

## Pelopidarum secunda: a ‘site of memory’ in the history of Elizabethan revenge tragedy

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In a chapter entitled ‘Where to Find Lost Plays’, the compiler of the British Drama catalogue Martin Wiggins reports a serendipitous exchange with Jane Cowling, co-editor of the Hampshire volume of the Records of Early English Drama:

To the mingled delight and despair of compilers of comprehensive catalogues of drama, lost plays continue to surface. When putting together the entries for my third volume a few years ago, I thought I’d better get a second opinion on my notional placement of the hard-to-date Winchester College play, *Pelopidarum secunda* (British Library, MS Harley 5110), and contacted Jane Cowling, the scholar who is editing the College’s records for *REED: Hampshire*. A correspondence at crosspurposes ensued, since she hadn’t heard of *Pelopidarum secunda* and assumed I was talking about another play entirely, which in turn was new to me, and the upshot was that, in effect, we swapped ‘lost’ plays.<sup>1</sup>

Wiggins provides a broad definition of ‘lost plays’:

Most lost plays are lost not in that they are not extant, but in that they are not *known* to be extant – which means, in effect, not listed as extant in the current standard reference work on the subject.<sup>2</sup>

*Pelopidarum secunda*<sup>3</sup> fits neither the traditional nor Wiggins’s broader definition; hence, his use of the inverted commas for the word ‘lost’ with reference to this play. An anonymous English adaptation of Seneca’s *Agamemnon* and Sophocles’ *Electra* performed at Winchester College around 1590,<sup>4</sup> the play is

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Wiggins, ‘Where to Find Lost Plays’, *Lost Plays in Shakespeare’s England*, ed. David McInnis and Matthew Steggle (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2014), 271.

<sup>2</sup> Wiggins, ‘Where to Find Lost Plays’, 255.

<sup>3</sup> Alongside *Pelopidarum secunda*, I will refer to this play also through the abbreviated form ‘*Pelopidarum*’.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue, Vol. 3: 1590–1597* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–4.

still extant, preserved in a manuscript (British Library, MS Harley 5110), and is listed in the reference works of early modern English drama. Before Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson's catalogue, the play is listed in E. K. Chambers' *The Elizabethan Stage* and in Alfred Harbage's *Annals of English Drama*.<sup>5</sup> Since 2020, the text of *Pelopidarum* has been entirely available online in a transcription that forms an appendix to the REED Hampshire volume, edited by Jane Cowling and Peter Greenfield, who have provided the play with a thorough introduction.<sup>6</sup> The 'Beyond Shakespeare Company' has posted a collective reading with comments online, available to the wider public.<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding this, *Pelopidarum* has been beneath the radar of literary criticism (except for Cowling and Greenfield's introduction) as well as from reference works of classical reception studies, despite its abundant reliance on Greek and Roman tragic sources. Perhaps, this has been partly due to its opaque title, which Wiggins and Richardson interpret as meaning either 'the second play on the descendants of Pelops' or 'the second generation of the descendants of Pelops'.<sup>8</sup> In any case, albeit not technically 'lost', *Pelopidarum secunda* has been largely ignored.

This study aims to contribute to classical reception and renaissance studies by analysing this hitherto neglected Elizabethan school performance through Marvin Carlson's conception of theatre as 'a site of memory'.<sup>9</sup> According to Carlson, 'every play is a memory play', whereby memory is conceived both as 'personal and cultural', that is, of the individual as well as of a receiving-interpretive community as a whole, and operates both at an intertextual and inter-performative level.<sup>10</sup> The phenomenon by which memories of previous texts and past performances haunt a play (and how such memories are activated in the audience's reception process) is termed by Carlson 'ghosting'.<sup>11</sup> Memory is also relevant to this play at three other levels: At an intratextual level, as a revenge tragedy *Pelopidarum secunda* rests on the mechanism of the memory of the dead, who literally haunt the living through ghosts; at an extratextual level, the play not only is thought of as a performance within a context of festive commemoration but, as I argue, it also belongs to a network of texts (both literary and non-literary) responding to recent events through shared political allegories and discourses; finally, the very oblivion into which this play has fallen so far

<sup>5</sup> E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 404; Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700* (London: Routledge, 1989), 209, 302, 373.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Greenfield and Jane Cowling (eds), 'Pelopidarum Secunda: A Play from Winchester College', in *REED Online: Collection: Hampshire*, ed. Peter Greenfield and Jane Cowling [online], 2020, <<https://ereed.library.utoronto.ca/collections/hamps/appendix-3/>> (accessed March 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Robert Crighton *et al.*, 'Pelopidarum secunda' [online] <<https://beyondshakespeare.org/1590-and-beyond/>> (accessed February 2023).

<sup>8</sup> Wiggins and Richardson, *British Drama*, Vol. 3, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as a Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, 2–8.

<sup>11</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, 7.

represents a further level at which memory is relevant to *Pelopidarum secunda*: the collective or archival memory.

This article considers this play as a multilevel ‘site of memory’, devoting particular attention to the intertextual, inter-performative, and extratextual aspects. I analyse *Pelopidarum*’s reliance on and departures from its classical sources; I establish connections with other performance contexts that cause those departures; finally, from a new historicist perspective, I suggest possible interpretations of the extratextual memories that haunt the characterization of some figures. In so doing, I argue that *Pelopidarum secunda* not only deserves to be reinstated in the history of Elizabethan revenge tragedy but also showcases a fundamental step in its development: the close engagement with the newly available Greek and Roman tragic models.

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### *Intertextual memories*

[S]een from the perspective of its *process of reception*, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations...as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation.<sup>12</sup>

Intertextual memory is an essential aspect of adaptation. Memory of the source text(s) is the *conditio sine qua non* for an adaptation to be recognized as such. Since the venue of the performance was a school context (Winchester College), most of the audience of *Pelopidarum* would have been familiar with its classical sources. Even so, the play’s epilogue facilitates their recognition:

Now for some speeches and their tediousness  
Have but Sophocles and Seneca  
Seldom to bear the burden of that fault...  
If anything deserveth praise ‘tis theirs.<sup>13</sup>

Forty-one per cent of the play is mostly closely translated from Seneca’s *Agamemnon* and Sophocles’ *Electra* (Table 1). The rest is either an expansion or an addition, thereby fulfilling Linda Hutcheon’s ‘repetition with variation’ model. The play thus combines and enriches the plots of Seneca’s *Agamemnon*, which culminates with Clytemnestra’s revenge, and of Sophocles’ *Electra*, which dramatizes the subsequent revenge of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon’s children, Electra and Orestes, on their mother. By unravelling these plays’ haunting presence throughout *Pelopidarum*, this first section aims to show the play’s uniqueness among the corpus of early modern receptions of classical tragedy

<sup>12</sup> Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O’Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 8.

<sup>13</sup> ‘*Pelopidarum secunda*’ in British Library, Harley MS 5110, fols. 81r–v; from now onwards, referred to as PS. All the quotations from the play have been modernised.

