

Father, Womb, Blood: Apollo's embryological theory, the ethics of revenge, and the supposed exclusion of women in Aischylos' *Eumenides*

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Abstract. In Aischylos' *Eumenides*, Apollo intimates a theory according to which the father is the sole genetic parent of the child. The status of this conception, and whether it is depicted as an outlandish idea, has been much and inconclusively discussed. This paper considers a neglected piece of evidence: Apollo's use of the very unusual word *αὐτάδελφον* when addressing Hermes. In light of the Greeks' awareness of this etymology as well as the other instances of this rare word in tragedy, the author argues that Aischylos' text highlights the etymological connection to *δελφός*, the womb, thus evoking the role of the mother. This suggests that Aischylos subtly lets his, and Apollo's, language rebel against the notion of merely paternal kinship, and the concomitant ideas about revenge, retaliation and children's obligations to their parent.

Keywords: Aischylos, *ἀδελφός*, *αὐτάδελφος*, womb, mother, father.

Tėvas, iščios, kraujas. Apolono embriologinė teorija, keršto etika ir tariama moterų atskirtis Aischilo tragedijoje *Eumenidės*

Santrauka. Aischilo tragedijoje *Eumenidės* Apolonas užsimena apie teoriją, pagal kurią tėvas yra vienintelis vaiko biologinis gimdytojas. Apie šios sampratos statusą ir tai, ar ji pateikiama kaip svetima ir keista idėja, būta daug, tačiau bevaisių diskusijų. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas vienas pražiūrėtas įrodymo elementas – itin neįprastas žodis *αὐτάδελφον*, Apolono pavartotas kreipiantis į Hermį. Atsižvelgdamas į tai, jog graikai žinojo šio žodžio etimologiją, taip pat į kitus šio reto žodžio vartojimo tragedijoje atvejus, straipsnio autorius teigia, kad Aischilo tekste išryškinama etimologinė sąsaja su žodžiu *δελφός* „iščios“, taip primenant ir apie motinos vaidmenį. Tai reiškia, jog Aischilas (ir Apolonas) savo kalba subtiliai maištauja prieš giminystės, pagrįstos tik tėvo vaidmeniu, sampratą ir su ja susijusias idėjas apie kerštą, atpildą ir vaikų pareigas gimdytojui.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Aischilas, *ἀδελφός*, *αὐτάδελφος*, iščios, motina, tėvas.

In the final play of Aischylos' *Oresteia*, Apollo develops a doctrine of blood relations according to which only the father is related to the child, while the mother serves as a mere vessel and nourishing device¹. The argument serves the purpose of defending a political morality according to which there are strong obligations *vis-à-vis* one's father, but not the mother – in this case, retaliatory killing for the sake of the male parent. The theory, its origins, normative implications, plausibility for an Athenian audience and function in the play have been much discussed in the literature. The implications of these issues are far-reaching – the role of the god and the gods, that of women in the family and in society, and the evolution of normative argument in ancient Greek thought are all important questions raised by the debate. Is it really possible that the Athenians took this argument about exclusively male generation seriously or found their preconceptions of women and blood relations confirmed by it? In the following, I will consider a neglected piece of evidence. Apollo calls his brother Hermes ἀντάδελφον αἶμα; the words have often been rendered as “my own blood brother, begotten of the same father” or something similar that is consistent with the god's view of kinship (A. *Eu.* 89)². I will, however, argue that the expression evokes the role of the womb and hence the mother, that it revolts against the theory expounded by Apollo, and that the wording suggests that the theory and Apollo's argument are one-sided. Moreover, the interpretation developed in this paper resonates with a number of fundamental questions about Greek society and law. While it is almost universally held that the *Oresteia* is the *mise-en-scène* of female subordination and male domination – “the basic issue in the trilogy is the establishment [...] of patriarchal marriage where wife's subordination and patrilineal succession are reaffirmed” (Zeitlin 1984, 159; cf. Rocco 1997, 144; Foley 2001, 201–202) – there is, I will argue, reason to believe that Aischylos' text subtly undermines the argument given for it by Apollo.

The argument will unfold as follows. After having discussed previous research about the legal debate in the *Eumenides* in general, we will look at the words ἀντάδελφον αἶμα and how they have been understood more specifically. The next section of the article will explore the etymology of ἀντάδελφον, the relevance of etymological considerations in Aischylos, and the uterine connotation in the word. Subsequently I will discuss other instances of the word and argue that they all occur in contexts that call attention precisely to the womb. Summing up, I will make the case that Apollo's use of ἀντάδελφον evokes its root, the uterus, and that this creates a remarkable tension between the embryological and normative doctrine expounded by the god on the one hand and his language, indeed that of the Greeks, on the other hand. To put it boldly, Aischylos lets language itself rebel against the god's words.

