze and its sound in Greco-Roman rituals including funerals, purifying ceremonies and lunar eclipses is well attested in the discussion of Villing (2002: 275-295). See also Cook (1902: 14-17).
168 According to these inscriptions, in cases of death-threatening possessions, the musical instrument urudu-nig2-kala-ga, which translates as “mighty copper”, had to be played loudly over the patient in order for the daimon “Mighty Copper” to be conjured. Once presented, the daimon would have been instructed to enter the patient, thus scaring the malevolent daimon away from their body, before he would be dismissed by the priest. See Rendu Loisel (2015: 216-217).
169 For the role of bronze in funerary rituals and graves see Villing (2002: 289-292). The evidence about the Roman world comes from *Fast* 44.
Telchines, the Cabeiroi, the Daktyloi and the Kouretes, all of whom are groups of daimones who were perceived in the Greek mythology and art as ecstatic male dancers in arms.\textsuperscript{171} Most of those daimones were supposed to have been metallurgists and would have been linked to the performance of rituals that involved music and dance. In fact, although almost all of them appear to have been related somehow to Hephaestus, Daktyloi and Telchines in particular appear to have had stronger connotations of the practice of magic and metallurgy.\textsuperscript{172} Daktyloi in particular were considered to have been the inventors of iron, according to a narrative attributed to Hesiod.\textsuperscript{173}

In summary, to speak of the sound of metal and its connotations is to speak of an association between the material and the divine across time. This is applicable to several ancient cultures. In the Seven Against Thebes, the outbreak of the sound of the Argives’ weapons takes place in the parodos amid the Chorus’ ‘Dionysiac frenzy’, adding to the existing atmosphere of divine presence, disorder and panic. Incidentally, the introduction of the sound of the weapons is followed by the song’s progressive transformation into a structured prayer.\textsuperscript{174}

2.3.4 Weapons and Ritual (104-181)

The choral song acquires a new form after the outbreak of the noises of the weapons. After verse 107, the astrophic verses of the Chorus become strophic, dividing the song into three strophic pairs of prayers, while iambic verses are introduced among the dochmiacs.\textsuperscript{175} The change in the structure of the song shows that the Chorus at this stage would have begun to sing their prayers in a more formal and direct way, even though dochmiacs continue to have a prominent role in

\textsuperscript{171} Strab. 10.3.7.
\textsuperscript{172} For more on the origin and traditions around those groups of daimones, see Blakeley (2006: 13-20).
\textsuperscript{173} According to Pliny the Elder who quotes in his HN. 7.56.3, “ferrum Hesiodus in Creta eos qui vocati sunt Dactyli Idaei” (the forging of iron Hesiod ascribes to the people called the Dactyli of Ida in Crete). The original Hesiodic passage does not survive.
\textsuperscript{174} For the choral song as a combination of lamentation, supplication and hymenaial lament, see Seaford (2012: 159-166).
\textsuperscript{175} According to Hutchinson (1985: 58-59), 109-150 are dochmio-iambic. In the section 151-181, the first pair consists predominantly of dochmiacs but closes with iambics, whereas the second pair adopts the reverse order as mainly iambic but closing with dochmiacs. See also West (1990a: 468-469). Hutchinson, however, rejects the change in structure in 109-150 but argues that those verses are astrophic too, with dochmiacs that “represent the ruins of a strophic pair” (1985: 63-64). West’s edition, which this dissertation has selected, considers 109-150 to form a strophic pair.
the metre. This change and increase in formality would have also been reflected in
the stage action; in 101-102, the Chorus indicate that they will be falling as
suppliants in front of the statues of the gods, an action that complements the prayers
and indicates the ritualistic character of the Chorus’ addresses: πέπλων καὶ στέφεων
<πότε> ποτ’ εἰ μὴ νῦν ἄμφι λιταν<ἀ βαλεῖν γρεῖαν> ἔξομεν; (when, when if not
now shall we place robes and garlands as prayer-offerings out of need to adorn the
gods?). The adornment of the statues and the formality of the prayer are further
supported by the individual addresses to the gods as the Chorus will predominantly
be referring to them by their names now, instead of the more general addresses in
the previous verses, indicating their movement from one statue to the next. By the
end of the song, the women will have addressed Zeus (116), Athena (131), Ares
(136) Aphrodite (138), Apollo (146, 160), Artemis (147-148, 154), Hera (152) and
Onca (164). In fact, as Hutchinson notes, the sequence of those addresses also
indicates the performance of a ritual: Zeus is addressed first in the strophic pairs
(116), the two children of Leto are addressed together (146-148) and the parents
of Harmonia, Ares and Aphrodite, are also summoned in succession (136-138).

The transition from the astrophic to the strophic structure of the prayer and
from the general addresses to the individual addresses to the gods is marked by an
address to Ares just before the initiation of the first strophe where the Chorus ask
the God to watch over the city:

τί рέξεις; προδόσεις, παλαιήθην
Ἄρης, γὰν τεάν;
δι χρυσόπηληξ δαίμον, ἐπιδε ἐπίδε πόλιν
ἂν ποτ’ εὐφιλήταν ἔθου.

What are you planning to do? Will you betray
your land, ancient God, Ares?
O God of the golden helmet, watch over, watch over the city
which you once considered worthy of your love.

Sept. 104-107

176 The sanctuary of Onca was allegedly placed outside the first gate of the city that the Messenger
reports on in 501-502. See also Sommerstein (2008: 169 n.24). For the debate on the number of
gods addressed in the prayer and the reading of verse 152, see footnote 92.
177 Hutchinson (1985: 67). Adding to this, Giordano-Zecharya (2006: 62-5) has noted this kind of
non-reciprocal prayers are a kind of supplications rarely addressed to gods.
The role of Ares in the *Seven Against Thebes* has received adequate discussion. The reason lies in the double identity that the god possesses in the play as both the divine inside and the god outside the walls. On the one hand, Ares features in the prayers of the Chorus as one of the protectors of Thebes; according to tradition, Ares had an old connection to the foundation of Thebes as the father of the wife of Cadmus, Harmonia, and also as the protector of the dragon that Cadmus had to slay. On the other, in the prologue, Ares is referred to by the Scout as one of the divinities by whom the Argive leaders took their oath, a ritual that links him by blood to the enemy, as well as to the rest of their divine alliances, Enyo and Terror. The worshipping of Ares in Argos appears to also have historical support as, according to Pausanias, sanctuaries of Ares existed in Argos. Throughout the play, Ares is portrayed as the god that exists on both sides of the walls. The Chorus’ exclamation τί ῥέξεις; προδώσεις, παλαίθθον Ἄρης, γὰν τεόν; (what are you planning to do? Will you betray your own land, Ares, ancient god of the city?) in 104-105, shows the Chorus’ awareness of the god’s double role in the war and his potential support of Argos. Ares’ crucial significance in the prayer finally manifests in the frequency of his name: out of the eight gods referenced across the passage, Ares is the only one who is addressed three times, in the beginning (104-105), the middle (136) and in the end of the prayer (162).

Through his double address as both a domestic god of Thebes and as a potential aggressor against the city, Ares is the first explicit sign of the assimilation of the external and the internal spaces of the city, not only in terms of the invasion of the army, but also in terms of divine alliances. Much like the Erinys that resides within Eteocles and Polyneices, Ares is a divinity inside and outside.

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178 See Torrance (2007: 40-42), Thalmann (1978: 55), Benardete (1967: 24) and Bacon (1964: 31), all of which argue that Ares is the divine entity inside and outside the gates of Thebes. Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 98) and Burnett (1973: 364) explicitly state the god’s identification with the Erinys in the play.

179 Sept. 45.

180 Paus. 2.25.1. However, there is no further evidence for this. For more on the worshipping of Ares in Classical Greece see Hutchinson (1985: 63).

181 παῦ Διὸς most likely refers to Ares rather than Athena, as the latter is identified with Onca. Sommerstein (2008: 167 and n. 22).

182 See also Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 98) who considers Ares and the Erinys in the play as the representations of the invincible male and female threat to Thebes, respectively. For Zeitlin, the union of the two forces at the end of the play through the death of the two brothers is the main act that concludes the end of the trilogy and the end of the House of Laius.
Opening the strophic part of the song, the strophe in the first pair recalls the astrophic part of the song. It comprises a mixture of addresses to the gods and vivid imagery of the enemy, created by the Chorus based on the sounds of weapons and horses. The imagery is terrifying as the details indicate that the enemy is now closer and therefore easier to be heard. Following the motifs of the previous verses, both the weapons and the horses produce sounds that foretell slaughter and divine intervention while building on the imagery of the astrophic verses. According to the Chorus, the whine of the cheeks of the horses is telling of slaughter (μινύρονται φόνον, 164), while their riders who had previously been described in liquid terms as ‘pouring forward at the gallop’ (ρεῖ, 80) now become a wave of nodding plumes (δοχμολόφων ἀνδρῶν, 114). The sight of the nodding helmets, already known from the Iliad as a terrifying sight, is complemented here by descriptions of its sound as splashing over the city, raised up by the blasts of war (κῦμα περὶ πτόλιν δοχμολόφων ἀνδρῶν καχλάζει πνοαῖς Ἄρεος ὀρόμενον, 115). Here, the terms πνοαῖς and Ἄρεος are used in metaphor to indicate the sounds of the wave and the war respectively. However, at the same time, when pronounced out loud, the same words create an acoustical association with the themes of breathing and daimonic presence as πνοαῖς refers back to the spirit of the Argives that had been described to be breathing in the prologue (ἐπνει, 53), while Ἄρεος refers to the god of war who, as the Chorus mentioned just before, is feared to be assisting the Argives. Appearing next to each other, πνοαῖς Ἄρεος brings the two themes together to indicate the threatening presence of the daimon outside the walls. A similar effect is achieved six verses later where the name of the god appears again in relation to the weapons of the enemy (φόβος δ’ ἄρειόν δπλων, 121), an expression that speaks of their usage in war, but which also creates an implicit acoustic link between the god, the weapons and the confusion and fear of the Chorus.

The strophe concludes with the foretelling of the seven Argive leaders present on the gates, an image that will be the core of the Messenger’s report later in the Redeapaare (ἐπτὰ δ’ ἄγηνορες πρέποντες στρατοῦ δορυσταίς σαγαῖς πύλαις ἐβδόμαις προσιστανταί πάλαι λαχόντες [seven chosen leaders of the army are taking their place on the seven gates, selected by lot brandishing their spears], 125-127). In a blend of the themes of wind and weapons, the presence of the seven

183 See Il. 3.337 where the poet describes the nodding of the helmet’s plume as ‘terrible’ (δεινός).
184 For the importance of wind and breathing in the play see 2.3.2, especially p. 64-65.
leaders at the gates is testified by the sound of their spears being waved (δορυσσοίς σαγαίς, 126). The fear of the Chorus is conveyed in every aspect of their speech. In verse 126 the alliteration of α in σαγαῖς πύλαις ἐβδόμαις προσίσταται πάλιοι λαχώντες reflects the powerful threat of the enemy. Furthermore, having started with a general address to the gods of Thebes (θεοὶ πολιῶχοι χθονός, 108), the reference to πνοαὶ Ἀρεος in 115 is followed by a direct address to Zeus and his supreme power (ὦ Ζεῦ πάτερ, παντός ἔχων τέλος, 116), juxtaposing the power of the two forces and highlighting the Chorus’ need of divine assistance. Similarly, the antistrophe comprises the first accumulation of addresses to the gods as a response to the approach of the enemy. There, the repetitions of both the vocal exclamation φεῦ φεῦ (136) and the need for salvation from fear (ἐπίλυσιν φόβων, ἐπίλυσιν διόδου, 133) both mark the prayer as urgent.

The extramural noises peak along with the Chorus’ cries in the second strophic pair; the strophe and the antistrophe are both introduced by the chaotic cries ἒ ἒ ἒ ἒ, non-verbal expressions of the Chorus’ despair that amplify the terrifying noise in the extramural space. Indeed, in verses 151-165, the accumulation of war noises is more compact than in any other part of the song, as chariots (151-153), spears (155), stones (159) and shields (161) are all reported together. The synaesthetic effect reaches its climax here as the sounds of language, music and the noises-off appear combined and intensified amid the Chorus’ desperate cry for divine assistance. The Chorus’ ἒ ἒ ἒ ἒ both reacts to and re-enacts the war noises from offstage, creating an atmosphere of non-verbal noise produced both onstage and offstage. As for the reports of the noises-off, it is notable that the human agent is missing but the descriptions of the sounds of the weapons and chariots is framed in a way that attributes them their own voice; specifically, in the second strophe, the Chorus is shaken by the squealing sound of the loads of the axles (ἔλακον ἄζόνων βριθομένων χρόαι, 153). Similarly, in 159 it is the bombardment of stones that the Chorus hear approaching (ἄκροβόλος δ’ ἐπύλξων λιθῶς ἔρχεται), while the presence of the enemy at the gates is marked by their clashing shields (κόναβος ἐν πύλαις χαλκοδέτων σακέων, 161). In the first two instances, βριθομένων and ἔρχεται both attribute human qualities to the chariots.

and the stones respectively, while the lack of a verb in 161 isolates the shields and emphasises their bronze substance as the source of the noise.

The atmosphere is characterised by frenzy, both implicitly in the terrifying imagery and explicitly in the Chorus’ verbalisation of the sensation of madness. Expanding on their previous report of the arrival of the seven Argive leaders at the gates in 125-127, the women conclude that waving of the spears at the gates makes the air go mad (δορυτίνακτος {δ’) αἰθηρ ἐπιμαίνεται, 155), indicating the presence of the daimon in the extramural space. The link between wind, madness and the Erinys has already been discussed.186 Here, however, the wind is also linked to the spear as it is produced by the way in which the weapon is wielded by its bearer (δορυτίνακτος).187 The extent to which the sound necessitates divine intervention is reflected in the structure of the text, as the noises-off alternate with the addresses to the gods in this strophic pair, a structure that implicitly assigns to the noises outside and to the gods the roles of attacker and defender respectively. Notably, the addresses to the gods are also much shorter than the addresses in the first strophic pair, with most of the gods addressed only by their name and one characterisation, another element that marks the rush and urgency of the Chorus (oreach’ Ἡρα; 152; Ἀρτέμι φιλα; 154; ὃ φιλ’ Ἀπολλόνι 161).

The parodos concludes with the third strophic pair, where reports of the extramural noises subside to give their place to the Chorus’ final plea to the gods. Just as in the very beginning of the song, the size of the threat is mainly expressed in the final strophic pair through the Chorus’ song. The women’s self-characterisation as χειρότονος (173) is indicative of the participation of the women’s bodies in the prayer, with their arms are raised up in the air to convey their despair. As the extramural noises pause and the Chorus finishes addressing the gods individually, the women conclude their song with collective addresses, initiating the strophe and the antistrophe with the more general references ‘θεοὶ’ and ‘φίλοι δαίμονες’ respectively (166 and 174).188

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186 See p. 64-65.
187 A similar link between madness and weapons will appear again later in the Arming Scene where the Chorus will accuse Eteocles of being possessed by a spear-mad delusion (δοριμαργος ἄτα, 688).
188 The characterisation of the gods as ‘φίλοι’ is a rarity in Greek tragedy. See Hutchinson (1985: 73). However, the term is encountered again in Aeschylus’ Eum. 999 where Athena and the citizens around her are addressed.
Their language is filled with various linguistic markers of urgency, including repetitions that highlight their fear and plea for help. In the introductory verses of the strophe (166) and the antistrophe (174), the vocal ἵω precedes the addresses to the gods, highlighting the Chorus’ pain, an act that is reinforced by the double repetition of the verb for hearing, κλέετε, in 171, the repetition in τέλειοι and τέλειατι in 167, and μέλεσθε μελόμενοι in 178 and 179. Apart from the repeated exclamations of fear, the antistrophe is characterised by profound sound effects, namely the consonance of λ and the alliteration of ε, while verses 177, 178 and 181 all start with the letter μ. Altogether, these sound patterns add to the effect of the noises-off by increasing the tension in the air through their repetitive sounds. Finishing their prayer, the Chorus conclude their thoughts by reminding the gods of the city’s sacrificial rites (φιλοθύτων δὲ τοι πόλεως ὀργίων, 180). Itself a ritualistic prayer, the parodos has become the Chorus’ defence against the external invasion until Eteocles’ entrance in 182 will order its termination by pointing out its catastrophic effect.

In the parodos, we saw how the dramaturgy of the play enacts the invasion of the daimonic agent. Following the choral song, the first episode is also centred around the motif of sound as it primarily constitutes a negotiation of the power of human sound over the non-human noise from offstage. In this sense, it differs slightly from the parodos, where the focus of the language was centred primarily on the noises-off; here, the effect of the noises in the extramural space becomes prominent through its absence from the discussion as Eteocles’ speech is centred around the Chorus’ song, which he elevates to the status of the main destructive power.

2.4 First Episode (182-286): Redefining the Destructiveness of Sound

The episode begins with Eteocles lashing out against the women, whom he addresses as ‘insufferable creatures’ as soon as he enters the stage (θρέμματ’ οὐκ ἄνασχετά, 182). Commenting on the king’s opening line, Hutchinson has rightly noted the peculiarity of the address, as tragic characters rarely respond to choral

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189 The possibility that Eteocles remains onstage during the parodos is highly improbable as characters in Greek plays would rarely be present onstage during the choral entrance song; see Taplin (1977: 139-141). Hutchinson’s commentary also agrees that a new entrance would be made by the hero in line 182 (Hutchinson 1985: 75).
songs. Interestingly, the few instances in which such responses are encountered in Aeschylus coincide with the appearance of a daimon or a ghost (necromancy); I am referring here specifically to the *Persians* and the *Ichneutae*, where a racket made by the Chorus is followed by the appearances of the ghost of Darius and Cybele. In the *Seven Against Thebes*, there is no explicit remark on divine presence in the war or appearance of a ghost, however the continuity between the happenings in the parodos and the first episode strengthen the existing implications for the manifestation of a daimon.

There are two main aspects of the episode that have drawn the attention of scholars, both of which are fundamental components of the dramatic action and are interconnected. The first, already evident from the first verse, is Eteocles’ misogyny and his angry reaction to the Chorus’ supplications; the second, closely linked to the first, is the length of the episode, the detail and extent to which Eteocles and the Chorus debate the appropriate way of asking the gods to defend the city. In previous decades, scholars have treated the passage as a religious debate that reveals Eteocles’ psyche through his arguments and wording. One of the most broadly-known pieces of research on the subject matter is by Patzer, who argued that Eteocles’ anger is in fact determination for victory and it is the outcome of his false interpretation of his dream; specifically, Patzer argued that by interpreting the Iron divider to signify that the division of property would be settled in battle, Eteocles adopts the tough, determined behaviour to secure victory. Years later, Brown would claim that the passage is a juxtaposition between Eteocles’ pragmatism and the Chorus’ emotional reaction, while others brought forth the prologue to suggest that Eteocles exhibits positive impiety. However, for all the intelligent analyses regarding Eteocles’ religious points of view, the majority of those arguments appear to have neglected an important element that should have been central in the initiations of those discussions in the first place: Eteocles’ perception of the Chorus’ song as the biggest threat to the city.

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191 Patzer (1958: 97). The argument was later rejected by Kirkwood (1969: 9) and Lesky (1961: 5) on the grounds of insufficient textual support.

192 Brown (1977a: 300-306), but see also Podlecki (1964: 283) and Golden (1964: 79).
The king’s presence adds a new dimension to the antithesis between sounds on and off stage as he confronts both the disturbing noises that we have encountered in the parodos: the sounds of the Chorus’ song on the one hand, and the noises-off on the other. Between the two, the Choral sound will be treated with harshness, whereas the noises-off will be intentionally ignored. Both responses have severe implications for the dramatic action; as we will see below, the Chorus’ maddened reaction to the noises-off is contrasted with Eteocles’ determination and rational approach; on its turn, this contrast further highlights the magnitude of the Chorus’ panic. At the same time, the way in which the noises-off are ignored by the king is the first indicator of his blindness to the Curse, which will eventually lead him to his death. Eteocles’ strategy for counteracting their effect is to ignore their existence, however the threat behind the noise, the Erinys that is invading the walls of Thebes, cannot be stopped, and Eteocles will not realise this until it is too late. His reaction to sound, his dismissiveness of the noises-off, his resistance to the lamentations and supplications offered by the women to the gods, are all his fatal flaws. Denial of the threat characterises Eteocles throughout the play. This characteristic of the tragic character manifests more elaborately in the Redepaare, as we will see in the next chapter, however elements of it appear as soon as he enters the stage in 182.

The Seven Against Thebes is not our only example of Aeschylus’ exploration of the matter of noise and the effect of human sound; his interest in the sound of language and tragic spectacle means that we see the motif of sound’s ability to create emotion repeatedly in his plays. One of the most striking examples is that of the Persians, where the Chorus’ non-verbal cries increasingly take over the scene when the defeat of the army is announced. Following this, the cries of the old men of the chorus are the voices that summon Darius’ ghost, and the play concludes with their lament which, like a procession, brings Xerxes

193 On the subject matter see also Gurd (2016: 74-76).
194 This is extensively discussed in Seaford (2012: 158-177 but see especially 159-163). There, the scholar traces the fatal flaw of the House of the Labdacids to their lack of ritual. Eteocles’ determination to both stop the Chorus’ lamentation in the first episode and to not be lamented (Sept. 6-8, 656) exemplify his case.
195 This is extensively discussed in Gurd (2016: 73-78). See also Thalmann (1986: 489-511) who draws connections between the affect theories of Presocratic natural philosophy and Aeschylus’ representation of the physiology of emotions across his plays.
196 Pers. 268-283.
home. Later, the Oresteia would also be filled with the sonorous effects of cries; we encounter the wails of Cassandra in the Agamemnon when she foretells his death, while Clytemnestra’s screams awaken the house when she is having the ominous dream about her death in the Choephoroi. Finally, the trilogy is marked by the lyre-less song of the Erinyes, that foretells death. However, it is only in the Seven Against Thebes that the matter becomes so nuanced as to take the form of an argument, a discourse on the destructive power of the human voice.

Sound in the Seven Against Thebes is more catastrophic than ever: it is a threat to civic order, reason and discipline. The noises-off are instrumental in bringing about this effect as it is their terrifying texture that magnifies the fear and disorder among the Chorus in the parodos. However, Eteocles refuses to acknowledge that. Instead, he focuses on the women, the only source of sound that he considers possible to be controlled. The first episode begins with a shift in dramatic focus from outside to inside. Specifically, the contrasting poles of threat and threatened, previously attributed to the Argives in the extramural space and the Thebans inside the walls respectively, is now relocated to the internal part of the city. When the king enters the stage, the noises-off have temporarily stopped, something that is indicated by the past tense in the Chorus’ response to his monologue: ἔδεια’ ἀκούσασα [...] ὅτε τε σύριγγες ἔκλαγξαν (I was frightened when I heard […] when the sockets of their wheels whirled, 203-205). Unlike the Chorus, Eteocles makes no remarks on the sounds; for him, the real threat to the city is the song of the Chorus, as the effects of their uproar are said to have resulted in the spread of cowardice among the citizens (νῦν πολίταις [...] ἰψοχὸν κάκην, 191-192). His interpretation of the danger is also phrased in space terminology; in the prologue, we have seen that the king had ordered the preparation of the city’s defence, which he had framed as an outward movement of his soldiers from the inside of the city to its walls. Similarly, the threat to the well-being of the city is now conceptualised as a movement initiated from within, namely that for Eteocles the morale of the warriors is being destroyed by the cries of the women, cries which move from the centre of the city to the gates: τὰ τῶν

197 Pers. 1002-1079. For more detailed analysis on the sonic effects of the Persians, see Gurd (2016: 64-74).
198 Ag. 1100, 1114-1118, Cho. 523-525.
199 Eum. 328-333. For sounds in the Oresteia and the song of the Erinyes see p. 50-51.
200 See also p. 53-54.
θύραθεν δ’ ὡς ἀριστ’ ὀφέλλετε, αὐτοὶ δ’ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἐνδόθεν πορθούμεθα (you serve those outside the gates perfectly, we are being sieged by our own from the inside, 193-194). 201

Thebes is under attack but, for Eteocles, the gender of the women, not the army outside, is the main cause of the problem, as their location inside the city gives them more power to influence the warriors. Throughout the episode, Eteocles reproaches the women for their femininity, which he associates with space; for the king, matters of the outside concern men only, whereas women should be staying indoors. Like their bodies, their thoughts should also remain internalised: μέλει γάρ ἄνδρι, μὴ γυνὴ βουλεύετω, τὰξεθεν· ἐνδόν δ’ οὖσα μὴ βλάβην τίθαι (matters of the outdoors concern the men, women should not be thinking about those; staying inside, do not inflict harm, 200-201). Truly, it is the externalising of the Chorus’ emotions, the sound of their voices in the prologue, that has angered the king. In his monologue, Eteocles justifies his aggression on the grounds of the Chorus’ human-produced sounds in the parodos, namely the Chorus’ αὔειν (cry out, 186) and λακάζειν (howl, 186). Commenting on their prayer, the first infinitive, αὔειν, draws attention to the content of the Chorus’ song, while λακάζειν characterises it in terms of its high volume and crying tone. 202 Whilst the song and its sound are harmful for the inner order of the city, moreover, for Eteocles, the supplication itself has been performed in a harmful and disrespectful way: μή μοι θεοὺς καλοῦσα βουλεύου κακῶς· Πειθαρχία γάρ ἦστι, τίς Εὔπραξίας μὴτηρ, γυνὴ Σωτήρος ὅδ’ ἔχει λόγος (do not summon the gods while being ill-advised; for Discipline is the mother of Success, the wife of [Zeus] Saviour; this is what they say, 223-225). The Chorus’ manner of supplication is something that the king once again attributes to gender. Unsurprisingly, Eteocles thus brings forth the matter of space: “it is the job of men to offer slaughtered sacrifices to the gods while fighting an enemy; your job is to stay silent and to stay inside” (ἀνδρὸν τάδ’ ἦστι, σφάγω καὶ χρηστήρια θεοῖσιν ἔρθουν πολεμίους πειρομένους· σόν δ’ αὐτῷ τὸ σιγᾶν καὶ μένειν εἴσω δόμον, 230-232).

As soon as the Chorus begin to defend themselves in 203, the scene transforms into a debate where six three-line exchanges between the Chorus and the

201 Compare with 30-34 where again Eteocles’ language shows an outward movement.  
202 The term λακάζειν is deployed to denote hysterical cries also in Supp. 872. For aude and its use as an expression of emotions and powers in mortals and immortals see Nooter (2017: 21).
king are followed by nineteen verses of stichomythia. This is the third element of the episode that has attracted scholarly attention as the structure of the stichomythia here is identical to the structure of the debate in 683-719 of the Arming Scene.203 There, the Chorus try to persuade Eteocles to not battle Polyneices, while they immediately notice and point out his irrational behaviour: τί μέμονας τέκνον; μή τί σε θυμοπληθής δορίμαργος ἄτα φερέτω (Why this wild eagerness, child? Do not let yourself be overtaken by this spear-mad delusion that is filling your heart, 687-688). It is not unexpected in a tragedy for the Chorus to try to bring characters in states of madness or confusion to sense. In the first episode, however, it is Eteocles who refers to the Chorus as mad, calling them ‘enemies of the wise-thinking’ (σωφρόνων μυσῆματα, 186). With the king maintaining his sanity and pragmatism, it is precisely through the shift in the roles that the Chorus’ inner disorder and madness are becoming clear.204

In the parodos, we saw that the Chorus had used the input of the enemy’s sound to calculate its distance from the gates, while their rich vocabulary visualised the enemy for their audience and produced fearful sound itself. This is an element that continues into the first episode as their defence against Eteocles’ words is also heavy in sound. When Eteocles accuses the women of spreading panic among the citizens, the Chorus recall the terrifying noises-off by producing fearful sound anew: ἔδεισον ἀκούσασα τὸν ἀρματόκτυπον ὀτόβον ὀτόβον (I was frightened at the sound of the rattle, the rattle of the chariots, 203-204). Like before, here too we encounter the consonance of o and τ, as well as the repetition of the word meaning sound ὀτόβον, a marker of the Chorus’ distress. Following this, just like in the parodos, the next few lines create a mental image as the Chorus visualise the sources of the noises which include the ‘whirling sockets of the chariots’ (σύριγγες ἔκλαγξαν ἐλίτροχοι, 205), as well the ‘fire-producing bits’ on the mouths of the horses (πυριγενετὰν χαλινῶν, 207). Overall, the Chorus continue to perpetuate the characteristics of their speech that the king has accused them of, their αὔειν and λακάζειν. Eteocles’ request continues to be the same: whereas the honouring of the gods is not something that the king objects to (οὕτωι φθονῶ σοι δαιμόνον

203 For which see 4.1.4 - 4.1.9.
204 In Greek literature, the distortion of the phren relates to madness and the Erinys. See Padel (1992: 20-29, 31-39 and 93-95). Being a play about clarity of thought and metaphorical blindness, notions of the mind (phrenes) are central in the Seven. See also 3.4.6 where the warriors’ phren is discussed in relation to their shields.
τιμᾶν γένος· 236), it is the power of sound, namely the terrified sounds of the Chorus, that threaten the order of the city and which the Chorus is asked to stop (ἄλλ’ ὡς πολίτας μὴ κακοσπλάγχνους τιθῆς, εὐκηλος ἱσθι μηδ’ ἄγαν ὑπερφοβοῦ, 237-238).

Remaining blind to the operation of the Curse and to his fate until the end is the most profound characteristic of the tragic character in the play. Indeed, Eteocles’ determination to counteract the power of the external enemy by refusing to acknowledge its presence is something that his stichomythia with the Chorus highlights. In Greek drama, stichomythias signify intensity; as in the parodos, here too the increased intensity is caused by the outbreak of extramural noises as the Chorus draw attention to new sounds reaching their ears: καὶ μὴν ἀκοῷ ἀ’ ἰππικῶν φρυγμάτων (indeed, I can hear the neighing of horses, 245). Here, the present tense of ἀκοῷ suggests that the sounds would be enacted anew, interrupting the dialogue between the characters and reviving the atmosphere of the parodos.205 This is further attested by the present tense in the verbs that follow where the Chorus suggest that “the city is groaning to its foundations” (στένει πόλις γῆθεν, 247) and that the clatter at the gates is increasing (ἀραγμός δ’ ἐν πύλαις ὀφέλλεται, 249). Contrasting the Chorus’ focus on extramural sound, Eteocles continues to ignore the noises-off but instead focuses exclusively on the effects of human sound, responding that the Chorus’ descriptive language itself is the threat to the city; his first response to the women’s report of the noises is “if you can hear them, do not make it clear” (μὴ νυν ἀκοοῦσ’ ἐμφανῶς ἄκου ἄγαν, 246). The juxtaposition in ἐμφανῶς ἄκου, literally translating into “listen visually”, underscores the element of synaesthesia that we saw more elaborately in the parodos. Eteocles is asking the women to not visualise the enemy with their words anymore (ἐμφανῶς), framing this action as a danger that is bigger than the one outside the gates. This verbal visualisation is what Eteocles seeks to protect his city from.

Like in the parodos, the appearance of noises-off in the first episode consumes the Chorus whose stichomythia with Eteocles now becomes a sequence of verses that resemble short monologues more than they do verbal exchanges.206

205 On the various uses of καὶ μὴν as emphatic particle and as expression to denote present action, see Denniston (1934: 350-355).
206 Mastronarde (1979: 76) also observes the “absence of contact” between the two parties and notes that it is unusual for Aeschylus. Hutchinson (1985: 85), however, adds a parallel to the discussion referring to Eum. 778-891, where Athena tries to conciliate the Furies.
Eteocles, on the one hand, is trying to silence the Chorus: οὐ σίγα μηδὲν τῶν ἔρεις κατὰ πτόλιν; (will you not stay silent instead of speaking about those things in public?), he asks them in 230. Then later again he asks: οὐκ εἰς φθόρον σιγῶς ἀνασχήμη τάδε; (can’t you put up with it silently, confound you?) in 232. In both instances, the use of vocabulary for sound and language shows that his main hope is to stop the production of harmful speech. Finally, to their addresses to the gods he responds παλινστομεῖς αὐθίνι μηδὲν τρείς (are you uttering ill-omened words again while touching the images [of the gods]?) in 258. In those lines, Eteocles’ repetitive use of σίγα and σιγῶς, together with the verb παλινστομεῖς, once again underscore his perception of the threat as something produced by man.

The Chorus, on the other hand, are focused on the external noises and do not respond to the king’s pleas but instead, continuing their behaviour from the parodos, address the gods in a frenetic state of panic. Here too the Chorus would have been falling in front of the statues of the gods, recalling their prayers in the parodos as Eteocles’ comment on 258 indicates (θεγγάνουσ’ ἀγαλμάτων). Their prayers have a lamenting tone: ὧς ξυντέλεια, μὴ προδότες πυργώματα (oh assembled Gods, do not betray the walls), they cry in 251. They continue by asking the gods of the city to not put them in the fate of slavery (θεοὶ πολιται, μὴ με δούλειας τυχεῖν, 253) and, lastly, they ask Almighty Zeus to turn his arrow against the enemy (ὁ παγκράτες Ζεῦ, τρέψον εἰς ἐχθροῦς βέλος, 255). Eteocles finally gets their attention with his accusation of disrespecting the images in 258, to which the women respond that it is fear that has taken hold of their words (ἀψυχίαι γὰρ γλῶσσαν ἄρπαξει φόβος, 259).

One main difference between the debate of the first episode and the one in the second episode (discussed in Chapter 4) is that, unlike the second episode, attempts to instil reason from one side to the other are successful here. To Eteocles’ request for silence (σίγησον, 262), the Chorus respond with the repeated affirmative σιγῶ· (I will be silent, 263).207 Once their silence has been secured, Eteocles gives the Chorus a series of commands which are focused on changing

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207 Eteocles’ plea in 260 (αἰτομακρυνοί μοι κοίφον εἰ δοθῆς τέλος [please comply with my little request!]) is phrased as a mock prayer. As Hutchinson (1985: 86) rightly notes, ἀιτομακρύνοι and εἰ δοθῆς traditionally mark a prayer made to a divinity that can fulfil the mortal’s request. As for the Chorus’ response, λέγοις ἂν ὡς τάχειστα is a typical, general kind of response to pleads, which is encountered later again in the Arming Scene (713) when the Chorus are trying to persuade Eteocles to change his mind about fighting Polyneices. See also Supp. 455-6.
the prayers of the Chorus from harmful to useful. In this regard, Brown’s reading of the episode as an expression of Eteocles’ disagreement with the Chorus about the appropriate mode of prayer is correct. Eteocles’ concerns are not about religion per se, but rather about the sound through which the prayers are voiced.

The women are first advised to listen to Eteocles’ exemplary prayers (κύμων ἀκούσας εὐγμάτων, 267), then utter the holy, prosperous ululation of triumph (οὐλογμέν ἢδεν εὐμενή πανόντος, 268). The assonance of vowels produces a verse of powerful sound effects, manifesting the potential impact that the ‘right kind of sound’ would have. This sacrificial cry that the Chorus are asked to imitate (θυσίας βΟapolis, 269) contrasts with the effect of their current cries, as it would restore confidence among the citizens (λόουσα πολέμιον φόβον, 270). This kind of sound, the king continues, is the one that will help the city gain the favour of the gods, unlike the effect of praying to the gods mournfully (φιλοστόνως, 279) or with ineffective and wild pantings (ἐν ματαίοις κάγριοις ποιφύμασιν, 280). Recalling his former characterisations of the Chorus’ prayers as αὔειν and λακάζειν in 186, verses 179 and 280 therefore once again underscore the king’s initial perception of the threat of war as the product of the city’s internal noise.

Indeed, before departing the scene, Eteocles announces that he aims to prepare for the battle before the city’s inner order is destroyed again by the hasty and noisy words of a Messenger (πρὶν ἄγγελον σπερχόν τε καὶ ταχυρρόθους λόγους ἱκέσθαι καὶ φλέγειν χρείας ὑπο; 285-286). Distancing himself and his city from the noise of the enemy that the Chorus highlights from as early as the parodos, the sounds of their weapons, shouts and horses, Eteocles’ comment is a final attempt to downplay the threat of war: the only sound from outside that can be truly harmful to the city is the human speech of the Messenger. Eteocles’ exit concludes the first part of the play.

In this chapter, through a close examination of the dramaturgy of the parodos we have seen how the play indicates the enemy’s double identity as a human and as a daimon from the outset of the play. After the prayers of the

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208 I am referring here to his article discussed in p. 79 above.

209 West’s edition prints ἄγγελος, however, the plural makes it seem out of place. See also Hutchinson (1985: 89). For this reason, I have replaced the word with the singular ἄγγελον form in this instance according to O’Nc. Verses 282-284 have provoked controversy in the discussion of the staging of the Redepeare due to its implications for the placement of warriors on the gates prior to the Messenger’s announcements in 375-676. See also n. 379.
parodos, where the ominous noises-off and the singing of the Chorus have filled the theatrical stage with a supernatural presence, I have also examined the first episode. In that part of the chapter, we saw how the king’s blindness to the operation of the Curse is made evident through his debate with the Chorus. Both Eteocles’ blindness as well as the central role of the weapons in the representation of the operation of the Erinys will be made clearer in the Redepaare, the central scene of the play, as the next chapter will explore. There, the Messenger’s descriptions of the enemy’s shields to the king and his citizens will progressively build an image of the war and the divine alliances of the two sides. Ultimately, Eteocles’ fear about the hasty and noisy words of the Messenger will turn out to be prophetic.
CHAPTER 3

Daimones of Bronze: The Warriors, the Shields and the Cosmos (375-676)

3.1 Introduction and Methodological Approach to the sieben Redepaare

Variety in the dramaturgical representation of the war is a central feature of the Seven Against Thebes. In every scene, the way in which the weapons are portrayed in the text is reshaped along with the dramaturgy, bringing the enemy closer and making its daimonic identity more evident. The role of the metals, which has been negotiated implicitly so far, comes to the fore in this climatic scene where the vivid descriptions of the shields of the attackers and defenders become a synecdoche for the war. Placed in the middle of the play and portraying the liminal space between Eteocles’ earlier depiction as a confident leader (264-286) and his sudden fatalistic surrender to death later in the same episode (675-719), this central scene encapsulates the reshaping and refinement of the king’s mind as he moves from a state of blindness to tragic awareness.

