

A Handbook of
CLASSICAL
DRAMA

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lus sometimes falls into the ridiculous. A case is the notorious metaphor "thirsty dust, twin sister of mud." This phrase from the *Agamemnon* (494-95) is the last, fatal step beyond the imaginative phrase in the *Seven against Thebes* (494), "murky smoke, variegated sister of fire." Aeschylus is also prone to use too many metaphors and to mix them beyond all reason. But these faults are very minor ones when considered along with the heroic vigor and archaic freshness of his poetry.

We shall pass over the metrical and musical development of Aeschylus, as little of this can be appreciated in translations. He is said to have created his own choral dance figures,⁸ but we know practically nothing about these. His plays are of great interest even when robbed of their music and choreography, stripped of their dramatic spectacle, and dulled by wholly inadequate translations; but this should not deceive the modern reader into underestimating the importance of music, dance, spectacle, and poetry in the original presentation.

1. SUPPLIANTS

(Possibly about 490 B.C.)

The *Suppliants* is probably the earliest of all extant dramas. It seems to have been the first member of a tetralogy of which the other plays may have been those now lost entitled *Egyptians*, *Daughters of Danaos* (*Danaïdes*), and *Amyneon* (a satyr-play).⁹

Theme.—The interpretation of the *Suppliants* remains uncertain because the subsequent plays of its trilogy have not survived and because the text of the play in crucial passages cannot be determined with certainty. The essential problem of the *Suppliants* as an individual play, however, seems to be the dilemma which is thrust upon King Pelasgus: Is he to honor the right of sanctuary even at the cost of war, or is he to reject his suppliants and see the altars of his gods polluted with their blood? The right and obligation of sanctuary in contrast to a rule of violence is the theme of the *Heracleidae* and the *Suppliants* of Euripides and of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*. The recognition of this right was an important step in the establishment of law and order.¹⁰

There is a certain dramatic irony throughout the play, since Danaos, though now a foreigner seeking sanctuary for his daughters, actually is to succeed Pelasgus as king of Argos, and his daughter Hypermetra is to become the mother of the later Argive kings by a son of Egyptus. The establishment of this line at Argos, therefore, is in a way the subject of the whole tetralogy.

Precisely why the maidens object to marriage with the sons of Egyptus is a matter of dispute among critics. It is thought by some

that the daughters have an unnatural fear of marriage or an undue devotion to the virgin Artemis.¹¹ Various passages in the play are cited to support this assumption, but it necessitates the assignment of the choral song in praise of Aphrodite near the end of the play to a chorus of handmaids. It finds support also in a beautiful fragment (frag. 44, Nauck²) from the last play of the trilogy, where Aphrodite herself appeared, possibly to defend Hypermetra,¹² somewhat as Apollo is to defend Orestes in the *Eumenides*: "Chaste Heaven desires to wound the Earth; Desire seizes Earth to receive his love; and the drenching rain of the bridegroom Heaven falls upon Earth. She bears for mortals the pasturage of the flocks and Demeter's livelihood; the yield of orchards too is brought to fruition by his quickening rain. Of these I am a cause." The whole trilogy, according to this interpretation, dealt with the conflict of Artemis and Aphrodite.

Other scholars insist that the main problem of the whole trilogy was that of endogamy and exogamy. Endogamy or marriage within a family group tended to retain property within the family. If an Athenian man died leaving a daughter but no son and no testamentary disposition of his daughter (and property—the two must go together), the nearest agnate male relative might marry her even if divorces were necessary to enable him to do so. If the girl was poor, however, this male relative might prefer to furnish her with a dowry so that she might marry someone else. Thus endogamy might sometimes be to the advantage of the woman; but, in general, endogamy leads to a lower status for women, since by marrying within a family group her natural male protectors become her husband or her husband's friends and she thus has no one to protect her own peculiar interests. Divorce becomes practically impossible for the woman. These scholars think the trilogy explained endogamy and led to the foundation of the Thesmophoria—a woman's festival—as a compensation for the lower status which endogamy entailed.¹³

It seems likely that objection to endogamy is at least one of the reasons why the Danaids are fleeing their cousins (335-41), but the violence of the cousins' efforts to force marriage upon them is repeatedly stressed and must not be underestimated (esp. 226-33, 1031-32). Some scholars think that this violence—effectively illustrated at the climax of the play when the Herald attempts to carry off the maidens by force—has caused their unnatural fear of marriage, and that the final play of the trilogy dramatized not Hypermetra's defense but the purification of the maidens who had slaughtered their husbands.¹⁴ The beautiful fragment from Aphrodite's speech, then, would be part of her successful effort to restore the maidens to a natural attitude

toward love and marriage. The only other fragment of any consequence preserved from the play would fit nicely into this scheme. It seems to direct the foundation of a propitiatory rite in honor of the dead husbands¹⁸—perhaps an example of the etiological motive that is so frequent in the trilogies of Aeschylus and in the plays of Euripides.

Discussion.—The *Suppliants* is a play of unusual interest in the history of drama because it represents a transitional period midway between the original lyric dithyramb and classical dramatic tragedy. The chorus in this play, as in the dithyramb from which tragedy arose, probably consists of fifty persons, and here the chorus constitutes the chief character of the drama. The play opens with the entrance of the chorus, as in the *Persians* and in the *Rhesus*. The exposition is given in their marching anapests (1–39) and in their lyrics. About half the play consists of choral lyrics, and even in the dialogue scenes their part is very considerable.

The play obviously belongs to the period of two actors, as do perhaps the other extant plays of Aeschylus with the exception of the trilogy on Orestes. Indeed the poet evidently has experienced difficulty in handling even two actors. We might have expected the king to converse directly with Danaus rather than with his daughters, and the long silence of Danaus during this scene is very awkward. When he finally is addressed, he replies with a single speech of only ten lines. The heated dialogue between the king and the Herald of the Egyptians is dramatic and effective but very short. The absence of Danaus in this scene of peril for the maidens is obviously unnatural, and the poet's technical ability is somewhat strained in motivating the exit of Danaus before this scene and his re-entrance afterward (966–72).

Other shortcomings of the play from the dramatic standpoint are obvious. It lacks action; there is too little characterization and too much genealogical and geographical detail. Its lyric diffusiveness marks it as primarily a choral rather than a dramatic production.

But the *Suppliants* has great virtues. The greatest of these is the beauty of its lyrics and the bold grandeur of its language, though both these qualities are obscured or lost in translations. The subject of the play, furthermore, centers about a very dramatic conflict. Pelasgus is forced into a dilemma of great significance for later civilization. A definite feeling of suspense, furthermore, is created during the first of the play. In their lyrics the chorus have declared that they will commit themselves to the god of the underworld if they fail to obtain protection from the gods of Olympus (154–61); and they repeat this determination of suicide to the king, threatening to hang themselves upon the altars and thus create a dreadful pollution (465, cf. 787–91).

Even after the chorus has with great effort won over the king, the final difficult decision of the people must be awaited, and almost immediately after the joyful news of their favorable decision the ship of the Egyptians is sighted. Finally, the threats and warnings of the Herald and the forebodings of the choral lyrics near the end of the play stimulate the interest of the audience in the subsequent plays of the trilogy. Aeschylus has here achieved no mean accomplishment in making the play at once an individual unity and an introduction to the trilogy.

The original presentation of the play must have been spectacular and colorful. There was no "background."¹⁹ A chorus of fifty, possibly with fifty handmaids (954), now danced in the orchestra, now took refuge on the mound.²⁰ They wore striking Egyptian costumes, finely worked white robes contrasting with their dark masks.²¹ Linen veils, perhaps secured by gold bands, covered their heads (120–22). On their first appearance, they carried suppliants' boughs. Danaus wears not the costume of a king but that of a ship's captain. The king Pelasgus, however, enters with royal splendor in a chariot drawn by horses—a favorite spectacle with Aeschylus—and he is doubtless accompanied by a guard with shields and spears and with trumpets which have announced his coming (180–83). The scene wherein the Herald and his henchmen attempt to drag the maidens from their sanctuary and are frustrated by the entrance of the king is extremely dramatic. The vast numbers which take part in the action of the play are more suited to pageantry and spectacle than to ordinary drama, but obviously the author of this play had a magnificent sense of the theatrical and the dramatic. Obviously the importance of these early virtues is incalculable.

2. PERSIANS

(472 B.C.)

Aeschylus won first prize with four plays unconnected in subject matter: the *Phineus*; the *Persians*; the *Glaucoi Potameis*; and the *Pro-metheus (the Fire-Lighter)*, a satyr-play. Pericles, who later became the most famous of all Athenian statesmen, was choregus. The *Persians* is said to have been produced later in Sicily and to have been greatly admired. It alone of the four plays has survived.²²

Source.—The *Persians*, we are told by an ancient commentator, was modeled after Phrynichus' *Phoenissae*, which was written on the same subject and was produced probably in 476 B.C., when Themistocles, the great hero of Salamis, was the victorious choregus for Phrynichus.

These two plays, along with the *Sack of Miletus* of Phrynichus, were the only historical tragedies, as far as we now know, written in the fifth century. It may be significant that the two written on the defeat of the Persians were both, in all probability, produced with ambitious politicians as choregi.¹⁹

Phrynichus' play opened with an iambic prologue spoken by a eunuch as he made ready the "thrones" for the counselors of the realm. These counselors possibly constituted a secondary chorus. Phoenician women whose husbands had gone to the war constituted the main chorus. This is the first recorded instance of a prologue and a "dusting maid" scene of exposition. The defeat of Xerxes was announced in this prologue. Aeschylus, though he clings to choral exposition, shows his superior theatrical genius by postponing the announcement of Xerxes' defeat and making it one of the best effects of the play.

Theme.—This play is designed primarily as a glorification of the victory over the Persians at the battle of Salamis, 480 B.C. This victory is here ascribed to the Athenians, and little is said of the other Greeks who took part. It is historically true, of course, that the Athenians and especially Themistocles were responsible both for the battle and for the victory, but Aeschylus' attitude in glorifying Athens is typical of the local patriotism of the period. Still, not a single Greek is mentioned by name, although scores of Persian names occur and add local color to the foreign setting. The Dorian Greeks, furthermore, are given credit for the subsequent victory at Plataea (817).

By presenting the result of the battle of Salamis from the Persian point of view, Phrynichus and Aeschylus achieve a tragic atmosphere and avoid an attitude of insolent boastfulness. A fundamental conception of Greek morality is that too great prosperity (*koros*, "satiety") brings on boastfulness or wanton insolence (*hybris*), which in the end results in ruin (*ate*). This conception, the most frequent basic theme of Greek tragedy, occurs repeatedly in the *Persians* and is given compelling emphasis here by having the ghost of Darius blame the defeat of the Persians on their wanton violence and sacrilege (808-42).

The placing of the action at the Persian court also lends a detachment and dignity somewhat similar to the heroic atmosphere which envelops themes and characters taken from remote history or mythology.²⁰ The Athenian point of view, however, breaks through the Persian setting repeatedly (cf. 213). It is most obvious in the pronouncements of the ghost of Darius.

Discussion.—The *Persians* is an important historical document, but Aeschylus has taken great liberty in his presentation of Darius; for in actual history Darius had suffered major defeats, including two

in his attempted invasions of Greece. Strangely enough, Aeschylus gives only the barest mention (244, 475) to the glorious Athenian victory over the forces of Darius at Marathon in 490 B.C., a battle in which Aeschylus himself took part, as he did also in the battle of Salamis. Darius as a king and general has been greatly idealized in the play for obvious artistic considerations: Aeschylus wishes to emphasize the contrast between Darius and Xerxes—a contrast that is carried out in the physical aspect of the two characters. Darius appears impressively from the top of his funeral mound, probably high above chorus and queen, and he is clad in royal robes of Oriental splendor and is crowned with a royal tiara (659-63). Xerxes, although he enters with his curtained car (1000-1001), has rent his robe (1030) and is doubtless a sorry and pitiful figure. Darius and Xerxes present an early example of character portrayal by contrast, therefore, and this effect is clearly deliberate because it is achieved at the obvious cost of historical accuracy.

The *Persians* is perhaps the least dramatic of all Greek tragedies. There is no basic conflict, although the emotional tone intensifies as the play progresses. The plot is one of tragic discovery rather than tragic decision. The continual shifting of the leading role, furthermore, somewhat tends to disjoint the play. Some technical improvements, however, may be noted.

A distinct advance in handling dialogue has been made. The total amount of dialogue is still only half of the play, and the frequent use of the long trochaic meter is archaic. But the shifts from trochaic to iambic meter and vice versa within a scene are effective in marking a change of tone and tempo.²¹ The chorus is no longer an important character in the dialogue when two actors are present. The Messenger, for instance, does first carry on an exchange with the chorus; but after this introduction, his conversation is with the queen, who very naturally is impatient to know the fate of her son, although she cannot in her terror bring herself to ask of him specifically. So the ghost of Darius first addresses the chorus, as is usual for an entering character, but his main dialogue is with the queen, and this shift from chorus to queen is again nicely motivated (703-6). Later he turns again to the chorus, then back to the queen, and then again addresses the chorus with his final words. Another indication of a tendency toward more natural dialogue is found in the less frequent use of choral lyrics interlarded with spoken lines (epirrhetic construction).

