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A Study of the Aeschylean and Pre-Aeschylean Myth of Orestes

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A STUDY OF THE AESCHYLEAN AND
PRE-AESCHYLEAN MYTH OF
ORESTES

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
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Master of Arts

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTORY

In 1941 the Nazis were masters of occupied France. They dominated more than the French cities and towns, more than the factories and naval yards. They aimed at silencing the minds and hearts of the French people. Yet in that enforced silence the heroes of the French resistance found ways to express their opposition. One of those ways was the theater, and one of the playwrights expressing his dissent was Jean-Paul Sartre. In his play *Les Mouches* Sartre presents a message of freedom, absolute existentialist freedom, which he hoped the enslaved world would hear and act upon.

To understand Sartre's ideas in this play one must know that although he presents them as his own, the mold into which he casts his thought has its roots in history. He was using for his plot the ancient legend of Orestes, a young man who once in the fabled past had won his freedom from bloodguilt and the avenging furies.

Sartre, like the rest of men, is an historical animal. He lives in the past, he lives in the present, he lives in the future by reason of his intellectual nature. And if the man is historical, so too are the works of his hand and creative mind. They share with man a continuity with the past, just as much as they possess an element of newness and originality that breaks with tradition.

All this is verified in Sartre's *Les Mouches*; any understanding of the
play must be two-dimensional, based primarily on what Sartre says in 1941, but
rooted also in the knowledge of what the myth of Orestes had been before Sartre
made use of it, so that the play can be seen in its historical context; that
is, in its human context.

What is true of Sartre is true also of Aeschylus. In 458 B.C. Aeschylus
presented his Oresteia, a trilogy portraying through this dramatic legend his
personal message on the meaning of man. But the myth which provided Aeschylus
with the raw material of his story had already developed even before this early
date in the fifth century before Christ. Not only had the myth grown in inci-
dental fictional details, it had also incorporated many religious and moral
overtones. A knowledge of this increment and of the alteration of the myth be-
fore the time of Aeschylus will make the interpretation of the Oresteia possi-
able. Without such an appreciation of the condition of the myth before
Aeschylus, any interpretation of the meaning and message of his trilogy would
run the risk of becoming a mere subjective projection of a modern critic, rather
than a genuine recapturing of the viewpoint of the author.

The purpose of this thesis, therefore, aims at understanding the Oresteia
of Aeschylus through a study of the myth of Orestes in its Aeschylean and pre-
Aeschylean form.

There is an objection to this plan that must be forestalled at once. The
objector is Professor H. D. F. Kitto. Many times over in his book on Greek
tragedy, he makes the following point: "Criticism, it seems to me, can without
discredit begin with what is in the poet's head, without inquiring how it got
there."¹ In other words he makes the dichotomy between historical scholarship

¹H. D. F. Kitto, Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study (Garden City, n.d.), p. vii.
and literary criticism, and opts for the literary effort which strives to understand the dramatic conception that underlies each individual play.

Does this criticism of the historical approach vitiate the aim of this thesis? Not needfully so. Kitto emphasizes the formal aspect of the play he interprets, but this in itself implies that the form he strives to grasp is the form of a certain matter. Hence, although form is primary, the matter (in this instance the myth Aeschylus chose) is integral to the play, and a knowledge of the myth will throw light on the meaning of the drama.

This is not to say that the history of the pre-Aeschylean myth will explain Aeschylus' play. The exact nature of the influence of the myth on the drama has been clarified by Bowra. Highlighting the importance of myth, he writes: "The selection which the poet makes from mythology provides him not only with a dramatic subject but with a means to clarify something that absorbs or troubles his mind. The strength of his play arises largely from the degree in which he has thought and felt about this and what it means in terms of human action. Even if he has a solution for it, this is usually much less important imaginatively and poetically than the presentation of the situation which provokes it."\(^2\) Thus myth determines the conditions of the artist's creativity, not the creativity itself.

Before any more is said about the development of the myth of Orestes, there are certain preliminary distinctions that must be made between myth, saga, and \(\text{Märchen}\). For the only possible way to understand and interpret the historical development of a myth is to know what myth is, and how it fits into the other

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activities of rational man.

Myth, saga, and Märchen form a totality whose close relationships make any precise definition liable to error. And the divisions that do exist between them are not always mutually exclusive. Just as one color fades into another, so does myth fuse with saga, saga with Märchen, and Märchen with myth. This overlapping need not mystify us, for these three are all forms of human expression; they share in the unity of the creative human subject who communicates the meaning he grasps in varying, though analogous, modes of discourse.

Märchen is the forerunner to modern fiction. It is the folk tale which knows no limits of time or place. All peoples have told such tales, still tell them, and will continue to recount these "stories of unfathomed antiquity told simply to entertain and devoid of any theological or didactic content."

The various motifs or themes used in the Märchen are not always easy to distinguish from myth and saga. It is true that when Homer portrays the misty land of the Cimmerians whose eyes never look upon the sun, when he spins out the fantastic story of the Cyclops with his elephantine-size sheep, when he tells of Odysseus' companions turned into swine by a witch—it is true that in these instances it is easy to recognize the pure fiction of the Märchen which appeals to the monstrous and the unknown and does "not stand for anything

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3 The precocious obsolescence of the various theories that have been presented as explanations of myth has been pointed out by Martin P. Nilsson, A History of Greek Religion, trans. F. J. Fielden (Oxford, 1925), p. 42, note; and in his thorough-going two-volume Geschichte der Griechischen Religion (Müller Handbuch series, 1955, 2nd ed.), I, pp. 3-13, Nilsson traces the vagaries of the various schools of myth. W. K. C. Guthrie, The Greeks and Their Gods (London, 1950), Chapter 1, notes the same diversity.

4 Bowra, p. 106.
outside themselves or convey any lesson or interpret any mystery." However, when the purely fantastic is fused with religious content and overlaid with social and cultural conventions, then it is difficult to decide what is really folk tale and what is myth. A method for resolving this confusion must rest on the following principle: "Ihrem Inhalt nach kann man Märchen und Mythos nicht scheiden, sie behandeln dieselben Sachen, aber sie geben ihren einen verschiedene Sinn; da hat Jolles sehr viel tiefer gesehen wenn er für den Mythos an die Frage stellte: jeder Mythos, solange er Mythos ist, ist eine Antwort, auch ohne stitologisch zu sein."6

This purely inventive nature of Märchen is best understood by considering the motifs which are more or less common to the folk tales of all peoples.7 It seems that there is a fundamental stock of themes which combine in various ways to form the corpus of Märchen. Nilsson lists some of the following: 1) adventure motifs in which the hero must overcome one unbelievable obstacle after another—fights with lions, dragons, chimaeras, minotaurs, etc.; 2) motifs centered about magical objects such as trick rings, weapons, and clothes which render the wearer invisible; 3) miraculous births; 4) animal fables including metamorphosis; 5) fairy tales with their elves and sea-nymphs.8

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5Ibid., 107.


7The many modern parallels to Greek myths have been listed by Frazer in his Loeb volume on Apollodorus.

As the development of the Orestes' myth is traced in future chapters, the place of the folk tale will be ever present, though often in a radically rationalized and humanized form with little of the shamanistic influence of the more primitive magic motifs.

Saga is an old Norse word for the Icelandic narratives which combined history and fiction. To emphasize the element of history which saga implies, the word legend might well be used in its place. Legends are traditional tales, myths purporting to be history; and as Rose explains: “These tales, however full of fictitious detail, have a historical basis, and represent either the popular memory or some imaginative writer's colouring of a real happening which was remarkable enough to be remembered more or less correctly.”\(^9\) The battle of Troy, the wars of the Seven and their sons against Thebes, the family troubles of Pelops and his dynasty surely distort history, if by history is meant the scientific, documented record of the past “wie es eigentlich gewesen ist” as Ranke has defined history.\(^10\) But if history is understood in a more liberal sense as simply the memory of the past, then surely these legends contain a kernel of history.\(^11\)

Even though legend is free in its handling of persons and events, and blends history with the strictly mythical motifs, legend is neither myth nor Märchen, just as Märchen is opposed to the other two forms. Thus besides saga


\(^11\) The work of Schliemann at Troy and his trust in the historical value of legend is the outstanding example of the kernel of history preserved in saga.
and Marchen, myth remains as a residue, a phenomenon of human culture, which calls for its own definition. However, to define means to give a logical analysis, and this is what appears impossible in the case of myth. Cassirer has said: "Myth appears at first sight to be a mere chaos—a shapeless mass of incoherent ideas. To seek after the 'reasons' of these ideas seems to be vain and futile. If there is anything that is characteristic of myth it is the fact that it is without rhyme and reason." 12

This objection to finding a common intelligible note to explain myth can be answered only if myth is considered as a function of man and not as any one product or content. It is a function of man insofar as it represents a complex mental process whereby man tries to integrate himself with the real world. From this process, definite characteristics do gradually appear which lie open to study; but the characteristics and various types of myth considered objectively according to their multiformal content will never solve the problem of what myth as myth really is.

Failure to recognize that the many facets of myth are not myth itself has given rise to many schools of thought. All of these have focused on one aspect of myth, and then extended a theory that explains that one aspect to all the other aspects found in myth. This undue expansion of universal theories that prize coherence and unity of explanation more than the correspondence of a theory that fits the facts parallels in great part the developments in cultural anthropology and archaeology. This is not difficult to understand when we realize that myth, from the beginning, was intimately linked with the study of religion. Thus when one new explanation after another was proposed as the

12 Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man (Garden City, 1944), p. 97.
origin of religion, the explanations of the function and meaning of myth kept pace with the innovations.\textsuperscript{13} Fetishism, animism, ancestor worship, totemism, and pre-animism were some of the sources from which religion was said to have sprung; consequently, the content of all myths was reduced to a hidden totemism, an animism, etc. This plurality of theories can best be traced by considering some of the various interpretations, and by examining the difficulties and the good points of each theory. No one of these theories solves all the problems in defining just what myth is. This is especially true when we consider the Greek myths, for the theories that might explain the mythology of the Cora Indians, the Melanesians of the South Seas, or the Australian aboriginals cannot be applied to the Greek myths without adaptation. The Greeks recorded their myths only when they were a highly developed people far advanced in civilization and culture. Hence in the sophisticated way of a literate people they turned their myths to more complex ends than the primitives had done, and into their myths read explanations of the issues of life and death. This is easily seen when the dramatic myths of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are compared with primitive myths.\textsuperscript{14}

What is myth? It has been interpreted as allegory. In explanation of this view, Rose writes: "One of the most ancient explanations is that these tales of wonder are allegories, concealing some deep and edifying meaning, which the wisdom of primeval sages prompted them to hide in this manner, either to prevent great truths passing into the hands of persons too ignorant or too


\textsuperscript{14}Bowra, p. 111.
impious to use them aright, or to attract by stories those who would not
listen to a dry and formal discussion.\textsuperscript{15}

This theory appears to find confirmation in ancient practice and interpreta-
tion. One need only remember the prolonged metaphor of the charioteer and
the team of horses which Plato uses in the \textit{Phaedrus} to describe the efforts of
the tripartite soul to attain eternal truth and beauty in order to see verified
the allegorical theory of myth. Not only Plato but his forerunners, the
natural cosmologists of Ionia, often dressed up their philosophical doctrines
in the garb of mythology. No doubt they thought that most people took myth as
a veiled and figurative presentation of truths more profound than expressly
stated in the mythic story; thus they used myth to solve problems of expressing
a truth difficult to formulate.\textsuperscript{16}

The initial credibility of the allegorical theory is lost when the im-
plications of allegory are found irreconcilable with primitive myth. Allegory
and metaphor presuppose a set of truths already known, known so well in fact,
that the usual denotation of words can be changed to make the terms and the
characters of a story represent in concrete form the abstract truths thus pre-
vented. But this is impossible; the early myth-makers lacked the precise
formulations and grasp of truths for allegory. Thus, although the allegorical
theory does explain the later practice of the Greeks, it does not tell us what
myth as myth is.


\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Cf. Hermann Fraenkel, Dichtung und Philosophie des Fruehen Griechentums
(New York, 1951), p. 653. He states that "der teils alte und teils originelle
philosophische Gedanken in mythischer Form vorlegt." See also pp. 138-50,
161-67.
Myth has also been interpreted according to the symbolic theory of Creuzer, as he developed it in his chief study, Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen. According to Creuzer, man felt himself to be one with all of nature, and spontaneously developed the many symbolic expressions of his language to express this unity. And from this unity with nature and the consequent spontaneous symbolism there arose a conscious symbolism to express the unlimited nature of God, the knowledge of whom was supposedly attained in a later period. Thus the age of myths was the age of this conscious symbolism, so that myth became the carrier of an esoteric meaning that adapted the truths about God to the limits of language and human conception. The true nature of myth was lost, according to Creuzer, when man overlooked the symbolism of myth, and merely considered the face value of the stories.17

Symbolism labors under the same criticism as does the allegorical theory in presupposing that myth is merely a device to express knowledge already possessed, rather than a method of attaining truth itself. "But for all his absurdities," says Rose, "Creuzer was right on one point. Schiller, to whom he owed much, had said that Art breaks up the white light of Truth into the prismatic colours; and the imagination works in a somewhat similar way, not setting forth facts clearly and sharply, as the reason does, but dealing in pictures.16 But Creuzer has more than this one point to commend his symbolic theory. He had a deep insight into the distinction between symbol and allegory when he observes that a symbol is bedeutsam, whereas an allegory will deuten.19

17 Schmidt, p. 35.
19 Friedrich Creuzer, Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen (Leipzig, 1810-12), p. 70.
Thus the symbol is self-explanatory; it has its own meaning. The allegory only intends or means to signify; its meaning is dependent on something else, on some interpretative key that will open the hidden meaning of the allegory. In describing myth as symbol, Creuzer thus sees correctly that the myth needs no extrinsic meaning.

Similar to the allegorical and symbolic schools in that it never realized how primitive man actually thought was the rationalistic theory. Even in Plato's day the sophists in their sophistication embraced this theory which sceptically rejects the truth of the divine and heroic myths, and explains them as poetic and fanciful accounts of very ordinary happenings. An example of this theory is found in the Phaedrus. Socrates and Phaedrus discuss the possible meaning of the myth of Orithyia and Boreas her abductor. Socrates presents the rationalized version of the story which makes Boreas a gust of the northwind that blew a girl off a cliff, and that was thus said to have carried her off as an abductor. Socrates continues with his own opinion of such explanations:

"[I], for my part, Phaedrus, ... consider such interpretation rather an artificial and tedious business, and do not envy him who indulges in it. For he will necessarily have to account for centaurs and the chimaera, too, and will find himself overwhelmed by a very multitude of such creatures, gorgons and pegasususes and countless other strange monsters. And whoever discards all these wonderful beings and tackles them with the intention of reducing them each to some probability, will have to devote a great deal of time to this bootless sort of wisdom." 20 This criticism of Plato penetrates the naivety of the rationalists.

Each of the above theories has a slight probability and explanatory value; but this plausibility usually comes from an a priori notion of man's knowing process, without verification of the theories in the myths themselves.

Another attempt at explaining myth was made by Euhemerus who lived circa 300 B.C. Euhemerism asserts that the gods are nothing but popular kings and heroes of old whose memory has grown and been embellished to a degree that approaches the divine. Thus behind every divinity and supernatural being, Euhemerus would find a human personality. This theory is far from absurd. As late as 1876 Spencer first published his theory that the origin of all religion was found in ancestor worship and the cult of the dead. And it is clear that both of these notions are closely linked with Euhemerism. But although ancestor worship does enter into a consideration of myth and religion, it can hardly be considered the sole font of man's notions of the gods and of his stories about their deeds, because apotheosis of man presupposes that men already believe in a divine realm into which the dead can be subsumed.

To the litany of theories that have been examined while seeking to explain myth, we can add the theory of natural myth as proposed by Max Müller. From his studies in philology Müller hoped to find the nature of the mythical gods by transferring his methods of philological analysis to mythology. As Cassirer has noted of Müller's methods: "Since this school adopted the methodological principle of basing mythological comparisons on linguistic comparisons, the factual primacy of verbal concepts over mythic ones seemed to them to be implied in

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21 Guthrie, p. 10.
their procedure. Thus mythology appeared as a result of language."\(^{22}\) In fact, Müller said that mythology was no more than "diseased language," "a part of a much more general phase through which all language has at one time or other to pass."\(^{23}\) Thus what primitive man used as mere metaphor or figure of speech to express his awe and reverence for the forces which caused natural events was mistaken as a literal expression of what was adored and reverenced. This theory was bolstered by studies of the Indo-European languages which possessed cognate words for the names of some of the gods. And it was argued that if the names were related in their root forms there must have been an original Indo-European religion of nature myths personifying the principal phenomena of earth, sky, sun, moon, etc. For example, they traced the etymology of the Sanskrit Dyauspiter, the Greek Ζεύς, the Latin Jupiter, the Old High German Ziu, and the Old Norse Tyr to the basic root meaning of shining or bright. Thus according to Müller's theory the father god of the Indo-Europeans was a sky god.\(^{24}\)

_Here again valid insight into the many meteorological myths of the Greeks and Aryans was vitiated by extending it to all myths. Although Müller had hit upon an element of myth when he saw that primitive man approached the forces of nature and tried to explain them imaginatively, his theory of the interaction of language and myth falsely subordinated myth to language, making myth the "dark


\(^{24}\) Guthrie, p. 5.
shadow which language throws upon thought."25

Only when myth is considered as an independent phenomenon of the human subject will a correct appreciation of its essence be reached. This is precisely what the psychoanalytic interpretation of myth attempted. By prescinding from the many different forms and motifs treated in the myths, the psychoanalytic method investigated the tensions and repressions of the human subject which could influence the imagination, and cause certain mythical motifs to be produced. On this analysis, myth is not symbolic of conscious intellectual knowledge, but of man himself. Diel explains the psychoanalytic approach to myth as a product of man's affective states in the following words: "La psychologie, en tant qu'elle s'occupe de cette production de l'ame humaine que sont les mythes, a donc deux problemes a resoudre: elle doit en premier lieu analyser le fonctionnement psychique a fin de mettre, d'une part, en lumiere l'existence de l'instance prevoyante et symbolisante et d'elucider, d'autre part, la nature du conflit intrapsychique, matiere a symboliser; et elle doit, en second lieu, proceder a la traduction detaillee et methodique du sens cache de la symbolisation."26

The influence of man's total inner experience is correctly emphasized in this theory, but Diel's demand for a methodical translation of the hidden meaning reveals the weak point in this approach. As Rose has said, speaking of the psychological interpretation of myth: "I have failed to find in its writings a single explanation of any myth, or any detail of any myth, which seemed even


remotely possible or capable of accounting for the development of the story as we have it.27

After the long list of theories: allegorical, symbolic, rationalistic, Euhemerism, natural myths, and psychological analysis, the only interpretation of myth that would appear free from error is an informed scepticism that fails to find any intelligible characteristic common to all myth and legend, or else an eclecticism which explains the various kinds of myth to the exclusion of a unifying principle. If this is the safe course, it is not the only course that can be followed. The following thoughts on myth do not pretend to answer all the problems, nor to vitiate the various good points of the theories mentioned above. An attempt, however, at some synthetic framework of interpretation offers the minimal benefit of having a context within which the development of the Cretes' myth can be understood. The synthesis is twofold. It consists in a methodological principle that will be the implicit guide in the investigation of the myth, and also in a theoretical assertion about the function of myth within the activities of man.