After the orderly chaos of the parodos and the first episode, the Redepaare makes the weapons’ role as referents to the enemy, more prominent. In the 300 verses of the scene, the Messenger gives seven reports to Eteocles on the enemy, using the shields of the warriors as surrogates for the descriptions of their owners. The emblems on the shields receive lengthy descriptions, which become more nuanced as the scene unfolds. Indeed, the scene is renowned for its rich ekphrasis, which conjures up the literary past of the weapons as epic props. Specifically, the Redepaare exhibits extensive allusions to and interaction with the Iliad, especially the making of the shield of Achilles in Iliad 18. However,

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211 For metal materiality in the Homeric epic see 1.4 and for bibliography on the shield as an ekphrastic object in epic poetry see n. 18.

212 Il. 18.478-608. Scholarly interest in the scene has been centred predominantly around its metapoetic implications, namely, the ways in which literary composition is exemplified through the implicit comparison the scene raises with the Homeric epic. The most recent discussion is Uhlig (2019: 98-160), where the evocation of Homeric epic in the Aeschylean scene is a central factor in the shields’ ability to operate as speaking agents. Uhlig argued that, through the extensive focus on their making in the scene, the material and the art invested in it, the shield transforms into a musical instrument, a prop that produces sound in the text through its own properties and form. In turn, the scene’s rich ekphrasis insinuates the shields into tragedy’s tradition of implicit
Aeschylus’ shields are not limited to the conduct of metaliterary discourse, but are reconfigured into a dramaturgical tool that advances the dramatic action through their relationships to the human actants. In this way, as the weapons identify with their carriers, endowing them with the agency of their emblems, they shape Eteocles’ strategic response who allocates his warriors to defend the gates accordingly.

In my reading of the seven speeches, I explore the relationships that the shields form with the characters of the play, namely the absent Argive warriors who are *presented* by the Messenger’s speeches, and Eteocles. In terms of their relationship to the warriors, I will show that each of the shields becomes a surrogate for the mind of its bearer through the text’s emphasis on the physical contact between the shield and the body of the combatant. In the Arming Scene, we will see Eteocles donning his armour in a symbolic embodiment of his role as the Iron divider of Oedipus’ property. In the Redepaare, the shields of the Argives are not visible onstage, however, the text portrays them as unified with their bearers; in this sense, they too operate as invisible props.

The assimilation between the weapon and the body of the combatant is also expressed as a two-fold relationship: first, the rich language of metal and metal-making in the scene draws attention to the past lives of the shields through remarks on the creator and the creative process (ἐσχημάτισται δ’ ἄσπις οὐ σμικρὸν τρόπον, 465; ὁ σηματουργὸς δ’ οὗ τις εὐτελής, 491; σήμα προσεμιχανημένον, 643), underlining the moment in which the objects transition from their metallic *thingness* (χαλκήλατοι […] κόδωνες, 386; εὐχλάκιον κράνους, 459; χαλκηλάτωι σάκει, 539-540) into *objecthood*. In doing so, the text emphasises the skill of the contemplation on its own materiality and comparison with its literary predecessors that the Redepaare represents, ultimately making the shield a negotiator of literary voice. For the discourse between the Redepaare and the Homeric epic see also Nagy’s elaborate discussion (2000: 97-118), in which he treats the scene as proof of a neo-epic tradition in literature to which both Aeschylus and Pindar are considered to belong.

213 For which see Chapter 4.

214 In theatrical terms, the word ‘prop’ would technically not be applicable to the shields of the Redepaare (see Sofer’s definition of the term is that of an “inanimate object that is visibly manipulated by an actor in the course of performance” (2003: 31). However, I have opted to use the term in this study in order to reflect the textual emphasis on the physical contact between the warrior and the weapon, which is instrumental in the transmission of agency from the second to the first. A similar use of the term is encountered in Chaston (2010: 67). This will become more elaborate in the representation of the weapons in the next scene (*Sept.* 676-719), where the impact of the armour on the warrior through physical contact is the main interpretative key to Eteocles’ behaviour (for which see Chapter 4).
craftsman, the cunning and the intention through which the shields have received their threatening emblems. As such, the human mind that designed the emblems and the hand that created them are portrayed as taking part in a cause-and-effect relationship with the emblems. Agency is not a one-way street. Metal is filled with vibrant materiality, but in order to transmit its agency to humans, it needs to be both processed and touched.

Indeed, not only does the maker determine the shape of the emblems, but the emblems in turn are presented as indicators of the minds of the warriors who bear them. This is better understood from the way in which the finished objects are described. In the Redepaare, the shields form the body’s circular surrounding (σώματος προβλήματι, 540), they are being whirled by their bearers (δινήσωντος, 490) and they attack the bodies of their opponents (γυμνωθῆν ἄρπάσαι δορί, 624). The shields are thus presented as the warriors’ ‘second skin’ -to use Mueller’s apt term-, extensions of the “natural limits of their biological agency”. Together, the two different layers of their relationship show the continuity between the object’s past and its present, and the physical touch is the channel through which agency is transmitted from one end to the other. Overall, thingness, objecthood, and the human mind and the body of the warrior become one unit, shaping and being shaped by the other. It is through this unification that the emblems are enabled to ‘speak’ on behalf of their owners and to operate as their surrogates.

In terms of the relationship that the shields form with Eteocles, the identification of the weapons with their bearer has important implications for his decision to fight against his brother in the Arming Scene (675-719), which we will examine in the next chapter. As Zeitlin has convincingly argued, the depictions on the shields of the Argives relate the war to the mythological past of the Labdacids, from the life of Oedipus and his curses, to the present, to the war and the fulfilment of the curse by his sons. By connecting the warriors to their

216 The perception of touch in the ancient world is discussed in Purves (2017: 1-20), where the author defines the spectrum of the body, within which the sense of touch is considered alongside the oldest and most recent philosophical contemplations on the subject matter. For a detailed insight into Aristotle’s take on the importance of the sense of touch, see Steiner-Goldner’s contribution in the same volume (2017: 50-63).
217 This was first elaborated on extensively by Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 33-102). In her monograph Under the Sign of the Shield, Zeitlin offered a detailed reading of the seven pairs of speeches, delineating all the mythological and historical implications of the emblems and showing that the shields together operate as a nexus, in which every new emblem that the Messenger describes reflects the ones that have preceded it and foresees those that follow it, ultimately depicting the
emblems, the shield therefore becomes a link between the Argive army and the Curse of Oedipus. I argue that it is this realisation of the double identity of the enemy that makes Eteocles surrender to the power of the Erinys, a realisation that results in his self-allocation to the seventh gate and his famous debate with the Chorus in the Arming Scene.  

Specifically, as he is listening to the Messenger’s reports on the emblems, the king offers his interpretation of their signs and allocates his warriors to the gates accordingly. However, it is not until the last shield at the seventh gate that the king will fully realise the connection between the warriors and their divine alliances. Considering this, the king’s change of mind is not as sudden or unjustified as previous scholarship has assessed, but it is the product of his reasoning through the imaginary props of the Redepaare.

The shields have multi-layered interpretative meanings that extend beyond their importance to the dramatic action. Through the process of Eteocles’ reasoning through imagery, the scene becomes part of Aeschylus’ tragic irony, depicting the elusiveness of the human mind and the importance of personal perspective. Literary performances, including epic and tragedy, stimulate ‘δοκεῖν’ through hearing; in a performance, ekphrastic literary objects would evoke cognitive reactions and interpretations, which would have varied depending on the personal perspectives of the spectators. In other words, the play would create thoughts and feelings, engage its audiences with the worlds it depicted, which they would experience together with the characters; as such, they provoked emotional reactions and contemplation on the events they portray.

This process becomes part of the dramatic action in the Redepaare, where the Messenger adopts the role of narrator and Eteocles, as his audience, reacts to war, its relation to the family of the Labdacids, and the passage of time. In the years that followed, Zeitlin’s work was expanded upon in the work of Chaston (2010: 85-117). Adopting the angle of cognitive psychology, Chaston sought to identify the cognitive schemes that knowledge of and exposure to shield representations in vases and iconography, as well as experiences of drama and its conventions, would have been activated in the minds of the play’s audiences, allowing them to decode the shields’ meanings. In referencing these two works, I do not wish to overlook the significant works that preceded it, including those of Bacon (1964), Benardete (1967/8: 5-17), Thalmann (1978: 105-135) and Vernant and Vidal-Naquette (1988 [1981]: 273-300), all of which contributed substantially towards the decoding of the semiotics of the scene. More contemporary works on the shields of the Redepaare include those of Berman (2007: 33-86), Poli-Palladini (2016: 113-136). In these works, the scholars have taken different approaches to the shields, focusing mostly on the historical basis of the representations and their relation to the geography of Thebes and its literary representation (Berman), or the function of the shields as dramaturgical mechanisms for the manipulation of time (Poli-Palladini).

For the controversy about Eteocles’ behaviour in 675-719 see the relevant discussion in 1.2 and for references to specific works see n. 38.
his descriptions. Throughout the scene, the king listens to the speeches of the Messenger and allocates his warriors to the gates based on his understanding of the signs. However, the results are frustrating; much like in the first episode, Eteocles will fail to engage with the shields correctly. His determination to be victorious will make him once again blind to the daimonic operator of the war. It will not be until the seventh shield that he will realise the link between the city, his oikos and the paternal Curse. In exposing Eteocles’ own false perceptions about the outcome of the war and his blindness to the signs on the shields, Aeschylus asks an implicit question: can one ultimately avoid their ‘blindness’?

Questions about perspective also extend to the Messenger’s speeches. Narratology and ekphrasis are both concerned with the complexity of personal perspective.\textsuperscript{219} Indeed, the Messenger’s resemblance to the Iliadic bard, together with the text’s repeated validations of his credibility, create an implicit expectation of an objective account. However, how reliable and objective we should consider the Messenger’s account to be, is a question that Aeschylus leaves open for interpretation. As Rader rightly comments, if the scene is ultimately a hermeneutical process, then the hermeneutic limitations of its characters should also be taken into consideration.\textsuperscript{220} The Messenger is not as an objective a narrator, since the character is ultimately reporting based on his own experience and interpretation of the things he has witnessed, for example, it is his opinion that Amphion is a fair-looking man (βλάστημα καλλίπροφον, 533) just like it is his assessment that he is unlikely to fight in a petty way (ἐλθὼν δ’ ἔοικεν οὐ καπηλεύσειν μάχην, 545). After all, just like Eteocles, the Messenger has emotional responses to the shields to which he has become an observer. Just like the Iliadic spectators of the armour of Achilles, the Messenger experiences both fear (ἐφριξα δινήσαντος, 490) as well as admiration (ὁ σηματουργός οὗ τῆς εὐτελῆς ὁρ’ ἦν 491) at their sight.\textsuperscript{221} Besides, unlike the epic bard who is an all-knowing narrator, the Messenger’s self-validation of his own reports is the only reassurance we are given. Taking this into consideration, the Redepaare is read in

\textsuperscript{219} For more on narratology and ekphrasis see also Fowler (1991: 25-35), who addresses the matter by drawing from the Aeneid.
\textsuperscript{220} Rader (2015: 67-69).
\textsuperscript{221} Cf. II. 19.14-18.
a new light. Aeschylus is ultimately asking us, to what extent is tragic representation reliable?

In summary, as the play progresses to the second episode, the association between Aeschylus’ play and Homeric epic becomes more direct and more central to the dramatic action. Aeschylus uses Homeric motifs to both serve the narrative of his story and to reflect on literature and representation. He thus indirectly offers his own perspective on the implicit literary comparison with Homer: if the epic shield can be reconfigured into a tool that serves both the play’s dramatic action and its poet’s meditation on literature, then the identity of the ‘most skilful literary craftsman’ may well be re-evaluated. With that in mind, I will proceed to show how the staging of the scene creates the premises for the double-layered discussion between Eteocles and his Messenger.

3.2 Relocating the Dramatic Battle – a Double Entrance (369-374)

In every scene of the Seven, Eteocles’ response to the war is juxtaposed with that of another character. In the first episode, Eteocles was portrayed as the powerful king of Thebes who was arguing with the frightened women of the Chorus. In the Redepaare, however, the opposition is set between two equally powerful parties: the Messenger, who holds detailed knowledge about the enemy, and the king, who is there to make the final decisions of the strategic plan for the city’s defence.

Symmetry and the notion of the double are the defining characteristics of the Redepaare. Before the discourse of the two characters is initiated, the dramaturgical premises of the second episode are established at the end of the first stasimon, when the women of the Chorus announce the entrances of the Messenger and the king:

ὅτοι κατόπτης, ὡς ἕμοι δοκεῖ, στρατοῦ
πευκό τιν’ ἤμιν ὃ φίλαι νέαν φέρει,
σπουδήι διώκων ποιμήνων χνόας ποδοῦν.

καὶ μὴν ἄναξ δὴ αὐτός, Οἰδίπου τόκος
eἰς ἄρτικολλον, ἄγγελου λόγον μαθεῖν·
σπουδὴ δὲ καὶ τοῦδ’ οὐκ ἀπαρτίζει πόδα.
It appears to me, that the eye-witnessing Messenger is bringing some news to us about the enemy, my dearest: he is forcing the sockets of his feet to move him rapidly.

And indeed, this is the king himself, Oedipus’ son, exactly on time to hear the words of the Messenger: speed is making his feet uneven, too.

*Sept. 369-374*

In these six verses, both the lack of a break between the two announcements, as well as the symmetry in the wording (ὁ τοις κατόπτης - καὶ μὴν ἀναξ δὸς ἀφότος on the one hand, then σπουδὴ διώκων and σπουδὴ δὲ καὶ τοῦδ’, on the other) suggest that the two characters would have become visible onstage simultaneously, most likely entering the stage from the two parodoi. The double entrance would have made the two characters resemble two opponents meeting for battle. However, the stage presence and introduction of each of the warriors on either side would have differed from that of the other.

The Messenger’s arrival and its preceding text are the first indications of the scene’s evocation of an Iliadic narrator. The relationship between the tragic messenger and the heralds and messengers of the Homeric epic, as well as tragedy’s extensive use of the epic convention as a literary tool that connects the past with the present, are topics that have received adequate scholarly discussion over time.

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222 According to Taplin (1977: 146) this is the only instance of two consecutive character entrance announcements without a break between them in our corpus of surviving tragedies. In terms of character entrance, Taplin (1977: 148) was right to suggest that the two characters would not have entered from the same side, as this kind of entrance would have created confusion among the audience, and it would have somewhat counteracted the symmetrical effect suggested by the text and the rest of the scene suggest. The scholar’s other claim that the two characters would have arrived at the centre of the stage simultaneously but would not have come into the audience’s view at the same time, for reasons of realistic representation is also very attractive, although there is no supporting evidence to testify in its favour. Finally, the possibility of Eteocles’ emerging from a functional *skene* that would represent the palace of the Labdacids (Seaford [2012: 337-339]) has rightly been excluded both by Taplin (1977: 453) and, more recently, by Liapis (2019: 93-95). As I show in the next section, Eteocles would have entered the stage accompanied by his Theban champions according to his promise in 284-286. As such, even if there was a *skene* or backdrop that represented the *oikos* of the Labdacids in the *Seven*, then it would not have had a functional use in the Redepare.

223 See Barrett (2002: *passim*, p. 23-55 especially for Aeschylus where the Messenger of the *Persians* is compared to the Homeric Messenger, and 2007: 250-254), Dickin (2009: 17-19, 108), Perris (2011: 1-10). The questionable accuracy of the Messengers’ reports is also discussed in
Indeed, as Barrett notes, tragic texts typically endow their Messengers with voices and speeches that resemble the epic narrator as a way of evoking their authority and validating their statements. In the Redepaare, however, this is amplified. Already before the Messenger’s entrance, we observe conspicuous usage of Homeric phrases and words which create an atmosphere that recalls the narrative of the Trojan war. This is unusual for Aeschylus who rarely borrows entire phrases from Homer; in fact, as Hutchinson notes, the first stasimon of the Seven contains the largest collection of Homeric phrases in surviving Aeschylus. The epic sentiment will be further enhanced in the Redepaare by the content and structure of the Messenger’s speech. In his seven speeches, the Messenger’s narrative repeatedly evokes the Iliad in his extensive telling of the events of the war. Like an epic bard, he uses embedded speech to presence the warriors, and, more importantly, his detailed description of the fabrication of their shields and their emblems evokes the audience’s memories of Iliad 18. Overall, the Messenger of the Redepaare is one of the most Homeric messengers in the corpus of Aeschylean tragedies.

The character would have entered the stage alone, as the Argive warriors he will describe will only be visualised through his narrative. Their invisibility is, however, counterbalanced by the extensive use of the language of sight which validates the Messenger’s reports throughout the scene. This is already made evident in the first stasimon, where the Chorus’ introduction of the Messenger as an eyewitness (κατόπτης, 369) pre-validates his upcoming reports. It is also a marker of his contrast with the Chorus, whose previous description of the enemy had relied merely on their hearing; unlike the previous scenes, Eteocles will now receive direct, eye-witnessed facts. The Messenger’s visual contact with the enemy is something that he himself highlights several times throughout the play. In the prologue, he establishes the validity of his report by stressing that he had

Barrett’s work (2002: xvi-xvii). For the importance of Messenger speeches in tragedy as producers of ‘complex mental imagery’ (ekphrasis) see Chaston (2010: 22-30).
225 Cf. Sept. 300 χερμάδ᾽ ὀκριόεσσαν with Il. 4.518 χερμαδίωι […] ὀκρώσατε; Sept. 316 ἐμβαλόντες ἀρείῳ with Il. 16.656 ἀνάλκιντα θυμὸν ἐνῆκεν; Sept. 322 Άιδα προίασε with Il. 1.3 Άιδι προῖασεν.
226 Hutchinson (1985: 90). According to the same commentator, another example of a profound collection of Homeric elements in Aeschylus is found in the parodos of the Pers. 80, 100 and 109.
227 Il. 18.478-608.
228 For the reports of the Chorus see Chapter 2.
witnessed the facts himself (αὐτὸς κατόπτης, 41), and at the end of the scene, on his departure, he characterises his narrative as a definite and certain account of the events beyond the walls (καὶ σαφηνεῖα λόγου εἰδῶς τὰ τῶν θύραθεν ἀβλαβῆς ἔση, 66-67). In the Redepaare, the Messenger will also underscore the validity of his statements as soon as he begins to speak: λέγομι ἂν εἰδῶς εὐ τὰ τῶν ἐνοπτίων (I shall speak about the actions of the enemy, being well-aware [of them], 375), without any doubts or reservations.229 Confidence is a characteristic that most Aeschylean messengers share, however it is usually exhibited alongside acknowledgment of their limitations. In the Persians, for example, upon the completion of his narrative in the first episode, the Messenger says πολλῶν παρόντων δ’ ὀλγῇ ἀπαγγέλλω κακά (I have announced few of the many sufferings that were), then a bit later again ταῦτ’ ἐστ’ ἀληθή’ πολλά δ’ ἐκλείπω λέγον κακῶν (and those words are true; but I am omitting many of the evils in my speech).230 An even more hesitant messenger is encountered in the Agamemnon, where the Herald even tries to avoid giving his report: τί τούς ἀναλωθήντας ἐν ψήφῳ λέγειν, τὸν ζῶντα δ’ ἀλγεῖν χρῆ τύχης παλιγκότου; (why should we speak on the account of the dead, why do the living have to feel the pain of the stroke of destiny?).231 In comparison, the Messenger of the Redepaare is shown to have a great amount of confidence and this will show as soon as he takes the floor.

The invisibility of the Argives in the Redepaare is counterbalanced by the elaborate entrance of Eteocles as, whereas the Messenger’s entrance would have been that of one man, Eteocles’ entrance would have been accompanied by his attendants and armed Theban champions.232 The antithesis between the one and the many, together with the visual spectacle of Eteocles’ cohort, reinforces the victorious atmosphere that the king of Thebes had established prior to his exit from the scene in the first episode. It also implies a further antithesis on the metapoetic level: for every shield in the Messenger’s epic narrative, the physical representation of a shield would have appeared in response. In the first case, the enemy soldiers

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229 Much like in the prologue, εἰδῶς certifies the secure knowledge that the Messenger holds, while εὖ is a remark on the quality of the knowledge. Following this, the Messenger further confirms that he will be able to report exactly which warriors are standing outside the gates (ἐν πόλεις ἐκεῖνος, 376). The Messenger’s certainty about the objective validity of his reports is seen again in Sept. 651-652. For the actual validity of his reports, see below.
230 Pers. 330 and 513-514.
231 Ag. 570-571.
232 The stage presence of the Theban warriors in the Redepaare has been debated extensively. See 3.3 below.
will be described through the imagery of their shields conjured in the mind’s eye; in the second case, the king will be introducing soldiers that are visible onstage, whose shields will not need a description, as they stand in plain sight. The role of the Theban champions has deeper implications for the dramatic action too, as every speech delivered by the Messenger will be followed by the departure of a Theban, paving the way for Eteocles’ isolation until he asks for his own armour and, assimilating himself with his soldiers through his donning of the armour, departs the stage too (719).

Altogether, this scene is a juxtaposition between the Messenger’s invisible warriors against Eteocles’ visible champions or, on a metapoetic level, a juxtaposition between the epic, imagined shields that are presented through language and the tragic weapons onstage. As soon as the Messenger and the king enter, the premises of their roles and perspectives are set implicitly by the stage action and language. That Eteocles was joined onstage by his Theban champions has not always been taken for granted. On the contrary, although the king’s entrance has received a significant number of scholarly analyses, the matter still remains open. However, as the presence of the warriors is an essential aspect of the visual juxtaposition between the two characters and the metaliterary discourse that my study covers, before proceeding with my analysis of the seven shields, a digression is necessary to clarify this issue. In the section that follows, I offer an insight into the most prominent of the works on the subject and delineate the reasons why I consider the accompaniment of Eteocles by his armed soldiers to be the most likely scenario.

3.3 Mirroring the Invisible – the Messenger and the Seven Champions

Eteocles’ accompaniment by his champions would offer a lot to the dramatic action, however, it has been a matter of controversy for years. Oppositions to the appearance of the six champions onstage is predominantly based on two arguments. The first argument is the lack of sufficient textual indications for the entrance of Theban champions: the warriors are not announced by the Chorus, they are not addressed at any point during the scene and there is no other explicit
remark on their presence. Eteocles uses two deictics in 408 (τόνδ᾽) and 472 (τόνδε), however, these are not considered sufficient to prove the stage presence of his warriors. As Taplin rightly points out, deictics can be used to describe a character who is absent from the stage. This usage is exemplified by the Messenger who also deploys deictics in his descriptions of the Argive leaders, even though they would not have been visible onstage. A similar example is found in verse 80, where ὅδε is used by the women of the Chorus to describe the approaching army despite their inability to see it. What is more, philological remarks on the originality and form of the two verses have contested the place of the deictics in the original; although these arguments are not conclusive, they have contributed towards further questioning concerning the presence of the warriors onstage.

The second, and more prominent, argument concerns the inconsistency of the tenses in Eteocles’ speeches. Specifically, in speeches one, five, six and seven the king uses the future and present tenses (ἀντιτάξω, 408; ἔστιν, 553; ἀντιτάξομαι, 621 and ἔστιν, 672). In speeches two and three he opts for present perfect (τέτακται, 448; πέπεμπται, 473), then he uses the aorist in speech four (ξυνήγαγεν, 508). Whereas the present and future tenses support the presence of and allocation of the warriors during the Redepaare, the perfects and the aorist make it difficult to explain why the king would be describing a visible departure onstage as a decision that has already been made. To this day, none of the solutions proposed by the

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233 Taplin’s work was the first to argue extensively against the presence of the Theban warriors on these grounds (1977: 149-156), expanding on an older argument made by Fraenkel (1964a: 276). For Taplin’s reliance on the Significant Action Hypothesis throughout his work and the criticism that his methodology has received see 1.1 and n. 385. In more recent years, Taplin’s rejection of the warriors has been accepted by Poli-Palladini (2016: 114) and Hutchinson (1985: 105). Finally, comprehensive readings of the multitude of scholarly works that preceded Taplin’s monograph, including the theory in Wolff’s of which Poli-Palladini has offered a more nuanced interpretation, can be found in Otis (1960: 155-156), Taplin (1977: 149-152) and Winnington-Ingram (1983: 23-24).

234 Sept. 395 (τῶιδε), 424 (ὅδε), 470 (τῶιδε), 544 (τῶιδε), and 631 (τόνδε). For Taplin’s discussion on the deictics see Taplin (1977: 150-151).

235 On the τειχοσκοπία of the Chorus see also section 2.2.2.

236 The deictic in 408 survives as τόνδε in MSS and Ω, but Grotius proposed a correction to τόνδε, then 472 was completely eliminated by Harberton. West has accepted both changes (1990: 85), however there is no explanation for his choice. Hutchinson’s commentary, where τόνδε is also chosen over τόνδε and 472 is marked as interpolated, justifies the scholar’s choices simply on the ground that the implications of the deictics for the presence of the Theban warriors is unattractive (Hutchinson 1985: 105, 111, 120). Overall, the elimination of the deictics has yet to receive sufficient explanation. On the matter see also Poochigian (2007: 7).

237 Taplin (1977: 151). Taplin’s point of view finds more support in Hutchinson’s commentary (1985: 104-105), according to which Eteocles is making his choice of champions during the
scholars on either side has been widely accepted without objections. In this section, I am hoping to shed new light on this intriguing issue, allowing us to see the Redepaare with fresh eyes. Overall, I argue that the presence of the Thebans onstage is necessary to the advancement of the dramatic action, while also being the most effective way to dramatise the unavoidability of Eteocles’ tragic fate.

As I said previously, the first in-depth argument against the presence of the champions was proposed by Taplin. However, as he had acknowledged the multiple benefits that the presence of the Thebans onstage would entail for the dramatic action, Taplin took a moderate position. Specifically, he argued that the presence of the warriors would complement the dramatic action by giving a clearly-defined, functional role to the Redepaare, while it would also help visualise Eteocles’ isolation. As such, Taplin decided to adopt an intermediating route. In his monograph *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, he proposed that Eteocles is indeed allocating his warriors during the Redepaare according to the Messenger’s reports. However, the warriors would not be present onstage, but the king’s words should be interpreted to have an off-stage effect at the time they are uttered. This kind of spatial (but not temporal) divide between Eteocles and the warriors, Taplin suggested, would allow for this kind of verbal and grammatical flexibility. His proposal has its merits by addressing the problem of the tenses without depriving the scene of its functional role, however it gives rise to a question about the function of verses 280-286. There, Eteocles had earlier stated that he was planning to place six warriors with himself as the seventh on the gates (ἕξ ἐμοί ζὶν ἔβδόμωι, 282). He had then argued that he wanted to do so prior to the arrival of the Messenger which would spread panic among the warriors with his noisy words (πρὶν ἄγγέλου σπερχνοὺς τε καὶ ταχυρρόθους λόγους ἱκέσθαι καὶ φλέγειν χρείας ὑπὸ [before the noisy and hasty words of the Messenger shall come and set everything on fire out of an emergency], 285-286).

Redepaare. In terms of the inconsistency of the tenses, Hutchinson denotes that the transition from present/future to the past serves the purpose of progressively taking the audience’s attention away from what is happening onstage. Leaving them under the impression that the choice was made beforehand, the text then shifts to the presence once more to highlight that the seventh gate has not been allocated a warrior yet, and so, for Hutchinson, the change of the tenses is the result of Aeschylus being purposefully unclear. However, the scholar does not engage closely with matters of staging. For the discussion on the deictics see also p. 111, 120 and 143.

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238 Taplin (1977: 152).
The return of Eteocles in the Redepaare both without his champions but with the purpose of making his allocation on the spot creates a problem of inconsistency: there is no explanation in the text for the king’s return with his mission unaccomplished and his warriors absent. As a solution, Taplin suggested that verses 280-286 were either originally located just before 675 and have therefore been falsely misplaced in our surviving version of the Seven, or alternatively that 285 and 286 have been interpolated. However, the nature of this suggestion is a little arbitrary since no such version of the text is transmitted by any of our surviving manuscripts nor have the scholiasts suggested a textual corruption in 284-286. In a paradoxical way, the attempt to use the text to reconstruct the accompanying staging has resulted in the destruction of the text. In light of all of this, Taplin’s argument should be re-evaluated.

In more recent years, one of the most prominent theories that offered a different approach was made by Poli-Palladini. Expanding on an earlier theory by Wolff, Poli-Palladini assumed the allocation of the warriors to have already taken place by the time Eteocles enters the stage. In her attempt to solve the inconsistencies of the tenses, she argued that Eteocles is merely returning in the Redepaare to announce the names of his fighters to the Thebans and, consequently, to the theatrical audience. The offstage allocation of the warriors would explain the two perfects and the aorist in Eteocles’ speeches. As for the three verbs in the future tense in 408, 621 and 672, she interprets them on the basis of the military connotations of the verb ἀντιτάσσω. By using it in its future tense, the scholar argued, Eteocles is projecting the future event of the battle, not referring to the allocation of the soldiers. In other words, Poli-Palladini treated the Redepaare as

240 Taplin (1977: 142-146).
241 Taplin (1977: 145). There is also no support for Taplin’s proposition that the τάξω of verse 284 was originally ἀξω. Indeed, Taplin makes a similar suggestion of an interpolation later in the same work in an attempt to dismiss the scenario of an arming scene in verses 675-676 (Taplin 1977: 161). The suggestion will be discussed separately in 4.1.2 and 4.1.3.
244 Poli-Palladini (2016: 113 and 115-116) relies on the hero’s promise to post the warriors before the arrival of the Messenger in 284. However, the ambiguity of τάσσω as a verb denoting both setting on the line and giving orders means that it is possible that Eteocles was referring to the selection of the champions only, and not to their allocation to the seven gates. See also below.
245 Poli-Palladini (2016: 115-124). To strengthen her argument, the scholar also highlights that the use of the future tense in Classical Greek denotes an action that will happen in the future regardless of the moment in which it was taken (p. 117).
a scene whose purpose is dramaturgical rather than functional. \^{246} In her mind, the scene’s role would be predominantly to inform the audience about the action that took place during Eteocles’ absence. Such action, she concluded, would make the tragic twist of the initiation of the Arming Scene all the more unexpected. \^{247}

Poli-Palladini’s explanation of the inconsistency of the tenses is not unattractive. However, as her overall theory necessitates demoting the Redepaare from a functional scene into an announcement scene, it needs to be treated with caution. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, in order to dismiss a staging element that is implicitly indicated by the text, there needs to be a positive reason. However, neither Taplin nor Poli-Palladini have presented one, and their arguments are based solely on the need to explain the different tenses in Eteocles’ speeches. Furthermore, neither argument offers an explanation that is fully satisfactory. As I said earlier, Taplin’s version requires implementing radical changes to the text which are neither in line with the manuscripts, nor recommended by the editors. As for Poli-Palladini’s suggestion, eliminating of the act of posting is also not unproblematic for the dramatic action, since if we are to assume that Eteocles has already sent out his champions by the time their opponents are announced, then that means that his self-allocation to the seventh gate in 673-676 would be involuntary. Furthermore, if all thirteen warriors were on the gates already by the time the Redepaare takes place, then this means that neither the validity of the Messenger’s reports nor Eteocles’ interpretation of the signs would have an impact on the tragic outcome of the play. And whereas the poet’s remark on the subjectivity of personal perspective would still stand regardless of the timeframe in which the discussion between the characters would take place, to remove the consequences of Eteocles’ choices from the equation weakens its importance. On the contrary, the allocation of the warriors during the Redepaare explicitly depicts the consequences of his flaw, while their gradual departure visualises the character’s isolation onstage, an image of the unavoidability of his

\^{246} The functionality of the Redepaare as a build-up for the revelation of Eteocles’ tragic fate and as an indication for his upcoming change of mind has already been discussed extensively in Thalmann (1978: 105-135), while the same scholars have also highlighted its dramaturgical value as a substitute for the lack of the representation of the war onstage. A list of further arguments that have been discussed in relation to the developments of the Redepaare like the Opfertod theory, the matter of Eteocles’ freedom of choice, etc. are listed in Poli-Palladini (2016: 115).

\^{247} Poli-Palladini (2016: 133-136).
In light of this, it might be worth making one more attempt to explain the inconsistency of the tenses, and indeed there is a proposal that might be worth examining. Specifically, as far as temporal inconsistency is concerned, I am inclined to side with the argument expressed by Aaron Poochigian a few years prior to the publication of Poli-Palladini’s monograph, according to which there is a way to compromise the presence of the warriors with the language of the text without one contradicting the other.

With regards to character entrances, although Eteocles’ champions are not introduced by the Chorus, this is not necessarily indicative of their absence, as the phenomenon of character entrance without announcement is common in Aeschylus. As Hamilton notes that, out of forty-five character entrances in Aeschylean tragedy, twenty-four are not announced at all. Even within the Seven Against Thebes, the Scout enters the stage in verse 39 of the prologue without an announcement. At the same time, it is unlikely that Eteocles would have entered the stage alone; unless explicitly stated otherwise, all characters of high-class rankings were accompanied onstage by a small revenue of silent actors, who may or may not have been mentioned in the text. Truly, Eteocles’ request for his armour at the end of the Redepaare in 675-676 confirms that at least one attendant would have been with him, presumably carrying his armour. If that is the case, then it is probable that the champions would have entered the scene as Eteocles’ retinue, then come forth at the sound of their names. This suggestion was originally made by Poochigian and, to this day, it continues to be the most compelling argument.

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248 Poochigian (2007: 1). Although he ultimately chose to banish the warriors from the stage, Taplin also admitted to the several benefits that the acceptance of the Thebans onstage would offer to the interpretation of the scene. See Taplin (1977: 152).

249 Poochigian (2007: 1-11). Prior to this, Rehm’s work on the use of theatrical space in Aeschylus (Rehm 2012: 310-311) and Hogan’s commentary (1984: 251 and 254-255) had also favoured the presence of the champions onstage. However, as neither sufficiently justified their point of view (Rehm assumes “that the six Theban fighters enter with Eteocles” and Hogan’s explanation is limited to the reference of the two deictics and to the appeal of the visual spectacle), their arguments have little to add to this conversation.

250 Hamilton (1978: 63-64). However, inconsistencies between the different plays make it difficult to understand which types of characters receive an explicit entrance announcement and which do not.

251 See also Poochigian (2007: 2) and Bain (1981: 2 and 14). Taplin (1977: 79-80) has made the same argument and has used the revenue of the Queen in the Pers. 607-608 as an example to be applied across the entire corpus of the surviving plays.

252 This will be discussed in 4.1.3.

253 Poochigian (2007: 2-3). Poochigian’s suggestion has found resistance in scholarship as a result of the lack of the typical introductory formula that would have been used to introduce a new character in the scene. See Poli-Palladini (2016: 114). For a contrary point of view, see Hamilton
Poochigian did not see the past tenses in Eteocles’ speeches as inconsistent with the allocation to the gates happening during the Redepaare. In terms of the present perfects, he proposed that a signalling gesture by Eteocles towards the silent actors would result in τέτακται and πέπεμπται acquiring present meaning. Perhaps Poochigian’s argument becomes somewhat less convincing when it comes to the aorist ξυνήγαγεν in 508, where he claims that Eteocles deploys ξυνήγαγεν to refer to an opposition between the two warriors that existed already from before the war. In that regard, Poochigian argued, Eteocles is not selecting his champion, but fate and Hermes have already done the deed for him. This proposal is not very convincing; there is nothing in the text to attest in its favour and there is also no reference to a personal animosity between the two warriors. This weak point has so far been the strongest point of criticism of his theory in the works of those who wish to banish the Argives from the stage. However, I suggest that the problem can be resolved if we make a distinction in terms of time between the warriors’ selection by Eteocles to form his fellow commanders in chief, and their allocation to the specific gates.

For the selection of the warriors by Hermes to have happened in the past in 508 can be compatible with their presence onstage if we assume that, instead of

(1978: 64) who claims that this lack of announcement is justified on the grounds of the mid-scene entrance of the warriors, something that would not require their formal or full introduction.

254 The matter of gestures and their implications on the Greek stage has intrigued scholars working on Greek drama and stage life extensively. See Mueller (2011) for a powerful engagement with the politics of gestures in Sophocles’ Antigone. Mueller’s work borrows its theoretical framework from earlier works that sought to address matters of gestures and their implications on the Greek tragic stage from as early as the 1970s, including those of Mastronarde (1979: 19 and 94), Kaimio (1988: 26-48) and Telò (2002: 9-51), all of which have examined physicality as a theatrical convention. Finally, for a broader overview of the cultural significance of body language in ancient Greece, see the various contributions in Cairns’ volume Body Language in the Greek and Roman Worlds. See especially Cairns (2005: 123-143), where the author examines the role of looks and gazes in social interactions, Clarke (2005: 37-49) who offers a very detailed engagement with the semantics of smiles and Llewellyn-Jones (2005: 73-95) whose interest focuses on female body language in tragedy.