Table 1 Seneca and Sophocles in *Pelopidarum secunda*

Act	Lines based on the source(s) / Lines of the act	%
1	258 (Seneca) / 730 lines	35.3
2	287 (Seneca) / 790 lines	36.3
3	87 (Seneca) + 368 (Sophocles) / 645 lines	70.5
4	390 (Sophocles) / 623 lines	62.6
5	78 (Sophocles) / 744 lines	10.5
Epilogue	50 lines	0
Total	1,468 (Seneca + Sophocles) / 3,582 lines	41

Note: *My count (3,582 lines) slightly differs from that of Cowling and Greenfield (3,465); see Cowling and Greenfield, REED: Hampshire.*

due to its combination of Sophocles and Seneca and to its reliance on these and other classical sources throughout the whole dramatic script. In so doing, the play capitalizes on the audience's familiarity with the classical tragedians, partly extensively recycling, partly significantly altering them. By blurring the boundaries of its intertextual memories, the play invites the audience to test their classical knowledge, which rests on their own intertextual memory, haunted by their reading and theatregoing experience.

The play starts with two additions to the sources. The first is a soliloquy of a courtier named Hipparchus, who describes Atreus' plans of revenge on his wife Aerope for committing adultery with his brother Thyestes; the ghost of the latter appears, thus quoting the Senecan source, which begins with a prologue delivered by Thyestes' ghost. The other addition corresponds to one of the play's most unsettling scenes: Atreus' bizarre execution of his revenge on his wife Aerope. In this scene, with no counterpart in the sources nor in any other classical tradition, Atreus tricks Clytemnestra and her servant Agathia into killing Aerope, Clytemnestra's mother-in-law, who remains silent throughout and is disguised as the witch Dipsas, an Ovidian memory.<sup>14</sup> Both Clytemnestra and Agathia are persuaded by Atreus to be about to torture Dipsas, through 'a cord that Calchas left behind him', a reminiscence of Seneca's or Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*s. In both plays, in her frenzied prophecy of Agamemnon's and her own death, Cassandra, who, like Calchas, was a priestess of Apollo, wears her 'prophetic bands', associated with the Apollonian cult.<sup>15</sup> Once Clytemnestra and Agathia

<sup>14</sup> Ovid, *Heroides, Amores*, ed. Grant Showerman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 346–47 (Ov.Am.I.8). All abbreviations from classical texts follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* conventions (<<https://oxfordre.com/classics/page/ocdabbreviations/abbreviations>> accessed 13 August 2023).

<sup>15</sup> 'sacratas infulas' (Sen.Ag.693), μαντεία στέφη (Aesch.Ag.1265). All quotations from Aeschylus are from Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, ed. and trans. A. H. Sommerstein (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 155 n274. All quotations from Seneca are from Seneca, *Oedipus, Agamemnon, Thyestes, Hercules on Oeta, Octavia*, ed. and trans. J.G. Fitch (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

realize Atreus' trick, Agathia kills herself, while Clytemnestra, who is about to do the same, stops when she sees Thyestes' ghost. The anonymous playwright proves to be familiar with the device of dramatic irony. Before killing Aerope, Clytemnestra says: 'I would not spare her if she were my mother'<sup>16</sup>; once she realizes the victim is her mother-in-law, the queen asks the now dead Aerope for forgiveness, addressing her as 'mother, dear mother'.<sup>17</sup>

The rest of Act 1 follows the Senecan source (35.3%; Sen.Ag.1–56; 108–309), expanding Thyestes' soliloquy and possibly drawing from a near-contemporary translation of Seneca's *Agamemnon*: John Studley's version, first published in 1566 and later in 1581 in Thomas Newton's collection *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies*.<sup>18</sup> As a revenge tragedy ghost, Thyestes reminds the living, his son Aegisthus, to avenge him; unlike Seneca, Thyestes also reassures Aegisthus (who is off stage) by saying that he has 'sprinkled her [Clytemnestra] with Lethe's drops' to make her forget what she did to Aerope and concentrate on her revenge plans against Agamemnon.<sup>19</sup> Alongside haunting the living's memory, the *Pelopidarum* Thyestes claims the power of limiting it. However, Clytemnestra is far from focussed on her plans and shares her anxiety with the nurse Storge, who advises her against committing adultery any further. As Clytemnestra chases him away, Aegisthus threatens to kill himself,<sup>20</sup> a manipulative strategy that proves effective: Clytemnestra changes her mind. The act ends with a chorus, whose five members are difficult to identify as the speech headings are abbreviated.

Act 2 displays a similar amount of text translated from Seneca (36.3%; Sen.Ag.412–588; 695–781; 791–807). In the first scene, a departure from the sources, Clytemnestra enters with a 'wrought shirt'<sup>21</sup> meant for Agamemnon and complains about his unfaithfulness. There follows her dialogue with Eurybates, including a compressed version of his long *rhexis* on the tempest which hit Agamemnon's fleet upon his return from Troy.<sup>22</sup> A chorus of Trojan captives lament their situation, expanding the corresponding chorus in Seneca and mingling it with Virgilian echoes.<sup>23</sup> In this chorus, intertextual memories are coupled with a reflection on memory. Like the Senecan Cassandra, who prophesizes

<sup>16</sup> PS, fol. 29v.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> 'Enses' ('swords', Sen.Ag.45) becomes in *Pelopidarum* 'the naked glittering swordes (fol. 31r); cf. 'the glittering sword'; Seneca, *His Tenne Tragedies* (London: Thomas Marsh, 1581), fol. 141v.

<sup>19</sup> PS, fol. 31v.

<sup>20</sup> PS, fol. 36r; Sen.Ag.305.

<sup>21</sup> PS, fol. 49v; the shirt prepared by Clytemnestra corresponds to the 'textos' ('mantle') in Sen.Ag.882–83, in turn based on the robe or net in Aesch.Ag.1382–3. Agamemnon's dream has no counterpart in the sources; it bears no relation to Agamemnon's dream in the *Iliad* (Hom.*Il.*2.21–24); however, in Aesch.*Cho.*527, Clytemnestra dreams of giving birth to a 'snake', whose corresponding Greek word δράκοντ[α] may have inspired the *Pelopidarum* author.

<sup>22</sup> PS, fols. 38r–41v; Sen.Ag.412–588.

<sup>23</sup> PS, fols. 41v–44v; Sen.Ag.589–663; 'smoking towers' modelled on the 'smoking roofs', 'fumantia culmina', Verg.*A.*12.569; cf. Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1–6*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

that ‘tears...will be called for throughout time’ (‘lacrimas omne...tempus petet’, Sen.Ag.659), a chorus member anachronistically complains about the ‘fame’ and ‘noise’ that ‘fill the pens and the books of future times/ with long recital of our overthrows’ and challenges the Greeks to ‘read in [her] face whole volumes of dispairs,/ and perfect Iliads of our endless cares’.<sup>24</sup> Another Trojan captive concludes that ‘[n]ature did wrong to give us memory/ a nest wherein builds naught but misery’.<sup>25</sup> When it comes to Troy, memory is often thematized; as noted by Laurie Maguire and Emma Smith, ‘references to Troy in early modern England often collocate it with remembering’.<sup>26</sup> After the chorus’ lament, Cassandra, whose lines are condensed in comparison to her Senecan counterpart,<sup>27</sup> falls into a frenzy and swoons. Agamemnon enters in triumph and engages in a dialogue, absent in Seneca, with the soldier Megasthenes, who boasts about his courageous deeds in war and is lavishly praised by Eurybates and Talthybius.