The principle of procedure is mainly historical. The aim is to discover the source of the myth or legend, its approximate date, and its gradual development in the hands of the Greek poets and artists. This will also include the question of the possible pre-Greek origin of the myth as well as the possibility of cultural and social conditions giving the myth new twists and turns. Next, it is important to classify the story as Märchen, saga, or myth. Rose suggests that, in addition to the above points of historical investigation, a cautious comparative study of the Greek and non-Greek myth be carried out. Although this

would be an interesting and enriching exercise, it is not strictly necessary to
attain the end of this thesis. 28

The thoughts that will guide the theoretical understanding of the myth as
it is discovered by the historical investigation include the following notions.

In most of the theories of myth that were considered there was the under-
lying belief that myth was somehow the product of an untutored, ignorant mind.
But myth is too extensive a phenomenon in human activity to be a simple mis-
carriage of logical reasoning, too satisfying to be a mere mistake. It is not
pre-logical in the sense that it offers no knowledge. Rather myth should be
looked upon as a part of man's attempt to conceptualize and express his know-
ledge. For besides the logical mode of expression, music, art, various aspects
of religious worship, and myth itself are all tools of human intelligence. As
Susanne Langer has said: "Language, the symbolisation of thought, exhibits two
entirely different modes of thought [the discursive, logical mode, and the non-
discursive, mythical mode]. Yet in both modes the mind is powerful and crea-
tive." 29

The non-discursive language of myth is the product of the imagination.
Just as legend is myth purporting to be history, so myth is imagination purport-
ing to be metaphysics. For the traditional problem of the one and the many
is not so much a problem of the professional philosopher as it is of man him-
self endeavoring to develop himself as man. Given a plurality of objects and
natural phenomena which present themselves to the mind of primitive man, man

28 Ibid.

29 Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, pp. viii-ix. This citation is found in
the translator's preface by Susanne Langer.
strives to unify that plurality. For in a world of disconnected fragments, in a broken world, man the knower and man the moral agent will not be able to retain his unity of subject; but in a world of unity, he runs a greater chance of keeping his action consistent with some goal.

All these considerations are linked intimately with mythic consciousness as emphasized by Mrs. Langer, for whereas rational metaphysics uses the full gamut of human experience, understanding, and judgement to arrive at the invariant structure of reality, mythic consciousness tries to visualize or symbolize the world through imagination alone. Stressing the experiential, non-rational origin of myth, Bowra has defined myth as it will be understood in this thesis:

A myth is a story which aims not at giving pleasure for its own sake but at alleviating perplexities which trouble pre-scientific man because his reason is not yet ready to grasp them. Before men advance to general concepts, they think in individual, pictorial images, and if they are to come to terms with something puzzling or unfamiliar, it must be brought into the orbit of such imagery and acclimatized to it. Faced by a world in which most things happen without a known cause, they need myths to explain them, and the explanation, which must suit their own special range of experience, is more emotional than rational and works not by describing cause and effect, but by associating one kind of experience with another and suggesting a connexion or similarity between them.

There is a difficulty in accepting this view of myth, for it entails our provisional acceptance of the world as the ancients interpreted it, and not the world of natural science. It is a world of demons, gods, and goddesses who appear so unsatisfactory as explanations even on the level of immediate and uncritical imagination, that it is almost impossible to conceive a nation of people naive enough to credit the myths which elaborated the actions and origins of the gods and divine heroes. Yet the early Christian fathers experienced the

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30 Bowra, p. 103.
firm grip that the myths and their gods had upon the imaginations of the Greeks and Romans. They fought against the myths as real enemies, just as Plato had fought against them in his program of education as presented in the Republic.

To enter into this world of mythical conception and imagination, modern man must lay aside his critical point of view and his elaborate notions of what makes for verifiable truth. Only then can he hope to understand how the Greek myths reflect man's reactions as he faces the forces of nature, as he lives within a society, as he performs religious rituals, and in general, as he strives to make intelligible the world in which he lives. Such explanations of the gods, nature, and society are myth properly so-called.

It is now easier to see the exact place of Märchen and legend in relation to myth. What was originally purely etiological myth is replaced or supplemented by Märchen told for enjoyment. And what was at first divine myth becomes heroic myth in order to explain the relations of the gods with mortal men. For what better men could act as players in the mythical presentation of man in his moral strivings than the great heroes of the legendary past. Thus myth, legend, and folk tale are fused into a complex that has been synthesized and unified in the imagination of man.

What originally presented itself as a dichotomy between legend and myth is thus eliminated. The resolution of this opposition will prove necessary because the story of Orestes shares so intimately in both myth and legend. Had not the shortcomings of the various theories of myth been duly noted in this first chapter, and had the fusion of myth and saga failed to receive proper consideration, the Orestes myth and its development by Aeschylus could scarcely be delineated in its totality.
CHAPTER II

THE MYTH OF ORESTES: FROM MYCENAE TO DELPHI

The work of Aristotle is, in great part, descriptive analysis of what is the case. Call this the biological, genetic, or empirical approach, the results of his investigations share in the solidness that comes from verifying theories in the data at hand. The Poetics of Aristotle exemplify this approach admirably, for in reading Aristotle's account of dramatic practice one can discern beneath his rules of theatrical-thumb the long traditions of the Attic theater, traditions no one could transgress without offending the public, without failing in the dramatic endeavor.

One of these rules of thumb treats expressly of the poet and the myths he uses in constructing his drama. In fact, Aristotle refers to the Orestes myth, and dictates the only sane way to handle the story creatively, while at the same time retaining the essentials of the story as related by tradition. Aristotle states: "τοις μὲν οὖν παρειλημμένους μέθοδοις λύειν οὐκ ἔστιν, λέγω δὲ οἶον τὴν Κλυταιμνήστραν ἐποθανόσαν ὑπὸ τοῦ θρόστου καὶ τὴν Ἐριφύλην ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἀλκμέωνος, αὐτὸν δὲ εὑρίσκειν δεῖ καὶ τοῖς παραδεδομένοις χρῆσαι καλῶς."¹

¹Aristotle, Poetics, 1453b22-26 ed. with critical notes and a translation by S. H. Butcher, 4th ed. (London, 1907), p. 50. Butcher translates the passage: "He may not indeed destroy the framework of the received legends—the fact for instance, that Clytemnestra was slain by Orestes and Erphyle by Alcmene—but he ought to show invention of his own, and skillfully handle the traditional material."
This admonition forms the keynote which will guide the investigation of
this chapter; that is, every form of the Cretan legend as developed in some
literary source will be considered as a compound of old and new, of tradition
and innovation. Therefore, every form of the myth found in the investigation
will point beyond itself to a previous source, and this previous source to an-
other prior to it. This is not to form an infinite regress that finds no point
of inception, for the plot which the poets accept from the past is rooted in
some cultural and historical beginning without which the heroic or divine myth
could not be shaped.

The heroic myth, it is important to note, responded to the demands of the
tragedians in a way that the divine myths could never do. The stories of the
gods might offer splendid etiological accounts of natural forces and religious
ritual, but such narrations were not suitable to move the emotions of man. The
heroic accounts, however, struck a responsive chord in the human heart. For
with little distinction between actual history and fiction, the people could
look to the legends of the ancient heroes for a better understanding of the ways
of human greatness and of the gods' manner of dealing with men. As Croiset has
said of the ancient heroes: "Leur histoire était la réalisation éclatante des
arrêts de la destinée."² The development of the heroic myth is, then, often a
progressive divinization of history; that is, the exploits of the past are seen
in an ever closer relation to the guidance and control of the gods, and not only
the exploits of the epic hero, but also his social institutions find closer
linkage and more radical dependence with the natural order instituted by the gods

²Maurice Croiset, Eschyle: Études sur l'invention dramatique dans son
Though this development is clearest in the handling of the myth by the tragedians, the earlier accounts of the Orestes myth offer sufficient material to make a study of their evolution worthwhile. In its second chapter, this present study will sketch the main development of the Orestes myth from the Mycenaean Age through the age of the cyclic poets. What will be traced is the story of Orestes, and not the complete Pelops legend. At first such restriction of the material may seem unwise, for Aeschylus' handling of the Orestes theme is never completely detached from the larger legendary frame of reference into which it fits. However, chronologically, the myths dealing with Pelops are later additions to the legends about the Atreidae. Nilsson has noted: "The most questionable and at the same time a superfluous figure of the Atreidae genealogy is the father of Atreus, Pelops." Whereas the family is called after Atreus, Pelops was inserted later in post-Mycenaean times as the eponymous hero of the tribe which gave its name to the Peloponnese. There is one difficulty: no such tribe is known to have existed. The fictitious eponym is nonetheless consistent with the practice of ancient ethnography, and the many sons and daughters attributed to Pelops had the added function of conveying their names and Achaian prestige to Dorian states. The myth of Orestes, then, rightly begins not with Pelops, but with the kingly Atreidae family whose power and sovereignty reach back into Mycenaean times. This means that the accounts of

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3 This is seen especially in the prophetic hindsight of Cassandra in Agamemnon. Before she is led into the palace of Agamemnon, she has a vision of the tragic events that have plagued the house of the Atreidae.


the Orestes myth as given in Homer must be considered merely as one stage, and
a fairly well-developed stage at that, of the complete evolution of the legend.
There are no actual literary or archaeological remains upon which to base this
thesis; but a certain hypothetical terminus post quem is permissible in placing
the Orestes myth at its approximate beginnings. To determine even an approxi-
mate a date, one must first answer the more general question, "How old is Greek
mythology?"

When Michael Ventris deciphered Linear B in 1952, placing the roots of the
Greek language in the Mycenaean world, he confirmed the thesis of Nilsson which
maintained that much of Greek mythology must be traced to a Mycenaean origin.
For what had long been suspected of the cultural objects described in Homer's
epics, and what had been conjectured about the Homeric language itself was now
verified. From this verification came the deeper realization of the literary
activity that must have existed as a bridge from the time of Mycenae to the age
of Homer's epics, that the myths presented by the poets of the Homeric age were
perhaps as old as Greek myth itself.

This question of the age of Greek mythology must be specified further if
it is to have any meaning. The Greek myth, including both divine and heroic
myth, has its roots in many different ages if it is a question of the reshaping
and remodeling of the basic stuff of the myth. But the origin and creation of
the great cycles of myth, especially of heroic myth, can be partially ascertained;
and this determination pushes us beyond the mere literary analysis of the
first form in which we find the myths. It presupposes that the mythic cycles
are not Homeric, or post-Homeric, but that the proverb "vixere etiam ante
Agamemnona fortes viri" is just as truly applied to the field of literature to
read "vixere etiam ante Homerum poetae." Thus the themes of these early poets, or bards, were not disconnected myths that still lacked unity, but rather the cycles of myth already were established in the Mycenaean age.

Even before the work of Ventris, the proof of this contention could be fairly well established on two counts. First, if the material elements, modes of warfare, building customs, etc. which are found in the epics reflect the earlier Mycenaean times, then the elements of myth and social life must also find root in those prior periods. This is true, for the merely material achievements of a culture are a result, a manifestation of its intellectual beliefs of which religion and myth are important parts. Further, the continuance of the material elements of a culture is less sure than the continuance of myth or religion, for the material framework in which a culture lives is more apt to be assimilated than the culture itself. In other words, accidental changes leave the substance of a civilization intact. Yet to prove that the myths and heroic legends as they appear in Homer probably found their origin in Mycenae is not to prove that any particular myth or aspect of a heroic legend is Mycenaean.

The second proof is more convincing. What is to be proved is that the epic cycles with their more or less fixed round of events and important heroes were

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6 Nilsson, Mycenaean Origin, p. 11. This is Nilsson's basic thesis as he develops it in Mycenaean Origin, and in his later work, The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and its Survival in Greek Religion (Lund, 1950).

7 Ibid., 24. Some of the material objects which Nilsson considers Mycenaean in Homer's epics: the full body shield, Nestor's cup, the boar's tusk helmet as mentioned in the episode of Dolon. The evidence from linguistics is also present. Mythical heroes with names ending in -eus, e.g., Atreus, Nелеus, point to earlier, pre-Hellenic times.
fixed before the age of the Greek epics, and consequently, were rooted in the past and not pieced together in later redactions. Archaeology offers striking proof of this. Schliemann was directed to Troy and Mycenae by the guiding hand of mythology, so that the findings of archaeology prove the connection between the cities of mythical importance and the Mycenaean cities which dominated that civilisation. Nilsson applies this principle to all the main cities of Mycenaean times, and in the constant correlation he finds between the mythological centers and the Mycenaean centers, he proves "that the mythological cycles in their chief outlines go back into the Mycenaean age." 8 This persistent connexion can be seen in some of the following cities which are linked to mythical cycles. Tiryns is the center for the exploits of Heracles; Mycenae is the home of Perseus and Atreus; Argos and the Danaides are related; Sparta is the locale for the myths of Helen and the Tyndarides; Pylos and the Nolides; Theseus is from Attica; Demeter is rooted in the Mycenaean town of Eleusis; Thebes can claim the myths of Cadmos, Amphion, Oedipus, and the Seven. 9

The thesis of Nilsson is directed principally at explaining the heroic myths, which apparently were closely connected with the cult of the dead in Mycenaean times. It is more difficult, however, to apply the same thesis to the divine and cult myths, for it is always possible that there were Minoan and pre-Greek influences determining the formation of the religious myths. In fact, Nilsson uses the fact of a Minoan influence to explain why there is no trace of the myths in Mycenaean art. He contends that the Minoan artista

8 Nilsson, Mycenaean Origin, p. 28.
worked for the Mycenaean rulers, and since the Minoans used only cultural representations in their art (for example, the Minoan double-axe and scenes of sacrificial rites), there would be little chance for literary, mythical representations to creep in.  

However, this dearth of pictorial descriptions of the myth in Mycenaean vase painting can also be explained as follows: "a) The vase painter did not consider his craft suitable for the representation of such ambitious subjects. b) Myth and epic were in their formation in the heroic age and their best expression was song rather than pictures. The Mycenaean society, and even more the Levantine society, was less of a "book-minded" society, to use a modern term, than that of Classical Greece. This is the same with Geometric art. One should expect Geometric painting to be full of mythological and epic scenes at a time when the Homeric epics were created."  

Thus the thesis of Nilsson is not jeopardized because of the lack of vase paintings which portray the stories from the cycles of myth. Perhaps as Luisa Banti has suggested, this lack of pictures only shows that the myths were in their first period of formation so that they did not offer the necessary...

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10 Nilsson, Mycenaean Origin, p. 32. Also see Nilsson's Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and its Survival in Greek Religion (Lund, 1950), p. 37. He mentions that besides the scenes of sacrifice and ritual, portrayals of fabulous monsters were frequent in Minoan art. To understand the point that is made about the difference between Minoan and Mycenaean art motifs, one should compare the reproductions of Mycenaean representations of mythology which appear in an appendix to the introduction of Nilsson's Minoan-Mycenaean Religion (pp. 34-50) with the excellent plates 1-23 which are printed in Nilsson's Geschichte der Griechischen Religion, 1. Band. 2. aufl. (München, 1955). These plates deal with Minoan motifs which betray a far different inspiration than the Mycenaean pictures.

aesthetic distance to make them popular as decorations.\textsuperscript{12}

Where do these theories, then, place the myth of Orestes? "It is impossible," Nilsson says, "to pronounce any well founded judgement on the age of this tragic myth, but it is the oldest of the family tragedies of the Atreidae, and it was followed by other myths of a similar nature attached to this house.\textsuperscript{13}

Although the myth cannot be dated exactly, it is impossible to explain how such a wealth of myths about this family of Mycenae could have originated in historical times for then Mycenae was only an insignificant location. Later modifications and reinterpretations are possible, but for the absolute beginnings of the Orestes myth one must look beyond Homer into the age of Mycenae's ascendancy.

The previous existence of the epic cycles ought not lessen our estimation of the importance of Homer's version of these same cycles of myth and legend. His development of the great Trojan cycle is the earliest available to us, and thus the literary history of the Orestes myth as distinguished from the archaeological study of that tale must begin with him. The next stage, therefore, in this investigation will consider Homer's knowledge of the Orestes myth. In this context, Homer means the author or authors of the \textit{Iliad} and the \textit{Odyssey}. Questions of dating and composition, though interesting and, perhaps relevant to a complete knowledge of the various elements of the myth's development, are not absolutely necessary for an understanding of the story of Orestes and his


\textsuperscript{13} Nilsson, \textit{Mycenaean Origin}, p. 45. Also see page 50.
family as narrated by Homer. 14

Although the actual events of the story of Orestes' revenge are not recounted in the Iliad, all the materials from which the main outline of the later story is drawn are present. Most significant is the character of Agamemnon as he is described in the Iliad. He is a man of power, almost unlimited power, in his position as leader of the Greek expedition against Troy. What is more, he holds power as an hereditary inheritance. Homer vividly portrays Agamemnon's ancestral authority and dignity by tracing the history of Agamemnon's scepter, the symbol of his absolute dominion:

άνα δὲ κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων
εὐτη σκῆπτρον ἔχων, τὸ μὲν Ἡφαῖστος κάριε τεῦχον.
"Ηφαίστος μὲν δόξε Δίι Κρονίου φιλάττει,
αὐτὰρ ᾧα Ζεὺς δόξε διακότορφ ἄργειάφοντε.
"Ερμης δὲ ἄνας δόξε Πέλοι πληξίππω,
αὐτὰρ ὃ αὔτε Πέλος δόξα Ἀτρέω, ποιμένι λαῶν.
"Ἀτρέως δὲ ἑνήκων ἔλπεν πολύμορον θυεῖν,
αὐτὰρ ὃ αὔτε θεύστ᾽ Ἀγαμέμνων λεῖπε φορήνα
πολλὴς νῆσοις καὶ Ἀργεῖ βασιλεῖ ἀνάσσειν. 15

Thomas B. L. Webster, From Mycenae to Homer (London, 1958), p. 283. Webster dates the Iliad at approximately 750 B.C. or shortly before, and assigns the date of 720 B.C. or shortly thereafter to the Odyssey. He stresses that the gap should be made as small as possible. About the authorship he says: "We must admit that those who like to believe that the Iliad was the poem of Homer's maturity and the Odyssey the poem of his old age cannot be proved wrong." (p. 283).