255 Poochigian (2007: 9). The fourth pair of speeches has been noted for its verbal peculiarity on the side of both the Messenger and Eteocles; apart from the matter of the tenses, it is also the only pair where both the Argive and the Theban shields are described. Due to its uniqueness and lack of direct correspondence with any of the other pairs of speeches, Zeitlin excludes this pair from both the Triadic and the Recursive organisational semantic schemes in her discussion of the Shield Scene (2009 [1982]: 123). See also the relevant discussions in Thalmann (1978: 106, 111-114) and Wilkens (1974: 61).

256 Poochigian’s theory is criticised extensively by Poli-Palladini (2016: 114-115) on the grounds of its inability to sufficiently explain the aorist in 508 as well as due to its inability to provide other examples in tragedy, where named but silent actors are onstage. Poochigian’s theory has also been rejected in the most recent years by Uhlig (2019: 130 n. 70), who however does not engage with the subject matter any further; her position is justified almost exclusively on the grounds of the insufficiency of positive arguments for the presence of the warriors.
allocating them to each of the seven gates directly, Eteocles first selected his six champions - most likely by lot, as convincingly argued by Thalmann - then brought everyone back onstage to hear the Messenger’s announcement and decide which warrior would be sent to each gate based on his reports.\(^\text{257}\) This would explain the use of the past tenses in 508 as referents to action that took place in the past, while the presence of the Thebans onstage and their departures would still validate the use of the future/present tenses in 408, 553, 621 and 672. It also helps elucidate matters of divine agency and personal responsibility as it would divide the responsibility of choice between the gods, who select the warriors, and Eteocles, who would be deciding which gate each warrior would protect. His failure to interpret the signs correctly, however, leads him to the seventh gate and to his death, manifesting the unavoidability of his fate despite his freedom of choice. Finally, it explains the reference to Hermes (508) as a contributor to the allocation process; if the six warriors had been selected by lot beforehand, then Eteocles’ reference to the god becomes a remark on the selection of Hippomedon as one of the leaders. More importantly, this scenario offers textual consistency with the previous part of the play, as it means that there is no reason to assume a textual inconsistency with 280-286.

In conclusion, the dramaturgical benefits of the presence of the Theban champions in the Redepaare are many. Apart from everything else mentioned above, the entrance of the king with his warriors gives movement to the scene. In the Frogs, Aristophanes characterised the Seven Against Thebes as a play “full of Ares”, a characterisation that indicates an elaborate representation of war.\(^\text{258}\) Along the same lines, both the parodos and the first episode that precede the Redepaare, as well as the Arming Scene that follows immediately afterwards (675-719) are

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\(^{257}\) On the theme of allotment and its significance in the Seven, see Thalmann (1978: 63-72). For a similar suggestion see Wiles (2007: 268-270), according to whom the Theban leaders would have been selected by Eteocles first, then be allocated to the specific gates in the Redepaare by Eteocles who would be casting the lots from a bronze helmet. As intriguing as Wiles’ theory is, it is also somewhat speculative; apart from the fact that there is no textual evidence to support his argument, it also fails to explain why Eteocles would return to the centre of the city after the selection of his champions, instead of drawing the lot at the place where he had made the original selection of warriors. Finally, like Poli-Palladini’s theory, it counteracts the destructiveness of Eteocles’ metaphorical blindness which makes him fail to interpret the signs on the Argive shields correctly; if the Thebans are allocated by the gods, then the extent to which Eteocles understands the cause of the war or not, becomes irrelevant to his choices, while his allocation to the seventh gate becomes involuntary.

\(^{258}\) See Ar. Ran. 1013, where Aeschylus, reminiscing on his play, argues that upon watching the tragedy, the audience would be inspired to go to war.
characterised by strong dramatic action. In the first, the noises-off resulted in a maddened choral entrance, whilst in the second, Eteocles is putting on his armour onstage and transforming into the mirroring image of Polynices. The rich staging of the Seven Against Thebes creates the expectation that Aeschylus selected the most elaborate possible dramaturgy for every scene. And although this is by no means sufficient evidence to prove the presence of the Thebans in the Redepaare, such staging would most certainly satisfy the expectation. Overall, the entrance of the king with his champions satisfies both the advancement of the dramatic action, while also retaining the escalating tension that we saw in the first part of the play. The presence of the Theban warriors is not mere dramaturgical adornment; above everything else, it is an important part of the dramatic action and of the visualisation of Eteocles’ inescapability from his inherited flaw. In the sections that follow, the Messenger’s description will be examined in relation to the departures of their Theban counterparts from the stage. With that in mind, I will now move on to show how this elaborate staging would function as the visual counterpart to the renowned ekphrastic shields of the Argives.

3.4 Seven Against Shields

3.4.1 First Pair of Speeches: Tydeus and Melanippus (375-421)

The Messenger’s narrative begins with the warrior on the Proteid gate, Tydeus (377). The links that the first stasimon has drawn to the Iliad by this stage are

259 For which see Chapter 4.
260 Following a comment made by Dawson in the 1970s and wishing to highlight the importance of the sound of language in the scene, Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 36) has argued that the name is a pun as the word resembles the Greek word for ‘first’, πρῶτος, reflecting Tydeus’ identity as the first warrior to be announced. Further to this, the author has also argued for a connection between the name of the gate and Proitos, the inventor of the Argive shield who, according to the tradition, built the walls of Thebes together with the Cyclops and she has noticed in particular that the eye depicted on the shield of Tydeus (verse 390), may evoke Cyclops. The same suggestion about the connection of the name of the gate with Proitos had been made earlier by Bacon (1964: 33) who, however, had missed the link to the Cyclops. Zeitlin’s proposal is very intriguing. However, it should be noted here that the historical validity of the names of the gates is a complex matter in scholarship. Both the variety of names offered in the epic and tragic tradition as well as the limited epigraphical and archaeological evidence at our disposal make it very difficult to draw any assertive conclusions about the extent to which Aeschylus is reviving a tradition, in which case there is not necessarily an intended association between the names of the gates and the events of the war, or whether Aeschylus is creating his own names for the gates, in which case the gates also become signs. On this matter, see Berman (2007: 108-9). See also Poli-Palladini (2016: 56) who considers it possible that Aeschylus contributed to the naming of many of the gates. For the list all
reinforced by the sound of the name: Tydeus’ Iliadic legacy had seen him stand out for his unmatched skill at war and desire for heroic action. In the Seven Against Thebes, however, he is portrayed under a negative light. Tydeus is the first of the seven leaders who are waiting outside the gates, eager to destroy Thebes. Both his lust for battle and his ominous sounds are reflected by the threatening noises that he produces using his armour:

τοιαύτ’ ἀυτῶν τρεῖς κατασκίους λόφους
σεῖει, κράνους χαίτωμ’ , ὑπ´ ἀσπίδος δὲ τοῖς
χαλκήλατοι κλάζουσι κόδωνες φόβον.

As he utters these cries, he shakes three crests with long shadows, the mane of his helmet, and underneath his shield the bells of beaten bronze are clanging in a terrifying way.

Sept. 384-386

From the first verses, the Messenger sets the tone for his upcoming speeches and for the portrayal of the relationship between men and weapons. Much like the introductory verse of the parodos (θρέομαι, 78), fear sets the emotional tone that will dominate the scene. Truly, the shaking of the helmet by Tydeus recalls the fearsome ‘wave’ of helmets that was described by the Chorus to be breaking loudly over the city (114-115). At the same time, the adjective κατασκίους recalls the Homeric δολιχόσκιος, a compound adjective deployed in the Iliadic battles to describe the long shadows of the spears. Another sign of Homeric descriptive clarity is reconfigured here into a tool for the expression of the tragic warrior’s desire: in the Iliad, shadows foretell death, and similarly, in the Seven, κατα-emphasises the shadow that Tydeus’ moving helmet makes. This movement is intentional as it is the warrior’s arm that shakes the helmet’s crests (σεῖει) to frighten his opponents. Finally, the reference to the sound made by the bells of

the different names linked to the gates of Thebes as they appear in Greek and Latin authors see Berman (2015: 77-91 and 162-175).
261 Cf. Il. 4.372-374, 4.387-390 and 5.801-808.
262 Δολιχόσκιος appears over twenty times in the Iliad. Examples include but are not limited to: Il. 3.346 and 3.355, 5.15, 6.44, 7.213.
263 For the use of weapons in battle to terrorise one’s opponents, see also p. 68-69.
beaten bronze under his shield (ὑπ’ ἀσπίδος χαλκήλατοι κλάζουσι κώδωνες φόβον) recalls the Chorus’ previous report of the sound of bronze shields at the gates (κόναβος ἐν πύλαις χαλκοδέτων σακέων; 161). In the Redepaare, there is no direct exposure of the audience to the sound of the raw metal that we saw earlier. However, this is substituted by language as the Messenger draws attention to the materiality of the weapon, namely the bronze that the bells are made of (χαλκήλατοι). In combination with the structure κλάζουσι φόβον, the metallic bells therefore acquire a voice that distinguishes them from the voice of their bearer.\textsuperscript{264} However, that voice is not completely autonomous, as the word χαλκήλατοι conveys the intentionality of their making. At the same time, the bells of bronze are attached to the warrior’s body as an extension of his arm. The sound of the weapons is deployed to strengthen the effect of Tydeus’ shouts, to extend its power and the message that the warrior is trying to convey to his opponent. Overall, the weapons are introduced as extensions of the warrior’s identity, a reinforcement of his own “biological agency”.\textsuperscript{265} And, truly, Tydeus is primarily described by means of an auditory image too.

Starting from afar, the first element that the Messenger highlights is the hostile tone of the warrior’s threats that recall the sound of a hissing snake (ὡς δράκων βοῶι, 381). We then find out that the shouts can be heard from a great distance, since Tydeus is standing at the shore of the river Ismenus (βοῶι παρ’ ὀχθαις ποταμίαις, 392). After both drawing attention to the way in which the threats are voiced and creating an image of Tydeus’ location, the Messenger finally reveals the content of his shouts: Tydeus “is reproaching the son of Oecles, the wise prophet, saying that he is cringing before death and battle out of cowardice” (θείνει δ’ ονείδει μάντιν Οἰκλείδην σοφόν, σαίνειν μόρον τε καὶ μάχην ἀψυχία [382-383]).\textsuperscript{266}

The effect of embedded speech as a mechanism that unites the past with the present in Aeschylean tragedy is not unique to the narrative of the \textit{Seven Against

\textsuperscript{264} I am borrowing the term ‘voice’ from Uhlig’s chapter on the shields of the Redepaare, where the weapons are examined as talking artefacts (Uhlig 2019: 129).

\textsuperscript{265} The term is borrowed from Melissa Mueller’s chapter on the agency of theatrical shields (2016: 135). There, using the case study of the \textit{Ajax}, the author addresses the function of the props as prosthetic extensions of the warrior’s body. Along similar lines, Nooter (2007: 110) who examines the sound of weapons in Greek literature as additions to the warrior’s voice.

\textsuperscript{266} Note here Uhlig (2019: 153) who argues that the use of θείνει adds a material dimension to the sound that corresponds to the warrior’s threatening use of weapons.
In a play where the dramatic action unfolds on the basis of an antithesis between the inside and the outside, the defender and the attacker, the visible and the invisible, it acquires additional meaning, however. By repeating the words of Tydeus, the Messenger begins to physically embody the warrior, *presenting* him onstage and bringing him face to face with the leader and champions of Thebes. To use Roisman’s words, the Messenger here indeed “is more than a conveyer of information, but a participant in action”. Ultimately, through the Messenger’s voice, Tydeus’ words pervade the walls of Thebes and are heard onstage. Furthermore, the embedded speech would have made the auditory image of his shield even more powerful. As Zeitlin has noted, the repetition of the word *βοά* here and in the rest of the scene, a broad term that denotes all different kinds of loud noises adds “to the sphere of the non-human terror inspired by the clashing of metal”. Together, the two actants in the description, the human and the non-human, become the two equal parts of one unit as each side produces its own voice and then complements the other in a synchronised way that creates one reinforced source of sound.

After the auditory dimension of Tydeus’ threats, the shield quickly becomes the centre of the narrative. In the three verses that follow, the Messenger moves on to the description of its device:

εχει δ´ υπέρφορον σημ´ ἐπ´ ἀσπίδος τόδε,  
φλέγονθ' úπ´ ἄστροις οὐρανὸν τετυμένον'  
λαμπρά δὲ πανσέληνος ἐν μέσω σάκει,  
πρέσβιστοιν ἄστρων, νυκτὸς ὀφθαλμός, πρέπει.

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268 Roisman (1990: 19).


270 See also Gurd (2016: 77) for whom the description of auditory imagery in the *Redepaare* is more dominant than that of visual imagery.

271 Melissa Mueller (2016: 136) correctly points out that, in the Homeric epic, the words *ἄσπις* and *σάκος* are deployed to refer to two different kinds of shields, with *σάκος* referring to a weapon larger and heavier than the regular *ἄσπις* wielded by the majority of Iliadic warriors. In the *Seven*, however, there appears to be no difference between *ἀσπίς* and *σάκος* as the two words are used interchangeably to describe the same shield. The perception of the two terms as similar in meaning is also found in Whallon (1966: 47), according to whom the words are deployed interchangeably to serve the needs of metre. The author, however, appears to have neglected the fact that at least as far as the Homeric epics are concerned, warriors are consistently linked to either an *ἀσπίς* (Hector and
And he bears this proud device on the shield,
a fashioned blazing sky with stars.

Eminent stands the bright full moon in the centre of the shield,
the eldest of the stars, the eye of night.

*Sept. 387-390*

Here, the textual reference to the sky emphasises the volume of the noises through comparison; the loud bells of beaten bronze in 386 contrast with the silent sky of the emblem in 387-390, while inviting the audience’s attention to focus on the visual aspect of the weapon, especially its shiny metallic surface. This is something that the words φλέγονθ’ and λαμπρά indicate placed emphatically in the beginning of their respective verses. In Greek literature, bronze is a metal that is often described in relation to light. The active participle φλέγονθ’ and the adjective λαμπρά complete the image of a shield that is not just portrayed as shiny, but is itself as a source of light, therefore emitting radiance as a result of its own materiality. Finally, like before, here too the word τετυγμένον (fashioned) once again underscores the past and the process through which the metal has become a non-human agent, thanks to the intention and intelligence of its creator. This brings us to the second crucial meaning of the three verses.

Although the device on Tydeus’ shield is the least nuanced of the seven Argive shields that will frame the 300 verses of the scene, verses 387-390 mark the point where the juxtaposition between tragedy and epic poetry becomes most explicit. Specifically, the shield exhibits close similarities to the first image on Achilles’ shield which is also a depiction of the cosmos, the sun, the moon and the stars. The comparison between the two poets would have been obvious here; just

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Aeneas) or a σάκος (Achilles and Ajax). For more on the differences between ἀσπίς and σάκος see Bershadsky (2010: 1-24) who analyses the poetics of the two terms; see also Kirk (1985: 315) who mainly traces the difference between ἀσπίς and σάκος on the grounds of appearance, considering the former to be mainly circular and the latter being rectangular. On the shapes of ἀσπίς and σάκος see also Grethlein (2006: 169-170), Drews (1993: 178-179) and Janko (1992: 61).


273 The gleam is considered characteristic of all things immortal in the philosophy of Empedocles: ἄμβροσα δ’ ὡς τὸ ὡς’ τῶν ἔκτης δέον τις καὶ ἀργὴι διότιδίαν ἀμώθη, D77a4.

274 *Il. 18.478-489.* Zeitlin also links the figurative depiction of the crest to its broader reference to Homer and cosmogonic creation by interpreting the κόσμοιν 397 as a pun on the decoration of Tydeus’ shield and the depiction of the universe (2009 [1982]: 34-36). For the link between the shield of Tydeus and that of Achilles, see also Breman (2007: 43) who further references the older works of Huddilston and Schmidt (n. 1).
like his epic predecessor, the tragic poet is creating a cosmos that is equally powerful. Hephaestus is the creator of the shield of Achilles, and the close links between the images on the two shields create the expectation of a correspondence between the divine origin of their creators too. However, the identity of the craftsman of the shield is not named in the Aeschylean passage. Instead, the role is implicitly undertaken by Tydeus himself as, although he cannot be assumed to have been the one who made the weapon, he is the man who chose the crest and whose intention is depicted upon it. Indeed, the bells of bronze are not the only attribute that extends the agency of the warrior, but the furious and arrogant personality traits that the warrior’s animalistic shouts have revealed are reflected in the characterisation of the crest of his shield as ὑπέρφρον (proud) and φλέγονθ’ (blazing), while instead of the bright sun on the first layer of Achilles’ shield, Tydeus has chosen for the centre of his shield to be occupied by the moon, the eye of the night (νυκτὸς ὀφθαλμὸς).

The eye of the night will later be interpreted by Eteocles as a metaphor for Tydeus’ desire to bring death upon the enemies who will face his shield (400-404). However, it is worth mentioning another interpretation of the eye and its implications in the Seven as suggested by Helen Bacon. Vision is central to the war and to the play, and Eteocles and the Chorus had only partially known what was beyond the walls prior to the Messenger’s entrance as a result of their limited

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275 According to literary sources, by the time the Seven Against Thebes was written, it was not uncommon for warriors to have personalised the emblems on their shields. See Plut. Mor. 234C-D.41, according to whom a Spartan had his shield decorated with a life-size fly, boasting that his enemy would get close enough to see the emblem. For a more elaborate approach to the passage see the relevant quotation in Torrance (2007: 68-69). According to other archaeological and epigraphical sources, however, the use of shields decorated with a distinctive crest had been a significant part of the armour of soldiers from as early as Homer’s time, but the crests would most often be fabricated to represent the provenance of the warriors. In a war, it was not an unknown technique for armies to try to confuse the enemy by using shields that carried the emblem of a different city: on this, see Xen. Hell. 4.4.10, according to which the Messinians, the Spartans and the Sicyonians carried shields with the initial of their homeland engraved on their surfaces. According to the first passage, the Spartan army, operating under the commands of Pasimachus, took up the shields of the Sicyonians in order to fool the allies of the latter, the Argives, when they were at war with them. For the evidence regarding the use of the round shield in the eighth century see Snodgrass (1964: 57 and 64-68, as well as 1999: 53-77). For an approach to the use of crests specifically both in literary as well as in archaeological evidence in the Classical era see Breman (2007: 58-61), according to whom shields from that era appear to be figural for the most part.

276 Chaston (2010: 86) claims that the firmament itself is a representation of Tydeus. For the place of the shield in the semiotic system of the Redeparaar see Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 33-39), who focuses on the positive connotations of the moon and stars in a context of peace and victory, and their negative connotations in a military context. For the perception of the design of the crest as a purely decorative one, see Breman (2007: 43) who follows the point of view expressed by Chase at the beginning of the previous century (1902: 70).
vision. Unlike them, the Messenger is the undeniable source of information precisely due to his ability to see. Yet, there is a force that knows more than him: the Erinys, which governs the House of Laius and knows the family’s tragic past, haunts the present and shapes the future. The eye of the Erinys, represented by the moon on Tydeus’ shield, sees the moves of Eteocles and will cast upon the city the Curse of Oedipus that will destroy his sons.277 In this sense, Tydeus opens the scene by carrying on his shield the eye of the Curse. The connection between Tydeus and the Erinys will be made explicit when the seer Amphiaraus later addresses Tydeus as ‘servant of Fear’ (πρόσπολον Φόβου, 574) and ‘summoner of the Erinys’ (Ἐρινύς κλητῆρα 574).278 But for now, the connection will remain implicit in Tydeus’ link with Ares; the shaking of the helmet by Tydeus both recalls the fearsome ‘wave’ of the helmets in 114-115 and reinforces the connection between the Argive army and Ares, whom the Chorus had previously addressed as the god of the Golden helmet (ὦ χρυσόπηλης δαίμον, 106), a connection which the Scout has already referenced in the prologue.279 Having been named and known to be standing at the Proteid Gate, the presence of Tydeus brings Ares closer; as opposed to the wave of men as described previously by the Chorus, a fearsome image but somewhat distanced from the visual spectrum of the audience, the Messenger now describes the image of an Ares-possessed soldier eager to die in battle just metres away from the characters onstage.

The representation of the shield as an agent is not seen in the Messenger’s narrative alone; the twenty verses that constitute Eteocles’ response (397-416) are equally divided between responding to the shield and responding to the warrior. The first ten verses deconstruct the power of the shield through Eteocles’ own interpretation of the device, thus weakening its threatening tone, and the next ten indirectly respond to the description of Tydeus through the portrayal of

277 For the full analysis of the eye of the night and its link to the Erinys, see Bacon (1964: 32-33).
278 See also section 3.4.6. In terms of verse 574, West (1990: 93) prints Φόβου instead of Φόνου after M. However, I agree with Hutchinson that Φόβου is the more probable option as the personification of Φόνου is rarely encountered (1985: 134). Furthermore, Φόβος has already appeared personified in the prologue of the Seven in the oath scene (45), something that is in line with his evocation by Tydeus here.
279 Ares’ depiction as wearing his helmet dominates Archaic and Classical art as a result and reminder of his warrior identity. See also Hutchinson (1985: 63). For the double identity of Ares in the play as a god both inside and outside the city see p. 73-74.
Melanippus as the man most capable of fighting off Tydeus. \(^{280}\) Although it is safe to assume that the speech as partly devoted to the weapons and partly to the human warrior is divided as such to correspond to each of the Messenger’s points, its effect would have been the enhancement of the image of the weapons as entities distinctive from but equal to their bearers.

Eteocles wastes no time, but immediately addresses each of the Messenger’s points separately. His first argument is a response to the threatening sound of the shield and the helmet; to counteract the power implicit in the Messenger’s description, the king addresses their defensive character and inability to be used as weapons of attack.\(^{281}\) Indeed, Eteocles reminds the Messenger and the Chorus that “neither can the crest inflict wounds” (οὐδ’ ἐλκοποιά γίγνεται τὰ σήματα; 398), “nor can helmets and bells bite into [the flesh] without a spear” (λόφοι δὲ κώδων τ’ οὖ δύκνουσ’ ἄνευ δορός, 399). It is interesting to notice here that Eteocles speaks as though Tydeus does not carry a spear, and yet, it is safe to assume that the Messenger’s descriptions should not be taken to mean that the warrior would not have gone to battle without his main fighting gear, nor that Eteocles would have interpreted the Messenger’s words as such. However, he chooses to address the parts of the warrior’s armour that the Messenger has mentioned, and which appear to be transmitters of meaning; for Eteocles, the implicit threats of the shield are diminished by its own form, as only a spear can bring about genuine harm. Sadly, there is an element of tragic prophecy in these words which will become real when he will lose his life through the sword and spear of Polynices, the iron of which will turn out to be the arbiter from his dreams, the power of the δύκνουσ’ Erinys that is instilled in the bloodthirsty and vengeful iron of the attacking weapons.\(^{282}\)

Following his first argument, Eteocles then moves on to offering an interpretation of the device on the shield. There, as before, he tries to counteract its effects by transforming its depiction of the timeless cosmos into an indicator of

\(^{280}\) See Hutchinson (1985: 110) for a different interpretation of the first part of the speech as ironical. According to Hutchinson, by delaying his response to the threats of Tydeus, Eteocles hints at the inability of the warrior to infuse any fear in him.

\(^{281}\) For the different types of agency attributed to offensive and defensive weapons see Mueller (2016: 9-10 and 135). There, the author differentiates between the ‘distributed personhood’ the literary texts imbue their attacking weapons with, and the operation of defensive weapons as a ‘second skin’ that extends a warrior’s existing biological agency.

\(^{282}\) For the association of the Erinyes with biting see Padel (1992: 119-120).
human mortality. Allusions to the shield of Achilles and its depiction of the whole cosmos on its first layer in the *Iliad* link the shining moon and stars on Tydeus’ shield to the power of the cosmos and, consequently, to the upcoming destruction of Thebes. However, Eteocles offers a twist to this interpretation by focusing on the darkness of the night rather than the stars, and by turning the shield against its own bearer, for the prophetic powers of the weapon are about to fall on Tydeus himself (καυτός κατ’ αυτοῦ τήνδ’ ὤβριν μαντεύσεται, [he will have fashioned the prophecy against himself, 406]). By re-directing the fearful depiction of the weapon against its owner, Eteocles aims to cancel the destructive effect of the shield-device and its desire to depict a prophecy. However, he does so once again within a context of tragic irony as he is not realising that the ominous brightness of Tydeus’ blazing sky will fall upon him. Eteocles’ frustrating failure is constitutive of the importance of the Aeschylean play: over the course of the scene, he will make the same mistake repeatedly. Slowly, the inescapability from his fate and his own fatal flaw unfolds. Vision, eyes and mind all come together in the performative process and all of them unfold around the metallic shields.

Having failed to draw the connection between iron and the fury of Tydeus, between bronze and the ominous shine of the device on the shield, in the verses that follow Eteocles evokes Ares as the protector of Melanippus in his capacity as a descendant of Spartoï, something that, in the eyes of the king, would put the warrior under Ares’ protection. The repetitive references to the champion’s autochthony can be interpreted as the king’s implicit reassurance to his city of the divine protection that the champion’s bloodline will bestow over Thebes (σπαρτῶν δ΄ ἀπ’ ἀνδρόν, ὃν Ἀρης ὀφείσατο, ἔνθιομ’ ἀνεῖται, κάρτα δ´ ἔστ´ ἐγχώριος [he is a scion rising from the Spartoi men that Ares spared, a man of his very land], 413; προστέλλεται ἐγγείων τεκούσῃ μητρὶ [sent to protect the mother that bore him], 415-416). Sadly, the descriptions of Tydeus’ wrath and of his weapons, together with the ominous oath scene of the prologue in which Ares was evoked as a protector of Argos, would result in Eteocles’ attempt to summon Ares being less

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284 See also Hutchinson (1985: 112) who confirms that the god is not a mere metonymy in this case but, as according to the legend Ares had indeed spared a small number of the Spartoï, the divinity is summoned here to protect Melanippus once again.
likely to be heard. However, the stage would still be radiating the vibrance of victory on his side with his cohort of armed champions.

The Messenger had previously underlined the threat posed by the presence of Tydeus through his elaborate words. Eteocles now does the same with Melanippus, only instead of describing his champion’s weapons, he would have pointed at him. Through a gesture and the turn of his head, synchronised with his introduction of the warrior, the king would turn the audience’s attention to the mute actor, a figure visible onstage, unlike the invisible presence of Tydeus in the Messenger’s speech. The exact moment in which the silent actor playing the role of Melanippus would have emerged from Eteocles’ cohort is unclear, but it would most likely have been between verses 407-408, where his name and family line are revealed (ἐγὼ δὲ Τυδεῖ κεδνὸν Ἀστακοῦ τόκον τὸν ἀντιτάξω προσστάτην πυλομάτων). Over the course of the next verses until 416, Melanippus would have been standing in silence in front of the audience fully armed, with Eteocles listing his qualities and values that would secure victory in his confrontation with Tydeus. The effect of the sight on the audience would have been significant; unlike Tydeus’ weapons which are invisible but verbally painted in the mind’s eye of the audience, Melanippus’ shield with its crest does not require a description as both the warrior and his shield would have been visible to the audience. The power of the spectacle would have enhanced Eteocles’ attempt at optimism, especially since the audience would have been familiar with the myth of the siege of Thebes and would have thus known that the six Theban warriors will return victorious from their allocated gates.

Altogether, Eteocles’ confidence during the verbal combat against the Messenger, the visibility of Melanippus, and the overpowering number of Thebans next to Eteocles onstage in comparison to the single Messenger, would have all resulted in creating the impression of power on the side of Thebes for the time

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285 The testimony of MSS for τόνδ’ could potentially be indicative of a gesture by Eteocles taking place in that moment. However, both West and Sommerstein print τόνδ’ (West 1990: 85 and Sommerstein 2008: 194). Hutchinson’s commentary has also rejected τόνδ’ arguing that o and ω are frequently confused in MSS. See Hutchinson (1985: 111). More recently, Poochigian has challenged Hutchinson’s point on the grounds of limited justification, but has also failed to provide substantial arguments for the acceptance of τόνδ’ over τῶνδ’, except for the functional role of the potential τόνδ’ as indication of stage action (2007: 5).

286 The Messenger will later confirm this in Sept. 797-798 (καὶ πύλας φαρμέθημεν μονομάχοις [and the defenders we reinforced the gates with were individually adequate in combat]).
being, temporarily succeeding in counteracting the fear infused in the Messenger’s speech. By 416 when Melanippus departs, Eteocles would have been deprived of one member of his cohort. However, the tragic king would have still had enough warriors with him to seem far from isolation.

3.4.2 Second Pair of Speeches: Capaneus and Polyphontes (422-456)

The departure of Melanippus is followed by the naming of the second warrior. Although it is shorter than the previous speech, this second passage will offer a more nuanced image of its warrior on both visual and sonic levels. Through its anthropomorphic depiction, the shield of Capaneus will elevate through association the depiction of the assimilation between human and weapon. This, as we will see in the next passage, will reach its climax with the shield of Eteocles in the next pair of speeches.

As in the case of Tydeus, the sound of the name of Capaneus is itself a sign for the martial skills and war-lust of the warrior as a result of the name’s mythological resonance, since the warrior’s use of the thunderbolt and confrontation with Zeus during the siege of Thebes is repeatedly encountered in Greek and Roman literature. 287 Capaneus is not equal to Tydeus, but the first element in his description that the text draws attention to is a physical comparison between the two warriors. Indeed, Capaneus is said to be a giant bigger than Tydeus: γίγας δό δ’ ἄλλος, τοῦ πάρος λελεγμένου (424). The word does not evoke physical comparison, but once uttered, it also draws an implicit link with the mythological Gigantes who, in the Theogony, are born alongside the Erinys by the Earth and the Sky. Although it is uncertain whether Aeschylus is evoking the Hesiodic tradition here, it is notable that the Hesiodic Gigantes are also portrayed by Hesiod as warriors in shining armours (τεύχεσι λαμπομένους) and long spears (δολίχ’ ἔγχεα), a description that is aligned with Capaneus’ appearance at the time of the description. 288 Furthermore, in the early tradition, the Gigantes were said to

287 Elsewhere in Greek tragedy, Euripides’ Phoen. 1172-1186 also depicts the warrior climbing a ladder with two torches, then being struck by Zeus’ thunderbolt, while in Sophocles’ Antigone, Capaneus’ thunderbolt, as powerful as Zeus, is finally met by the fire of Zeus (Soph. Ant. 127-137). Later references to the warrior’s life and story are also encountered in Latin poetry too for which see Stat. Theb. 10.897-939 and Ov. Met. 9.404-417. See also Ov. Ars am. 3.20-22.
288 Theog. 185-186. The Gigantes as a race are attributed different origins in the Odyssey, where they hold a place between men and gods; together with the Kyklopes they are ἀγχίθεοι (Od.
have fought against the Olympians who were led by Zeus in the Gigantomachia. Coincidentally, it is Zeus whose authority and power Capaneus’ hubristic claims challenge in the Seven: οὐδὲ τὴν Δίως ἔριν πέδου σκῆψασιν ἐμποδὸν σχεθεῖν (not even Strife falling on the ground sent by Zeus could stop me, 428-429). Even though the association between the tradition of the Gigantomachia and Capaneus’ challenges to Zeus are only a possibility, the description of the boasts of Capaneus as shouts that exceed both the size of Tydeus’ threats and human limits more broadly (οὐ καὶ ἄνθρωπον, 425), strengthen the implications of a daimonic portrayal of Capaneus. However, the more sophisticated term φησιν is used to refer to Capaneus’ use of speech when he states that he is going to burn down the city, opposing the previous portrayal of Tydeus’ speech in animalistic terms as that of a hissing serpent (381). Capaneus’ speech is not the only element that acquires more nuance in comparison to Tydeus; his shield also portrays an emblem that ‘speaks’ more clearly about the developments of the battle:

ἔχει δὲ σῆμα γυμνὸν ἄνδρα πυρφόρον,
φλέγει δὲ λαμπὰς διὰ χερῶν ὑπλισμένη·
χρυσοίς δὲ φωνεῖ γράμμασιν “πρήσω πόλιν”.

He has a naked man carrying fire as his emblem,
and the torch his arms are armed with is blazing
and with golden letters it proclaims, “I will burn the city”.

Sept. 432-434

Although the depiction on the shield of Capaneus differs greatly from its predecessor, both weapons are equally distinguished for their metal radiance. 

Links between Capaneus’ and Tydeus’ shields are drawn in terms of the shine, the

7.206), while Odysseus says that the Laistrygones are more like Gigantes than men (οὐκ ἄνδρεσσιν ἐοίκότες ἀλλὰ Γίγασιν, Od. 10.118-120). The extent to which Homer and Hesiod had the same traditions and daimones in mind when they wrote of the Gigantes, is uncertain. For further mythological and literary testimonies on the Gigantes and their relation to men see Gantz (1993: 445-454) and also West (1966: 173).

289 There is no narrative of the Gigantomachia in the Theogony, however the praise of Heracles in verse 954 for completing “a great work among the immortals” (μέγα ἐργὸν ἐν θεανάτησιν) can be taken to refer to his participation in the fight alongside Zeus. This is supported by the Ehoiai according to which Heracles had “slain overbearing Gigantes” (fr. 195.28-29 MW), for which see Gantz (1993: 446).
brightness and colour of the shields. Indeed, following on from the blazing sky on Tydeus’ bronze shield, the man on Capaneus’ shield is also holding fire in his arms (πυρφόρον) which is blazing (φλέγει), terms that recall the fire of the bronze in the previous passage and its ability to emit light.290 Once again, the text here is suggestive of an active association between the warrior and daimonic power. In the Eumenides, the torch held by the goddess Athena shows the way to the Eumenides to enter the centre of the city.291 Later, in the Aristophanean Plutus, Chremylus and Blepsidemus associate the Erinys with the torch, something that the scholia interpret as a potential reference to the Eumenides.292 The torch in the hand of Capaneus might therefore be a reference to the Erinys by association, and it also creates the implication that Tydeus’ wrathful character is shared by Capaneus.

What marks a distinctive difference between the two weapons, however, is the golden letters (χρυσοίς γράμμασιν). Adorning an already-gleaming surface, the gold on the shield creates a mental image of a metal with an even-finer brightness on top of the bronze, adding more nuance of colour. Similarly, the letters offer more clarity on the shield’s message to its viewer.293 Opposing Tydeus’ shield which communicated its threatening message through the silent depiction of the moon and the noise of its bells, Capaneus’ shield acquires its voice through its direct message and through the metal that makes the message stand out with its shine.294 Like before, the use of the active verb φωνεῖ implies an agency on the part of the shield and its ability to produce meaning. This time, however, the verb φωνεῖ indicates that the shield implicitly acquires a human voice as Capaneus speaks his message through the shield.295

The letters are not only important because of the message they convey, but also because of their implications for the process behind the shield’s making. Although he is once again unnamed, the craftsman of the Seven Against Thebes is nevertheless present as the letters are implicit of the careful handiwork and the

290 For more on the linguistic links through which the two shields are represented as a “developing story” see Chaston (2010: 89-90).
291 Eum. 1022.
292 Ar. Plut. 422-435. For the scholia, see Dindorf and Dübner. The matter is further discussed in Cantarella (1970: 363-381).
294 Chaston (2010: 89) interprets the stages of the description of the shield as those of agent (πυρφόρον, 432) to means (λαμπὰς, 433) and to deed (πρήσω, 434).
intelligent shaping of the weapon by its creator. Even more so than before, the audience is invited to focus on the fact that the shield is an artefact: σήμα draws attention to the depiction, the artistic design of the shield that gives it form and through which its message is communicated. The design is one of a naked man who is carrying a torch, through which, once again, there is a double meaning conveyed.

In terms of the naked man (γυμνὸν ἄνδρα), like Hutchinson rightly points out, it was a frequent phenomenon for ancient Greek artists to depict figures naked in settings where they would have ordinarily been clothed. By drawing attention to the nudity of the warrior, the Messenger’s narrative would have therefore reminded the audience that the shield is a piece of art, an embellished artwork that someone has worked on. Like before, the anonymity of the craftsman creates a void that is implicitly filled by the agency of the person for whom the crest was intended, the warrior himself.

