

Tragic Money

I. Introduction

Tragedy was a product of the classical polis, but took its themes (with very few exceptions) from an imagined earlier age, the heroic age that is also the subject of the Homeric poems. The result, it has been argued, is a creative tension, notably between the spirit of heroic autonomy and the rule of law characteristic of the polis.¹ The institutions of the polis make themselves felt, anachronistically, in the tragic representation of heroic myth.²

My aim here is to extend this argument by examining the influence of money, including coinage (an institution of the polis), on the tragic representation of heroic myth, and in particular through three case studies, one selected from each of the extant tragedians. My aim is to describe the part played by money in the texture of the plays, and to indicate the relation of this role to its cultural and historical background. I will be concerned only briefly with the definitional and theoretical problems of money and with the early history of the development of precious metal as money. Such topics will be treated at much greater length in the large-scale study of the cultural consequences of money on which I am currently engaged, and which will locate tragic money in its historical context.³ For my present purpose it will be sufficient to use, as a historical foil to tragedy, Homeric epic. This is because, although both Homer and tragedy represent the heroic world, the creative phase of Homeric epic (roughly the eighth and early seventh centuries) occurred *before* – whereas tragedy came into being shortly *after* – the rapid development of coinage (the first ever

¹ E.g. Vernant & Vidal-Naquet 1988: 23–8.

² See e.g. Easterling 1985: 6–7, whose two paragraphs on coinage are the only treatment known to me of tragic money, apart from occasional remarks on money from a perspective very different from mine in von Reden 1995: 147–68.

³ The cultural consequences of money in early Greece have received far less attention than those of literacy. Notable exceptions are Thomson 1961; Shell 1978; Kurke 1991.

widespread coinage) by the Greek city-states in the sixth century. The world represented by Homeric epic contains neither coinage nor even (except for a few indications) money,⁴ nor is its representation of events influenced by money, whereas the world represented by tragedy does, anachronistically, contain (precious metal) money, occasionally explicitly in the form of coinage, and is, I will argue, in various non-obvious ways shaped by money. Like other institutions of the polis, coinage (and precious metal money generally) influences the tragic representation of heroic myth.

Money is, of course, a quite distinct category from wealth. If we say that the functions of money are to be a measure of value, a means of exchange, a means of payment and a store of value,⁵ then in Homer there is nothing that is especially associated with, or regularly performs, any one of these functions, except that a measure of value is sometimes provided by cattle. And so there is in Homer nothing with a greater claim than cattle to be called money.⁶ But even cattle do not perform any of the other functions of money, and even as a measure of value they ^[120] are used only occasionally and for a limited range of goods.⁷ In the sixth and fifth centuries, on the other hand, we find precious metal performing all the functions of money. The *combination* of these functions in a single thing (gold or silver) produces a radical novelty. Furthermore, it seems that precious metal (whether gold, silver or even both simultaneously) became, at least in some of the city-states, generally acceptable as a means of payment and exchange. We may therefore call it a universal equivalent.

From the evidence for the development of a universal equivalent in this period I confine myself here to a small sample of texts. The function of money as a (universal) *means of exchange* is famously illustrated by Heraclitus:⁸ 'All things are requital for fire and fire for all things, just as goods for gold and gold for goods.'⁹ The supreme inherent value of gold, and its strange new power to (in a sense) embody all things, allows the poetic exaggeration by Pythermos, apparently a contemporary of Heraclitus, to

⁴ See nn. 6, 76 and 78 below. The question of to what extent, if at all, there is money in Homer, and the crucial question (on which it depends) of how we define money (too broad a definition is useless), I will deal with in my larger study.

⁵ For this analysis see e.g. Polanyi 1977: esp. 102–6. But on any reasonable definition of money, money barely exists in Homer.

⁶ Despite the few indications of a special status for gold as representing wealth in general: e.g. *Od.* 3.301.

⁷ The only cases involving trade are *Il.* 21.79 (sale of Lykaon); *Od.* 1.431 (purchase of Eurykleia). The others are *Il.* 2.449 (golden tassel on Athena's aegis), 6.236 (suits of armour exchanged), 23.702–5 and 885 (prizes); *Od.* 22.57 (compensation).

⁸ DK 22 B 90.

⁹ πῦρὸς ἀνταμοιβὴ τὰ πάντα καὶ πῦρ ἀπάντων ὄκωσπερ χρυσοῦ χρήματα καὶ χρημάτων χρυσός.

the effect that ‘the things other than gold were after all nothing’.¹⁰ A universal means of exchange will also almost inevitably act as a *measure of value*.¹¹ A specified quantity of precious metal as a *means of payment* is frequent, for instance in Herodotus,¹² in early inscriptions,¹³ or in the coins paid to Athenian officials and jurymen. The function of precious metal money as a *store of wealth*, and indeed the overall importance of money in the age of Sophocles and Euripides, emerges from the stress laid in various speeches, reported by Thucydides, on the importance of money in the Peloponnesian war.¹⁴ Thucydides even makes Hermokrates the Syracusan refer to ‘gold and silver, by which war *and the other things* thrive’ (6.34.2 ... ὄθεν ὁ τε πόλεμος καὶ τᾶλλα εὐπορεῖ). Perikles (2.13.3) is made to claim that the strength of the Athenians comes from the income of 600 talents from the allies, and to refer to 6,000 talents of coined silver on the Acropolis and much uncoined silver and gold of various kinds in the temples. Both uncoined gold and silver and the Athenian silver coinage could be used to defray the various expenses involved in warfare. Uncoined precious metal money existed before, and continued to exist alongside, the special form of precious metal money that is coinage. But coins, of which vast numbers have survived from the sixth century onwards, no doubt facilitated the combination of money functions, the increasing importance of money in the economy, and the sense of money as something separate from everything else.¹⁵ In Aristophanes they are a regular feature of everyday life.¹⁶ [22]

2. Does Money Have Limits?

Precious metal as a universal equivalent (money) has – despite its ease of storage, of concealment and of transport in high values, its homogeneity and its lack of use-value – the effortless power to acquire (or seemingly to be transformed into) things unlimited in kind and number. And so there seems to be no natural limit to the acquisition of it, whereas to the

¹⁰ *PMG* 910. This fell on receptive ears, being referred to by Hipponax (or Ananius: Ananius fr. 2 West).

¹¹ As at e.g. Ar. *Pax* 1201.

¹² E.g. 2.180; 3.56, 58–9, 131; 5.51, 77; 6.79, 92.

¹³ E.g. Jones 1993: nos. 46–9.

¹⁴ Thuc. 1.80.3–4, 83, 121.3, 141–3; 2.13.2–3. Cf. e.g. [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 3.3; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 27.3.

¹⁵ A good recent overview of the problems of the early development of Greek coinage is by Howgego 1995: 1–7, 12–18.

¹⁶ *Eq.* 797–800; *Vesp.* 787–93; *Nub.* 247–9; *Pax* 1201–2; *Av.* 301, 1105–8; *Ran.* 139–41, 718–33; *Ecl.* 601–2, 815–22.

acquisition of e.g. tripods there is a natural limit set by the use of tripods (to boil meat, as gifts, etc.) and by the problem of storing them.

‘Of wealth’, writes Solon, ‘there is no limit that appears to men. For those of us who have the most wealth are eager to double it’ (fr. 13.71–3). This sentiment probably precedes the introduction of coinage, but is certainly appropriate to a society in which precious metal money has become a focus of desire, and is quite unlike anything in Homer. The notion takes brilliant form in Aristophanes’ *Wealth*: not only does Wealth have power over everybody and everything, it is also distinct in that of everything else (sex, bread, music, honour, courage, soup and so on) there is satiety (πλησμονή), whereas if somebody gets thirteen talents he desires the more strongly to get sixteen, and if he achieves this, then he wants forty and says that life is not worth living unless he gets them (189–97). To the apparently unlimited power and unlimited accumulation of money belongs a unique desire. Tragedy comments on this desire both in general¹⁷ and in particular – notably in the figure of Polymnestor in Euripides’ *Hecuba*, destroyed, like Polykrates of Samos,¹⁸ by his passion for ever more gold.¹⁹ The power of money to acquire all things, together with its ease of storage, of concealment and of deployment, concentrates the desire for each of those things on to itself, making itself seem more desirable than any particular thing that it can obtain. And indeed with the development of money the aim of commerce seems to be, in Greece as generally elsewhere, more and more the acquisition of money (rather than of the things that can be acquired by money).

This seemingly unlimited power of money, inspiring unlimited desire for its unlimited accumulation, extends itself outwards, and thereby threatens traditional non-monetary values. For instance, in choosing a spouse people prefer wealth to noble birth, complains Theognis (183–96). At the same time the seemingly universal power of money over all things (to acquire them, or to be transformed into them) is also the power to include them in a seemingly universal regime of comparative evaluation. Money requires and promotes the evaluation of every commodity against every other. This creates or encourages a mode of thinking inclined to comparative evaluation even of those things (if there are any such) which fall outside the power of money. In other words, the seeming universality of comparative monetary evaluation is unconsciously extended outwards into the

¹⁷ E.g. Eur. *Supp.* 239: the useless wealthy are ‘always passionate for more’, πλειόνων τ’ ἐρῶσ’ ἀεί.

¹⁸ Hdt. 3.123–5. See §3.

¹⁹ 775 χρυσὸν ἠράσθη λαβεῖν, 1002–14, 1146–8, 1206–7.

universe of evaluation as a whole. And so the universalising dynamic at the heart of money, its need to extend its influence outwards, both sets up a contradiction between money/wealth and (say) noble birth – a contradiction of historical importance – and at the same time promotes a mode of thinking inclined to compare basic values (money/wealth, noble birth, health, virtue and so on) with each other. Money/wealth is not necessarily a term in the comparison.²⁰ But it frequently is, and in such cases we can say that money/wealth becomes a value, to be compared with other values, in a regime of comparative evaluation that it has itself (as a general measure of value) helped to establish. Health is best, says the drinking song, physical beauty second, honest wealth third and to be young among [122] friends fourth.²¹ Such comparisons are missing from the moneyless world of Homer.²²

At this point my use of the term ‘money/wealth’ requires clarification. When all or most goods can be obtained (and evaluated) by a single thing (i.e. money), wealth and money can be transformed into each other and so may tend to be denoted by the same term. For example χρήματα, defined by Aristotle as ‘all things of which the value is measured by currency’,²³ is variously translated ‘things’, ‘wealth’ and ‘money’. It means, in the post-heroic age, both money and those things which money can measure and transform itself into, just as they can transform themselves into money. In this sense both the things and the money seem to belong to the same category (money/wealth). And so when tragedy compares (say) noble birth with χρήματα or πλοῦτος (wealth) or νόμισμα (currency) or ἄργυρος (silver, the material of Athenian coinage) or χρυσός (gold, the most valuable of commodities and associated with the wealth of the heroic age), these terms all refer to aspects or forms of the same thing, the money/wealth familiar to the Athenian audience. By the term ‘money’ I will henceforth mean this money/wealth, rather than the narrower category of currency or coinage.