Iliad II.100-108. The quotations from the Iliad are taken from the edition of David B. Monroe and Thomas W. Allen, 3d ed. (Oxford, 1919). The English translations of the passages from the Iliad are taken from The Iliad of Homer, literally translated with explanatory notes, by Theodore Buckley (London, 1870). "... when king Agamemnon arose, holding the sceptre, which Vulcan had laboriously wrought. Vulcan in the first place gave it to king Jove, the son of Saturn, and Jove in turn gave it to his messenger, the slayer of Argus. But king Mercury gave it to steed-taming Pelos, and Pelos again gave it to Atreus, shepherd of the people. But Atreus, dying, left it to Thyestes, rich in flocks; but Thyestes again left it to Agamemnon, to be borne, that he might rule over many islands, and all Argos (p. 25)."
But what was Agamemnon's by ancestral right would naturally pass into the hands of his son Orestes. Thus in this passage of the Iliad there are implicitly stated the basic elements which will provide the motivation for the dispossessed Orestes to revenge his father's murder and regain his lawful inheritance.

Homer reveals another important facet of Agamemnon's personality, his low esteem for his wife Clytemnestra. It is this theme which will be taken up by later versions of the Orestes story, and made the necessary motivation for Clytemnestra's murder of her husband. Of Agamemnon as he faces up to the prophet Calchas and the prophet's demand that he return his slave girl Chryseis, Homer writes:

καὶ νῦν ἐν Δαναοῖς θεοπροτέων ἀγορεύεις ὡς δὴ τοῦδ' ἐνεκά σφιν ἐκηβόλος ἀλγεὰ τεῦχει, οὕνεκ' ἐγὼ κούρης Χρυσηῆδος ἀγλὴ ἀποίνα οὐκ ἔθελον δεξαθαι, ἐπεὶ πολὺ βούλομαι αὐτὴν οὐκ έχειν· καὶ γὰρ ὅταν εὐαγγείλης ἀλόχου, ἐπεὶ ὦ ὦ έθεν έστι κρυπτὶ, οὕ δέμας οὔδε φυὴν, οὕτ' ἄρ φρένας οὔτε τι έργα.16

The children of Agamemnon, important in the development of the Orestes myth, are also acknowledged in the Iliad. When Agamemnon attempts to placate the sulking Achilles, he offers the following conditions to Achilles, conditions which involve the family of Agamemnon:

εἴ δὲ κεν Ἀργος ἐκσιμεθ' Ἀγαμήκον, οὔθερ αἴρεσις

16 Ibid., I.109-115. "And now, prophesying amongst the Greeks, thou haranguest that sooth the Fardarter works griefs to them upon this account, because I was unwilling to accept the splendid ransom of the virgin daughter of Chryses, since I much prefer to have her at home; and my reason is, I prefer her even to Clytemnestra, my lawful wife; for she is not inferior to her, either in person, or in figure, or in mind, or by any means in accomplishments (p. 5)."
This explicit reference to Orestes should not be taken as an indication of a well-developed Orestes myth as known in later times. As Lesky has commented:

"Wieweit die Züge der Orestes-Sage zur Zeit der Abfassung unserer Ilias ausgebildet waren, lässt sich nicht sagen; jedenfalls verwendet dasselbe Epos den Namen O. in freier Weise einmal für einen von Hektor getöten Griechen (V. 705), dann (XII. 139, 193) für einen von Polypoites erschlagenen Trojaner."¹⁸ This comment carries some weight, but the mere repetition of a name that may well have been common does not mean that the Orestes myth was not already well-known or undeveloped. A better appreciation of the silence of Homer concerning the role of Orestes is obtained by considering the purpose of the Iliad. The Orestes myth is properly an event of the post bellum Trojan cycle; it has no logical place in the siege story. Therefore the argument from silence to ignorance is not valid. However, it is interesting to note that the scholia concerning these three loci where Orestes is mentioned all reject the verses because of the nominal identity with Agamemnon’s son. Composed as they were in a literary age when the complete Orestes myth had evolved, these scholia can be interpreted as a possible confirmation of the notion that the free use of Orestes’ name,

¹⁷Ibid., IX. 141-145. "But if we reach Achaean Argos, the udder of the land, he may become my son-in-law; and I will honour him equally with Orestes, who is nurtured as my darling son, in great affluence. Now I have three daughters in my well-built palace,—Chrysothemis, Laodice, and Iphianassa (p. 155)."

which the scholiasts considered improper, points to a period in which Orestes' deeds were not yet known, or else to a version of the story of Agamemnon that did not emphasize the deeds of Orestes. 19

Thus there is nothing in the Iliad that relates directly to the events which comprise the myth of Orestes. But the mere fact that the main personages, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Orestes are all known as figures in the same story offers some reason to believe that the cycles of myth from which Homer drew his themes included the further deeds of Orestes. A consideration of the details of the Orestes myth as known to the author of the Odyssey tends to confirm this suspicion, especially if the dates of composition of the two epics are, as Webster has indicated, to be placed as close as possible. No doubt it was this feeling for the unity of the source material from which the Iliad and Odyssey were composed that prompted a scholiast to comment on Telemachus' questioning Nestor about Agamemnon's death after the Trojan war: καλὸς ἀναπλήρωσις τῆς Ἰλιάδος ἡ ὁδύσσεια λέγεται. ἀ γὰρ κατέλειψεν ἐκεῖ, ἐνταῦθα λέγει. 20

Telemachus' question, "How did Atreus' son die?" finds its first partial answer in the very beginning of the Odyssey. There, after the initial miss

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19 Immanuel Bekker, Scholia in Homeri Iliadem (Berlin, 1825), pp. 170, 341, 345. Commenting on Iliad V.705, the scholiast writes: ἥ διπλὴ πρὸς τὴν ὁμονυμίαν ὅτι ὁμονύμος ὁ ὀμόσ τῷ Ἀγαμέμνονος νῦν.

20 Guilielmus Dindorfius, Scholia Graeca in Homeri Odysseam ex codibus aucta et emendata (Oxford, 1855), I, III. The comment refers to Odyssey III.248: "The Odyssey is appropriately called the completion of the Iliad, for the lacunae in the Iliad are compensated for in the Odyssey."
en scène, Zeus rises up to speak, for as Homer says:

μνήσατο γὰρ κατὰ θυμὸν ἐμύμωνος Ἀγίσθοιο,  
tὸν ἢ Ἀγαμεμνόνιδος τηλεκλυτὸς ἐκταν Ὄρεστης. 21

What is noteworthy in these few lines is the description of Aegisthus as ἐμύμων. Cualiffe gives this word as an "epithet of a person of general commendation, noble, illustrious, goodly, or the like." But in referring to its application to Aegisthus he says that it is apparently only a conventional epithet devoid of any special meaning when used in the present context. This need not be true. In fact, the further narration of Aegisthus' deeds as presented in the speech of Zeus carries with it an almost tragic feeling of sorrow for the revenge Aegisthus took on his father's foe. Zeus speaks:

"Ο πόσοι, οἷον δὴ νυ θεοὺς βροτοὶ αἰτιῶνται.  
ἐξ ἡμέων γὰρ φασὶ καὶ ἐμμεναι αὐτοὶ σφηνίζεις ἀτασθαλίσσιν.  
ὑπὲρ μὸρον ἀλγε ἕκουσιν,  
ὡς καὶ νῦν Ἀγισθός ὑπὲρ μὸρον Ἄτρειδα  
γῆς ἀλοχόν μνησθῆν, τὸν δ' ἐκταν νοστῆσαντα,  
εἴδος αἰτῶν ὀλεθρον. ἔπει πρὸ οί εἴπομεν ἠμεῖς.  
"Ερμείαν πέμψαντες, εὐθόκον ἀργεῖφόντιν,  
μητ' αὐτῶν κτεῖνειν μητε μνάσθαι ἄκοιτιν.  
ἐκ γὰρ Ὅρεσταο τίσις ἔσυται Ἄτρειδα,  
οππότ' ἂν ἡμὴν καὶ ἦς ἁμείρεται αἰνής.  
ὡς ἔφαθ Ἔρμείας, ἀλλ' οὗ φένας Ἀγίσθοιο  
πετ' ἀγαθὰ φρονέων· νῦν δ' ἀδέσποτα πάντι ἀπέτισε. 23

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21 *Odyssey* I.29-31. The quotations from the *Odyssey* are taken from the 2d edition of Thomas W. Allen (Oxford, 1917). The English translations are from *The Odyssey of Homer, with the Iliad, Epigrams, and Battle of the Frogs and Mice*, literally translated with explanatory notes, by Theodore Buckley (London, 1851). "[17] or he remembered in his mind the noble Aegisthus, whom far-famed Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, slew... [p. 2]."


23 *Odyssey* I.32-43. "Alas! Now, forsooth, do mortals reproach the gods! For they say that their evils are from us: whereas they themselves, through their own infatuation, suffer griefs beyond what is destined. Thus even Aegisthus, contrary to the decrees of fate, married the wedded wife of Atreides,
Although Zeus does not condone the action of Aegisthus, he is apparently using the story of Aegisthus' revenge as an example of the origin of evil; perhaps this indicates the place which the Orestes myth had taken as bearer of a religious and moral import.

The words of Zeus also hint at the character of Clytemnestra. She is wooed by Aegisthus, and this could imply her initial honesty and lack of active participation in the murder of her husband. As for Orestes, the motivation that spurs his vengeance for Agamemnon's death is made a simple matter of protecting personal rights: "διπόσταν ἡβην τε καὶ ἰς μεσεβαται αὐτῆς." 24 The verb μεσεβαται could possibly be interpreted as an indication of Orestes' exile after his father's death; but this must be judged in the light of the more detailed accounts in the later sections of the Odyssey.

Not only does this passage offer numerous details of the Orestes story, it also performs the added function of unifying myth with legend in an artistic unity. The properly mythical and etiological realm of the gods justifying their ways before man is linked with the legendary that joins the dim light of history with a fictional embellishment of that remembered past to produce

and slew him on his return, although aware that utter destruction awaited himself; since we forewarned him, (having sent the trusty Mercury, the slayer of Argus,) neither to kill him, nor to woo his wife; for from Orestes revenge shall follow for Atrides, when he grows to man's estate, and longs for his country. Thus spoke Mercury; but although he gave good advice, he did not persuade the mind of Aegisthus; but now he at once atoned for all these things (pp. 2-3)."

24 Ibid., I.41. "...when he grows to man's estate and longs for his country."
Homer's synthesis of humanized gods and divinised men. 25

Later in the first book of the Odyssey, there is another mention of Cretes. It occurs when Athena exhorts young Telemachus to slay the suitors who would marry his mother, and devour his and his father's estate. In this situation Cretes and his boldness in avenging his father and reclaiming his inheritance are the perfect examples to set before Telemachus. Thus Athena counsels Odysseus' son:

In this passage we note that Aegisthus has passed from his character of ἀμύμων 'blameless' to δολόμητις 'crafty', the note of sympathy that was found in Zeus' reference to Aegisthus is absent. Furthermore, the fame that Cretes wins comes solely from his vindication of his father's rights, so that it seems the tradition Homer is drawing upon for the Cretes story does not

25 It should be noted that the first reference of his Zeus to Aegisthus and Cretes is a rather loose fit in the context of the first few lines of the story. Of course what bothers the mind of Zeus has every right to find expression in the narration, but how this is linked to Athena's dialogue with Zeus concerning the safety of Odysseus is difficult to understand. At most Aegisthus who has suffered deservingly is a contrast to the innocent Odysseus.

26 Odyssey I.294-302. "Then consider in thy breast and in thy mind, how thou mayest kill the suitors in thy palace, either by stratagem or openly. Nor oughtest thou by any means to follow childish pursuits, since thou art no longer of such an age. Dost thou not hear what glory the fame Cretes has obtained amongst all men, since he slew the crafty murderer Aegisthus, who slew his renowned father? And do thou, my friend, (for I see that thou art honourable and great,) be brave, that some one of posterity may speak well of thee also (p. 10)."
include the active participation of Clytemnestra in the murder of her husband. As the scholiast says of the name of Agisthus in comment on Odyssey I.300: "οὐκ οἴδεν δ' ποιητῆς τὸν Κλυταιμνήστραν ὑπὸ τοῦ παιόδος μόρον." 27 Of course this explanation is not the only one that might explain the absence of Clytemnestra. The Homer who created a new synthesis of all the previous epic cycles followed the rule of *nova et vetera*. He used his creative skill according to the exigencies of his artistic medium and of his story. And in the present admonition of Athena to Telemachus it is easy to see Homer's desire to narrate an episode which can be *paradigmatisch* 28 for young Telemachus, an episode relating a deed to which only honor and glory are linked without the slightest stain of guilt. Consequently, the silence of Homer may well be a manifestation of his poetic ability to pick and choose from tradition as he needed.

More important than the place of Clytemnestra is the use of Orestes as an example. If Athena could hold Orestes up to Telemachus as an example long familiar to the young man, then surely the audience which listened to the recitation of the *Odyssey* must have known of the legendary fame of Orestes. For although Homer's account of Telemachus may be a new addition to the epic cycles that existed before him, it is to be expected that the examples in this novel form of the story will always proceed *per notiora*, and will integrate the new elements of the story to the old by interweaving parts of the epic tradition already long familiar to the audience. In the reference to Orestes such a

27Dindorfius, I, 55. "The poet does not know of Clytemnestra's death at the hands of her son."

When Athena and Telemachus travel to Pylos to visit Nestor to learn what he knows of Odysseus' fate, Nestor relates the fortunes of the Greeks after the fall of Troy, and also adds another exhortation for Telemachus to follow the example of Cretes. It is identical with Athena's advice, and adds nothing new to the elements of the story already mentioned. 29

A few lines after this summary reference to Cretes, Athena in the form and with the voice of Mentor, rebukes Telemachus for a lack of trust in her protection. She justifies herself in permitting Odysseus' exile by comparing the troubles of Odysseus with the fate of Agamemnon:

This reference to Agamemnon encourages Telemachus to ask old Nestor for the true story of Agamemnon's death. Telemachus questions Nestor:

29 Odyssey III.193-200.

30 Ibid., III.229-235. "But him the blue-eyed goddess Minerva in turn addressed: 'Telemachus, what word has escaped the lips? God, if willing, could easily save a man even from a distance. But I should rather wish, having suffered many griefs, to come home and behold the day of my return, than coming to perish at my own hearth, as Agamemnon perished by the stratagem of Aeëthisus and his own wife (p. 35)."
In reply Nestor relates the whole truth of the story, and as is usual with the discourses of Nestor, the whole truth means the long-winded truth. But the rambling account does add a few more details to the account:

In np17 flaator relate the whole tNh or the story, and as 18 uw with the dlscoureea of "ator, the whole tnth ana tbe 10ft~wlDded truth. But the rubbing accoumt. doea aew JlOA detail. to the account I

31Ibid., III.248-252. "How did wide-ruling Agamemnon, the son of Atreus, die? Where was Menelaus? What destruction did crafty Aegisthus contrive for him? since he slew one much his better. Was he not in Achaean Argos? or was he wandering somewhere amongst men; and did he, having taken courage, slay him (pp. 35-36) ?"

32Ibid., III.255-275. "\[\text{\textit{f}}\] hou thyself dost suspect this, as it in truth happened. If auburn-haired Menelaus, son of Atreus, coming from Troy had found Aegisthus alive in the palace; he would not have poured upon him when dead the crumbled earth, but certainly dogs and birds would have eaten him lying on the plain far from Argos; nor would any one of the Grecian women have mourned him, for he devised a very heinous deed. For we sat there accomplishing many labours; but he at leisure in the recess of horse-pasturing Argos soothed the wife of Agamemnon very much with words; the divine Clytemnestra herself indeed before refused the disgraceful deed, for she possessed a good understanding: for there was with her a man, a bard, to whom the son of Atreus, when he set out to Troy, gave earnest charge to preserve his wife. But when the Fate of the
Nestor then relates the events of his return trip from Troy, including a long account of the storm that ended with Menelaus in Egypt separated from the main body of the fleet that was sailing home. After this description Nestor continues with matter pertinent to the Orestes story:

Although many new details are added to the account of Agamemnon's death:

Menelaus' absence, the custodian left in charge of Clytemnestra, the storm at sea, and Orestes' exile, the most significant advance is the clarification of the role Clytemnestra took in the murder of her husband. This clarification comes, however, by innuendo. The honest and sensible Clytemnestra is duped by Aegisthus, but according to the account she becomes his wife willingly.

Thus when Nestor says that it was Aegisthus who slew Agamemnon, this does not leave Clytemnestra out of the picture as an accomplice; for Athena had said

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33Ibid., III.303-311. "But in the mean time Aegisthus devised these sad things at home, having slain the son of Atreus; and the people were subdued under him. For seven years then he reigned over Mycene rich in gold; but in the eighth year divine Orestes came back from Athens, an evil for him, and slew the murderer of his father, crafty Aegisthus, who slew his illustrious father. He then having slain him gave a funeral banquet to the Argives for his hateful mother and unwarlike Aegisthus; but on the same day Menelaus strenuous in battle came to him... (p. 37)."
More important in determining the responsibility of Clytemnestra is the mention of the funeral feast. Granted that Orestes is the slayer of Aegisthus, but what of Clytemnestra? Had she been killed by her son for her part in the crime? To say that she had just died a natural death at the same time of Aegisthus' violent death satisfies no one. The scholiast, contradicting the opinion of the commentator on *Odyssey* I.300, says that the reference to the funeral of Clytemnestra is just a polite way of sparing Orestes. Instead of saying that she died at her son's hands, the poet simply states that she was buried by him. Another scholiast mentions that lines 309 and 310 of the first book were missing in some editions, perhaps to retain consistency with the earlier accounts in which Homer does not mention Clytemnestra's death. Even if they are genuine, the scholiast continues, all the lines make clear is that Clytemnestra died along with Aegisthus, not necessarily that she died at Orestes' hands.

Robert even suggests that Clytemnestra "aus Scham und Verzweiflung sich selbst getötet habe." But it is almost impossible to judge precisely what Homer was alluding to when he mentioned the funeral feast. If Homer did not intend Orestes to be portrayed in the epic as the murderer of his mother, this

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34 Ibid., III.234-235. "... as Agamemnon perished by the stratagem of Aegisthus and his own wife (p. 35)."
35 Dindorfius, p. 150.
36 Ibid., pp. 149-150.
could mean that he did not know of this detail of the story because it was not yet part of the accepted legend. And even if this were so, it is not difficult to see how the simple form of the myth as presented by Homer with its emphasis on Aegisthus and Orestes as a parallel to the suitors and Telemachus offered fertile poetic potential for a later evolution of the story that would stress the conflict of Orestes and his mother.

After Telemachus' visit with Nestor in Pylos, he continues his search for information about his father. He next travels to the Spartan home of Menelaus.