The association of Capaneus with the shield is conveyed not only through the lens of its making, but through the finished product too. Specifically, the letters on the shield are the means through which the message “πρήσω πολιν” is communicated by the warrior on its emblem. Indeed, the most noticeable difference between this shield and the one of Tydeus is that the emblem does not depict a general, universal sign, but is specific to the reality of the war and the warrior who wields it. In turn, the written message connects the two figures, Capaneus who is bearing the shield and the warrior who is depicted on it. By holding the shield’s warrior on his arm the same way that he would hold the torch, the world of the shield replicates the world of Capaneus. As Uhlig notes, the warrior on the shield is depicted climbing the ladder, like Capaneus seeks to climb the wall of Thebes; one is holding a torch in his arm as his weapon, the other is holding the shield. By holding the shield in front of him, Capaneus invites his opponent to read his message on the shield, a message shared between the two warriors, the one who ordered it to be depicted on the emblem and the one who shares the scene on the emblem. Finally, onstage, the message is transmitted by the Messenger. Through

296 Hutchinson (1985: 115). However, Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 50 n. 64, citing Vidal-Naquette) notes that γυμνὸν ἄνδρα might refer to a lightly armed soldier, later to be contrasted with the fully armed soldier of Eteocles’ shield in the next passage (ἀνὴρ ὀπλίτης, 466). For the depictions of naked men on shields in vase paintings see also Chase (1902: 69 and 88-89).
the sound of his words ‘πρήσω πολίν’, he embodies the two agents, sending a loud message to the Theban champions.297

Eteocles’ response to the words of the Messenger follows a pattern very similar to the one he had previously deployed for Tydeus. Before announcing the name of the allocated warrior, the king seeks to counteract the power of the enemy, and the shield and its threatening message is the first opponent to be addressed. Eteocles is reassured that just like his predecessor, Capaneus is also going to bring about his own death through the hubris of his words (πέμπει γεγονὰ Ζηνὶ κυμαίνοντ’ ἔπη, 443). Referring back to the statement about the burning of the city, Eteocles does not differentiate between the man on the shield and the man holding it, but πρήσω πολίν is indeed interpreted as a message coming from the shield and the warrior alike (κάπογομνάζων στόμα, 441). The most profound element that indicates that the king is beginning to understand the identification between the two agents, the human and the non-human, is his conviction that the hubristic emblem on Capaneus’ shield is the element that will backfire on the warrior as its arrogance will be answered by Zeus’ thunderbolt (ἥξειν κεραυνόν, 445).298

Part of what foretells the condemned future of Eteocles in the text is his inability to interpret the signs correctly as a result of his blindness that comes from his determination to translate them in his city’s favour. We first see this in action when the king argues that Capaneus is merely threatening Thebes, whereas his Theban warriors are ready to act (ἀπειλεῖ δρᾶν παρεσκευασμένος, 440). In reality, the warrior Capaneus is standing outside the walls, also ready to act, but Eteocles’ defence is directed towards the shield, the artificial world of which is contrasted to his surrounding reality. This is further underscored through his emphatic statement οὐδὲν ἔξεικασμένον (not a mere image, 445), where Eteocles underlines again the nature of the shield as an artefact.299 Similarly to verse 398, where the defensive nature of the shields was referenced as a comment on their inability to provoke harm, here their identity as artefacts is referenced to highlight the difference between the weapon and the divine agents on the side of Thebes.300 In fact, the fire-

297 For the similarities between Capaneus and Eteoclus with the warrior figures on their shields see Uhlig (2019: 134-139). See also Steiner (1994: 51-53).
298 For the literary tradition behind this prophecy see n. 287 above.
299 For the semiotics of Eteocles’ interpretation of the fiery element and the hierarchy of the lighting, torch and fire, see also Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 43).
300 See also Chaston (2010: 91) and Hutchinson (1985: 116).
holding warrior on Capaneus’ shield will be met by Polyphontes, but Eteocles turns the threat of Capaneus’ fire into an internal weapon that lies in his warrior’s spirit (αἴθων, 448). Unlike his Argive counterpart, Polyphontes does not utter hubristic words, but he has the support of Artemis and the rest of the gods (450). As Eteocles is making his argument, the statues of the gods in the visible space of the theatre would have operated as a visual verification of his claims. Like in the case of Melanippus’ departure, here too the departure of Polyphontes leaves the king with the majority of his fighters by his side, still fearless and still surrounded by a victorious atmosphere on the stage. Confident of his upcoming victory, Eteocles challenges the Messenger to name the next champion: λέγ᾽ ἄλλον ἄλλαις ἐν πύλαις ἐκλήχοτα (451).

3.4.3 Third Pair of Speeches: Eteoclus – Megareus (458-485)

The third shield described by the Messenger is that of Eteoclus. Counting fewer than thirty verses in total, the length of the passage dedicated to the warrior of the Neistan gate and his Theban counterpart is the shortest of the seven passages in the scene. The description of the shield and its owner, the narrative and the elements highlighted in it, strongly resemble the description of Capaneus’ shield from the previous passage, including the depiction on the crest which once again is that of an attacking man:

εσχημάτισται δ’ ἀσπίς οὐ σμικρὸν τρόπον·
ἀνήρ ὅπλίτης κλίμακος προσαμβάσεις
στείχει πρὸς ἐχθρὸν πύργον, ἐκπέρσαι θέλων·
βοά δὲ χούτος γραμμάτων ἐν ξυλλαβαίς
ὡς οὖδ᾽ ἂν Ἀρης σφ’ ἐκβάλει πυργομάτων.

301 The origin of Eteoclus’ name and the traditions to which it is linked are uncertain: Garvie (1978: 72) had argued in the past that Aeschylus had made up the name in the Seven Against Thebes, but Hutchinson later pointed out that the name is encountered among the seven leaders in a group of statues, probably dedicated by the Argives after the battle of Oenoe (Hutchinson 1985: 117-118; Hutchinson quotes Paus. 10.10.3). Either way, the genealogy of Eteoclus does not make it clear how he was linked to the seven in Aeschylus’ play. Instead, it appears that he is mainly linked to the play through his name’s similarity with the name of Eteocles. See also Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 52-54) who argues extensively and convincingly of the semantics of the pair, Eteocles and Megareus, as the mirror image of Eteocles, his alter-ego and his ideal self. Along similar lines, Chaston (2010: 94) argues that echoing good and bad fortune respectively, the names of Eteocles and Eteoclus contribute towards the blurring of the limits between the internal and the external, the friend and the foe.
And his shield has been shaped in no modest style;
an armed man is climbing a scaling ladder
towards the top of the wall of the enemy, wishing to destroy it;
and he too is shouting in syllables made of letters
that not even Ares shall be able to throw him off the wall.

*Sept. 465-469*

Unlike the previous two passages, Eteoclus’ shield does not differentiate itself from the previous speeches, but rather the text’s primary focus is the completion of the assimilation between the warrior and his weapon that Capaneus’ shield has initiated, an element that now becomes more prominent as Eteoclus will identify completely with the figure on his shield. To quote Zeitlin, the shield “completes the work of correspondence between man and the iconic emblem he carries on his shield”.302 It does so by reflecting the previous passage very closely but presenting an even more realistic depiction on the shield’s surface.

Like Capaneus’ shield, here too the crest’s main depiction is a warrior (ἀνήρ ὀπλίτης, 466) who is attacking the city with the aim of destroying it (ἔκπέρσαι θέλων, 467). Indeed, similar to his compatriot on the Electran gate, Eteoclus is arrogant and hubristically doubts the ability of Ares to stop him from achieving his goal (ὡς οὖδ’ ἂν Ἄρης σφ’ ἐκβάλοι πυργομάτων [not even Ares shall be able to throw him off the wall], 471). The similarity between the two shields and the two warriors is further marked by the Messenger’s δὲ χόδτος (he too, 467) when he points out that, like in the case of Capaneus, Eteoclus’ threats are also voiced through the letters on the surface of the shield (γραμμάτων ἐν ξυλλαβάς, 468).303 As with Tydeus, the shield is examined as a fabricated object as it is introduced by ἐσχημάτσατι, a remark on the metalmaking process, back when the weapon was in the process of the making, before it took its final form. The shield is not the only weapon in this scene; a reference to the helmet of fine bronze from which Eteoclus’ name was cast (εὐχάλκου κράνους, 459) highlights the influence of the lot on the development of the war. The word εὐχάλκου is the most nuanced adjective used to refer to bronze thus far, following χαλκοδέτοιν (161) and χαλκήλατοι (386); the εὐ-

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303 See also Uhlig (2019: 137).
emphasises the metallic substance of this weapon more than the descriptions of the bronze-rimmed and beaten bronze shields encountered previously. This is in fact a motif that we will encounter again when Amphiaraus’ shield later receives the optimum characterisation as ‘πάγχαλκον’ (591). Together with the depiction of the clothed man that I discuss below, these are perhaps the only two ways in which the shield appears to be a differentiated version from that of Capaneus.

Eteoclus’ shield draws connections to both of its predecessors. Indeed, Eteoclus is speaking in letters, like Capaneus. However, the Messenger is not using embedded speech here like he did before. Instead, the verb φονεῖ that was previously used to describe the voice of the shield is here replaced by the stronger βοῖ (468), a verb used twice previously in the text in reference to Tydeus (381 and 392). Indeed, Eteoclus’ ferocity, a direct reflection of the intensity of the sounds that surround his presence on the gate, becomes clear as soon as he is introduced through the elaborate description of his horses that are snorting (ἐμβριμώνας, 461), whistling a barbarian tune (συριζουσι βαρβαρον τρόπον, 463) through their nostrils (μυκτηροκόμπους πνεύμασιν, 464) while running in circles eager for war. This recalls the animalistic sounds that surrounded Tydeus’ presence in the first passage; interestingly, the described noises of the horses are silenced once the shouts of the shield are introduced. This further enhances the strength of the shield’s auditory imagery as it is the climax of the introductory noises that precede it, noises that are silenced once the description of the shield begins. At the same time, like in the case of Capaneus, Eteoclus too utters threats through the voice of the weapon (βοῖ δὲ χοῦτος γραμμὰτων ἐν ξύλλαβαῖς). Altogether, the use of βοῖ together with the written words brings together the human and non-human agents by underscoring not just the visual, but moreover the auditory power of the letters which here become the surrogates of Eteoclus’ human voice. Exceeding the physical limits of both the human voice and the silent power of the letters on the shield that are primarily visual, the use of the verb βοῖ, which previously described Tydeus, therefore makes the strength of the shield’s voice equated to the

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304 This will be discussed later in 3.4.6.
305 On recalling Tydeus through the voice that is shared between Eteoclus and the warrior on his shield, see Uhlig (2019: 136-137).
306 Tydeus was previously also described in similar terms in 393-394. For the horses of Eteoclus as a reflection of his spirit see also Chaston (2010: 92-93). For the imagery of horses in the play more broadly, see Cameron (1971: 74-84) and 2.3.2.
warrior’s shouts, which were previously described as so strong that they could be heard from across the river (392).

The auditory power of the shield is not the only aspect that appears to be a reinforced version of Capaneus’ weapon, but the crest’s depiction itself also manifests closer identification between the crest and the bearer than before. Capaneus’ warrior was naked, an element that highlighted, as we have said, the identity of the shield as an artefact, whereas Eteocles’ warrior is a closer, more realistic representation of his bearer as he is in full armour (ὅπλίτης), while the portrayal of his surroundings is also more detailed as he is said to be climbing the walls of Thebes (στείχει πρὸς ἐχθρῶν πύργον, 467). Like his auditory imagery, Eteocles’ ferocity and desire to penetrate the walls have already been introduced through the horse imagery, where the latter were described to be eager to fall on the gates (θελοῦσας πρὸς πύλαις πεπτωκέναι, 462).

Although it does not differ significantly from its predecessor, Eteocles’ shield contributes towards the climactic assimilation between the world depicted on the weapons and the world of their human bearers. Indeed, the extent to which Eteocles and his shield are identified with each other is reflected in Eteocles’ response where, as opposed to the previous two passages, the king makes no separate address to the warrior’s weapon; instead of trying to counteract the effects of the shield first, Eteocles considers both the shield and the warrior as one unified entity that will be defeated as his champion will conquer the two men, Eteocles and the warrior on his shield, and the city of Argos (δόμα κοσμήσει πατρός ἡλῶν , 478-479). As for the shield, referred to as the κόσμος of Tydeus (397) in the first passage, it will now be the κόσμος, the decoration of the walls of Megareus’ family house (δόμα κοσμήσει πατρός) as a booty from the war (λαφύροις, 479). To repeat an insightful observation by Benardete, Eteocles’ claim that “not even Ares will be able to throw him off the walls” becomes, for Eteocles, an unconscious

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308 This is a depiction of an actual practice. Thucydides mentions the use of ladders as a mechanism to secretly invade the walls of the enemy city in war (4.135, 5.56.5). See also Hutchinson (1985: 119).

309 For the semiotics of the word κόσμος and its evoked assimilation between the shield and the world see Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 42). For the metapoetic implications of the hanged shield, see Uhlig (2019: 137). There, the scholar relates the weapon to the script of the Seven which, like the shield at the end of the war, would be left aside until the next performance. Although it is an intriguing suggestion, the uncertainty behind the way in which the verses of the play were made accessible to actants in the first place, means that I would be hesitant to accepting Uhlig’s suggestion.
prophecy concerning the future of the shield that will obtain an unshakeable position on the wall of Megareus’ house forever.\textsuperscript{310}

Eteocles and Capaneus are not the only ones who identify with the depictions on their shields, but as we are reaching the centre of the scene, Eteocles and the Messenger both appear to merge with the worlds depicted on the Argive shields. Indeed, apart from Eteocles’ obvious association with Eteocles through the similarity of their names, his exchange with the Messenger notably concludes with Eteocles challenging the Messenger to brag about the accomplishments of other men (κόμπαζ’ ἔπ’ ἄλλωι, 480); the remarkable choice of the word κόμπαζ’ implies Eteocles’ view that the Messenger is boasting about the power of the enemy.\textsuperscript{311} The Messenger is however a Theban, and his reports are meant to warn and protect the defenders from the enemy. As such, once again, the importance of personal perspective is highlighted indirectly through the king’s subjective perception. Just like the shields, the Messenger’s voice, his descriptions of the enemy, and the embedded speeches have resulted in the Messenger’s own unification with the warriors beyond the walls on whose behalf he speaks. Having concluded the mirroring effect of the human on the weapon, from this point onwards the emblems will begin to introduce the divine forces that are inciting the war.

3.4.4 Fourth Pair of Speeches: Hippomedon – Hyperbius (486-525)

Standing in the middle of the Messenger’s narrative with three shields preceding it and three shields about to follow it, the fourth pair of speeches marks the point of no return in the Redepaare. First, as we will see below, this is the only instance in which a Theban shield will be described in response to its Argive counterpart.\textsuperscript{312} Furthermore, the fourth speech corresponds with the initiation of a new order of things inaugurated by the monstrous imagery on the shield of

\textsuperscript{310} Benardete (1967/8: 8).

\textsuperscript{311} Chaston (2010: 94) comments on the address and argues that it indicates not only Eteocles’ perception of the Messenger, but the assumption of the enemy’s characteristics by the Messenger. For a different opinion, see Benardete (1967/8: 8) who claims that Eteocles cannot differentiate the reporter from the report, the same way that he cannot differentiate between Eteocles and the man on his shield.

\textsuperscript{312} Sept. 512-513, for which see below.
Hippomedon. From this moment onwards, the divine forces operating behind the war begin to manifest explicitly. The Messenger’s description reads:

ἄλω δὲ πολλήν, ἀσπίδος κύκλον λέγω,
ἐφρεῖζα δινήσαντος· οὐκ ἄλλως ἐρῶ.
ὁ σηματουργὸς δ’ οὐ τις εὐτελῆς ἄρ’ ἦν
δόστις τόδε ἐργον ὅπασεν πρὸς ἄσπιδι,
Τυφών’ ἵντα πυρπνῶν διὰ στόμα
λιγνὺν μέλαιναν, αἰώλην πυρὸς κάσιν
ὄφεων δὲ πλεκτάνησι περίδρομον κύτος
προσηδάφισται κολογάστορος κύκλου.

I shuddered when he twirled it, I speak of the big, round orb of his shield, I shall not deny it.
And it wasn’t a cheap craftsman
he who fashioned that design on the shield,
Typhon emitting dark smoke
through his mouth that breathes fire, the variegated sibling of flame.
And the surrounding bowl of his hollow-bellied shield
is floored with wreaths of serpents.

Sept. 489-496

Initially, the description picks up from the previous reports, with the fire-breathing mouth of the monster (πυρπνῶν) recalling the fire on the shields of Tydeus and Capaneus. At the same time, through his shouts, the warrior’s wrath and war-lust brings to mind the shouts of Tydeus and Eteocles (ξύν βοή, 487). However, the shield differentiates itself from the previous ones in terms of its imagery. After the mirroring effect of man and shield that we have seen in the

313 Hippomedon’s mythological origin is uncertain. In the Soph. OC. 1317 he is referred to as the brother of Adrastus, then in the Phoenissae he is assumed to be his nephew (Phoen. 126-130). Homer depicts him as a Giant in the Od. 10.120, a tradition that the Euripidean play also adopts. There is no relevant mention in Aeschylus.
314 I am referring here to the description of the emblems as φλέγονθ’ in 388 and πυρφόρον in 432 respectively.
315 Cf. 381, 391-2 and 468. On the shouts of the three warriors see also Thalmann (1978: 112).
previous descriptions, Hippomedon’s shield is the first emblem to explicitly depict a daimon. Not only this, but the association of the warrior with his emblem becomes very prominent here, extending to every layer of the object’s description.316 We have already seen how the scene problematises the relationship between the weapon and the man on two levels: first, by associating the crafted object with the maker and, second, by emphasising the assimilation between the finished product and the combatant. Both relationships are magnified in this speech, as we will see next.

The maker of the shield is referred to directly for the first time, and the existence of a person behind the making process is highlighted three times (σηματουργῶς, τις and ὅστις).317 Furthermore, his artistic skill is praised as not cheap (οὐ εὔτελὴς) and the emblem is also referred to as a creation, ἔργον, highlighting its artistic value and reminding the audience of the intention and the cunning involved in its making. Altogether, more so here than in any of the previous cases, the text emphasises the human skill and intention as elements integral to the fabrication of the shield.318

As for the second layer of the relationship between human and object, the weapon is presented as unified with its bearer. First, Hippomedon is introduced by the Messenger in artefact terminology in terms of his form and great figure (σχῆμα καὶ μέγας τύπος, 488), something that Benardete has interpreted as “victory of the image in its claim to reality”.319 Standing at the fourth gate, the warrior is pictured as he is whirling his shield (δινήσαντος). This moving image does not only show the warrior’s desire for the fight, but it also presents the weapon as an extension of the warrior’s body, working in collaboration with him and aligned with his intentions.320 Finally, the monstrous depiction of Typhon corresponds to the daimonic terminology that the Messenger selects to depict Hippomedon; the warrior is filled with the god Ares (ἐνθεός δ’ Ἀρεί, 497), while his war cries, described by the verb βακχάει, also evoke those of a maenad. As for the fearsome look in his eyes

316 For the notion of the shield’s return to its mythological past see also Eliade (1963: 21) and Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 62-64).
317 As Uhlig points out, this is also the first time that the maker of the shield is referred to as someone distinctively different from the bearer of the shield: Uhlig (2019: 141).
318 Cf. Od. 11.613, where, after observing the images on the sword-belt of Heracles, Odysseus expresses the hope that the craftsman won’t produce any new creations.
319 Benardete (1967/8: 9-10).
320 For more on the movement of the scene, both in the emblems as well as in terms of the warrior, see Zeitlin (2009 [1982: 62]).
Indeed, Hippomedon’s presence is later said to have brought before the gates Terror itself (Φόβος γὰρ ἡδὴ πρὸς πόλις κοιμάζεται, 500), the daimonic entity that, together with Ares and Enyo, had been summoned by the Argives when they took their oath (45). The shield is filled with implications of cosmic power, something that its emblem and carrier alike denote.

Aside from these changes in depiction, the fourth speech corresponds with a shift in the way that the shield relates to the passage of time. The previous shields gazed at the future, their images implying certain developments in the upcoming battle. This time however, recalling memories from the *Theogony*, the monster Typhon refers back to the creation of the cosmos. Time and its passage are fundamental in the *Seven*, a tragedy that describes the conclusion of a curse that has been residing in the House of the Labdacids for three generations.

In relation to this, Zeitlin traced a potential association between the textual emphasis on the shape of the shield and the passage of time; she argued that the triple repetition of words that denote the circularity of the shield throughout the speech (δινήσαντος, 490; ἀσπίδος κύκλον, 489; κοιλογάστορος κύκλον, 496) might be a reference to the cycle of time. As the fourth shield marks an end and a beginning in the semiotics of this narrative, it also becomes an indirect reminder of the family’s relationship with time. In order to understand the reason for the war

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321 The fearsome look also links to the Hesiodic narrative of Typhon whose heads omit fire under his own fearsome look, δερκομένοι (Theog. 828).
322 For the story of Typhon see Theog. 820-880. In the *Seven*, the description corresponds to that in the Hesiodic narrative: the darkness of λιγνὺν μέλαιναν recalls the dark tongues that Hesiod had attributed to the monster in the *Theogony* (γλώσσῃσι δνοφερῇσι λελιχμότες [licking with their dark tongues, 826]), while the fire-breathing mouth (πυρπνόον) recalls the flame blazing from all his heads (πασέων δ’ ἐκ κεφαλέων πῦρ καίετο, δερκομένοι 828). For more on the similarities in the descriptions of Typhon in the two passages, see also Uhlig (2019: 144) and Chaston (2010: 97).
323 Beyond Aeschylus, a similar description of the monster is encountered in Pind. Pae. 8a19-23 where Hecuba is also supposed to have dreamt that she bore “the fire-bearing Hundred-handed [monster]” who destroyed Troy. In art, depictions of Typhon vary. Evidence from the monster’s representation on shields portrays a different image; see Chaston (2010: 96) who refers to a shield relief from Olympia and a plate of a hydria where the battle between Zeus and Typhoeus is depicted. Neither of these two cases present the monster breathing fire and emitting smoke. However, the depiction of the wreath of snakes is also commonly encountered in representations in art of Typhon, where he is often portrayed with snakes in place of his legs (for which see LIMC s.v. Typhon, p. 112-113).
323 Zeitlin also notices the circularity in the placement of the repetitive words in verses 489 and 496, as they both open and close the Messenger’s description forming the literary circle of the ring composition (2009 [1982]: 63). On the same note, Chaston (2010: 95-96) interprets the repetitive terms as an evocation of the encirclement of the city by the Argives.
and his future, Eteocles needs to first look back. Although we saw a similar reference in the description of the shield of Tydeus, where the full moon stood on the shield as the round eye of the night, here the audience is invited to focus their attention on the shape of the shield itself rather than the shape of its imagery.\textsuperscript{324} Zeitlin’s proposal is further intriguing as, beyond the above, the circle also raises the question of a potential echo of Presocratic philosophy, where rotation is considered one of the most essential creative forces of the universe. In his fragments, Empedocles considers the elements to be caught up in a continuous movement within a circle.\textsuperscript{325} Notably, the word δίνη is used by Empedocles to describe the rotation of the sky around the earth, while in Aristotle’s \textit{Clouds} it is Δίνος who replaces the lightning and thunderbolt of Zeus.\textsuperscript{326} Whether the correlation between circles and time on the shield of Hippomedon was something Aeschylus intended to highlight via the repetitive references to the shape of the shield is unclear. Nevertheless, both associations between shield and bearer and between past and future are reinforced by Eteocles after the close of the Messenger’s speech:

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\text{ξυνοίστον δὲ πολέμιως ἐπ᾽ ἀσπίδων }
\text{θεοῦς: ὁ μὲν γὰρ πυρπόν Τυφών’ ἔχει, }
\text{῾Υπερβίτω δὲ Ζεὺς πατὴρ ἐπ᾽ ἀσπίδος }
\text{σταδαῖος ἢσται, διὰ χερὸς βέλος φλέγον.}
\]

And they will bring together enemy gods on their shields. One has the fire-breathing Typhon, but for Hyperbius it is father Zeus who stands on his shield, with the blazing thunderbolt in his hand.

\textit{Sept.} 510-513

\textsuperscript{324} A connection between the sun and the moon might also be implicit here through the use ἅλω, which literally means the curve of the celestial elements. Here, it most likely refers to the shape of the shield like the κύκλων.

\textsuperscript{325} ταύτη δ’ αἴνω ἔσσεν ἀκίνητοι κατὰ κύκλων, D 73 244 and ἅλω μεταλάσσομαι[τ’ ἀίσσῃ] κύκλων [ἄπαντιε., D 73, 282. D 73.233-244 specifically presents the world as a two-part symmetrical cycle that is eternally repeating itself.

\textsuperscript{326} Empedocles’ testimonia B 35.1 (D 73) and Ar. \textit{Nub.} 380-382.
The defender of the gate will be Hyperbius, who bears no imagery on his crest other than that of Zeus. The king’s optimism for the war is temporarily reinforced at this point as he considers the depiction of Typhon to be a sign of his warrior’s victory, since according to the myth Zeus had defeated Typhon in battle.\footnote{If the monster resides on Hippomedon’s shield, the king argues, then it must have been Hermes who chose the next pair to battle (ξυνήγαγεν, 508). By interpreting the divinities on the shields as signalling the outcome of the battle between their bearers, Eteocles subconsciously reveals the second dimension of the war: the warriors are not fighting alone, but the god on each shield will be fighting the god of the other. Eteocles’ comment τοιάδε μέν τοι προσφίλεια δαμόνων· (such are the divine alliances, 515) will turn out to be true for every upcoming emblem. For the moment, the sight of the armed Hyperbius reinforces the victorious sentiment, as the double depiction of Zeus on both the shield of the warrior and the statue onstage would create an atmosphere of power and divine protection.\footnote{However, after Hyperbius’ departure, Eteocles would have been left with less than half of his cohort onstage. His upcoming isolation would have been a reminder that the moment for Eteocles’ departure for the battlefield is approaching. And unlike Hyperbius, who will indeed come back from the battle victorious, Eteocles will return dead next to his brother (848).}}

3.4.5 Fifth Pair of Speeches: Parthenopaeus – Actor (524-567)

As soon as Hyperbius departs the stage, the Messenger announces the fifth opponent on the North Gate.\footnote{As soon as Hyperbius departs the stage, the Messenger announces the fifth opponent on the North Gate. Thought to be the son of Ares and Atalanta, Parthenopaeus is not named until the end of the Messenger’s speech.\footnote{Instead,}} Thought to be the son of Ares and Atalanta, Parthenopaeus is not named until the end of the Messenger’s speech.\footnote{For the aorist of 508 and the involvement of Hermes in the selection of the champion see section 3.3.\footnote{The name is most likely invented by Aeschylus. See Berman (2015: 80-85) and Berman (2007: 87-115) where the matter is analysed in more details, and compare with Symeonoglou (1985: 63) who speculates that the name Borraiai Gate could correspond to walled, gated ruins from the Mycenean age in the North of Cadmeia. Symeonoglou’s map is map no. 5 in Berman (2015: Appendix II, p. 172-173).\footnote{There are various genealogies attributed to Parthenopaeus, one of which sees him as a brother of Hippomedon and son of Talaus and Lysimache, while the other, from which Aeschylus has most probably drawn, saves his name as that of the son of huntress Atalanta. See also Hutchinson (1985: 126) and Sommerstein (2008: 207 n. 74).}}\footnote{This is a reference to the outcome of the gods’ battle in the *Theog.* 820-880 as a result of the monster’s desire to take Zeus’ place, 837. Zeus is repeatedly portrayed in the play as the protector of Thebes, for which see also *Sept.* 117, 255-256, 485, 630.}}
implications of his identity and name arise from the emblem on his shield which is at the centre of the Messenger’s entire speech. This time, the emblem creates an explicit association between the war, the Labdacids, and their Curse. However, as we will see, like in the previous cases, the king will remain indifferent to the signs, which he will only interpret through his war-focused mindset.

The name of the warrior at the fifth gate is not revealed from the start of the speech. Instead, his entire identity is depicted through his relationship to his weapons. Before the Messenger has even begun to describe the shield, the warrior’s wrathful war-spirit is expressed through the oath the warrior swears under his spear, promising to sack the city of Cadmus by force (λαπάξειν ἄστυ Καδμείων βίαι, 531). Like his fellow warriors, this leader too utters hubristic words. His hubris is also conveyed through his relationship with his spear which the warrior promises to honour more than a god (αἰχμῆν ἢν ἔχει, μᾶλλον θεοῦ σέβειν, 529-530). More importantly, though, Parthenopaeus’ arrogance (ὁμίν [...] φρόνημα, 536-537) is reflected in the boastful emblem that he carries:

tὸ γὰρ πόλεως ὀνείδος ἐν χαλκηλάτωι
σάκει, κυκλωτῶι σώματος προβλήματι,
Σφίγγ’ ὁμόσιτον προσμεμηχανημένην
γόμφοις ἐνόμα, λαμπρὸν ἐκκρουστων δέμας,
φέρει δ’ ὑφ’ αὐτῆ φώτα Καδμείων ἕνα,
ὡς πλειστ’ ἐπ’ ἀνδρὶ τῶι διά ἱππεσθαι βέλη.

And he carries the city’s disgrace on his shield of beaten bronze, the round protector of his body; the fashioned raw-flesh-eating Sphinx, whose bright figure is beaten out and attached with rivets; and underneath her body she carries a man, one of the Cadmeans, So that the greatest number of weapons possible will be thrown at that man. 

Sept. 539-544

331 See also Acus. FGH 2 F 22 where Zeus punishes Caeneus by death for treating his spear as a god.
Parthenopaeus’ shield encompasses all the elements that we have seen highlighted in the descriptions of the previous shields. His depiction of the monster Sphinx has a bright form (λαμπρόν). Moreover, as a design, it has been fashioned with great effort and skill: first, bronze was beaten to make the shield (χαλκηλάτων), then the figure of the Sphinx was crafted separately (ἐκκροσοστὸν δέμας) and later attached to the shield (προσμεμηχανημένην) with rivets (γόμφοις ἐνώμα). As such, the Sphinx is both on the shield and outside it, forming an added level of embossing on its surface. Much like the Sphinx, the other figure on the crest, the captured Cadmean (Καδμείων ἕνα), also challenges the physical borders of the inside and the outside through the implicit assimilation that he creates between the world of the humans and the world of the artefact: the Cadmean that the Sphinx carries is the only instance of a Cadmean portrayed beyond the walls of the city.

Parthenopaeus, who is himself a metoikos, a citizen of two cities like the Cadmean on his shield, will be exposed to the weapons of his enemies, but they will reach his shield first (ὡς πλεῖστ᾿ ἐπ᾿ ἀνδρὶ τὸ δ᾿ ἱπτεσθαι βέλη). By hitting one of their own, the Cadmeans will first see their own upcoming destruction manifest symbolically on the artefact. In this sense, the emblem becomes a referent to the human, creating an ally entity in the hands of a foe. Finally, like in the case of Hippomedon, this daimonic depiction of the emblem also looks back to the past; this time, however, the past is much more closely associated with Thebes. Indeed, the Sphinx, the monster known for its riddle about the three stages of life, has been the primary enemy of the city for years before the war.

Just before the description of the emblem, the Messenger gives the warrior a description of his youthful physique that sees him as a boy transforming into a man in his adolescence: στείχει δ᾿ ἵουλος ἀρτι διὰ παρηδόνων, ὀρας φυούσης, ταρφῖς ἀντέλλουσα θρίς (and the beard is growing across his cheeks, in his prime time, thick growing hair, 534-535). Together with the placement of the shield in front of his body (σώματος προβλήματι), the figure of Parthenopaeus becomes the

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332 Previously, the brightness of the shields had been conveyed through the brightness of their flames: see verses 388, 432 and 494. For the importance of the flames in the scene see also n. 299. For representations of the Sphinx on shield-depictions on vases see Chase (1902: 122). Chaston (2010: 100 n. 135) also mentions the representation of the monster on a cheek piece of Achilles which is found in Simon (1976). For a broader exploration of shield-depictions of the Seven Against Thebes on vases, see also Lissarrague (2007: 152-3) and Berman (2007: 64-76).

333 See also Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 72).

334 See also Uhlig (2019: 147).

335 The expression is most likely Homeric. See Od. 11.319.
implicit embodiment of the Sphinx and its riddle. Yet Thebes is not the only entity with a shared past with the Sphinx; Eteocles’ own house is closely related to it, since the solving of its riddle saw Oedipus become the king of Thebes.

The vocabulary employed to describe Parthenopaeus and the shield’s emblem reflects the raw, bloodthirsty characterisations usually attributed to the Erinys. At the start of his description, the Messenger states that Parthenopaeus’ eyes are those of a gorgon (γοργόν τ’ ὀμμ’ ἔχον, 537). The choice of words for his merciless mind (ὁμόν φρόνημα) are also of particular interest as the word φρόνημα will later be used to recall Oedipus’ twisted mind that led him to his end (κατὰρὰς Οἰδιπόδα βλαψάφρονος, 725-726; παράνοια συνήγα λυμφίους φρενόλης, 756-757). More importantly, the combination of the terms ὀμόν + φρήν will later appear in relation to Iron, the Scythian stranger from Eteocles’ dream and the embodiment of the Erinys: ὀμόφφορων Σίδαρος (730). The warrior and his shield are one, and indeed the Sphinx on his emblem also evokes the presence of the Erinys. Beyond its mythological relevance to the destiny of Oedipus and the curse of the Labdacids already mentioned, Eteocles will later refer to the upcoming attack of the Sphinx as that of the most hateful beast’s bite (θηρὸς ἐχθίστου δάκος, 558). Like ὀμόν, δάκος is also used to refer to the effect of curses and the Erinyes in Aeschylus. As far as the Seven Against Thebes is concerned, when Eteocles decides to fight against his brother, the Chorus assume him to be under the influence of a raw-biting lust ὀμοδακῆς σ’ ἄγαν ἔμερος (693). In the Redepaare, the term appears again earlier in relation to the spear which was, according to the king, the only weapon that could inflict harm (λόφοι δὲ κόσμων τ’ οὐ δάκνουσι’ ἄνευ δορὸς, 399).

Eteocles will remain ignorant of the connection between the Sphinx and his house for the time being, as well as of the operation of the Curse. Specifically, Eteocles’ approach is practical as his only concern is keeping the enemy outside the walls. Thus, the king allocates Actor as a defender to the fifth gate, who will prevent the beast and his carrier from penetrating the walls of the city (οὐδ’ εἰσαμείσαι θηρός ἐχθίστου δάκος, ἔξωθεν εἴσο [and he will not allow the beast of the hateful bite to invade the inside from the outside, 558-560]).

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336 See also Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 68-69).
337 See especially the Oresteia: Ag. 824, Cho. 530, 843, 995, Eum. 638.
miss the implications of the association between his house, his father’s mind and the Sphinx is another reminder of the subjectivity that sign interpretation entails: ignoring the Messenger’s signs, the king remains unsuspicious about the operation of the Erinys and instead interprets the sign in relation to the spatial borders of his city only. In its turn, the different lenses through which the Messenger and the king have interpreted the sign inevitably raise the question about which of the two characters has offered the most accurate depiction of the war and its upcoming developments. The connection between the mind and the shield, as well as the importance of the personal perspective that characterises the Redepaare, will be made more evident in the last two speeches. For now, as Actor departs the scene, with Eteocles left with only one more champion, the tension climaxes.

3.4.6 Sixth Pair of Speeches: Amphiaraus – Lasthenes (568-630)

On Actor’s departure, the assimilation of Parthenopaeus with the Sphinx will find its counterpart in the description of Amphiaraus, who is positioned at the Homoloïd gate (570). Placed between the ferocious emblems that the first five shields have established and the revelation of Polyneices’ stand on the seventh gate that follows, the shield of the seer creates a pause in the sequence of threatening emblems:

τοιαῦθ᾽ ὁ μάντις ἀσπίδ᾽ εὐκήρος νέμων
πάγχαλκον ἡμίδα. σήμα δ᾽ οὐκ ἐπίνη κύκλων
οὐ γὰρ δοκεῖν ἄριστος ἄλλ᾽ εἶναι θέλει,
βαιθεῖαν ἄλοκα διὰ φρενός καρπούμενος,
ἐξ ἢς τὰ κεννα βλαστάνει βουλεύματα.

340 The existence of the gate is supported by the literary and the archaeological evidence and the name appears in the works of Euripides, Pausanias, Statius and Apollodorus. See Berman (2015: 80, 90, 110 and 151). The different proposed locations of the gate are presented in the maps of Forchhammer, Fabricius, Keramopoulos, Symeonoglou and Mastronarde at the end of Berman’s book (2015: 164-167 and 170-175). In terms of its semiotics, like in the case of Tydeus on the Proteid Gate, Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 80-81) highlights the verbal association between the warrior and the name of his gate, as the Αμφι- of the seer’s name links to the “Gate of the Sameness” (Homoloïd), both of which denote the double layers of identity in the character of Amphiaraus as a warrior and a seer, an insider and an outsider of Argos, who is aware of the double war against Thebes and against the Labdacids.
Such words spoke the seer wielding calmly
his shield of all bronze. There was no emblem on its circle;
for he does not wish to seem to be excellent, but to be,
harvesting the fruit of his fertile mind,
from which flourish sensible decisions.

*Sept. 590-594*

Something powerful happens here around the subservience and non-
subservience of metal to artifactuality and visual representation: Amphiaraus’
shield lies without an emblem (σήμα δ’ οὐκ ἐπῆν κύκλῳ). Previously, we have
seen shields extending the biological agency of their bearers through the implicit
association between the emblems and their minds. Here, however, the power of
the shield’s agency manifests through its absence, as the warrior chooses to
maintain clarity of mind.

Specifically, the sixth passage breaks the cycle that
the previous five shields have established; the flow of agency from the human to
the weapon and vice versa is the product of their physical contact, and
Amphiaraus’ refusal to carry an emblem translates into a refusal of the skilful
craft of the shield-maker, who has previously been employed to instil the wrathful
emblem on the weapons. As a result, the bronze on its surface is not beaten and it
is not mixed with other colours or metals: it is solid, quiet and pure (πάγχαλκον).
Subsequently, Amphiaraus’ mind will also remain undisturbed by it.