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² This translation in: Sommerstein 2008, 365. Translations are mine when not otherwise stated.

Gods, Egyptians, Anaxagoras and the state of the question

The assessments of Apollo's ideas about kinship and generation in the *Oresteia* have been spectacularly divergent. During the court debate, Apollo claims that the father is the sole parent in a stricter sense, and that the mother merely nourishes the child: οὐκ ἔστι μήτηρ ἢ κεκλημένη τέκνου | τοκεύς, “the so-called mother is not the child's parent” (*Eu.* 658–659). Instead, she is just a τροφός, “nurse” (*Eu.* 659)³. The chorus of Erinyes accusing Orestes have previously argued that there is a difference between killing blood relatives and relatives by marriage, and that they thus only persecute the former. When Orestes asks why the Erinyes did not punish his mother for killing his father, they reply that Klytaimestra did not murder her own kin – in a particular sense: οὐκ ἦν ὁμαίμος φωτὸς ὃν κατέκτανεν, “she was not of the same blood as the man that she killed”, unlike Agamemnon, who slaughtered his own daughter Iphigeneia (*Eu.* 605)⁴. The Erinyes' exclusive interest in punishing the killing of blood relations may have been an Aeschylean invention for the purpose of showing their one-sidedness; others have claimed that this was their traditional function (Wilamowitz 1914, 222). This issue has been much – and inconclusively – discussed, and need not detain us here (Winnington-Ingram 1983, 120; Croiset 1928, 244–245; Dirksen 1965, 57; Reinhardt 1949, 147; Fischer 1965, 59). Yet Apollo's claim responds to the argument made by the Erinyes: even if their duty is that of persecuting those who have killed their own kin, Orestes does not fall under their jurisdiction, for children are not blood relatives of their mother.

But what is the status of this argument? Christian Meier argues that regardless of Aeschylos' view of the matter, the audience must have perceived the theory as a “Ungeheuerlichkeit”, “monstrosity” (Meier 1983, 182; likewise Reinhardt 1949, 148, criticized by Schneider 1974, 322–323). Anne Lebeck says that Apollo's theory is portrayed as having a “shaky foundation” (Lebeck 1971, 128, cf. 122). Nicole Loraux likewise asserts that the god's view comes across as an “extrémisme” (Loraux 1990, 129). In a slightly different vein, Alan Sommerstein suggests that the spectators are likely to have thought of the argument as a “specious but fallacious piece of forensic pleading” (Sommerstein 1989, 208). Giulia Maria Chesi has even made the argument that the entire text of the *Oresteia* systematically subverts the recurring attempts to deny the role of mothers in procreation and the rearing of children (Chesi 2014, *passim*, e.g., 186). Common to these arguments is the assumption that for Aeschylos, the god's claim simply does not constitute a compelling reason (Dirksen 1965, 49; cf. Rechenauer 2001, 61).

On the other hand, some have made the case that Apollo's doctrine should be understood as divine in a non-trivial sense; Wolfgang Rösler, in his analysis of Presocratic ideas in Aeschylos, contends that Apollo's claim must be considered as “göttliche Wahrheit” in the context (Rösler 1970, 75). Some have even suggested that this kind of view was

³ This may allude to the nurse in the *Libation Bearers*, who rescues Orestes from his mother, thereby subverting her motherhood.

⁴ But cf. Chesi 2014, 19, who suggests that Klytaimestra could be making an opposed yet symmetrical argument, that is, that the *mother* is the only parent.

“widely held” in 5th century Athens (Kuhns 1962, 46–47; likewise Zeitlin 1984, 180; see also Songe-Møller 1999, 29, 31, but contrast 155, 159). At least, some argue, the god’s position is more valid or true than that of the Erinyes (Grossmann 1970, 224).

A third strand of interpretation includes scholars who argue that the embryological argument would have seemed to be neither inherently flawed nor very persuasive in its context (Winnington-Ingram 1983, 123). In this vein, it has been claimed that the debate establishes a “vero e proprio conflitto di autorità” in the play (Citti 1962, 108). The result would simply be ambiguous, or the perception would be that both sides are, in some sense, right (Lesky 1931, 211).

