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# EURIPIDES

Stories, texts & stagecraft

Edited by Mattia De Poli

COLLOQUIA

PADOVA  
**UP**

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6.

**Electra Loves Asyndeton.  
A Survey on Asyndetic Series of Imperatives  
in Ancient Greek Drama.**

*Mattia De Poli*

***Introduction.***

A theory about the use of asyndeton was first offered by Aristotle (IV BC)<sup>1</sup> and in the same period asyndeton often recurs by orators and playwrights, such as Demosthenes or Menander.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in the archaic poetry it is already attested by Homer – as the ancient rhetoricians knew<sup>3</sup> – and also lyric poets used it somehow.<sup>4</sup> Step by step, in the late V BC asyndeton arrives to Athens, where the Sophists – like Gorgias – wisely and widely exploited it<sup>5</sup> and dramatists, too, were well aware of the effects they could obtain by asyndeton, although sometimes this rhetorical figure has been neglected by modern scholars.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.12 [1413b-1414a]; see SIFAKIS 2002: 155-158. Cf. Pseudo-Longinus, *On the Sublime* 19-20; Demetrius, *On Style* 193-194. As for the rhetorical handbooks dealing with *tricolon* as a particular case of asyndeton, see BOCCOTTI 1975.

<sup>2</sup> See DENNISTON 1952: 99; FERRERO 1976. Both Demosthenes and Menander are usually quoted by Aristotle, Pseudo-Longinus and Demetrius: see the previous note.

<sup>3</sup> See ANGELI BERNARDINI 2008: 52. Cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.12.4 [1414a]; Pseudo-Longinus, *On the Sublime* 19.2.

<sup>4</sup> ANGELI BERNARDINI 2008: 52, singles out three different kind of asyndeton in lyric odes according to the context: 1) in programmatic sections, when the poet urges himself or the chorus to start or stop singing, go on with the song, select or omit arguments (cf. Pindar, *Nemean Odes* 4.37-38, 69-70, 7.48-51, 68-72); 2) in gnomic sections; 3) in narrative sections with different effects.

<sup>5</sup> DENNISTON 1952: 99.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, BREITENBACH 1934 doesn't mention asyndeton among the rhetorical figures in the Euripidean lyrics. For a list of asyndeta just in the Euripidean monodies, see DE POLI 2011: 361. Also Latin playwrights took advantages from the use of asyndeton: see BINI 1981, referring to both Plautus and Terentius.



According to the ancient rhetoricians, it «produces amplification»<sup>7</sup> and «gives the idea of an agitation which both checks the utterance and at the same time drives it on».<sup>8</sup> Modern scholars usually agree with this interpretation,<sup>9</sup> focusing on some effects like emphasis, strength and pathos. Now, if we consider that imperative as a verbal mood is used to give an order and the speaker assumes that the wished action or situation materialise as soon as possible,<sup>10</sup> the effect of two, three or more different imperative verbs in an asyndetic series will be even more striking.

As we might expect, a tricolon of imperatives is in Gorgias' *Defence of Palamedes* (fr. 11 a 22): εἰ δέ του μετέχοντος ἀκούσας, ὅστις ἐστίν, αὐτὸς ἐλθέτω, φανήτω, μαρτυρησάτω. If Odysseus' accusation relies on a participant, Palamedes invites his prosecutor to let him «come forward, show himself, bear witness», so the accusation will gain much in credibility. Although the effect of this particular asyndeton is slightly weakened by the usage of the third person, it is anyway an insistent demand: Palamedes is forcing the witness to come and face the indicted.

Now I will focus on asyndetic series of different imperative verbs at the second person: first in the Aristophanean comedies and in the Euripidean satyr-plays and tragedies, then within the utterances of Electra as a tragic character.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Some cases in the Aristophanean comedies.***

In the Aristophanean comedies we find asyndetic series of the same repeated verb and they probably produced singular effects, like «the cry of soldiers when no quarter was to be given».<sup>12</sup> But sequences of imperatives without any conjunction<sup>13</sup> are made up also of different verbs, as in the four following passages.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.12 [1413b]: ἔχει οὖν ἀϋξήσιμν.