After Agamemnon’s brief exchange with the distressed Cassandra, still onstage,<sup>28</sup> Agamemnon performs sacrifices to thank the gods for the victory at Troy and asks Megasthenes to prepare the celebrations. Aegisthus kills his uncle Atreus, while the latter is performing sacrifices for Agamemnon’s safe return. Cassandra witnesses the murder and prophesizes Agamemnon’s death in a soliloquy, which partially corresponds to her ‘live’ account in Seneca. The priestess’ narration is thus turned into a prophesy on a murder later dramatized onstage.<sup>29</sup> Subsequently, after dreaming about ‘two dragons, female and a male’—clearly standing for Clytemnestra and Aegisthus—Agamemnon awakens and puts on the shirt prepared by his wife.<sup>30</sup> Clytemnestra and Aegisthus enter and the latter kills Agamemnon with one blow. In Seneca, the ‘semivir’ Aegisthus (Sen.Ag.890) strikes Agamemnon but fails to kill him; it is Clytemnestra who completes the job, striking him with an axe and partially decapitating him; then, together they stab and mutilate the body.<sup>31</sup> In Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, the role of Aegisthus is even more marginal: only Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon, with two blows (and then inflicts a third one); Aegisthus claims they devised the plan together. *Pelopidarum secunda* is possibly the first early modern play offering a version in which only Aegisthus attacks and kills Agamemnon without Clytemnestra

<sup>24</sup> PS, fol. 42r.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Laurie Maguire and Emma Smith, ‘What is a Source? Or, How Shakespeare Read His Marlowe’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 68 (2015), 25.

<sup>27</sup> PS, fol. 44v; Sen.Ag.695–781.

<sup>28</sup> PS, fols. 47r–v; Sen.Ag.791–807. Cassandra’s presence onstage is one of the problems that make Seneca’s *Agamemnon* difficult to perform; cf. Edith Hall, ‘Aeschylus’ Clytemnestra versus her Senecan Tradition’, in Fiona Macintosh, Pantelis Michelakis, Edith Hall, and Oliver Taplin (eds), *Agamemnon in Performance 458 BC to 2004 AD* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 63 n32.

<sup>29</sup> PS, fols. 49r–v; Sen.Ag.867–909.

<sup>30</sup> PS, fol. 49v.

<sup>31</sup> Sen.Ag.890–906.

needing to intervene. Aegisthus himself draws attention to this, when he underlines that the wound he has inflicted to Agamemnon does not need other blows to be mortal: ‘Tis wide enough: you need not mend it more’.<sup>32</sup> The chorus expresses a mixed judgment on Aegisthus’ revenge, partly justifying it, partly dismissing it as a short-lived triumph.

Act 3 combines passages translated from both Seneca’s *Agamemnon* and Sophocles’ *Electra* and is the one with the highest percentage of text based on these sources (70.5%). The act opens with Electra mourning her father’s death, while her servants comfort her. She then engages in two dialogues: one with her sister Chrysothemis and one with Stropheus, in Seneca ‘Strophius’, who has saved Orestes after the murder of Agamemnon.<sup>33</sup> The figure of Stropheus, absent in Sophocles, functions as a hinge between the two sources. The intertextuality gets more complex when Electra offers herself to Aegisthus’ sword ‘willingly...with naked breast’.<sup>34</sup> While this is partly based on Seneca,<sup>35</sup> the reference to her ‘naked breast’ evokes another Greek tragic virgin: Polyxena, who in Euripides’ *Hecuba* offers her ‘breast’ (στέρνον) to the executioner.<sup>36</sup> The *Pelopidarum* author reads Seneca through Euripidean lenses.

The fourth scene—featuring Electra, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus—incorporates and expands many lines from the Senecan source.<sup>37</sup> Electra challenges the couple to kill her but they decide to imprison her and kill Cassandra. While Seneca’s *Agamemnon* breaks off before letting the audience know if Cassandra dies, *Pelopidarum* clarifies this ambiguity through a chorus of Trojan captives, who lament her death and a stage direction, which suggests that the same chorus bring the dead body away (‘*Exeunt* bearing out the dead corpse’).<sup>38</sup> Cassandra’s death is mourned also by a member of the main chorus, perhaps via Studley’s Seneca. Prompted by the abrupt end of Seneca’s *Agamemnon*, Studley felt the need to add a *rhexis* delivered by Eurybates, who announces that Cassandra has been beheaded and ‘the Greeks themselves to grief are moved to see this heavy sight’.<sup>39</sup> In *Pelopidarum*, this sentence is dramatized in the speech of a chorus member, who underlines that ‘even myself a Greek lament you’.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>32</sup> PS, fol. 49v.

<sup>33</sup> Sen.Ag.918–50; Soph.EL137–309, 328–515. All quotations from Sophocles are taken from Sophocles, *Ajax, Electra, Oedipus Tyrannus*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). Soph.EL.495–503 are omitted; Chrysothemis’ first speech is expanded (PS, fol. 53r; Soph.EL.328–40). The lines referred to Pylades in Sen.Ag.940–3 are omitted, as Pylades enters later with Orestes.

<sup>34</sup> PS, fol. 57r.

<sup>35</sup> ‘ultro vulneri opponam caput’, ‘I shall offer my neck to the death blow’ (Sen.Ag.946).

<sup>36</sup> Eur.Hec.563.

<sup>37</sup> Sen.Ag.953–1012, except for Sen.Ag.986–7.

<sup>38</sup> PS, fol. 59r.

<sup>39</sup> John Studley in Seneca, *His Tenne Tragedies* (London: Thomas Marsh, 1581), fols. 159v–160v. The word I modernised into ‘moved’ reads ‘moude’, which does not appear among the early modern past forms of ‘move’ in *OED*.

<sup>40</sup> PS, fol. 60r.

Almost two thirds (62.6%) of Act 4 are translated from Sophocles' *Electra*. In the first scene, based on the Sophoclean prologue,<sup>41</sup> Eurysthenes (so the pedagogue is called) and Orestes devise a plan according to which the old man will pretend to be a messenger announcing Orestes' death. Orestes performs a sacrifice at his father's tomb with 'streams of milk', 'sweet flowers', and 'locks' of his hair, the same items that Chrysothemis will find later.<sup>42</sup> Unlike the Sophoclean source, Pylades is a speaking character: In this scene, he discusses the future of Mycenae with Orestes, supporting him as the next king and persuading him to take revenge.

The second scene, also an addition, focuses on Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. The queen is overcome by a sense of guilt for killing Agamemnon; Aegisthus tries to comfort her. Both express their feelings through a typical Senecan stylistic device, the cumulative asyndeton, such as '[l]ove, hate, hope, fear, joy, sorrow', sometimes coupled with oxymorons ('sweet foe, and loving enemy').<sup>43</sup> For Aegisthus' sake, Clytemnestra pretends to feel better but as soon as he leaves, she asks for music to soothe her pain; there follows a song celebrating music's soothing effect. This 'meta-song' contains a haunting reference to a 'tiger fierce'.<sup>44</sup> While in their respective *Agamemnon*s Aeschylus and Seneca associate Clytemnestra with a lioness,<sup>45</sup> in *Medea* Seneca defines the namesake protagonist as a tiger; so does Studley in an addition to his translation.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the phrase 'tigre fierce' appears twice in Newton's collection.<sup>47</sup> The song thus implicitly associates Clytemnestra with Medea.