The adjective πάγχαλκον is the last of the compound adjectives to refer to
bronze encountered in the Redepaare. Interestingly, these adjectives appear in an
ascending order that emphasises the metal more and more as the dominant element
of the emblems every time, moving from the beaten and bound bronze on the
shields to the fine bronze of the helmet and to the shield of pure bronze
(χαλκοδέτων, χαλκήλατοι, εὐχάλκου, πάγχαλκον). This ascending order further
correlates with the increasing clarity through which each of the shields show the
association between its bearer and his divine alliance. Through the absolute form of
πάγχαλκον, the metal of the shield has dominance over the emblem; instead of a
depiction, it is merely the circular shape of the shield (κύκλῳ) that refers to the

341 Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 79) reads the shield as the silent counterpart of the silence of the sky on
Tydeus’ shield, however, the lack of an emblem here is, according to the scholar, the most
profound sign of the seer’s sight. See also Thalmann (1978: 117-118).
bearer and it does so by recalling the seer’s ‘eye’ of knowledge.\(^{342}\) As for the second relationship between the weapon and the warrior, Amphiaraus refuses to engage in aggressive movements with his weapons like his predecessors are said to have done (τους τους τρεις κατασκοιν νόμος σείει, 383 and ἀσπίδας κύκλον λέω, ἡφξει δινήσαντος, 489-490); instead, he is keeping the power of the weapon under his control, as he is reported to be wielding it calmly (εὐκηλος νύμων).\(^{343}\) This, however, is not the result of a lack of fighting skill, as Amphiaraus is an excellent champion (ἀλκήν τ’ ἀριστον, 569), but rather it implies the conscious taming of the weapon’s warful nature by the seer. Truly, the reason for Amphiaraus’ decision is the pursuit of true excellence, a counsel that according to the Messenger can only be produced by a clear, undistorted mind (593-594).\(^{344}\) In fact, rational thinking dominates the power of the fury throughout this passage, and that is one of the play’s tragic ironies. If representation is destructive, if it creates confusion and if it replaces truth with subjective realities, then to what extent is the fruit of the thought produced by a tragic play, good counsel?

In keeping his shield clear of an emblem, the seer exemplifies his wise mind. We have already seen the importance of φρήν in the play in relation to the Erinys, the operation of which destroys clarity of thought.\(^{345}\) In this passage, Amphiaraus chooses to keep his thought undisrupted by maintaining his weapon under his control; in doing so, he has kept the Erinys away. Already from the beginning of the passage, the Messenger and Eteocles characterise him as σωφρονέστατον and σώφρων in 568 and 610 respectively, contrasting the savage spirit of Parthenopaeus (ὡμὸν φρόνημα, 536-537).\(^{346}\) This is further highlighted in the description of Lasthenes later: γέροντα τὸν νοῦν, σαρκα δ’ ἡβδόσαν φύει (he has the mind of an old man and the flesh of a young man, 622). There, the physical and mental excellence of Amphiaraus’ opponent is phrased as a temporal contrast

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\(^{342}\) See also Bacon (1964: 33) and Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 72).

\(^{343}\) I have adopted here West’s and Hutchinson’s suggestion of εὐκηλος after Prien’s amendment, over the εὐκηλον that survives in M, as such a choice would create confusion over the dative κύκλωι in the next verse. See also the comments of Hutchinson (1985: 137) and compare with 642 εὐκυκλόν.

\(^{344}\) There is a notable fictional anecdote by Plutarch regarding this part of the text, according to which the audience of the play turned over to look at Aristeides the Just when the praise of Amphiaraus’ personality was spoken (Aristeides 3.5, quoted by Sommerstein [2008: 213 n. 84]).

\(^{345}\) For the importance of ϕρην and clarity of thought see also n. 204 in Chapter 2.

\(^{346}\) This is the only instance in which an Argive warrior is presented under a positive light. See also Chaston (2010: 105) who sees him as an endorsement of the Theban warriors and Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 80) who sees him as a warrior operating in favour of Thebes outside the walls, another transgressor of the boundaries of the inside and the outside.
between old and young age, evoking a comparison with Parthenopaeus whose physique is also depicted as a transition through the different stages of life.\textsuperscript{347} This time, however, it is not the Sphinx that fuels the warrior, since Amphiaraus makes decisions alone, by the power of his own mind. As such, it will be Amphiaraus’ decision, not that of a daimon on his shield, that will determine the outcome of the battle on the sixth gate.

In the previous passages the entanglement of the daimon in the war and its relation to the house of Laius has been implicit in the emblems of the warriors. However, Amphiaraus’ shield is empty. In choosing it to be this way, Amphiaraus strips it of the ability to ‘speak’ for him. Instead, what reaches the Messenger’s audiences is his own words, embedded in the Messenger’s speech.\textsuperscript{348} Further to this, Amphiaraus was not a mere warrior, but, according to tradition, he was a chthonic deity with a distinctive cult in Thebes.\textsuperscript{349} This marks his words as valid prophecies for the future of Argos in the war. Once again, however, Eteocles will miss the signs out of his need to secure the future of the city.\textsuperscript{350}

The Messenger reports on two addresses made by Amphiaraus to two of his fellow warriors, Tydeus and Polyneices. Addresses to the first are reported through indirect speech (571-575), while the seer’s address to Polyneices occupies ten verses of embedded speech (580-589). In terms of the selection of these specific fighters, the narrative of the play looks back to the \textit{Iliad}, where the two warriors prepare the expedition against Thebes together after Adrastus’ promises to help them return to their homeland.\textsuperscript{351} In the \textit{Seven}, they lead the attack on the first and the last gates. As such, Amphiaraus’ addressing them as the most hubristic and destructive men enforces the perception that, between them, they contain all the hubris expressed by the Argive army. When it comes to Tydeus,

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\textsuperscript{347} Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 89).

\textsuperscript{348} Chaston offers an interesting justification for this change in the narrative that adopts Kaufmann’s theory about the use of imagery “in the initial phase of the problem, after which the verbal system will have precedence”. See Chaston (2010: 106). See also Uhlig’s different approach that sees the use of the embedded speech as manifestation of Amphiaraus’ inability to escape tragedy’s mimetic stance; his attempt to silence the voice of the shield is counteracted by the transmission of his word through the voice of the man onstage: Uhlig (2019: 148-149).

\textsuperscript{349} The existence of his cult in Thebes is attested by Herodotus who dates it back to the sixth century, Hdt. 1.52. See also \textit{Od.} 15.245-247. For more on the literary evidence regarding the mythological background of Amphiaraus see Hutchinson (1985: 132-133).

\textsuperscript{350} On Amphiaraus’ prophecies and Eteocles’ response as speeches in which the family and the city collide, see also Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 83-84).

\textsuperscript{351} \textit{Il.} 4.376-380.
the Messenger had reported in the first speech that he was challenging the seer from across the river and accusing him of cowardice. In his turn, Amphiaraus accuses Tydeus now of being the initiator of the war and therefore of all the bad things for the Argives (ἀνδροφόνηταν and πόλεως ταράκτορα, 572; τῶν κακῶν διδάσκαλον, 573; πρόσπολον Φόβου, 574; κακῶν τ’ Ἀδράστω τὸνδε βουλευτήριον:, 575). More striking is Tydeus’ address as Ἐρινύος κλητήρα (summoner of the Erinys, 575). Evidently aware of Oedipus’ curse on his sons, Amphiaraus knows that, in helping Polyneices in the expedition, Tydeus is awakening the old curse for the two sons of Oedipus and bringing the end upon the Argives, himself included.352 So far, the Erinys has only explicitly been referred to in Eteocles’ prayer in the prologue (70). Now, Tydeus does not only refer to it, but moreover he becomes the summoner of the daimon (κλητήρα), who will soon manifest.

According to the Messenger, upon finishing his speech to Tydeus, Amphiaraus refers to Polyneices’ name, dwelling on the significance of its etymology (577-578).353 Literally translated, Polyneices’ name means ‘Much Strife’ (πολύνεικος). In light of this, the comment can only be interpreted as Amphiaraus’ address to the strife between the two brothers over the throne of Oedipus, the reason behind Polyneices’ expedition that is now pushing the Argives to disaster. This indirect report is followed by ten verses where the Messenger directly transmits the words of the seer:

352 See 587-588 later, ἔγωγε μὲν δὴ τήνδε πιανὸν χθόνια μόντις κεκευθὸς πολέμας ὑπὸ χθονός (and I will make the land richer, a seer buried in foreign land).
353 The text presents several corruptions here. On the different surviving words and correction suggestions see Hutchinson (1985: 134-135), West (1990: 94), and Sommerstein (2008: 210). The words ἔξυπτετοις ὑνόμα καὶ τοῦνοι ἔνδικτομένος, on which this comment is based, are preserved in the texts of all three scholars.
And his lips utter these words:

"Is this kind of work appreciated by the gods
a good thing to hear and to speak of posthumously,
to have brought a foreign army to plunder
your fatherland and the native gods?
What claim to justice can quench the mother source,
and how can your fatherland become an ally to you,
if it is conquered by your spear?
For my part I make this land richer,
a seer buried in foreign land.
Let us fight; I hope for a non-shameful death."

 Sept. 579-589

The importance of embedded speech in the Redepaare as a tool for the Messenger’s embodiment of the warriors has already been noted in this chapter.354 In this passage, however, the Messenger does not simply transfer words, but he becomes a spokesperson on behalf of a prophecy.355 More importantly, however, the speech contains a second layer of meaning which it only acquires once it is

354 See n. 267 and 348.
355 Compare with verse 480 (κόμπαζ᾽ ἐπ᾽ ἄλλωι) in section 3.4.3.
enacted.\(^{356}\) as soon as the Messenger finishes the sentence ‘λέγει δὲ τοῦτ’ ἔπος διὰ στόματ’, every one of his upcoming words will be addressed to his counterpart onstage, Eteocles, the brother of Polyneices and his opposite force in the play. As such, Eteocles becomes the receptor of the same prophecy as Polyneices and, although Amphiaraus’ words were addressed to his brother, they are equally true for him, the person who shares Polyneices’ fraternal hatred and Curse. Eteocles, however, remains oblivious to this.

Neither the address to Tydeus as the summoner of the Erinys, nor Amphiaraus’ warning speech to Polyneices resonate with the king, who instead proceeds to the allocation of Lasthenes. Yet, for all that the king will indeed not acknowledge it until his next speech, his use of vocabulary is unknowingly heavily charged with predictions of his own tragic future, so much so that it is almost as if Amphiaraus’ prophecies have begun to awaken the king’s subconscious mind.\(^{357}\) During his praise of the seer, Eteocles will be speaking of the company of evil men, stating that it is a fruit better to not crop (καρπὸς οὐ κομιστέος, 600). The language of harvesting and crops is used elsewhere in Aeschylus in relation to unholy behaviour.\(^{358}\) In the Seven, it will appear again when Eteocles is preparing to meet Polyneices at the seventh gate. There, it is his brother’s blood that becomes the crop that should not be harvested (πικρόκαρπον ἀνδροκτασίαν, 693). Along similar lines, when Eteocles is addressing the cohort of the Argives as a ‘god-detested set of men’ (θεοπτύστω χένει, 604), he is unaware that he will soon be referring to the god-hated men in his own family (Φοίβοι στουγθέν πᾶν τὸ Λαῖου γένος [the whole family of Laius, detested by Apollo], 691). Finally, in terms of his euphemistic conviction that the Argives are marching the path of no return (τείνουσι πομπήν τὴν μακρὰν πόλιν μολεῖν [marching in line a path from which return is long], 613), the tragic irony of Eteocles speaking of his

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\(^{356}\) See also Uhlig (2019: 149-153), who sees the Messenger and his embodiment of Amphiaraus in this scene as the human surrogate for the golden letters that are missing from the prophet’s shield.

\(^{357}\) Perceptions of the subconscious have been discussed to a great extent in relation to Oedipus, especially the Oedipus Rex which inspired Sigmund Freud’s naming of the ‘Oedipus complex’ and formed part of his arguments on the Freudian slips. Following a comment on the notion of repetition by Brooks (1977: 288), it is my belief that the Redepaare could be read as the slow manifestation of an awakening subconscious, but I will leave the matter open for future discussions.

\(^{358}\) See also Pers. 816-826, where similar usage of words for crops are used by Darius. On the use of words for fruit and harvesting in relation to the Erinyes specifically, see also Padel (1992: 134-137).
own death will be revealed when in 719 he will be the one to exit the dramatic space, never to return. Without realising it, Eteocles foretells his own death.

After praising Amphiaraus, Eteocles places Lasthenes on the gate to defend the city. For the king, the noble seer will find his end once the swift eye of his champion detects and attacks the body of Amphiaraus that the shield will expose: ποδόκες ὀμμα· χεῖρα δ´ οὐ βραδύνεται παρ´ ἀσπίδος γυμνωθὲν ἀρπάσαι δορί , 623-624). The importance of the eyes of the warriors and their hands has been highlighted several times in the scene; here however, Lasthenes’ great war skill has serious implications for Eteocles himself. Lasthenes’ swift eye, ποδόκες, recalls the name and the story of Oedipus, as well as the characterisation of the Erinys as swift-footed in 791 (καμψίπους).

In its turn, ποδόκες ὀμμα recalls Parthenopaeus’ eye of the gorgon (γοργὸν δ´ ὀμμα´, 537). The warriors outside the gates share the ferocious look of Ares and it is that look that Eteocles will encounter once he meets his brother on the seventh gate. Similarly, like the spear of Lasthenes that will attack the body of Amphiaraus once a part is left uncovered by the shield, Eteocles’ and Polyneices’ mutual deaths will occur by spear from each other’s hands. Closing his speech, Eteocles highlights the gift of good fortune for mortals: θεοῦ δὲ δῶρον ἑστιν εὐτυχεῖν βροτούς (but it is a gift from god for mortals to be fortunate, 625). Indeed, Thebes will receive fortune in the battle, but the price is one that Eteocles and his brother will have to pay.

3.4.7 Seventh Pair of Speeches: Polyneices – Eteocles (631-676)

The departure of Lasthenes leaves the last champion of Thebes onstage alone together with the Messenger. From one opposing the many, the Messenger becomes the only counterpart to the king. Polyneices’ identity is revealed soon afterwards as the attacker at the Seventh gate. His name is not mentioned until

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As revealed in 805 and 838-839 for which see also 4.2.2. On the importance of the hand as the dominant tool of the warrior and the passive role that βραδύνεται attributes to the spear, see Hutchinson (1985: 141).

Aeschylus leaves the gate unnamed, so the reference to its sequence is only used to highlight the conclusion of the report of the Messenger which will see Polyneices as the last champion (ἔβδομον ὁδὸν ἐβδομάς, 631). Euripides’ Phoenissae also maintains the same name (1104-40). There is no evidence to suggest that the name or the location of the gate corresponds to a real gate in the ancient city, but see Berman’s suggestion that the name ‘Seventh’ is an alternative for the Hypsistai or the spring, the Dirkaei or Krenaiai gates in Berman (2015: 84), and compare with Paus. 9.8.4, where the name of the Hypsistai gates appears.
641, but instead, the tragedy that is about to take place is indicated by the Messenger’s emphasis on the warrior’s fraternal relationship to Eteocles: τὸν αὐτόν σοῦ κασάγνητον (your own very brother, 632). Both the emphatic use of αὐτόν and the absence of Polyneices’ name frame the horror of the war as something that, for the first time, is explicitly much more personal to Eteocles, than it is a matter of the city.\(^{362}\) Tension also climaxes in this speech as the Messenger abandons the past tense and brings Polyneices to the ‘here and now’ when he tells Eteocles in oratio obliqua “what kind of destiny he is cursing and praying for, sounding out a paean for capture” (ὁς ἄραται καὶ κατεύχεται τοχαῖς [...] ἀλώσιμον παῖδιν ἐπεξιμακράσσος, 633-635).\(^{363}\) Through the use of the present tense, Polyneices is brought into the present. Apart from his temporal separation from the rest of the warriors, Polyneices encompasses the agency of all his six predecessors.

Just like Amphiaraus, Polyneices does not receive any characterisation from the Messenger, but the revelation of his desires and mind comes exclusively from his own words. However, his threats do not resemble the seer’s wise prophecies, but instead his curses (ἀράται) become a verbal link to the Ara of his father (Ἀράτ᾿ Ἐρινύς πατρός, 70). In that sense, Polyneices becomes a literal summoner of the Erinys (Ἐρινύος κλητῆρας), concluding the work that Tydeus initiated in his first speech. Indeed, Polyneices declares that he is ready to commit fraternal murder, to kill his brother and to be killed by him too: σοὶ ἔμφερεσθαι καὶ κτανὸν θανεῖν πέλας (to fight with you and to die besides you after killing you, 636).\(^{364}\) In a tragic way, the prophetic powers of Amphiaraus are recalled in this passage again, as Polyneices becomes the prophet of his own death. If his words recall the first and the sixth champions, Polyneices’ shield is also the referent to the four shields between them, as it encompasses all the characteristics of the shields that the Messenger has emphasised previously in his descriptions of the warriors:

\(^{362}\) On the emphasis of the phrase see Hutchinson (1985: 143-144) who notes the rarity of the use of a stop before the eleventh element of the verse followed by an enjambement.

\(^{363}\) Uhlig (2019: 155). The present tense does not only appear in the narrative of Polyneices, but it had also been used to give vibrance to the speech of Amphiaraus, (κακοῖς βλέπει, 571; καλεῖ δὲ, 579), however, the Messenger’s conclusion of ἡμῖν had returned the narrative to the past in 591, leaving Polyneices to be the only figure whose speech is presented as a present event.

\(^{364}\) It is also possible to trace a ring composition here as 636-638 look back to the oath scene in the prologue 46-48 where the Argives had sworn to either conquer the city or be buried in its grounds. However, to swear to either win or die was a widely spread military oath in Greece, with the Spartan oath to destroy Messenia or die being the most broadly known (Euph. FGH 70 F 226), so the association between the two passages alone is not enough to prove it is intentional.
ἔχει δὲ καινοπηγὲς εὐκυκλὸν σάκος
dιπλοῦν τε σήμα προσμεμηχανιμένον·
χρυσῆλατον γάρ ἄνδρα τευχηστήν ἰδεῖν
ἀγεὶ γυνὴ τὶς σωφρόνος ἥγουμενῃ·
Δίκη δ᾿ ἄρ’ εἶναι φησιν, ὡς τὰ γράμματα
λέγει, “κατάξω δ᾿ ἄνδρα τόνδε, καὶ πόλιν
ἐξει πατρόιον δομάτων τ᾿ ἐπιστροφᾶς.”

He has a newly forged, well-rounded shield
and a double emblem cunningly attached on it.
One can behold an armed man made of beaten gold,
whom a woman is guiding with wisdom;
And she claims to be Justice, as the letters say:
“I shall bring this man home, and he will acquire the city
of his father and the [ability to] return to his residence.
Sept. 642-648

Like his speech, Polynéices’ shield narrates a recent story through its
emblem that has been newly-fashioned (καινοπηγὲς). Its well-rounded shape
(εὐκυκλὸν) is the supreme form of the circular shields of Hippomedon,
Parthenopaeus and Amphiaraurus.³⁶⁵ Like Capaneus, the shine of Polynéices’ shield
comes from the gold that is beaten on its surface (χρυσῆλατον), and, like both
Capaneus and Eteocles, his shield acquires its own voice through the letters on its
surface (ὡς τὰ γράμματα λέγει).³⁶⁶ Polynéices’ opponent will see these letters in
relation to his crest, the double depiction on which, recalling the shield of
Parthenopaeus (541 and 543), has been crafted and attached to the shield separately (διπλοῦν τε σήμα προσμεμηχανιμένον, 643). As with the shields of Parthenopaeus
(543) and Eteocles (466), an armed man is depicted (ἄνδρα τευχηστήν). His
accompanying divinity, however, is not a threatening entity, like Typhon on
Hippomedon’s shield (493) or the Sphinx on the shield of Parthenopaeus (541), but
Justice (Δίκη), and the letters speak on her behalf as she promises to bring

³⁶⁵ Cf. κύκλον, 489; κυκλωτόν, 540; κύκλως, 591.
³⁶⁶ Cf. χρυσοῖς γράμμασιν, 434; γραμμάτων, 468.
Polyneices back to his fatherland and reassert his right to dwell in the house (κατάξω δ’ ἀνδρα τόνδε, καὶ πόλιν ἔξει πατρώαν δομάτων τ’ ἐπιστροφάς).

The image of Dike leading Polyneices’ path reinforces the reminder that ekphrasis is always concerned with sense of perspective. On one level, the presence of Dike counteracts the aggressive, maddening and lustful character that the play has thus far associated with the Argives. However, on another level, Polyneices’ shield recalls the wise seer Amphiaraus through its claims to wisdom (σοφρόνος). In doing so, the shield becomes a tool for reflection on the subjectivity of what is right and what is wrong: having chosen Justice as his emblem, it is evident that Polyneices considers the expedition against Thebes an attempt to restore justice after an unlawful exile from which he is hoping to return (ἐπιστροφάς). This is further indicated by the fact that, just like Eteocles had done in 69-72, Polyneices summons the protector gods of Thebes, asking them to stand by him:

καλεῖ πατρώας γῆς ἐποπτῆρας λιτῶν
tῶν ὧν γενόσθαι πάγχο Πολυνείκους βία.

He is summoning the ancestral gods of his fatherland to be favourable to his prayers in all ways, such are the cries of Polyneices.

Sept. 640-641

However, just like Eteocles, Polyneices has a distorted understanding of Justice. Dike and the Erinys are not dissimilar in Aeschylean poetry, since both deities serve the restoration of order, which is not personal but cosmic, a process during which blood is shed. In the Oresteia, the Erinyes are the avengers of Dike; specifically, in the Choephoroi familial murder and bloodshed are caused by the sword of the Erinys once Justice, daughter of Zeus, has been dishonoured. Later in the same

367 It might be worth noting the presence of Dike in the fragments of presocratic philosophy; the deity appears as one that restores the cosmic balance in the works of Parmenides (P. B1.14) and of Heraclitus (H. B94), where the deity appears also in relation to the Erinyes: Ἡλικος οὐς ὑπερβηθηκαι μέτροι· εὶ δὲ μὴ, Ἑρακλής μιν Δίκης ἐπίκουροι ἐξωρηθησθησαν. On the role of Justice in Presocratic philosophy as an executioner of law in the polis, see also Gagarin (2002: 19-23), where both fragments are referenced. On the importance of the feminine element as dominant in the scene and in the play more broadly through the presence of Dike, the Erinys and the Chorus see Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 100-102).

368 Cho. 639-652.
play, it is Justice who touches the fighter’s hand before battle, breathing its wrath on him. In the Seven Against Thebes, Dike will literally be leading her champion by the hand as Polyneices moves ahead holding his shield, convinced that he is guided by the force that will bring him back to his home. However, it is not just Polyneices who will be led by Dike, but both brothers, who will share the same fate when they die in the battlefield; in light of this, the man on Polyneices’ shield who is led by Dike turns out to be a representation of both men.

Unlike the previous speeches, the announcement of Polyneices’ presence on the seventh gate leaves Eteocles in no doubt of the operation of the daimon in the war: πατρὸς δή νῦν ἁραὶ τελεσφόροι (my father’s curses are being fulfilled, 655). His perception of the shield and its agency is also different than before as, unlike his previous statements where he had counteracted the ability of the shields to inflict wounds as weapons of defence, this time Eteocles acknowledges the voice of the shield:

τάχ’ εἰσόμεσθα τοὐπόσιμ’ ὁποι τελεῖ,
εἴ νιν κατάξει χρυσότευκτα γράμματα
ἐπ’ ἀσπίδος φιλῶντα σὺν φοίτωι φρενῶν.

Soon we shall find out where his blazon shall end up,
whether the gold-beaten letters lying in frenzy
on the shield threatening arrogantly, shall bring him home.

Sept. 659-661

Eteocles had already begun to acknowledge that the representations on the shields reflected the divine alliances of their bearers when Typhon had appeared on Hippomedon’s shield (515). However, he refuses to believe that Justice would be on the side of his brother, as shown by his reaction to the shield’s written message. As such, this time Eteocles tries to counteract the shield’s power, not by

369 Cho. 946-952. See also Eum. 508-516, where the summoning of Justice comes together with the summoning of the Erinyes as if the two entities are operating together.
370 See Bacon (1964: 27-38) who has argued for the depiction of the Erinyes on Eteocles’ shield in the arming scene. For the death of the brothers as their final reconciliation and payment of the debt to the Curse see the end of the play Sept. 743-771, 886-887, 908-909.
371 Hutchinson (1985: 150) argues that the letters, not Dike, is the object of κατατάξει in 660; in that sense, χρυσότευκτα conveys irony. For a different opinion compare with Uhlig (2019: 157).
doubting the truth of its emblem, but by tracing the difference between objective reality and the deceitful effect of personal perspective. By naming the letters instead of Dike, Eteocles is suggesting that it is the bearer rather than the crest who is speaking: like Polyneices, whose mind was never guided by Justice (εἰ δὲ ἦ {[…]}, Δίκῃ παρήν ἔργοις ἐκείνου καὶ φρεσίν, 662-663), the letters are also speaking nonsense (σὺν φοίτοι φρεσίν, 661). His explanation for the statement is that Dike, who is of a wise counsel (σωφρόνως), would not accompany a man of an audacious mind (φωτὶ παντόλμωι φρένας, 671). After all, Eteocles is attacking his paternal land and that would surely make him hateful to the goddess of Justice: οὐδ᾿ ἐν πατρίδιας μὴν χθονὸς κακουχία οἴμαι νῦν αὐτῷ νῦν παραστατεῖν πέλας.372 His statement is multi-layered as it is concerned with the dramatic character of Polyneices and is also a reflection on the scene’s metapoetic discourse. Not only does his comment bring to a climax the scene’s overall representation of tragic irony, but, paradoxically, it becomes the most prominent example: arguing about the subjectivity of perspective, Eteocles fails to see that his own interpretation is subject to his understanding of Justice. Convinced of the correctness of his interpretation, Eteocles will proceed to his self-allocation as he will get ready to ‘harvest the crop of the company of evil men’.

Loyal to his determination to prove the shields and their ominous messages wrong, Eteocles declares himself the right warrior to stand against Polyneices: τούτως πεποιθῶς ἔμι καὶ ξεστήσωμαι αὐτῷ (I am convinced about this and I shall stand against him myself, 672-673). Persuaded that Justice is on his side (ἐνδικτερος, 673), the king keeps his earlier promise to place himself on the seventh gate.373 After all, there are three roles that he and Polyneices share, those of ruler, brother and enemy.374 This makes Eteocles the most suitable warrior for the fight, more than any other of his matches. His words are filled with tragic irony: ultimately, it is not by his victory over Polyneices that he will serve Justice, but the justice of the Erinys will be served once both of Oedipus’ sons have perished.

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373 Sept. 280-286. For Taplin’s doubts about the authenticity of the verses see also 3.3.
374 Sept. 674-675 (ἄρχοντι τ᾿ ἄρχων καὶ κασιγνήτωι κάσις, ἐχθρός ἐξ ἐχθροὶ στήσομαι).
Oblivious to that, he asks for his greaves, a synecdoche for his armour and an implicit declaration of his self-allocation to the seventh gate:

φέρ’ ώς τάχος
cνημίδας, αίχμης και πτερών προβλήματα.

Bring me immediately
my greaves, protectors against the spear and shafts.\(^{375}\)

*Sept. 675-676*

After his repeated attempts to counteract the power of the metallic sounds and to underplay the semantics of the shields of the Argives, Eteocles will now be engaging physically with the metallic armour, which would have appeared onstage in its full, visible *objecthood*. Much like the warriors of the Redepaare, whose bodies were portrayed as assimilated with their weapons, Eteocles will now be seen in the process of becoming one with his armour. Having heard the details of the Argives and their weapons, it is time for Eteocles to take matters in his own hands. The staging of Eteocles’ arming, I argue, is as crucial to the dramatic action of the *Seven* as it is for the play’s metapoetic engagement with epic.

In conclusion, to study the Redepaare is to observe the epic shield and its ekphrasis unfold into multi-layered symbolism. In this chapter I have shown how, through the Messenger’s speeches, the Argive shields serve a double role, both as the primary referents to the enemy and their daimonic alliances, and as indicators to the importance of personal perspective in the interpretation of representation. In the next chapter, where I examine Eteocles’ Arming Scene, we will see another Homeric motif reconfigured into a tool for the depiction of the tragic hero and the representational power of tragedy. This time, Eteocles will be the one to both recall the epic hero and embody the tragic hero.

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\(^{375}\) The correct wording in the verse has been a source of scholarly controversy over the years. See the discussion in n. 395.
CHAPTER 4

The Arming Scene and the End of the Play

4.1 The Semiotics of the Metallic Armour (675-719)

4.1.1 A Change in Material Representation

Once the Messenger’s report in the Redepaare has been concluded, the episode enters a state of transition, where Eteocles is preparing to leave for the battlefield. Formed by five six-verse exchanges between Eteocles and the Chorus (677-711) which then escalate into a stichomythia (712-719), this part of the episode (or Arming Scene, as I have called it in this dissertation) is the central and most widely discussed scene of the play. Specifically, the scene is well-known for its portrayal of the significant behavioural change in Eteocles. In contrast to his former claims to victory and his confidence, the king transforms in this scene from a victorious leader into a defeated soldier. More importantly, the operation of Oedipus’ Erinys is acknowledged for the first time as the controlling power of the war (695-697). As I have discussed in the Introduction, Eteocles’ voluntary departure for the seventh gate in 719 has been the main source of scholarly controversy about the divine interference of the Erinys in the death of the two brothers. To this day, questions about Eteocles’ morality, ethical responsibility, and control over his actions continue to preoccupy critics. As part of my discussion on the function of metallic weapons, I will shed new light on this complicated matter, allowing us to see it with fresh eyes. Specifically, I argue that, in order to answer the question regarding the cause of Eteocles’ change in the Arming Scene, the onstage action of the scene is the most significant interpretative key.

The motif of the call for one’s arms was not new in the Seven. Arming scenes abound in Greek literature, especially in the Iliad, where the call for one’s

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376 This matter preoccupied scholars persistently between the 1950s and the 1990s. After an article by Solmsen in the 1930s, where the author proposed that Eteocles’ actions in the Arming Scene are dictated by the Curse, numerous scholars engaged in heated debate trying to negotiate matters of personal responsibility, divine will and inherited guilt. For the development of the debate across the decades together with bibliography see Introduction 1.2.
arms initiates a type-scene that marks the declaration of a hero’s desire to fight. At the same time, these scenes also pave the way for the warrior’s aristeia. Aeschylus’ frequent deployment of Homeric themes and motifs in the Seven Against Thebes means that an adaptation of the Homeric arming scene here is not surprising, especially since the king had already announced that he would be one of the seven defenders of the city in the first episode. However, as in the previous parts of the play, the order for his armour does not merely reproduce the motif’s epic predecessor. More so in this scene than in any of the previous Homeric allusions of the play, the poet implements radical alterations to the Homeric model, reshaping the literary representation and meaning of the arming scene and turning it into a tool for symbolising the enactment of Oedipus’ Curse. Specifically, I argue that Eteocles’ order for his greaves in 675-676 indicates the initiation of an arming scene. In theatrical terms, this means that a costuming scene would be about to take place, finally visualising the theme of the interaction between warrior and weapon. This interaction, I argue, is crucial to the development of the play.

377 See for example Il. 7.101, where Menelaus declares his decision to fight Hector by announcing that he is about to arm himself. Similarly, at Il. 19.23, Achilles declares his decision to return to the battle by announcing that he is going to put on his armour. For the different categories of type-scenes as a literary mechanism in Homer, see Clark (2004: 134-137), and for arming scenes specifically see Hainsworth (1993: 215-23), Fenik (1968: 73-74, 78-79 and 191), Russo (1968: 282-285), Armstrong (1958: 337-354), and Arend (1933: 92-97). For the armour as symbolism for strength and stature in the Iliad see Shannon (1975: 25-28). Finally, an intriguing parallel between type-scenes and the schemes of cognitive psychology has been made by Minchin (2001: 32-72).

378 This is especially true for the four main arming scenes: those of Paris, Agamemnon, Patroclus and Achilles (Il. 3.330-339, 11.17-46, 16.131-144 and 19.369-391). In these scenes, the heroes are described to be putting on each piece of their armours in a symbolic assuming of their identities as warriors which further marks the preparation for their acquisition of kleos. The kleos of the epic heroes is something that scholarship has repeatedly described as irrevocably linked to Homer’s own desire for kleos through poetic composition. See De Jong (2006: 188-207), Fowler (2004: 226-227) and Macleod (1983: 1-15) and compare with Il. 6.358, 9.189.

379 Sept. 282-284: ἔτι δὲ γ’ ἀνδρας ἔμοι ἔξω ἄρητας ἀνηρτέτας ἐρθοῦσα τῶν μέγαν τρόπον εἰς ἐπιτυμαχεῖς ἔξοδος τάξο μολὼν (on my side, I will go and position six men, with myself as the seventh, to fight against the enemy at the seven-walled exits). These verses have been central to the scholarly debate about Eteocles’ freedom of choice in the Arming Scene. See Taplin (1977: 142-146) for the full discourse together with bibliography.

380 The staging of the arming scene in the Seven Against Thebes has been contested repeatedly in the past. It has however been accepted in over the last few years as the communis opinio. For an overview of the discourse as well as for my evaluation of the philological arguments that oppose the staging of the arming scene, see the section below.

381 The importance of costumes in theatre is hugely significant and the delineation of their role as a marker of identity has received ample discussion over the years. For general discussion on the dramatic costumes as creators of meaning see Konstan (2013: 63-75), Wyles (2011: passim) and Brooke (1962: 64-81). More focused studies on specific costumes or plays include those of Marshall (2001: 127-136), Griffith (1988: 552-554) and Thalmann (1980: 260-282). For comedy, see Rusten (2013: 279-290), Duncan (2006: 124-159), Robson (2005: 171-186) and Revermann (2006: 145-159). For works on the meaning and use of different categories of props in Greek plays, see section 1.1 of the Introduction. Among the rest of the works referenced in my
Costuming is central to theatrical performances; together with props, costumes frame the narrative by contributing towards the creation of character identity.\(^{382}\) In the *Seven Against Thebes*, the extensive representation of metallic weapons in the play as objects that are implicitly or explicitly associated with the daimonic agent gives Eteocles’ arming additional levels of meaning. In my reading of the Arming Scene, I connect Eteocles’ understanding of and surrender to the Erinys to the covering of his body by the armour, a process that takes place throughout his debate with the Chorus.\(^{383}\) In the next sections, the characters’ discourse will be examined in the context of the text’s accompanying stage action, namely his arming. By the end of the chapter, I will have shown how the two elements are linked in a cause-and-effect relation. Overall, the armour becomes the main tool through which both Eteocles’ transformation into the double of Polynoeices and the embodiment of the daimon of the house are dramatised; these assimilations will lead to the end of the war once the two sons of Oedipus have killed each other in battle. As we will see in the second part of the chapter, the motif of this union is expanded further in the choral song, where, as the play concludes, we will see the three generations of the Labdacids joined together in the Chorus’ narrative, while the main antitheses of the play, Eteocles and Polynoeices, Thebes and Argos, inside and outside, will one by one be resolved into a union.

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\(^{382}\) In using terms such as prop and costume, I wish to be mindful of the complexity that surrounds their definitions. The general consensus sees the costume as one or more items worn by the actor as distinctive parts of the character’s identity, whereas a prop is one or more objects that visibly interact with a human actant onstage. For the relevant definitions see Sofer (2003: 31), Todorff (2013: 95-96) and Ketterer (1986: 193). However, the distinction between costumes and props is not always clear and the Arming Scene of the *Seven Against Thebes* is an exemplary instance. Here, the pieces of the armour are props, objects visibly manipulated by an actant in the scene; at the same time however, the armour is a costume, covering the body of the actor to signify his new identity. In this chapter, I will therefore reduce my terminology to only include the use of the word ‘props’. This term is preferable because of my approach that sees each piece of the armour separately, while it also remains in line with Sofer’s definition.

\(^{383}\) This is not the first piece of scholarly work that sees the armour of Eteocles as reflecting his internal change, but the earlier works of Schadewaldt (1961: 105-116) and Bacon (1964: 34-36) concluded as early as the 60s that the iron armour symbolises Eteocles’ slow transformation into an ‘iron soldier’ that will realise the order of the Erinys. However, the limited theoretical frameworks on which stage studies were conducted at the time meant that neither Schadewaldt’s nor Bacon’s articles have offered any insight into the cognitive mechanisms that the individual props activate during the enactment of the costuming. To this day, their works have become neither as widely known nor as accepted as they deserve.
Eteocles’ Arming Scene is not only central to the development of the dramatic action but, through its various allusions to the Homeric epic, also concludes Aeschylus’ metapoetic discourse. Formerly a symbol for bravery, martial skill and desire for battle and glory, the Homeric armour will now become the Aeschylean tool for the transformation of the warrior from a hero into the embodiment of his cursed fate. Making use of the nature of the dramatic experience, itself a physical act in which all the human senses are involved, the poet reframes the way in which weapons are seen in literature, turning them into a literary symbol that is distinctively tragic. At the same time, the weapons become the medium for the negotiation of tragedy’s own materiality: in the next sections we will see that, as Eteocles is putting on his armour, the tragedy creates a self-referential depiction of its human and non-human actants behind the scenes. Specifically, it restages the preparation for the performance itself, in which an actor would have assumed the role of Eteocles by putting his costume and his mask on backstage - the same actor who is now acting the role of Eteocles by putting on a second costume to assume another role as the iron soldier, the metallic embodiment of Oedipus’ Curse. This time, however, the process takes place before the eyes of the audience.384

Along with its representation of the relationship between warrior and weapon, the scene is also a direct depiction of the relationship between the epic warrior and his tragic counterpart. Whereas the epic warrior receives praise and glory for his heroism, the tragic hero is a materialised entity that inherits the weapons, memories and expectations of the first. Carrying this heavy literary baggage, the tragic hero transforms epic conventions into a new mechanism.