The use of a dream and of an omen to foreshadow the development of the tragedy is noteworthy. The dream also prepares for the scene with the ghost of Darius, but the poet could have joined these two

scenes more closely by having the queen refer to her dream when she comes on to make the offering to Darius.¹⁹

The ghost, also, makes his first appearance in extant drama in this play, and a grand and impressive first appearance it is. The manner in which he is exorcised is spectacular and impressive. The time which he may remain, as with all ghosts, is strictly limited. His knowledge, for obvious dramatic reasons, is the reverse of that of the living: he does not know the present calamity of the Persians, although he is able to foretell their future defeat at Plataea. His final words—an exhortation to enjoy life—are not mere idle sententiousness but, like verses 689-90, are designed to remind us of the ghostly character of the speaker.

A phrase in the first line of the play, "those who are gone," contains ominous dramatic irony, and this phrase is frequently repeated.²⁰ Indeed the foreboding of the first scenes of this play adumbrates the grand effects of foreboding in the early scenes of the *Agamemnon*.

Pomp and circumstance are conspicuous again in this play. Especially noteworthy is the contrast between the first entrance of the queen, royally adorned and in her chariot, and her second entrance, in mourning probably and humbly on foot.

The dramatist obviously has not yet mastered integration of plot. Although the appearance of the ghost of Darius receives skillful preparation (198, 221, 554), motivation and foreshadowing are awkwardly handled. From the queen's lines about her son as she makes her first exit, we should expect Xerxes to appear as the next character.²¹ But actually she herself reappears, and then comes the long episode with the ghost of Darius. Darius, furthermore, instructs the queen to meet Xerxes with new raiment, and she expresses her intention of trying to do so; but we hear no more of this, and so we suspect that it is simply an awkward motivation for her exit.²² Obviously her presence is not desired during the final scene. From the speech of the Messenger, again, we should never know that a large Persian army still remained in Greece.

The most famous passage in the play is the magnificent description of the battle of Salamis (353-432). This is the first long messenger's speech in extant tragedy, and it is perhaps the most thrilling and brilliant of all such speeches.

3. SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

(467 B.C.)

Aeschylus was awarded first prize for the Theban tetralogy, the *Laius*, the *Oedipus*, the *Seven against Thebes*, and the *Sphinx* (a satyr-play).²³ Of these only the present play has been preserved.

The short scene between Antigone and the Herald at the end of the play is usually considered spurious. If genuine, Antigone's resolve to bury Polyneices in defiance of the command of Creon, the subject of Sophocles' *Antigone* and of Euripides' lost play of the same title, leaves the story unfinished. A similar scene, similarly suspected, occurs in Euripides' *Phoenissae*.

Influence.—In Greek literature and art the Theban cycle of legends was second in importance only to the Trojan cycle. Aeschylus' tetralogy was followed by many other Greek tragedies. Sophocles' masterpiece, *Oedipus the King*, was doubtless influenced by the *Oedipus* of Aeschylus, and Euripides' *Phoenissae* covers essentially the same story as the *Seven against Thebes*. Other extant Greek tragedies dealing with this cycle are the *Antigone* and the *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles, and the *Suppliants* and the *Heracles* of Euripides.

Theme.—The story of the downfall of Laius and his descendants, like that of Atreus and Agamemnon, is a classic example of the truism that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons. This theme must have been the basis of the whole trilogy. As an individual play, the *Seven against Thebes* appears to have two subjects. The first of the play is taken up with the fate of Thebes, although the curse of Oedipus is recalled by Eteocles (69-77) and is obviously an important factor in determining the fate of the city. The bitter personal feuds of the various Argive leaders and the presumptuous insolence of all except Amphiaras—who foretells his own fate—have been given such stress that the poet certainly intended thus to foreshadow and at least in part to explain the defeat of the Argives. But after the departure of Eteocles very little is said of Thebes, and only one line tells the fate of the captains who have been described at such length (794): "Fallen are the mighty men and all their boasts." The second part of the play is primarily concerned with the fate of the house of Laius. Indeed the curse of Oedipus becomes almost an obsession with both chorus and characters. The ruin of the house is considered final and complete, and no hint is given of the war, so famous in legend, which the "Epigoni," or descendants of Eteocles and Polyneices, later waged.

In this play Aeschylus seems little concerned, strangely enough, with the moral dilemma of the two brothers. The play is presented

almost wholly from the point of view of Eteocles and the Thebans. Nothing is said of a contract between the two brothers. Polyneices has been banished, and Antigone seems to address the dead Eteocles as the "primal author of these grievous woes," although this passage is uncertain (998-99). But each of the brothers claims to have justice on his side. Obviously Aeschylus has refused an opportunity to present a moral conflict between the two brothers, such as that which forms the basis of Euripides' *Phoenissae*.

The explanation of this sacrifice of dramatic effect, in the opinion of the present writer, lies not primarily in the poet's desire to portray Eteocles as a brave and tragic character. Aeschylus, it seems, is like his own Amphiaras, who accuses Polyneices of wickedness and sacrilege in his attempt to sack his native land (580-86). Aeschylus apparently cannot entertain the possibility that an attack on one's native city may be justified. He belonged to that generation which had seen the tyrant Hippas expelled from Athens and returning with the Persian army at Marathon. More recently, Themistocles, the savior of Greece at the battle of Salamis, had been ostracized and forced into exile (probably 471-470 B.C.), and then, possibly before the production of this play, he had been accused of plotting with the Persians against Greece and condemned. He fled, however, and went over to the Persians. That Persia was still a menace is shown by the fact that the last great battle, a naval engagement at Eurymedon in Asia Minor, was fought shortly before this play was produced. Aeschylus' unqualified condemnation of Polyneices, therefore, and the patriotic fervor of the play may be due to the contemporary political situation and has almost certainly been influenced by contemporary ideals of patriotism.

Patriotic feeling, furthermore, may account for Aeschylus' failure to mention the word "Thebes" during the whole play. Thebes had gone over to the Persians in the recent invasion which ended at Salamis and Plataea and so was in disgrace with the majority of the Greeks. Here Aeschylus invariably employs the archaic terms "Cadmeans" or "city of Cadmus," which are at once more poetic and less offensive to contemporary feelings.

Scholars have been puzzled by the references to the attacking army as one speaking a foreign tongue (170, cf. 72-73). There are also frequent references to enslavement. These are the results perhaps of a half-unconscious emergence of the Athenian point of view. For Athenians of that day the siege of a city inevitably suggested the destruction of Athens in 480 B.C., and the besieging enemy suggested the Persians.²⁷

Discussion.—The opening scenes of the *Seven against Thebes* are among the most natural and effective in Greek tragedy, although the

problem of exposition in this play is perhaps simplified somewhat by the fact that it was the last member of a trilogy.²⁸ The mention of the curse of Oedipus (69-77), which probably figured prominently in the previous play, is an ominous and foreboding note. The hysterical entrance of the chorus in excited dochmiac meter and probably carrying gifts and crowns for the gods (101) vividly suggests the panic of a city under siege and, by contrast, brings out the cool bravery and unselfish patriotism of Eteocles. His extreme anger when he upbraids the chorus for its fears is well suggested in his language, which is here characterized by the use of hyperbole (197) and the grammatical irregularities of excited speech (250).

This excellent beginning is frustrated, however, by the second entrance of the Messenger (369), who describes each of the seven leaders of the Argives and his shield. Eteocles, probably accompanied by his various captains in their armor, chooses the opposing Theban with regard to the blazon and character of the Argive and says something of each as he sends him forth. Such description is essentially epic, and whereas it might be tolerated in the exposition of a drama it is especially out of place in the very center. It seems to be criticized by Euripides when he presents his Eteocles as protesting that there is no time for describing the warriors when the city is being besieged (*Phoenissae* 751-52). As motivation for this long scene, however, Aeschylus does say that the Argives have halted because the auspices are not favorable (378-79). For a static scene, furthermore, it is magnificently constructed. The descriptions rise to a climax with the figure of Amphiaras and his denunciation of his own cause. When the Messenger describes Polyneices, Eteocles remains alone, now stripped of all his captains and obviously the one champion to face his brother, who has issued what amounts to a challenge which cannot with honor be refused. The despair of Eteocles and the utter gloom when he departs, like the despair and gloom when Hector departs from Andromache in the *Iliad* (6.529),²⁹ prepare for the tragic outcome.

The dirge and funeral procession at the end of the play add a solemn pageantry to the action.

Some of the poet's technical difficulties may be mentioned. The foreshadowing of the first entrance of the Messenger is too immediate (36-38). The Messenger on making his exit, however, nicely prepares for his return. The appearance of Eteocles at precisely the same time as the Messenger at verse 372 is convenient (as the chorus remarks!) but should have been more plausibly motivated. The change in the attitude of the chorus during the play is noteworthy. At first panic-stricken, when Eteocles departs for the actual battle and when

panic is really in order, they sing not of the battle and their fear for Thebes (except verses 764-65) but of the fall of the house of Laius. Such a change in the attitude of the chorus, however, is not infrequent in tragedy and is characteristic of Old Comedy. Indeed, too immediate foreshadowing and pat unmotivated entrances are also characteristic of Old Comedy. Such technical details were perfected only with time, and Old Comedy cultivated its nonchalance in regard to them.

4. **PROMETHEUS BOUND

Date unknown; possibly earlier than the *Seven against Thebes*. The famous "prediction" of the eruption of Mount Etna contained in verses 363-72 proves that the play is later than this eruption (probably 479/8 B.C.).

The *Prometheus Bound* is usually considered to have been the first member of a trilogy now lost, of which the other plays probably were those entitled *Prometheus Unbound* and *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*. The satyr-play produced with this trilogy is unknown, but a satyr-play entitled *Prometheus (the Fire-Lighter)* was one of the plays produced with the *Persians* in 472 B.C.²⁹

Influence.—Two lines of this play are parodied by Aristophanes (*Knights* 759, 836). The *Prometheus Unbound* is cited and quoted frequently by ancient authors. The whole legend was famous in literature and art, but no other Greek play besides the four of Aeschylus is known to have existed. The Roman Accius, however, produced a *Prometheus*.

In modern times the *Prometheus Bound* has had tremendous influence on literature. Conceptions and misconceptions of the play and of individual phrases have inspired an endless number of writers.³⁰ Christian interpretations of the myth are as old as Tertullian (ca. A.D. 155-230). The play exerted important influence on Milton, Goethe, Byron, Shelley (whose poem, *Prometheus Unbound*, is well known), the Brownings, Swinburne, Robert Bridges, and many other poets. Its influence on Thomas Hardy was especially great, as we may observe in the conceptions of his *Dynasts* and in his use of the phrase at the end of his *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, "the President of the Immortals."

Legend.—The myths concerning Prometheus varied greatly.³¹ The most important innovation which appears in this play and which Aeschylus perhaps originated consists of giving to Prometheus the secret of an oracle which threatens the overthrow of Zeus. This oracle was already famous as the explanation of the might of Achilles, whose mother Thetis was the charmer of Zeus and Poseidon until they learned

that her son was fated to be mightier than his father. No association of this oracle with Prometheus, however, is known previous to the *Prometheus Bound*. According to the usual version of the myth, the freeing of Prometheus was accomplished by Heracles. Thus Aeschylus has really incorporated two independent solutions of the quarrel between Zeus and Prometheus. The dramatic advantage of this combination is readily seen if the reader tries to imagine the play without one of these two solutions. In a plot of extremely limited possibilities for action, the secret creates a certain suspense and arms Prometheus with a powerful knowledge in his conflict with Zeus. The retention of Heracles, furthermore, lends suspense and interest to the trilogy, for his appearance is repeatedly foreshadowed in the *Prometheus Bound* and, as we know from extant fragments, constituted an important part of the *Prometheus Unbound*. It also justified to some extent the long episode with Io, his ancestress, in the *Prometheus Bound*. Aeschylus was probably the first to join the myth of Io with that of Prometheus. In fact, the wanderings of Io as described in Aeschylus' own *Suppliants* are much shorter or, at least, more briefly told than those described here, and no mention is there made of Prometheus or his desert cliff.

Still another solution is suggested at the end of the play, where Hermes says that Prometheus should not expect an end of his suffering until another god is found who is willing to take his place in Tartarus (1026-29). This condition adds no complication to the present play except that it seems to suggest an impossible solution. Actually, the centaur Cheiron, painfully and incurably wounded by the arrow of Heracles, preferred Tartarus to continued existence.