In the following scene, Eurysthenes announces Orestes' death, as planned. Electra bewails her brother's death<sup>48</sup>; Chrysothemis claims to have proof Orestes is alive—the tokens at Agamemnon's tomb—but Electra tells her the news delivered by the (false) messenger.<sup>49</sup> Electra then fails to persuade Chrysothemis to join her in seeking revenge. While the scene is mostly an expanded translation from Sophocles,<sup>50</sup> other sources potentially haunt the *Pelopidarum* author's intertextual memory. The description of Orestes' adversaries in the (falsely) fatal chariot race 'whip[ping] their milk-white steeds, whose thundering hooves/seemed to make the earth quake for fear' combines Senecan and Ovidian imagery in contemporary English translations: The phrase 'quake for fear' occurs in Newton's collection<sup>51</sup> and the 'milk-white steeds' image derives from Arthur

<sup>41</sup> Soph.*EL*1–53, 67–73, 77–85.

<sup>42</sup> PS, fols. 61v, 67v; Soph.*EL*895–6, 901.

<sup>43</sup> PS, fols. 63v, 64v.

<sup>44</sup> PS, fol. 64v.

<sup>45</sup> 'two-footed lioness' (δίπους λέαινα, Aesch.*Ag*.1258); 'daring lioness' ('audacis leae', Sen.*Ag*.740).

<sup>46</sup> 'tigris', Sen.*Med*.864; 'untamed tiger', Seneca, *Tenne Tragedies*, fol. 120v.

<sup>47</sup> Seneca, *Tenne Tragedies*, fols. 91v, 162v.

<sup>48</sup> PS, fol. 67r; Soph.*EL*805–15, 826–40, 845–70.

<sup>49</sup> PS, fols. 67v–68v; Soph.*EL*871–1006.

<sup>50</sup> Soph.*EL*660–803, with the omission of Soph.*EL*701–8, 761–3.

<sup>51</sup> Seneca, *Tenne Tragedies*, fols. 82r, 128v, 138r, 209r, 211r.

Golding's version of the *Metamorphoses*.<sup>52</sup> Finally, the chorus, with no counterpart in Sophocles, recapitulates the events, assesses the characters' behaviour, and anticipates the content of the following act.

One of the chorus' proleptic sentences—'nature against revenge [is] a great restraint'<sup>53</sup>—encapsulates Act 5's first scene, centred on Orestes' nagging doubts about killing Clytemnestra out of respect for the natural bond to his mother. In a monologue, Orestes describes the rites he has performed at his father's tomb with details from all the three Greek tragedians.<sup>54</sup> Eurysthenes privately urges Pylades to watch on Orestes so that he does not hesitate out of fear of being 'unnatural'; Pylades should simply 'make him forget nature'.<sup>55</sup> As Orestes joins them, Eurysthenes promises to seek support for his rightful claim to the throne. Unlike the Sophoclean source, Orestes shares with Pylades his doubts on Apollo's oracle: If it had not been the oracle to order to kill his mother, he thinks it would be 'impious'.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Orestes attributes the murder of Agamemnon to Aegisthus but Pylades persuades him that his mother needs to die too, like his Aeschylean counterpart in *Choephoroi*.<sup>57</sup> In Euripides' *Electra*, it is the namesake character, not Pylades (who has a non-speaking role in both Sophocles and Euripides), who encourages Orestes to fulfil Apollo's command.<sup>58</sup>

Urged by Eurysthenes, Orestes and Pylades start implementing the plan. As they bump into Electra, Orestes at first pretends to be a messenger carrying her brother's ashes but then reveals his identity. Electra rejoices in this moment of *anagnorisis* enabled by Orestes' 'ring' ('seal', Soph.*EL*1223) once possessed by Agamemnon.<sup>59</sup> As Clytemnestra enters, Orestes reveals his identity to her too and, as she asks for forgiveness, he hesitates once again, just before striking her with his sword. Euripides' *Electra* resurfaces in the way Orestes formulates his doubts and in Clytemnestra's partial regret.<sup>60</sup> Orestes' last-minute hesitation dramatizes his Euripidean counterpart's account of how Clytemnestra begged him and he almost 'let go of the

<sup>52</sup> 'milk-white steed' for 'albo...equo' in Ov.*Met.*15.189–90; cf. Ovid, *The xv. books of P. Ovidius Naso* (London: Wilyam Seres, 1567), fol. 80v; Ovid, *Metamorphoses Volume II*, trans. F. J. Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916).

<sup>53</sup> PS, fol. 69r.

<sup>54</sup> The invocation to Hermes is taken from Aesch.*Cho.*1, 6; the address to Pylades and the offering of animal blood from Eur.*EL*82, 92; Orestes offers the blood of a sheep, whereas in *Pelopidarum* Orestes offers that of oxen. The offering of his hair derives from all the three tragedians: Aesch.*Cho.*7; Soph.*EL*52; Eur.*EL*91. All references to Euripides are taken from Euripides, *Suppliant Women, Electra, Heracles*, ed. and trans. David Kovacs (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>55</sup> PS, fol. 70v.

<sup>56</sup> PS, fol. 72r.

<sup>57</sup> Aesch.*Cho.*899–907.

<sup>58</sup> Eur.*EL*966–87.

<sup>59</sup> Soph.*EL*1099–1202, 1205–29, 1257–70, 1293, 1299–1303, 1307–9, 1322–3, 1326, 1331–41, 1346, 1349–50, 1361.

<sup>60</sup> Eur.*EL*969, 1105–6.



An allusion to William Wykeham, bishop of Winchester, founder of the college in 1382, suggests a connection of the performance with the celebration of Founder's Day (21 December)<sup>70</sup>:

Know this: that our most thankful recompence  
 Can but account you founders of our credit  
 And join you with good William of Wykeham.  
 Think this: that is no small magnificence  
 To be the founders of a college praise.<sup>71</sup>

Like Wykeham, the audience are 'founders', that is, founders of the good reputation ('credit') and the praise of the college. On Founder's Day or other festive occasions, students' performances were part of the celebrations and played an important part in maintaining and, if possible, increasing the prestige of a school which relied on the fees paid by wealthy parents.<sup>72</sup> Since its foundation, the college provided for 70 'scholars', whose education was free, but also welcomed 'commoners', sustained by their families.<sup>73</sup> This also explains the high number of speaking parts in *Pelopidarum* (36)<sup>74</sup> with such large casts, performances were meant to reinforce the pupils' sense of belonging. Students had an active role not only in the play's performance but also in its transcription, entrusted to 16 different hands of the college members.<sup>75</sup>

By displaying the students' training and skills, school performances functioned as a marketing tool for increasing the institution's prestige.<sup>76</sup> Alongside showcasing the school's reputation, however, theatrical performances were didactic tools. Whether author of *Pelopidarum* or not, the headmaster Johnson organized and supported theatrical exercises. In a dictated lesson written down by one of his pupils, William Badger, Johnson explains that, thanks to acting, students learnt

with what expression, with what gestures something should be pronounced. For there should be in the voice a certain amount of elevation, depression and modulation, in the body decorous movement without prancing around, sometimes quieter, at others more vehement, with stamping of the feet accommodated to the subject.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>70</sup> The school was a preparation for pupils meant to enter New College, Oxford, which Wickham had founded in 1379; cf. Greenfield and Cowling, 'Pelopidarum Secunda'.

<sup>71</sup> PS, fol. 81v.