It would seem, then, that it is difficult to tell what standing Apollo’s embryological view has in the tragedy (Fischer 1965, 90). It has even been argued that the argument itself is depicted as irrelevant in the drama (Croiset 1928, 254). The origins of the conception of male generation have likewise been discussed and are surely relevant to our understanding of it. It has often been held that Aischylos must have derived the idea from Anaxagoras, who had (at least according to Aristotle’s *Generation of animals*) defended this theory (Arist. *GA* 763b31-3). As pointed out by Sommerstein, however, this hypothesis does not answer the question about the perceived validity of the idea in the context of the *Eumenides* (Sommerstein 1989, 206–208). Moreover, it has instead been asserted that Aischylos was in all likelihood familiar with the notion of exclusive paternal generation not from Greek natural philosophy, but from Egyptian sources (Peretti 1956, 249). The Greeks thought of Egypt as an inverted and strange world, and it could thus be argued that such an Egyptian connection could make Apollo’s embryological doctrine look outlandish too (on Egypt: Hdt. II. 35). There is, however, probably good reason to be cautious in drawing conclusions about the role of the theory in the trilogy on the basis of such considerations (but cf. Chesi 2014, 159). Furthermore, while it has often been claimed that some aspect of Apollo’s argument is inconsistent, the relevance of incoherences or logical inconsistency has seldom been stated clearly or addressed directly in studies on Aischylos, but rather often been taken for granted (Solmsen 1949, 62)⁵.

There is, then, little scholarly consensus about how Apollo’s embryological argument for the killing of Klytaimestra is to be evaluated. It is time to look at a different piece of evidence.

The siblings and their parent

In the following we will, as I said, see that an intriguing expression at the beginning of the play may provide a key to understanding how Apollo’s doctrine was depicted in the drama. This is perhaps a detail. Yet we will discover that this detail brings out a world of intriguing problems.

After speaking to Orestes, Apollo addresses Hermes (who is probably absent), asking that he look out for the suppliant (on Hermes’ absence: Taplin 1977, 364–365): οὐ δ’,

⁵ Mark Griffith has even suggested that Aischylos has “relatively little interest in [...] logical consistency” (Griffith 2009, 31).

αὐτάδελφον αἷμα καὶ κοινοῦ πατρός, | Ἑρμῆ, φύλασσε (*Eu.* 89–90). Alan Sommerstein translates these words as “you, my own blood brother, begotten of the same father, Hermes, guard him” (translation in Sommerstein 2008, 365). The expression αὐτάδελφον αἷμα has generated relatively little interest. Some critics have quoted the words without commenting on them (Headlam & Thomson 1966 and Conacher 1987 do not mention it; Chesi 2014, 162 quotes the words but does not discuss them). The formulation has typically been understood as “blood, very much that of a sibling”, that is, stressing the bond between the two brothers Apollo and Hermes. Sommerstein thus claims that “for [Apollo] the phrases αὐτάδελφον αἷμα and (παῖς) κοινοῦ πατρός are synonymous” (Sommerstein 1989, 99; cf. Blass 1907, 80). Similarly, Anthony Podlecki says that “this is something of a redundancy”, that is, both expressions – “very brotherly” and “of the same father” – convey the same idea (Podlecki 1989, 136). These views trade heavily on the assumption that αὐτάδελφος simply means ἀδελφός, brother. Groeneboom likewise says that the former is “een poëtische versterking”, “a poetic intensifier”, of the latter (Groeneboom 1952, 106). This implies that the αὐτ- prefix merely adds intensity, “very much that of a sibling”.

According to Apollo’s theory, Hermes is indeed his brother; his conception of heredity emphasizes the bond father-child, indeed eliminates kinship between mother and child. Citing αὐτάδελφον αἷμα, Simon Goldhill thus speaks of “[t]he implication that Hermes is absolute kin with Apollo” (Goldhill 1984, 213). But there is a strange problem. The prefix αὐτ- implies *sameness*. Hermes and Apollo have the same father, but not the same mother. Yet ἀδελφός is clearly related to δελφός, “womb”, and the word’s prefix, a copulative ἀ-, indicates a relation of identity, belonging or sameness. Etymologically, then, ἀδελφός signifies “from the same womb”. And this highlights the mother as the common origin, not the father. Benveniste thus speaks of an implied “fraternité co-utérine” in the word ἀδελφός (Benveniste 2003, 219, cf. 213–214, 220–221). Unlike Greek φράτηρ, likewise designating the brother (Proto-Indo-European **bhrāter*, Avestan *brātar-*, Latin *frater*, Lithuanian *brolis*, Russian *бpам*, English *brother*, Swedish *broder* and so on), which had acquired a political sense in Greek (designating men belonging to the same phratry, including non-kin), ἀδελφός does thus originally signify siblings with reference to the *mother*, not the father.