<sup>8</sup> Pseudo-Longinus, *On the Sublime* 19: τὰ γὰρ ἀλλήλων διακεκομμένα καὶ οὐδὲν ἦττον κατεσπευσμένα φέρει τῆς ἀγωνίας ἔμφασιν. [...] τοιαῦθ' ὁ ποιητὴς ἐξήνεγκε διὰ τῶν ἀσυνδέτων.

<sup>9</sup> LAUSBERG 1960: 353; BECCARIA 2004: 92.

<sup>10</sup> Imperative expresses a stronger order than exhortative conjunctive or optative with ἄν: KÜHNER, GERTH 1898, I: 233-238.

<sup>11</sup> DENNISTON 1952: 99, makes a distinction between «*asyndeton at the comma*» or «half asyndeton», when it involves words or clauses, and «*full asyndeton*» or «asyndeton at the colon or full stop, *between sentences*», that is much rarer. A string of verbs like imperatives (or nouns or adjectives) is an half asyndeton, but sometimes in poetry such a distinction is not easy to be followed, so I avoid it.

<sup>12</sup> STARKIE 1909: 66, referring to Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 280. For the usual couple παῖε, παῖε, cf. Aristophanes, *Knights* 247, *Wasps* 456, *Peace* 1119. An «impressive tricolon in asyndeton» is in Aristophanes, *Birds* 851, but here the three verbs are present indicative: see DUNBAR 1995: 505. On series of imperatives in Aristophanes, see CAMPAGNER 2001: 12.

<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, a particular effect was produced also by a series of imperatives in polysyndeton, as in Aristophanes, *Knights* 251-252.

After destroying by fire Socrates' school, in *Clouds* 1508 δῖωκε, παῖε, βάλλε ... Strepsiades urges himself (and secondly his slave Xanthias)<sup>14</sup> to run after the philosophers and beat them, using a perfect tricolon within a spoken iambic trimeter.

In *Wasps* 1326 ἄνεχε, πάρεχε ...<sup>15</sup> a drunk Philocleon probably uses a formulaic expression and literally addresses himself while holding a torch, but he indirectly commands other people following and hassling him to back away, just threatening them by the torch: a couple of imperative verbs shapes two tribrachs, probably corresponding to a trochaic meter because of the following catalectic trochaic trimeters.

In *Birds* 364-365 ἐλελελεῦ· χῶρει, κάθες τὸ ῥύγχος, [...] / ἔλκε, τίλλε, παῖε, δεῖρε· κόπτε πρώτην τὴν χύτραν<sup>16</sup> the choryphaios speaks to the other birds of the chorus, although it is likely he does the same actions he speaks of, so they all together ward off the two human beings: after a war-cry, the choryphaios gives the birds the instructions to get ready for the assault (364), then he urges them to start their attack (365).<sup>17</sup> Both 364 and 365 are catalectic trochaic trimeters.

Finally, in *Birds* 1720-1721 ἄναγε, δίεχε, πάραγε, πάρεχε· / περιπέτεσθε μάκαρα μάκαρι σὺν τύχῃ<sup>18</sup> the whole chorus is singing: the first four verbs (1720) «blend three technical military commands [...] with what was probably a ritual shout at wedding processions»,<sup>19</sup> so the birds divide into two groups, and then they both start fluttering (1721) – and dancing – for the bride, Basileia, and the bridegroom, Peisetairos. We must understand the four second person singular imperatives and the second person plural one as self-intended orders. 1720 is a sequence of four tribrachs, probably corresponding to a trochaic dimeter, while 1721 is a catalectic trochaic trimeter starting by a tribrach and with other solutions.