<sup>72</sup> A. F. Leach, *A History of Winchester College* (London: Duckworth, 1899), 152; Greenfield and Cowling, 'Historical Background', in *REED: Hampshire*.

<sup>73</sup> Greenfield and Cowling, 'Historical Background'.

<sup>74</sup> Greenfield and Cowling, 'Performance Traditions', in *REED: Hampshire*.

<sup>75</sup> Greenfield and Cowling.

<sup>76</sup> Amanda Eubanks Winkler, *Music, Dance, and Drama in Early Modern English Schools* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 65, 74.

<sup>77</sup> Christopher Johnson, 'Dictates from Winchester College', in Greenfield and Cowling (eds), *REED: Hampshire*, translation by Abigail Ann Young and Stephen P. Anderson.

[Debet enim in voce elevatio, depressio, ac flexus quidam esse, in corpore motus sine iactatione decorus interdum remissior, interdum etiam vehementior, cum pedum supplotione ad rem accommodata.]

According to Johnson, acting improved a variety of skills: expression ('ore'), gestures ('gestibus'), modulation of the voice tone ('in voce elevatio, depressio, ac flexus'), and body language accompanying the deliver ('in corpore motus'). In another lesson, Johnson asked his students to reflect as audience on the role of the chorus through the question: 'What effect does the poetic chorus have on you?'.<sup>78</sup>

Some stage directions in *Pelopidarum secunda* reflect such a wide-ranging competence expected from the students. In the scene in which Clytemnestra is torn between the love for Aegisthus and 'matrons' chastity', a stage direction gives instructions on how the actor should express such inner conflict through movement and meaningful silence: 'Here stay. So stepping farther a little and pausing begins as after'.<sup>79</sup> In another lesson registered by Badger, Johnson vented his frustration in organizing performances: He lamented not only the difficulty in the processes of *inventio* and *dispositio* of the text and the expenses for the scenery but also how exasperating it was to train students who were 'a little inept' ('paulo ineptiores').<sup>80</sup> Detailed stage directions were possibly meant to guide inexperienced students-actors.

By referring to the body's 'decorous movement' ('motus decorus'), Johnson also drew attention to the performances' kinaesthetic dimension, which is mirrored by some stage directions in *Pelopidarum*. In Act 4, the chorus members are strangely enough expected to start from 'the east', 'chang[e] their places to the west' and 'to the midst'.<sup>81</sup> This could be explained as reference to the exit direction taken by the character whose actions are being commented upon by the chorus. The first speech mostly concerns Orestes; 'the east' might correspond to the direction that Orestes took in his exit before. The second is about Clytemnestra and Eurysthenes, who exited together just before the chorus. The last focuses on Electra; the chorus is expected to stay in the middle ('midst'), perhaps because she is still on stage.

Other stage directions involve the movement of kneeling, thereby betraying a Christianizing adaptation of classical rituals. Clytemnestra kneels when addressing Jove in a prayer, and so does Agamemnon when thanking the gods for his victory; Aegisthus kneels when he is about to kill Atreus and sacrifice

<sup>78</sup> British Library, Add. MS 4379 quoted in K. Money, 'Johnson, Christopher', in *ODNB*.

<sup>79</sup> PS, fol. 32r.

<sup>80</sup> Johnson, 'Dictates'.

<sup>81</sup> PS, fols. 69r–v. Alternatively, this movement was meant to imitate the Earth's rotation, *motum mundi* as happens in Ben Jonson's *Masque of Beauty*, but such masque-like sophistications seem improbable in a school context.

him to the gods in his vengeance; finally, Orestes kneels when asking for protection.<sup>82</sup> While there are examples of kneeling in Greek literature and art, the practice was most unusual in praying, especially for men, and was generally confined to highly emotional supplications.<sup>83</sup> Kneeling was a standard Christian praying gesture; on top of that, a statue of the founder Wykeham kneeling towards the Virgin Mary nestles within a niche in the tower leading to the college's inner court. This image must have haunted the student's visual memory, as it literally loomed over them when they entered the college through Middle Gate.

A Christianizing approach also informs the ethical–theological framework according to which the events are interpreted by the chorus. In Act 1, they comment on the servant Agathia's suicide from a typically Christian perspective:

The maid that took her crime to be so heinous  
 For strangling of Aeropas though unwilling,  
 Did kill herself to clear her conscience,  
 And so repenting doubled her offence.  
 As though when faults by ignorance do stain us,  
 Nothing could wash our hearts but blood and killing.<sup>84</sup>

Clearing one's conscience, the sacrificial logic of purifying a sin with blood, and the conception of suicide as an 'offence' reflects a Christianizing approach, which syncretically mingles with the Aristotelian notion of *hamartia* ('faults by ignorance').<sup>85</sup>

As shown by the influence of Christian rituals, *Pelopidarum* was permeable to other performative contexts, including the church. Because the memories of 'past roles, past performers, and past performance contexts do not fade' but rather keep 'haunt[ing] the performative present', in Amanda Eubanks Winkler's words, school performances have an 'interstitial, liminal nature' and 'might be haunted by the church, the court, the bawdry of the public stage'.<sup>86</sup>

*Pelopidarum* features examples of 'ghosting' from all these three contexts. 'The bawdry of the public stage' is coupled with classical models in a traditionally comic character: the braggart soldier Megasthenes, who dominates one of the additions to the sources. Megasthenes, in charge with the celebrations for Agamemnon's victory, pictures the triumph as follows:

<sup>82</sup> PS, fols. 41r, 47v, 48v, 61v.

<sup>83</sup> W. D. Furley, 'Prayers and Hymns', in Daniel Ogden (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Religion* (London: Blackwell, 2007), 127; S. G. Cole, *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 116; Simon Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 190.

<sup>84</sup> PS, fol.37r.

<sup>85</sup> On the circulation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, see Micha Lazarus, 'Sidney's Greek Poetics.' *Studies in Philology*, 112 (2015): 504–36.

<sup>86</sup> Eubanks Winkler, *Music, Dance, and Drama*, 36.

I'll follow after in a coach most riche.  
 These Trojans jennets will make coach mares for the turn.  
 Blush not, sweet beauties, I shall honour you  
 To join in triumph with Megasthenes.<sup>87</sup>

In mocking the mourning Trojan women, turning them into 'jennets' and 'mares', Megasthenes sexualizes them and, in referring to their 'blushing', involves the audience, who might also have reacted so for the titillating comparison.

While the general audience might have been reminded of *capitano* figures from comedies influenced by *commedia dell'arte* or even Vice morality-play characters, students were familiar with the braggart-soldier type also through Roman comedy. Comedies by Terence and Plautus were regularly read and put on at Winchester in the 1560s<sup>88</sup>; the figure of Megasthenes probably evoked those past comic performances, which perhaps even featured the same student-actor 'typecast' for such braggart-soldier roles.<sup>89</sup> Thus, the body of the typecast actor might have haunted the audience's memory. Another character, Talthybius (a name that the learned among the audience might have remembered from Euripides' *Hecuba*) draws attention to the physical qualities of Megasthenes<sup>90</sup>:

Believe it, king, view but that personage  
 That justifies far greater likelihoods  
 He is as tall a captain of his hands  
 As are the cedar trees in Lybanus<sup>91</sup>  
 ...  
 Then, good Megasthenes, do thyself advance  
 And verify all with thy countenance.<sup>92</sup>

Talthybius prompts him to come forward to be inspected by the king and, by extension, the whole audience.