The etymology is confirmed in the standard etymological works (Chantraine 1968–1980, I, 19; Frisk 1960–1970, I, 19; Beekes 2010, s.v. ἀδελφός). And it establishes a tension in Apollo’s argument. The god who believes in exclusively male generation, the god who excludes the mother from the family in the stricter sense, addresses his brother by the same father with reference to what they do in fact *not* have in common – the uterus of the mother.

It could be objected that ἀδελφός simply meant “brother” without any distinction between different kinds of siblingship, and that the word had become lexicalized, that is, that the etymology may well have been long forgotten at the time. The reference to the same womb, δελφός, has been explained by possible matrilinear traditions in the pre-Hellenic population of the geographic areas that later became Greece (Kretschmer

1910)⁶. The notion of siblings as co-uterine relations was, or so someone could argue, less germane to the Greeks, and hence the original meaning may simply have been forgotten. But this is not correct.

There is every reason to believe that the Greeks were in fact aware not only of the etymology of the word ἀδελφός as a distant beginning, but still felt the force of the word's origin. Hesychios defines ἀδελφοί as οἱ ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς δελφύος γεγονότες. Δελφύς γάρ ἢ μήτρα λέγεται “those who are born from the same womb; for the uterus is called *delphys*” (col. 32, s.v. ἀδελφοί). Centuries away, then, a dictionary explains the word in accordance with its roots. Moreover, Aristotle laconically notes that the word ἀδελφοί derives from δελφύς, the womb, and that brothers are thus called brothers with reference to the womb of their mother (Arist. *HA* 510b13). Hesychios' terminology deviates from that of Aristotle, who is more precise in distinguishing between on the one hand ὑστέρα, δελφύς, the uterus in the stricter sense, and on the other hand μήτρα, the vagina. Yet the point is clear: the etymology was still known in the classical period and beyond, and the Greeks would plausibly have heard *womb* in the word *brother*. And as we shall see, the word is not innocent – Aischylos' language rarely, if ever, is⁷.

The use and possible abuse of etymology

It would seem, then, that ἀυτάδελφον αἶμα καὶ κοινοῦ πατρός cannot really mean “my own blood brother, begotten of the same father”. Instead, the expression creates a tension or even inconsistency: the word ἀυτάδελφον is etymologically speaking not compatible with κοινοῦ πατρός, “of the same father”, in the case of Apollo and Hermes. It could be objected that “etymology” is a problematic concept in the interpretation of the Greek imaginary, and that the Greeks had a very different understanding of words. To begin with, however, we should note that Aischylos himself sometimes uses ἐτήτυμος and ἐτητύμως in order to indicate either the origin or the “true” meaning of a word, e.g., when saying that Right, personified as the goddess Dike, is Διὸς κόρα, “daughter of Zeus” (*Cho.* 948, cf. *Ag.* 167). Modern scholarship will, needless to say, disagree with Aischylos' words, if taken as a claim about the actual linguistic descent of the name Dike. But as an “etymological derivation” it is etymological in a different sense (Goldhill 1984, 62, cf. 239). In this context, we need to include not only folk etymology, but also what Aischylos himself may or may not have considered a fiction on his part, indeed an *invented* kinship between words and sounds. This is not to say that we are entitled to lose sight of the true etymology, that is, the question of the real origin of a word. But etymological speculations in Greek culture were if not frivolous, then at least remarkably flexible with

⁶ Cf. however Gonda 1962 (the present argument is agnostic with regard to these historical questions).