²⁰ It is not in Sappho fr. 16; Xenophanes fr. 2 West = DK 21 B 2.

²¹ *PMG* 890; also Archil. fr. 19 (‘I don’t care about the wealth of Gyges etc.’, continued presumably by specifying what is more important than wealth); Thgn. 699–718; *PMG* 988; Eur. *Med.* 542–4, fr. 659.

²² With the notable exception of the passage (discussed below in §3) of *Iliad* 9 in which Akhilleus compares numerous gifts with his life. We have, of course, to allow the possibility that the creator(s) of Homeric epic were not unfamiliar with money, but tended to exclude it from their heroic vision. Poetry that is not very much later than Homer, such as Sappho and Alcaeus, shows the influence of money (though not of coinage).

²³ *Eth. Nic.* 119b26–7 χρήματα λέγομεν πάντα ὅσων ἄξια νομίματι μετρεῖται.

The range of values or motivations to which tragedy explicitly or implicitly compares money is wide, especially in Euripides, and the comparison takes various forms.²⁴ It may be said that people honour money above freedom²⁵ or wisdom;²⁶ or that money is in fact more powerful than words²⁷ or family feeling;²⁸ or that it *should* be preferred to piety.²⁹ The advantage enjoyed by money may not be simply that it is more desirable, but rather that it is primary, in the sense that the other value may turn out to be one of the numerous things that are obtainable by money. For instance, noble birth (εὐγένεια) results from having wealth in the house over a long period.³⁰ Conversely, εὐγένεια is destroyed by poverty.³¹ Everything is secondary to wealth, for, although some praise health, the poor man is always sick.³² In a fragment (fr. 88) of Sophocles' *Aleadaí*, money (τὰ χρήματα) is said to create friends, honours, tyranny, physical beauty, wise speech and pleasure even in disease.³³ Small wonder then that money is said to be the most honoured and powerful thing among men,³⁴ to be what they all toil for,³⁵ to ^[123] 'enslave'³⁶ and 'defeat'³⁷ them. 'Money' may even come to stand for something like 'an especially good or desirable thing', as in such expressions as 'it is money if one is pious to god', or '(I do not want money from you). It is money if you save my life, which is the dearest thing I have.'³⁸ In a fragment (fr. 324) of Euripides' *Danae* it is said that the pleasure given by gold is greater than that of parents and children in each other, and is like Aphrodite's look that inspires innumerable passions. Erotic passion for money reappears elsewhere,³⁹ notably in an anonymous fragment that is worth quoting in full:

²⁴ It should be noted that the frequency of money in the fragments is due to the interest in money of the writers who preserved them, especially the anthologist Stobaeus.

²⁵ Eur. fr. 142.

²⁶ Eur. fr. 327; cf. also *HF* 669–72.

²⁷ Eur. *Med.* 965.

²⁸ Eur. fr. 324.

²⁹ *Fr. trag. adesp.* 181.

³⁰ Eur. fr. 22; also fr. 95.

³¹ Eur. *El.* 38; cf. on the other hand Eur. fr. 1066 (χρήματα depart but εὐγένεια remains).

³² Soph. fr. 354.

³³ See nn. 87 and 105 below. See also Soph. *OT* 542 (tyranny caught by χρήματα, cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 1638–9); Eur. *Hec.* 818 (payment for rhetoric lessons, which bestow power); *El.* 428–9 (χρήματα permits hospitality (but cf. 394–5) and saves from disease).

³⁴ Eur. *Phoen.* 439–40; also *HF* 774–6, fr. 325; *fr. trag. adesp.* 294.

³⁵ Eur. fr. 580.

³⁶ Eur. *Hec.* 865, *Supp.* 875–6; cf. fr. 1092.

³⁷ Eur. fr. 341; cf. *Ion* 629.

³⁸ Eur. fr. 252, *Or.* 644–5; cf. also Aesch. *Cho.* 372; Eur. *Hec.* 1229, *Tro.* 432–3.

³⁹ Eur. *Supp.* 178, 239, *Hec.* 775. Conceivably the word may have lost erotic associations, however, in such passages.

O gold, offspring of the earth, what passion (ἔρωτα) you kindle among humankind, mightiest of all, tyrant over all. For those at war you have greater power than Ares and enchant all things: for the trees and the mindless races of wild animals followed the Orphic songs, but you (are followed by) the whole earth and sea and all-inventive Ares.⁴⁰

On the other hand, it is claimed that alongside money are needed virtue⁴¹ and knowledge;⁴² that money is powerless to prevent a military conflict,⁴³ or against death;⁴⁴ that it is not to be preferred to a trouble-free life,⁴⁵ a good wife,⁴⁶ a genuine friend,⁴⁷ the fatherland,⁴⁸ wisdom;⁴⁹ that (a person's) nature, not wealth, is what lasts;⁵⁰ that in choosing a spouse people prefer ἄξιωμα (rank, reputation) to money.⁵¹ Sometimes the priority is expressed in terms of exchange: for genuine friendship one should give much money,⁵² even an innumerable amount;⁵³ one would not exchange youth for any amount;⁵⁴ virtue (is the only thing that) cannot be acquired by money.⁵⁵ Such texts maintain that there is, after all, a limit to the power of money.

3. Aeschylus: *Agamemnon*

In a famous scene of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Agamemnon is persuaded by Klytimestra to walk to his house on a path of textiles. The economic aspect of this scene has been emphasised by John Jones: what Agamemnon is persuaded to do is to waste the wealth of the household. 'Clytemnestra's sentiment that the *oikos* is so rich that it need not bother with this kind of extravagance, while trivial-seeming to us, will have struck a fifth-century audience as ^[124] recklessly hubristic.'⁵⁶ In the same vein Simon Goldhill

⁴⁰ *Fr. trag. adesp.* 129.

⁴¹ Eur. *fr.* 163, 542.

⁴² Eur. *fr.* 1066.

⁴³ Aesch. *Supp.* 935.

⁴⁴ Aesch. *Pers.* 842; Eur. *Alc.* 56–9.

⁴⁵ Eur. *Ion* 629–31, *Med.* 598–9, *Phoen.* 552–4.

⁴⁶ Eur. *fr.* 543.4–5 (the only thing preferable to wealth).

⁴⁷ Eur. *Or.* 1155–6.

⁴⁸ Eur. *fr.* 1046.

⁴⁹ *Fr. trag. adesp.* 130.

⁵⁰ Eur. *El.* 941.

⁵¹ Eur. *fr.* 405.

⁵² Eur. *fr.* 934.

⁵³ Eur. *Or.* 1156–7.

⁵⁴ Eur. *HF* 643–8.

⁵⁵ Eur. *fr.* 527; cf. *El.* 253, 372.

⁵⁶ Jones 1962: 82–93 (citation from 88).

writes that ‘the wanton destruction of the household property’ represented by trampling the textiles ‘is in absolute opposition to the normal ethos of the household, which aims at continuity and stability of wealth and possessions’.⁵⁷ While in general agreement with this view, I want to take the argument further by focusing on the wealth as *money*.⁵⁸ What is shocking about the scene is not just the waste of wealth, but the seemingly infinite power of money (to acquire things from outside the household). Now, just as money can be transformed into a wide range of items, so the topic of money cannot (from one perspective) be separated from a host of others: wealth, exchange, production, signification and so on. But from another perspective money is quite distinct from all of these: not only is it conceptually distinct, but they may also all in fact exist without it. My focus is on the specific (and historically important) phenomenon of money. There has been, so far as I am aware, only one other discussion of this scene that picks out the monetary aspect.⁵⁹

As Agamemnon walks into the house to his death, Klytaimestra justifies the dangerously extravagant use of the textiles as follows (958–65):

ἔστιν θάλασσα – τίς δέ νιν κατασβέσει; –
 τρέφουσα πολλῆς πορφύρας ἰσάργυρον
 κηκίδα παγκαίνιστον, εἰμάτων βαφάς.
 οἶκος δ’ ὑπάρχει τῶνδε σὺν θεοῖς, ἄναξ,
 ἔχειν, πένεσθαι δ’ οὐκ ἐπίσταται δόμος.

⁵⁷ Goldhill 1986: 11.

⁵⁸ The distinction between wealth and money is important. Although money is wealth, and wealth may take the form of money, with the result that the same word (e.g. χρήματα) may refer to both, nevertheless they are crucially distinct categories. Wealth and its dangers are themes of the *Agamemnon* (e.g. 773–81, 1575–6); but, apart from the lines discussed below (949, 959, 437), money occurs only in the allusion to (false) coinage at 780.

⁵⁹ This is a passage in Sitta von Reden’s discussion of the scene in terms of how ‘commercial images convey meanings of social disruption in a complex sense’ (von Reden 1995: 161–4). Because the passage is hard to summarise, I give it in full:

it remains remarkable that the value of a symbol of power is described in monetary terms. The purple tapestry was certainly not bought with money. Given that the text has just raised the question how objects change their value in different contexts of exchange, the attribute ὀργυρώνητος seems to withdraw the tapestry from the sphere of sacred values circulating between men and gods and to transfer it instead into a human sphere of exchange. Moreover, if there is a metaphysical relationship between the colourful carpet and Clytemnestra’s crafty web of words the redefinition of the carpet as a value in the monetary economy of humans carries over to Clytemnestra’s speech.

I do not know why von Reden claims that ‘the purple tapestry was certainly not bought with money’ (her endnote does not help). Her general approach to the scene is influenced by Goldhill’s reading of it in terms of the manipulation (and openness) of signification in Goldhill 1984: 66–79.

πολλῶν πατησμών δ' εἰμάτων ἄν ἠϋξάμην,
 δόμοισι προνεχθέντος ἐν χρηστηρίοις
 ψυχῆς κόμιστρα τῆσδε μηχανωμένη.