In the epilogue, the students-actors admit that the play is fraught with 'great deadness'<sup>93</sup> and 'undecentness',<sup>94</sup> but they frame these features within the

<sup>87</sup> PS, fol. 48r.

<sup>88</sup> T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, vol. 1 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), 326.

<sup>89</sup> On typecasting as a form of 'ghosting', see Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, 8–9.

<sup>90</sup> From μέγας and σθένος, 'huge strength', Megasthenes was perhaps a speaking name referring to a well-built actor or an ironical in-joke to mock a slender student-actor.

<sup>91</sup> The image of cedar trees appears in several Psalms (29, 72, 80, 83, 88, 104, 148), which further testifies to the porosity of school drama to the religious performance context.

<sup>92</sup> PS, fol. 46v.

<sup>93</sup> PS, fol. 81r. This is probably an earlier occurrence of the word than the first one registered in the *OED* (1607).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

carnavalesque atmosphere of the festive day. Students rejoice for the ephemeral freedom they are granted, literally in their body and soul, with their ‘arms and legs that do but once a year/ act freed from a gown’.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, they try to make amends before ‘God, the Queen, and the founder’,<sup>96</sup> which betokens the playwright’s concern that the audience, especially parents, would regard the play as morally harmful to their offspring, who might be corrupted by playing such negative roles.

Concerns over the contagious effects of negative examples emerge in an addition to a passage translated from the Senecan source. As Clytemnestra inquires on why Electra, a virgin, dared appear in public, the latter retorts:

I, being a maiden, left<sup>97</sup> the adulterers  
Lest the like vices should pollute my mind.<sup>98</sup>

The second line, which attributes to Electra a conception of vice as contagious, is an addition by the *Pelopidarum* author, with no counterpart in Seneca nor in Studley’s version.<sup>99</sup> The author might have reworked the *sententia* uttered by the Sophoclean Electra (‘shocking behaviour is taught by shocking things’)<sup>100</sup> or anti-theatricalist attacks with Platonic echoes such as Stephen Gosson’s: ‘The expressing of vice by imitation brings us by the shadow, to the substance of the same’.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, in the early modern imagination, imitation in acting necessarily involved the actor’s self-inducing to feel those emotions in the first place. In commenting on the Ciceronian process of *actio*, a sixteenth-century student remarked: ‘As Cicero saith it is almost impossible for an orator to stir up a passion in his auditors except he be first affected with the same passion himself’.<sup>102</sup>

A comparison with another late-sixteenth-century school adaptation from classical sources confirms that other school performances struggled to strike a balance between morality and entertainment. Performed at Berwick Grammar School and attributed to Aristotle Knowsley, a play

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> In the article, the word reads ‘felt’ but, considering that it should translate ‘deserui’, I amended it into ‘left’; also, since there are no variants in the transmission of this word, it is highly unlikely that the printed edition used by the author had a variant reading; cf. apparatus criticus in the Oxford Classical Texts edition of Seneca’s tragedies; cf. Seneca, *Tragoediae*, ed. Otto Zwierlein (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 290.

<sup>98</sup> PS, fol. 57r.

<sup>99</sup> Sen.Ag.955: ‘Adulterorum virgo deserui domum’; Seneca, *Tenne Tragedies*, 158v: ‘I have with my virginity the houses of bawds forsook’.

<sup>100</sup> Soph.EI.621: αἰσχροῖς γὰρ αἰσχρὰ πράγματα ἐκδιδάσκειται.

<sup>101</sup> Stephen Gosson, *Plays confuted in five actions* (London: for Thomas Gosson, 1582), fol. G4v. The notion of acting as contagious goes back to Plato’s *Republic* (Pl.*Resp.*395c-d) and was widespread in early modern debates on theatre; cf. E. R. Sanders, ‘The Body of the Actor in *Coriolanus*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57 (2006), 392–93.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 4, 121 (Folger MS V.a.381, fol. 94).

entitled *Tragedie called Oedipus* (1596–1603) equally features morally questionable characters performed by children.<sup>103</sup> As Eubanks Winkler claims, school performances such as Knowsley's *Oedipus*—and, as I argue, *Pelopidarum* too—'negotiated the boundary between licensed revelry and the enactment of vice, holding in tension a desire for moral education with the need to produce a lively, interesting play'.<sup>104</sup> Conceived as 'tension-releasing rituals',<sup>105</sup> both plays testify to a clash between the pedagogical expectations of a school performance context and the transgression triggered by carnivalesque license. Arguably, the choice of illustrious classical sources was meant to further justify such 'tension-releasing rituals', in a sort of 'classics-washing process'.

In Knowsley's *Oedipus*, this 'tension-releasing' effect is achieved through music, with the inclusion of two transgressive songs.<sup>106</sup> *Pelopidarum* also features music but to a lesser extent: as seen above, Act 4 contains a song requested by Clytemnestra to soothe her sense of guilt after killing Agamemnon. There is however another trace of music: In the last chorus, two speeches contain a refrain ('earth unawares consenteth to the skies' and 'gods will have offenders blind'), whose sententious tone and regular repetition evoke the structure and the singing practice of some psalms.<sup>107</sup> Psalm singing was part of early modern school statutes<sup>108</sup> and was practiced at Winchester too, as confirmed by Christopher Johnson in the poem on the students' daily routine.<sup>109</sup>

Alongside the performance context of the church, *Pelopidarum* is haunted by performances at court. Like early neoclassical drama performed both on academic stages and at court such as *Gorboduc* (1561), *Pelopidarum* contains potentially controversial political commentary, entrusted to the long choruses. At the end of Act 3, a chorus member thus comments on Aegisthus' murder of Agamemnon:

Rebellion hath reason  
To put some princes down,  
When the reward of treason  
Is no less than a crown.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Eubanks Winkler, *Music, Dance, and Drama*, 133–34.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> One is a lullaby, which is transgressive in its performance circumstances: a boy actor singing a traditionally female music genre; the other is a ballad openly celebrating children's unruliness; cf. Eubanks Winkler, *Music, Dance, and Drama*, 133–42.

<sup>107</sup> PS, fols. 80r–v. There are refrains in Psalm 107 ('Then they did cry in their distress, unto the Lord for aid'; 'Let men therefore before the Lord confess His kindness then') and Psalm 136 ('for his mercy endureth for ever'); cf. Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins, *The Whole Booke of Psalmes* (London: John Day, 1565), 146–7, 181 [wrongly numbered as 182].

<sup>108</sup> Eubanks Winkler, *Music, Dance, and Drama*, 40.

<sup>109</sup> Johnson, 'De collegio', 10, 20.

<sup>110</sup> PS, fol. 60r.

Although Aegisthus depicts Agamemnon as a tyrant,<sup>111</sup> his regicide is nonetheless branded as a rebellious and treacherous act. The chorus' conservative stance reflects contemporary Protestant resistance theory, according to which any rebellion attempted by a private citizen is to be condemned, even if the ruler behaves like a tyrant.<sup>112</sup> The chorus' belief in unconditional obedience is confirmed by their comment on Orestes' murder of the 'prodigious tyrants':<sup>113</sup> Clytemnestra and Aegisthus:

Thus we wish for a thing, to loath it after:  
First we slaughter a king, then hate the slaughter.  
Pull authority down to gain a mad man,  
Better 't were for a crown retain a bad man.<sup>114</sup>

The choice of the Pelopides' saga as subject connects *Pelopidarum secunda* with a play which may have been performed at court by a boy company: John Pickering's *A Newe Enterlude of Vice Conteyning the Historye of Horestes* (1567).<sup>115</sup> This play is one of the verbal sources of Knowsley's *Oedipus*<sup>116</sup>; this intertextual connection testifies to the permeability of school performances. Moreover, it corroborates the possibility that *Pelopidarum* was influenced by *Horestes* or that at least they shared a common system of extratextual references.