Staging.—It is usually assumed that Might and Violence and Hephaestus enter at the opening of the play with a wooden figure larger than human size (74, 1023), which they fix to the cliff with chains and a wedge driven through the chest, all doubtless in realistic fashion, for the chorus later declare that they have heard the echo of the clangor in the depths of their caves (133-34).³² These characters make their exit before Prometheus speaks, and perhaps in actual production the actor taking the role of Hephaestus climbed from below "stage" into the wooden figure of Prometheus, for this play seems to have been presented by two actors. Although the exit of Hephaestus is separated from Prometheus' first speech by only six lines, we should assume that Prometheus is silent for some time before speaking, as he doubtless is again later in the play.³³

The cliff to which Prometheus is bound seems to have considerable height (142-43). Some scholars assume that Prometheus himself was high above the orchestra; that the wooden figure is brought out from

within the cliff rather than through the orchestra and that the first characters enter from the cliff; that Prometheus' position on the cliff can be reached only through the air or from within the cliff, as the chorus reach it in their winged car and as Oceanus reaches it on his winged steed, doubtless from the side opposite that of the chorus; that the chorus remain on the cliff near Prometheus during the whole play and are never in the orchestra; that Io enters in the orchestra, where she could have ample space for her wild dances; that Hermes, also, enters in the orchestra; and that, at the end of the play, Prometheus and the chorus sink down with a part of the cliff out of sight.⁵⁵ This last assumption, at least, seems unavoidable, and it would be perverse to deny the possibility of this effect in the theater of Aeschylus.

Impressive, doubtless, was the sight of Prometheus pinioned against the rugged cliff, possibly a gigantic, naked figure, wooden and therefore somewhat schematized. This setting and its various spectacular effects furnished an atmosphere worthy of the Titanic and Olympian characters of the play.

Theme.—An adequate discussion of the significance of the *Prometheus Bound* is far beyond the scope of this treatment. Intellectually, it is perhaps the most stimulating of all Greek tragedies, and it has long been subject to various interpretations. Suffice it here to say that the basic theme, as often in Greek tragedy, appears to be the conflict between brute force or violence and intelligence or justice. It seems a mistake, however, to discover in the play, as some have done, an attack upon popular religion. Throughout the play, the idea that Zeus is new as a ruler and that every new ruler is likely to be tyrannical is emphasized insistently.⁵⁶ In fact, it is hard to escape the impression that this is a fundamental idea of the play and quite possibly of the whole trilogy, which may have ended with the recognition and adoption of wisdom and justice by Zeus. Obviously the new and unjust Zeus is not the Zeus of the *Agamemnon* or the Zeus of Aeschylus' own belief. Attractive to many critics, therefore, is the assumption that the fundamental theme of the trilogy was the establishment of Zeus as a god not only all-powerful but also all-just and in the fullness of age and wisdom—a final and perfect compromise or rather combination of power and justice (cf. 188-92). The creation of such a god is not accomplished in a day, and it has been called the noblest work of man. Such a theme would befit the cosmic profundity of the play.

Some scholars have described the basic theme of the trilogy as the evolution of man and god. Obviously the tradition of a Golden Age and of man's gradual decline is reversed in the *Prometheus Bound*, where primitive man is depicted as a pitiful and helpless brute.

If the third play of the trilogy was *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*, as seems likely, the trilogy may have ended with the establishment of the torch race and the cult of Prometheus at Athens, for Prometheus was there worshiped as a god and closely associated with Hephaestus. Torch races were held in honor of both gods (among others), and their domains were essentially the same (fire and handicraft). In the *Prometheus Unbound*, we are told by Athenaeus (674 D), Aeschylus said that wreaths were worn on the head in honor of Prometheus and in retribution for his bonds, and we know from a fragment (194, Nauck⁵⁷) that Prometheus there further elaborated his benefits to mankind. So this trilogy, like the *Orestes* trilogy and other Greek tragedies, may have ended with the establishment of an Athenian institution.

The name Prometheus means "forethinker," and this meaning is so often played upon that an element of allegory is undeniable (86; 442-71, etc.). But any consistent and elaborate system of allegories would be unique in Greek tragedy, and efforts to discover such systems in the *Prometheus* have not been successful.⁵⁸ Significant names are not uncommon in tragedy, nor are lines with double meanings. Thus the statement that the acts of the new Zeus are not subject to review (324), like many other passages in this play, reflects Athenian pride in their democracy and hatred of tyranny; but essentially the same statement is applied to Xerxes in the *Persians* (*Persians* 213), and similar passages are extremely common in Greek tragedy. It is not necessary, therefore, to assume any elaborate allegory in the interpretation of the *Prometheus Bound*.

Chorus.—The role of the chorus is markedly reduced in the *Prometheus Bound*, although this reduction and the quiet meters of their songs may be due to peculiar conditions of staging. Choral lyrics constitute about one-seventh of this play, whereas they were approximately half of the *Suppliants*. The chief characters of the *Prometheus Bound*, however, are generously assigned anapaests and lyrics, which compensate for the reduced choral lyrics. The number of the chorus is probably twelve; certainly the number is small, for they enter on a machine. The introduction of characters, a usual function, is not here given to the chorus. This would be readily understandable if the chorus was not located in the orchestra, but it may be due to the fact that Prometheus is always present and is omniscient.

Discussion.—The *Prometheus* is a strange and extraordinary play. Action is impossible for the main character, since he is bound upon a cliff. The drama is static, but it is filled with conflict. It falls into episodes according to the secondary character present, and as in the *Agamemnon* no secondary character appears more than once. These

various episodes have no connection with each other; but all, of course, have a connection with Prometheus, and all serve to bring out his character more vividly.

The *Prometheus* contains the first protatic characters (characters added to the first of the play for purposes of exposition) in extant drama, although Phrynichus' lost *Phoenissae* doubtless employed a protatic character. The prelude scene of the *Prometheus* is nevertheless a dramatic and very effective one in its contrast of character. Might is crude and utterly heartless:

He is as disproportion'd in his manners
As in his shape.

Might usually speaks of Prometheus in the contemptuous third person, and he directly addresses the Titan only to taunt him. With a vulgar curtness that is rare in tragedy he upbraids Hephaestus for his reluctance to bind Prometheus. Indeed, characterization by language is carried perhaps as far in this scene as it ever goes in Attic tragedy. Not only the diction but the unusual type of conversation line by line (*stichomythia*) is significant of character, for Hephaestus invariably has precisely one line and Might precisely two. The comparative shortness of Hephaestus' speeches emphasizes his reluctance, and reluctance is the dominant note of his character, although he also appears kind and compassionate in comparison with the inhumanity of Might. The reluctance of Hephaestus may have been brought out in actual production also by exaggerating his usual limp as he followed Might and Violence upon the scene. Since Hephaestus is the smithy god (*Vulcan*), one might have expected him to be offended at Prometheus' revelation of divine fire to mortals. But he is portrayed as distinctly friendly to Prometheus, perhaps in part because the cults of Prometheus and Hephaestus were closely associated at Athens.

In the opening scene there is a note of irony in that Hephaestus must bind the humane Prometheus in this inhuman land. Noteworthy also is the long delay in mentioning the name of Prometheus and the effectiveness of the line when Hephaestus finally addresses him (66): "Alas, Prometheus, for your woes I grieve."

The character of Prometheus, like that of Hephaestus, is brought out by contrast, mainly by contrast with Oceanus. Oceanus, too, has taken part in the recent war and discord which have ended so disastrously for Prometheus. But Oceanus has escaped all punishment, for he has followed the old Delphic maxim, "Know thyself." This is the homely wisdom which he urges upon Prometheus (309), and he means by it that Prometheus should recognize his own limitations and the

irresistible supremacy of Zeus. In somewhat contemptuously refusing the good offices of the well-disposed Oceanus, Prometheus appears to harden his determination into obstinacy, and his righteous indignation at Zeus' injustice is too much stimulated by an unnatural joy in suffering under persecution. Still, he is hardly a martyr, for he knows that in the end Zeus must release him and compensate for the wrongs done him.

In the final scene, again, Hermes in a quite different tone urges Prometheus to bow before the will of Zeus. Hermes likens him to a newly yoked colt champing the bit and fighting against the reins—Prometheus, like Zeus, is new in his position—and Hermes repeatedly accuses Prometheus of willfulness and obstinacy. The chorus, too, being entirely ordinary and unheroic, except at the very end of the play, urge Prometheus to yield, and they admit the justice of the charge of obstinacy (1037). We cannot fail to admire the truly heroic inflexibility of Prometheus before the tyrannical threats of Hermes, the usual insolent herald of Greek tragedy; but still Prometheus seems willful and obstinate throughout the play. In the prelude, Might confesses that willfulness and obstinacy (*authadia*) are among his own characteristics (79), and he has already used the same Greek word to characterize the unyielding point of the wedge driven through Prometheus' chest (64). So Might is as hard as steel. Later in the play (436-71) Prometheus defends himself against the charge of displaying these same qualities after he has apparently done so to a marked degree in the scene with Oceanus. Prometheus, too, therefore, has the determination of steel.

But if we admit the obstinacy of Prometheus, we must not overlook the tyrannical injustice of the new Zeus, for the chastisement of Prometheus exceeds his offense. The very fact that the conflict will eventually end in a compromise for which both parties will be anxious proves that both parties are at fault. It is obvious from various passages in the play that both Zeus and Prometheus are to undergo change (186-92, 511-13, 980-82). Fragments from the opening of the *Prometheus Unbound*, also, show that later Zeus has softened. He has pardoned the Titans who formed the chorus of that play. These same fragments indicate that Prometheus has suffered greatly and suggest that his obstinacy is gone. Any attempt of modern critics wholly to justify the position of Zeus overlooks the significance of these later changes. The new Zeus of this play is not the Zeus of later times. A bitter contempt for the new Zeus is everywhere obvious in the lines of Prometheus, emphasized by the words for "ruler" that are applied to him. Zeus is nowhere referred to as "king" (the title applied to him in the great

chorus in the *Agamemnon*, line 355) or as "Lord" except by Io (584), but everywhere he is "dictator" or "tyrant" (*tyrannos*, 222 and frequently) or "marshal" (*agor*, 96) or "president of the immortals" (*makaron prytanis*, 169).

In the *Prometheus*, as in the *Seven against Thebes*, the central portion of the play is taken up with a series of long speeches. The Athenian audience, always keenly interested in artistic eloquence, probably took great delight in these speeches. They are skillfully constructed, especially those in the scene with Io, wherein Prometheus' reluctance and the keen interest of the chorus are subtle psychological devices for exciting the interest of the audience. The appeal of these speeches, however, is of an epic rather than a dramatic nature, although in part they constitute further exposition for the trilogy. Indeed, this play, like the *Agamemnon*, has the unusually elaborate exposition which well befits the first play of a trilogy.

Some effort has been made to join together the various phases of the action. Preparation for the entrance of Oceanus is found in the mention of him as father of the chorus (140); but after he appears, strangely enough, no reference is made to the fact that the chorus consists of his daughters. That Prometheus has married a daughter of Oceanus also is here ignored (cf. 555-60). Later Io is reminded that the chorus are the sisters of her father (636). No preparation for her appearance, however, has been given. But she, too, is a victim of the unjust Zeus. Another connection between Io and Prometheus is the fact that one of her descendants (Heracles—not named in the play but widely known as the deliverer of Prometheus) will eventually deliver Prometheus. This descendant, Prometheus tells us, will be the thirteenth generation from Io (774; 871-74; cf. 27). The appearance of Io and the references to Heracles, therefore, obviously prepare for the role of Heracles in the *Prometheus Unbound*. In that play, as the fragments preserved indicate, Prometheus described the wanderings of Heracles in the west as he here describes the wanderings of Io in the east and with a similar wealth of geographical detail. Heracles, also, was a victim of divine injustice. The divinity mainly responsible for the sufferings of both Heracles and Io was Hera, jealous of the many loves of Zeus. She is repeatedly mentioned in this play; but Prometheus blames Zeus for the suffering of Io, for he wishes to stress the injustice of Zeus.

Numerous other references to the freeing of Prometheus doubtless look forward to the *Prometheus Unbound*, as do the threats of Hermes that Prometheus will return from Tartarus to be torn by the eagle of Zeus, "a day-long uninvited banqueter." References to "Earth" or

"Themis," the mother of Prometheus and the important source of his knowledge, prepare for her appearance in a subsequent play of the trilogy.

The severer punishment of Prometheus and his being cast into Tartarus at the end of the *Prometheus Bound* are repeatedly foreshadowed in the earlier scenes, especially by his wish that he had been hurled into Tartarus where his enemies could not see and mock his misfortune (152-59). The boastful threats of Prometheus against Zeus are so plain and stress the possible rather than the actual outcome so insistently that one is inclined to consider them taunts addressed directly to Zeus rather than predictions to Io and the chorus. At least the appearance of Hermes announcing the wrath of Zeus seems the natural result of these boastful threats.