⁷ The conception of parenthood in Greek societies seems to have implied a stronger genetic relation between mother and child. As has been pointed out in the context of Orestes' court case, the Athenian legal system “in important respects treated the bond between mother and child as closer than that between father and child” (Sommerstein 1989, 207). This goes for adoption as well as marriage between half-siblings (who could only be allowed to marry if they were children of the same father, not of the same mother, implying that they were considered to be “more related” if they had the same mother – see Wilgaux 2011).

regard to phonetic similarities and semantics (Lallot 1991). And particularly in Aischylos, meaning is created by way of aetiological as well as “contaminational” etymology, and any interpretation with a claim to precision will need to take this into account (Dougherty 1991, 123; on “contaminational” etymology, see Grintser 2008, 93). In the case of Δίκη and Διὸς κόρα, ἐτήτυμος is likely to mean “true”, and Aischylos’ words need not have much to do with the origin of the word Δίκη, but just express an idea about the truth of such a correlation (Sier 1988, 291; Garvie 1986, 309–310). Yet it is clear that Aischylos, in identifying this (false, according to modern usage) etymology, plays on the elements of the word, its phonetic properties and potential, and that the result can be construed as a claim to truth⁸. We may, then, surmise that Aischylos is not only aware of the (true, according to a stricter conception of “etymological”) etymology of ἀδελφός, but that he may be expected to explore its possible meanings when employing ἀτάδελφος⁹.

Thus far, I have discussed ἀτάδελφος as if it were just a special case of ἀδελφός. I have argued that the word conjures up the idea of the womb, and that this creates a peculiar problem in Apollo’s use of the term, since his conception of male generation and hence his defence of a specific morality of revenge in fact denies the “genetic” role of the mother in procreation. But again, one could object that the dominant use of ἀδελφός in Aischylos’ epoch did not involve a notion of uterine unity, but expressed a far more mundane idea of brothers and sisters, including both types of half-siblings. The copulative ἄ- in ἀδελφός indicates sameness, and it could, as it were, be understood as used of brothers and sisters being “same” without any reference to their mothers’ womb. In order to assess this objection, we need to look at the compound ἀτάδελφος. Before we do this, we should note that the *alpha copulativum* and αὐτός both mean “same”, but that they are not related. The former stems from the Proto-Indo-European **sm-*, “same” in English and, e.g., ἅμα, “together” in Greek, whereas αὐτός derives from the Proto-Indo-European roots **h₂ew-*, meaning “again” and **to* (“that”) (Beekes 2010, 173; contrast however Frisk 1960–1970, I, 191–192). We cannot suppose that Aischylos had knowledge of these different origins, and there is no need to. Regardless of whether the poet invented the word himself or not,

⁸ It could be objected that Aischylos’ etymologies typically convey their own explication in a direct manner, that is, that they are *explicit* in being etymologies, and explicit in the sense that they convey, and that this is evidently not the case with ἀτάδελφον αἶμα. While this is generally true of speaking names (but see Tsantsanoglou 2013, 50, who discusses *Septem* 577 as an exception, a passage in which Aischylos gives “only the description of the procedure leading to the etymology”), ἀτάδελφον is not a proper name. And it would seem hard to deny that Aischylos uses the etymologically induced polysemy of individual words as a means to convey meaning in his poetry (cf., e.g., Verdenius 1985, 290, 292, 298). Moreover, Consuelo Reinberg (1980, 42–45, 48–54) has suggested that some etymologies in Aischylos are in fact used to subvert and revise the primary or *prima facie* meaning of a word (e.g. σῆμα in *Septem* 387 and the recurrent play of Πέρσαι and πέρθω in *Persians*), and these etymological plays would, as it were, resemble the one explored in this paper. (For a case in the *Oresteia*, the χίμαιρα of *Ag.* 232, see also Tralau 2016).

⁹ In this context, I cannot attempt to locate Aischylos along the dimension of Greek conceptions of language, from conventionalism to naturalism (as epitomized in *Pl. Cra.* 427d–435c). It would perhaps be too tempting to ascribe some sort of “naive” naturalism to him. For what it is worth, however, cf. Liebermann 1996, 36–37, who rejects wide-spread assumptions of Greek primitive name magic, and makes the argument that already the etymologies in epic (specifically, Hesiod) are the products of a reflective, sophisticated and critical view of language and names.

the substitution of $\alpha\upsilon\tau\text{-}$ for $\alpha\text{-}$, and the use of the word in the tragedy, arguably emphasise and intensify the meaning of the prefix. The word calls attention to its parts – to *same* and *womb*. And this is, I will argue, confirmed by the other extant uses of the strange word.

The strangeness of $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\omicron\varsigma$ in the context of tragedy

While $\acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\omicron\varsigma$ is very common, $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\omicron\varsigma$ is a rare word. Until the end of the classical period, there are only six instances in extant literature. In order to see how $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\omicron\varsigma$ may have been or should be understood, we must look at the passages in which the word is used¹⁰. We are already familiar with one of them. The other five are likewise from tragedy, and the first recorded use is Aischylean.