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### *Extratextual memories and revenge tragedy*

This section sets the play within a network of (near-)contemporary works, including *Horestes*, which share political allegories and discourses. In so doing, I argue that *Pelopidarum* may have alluded to contemporary figures not by simply mirroring them, as a 'mere pointer back to extratextual reality',<sup>117</sup> but appropriating political discourses and engaging with debates surrounding such figures.

Although performed and written in different contexts, both *Pelopidarum secunda* and *Horestes* feature a character with contemporary political implications: Clytemnestra. This figure had been associated with Mary Queen of Scots since the late 1560s for the similarity of her presumed involvement in

<sup>111</sup> PS, fols. 35r–v: 'cruel tyranny', 'tyrants' use'.

<sup>112</sup> Allyna Ward, "'Whosoever Resisteth Shall Get to themselves Dampnacioun': Tyranny and Resistance in *Cambises* and *Horestes*", *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 38 (2008), 150–1.

<sup>113</sup> PS, fol. 61v.

<sup>114</sup> PS, fol. 79v.

<sup>115</sup> On the doubts concerning the performance at court, see Wiggins and Richardson, *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue, Vol. 2: 1567–1589* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8.

<sup>116</sup> Eubanks Winkler, *Music, Dance, and Drama*, 140–41.

<sup>117</sup> Jean Howard, 'The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies', in *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama*, ed. Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 27.

the murder of her second husband Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley; the association was made for instance by the Scottish poet Robert Sempill, whose poems circulated in England too.<sup>118</sup> Anti-Marian propaganda associated the queen also with classical sorceresses such as Medea and Circe; while the Scottish Witchcraft Act was passed under Mary's reign,<sup>119</sup> George Buchanan draws attention to the fact that in one of the Casket letters, Mary styled herself as Medea, 'a bloody woman and as poisoning witch' in *Ane detectioun of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes* (1571), which was printed and circulated in England.<sup>120</sup> Finally, Edmund Spenser probably alluded to Mary in the figure of the witch Acrasia.<sup>121</sup>

The association of Mary with witches sheds a sinister and much more controversial light on the play than the usual connection between Mary and Clytemnestra. If the play was indeed written around 1590, the unusual killing of Aeropas, an episode of parricide in its broadest meaning of killing a relative (the daughter-in-law Clytemnestra unwittingly killing her mother-in-law Aeropas), may have alluded to a recent parricide, which also happened to be a regicide: the execution of Mary by the order of Queen Elizabeth I in 1587.<sup>122</sup> In the play's first scene, Hipparchus underlines that he has orchestrated the murder as both regicide and parricide: It is a murder involving 'a queen [executing] upon a queen/ ... a cousin and a queen'.<sup>123</sup> Two elements would further reinforce this topical connection: Aeropas's disguise as the witch Dipsas, who would stand for Mary, and the despair into which Clytemnestra falls after realizing that she killed Aeropas. Clytemnestra's distress may correspond to Elizabeth's own reluctance to order the execution of Mary, an aspect on which Elizabethan propaganda insisted, to exonerate the queen.<sup>124</sup> Such an unfavourable association of Elizabeth with Clytemnestra would have been a very transgressive move, considering that the Greek tragic figure had become a byword for Mary thanks to anti-Marian propaganda. However, Winchester had a reputation of resistance to

<sup>118</sup> There is no record of either Sempill's or Buchanan's works in the extant inventories and catalogues of Winchester College; see James Willoughby (ed.), *The Libraries of Collegiate Churches* (London: The British Library Board, 2013), 595–861. However, these works circulated in England: see J. E. Phillips, *Images of a Queen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 44–49; Priscilla J. Bawcutt, 'Sempill, Robertunlocked (d. 1595?)', in *ODNB*.

<sup>119</sup> Julian Goodare, 'The Scottish Witchcraft Act', *Church History*, 74 (2005), 39–67.

<sup>120</sup> George Buchanan, *Ane detectioun of the duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes* (London: Daye, 1571), fols. Kiii, U3r; I. D. McFarlane, *Buchanan* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 302. While the authenticity of the letters is still debated, in one of those Buchanan appended to his attack, Mary does implicitly identify with Medea; see Cathy Shrank, "'This fatal Medea,'" "this Clytemnestra": Reading and the Detection of Mary Queen of Scots', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 73 (2010), 527–28.

<sup>121</sup> Kerby Neill, 'Spenser's Acrasia and Mary Queen of Scots', *PMLA*, 60 (1945), 682–88, and Debra Barrett-Graves, 'Mermaids, Sirens, and Mary, Queen of Scots: Icons of Wantonness and Pride', in Debra Barrett-Graves (ed.), *The Emblematic Queen: Extra-Literary Representations of Early Modern Queenship* (New York: Macmillan, 2013), 80–82.

<sup>122</sup> Cowling and Greenfield, 'Pelopidarum secunda'.

<sup>123</sup> PS, fols. 27r-v.

<sup>124</sup> Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, 124–25.

Protestantism between the 1560s and the 1590s. Therefore, as Cowling and Greenfield have suggested, veiled criticism of Elizabeth might have struck a chord with the audience who disliked her.<sup>125</sup>

If *Pelopidarum secunda* rests instead on the political allegory of Clytemnestra as Mary,<sup>126</sup> this reading may have encompassed other figures such as Orestes. Although cross-gender identifications with classical models were rare,<sup>127</sup> Orestes himself may have been a projection of Elizabeth. Not only Clytemnestra's regret after killing Aerope but also Orestes' hesitation in killing his mother could allude to Elizabeth's reluctance to agree to execute Mary. Albeit referring to Orestes' murder of Clytemnestra, a line of the last chorus quoted above ('First we slaughter a king, then hate the slaughter') could also apply to Elizabeth's reluctant regicide of Mary.

The figure of Orestes lends itself to another tantalizing allegorical reading: Orestes as James VI of Scotland. When Pickering's *Horestes* was published in 1567, Mary's son James was only 1 year old; therefore, it is unlikely that he was projected onto Orestes. However, '*Horestes* has an oddly prophetic aspect'<sup>128</sup>: 20 years after the play's publication, when Mary was about to be executed for treason, James, like Orestes, had to deal with a mother accused of adultery and the murder of her husband. *Pelopidarum* may have been written around that same period, in which James, then in his early twenties, was carefully expressing his diplomatic stance towards his mother, whom he had not seen since he was a baby. James' position was therefore informed by political convenience, not by filial love. In a letter to Elizabeth, written in a last attempt to intercede for his mother's life, James' concerns are primarily political such as the preservation of the divine right of kings, but he defines Mary as his 'natural mother' and mentions 'nature', alongside 'honour', as motive that 'binds and obliges [him]'.<sup>129</sup>

Beyond any specific political allegory, the characterization of Orestes in *Pelopidarum* as well as in Pickering's play deploys natural law discourse. In *Horestes*, the allegorical figure personifying nature ('Dame Nature') tries to

<sup>125</sup> Cowling and Greenfield, 'Pelopidarum secunda'.