A certain suspense is maintained during the early part of the play. Prometheus mysteriously refers to his secret concerning the possible overthrow of Zeus (169-71; 189), and he does not reveal it to Oceanus. Later he tells the chorus, too, that he will not yet say whether Zeus is to rule forever, because by keeping this secret he will escape his bonds (520-25). This refusal is really as naïve as his refusal to tell his own story to Io simply because he has just finished telling it to Oceanus and the chorus, or his refusal to reveal details concerning Heracles because, he alleges, it would take too long and would profit Io nothing to learn them (875-76). But finally (768) Prometheus does reveal quite frankly the oracle that the son of a certain mother is fated to be mightier than his sire; but he does not, of course, reveal the essential part of the secret—the identity of the mother.¹⁴ The suspense over this secret and that over the outcome of the clash of wills between Zeus and Prometheus constitute the only dramatic interest maintained throughout the play; for here, even more obviously than in the *Persians*, there is no reversal of fortune, and the dramatic structure is unusually simple. But there is a general heightening of tension as the play progresses, especially in the growing wrath and boldness of Prometheus.

The final scene, like the prelude, is highly dramatic. Hermes and Prometheus revile each other in cutting repartee that might appear comic to the modern reader but in reality is spoken in bitter earnestness. At the very end of the play, spectacular stagecraft and the Titanic defiance of Prometheus combine to make a magnificent finale for this "first act" of the trilogy.

5, 6, 7. **TRILOGY ON ORESTES (*ORESTEIA*)

(458 B.C.)

Aeschylus won first place with this, the only complete trilogy of Greek tragedies which has survived. The individual plays are entitled *Agamemnon*, *Choephora*, and *Eumenides*. These three tragedies were originally followed by a satyr-play, now lost, entitled *Proteus*. The first play concerns the murder of Agamemnon, the second the vengeance taken for this murder, the third the results of this vengeance. The title of the second play (Libation-Bearers) suggests the claims of a murdered father, and perhaps the "offerings" made to him (slaughter of his murderers), as the title of the third play (Avenging Furies) suggests the claims of a mother slain by her son.³⁹ The *Proteus* probably parodied the tale of Menelaus and Proteus as told in the *Odyssey* (4.351-570).

Structure of the trilogy.—This trilogy bears some resemblances, mainly superficial, to a modern drama in three acts. Several years elapse between the first and second plays, some days between the second and third, and during the third play an indefinite time elapses at a change of scene. Although the first two plays have the same background, the palace of Agamemnon, the third play opens before the temple of Apollo at Delphi, then quickly passes, it seems, to an interior scene, and then with a vacant stage shifts to Athens. Both the first and the second play close at a high emotional tension and each obviously looks forward to the succeeding play.

These separate plays differ from the acts of a modern play, however, in that each contains its own problem with sufficient exposition and its own immediate solution, although this solution in the first and second plays is of such a nature that it brings on a new action. Still, the plays could be presented and understood independently. Each play also has its own chorus and for the most part a separate cast of characters. No character appears in all three plays except Clytemnestra—if we are willing to consider her ghost the same personality as the living character. Orestes is doubtless the main character of the trilogy. Though he does not appear in the *Agamemnon*, he is there mentioned several times and his return is ominously foretold.

There is an essential unity in the three plays—all deal with the eventual fate of the house of Agamemnon—but this unity is marred in the *Eumenides* by the emergence of the theme of Athens and her greatness, which eclipses Orestes at the end.

No significant development of character is presented in this trilogy. Clytemnestra seems to break somewhat at the end of the *Agamemnon*,

and the modern reader might have expected her to be profoundly affected by the murder during the several years which elapse before the return of Orestes; but she is essentially the same character in the *Choephora* that she was in the *Agamemnon*. Perhaps the author deliberately intended that she should be, for change might indicate more humanity and weakness than the author wishes to allow her. Orestes, too, seems to break at the end of the *Choephora*; but he is the same individual, convinced of the justice of his cause, in the *Eumenides*.

Legend.—The story of the return and murder of Agamemnon is told in various installments in the *Odyssey*, where his fate is artistically employed as at once a warning and a contrast to that of Odysseus.⁴⁰ Aegisthus, according to the Homeric version, invited Agamemnon to a feast at the house of Aegisthus and with the aid of Clytemnestra there murdered him and his company in a wholesale and treacherous slaughter. Cassandra is said to have been slain at Agamemnon's side by Clytemnestra. No mention is made of an earlier delay at Aulis and the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Ambition and lust are presumably the motives in this Homeric version. Various other early poets, especially Stesichorus, treated the theme with certain additions and changes.

In Aeschylus, Agamemnon is slain in his own palace by Clytemnestra with the apparently minor aid of Aegisthus. Hatred conceived at the sacrifice of Iphigenia is suggested by the chorus and is plainly stated by Clytemnestra herself as her motivation. This was not original with Aeschylus.⁴¹ In the *Choephora*, however, only one passing reference is made to Iphigenia, and this by Electra (*Choephora* 242), whereas the charge is repeatedly made and practically admitted by Clytemnestra that she slew Agamemnon because of her love for Aegisthus (*Choephora* 893, 920). Each motivation is successful in its own play, but the second play seems hardly consistent with the first. Aeschylus is stressing the guilt of Agamemnon in the first, that of Clytemnestra in the second.

Influence.—The *Agamemnon* has often been considered the greatest of all Greek tragedies. Its perfection, however, depends primarily on poetic effect and tragic atmosphere—the forte of Aeschylus. Its plot is very simple. For these reasons, and possibly because of its very perfection, it inspired few imitators or adapters. Only one other Greek play is known to have been written with this title (by Ion), although Sophocles apparently wrote a *Clytemnestra* and an *Aegisthus*, the precise subjects of which are unknown.

The *Choephora* obviously falls below the *Agamemnon* as drama and in certain ways fails to do justice to the return of Orestes. Both Euripides and Sophocles rewrote this part of the story, and Orestes

was one of the most frequently employed characters in Greek tragedy. Although the date of Sophocles' *Electra* is unknown and highly disputed, it is assumed in the present work that Sophocles' interpretation followed that of Euripides, constituting a violent reaction and protest against Euripides' condemnation of Orestes' slaying his mother. We hear of no later Greek play entitled *Electra*.

There is no indication that these plays of Aeschylus were widely read or of great influence in later times.⁴² Various scenes from them or from the myth in general, however, are found in vase painting and other art.⁴³

Some five tragedies entitled *Orestes* are known to have been written by Greek dramatists.⁴⁴ Only that of Euripides survives. The eventual purification of Orestes is the subject also of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, as the sacrifice of Iphigenia is the subject of his *Iphigenia at Aulis*.

All these themes were popular among the Roman dramatists, and the extant plays of Seneca include a *Thyestes* and an *Agamemnon*.

The *Electra* of Sophocles and that of Euripides have inspired a great many adaptations among modern writers, including the *Oreste* of Voltaire (1750) and a play of similar title by Alfieri (1786).⁴⁵

The trilogy of Aeschylus was not as influential in Renaissance times and later as one might expect, partly because its language is more difficult and its manuscript tradition has been more imperfect than those of any other Greek tragedy.⁴⁶ Considerable progress has been made in these matters, however, and the trilogy has exerted great influence in recent times. Richard Wagner, for instance, was tremendously affected by it; his ideas about the significance of drama and the theater in general were molded by impressions gained from it.⁴⁷ Certain dramatists of the present day have been profoundly affected by it. One of the most remarkable modernizations of the story is Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*.⁴⁸ This trilogy shows striking similarities to the trilogy of Aeschylus in its situations and events, in the use of action in one of the plays significantly parallel to that in another, and in interpreting the plot as an illustration of the principle that one dreadful crime leads inevitably to another. Noteworthy, also, are O'Neill's effective use of the "chorus" as representing "the town as a human background for the drama . . .," his repeated description of faces as masks, his very effective use of literal repetition⁴⁹ and dramatic irony,⁵⁰ and numerous minor details reminiscent of Aeschylus. O'Neill's characters, however, and their motivations and the spirit of his play are very different from those of Aeschylus.

Theme and leading ideas.—The primary theme of the whole tril-

ogy is the curse of a private blood feud inherited from generation to generation and the necessity of its final replacement by public legal process.

Certain ideas pervade the whole trilogy and occur time and time again like leitmotifs. For instance, blood once spilled is, as Aeschylus says, irrevocable, and no really adequate atonement can ever be made.⁵¹ The most memorable expression of this thought occurs in the *Choephoroe* (72-74, Morstead):

Though in one channel ran Earth's every stream,
Laving the hand defiled from murder's stain,
It were in vain.⁵²

The "doer must suffer," and one dreadful crime leads to another.⁵³ Through suffering comes wisdom—this is the main theme of the great opening songs of the *Agamemnon*, with their beautiful description of the sacrifice of Iphigenia.⁵⁴

The fate of Agamemnon himself is interpreted by Aeschylus as an example of the fatal progression from worldly success (*koros*) to overweening pride and insolence, especially against the gods (*hybris*), and its resultant ruin (*ate*). But the chorus insist that it is not mere worldly success but sin—and of course *hybris* is sin—that brings mortals to ruin (*Agamemnon* 750-81).

**AGAMEMNON

Scene.—The scene, as usually in later Greek tragedy, is before a palace, here the palace of Agamemnon. The Watchman appears on the roof of the palace (top of the "skene"). Images of certain gods are visible (513), especially the usual statue of Apollo of the Ways (1081). Agamemnon and Cassandra enter in cars or chariots.

Time.—Double chronology is unusually conspicuous in the *Agamemnon*. Troy is said to have been taken during the night, in which the signals are seen and the action of the play begins (279). Although Agamemnon could not possibly have sailed from Troy to Argos in one day, he nevertheless appears a few hundred lines later.

Theme.—As an individual play, the subject of the *Agamemnon* is the vengeance which Clytemnestra takes upon the king because, she claims, he sacrificed their daughter, Iphigenia, at Aulis ten years previously. The primary theme is the continual destruction, inherited from generation to generation, which a blood feud and crime bring upon a house.

Discussion.—The *Agamemnon* does not contain a great deal of dramatic action. The first half of the play, before the entrance of

Agamemnon, is almost wholly devoted to exposition, preparation, and foreshadowing. The tension, however, rises sharply from the dark hints of the Watchman and the vague foreboding of the first choral songs to the cruel ironies of Clytemnestra, which are all the more alarming because of her outward calm. The real action begins with the dramatic climax—the verbal duel between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon. The surrender of Agamemnon to his wife is the turning point of the play, but the emotional climax comes with the raving prophecies of Cassandra and the death cries of Agamemnon which follow almost immediately. Although the real action is slow in starting, once started there is no delay. The final complete choral song—such songs have a tendency to retard the action, and the first half of this play is unusually rich in them—comes just after Agamemnon's exit. The last six hundred and fifty verses, therefore, are rapid, and their rapidity is matched by their excitement.

From the death of Agamemnon, the action looks both backward to the murders and forward to the events of the succeeding plays. The suspense and excitement are maintained to the end, and the atmosphere remains tense and tragic. Obviously only the immediate problem—the vengeance of Clytemnestra upon Agamemnon—has been solved.

Of the six characters in the *Agamemnon*, five appear or, more properly, have speaking lines only during a single scene each. Clytemnestra is the only character who appears more than once. She dominates the play as she dominates every character in it, with the exception of Cassandra, and the power of the drama comes primarily from this one powerful figure and from the overwhelming tragic atmosphere and pathos which the poet has created. Despite her unquestioned dominance, however, there is not a single colorless or stereotyped character in the whole play. Agamemnon himself approaches the usual type of haughty and overconfident king, but strikingly individual elements may be recognized in his character. He is tired and worn, a disillusioned and almost defeated victor. Although his role as a speaking character is short, the whole play is concerned with his fate and so it is rightly called by his name.

Clytemnestra as portrayed in the *Agamemnon* is one of the most impressive characters in Greek drama. She is described by the Watchman in the opening lines of the play as a woman with the counsel and will of a man. This first reference significantly cites her most striking characteristic. In her first conversation with the chorus she stands out as a self-confident realist. Although she has not neglected to sacrifice at the altars of the city, she scoffs at the idea that her news may depend upon the visions of a slumbering mind or mere rumor.