In response to Telemachus' questions about his father, Menelaus tells the news he had from Proteus about the returning chieftains. The homecoming of Agamemnon is included in the narrative, and is the most detailed account of Agamemnon's murder yet recorded in the epic. As Agamemnon landed in his homeland:

τὸν δ' ἄρα ἀπὸ σκοπιῆς εἰς σκοπός, ὅν ὁ καθεῖτεν Ἀθησέως δολομητὶς ἄγων, ὑπὸ δ' ἑσχετο μίσθον χρυσοῦ δοῦ τάλαντα φύλασσε δ' ὁ γ' εἰς ἔνιαυτόν, μὴ ἐλθοὶ παρίδιον, μυήσαιτο δὲ-θοορίδος ἄλιπης. βῇ δ' ἔλευς ἄγγελέων πρὸς δήματα ποιμένι λυών. Ἀὐτίκα δ' Ἀθησέως δολίνην ἐφρασάτο τέγνην, κρινάμενοι κατὰ δήμων ἀκικοὶ κἀτὰς ἀρίστως εἰς δύον, ἐτέρῳ δ' ἀνώγει δαίτα πένεσθαι. οὖταρ δ' ἐκ καλέων Ἀγαμέμνονα, ποιμένα λαῶν ἔποιησιν καὶ δικαίων, δεικνύσας ὑπερηφάνων. τὸν δ' οὐκ εἴδον οἴδασιν ἀνίκατες καὶ κατεπεφνεν δεινοῦς, ὡς τις τε κατεκατειρεῖν θύμοι ἐπὶ φάτνη. οὐδὲ τις ἄτριθεος ἐτάρων λίποθεοι οἱ ἔποντο, οὐδὲ τις Ἀθησέως, ἀλλ' ἐκτάθει ἐν μεγάρουσιν. 38

38 Odyssey IV.524-537. "The spy indeed saw him from a place of look-out, whom crafty-counselling Aegisthus having led, had seated there; and he promised him two talents of gold as a reward. And he watched for a year, lest coming he should escape him, and be mindful of doughty valour. And he hastened to tell it at the house of the shepherd of the people; and Aegisthus immediately planned a deceitful stratagem. Having chosen out of the people twenty of the most excellent men, he set them in ambush, and elsewhere he ordered a banquet to be prepared. But he himself went to invite Agamemnon, the shepherd
It is difficult to see in this passage anything more than a further fictionalizing of the simple fact that Aegisthus killed Agamemnon on his return. The character of the paid sentinel is common to all detective stories, just as the treachery in the banquet hall with everyone perishing save a single witness is frequent in folklore motifs. The efforts of T. T. Duke to find some hidden significance in the notion of Agamemnon's being slaughtered like an ox at the manger, a significance that would make of Agamemnon the Bull-King of Minos slain ceremonially at the end of his terminal kingship lest his failing virility impair the fecundity of the land and its occupants is interesting, but makes too much of a simile which must have been familiar to the beef-eating Greeks. 39

The accounts of the Orestes story narrated in the first, third, and fourth books of the Odyssey are all linked with the Telemachy. The story of Agamemnon is apparently told more for the sake of its emotive power in bringing young Telemachus to a defense of his rights, than for the pathos of the story itself. The next passage containing a reference to the Orestes story emphasizes Agamemnon's death; and since it occurs in Book XI the Nekyia, the story is told for its own sake. As Odysseus relates his adventures to King Alcinous, he tells the story of his meeting with Agamemnon in Hades, and Agamemnon's version of the manner of his own death. It is interesting that Odysseus says that he met

of the people, with horses and chariots, meditating disgraceful deeds. Entertaining him at a banquet he led him unawares to death, and slew him, as if any one has slain an ox at its manger. Nor was any one left of the companions of the son of Atreus, who had followed him, nor any one of those of Aegisthus; but they were all slain in the palace (p. 57)."

Agamemnon in the company of the other souls who had perished in Aegisthus' palace. This forms a neat link with the earlier account in Book IV. But if the general setting of this passage agrees with the prior account, the tone and emphasis varies principally in the role taken by Clytemnestra. From the honest but weak-willed wife who is a passive accomplice to Aegisthus, she becomes co-partner in the affair. Agamemnon describes her role in the following section:

"Διογενεύς Δαστίαδη, πολυμήχαν' Ὀδυσσεῖ, οὔτ' ἐμὲ γ' ἐν νήσσι Ποσειδών ἔδομας τὸν ὄρος ἀργαλέων ἀνέμων ἀμέγαρτον ἀυτὴν, οὔτ' ἄναρσιοι ἄνδρες ἐδηλήσαντ' ἐπὶ χέρσου, ἄλλα μοι Αἴγισθός τεύξας θεάτρων τε μόρον τε ἐκτα σύν οὐλομένη ἄλοχῳ, οἰκονόμης καλέσσας, ἐδειχθάς, ὡς τίς τε κατέκτανε βοῦν ἐπὶ φάτνη. ὡς θάνον ἐνεκτιστῷ θανάτῳ· περὶ δ' ἄλλοι οὐταῖροι νωλεμένως κτεῖνοντο ὑπὲς ὡς ἄργιδόντες." 40

But not only does Clytemnestra kill Agamemnon, she also reveals her motivation, a deep-rooted hatred for her husband and jealousy for his concubine Cassandra:

οἱκτροτάτην δ' ἦκουσα ὅπα Πριάμοιο θυγατρός, Κασσάνδρης, τὴν κτείνε Κλυταιμνήστρη δολομητίς ἀμφ' ἐμοῖ, αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ ποτὶ γαῖῃ γεῖρας ἀείρων βάλλων ἀποθάνῃσι περὶ φανάρω· ἢ δὲ γυναίκις νοσφισάτω, οὐδὲ μοι ἔτηλ ὑδντε περὶ ἔτος ἀδαί γεροῖν κατ' ὀφειλομοῦς ἐδίκει σὺν τε στόμῳ ἐρείσαι. ὥς οὐκ αἰνότερον καὶ κυντερὸν ἄλλο γυναικὸς, ἢ τίς δ' τοιαῦτα μετὰ φρεσίσιν ἔργα βάλλειν.

41 Odyssey XI,405-413. "O Jove-born son of Laertes, much-planning Ulysses, neither did Neptune subdue me in my ships, raising an immense blast of cruel winds, nor did unjust men injure me on land; but Aegisthus, having contrived death and Fate for me, slew me, conspiring with my pernicious wife, having invited me to his house, entertaining me at a feast, as any one has slain an ox at the stall. Thus I died by a most piteous death; and my other companions were cruelly slain around me, as swine with white tusks. . . (p. 157)."
Why this difference between the earlier version of a timid Clytemnestra who had no part in Agamemnon's death and the version of Book XII? Has the poet simply embellished the account of the Telemachy, or has he drawn upon an intermediate form of the Orestes story that was more detailed? This is not an otiose question, yet with the evidence at hand it is impossible to answer. More pertinent is the position of Croisot who stresses the implication of the Nekyia account rather than its origins. Of the progress in the Orestes myth he says: "Nous nous acheminons vers la tragédie; nous commençons à voir plus clairement quelle forme de la légende Eschyle aura à traiter, de quels éléments déjà constitués il se servira. Ce nouveaux problèmes moraux surprient, qui n'existiaient pas dans la forme naïve de la première légende. La conscience des personnages grandit; des sentiments nouveaux naissent en leur âme."

Croisot's statement is true, but what needs careful note is his phrase "nous nous acheminons." The accounts of the Orestes myth as Homer narrates them are only in potency to the later dramas of classical times. The character

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\[1\] Ibid., XI, 421-32. "I heard the most piteous voice of the daughter of Priam, Cassandra, whom deceitful Clytemnestra slew near me; but I, raising my hands from the earth, dying, laid them on my sword; but she, impudent one, went away, nor did she endure to close my eyes with her hands, and shut my mouth, although I was going to Hades. So there is nothing else more terrible and impudent than a woman, who indeed casts about such deeds in her mind: what an unseemly deed has she indeed contrived, having prepared murder for her husband, whom she lawfully married! (p. 157)"

\[2\] The Odyssey XXIV.22, 95-97 also mentions Clytemnestra's active role, but adds nothing essentially new to the present version.

\[3\] Maurice Croiset, "La légende de l'Orestie avant Eschyle," Revue des Cours et Conférences, VII, 543.
portrayal of Clytemnestra, though profound, is still used to offset the virtues of Penelope, and not to evoke the pity and fear of tragedy. This tragic element is lacking in Homer because there is, as it were, no case of conscience for Orestes to solve. He has the simple duty of revenge, and fulfills it without the slightest scruple. In fact, Orestes does not appear as a person in Homer's epics. He is a mere actor whose deeds are noble, but which do not offer the grounds for inner conflict, a conflict that will turn the narrative of Orestes into the tragedy of Orestes. As Defradas has said: "Le drame n'existe qu'à partir du moment où il s'installe dans le cœur même d'Orestes... Le drame apparaît en même temps que le doute." 43

The question is, therefore, When did the retribution of Orestes become a heart-rending dilemma forcing the young man to choose between the vindication of father's rights and his own inheritance and the claims of his mother?

To omit a consideration of the development of the Orestes myth between the time of Homer's epics and the trilogy of Aeschylus might possibly be warranted by the scant fragments that remain as clues to aid our study of the myth's evolution. But such an omission would completely vitiate the basic presupposition of this thesis; namely, that Aeschylus changed not the basic outlines of the Orestes myth as he knew it, but rather changed the emphases and meanings of the central portion of the myth, and accommodated certain details to the exigences of his theatrical production. Thus, although the evidence is slight, there are references to the myth in its post-epic and pre-tragic forms.

The Troy story as presented in the Iliad and Odyssey was incomplete. Before, during, and after the actual episodes related in the two epics, there were many lacunae which needed to be completed. It was epic cycle that bridged over these gaps. The epic cycle was a collected series of poems that were composed out of material such as Homer used, but without his freedom in the alteration and adaptation of it. It is likely, then, that the pre-existing corpus of myth and legend used by Homer was also used by the various poets after him, so that any reference to the Orestes myth found in the epic cycle could well claim equal antiquity with Homer's version.

The Troy story in its complete form includes the matter treated in the Theogonia, Titanomachia, and Cypria. These three deal with the antecedents to the Iliad. The action between the Iliad and the Odyssey is covered by the Aethiopis, Ilias Parva, Iliu Persis, and the Nestoi. After the Odyssey there is the Telephogonia. The Oidipodeia, Epigoni, and Thebaïs can either be considered preliminary to the epic cycle or else constitutive of an entirely different cycle.

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46 The information we have about the epic cycle is based on an epitome of it in the Chröstomathia of Proclus. According to Thomas W. Allen, Homer, The Origins and Transmission (Oxford, 1924), p. 53, this Proclus has been variously thought to have been the fifth century Neoplatonist, or else a grammarian of the Antonine period in the second century A.D. Allen opts for Proclus the Neoplatonist as author for he feels that the whole neoplatonic tradition was heavily "inlucted" with philology, so that such a work as a treasury of literature would be within his competence. This is the traditional view of The Suidas. However, Allen admits that Schaad in the fifth edition of Christ's Geschichte d. gr. Lit., pp. 703-706 thinks the second century grammarian is just as apt a candidate for the authorship. At any rate, the title to authorship is a dubious honor, for all we have of the Chröstomathia are scanty remains of a further epitomised version in the Bibliotheca of Photius of the ninth century.

47 The Homeric Hymns contain no direct mention of Orestes, but in the Hymn to Apollo there is some evidence of a Delphic influence that made itself felt in other versions of the Orestes myth. This will be considered later.
Of all these poems only the Cypria and the Hostoi offer further developments to the Orestes legend. The Cypria, the authorship of which has been variously attributed to Stasinus, Hegesineus, or possibly Stesander, relates the events that precede the battle of Troy. \(^{48}\) One of these antecedents is the gathering of the ships at Aulis and Agamemnon's offense to Artemis which necessitates the immolation of Iphigeneia. The summary account of Proclus runs thus:

"καὶ τὸ δεύτερον ἡθορισμένου τοῦ στόλου ἐν Αὐλίδι;
Ἀγαμέμνον ἐμὲ θέρας βαλὼν ἔλαφον ὑπερβάλλειν ἔφησε καὶ τὴν Ἀρτέμιδι. μηνύσασα δὲ ἡ θεὸς ἐπέσχεν αὐτοῦς τοῦ πλοῦτος κειμένως ἐπιπέμπουσα. Κάλκαντος δὲ εἰπόντος τὴν τῆς θεοῦ μήνιν καὶ Ἰφιγενείαν κελεύσαντος θύειν τῇ Ἀρτέμιδι, ἐς ἔπι γάμων αὐτήν Ἀχίλλης μεταπεισάμενος θύειν ἐπιπερουσίν. "Ἀρτέμις δὲ αὐτῆς ἐξαρπάσας εἰς Ταῦρους μετακομίζει καὶ ἀδάνατον ποιεῖ, ἔλαφον δὲ ἀντὶ τῆς κόρης παρίστησι τῷ βασίλῃ. " 49

This story was unknown to Homer, for in Iliad IX.145 he named the daughters of Agamemnon, but did not refer to an Iphigeneia. Nor did he capitalize on the hate Clytemnestra would have felt for this attempted sacrifice of her daughter when he portrays her as the jealous wife who kills her husband's war prize.

\(^{48}\) Allen, Origins and Transmissions, p. 62.

\(^{49}\) Homer, Cypria in Homer's Opera, V. ed. Thomas W. Allen (Oxford, 1911), p. 104. "And afterwards when the fleet had gathered at Aulis, Agamemnon overshot a deer while he was hunting, and wounded Artemis. In her anger the goddess let loose storm winds to retain the men of the fleet. Calchas explained the goddess's wrath, and ordered them to sacrifice Iphigeneia to Artemis. They sent for her as though she were to marry Achilles, and tried to sacrifice her; but Artemis snatched her away to the Tauri, and putting her to sleep made her immortal. In place of the young girl, Artemis placed a deer on the altar (writer's translation)."
It is just such motivation that Aeschylus will use to heighten the conflict of opposing duties which Clytemnestra and Orestes experienced. 50

Another addition to the myth came with the Nostoi of Agias of Troezen. 51 This work mentions the death of Agamemnon by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, and the consequent vengeance of Orestes who is accompanied by Pylades; in the version of the Chrestomathia: " έπειτα Ἀγαμέμνονος υπὸ Αἰγίθου καὶ Κλυταίμνηστρας ἀναρρηθέντος ὑπ' Ὀρέστου καὶ Πυλάδου τιμώρια, καὶ Μενελάου εἰς τὴν σίκειαν ἀνακομίδη." 52

The vengeance which is mentioned in this account can be considered as a punishment of both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, for they are both reported as responsible for the murder. More significant is the reference to Pylades. This indicates a Delphic influence on the myth. The reason for this assertion is twofold. Jebb asserts that the Nostoi "related how Calchas committed suicide, because Mopsus, whom he met at Colophon, proved to be a greater seer than himself. Mopsus belongs to the traditions of the Apolline μαντική; he is sometimes called the son of Apollo by Manto, a daughter of Teiresias." 53

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50 Rose suggests that Iphigeneia is actually Artemis herself, and that the substitution of a deer, bear, or bull for the goddess is an example of a myth acting as aion for a ritual ceremony. If this is so, it offers another example of the fusion of divine and heroic myth. In this case, the divine is downgraded to the heroic.

51 Allen, Origins and Transmissions, p. 64.

52 Allen, Homerí Opera, V, p. 109. "Thereafter Orestes and Pylades revenged the murder of Agamemnon by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra; and Menelaus returned home (Writer’s translation)."

53 Richard C. Jebb, Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments. Part VI, The Electra (Cambridge, 1924), p. xii. This is not certain; the second reason carries more weight, for there is a textual difficulty about the names of Teiresias and Calchas, and Jebb uses the reading that favors the influence of Delphi.
Also, Pylades is a hero of Phocis which links him intimately with Delphi which is within the Phocian territory, so intimately that he has been called "eine Hypostase des pythischen Apollon."\textsuperscript{54}

The exact nature of the influence of Delphi on the myth must be considered in the next chapter, for its place in the evolution of the Orestes myth outweighs the Homeric and cyclic additions to the story. As Jebb has said, Delphi was "the agency by which the primitive legend of Orestes was ultimately transformed."\textsuperscript{55}


\textsuperscript{55}Jebb, The Electra, p. xii.
CHAPTER III

THE ULTIMATE TRANSFORMATION: THE DELPHIC ORACLE

Although the cyclic poems continued to develop the traditional story of Orestes, they did this in much the same way as Homer. The myth was still a part of a narrative that restricted the growth of the tragic potential, and emphasized action and not the individual actors. Between such an objective presentation of the myth and the shape of the story used by Aeschylus there is a wide hiatus that points to some radical reconditioning of the myth. There are not striking differences in the general outline of the story, for the version Homer knew remained more or less intact in Aeschylus. What has changed is the content. "Content, as opposed to subject matter," says Panofsky, "may be described . . . as that which a work betrays but does not parade. It is the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion. . . ."¹

Behind a change in content there is always a change in thought. A striking example of such thought mutation is seen in the adaptation of classical themes during the Middle Ages. It is not true to say that the Middle Ages had broken completely with the classical tradition, that the Renaissance was

an absolute rebirth of classical antiquity. Rather the Middle Ages introduced a new attitude toward the classic literary, philosophical, and artistic conceptions. Erwin Panofsky gives the following description of one example of such reinterpretation: "On the facade of St. Mark's in Venice can be seen two large reliefs of equal size, one a Roman work of the third century A.D., the other executed in Venice almost one thousand years later. The motifs are so similar that we are forced to suppose that the mediaeval stone carver deliberately copied the classical work in order to produce a counterpart of it. But while the Roman relief represents Hercules carrying the Erymanthean boar to King Euristeus, the mediaeval master, by substituting billowy drapery for the lion's skin, a dragon for the frightened king, and a stag for the boar, transformed the mythological story into an allegory of salvation."²

What the Middle Ages were to the classical myths, the influence of Delphi and the Apolline religion were to the archaic myths. The change in content of the Oreste myth must be traced not to any haphazard inspiration of individual poets, but to the mediation of a religious source, which was the catalyst in the passage from Ionian naturalism to Greek humanism of the fifth century.³

This assertion of the importance of Delphi can almost be made a priori, for in the final form of the Oreste myth, the murder of Clytemnestra, itself a natural crime, becomes the condition for Orestes' revenging the unjust murder of his father. Once the crime is committed, Orestes must purify himself. For without clean hands and clean heart, the glorious hero of Homer would become an

²Ibid., p. 41-42.

outcast, a shameful criminal.⁴ On this evidence alone, Defradas is willing to say:

La purification d'Oreste après son crime est inhérente à la conception nouvelle de l'Orestie. Le dieu qui se purifie du sang de Python était tout désigné pour purifier Oreste. Le Dieu du Pèan, hymne magique des purifications et des guérisons, devait attirer vers son sanctuaire de Delphes le criminel Oreste pour le purifier de sa souillure, comme il avait attiré Heracles souillé du sang de ses enfants. Nous n'hésiterions donc pas, même s'il n'existait pas des raisons de fait plus convaincantes, à affirmer a priori que l'Oreste n'a pu naître qu'à Delphes, en vertu de son contenu.⁵

The necessary appreciation for the importance of the sanctuary of Delphi in remolding the myths of the Greeks can come only from an understanding of the general place of the Oracle in Greece, and especially of its contribution to the poets who treated the Orestes legend in the interval between Homer and Aeschylus.