<sup>126</sup> The lack of overt references may suggest an earlier date than 1590, as a 15-year ban on anti-Marian propaganda was active from 1 March 1569 to 4 December 1584; see Phillips, *Images of a Queen*, 56, 118.

<sup>127</sup> An example is the identification of James with Clytemnestra; see R. S. Miola, 'Representing Orestes' Revenge', *Classical Reception Journal*, 9 (2017), 158 n24. Less rare were cross-genre identifications with biblical figures such as Elizabeth as Solomon, David, and Hezekiah; cf. Linda Shenk, *Learned Queen: The Image of Elizabeth I in Politics and Poetry* (New York: Macmillan, 2010), 14; Mary Villeponteaux, *The Queen's Mercy: Gender and Judgment in Representations of Elizabeth I* (New York: Macmillan, 2014), 107; Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring, and Sarah Knight (eds), *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 93.

<sup>128</sup> Karen Robertson, 'The Body Natural of a Queen: Mary, James, *Horestes*', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 26, 1 (1990), 33.

<sup>129</sup> Letter of James to Elizabeth in G. P. V. Akrigg (ed.), *Letters of King James VI and I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 81–82.

dissuade Orestes from killing his mother for the sake of natural ties.<sup>130</sup> However, the allegorical figure Vice, which reveals its real identity as Revenge, induces Horestes into pursuing his vindictive plan. This play contributes to making the Orestes myth paradigmatic for the inability of natural law to contain revenge. As seen above, in *Pelopidarum* Orestes' hesitation in killing his mother is connected to nature. In his prayer before killing Clytemnestra, Orestes asks the gods to

let me now nature itself forgo  
 Let duty, love, and all whatever respects  
 Cease towards her, who thus them all neglects!<sup>131</sup>

By reading Orestes' actions through natural law, both plays could trigger extratextual memories of contemporary discussions on Mary Stuart's process. After her execution, an anti-Marian tract possibly by Maurice Kyffin assesses Mary's and Elizabeth's conduct in light of natural law<sup>132</sup>; in a poem, Kyffin condemns 'cursed Circes', evoking Mary and wishes Elizabeth continued to rule 'as far, as course of Nature can afford'.<sup>133</sup> As part of this intertextual network, *Pelopidarum* contributes to exploring and problematizing the implications of a royal execution in the form of a classical revenge tragedy.

In *Pelopidarum*, the triumph of revenge, a word repeated 48 times throughout the play, is not shown through allegorical, morality-play characters such as Nature and Vice but through the display of its bloody effects. Unlike its classical sources and partly Pickering's *Horestes*,<sup>134</sup> revenge is not only obsessively mentioned but also carried out onstage without restraint. The play features five murders onstage out of revenge, all against family members and most of them involving blood, 'natural' relations: Atreus' stratagem to have Clytemnestra and Agathia kill his wife Aeropa; Aegisthus' murder of his uncle Atreus and of his cousin Agamemnon; Orestes' murder of his mother Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. The play's numerous onstage deaths, which utterly violate the Horatian *tolles ex oculis* proscription,<sup>135</sup> betray the contact with the incipient contemporary trend of revenge tragedies on the English commercial stage, a genre that may have started precisely with Pickering's *Horestes*<sup>136</sup>; Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592) and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594) were also written and staged around the early 1590s.

<sup>130</sup> Pickering, *Horestes*, fols. Biiiiir-Cir.

<sup>131</sup> PS, fol. 62r.

<sup>132</sup> *A defence of the Honorable Sentence...* (London: John Windet, 1587), G3r-H4r.

<sup>133</sup> Maurice Kyffin, *The blessedness of Britain* (London: John Windet, 1587), B2r-v; Phillips, *Images*, 121.

<sup>134</sup> In *Horestes*, the namesake protagonist hangs Egistus onstage (Pickering, Diiv) but only orders Clytemnestra's death (Diir); he does not kill her onstage.

<sup>135</sup> Horace advises against onstage violence in his *Ars Poetica* (Hor.Ars.182–6) but the rule is violated for example by Seneca in *Medea* (Sen.Med.970–1).

<sup>136</sup> George Oppitz-Trotman, *The Origins of English Revenge Tragedy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 113.

As a revenge tragedy, *Pelopidarum secunda* is a play whose engine is the memory of the dead.<sup>137</sup> As its English Electra puts it in Sophoclean words,

[h]e is foolish, which forgets his parents' death  
When they by treachery are slaughtered.<sup>138</sup>

Probably written around the time in which the early English revenge tragedies appeared, *Pelopidarum secunda* stages Sophocles' and Seneca's versions of the Pelopides' saga with a vengeance (pun intended). The play's repeated onstage violence partly clashes with school drama's pedagogical mission, slackened by the festive occasion for its performance; partly contributes to its memorableness, perhaps as a result of the intention to commemorate the founder of Winchester College. Despite being now mostly forgotten, therefore, *Pelopidarum secunda* aimed to be memorable. This is perhaps the reason why the play is replete with transgressive scenes and conveys controversial and ambiguous political messages. This play may have rekindled the audience's memories of the recent royal execution of Mary Stuart or, if performed earlier, participated in the debates surrounding her process, by deploying classical myths of revenge.

Alongside onstage violence, *Pelopidarum* features many other typical ingredients of Elizabethan revenge tragedies: the victim's ghost, the avenger's hesitation, and the intrusion of comic elements. Most importantly, however, *Pelopidarum* exhibits the direct, albeit not exclusive,<sup>139</sup> filiation of Elizabethan revenge tragedy from classical tragedy. The increasing availability of Greek and Senecan tragedy in printed editions and translations into Latin or vernacular contributed to shaping English revenge tragedies, by, as Tanya Pollard puts it, 'introducing both the idea of revenge tragedy and models for recreating it'.<sup>140</sup> While most English revenge tragedies mainly reworked and developed the most successful contemporary trends of the day (e.g. the play-within-the-play device), *Pelopidarum secunda* recuperated the classical models from which the genre originated and coupled them with elements from other 'haunting' performance contexts such as the church and the court. By showcasing Greek and Senecan tragedy in close translation,

<sup>137</sup> On the link between revenge and memory of the dead, see John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: From Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 170–92, and Thomas Rist, *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). Kerrigan argues that revenge and memory in revenge tragedies have a paradoxical relationship: while the past calls for revenge, remembering can become a lingering obstacle and distract the avenger from action.

<sup>138</sup> PS, fol. 51r; Soph. *EL* 145–46.

<sup>139</sup> Other traditions contributed to the development of revenge tragedy, such as morality plays; see Oppitz-Trotman, *English Revenge Tragedy*, 101–07.

<sup>140</sup> Tanya Pollard, 'Tragedy and Revenge', in Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 63; on the debt to classical drama, see also Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy*, 174: 'without an awareness of the long history of revenge tragedy, and, in particular, of the part played in it by classical drama, something must be lost from our reading of *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*'.

*Pelopidarum* sheds further light on the origins of English revenge tragedy. As a long-forgotten example of the role of the classics in the history of Elizabethan revenge tragedy, therefore, *Pelopidarum secunda* deserves a more prominent place in the history of early modern English drama as a whole.

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