The first one is to be found in *Seven against Thebes*, where the chorus anxiously ask Eteokles whether he is really going to fight his own brother: $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda' \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\omicron\nu \alpha\tilde{\iota}\mu\alpha \delta\rho\acute{\epsilon}\psi\alpha\sigma\theta\alpha\iota \theta\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\epsilon\iota\varsigma$, “but do you want to cull your *autadelphon* blood?” (A. Th. 718). The question clearly expresses repugnancy at the idea of killing one’s own sibling. Several commentaries refrain from discussing the word at all (Tucker 1908, 48; Todesco 1945, 86; Hutchinson 1985, 160; cf. Verrall 1887, 86, who says that “the use of $\alpha\tilde{\iota}\mu\alpha$ in poetry is singularly loose”, but does not discuss $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\omicron\nu$). Groeneboom, by contrast, argues that it implies “verwantschap in den volle zin des woords”, “kinship in the full sense of the word” (Groeneboom 1938, 205). In any case, the $\alpha\upsilon\tau\text{-}$ prefix cannot be interpreted as an intensification in the way that Groeneboom understood the word in the *Eumenides*, that is, “very brotherly, very beloved” (Groeneboom 1952, 106). Polyneikes is not “very brotherly” in the affective sense to Eteokles, nor vice versa. But if $\alpha\upsilon\tau\text{-}$ stresses sameness in a special way, then there is in fact not just “kinship in the full sense of the word”, but a particular strangeness and kinship to stress in the case of the brothers’ family. Their father, who has cursed them, is also their brother, for father and sons share something; they share their mother’s womb, as Aischylos emphasizes shortly thereafter when he lets the chorus sing of Οἰδιπόδαν , | $\acute{\omicron}\sigma\tau\epsilon \mu\alpha\tau\rho\acute{\varsigma} \acute{\alpha}\gamma\eta\nu\acute{\alpha}\nu$ | $\sigma\pi\epsilon\iota\rho\alpha\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\rho\upsilon\rho\alpha\nu$, “Oidipus, who sowed his mother’s holy field”, and the $\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\alpha\nu \alpha\acute{\iota}\mu\alpha\tau\acute{\omicron}\epsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\nu$, “bloody root” of the family (A. Th. 752–755). Oidipus issues from the same womb as his own children¹¹. And we may cautiously conjecture that this mythic fact gives a peculiar chilling tone to the word in this context: *same* and *womb* together cannot but recall a disconcerting fact.

It could be objected that this places far too much weight on a single instance of a rare word, and that this belongs to the realm of speculation. But the subsequent history of the

¹⁰ Later, Lykophron employs $\alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\lambda\phi\omicron\nu$ when speaking of Idomeneus as the alleged brother of Aithon (*Alexandra* 432). There are several reasons to be cautious about drawing any conclusions from this passage. First, it is true that Odysseus, in one of his marvelous lies (*Od.* 19. 183), presents himself as Aithon, brother of Idomeneus; but we do not know whether there was in fact a brother called Aithon in the mythic universe – “in fact” in the sense of external to Odysseus’ lie. Second, if there was one, then we still do not know the exact nature of their kinship, that is, in what sense they were brothers. Third, given the role of the *Alexandra* as an extreme case of Hellenistic *Kunstsprache*, with its heavy neologisms and fleeting and obscure references, a plausible discussion of the implications of the word for the question asked in this paper is difficult *per se*, and just not possible here.

¹¹ Euripides will thus later say that the children are $\mu\acute{\iota}\alpha\sigma\mu\alpha \pi\alpha\tau\rho\acute{\varsigma}$ (*Ph.* 816).

word may be telling. *Seven against Thebes* was staged in 467 BC, the *Oresteia* in 458. The three next instances are later, from Sophokles' *Antigone*, dating from 442 or 441.