384 Weapons appear to have had strong association with the tragic costume and this is often indicated by comedies and vase paintings, where weapons are often included in the depiction of tragic costume. One of the most characteristic examples in comedy is the arming scene in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* (Ach. 1097-1142), where Telephus and Dikaiopolis are simultaneously ordering their slaves to bring them things in preparation for a battle and a feast respectively (see also p. 156 and n. 460). In art, several vase paintings also appear to incorporate weapons as part of the tragic costume; examples include, among others, the depiction of a maenad holding a sword on an Attic red-figure hydria fragment by the Leningrad painter in 470-450 BC (now in Antikensammlung, Staatliche, Berlin inv.3223) and that of an actor in a short tragic costume holding his mask and sword on a fourth century Tarentine Gnathia bell krater fragment (Wurzburg Museum inv. II4600 (L832)). To these examples, it might be worth adding the Pronomos vase, dated to 400BC, which depicts an actor dressed as Heracles, fully equipped with his greaves and breastplate, holding his club and bow (now in Naples Museo Archeologico Nazionale inv.81673). However, it is uncertain whether this depiction is that of a satyr actor or a tragic actor; for an in-depth analysis on the tragic and satyr representations on the Pronomos vase, see Griffith’s chapter in Taplin’s and Wyles’ volume of collected essays (2010: 47-64).
through which he embodies the essence of the genre by incarnating the pain and the darkness that is the core of tragedy.

In arguing the above, I am aware that to present an interpretation of the scene that relies on the reconstruction of performance is not without stakes. Indeed, the chapter might find resistance among those who hold the more traditional view that contests the staging of Eteocles’ arming. To those arguments, however, I am hoping to provide substantial answers. As such, I shall start by addressing the primary scholarly arguments that challenged the enactment of the Arming Scene in the past.

4.1.2 The Theories of Interpolation and of the Forgotten Order

It has become clear by now that the path to a reconstruction of the theatrical action of the Seven Against Thebes necessitates engaging with numerous obstacles in the majority of its scenes. This is especially true for the arming of Eteocles in 675-719, the theatricality of which has been by and large overlooked by scholars after two main schools of thought both argued extensively against it. Both arguments were rooted in the same methodological basis, the Significant Action Hypothesis, the notion that every piece of significant action taking place onstage should be made explicit in the text. On that basis, the two arguments challenged the staging of the scene in different ways. The first argument, which found its primary support in the works of Groenboom and Hutchinson, denied any costuming process or correlation between the armour and Eteocles’ change in character. Instead, it read the request for Eteocles’ greaves in 675-676 as an order to an imaginary servant, written to be uttered quickly for dramatic effect, but then expected to be easily forgotten. As for the second argument, it took an even more radical approach: originally proposed by Taplin, it banished verses 675-676 as interpolations; for Taplin, Eteocles was in his armour already from the beginning of

385 The Significant Action Hypothesis was adopted by Taplin (1977: 28-39) in the Stagecraft of Aeschylus by Taplin who reframed an older argument by Wilamowitz. Although the theory has been widely accepted, its view that all significant action is declared through explicit remarks in the text has repeatedly made it subject to criticism, for which see Revermann (2006: 11-12 and 46-65). For criticism on Taplin’s methodological approach to stage action and words more broadly see Altena (1999-2000: 305-309), Marshall (1999-2000: 331-335), Wiles (1997: 5-14), Slater (1993: 5-11), Goldhill (1989: 172-82) and Wiles (1987: 136-51).

386 Groeneboom (1938: 198) and Hutchinson (1985: 152-153).
the play, and therefore he did not need to call for his armour in the first place.\footnote{Taplin (1977: 159-161).}
Starting with the first, I will address both arguments and show how their limitations lead to the conclusion that the Arming Scene is the most likely scenario. As Taplin’s argument is both more elaborate and more widely spread, his points will require a lengthier response.

Supporters of Groenboom’s theory based the rejection of the arming scene predominantly on a comparison between Eteocles’ order for his greaves in 675-676 and Clytemnestra’s order for the axe in the Libation Bearers. Much like the Seven Against Thebes, the scene in the Libation Bearers comprises a request for a weapon by the main character that is seemingly never answered.\footnote{Cho. 889.} The events that follow Clytemnestra’s request in the Libation Bearers make it clear that she never received her weapon; however, no questions are raised by this omission, as Clytemnestra is murdered in the next scene and so the request for the axe is completely forgotten. Supporters of the comparison with the Seven argue that Eteocles asks for his armour in 675-676, then his debate with the Chorus lets the order be forgotten in a similar way. The argument might be intriguing on a primary level, but a close reading of the two paralleled scenes can show its limitations; as Bain has argued, orders to servants or attendants in Greek plays are usually executed, unless there is an obstruction.\footnote{Bain (1981: 2 and 14).} When Clytemnestra asks the servant to bring her the axe, the attendant would presumably have run inside eager to fulfil the request. However, the arrival of Orestes from inside the house with a sword in his hands makes the non-arrival of the axe both easily forgotten and more-or-less self-explanatory, as the servants inside the house would presumably have dispersed at the sight of Orestes.\footnote{Poli-Palladini (2016: 140-141).} In the Seven Against Thebes, however, there is no unexpected event or disruption of the sort that would justify such an omission. On the contrary, Eteocles remains onstage, engaging in dialogue with the Chorus, and so the potential failure to fulfil his order would be noticeable. Furthermore, even if the intensity of his discourse with the women led to a temporary oblivion of his request, his departure for the seventh gate in 719

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Taplin (1977: 159-161).
\item Cho. 889.
\item Bain (1981: 2 and 14).
\item Poli-Palladini (2016: 140-141).
\end{thebibliography}
without armour would have raised questions about the missing weapons. Overall, Groenboom’s proposal contradicts the play’s textual indications.

A different suggestion that aimed to fill this interpretative gap was made later by Taplin in his monograph *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*. There, Taplin dismissed the arming scene by challenging the authenticity of 675-676. He did so on the grounds of three main arguments: first, resorting to the Significant Action Hypothesis, Taplin expressed his conviction that Eteocles’ arming would be too important an action to not be accompanied by explicit verbal remarks. Furthermore, he argued, if the arming was indeed enacted, it would have happened simultaneously to the king’s discourse with the Chorus, which would therefore be a distraction from the dialogue, something that would therefore diminish its significance. Finally, Taplin rejected it on the basis of parallels in later tragedy, listing instances where a hero’s need to arm is indicated by words, but the staging of his arming is avoided. Such examples include the *Heraclidae* where Iolaus calls for his armour but then decides not to arm before he reaches the battlefield, and the *Phoenissae* where Eteocles departs immediately after requesting his armour. For these reasons, Taplin concluded that 675-676 create unnecessary complexity and confusion in the text and he proposed their elimination. Instead, he suggested that Eteocles would have been armed throughout the play.

Although such an explanation would help surpass some of the technical problems that Taplin identified in the enactment of Eteocles’ arming, the drastic action of abolishing two lines of the text needs to be treated with caution before being accepted. It is true that verses 675-676 have provoked controversy due to the various forms in which they have been transmitted in different manuscripts.

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391 Taplin (1977: 159).
393 Eur. *Herc. 698-699* and *Phoen. 779*.
394 Taplin (1977: 161-163). Before Taplin, Wilamowitz (1914: 77) had also suggested that Eteocles would be fully armed onstage from the beginning, except for his greaves which would be added somewhere between 676 and the king’s departure in 719. However, Taplin (1977: 158-159) has rightly ruled out his idea on the grounds that such an act would contradict the Homeric sequence of arming as encountered in the *Iliad*, which the *Seven* strongly recalls, as well as in vase representations. Further support for the argument that the passage would follow the Homeric sequence can be found in Garvie (2010: 24).
395 Scholars continue to be conflicted about the original form of the verse due to the abundance of variations found in the manuscripts on the words αἰχμῆς and πτερῶν. Specifically, αἰχμῆς and αἰχμὰς are two both presented as alternatives for αἰχμῆς, then πετρῶν has been proposed instead of πτερῶν by M I b k, while Paley’s edition has corrected the word to πέτρων (1879: 310). Reasonable
However, deleting a part of the text requires solid justification. Taplin’s proposal concerning the interpolation of 675-676 is derived from potential staging difficulties he saw in the enactment of Eteocles’ arming, but he did not present any textual inconsistencies or linguistic problems.\(^{396}\) If anything, 675 is necessary for the completion of the tricolon with polyptoton in 674 ("ἀρχοντι τ´ ἀρχων καὶ κυσιγνήτωι κάσις // ἐχθρὸς ξόν ἐχθρῶι στήσομαι"); without 675, the tricolon remains unfinished.\(^{397}\) Overall, the evidence against the authenticity of the verses is not sufficient to result in their elimination.

The argument that Eteocles is in armour from the beginning of the play also has its problems, as several scholars have pointed out. One intriguing point regarding the costume of Eteocles has been made by Poli-Palladini who addressed the practical difficulties that wearing armour throughout the play would entail for the actor. In Classical Greece, the hoplites would only don their armour just before entering a battle. The reason was that the hoplites-shield was very heavy, weighing approximately 30kg; as such, the breastplate and the greaves emitted lots of heat, making it uncomfortable for the soldier to keep them on for a long time after the end of the battle; in addition to this, helmets obstructed the ability of their wearers to see and to hear.\(^{398}\) Considering the fact that the actor playing...

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\(^{396}\) However, some support for Taplin’s theory could be found in Prien and Dindorff who have also eliminated 675, a line which Weil characterised as "piaculum commiserunt" (1862: 73). Paley’s commentary suggested that 674-676 could potentially be an interpolation altogether as “the composition of these three lines seems scarcely Aeschylean” (1879: 309-310).

\(^{397}\) Taplin’s claim that the third part of the tricolon weakens the sentiment created by the first two is also not well founded. See Taplin (1977: 161).

\(^{398}\) See also Poli-Palladini (2016: 59) as well as Snodgrass (1999 [1967]: 52) according to whom the helmet “must have made its wearer temporarily deaf besides sharply restricting his vision”. For more on the consistency, functionality and weight of the weapons of the hoplites, see Snodgrass (1999 [1967]: 49-60), Hanson (1989: 57, 60-2, 65-88) and Snodgrass (1964: passim). Finally, a testimony to the weight of the armour in drama is found in Eur. Heracl. 720-728, where the...
Eteocles would enter the stage in 375, about to engage in a very lengthy and detailed dialogue with the Messenger, it is perhaps more likely that he would not have been armed for the entire duration of the episode. Instead, it is more reasonable to assume that he would have had one of his attendants carrying the armour for him, then calling for it just in time for his departure.\textsuperscript{399}

In light of the above, Taplin’s proposal is neither philologically necessary nor attractive. The elimination of Eteocles’ call for armour might be less of a textual necessity and more of a scholarly desire to overcome the difficult question of how this kind of stage action would have taken place. However, to deprive the text of such a powerful theatrical action, especially since both its place in the text and the words that accompany it are indicative of the scene’s importance, requires more careful consideration.\textsuperscript{400} Besides, the Significant Action Hypothesis on which all the arguments against the Arming Scene are predominantly based has received serious criticism, and with good reason; even though the theory paved the way for new investigation into the ancient texts in the 1970s, it is also limited by its arbitrary nature that expects \textit{all} significant action to be indicated by explicit remarks.\textsuperscript{401} Furthermore, the claim concerning the distracting effect that Eteocles’ arming would have had on his dialogue with the Chorus was based on the perception of the two elements as two distinctive, unrelated courses of action happening simultaneously (“could such powerful words be accompanied by action independent to them?”); the possibility of interconnectedness between stage

\textsuperscript{399} This doesn’t mean that the king would have necessarily been completely unprepared for the battle, but Poli-Palladini suggests that he would most likely have been dressed throughout the play in the typical garments of a military leader, a rich but short tunic or red cloak with fabric or leather boots (2016: 62). She has also suggested (2016: 63) that he would be semi-prepared for war, wearing the linen cuirass that we know Athenian hoplites to have worn in the fifth century. Relevant remarks can be found in Alc. fr. 357.6, Hdt. 2.182.1, 7.89.1, Xen. An. 4.7.15, Paus. 6.19.7., cited by the author on the same page, n 82. Such assertions can only be made with limited certainty, however, Poli-Palladini is right to point out that such an appearance would both be convincing, consistent with the Homeric sequence of arming, easy to fit the armour on top of and, from a practical perspective, would allow the actor to move comfortably in order to adjust his greaves.

\textsuperscript{400} For the contrary opinion see Michelakis (2002: 125), according to whom the visualisation of the arming would be of minimal importance to the ancient spectators. For Michelakis, the audience would have been able to grasp the intended meaning of the call for the armour thanks to the visual narrative of the epic, and so the visual representation would not have been necessary. In my opinion, such a perspective oversimplifies matters of timing and the Greek theatre’s desire for realistic representation, while also trivialising theatre’s power of materialising imagery.

\textsuperscript{401} For the hypothesis and its criticism see n. 385 above.
action and dialogue, therefore, has not been considered in this assessment.\footnote{Taplin (1977: 159).}
Finally, the avoidance of arming scenes in the Euripidean plays could be attributed to any factor, from a broader trend that avoided the staging of such scenes, as Taplin claimed, to differing preferences between the two tragedians or the desire of one to differentiate himself from the works of the other.

Indeed, when it comes to understanding Aeschylus’ dramatization of arming scenes, an investigation into potential traces of this motif in scenes from later plays which engage with Aeschylean plays appears to indicate otherwise. The most telling example in this regard is Aristophanes’ \textit{Acharnians} which presents an extensive parody of an arming scene where Lamachus asks the slave to bring him his weapons while Dicaeopolis mirrors these orders, asking the slave for peacetime luxuries.\footnote{Ar. \textit{Ach}. 965 has been marked as a parody of \textit{Sept.} 384-385 by Olson (2002: 309), while \textit{Ach.} 1103 can also be seen as a reference to \textit{Sept.} 676. \textit{Ach.} 1124 is also a tragic periphrasis of \textit{Sept.} 489 according to several commentators. See Olson (2002: 343), Rau (1967: 138) and Rennie (1909: 254). Although Taplin (1977: 160 n. 1), rejects the possibility of a connection between the double arming and tragedy, he admits the oddity of the closeness of \textit{Ach.} 1124 to \textit{Sept.} 489. For the paratragedy of Aristophanes as a way of integrating tragedy into the semiotics of comedy see Revermann (2006: 105-106 and 187-188).}

Although it could be argued that the use of props and staging might have been different in comedy than in tragedy, this scene of the \textit{Acharnians} has paratragic lines that draw from Aeschylus’ \textit{Seven}, suggesting a potential connection between the Aristophanean depiction of arming and the earlier Aeschylean play.\footnote{Ran. 925-926, 928-930, 1013-1017.} Furthermore, we also encounter repeated mockeries from Aristophanes’ Euripides for Aeschylus’ extensive use of armour and weapons in his tragedies in the \textit{Frogs}.\footnote{Lys. 184-190. Cf. \textit{Sept.} 42-53. See also Revermann (2006: 243-244).}

Finally, in \textit{Lysistrata}, when the women are preparing to take their oath of solidarity, the large shield on which the oath takes place evokes paratragic associations with Aeschylus, namely the bloody oath of the Argives on a shield as narrated in the \textit{Seven}.\footnote{Lys. 184-190. Cf. \textit{Sept.} 42-53. See also Revermann (2006: 243-244).} Finally, arming scenes were very popular in art, and several archaeological findings even suggest a connection between their depiction and Aeschylean tragedy. I am referring here to two specific examples of vases that depict Achilles receiving his divine armour from the Chorus in Aeschylus’
These references make the employment of weapons as props in the Aeschylean plays seem more likely. Taplin did indeed include one of those vases in his discussion, but his comment produced a circular argument; concluding his theory of the abolishment of the arming scene he claimed that, had an arming scene taken place in the *Nereides*, then it would have been indicated clearly by words. The extent to which such a statement can confidently be made on behalf of a text that does not survive is questionable.

Attempts to reconstruct the staging of an ancient play will never come without challenges and there will always be an extent to which we will not be able to offer certain answers. However, our textual and scholarly evidence suggests that the appearance of Eteocles’ armour onstage is a far more likely scenario. As such, the only question left to answer is what would have happened once Eteocles is presented with his armour.

### 4.1.3 Eteocles’ Arming: Sequence and Timing

If 675-676 are not interpolated, nor is there a valid way to justify the non-execution of the order conveyed in them, then we are left with two possibilities about the stage action they entail: either an attendant approaches the king with the armour in his arms, then follows him upon his exit, or he hands over the armour to Eteocles, who dons the armour onstage. Out of the two, the first seems less probable. Taplin has rightly argued that it would deprive the stage of significant spectacle, making Eteocles’ final exit anticlimactic.

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407 The first of the two is an Attic red-figure dinos from Olynthos, dated to the end of the fifth century BC (420-410) and attributed to the school of Meidias. Thessaloniki, Archaeological Museum 8.70. See also Robinson (1933: 109-15 and pl. 78-9); Dohle (1967: 125 and pl. 6-8); Barringer (1995: 36, 178, no. 29 and pl. 28-29); Hopman (2012: 163). The second is an Apulian red-figure pelike of Ruvo, dated back to the fourth century B.C and attributed to the Group of Ruvo 423. It can now be found at the Jatta Museum, Italy (Jatta Collection 1500). See Hopman (2012: 163-164 and fig. 23a and b; Barringer (1995: 42-43, 181, no. 45 and pl. 51-53). For the association of the vases with the Aeschylean play see Barringer (1995: 18) and Dohle (1967: 125). For more examples of arming scenes depicted in art see also Podlecki (2013: 144) and Torrance (2007: 18).

408 Taplin (1977: 160).

409 For the different theories regarding the identity of the person bringing the armour to Eteocles see n. 414 below.

410 I consider the possibility that Eteocles is fully armed minus the greaves far less likely based on the fixed Iliadic sequence according to which the greaves are the first piece of the armour a soldier would don: *Il.* 3.330-339, 11.17-46, 16.131-144 and 19.369-391. See also Taplin (1977: 158-159), Sommerstein (2008: 221 and 1996: 101), Hogan (1984: 261) and Bacon (1964: 35).
To this I would also like to add some observations from the stichomythia, where the use of certain words indicates that Eteocles is wearing his armour by the time he departs. In verse 715, Eteocles describes himself as ‘whetted’ (τεθηγμένον), a word that is used again later to describe iron itself (944).\footnote{Note a similar use of the word in verse 584 of the Sophoclean Ajax, where the character’s tongue is characterised as τεθηγμένη right when the hero has entered with his sword, just before he gives his deception speech.} Finally, he also refers to himself as a ‘man at arms’ (ὅπλητης) in 719. Both expressions would seem out of place if Eteocles was not in his metallic armour when making those statements; indeed, I would suggest that these remarks should be interpreted as probable markers of the visibility of Eteocles’ armour.

The final question to ask is when exactly we would expect Eteocles to don his armour. Timing is hugely important in theatrical enactment: from the sequence of the events taking place in the dramatic action, to the speed of the speech of the actors, and to the synchronicity of their word and actions. The question of when something is said or done is equally important as the question of how. Starting with the kinds of weapons the hero would be donning and the order in which this would happen, the most probable scenario is that Eteocles follows the Homeric sequence of arming, according to which the greaves would be the first item put on, followed by the corslet, the sword and shield, the helmet, and the spear the last.\footnote{Both Eteocles’ call for the greaves and the Iliadic tone of the Redepeaare that preceded the Arming Scene point towards the adoption of the Iliadic sequence for the order of Eteocles’ arming. This was the suggestion that Schadewalt originally made (1961: 105-116), and it was later accepted by several scholars such as Bacon (1964:34-36), Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 101), Torrance (2007: 18) and Sommerstein (2008: 221). Minor disagreements about the exact order in which the helmet, shield, spear and sword would have been donned appear among the works of those scholars (for which see the corresponding subsections below). Strangely, most of these scholars either do not produce a convincing argument to support the proposed differentiation from the Homeric order, or they do not justify their choice at all. For this reason, I am inclined to retain the original sequence seen in the Iliadic arming scenes (Il. 3.330-339, 11. 17-46, 16. 131-144 and 19. 369-391, as above).} This would not only be aligned with the Homeric way in which armour is introduced, as a declaration of the warrior’s desire to enter the battle, but it also fits very well with the textual structure as each piece would be donned in each of the five clearly marked sections exchanged between Eteocles and the Chorus (677-685, 686-691, 692-697, 698-704 and 705-711) before their argument climaxes in the stichomythia (712-719). If this is true, then we can expect Eteocles to have been fully armed by verse 711, when the text transitions from the...
exchanges to the faster-paced stichomythia, just in time for the key words τεθηγμένον and ὀπλήτην to be uttered.\textsuperscript{413}

To discuss staging and timing in an ancient play will always be a complicated matter, while the challenge of getting the balance between the analysis of the text and an accurate reconstruction of its performance always haunts the work of any scholar who has attempted to answer these questions. However, I hope that I have provided sufficient evidence to indicate that the theatrical enactment of Eteocles’ arming is the most probable scenario. With that in mind, I will now move to the next part of the study. In the sections that follow below, I examine the text and the arming as two synchronised courses of action. I show that Eteocles’ understanding of the operation of the Erinys is a gradual process that cannot be seen separately from the donning of his weapons. Overall, the enactment of the costuming will not only help Eteocles redefine his identity, but, beyond the specifics of the play’s dramatic action, it reveals tragedy’s own curious negotiation of its materiality as it elaborately establishes its unique identity and place among the literary genres.

4.1.4 Greaves (675-685)

ΧΟΡΟΣ

μή, φύλτατ’ ἄνδρὸν, Οἰδίπου τέκος, γένη

όργην ὀμοιός τοὶ κάκιστ’ αὐθαυσμένων;

ἄλλ’ ἄνδρας Ἀργείοις Καδμείους ἄλις

εἰς χέιρας ἐλθέιν’ αἵμα γὰρ καθάρσιον.

ἄνδροιν δ’ ὀμαίμους θάνατος ὀδ’ αὐτοκτόνος,

οὐκ ἔστι γῆρας τοῦδε τοῦ μίαματος.

ΕΤΕΟΚΛΗΣ

εἶπερ κακὸν φέροι τις, αἰσχύνης ἄτερ

ἔστω· μόνον γὰρ κέρδος ἐν τεθνηκόσιν

κακῶν δὲ καίσχρον οὔτιν’ εὐκλείαν ἔρεις.

\textsuperscript{413} Compare with Schadewaldt (1961: 116) who has placed the spear in 719 and Bacon (1964: 36) according to whom Eteocles equips himself with the spear in 715. For my objections to their proposals see the individual sections below.
CHORUS

No, dearest of the men, offspring of Oedipus, do not become identical in temperament to the one who utters the evilest words!

There are enough Cadmean men to fight with the Argives; for that blood can be purified.

But the death of two men of the same blood killing each other, that pollution will never grow old.

ETEOCLES

If one must suffer evil, let it be without shame;

for this is the only profit for the dead.

You can never speak of glory arising from a shameful disaster.

Sept. 677-685

The exchange between the Chorus and the king begins as soon as he is given his greaves. Costuming is integral to theatrical performances as an indispensable part of character identity. A change of costume can subsequently be indicative of a change of role, behaviour or identity. From the very first passage, the armour is an indicator for the assimilation of Eteocles with Polyneices, a physical merging

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414 The identity of the executioner of Eteocles’ command remains unidentified; we can be almost certain that the Messenger would have left the stage after the termination of his report in 652. As Taplin (1977: 156) notes, characters in Greek tragedy tend to depart the stage once they have said their final words. This is supported by the conclusive character of the Messenger’s final words which validate the accuracy of his report in a similar way similar to his opening verse in 375 (ὡς οὔποτ᾿ ἄνδρὶ τῶι δε κηρυκευμάτωι μέμψῃ ι· σὺ δ᾿ αὐτὸς γνῶθι ναυκληρεῖν πόλιν [so you will never be able to criticize me for my reports; now you must think how to guide the ship of the city], 651-652). Finally, 651-652 are a mirror of the Scout’s final words in the prologue, where the character had once again stressed the accuracy of his reports just before he had departed the stage: καὶ τῶι ἄκοισας ὥ τι μὴ ληφθῶ δόλωι (once I have heard from them, I shall not be caught by deception], 38). Instead, it is almost certain that Eteocles is here addressing one of the mute servants from the cohort that would have entered with him in the Redepaare (for the king’s entrance in the second episode see 3.2). This is the most widely accepted proposal on the matter in modern scholarship with objections to it having only ever been expressed by Schütz who, in the early 19th century proposed that Eteocles is addressing the Messenger (1809: 260 ad 674), and then by Groeneboom who suggested that the order is addressed to an attendant inside the palace (1938: 197-198). However, both suggestions seem highly improbable as the Messenger would not be expected to act as a servant and as an address to an imaginary attendant would deprive the scene of realism, especially since the accompaniment of Eteocles by mute attendants onstage in the second episode is hardly contested in contemporary scholarship. See also Taplin (1977: 161) and Poli-Palladini (2016: 137). For more on the followers of hoplites in the Greek world see Pritchett (1971: 49-51) who highlights that the carrying of armours was one of the main duties of the attendants of warriors (quoting Hdt. 7.229.1, 5.111., Xen. An. 4.2.21, Xen. Hell. 4.8.39). A different suggestion is made by Hecht and Bacon (1973: 50), who argue in favour of silent slave-girls bringing the armour to the king, however, this is not supported by positive evidence.
that reflects their internal assimilation from the point that Chorus report that Eteocles is becoming identical (ὁμοιος) to his brother. Up to this point, Eteocles had been presented as the protector of Thebes, while Polyneices was the leader of the threatening enemy; the former had been praying to the domestic gods, while the latter had been making hubristic threats outside the gates. This changes, however, as Eteocles prepares for the seventh gate and begins to don his armour.

The king’s decision to fight his brother finds resistance among the Chorus, who try to change his mind by appealing to his better nature (φιλτατ᾽ ἄνδρῶν). This address is contrasted with the term ὁμοιος in the subsequent verse, a sign that Eteocles is beginning to resemble his brother; if he lets himself become similar in temperament to Polyneices, the Chorus warn Eteocles, then he will end up identical to that ‘utterer of the evilest words’ (κάκιστ’ αὕδιμενοι, 678). Upon the Chorus uttering the word ὁμοιος, the visual spectacle of Eteocles donning his armour would have most likely also become a reference to his internal change. Until now, Eteocles has been wearing his chief-in-command costume, whilst the assumption is that Polyneices, outside the walls, is already dressed in his full armour. Therefore, as Eteocles puts on his greaves, the Chorus’ comment becomes an implicit signal to his assimilation with his brother which is not only external, but also internal. The internal and the external transformation continue to be linked repeatedly in the following parts of the scene, up until Eteocles’ arming is completed. In the end, the battle between the two brothers will lead to a union that will be both metaphorical, with the two brothers united in death, and literal, as the two bodies will be brought onstage and placed next to one another in 848.

Eteocles’ change does not take place only in relation to Polyneices, but his decision to fight Polyneices also leads to an exchange in roles between the king and the Chorus.415 In the first episode, the Chorus had been accused of being ‘hateful to the sensible’ in 186 (σωφρόνων μισήματα). Now, however, it is Eteocles who is being referred to as the one with a changing temperament. Much like Eteocles in the first episode, the Chorus are now attempting to reason with their king and to point out an alternative course of action: ἄλλ᾽ ἄνδρας Ἀργείοισι Καδμείους εἰς χεῖρας ἐλθεῖν· (There are enough Cadmean men to fight with the Argives), they say

in 679-680. The Chorus’ response is not dissimilar to that of Agamemnon in Iliad 7 when he is trying to change the mind of Menelaus about fighting Hector: πρόμον ἄλλον ἀναστήσουσιν Ἀχαιοῖ (the Achaeans shall raise another champion).\(^{416}\)

There is, however, an essential difference in the stakes involved in the participation of each warrior in the battle; Agamemnon wants to save his brother from the ferocity of Hector, a warrior who is feared even by Achilles. For the Chorus, however, the motivation lies in the roots of tragedy, the notions of damnation and civic pollution. Specifically, the women fear that Thebes would never be able to rid itself of the miasma that fratricide would bring to it (ἀνδρῶν δ᾿ ὁμαίμοιν θάνατος ὤδ᾿ αὐτοκτόνος, οὐκ ἔστι γῆρας τοῦδε τοῦ μίασματος, 681-682).\(^{417}\) In that sense, to fulfil the promise he had given earlier in the first episode to station himself at the seventh gate would make Eteocles as destructive to Thebes as Polynoeices. The miasma that the acoustic imagery of the parodos had only conveyed implicitly before, is now beginning to become explicit.\(^{418}\) Finally, in the Homeric world, warriors are defined by their desire for kleos.\(^{419}\) Eteocles’ desire for glory is made evident when he states that he has made the choice motivated by the quest for εὐκλείαν. However, glory is seen here under a different light.

As he is putting on his greaves, the king’s response to the Chorus elucidates his reasons for choosing to execute the deed (683-685). Eteocles’ position in 683-685 resembles Achilles’ scene in the Iliad 9, where the hero contemplates whether he should die a glorious death at war or peacefully at home without kleos.\(^{420}\) Here too, Eteocles’ declaration that he will fight on the seventh gate is rooted in his motivation for victory, which is however becoming more personal now than before, as primarily indicated by the use of the pronoun τις. In the first episode, Eteocles had addressed Thebans primarily in the plural, but his sudden shift to singular here indicates the shift in his perception of the war as something personal rather than

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416 Iliad 7.115-116.

417 There is no other locus in Greek literature where we encounter the distinction between pollution from spilt blood that is fraternal as opposed to blood of enemies who are not related. It is possible that the Chorus is therefore trying to tap into the general sentiment about fratricide in order to sharpen their argument. See Hutchinson (1985: 154).

418 On imagery of blood and pollution in the first part of the play see p. 65 in Chapter 2 and n. 516.

419 In Iliad 6.446, Hector decides to return to war in order to win the great glory (μέγα κλέος); later, in Iliad 9.189, we encounter Achilles singing about the glorious deeds of men (κλέα ἀνδρῶν), an implicit declaration of his desire to also be immortalised by the songs of his successors. Finally, in Iliad 17.16, Menelaus is ordered to move away from the dead body of Patroclus so that he may be offered glory (κλέος) among the Trojans.

collective.\textsuperscript{421} Not only this, but κέρδος refers to a profitable outcome for himself, an outcome defined as ‘glory’ (εὐκλείαν).\textsuperscript{422}

However, the conditions under which Eteocles is summoned to the war are different to those of Achilles. In his response, εἴπερ κακὸν φέρει τις, the third person syntax frames his future in terms of a divine-inflicted destiny over which Eteocles has no control. In other words, for Eteocles, the acquisition of kleos will not be the outcome of exceptional war skills, but his only consolation for the deathly fate that he has been assigned. This is further reinforced in the next verse when he implicitly refers to himself as dead, foretelling the outcome of the battle (τεθνηκόσιν).\textsuperscript{423} Overall, epic heroism is revived and enacted in the play for the purpose of tragic effect. Etymologically rooted in the king’s name, it is not kleos that will find Eteocles but, rather, the fulfilment of the family Curse.

4.1.5 Corslet (686-691)

ΧΟΡΟΣ
τί μέμονας, τέκνον; μή τί σε θυμοπληθήθης ἄτα φερέτω· κακοῦ δ᾿ ἐκβαλ᾿ ἔρωτος ἀρχάν.

ΕΤΕΟΚΛΗΣ
ἐπεὶ τὸ πράγμα κάρτ᾿ ἐπισπέρχει θεός,
ἴτω κατ᾿ οὖρον, κῦμα Κωκυτοῦ λαχόν,
Φοίβωι στυγηθέν πᾶν τὸ Λαῖου γένος.

\textsuperscript{422} Compare with Kyriakou (2009: 51-58), where the author reads Eteocles’ desire for glory as an indication that even tragic heroes marked by a curse can choose to act in a noble way. However, the author rightly rejects the Opfertod theory that Eteocles’ actions in the Arming Scene sought glory for the city, not himself. The theory had been repeatedly discredited in the past before Kyriakou’s monograph, for which see the discussion in Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 115-119), Thalmann (1978: 180-181), Moreau (1976: 180).
\textsuperscript{423} Compare with verses 208-210, 216-218, where Eteocles’ speech had focused on the salvation of the city. For his first debate with the Chorus see 2.4.
CHORUS
Why this wild eagerness, child? Do not let yourself
be overtaken by this spear-mad delusion
that is filling your heart. Expel the root of this evil!

ETEOCLES
Since the god is speeding this to its conclusion,
may it go to the wind, consigned to the wave of Cocytus,
the entire house of Laius hated by Phoebus.

Sept. 686-691

Both motifs of madness and fatalism advance in this second part of the Chorus’ debate with Eteocles. The increase in the tension is observed in the metre; from 686 to 711 a certain form of dochmiacs is constantly repeated, with most metres not divided from their following metre by word-end.\(^\text{424}\) Previously, dochmiacs were used extensively to signify tension, confusion and loss of control in the parodos.\(^\text{425}\) Here they abound once again as the notion of the distorted mind becomes the focus of the text.

The Chorus’ address to Eteocles as ‘child’ (τέκνον) in the first verse of the exchange is further indication of the new dynamics in their relationship; in the first part of the play, the vocabulary of childhood is deployed to refer to the maddened women who characterise themselves as παρθένοι.\(^\text{426}\) The use of the term τέκνον for the king in 686 reveals the Chorus’ new role as the wise counsellors and that of the king as the maddened side. In the first episode, Eteocles accused the Chorus of having lost their minds. Now, it is his actions that make the Chorus wonder the same: τί μέμονας, τέκνον; (why this wild eagerness, child?), they ask in 687. μέμονας, indicating here eagerness, also alludes acoustically to μένος, the Greek word for rage, potentially implying that Eteocles is governed by a lack of clarity in his mind. This is strengthened by the Chorus’ use of words that denote an intense emotional state, implying a loss of control (θυμοπλήθης and ἅτα).

\(^{424}\) Hutchinson (1985: 155).
\(^{425}\) See section 2.2.1.
\(^{426}\) Sept. 109 and 171.
Homer's allusions are also present in the text. Agamemnon's initial reaction to Menelaus' preparation for the fight against Hector is also an accusation of madness, and his opening line is ἀφραίνεις, Μενέλαε διοτρεφές, οὔδε τί σε χρή ταύτης ἀφροσινῆς (you are acting mad, Menelaus, nurtured by Zeus, and this kind of madness doesn't serve you). Here the enjamed genitive ταύτης ἀφροσινῆς strengthens the verb ἀφραίνεις, which is emphatically placed at the beginning of the sentence to mark the irrationality of Menelaus' decision. As for the madness itself, it is attributed to Menelaus' desire to fight, driven by contest or rivalry (ἐξ ἐριδος).

Successful in his mission, the Achaean king manages to change his brother's mind. The same however will not be true for Eteocles, who will continue his battle preparation despite the Chorus' efforts; his mad decision is not perceived as mere rivalry against Polyneices, but as wrath that is both internal and external.

Further to their astonishment at his reaction, the Chorus also trace an evil desire inside the king (κακοῦ ἐρωτος, 688-689), which is further defined as ἀτα, a word associated with divine madness in Greek literature. That divine madness, the ἀτα, is perceived as something rooted inside Eteocles’ weapons, filling him with rage (θυμοπληθὴς δορίμαργος ἀτα, 686-687). This is reminiscent of previous passages that associate weapons with madness or pain, such as the Scout describing the Argive leaders as of an iron-minded spirit, σιδηρόφρων γὰρ θυμὸς (52). There, the term σιδηρόφρων bridges the destructive hardness of iron and the warriors' minds. Furthermore, in the parodos we saw the sound of the spears filling the air with madness (δορυτίνακτος {δ’} αἰθὴρ ἐπιμαίνεται, 155), while the Chorus pray to the gods to not betray the city during the pain of battle (πόλιν δορίπον μὴ

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427 Il. 7.109-110.
428 See also Kirk (1990: 247-248).
429 Il. 7.111, as in Od. 4.343.
430 In the Iliad, Ata is Zeus’ eldest daughter, and she is linked to a state of panic, confusion and recklessness. See Il. 9.505-7, 19.113 and 126-30. In the Persians, Aeschylus again uses the term to declare madness and destruction coming from daimonic intervention (Pers. 112-114). For more on ata in epic and tragic poetry see Padel (1992: 162-164), Stallmach (1968: for the Seven especially see 42, 78-79) and Dawe (1968: for the Seven especially see p. 108-109).
431 The Iliad debates this very issue of wrath as something both internal and external through Agamemnon's apology to Achilles. In Il. 9.260, Achilles is asked to put aside his bitter wrath which is presented as something existing within him and is therefore within his capacity to cast away (ἐὰς ἐὰν ἐριλάων θυμαλγέα). Then, in Il. 19.88, Agamemnon seeks forgiveness on the ground of his innocence and blames Zeus, Fate and the Erinys for infusing fierce blindness in him, something that implies his inability to control his actions (αἰν ἠγορῆ μεσιν ἐμβάλον ἄτην).
Finally, in 628 the Chorus once again pray that the city be saved from spear-inflicted pain (δορίσου κάκ’ ἕκτρέποντες <εἰς> γὰς). Whilst verses 686-687 do not offer a new metaphor or motif in this regard, this is the first time that weapons are linked in the text to the change in Eteocles. In addition to this, the visual spectacle in the theatre with regard to the weapons would have supplemented the text and given these verses new meaning. In particular, δορίμαργος invites the audience to look again at Eteocles, who would now be putting on his breastplate, a substantially large piece of metal consisting of only a front and rear metallic part but covering Eteocles’ core. In light of this, 686-687 imply an alignment between the king’s appearance and his words; Eteocles’ physical transformation is thus linked to his internal infliction of madness. More importantly, in the previous parts of the play, weapons as symbols of pain and madness have so far only been associated with the army of the Argives. In 688 however, the maddening spear is linked for the first time with a Theban. Proving the Chorus’ previous statement in 677-682 right, Eteocles is now becoming in words and in looks ὁμοιός to the Argives. The madness outside the gates is beginning to invade the interior of Eteocles.

