

Euripides' *Orestes* depicts a bleak world in which all the central bonds of Greek society – kinship, friendship, political belonging – have broken down. Critics have noted this pervasive corruption and seen it as a direct reflection of the corrupt state of contemporary Athenian political life (e.g. Wolff 1983, Euben 1986: 222-51, Porter 1994). The play's failed relationships, in this reading, reflect the rupture of political bonds in the stasis of 411 BCE. My paper takes a different approach to the play's corruption and its relation to contemporary Athenian politics. It argues that the central problem of *Orestes* is not the failure of friendship but the loss of the enemy. Carl Schmitt (1996 [1932]) famously proposed that the opposition between friend and enemy defines the field of the political as such, and the question "Who is the enemy?" is thus the fundamental political question. *Orestes*, produced in 408, asks but is unable to answer this question and that failure makes politics itself impossible. In its inability to locate the enemy, I argue, the play not only mirrors the political strife of 411 but enacts the political dynamics that will result in all-out civil war in 403.

In *Orestes* the enemy is nowhere and everywhere. The play is set in the aftermath of the Trojan War and the murder of Clytemnestra; the two defining enemies (external and internal) of the myth are thus already lost. In their absence, the categories of *philia* and *ekhthra* no longer hold. *Philo*i act like *ekhthro*i, as kin betray kin (721) and the city's decree becomes a death-sentence against its citizens (974-75). *Ekhthro*i are ubiquitous and intimate, and the play's persistent conflation of *ekhthro*i and *polemio*i brings foreign warfare inside the *oikos* and *polis*, threatening the very distinction between inside and outside (e.g. 13, 762, 1160). It seems like this confusion will be resolved with the appearance of Pylades. This "dearest of men" (*philtaton brotôn*, 725) seems to bring new hope to a world in which every structure is corrupted by internal enmity. The hope he offers is, precisely, a new enemy: by killing the much-hated Helen (19-20), he proposes, they will become heroes throughout Greece (1134-39). This plan fails, however, and the play's final montage – Orestes with his sword to his cousin Hermione's throat and his ancestral palace in flames – vividly dramatizes the interior enmity that so troubles this play. Orestes can find no *ekhthros* who is not also a *philos*, no way to destroy his enemy without burning down his own home. This confusion in the category of the enemy is not resolved by the *ex machina* appearance of Apollo (Dunn 1996: 158-79); instead it is institutionalized. The god simply commands enemies to become friends, thereby perpetuating enmity within both the *oikos* and the *polis*. The intimacy of enmity in *Orestes* supports Schmitt's thesis that the identity of the enemy is the fundamental political question and suggests that a *polis* that cannot answer it is susceptible to the sort of internal corruption that the play depicts. The play's failure to answer the question "Who is the enemy?" – or the corollary question: "What happens when the enemy is us?" – thus not only reflects but dramatically enacts Athens' own failure in 408 to come to terms with the enemy within and anticipates the real-world tragedy by which the *polis* would find an answer five years later.