The sea exists – who will dry it up? – nourishing an ever-renewed gush, equal to silver [i.e. worth its weight in silver],⁶⁰ of much purple, the dyeings of garments. The household has a supply of these things, with the grace of the gods, for us to have, king. The house does not know how to be poor. Of many garments would I have vowed the trampling, had it been prescribed at the home of an oracle for me as I devised a means of recovering this man's life.

The textiles may be trampled because their purple dye comes in constant supply from the inexhaustible sea. But it does not flow directly into the house. ἰσάργυρος expresses the high value of the dye. Agamemnon has just remarked that the textiles are ἀργυρώνητος (949), ^[125] bought with silver, an epithet that would be inconceivable in the moneyless world of Homer. The inexhaustibility of the supply of dye is relevant only if there is an inexhaustible supply of money (silver) to pay for it, which by implication therefore there is. The emphasis on the (natural) inexhaustibility of the sea implies the inexhaustibility of the silver money (a human construction) used in equal quantities (ἰσάργυρον) to acquire the dye.⁶¹ We noted earlier that money is both homogeneous and unlimited. In both these respects it is like the sea.

The power of money means that the textiles are infinitely replaceable. The textiles walked on by Agamemnon are in essence no different from the textiles that can so easily replace them. They are, in this respect, quite antithetical to the golden lamb which, in the previous generation of the house of Atreus, bestowed the royal power.⁶² In Homer the Argive royal power is conveyed by a sceptre once held by Zeus and transmitted down the generations.⁶³ The functioning of such 'talismanic' objects requires them to be unique.⁶⁴ Despite the frequent references in the Agamemnon to the

⁶⁰ Commentators compare Theopompus, *FGrHist* 115 F117 ἰσοστάσιος γὰρ ἦν ἡ πορφύρα πρὸς ἄργυρον ἔξεταζομένη (at Kolophon), 'for the purple dye was being valued as equal in weight against silver' (i.e. as worth its weight in silver).

⁶¹ It is interesting that the (potentially alarming and relatively novel) *manmade* inexhaustibility of money is envisaged in terms of the *natural* inexhaustibility of the sea – whether through reticence or anxiety or the need for a concrete analogue for a difficult abstraction. Cf. e.g. Soph. *Ant.* 1077 κατηργυρωμένος, meaning 'bribed with silver'.

⁶² Eur. *El.* 699–746 with Cropp 1988: *ad loc.*; *IT* 196; *Or.* 812–13, 996–1000.

⁶³ *Il.* 2.101–8.

⁶⁴ The description is from L. Gernet's discussion of such objects in Greek myth (Gernet 1981: 73–111).

bitter struggle for the kingship in the earlier generation, neither the lamb nor the sceptre is mentioned.⁶⁵ How then does Aigisthos hope to exercise the power that he has, in conjunction with Klytaimestra, usurped? 'I will try to rule the citizens', he says, 'through this man's [i.e. Agamemnon's] money'.⁶⁶ And it is later in the trilogy repeatedly stressed that in enacting revenge Orestes is also reacquiring control of the χρήματα.⁶⁷ In Aeschylus the power of the royal household derives not from the talismanic object of myth, a divinely granted unique object in which alone is embodied the power to rule, but rather from its opposite: from the relatively novel power of money, with its homogeneous power to acquire and replace all objects.

In one version of the myth, then, the kingship depends on a unique talismanic object, whereas in the other it depends on the homogeneous, unlimited power of money. The polar opposition formed by these two kinds of value is implicit in various texts of the period, notably in Herodotus⁶⁸ and in tragedy:⁶⁹ I will concentrate here on one example from each – the Herodotean story of the tyrant Polykrates' seal-ring (3.40-3), and a passage from the tragedy *Rhesus* attributed (probably wrongly) to Euripides.

Amasis, alarmed by his friend Polykrates' success, advises him to avoid the jealousy of the gods in the following way: 'Think of whatever it is you value most – whatever you would most regret the loss of – and throw it right away.' The relinquishing of something valuable so as to ^[126] obtain safety is an ancient and widespread pattern of action.⁷⁰ Polykrates throws his seal-ring (σφραγίς) into the sea, whence however it returns to him (in the belly of a fish). Why is a seal-ring his most valuable possession? Because it is a source and symbol of sovereign power. Polykrates may, like many an autocrat, have used his seal-ring to implement his authority. However, his power was largely based on the control of precious metal money.

⁶⁵ *Ag.* 1095–7, 1193, 1217–22, 1242–3, 1583–1602.

⁶⁶ *Ag.* 1638–9 ἐκ τῶν δὲ τοῦδε χρημάτων ...

⁶⁷ *Cho.* 135, 250, 275, 301; *Eum.* 757–8.

⁶⁸ E.g. at 9.93–4, the story of Euenios, who after having failed in his duty to guard some sacred sheep thought to buy some more to replace them (ἀντικαταστήσειν ἄλλα πριάμενος). But he is found out and blinded. In return, the people are required by an oracle to make him whatever compensation he chooses for being blinded. He is asked, before he knows about the oracle, what compensation he would choose, and specifies certain pieces of property. But when the oracle is revealed to him, he is angry at the deception, even though the people buy the property from its owners and give it to him. His anger is presumably at having been tricked into confining his choice to something specific. Neither the specific sheep nor the specific property are replaceable by (the potentially unlimited power of) money.

⁶⁹ E.g. in Eur. *El.* (§5 below) or, in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, the persistent contrast between the bow (talismanic object and gift) and the commercial ethos associated with the trickery of Odysseus (303, 578–9, 668–73, 978, etc.).

⁷⁰ Burkert 1996: 34–55.

Herodotus calls him ‘very desirous of money’ (3.123 καὶ κως ἰμείρετο γὰρ χρημάτων μεγάλως), and he is eventually (doomed by the return of his ring) lured to his death by the false promise of enough money in the form of gold to ‘rule the whole of Greece’.⁷¹

The reign of Polykrates coincides with the early rapid development of coinage, and he certainly coined money.⁷² And so, given the likely importance of royal seals in the development of coinage,⁷³ Polykrates’ seal may also have been associated with his monetary power. But whereas the seal transmits power through its impression (with the recipient substance, say clay, being of no significance), the coin is powerful not only by virtue of the impression it has received but rather mainly by virtue of its substance, the value of which is guaranteed by the impression. And of course unmarked precious metal money has power by virtue of its substance alone. But if the widespread power of Polykrates is basically monetary, then the precautionary loss advised by Amasis cannot work: to throw away the object whose loss he most regrets is far less of a loss than it would be in a pre-monetary world. Rich textiles, notes Klytaimestra, can be replaced by means of money. What Polykrates chooses to throw away, his little seal-ring, might seem to be vital, as the source of his royal power and even of his control over coinage. But in fact his power depends not on his seal but on the inherent power of precious metal (coined or uncoined).

In order to abandon a small object irretrievably it makes sense to throw it into the sea. But what does it mean for it to come from the sea? Queen Klytaimestra’s ability to replace the textiles from the ‘inexhaustible’ sea implies control not just over the wealth of the (unlimited, homogeneous) sea, but also – because the textiles are ‘bought with silver’ – over the unlimited homogeneity of money. So too in the popular tale of Polykrates, the sea, because it is the obvious concrete embodiment of unlimited homogeneity, may be a means of imagining the novel abstraction of money. To be sure, it is also relevant that Polykrates controls the sea literally, with his ships.⁷⁴ But his power is based to a large extent on money. What seems to bestow the power is not a unique seal-ring (as it might be for a ruler in the pre-monetary world), but the unlimited homogeneity of money, which, in stark contrast to the ruler’s seal-ring, seems to be everywhere. And so in a world of money, in which everything seems infinitely replaceable, the

⁷¹ Hdt. 3.122.4 εἴνεκέν τε χρημάτων ἄρξεις τῆς ἀπάσης Ἑλλάδος.

⁷² Hdt. 3.56.2; Kraay 1976: 30, 36.

⁷³ Macdonald 1905: 44–52; Steiner 1994: 159–63.

⁷⁴ For the ‘thalassocracy’ of Polykrates see Hdt. 3.122.2; Thuc. 1.13.6, 3.104.2; also Hdt. 3.39, 44–5.

ruler cannot, despite (or rather because of) the unprecedented form of power given him by money, succeed in the ancient and vital precaution of sacrificing a single object of irreplaceable value. Even the homogeneous infinity of the sea, so far from being a means of losing the ruler's irreplaceable seal-ring, seems to confirm his power to replace by restoring it to him. Thucydides (1.13) associates the growing importance of money with the establishment of tyrannies in the cities and the development of sea power. Besides his unprecedented individual domination of the sea, Polykrates is one of the first autocrats in a world in which the increasing power of money is being marked by the rapid development of coinage. The return of the seal-ring from the sea may express the tension, in the popular imagination, between a ^[127] traditional instrument of autocracy (the seal-ring) and a relatively new one (money).⁷⁵

As for the *Rhesus*, my interest is in a Homeric episode that has been reshaped, partly under the influence of money. In the *Iliad*, Hektor offers the horses and chariot of Akhilleus as a reward to elicit a volunteer for a dangerous exploit. The volunteer, Dolon, is described as 'a man of much gold and bronze' (10.315 πολύχρυσος πολύχαλκος). The only purpose of this description is to prefigure his later claim, when captured and asking to be ransomed, that 'there is inside (our house) bronze and gold and much-wrought iron' (378–9). In the tragic version the reward (or payment, μισθός) is mentioned only after Dolon has volunteered. Hektor suggests various possibilities, including gold, which Dolon rejects on the grounds that 'there is (gold) in (our) household; we do not lack livelihood' (170). The identity here assumed between gold and livelihood (βίος), an identification that barely occurs in Homer,⁷⁶ means that gold is envisaged as money. When Hektor a few lines later asks him which of the Greeks he would like to have so as to ransom, Dolon replies 'as I said before, there is gold in (our) house' (178). Dolon finally reveals that he wants the horses of Akhilleus, which Hektor grants him (even though they are not yet captured), not without expressing his own strong desire for them, immortal as they are, the gift of Poseidon to Peleus (184–8).⁷⁷ The Homeric version has been recast so as to elevate the horses of Akhilleus to the status

⁷⁵ As does, in a different way, the story of Gyges and his seal-ring: Seaford 1994b: 224–5.