Unlike the case of Agamemnon who manages to change Menelaus’ decision, the words of the Chorus do not impact Eteocles, and the king continues to be persuaded to meet his tragic fate. Like Eteocles’ previous response (683-685), here too the hero’s decision continues to receive a fatalistic justification as Eteocles attributes his destiny to a greater power. With the third person imperative, ἵτω κατ’ οὖρον (let it run before the wind), Eteocles implicitly consents to the destruction of the house of Laius. At the same time, he frames his choice as submission to something predetermined, namely divine intervention that is rushing things to the end (ἐπεὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα κάρτ’ ἐπισεπέρχει θεός, 689). In terms of the identity of the divine, κατ’ οὖρον brings back the motif of the wind, imagery that was linked to daimonic agency in the prologue, where we saw words for breathing pervading the text to signify daimonic agency; now, the wind will take away the house of Laius, which the Gods despise (Φοίβωι στυγηθὲν πᾶν τὸ Λαιόν γένος).

Breastplates as a piece of warriors’ armour had been known in Greece as early as the Geometric era, as revealed by discoveries in Argos. The type of corslet that was mostly adopted in Greece after the sixth century when Aeschylus composed his plays was that of the ‘bell-corslet’, consisting of the front and rear metallic parts fitted with metal pins on the sides and on the shoulders. See Snodgrass (1964: 72-86) and Brooke (1962: 37).
As for the destination, the lot of the house belongs to Hades, as the house has been allocated to the waves of Cocytus, the river that flows from earth to Hades (κόμα Κώκυτος λαχών, 691). Eteocles has lost the desire to fight for his city just as much as he has lost the desire to fight for his own life. This will become all the more prominent in the next part of the text, where the hero equips himself with attacking and defensive weapons.

4.1.6 Sword and Shield (692-697)

ΧΟΡΟΣ
ordovaκής σ᾿ ἄγαν ἱμερός ἐξοτρύ-
νει πικρόκαρπον ἀνδροκτασίαν τελείν
αίματος οὐ θεμιστοῦ.

ΕΤΕΟΚΛΗΣ
φίλου γὰρ ἐχθρά μοι πατρὸς †τελεῖ† ἀρά
ζηροῖς ἀκλαύτοις ὀμμασὶ προσιζάνει,
λέγουσα κέρδος πρὸτερον ὑστέρου μόρου.

CHORUS
An all harshly biting desire is pushing you
to commit a homicide of unlawful blood
that will bear bitter fruit.

ETEOCLES
Yes, for the hateful <black[?]> Curse of the loving father
is seated beside me with dry, tearless eyes,
saying that gain that precedes the death that will follow.

Sept. 692-697

433 For wind imagery and its significance in the Seven Against Thebes as well as in Aeschylean tragedy more broadly, see 2.3.2, especially p. 64-65 and especially n. 140.
434 It is worth noting here Thalmann’s excellent observation according to which Eteocles’ choice of ship imagery in this verse is further evidence of the switch of his focus from the city to the family. See Thalmann (1978: 35).
As we are reaching the middle of Eteocles’ debate with the Chorus, both the
king’s alleged madness and the reasons that led to his change of heart become
clearer. This is not unrelated to the fact that, according to the Iliadic arming
sequence, Eteocles would be taking up his sword and shield at this point. The
importance of the two props marks this part of the debate as the point of no return.

Tragedy is unique in its ability to use the epic past in order to redefine its
present. In epic, the sword, along with the spear, is the alienable ally of its bearer, a
weapon that enforces the heroism or the strength of the warrior in the battlefield, as
we see in Iliad 16 when Hector cuts off the edge of Ajax’s spear with his sword,
and then in Iliad 22 when Hector draws the sword to attack Achilles in what turns
out to be his last battle.\textsuperscript{435} As for Achilles, in Iliad 1 he is planning to use his
blade to slay Agamemnon, but in the end he ends up using his Hephaestian sword
to destroy the Trojans at the river.\textsuperscript{436} In drama, the weapon’s murderous purpose
gives it a new dimension; the sword becomes the symbol for the tragic genre, a
capturer of its essence that signals pain and death.\textsuperscript{437} The sword harvests blood, it
is a weapon that signifies imminent danger and murder; this is all reflected in the
text.

In 692-697, another layer is added to the delusion that the women had
previously traced in the king and, responding to his previous statement, the
Chorus now see a raw, biting lust inside Eteocles (ὁμοδακής ἰμερος). The
semiotics of these words are significant. The word ἰμερος is used elsewhere in
Aeschylus to signify an overwhelming desire that is beyond the power of the
human and instilled in them by a god or superior force.\textsuperscript{438} In Eteocles’ case, the
desire is not just overwhelming, it is also ὀμοδακής. In this compound adjective,
the prefix ὀμο- attributes to the lust a monstrous character, something that is
strengthened by -δακής, a word that signifies biting and is linked to the destruction
of sanity. Thus the king’s lust is one that is biting his phren, like Hector’s mind was
“bitten” when he received shaming news in the Iliad or like the Chorus’ mind is
bitten in the Oresteia when Cassandra’s cries are heard.\textsuperscript{439} The Seven Against

\textsuperscript{435} Iliad 16.114-116 and Iliad 22.306-311.
\textsuperscript{436} Iliad 1.190-193 and Iliad 21.19-26.
\textsuperscript{437} For the semiotics of swords in tragedy see Mueller (2016: 15-41), Revermann (2013: 77-79),
Fletcher (2013: 210-215), and Tordoff (2013: 92-96).
\textsuperscript{438} Aesch. PV 649-650, 865, Supp. 87, Ag. 544, Cho. 299.
\textsuperscript{439} Iliad 5.493 and Ag. 1164. See also Hutchinson (1985: 156). On biting and its connotations in
Greek literature see also Padel (1992: 119-120).
Thebes is a play where spears make the air go mad (155) and shield-emblems operate as the surrogates of their bearers. More importantly, it is a play in which iron is interwoven with the notion of a raw-phren (σιδηρόφρην, 52; ϊμόφρην σίδαρος, 730). Seeing the sword in the hands of Eteocles onstage while hearing simultaneously about the harsh lust that is now biting his mind (ἵμοδασκίς) would have inevitably reactivated the cognitive scheme that has repeatedly linked metallic weapons with wrath and madness in the play, enforcing the implication that the sword itself is biting the hero.

The association between the sword and god-inflicted madness in tragedy is not encountered in the Seven Against Thebes alone, but a striking parallel is found in the later Sophoclean Ajax. Even though we cannot prove direct influence from the Aeschylean play, in both plays the two swords are inherently linked to the daimon-inflicted madness that will destroy their owners. In the Seven Against Thebes, as we have just seen, the Chorus create a connection between the sword and Eteocles’ madness which is attributed to the thingness of the weapon, the monstrous-like mind of iron. In the Ajax meanwhile, as soon as the hero appears onstage with his sword, his tongue is characterised as ‘whetted’ in his Deception Speech (τεθηγμένη), a word that, in describing the hero’s determination and stubbornness, evokes the sword’s past, the imagery of metal turning from thingness into objecthood. As soon as the sword visibly becomes the extension of their hands, the autonomous self of the heroes is blended with the personhood of the metallic weapons through their physical contact, all whilst the objecthood of the swords is blended with the thingness of their metallic components through the words spoken onstage. In terms of their background story, both heroes equip themselves with swords charged with negative omens; Ajax receives the sword as a gift from Hector, his enemy, whilst in the Seven iron is prophesised in Eteocles’ dream to be the Scythian stranger who would divide the land for the two


441 The monologue of Ajax (Soph. Aj. 646-692) has been marked as a parallel of Eteocles’ monologue Sept. 653-676 by Sicherl (1977: 89) and Fraenkel (1967: 82). For the attack against the women as common ground for Eteocles and Ajax see Alden (2000: 317) and compare Aj. 293, 312-313, 369 with Sept. 182, 186-187, 195, 200-202.

442 Aj. 583-584. Interestingly, as Finglass points out, (2011: 309) the same word is encountered in the Seven, spoken by Eteocles when he describes himself as ‘whetted’ once he is fully armed in 715, then later again in 944, when the Chorus describe iron (944). For a parallel between the two scenes see also Mueller (2016: 31-34).
brothers. Like Ajax, Eteocles is also governed by a destructive lust that determines his course of action, and his current state is portrayed as that of someone who is being pushed (ἐξοτρύνοιται), with the Chorus implicitly suggesting that another force is driving him to make the decision. The Chorus underline how the challenge involves committing an unlawful murder. They do so through a metaphor that parallels the outcome with butter fruit (πικρόκαρπον) carrying the connotation of eating, consuming, which strengthens the passage’s implications of daimonic agency. At the same time, the two pairs of synonymous phrases πικρόκαρπον ἄνδροκτασίαν and αἵματος οὐ θεμπστοῦ emphasise the absurdity of the act as a way of reminding Eteocles that the city would not be able to rid of the subsequent pollution. Finally, both heroes equip themselves with their swords, seeking the kleos of the epic heroes. However, it is the actions pursued in this quest for kleos that will make their deaths seem questionably heroic. Used to execute a suicide for Ajax and a fratricide for Eteocles, the sword becomes yet another marker for the tragic heroes’ differentiation from their past selves.

With his sword in hand, the epic hero transforms into a tragic hero, ready to become the enemy of his own city. The sword is not the only striking prop appearing onstage in this exchange however, since Eteocles would simultaneously be taking up his shield. There is not more that can be said about the implications of the shield in the Seven Against Thebes than what the Redepaare has already shown; made primarily of bronze, the shield is the weapon of defence par excellence, operating as the warrior’s second skin. Moreover, the shield in the play is the marker of its bearer’s identity, his spirit and divine alliances. In the

443 Aj. 661-663 and 1032-1033, Sept. 727-731. For Eteocles’ dream, see below.
444 For a different viewpoint see Brown (1977a: 310-311) who argues that the description of emotions as forces invading a body from the outside was “merely the normal way of referring to any strong emotion and does not entail anything supernatural”. Therefore, the scholar interprets ἵμερος in the Seven Against Thebes to be part of Eteocles’ own emotions with no intentional implications of a daimonic intervention. Conclusions about emotions and their perception in ancient Greece are not easily drawn or categorised, and Brown’s note about the fluidity in the perception of human emotions is for the large part correct. However, in this instance we encounter a multitude of terms such as ὀμός and δᾶκω which are usually deployed in relation to the Fury in the Greek literature. Therefore, I am more inclined to suggest that the Chorus are implying a link between Oedipus’ paternal Curse and Eteocles’ behaviour here, regardless of the extent to which the hero might or might not be carrying the inherited guilt inside him (for which see the bibliography noted in 1.2 above).
445 On the morality of Ajax and his death see Mueller (2016: 33-34), Kyriakou (2011: 189-190) and Scodel (1984: 18-20). Eteocles’ heroism has been defended in the Opfertod theory which, however, has repeatedly been criticised. For bibliography on the matter see n. 422.
446 As mentioned previously in p. 90, the term is adopted from Mueller (2016: 135).
Iliad, the shield signified the divine assistance given to Achilles through the excellence of Hephaestus’ craft. In a tragic hero’s hands, however, daimonic intervention brings the hero closer to death as a result of his condemned fate. All the above is suggested by Eteocles’ response to the Chorus.

Verses 695-697 are the first instance in which the Erinys is explicitly referred to as the determining factor in Eteocles’ decision. Although the name of the Erinys is not verbalised before the Chorus’ next response to the king, it is in verses 695-697 that the Curse is invoked as the entity that dictates the dramatic action. There, the introductory γὰρ is perhaps one of the most striking elements as its use by Eteocles means that the king acknowledges and accepts the statements of the Chorus.\(^{447}\) Eteocles does not dispute the claim that his decision is governed by a ‘harshly-biting lust’, and justifies his pursuit of profit on the grounds that he is urged to do so by the Curse of Oedipus (ἀρὰ). In his opening verse, φίλου πατρὸς, Eteocles states that he does not despise his father for cursing him. His grounded tone contradicts the Chorus’ accusations that the king is in a state of irrational rage; at the same time however, Eteocles continues to appear surrendered and prepared to accept his past, present and future. This is further highlighted by the contrast of the phrase φίλου πατρὸς with ἐχθρὰ ἀρὰ, which underscores once again his tragic fate: he is a hero whose life is determined by a paternal Curse instead of paternal love. Whilst ἀρὰ will not be referred to as the Erinys until the next exchange, its influence on Eteocles is made explicit: the Curse is present, seated next to the king (προσιζάνει) who can see her tearless eyes (ξηροῖς ἀκλαύτοις ὀμμασιν).

The characterisation of the Curse as one of ‘dry, tearless eyes’ is not merely a metaphor or a way of renouncing his tears and his mourning, but concludes the decoding of the cycle of semantics that the shield of Tydeus had initiated in the Redepaare. There, the shield represented the eye of the night which, as we saw in the previous chapter, is the eye of the Erinys, a symbol of its all-knowing, ever-present role in the play.\(^{448}\) Sight and vision in both a literal and metaphorical sense are hugely significant in the Seven Against Thebes, but the totality of all their layers of meaning does not unravel until verse 696, when Eteocles uses the word ὀμμασιν.

\(^{447}\) See also Hutchinson (1985: 156) who notes that “γὰρ appears never to introduce a statement which denies the truth of a preceding statement”. Similar uses of γὰρ can be found in Il. 1.293, Ag. 1636 and Ach. 598.

\(^{448}\) See p. 111 in section 3.4.1 as well as Bacon (1964: 32-33).
Indeed, the tearless eyes do not belong to the Erinys only, but are an indirect reference to Eteocles’ own eyes - Eteocles who has just renounced the tears of lamentation: ἀλλ’ οὐτε κλαίειν οὐτ’ ὀδύρεσθαι πρέπει (but it is not appropriate to cry or lament, 656). His mention of the lack of tears in 696 is a sign of the completion of his assimilation with the Curse which appears tearless on his shield. By metaphorically adopting the eyes of the Erinys, Eteocles’ figurative blindness is also lifted as the king can finally see the governing force of his actions, leaving behind his denial and the need to counteract it. His language is no longer about the war in the city, and the Curse is at the core of his decision-making process, identified, seen and acknowledged. Its dominance is reflected in the sound of the verses too, as the assonance of α and ο in Eteocles’ verses, ἀρὰξ θηροῖς ἀκλαύτοις ἀκλαύτοις ὑμακαίν προσκήναι, fills the space with the atmosphere of power and authority, while the consistent repetitions of almost every other syllable signifies Eteocles’ submission to it.

The figure on Eteocles’ shield was not revealed in the Redepaare. However, it would have become visible to the spectators as soon as Eteocles took it up. What form would we expect his shield to have if not the Erinys itself, the leader of the Dike on Polyneices’ shield? The two brothers are physically identical, united in death and driven by one and the same force (ὁ δαίμων κοινὸς ἦν ἄμφοι ἕμα, 812), the same daimon that is depicted on their shields.

By the end of 697, the eye of the night and the external nature of its threat have become internal, as the tearless eye of the Erinys is portrayed on the metallic surface of the weapon that is wielded by the king inside the city. And there is no better moment for Eteocles to take his shield, its crest visible to the Chorus and the audience, than the moment that the hero attributes to the Curse a personified presence. In light of this, his claim that the deity is standing by and speaking to

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449 See also Seaford (2012: 160-161) for whom the rejection of the rituals of lamentation by Eteocles in these two passages as well as in verses 6-8 encapsulates the flaw of all three generations of the House of the Labdacids. See also sections 1.2 and 1.3.

450 The repetitive characterisation of the eyes as ζηροῖς ἄκλαύτοις has an emphatic purpose, however, Hutchinson (1985: 155) notes that, unlike ἄκλαύτος, ζηροῖ (dry) is not encountered in this kind of context in Greek literature. This makes it more probable that the verse is indicative of the text’s need to highlight the similarity between the eyes of the hero and the Curse.

451 For the Erinys as the emblem on Eteocles’ shield see also Chaston (2010: 116-117 and 130) and Bacon (1964: 35).

452 For a different suggestion that sees the shield placed later in 705-711 see Sommerstein (2008: 225) and Bacon (1964: 35). However, Sommerstein has not justified at all his choice to digress from the Iliadic arming sequence, while Bacon has done so on the grounds of seeing a link.
him becomes a literal statement as the Erinys is literally on his shield, next to the warrior’s body, visible as much to him as to everybody else. This further marks the differentiation between him and the epic warrior. In the Iliad, Achilles’ shield is a piece of art, both marvellous and fearful to behold as a result of the divine shine and the power instilled in the hero through it. Eteocles’ shield, however, is predominantly fearful and signifies Eteocles’ assimilation with the tearless Erinys. Once the shield is held, it becomes the hero’s identity; the moment Eteocles takes up the Erinys, is the moment that the two become one. The Curse is not simply seated near Eteocles, but she is also whispering to him (λέγουσα), a metaphor that implies the influence of the Curse on Eteocles’ mind while also hinting at the unavoidability of his deathly fate. I have previously stated that Eteocles’ situation in the Arming Scene resembles the dilemma of Achilles in Iliad 9 when he reveals the death that awaits him if he chooses to rejoin the battle. Like Eteocles, Achilles ultimately chooses to die an early, honourable death. The difference, however, between the tragic and the epic hero lies in the choices they can select from; whereas Achilles could have opted to have a long life in retirement from the battle, Eteocles’ Curse would have eventually found him. By denying himself an early death, he would only be losing the profit of the kleos.

By the time Eteocles concludes his statement in 697, the combination of his words with his body that is now almost fully armed would have produced a terrifying result along with the appearance of both the sword and the shield, the two weapons with the heaviest literary baggage. These two weapons thus visualise the transformation that takes place on two levels; first, the king of Thebes transforms into the double of his brother, the embodiment of the Erinys, and second, there is a transformation of the epic hero into a tragic character, as the weapons, the warrior’s former allies and markers of divine assistance, now turn into the objects through which the Erinys manifests. Furthermore, the between the shield, the eye in the Seven Against Thebes, and the vocabulary of seeing and visions in 705-711. Later, in her translation of the play with Hecht, the scholar developed her argument further by commenting that the shield preceded the helmet in the Homeric epic due to the size of the shields which, unlike those of the fifth-century hoplites, were so big that they required the use of a strap tied to the soldier’s back to be worn (Hecht and Bacon [1973: 81-82]). The argument is not convincing. Even if the Homeric shield was heavier, there is no reason to suggest that the order of the arming would be different in the Aeschylean play. Overall, as intriguing as her suggestion is, the text accommodates the shield better in 692-697, a sequence that does not require a transgression of the Homeric sequence.

454 See also Hutchinson (1985: 156).
simultaneous appearance of the shield and the sword means that the two weapons complement one another; if the shield visualises his identification with the Erinys, the sword, as the weapon of attack, becomes the executioner of its will. Much like Ajax who claims that he can see the invisible once he has the sword in his hand, Eteocles sees the Erinys and is ready to use the sword to fulfil its desire.\(^{455}\) The epic hero, almost fully converted into a tragic persona, is now standing with his attacking and defensive weapons as he is ready to accept his tragic fate.

4.1.7 Helmet (698-704)

ΧΟΡΟΣ

ἀλλά σὺ μὴ ’ποτρύνου· κακὸς οὐ κεκλη-
ση βίον εὖ κυρήσας· μελάναιης {δ’} ἔξ-
εισι δόμων Ἐρινύς, ὅταν ἐκ χερῶν
θεοὶ θυσίαν δέχονται.

ΕΤΕΟΚΛΗΣ

θεοὶς μὲν ἡδη πως παρημελήμεθα,
χάρις δ’ ἄφ’ ἡμῶν ὀλομένων θαυμᾶζεται;
τί οὖν ἂν σαίνοιμεν ὀλέθριον μόρον;

CHORUS

But don’t let yourself get carried away! You will not be called a coward
if you can stay alive in an honourable way; the Erinys of the black
goatskin will leave your house, when the gods shall receive
a sacrifice from your hands.

ΕΤΕΟCLES

It seems that we have already been abandoned by the gods,
and grace from our side, who are doomed to perish, is admired;
Why should we then cringe at the fate of death?

Sept. 698-704

\(^{455}\) Aj. 646-647, although unlike Eteocles, Ajax does not name a specific invisible presence but refers to seeing beyond the visible more generally.
Following on from the previous passage where the Curse was personified for the first time, the tension grows in this next exchange between the characters. This is primarily reflected in the metre as 698-701 contain the highest number of running dochmiacs in the entire play.\(^{456}\) This coincides with the first instance in which the operation of the Curse is referred to as that of the Erinys (Ἐρινύς), whose presence inside the house of Laius is acknowledged by the Chorus after Eteocles’ previous statement (δόμων).\(^{457}\) The increased tension in the language of the Chorus matches the severity of the visual spectacle as the king’s change in identity is indicated through the act of putting on his helmet.\(^{458}\)

The face is the primary distinctive feature of a person’s figure; even prior to the development of the genre of drama, the motif of covering the head was used in literature to signal a change in role, the most prominent example here again being the *Iliad*, where we see Andromache switch from being a wife to a widow when she loses her veil, while Hector removes his helmet in the twenty-second book of the *Iliad* in a symbolic temporary renunciation of his role as a warrior.\(^{459}\)

In theatre, the convention of the use of the mask bestows the action with additional meaning. The mask is the primary indicator of a character’s identity, and the process of transformation through the covering of the head recalls the preparation of the theatrical production itself in a way that is even more pointed than before. Namely, the same way that the actor wearing Eteocles’ mask had disappeared underneath it to assume Eteocles’ identity before the performance, Eteocles is now concluding his assumption of the role of the warrior by losing his face beneath the helmet.\(^{460}\)

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\(^{456}\) Specifically, every verse between 698-701 comprises two dochmiacs. See West (1990a: 470-471) and the corresponding comment in Hutchinson (1985: 155).

\(^{457}\) Prior to this, the Erinys had only been mentioned once in the prayer of Eteocles in 70 (Ἀρά τ’ Ἐρινύς πατρὸς ἡ μηγασθενής), where she was summoned alongside the domestic gods to prevent the city from being besieged. On that prayer, see Kyriakou (2009: 42) who characterises the address to the Erinys as futile due to the daimon’s implacable nature. Kyriakou also points out the danger of ill-omened words when the Erinys is summoned.

\(^{458}\) This would probably happen with the help of the attendant as the actor’s left hand would be holding the shield (for the size and weight of the hoplite shield see Snodgrass [1964: 37-38]). How the helmet would fit over the actor’s mask is another question, but I would expect that either a slightly bigger helmet would have been used to fit Eteocles’ head and mask or, alternatively, that his mask would have purposefully been made thinner than usual, in a way similar to that of the golden death masks that were broadly used in Classical Greece, and which were sometimes adjoined to helmets: Wiles (2007: 248) and Theodossiev (1998: 345-367).

\(^{459}\) *Il.* 6.467-473.

\(^{460}\) Wiles (2007: 273) characteristically parallels the helmet with the mask in his comment that “when he arms himself, Eteocles effectively dons a mask that tells him what to do”. In the years that would follow, the helmet-prop would be used extensively, as our evidence suggests,
Throughout the play, the helmet’s association with the enemy and its divine alliances has been significant. In the parodos, the enemy was compared to a loud wave crashing against the walls of the city as a result of the fearful, synchronised movement of their helmet-crests. Later, at the beginning of the Redepaare, the raw war-desire of Tydeus was symbolised through the movement of the triple crests on his helmet. In turn, we saw earlier that the description of Tydeus’ helmet had also implied an indirect connection with Ares, the god who is lurking both inside and outside the city and who was referred to as the god of the golden helmet in the parodos (χρυσοπήληξ δαίμον, 106). Finally, it was from a bronze helmet that the lots of each Argive leader had been selected, leading Polyneices to the seventh gate in the fulfilment of the Curse. By wearing the helmet, the last visible part of Eteocles’ body would now be covered underneath the armour. The king has now become visibly identical to Polyneices.

By this stage, Eteocles’ mind is already made up, as portrayed partly by the futility of his exchange with the Chorus. Here, the lack of communication between the two sides becomes particularly stark. The Chorus utilise false promises as their last resort to keep Eteocles inside the walls; in 698-701, the women express their hope that the daimon of the black goatskin (μελάναντης) might eventually leave the oikos (ἐξεισίαν δόμων). Further to this, in an attempt to speak to Eteocles’ desire for kleos the Chorus also suggest that he can choose to

especially in comedy. In the Acharnians, the helmet is one of the pieces of armour that are handed over to Telechus as he is getting armed for battle (Ach. 1103), whilst in Peace, Trygaues hands his slave a helmet crest to wipe the table (Pax 1193-1196), then the Arms Dealer is led by an unpleasant smell to realise that it has been used as a chamber pot in 1250-1252. In Lysistrata (Lys. 748-755), the heroine removes a helmet from underneath a woman’s dress that has been used to make her look pregnant. Finally, in Aeschylus’ fragmentary satyr play Isthmiastai or Theoroi (Pap. Oxy. 2162), Dionysus presents metallic objects to the satyrs in order to punish them for neglecting his worship to train in athletics instead; although it has been long debated what kind of objects those would be, Wiles has argued that, taking into consideration textual evidence that suggest that the satyrs were training for the race in hoplite armour, the object handed over to them by the god would most likely have been a hoplite helmet (Wiles 2007: 207). Finally, in art, an Athenian pelike from Vulci also depicts Dionysus being presented with arms by a satyr in a helmet and a thyrsus (Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale, Cabinet des Medailles 391). Although there is no direct evidence linking it to the Aeschylean play, such evidence makes a familiarity among the Athenian audience with helmet-masks more probable.

461 Sept. 114-115. Similar imagery is encountered in Il. 3.337.
462 Sept. 384-385.
464 See also Wiles (2007: 272) who points out that Eteocles would also resemble the statue of Ares onstage. Adding to this, Hecht and Bacon’s translation of the text (1973: 52) proposes that, once Eteocles has donned his whole armour, his posture would replicate that of Ares’ stature.
live, something he can do in an honourable way (βίον ἐν κυρίεσθαί). However, there is no indication in the play that would allow for this kind of assertion: if the war is truly a manifestation of the Curse, then Eteocles has no choice, since the Curse will reach him and his brother eventually. This is implicitly underlined in the text by the term μελάνατης. The word is encountered in Pausanias as a title for Dionysus, and the way in which it is deployed in this passage is significant.  

Seaford rightly points out that, by evoking Dionysus, μελάνατης links the situation of the oikos of the Labdacids to myths of maenadism, thus indicating once again the state of divine madness and frenzy. As for the promise that the gods will expel the Erinys from the house after receiving an offering (ὅταν ἐκ χερῶν θεοὶ θυσίαν δέχονται), this is also dubious; although the exact wording of Oedipus’ Curse remains unknown, the text clarifies that it was summoned by Oedipus against his sons, and there is no indication that its presence is linked to a dissatisfaction on the part of the gods who are permitting it to stay. As such, the hopes that the Chorus are giving to Eteocles are not grounded. It is unclear whether the women are genuinely aware of the implications of the Curse or not. However, the inaccuracy of their arguments inevitably underscores the unavoidability of Eteocles’ fate. The weakness of their argument is indicated by the way in which Eteocles quickly dismisses it.

The physical construction of the hoplites’ helmet in fifth-century BC Athens only had a small opening for the eyes, thus severely impairing the vision and the hearing of the warrior. As such, the covering of Eteocles’ eyes and ears onstage would potentially mirror his inability to listen to the Chorus or see clearly, an inability that is both literal as a result of the obstruction of his sight and hearing, and also metaphorical, as the hero’s assimilation with the Curse means that he has become indifferent to any other solution. Eteocles’ response to the

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465 Paus. 2.35.1.
466 Specifically, the author argues that the word links the oikos to the Attic cult of Dionysos Melanaigis who drove the daughters of Eleuther out of their house in frenzy. Seaford (2012: 161).
467 According to Sept. 788-790. Of course, these assumptions are all based on the surviving text and the acknowledgment that the full and original content of the Curse is lost. For the problem of the wording of the Curse in the Seven Against Thebes see the bibliography cited in n. 24, p. 17 earlier in this chapter.
468 The description refers to the style of the Corinthian helmet which was the most common type of helmet we encounter in classical Athens. For the features and construction techniques of helmets in the age of the hoplites, see Kagan and Viggiano (2013: 24-25, 60-61, 117) and Snodgrass (1999 [1967]: 50-52, 55-59, 63-69, 72-76). For the development of the helmet in Greece more broadly, from the bronze age to Classical Greece, see Snodgrass (1964: 3-35).
Chorus reflects all of this as the king does nothing more than simply reframe his former statement from 683-686 without addressing the points of the Chorus. Specifically, the king simply states once again that the gods have abandoned the city (θεοῖς μὲν ἣδη πως παρημελήμεθα) but, as an honourable death is still possible, then he should benefit from it (χάρις δ' ἀφ' ἡμῶν ὀλομένων θαυμάζεται, 703). Having put on his helmet, Eteocles has now covered the last visible part of his body by his armour, a sight that, much like his words, shows that the moment of his departure is now close. All that is left to do now is for the king to take his final weapon.

4.1.8 Spear (705-711)

ΧΟΡΟΣ
μίμν’ ὅτε σοι παρέστακεν, ἐπεὶ δαίμων
λήματος ἂν τροπαίαι χρονίαι μεταλ-
λακτός ἴσως ἂν ἐλθοὶ θελεμωτέροι
πνεύματι νῦν δ’ ἔτι ζεῖ.

ΕΤΕΟΚΛΗΣ
ἐξέζεσεν γὰρ Οἰδίπου κατεύγματα·
ἄγαν δ’ ἀληθεῖς ἐνυπνίων φαντασμάτων
ὁπεῖς, πατρώιων χρημάτων δατήριοι.

CHORUS
Stay, while you have the chance! For the controlling daimon
might, in time, change the wind of its spirit
and blow with a gentler breath;
but now it is still raging.

ETEOCLES
Yes, for the curse of Oedipus has made it rage:
they were very true, those visions of night apparitions,
about the dividing of our father’s property.

Sept. 705-711
The fifth exchange between Eteocles and the Chorus concludes the arming process. In a final attempt to change the king’s mind, the Chorus rephrase their former statement, adopting a more moderate approach than before; instead of promising that the gods will send away the Erinys, the women suggest that the passage of time might eventually change the will of the daimon.\(^{469}\) The verbs in the future tense that framed the previous statement (ἐξέσι and ὅταν […] δέχονται) are now replaced by the more restrained ἴσως ἂν ἔλθοι, in which the combination of ἴσως (might/perhaps) with the potential optative highlights the hypothetical nature of their remark. The use of παρέστακεν is also noteworthy; originally a Homeric word, it was used in the *Odyssey* to describe a fate that cannot be avoided.\(^{470}\) Here, the Chorus is using it in the context of their attempt to persuade Eteocles that his fate can indeed be changed, a potential indication of the fault in their statement and the futility of their efforts. The women acknowledge the difficulty of the situation themselves: the concluding νῦν δ᾿ ἔτι places emphasis on the present moment in which the curse is still raging (ζεῖ) to highlight that, if there is truly any possibility of survival, then that will only be shown in the future. The modesty and uncertainty of their argument is, however, counteracted by Eteocles’ certainty, who claims to have finally understood how the paternal Erinys will manifest.

At this stage, the king would have taken up his spear, the last piece of military equipment that completes the armour. Scholars have disagreed over the years about the exact way in which this action would have taken place.\(^{471}\) Schadewaldt’s suggestion was that Eteocles would have taken the spear right before his departure in 719, and Bacon counter-suggested verse 715 in order for the spear to visually complement Eteocles’ self-reference as τεθηγμένον (whetted).\(^{472}\) Finally, Sommerstein’s translation places it in 705-711, just before the stichomythia and together with the shield.\(^{473}\) I have already expressed my objection to placing the shield at the end, however as far as the spear is concerned, I agree with Sommerstein’s position. From a staging point of view, for the actor to not don any

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\(^{469}\) The presence of the daimon is emphasised here through the postponement of ἄν. In terms of its identity, the Chorus is evidently referring here to the Erinys that the women referred to previously in 700. See also Hutchinson (1985: 159) who notes that, in Aeschylus, when the term is encountered in the singular, it is used to signify a destructive force that does not correspond to the Olympians; one exception to this rule is the god Ares.

\(^{470}\) *Od.* 16.280. See also Hutchinson (1985: 158).

\(^{471}\) On the sequence of arming, see the introductory part of this section.

\(^{472}\) Bacon (1964: 36).

\(^{473}\) Sommerstein (2008: 225 inserted comments *ad 709*).
pieces of the armour until 715 or 719 would entail a long pause in the arming process, and the final exchange in 704 and 715 taking place without any props complementing its spectacle. This would therefore desynchronise Eteocles’ responses and his arming which had thus far linked his external transformation with his internal change.

More importantly however, the text of 709-711 contains an indirect allusion to the spear, making this the most suitable moment for Eteocles to take hold of his weapon. These verses are among the most cryptic lines of the play as Eteocles speaks of a dream about the division of Oedipus’ property. The phrasing suggests that the dream would have already been discussed earlier in the trilogy, most likely in the lost Oedipus. Yet no reference to it has been made in the previous parts of the Seven. As the text offers no insight into its content or the identity of the dreamer, the reader of the Seven Against Thebes is left uncertain of Eteocles’ conclusion. However, some information about the potential content of the dream can be derived from the second stasimon. There, the Chorus reveals the prophesised division of Oedipus’ kingdom by iron in 730-731 (πικρός, ὀμόψυρον Σίδαρος, χθόνα ναίειν διαπήλας [bitter, raw-minded Iron, allotting them land to dwell in]). And for all that this hardly answers the multitude of questions arising

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474 Similar wording can be found in Pers. 518 when the Queen is narrating her dream (νυκτὸς ὡς ἐμφανὴς ἐνοπτῶν). In her discussion of Eteocles’ dream, Poli-Palladini (2016: 170) also quotes PV 645 (ὁμας ἐναγοι) and the Cho. 38 (κριταὶ δὲ τῶν ὀνείρων). The use of the plural in these instances points towards a repetitive dream and a singular dream respectively, making it unclear whether we should assume Eteocles’ dream in the Seven Against Thebes to have been a unique or a repetitive occurrence.


476 However, dreams in Greek literature usually appear to and are decoded by the person they have direct meaning for: see Kessels (1978: 10-14). Manton (1961: 79) has suggested that perhaps Jocasta was the original dreamer and that she narrated her dream to Eteocles in the Oedipus. However, most Classicists, including myself, agree that it is more likely than not that Eteocles himself was the dreamer and he is now realising the meaning of his vision. See Poli-Palladini (2016: 170), Papadopoulou (2008: 37), Lawrence (2013: 59), Torrance (2007: 62), Hogan (1984: 265) and Burnett (1973: 357, 360). Further to this, the plural ὀψιά leaves it unclear whether the dream was only seen once (in which case we are dealing with a poetic plural) or whether the dream had repeatedly appeared to the dreamer. Thankfully, this particular question does not influence the reading of the scene, as the main difference between the two categories is, according to Devereux (1976: 6) that repetitive dreams simply signify modifications in the content of the original dream, without however changing the core. Overall, whether Eteocles had the dream once or more, it appears that the core is what the Chorus refer to in 727-730 as the Scythian divider of the property and, in this sense, whether Eteocles dreamt of it once or more is of small significance. For more on the significance of dreams in Greek literature see Vernant (1983: 305-320) who highlights the links between apparitions, including ghosts and dreams, to the human soul, Devereux (1976: passim) who offers a psycho-analytical approach to dreams in Greek tragedy; and Dodds (1951: 102-134), whose work is a cross temporal examination of the perceptions about dreams in ancient Greece.

477 For the Chorus’ narrative of the dream, see p. 185 below.
from 709-711, such as the identity of the dreamer, the timing and frequency at which the dream occurred, or even its exact content, this piece of information helps elucidate the revelation that Eteocles is having in 709-711: that the weapons of war are going to be the tool through which the paternal land will be divided.