A technical peculiarity—lack of motivation for entrance and exit—is very effective in the case of Clytemnestra. Whether this is a deliberate artifice on the part of the dramatist may be disputed. One scholar, at least, has seen mere dramatic artlessness in Clytemnestra's unmotivated exit at verse 614.¹⁰ But, since lack of motivation is characteristic of her role throughout the play, it seems reasonable to attribute this feature to the deliberate purpose of the dramatist. It is effective because it adds a certain eeriness to the character of Clytemnestra. She appears and disappears at precisely the proper moment like a baleful apparition endowed with supernatural knowledge.¹¹

The *Agamemnon* is one of the few Greek tragedies in which an important intrigue is planned and executed with no explanation beforehand. In the *Medea* of Euripides, for instance, Medea's own foretelling of her plan is essential because the most interesting part of that play is Medea's inner struggle. But that technique could not be employed in the *Agamemnon*, if for no other reason, because Clytemnestra does not and could not—without losing her dramatic stature—waver in her resolve for a single moment. Here we are not even told that Clytemnestra has taken Aegisthus as her paramour. But there have been repeated hints both of this fact and of her murderous desire for revenge, and Aeschylus is obviously taking for granted that the audience knows the story of the return of Agamemnon; many of the lines could not be appreciated without this knowledge. So the *Agamemnon* is not essentially different from the other Greek plays which prefer dramatic irony to surprise; but it is superficially different in that, like the *Oedipus the King* of Sophocles, it takes for granted more foreknowledge than do most Greek tragedies. No play contains more tragic foreboding, however, than does the *Agamemnon*.

Great artistry is employed in the creation of this overwhelming tragic atmosphere of the *Agamemnon*. The first part of the play on the surface announces the Greek victory at Troy and the return of the conquerors. After ten years' struggle and hardship in camp, ten years' anxiety and grief at home, this news would seem to call for great rejoicing. But neither chorus nor characters can rejoice, and each successive phase of the early scenes adds greater tragic gloom and foreboding of disaster.

The gloom sets in immediately with the prologue. Although the Watchman is a protatic character, his speech is one of the most natural and effective monologues in Greek tragedy. Weary of his lonely task, he sings or hums to keep himself awake; but, like the Nurse in Euripides' *Medea*, he soon strikes the note of tragic foreboding, expressing his grief over the fortunes of this house. His dance of joy at sight

of the beacon signal is quickly stifled in the dark thoughts that not all is well in Argos. The very walls of the house would cry out (at Clytemnestra's unfaithfulness) if they could find a tongue!

The chorus of old men enters with one of the longest series of marching anapests and choral lyrics found in Greek tragedy (218 lines). They are still in ignorance of the news—a masterly stroke of the poet here as in the *Persians*—but their songs are very pertinent to the situation and important both for the exposition and for the emotional tone. Clytemnestra may be present in the background during a part of these songs, since she is addressed at verse 83 and since her presence at the altars sacrificing would lend a certain irony to the moralizing of the chorus that the sinner may not avert the wrath of heaven by sacrifice (69-71). Here the chorus is speaking with specific reference to Paris; but their words, as Thomson points out,⁴⁷ apply equally well to Agamemnon, to whose sin such thoughts inevitably lead the chorus, and to Clytemnestra. Clytemnestra must depart from the scene, however, before the chorus's description of the sacrifice of Iphigenia. This is a very beautiful and poetic description, approached with lyric indirectness and viewed with the clear perspective which their age and the intervening years have given them. The sacrifice of Iphigenia is condemned with a positiveness that strengthens the chorus's foreboding of revenge and punishment. This story to a certain degree explains the dark hints of the Watchman and makes possible a proper interpretation of the ambiguous words and actions of Clytemnestra. The prophecy of Calchas is repeated with details—doubtless original with Aeschylus—that foreshadow the action of the play (151-55): "a sacrifice strange and contrary to our custom, one not followed by a feast, worker of strife among kin, fearing not the loed of the household; remaining is a dreadful, re-aring, house-ruling, deceptive, unforgetting wrath, which will avenge the child." So the chorus sings, although no translation can reproduce the rugged power and the boldness of the original.

The chorus apostrophizes Zeus in perhaps the loftiest verses in Aeschylus (160-83), introducing one of the leading ideas of the trilogy, that wisdom is learned through suffering, which Heaven visits upon man against his will—an attempt to justify the ways of God to man with specific application to Agamemnon; for Agamemnon, though warned beforehand by the ominous prophecies of Calchas, nevertheless sacrificed his daughter. The chorus then returns to their pathetic story, breaking off at precisely the proper point: "What happened then, neither did I see nor do I tell . . ." Like the Watchman, the chorus has repeatedly foreboded ill and deprecated it by praying in a refrain

for a happy outcome and, finally, by refusing to think of the inevitable events that are to come. At this point Clytemnestra significantly reappears—the embodiment of the family hatred and the exactor of the revenge of which the chorus has sung.

After Clytemnestra has described the taking of Troy as she imagines it, she suggests the possibility that the Greeks with their insolent violence may outrage the gods—as, of course, they did—and that even if they do not commit any such outrage there is still the woe of the dead (337-47).⁴⁸ Clytemnestra is here thinking of the dead Iphigenia, but the woe of the dead is a theme that is repeatedly dwelt upon by chorus and Herald in the following scene. At the end of her speech Clytemnestra indulges in a subtle and characteristically Greek device: she picks up and echoes a phrase of the chorus as a good omen (349). The chorus has repeatedly expressed the prayer that the god may win the victory (121, 139); and, more pointedly, as they are about to address Clytemnestra upon her entrance, they pray that "good execution crown all this as our closest, lone-guardian bulwark of the Peloponnesian land desires" (255-57). Clytemnestra is delighted that the chorus here have quite unconsciously prayed for the fulfillment of her vengeance upon Agamemnon, and so she echoes their refrain.

After this episode, the choral song begins as a hymn of thanksgiving to Zeus, who has cast a net of destruction over Troy. Here the audience may shudder at the thought that Clytemnestra is secretly planning to cast such a net of destruction over Agamemnon. But, like the Watchman, the chorus stifles its joy in tragic thoughts, unable to forget the ruin that follows too great prosperity and sin, Paris and Helen, the grief of Menelaus, which is beautifully described, or the sufferings of the homes in Greece to which the god of war, "trafficker in bodies," has returned ashes instead of the men who went away—all for another's sinful wife. The chorus dwell upon the hatred which the people feel toward Agamemnon and Menelaus and the danger of success that is unjust or brought about at the cost of much bloodshed. Thus the chorus interpret Clytemnestra's ambiguous reference to the woe of the dead as a reference to the Greeks slain at Troy, and the final note of their song is one of foreboding of the retribution which this woe will cause and of skepticism over the news of victory.

The Herald brings good news; but, like the Watchman, he shows little joy, and the final effect of his appearance is to aggravate rather than relieve the tragic gloom of the play. From his description of the fall of Troy we surmise that the Greeks have been guilty of excess in their good fortune and of the sacrilege which Clytemnestra ironically deprecated. The very words of the Herald suggest the words which

Clytemnestra has used. One line (527), indeed, states definitely that the altars and sanctuaries of the gods have been destroyed; but the authenticity of this line, almost identical with a line in the *Persians* (811), has been doubted.⁴⁰ Even if this line is rejected, the Herald is still much too boastful of the destruction of Troy and the great good fortune and honor of Agamemnon, "most worthy of all living mortals" (531-32). Such boasts, according to ancient belief, invite the envy and wrath of Heaven. Here they serve also to prepare for the appearance of Agamemnon, for they suggest the pride and conceit which are Agamemnon's most striking characteristics.

The Herald elicits from the chorus, whose reluctance to speak is reminiscent of the similar reluctance of the Watchman, that all is not well in Argos. This leads him to recite his depressing report of the toils about Troy that broke the hearts and bodies of the Greeks: "If one should add the tale of the bird-killing winters—how unbearable the snows of Mount Ida made them—or the heat of summer, when the sea lay waveless down to rest upon its stifling noonday couch—Why must we recall such suffering?" Then the Herald refers to those who escaped these toils for the peace of death—the theme of the previous choral song and of Clytemnestra's ambiguous words. He repeatedly breaks off under strong emotion.

Clytemnestra, suddenly appearing, now reminds the chorus of her previous knowledge and of their needless skepticism. Having thus humiliated them, she is in a favorable position to make her false protestations of joy at the return of her husband and of her own loyalty and faithfulness. She maintains her hypocrisy well; but her speeches are interlarded with phrases of double meaning, and at times she yields to her bitterness in lines of bloodcurdling irony (611-12): "I know no joy of another man or shameful rumor any more than I know the dipping of the steel."

After Clytemnestra has withdrawn, the Herald would gladly consider his tale finished, since the good news is told; but the chorus forces him to continue with a report of the storm and the fate of Menelaus. Here the impression that sacrilege has been committed by the Greeks is unmistakable, for the storm is attributed to the wrath of the gods (649).

The Herald spends fifteen lines explaining why he should not describe the storm; but this excuse deceived the ancient audience no more than it does the modern reader, for the description of a storm is the favorite tour de force of ancient poets, and a full account of a storm once cited on the horizon in an ancient literary work is absolutely inevitable. Nor can we now resist the temptation to quote three magnifi-

cent lines from his description of the deathly calm which followed (658-60): "When the bright light of the sun came up, before us the Aegean sea blossoms with the corpses of Greek men and the wrecks of ships."

After the Herald departs, the chorus again sings of Paris and Helen and the ruin which they brought upon Troy, where Helen (the sister of Clytemnestra) went as a "maiden-weep Avenging Fury." These thoughts of sin and insolent pride and punishment dominate the verses immediately before Agamemnon enters, and the fate of the house of Agamemnon, as explicitly pointed out in the *Choephoroe* (935-38), is essentially the same as the fate of the house of Priam.

The treachery of Clytemnestra and the conceited pride of Agamemnon are both well portrayed in the scene of their clash. The pride of Agamemnon is of great significance in his character. Already suggested in the Herald's speech, it is now spectacularly symbolized by Agamemnon's triumphant entrance in his chariot with followers and fanfare. He is somewhat grudging in the credit for his success which he allows the gods and his allies (811), and he is too proud of his utter destruction of Troy.⁴¹ His conceit entirely prevents him from properly understanding the veiled warnings of the chorus. From his haughty and contemptuous response to Clytemnestra's hypocrisy, it is obvious that he despises her; but if he has really grasped her ill-concealed innuendoes, he pathetically underestimates his adversary. The essential weakness of his character is only too apparent in this clash with the strong-willed Clytemnestra, and this clash constitutes the dramatic climax of the play. In attempting to make Agamemnon accept her base flattery and walk upon the crimson tapestry, Clytemnestra is attempting to cause him to commit an act of insolence, it seems, which will evoke the disgust and hatred of men and the vengeance of the gods. Such an act will be a good omen for the success of her murderous designs and will lessen their odiousness. The insolence of the act which Agamemnon does commit is likely to be underestimated by the modern reader. The ordinary ancient Greek house had no rug or carpet upon the floor, and the rich tapestries which are spread for Agamemnon, as he himself says, were proper to the worship of the gods. Some critics, however, think that there is no insolence in Agamemnon's act but that the tapestries are a symbol of Clytemnestra's hypocrisy and that their crimson color symbolizes the coming bloodshed.⁴² Certainly the color and action here add to the effectiveness of this magnificent scene.

In order to persuade Agamemnon, Clytemnestra condescends even to using a term of endearment (905), and she prostrates herself in an Oriental manner—a loathsome act of servility in Greek eyes (and later

the cause of serious dissension in the army of Alexander the Great). At first Agamemnon brusquely refuses such excesses; but Clytemnestra displays a demonic or, perhaps more properly, feminine cunning. She subtly flatters his pride and makes the issue one of courage—a powerful persuasion when urged by a woman—and of generosity in granting her this desire. As Agamemnon submits with a show of reluctance, he insultingly bids Clytemnestra to receive with kindness the girl, Cassandra, his concubine, whom he has brought with him as his especial prize from Troy.

Throughout this scene there are ironic double meanings in the lines of Clytemnestra. She states that, if Agamemnon had been wounded as often as rumor said, his body would be pierced more than a net (868)—an ill-omened statement. Later we look back upon this and the chorus' earlier reference to a net of destruction with horror. The unhopd-for home to which justice leads Agamemnon, in Clytemnestra's mind, is Hades; and her "care never overcome by sleep," which will justly dispose all else as decreed by Heaven, is her undying hatred and passion for revenge. Near the end of this scene Clytemnestra refers to the crushing of the wine from the unripe grape—the blood of the virgin Iphigenia. One bold word leads to another until, as Agamemnon enters the palace and can no longer hear, she breaks out openly, praying to Zeus to fulfill her prayer.

But there has been one passage in this scene which was charged with an irony that Clytemnestra did not intend—the first mention of her son Orestes.²²

After the hypocritical and ironic welcome which Clytemnestra tenders Agamemnon, the main theme of the chorus is again dreadful foreboding. The old men have made a feeble and wholly unsuccessful attempt to warn Agamemnon of her hypocrisy, and now they are unable to cast off their fear. A foundering ship may be saved by jettison, they philosophize, and a famine may be averted by a year of plenty; but blood once spilled is irrevocable.