The sanctuary and shrine of Delphi, the home of Apollo, had many occupants prior to the advent of Apollo, god of the oracles. The site already was occupied in the late Helladic period, even though it was little suited for any extensive inhabitation since it consisted of a mountain shelf on the southwest spur of Mt. Parnassus. From this fact Parke argues that the early settlement was probably accounted for by the existence of an important local cult.⁶

⁴Cf. Th. Zieelinski, "Die Orestessage und die Rechtfertigungsidee," Neue Jahrbücher, III (1899), 81-100, 161-185. The far-fetched attempt of Zieelinski to make of the Orestes myth a transposition onto the human plain of a cosmic myth, wherein Clytemnestra is the earth goddess, Agamemnon Zeus, and Orestes and Pylades hypostases for Apollo the sun god who reforms the cosmic myth by humanising and moralising it, is a good instance of the close link that has been seen between Orestes and Delphi, although bad etymology vitiated the attempt.


archaeological evidence uncovered at Delphi is too vague, however, to make any clear conclusions about the exact nature of the early cults. Amundry mentions a Minoan rhyton found on the site of the classical sanctuary, but rejects this as sufficient evidence to prove that the classical temple of Apollo was built on the site of a Mycenaean cult. What he does admit is that there is sufficient evidence to establish the presence of a Mycenaean cult in another part of the Delphi area in which the shrine of Athena Pronaia stood in classical times. Parke draws the following conclusions about the nature of this early cult at Delphi:

The subject of Minoan-Mycenaean religion cannot be fully elucidated through the surviving monuments and the traces in classical tradition, but all indications point to the conclusion that the chief deity of the Minoans and those influenced by them on the Greek mainland was at all times a goddess, strongly associated with the earth and its fruits, who was worshipped particularly by women with orgiastic dances. Hence if Delphi was a cult center before Hellenic times, an original worship of an earth goddess would be a natural supposition on our archaeological evidence alone. But since all our literary tradition agrees in making Apollo a settler come from elsewhere and most of the tradition (though not in the earliest poem) makes Earth his predecessor, we can take it that the agreement of archaeology and tradition is right.

This hypothesis on the chthonic nature of the early worship at Delphi finds further verification in the presence of the omphalos in the inner sanctuary during historic times. The omphalos, a conical block of stone, was explained


8Parke, pp. 5-6.
in classical times by an aetiological myth. This stone was thought to mark the navel, the very center of the earth, for it was at this point that two of Zeus's eagles, each flying from the ends of the earth, met. But this view is surely late, an explanation developed when the Greeks no longer remembered its original significance. More feasible is the interpretation which makes the omphalos a fetish associated with the earth goddess, something analogous to the baetyl connected with the Mother Goddess of Minoan art. Even the literal interpretation of Delcourt who accepts the omphalos, or ruptured navel, as a natural symbol of fecundity and birth is better than the eagle legend, for it emphasizes the main fact: Delphi was holy ground before the Lord Apollo made his appearance; it was the sanctuary of a chthonic god who was displaced to make way for the Olympian Apollo, prophet of a new world order.

But when did Apollo make his appearance? When is it legitimate to speak of a Delphic influence on the thought and literature of Greece? Or more specifically, when was the legend of Orestes appropriated as a medium of the new god's religious message? Far from dry chronology, the answer to these questions is of the highest importance if the puzzling change in the content of the Orestes story is to be explained.

Was Apollo already installed at Delphi as an oracular god at the time of the Iliad and Odyssey? In mentioning the contingents of the Achaean army,

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10 Parke, History, pp. 6-7.
11 Delcourt, L’Oracle de Delphes, p. 145.
Homer includes those from "rocky Pytho and holy Crissa." At first this seems to indicate that the valley of Pleistos which contains both of these small settlements was connected with Apollo, especially when the use of the adjective γαθέν in this context is compared with its use in Iliad 1.36 to refer to Κύλλαιον τε γαθέν, holy because of its connection with Apollo. But Lefradas, following Nason, considers the whole passage as a late composition, which presents a geography corresponding to the seventh century.

Also in the Iliad IX.404-405, Achilles refuses the gifts of Agamemnon's ambassadors as the price of reconciliation, for he says that nothing can match the price of his life, not even the wealth of Apollo's shrine:

οὐδ' ὅσα λάινος οὐδὸς ἄφτορος ἐντὸς ἔργει,
φοίβου 'Απόλλωνος, Πυθοί ἐν πετρήσσῃ 14

And in the Odyssey VIII.79-80, there is a reference to an oracular response which Agamemnon received from Apollo at Pytho:

Ἄς γάρ ὁ ιχθεὺς μυθήσατο φοίβος 'Απόλλων
Πυθοῖ ἐν ἡγαθεί, δὲ ὑπέρθη λάινον οὐδόν 15

Defradas rejects these two passages as late additions to the epics; he bases his views on the reference to the threshold of rock, a building procedure not common before the seventh century. Wood was the material that would have been

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12 Iliad II.519-520.
14 "For all [the treasures] which the stony threshold of the archer Phoebus Apollo contains within it, rocky Pytho (p. 162)."
15 "For so Phoebus Apollo, giving an oracle, told him in divine Pytho, when he passed over the stone threshold . . . (p. 101)."
used in the archaic period, and the Mycenaean age would have honored a famous shrine with a bronze threshold. 16

More impressive than such textual and archaeological evidence is the general image that Apollo presents in the epics, especially in the Iliad. In a few closely written words, Defradas sums up the personality of Apollo in Homer:

L'image d'Apollon que nous donne Homère habituellement ressemble pas à celle de l'Apollon classique. Ce n'est pas encore un dieu grec. C'est le dieu des Troyens. C'est un dieu terrible, donc les flèches répandent la mort. Il est le dieu à l'arc d'argent, et cet arc est comme le symbole de la mort. Si des rites cathartiques appartiennent au culte à Apollon Smintheus, il faut en attribuer l'origine à une influence crétoise et non à une influence delphique.

L'Apollon d'Homère n'est pas, sauf exception, le dieu des Muses et de l'inspiration poétique, ce dieu de civilisation que l'on aimera plus tard considérer comme le pur idéal de la culture grecque. Mais certaines de ses interventions déjà révèlent une nature nouvelle; il exprime des idées morales qui peuvent être regardées comme un ferment de progrès, comme une première ébauche de ce que sera l'éthique grecque classique. 17

The upshot of these negative conclusions about the place of a Delphic Apollo in Homer is not negative in itself. Rather, the Apollo of Homer presents himself as an evolving deity whose functions are beginning to feel the restraint imposed on them by a fading Homeric morality. He is a god looking for a new home, a new context in which to spread the aura of his salvific grace. His search for new quarters ends at Delphi; but before he can claim dominion over the sacred precinct, he must successfully displace the earth goddess and the other cults which were the prior tenants of Delphi. The establishment of

16 Ibid., pp. 30-31. Another reference to Pytho occurs in the Odyssey XI. 580-581; Defradas dismisses it as an interpolation on an interpolation (see p. 32).

17Ibid., p. 44.
Apollo at Delphi, and more importantly, the approximate dates of the rise of a Pythian influence in literature and politics can best be determined from the Homeric Hymn to Apollo. It is this poem which reveals some of the themes stressed by the Delphic priesthood, themes which will have a decided influence on the content of the Orestes myth.

The Hymn to Apollo is best considered as two poems, each clearly distinct from the other by reason of its subject matter. The first part of the Hymn is a celebration of Delos and the birth of Apollo on that island. The second part, later in date of composition, explains Apollo's invasion of Pytho. Such a division of the Hymn was first proposed by Ruhnken in 1759, and has been accepted by most editors since that time, including Wilamowitz who sees in the second part of the Hymn the work of an author who purposely tried to glorify Pythian Apollo in obedience to Delphi. 18 The Allen-Halliday-Sikes edition of the Homeric hymns denies this position, and emphasizes the contemporaneous existence of Delos and Delphi, a simultaneity based, it would seem, on accepting the Homeric references to Delphi as early rather than late. 19 Such a denial, however, of the separatists' thesis, does not explain the manifest cleavage in content.

Defradas places the date of composition for the first part of the Hymn in honor of Delian Apollo at least as early as the seventh century. The second part is best placed at the end of the seventh or the beginning of the sixth century. 20

18 Ulrich v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Pindaros (Berlin, 1922), p. 76.
20 Defradas, Les Thèmes de la Propagande, p. 61.
The reason for this date is the incompatibility of certain references in the poem and the events of the first Sacred War circa 590. This war was fought by the people of Crisa and the Delphians over what the men of Delphi considered the violation of their sacred territory by the control and taxation levied by the Crisians who held the passage leading from Delphi to the sea. With the help of the northern Amphictionic league and the southern Sicyons, Delphi vanquished Crisa, razing the city to the ground, and slaughtering the inhabitants. Thus bitter enmity arising from religious fanaticalism would naturally make the name of Crisa an execration after the war, and prohibit any favorable mention of the city now plowed under the fields. The Hymn to Apollo, however, refers to Crisa not as the definite site of a city, but rather to the general area in which the towns of Delphi and Crisa (Cirrha) were later to take shape. This points to a period in which the whole valley of Pleistos was a political as well as a geographical unity. In fact the Hymn makes specific mention of Crisa as the port of entry to the shrine, and as the preferred location for Apollo to build his temple. These references can be considered as evidence of the excessive glory that Crisa was claiming for itself at the expense of Delphi, a claim which led to the Sacred War.

21 John Bagnell Bury, A History of Greece to the Death of Alexander the Great, 3rd ed. (London, 1951), pp. 157, 159. After the Sacred War Delphi was protected by the Amphictionic league thus giving the oracle and its priestly aristocrats greater power as is evidenced by the Pythian games starting in 582 B.C.
22 Hymnus Apollenis, v. 445 in Allen, Homeri Opera, V.
23 Ibid., vv. 438-39, 431.
24 Ibid., v. 269.
Thus the date for the Hymn to Apollo is early, perhaps as much as a century and a half before the Oresteia of Aeschylus. This is sufficient time for the development of the moral and political imperialism exercised by Delphi; it is also adequate to account for the reworking of many of the traditional heroic myths along the lines of the new morality of Delphi. In the Hymn to Apollo there are already certain clear indications of the new stature which Apollo and Delphi were vindicating as their rightful possession. An example of this is seen in the Hymn's version of the founding of Delphi. First, Apollo is described as the originator of the sanctuary beneath Parnassus:

(κρήση) ένεα ἤναξ τεκμήριατο φοίνος, Ἀπόλλων νηόν ποιήσασθαι ἐπήρατον εἰπε τε μύθον
'Ἐνθάδε τῇ φρονέω τευξαὶ περὶκαλλάς νηόν
ἐμεναι ἄνθρωποις χρηστηρίου, οίτε μοι αἰεὶ
Ἐνθάδε ἀγινήσουσι τελησσας ἐκατόμβας,
ἡμέν οὐκ Πελοπόννησον πέιραν ἤχουσιν,
ἡδόνοι θυσήμην τε καὶ ἰμωρίας κατὰ νήσους,
χρησμονοι, τοίς δὲ ἐγὼ νημερτέα βουλὴν
πᾶσι θεμιστεύοιμι χρέων ἐνὶ πλοῦτι νηφ. 25

Secondly, he attacks and kills a female serpent that lives in a nearby stream. The whole episode is presented simply; the snake is merely an evil, a bane on men, which Apollo ἀλεξίκακος removes from the area with the help of his bow:

'Αγχοῦ δὲ κρήνη καλλίφροος, ένεα δράκαιναν
κτείνειν ἤναξ, Δίδος υἱὸς, ἀπὸ κρατερὸ βιοῦ,
τατρεφέα, μεγάλην, τέρας ἄγριον, ἢ κακὰ πολλά

25Ibid., vv. 285-293. "Here [at Crisaj king Phoebus Apollo resolved to construct a pleasant temple, and thus he spoke: "Here indeed I design to build a very beautiful temple, to be a shrine of oracles for men, who shall always bring hither to me perfect hecatombs, ay, as many men as possess rich Peloponnesus, and as many as dwell in Europe and the sea-girt isles, coming in quest of oracles. But to them all will I declare unerring counsel, giving responses in my rich temple (p. 359)."
The Hymn's emphasis on Apollo's primacy at Delphi is an attempt to palliate the fact that he was an intruder into the sanctuary of the earth goddess who had held the locale as a cult site from Mycenaean times. Furthermore, Apollo's conflict with the snake is better interpreted as a representation of his battle with the earth goddess for possession of Delphi. Just as the omphalos was the symbol of the Mother Goddess, so too the snake which was killed by Apollo was "originally the visible manifestation of Ge herself, a belief which can be traced in the Minoan religion." But forced entry was just what the early worshippers of Apollo did not want to emphasise. Their god deserved better propaganda than that, and he got it.

The Hymn to Delian Apollo still represents him as the Far-Darter, the Archer-Prince of the Iliad; but in the second part of the Hymn to Pythian Apollo there is a change. As Defradas has said: "Le dieu nouveau qui s'installe à Delphes est un bienfaiteur des hommes, un de ces ennemis du mal qui commencent à se multiplier, à l'aube de la civilisation de la Grèce classique. Le dieu tueur de monstres sera naturellement appelé, dans son sanctuaire du

26 Ibid., vv. 300-304. "And near it is the fair-flowing fountain, where the royal son of Jove, with his strong bow, slew the serpent, a stoutly-nourished, mighty, a savage portent, which did many ills to men upon the earth, many to themselves, and many to their long-footed sheep, since it was a blood-thirsty bane (p. 359)."

27 Parke, History, p. 7. See also Amandry, La Mantique Apollinienne, p. 213. He sees the snake as a personification of the subterranean powers which must be appeased by offerings. Even granting this view of the snake-figure, Apollo still emerges as the displacer of a more archaic cult.
Parnasse, à patronner une doctrine morale qui apportera aux hommes une vue plus policée et plus digne."

28 The Hymn to Pythian Apollo thus stressed Apollo’s role of benefactor, of purifier. Further insight into the Delphic attitudes towards this role of purification can be obtained from a consideration of the eighth-yearly feast of Septeria at Delphi. It is especially these notions of purification which must be clarified if any re-creation of Aeschylus’ meaning is to be achieved. The ritual surrounding this festival of the Septeria was centered on a holy drama, almost a pantomime, of what was thought to be Apollo’s slaying of the snake Pytho, and his subsequent flight to Tempe where he sought purification from the blood of the snake. Farnell details the elements of the ritual in the following words:

"In a certain day in spring, a noble Delphian boy, conspicuous probably for his beauty, proceeds with a band of boys chosen from the best families under the escort of certain sacred women called 'Oleia,' who carry torches and conduct the youths in silence to a cabin that was constructed near the Pythian temple in the form of a royal palace, and which was regarded as the abode of Python: this they set fire to and overturn the table, and without looking round fly through the doors of the temple. Then the boy-leader feigns to go into exile and even servitude; afterwards they all proceed together to Tempe, where they are purified at an altar, and having plucked the sacred laurels that grew there and made crowns for themselves with its leaves, they all return home along the sacred Pythian way. . . ."

An analysis of this ritual makes it difficult to see it as originally a mimetic enactment of Apollo’s adventures. That it is some kind of expiatory or

28 Defradas, Les Thèmes de la Propagande, p. 67.

29 Lewis R. Farnell, The Cults of the Greek States, IV (Oxford, 1907), p. 293. Although the information about the Septeria is garnered from Plutarch and Aelian, late sources in themselves, the ritual in its classical form may be said to date from the Amphictionic period of the oracle because of the procession of the young boys from Delphi north to Tempe.
Purificatory rite is obvious; but it is easier to believe that the ritual-legend of Apollo was superimposed on the ritual itself, and with time gained enough influence to alter the form of the myth itself. Farnell sees the hut not as the abode of the snake, but rather as a place of preliminary lustration, so that the firing of the hut signifies the purification of the contagious pollution. This is the core of the rite. Overturning the table and running from the hut without turning back are symbolic of the desire to avoid all contact with pollution, as if the very sight of the befouled objects would affect a person. Furthermore, the procession of the boys carrying the laurels along the Sacred Way is seen as a ceremony of public lustration; it is thus congruent with the notions of purification used to explain the other facets of the ritual. The development of the Apolline interpretation of these rites was obvious. "It was quite natural," says Farnell, "that the belief should arise that what the boy was doing the god had also done, and that the boy was repeating in a mimetic show what the god had done in earnest. Hence grew the dogma that the death of even Python was a stain on the pure nature of Apollo, which only the journey to Tempe and the efficacy of the cleansing laurel could purge."

The feast of Septeria is of prime importance in the formation of the distinctly Delphic attitudes and dogmas. Above all it highlights two points. First, blood spilled justly demands a cathartic rite to assure proper expiation; and secondly, the attempted subordination of the process of purification to the

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Delphic authority and the Apolline rite was present when any religious impurity was incurred.

At the risk of an over-generalization, it can be said that the dogma which is specifically Delphic is the emphasis on bloodguilt. The evolution of this concept from Homer's time to Aeschylus' is paralleled, if not caused by, the rise of Delphi. Here, then, lies the reason for the change in the content in the myth of Orestes: the need for ritual purity to avenge the blood that cries out unholy to the murderer whose hands are stained with blood.

In Homer the notion of pollution is absent. Blood brings with it no defilement that requires purification or release from guilt. Homer does mention certain types of material purification. For example, he reports the cleansing of the Achaeans' camp after a plague (Iliad I.313), or Odysseus' clearing the air in his palace with burning sulphur after the slaying of the suitors (Odyssey XXII.493); but all of these retain an original element of some material stain or filth that must literally be washed away to prevent contagion.