⁷⁶ By far the closest is *Od.* 14.324–6 (= 19.293–5), in which it is said that the 'bronze and gold and much-worked iron' gathered by Odysseus as he travelled in search of gain 'would feed one man after another to the tenth generation'. See also *Od.* 3.301.

⁷⁷ As if to preclude the kind of dissent created between Ajax and Odysseus by the *arms* of Akhilleus, Dolon immediately consoles Hektor for the loss of the item of unique *quality* ('the finest (κάλλιστον) gift of the Trojans') by invoking *quantity*: Hektor should not be envious, for there are innumerable other things for him to enjoy (191–4).

of a uniquely desirable object, more desirable even – it is stressed – than money. And to that end the Homeric wealth of Dolon has become, in the tragic version, money. In the moneyless world of Homer there is no need to elevate a desirable object above the power of money.⁷⁸

In the *Agamemnon*, we observed, money may replace luxury goods and convey political power. But that does not exhaust the functions attributed to it. Klytaimestra asks Agamemnon whether he would have vowed to the gods, in a moment of fear, to walk on the textiles, and Agamemnon agrees that he would have so vowed, had an expert prescribed the ritual (933–4). And as he walks into the house, ‘destroying wealth and silver-bought weavings’ (949), she declares, in the passage quoted above, that she would have vowed the trampling of many cloths to save Agamemnon’s life, had it been prescribed by an oracle. Given that she has just alluded to the inexhaustible supply of dye for garments bought by the house’s supply of money, it follows that the ‘many garments’ on which Agamemnon’s life would depend would themselves depend on money.

Of course the expert prescriptions of ritual imagined by Klytaimestra are merely hypothetical, designed to show that walking on textiles cannot be unequivocally bad because it might in a certain circumstance be right – a way of pleasing the gods and saving Agamemnon’s life. But would such prescriptions be given? In Euripides’ *Alcestis* the figure of Death objects to the use of wealth to ‘buy’ long life (56–9). It is true that the destruction of valuable ^[128] things might, as we have seen, be considered conducive to safety. Indeed, on Agamemnon’s entry into the house the chorus sing of their anxiety: an overloaded house is like a ship from which, to avoid disaster, wealth must be jettisoned into the sea, whereas⁷⁹ Zeus gives an abundant annual harvest to keep off hunger (1007–18). However, the wealth trampled by Agamemnon is no such sacrifice, for it is, as Klytaimestra boasts, inexhaustibly replaceable, and comes indeed from the sea (like the ominous return of Polykrates’ ring), in sharp contrast to the seasonal crops

⁷⁸ This does not mean that gold is not used in payment in Homer. In fact, the least weak suggestions of money in the epics are some instances of gold by itself as substance (i.e. not in an artefact) given in payment (though it may be called a ‘gift’): *Il.* 11.123–5, 18.507, 22.331–2; *Od.* 4.525–6, 11.327 (cf. 15.527), 14.448. But it is interesting that these transactions are either peripheral to the main narrative (e.g. in the decidedly non-heroic trial scene on the shield of Akhilleus) or negative in some way (e.g. Aigisthos’ payment to his watchman) or (in most cases) both. Because gold-as-payment is in each case not the only unusual feature of the passage, no circularity is involved in suggesting that they are non-heroic intrusions from the incipient world of money.

⁷⁹ Denniston and Page 1957 on Aesch. *Ag.* 1015–17 write ‘τοῖ [in 1015] is odd here, for this [i.e. the sentence about agriculture] is simply a further illustration of the same theme’, failing to see the contrast, which makes τοῖ appropriate. Cf. e.g. Thgn. 197–202.

provided by Zeus to fulfil the basic need of hunger. Sea trade was in this period the main source of commercial wealth.

The ritual prescriptions hypothesised by Klytaimestra have in reality not been given. The effect of Agamemnon walking on the textiles is in reality the opposite of what is imagined in Klytaimestra's hypotheses. Trampling the infinitely replaceable 'silver-bought' textiles, which Klytaimestra had hypothesised as pleasing the gods and saving Agamemnon's life, in reality displeases the gods and so, we feel, seems to doom him. The dangerous power of money may produce quite opposite effects. Agamemnon regards himself as being treated as a god (921–5, 946) and is accordingly anxious (924). There is danger of resentment, φθόνος, from men (937–9) and from gods (947).

Of human φθόνος against him we have already heard – in the choral strophe (437–55) that describes the Greek deaths at Troy with the image of Ares as a 'gold-changer of bodies', who 'sends from Troy the fired heavy bitterly bewailed [gold] dust to their dear ones, filling the urns with easily placed (εὔθετος) ash in exchange for men'. Ares is envisaged as a trader who exchanges large things (goods/bodies) for small (gold dust/ash of cremated bodies – 'heavy' only in the grief it inspires).⁸⁰ A crucial advantage of precious metal as a medium of exchange, its ease of storage and of transport, is expressed in εὔθετος,⁸¹ a word which also, it has been recognised, evokes the laying out of the body at a funeral.⁸²

In the ninth book of the *Iliad* Agamemnon offers Akhilleus numerous valuable gifts as persuasion to return to the battle, but Akhilleus rejects them. All the wealth of Troy, and of Delphi too, says Akhilleus, is not equal in value (ἀντάξιος) to my ψυχή (soul or life). Cattle and sheep, he explains, can be plundered and tripods and horses can be obtained, whereas the ψυχή of a man cannot be plundered or captured to come back again once it were to exchange the barrier of his teeth (401–9). ἀμείβεσθαι elsewhere in the *Iliad* always refers to *exchange* (of armour). Uniquely in Homer, we have here an explicit comparative evaluation of basic categories

⁸⁰ 'Gold-changer' is χρυσαμοιβός, which occurs only here (and in Hsch.). Cf. ἀργυραμοιβός, a name given by Plato (*Plt.* 289e) to those free men who trade 'in the market-place or by travelling from city to city by sea or by land, exchanging currency (χρυσάμοιβός) for other things or currency for currency'. χρυσάμοιβός is more appropriate than ἀργυραμοιβός to the heroic age and to a god.

⁸¹ The mss. εὔθετου ('of the ash') has been emended to εὔθετους ('of the urns'), unnecessarily. And the corruption would be much more likely the other way (Denniston and Page 1957: *ad loc.*).

⁸² Phryn. *Praep. Soph.* 71.9 (von Borries) εὔθετεῖν νεκρόν· τὸ εὖ κοσμεῖν ἐν τάφοις νεκρόν; Dio. Cass. 40.49; *SEG* 1.449. Fraenkel's comment on *Ag.* 444 that this sense 'is irrelevant here, for the bodies have been cremated' misses the exquisitely bitter combination in a single word of opposites – impersonal commercial convenience and the ritualised love for a dead family member.

(wealth against life), perhaps as a heroic rejection of the incipient power of money.⁸³ Although life is too valuable to be exchanged for wealth, death is envisaged by Akhilleus as itself a kind of (irreversible) exchange of life, as it is sometimes in tragedy – for ^[129] example⁸⁴ in Euripides' *Suppliants* (775–7): 'this is the only expenditure (ἀνάλωμα) that you cannot obtain once it is spent – human life; whereas there are means of raising money'.⁸⁵ The image of the gold-changer in the *Agamemnon* combines these notions and takes them further. The death-as-exchange occurs, like the death-as-exchange mentioned by Akhilleus, in battle. And this is precisely the death (on behalf of the Atreidai at Troy) that is bitterly rejected by Akhilleus. Further, the idea of a trader (Ares) *presiding*⁸⁶ over warfare implies that the aim of the warfare is gain. In the anonymous tragic fragment quoted in §2 it is said that for those at war gold has more power than Ares, and that Ares follows the enchantment of gold. And so, given that in the *Iliad* Akhilleus complains that Agamemnon takes the most and best spoils of the war for himself (1.165–8, 9.330–3), it may even be that the Aeschylean image of dying as an exchange (of bodies for ash) implies the further notion that the exchange involves gain for the Atreidai, against whom the Greeks direct bitter φθόνος (450), angry talk and curses (456).

Because its power appears transcendent and unlimited, money seems able even to *exchange into their opposite* things (any commodity into money, large into small, life into death) as well as people, whether because they desire money (honest people into criminals at Soph. *Ant.* 298–9) or because they have it: a bad man into a good one (Thgn. 1117–18), a slave into an honoured man (Eur. fr. 142), a poor speaker into a clever one and an ugly person into a beautiful one (Soph. fr. 88), even, we saw in the *Agamemnon*, a man into something like a god.⁸⁷

As well as this power of exchange into the opposite, money in the *Agamemnon* seems able to do opposite things: to save life and to destroy it, to please the gods and to offend them. The unlimited, out-of-sight power of the household's money, embodied in the invisible inexhaustibility of the sea and of the 'ever-renewed gush, equal to silver' of the dye produced in its depths, is ambivalent. On the one hand, in the hypotheses of Klytaimestra, it may please the gods and save Agamemnon's life. The trampling of the

⁸³ I will argue this in detail elsewhere [Seaford 2004d: 301–3].

⁸⁴ See also *Med.* 968, *Hipp.* 964–5; cf. Soph. *OT* 30.

⁸⁵ ... χρημάτων δ' εἰσὶν πόροι – a regular phrase for raising money: LSJ, s.v. πόρος ii.3.

⁸⁶ Because holding the balance (439), like Zeus at Hom. *Il.* 8.69, 16.658, 19.223–4, 22.209.

⁸⁷ Or, in the words of Soph. fr. 88.2–3, money can acquire 'the seat of highest tyranny that is nearest to the gods' (adopting Conington's θεοσίω for the nonsensical ἀκουσίω or τ' ἄγουσίω of the mss).

'many cloths', dyed with valuable but inexhaustible dye and bought with silver, is enclosed by the imagination of Klytaimestra within a ritual framework: anxiety is allayed by imagining the containment of material excess within ritual prescribed by experts. The hypothetical ritual is called by Agamemnon a τέλος. The basic sense of τέλος, which it certainly retains when applied to ritual, is that of *completion*. τέλος can also mean 'that which is paid for state purposes',⁸⁸ and τελεῖν can mean simply 'to pay'. As well as making rituals possible, money also *resembles* ritual in certain respects. The efficacy of both depends on collective trust in the efficacy of a detached paradigm that persists through everyday vicissitudes.⁸⁹ And rites of passage in particular may, like money, be agents of transformation into the opposite.