<sup>14</sup> «Chase them, hit them, pelt them ... », SOMMERSTEIN 1982: 155. The attribution of 1508-1509 is a debate: see DI BARI 2013: 287-300. Generally, I follow DOVER 1968: 268. MASTROMARCO 1983: 90-91, is right referring εἰδῶς (1509) only to Strepsiades, but the imperatives at 1508 could be a kind of self-exhortation and the slave could co-operate with his master.

<sup>15</sup> «Lift the torch high, hold it near ... », STARKIE 1897: 360. For similar translations, see MASTROMARCO 1983: 545; COULON, VAN DAELE 1924: 74-75. These verbs are often translated as «Stand up! Make way!» (MACDOWELL 1971: 306) or «Stop! Make way!» (SOMMERSTEIN 1983: 129), and STARKIE 1897: 360, considers them like a «stereotyped Bacchic cry». Anyway, I believe that they originally were shouted by a person holding a torch during a (wedding) procession, like in Euripides' *Trojan Women* 308 (see DE POLI 2011: 149-150), and later they started meaning something like «Stop! Make way!», even without any torch there, maybe like in Euripides' *Cyclops* 203 (see USSHER 1978: 77-78): for this shift of meaning, see DUNBAR 1995: 754. An «ambiguous» meaning for this couple of imperatives was suggested by SEAFORD 1984: 142-143.

<sup>16</sup> «Eleleleu. Forward! Level your beaks! [...] / Pull them, pluck them, hit them, flay them! Strike the pot first», SOMMERSTEIN 1987: 59.

<sup>17</sup> For the words at 365 probably alluding to a children's game, see DUNBAR 1995: 277.

<sup>18</sup> «Arise, divide, deploy, make way! / Fly around him who is blest with blest fortune!», SOMMERSTEIN 1987: 195.

<sup>19</sup> DUNBAR 1995: 753.

Generally, these lines are uttered as a shout and military language is surely a great influence on most of them,<sup>20</sup> but case d) is slightly different because the chorus has no hostile intention: here imperatives are just meant to lead precise choral movements and dance in the orchestra for an happy event like the marriage of Peisetairos and Basileia. Otherwise, a single character – eventually helped by someone else – expresses his own anger, fury, aggressive intent against other people, and tribrachs or trochaics fit his excitement well.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Some cases in the Euripidean satyr-plays and tragedies.***

Also in satyr plays and tragedies a series of second person singular imperatives in asyndeton is usually a symptom of one's agitation and it means force and violence as either aggression or reaction. As far as Euripides is concerned, we can single out a couple of instances, that have something in common with those in the Aristophanes' comedies (and in lyric odes).

In *Cyclops* 203 ἄνεχε, πάρεχε<sup>22</sup> Polyphemos is holding no torch: so, although he utters the same words as Philocleon in Aristophanes' *Wasps* 1326, their translation can't understand any reference to it. The Cyclops, addressing Silenos and the other Satyrs, gives them the order to stop frenzy and make room: even if he doesn't use any specific military term, his approach has much of «the style of a sergeant-major».<sup>23</sup> These «bullying imperatives» mirrors his «despotic nature»<sup>24</sup> and shape two tribrachs that fill into an iambic trimeter and express Polyphemos' «agitation»<sup>25</sup> as well as his «impatience and anger».<sup>26</sup>

Otherwise, in *Trojan Women* 308 ἄνεχε, πάρεχε. φῶς φέρω, σέβω, φλέγω<sup>27</sup> a singular wedding ceremony is happening on the stage: Cassandra has been taken by Agamemnon as his concubine but, as a visionary, she feels happy like a true bride since she foreknows that the Greek hero will be killed because of her. No one can understand her joy, so Cassandra celebrates the rite by herself and plays a double role as both a bride and a ministrant, singing and holding a torch:

<sup>20</sup> As for war-cries, military commands or even cries of no quarter, see STARKIE 1911: 312, and DOVER 1968: 268 (cf. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 1508); DUNBAR 1995: 276-277 (cf. Aristophanes, *Birds* 364-365) and 753 (cf. Aristophanes, *Birds* 1720).