Throughout the duel between man and wife there has been present a third figure—the lie incarnate of their pretended joy and harmony, Cassandra. Now Clytemnestra quickly and unexpectedly returns and commands Cassandra to go within. Nowhere else does Clytemnestra appear so vile a creature as in this scene. She basely attempts to impress upon Cassandra her good fortune in being assigned as a slave to a house of wealth. But here for once Clytemnestra meets her peer, and she can only break out with bloody threats and then leave the stage. The resemblance and the contrast between this scene and the preceding clash of man and wife is most effective.

In extant plays the dramatic exploitation of madness appears first in the scene with Cassandra. Like the first appearance of a messenger's speech in the *Persians*, this has rarely if ever been surpassed. Very effective preparation has been made in the tension built up by Cassandra's stubborn refusal to speak as long as Clytemnestra remains "on stage."

Cassandra's clairvoyance breaks forth in wild and enigmatic lyrics. Her passion and excitement is emphasized by its contrast to the naive simplicity of the chorus, who undertake to give a pedestrian answer to her exclamation (1087): "Ah, now whither, Apollo, have you led me!" Later in the calmer mood of spoken iambic lines she describes with dreadful vividness what she has already intimated: the murder of Agamemnon and the murder of herself are soon to take place within the palace. A chorus of Furies, she declares (1186-93), are ever present singing a song of ruin on the roof of this palace. The truth of her relation of the past must be admitted by the old men of the chorus; but, when they are finally made to understand her words concerning the present and the future, they refuse to believe. Then with dramatic sensationalism she throws down her staff and tears the wreath of a prophetess from her head. Amid the consideration of her own death she breaks off to prophesy the coming of the son who will slay his mother to avenge his father's death and will put an end to these destructions (1281; cf. 1104).

As Cassandra is about to enter the palace she recoils at the stench of blood, and the chorus again responds with naive simplicity. She declares that a woman (Clytemnestra) will die for a woman (Cassandra) and a man (Aegisthus) for a man (Agamemnon). Finally she walks sadly and calmly into the palace with lines in which her own tragedy is generalized into the greater tragedy of the fate of mortals upon the earth. This scene, in which the vengeance for the deed is told before the deed is actually committed, furnishes magnificent preparation for the murder of Agamemnon.

At the death cries of Agamemnon the chorus fall into ineffectual dissension. Indeed each member seems to express his individual opinion, for there are twelve separate speeches. The utter futility of the chorus at such a point would be expected in Greek tragedy, but Aeschylus has carefully prepared for it. At the opening of the play, these old men, "fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf," have described themselves as "no stronger than a child, a dream of the night lost and wandering in the day" (81-82). Their naive simplicity in the scene with Cassandra, also, prepares for their weakness and indecision here.

Clytemnestra appears at her greatest superhuman height when she

comes forth with the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra. She confesses her former deception with no shame or compunction; she describes the slaughter of her husband with amazing sang-froid and heartless irony (1387). When his blood fell upon her, she "rejoiced no less than a field of grain in the labor of the bud rejoices at the fall of rain from heaven" (1390-92). Agamemnon, she declares, filled the mixing bowl of the house with curses, and he himself has drained it. The chorus is amazed at her brazenness; but she is more composed than ever: "Whether you choose to praise or censor me, I care not. This is Agamemnon, my husband, dead and slain by this right hand, a worker of justice. Thus it is."

Her defense is a mother's defense: Agamemnon slew their child. Her jealousy as a wife, also, asserts itself in a bitter, almost revolting passage, and she is proud to have Aegisthus as her defender. Finally, bringing forth the name of Iphigenia for the first time in the play, she pronounces her judgment that the penalty matches the deed.

To the inquiry of the chorus concerning the burial of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra responds that she will bury him, but with no tears, and that his daughter, Iphigenia (the second and last use of the name in the whole trilogy), as is fitting, will welcome her father at the swift-flowing passage of woes, throwing her arms about him and kissing him (1555-59).

Clytemnestra's defense is convincing, for such cold-blooded bitterness is most plausibly interpreted as the result of years of carefully nursed hatred (cf. 912, 1377). The chorus has prepared for this defense in quoting the prediction of Calchas (126-55) and in repeatedly condemning the sacrifice of Iphigenia, calling Agamemnon's consent to the sacrifice sacrilegious, impure, and unholy (219-20). But, strong as Clytemnestra shows herself at the beginning of this scene, the impassioned clash with the chorus is not without its effect on her. At the very last she is broken and admits the truth of the law that the doer must suffer. She bids the curse leave the house, and confesses that she would be content with only a part of the house's wealth if she might free it from its mad slaughter (1567-76). Whether her conscience is awakened is a disputed point. She certainly is fearful of punishment to come.

The *Agamemnon*, like the *Prometheus*, ends in a high pitch of excitement. Such an ending is possible in the first or second play of a trilogy, but single tragedies like those of Sophocles and Euripides almost invariably have an ending of calm finality.

The chorus have been heavily stricken by the death of Agamemnon and amazed at the hard joy of Clytemnestra, but the insolent gloating

of the cowardly Aegisthus is more than they can endure. Bitter and contemptuous reviling is exchanged for threats, until finally, with rising excitement, emphasized by a shift to trochaic meter (1649), they decide to resort to arms and draw their swords.⁴⁰ Clytemnestra, however, breaking her long silence, takes command of the situation at the crucial moment, and the play ends in a temporary compromise, with the name Orestes repeated and with his return given as the one hope of the chorus.

Preparation for the *Choephoroe* (and *Proteus*??).—Orestes is first mentioned by Clytemnestra (879). Cassandra does not mention him by name, but she clearly foretells his return and the vengeance which he will take. The chorus repeatedly insist that Clytemnestra's deed will bring other distress upon the house and predict that she will pay the penalty for it by citing the law of the talion (1429-30) and by repeating the principle so often enunciated in the play and cited by Clytemnestra herself (1527) in defense of her deed, "the doer must suffer" (1560-66). Near the end of the play, the chorus looks forward to the coming of Orestes (1646, 1667), and their attitude, abhorrence of the deed of Clytemnestra and insistence upon the justice and necessity of punishment, is the attitude of the poet throughout the remainder of the trilogy.

It has been suggested that the passage concerning Menelaus in the Herald's speech prepares for the satyr-play, *Proteus*, which followed this trilogy. This play doubtless told how Menelaus on his voyage from Troy consulted Proteus, the old man of the sea, about his return home. Still, the sinister implications of this passage in the *Agamemnon* are sufficient to justify its inclusion, and some mention of Menelaus seems essential to any account of the return of Agamemnon. Preparation for the *Proteus* may be found in another mention of Menelaus in the *Choephoroe* (1041 b); but there the text is uncertain.

CHOEPHOROE ("LIBATION-BEARERS")

The first of the prologue is missing in the manuscripts, but some fragments of it have been preserved in quotations by Aristophanes and ancient commentators. Another textual problem concerns the speech of the first reaction to the news of Orestes' death (691-99), which is given to Clytemnestra in the manuscripts but to Electra by some editors. The text of the lyric parts is often uncertain.

Scene.—The *Choephoroe* shows the same informality in regard to the background as do the *Persians* and the *Ennemides*. This background must have been essentially the same as that of the *Agamemnon*, for the palace is required in both; but the first part of the *Choephoroe*

is laid before the tomb of Agamemnon. Even in the first part of the play, however, reference perhaps is made to the statue of Apollo of the Ways (583), which always stood near the entrance of a house, and in the second part the chorus once refers to the tomb (722-25).

At least two entrances to the palace are employed. Clytemnestra probably enters from the women's apartments at verses 668 and 885, as also the Nurse at verse 734. In actual life, of course, such women's apartments would presumably be entered from within the palace.

The chorus withdraw temporarily at verse 874, giving the whole "stage" to the climactic action which follows.

Time.—A considerable length of time, perhaps seven years as in the *Odyssey* (3. 304-6), has elapsed between the murder of Agamemnon and the action of the present play; but in the extant text of the play we are nowhere given any precise information on this point (cf. 26; 1012).

The play opens in the early morning, as did the *Agamemnon* and as will the *Eschylus*; but by the time that Orestes comes to the palace night is falling (660).

Legend.—In the *Odyssey* (1. 298) Orestes returned from Athens to slay Aegisthus and win renown among all men. Clytemnestra, "his hateful mother," died at the same time, but we are not told in what manner. The version in which Orestes slew his mother and was pursued by her Avenging Furies, however, was certainly well established before the time of Aeschylus, as was Orestes' association with Pylades and the Delphic Apollo. The story of Electra, whose name, meaning "unwed," was reputedly applied to the daughter called Laodice in Homer, belongs to this later version.

Theme.—The theme of the *Choephoroe* as an individual play is again that of revenge, this time the revenge of Orestes upon his mother and Aegisthus for the murder of Agamemnon. Such revenge, according to the law of the blood feud, was the first obligation of Orestes; but here it involves the slaying of his own mother. Aeschylus interprets this deed as necessary but dreadful, and one that must itself be followed by dreadful consequences.

Recognition and intrigue.—The crude implausibilities by which Electra concludes that Orestes has been at Agamemnon's grave are pointed out at length by Euripides in his *Electra* and are best considered in connection with that play. Aristophanes, also, perhaps refers to this scene of Aeschylus (*Clouds* 534-36). But scenes of recognition were not, in all probability, common in early tragedy. This is the first extant tragedy to contain one. Certainly the technique of gracefully managing such scenes was not easy, and it was only gradually developed by the dramatists.

The *Choephoroe* is also the first extant play to contain an intrigue of the type which later became so popular. In this play, as usually later, the intrigue is planned before the audience in order that they may be aware of what is about to take place, although here Orestes does not reveal his intention of announcing his own death—a deception found elsewhere in Greek legend and in Euripides' lost *Cresphontes*. After the plan is revealed, the chorus is here enjoined to silence, as regularly in Sophocles and Euripides (*Choephoroe* 581-82). Incidentally, we may note that Orestes (560-64) says that he and Pylades will imitate the speech of Phocis (the district about Delphi and the home of Pylades); but in the scene with the porter and Clytemnestra no dialect is actually used, although the manner of a lowly traveling merchant is well simulated. The story which Orestes tells is a bare one, however, and has none of the convincing detail of that in Sophocles.

In later tragedy, as had been the case in the *Odyssey*, such intrigues are usually executed with great skill in deception. Here Orestes' plan to go in and slay Aegisthus impresses one as being too unrealistically simple. In fact, he would apparently have failed if chance and the chorus had not come to his aid. Still, there is more complication here than in the corresponding details of Sophocles' play, for here Clytemnestra is skeptical of the report of Orestes' death and summons Aegisthus and his guard. Aegisthus, too, though he fails to receive her message intact, is skeptical. It may be that Aeschylus is making the risks of Orestes great in order to increase the suspense. Certainly there is an element of surprise; for Aegisthus is not discovered within, although there was a well-established tradition, as vase paintings show, that Orestes slew Aegisthus seated on a "throne," and in this play (572) Orestes suggests that he may find Aegisthus on the "thrones" of Agamemnon.⁴⁴ There may be an element of suspense in the speech of the old Nurse, also, since rambling and apparently pointless speeches of this sort are effective in increasing the impatience of the audience at an exciting point in the action. Still, the homely garrulousness of the Nurse makes her, like the Watchman in the *Agamemnon*, one of the most vividly portrayed minor characters in Aeschylus. Her realistic description of Orestes as a helpless infant superficially bears a resemblance to comic relief; but, in reality, it subtly prepares for the appeal of Clytemnestra to Orestes to pity the breast which suckled him.⁴⁵

The simple intrigue of Orestes succeeds only because the chorus takes part in the action at this precarious point and directs the Nurse to change the command of Clytemnestra and bid Aegisthus come alone instead of with his guard. A similar important interference of the chorus takes place in Euripides' *Ion* (760-75).

Discussion.—The *Choephoroi* opens significantly with the fervent prayer of Orestes to Hermes and to his dead father. In the section of the prologue now lost he probably revealed the command of Apollo. Certainly he regards the taking of vengeance as an inescapable duty. These are the only facts of importance which he can give; the situation within the palace must be told by the chorus and Electra.

The first words of the chorus sound a depressing, foreboding note. The ominous dream of Clytemnestra is given as the motivation of their entrance; but they are careful not to reveal the details of this dream, which are to be brought in later with great effectiveness. Though the chorus consists of captive maidens, they are more keen in their desire for vengeance and more bitter in their hatred of Clytemnestra than Orestes and Electra themselves.