The second ἀντάδελφον is found in the very first verse of the play: Antigone addresses her sister as ὃ κοινὸν ἀντάδελφον Ἰσμῆνης κάρα. The words are almost untranslatable, but “common selfsame sibling Ismene” would give an idea of it¹². Some commentators have understood this as “merely a poetical strengthening of ἀδελφός” (Jebb 1900, 1; Kamerbeek 1978, 37). Yet others have argued that ἀντάδελφον raises an ominous past. In this vein, Nicole Loraux has claimed that the many uses of ἀντ- words speak to the sameness of the womb, the incestuous generation of Oidipus' children and the curse of the Labdakids; this language “sert à dire le lien du sang comme lieu d'inceste, de parricide, de suicide” (Loraux 1986, 167; Griffith 1999, 120, appears to be sympathetic to the interpretation). Moreover, Charles Segal has claimed that *Antigone* consistently raises the spectre of this origin, recalling the womb of Oidipus' mother and wife. This is true of the use of ἀντάδελφον, but the notion appears in other ways and words as well. The heroine thus speaks of τοὺς ὁμοσπλάγγχους σέβειν, “reverence for those of the same womb”, as rendered by Segal (*Ant.* 511; Segal 1999, 183–185). And ὁμόσπλαγγχος – even more rare, the word only appears in one more place, perhaps tellingly, in Aischylos' *Seven*, of the incestuously engendered brothers – literally means someone who is the “same” in issuing from the same σπλάγγχνα, “inward parts”, in this case specifically “womb” (*A. Th.* 889–890; this is likewise the case in *Pi. O.* 6.43). Furthermore, it has been argued that precisely this notion of a “community of the womb”, of blood relations, can account for Antigone's notoriously enigmatic claim that she would sacrifice herself for a sibling and a parent, but not for a spouse (Tralau 2005, 390–392; 2010, 83–91). In these three passages from *Antigone*, the word ἀντάδελφον is only used of the siblings begotten by Oidipus and his mother: Ismene and, twice, the dead Polyneikes (*S. Ant.* 1, 503, 696).

The sixth possible, and final, instance is to be found a few decades later in Euripides' *Melanippe captive* (F 495.18 Kannicht). The eponymous character's sons by Poseidon have been adopted by Metapontos, king of Metapontium, and his queen Theano. The latter incites her brothers to try to kill the adopted twins. The text is disputed, but in a description of the assassination attempt, the word ἀνταδέλω may have been used of Theano's brothers, the supposed uncles trying to kill them, as σὼ δ' ἀνταδέλω, with the basic meaning “your brothers”¹³. This relates to distorted family relations, but there appears to be no reference to incest or outlandish embryological ideas. Yet in a different version of the myth, the corresponding characters were (supposedly biological, but in reality adopted) brothers instead, that is, sons of another woman whom Melanippe's sons believed to be their mother (Hyginus, *Fab.* 186). Now, if Euripides invented the version where it was the brothers of the adoptive mother who attempted to kill Melanippe's sons (as assumed by Romero Mariscal 2014, 205; cf. Jouan & van Looy 2000, 369), or if Hyginus' variant is in any case older or just as old, then we may cautiously surmise that

¹² It would be Hölderlinesque to render the periphrasis Ἰσμῆνης κάρα as “Ismene's head” in the translation. For this, and many other objections, I am indebted to a generous anonymous reader.

¹³ Most editors print ἀνταδέλω; Weil suggested ἀντ'ἀδέλω, but cf. van Looy 1964, 286.

an Athenian audience would be aware of the latter version, in which an adoptive mother plots to have her (biological) sons kill her (adoptive) sons, who – unlike the spectator and reader – *in fact believe that they issue from the same womb as their adoptive brothers*. If this argument is sound, then ἀὐτάδελφω is likewise likely to elicit the idea of the womb, echoing the other version of the myth, and a troubling (lack of) uterine community, not unlike the wording and context in *Antigone* and *Seven*.

What can we make of this? To be perhaps superfluously clear, the point is not that the ἀὐτάδελφον employed by Apollo in *Eumenides* could evoke incest or the cursed family in Thebes. But we have seen that five other instances in which the word is used can reasonably be construed as alluding to the womb. The other cases of ἀὐτάδελφον all seem reminiscent of the uterus in a very special and disconcerting way. And if they do, then we may be justified in interpreting Apollo's ἀὐτάδελφον similarly: unlike an everyday ἀδελφός, the word reminds the listener and reader of the word's components – “same” and “womb”. It could be objected that the passages in *Antigone* are irrelevant since they are probably dependent on the *Seven* and the *Eumenides*, whereas the opposite could not be the case. This is true, but it is only a half-truth. In a limited corpus of texts, one will often need to make inferences from later sources, and the suggestion that a certain use is later cannot be methodologically controlling¹⁴. The point to make here is that even if we do not know about other, earlier instances of the word, or whether Aischylos invented it, we will need to look at what Sophokles feels entitled to do with the word. Before and after the *Oresteia*, in the *Seven*, in *Antigone*, and in *Melanippe captive*, tragedy flashes the word in ways that evoke its origins – the womb.