The notion of pollution should not be confused with the doctrine of poiesis, that is, the recompense or vengeance that was due the murdered man. Even in Homeric times the murderer was liable to punishment at the hands of the murdered man's relatives, but this reatus poenae was not yet a reatus culpae, nor did this obligation of blood vengeance concern the state. It was only the

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33 Cf. Iliad II.661-670 and the story of Thersilochus. He killed his uncle in a fit of youthful anger, left his homeland since blood money would not exonerate him in a case of bloodshed within a family, and was received in Rhodes where Zeus blessed him with wealth. In none of this is there any mention of blood-guilt that requires purification.
family of the victim which was responsible. They could meet this duty by forcing the slayer into exile, or by accepting blood money, a wergild, that could be considered satisfaction to the relatives for their loss and also a payment in justice to the deceased.\footnote{Hubert J. Treston, Points (London, 1923), p. 64. Treston sharply divides a Pelagian principle of punishment that looks to just compromise and fair settlement, and an Achaean principle that acknowledged only blood vengeance.} At the bottom of these practices allowing easy escape of the murdered, Rohde finds a general decline in the belief in the future life.\footnote{Erwin Rohde, Psyche, trans. W. B. Hillis (London, 1925), pp. 175-176.} Homer thus portrays the dead soul as a powerless shade with little if any effect on the condition of the living. Consequently, a strict lex talionis is not required to protect oneself from his dead relatives unjustly murdered; and the wergild becomes a business deal carried on by the living members of the family. Such a transaction bears a faint resemblance, as it were, to the use of life and accident insurance in the present day. But after Homer the picture changes. A new concept of guilt replaces Homer's notion of atonement, or infatuation, which was sent down by the gods ab extrinseco, more a cause of erring action than the moral result of it. This new interpretation brings with it a fear and trembling rooted in contagious, hereditary pollution. Dodds points out that this new sense of pollution was not yet a fully developed sense of moral guilt, a condition of will and inner consciousness, but rather the "automatic consequence of an action" which remained in the external order, operating with a ruthless indifference to a man's intentions.\footnote{E. R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951), p. 36.} But he goes on to qualify this statement by observing that
"in the old Greek word *agos* (the term which describes the worst kind of *miasma*)
the ideas of pollution, curse, and sin were already fused one with the other at
an early date. And while *catharsis* in the Archaic Age was doubtless often no
more than the mechanical fulfilment of a ritual obligation, the notion of an
automatic, quasi-physical cleansing could pass by imperceptible gradations into
the deeper idea of atonement for sin."\(^{37}\) In a word, the Greek world was passing
from the shame-culture of Homer’s time to the guilt-culture of the post-Dorian
invasion period, a guilt that was a mixture of objective and subjective factors.\(^{38}\)
No wonder that in such an age of anxiety and of increased awareness of the
invisible powers of the dead the oracle of Delphi grew in importance.\(^{39}\) It was
the center from which Apollo, the averter of evil, that strong yet gentle god
of purity, could radiate his supernatural influence of purification and law.
These are not merely poetic words; they point to the facts which are seen, for
example, clearly translated into *Draco*’s laws for homicide. Delphi’s insistence
that blood spilt brought with it a pollution that must be cleansed at the risk
of defiling not only the criminal but the whole of society is reflected in
*Draco*’s laws. For besides distinguishing between deliberate murder, involuntary
homicide, and killing in self-defense, *Draco*’s laws insist that the state step
in to direct the apprehension and legal trial of the person polluted by murder.
This state supervision does not contravene the older notions of a family

\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 37.

\(^{36}\) It must be noted here that the theorizing from page 61 onwards is con-
jectural. It is a construct, based on very meager literary fragments: a farcery
from inner-conscious knowledge of the workings of the archaic Grecian mentality.

\(^{39}\) Rohde, pp. 174-175.
obligation to carry on the blood vendetta. In fact, it was the family that remained the primary prosecutor; they alone had the right and duty of appeasing the soul of their dead relative by exacting punishment of the slayer. What state intervention means is that to the notion of blood feud is added the religious concept of purity. Not only does the state insure personal justice, it must also guard against the pollution that would befoul the whole community if the tainted perpetrator of the crime were not quarantined. The religious and cathartic character of the transaction remains; it is merely channeled through the control of the state.

The network of laws and social customs which have been called in to witness to Delphi's influence give valid testimony. But a richer source remains. The art and literature of man are more receptive to the new images man forms of himself than are the formulations of the law courts. These latter are bound more rigidly by tradition; but the literary creations of an age must, at the expense of being passed over, incarnate the actual inspirations and fears of an age. For example, much of modern literature exhibits a leveling of values; there is no hierarchy, no clear teleology to guide man. This does not mean that man has become anti-moral, or even a-moral; it indicates that he is at sea when it comes to understanding what ethical code must be his and why he must be

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40 Hartvig Frisch, Might and Right in Antiquity from Homer to the Persian Wars, trans. C. C. Martindale (Copenhagen, 1949), pp. 122-124. Perhaps the distinction between the various forms of murder can also be traced to a greater consideration for the individual—an emphasis made by Delphi, and reflected in its well-known aphorism "Know Thyself." The citizen was no longer a cog in the family or clan. Although the phratries did remain, the iron-bound solidarity of the family gave way to the rights of the individual as individual.

41 Rohde, p. 180.
ethical at all. 42 What is true today was true of the fifth and sixth century Greeks; that age also projected its own concept of man into its art forms, and especially into the content of the myths.

It is in the works of Stesichorus and Findar that the Delphic image of man is most clearly filtered through the myth of Crete. Furthermore, it is their forms of the myth which come closest to the time of Aeschylus, and which provided him with fertile ideas to be more fully elaborated by his own genius.

The reputation and wide influence of Stesichorus upon his age is not paradoxically, matched by the knowledge we have of his works which remain in fragmentary form. 43 Of his importance Professor Gilbert Murray has said: "There was scarcely a poet then living who was not influenced by Stesichorus; scarcely a painter or potter who did not, consciously or unconsciously, represent his version of the great sagas." 44 This is difficult to substantiate in regard to many of Stesichorus' works; but luckily his Oresteia permits sufficient reconstruction to be valuable for determining the major outlines and stresses in his conception of the Crete's myth.

42 An example of this is seen in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury. The world and human life are a brute, irrational datum; no longer is being, no longer is the good an intelligible category of life ready to supply a norm of moral life. Rather, in the words of Shakespeare, life "is a tale,/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing."


The first point to be noted about Stesichorus is that he was indebted for his Oresteia to an earlier lyric poet, Xanthus, who also composed an Oresteia. It is here that we meet Electra for the first time. Her real name is said to have been Laodice; but because she never married she was called Electra; that is, ἀ-λεκτρος 'unwed.' The fact of her not marrying is significant. Judging from the later forms of the myth, especially as emphasized in Euripides' Electra, one can see a reference to the servile state to which Electra was reduced by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. It is just such a basic antipathy between Electra and her mother that Aeschylus will incorporate into his version.

From Stesichorus' Oresteia Bergk cites the following passages with bearing on the general scheme of the Orestes myth. The first is a reference taken from the scholia to Aeschylus' Choephoroi v. 733: Κύλισαν δὲ φησὶ τὴν 'Ορέστου τροφόν, Πίνδαρος δὲ 'Αρσινόην. Στησίχορος Λαοδάμειαν. 47

An apparently minor fact, the very existence of a nurse in the various versions of the Orestes story points to some prior and common source which more or less determined a textus receptus that included the role of the nurse. Further, this detail of the nurse, judged in the light of the later accounts of Orestes' rescue from Aegisthus and Clytemnestra after the death of Agamemnon, confirms

45 Theodorus Bergk, Poetae Lyrici Graeci, Pars Tertia, 4 ed. (Lipsiae, 1882), p. 204.

46 Cf. Croiset, Eschyle, p. 170. Croiset believes that Stesichorus' version also included the sacrifice of Iphigeneia because this episode was so closely linked to the general story of Orestes.

47 Bergk, p. 222. "Aeschylus calls Orestes' nurse Cilissa; Pinder calls her Arsinoe; and Stesichorus calls her Laodameia." (Writer's translation).
with strong probability the existence of Clytemnestra's active, if not principal, part in her husband's murder. The attempt on Orestes' life would also furnish Orestes with one more motive for taking revenge on his mother. The use, or rather the non-use, of this detail in Aeschylus' version presents a surprising view into his creativity. This will be considered later.

Fragment 42 offers the further detail of the terrible dream of Clytemnestra which both Aeschylus and Sophocles included in their accounts:

τὰ δὲ ὄρμαν ἐδόκησε μολεῖν κάρα βεβροτωμένος ἄκρον.
ἐκ δ' ἄρα τοῦ βασιλέως Πλεισθενίδας ἐξανα. 48

Tucker builds on this fragment to reach a fuller insight into the structure of Stesichorus' Orestes. "In the light of what we know," Tucker argues, "from the dramatists and from ritual, we may suppose her to have endeavoured to placate Agamemnon with χοῦτι, and, if the suggestion be correct, that the passage in the Clouds (534 sqq.) refers to Stesichorus, we may assume that Electra, carrying the libations for Clytemnestra, discovers the trees at the tomb and recognizes it." 49

And Preller-Robert add to this the name of the companion who returned with Orestes: "Bei Stesichoros begab sich nun Orestes in Begleitung des Talthymbios, aber, wie es scheint, ohne Pylades, nach Lakedaimon, wohin dieser Dichter den Königssitz Agamemnon's verlegt (Schol. Eur. Or. 46)." 50

Thus one by one the details and even the main emphases of the Orestes

48 Ibid. "She thought that a serpent approached her with its head smeared on the crown with gore. Then from this portent appeared the kingly Pleisthenid (writer's translation)."


50 Preller-Robert, p. 1308.
legend as presented by Aeschylus and the other dramatists are being accounted for in the version of Stesichorus. There is, however, a final fragment which outweighs the others in importance, for it offers a glimpse of Orestes’ fate after he had killed his mother and Aegisthus, the very element of the story that Homer failed to develop. Up to this point there has been no mention of the Furies which pursued Orestes to exact from him the price of blood, but this silence is broken by Stesichorus. In fragment 40, the scholiast to Euripides’ Orestes v. 268 states: Στησιχόρος ἔπομενος (Εὐριπίδης) τόξα φησὶν αὐτὸν (τὸν Ὀρέστην) εἰληφέναι παρὰ Ἀπόλλωνος.

The implications of Apollo’s defense of Orestes are plain. First, the death of Clytemnestra at Orestes’ hands is certain. Else why the need for Apollo’s protection? What is at stake is the act of a man who has conflicting duties according to the laws of blood guilt and pollution. He must avenge the blood of his father, but in avenging the deed he draws vengeance on himself: the pollution which comes of parricide. Secondly, Apollo’s willingness to lend his bow to Orestes as protection indicates that Orestes had received prior assurance of the Delphic god’s help and sanction for his deed. On this point Robert says:

"Die einfachste Sagenform scheint die zu sein, dass zwar Orestes selbst den Entschluss gefasst hat, die beiden Täter seines Vaters zu töten, aber doch das delphische Orakel vor der Tat um seine Billigung befragt, die er denn auch erhalt."52 And thirdly, the bow and arrow defense must be a protection from something or somebody. Here in its clearest light the ultimate and significant

51Bergk, p. 221. “Following the account of Stesichorus, Euripides says that Orestes obtained the arrows from Apollo (Witter’s translation).”

52Freller-Robert, p. 1308.
influence of Delphi shows through, for Orestes guards himself from the erinyes, the living symbols of the *Miasma* which stains a man of blood. Against such pollution a man must seek a lasting cure, the ritual purity administered by Phoebus Apollo and his privileged shrine.

Another source is available from which to draw further details of Stesichorus' version of the Orestes myth. Not only did he influence the adaptation of the myth by literary men, he also furnished material for the vase painters. From the pictures on some of these vases which antedate Aeschylus' version of the play, or which present motifs not found in any of the great dramatists' accounts of the myth, we can find further links to bridge the gap left between the earliest remains of the story and the final version adopted by Aeschylus.

However, an important point must be made. The relation of poetry to painting is a subtle one, a study in itself for the art historian. No one will force the painter to follow the poetic version of some motif he is painting to the last detail; his own imagination can be expected to rework the subject he has received from the literary sources. The basic requirements of symmetry, balance, and highlighting may require secondary characters in the poetic version to be discarded in the pictorial representation. Yet in all this the original stimulus from poem or drama remains to influence the artist. Some of these lines of mutual causality have been examined by H. Goldman in the following paragraph:

The painter may reflect in his work the actual scenic production of a play, and show reminiscences of the grouping of the actors, the costumes, and the stage-setting. Then again, he may follow the myth in a more general fashion, either reproducing a definite moment in the action, but composing the picture according to the traditions of his own art, or trying by a synthetic treatment to suggest rather the play as a whole than any specific scene. After the middle of the fifth century the Greek vase-painter was more given to this latter
method. He grouped his composition rather loosely, and we look in vain among his works for any conception of such concentrated dramatic intensity as that of the murder of Agamemnon on Pre-Aeschylean vases. Finally the treatment of a myth by a popular dramatist may cause the vase-painter to identify certain general types with the particular story. 53

Any arguments, therefore, about the scenes from vase paintings as they bear on Stesichorus' account must remain probable. It is true that the theory of Robert in Bild und Lied which traces many of the paintings to the Oresteia of Stesichorus has been generally accepted by archaeologists, but it still remains a theory. 54

The first picture that can be considered as representing a scene from the myth of Orestes, and can also be referred to the version of Stesichorus is found on the interior of an Attic kylix. This is a small picture, but still captures much of the suspense and action of the deed it portrays: Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon. Nothing has been heard so far about the manner in which Stesichorus portrayed the murder; this painting suggests the main outlines of the killing, and not too surprisingly they appear to agree with that of Aeschylus. Goldman describes the vase in these words: "We see Clytemnestra bent on the destruction of her husband, rushing, axe in hand, towards the bathroom door. But, apart from the fact that the vase has all the characteristics of the severe red-figured style and can hardly be dated later than about 470 B.C., the

53 Hetty Goldman, "The Oresteia of Aeschylus as Illustrated in Greek Vase-Painting," Harvard Studies, XXI (1910), 111-112.

54 John E. Huddleston, Greek Tragedy in the Light of Vase Paintings (London 1898), p. 44, n. 1. Robert also admits the hypothetical nature of his findings. See Bild und Lied, p. 178.
weapon that she carries in the play of Aeschylus is a sword, not an axe.\footnote{Goldman, p. 114. In an appendix to her monograph Goldman lists the museums and catalogue numbers that identify the vases here discussed.}

What makes the identification of this picture certain is the woman with the axe. Clytemnestra is the only well-known hatchet murderer in early Greek myth. As Robert has noted: "Am Beil erkannte jeder antike Besucher die Klytaimnestra, an ihrer wilden Bewegung, dass sie im Begriffe stehe, das Verbrechen zu begehen..."\footnote{Robert, Bild und Lied, p. 178.} If a poem is a speaking picture, and a picture a mute poem, then in the silence of this red-figured vase painting the seeds of moral conflict and complication that grow into the tragic myth of Orestes are clearly visible.

As was noted before, it appears that Stesichorus portrayed Orestes' return to avenge his father, and made Talthybius, not Pylades, his companion.\footnote{Page 68, n. 47.} This reconstruction of Robert is substantiated by a small relief from Melos which predates the play of Aeschylus; the work of art portrays the actual meeting scene of Orestes and Electra. Once again the neat description of Goldman is used to highlight the main features of the work:

The relief was probably made before the year 460 B.C.; but even if it could be dated later, the place of its manufacture and the fact that it diverges in certain important details from the Aeschylean version, prohibit our establishing any connection between the two. Electra (inscribed APKTP) is shown, seated in deep dejection on the step in front of a grave stele (inscribed AMKE). Her legs are crossed and she leans her head, which is veiled, on her left hand. A pitcher for pouring libations is at her feet. Behind her stands an old woman likewise veiled, evidently the nurse. From the opposite side three men approach. The foremost has one foot raised on the steps of the monument, and, leaning over, is about to touch Electra's arm, while the second, at some distance, holds his hand thoughtfully to his chin.
The third with the baggage on his back, evidently a servant, shows no signs of participating in the scene. The horse in the foreground indicates that they are travellers.58

This arrangement, most likely based on Stesichorus' Oresteia in the opinion of Robert, not only offers a vignette of sorrow preceding the recognition scene, but naturally points beyond itself to the actual moment of meeting, and also to the scene in which brother and sister will dedicate themselves to the business of revenge.59 If the Stesichorean version of the Orestes myth was powerful enough to inspire such plastic art work, there is little wonder that his influence was felt by the dramatists who attempted the same theme.

The most popular part of Stesichorus' Oresteia, at least from the viewpoint of the artist, was the death of Aegisthus. Robert traces seven examples of early fifth century vases that depict this part of the story, and Goldman adds an eighth instance.60 There should be little wonder at this popularity; the blood and thunder action of Stesichorus version was the very motif an ambitious artist could hope to capture in his painting. Robert recreates the archetypal scene that lay at the root of this group of vases: "Orestes in voller Rüstung stösst dem Aigisthos das Schwert in die Brust. Klytaimnêstra eilt mit geschwungenem Doppelbeil dem Gatten zu Hilfe; ein warnender Zuruf der erschreckten Elektra...macht den Bruder auf die ihm vom Rücken drohende Gefahr

58 Goldman, pp. 123-124. Robert interprets this grouping in accord with his theory of Orestes' return. The man leaning over and touching Electra on the arm he names Talthybius, and the second youth is given as Orestes, for he is portrayed as the most distinguished of the three. See Bild u. Lied, pp. 167-168. Goldman prefers to have Orestes make the gesture of tenderness, for only in this way does she see "the beauty and consistency of the gamut of emotions" preserved.
59 Robert, Bild u. Lied, Chapter V.
60 Ibid., pp. 149-150; and Goldman, p. 134.
Besides giving a fuller picture of the external details of the story, this group of vases points to the importance of Clytemnestra in Stesichorus' version of the Oresteia. Here again, as in the fragment which reports her nightmare about the bloody snake, Clytemnestra's full culpability, her complete unity of purpose with Aegisthus, are manifest. Her whole character stands out in grisly motif: a mother attacking her son with an axe to defend her paramour.

Thus the evidence of art has contributed three major links in the myth of Orestes; in all probability these additions to our knowledge of the story are originally from the Oresteia of Stesichorus: the manner of Agamemnon's death by Clytemnestra, the meeting and recognition scene, and the details of Aegisthus' death. Combined with the subject matter contained in the fragments: the position of Electra after her father's death, the nurse who saved Orestes from destruction, the terrible dream of Clytemnestra, and Orestes' defense by Apollo, these elements form a highly evolved version of the myth.

What is the influence of Delphi in all this? Although there is no need to posit a distinctly Delphic Oresteia as did Wilamowitz, the story of Stesichorus shows the inspiration of Delphi especially in the Apolline sanction and defense

61 Robert, Bild u. Lied, p. 159.

62 Orestes' surprise attack on Aegisthus could well point to a prior plot or ruse whereby he gained entrance into the palace.
of Orestes' deed. 63 And even the conception of an action which brings with it
the moral conflict arising from the opposed ideas of pollution and the duty of
revenge is closely associated with Delphi. Furthermore, the exile of Orestes
to Phocis, the site of Apollo's sanctuary, and the Dorian influence that made
Stesichorus change the palace of Agamemnon from Argos to Sparta point at least
indirectly to Delphi. 64 There is no question here of discerning exactly what
this connection between Stesichorus and Delphi was or how it grew up; the
reality of the influence, however, is there.

The transformation of the Orestes myth through its association with Delphi
has been considered in Stesichorus' version; it now remains to analyse Pindar's
conception of the Orestes myth in order to ferret out any new emphasis that he
has added which could possibly have influenced Aeschylus.

Pindar develops his version of the Orestes myth in the eleventh Pythian
ode which celebrates the victory of a Theban named Thrasydaeus. After a very

63 Wilmowski-Moellendorff, Das Opfer am Orape, pp. 246-256, cited by
D'Esfradas, Thémes de la Propagande, p. 175. Wilmowski finds certain common
traits as well as certain differences between the versions of Aeschylus and
Stesichorus. To account for the common traits he postulates a common source
rather than the direct imitation of Stesichorus by Aeschylus as Robert and
others do. Another argument finds the lyric brevity of Stesichorus dependent
on the existence of a fuller epic account with more explicit development, but
all this conjecture is stretching things too far in the light of the fragmentary
evidence.