Electra as depicted in Sophocles and Euripides is the true daughter of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra. By contrast, the Aeschylean Electra, at first glance, appears somewhat weak. True, she does see that to make an offering to the dead Agamemnon on behalf of her mother would be a shameless act; but she appeals to the chorus for instructions, and they must first remind her of Orestes (115). She is uncertain whether it is sacrilege to pray for some god or mortal to come and slay her mother, although when reassured by the chorus she does have the courage to make such a prayer. The manner in which she compares her brother's footprints to her own, furthermore, makes her seem simple. But these evidences of weakness and simplicity are due at least in part to the archaic stiffness of Aeschylus' technique. He must have conversation between Electra and the chorus, and for this he has chosen the unwieldy and formal conversation line by line (*stichomythia*). The awkwardness of the recognition, too, is due to the poet's own shortcomings.

Electra is not really a weak character. During the long invocation of Agamemnon she flagellates herself into a strong and savage fury. Except for the general atmosphere created, however, this mood finds no proper dramatic effect in the latter half of the play. According to our manuscripts, Electra does not speak after verse 507, although some editors have her re-enter with Clytemnestra when Orestes knocks at the gate and assign her the speech of reaction to the news of Orestes' death (691-99). This is an important speech; but the sentiments expressed are not very different from those which Clytemnestra in her more human moments expresses in the *Agamemnon* (1567-76), and the speech adds greatly to the depth of Clytemnestra's character if the assignment of the manuscripts is retained. Even if these lines should be given to Electra, the dramatic possibilities of her role are still not

well exploited, for she does not appear in the final scenes. But she is not strictly pertinent there: Pylades must play the supporting role at the climax in order that Apollo's share in the action may be emphasized; and afterward Orestes is the only important character.

The abuse of Electra is not stressed by Aeschylus as it is by Sophocles and Euripides, but it is nevertheless unmistakable. Electra considers herself a slave (135). The privation and poverty of the rightful heirs is one of Orestes' prime complaints (esp. 246-63). Electra, as her very name indicates, has no hope of marriage unless the usurpers are destroyed (cf. 486-88). When her father was being buried, furthermore, she was shut up, "like a baleful dog," within her chamber (445-50).

As justification for taking vengeance upon his mother, Orestes lists first the command of Apollo, then his grief over his father's death, his own poverty,⁴⁶ and the subjection of his countrymen to the rule of two women—for he insists Agisthus is in spirit a woman (300-305). His prime motivation, therefore, is the command of Apollo; and this leads directly to the following play, where Apollo takes responsibility for his deed, and to the generalizing of Orestes' case into a contest between old divinities and new.

After the recognition has taken place, Orestes, in the strongest terms and with the most optimistic confidence, declares his determination to slay the guilty pair. Instead of translating this into immediate action, however, chorus and characters turn to the tomb of Agamemnon and begin exorcising the spirit of Agamemnon as an aid for the vengeance of his son. This long lyric scene may become tiresome to the modern reader, unacquainted and unsympathetic with such mystic exorcism and finally disappointed, perhaps, that Agamemnon's ghost does not appear as does the ghost of Darius in the *Persians*. Its appearance would nicely parallel that of the ghost of Clytemnestra in the *Electra*. Judged from the dramatic standpoint, this scene is undeniably too long. It is conceived perhaps as lasting from dawn till evening. Its length may in part be due to the lack of complication in the plot and the necessity of prolonging the play to the minimum length required of a tragedy. But, in spite of Orestes' determination even before the exorcism, this scene does have its dramatic function. It furnishes the emotional power necessary for the execution of such a horrible deed by creating a frenzy of passion in the participants and, to a less extent, in the audience itself. It stresses the justification of Orestes' act and adds certain details, such as the maiming of Agamemnon's body and the disgrace of Electra. Its music and perhaps its frenzied action, also, probably added greatly to its effectiveness in the theater.⁴⁷

In his first scene with Electra, Orestes has called the murderess of his father a dreadful viper (249)—most aptly and forebodingly, for female vipers were supposed to devour the males and themselves to be devoured by their offspring. Now after the exorcism of the spirit of Agamemnon has been attempted, Orestes inquires of the motive behind the mission of the chorus, and for the first time the details of Clytemnestra's dream are revealed—she dreamed that she had borne a serpent which drew blood from her breast. Orestes is heartened by the coincidence of this dreadful omen. He is ready for the deed.

There is an awful irony in the speech of welcome with which Clytemnestra greets the pretended travelers. One inevitably recalls the welcome given Agamemnon. This house indeed has warm baths and rest from toil for weary travelers!

Aeschylus has not done justice to the cause of Clytemnestra in the *Choephoroe*.⁶⁸ He is preparing for the acquittal of Orestes in the *Eumenides*, and apparently he feels that he cannot here give her as strong a defense as she had in the *Agamemnon*. Although she is not here so clearly the woman with a man's will and counsel as she was in the former play, she is still essentially the same. Aeschylus has made no attempt to portray a deterioration of character in her case, though perhaps seven years have passed and though base deeds and base associations normally lead to deterioration of character. Here as in the *Agamemnon* the first reference to Clytemnestra points her chief characterization for the play. She is an ungodly woman (*dyntheos*). So say the chorus (46, 525) and Electra (191). She has not lost all motherly feeling for her children, however, if the speech of reaction to the news of Orestes' death is really hers. But unfortunately she is not here given a scene with Electra, which might best be employed, as in Sophocles and Euripides, to bring out her character. Much abuse is heaped upon her by her children, but the most damning evidence against her in the *Choephoroe* is the Nurse's revelation of her secret joy at the news of Orestes' death.

The scene at the climax is a masterpiece. The chorus is temporarily withdrawn in order that all attention may be focused on the action and the characters. The Servant enters frantically calling for Clytemnestra. He has not lost his powers of making objective observations of what is actually going on, but his excitement is intense enough nicely to set off Clytemnestra's unperturbed mastery of the situation. She reads the Servant's riddle when he says that the dead are killing the living—a grand dramatic line. Orestes, the agent, has been thought dead but is actually very much alive; Agamemnon and Cassandra are dead indeed, but they are the true authors of the present slaughter.

Clytemnestra's former strength now becomes apparent. She calls for her "man-slaying" ax—she would clearly slay her son to save her own life. When she is prevented, she bares her breast in her appeal to him. As in the *Agamemnon*,⁶⁹ she attempts to lay the blame of her husband's murder in part upon the curse of the house or Fate. But Orestes, in perhaps his most effective line, throws this explanation back at Clytemnestra: Fate, then, is responsible for her own present doom. He charges her with having sold him away into slavery for love of Aegisthus—an idea voiced by Electra near the beginning of the play (132-34). Throughout the play it has been taken for granted, especially in the stasimon recounting the crimes of lustful women (585-651), that lust furnished Clytemnestra her motive for slaying Agamemnon. Even in the *Agamemnon* Clytemnestra has given hints of a real passion for Aegisthus (*Agamemnon* 1434-36; 1654). In the *Choephoroe* her passion is clearly revealed upon the discovery of Aegisthus' corpse. In both plays, furthermore, Clytemnestra insists that, for woman, separation from man is unbearable (*Agamemnon* 861-62; *Choephoroe* 920). Clytemnestra begs Orestes to consider the unfaithfulness of Agamemnon as well as her own; but he insists on the justice of the double standard.

Clytemnestra makes no reference to Iphigenia. Here the author is unfair. Indeed, only one slight reference is made to Iphigenia during the whole play (242). Finally, Clytemnestra, reverting to the riddle of the Servant and playing bitterly on an old proverb, declares that she is pleading with a tomb—Orestes is the spirit of the implacable Agamemnon. Her last words are that she has borne a serpent. Her dream has come true.

Orestes has been a true son of Clytemnestra in this scene. His appeal to Pylades, reminiscent somewhat of the appeal of Electra to the chorus at the opening of the play (122), is dramatically effective in that Pylades, after being silent during the whole play, speaks three lines, citing the authority of Apollo and thus, as it were, placing the stamp of divine approval upon the deed. Still, this appeal would weaken the character of Orestes if it did not seem almost superfluous; for Orestes has been very sure in his purpose all through the play, as sure of it as Clytemnestra was of her purpose in the *Agamemnon*, although Orestes has the direct command of Apollo to support him. For Orestes to falter as Medea does would be sacrilege. His appeal to Pylades, furthermore, comes at the first of his scene with Clytemnestra. If he has shown any real hesitation, it is purely an emotional reaction, for he certainly shows no intellectual misgivings during the subsequent clash. Clytemnestra, however, is never broken as Hamlet's mother is broken.

Orestes is victor, but his superiority is primarily one of physical strength.

The most marked characteristic of Orestes is his bitterness. This is seen from the first of the play, but it comes out most clearly in his final speeches. With sardonic humor he tries to find a name for the bloodstained cloak in which his father was ensnared (973-1006). His lines are charged with the emotion which he so thoroughly suppressed in the scene with Clytemnestra, and these final speeches are strange ones for Greek tragedy. In fact, if we read this speech in a translation which, like Thomson's, is colored by Shakespearean language, we may imagine that we are here reading a newly discovered speech of Hamlet.²¹ Again Orestes describes his mother as a deadly serpent whose mere touch would "breed corruption." In these powerful speeches, as in the scene between mother and son, Aeschylus rises to the height of the *Agamemnon*.

Orestes breaks in the final scene as Clytemnestra did in the final scenes of the *Agamemnon*. Orestes' faith in the justice of his cause, however, is never shaken, and the Furies, though not seen by the others present, are external supernatural beings and not merely forces of his own conscience.

Preparation for the *Eumenides*.—The terms "Erinys" and "Erinyes" (Avenging Fury and Furies) occur some nine times in the *Agamemnon*, used with reference to the crime of Paris, to Helen, to the hatred caused by the loss of Greek lives at Troy, and to Agamemnon and his house both because of the sacrifice of Iphigenia (1433) and because of the family blood feud and crimes of Atreus (1580). The same terms are used in the *Choephores* in reference to the spirit of Agamemnon demanding vengeance. The most significant of four passages is that in which Orestes describes the Fury of the house as never stinted (577). More definite foreshadowing of Orestes' own punishment is found in the warning of Clytemnestra that Orestes should beware of her curses and her avenging hounds (912, 924). The chorus repeatedly say that blood demands blood and repeatedly stress the difficulty of laying such a curse. These indications may lead us to expect the appearance of the Avenging Furies at the end of this play and the struggle between them and Apollo in the *Eumenides*.

Since Apollo has commanded the deed, however, and since the chorus thoroughly approve and rejoice at the deliverance of the house, we might be led to assume that the curse has been laid once for all. This inconsistency brings out the basic conflict between Apollo, representing Agamemnon and the moral necessity of avenging his foul murder, and the Furies, representing Clytemnestra and the crime against

nature of a son's slaying his mother. This conflict, of course, is the central problem of the next play.²²

At the end of the *Choephores*, Orestes says that he will take refuge at the shrine of Apollo in Delphi, and the chorus assure him that Apollo will free him of his woes, although the final note of the chorus is one of bewilderment and uncertainty. This last scene is very similar to the closing scenes of the *Agamemnon*: In each, two bodies are exhibited with their slayer, who attempts to justify the slaughter but is met with opposition, in the *Agamemnon* by the chorus, in the *Choephores* by the Furies. In each play, the end obviously has no finality.

EUMENIDES ("KINDLY SPIRITS")

Scene.—The *Eumenides* is one of the few Greek plays in which there is a complete removal of the chorus and a change of scene. The prelude takes place before the temple of Apollo at Delphi. The Priestess, who speaks the prologue, is clearly outside the temple; but Apollo, Orestes, Clytemnestra's Ghost, and the chorus are inside, though actually on a platform (*eccyclema*) or revealed by some other device.²³ When Orestes enters at Athens, he is facing a shrine of Athena; but here the locality is left somewhat vague, for the ensuing trial apparently takes place on the Areopagus (685, "Ares' Hill"), west of the Acropolis. Here again we note the informality of early tragedy in regard to background.

Since almost every Greek temple was built upon a podium of three high steps, there may have been three steps in front of this building, and it has reasonably been assumed that these steps were evident also in the *Agamemnon* and *Choephores*. A certain amount of scene-shifting may occur during the play. Possibly a statue of Athena is produced and, later, urns for the voting and perhaps benches for the judges are brought in.

Athena first appears probably in a car or on the machine.

The masks and the appearance of the chorus of Furies were verbally dreadful. Aristophanes amusingly refers to them in the *Plutus* (422-26). There is an ancient story of very doubtful value to the effect that this chorus of Furies so astounded the audience that children fainted and pregnant women miscarried. (But the presence of women and children in the theater of this period is itself a disputed point.) Certainly the scene wherein the Furies are awakened by Clytemnestra and excited to punish Orestes has an effective eeriness about it. So has their "hypnotizing song" during which they perhaps dance wildly around Orestes clinging to the altar of Athena.

The conversion of the Furies into Kindly Spirits with no change of masks, therefore, somewhat embarrasses the poet; but he has Athena say that she sees great benefit for the citizens coming from these dreadful visages (990-91).

Time.—The action takes place perhaps a few days after that of the *Choephoroe*. An uncertain interval of time passes at the shift of scene.