<sup>21</sup> As for an instance in “new comedy”, cf. Menander, *Dyskolos* 81 πάρες, φυλάττου, πᾶς ἄπελθ' ἐκ τοῦ μέσου, expressing Pyrrhios' agitation: see FERRERO 1976: 86-87. In Latin comedy, cf. Plautus, *Curculio* 88-89, with comic effect; Terentius, *Andria* 334, with pathetic effect: see BINI 1981: 117.

<sup>22</sup> «Get out of the way! Make way!», O'SULLIVAN, COLLARD 2013: 91.

<sup>23</sup> SEAFORD 1984: 142.

<sup>24</sup> O'SULLIVAN, COLLARD 2013: 158-159. About the effect produced by these imperatives, see also USSHER 1978: 77-78.

<sup>25</sup> SEAFORD 1984: 142-143.

<sup>26</sup> O'SULLIVAN, COLLARD 2013: 158-159.

<sup>27</sup> «Hold up the fire, display it! ... », MORWOOD 2000: 47, with a slight change, because he writes φέρ' as a third imperative. About the textual matters at this line, see DE POLI 2011: 149-150.

the two imperatives – the same as in Aristophanes' *Wasps* 1326 and Euripides' *Cyclops* 203 – are self-intended orders here as usual in ritual songs.<sup>28</sup> They don't imply any hostile intention toward the other Trojan women around her, but joy is blended with murderous fury against Agamemnon: these two tribrachs in a plausible iambo-cretic sequence (*ia cr ia*) express agitation and anger again.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Electra's voice and tragic asyndeton.***

Electra is the protagonist or one of the main characters in several tragedies: Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, Euripides' *Electra*, Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Orestes*. Now we are going to focus on asyndeton in these plays, mainly on strings of second person singular imperatives uttered by her.

In the eldest drama *Electra*, Orestes or the chorus often use imperatives to give orders, lament something or implore someone, but these verbs are never in an asyndetic series if we just except ἴδετε ... ἴδεσθ' ... (406-407): Orestes is the speaking character, he is lamenting over his family's misfortune and begging the Gods of the underworld to look at him and his sister and to help them, but it is properly a kind of anaphora, being two forms of the same verb repeated.<sup>30</sup> Anyway, it is inserted in the great *kommos* sung by the Chorus, Orestes and Electra, that is one of the highest emotional peaks in this Aeschylean tragedy.<sup>31</sup>

A true pathetic asyndeton is in Euripides' *Electra* 592-593: ἄνεχε χέρας, ἄνεχε λόγον, ἴει λιτάς,<sup>32</sup> a dochmiac or iambo-cretic line (*2dochm* or *2cr ia*). The Argive maidens fully express their happiness for Orestes' return home in a short choral song (585-595),<sup>33</sup> that is the only lyric section at the end of the recognition scene in this play. Here the dramatic function of asyndeton looks like that at the end of Aristophanes' *Birds* with the same joyful atmosphere.<sup>34</sup>

In the same play this rhetorical figure recurs again at least four times:<sup>35</sup> it

<sup>28</sup> Such imperatives look very like those in lyric odes: see above, note 4, as for the exhortative function (1).

<sup>29</sup> See LEE 1976: 125-127; SUSANETTI 2008: 161 note 62; DE POLI 2012: 116-120.

<sup>30</sup> See UNTERSTEINER 2002: 292. «There is probably no significance here, other than metrical, in the *variatio*»: maybe «the middle adds emphasis to the command or wish» (GARVIE 1986: 152).

<sup>31</sup> See GARVIE 1986: 122-125; UNTERSTEINER 2002: 255-257. It is probably an iambo-dochmiac context. For another instance, cf. 725 (chorus), discussed below. At the beginning of 491 (Orestes) and 492 (Electra) the verb μέμνησο is repeated in anaphora, but there is the correlative δέ. Cf. Euripides, *Electra* 672-673.