On the other hand, whereas the power of ritual may derive from its self-containment (as a paradigm of how things should be) and its function may be precisely to limit or to contain – for instance to mark the end of a period of hostility or of mourning, or indeed to mark a prudent limit to good fortune by an offering to deity – the power of money is (in the sense we have described) essentially unlimited. And this unlimited power, embodied in the trampled textiles, seems to doom Agamemnon. As he himself anxiously admits, they constitute an honour appropriate only for a god. He walks over them to his death. In this respect it is highly ^[190] significant that the textile in which Klytaimestra then traps Agamemnon so as to kill him is, it has been pointed out,⁹⁰ associated with the textiles that he trampled. They are both referred to by the same vocabulary.⁹¹ And the murder-cloth on stage at the end of the *Choephoroi* was, if not the same prop, at least a strong visual reminder of the earlier sight of the trampled cloths, especially as it is said to have been *dyed* by Aigisthos' sword (the trampled textiles were πόρφυρος,⁹² the colour of blood),⁹³ and stained by the κηκίς (gush) of blood, with its evocation of the κηκίς of dye referred to by Klytaimestra. It is as if the woven cloth which Klytaimestra imagined as saving Agamemnon's life has become what Orestes calls the 'father-killing woven cloth' (*Cho.* 1015 πατροκτόνον γ' ὕφασμα).

⁸⁸ LSJ, s.v. τέλος v.

⁸⁹ See e.g. Douglas 1966: 69: 'money is only an extreme and specialised type of ritual'.

⁹⁰ E.g. by Taplin 1978: 79–82.

⁹¹ εἶμα at *Ag.* 921, 960, 963, 1383; ποικιλ- at *Ag.* 923, 926, 936, *Cho.* 1013, *Eum.* 460.

⁹² *Ag.* 910, 957.

⁹³ At Ach. Tat. 2.11.5–6 the dye πόρφυρος is mistaken for blood; Hom. *Il.* 17.361; Ap. Rhod. 4.668; Bion, *Epitaph.* 27; etc.

I have elsewhere argued in detail that various features of Klytaimestra's treatment of Agamemnon, including the cloth in which she traps him, form a coherent complex designed to evoke the death ritual given to a man by his wife.⁹⁴ Agamemnon is killed by the cloth in which normally a woman lovingly wraps her dead husband,⁹⁵ and which has normally been woven by the women of the household,⁹⁶ often presumably by his wife.⁹⁷ Death ritual encloses within a traditional, reassuring order⁹⁸ the brutality of death. In the *Agamemnon*, with death ritual as the expression of brutal violence, the enclosure is turned inside out. The temporal aspect of this reversal is the (anomalous) perpetuation of the ritual: Agamemnon, not yet laid to rest, continues (in the *Choephoroi*) to be lamented, and unsuccessfully appeased (by the libations of Klytaimestra).⁹⁹ The lamentation arouses the emotions needed for the matricide and so helps to perpetuate the reciprocal violence. The last lines of the *Choephoroi* ask despairingly: where will the might of destruction end?

Normally the grief inspired by death must not overturn the traditional limitations set by ritual and by legislation; such overturning may (in cases of murder) encourage uncontrolled vendetta, whereas it is vital for the polis that revenge too should be contained within traditional limitations.¹⁰⁰ In the *Oresteia* there is systematic subversion of such traditional limitations, and one agent of this subversion is the unlimited power of money. It is not just that the money of the household is what Aigisthos hopes to rule by, and what Orestes hopes to regain. Rather, the unlimited power of money is, we saw, embodied in the cloths trampled by Agamemnon, which are associated with the cloth that kills him. Further, of the cloth that kills him Klytaimestra says (*Ag.* 1382–3): ^[132]

⁹⁴ Seaford 1984cⁱⁱ.

⁹⁵ See esp. Eur. *Tro.* 377–8 οὐ δάμαρτος ἐν χεροῖν πέπλοις συνεστάλησαν (and 390). On the link between φίλια and the handling (washing and dressing) of the corpse see esp. Soph. *Ant.* 897–902.

⁹⁶ Hom. *Il.* 22.510–11.

⁹⁷ In the *Odyssey* Penelope does so for the widower Laertes.

⁹⁸ Expressed e.g. in the word εὐθετος; see n. 82 above.

⁹⁹ It is also relevant to our theme to note that Klytaimestra's 'gifts' to her murdered husband are 'less than the offence. For someone to pour out everything in exchange for one blood [i.e. life] is labour in vain' (*Cho.* 519–21). Although both blood and offerings can be 'poured out', once again it is said that life is more valuable than all wealth. οὐκ ἔχοιμι' ἄν εἰκάσαι τάδε τὰ δῶρα. (a better reading than τῶδε. ...) in the previous line has never been properly understood (e.g. Lloyd-Jones translates 'I do not know to what to liken these her gifts'). In fact it refers to the lack of equivalence between the offerings and what they are an attempt to compensate for. The phrase οὐκ ἔχω (προσ)εἰκάζειν occurs elsewhere in Aeschylus only at *Ag.* 163, where its meaning is interestingly similar (in the image of a balance).

¹⁰⁰ Seaford 1994b: 74–105.

ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον, ὥσπερ ἰχθύων,
περιστιχίζω, πλοῦτον εἴματος κακόν.

A covering without end, like [a net] for fish, I set around him, an evil wealth of cloth.

ἀμφίβληστρον is from the verb ἀμφιβάλλω, which is used for dressing the corpse, and so suggests a shroud. Why is it ‘without end’ (ἄπειρον)? Because, unlike garments worn by the living, the funerary garment was wrapped around the hands and feet of the corpse, and sometimes even the head. It encloses, like the net which is ἄπειρον in the sense that it has no πέρασ, no end or limit past which the quarry can escape. And indeed in the hands of Klytaimestra it has in effect become such a net. All this has been argued in detail elsewhere.¹⁰¹ The further point to make here is that from ἄπειρον also flows the description ‘evil wealth of cloth’. The cloth comes from the household’s unlimited ‘silver-bought’ supply, in sharp contrast to the ritualised specificity of the cloth normally woven within a man’s household (presumably often by his wife) for his corpse. The unlimited money of the household that was earlier embodied in the cloths trampled by Agamemnon is now embodied in the cloth that kills him because it has no limit. In a manner characteristic of the astonishing imagination of Aeschylus, the abstraction of dangerously unlimited money is expressed in a concrete instrument of Agamemnon’s death.

The unlimited money was in fact embodied in the cloth through its dye, the ‘ever-renewed gush (κηκίς), equal to silver, of much purple, the dyeings of cloths’. Even in this particular the physical embodiment of the dangerous notion of unlimited wealth seems to turn against its owner, for the same word, κηκίς, is used of the gush of blood that (like the dye) stained the murder-cloth, displayed by Orestes as he stands in the toils of apparently ever-renewed vendetta at the end of the *Choephoroi* (1012). He has just decided, as he addresses the cloth, that it is not so much a shroud as a net (998–9), and indeed ‘the kind of net possessed by a brigand, a cheater of travellers, leading a life that deprives people of money/silver’ (1002–3 ἀργυροστερῆ βίον νομίζων). The detail here is puzzling. Perhaps we can make sense of it as flowing from the notion of the cloth as used to deprive the king of the unlimited money that it also embodies.

To conclude, the unlimited power of money, embodied in the cloth, is set by Klytaimestra within the limits of (hypothetical) ritual, but with the killing of Agamemnon subverts those limits and displays once again the

¹⁰¹ Seaford 1984cⁱⁱ.

power of money to exchange things into their opposite. This dialectic of money and death ritual I will now pursue in the *Antigone*.

4. Sophocles: *Antigone*

Kreon's first speech in Sophocles' *Antigone* announces the edict forbidding the burial of Polyneikes. It is followed by an interchange with the chorus that, despite its brevity, reveals much. Kreon asks them not to side with 'those who disobey these things' (219). And when they reply that nobody is foolish enough to have a passion for death, Kreon agrees that death is indeed the payment, but that gain (κέρδος) often ruins men through their hopes. There follows immediately the news that death ritual has been performed for Polyneikes, to which Kreon responds by being 'completely certain' (ἐξεπίσταμαι καλῶς) that his political opponents have bribed the guards to do it (289–94), adding a generalisation about the power of money, as follows (295–301):^[132]

οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀνθρώποισιν οἶον ἄργυρος
κακὸν νομίσμ' ἔβλαστε· τοῦτο καὶ πόλεις
πορθεῖ, τόδ' ἀνδρας ἐξανίστησιν δόμων,
τόδ' ἐκδιδάσκει καὶ παραλλάσσει φρένας
χρηστὰς πρὸς αἰσχρὰ πράγμαθ' ἴστασθαι βροτῶν·
πανουργίας δ' ἔδειξεν ἀνθρώποις ἔχειν
καὶ πάντος ἔργου δυσσέβειαν εἰδέναι.

no currency ever grew up among human kind as evil as money: this lays waste even cities, this expels men from their homes, this thoroughly (ἐκ-) teaches and alters good minds of mortals to set themselves to disgraceful acts; it showed men how to practise villainies and to know every act of impiety.

In this striking statement of the unlimited impersonal power of money, which we have already mentioned (in §3) as an example of its power of transformation into the opposite, we should notice here three things. The first is that Kreon seems to mean not just money but specifically coinage. 'Silver' (rather than gold, as at 1039) was the material of contemporary Athenian (and most Greek) coinage. The word νόμισμα means something like 'custom', but could also mean coinage ('currency' has a similar range), and so could hardly fail to suggest coinage here. It is as if Sophocles has coinage in mind, but does not want to commit the anachronism of locating it in the heroic age. The second point of interest is the emphasis on the *psychology* of money: it is said to teach and alter minds, and enable us to 'know' impiety. Third, Kreon says that there is no act of impiety that

money will not enable us to know (πάντος ἔργου). The power is unlimited even against the imperatives of religion. But how can performing death ritual be impiety? It is, rather, Kreon's denial of burial that would seem to most Athenians to be just such an act of extreme impiety.¹⁰² It seems to be Kreon himself who is transforming things into their opposite, a transformation later expressed in the words of Antigone: 'I obtained impiety by being pious' (924 τὴν δυσσεβειῶν εὐσεβοῦσ' ἔκτησάμην).