Legend.—Most of the action of the *Euменides* seems to have been the invention of Aeschylus, although there was a tradition that Orestes had been tried by the Areopagus with the children of Aegisthus as prosecutors.¹³ There was also a tradition, contrary to the version of Aeschylus, that the first trial of the Areopagus was Poseidon's prosecution of Ares for the slaughter of Poseidon's son.¹⁴ That Apollo instigated and purified or protected Orestes was well established in poetry long before Aeschylus.

In popular Greek morality, terms of ill omen were avoided and often replaced by their opposites. Thus the inhabitants of certain areas of the Black Sea, as related in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, were accustomed to put strangers to death; accordingly this sea, once the "Inhospitable" (Axine), became the "Hospitable" (Euxine). In like manner, the dread spirits which form the chorus of the present play were properly Furies or Avenging Spirits (*Eriinyer*) but by a propitiatory euphemism became the Kindly Spirits (*Euменides*). Aeschylus in this play, however, explains the change of name as denoting a real change of character. In the earlier part of the play, it may be noted, the term Furies is applied to the chorus by themselves but carefully avoided by others. Near the end, Athena addresses them by this title, but with a complimentary epithet (951). The conception of the Furies as punishing murder only when kindred blood is concerned is not consistently maintained in the previous plays, and it is by no means the invariable conception of them in Greek tragedy.¹⁵

Theme.—The murder of Agamemnon was a foul deed demanding revenge. Orestes has taken this revenge; but in so doing, in spite of the direct command of Apollo, he has transgressed one of the most basic human laws by slaying his own mother.¹⁶ The liberation of Orestes finally ends the woes of the house of Atreus; but it also offends the Furies, and the last part of this play is concerned with the conversion of these primitive divinities from Furies to Kindly Spirits and with their propitiatory settlement and the foundation of their cult in Attica. Their conversion symbolizes the abandonment of the law of the talion and the private blood feud in favor of public legal trial. It symbolizes an adoption of justice that is tempered by reason and mercy—equity rather than rigid law, an extremely important advance in the growth of

justice. The Athenians proudly considered themselves the originators of laws and legal processes to replace violence. Explanations of Attic customs and institutions, such as here the founding of the Areopagus, were among the most frequent elements of tragedy.

The conversion of the Furies, daughters of Night, constitutes also a reconciliation of the powers of darkness with the powers of light, or the union of the ancient Fates with Zeus (1045-46). This conception of the eventual reconciliation of all divine powers is important in interpreting the prologue and other sections of the play.

At first glance, it may seem unfortunate that the case of Orestes is not honestly argued on the real moral issue: can deliberate homicide, especially the present dreadful case, be justified? But in point of fact, the poet does not attempt anywhere in the trilogy to systematize the moral chaos of this family. The guilt of Agamemnon is never systematically considered, and in the *Choephoroe* the case of Clytemnestra is not argued out in a fair and honest fashion. None of the three plays has a really satisfying moral solution. Obviously Aeschylus here, as perhaps in the *Seven against Thebes*, is not primarily concerned with the moral problem. Indeed he is here deliberately seeking a problem insoluble according to primitive law, for such a problem most clearly sets forth the necessity for a new conception of justice and a new system of legal procedure. This is his primary concern—a political and patriotic and, in a way, religious theme. Since the moral problem of Orestes is a hopeless conundrum, Aeschylus thus made the subject precisely fit his purpose, whereas both Sophocles and Euripides in their own different ways merely broke their heads over the conundrum.

The patriotic and religious themes of this play have overwhelmed the story of Orestes. Like the *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles, the *Euменides* was written in the poet's old age shortly before his death, and it was obviously designed as a glorious encomium of Athens, "the land most beloved of the gods" (869).

Patriotic and political elements.—One of the main motives of this play is the celebration of the divine foundation of the council of the Areopagus. This council in the time of Aeschylus consisted of former "archons," yearly magistrates chosen by lot from the two uppermost of the four classes of citizens and retaining their position on this council for the remainder of their lives.¹⁷ The Areopagus held wide juridical, and indirectly, political powers until three years before the presentation of these plays, when it was reduced to a court for homicide cases. This reform was one of the most important steps in the development of the extreme democracy which held sway at Athens during the latter part of the fifth century. Whether or not Aeschylus is criticizing this change

is a matter of dispute. Athena commands that the laws be not changed (693)—typical Greek conservatism—and that a mean between anarchy and tyranny be maintained (696), as the Furies have earlier advised (526-37). The council, furthermore, is flatteringly called the savior of the city and the bulwark or garrison of the land (701, 706, 949), phrases which approach the official designation of the Areopagus before its reform as "the guardian of the laws."¹⁸ Still, the council is here founded as a homicide court (682).

Even if we should conclude that Aeschylus is here criticizing the reform of the Areopagus, we cannot accuse him of partisanship, for he certainly praises the alliance with Argos, which had recently been maneuvered by the same party, the extreme democrats. In much the same fashion, Euripides' *Suppliants* celebrates or prepares for the later alliance with Argos in 420 B.C. Even in Homer, Orestes is obligated to Athens, since it is from Athens that he returns to slay Aegisthus. But in Homer, Agamemnon's city is Mycenae, not Argos. The reason for this change in Aeschylus is significant.¹⁹ Mycenae had been destroyed by Argos in 468/7 B.C.; and, by placing the home of Agamemnon at Argos, Aeschylus flatters the Argives as much as he would have insulted them by placing it at Mycenae, and he makes possible the impressive ratification of eternal friendship between Argos and Athens in this play. Preparation for this theme is found in laudatory references to Argos in both the *Agamemnon* (1665) and the *Choephoroe* (302). Orestes solemnly promises faithful alliance to Athena in return for her aid (*Eumenides* 288-91). In his efforts to influence the judges, Apollo, too, promises the faithful alliance of Orestes and his descendants with Athens (669-73). After his acquittal, Orestes declares his everlasting friendship and aid even after death. In the time of Aeschylus the reputation of the Argives needed rehabilitation at Athens because of their doubtful loyalty to the Greek cause during the Persian wars.²⁰

Even minor details of the play contain patriotic implications. When Orestes invokes the aid of Athena, he asks her to come "whether she is in the land of Libya . . . bringing aid to her friends, or watching over the Phlegraean plains . . ." (292-96). Obviously Aeschylus is here thinking of the large Athenian expedition which was in Egypt when these plays were produced, and of the important Athenian interests in Thrace (Phlegraean plains) and the recently suppressed revolt of Thasos, an island near by. When Athena actually appears to aid Orestes, she says that she has come from the region of the Scamander River (near the site of Troy in Asia Minor), which, Athena continues, was given as a special gift to herself and to the Athenians by the Greek leaders who captured Troy. An ancient commentator tells us

that this passage refers to the dispute of Athens and Mytilene over the possession of Sigeum in the Troad.

Athena promises victory among men to her city (913-15), and both she and the chorus repeatedly deprecate civil strife. This deprecation perhaps is not a pointless generality. The friends of the exiled Cimon were contemplating revolt at this time, and the extreme democrats, now in power, were still anxious to avenge the murder of their former leader Ephialtes.²¹ But again Aeschylus shows no partisanship. He exhorts the aristocrats against civil war (861-66) and the extreme democrats against exacting of vengeance (979-83).

Discussion.—The *Eumenides* opens with a monologue-prologue in which the Priestess recites mythological history as the author would have it understood for this play. The speaker of the prologue, as in the *Agamemnon*, is a protatic character, and her recitation resembles a prologue from Euripides. The subject matter here is more pertinent than it seems, however, for Orestes' case is being generalized into a clash between old and new gods and old and new conceptions of justice, and this process begins at the very opening of the play.

The action is set into motion with the Priestess' second entrance, terrified at the dreadful sight which she has discovered within the temple. The ensuing rapidly changing scenes are dramatic and spectacular. Orestes is sent forth by his mentor Apollo,²² and the Furies are awakened for the pursuit by the ghost of Clytemnestra. The appearance of the ghost with her recent wounds and the general goriness of these scenes suggest the horror of Orestes' deed and bind the opening of the new play closely with the ending of the *Choephoroe*. Significantly the name Clytemnestra is withheld in her first speech until the last moment possible (in this meter), and at its sound the Furies are first aroused.

In these prelude scenes the final acquittal of Orestes is foretold by Apollo; but even here it becomes obvious that a momentous clash is developing between the elder Furies and the younger Apollo and Athena. Considerations of great import are at stake: ancient prerogatives, the conception of justice, and the manner of maintaining it among mortals. These momentous subjects gradually emerge and overshadow the personal fate of Orestes as the play progresses. They are the burden of the first stasimon after the chorus has discovered Orestes at Athens (321-96). The attitude of Athena, also, causes these considerations to loom far above the case of Orestes. She refuses to allow such a case to be decided on mere technical grounds—whether or not Orestes actually committed the deed (432)—nor will she in archaic fashion undertake herself to arbitrate the case. She has been placed in

a dilemma worse than that of Pelasgus in the *Suppliants*. He had to choose between sacrilege and war; she must choose apparently between two types of sacrilege: rejection of a suppliant or transgression of the Furies' prerogatives with their consequent dread revenge upon her land. Here the more important issue comes to the fore—placating the Furies—for we have been told already that Orestes will be acquitted. Thus the poet prepares for carrying the play beyond the trial of Orestes.

This generalization of Orestes' case is continued in the following stasimon. The chorus predict the collapse of discipline and restraint of crime if he is acquitted—fear of punishment is the foundation of all law and order; crime, therefore, must be followed by punishment.

As this play was designed in part to give divine prestige and sanctity to legal processes in Athens, the trial of Orestes quite naturally has many points of similarity to actual trials there: the preliminary hearing before the case is assigned to a particular court, the clemency shown the accused by allowing him to speak last and by acquitting him if the votes are equal, the repeated exhortations to the jurors to remember their oaths (674-75; 708-10), and various other details. In actual trials on the Areopagus, oaths were taken by the "Venerable Godesses," another name for the Eumenides, whose sanctuary was the chasm close by the Areopagus to which they are led at the end of this play.²³

If we care to view the trial unsympathetically, we find still other less admirable similarities to real trials in both ancient and modern times. Orestes indulges in legal trickery by making the chorus admit that they did not persecute Clytemnestra because she was not the blood kin of Agamemnon (605, cf. 212) and then by producing a "professional expert" to testify that a child is the product solely of the father's seed and that the mother is merely a nourisher. This doctrine, doubtless taken from the analogy of sowing seed in the earth, was current among Egyptians and the Pythagoreans. It was accepted or at least used by Euripides (*Orestes* 551-56) and by Sophocles (*Electra* 341-42; cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 50 D). It is found today among certain primitive peoples.²⁴ Here this explanation has the practical advantage of relieving the Argive descendants of Orestes of any embarrassment at having such an ancestress as Clytemnestra. It is thought that certain of the Athenian nobility, also, traced their descent from Orestes.²⁵ But worse than this sophistic argument of Apollo—and sound arguments are not altogether neglected (625-39)—is the fact that the presiding judge herself, Athena, is offered as proof of this theory of parentage. She had sprung from the brow of Zeus and was the one known example in all creation of a being without a mother! Apollo also indulges in

violent abuse of his opponents in a manner usual in Athenian courts, and he has the effrontery publicly to bribe the judges by offering to make Athens great and Orestes and his descendants faithful allies for all time (668-73). While the jurors are casting their ballots, the chorus and Apollo threaten them and then turn upon each other with mutual insults. The chorus, to whom Apollo symbolizes the younger gods (162) who have dangerously radical ideas concerning the responsibility and punishment of criminals, remind him of another contention which he won by making his opponents, the Fates, drunk!

The presiding officer, Athena, is little better than the advocate; for instead of considering the case on its merits, or voting for acquittal out of clemency, she votes for Orestes because she had no mother and likes men—but not enough to marry one (735-38)!

The serious contention of both Apollo and Athena is that a child owes his first allegiance to his father, and with this doubtless every Athenian would agree. At least the usual Athenian attitude exaggerated the importance of the male.²⁶ This is the point on which Orestes is acquitted; but it is given no more stress than is necessary to make the acquittal plausible and, even so, half of the judges vote for condemnation. Scholars seem unjustified, therefore, in interpreting the play as primarily an explanation of the patriarchal order or of the Athenian law of inheritance.²⁷

The trial is at least a very spirited and dramatic performance. It is the first example of an extended scene with three speaking actors and the chorus all taking important parts. Since the chorus continue their dire threats, the dropping out of Orestes and Apollo does not cause the play to collapse, and the dramatist must be given credit for successfully managing this very difficult transition.

The pageantry at the end of the play, like the opening scenes, would be far more effective in the theater than appears in mere reading. The crowds of supernumeraries, the color, and the music would make a grand spectacle, and the glorification of Athens must have been a moving experience for the original audience.