<sup>32</sup> «Raise hands, raise voice, send prayers», CROPP 1988: 45.

<sup>33</sup> As for this infraepisodic choral song, see CENTANNI 1991: 45-48.

<sup>34</sup> In Euripides' *Electra* 592-593 imperatives are probably intended not only to Electra but also to the chorus itself.

<sup>35</sup> Asyndeton is avoided at 1227-1228 (attributed to Orestes by modern editors, instead of the chorus), if we write καὶ at the beginning of 1228: for the critical matters, see DISTILO 2012: 593-594.

is employed in different situations and forms, but always by Electra. At 223 ἄπελθε, μὴ ψαῦ' ὧν ...<sup>36</sup> asyndeton is easy to explain because of her agitation and fear: suddenly Orestes stops hiding and shows himself to his sister, together with Pylades, but she doesn't recognize them and tries to repel those strangers and avoid their touch. In the prologue asyndeton is a main feature of Electra's monody (112-166). A string of nouns is at 143 ἰαχὰν αἰοιδὰν μέλος Ἰίδα<sup>37</sup> in the second strophe: the woman was going for water from the stream, holding a pitcher on her head; now she takes it off because she wants to raise her mournful song. She leaves her work: her new condition as wife of a farmer, living far from the royal palace and the city,<sup>38</sup> has charged her with that task, but she doesn't accept such punishment at all and finally she rises up. After refusing to go for water, she makes her protest aloud, crying and singing her lamentation, that is emphasised by asyndeton in a dochmiac context.

Such a final rebellion will enlighten two other asyndeta in this monody. One combined with repetition is in the anapaestic lines repeated as a refrain at the beginning of the first strophe (112-113) and antistrophe (127-128): σύντειν' (ῶρα) ποδοῦ ὀρμάν· ὦ, ἔμβρα ἔμβρα.<sup>39</sup> Echoing work songs,<sup>40</sup> Electra urges herself to carry out her task, but in her heart she considers it like an unfair punishment and the following participle κατακλαίουσα («in lamentation»), sounding like an aprosdoketon, explicit her opinion and feelings. These imperatives in asyndeton are self-intended orders, but we must suppose these words uttered as an attempt to force her will.

Mesode, inserted between the strophe and the antistrophe of the first pair, has another asyndeton (125-126): ἴθι τὸν αὐτὸν ἔγειρε γόνον, ἄναγε πολύδακρυον ἄδονάν.<sup>41</sup> Some words in these glyconic lines, first of all the three imperatives but also the noun ἄδονάν, are reminiscent of wedding songs, but they are once more mixed with other words explicitly referring to lamentation, such as γόνον and πολύδακρυον. Here asyndeton is striking and underlines Electra's sufferings, because her marriage to the farmer is as unfair as her general condition. So, when a stranger tries to touch her (223), it will be her final humiliation before the joy for Orestes' return home.

Asyndeton is well-suited to the Sophoclean Electra, too. Two cases are inserted in prayers, another one is in the reunion duet. In *Electra* 115 we find the first instance of a series of second person imperatives: ἔλθετ', ἀρήξατε,

<sup>36</sup> «Get away; keep your hands off those ... !», CROPP 1988: 19.

<sup>37</sup> «A wail, a song, a chant of Hades», CROPP 1988: 15. For textual and metrical matters, see DE POLI 2011: 125-128.

<sup>38</sup> For the particular condition of Electra in this play, see DISTILO, in this book (chapter 2).

<sup>39</sup> «Hasten on (for it is time) your urgent step; O, press on, press on», CROPP 1988: 13.

<sup>40</sup> See DE POLI 2012: 130-132. A similar asyndeton in a work song is in Euripides' *Cyclops* 55-56, although imperatives are addressed to the ewes here.

<sup>41</sup> «Come, rouse the same lament, stir up the pleasure that comes from many tears», CROPP 1988: 13.