The episode ends with Kreon firm in his view that what he is contending with is the power of money (322, 326). He even accuses the guard of 'giving up his life/soul for money' (322 ἐπ' ἀργύρω γε τὴν ψυχὴν προδοῦς). Kreon is completely certain that the performance of the death ritual is to be attributed to the power of money, and so implicitly excludes the possibility that it has been performed for its inherent value – just as he excludes this inherent value also from his own decision to ban the death ritual, never even *weighing up* the importance of death ritual against the importance of not honouring traitors.

Kreon's attitude to money is explored further, much later in the play, in his intense confrontation with the seer Teiresias. Faced with Teiresias' exposure of the error of denying Polyneikes burial, Kreon replies that he has 'long been traded and made into cargo' (1036 ἐξημπολήμαι κάκπεφόρτισμαι πάλοι) by the tribe of seers. The verbs used are striking, and they are precise. Kreon imagines himself as like a slave shipped off to be sold. Just as the cargo makes profit for the trader who controls it, so Kreon claims that he has in the past made profit (presumably unwittingly) for the corrupt seers by accepting their advice. This (mistaken) sense Kreon has of having been wholly in the power of money is a little later given an explicit psychological dimension, when Kreon says to Teiresias 'know that you will not purchase my mind' (1063 ὡς μὴ ἔμπολήσω ἴσθι τὴν ἐμὴν φρένα). 'Purchase my mind' does not mean that Teiresias intends to bribe Kreon, rather that for Kreon to obey would be to sell his mind in the sense that it would be (indirectly and unwittingly) in the power of the money paid to Teiresias. The implication of 1036, that the power of money may be unseen by its victims, is in 1063 made a little more explicit in the notion of purchasing (and so controlling) the *mind*.^[133] A similar phrase occurs elsewhere only in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: Deianeira compares her reception of the youthful Iole into her house as 'like a sailor [receiving] a cargo, harmful merchandise of my mind' (537–8 φόρτον ὥστε ναυτίλος, λωβητὸν

¹⁰² Cf e.g. Eur. *Supp.* 123, 520–63 (Theseus on the unburied dead at Thebes); Phylarchus, *FGrHist* 81 F45 *ap.* Ath. 12.521d.

ἐμπόλημα τῆς ἐμῆς φρένος). The rare word ἐμπόλημα refers to what is traded, or to the profit made by trade. Iole is to Deianeira as an ἐμπόλημα is to a sailor not only in that Deianeira has received her into her house/ship, but also in that the merchandise may harm (λωβητός) the sailor: the profitable merchandise on which the sailor is intent (paradoxically, for he does not want it for himself) may bring him to a watery grave.¹⁰³ Similarly the ‘cargo’ taken on by Deianeira may, though not for herself, destructively absorb her mind, an absorption expressed by the juxtaposition ἐμπόλημα τῆς ἐμῆς φρένος. As in the similar phrase in the *Antigone*, there is a sense of the power of monetary gain to absorb or invade the mind.

The context of Kreon’s remarkable statement at 1063 deserves scrutiny. His continuing accusations of venality (1037, 1047, 1055) have been met with a *vos quoque* by Teiresias: to Kreon’s view that all seers love money he responds (1056) that it is the characteristic of tyrants to love disgraceful gain (αἰσχροκέρδεια). Teiresias is, as usual, correct. Wealth and tyranny are often mentioned together,¹⁰⁴ for instance of Kreon himself a little later (1168–9). Further, in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* (541–2) it was pointed out, again to Kreon, that to obtain tyranny you need money (χρήματα),¹⁰⁵ and in fr. 88 it is said that with χρήματα people acquire tyranny.¹⁰⁶

When a little later Kreon repeats yet again the charge of venality, ‘Reveal, only speaking not for gain’, Teiresias replies οὕτω ἤδη καὶ δοκῶ τὸ σὸν μέρος (1062). The meaning and interest of this line have never been realised. In order to bring out its subtle significance we will have to resort to detailed analysis and to what may seem rather ponderous paraphrase.

The line has been interpreted in two different ways, depending on whether δοκῶ is taken to mean ‘I think’ or ‘I seem’: first, as a grim understatement of Kreon’s impending catastrophe, ‘I think [to be about to speak] thus [i.e. with no gain] for you too already’ or (amounting to the same meaning) ‘I think your part [i.e. the outcome for you] too [to be] already thus [i.e. not gainful]’, and second, as a question, ‘Do I already seem in your view [to be speaking] thus [i.e. for gain]?’ The most recent commentator (Brown), while admitting that neither interpretation is satisfactory, prefers (as does Jebb) the former. But the phrase τὸ σὸν μέρος can

¹⁰³ That is why, as we saw (§3) at Aesch. *Ag.* 1008–14, it may be advisable to jettison the cargo.

¹⁰⁴ E.g. Soph. *OT* 380, fr. 88; Eur. *Supp.* 450–1, *Ion* 625–30, *Or.* 1156, fr. 420. Note the τυραννική οὐσία of Kimon ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 27.3).

¹⁰⁵ See also Hdt. 1.61, 64; Pl. *Resp.* 1.338a–b, 8.567d, 8.568d. The sentiment in *OT* must have been strongly felt, for it applies in fact to the career neither of Oedipus nor of Kreon.

¹⁰⁶ Literally χρήματα ‘finds’ for people friends, honours and the seat of highest tyranny, nearest to the gods (see n. 87 above). The fr. was mentioned in §2.

mean neither 'for you' nor 'the outcome for you'. Nor on the other hand can it mean 'in your view'. It occurs twice elsewhere in Sophocles, in both cases in the same place in the line as here. Oidipous tells Kreon that his daughters are destitute πλὴν ὅσον τὸ σὸν μέρος, 'except in so far as your part', i.e. except for what you do for them (*OT* 1509). Secondly, Oidipous tells Polyneikes (*OC* 1366) that without his daughters he would not still exist, τὸ σὸν μέρος, i.e. 'as far as your part is concerned'. And the very similar adverbial τοῦμόν μέρος occurs once in Sophocles, again in the same place in the line, when Hyllos tells his father Herakles that, in the preparation for his death, οὐ καμῆ τοῦμόν μέρος, 'you will have no difficulty as far as my part is concerned'.¹⁰⁷ The phrase consistently means something like 'as far as your (or my) part is concerned'. The effect of your (or my) part is (or would be, ^[134] were there no other factors) what is described in the verb: Oidipous would not still exist; Herakles will have no difficulty.¹⁰⁸

What is Kreon's part, such that (if the only factor) its result is that 'I seem (or think) to be speaking for gain'? It can hardly be other than his arrogant and suspicious behaviour, characteristic of the tyrant. Also characteristic of the tyrant, Teiresias has just pointed out, is love of gain (1056). And so Teiresias' words mean 'For [i.e. you say what you have said because] I too *seem* [as well as you, who however really are mercenary] [to speak] thus [for gain] already [even before having made the revelation], as far as your part in the situation is concerned [i.e. your tyrannical outlook].' That is to say, 'so far as your tyrannical outlook is concerned, yes, I must seem to you right from the start to be speaking for gain, because tyrants love gain'.¹⁰⁹ This interpretation gives point to every word in the line, as well as to Kreon's reply (discussed above) that Teiresias will not purchase his mind. This reply means, as argued above, 'my mind will not succumb to your attempt to control it by the power of money that motivates you'. But it can now be seen to be also appropriate specifically as a reply to (our interpretation of) the previous line: Kreon mentions his own mind to defend it against Teiresias' implication that it is under the power of money.

Teiresias' implication is crucial for the understanding of Kreon. From the beginning, the tyrant has seen in the resistance to him nothing other than the power of money, a power for which, he believes, people may give up even their lives (221–2, 322). His persistence in this vehement blindness

¹⁰⁷ Similarly Eur. *Heracl.* 678; [*Rhes.*] 405; Pl. *Cri.* 45d2, 50b2, 54c8, *Epist.* 7.328e1.

¹⁰⁸ In a more complex construction (with πλὴν) the daughters of Oidipous would be destitute or not destitute.

¹⁰⁹ Even if δοκῶ means 'I think', this would give much the same meaning, with δοκῶ sarcastic.

is, Teiresias indicates, characteristically tyrannical. Tyrants are arrogant and suspicious, and see the world in terms of monetary gain. Kreon reacts to threat by angrily projecting the same narrowness of vision onto his opponents. He resembles, on this interpretation, the other Theban tragic tyrants Oidipous and Pentheus in that, like them, he spends the first part of the drama vehemently persecuting what he himself turns out to be. The narrowness of vision is in all three cases finally blown apart. Reporting the death of Haimon, the messenger reflects that household wealth and tyrannical *bella figura* (σχήμα) are worthless ('I would not buy them for the shadow of smoke') without happiness (1168–71). In the end the only 'gain' (κέρδος) for Kreon is to be led away (1324–6). In fact, all the evil consequences of money noted by Kreon in the passage quoted above (295–301) may be said in the end to apply to himself: devastation of the polis (cf. 1015 νοσεῖ πόλις), the expulsion of men from their homes, good minds altered to perform disgraceful deeds, and extreme impiety. It is the money-obsessed tyrant who, as we saw Antigone implying in the matter of impiety and piety, has transformed things into their opposite.

This interpretation of what Teiresias says at 1062 is confirmed by his next words, the opening of his devastating final speech (1064–90). It will not be long, he says to Kreon, before

you will have given in return (ἀντιδούς) a corpse from your own vital parts [i.e. Haimon], an exchange (ἀμοιβόν) for corpses, wherefore (ἀνθ' ὧν) you on the one hand have (ἕχεις μὲν) [one] of those above, having thrust it below (τῶν ἄνω βαλὼν κάτω), having lodged a soul ignominiously in a tomb [Antigone], and you on the other hand have (ἕχεις δέ) [one] of those below,¹¹⁰ a corpse dispossessed, without death ritual, impure [Polyneikes].

These lines are often rightly cited as expressing the dual perversion of ritual norms that is somehow at the heart of the *Antigone*. What has not attracted attention is the extent to which this involves *exchange*. The corpse of Haimon will be given *in exchange* for (it is thrice declared) the corpses *in the possession* of Kreon. Whether we translate ἀνθ' ὧν here 'because' (as most translators do) or 'wherefore' (its more frequent meaning), it must, as it does ^[135] elsewhere,¹¹¹ refer to exchange. Hence the emphasised (by

¹¹⁰ The mss. θεῶν is suspect, and I have omitted it from my translation (this does not affect my argument).

