

Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 188

In PAGE's text of the *Eumenides*, Apollo's abuse of the Erinyes includes the following lines (185-90):¹

οὔτοι δόμοισι τοῖσδε χρίμπτεσθαι πρέπει· 185
 ἀλλ' οὐ καρανιστῆρες ὀφθαλμωρύχοι
 δίκαι σφαγαί τε σπέρματός τ' ἀποφοροῦ
 παίδων κακοῦται χλοῦνις ἢ δ' ἀκρωνία
 λευσμοί τε καὶ μύζουσιν οἰκτισμὸν πολὺν
 ὑπὸ ῥάχιν παγέντες. 190

187 -φοροῦ Musgrave : -φοραί codd.

As generally interpreted, one of the practices described in this unpleasant list does not fit with the rest: οὐ . . . σπέρματός . . . ἀποφοροῦ / παίδων κακοῦται χλοῦνις (186-88). Commentators and translators are quite consistent in their renderings. I offer a representative cross-section. K. O. MÜLLER translates: »wo Entmannung auch / Der Knaben Blüthe schändet«. SMYTH's Loeb is more literal: »where, by destruction of the seed, the manhood of youth is ruined«. LATTIMORE, aiming perhaps at euphemism, falls into unintelligibility: »where . . . by the spoil of sex the glory of young boys is defeated«. MAZON is nearly as vague, and quite inappropriately florid: »où, pour tarir leur fécondité, la fleur de leur jeunesse est ravie aux enfants«. YOUNG is the most explicit, and the most succinct: »where boys are maimed into eunuchs«. Though YOUNG's version is rather clearer than the rest, all seem to imply what SOMMERSTEIN's commentary makes explicit: »As the victims are boys, castration is here being thought of not as a punishment but as a means of securing a supply of eunuchs.« It seems then that we must assume that Aeschylus, or perhaps Apollo, has gotten carried away by his list of revolting things that people do to each other and inserted an example that does not suit the argument. I find it

¹ My text and the pertinent bit of the apparatus are quoted (with minor orthographic changes) from D. PAGE (ed.), *Aeschyli Septem quae Supersunt Tragoediae*, Oxford, 1972. Other editors and translators referred to by surname are: E. FRAENKEL, *Aeschylus, Agamemnon*, 3 vols., Oxford, 1950; R. LATTIMORE, *Aeschylus I: Oresteia*, Chicago, 1953; P. MAZON, *Éschyle, Tome II: Agamemnon, Les Choéphores, Les Euménides*, Paris, 1961; K. O. MÜLLER, *Aeschylus, Eumenides*, Göttingen, 1833; A. J. PODLECKI, *Aeschylus, Eumenides*, Warminster, 1989; H. W. SMYTH, *Aeschylus II, Agamemnon, Libation-Bearers, Eumenides, Fragments*, London and Cambridge, 1971; A. H. SOMMERSTEIN, *Aeschylus, Eumenides*, Cambridge, 1989; G. THOMSON, *The Oresteia of Aeschylus*, Amsterdam and

difficult to believe that either can have been so illogical. In fact, I see two problems with the phrase *παίδων κακοῦται χλοῦνις*:

1. The problem with *παίδων* is that the context demands judicial and punitive, not commercial, castration, and that would not be confined to males who were young enough to be described as *παῖδες*. This point can be put more strongly. Although the ancients had no special courts or punishments for juveniles, we would expect that those who had committed crimes serious enough to merit castration as a punishment would in nearly every case be *ἄνδρες* or *ἔφηβοι* rather than *παῖδες*.² The fact that *παῖδες* are not necessarily masculine is not so much a point against the usual interpretation as a useful hint: the word is too broad in gender, as well as too narrow (or simply wrong) in age.³

2. The problem with *χλοῦνις* is its meaning. This may seem an unreasonable objection: the word is a *ἄπαξ λεγόμενον*, and we can therefore feel free, within fairly broad limits, to define its meaning so as to suit the context. However, SOMMERSTEIN notes that *χλοῦνις* appears to be related to *χλοῦνης*, which means »eunuch« elsewhere and is even attested with that meaning in a fragment of Aeschylus' *Edonoi* (*Fr.* 62 Radt).⁴ THOMSON worries about the ending, which seems to him more appropriate to an adjective than to a noun, and tentatively suggests a lacuna. It would certainly be a very odd coincidence if a word that looks as if it ought to be an adjective meaning »castrated« (or a noun meaning »eunuch« — it makes little difference which) were to turn up quite by chance in a passage where men (or boys) are in fact being castrated, and turn up as a noun with an entirely dif-

Prague, 1966; and D. YOUNG, *Aeschylus, The Oresteia*, Norman OK, 1974. Except as noted, all references are *ad loc.*

² Aeschylus does not specify particular classes of victims for any of the other punishments, and I do not see why he should do so here. Castration would surely be nearly as terrible a punishment for grown men as for boys. I say «nearly» because it deprives a man of any hope of future children, and that would be worse for those who do not yet have any, who are likely to be the younger men and the boys. More on this point below.

³ I do not mean to suggest that all of the criminals would necessarily be male, though most would be. However, some other punishment would obviously have to be found for condemned women.

⁴ Doubts about the meaning of *χλοῦνης* are possible, and L.S.J.⁹ provides four different ancient interpretations, with «castrated» first on the list. However, P. CHANTRAINE (*Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Grecque*, 4 vols., Paris, 1968-80, s.v. *χλοῦνης*) notes that Aristotle's explicit testimony for this meaning (*H.A.* 578 b 1) «est un témoignage ancien et sérieux» and provides further arguments and references.

ferent — indeed entirely opposite — meaning: »virility«. That would truly be a *lucus a non lucendo*.

As a first step towards a solution, we may note that children do have a place in punishment *σπέριματος ἀποφθορᾶ*, though not as the victims.⁵ It seems to me likely that *παίδων* in 188 refers not to the men who are being castrated, but to their hypothetical offspring, the children who will never be born because of their fathers' punishment. In that case the word's gender (common) and age (young) would be perfectly appropriate.⁶ Although L.S.J.⁹ lists no parallel for the use of *κακοῦν* with the genitive, Kühner-Gerth's account of the genitive of separation (1.396-399, § 421.2) lists numerous verbs with broadly similar meanings. Perhaps the best parallel is A. *Ag.* 120, where, as Fraenkel puts it, *βλαβέντα λιοσθίων δρόμων* means »prevented from running the final course«: if Aeschylus can use *βλάπτειν* with a genitive of separation in the first play of his trilogy, I see no reason for him not to use *κακοῦν* in much the same way in the third. In sum, I take *οὔ . . . σπέριματός . . . ἀποφθορᾶ / παίδων κακοῦται γλοῦνις* to mean »where, by destruction of seed, the (new-made) eunuch is prevented from (producing) children«.⁷

⁵ In Herodotos' account of Hermotimos' vengeance on Panionios (8.104-06), the castration of the sons by their own father forms a part, but only a part, of the father's punishment. Aeschylus' words are quite inadequate to imply anything along those lines in our passage. Other than the Erinyes, no interested spectators are mentioned.

⁶ Perhaps I should add that in this case the meaning of *παίδων* is slightly different: they are »children« as the sons and daughters of particular fathers (L.S.J.⁹ s.v. *παῖς* I) rather than boys and girls generally, or just boys, as in the usual interpretation of this passage (L.S.J.⁹ s.v. *παῖς* II).

⁷ I wish to thank Profs. Benedetto Marzullo and David Kovacs for their comments on this paper, which were very helpful even when not heeded.