τείσασθε πατρός φόνον ἡμετέρου.<sup>42</sup> In the prologue the protagonist of the play sings an anapaestic monody (86-120), lamenting her misfortune and finally praying the gods of the underworld to help her. At 110-120 the anapaestic feet often show a dactylic inversion, a usual phenomenon in solemn context:<sup>43</sup> it is evident also at 115, that express the first and main request in Electra's prayer using a perfect tricolon. She is asking for help, just like at 1380 αἰτῶ, προπίτνω, λίσσομαι:<sup>44</sup> three present indicative verbs meaning ask build up another perfect tricolon, again in the right middle of a prayer uttered in spoken iambic trimeters by Electra, that now addresses the sun-god Apollo. At the very beginning of the play she is all alone and hopes that Orestes comes back home, but her soul is totally intent on taking vengeance upon her mother and Aegisthus for Agamemnon's murder. Later, after Electra has recognised Orestes, when her brother and Pylades go into the palace to kill Clytemnestra, she repeats her prayer with a similar strength<sup>45</sup> and the same intention. First Electra «calls on them [i.e. chthonic deities] directly without fear of the consequences», then her «petition is a truly pious one which the god will now bring to a successful end».<sup>46</sup> Different pity, the same purpose, the same anger.

This change in Electra's behaviour is a consequence of Orestes' return home and even in the highest emotional part of the recognition scene, the reunion duet, she uses asyndeton to express her crazy happiness (1234-1235): ἐμόλετ' ἄρτίως, ἐφηύρετ', ἦλθετ', εἶδεθ' οὐς ἐχρήζετε.<sup>47</sup> If we except the first verb, that is followed by a temporal adverb, shaping a dochmiac (1234), the sequence is unbroken and again shaped as a perfect tricolon made of three indicatives in a full iambic trimeter (1235). The joy expressed by the choral song in Euripides' *Electra* 592-593 is now directly attributed by Sophocles to a singing Electra.

Finally, *Orestes*, a later Euripidean play, shows another face of Electra as tragic character in a different situation. She is looking after her suffering brother and tries to prevent any noise that might wake him up. Such a careful Electra asks the Argive women to make no sound walking or speaking: she is so worried about Orestes' sleeping that she gives them orders trice and each time she uses second person imperatives in asyndeton, first in two spoken iambic trimeters (136-137 ἡσύχῳ ποδὶ χωρεῖτε, μὴ ψοφεῖτε, μῆδ' ἔστω κτύπος)<sup>48</sup> and

<sup>42</sup> «Come, bring help, avenge the murder of our father», LLOYD-JONES 1994: 177. Cf. Pseudo-Euripides, *Rhesus* 370-371 ἐλθε φάνηθι, τὰν ζάχρυσον προβαλοῦ Πηλεΐδα κατ' ὄμμα πέλταν, «come, appear, hold before you your richly gilded shield» (FRIES 2014: 255).

<sup>43</sup> See DE POLI 2013: 110-117.

<sup>44</sup> «I ask, I fall before you, I implore», LLOYD-JONES 1994: 303.

<sup>45</sup> See KAMERBEEK 1974: 179.

<sup>46</sup> FINGLASS 2007: 131 (comparing 110-120 to Orestes' prayer at 67-72), 500 (comparing 1376-1383 to Clytemnestra' prayer at 655-659).

<sup>47</sup> «Now you have come; you have found, you have arrived, you have seen those whom you desired!», LLOYD-JONES 1994: 287. See KAMERBEEK 1974: 163; FINGLASS 2007: 473.

<sup>48</sup> «Walk with quiet step, make no noise, let there be no clattering», KOVACS 2002: 427. I consider

then in lyrics (140-142 σῖγα σῖγα, λεπτὸν ἵχνος ἀρβύλας τίθει, μὴ κτύπει, μηδ' ἔστω κτύπος, ἀποπρὸ βᾶτ' ἐκεῖσ' ἀποπρὸ μοι κοίτας, and 149-150 κάταγε κάταγε, πρόσιθ' ἀτρέμας, ἀτρέμας ἴθι· λόγον ἀπόδος ...),<sup>49</sup> mostly dochmiacs and with some repeated words that are probably expression of a frightened and annoyed Electra.