64 C. M. Bowra, Greek Lyric Poetry (Oxford, 1936), p. 126. In fact Bowra
has suggested that Stesichorus produced his Oresteia during his stay in the
Peloponnesus to celebrate Tegae's entrance into the Spartan sphere of influence.
This move had been engineered by Sparta with the help of an oracular response
from Delphi which directed Sparta to transfer the bones of Orestes from their
burial place in Tegae to Sparta. The Spartans managed to find what they said
were the remains of Orestes. Thus the Spartans broke the morale of the Tegaeans
who did not feel like facing the wisdom of Delphi which had declared that Sparta
would be the "protector of Tegae" if Orestes' remains rested in Spartan terri-
tory. See Parke, History, pp. 95-96.
short reference to Thrasydaeus' victory and the glory of his native land, Pindar passes over very abruptly to the story of Agamemnon's death and the vengeance of Orestes. The relation of the Orestes myth to a victory hymn for a Theban has puzzled many, but this is not the main difficulty. Before anything can be ascertained about Pindar's influence on Aeschylus, the date of the eleventh Pythian must be fixed. Here is where the difficulty occurs, for the scholiasts attribute two Pythian victories to Thrasydaeus, one in 474 and another in 454. Of course these might not be references to the same man at all but if they are the same, then the eleventh Pythian might well have been written after Aeschylus' Orestes, and have been influenced by Aeschylus. Bowra, the main exponent of the later date, arguing mainly from the heavy pro-Spartan flavor of Pindar's version of the Orestes myth, considers it unlikely that such Spartan emphasis would have been acceptable in 474. He says: "Now in 474 most Thebans of Pindar's class must have felt that Sparta was a potential enemy and Athens a potential friend. Soon after the Persian defeat Sparta had tried to oust Thebes from the Amphictyonic Council (Plut. Them. 20), but the attempt had been frustrated by Themistocles, who for good Athenian reasons did not want Sparta's power strengthened to the north of Cithaeron. 474 was hardly the time for an aristocratic Theban poet to emphasize his own relations with Sparta or


66 Farnell, Translation, p. 148.
to praise Spartan heroes. In 454 the situation was reversed. Athens was a proved enemy and Sparta a possible friend.67

Notwithstanding this weighty argumentation, another case favoring the earlier date of 474 has been made by Defradas. Weighing the arguments of Bowra which rest on the political climate and passing circumstances of the day, Defradas considers the pro-Spartan version of the Orestes theme within the context of Pindar's lifelong work, and finds that the roots of this sympathy for Sparta is more an ideological than a political sympathy, a wish to retain the ancient aristocratic way of life epitomized by Sparta. Such a leaning toward Sparta, especially when heavily cloaked in myth, is not impossible in 474. It is easier to appreciate the intensity of this aristocratic bias when we recall the pro-Spartan sentiments of the Athenian aristocrats, even during the Peloponnesian War.68 Since, therefore, the general tenor of Pindar's work shows him an incorrigible aristocrat, his friendship for Spartan ideals is natural. What cannot be proved is that this friendship suffered the slightest diminution throughout the course of his work, unless the theory of Bowra be accepted as an a priori fact.

The probability of the earlier date for the eleventh Pythian validates a consideration of Pindar's treatment of the Orestes myth; for it too shows the Delphic influence that has been seen in Stesichorus and which will appear in Aeschylus.

Pythian XI describes the victory of Thrasydæus as occurring "in the


fertile fields of Pelasges, guest-friend of Orestes of Laconia," and from this
point of departure relates the story of Orestes:

... Him, [Orestes] at the time of his father's murder, his nurse
Arsinoe delivered out of the woeful treachery from the violent
hands of Clytemnestra,
When, with the cold grey steel, she sent Cassandra, daughter of Dardan
Pram to join the soul of Agamemnon along the shadowy
bank of Acheron—
A woman without pity.
Was it indeed that the thought of Iphigeneia, sacrificed
on Euripos' bank far from her fatherland,
Stung her so as to awaken heavy-plotting wrath,
Or was it that, won to another's bed,
The adulterous embraces of the night beguiled her?

Howbeit, the hero-son of Atreus, having come back after
a long time,
Perished himself in far-famed Amuklai,
And brought to her death the prophetic maid

But he, the young child, came to the home of his aged
guest-friend Strophios, dwelling at Parnassos' foot;
And, waxen in years, with the War-God's might he slew
his mother and laid Aigisthos low in blood. 69

There are three things to note about this version. First, the heavy Spartan
tone. Like Stesichorus, Pindar makes Orestes a Laconian; he also locates
Agamemnon's death in Amyklai, a Spartan town, and not in Argos. Secondly,
Orestes is joined with Delphi through his relation with Strophius "dwelling at
Parnassos's foot" and with his friend Pylades. As was noted before, this
friendship was already known in the Nostoi, and has been considered a human
expression of Orestes' reliance on Pythian Apollo. 70 But the major connection
between Delphi and Orestes which should consist in Apollo's purification and
sanction of his act is not explicitly mentioned. However, this is hinted at in

69 Farnell, Translation, pp. 145-146.
70 Page 47, note 53.
the prelude to the poem in which the daughters of Harmonia are called together:

In order that, with the fall of eventide, ye [the daughters of Harmonia] may sing the praises of the Goddess Themis, of holy Putho, and earth's center, whence God's judgments come. ... 71

In this passage Wilamowitz sees an encomium of Themis, holy justice in the abstract, and not the goddess; 72 Defradas, developing these ideas, relates this allusion to Delphi, the center of justice, to Orestes' slaying of his mother, and concludes that it was at Pytho, the earth's center, that the deed would be justified. 73 The content, therefore, of Pindar's version of the myth has also been affected by the Delphic doctrine of purity and pollution.

The third point to be noticed is the role played by Clytemnestra. She, the "woman without pity," is in the foreground as she was in Stesichorus. But now there is a new interest in the motives for her murder of Agamemnon. Was it pleasure that seduced her, or did her constant brooding on her husband's cowardly sacrifice of Iphigenia drive her to the deed? There is an inwardness to Clytemnestra that was lacking before; an element of conflict has entered her character, bringing with it a further complication. To the narrative accounts of epic poetry, the Delphic influence added the problem of pollution. Now the myth reaches beyond the question of ritual purity by introducing an emphasis on human motivation.

Although, as Verrall has pointed out, there is a good possibility that Aeschylus was not directly influenced by Pindar's version of the myth, Pindar's

71 Farnell, Translation, p. 145.
72 Wilamowitz, Pindaros, p. 260.
conception of the Orestes myth illustrates the all-pervading inspiration of Delphi, and also shows us that the myth was beginning to present problems which overreached the limits of lyric. 74

The Orestes myth had become a symbol combining the legendary facts of the Mycenaean Age, the purely fictional embellishments of epic and lyric, and finally the truly mythical etiology of the Delphic sanctuary. Only in the Oresteia of Aeschylus do these diverse elements find their proper unity; only there can the symbol adequately express its message to men about man.

CHAPTER IV

THE ORESTEIA OF AESCHYLUS: CREATIVITY AND DEPENDENCE

Although the Orestes myth was now unified and organized to an almost sophisticated degree, which showed its possibility for good theater, it was far from that rigid determination which would prohibit further innovation, further restructuring. It is in the Oresteia of Aeschylus, and most of all in the final play of the trilogy, that the myth reaches far beyond the limits of tradition, so far, that it may perhaps be proper to speak of the myth’s being transcended rather than merely transformed as it had been through the intervention of the Delphic oracle.

But this transcending of the myth is as it should be. The primitive forms of the myth that have been treated so far, their major elements, details, and ideological emphases, can never determine the refashioning of the myth. True, the preexistent elements of the myth can limit the special problems that the dramatist can portray through the medium of the myth-symbol. And the greater the independence from the myth, the more unrestricted are the conditions of the poet’s creativity. But whether the poet adheres closely to tradition, or whether he jumps the traces of the customary story, the elements of myth, saga, and fiction that cluster about the topic he wishes to present can never be equated with his creativity itself.
There is a difference, however, in the way a modern author or playwright relies on his source material and the mode of dependence to which the Greeks were subject. For example, the modern reader of Shakespeare's tragedy *Julius Caesar* will find his enjoyment and appreciation in the play itself. Possibly he may find his comprehension of the play's nuances deepened by a familiarity with Roman history, but this is not necessary. The play says what it says, nothing more; to understand it one need not know that Shakespeare relied on Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* for the details of his story and for the characterization of the dramatic personae.

The relation of the Greek theater to the stories that were dramatized was one of greater subordination. The action of the play was not as perfectly self-contained as in the modern play; consequently, the dramatist was at greater liberty to skip needless connectives in his story; he could rely on his audience to supply the tacit component of his story. Bowra explains the Greek dramatists' relation to the myths in the following words: "They were able to take so much for granted that they could go straight to the main point without explanatory introduction and be sure that each new turn which they gave to an old story would be appreciated at once at its full value. They were thus able to produce works of striking originality in which they gave free play to their own ideas inside a traditional frame, which enforced its seriousness on them and made them live up to its demands."¹

Thus our appreciation of a Greek play, especially in a world that has lost its ready familiarity with the myths of the Greeks, requires some background

¹Bowra, *The Greek Experience*, p. 117.
to enrich the understanding of the play. The previous chapters have attempted
to highlight the development of some of the major outlines of the myth. Now
in the light of that research there is extensive data for estimating the degree
of original invention, the depth of characterisation, the architectonic skill,
and the ethical ideas of Aeschylus.

However, the final judgment on Aeschylus' creativity cannot be made with
only the individual elements of his story as criterion. What Aeschylus created
is not a string of stories with varying grades of dependence on a prior cycle
of stories. His trilogy is a totality, a whole which is greater than the sum
of its parts, an organism with one vital form, one tragic conception that gives
meaning to the whole. Jaeger's remark on Greek drama applies neatly to the
Oresteia of Aeschylus: "Tragedy can be appreciated only if we start with
the conviction that it is the highest manifestation of a type of humanity for
which art, religion and philosophy still form an indissoluble unity."^2

The study of Aeschylus' dramatic invention must, therefore, consider his
ability in adapting the myth to the purposes of the stage and also the con-
centration of interest he has achieved by infusing a new dramatic form into the
traditional myth. Both of these objectives can be attained by following the
main lines of the Agamemnon, the Choephoroi, and the Eumenides with an eye open
to Aeschylus' creative invention, his selection from already existing accounts,
and the dramatic idea that motivated his preferences.^^

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^3 Cf. Lewis Campbell, "Aeschylean Treatment of Myth and Legend," JHS, VI
(April 1885), 162. We must heed the following caution of Campbell: "From the
fragmentariness of our knowledge it is impossible to say with perfect confi-
dence in particular instances, 'the poet invented this or that.'"
The Agamemnon forms, as it were, the first act of the trilogy. This first play can be considered as an act in a larger whole, for it ends with a partial solution to the problem it poses; it points beyond itself, although this relation to the following plays does not affect the self-contained unity of the play in itself. If the Agamemnon were the only play of the trilogy that survived, it would still make sense; it would still reveal what Aeschylus' dramatic conception was, and how he put it into dramatic shape. Furthermore, the very staging of the play would reveal the incidents that were most likely invented by Aeschylus. For what would be effective on the stage had to be invented for the stage, and could not be borrowed from epic, lyric, or any other narrative form in which the action could be supplied from the reader's or listener's imagination.

The opening lines of the Agamemnon are spoken by a watchman posted on the roof of King Agamemnon's palace in Argos. He awaits a beacon light that will announce the fall of Troy and the return of the king. As he tells of the miseries of his watch, the beacon flashes out, and he runs to inform Clytemnestra. The speech of the sentinel, so natural, so effective, is one of the finest monologues in tragedy. It is good theater, it is Aeschylus' own. Yet its originality is not marred by the fact that the person of the watchman comes from an earlier form of the myth. According to Croiset the watchman posted by Aegisthus in the Odyssey's account of the story in order to warn Aegisthus of Agamemnon's return is the forerunner to Aeschylus' guard. But Croiset adds:

"Mais ce qui n'est, dans l'Odyssée, qu'une simple indication devient chez Eschyle une scène vivante et même touchante." Aeschylus thus begins his

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4Croiset, Eschyle, p. 179.
trilogy with the most fitting tribute he could pay to the epic form of the story; he mediates the past by refashioning it for the present. The watchman, no longer a mere spy, strikes the keynote of the trilogy: a wait in the dark for the light of purity and deliverance.

The prologue over, the chorus of Argive elders enter to the rhythm of marching anapests; they come as the true interpreters of the political situation and of the religious wisdom that penetrates the plays. While the chorus sings of its impotent old age that has witnessed the agonizing battle over Troy and Helen for the past ten years, Clytemnestra enters, and orders the sacrificial fires to be set ablaze in honor of the event. The chorus continues to sing of a strange portent that prefigured the battle at Troy years ago: two eagles devoured a hare and an old prophet so interpreted this omen that Iphigeneia was sacrificed to appease Artemis who was stalling the Greek ships at Aulis with contrary winds.

We cannot be sure if Aeschylus was the first to join the prodigium of the two eagles and the hare to the story of Iphigeneia's sacrifice. But the ignorance of the source of this story is not the main problem. The very meaning of the sign is difficult to discover. Why did Artemis become angry with the Atreidae? It surely cannot be the mere fact that two eagles killed a hare, and that afterwards Artemis saw in the two eagles a symbol of Agamemnon and Menelaus. Of this interpretation Fraenkel says: "Such an easy shifting of responsibility is inconceivable in a play whose central problem consists in the connexion between guilt and atonement and which is dominated by the belief in the unerring sway of divine justice." Furthermore, although Aeschylus does

relate the bird portent, he passes over the recognised version of the story. Already in the Cypria as has been seen, Agamemnon's wounding of Artemis on an overshot was part of the Aulis episode; and in Steichorus this may well have been the motivation for the sacrifice of Iphigeneia.6

Since the sacrifice of Iphigeneia is not a mere past event in the motivation of the trilogy, but rather a real source of anxiety for Agamemnon and a driving force for Clytemnestra's revenge, the silence of Aeschylus about the earlier version is a real problem; it manifests a selection that clearly indicates some preference in his mind. Fraenkel's analysis of this selection by the omission of the story of Artemis' wounding as the motive for the ships' delay at Aulis is significant: "Such a motive, simple and consistent, is in keeping with the spirit of fairytales, sagas, epic poetry. Any attempt to accept a story of that type or to compromise with it would have struck at the very heart of his tragedy."7 In place of the automatic causality of an accident which enrages a goddess, Aeschylus stresses the willing perpetration of an unpardonable sin by Agamemnon. The cause of Agamemnon's sufferings will be, therefore, a result of his own deliberate decision in the face of a moral dilemma. Thus Aeschylus, for the purpose of his drama, had to make the sin of Agamemnon the beginning of the evil; but he also had to include some mention of the traditional tale of Artemis' relation to the sacrifice. How was he to accomplish this? Fraenkel explains his solution in the following paragraph:

6 See page 45, n. 49; and page 66, n 46.

7 Fraenkel, Agamemnon, II, p. 98.
By a bold stroke the poet fought his way out of the difficulty: he followed the traditional story in maintaining the wrath of Artemis and her appeasement through the sacrifice of Iphigenia but eliminated the act of Agamemnon which had incensed the goddess. While suppressing the cause, he elaborated the details of the sign whose unfavourable elements portended the disapproval of Artemis. This solution was facilitated by the fact that Aeschylus was writing not a coherent narrative but a retrospective song in a lofty strain and was therefore at liberty to select and emphasize a few significant points, and moreover by the cryptic character appropriate to the words of a seer. Still it would be wrong to under-estimate the audacity of the poet who ventured to withhold from his audience an important and familiar link of the story. Aeschylus might be confident that the power of his song would keep the hearers firmly in its grip and leave no room for idle speculation or curiosity about details.8

In this way, then, the chorus of Aeschylus ferrets out the inner meaning of the myth; it alone can transcend the mere details of the story, and find in them the universal significance which gives Aeschylus' drama its life, its action. In fact, the choral hymns throughout the trilogy are part of the action and not a mere comment on it. As Owen remarks: "Tragedy with Aeschylus is not yet a dramatic story with a chorus fitted into it, as it became with Sophocles when the more obvious and more readily compelling dramatic interest of story triumphed and altered the nature of the art. . . . The whole play is the dramatization of the choral hymn."9

The chorus, having finished its song, turns to Clytemnestra and asks what news has inspired her to offer sacrifice. She relates the message of Troy's fall, and explains how she learned the news so quickly by tracing the flash of signal fires from Mount Ida to Mount Arachneus. Strangely enough the coryphaeus is convinced by the story, although previously he had been sceptical of

8Ibid., p. 99.
Clytemnestra's report. Then with consummate irony Clytemnestra imagines the possible excesses which the victorious Greeks will commit, and prays that they do not dishonor the gods and thereby forfeit a safe homeward trip. In the heart of Clytemnestra anger for Iphigeneia still rankles; there will be no need for the gods to take vengeance: the double-meaning words of Clytemnestra insure that.

The second choral ode follows, setting forth the moralistic pattern on which Aeschylus has chosen to fashion the story of Agamemnon. The fate of Paris and the fall of Troy are explained by the ancient doctrine of Ate:

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\text{τῶν πολυκτόνων γάρ οὐκ ἄκοινοι θεοί. κελαί-}
\text{ναὶ ὦ ἔρινυες χρόνῳ}
\text{τυχηρῶν δυν' ἄνευ δίκαιος}
\text{παλίντυη τριβὰ βίοι}
\text{τιεὶς ἀμαυρῶν, ἐν δ' αἰ-}
\text{στοῖς τελέοντος οὕτως ἄλ-}
\text{κῆ. τὸ δ' ὑπερκόπως κλέειν}
\text{ἐν βαρύ' βάλλεται γὰρ δο-}
\text{σοίς Δίδεεν κάρανα.}
\text{κρίνω δ' ἀφθονον ὀλβον',}
\text{μὴ εἴην πτολιπόρθες}
\text{μὴ οὖν αὐτὸς ἀλους ὑπ' ἄλλ-}
\]

Cf. Verrall, Agamemnon, Appendices I.J, III. Verrall developed a theory to account for the improbabilities he found in the usual interpretation of the story; for example, the impossibility of the beacon system, Aegisthus' presence in Argos, the too ready belief of the chorus in the beacon lights. He invented a second chorus of conspirators who were in league with Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and assigned them ll. 351-366 where the chorus accepts the story of the beacons. Fraenkel rejects this theory, and would rather find an explanation for Clytemnestra's persuasiveness in the imagination and suggestion of her report which adds a seeming reality to the original report that Troy had fallen. See Fraenkel, Agamemnon, II, p. 184.
But the formula of justice: πλούτος 'wealth', κόρος 'surfeit', ὑβρίς 'insolence', πειθω'persuasion', "Ατη'ruin', is universal. It snared Paris for his sin; it will also snare Agamemnon. Accordingly Aeschylus stresses Agamemnon's personal guilt throughout the first play of the trilogy. Man as an individual must pay for his personal crimes as an individual, not because of the influence of a hereditary curse upon his family. Agamemnon's crime was the sacrifice of Iphigenia; the crime of his father Atreus in butchering the children of Thyestes serves as the motive for Aegisthus' part in the murder of Agamemnon, but it is not the main reason for Agamemnon's downfall.\(^\text{12}\)

While the chorus sings, a herald approaches. He brings good news: Agamemnon is returning after his victory at Troy. However, joyful news is

\(^{11}\)Agamemnon vv. 461-475, Aeschyli septem quae supersunt tragoediae, ed. Gilbertus Murray (Oxford, 1937). The other quotations from the trilogy will be from Murray's edition. Unless otherwise noted, the translations of the Oresteia are taken from Aescylus' Oresteia, translated with an introduction by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1953):

"The gods fail not to mark
those who have killed many.
The black Furies stalking the man
fortunate beyond all right
wrench back again the set of his life
and drop him to darkness. There among
the ciphers there is no more comfort
in power. And the vaunt of high glory
is bitterness; for God's thunderbolts
crash on the towering mountains.
Let me attain no envied wealth,
let me not plunder cities,
nor be taken in turn, and face
life in the power of another (pp. 48-49)."