Just like swords, spears in Greece were markers of social status; specifically, they were indicators of their bearer’s privileged patrimony and thus pointers to a person’s identity.\textsuperscript{478} To find an example of this, one doesn’t have to go any further than the arming of Patroclus in the \textit{Iliad}, where the hero dons Achilles’ whole armour, except for the spear. Committed to the service of its owner, the spear is too heavy for anybody other than Achilles to carry.\textsuperscript{479} Much like in the case of the sword and the shield, the conceptualisation of the spear as interwoven with ideas of family, inheritance and \textit{kleos} appears in Greek drama too; in \textit{Iphigeneia in Tauris} we see Orestes use his knowledge of the family spear’s history and location as proof of his identity.\textsuperscript{480} In the \textit{Seven Against Thebes} meanwhile, the hero tragically will not inherit his father’s weapons or his property but, rather, his father has passed on to him a fate of death. There is no better moment for Eteocles to uncover the symbolic meaning of his dream of the Chalybian stranger than the moment when he reaches for the spear, the symbol of his family line and his tragic inheritance of cross-generational guilt, the same object which will become the iron divider of his and Polyneices’ wealth (\textit{T}χρημάτων \textit{δατήριοι}, 711).\textsuperscript{481} Indeed, although the text does not specify what the murderous weapon of the two brothers will be, the spear is repeatedly flagged as the inflictor of pain and death throughout the play, placing it at the heart of the war action. In the parodos, it is the spear that is driving the wind mad (\textit{δορυτίνακτος} \{\textit{δ’}\} \textit{αἰθήρ} \textit{ἐπιμαίνεται}, 155), and it is also the spear-inflicted evils of the enemy that the Chorus ask the God to keep the city safe from (\textit{πόλιν \textit{δορίπον\ ῶν μὴ \προδώθ’}, 169-170; \textit{δορίπον\ κάκ’ εκτρέποντες} \textit{<εἰς> γάς}, 628). Later, once the Messenger announces the death of the two brothers, it is the spear that is referred to by the women as the main murderous weapon (\textit{δορὶ \textit{δ’ εκανες}.} /\textit{δορὶ δ’ ἐθανες}, 962), while its sound will be paralleled to that of a

\textsuperscript{478} See also Mueller (2016: 134-135).
\textsuperscript{480} \textit{Eur. IT}. 822-826. On the association of the spear with patrimony see also Goff (2010: 219-233).
\textsuperscript{481} The sword is not the only iron piece of the weaponry, but the spear of the Athenian hoplite was also made of iron after the Geometric years. See Snodgrass (1999 [1967: 57, 97]) and Snodgrass (1964: 135).
deathly duet (ἠ δύσορνις ἀδε ξυναυλία δορός, 838-839). The moment that the spear becomes the extension of Eteocles’ hand and his arming process is completed is the moment his metaphorical blindness is lifted as he can now understand the future that his vision had once shown him. Eteocles’ spear will inflict δορίπονα κακά to the enemy, evils that will become his own when Polyneices’ spear will be raised against him in return.

4.1.9 Concluding the Scene: Stichomythia and Departure (712-719)

Fully armed and transformed into the double of Polyneices inside the walls, Eteocles is now ready to depart, and the conclusion of the physical spectacle coincides with that of the textual structure. The increased tension arising from the completion of his arming manifests in the change in the speaking pattern as the six-verse exchanges climax into a stichomythia, in a way similar to the end of Eteocles’ debate with the Chorus in the first episode. Indeed, there are noticeable parallels between the two passages, a mechanism that underscores the unavoidability of Eteocles’ tragic fate through the different outcome that brought about in this second case. Starting with the first two verses of the stichomythia, 712 and 713 both refer back to 260-261: πείθου γυναιξί, καίπερ οὐ στέργων δῆμος (listen to us, women, even if it doesn’t please you to do so, 712), say the Chorus, implicitly responding to Eteocles’ condescending comments on the female gender in their first debate. At the same time, the content of their plea also recalls the debate’s concluding stichomythia when the king asks the women for their attention (αἰτουμένωι μοι κοῦφον εἰ δοής τέλος, 260). The king responds: λέγοιτ’ ἂν ὡν ἂνη τις’ οὐδέ χρή μακράν (you can speak if something is useful, but don’t make it long, 713). A similar response was given to him by the Chorus when in 261 they had accepted his pleas but requested that he be quick: λέγοις ἂν ὡς τάξιστα, καὶ τάξ’ εἴσομαι. However, in this instance, the Chorus’ attempt will not be fruitful.

As opposed to the Chorus’ response of compliance in 263, Eteocles rejects the Chorus’ request. His response τεθηγμένον τοί μ’ οὐκ ἀπαμβλυνεῖς λόγοι (I am

482 For the identity of the murderous weapon see also n. 41.
483 Sept. 245-263.
484 See Sept. 188, 195, 200-201, 230-232 and 256. The same observation is made by Hutchinson (1985: 159).
whetted, and you are not to blunt me with your speech, 715), challenges the Chorus to look at him, totally vanished beneath the armour.\textsuperscript{485} Eteocles is now ‘whetted’, fashioned like the iron into the metallic armour he is wearing, and the Chorus’ words cannot soften him (οὐκ ἄπαμβλυνεῖς), as he has become one with it. Altogether, this symbolic use of metallurgical terminology encapsulates in one sentence the portrayal of the relationship between the man and the metal throughout the play, which has been shown to be one of constant mixing and reshaping. Later, Eteocles will repeat that the Chorus’ words are not words that “a man at arms should tolerate” (οὐκ ἄνδρ’ ὀπλίτην τοῦτο χρὴ στέργειν ἔπος, 717). Eteocles is now defined by the role imposed on him by his new costume, the armour; he is no longer a king, but a soldier. Finally, to the Chorus’ rhetorical question about whether he truly wants to harvest his brother’s blood, Eteocles simply responds with a general comment about the unavoidability of his fate and submission to the divine will: θεῶν διδόντων οὐκ ἂν ἐκφύγοις κακά (you cannot escape the pains that the gods have sent you, 719). The Chorus’ points do not reach him, but his mind has been made up and no further explanation can be given other than it is a decision beyond the sphere of humans.

Eteocles’ entrance onstage in 375 is very different to his exit in 719. Having previously entered with his six champions and his military determination for victory which enhanced the glory of the visual spectacle, he is now departing the stage alone and unrecognisable beneath his armour. His pursuit for kleos has become a pursuit for death, as he himself has become the double of Polynæs, the incarnation of Ares, the Curse and the Scythian stranger, who will fulfil the paternal prophecy. With the departure of the tragic hero, the discourse between Homer’s epic and Aeschylus’ tragedy is also concluded. The warrior has left the scene to fulfil his tragic purpose, and the staging changes for the Chorus to sing of the pain and the suffering that the parodos had foretold with a tragic mourning song. In these final scenes of the play, the song of the Chorus brings the trilogy of the Labdacids together as one, as the antitheses of the play are each shown to have been resolved.

\textsuperscript{485} For the use of the same term in the Ajax, see p. 169 and n. 442 above. In Aeschylus, the word is encountered again as a metaphor for raw anger in Supp.186. For the significance of the word in the Seven Against Thebes as one that denotes Eteocles’ internal hardening in relation to the external see Bacon (1964: 36) who argues that the word is also the marker for Eteocles’ grasping of the spear.
4.2 Coda: The Second Stasimon and The End of the Play

4.2.1 The Second Stasimon (720-791)

Eteocles’ departure in 719 signifies the beginning of the trilogy’s end. His union with Polyneices is shown visually after the second choral song, when their bodies are brought out onto the stage, looking identical in their armours and united in death. This marks the end of the war as a reconciliation of all the antitheses in the play. Operating as an intermediator between the Arming Scene and the upcoming announcement of the death of the two brothers, the second stasimon is the first part of the lysis of the drama, bringing the iron, the Curse, the two brothers and their ancestors together, in a song where the past, the present and the future are finally united in one moment in time. Demolishing the antithesis between Eteocles and Polyneices, father and sons, madness and reason, the second choral song shows the worlds of the Seven Against Thebes and of the lost plays preceding it to be one, brought together in union through the power of the Erinys.

The first and most striking element of the stasimon is the complex structure and thematic order of its five strophic pairs. As Hutchinson has observed, each strophe is distinct metrically from the one that precedes it, while the content also varies from one part of the song to the other as the narrative does not follow a temporal order, but the past and the future are interwoven with the narrative of the present. All three aspects of time are contained within one element, the Erinys, the mention of which opens and closes the song in a ring composition (722 and 791).

The first and the second strophe of the ode begin where Eteocles’ departure has left off, the Curse of Oedipus and its effect on the present. Starting with the word πόρρικα in 720 the Chorus mark their emotional state as one of horror, sounding an exclamation of fear similar to the one in the first verse of their entrance song (θρόμα, 78). This time, however, it is not fear of the enemy army that has put them in this situation. Following the revelations of the Arming Scene,

486 There are lots of problems regarding the originality of the text past verse 819. See n. 510 below.
the riddle of Eteocles’ behaviour and his comprehension of the enemy’s identity is elucidated: in 723-726, the Erinys is identified with the strife (ἔρις, 726) that will destroy the offspring of Oedipus (παιδολέτωρ, 726), executing the paternal curse (πατρὸς [...] κατάρας Οἰδίποδα 723 and 725).489 In these verses, the Chorus essentially summarise Eteocles’ statements, changing their former point of view that saw his behaviour as that of a mad man and reframing it as an undeniably true judgement.490 The phrasing of the strophe makes it seem as if the Chorus are well aware of that angry Curse of Oedipus and the events that followed it. Along similar lines, the antistrophe makes the link between Eteocles’ weapons and the Curse explicit for the first time, elucidating Eteocles’ cryptic dream.491

In the antistrophe, the Chorus present the image of a Chalybian migrant from Scythia (Χάλυβος Σκυθόν ἀποικός, 728) who will be dividing the inheritance of the two brothers (κλήρους ἐπινομᾶτι, 727) and that migrant is no other than the raw-minded Iron (ὡμόφρον Σιδαρος, 730). For all that the Chorus do not make it clear whether they are referring to the dream of Eteocles or whether they are using the personification of the arms as a poetic metaphor for the battle, the words χρηματοδαίταις and ἐπινομᾶτι create an implicit link between the song and the dream of Eteocles, in which the division of the paternal inheritance was referenced in similar terms (πατρώιων χρημάτων δατήριοι, 711).492 And so, the Chalybian stranger, a personified form of the metal that made Eteocles’ armour, will become the murderous hand that threatens to give Eteocles and his brother nothing more than space for their grave (732). In that sense, Iron is therefore virtually identified with the Erinys as the executioner of the Curse. This is further strengthened through the motif of madness that we have already seen spread throughout the play, tormenting the Chorus and Eteocles; in the first strophe, the paternal curse is said to have been made in an overwhelming state of anger (περιθύμους, 724) by the ruined mind of Oedipus (βλαψίφρονος, 725-726).493 In the

489 In the epic Thebaid, the Erinys and the curse are differentiated slightly from one another and the Erinys hears the curse in fr. 2.8 (Ath. 465e) which she later executes. See also Hutchinson (1985: 163) and n. 507 below. For the function of the Erinys, the Curse, Iron and Ares as one in the Seven Against Thebes, see 1.3. See also n. 35, n. 182 and p. 193.
490 See also Poli-Palladini (2016: 197).
491 For the content of the dream and the problems arising from Eteocles’ reference to it in 709-711, see n. 476 above.
492 For the framing of the curse in the Seven as a financial transaction see Seaford (2012: 161 and 168-169).
493 Compare with 781, where Oedipus is described to be acting under the impulses of his maddened heart (μαινομένα κραδία).
antistrophe, verse 730, Iron is referred to as cruel (πικρός) and raw-minded (ὠμόφρων). This wording evokes further connections with the previous parts of the play that saw the themes of iron, weapons and rage unified (σιδηρόφρων γὰρ θυμός, 52; θυμοπληθῆς δορίμαργος, 686-687). More importantly however, the theme of madness begins to transcend the limits of time and move beyond Eteocles; the cross-temporal passage of madness is shown as something that has always existed in his family. This brings us to the core of the song.

In the second strophe, the Chorus briefly show us the future. Although the death of the brothers has not been announced yet, the Chorus accurately predicts the reciprocal fratricide that will take place between the two brothers: αὐτοκτόνως, αὐτοδούκτοι τὸνοσι (734-735). The terrible pollution that will occur as a result of it, the Chorus add, is attributed to nothing else than the mingling (συμμιγεῖς, 740) of the new pains (πόνοι δόμων νέοι, 739-740) with the old evils (παλαιοίς κακοῖς, 740).

So far, the play has focused on the inheritance of Oedipus’ Curse by his two sons. Now, however, in the second antistrophe and the third strophe, the Chorus dive deep into the past of the Labdacids to show that the pain is the result of not one or two, but of three generations carrying the guilt and passing it on to those that succeed them. The second antistrophe starts with the word παλαιογενῆ, emphasising the narrative’s shift to the past, then the terms αἰώνα and μένειν in 744-745 underscore the presence of the Erinys as consistent and durable throughout time, contradicting the Chorus’ former suggestion in the Arming Scene that the passage of time would take the Curse away (ἂν τροπαίαι χρονίαι μετάλλακτος ἵσως, 706-707). The persistence of the punishment is strengthened by the use of the word τρίτον which underlines the duration of the curse across three generations. The severity of the punishment is thus justified, for which the same number is used again in 746: Laius defied the ancient oracle despite the fact that he was warned by Apollo three times (τρὶς) that he should die childless (θνάσκοντα γέννας ἕτερ, 746-747).

494 For the repetitions of αὐτο- as evocations of the violent and reproductive introversion of the oikos, both here and in the play’s concluding scene, see Seaford (2012: 163-164).
495 The next few verses are the only surviving evidence for the content of the lost Laius and Oedipus as the Chorus engage in the summary of their lives. However, the evidence is so limited that Gagné is right to say that any attempt to reconstruct the plays based on these few verses would most likely result in speculations (Gagné 2013: 351). See also 1.2.
Here, the repetition of the number three demonstrates the unavoidability of the punishment, which goes beyond the doings of Eteocles and Polyneices, but in fact has been tormenting them and their ancestors equally for years. Subsequently, another level on which Eteocles is reconciled with his ancestors is that of his mind. Just as in his case and in the case of Oedipus, the driving force that led to the deathly transgression was the madness that governed the mind of Laius (ἄβουλιαν, 750 and φρενώλης, 757). Eteocles’ mind is no longer contrasted with that of the Chorus, and his departure for the battlefield is no longer a marker of his assimilation with Polyneices (ὁμοίος τῷ κάκιστῷ αὐδομένῳ, 678), but in fact the whole genos of the Labdacids is tormented by the same murderous and disastrous mind.

Before the Chorus continue to narrate the disastrous past of Oedipus in the fourth pair of strophes, including his defeat of the Sphinx, incestuous marriage and subsequent self-blinding (766-790), the Chorus briefly return to the present and to the imagery of the ship-state. In the parodos, the army of the Argives is compared to a wave clashing against the walls of the city. Then, in the Arming Scene, the same metaphor is used by Eteocles to imply the end of his oikos, while also transferring the centre of the war from the city to the family. Now the Chorus return to the same imagery, offering a new explanation for the troubles of Thebes: the wave that is loudly breaking over the city has triple the strength of the ones that preceded it (τρίχαλον, ὁ καὶ περὶ πρύμναν πόλεως καχλάζειν, 760-761).

In this verse, καχλάζει recalls the use of the word in 115, while περὶ πρύμναν

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496 See also Gagné (2013: 353). The strophe has in the past been interpreted as indicative that Laius, apart from disobeying the oracle of Apollo, had also committed another crime. Many commentators have suggested that the crime might be a reference to the tradition of the rape of Chrysippus which had resulted in the curse of Laius by Pelops and which Euripides had apparently portrayed as the cause of the family’s misfortunes in his play Chrysippus. See Kyriakou (2009: 45-46) and Thalmann (1978: 15-17 and 99). However, as there is no indication that the tradition dated earlier than Euripides, conclusions about its appearance in Aeschylean tragedy cannot be made with certainty.

497 νυμφίους φρενώλης is more likely to be a reference to Laius and Jocasta than to Jocasta and Oedipus, as a ‘mad’ act could only have been committed by the former pair who had been warned about the implications of their potential reproduction, while the latter were not aware of the incest they were committing. See also Sommerstein (2008: 231 n. 110) and Winnington-Ingram (1966: 90). For the contrary view see Gagné (2013: 353), Hutchinson (1985: 168), and Manton (1961: 80-81) who attribute φρενώλης to Oedipus and take νυμφίους as reference to the union of Jocasta with her son.

498 Sept. 79, 84-85, 114-115, then Eteocles had used again the ship metaphor in the first episode in 208-210. For the nautical imagery in the play and its significance see Thalmann (1978: 31-38) and Cameron (1971: 58-73).

499 Sept. 689-691.
πόλεως presents the city as the receptor of the clashing waves and τρίχαλον links the waves to the three generations of transgression that followed the three warnings of Laius.\textsuperscript{500} Thus the oikos of Laius is not only the governor of the ship that Eteocles had spoken about in 208-210, but it is also the wave itself, the bearer of the city’s troubles. In this sense, the borders between city and family are eliminated, and the family is both inside and outside the city, defending and condemning it at the same time as together they form one unbreakable union.\textsuperscript{501}

The fourth strophe takes the ship metaphor further as 760-761 raise the need for a solution: in life, prosperity that has grown excessively (ὄλβος ἄγαν παραγνθείς, 771) needs to be eliminated in order to reverse cosmic imbalance, just like overcharged cargo needs to be laid off from the ship (πρόπρομνα δ’ ἐκβολάν φέρετ, 769).\textsuperscript{502} The notion of prosperity or wealth as the cause of suffering for the Labdacids appears here for the first time and it is initially unclear what kind and whose prosperity ὀλβος refers to. For Hutchinson, ὀλβος is a reference to Oedipus’ happiness, not to his money, which provoked the reversal of the cosmic balance in becoming excessive.\textsuperscript{503} However, the short-lived happiness and miserable end of Oedipus make that interpretation doubtful. Instead, the matter is elucidated in the preceding verses of the strophe. In drawing attention to the βαρεῖαι καταλλαγί which precedes the parallel (767), Gagné noticed that βαρεῖα, literally translating as ‘heavy’, creates a connection to the heavy cargo. In that sense, the ὀλβος is a euphemism for the inheritance of the Curse that has been growing excessively throughout the generations.\textsuperscript{504} In this light, the origin of Eteocles’ and Polyneices’ need to separate their inherited land in pursuit of kerdos is starting to become clear; for the two brothers, the curse manifests as a financial transaction.\textsuperscript{505} Together with the division of the parental property, the deathly fate of the two sons will be fulfilled by Iron. Therefore, in order for the city to be saved,

\textsuperscript{500} Hutchinson (1985: 168) considers the verse a synonym or reference to τρικυμία, a swelling of waves during a storm that have triple the strength of their usual form.
\textsuperscript{501} See also Gagné (2013: 354).
\textsuperscript{502} The same imagery is encountered in Ag. 1008-1114 where the overthrow of excessive cargo is explicitly paralleled to that of excessive wealth being sacrificed by a rich family to protect it from potential destruction, while 163 of the Persians also suggests that excessive wealth leads to disaster. Money and its importance in Greek thought has been extensively discussed by Seaford: for money in Greek tragedy specifically see Seaford (2012: 167-168), Seaford (2008: 49-65) and Seaford (2004: passim but see especially 147-148, 305-317).
\textsuperscript{503} Hutchinson (1985: 170).
\textsuperscript{504} Gagné (2013: 354-355).
\textsuperscript{505} Seaford (2012: 168).
the excess weight of the curse needs to be eliminated. This results in the inevitable question: if their family is both the saviour of and threat to the city and if the lives of its members are inseparable from the survival of Thebes, then does this mean that the elimination of the brothers will bring about the elimination of the city? The Chorus’ fear has already been summarised in the preceding strophe: δέδοικα δὲ σὺν βασιλείσσι μὴ πόλις δαμασθή (I fear that, together with the kings, the city too shall be laid low, 764-765).

The Chorus finally returns to the present moment and the foreseeable future, but not without a summary of the past that has formed them: following his sufferings, Oedipus was angered by the poor maintenance offered to him by his sons (ἀραίας ἐφήκεν ἑπίκοτος τροφᾶς, 785-786), and so he gave them a curse of a bitter tongue (πικρογλώσσους ἀράς, 787). Here, the πικρογλώσσους creates a verbal link with the Iron which was previously described as πικρός (730). Indeed, the following verse presents once again the destiny of the brothers to divide their property with an iron-wielding hand (σιδαρον όμωι διὰ χερὶ ποτὲ λαχεῖν, κτήματα·, 788-790). Following this, νῦν marks the return to the present moment, while the present and future tenses in τρέω μὴ τελέσῃ καμάστοις Ἐρινός (I am terrified that the swift-footed Erinys shall fulfil this, 790-791) bring together for one final time the past, the present and the future, all in the same moment under the sign of the Erinys.

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506 For Hutchinson (1985: 169), as Polynices is not a king, the plural βασιλείσσι should be interpreted as a reference to Eteocles and his predecessors, not Eteocles and Polynices. I am however reluctant to adopt his point of view as technically both the brothers had inherited Oedipus’ throne and were expected to share it. In this sense, Thebes has two kings, each of whom is the double of the other. This interpretation is also more in line with the text, where the future μὴ πόλις δαμασθή denotes fear of an event taking place in the future, namely the upcoming battle between the brothers. Additionally, as the Chorus’ expression of fear in the beginning and the end of the song concerns the fulfilment of the Curse and its implications for the offspring of Oedipus (726, 735, 731-733, 788-791), their cry in 764-765 is also likely to refer to both of his two sons, like in 921 where the Chorus cries for the two monarchs (τοῖν̄δε δυοῖν ἀνακέτου).

507 It is unclear from this play what kind of mistreatment Oedipus received from his sons. Elsewhere in the literary tradition we encounter similar claims of paternal disrespect. In Thebaid fr. 3 (Schol. Soph. OC. 1375) Oedipus is presented as insulted by being given an inferior part of the meat of a sacrifice; additionally, in fr.2, (Ath. 465e), the disrespect of the two sons towards their father originated in them offering him a drink from a cup that originally belonged to Cadmus. I agree, however, with Cameron (1971: 21 n.16) and Manton (1961: 82), that to try to connect the two texts would superimpose the stories of the Thebaid in the Aeschylean trilogy without any evidence that Aeschylus had in mind either myth. In that regard, we can only speculate about the extent to which Thebaid reproduced elements of the Aeschylean trilogy.

508 The exact wording of the Curse, as well as the matter of whether the fratricide was included in it or not, remain unclear, however. See Poli-Palladini (2016: 155-159).
Within one song, the borders of space and time are dissolved and, one by one, the antithetical pairs of the play have found their union in the god, the _aigis_ of the daimon.\(^509\) Ancient Greek literature never offers an unmediated way to theology and, in the _Seven Against Thebes_, the _daimon_ is seen through the acts of iron, the material that was prophesised to destroy the _oikos_ of the Labdacids and which channels its divine agency to the human receptors through physical contact. Its destructive power manifests in the visual reconciliation of the two brothers onstage.

4.2.2 ‘τάδ’ αὐτόδηλα’ – Reconciled in Death by Iron (792-1004*)\(^510\)

The _Seven Against Thebes_ unfolds through the materialisation of the invisible. The end of the house of the Labdacids and the removal of the Erinys are not completed until the dead bodies of Polyneices and Eteocles appear onstage at 848, following a short announcement of their death by the Messenger.\(^511\) From this moment onwards, the union of Oedipus’ two sons and the subsequent elimination of the play’s multiple antitheses become the central themes of the final scenes in language and spectacle alike.

The theme of reconciliation is introduced as soon as the Messenger enters the stage in 792, where he joyfully announces that the city has escaped the danger

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\(^{509}\) The unifying of opposites in the _Seven_ as indication of Aeschylus’ philosophical views is examined by Seaford (2012: 325-327). For Seaford, the spatial-temporal unity of the opposites recalls the Heraclitean monetised chronotope. At the same time, the self-sufficiency of the _oikos_, its introversion and its elimination that end the cycle of opposites and unity is distinctively Parmenidean. See also Introduction 1.3.

\(^{510}\) The final part of the play is highly likely to be corrupt, making the discussion of the stage action of the final scenes difficult. Over the years, scholars have disagreed extensively over which verses are interpolated. However, there appears to be a general consensus that the final scene (1004-1078) was almost certainly an interpolation of the later years that sought to make the end of the _Seven_ compatible with Sophocles’ _Antigone_. For detailed discussions on the matter see Hutchinson (1985: 209-211), Brown (1976: 206-219), Dawe (1978: 93-101), Taplin (1977: 169 and 180-191), Dawe (1967: 16-28) and Fraenkel (1964b: 58-64). An elaborate overview of the bibliography that preceded these works can be found in Nicolaus (1967). The authenticity of the scene finds some support in the works of Rader, Erbse and Lloyd-Jones. However, none of these scholars have been able to make a solid case: specifically, Rader’s article (2009: 17-18 and 39), accepts the authenticity of the scene indirectly by claiming that the arguments of Lloyd-Jones are convincing but does not take the discussion further. As for Lloyd-Jones (1959: 80-115), his work offered a detailed outline of the flaws in the individual arguments of Wilamowitz (who was the first to argue for the rejection of the final scene in 1902), showing them to not be conclusive; however, the scholar failed to present any positive arguments in support of the authenticity of the scenes. Finally, Erbse responded to linguistic and metrical remarks made by Nicolaus and Fraenkel, claiming that the verses could have been Aeschylean (1974: 169-198). However, his positive evidence for the authenticity of the final scene was overall very limited.

\(^{511}\) The staging of the entrance of the bodies including the use of the _ekkyklema_ and the use of a secondary chorus, are discussed below.
of siege (πόλες πέφευγεν ἢδε δούλιον ζυγόν, 793). In what is a positive use of sea imagery, formerly deployed to describe the enemy as a powerful wave, the Messenger reports that the wall has resisted the power of the storm just like in times of fair weather (πόλις δὲ ἐν εὐδίαι τῇ καὶ κλυδωνίου πολλῆς πληγαῖς ἄντλοις οὐκ ἐδέξατο, 795). He also reports that the boastful enemy has fallen: πέπτωκεν ἀνδρῶν ὀβρίμων κομπάσματα (794). In this verse, the use of κομπάσματα recalls the boasts of Tydeus and Hippomedon, in 391 and 500 respectively, in an implicit confirmation of their elimination.512 The fall of the Argives means that the war is over, therefore bringing the antithesis between the two armies, the defenders and the attackers, those inside and those outside, to its conclusion.

The message of relief does not come without a price, since the Messenger soon confirms that the Chorus’ worst fears are true with his announcement of the mutual fratricide of Oedipus’ sons: ἄνδρες τεθνᾶσιν ἐκ χερῶν αὐτοκτόνων (the men died from each other’s hands, 805). As predicted by the Chorus in the previous stasimon, hammered Scythian iron helped divide their whole inheritance in two equal parts, leaving them with only enough land for their individual graves (Σκύθησις κατοχείς δὲ ἐκ ταφῶν χθόνος, 817-818). It is remarkable that the Messenger here recalls the same imagery that the Chorus had conjured in 727-733, even though he was absent when their words were uttered. Whilst it is unclear whether this should be taken as evidence that Eteocles’ dream had been elaborated upon in the previous parts of the trilogy, or whether the overlap takes place for poetic effect, the Messenger confirms that the events took place under the influence of a daimonic force that was “one and the same for both”: οὕτως ὁ δαίμων κοινὸς ἦν ἀμφότερος, 812. In this verse, κοινὸς and ἀμφότερος emphasise the shared destiny of the brothers who were united in death by dividing their land, as orchestrated by the daimon.513 Words that signify similarity and doubles abound in the rest of the passage, thus bringing their reconciliation to the centre of the episode. In 811-819, the brothers are referred to as ὁμαίμοις (of the same blood) and δισσώμεστοι (leaders of two armies, 816), while the Chorus uttering words like δήτα, δύσποτμον (813), διέλαχον (816) and

512 ταῖς ὑπερκόμποις σγαϊς καὶ Φόβος γὰρ ἢδη πρὸς πόλιςς κομπάσματα. On the enemy’s boasts as a marker of their threatening approach see 3.4.

513 Hutchinson (1985: 177) is right to exclude the possibility that the Messenger is referring to Apollo here, as the use of the term in reference to a named Olympian is un-Aeschylean.
δυσπότιμος (819) recalls the notion of double and the number δύο through the sound of their first syllables.514

In 848, the two bodies are finally brought out onto the stage. At their sight, the Chorus exclaims τάδ’ αὐτόδηλα: πρεπεῖ οὖν ἀγγέλου λόγος (it is plain to see; the Messenger’s words are visible reality”, 848). Laid down, side by side for the Chorus to behold, the metallic surface of their armours demonstrates the assimilation of their human bodies with their executioners, while the similarity of their armour demonstrates that Eteocles is truly δύομος to Polyneices. This is strengthened by the Chorus’ remarks as they continue to embellish their cries with words that recall the notion of doubling through content or sound, highlighting the mutual fratricide (αὐτοφόρον) and the subsequent assimilation of the two brothers: δυπλαῖ (double), δίδυμοι (twin) and δύμαρα (sad happenings), 849-850. The same kind of vocabulary litters the rest of the scene, especially in the choral lament, where the tragedy of the two brothers is further underscored by the emphasis on their shared womb and blood.515 Here, the two brothers are referred to as ὁμοσπλάγχων (of the same womb, 889-890), ὥμοσποροι (of the same seed, 933) and ὅμαιμοι (of the same blood, 940); what had previously become two out of one, has now become one again, a reunion in the state of non-existence. Their shared blood, therefore, does not only unite the two men between them, but it marks their eternal union with the city as well, as both siblings were first born to its governing rights (δύοῖν ἀνάκτον, 921), then their blood became one with the city’s soil, binding the house of Laius and the city of Thebes in eternal union (ἐν δὲ γαίᾳ, ζῷᾳ φωνοῦτοι μέμικται, 938-940).516 To speak of the city and of the family as two different entities is as futile as speaking about the enmity between Eteocles and Polyneices, but all has become one with the dividing power of Iron.

514 See also Thalmann (1978: 101), according to whom the wounds on the bodies of the two brothers are “the literal correlate of the idea of division”, then p. 59-61 and 75-76 in the same volume for a more detailed analysis of the role of division in the play.
515 The text indicates that, after verse 874, two singing parties share the song. Most editors and scholiasts agree that the Chorus would split at this stage into two semi-choruses, then sing the refrain together at 975-978 and 986-989. However, an intriguing proposal introduced by Poli-Palladini (2016: 217-219) has recently suggested that the division reflects their fellow warriors carrying the bodies, who then share the song with the group of maidens as a secondary Chorus. Both proposals make a legitimate case and deserve further exploration. However, as neither point of view affects the textual interpretations I expound here, I shall leave the discussion open for future consideration.
516 For the theme of blood in the play and its correlation to the motif of autochthony as a portrayal of the relationship between earth and womb, see Thalmann (1978: 50 and 51) and Cameron (1971: 85-95). For blood imagery in Aeschylus and in general, see Padel (1992: 172-179).
With all the key antithetical pairs of the play dissolved into single units, there is only one more double whose internal unity has yet to be commented upon: the two divine forces driving the play, Ares and the Erinys, the main male and female deities that the play has portrayed as the ones responsible for the war. We have already seen that the lack of any sort of clear distinction between the roles of Ares and the Erinys had already from the start of the play blurred the boundaries between them, with the two daimones recalled almost interchangeably throughout the scenes.\(^{517}\)

On the one hand, Ares is portrayed throughout the play as the god inside and outside: in the parodos, Ares is summoned twice by the Chorus as both a protector and as a potential destructor of the city (105 and 136) and was one of the daimones under whose names the Argives had taken their oath in the prologue (45). Three out of the seven Argive warriors are linked to Ares in the Redepaare either through origin or through possession by the daimon (489, 497, 532), and, much like those warriors, once Eteocles has donned his armour in the Arming Scene, he becomes the live embodiment of Ares.\(^{518}\) On the other hand, with the exception of Eteocles’ prayer in verse 70, the name of the Erinys does not appear in the text until just before the hero’s departure in 700. However, after 719, the daimon instantly becomes the focus of the play, framing the second stasimon in a ring composition that symbolically depicts its ruling over the house of Laius across the three generations.\(^{519}\) Altogether, Ares and the Erinys had therefore both received elaborate mentions across the play, however the two deities had not overlapped until now, at the play’s closure. Much like the two brothers and the armies, their symbolical reconciliation happens in the Chorus’ lament - and the vehicle is, once again, Iron.\(^{520}\)

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517 For the union between the two forces in the lament, see Poli-Palladini (2016: 214-215). For the contrary opinion, see Hutchinson (1985: 200) who does not believe that Iron and Ares are identified in these verses.

518 The role of Ares in the play as the god both inside and outside the walls, as well as the divine double of Eteocles in the Arming Scene, have been discussed in the previous parts of this dissertation. See p. 73-74, and also n. 182 and n. 489.

519 See verses 719-726 and 790-791, on which see the previous section.

520 The initiation of the lament is signified by verse 855 when the women state that their song and dance will be accompanied by the beating of their heads, one of the most common gestures of mourning (ἐρέσσετ᾿ ἀμφὶ κρατὶ πόμπιμον χεροῖν πίτυλον, 855-856), a statement that marks the song as a formal lamentation. For the ritual of mourning in the Classical Greek society see Garland (1985: passim), Alexiou (1974: passim but see especially 83-101 for the typical lamentation for the fall of the city). Especially for the representation of dance and gestures of lament in tragedy see...
Following the revelations of the Arming Scene, in the closing verses of the second stasimon, the Chorus predicted that the Erinys would enforce the Curse of Oedipus, driving the two brothers to murder one another with an iron-wielding hand (σιδαρονόμωι διὰ χερὶ [...] μὴ τελέσῃ καμψίτους Ὑρινός, 788 and 791). In the lament, once the Messenger confirms their fear of mutual fratricide through iron to have come true (οὐτως ὡμάρμοις χερσίν [...] διέλαχον σφυρηλάτων Σκόθη σιδήρωι κτημάτων παμπησίαν, 811 and 816-817), the blame is indisputably attributed to the Erinys whose power is unstoppable (ὦ μέλαινα καὶ τέλεια γένεος Οιδίπου τ´ ἀρά, [O black and fulfilled Curse of Oedipus and his family, 832-833] and κάρτα δ´ ἀληθῆ πατρός Οἰδίποδα πότνι Ὑρινός ἐπέκρανεν, [and the great Erinys of your father, Oedipus, was very truly fulfilled, 886-887]). However, it is not just the Erinys whose orders are executed by the metal, and in 908-910, Iron and Ares share the role of the divider: διαλλακτήρι δ´ οὐκ ἀμεμφεία φίλοις, οὐδ’ ἐπίχρους Ἀρης (among friends, their reconciler is not free of blame, nor is Ares seen as pleasing), they say. Then, in 941-946, Iron and Ares are both identified as the executioners of the paternal Curse:

πικρὸς λυτήρ νεικέων ὡ πόντιος
ξεῖνος ἐκ πυρῷς συθείς,
θητὸς Σίδαρος· πικρὸς δὲ χρημάτων
κακὸς δαπητᾶς Ἀρης,
ἀράν πατρώιαν τιθεὶς ἀλαθῆ.

A bitter resolver of arguments is the foreigner from the sea, born out of fire, whetted Iron; and Ares too is bitter, the evil divider of property, who has made the paternal curse come true.

*Sept. 941-946*

Iron is the divider of the land, and Ares too. For the first time in the entire play, Ares is finally recognised as the divine agency residing in the weapons’

Delavaud-Roux (1993: 115-139). Finally, for group and individual dedications to the dead on graves see Morris (1992: 149-155).
objecthood, the power assimilated with Eteocles once the armour had covered his body. And so, after a deadly battle, Ares-Iron has executed the orders of the Erinys-Curse. Indeed, as the play is reaching its end, the Chorus realise that the spear-duet that had driven them mad in the parodos as the weapons of the enemy clashed was truly an omen of death (Ἠ δύσορνς ἄοε ξυναυλία δορός, 838-839); in this short verse, δύσορνς and ξυναυλία recall the maddened melody not only of the weapons, but also of the aulos, the musical instrument which, together with the sound of the weapons, filled the air for the first time with the ominous atmosphere of death.\footnote{For which see p. 49-50. On the spear as the murderous weapon of the two brothers see also n. 41 and p. 181-182.} In the parodos, the Erinys are revealed through the aulos, the disharmonious music of which was a sign of disorder. In 838-839, the spear and the disharmonious music become one, as the weapon itself identifies with the discordant melody.\footnote{Poli-Palladini (2016: 211) makes the very intriguing suggestion here that the aulos-players would have been playing with reciprocal movements as to imitate the spear duel.} In the end, the spear is indeed proven to be a “lyre-less song of the Erinys”;\footnote{Paraphrased from Eum. 330-333.} it is Ares, and it is also the Curse/Erinys. And so, under the sign of the metal, the male and the female have become one.\footnote{See also Zeitlin (2009 [1982]: 98) and Burnett (1973: 886-887) who consider the union of the two forces as the establishment of a cosmic equation.} As we reach the end of the lament, the two semi-choruses briefly reform as one to sing twice, in the refrain of the lament (978-988), of the power of the \textit{daimon}.\footnote{Hutchinson (1985: 204) notices that the refrain, when it is sung, contrasts the much shorter phrases of the soloists, highlighting the dominating power of the \textit{daimon}.} Eteocles’ address to the Erinys in the prologue has turned out to be prophetic:\footnote{See verse 70: Άρα τ ᾧ Ἐρινύς πατρός ή μεγασθενής.} 

\begin{equation*}
   ὦ μέλαιν Ἐρινύς, ἣ μεγασθενής τις εἶ
\end{equation*}

O black Erinys, you truly are powerful
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