¹¹¹ LSJ cite, under the meaning 'because' (A.i.3), this line of *Ant.* and *Ar. Plut.* 433–4, which however means 'you will pay the penalty *in return for* your attempt to banish me'. Under the meaning 'wherefore', LSJ cite [Aesch.] *PV* 31, *Soph. OT* 264, *Thuc.* 6.83.1, *Ev. Luc.* 12.3; and Jebb 1891 on 1068 cites *Soph. OC* 1295; but in all these cases too (except the much later *Ev. Luc.* 12.3) it is a matter of exchange.

position) and repeated ἔχεις. ἔχεις ... βάλων κάτω does not mean 'you have thrust the corpse below',¹¹² but rather 'you have (i.e. possess) the corpse, having thrust it below', just as the second (parallel) ἔχεις, which has no attendant participle, must refer to possession. In fact Kreon's perversion of death ritual is envisaged as a hideous exchange, in which because he controls and possesses the corpses (where they should not be) he has in return to pay with the corpse of his own son. This disastrous *possession* of the corpses whose death ritual he controls is of a piece with the tyrannical desire for gain to which Teiresias has directly (1056) and indirectly (1062) just referred. That is perhaps why Teiresias says that Kreon will have given only one (ἓνα) corpse in exchange for two.

The transaction is precisely antithetical to the one imagined earlier by Antigone (461–8), in which, balancing premature death against the evils of her life and the pain of not burying her own brother, she chooses premature death as representing a *gain* (κέρδος). Decisive is the (non-monetary) value of death ritual and of the good relations with her blood-kin in the next world¹¹³ that her performance of their death ritual ensures (897–902).¹¹⁴ By contrast, whatever Kreon gains by his perversion of death ritual he has to pay for with the bitter alienation and death of his blood-kin, 'a corpse from your own vital parts'. The girl innocent of money registers an overall gain, the money-obsessed tyrant an overall loss.¹¹⁵

The value to which Kreon professes allegiance is not of course monetary but the well-being of the polis. There is, nevertheless, a subterranean contradiction between this allegiance to the polis and his elaborate condemnation of silver as an evil 'currency' (νόμισμα). Coinage was a creation of the polis, and the word for it (νόμισμα) indicates the fact that coinage depended for its acceptability on the νόμοι, the conventions and laws, of

¹¹² Thus Brown 1987, and similarly other translators. Translations of Greek tragedy regularly eliminate what seems awkward or unfamiliar, and thereby fail to reproduce precisely what is interesting.

¹¹³ Her location of value in Hades is sufficient to shed doubt on certain values in this world (521).

¹¹⁴ What may seem to some paradoxical – that this value produces an overall gain despite being non-monetary – is brought out by the word κέρδος.

¹¹⁵ Further, the replaceability of the spouse (or betrothed) – stressed by both Kreon (526) and Antigone (909) – is analogous to the replaceability of goods by means of money, whereas the *natural* tie of blood-kin may be, Antigone maintains (911–2), irreplaceable: see Murnaghan 1986: 199; Seaford 1994b: 216–18. Similarly Klytaimestra, who implies the unlimited power of money to replace goods (§3), has already replaced her spouse, while ironically praising his *uniqueness* (Aesch. *Ag.* 895–901 – in images associated with death ritual: Seaford 1984c¹¹: 254), having just used (888) the same verb (κατασβέννυμι) of her tears for him having dried up as she later uses to express the *inexhaustibility* of the sea (as a metaphor, we have seen, for the unlimited power of money). I owe much in this note to Betty Belfiore.

the polis.¹¹⁶ The very metaphor with which Kreon opens his elaborate profession of devotion to the polis assimilates the ruler¹¹⁷ to a coin: you cannot know the soul, mentality and judgement of anybody, he says, until he is seen 'proved in rubbing against rule and laws' (177 ἀρχαῖς τε καὶ νόμοισιν ἐντριβής). ἐντριβής is a metaphor from rubbing precious metal against the touchstone. Its juxtaposition with νόμοισιν evokes the legislative concern of the polis to ensure by testing the ^[130] quality of its coins.¹¹⁸ Now one aspect of the tyrants' use (noted above) of money to establish and maintain their power was their control of the novel power of coinage. To take an Athenian example,¹¹⁹ Peisistratos not only used money to obtain (Hdt. 1.62.2) and confirm (Hdt. 1.64.1) his tyranny, but may well have presided over the introduction of coinage into Athens.¹²⁰ And there was a tradition that his son the tyrant Hippias, a contemporary of the older members of Sophocles' audience, manipulated the coinage.¹²¹

Kreon, then, expresses devotion to the polis, even though he also claims that the polis belongs to himself as ruler (738). He attributes desire for the uniquely harmful νόμισμα of silver to his enemies, even though members of the audience would be well aware that a tyrant relies on the νόμισμα of silver.¹²² 'Do not', says Haimon to Kreon, 'keep only one disposition (ἦθος) within you, that what *you* say, and nothing else, is right' (705–6). We may perhaps regard the exclusive pursuit of a single value to be a habit of mind influenced by money, even though the single value pursued is not acknowledged to be money.¹²³ Indeed, how could it be? In a manoeuvre well known to modern psychology¹²⁴ and depicted (though not of course theorised) elsewhere in tragedy,¹²⁵ Kreon cannot allow himself

¹¹⁶ See esp. Arist. *Pol.* 1257b, *Eth. Nic.* 1133a. Inscribed laws have survived enforcing the acceptability and use of local currency: the Attic inscription referred to below (n. 118); also *SIG³* 218, 525.

¹¹⁷ That the ruler is meant is clear from 177 ἀρχαῖς and 178.

¹¹⁸ See e.g. the inscribed Attic law published by Stroud 1974: 157–8: *inter alia* the public tester is to neutralise silver coins which are bronze or lead underneath.

¹¹⁹ From many other instances we may cite the tradition that Polykrates (cf. n. 72) manipulated the Samian coinage.

¹²⁰ Kraay 1976: 58–9.

¹²¹ [Arist.] *Oec.* 1347a (fourth century).

¹²² We may even be reminded of the tyrant described by Thrasymakhos in Plato's *Republic*, whose massive thefts and enslavement of the citizen body are sanctioned by the justice that he himself creates (justice being 'the interest of the stronger'): *Resp.* 1.338e, 1.344a–c.

¹²³ Nussbaum 1986: 58 writes 'By making all values commensurable in terms of a single coin – he is preoccupied with the image of coinage and profit in ethical matters – Creon achieves singleness, straightness, and an apparent stability.' This is perceptive, but money in the play does, I believe, far more than provide ethical imagery that is analogous to Kreon's habit of mind.

¹²⁴ See e.g. Rycroft 1968: 29–30, 125–6; Laplanche and Portalis 1988: 349–60.

¹²⁵ Notably in Pentheus in Eur. *Bacch.*, as shown by Parsons 1988, who also offers an excellent general defence of the application of psychoanalytic insights to tragedy.

to acknowledge the ambivalence within himself (as a tyrant) between devotion to the polis and self-seeking power; and so on the one hand he vehemently professes the former and on the other hand he subconsciously *denies* the latter within himself, vehemently *projecting* it onto others. There is a similar and related manoeuvre, shortly before his rejection of monetary control over his mind, in his angry remark to Teiresias: ‘Make your profit, trade in electrum from Sardis and Indian gold. You will not cover that man with a tomb’ (1037–9). Whereas earlier the corrupting element was, according to Kreon, the silver currency of the polis, now it is gold and electrum (a natural alloy of gold and silver) from distant parts. It is as if Kreon, now increasingly threatened, is so keen to keep money (which we know his position in the polis requires) separate from himself and his polis, that he projects money (together therefore with the allegiance of his enemies who seek it) onto foreign parts, well away from himself and his polis.

In *Agamemnon* the unlimited wealth of the tyrannical household, embodied in the murderous cloth, perverts death ritual into its opposite: the cloth with which a dead man is usually lovingly wrapped by his wife becomes an ‘evil wealth of cloth’ by which, precisely because it is ‘unlimited’, Agamemnon is trapped by his wife. The death ritual¹²⁶ of Antigone is, like that of Agamemnon, a means of killing her. And this, together with the opposite perversion^[137] of keeping the dead Polyneikes unburied, is inflicted by the unlimited power of a tyrant for whom money is so important that his vision of its unlimited power seems to make him blind to the claims of death ritual, and whose consequent perversion of death ritual is expressed in terms of possession in return for which he must after all give up what is most dear to him. In both dramas the implicit contradiction between the unlimited impersonal power of money and the absolute personal claim for death ritual is expressed in catastrophic perversion of the ritual.

5. Euripides: *Electra*

The contradiction between on the one hand the impersonal, generalised value of money and on the other hand the individual significance of a kin-relationship (and of objects specific to it) will now be pursued in Euripides’ *Electra*. The old man, who has arrived with meat and wine for Elektra’s guests (as yet unrecognised as Orestes and Pylades), stares intently at Orestes. ‘Why’, asks Orestes, ‘is he staring at me as if looking at a bright

¹²⁶ The procession to the ‘tomb’ clearly evokes a funeral procession (806–16, 891–4).

mark on silver? Is he matching me with someone/something?’ (558–9 τί μ’ ἐσέδορκεν ὡσπερ ἀργύρου σκοπῶν λαμπρὸν χαρακτῆρ’; ἢ προσεικάζει μὲ τῷ;). As we saw also in the *Antigone*, it is as if the dramatist has coinage in mind, but does not want to commit the anachronism of naming it directly.

The old man is in fact ‘matching’ someone unknown to him (the stranger, who could be anyone) with a specific person whom he remembers (Orestes). Now ‘matches’ must also make sense in terms of the immediately preceding coinage metaphor, and so implies (whether or not προσεικάζειν was a technical term for it) the matching of the mark on this particular coin with the *type* of coin-mark that guarantees authenticity,¹²⁷ for that would be the point of intense staring at the mark on the coin, whether by ordinary people or by the testers called ἀργυροσκόποι¹²⁸ or ἀργυρογνώμονες.¹²⁹ But this implies a process antithetical to the matching of a stranger with Orestes. The stranger, who could be anybody, is identified as a unique individual, whereas to identify a coin as authentic by ‘looking at the mark’ means to identify the presence of the general type to be found also in any authentic coin. Perhaps then, we may be tempted to say, the point of the metaphor is confined entirely to the intentness with which the old man looks at Orestes.