Even praying a chthonic deity as the Night in a dochmiac song,<sup>50</sup> she asks her some relief for the Agamemnon's troubled family (177): Ἐρεβόθεν ἴθι, μόλε μόλε κατὰπτερος.<sup>51</sup> At a first sight, it has nothing to do with the prayer to the gods of the underworld at the beginning of Sophocles' *Electra*, but suddenly the young woman reveals her dark side. After the foot-noise, produced by the chorus at 183, she changes her mind: speaking with the Argive women, she focuses her attention on Orestes' present condition and remembers the matricide. So, in another short dochmiac songs, that is in strophic response with the prayer to the Night, Electra abruptly claims that her mother first slew and then was slain (195 ἔκανες ἔθανες), using a couple of indicatives in asyndeton and directly addressing her mother, in a way that reveals her desperate anger.

In the Euripidean drama a string of two or three adjectives with privative ἀ- in asyndeton usually recurs in laments;<sup>52</sup> nevertheless the perfect tricolon ἀνάδελφος ἀπάτωρ ἄφιλος<sup>53</sup> in *Orestes* 310 has much more in common with «Nestor's strong language» in Homer's *Iliad* 9.63-64 ἀφρήτωρ ἀθέμιστος ἀνέστιός ἐστιν ἐκεῖνος ὃς πολέμου ἔραται ἐπιδημίου ὀκρυόνεντος.<sup>54</sup> The eldest Homeric hero utters a gnomic sentence that is intended to avoid any division among the warriors of the Greek army after a pessimistic speech of Agamemnon and the proud reaction of Diomedes: it is a kind of curse or public oath of allegiance. In the Euripidean tragedy Orestes has just invited Electra to enter the palace and have a rest, because he needs her assistance in every acuteness of his disease, and she accepts this invitation claiming her total dependence on him in a sort of private association.<sup>55</sup>

Again, brother and sister have got a plan, a criminal one: after their mother died, now they will murder Clytemnestra, their aunt, in order to punish

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these words as an example of asyndeton although μηδ'. Cf. also 141.

<sup>49</sup> «Softly, softly, your footsteps lightly place, take care to make no sound! Go back from the bed, please, go back!», KOVACS 2002: 427. «Come near, come near, approach gently, gently tread, and tell me ... », KOVACS 2002: 429. At 136-137 and 140-142 I follow KOVACS 2002, but these lines are disputed both for the attribution and for the authenticity. See WILLINK 1986: 103-107; DI BENEDETTO 1965: 34-35. For an analysis of 149-150, see WILLINK 1986: 109.

<sup>50</sup> For the attribution of this prayer to Electra, see DE POLI 2011: 262-264.

<sup>51</sup> «Come from the Erebus, come winging», KOVACS 2002: 431.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Euripides, *Andromache* 1216, *Hecuba* 669 [and 810-811, slightly different], *Suppliant Women* 966, *Trojan Women* 1186, *Iphigenia among the Taurians* 220, *Helen* 689.

<sup>53</sup> «Being without brother, father or friend», KOVACS 2002: 445. See WILLINK 1986: 136.

<sup>54</sup> «A clanless, lawless, hearthless man is he who loves the horror of the war among his own people», MURRAY 1999: 399. See HAINSWORTH 1993: 67.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Homer, *Iliad* 6.429-430.