The word's rebellion: conclusions and implications

When Apollo speaks of his brother of the same father, before he develops the argument that the mother is not related to her child, he thus uses a word that highlights the very phenomenon that his doctrine excludes: the womb, and hence the role of the mother. This makes for a very special tension. Apollo's wording does not constitute a logical inconsistency, for he does not make a statement that contradicts his embryological view and its companion idea of the ethic of retaliation. Yet while we are not dealing with a contradiction in the proper, logical sense, his formulation is incongruent with the ideas expounded in the defence of Orestes – incongruent in the sense of a linguistic tension, a terminological aberration given his later claim about exclusively male generation. When addressing his brother who has a different mother, he employs a word that calls attention to the *same* womb, thus prompting a special conception of siblingship that is enshrined in the word itself.

While it may, given the ambiguity of such a rare word, not be logically inconsistent to use the word of Hermes, its subtle connotations are ostentatiously incongruent with

¹⁴ As I argued above, given his style, innovation and mannerisms, the implications of Lykophron's use of the word (*Alexandra* 423) are, at the very least, hard to assess, and for that reason different from the information that can be gathered from a lexicon such as that of Hesychios. Later instances of the word, a millennium or further away, raise other problems, and I will not discuss them here.

his and Apollo's kinship relation. For the same reason, the use of the word may not be logically inconsistent with the embryological argument itself, but it does constitute a conceptual strangeness that needs to be accounted for. Speculation about a lost variant of the myth, in which Hermes and Apollo would in fact be sons of the same mother, is an *ad hoc* hypothesis that looks suspiciously convenient and ultimately impossible to prove (the idea, from Stanley & Butler 1812, 123, is justly criticized by Groeneboom 1952, 106). Yet one way to understand the wording would be to say that this linguistic tension between the word and the idea indicates that the idea itself is in tension with reality, and that Aischylos' text constructs Apollo's language so as to disclose the one-sidedness and falsehood of his views. *Even the words of the god who denies kinship between mother and child actually evoke the relation and the bond between the woman, the womb, and her offspring.* Apollo develops a notion of kinship that his language revolts against.

One could object that the words are spoken hundreds of verses before Apollo expounds the embryological theory. Oliver Taplin has argued that "we should hesitate to explain anything earlier in the play in terms of something which is only divulged later" (Taplin 1977, 18). While Taplin's precept should remind us to be cautious, it cannot serve as a methodological police constable or prison guard. We have overwhelming reason to believe that poetry – perhaps in particular Aischylean poetry – operates by images that anticipate other images. They are, then, often "proleptic" in the sense that their meaning is disclosed and completed much later in the drama or in the trilogy (Lebeck 1971, 1). And Apollo's embryologico-political arguments interact with his previous statements, in this case ἀντάδελφον. Indeed, and consequently, we may – perhaps must – suspect that hearing the argument about male generation of blood relatives at the Areopagos retroactively modifies or undermines the interpretation and credibility of other things that Apollo says about fathers, mothers, the womb, children and siblings.

Apollo employs a word evocative of the womb, and this makes his language incongruent with the embryological theory that he relies on to justify a peculiar version of the politics of retaliation. Again: while not a logical inconsistency, this may be a subterranean indication that Apollo's argument is flawed in excluding the mother – in embryological as well as political terms. The word ἀντάδελφον thus undermines the notion of exclusively male generation as well as the concomitant devaluation of the mother in Apollo's ethics of revenge.

We are approaching the end. The implications of this interpretation for our understanding of the verse at hand should be obvious – and to a lesser extent, this should be true of the role and doctrine of Apollo in the trilogy as well. Yet there may be other implications. It is almost universally held that the *Oresteia* heralds and celebrates the exclusion of women from the political and legal spheres. The view that the trilogy "stands squarely within the misogynistic tradition which pervades Greek thought" has a long modern history, with roots in Bachofen's theories of matriarchy, and possibly beyond (Zeitlin 1984, 160; Bachofen 1984, 190–196, 221–222; cf. Meier 1983, 185; Rocco 1997, 144; Foley 2001, 201–202). It would perhaps be over-rash and hybriatic to question this conception on the basis of a single verse. Yet it would seem that at this moment in Aischylos' text,

the celebration of an all-male order and the exclusion of women is problematized, indeed subverted. Apollo's own words conjure – in case someone had forgotten about it – the role of women, the womb, and mothers.

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