But we cannot so restrict the metaphor, for in fact it extends throughout the process of recognition. A few lines earlier, on first seeing the strangers, the old man says (550–1) ‘they are well-born (εὐγενεῖς) – but this is ἐν κίβδηλῳ: for many who are well-born are bad’. κίβδηλος means false or spurious, ‘especially of coin’ (LSJ). ‘O Zeus,’ says Euripides’ *Medea*, ‘why have you provided for humankind clear signs of what gold is κίβδηλος, but there is no natural mark (χαρακτῆρ ἐμπέφυκε) on the body of men by which to distinguish the bad’ (*Med.* 516–19). This contrast is already in *Theognis* (119–24), with the difference that by the time of the tragedians it has been influenced by coinage.¹³⁰ Gold can be tested (e.g. by the touchstone), but in the late fifth century the most widespread means of guaranteeing the value of precious metal was the engraved or impressed mark (χαρακτῆρ – from χαράσσειν, ‘to cut, engrave, inscribe’) on silver coinage. Men, unlike gold, cannot be easily tested. And, unlike coins, they do not have a χαρακτῆρ on their bodies. Orestes however does indeed have such a

¹²⁷ That is so whether the type is merely remembered or is to hand in a coin known to be genuine.

¹²⁸ *IG* V.1390.47–8; Phryn. *Praep. Soph.* 30.10 (de Borries).

¹²⁹ [Pl.] *Virt.* 378e.

¹³⁰ Falsely stamped coin is a moral image already at Aesch. *Ag.* 780.

χαρακτῆρ. Elektra, still not yet persuaded by the old man that the stranger is Orestes, asks (572) ‘what χαρακτῆρ can you see by which I will be persuaded?’ The word χαρακτῆρ does not follow from what ^[138] precedes, but is rather chosen by Euripides to anticipate the old man’s reply: a scar.

The novelty of coinage, from a semiotic perspective, is that the sign (the mark) authenticates its own material (the metal). In this respect coinage differs from such authenticating signs as, say, a token carried by someone to authenticate their identity, or even from a seal authenticating a document. Now the scar is a traditional token of identification, most famously in the Homeric homecoming of Odysseus.¹³¹ But of all the traditional tokens of identification only the scar resembles the mark on coinage – as something inscribed or impressed, and so part of what it authenticates. The scar is, at least here at *El.* 572, a χαρακτῆρ.

Immediately before the recognition there is a long passage in which Elektra dismisses the tokens advanced by the old man as signs of Orestes: a lock of hair and a footprint found at Agamemnon’s tomb, and a woven cloth. This has been much discussed, often with the justified assumption that the point cannot merely be criticism of the effectiveness of these tokens in Aeschylus’ version. Although Elektra turns out to be wrong about hair, footprint and cloth, it is of course more sensible to be convinced by a scar. But why then were the tokens effective in Aeschylus, and why the emphatic difference in Euripides? The hair, footprint and cloth are invested with the personal identity of Orestes. The hair also embodies his relation with his father enacted in death ritual, and the cloth his relation with his sister. But the scar (unlike the other tokens, which are hard to match with certainty to what they authenticate) is like a coin-mark, part of what it authenticates. The convenience of self-authentication would have contributed to the rapid spread of coinage.

Elektra’s dismissal of hair, footprints and cloth may have various functions, such as (it has been suggested) to express her nervous reluctance to accept such wonderful news. But we can also say that the old poetic notion of a thing so closely associated with an individual as to be an unmistakable token may reflect a past world in which the impersonal power of money, and especially of coinage, has not yet largely replaced the power of objects that are envisaged as unique because invested with personal identity or ‘talismatic’ power. Examples of objects invested with personal identity would be the gift, or the shroud – or Akhilleus’ shield, which is

¹³¹ *Od.* 19.390–475; 21.217–23. Odysseus’ scar was acquired in a hunt. So too was Orestes’ but, as he was a small child, the hunt becomes a playful chase of a fawn inside the house (or courtyard).

to be found in the choral ode (432–86) preceding the recognition, with its ‘signs in the circle’ (ἐν κύκλῳ ... σήματα), antithetically to a coin-mark, terrifying in heroic battle.¹³² Examples of objects invested with talismanic power would be a royal sceptre – or the golden lamb that bestowed sovereignty in Argos and is to be found in the choral ode (699–746) following the recognition.¹³³ In this way Elektra’s dismissal of the tokens is of a piece with the monetary dimension of the recognition.

We are now in a position to re-describe the apparent ineptness of the phrase ἡ προσεικάζει με (559). The scar identifies Orestes as a unique individual, the long-lost brother. But the coin-metaphor, appropriate though it turns out to be to the identifying scar (χαρακτῆρ), implies the recognition not of a unique identity but of its opposite, of a type and of the quality guaranteed not (as in heroic myth) by a unique identity but rather by adherence to the type. Once again, somewhat as in the *Agamemnon* and *Antigone*, we find a combination of opposites, of the unique personal value of a family member with the general impersonal value of money. In the *Agamemnon* the opposites are combined in a cloth, in *Electra* in a scar.

The old man begins his revelation of Orestes’ identity by telling Elektra to pray to get a dear treasure (λαβεῖν φίλον θησαυρόν). The dear treasure is of course Orestes. But θησαυρός, as well as sustaining the money metaphor, must remind us that, for Elektra, the regaining of ^[139] Orestes will mean the regaining of much else besides. In contrast to the Aeschylean and Sophoclean versions, the defining characteristic of Elektra in the first part of the play is the poverty about which she constantly complains. The situation of a princess married off to a penniless peasant provokes the kind of reflections that in §2 we described as encouraged by the apparently unlimited power of money. Elektra’s poverty, she maintains, excludes participation in the ritual of the polis and the offering of hospitality.¹³⁴ Even noble birth (εὐγένεια) is, claims the peasant, destroyed (ἀπόλλυται) by poverty (37–8). Orestes too, it is emphasised, has nothing: ‘everything depends on your own hand and chance, if you are to take your ancestral house and polis’ (610–11). The poor, it is claimed, may be more virtuous, and even better hosts, than the rich.¹³⁵ But to obtain autocracy, in the post-heroic age and even according to views expressed in tragedy, you need money and

¹³² On the resemblance of the shield-devices in Aesch. *Sept.* to coin-marks see Steiner 1994: 53–9.

¹³³ At Eur. *IT* 813–15 this golden lamb is actually depicted among the scenes woven on the cloth by which Orestes proves to his sister his identity.

¹³⁴ 184–92 (her tears are also a reason for not participating), 404–5.

¹³⁵ 253, 371–2, 394–5.

the following that comes with money.¹³⁶ Orestes, it is stressed (601–9), has no following because he has nothing. And so he must rely on the traditional individual heroism.

In this he is successful. Elektra accuses her mother of having ‘bought’ Aigisthos as husband (1090), and taunts the dead Aigisthos as follows: ‘you prided yourself that you were someone, strong by means of money (τοῖσι χρήμασι σθένων). But money is only for short acquaintance. It is nature (φύσις) that is secure, not money’ (939–41). The gold offered by Aigisthos as a reward for killing Orestes (33) proved ineffective. And the contrast between the poverty of the peasant’s hovel and the luxurious wealth brought to it by Klytaimestra¹³⁷ forms a visually powerful context for the matricide. Money proves in the end to be less powerful and less basic than it seemed to be in the first half of the play.

The recognition of Orestes, with all its emotional power, is from its beginning tied to this competition of basic values, for, as we have seen, the old man, on first seeing the strangers, dissociates noble birth from virtue. He also implicitly compares noble birth without virtue to precious metal that is spurious (κίβδηλος). And so when, seven lines later, the recognition of Orestes is represented in terms of examining the mark on a coin, it must inevitably seem to be not just the recognition of identity but also of quality, of true value. What we have called a combination of opposites implied by this imagery – of the impersonal general value of money with the personal value of a unique individual – may also be seen as a symbolic resolution of contradiction. It may seem that Orestes cannot prevail, for he has nothing. Contrary to Elektra’s heroic expectation (524–6), he has had to arrive secretly. As if in response to such realistic pessimism, the triumphal recognition of Orestes seems to be not only the traditional recognition of a person (a family member, a hero who will bring deliverance) but also of true value (money that is not κίβδηλος). In the person revealed seem to be combined all basic values that are elsewhere so problematically compared with each other: kinship, noble birth, heroic nature, the impersonal power of (genuine) money. It is as if the potential spuriousness (κίβδηλος) of money implies doubt about its power. And indeed the power of the tyrants’ money proves to be a matter of mere temporary seeming, whereas true and lasting value resides in the nature (φύσις) of Orestes. Whatever we or the Dioskouroi (1244–6) may think of the eventual matricide, the transition,

¹³⁶ Soph. *OT* 541–2; cf. e.g. Eur. *Phoen.* 402–5, which makes it clear that, for keeping friends, money is more important than noble birth.

¹³⁷ Note esp. 994–5, 998–1001, 1006–7, 1107–8, 1139–40.

in the recognition scene, from appearance to reality is also a (temporary) symbolic mediation of the unresolvable conflict between basic values.¹³⁸

POSTSCRIPT

Subsequent monographs on money are D. Schaps, *The Invention of Coinage and the Monetization of Ancient Greece* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004); S. von Reden, *Money in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

The relationship of money to the genesis, form and content of tragedy is explored in Seaford 2004c; see also Seaford 2000a.

Papers involving specific tragic passages are G. Bakewell 'Agamemnon 437: *Chrysamoibos* Ares, Athens and empire', *JHS* 127 (2007), 123–32; H. Tell, 'Wisdom for sale? The Sophists and money', *CP* 104 (2009), 13–33 (27–31 are on the tragic Teresias); Y. Chang, 'On Sophocles' *Antigone* 1037–9: electrum, gold, and profits', *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 37. 1 (2011), 143–68; K. Ormand, 'Buying babies in Euripides' *Hippolytus*', *ICS* 40 (2015), 237–61.

For the idea that money influences dramatic form see Seaford 2017a (= Chapter 20 in this volume).

¹³⁸ I am grateful to Betty Belfiore, Chris Gill and the anonymous *JHS* referees for their improvement of this paper.