Menelaus who refused to defend his nephews in the public assembly. While Orestes and Pylades are in, she stays outside and looks if anyone arrives on the street. She is fully intent in his role, so she urges also the Argive women of the chorus to be very careful with an asyndeton between two sentences in prosodiacs and dochmiacs (1266-1267): ἐλίσσετέ νυν βλέφαρον, κόρας διάδοτε πάντα διὰ βοστρύχων (*pros 2dochm*).<sup>56</sup>

Finally, the action. Electra is excluded from it, staying outside the palace, but her words have even more strength than Orestes' arms. Actually he doesn't kill Clytemnestra, but she does, shouting in enoplian (1302-1303): φονεύετε καίνετε θείνετε ἄλλυτε.<sup>57</sup> It doesn't matter what really happens inside the palace: it is likely Menelaus' wife dies and it is enough. In Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* Electra is not on the scene since 584 and, while Orestes and Pylades enter the palace together with Clitemnestra, the chorus sings a short song, but it prays just for help (725 νῦν ἐπάκουσον, νῦν ἐπάρηξον) and later, when also Aegisthus goes in, it asks for Orestes' victory (855-868 εἴη δ' ἐπὶ νίκῃ), but it doesn't want to look like an accomplice (872-874). Otherwise, asyndetic utterance is not usually concurrent with the murder. Neither in Aeschylean *Eumenides* 130 λαβὲ λαβὲ λαβὲ· φράζου nor in Pseudo-Euripidean *Rhesus* 675 βάλε βάλε βάλε. θένε θένε <θένε> the chorus' voice sounds as bloody as Electra's voice in *Orestes*, although they are all beastly somehow.<sup>58</sup>

## Conclusion.

Asyndeton is widely spread in ancient Greek drama and it usually emphasises highly pathetic moments, as rhetoricians observed: metrics is usually a clear symptom. Great emotions – desperation and joy, frustration and anger – are particularly proper to a tragic character like Electra, so it is quite easy that asyndeton is more well-suited to her rather than the chorus or other characters like Orestes: it is evident mainly in Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Orestes*, where Electra plays a role and uses asyndeton, that were not attributed to her in the previous tragedies.<sup>59</sup> Sophocles prefers perfect tricola,<sup>60</sup> while comedy is

<sup>56</sup> «Wheel your eyes about, turn your glance in all directions through the locks of your hair», KOVACS 2002: 553. For the structure of this asyndeton, cf. Eschylus, *Libation Bearers* 406-407, above.

<sup>57</sup> «Slaughter her, slay her, smite her, finish her», WEST 1987: 149. For the textual matters and the attribution of these lines, see DE POLI 2011: 292-293.

<sup>58</sup> For Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 130, see SOMMERSTEIN 1989: 106. For Pseudo-Euripides, *Rhesus* 675, see FRIES 2014: 370-371. For Euripides, *Orestes* 1302 (attributed to the chorus), see WILLINK 1986: 296; WEST 1987: 272.

<sup>59</sup> One might compare Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers* 770-773 and 779-780 (chorus) with Euripides, *Orestes* 1337-1343 (Electra): both have some asyndeta.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Sophocles, *Ajax* 896 οἴχωκ', ὄλωλα, διαπεπόρημαι (Tecmessas).



a possible influence on Euripides' *Orestes* also for the series of four imperatives.

“Basic” form (2 elements)

Aeschylus	<i>Libation Bearers</i> (406-407,) 725; <i>Eumenides</i> 130*.
Euripides	<i>Electra</i> 112-113* = 127-128*, 223; <i>Orestes</i> 177*, 195, 1266-1267

Tricolon (3 elements)

Euripides	<i>Electra</i> 125-126, 143, 592-593; <i>Orestes</i> 136-137, 149-150*, 310
Sophocles	<i>Electra</i> 115, 1380.

“Expanded” form (4 elements)

Euripides	<i>Orestes</i> 140-142, 1302-1303
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Aristophanes

“Basic” form	<i>Wasps</i> 1326 (cf. Euripides, <i>Trojan Women</i> 308; <i>Cyclops</i> 203).
Tricolon	<i>Clouds</i> 1508.
Combined form	<i>Birds</i> 364-365 (“basic” form + “expanded” form + single element), 1720-1721 (“expanded” form + single element).

\* with repetition of the same verb.

10.

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