\(^{12}\)Cf. Fraenkel, Agamemnon, II, pp. 624-625. He notes that there is no mention of Thyestes and his children before the Cassandra scene, and that none of the choric songs allege the old misdeed as the reason for Agamemnon's death.
immediately clouded over with tragic gloom, for the herald describes Agamemnon's utter destruction of Troy; even the altars and shrines of the gods have not been spared. Thus the irony of Clytemnestra's previous prayer has its full effect. The tally against Agamemnon is mounting. Paris and Troy did not escape; will Agamemnon? The herald does not add much to our knowledge of Agamemnon's character, nor does he interest us in the motivation that lies behind his deeds. But he draws in bold lines the nature of the sin which awaits its punishment.

When the chorus questions the herald about the fate of Menelaus, the herald reluctantly tells the story of the storm which destroyed the fleet on its return voyage. Menelaus is missing. Aeschylus' vivid description of this sea disaster was inspired by the Nostoi and the Odyssey. We have already seen that in the Odyssey (III.303-312) Menelaus was blown off course by the storm, and ended in Egypt. And since the Oresteia trilogy was originally followed by a satyr play entitled Proteus, which "probably parodied the tale of Menelaus and Proteus as told in the Odyssey (IV.351-570),"¹³ it is easy to see why Aeschylus would include this allusion to Menelaus. Moreover the account of the wreck at sea plays an artistic part in the drama; it is not a respectful nod to the traditional version of the story. As Croiset says: "C'était un plaisir pour lui que de recueillir et de rajeunir ces grands souvenirs de l'épopée. Or, ces développements narratifs convenaient beaucoup mieux dans la bouche du héraut que dans celle du roi lui-même, celui-ci ne devant paraître qu'en triomphateur pour tomber presque aussitôt dans le piège fatal."¹⁴

¹³Philip Whaley Harsh, A Handbook of Classical Drama (Stanford University, California, 1944), p. 60.
¹⁴Croiset, Eschyle, p. 185.
After the herald departs, the chorus sings of the ruin of Paris and of the destruction he and Helen brought down on Troy. And their message is this: insolence and pride never fail to be punished: "(Δικαν) πᾶν ὀ̣ ἐπὶ τέρμα νομῷ." Thus just before Agamemnon enters, Aeschylus fills the air with thoughts of the fate of Priam's house, a fate essentially the same as that which awaits Agamemnon.

The grand entrance of King Agamemnon accompanied by Cassandra is saluted by the chorus; but their greetings are not the joyous, unrestrained welcome that might be expected. They flavor their words with a warning of sedition lurking in the city against the King. And the reply of Agamemnon to their reception is equally as guarded. He places the responsibility for his obliteration of Troy on the avenging justice of the gods, and with that prelude completed, promises to act on the warning of the loyal chorus of elders: he will make sure where his true friends can be found. Queen Clytemnestra now makes her welcoming speech to Agamemnon. It is a bloodcurdling web of ironical allusions to her concern over the false reports of his death, an excuse for the absence of Orestes whom she says she has sent to Agamemnon's Phocian friend Strophius to protect the boy from any dangerous revolution, and finally, her petulant request that Agamemnon tread the crimson carpet that leads up to the palace, the path of Justice escorting him to his hearth and to an unexpected fate.

This entrance scene presents characters who were long familiar in the prior versions of the myth, but the staging of the harsh conflict between

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15 Agamemnon v. 781. "And all things she [righteousness] steers to fulfillment (p. 58)."
Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, the irony that fills the dialogue, and the laying of the carpet between the chariot and the door of the palace are best accredited to the genius of Aeschylus turning tradition to artistic and theatrical advantage. Commenting on this ability of Aeschylus to embody his concept of the tragic in the fate of Agamemnon, Kitto says: "The movement which is proper to this Aeschylean tragic idea—as 'dramatic' a movement as any—is our increasing sense of the inevitability of the fall. Nothing in the first part of the Agamemnon brings the catastrophe nearer (except the actual arrival at Argos) . . . but everything darkens the colours and makes the chasm that separates the doomed man from Justice wider and more awful."

Aeschylus made another deliberate change in the accepted legend. In Stesichorus and Pindar, as well as in the Electras of Sophocles and Euripides, Orestes was saved from Aegisthus and Clytemnestra after their murder of Agamemnon. But Aeschylus portrays Clytemnestra as sending Orestes to a friend of Agamemnon. She is not lying to her husband, for later in the Choephoroi vv. 914-915, Orestes blames his mother for not keeping him at home, but does not accuse her of a plot to murder him. Contrasting this version with the later version of Euripides, later though most likely drawing upon an earlier source, Verrall says: "In Aeschylus he [Orestes] is 'cast away' beforehand by the undesigned effect to a base intrigue. As elements in a romance or in a study of character, the inventions of the two later dramatists would be as much superior as they are more obvious. But the story of Aeschylus is not such; it is a legend of Divine Providence; and for this purpose the Aeschylean method of rescue has an

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16Kitto, pp. 113-114.
advantage equally manifest. No event, not even one effected by miraculous means, has so much of the providential character, as that which comes to pass by human agency indeed, but without or against the will of the agents. And such in Aeschylus is the saving of Orestes. However edifying this interpretation, it is perhaps stretching a simple detail too far. A better explanation of Aeschylus' version is found in his desire to concentrate the dramatic interest on the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra; and thus through simplicity gain in intensity. The introduction of this added crime on the part of Clytemnestra and the rescue of Orestes would have complicated the play without a corresponding increase in interest. Not one to pad his drama with mere narration, Aeschylus exercised his freedom by changing the story to suit his purposes.

The next section of the play presents what can be considered the finest piece of lyric creativity on the part of Aeschylus: the scene of Cassandra's vision. Agamemnon enters the palace, and Clytemnestra follows after a vain attempt to make Cassandra come inside with her. Left outside in the chariot, Cassandra breaks forth in a wild cry of anguish to Apollo who had led her to her death in the house of Atreus. Her eerie, prophetic clairvoyance looks into the past, and sees the crime of Atreus' butchery. She looks into the future and sees the treachery that will end her own life. But future time becomes

17 Verrall, Agamemnon, p. xvii.

18 This is basically the interpretation of Croiset. However, he says that by suppressing the rescue scene, Aeschylus thus removed one of the complaints Orestes had against Clytemnestra. This last point does not seem to fit the facts. Although Clytemnestra does not actually attempt the life of Orestes, she does deprive him of his ancestral kingdom—no small element in the motives of the vengeful Orestes.
present fact, and Cassandra quietly enters the palace as she laments the tragic destiny of man:

The simple fact of Cassandra's murder by Clytemnestra as related in the Odyssey XI.409-434 is changed from a mere datum to a dramatic preparation for the murder of Agamemnon. Cassandra is not only the motive force that partly explains Clytemnestra's jealous murder of her husband, but also in her role as victim, she has concentrated the sum and symbol of all the wickedness in the house of Atreus.

The play does not end with the death of Agamemnon and Cassandra, although this would have been the natural ending for a narrative presentation of the myth. Up till the present we have not heard a word of the motivation of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Now, after the murder has been completed, Aeschylus presents the denouement of the play by a frank, almost brutal, portrayal of the hate that spurred on Clytemnestra and her lover. He leaves aside the irony and innuendo of the previous section of the play, and lets Clytemnestra and Aegisthus defend their action. Far from the hesitant accomplice as portrayed in Homer, Clytemnestra reaches the height of savagery in the following words:

19Agamemnon vv. 1327-30. "Alas, poor men, their destiny. When all goes well a mere shadow will overthrow it. If it be unkind one stroke of a wet sponge wipes all the picture out; and that is far the most unhappy thing of all (p. 78)."
Aeschylus leaves us with an unmistakable final impression: Clytemnestra has had the main role to play. Now Aegisthus is the accomplice, and the motive power of the woman's will is the key to the action. But somehow, inexplicably, the guilt that is mysteriously present in the house of Atreus, a guilt finding perpetual reincarnation in the personal sins of its members, is punished through Clytemnestra's instrumentality. The chorus sense this. Clytemnestra does too, for she cannot escape the disturbing thought that the inexorable law of guilt now binds her. Although there is nothing of true repentance or remorse in her words, she can still appreciate the following sentiments of the chorus:

δνείδος ἡμεῖς τὸ δ' ἀντ' ὀνείδους.
δύσμαχα δ' ἔστι κρίναι.
φέρετ φέροντ', ἐκτίνει δ' ὁ καίνων.
μίμει δὲ μίμονος ἐν θρόνῳ Δίδω
παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα: θέμιον γάρ,
τῆς ἂν γονᾶν ἄρατον ἐκβάλοι δόμων;

20 Ἀγαμήμον v. 1385-92.

"When he was down
I struck him the third blow, in thanks and reverence to Zeus the lord of dead men underneath the ground. Thus he went down, and the life struggled out of him; and as he died he spattered me with the dark red and violent driven rain of bitter savored blood to make me glad, as gardens stand among the showers of "Od in glory at the birthtime of the buds (p. 90)."
The Agamemnon ends; but its conclusion is, as it were, a new problem to be solved. The moral violence of Agamemnon was punished by fresh violence by Clytemnestra. Her act is the complement of his sin, but what will be the outcome of her crime? Thus the Agamemnon is only a prelude to the Oresteia. The final solution to the problem of guilt and atonement remains. However, by itself it is enough to prove the consummate art of Aeschylus in refashioning the narrative details of the current myth into a dramatic symbol. And what does this dramatic symbol tell us of Aeschylus' tragic conception? If no more than the Agamemnon had survived, what would be the judgment on Aeschylus' view of the tragic in life? The view of Kitto seems to account for the story Aeschylus tells in the Agamemnon; it is an opinion; that is, an idea still open to revision; but this very openness does not destroy the value of his thought.

The tragedy is that there are on the one hand certain fundamental moral principles, on the other hand the possibility of man being so infatuated as to set these at defiance and to be utterly destroyed in consequence. This is not the tragedy of the divided or vulnerable human soul; Agamemnon's tragedy is not one of character. . . . We are not shown a hero in whom hybris, called by some circumstance into activity, ruins a character otherwise admirable, nor one who, intending well, works evil through mistake or mischance. Instead of looking at such a division in the hero's own soul or mind we look at the division, the chasm between Agamemnon and Justice; the tragedy is in his existence, not in his spiritual composition. 22

21Agamemnon vv. 1560-66. "Here is anger for anger. Between them who shall judge lightly? The spoiler is robbed; he killed, he has paid. The truth stands ever beside God's throne eternal: he who has wrought shall pay; that is law. Then who shall tear the curse from their blood? The seed is stiffened to ruin (p. 86)."

22Kitto, pp. 110-111.
Throughout the *Agamemnon* Aeschylus has not only presented a tragic picture of Agamemnon, but also prepared us for the next stage in the development of the tragedy; that is, for the next play of the trilogy, the *Choephoroi*. This preparation hovers over the final scenes of the play, especially in the repeated mention of Orestes. Just as the watchman waited for the beacon light to announce victory over Troy and the safe return of Agamemnon, so Orestes is the light that will free the city from the tyrants' rule. And Cassandra had prophesied that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus would pay the penalty for their crime; the chorus of elders were not slow to equate the abstract notion of retribution with the return and vengeance of Orestes.  

The story of the *Choephoroi* is the story of Orestes. In the *Frogs* v. 1124 Aristophanes recognised this by giving the name Story of Orestes to the *Choephoroi* and not to the whole trilogy as is the modern editorial practice. As Verrall says of Aristophanes' title: "This may be merely a slip; but it is quite likely that the titles of the Aeschylean plays fluctuated in popular usage before they were fixed by the learned; and in sense, as distinct from form, the title describes our play better than it describes the entire work."  

The *Choephoroi* is truly the action of Orestes. It is Aeschylus' dramatic portrayal of a higher viewpoint, a second stage in the solution of the problem of justice. The picture of divine justice in the *Agamemnon* was not adequate, for the workings of God's will are not appropriately embodied in an instrument as evil as Clytemnestra. Between justice and evil there is a basic antinomy;

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23 *Agamemnon* vv. 1317-1320, 1646, 1667.

hence the need for a higher viewpoint.

Justifying God's ways to men Aeschylus presents Creastes; and in this presentation we can discern the continuing creative invention of Aeschylus. The Choephoroi, however, differs from the Agamemnon and the Eumenides in its closer adherence to the customary myth as known at the time. The instances of Aeschylus' genius will be more apparent in the intensity he adds to the action and the delineation of character than in any striking change in the basic outlines of the myth.

The Choephoroi begins with a prayerful speech of Creastes at his father's tomb.25 As Creastes prays, he and his companion Pylades see the chorus of foreign women escorting Electra to the tomb to offer a libation to Agamemnon's spirit.26 Artfully Aeschylus has Creastes and Pylades withdraw to overhear the prayer of Electra and the chorus, for the returning exile has no way of knowing the exact conditions that prevail in the city. The sorrowful parados then tells how a terrifying dream incited Clytemnestra to send a libation in honor of Agamemnon, but they do not specify what the dream was about. Aeschylus saves this detail for a later moment when it can be put to more effective use. Instead of stressing detail, the chorus sings of the problem which Creastes must try to solve with Apollo's aid, the problem of breaking the cycle of guilt

25The first part of the prologue is missing. Creastes begins with a prayer to Hermes Lord of the Dead; but in the missing lines he probably revealed the command of Apollo which had brought him back to Argos, so that the audience would have no doubt that Creastes looked on his role of avenger as an inescapable duty. Cf. Harsh, p. 76.

26Pylades and not Talthybius as in Stesichorus' account fills the role of companion. Aeschylus thus remained consistent with his omission of the attempt on Creastes' life and the subsequent rescue by Talthybius.
and punishment:

τι γάρ λύτρον πεσόντος αἵματος πέδοι; 
Ἰῶ πάνοιγμι ἑστία, 
Ἰῶ κατασκαφαὶ ὅμων, 
ἄνηλιοι βροτοστυγεῖς 
δόνοι καλύπτοσι ὅμους 
ἵσσωτάνθεν θανάτοισι. 27

And their answer to the question they posed is of little comfort to Clytemnestra:

θιγόντει οὖντι νυμφικῶν ἔδωλήν ἄκος, πόροι τε πάντες ἐκ μιᾶς δόοι
(πρὸ) βαίνοντες τὸν χερομυσή
φόνον καθαίροντες θείοιν μάταν. 28

Electra who has been silent up till now asks the chorus what prayer she can offer up with the libations. Surely she cannot offer them in the name of Agamemnon's loving wife, so the chorus counsels her to offer them in her own name and that of Orestes, the two dispossessed children of their father, the two who love him amid so much hate. Electra's prayer is not the whining petition of a weak, hesitant girl; Aeschylus has remained true to the earlier Stesichorean form of the myth in his portrayal of Electra at the grave. First, Electra is one much suffering from her mother and Aegisthus. She can say:

27 Choephoroi vv. 48-54.

"What can wash off the blood once spilled upon the ground? 
0 hearth soaked in sorrow, 
0 wreckage of a fallen house. 
Sunless and where men fear to walk 
the mists huddle upon this house 
where the high lords have perished (p. 94)."

28 Ibid., vv. 71-74.

"For one who handles the bridal close, there is no cure. 
All the world's waters running in a single drift 
may try to wash blood from the hand 
of the stained man; they only bring new blood guilt on (p. 95)."
And later she describes her condition in more graphic terms:

ηγὼ δ' ἀπεστάτων ἄτιμος, οὐδὲν ἄξια·

Εἰ νῦν ὁ Ἀφρεκτός πολυσινοῦς κυνὸς δίκαν

ἐτοιμότερα γέλωτος ἀνέφερον λίβη,

χέουσα πολύδακρυν γόνι Γκριμπίμινα.

τοιαύτ' ἄκοιν ἐν φρεσίν γράφου, πάτερ. 30

Electra's role is developed by Aeschylus in the recognition scene and more forcefully in the kommos that follows. But if her character is developed, it is developed only to be dropped from an active participation in Orestes' vengeance; for after Orestes' order for her to keep a watchful eye on the events in the palace she is silent. This is a departure from the probable account of Stesichorus as reconstructed from vase painting. As was noted before, the group of vase paintings inspired by the Stesichorean version of the death of Agisththus featured Electra warning Orestes of his mother's attack with the axe.31 But the comparable scene in the Choephoroi does not give any place to

29 Ibid., vv. 135-137.

"Now I am what a slave is, and Orestes lives outcaste from his great properties, while they go proud in the high style and luxury of what you worked to win (pp. 97-98)."

30 Ibid., vv. 444-449.

"Meanwhile I stood apart, dishonored, nothing worth, in the dark corner, as you would kennel a vicious dog, and burst in an outrush of tears, that came that day where smiles would not, and hid the streaming of my grief. Hear such, and carve the letters of it on your heart (pp. 445-50)."

31 Page 73.
Electra. Aeschylus' reason for this departure is obviously to concentrate interest on Orestes and his awesome duty, and not to diffract attention through interest in too many actors. This is proved by the contrasting role she plays in Sophocles and Euripides. There emphasis on Orestes has switched to Electra, for she offers a better sounding board for a tragedy of character, and is accordingly exploited to the full when it comes to arousing pathos and emotion.  

The recognition scene that follows upon Electra's prayer is a bit clumsy, perhaps, in its mechanical aspects. The lock of hair and the footprint are not impressive as recognition signs to the modern audience, but Tucker has argued that there is nothing inconclusive or absurd about the lock and the footprints. From Electra's point of view he finds her acceptance of the evidence psychologically correct, for "(1) she is not by any means entirely satisfied because of the similarity of the hair to her own and the correspondence in the shape of the footprints. Her waves of feeling—hope, assurance, perplexity, distrust—are brought out in her speech with the greatest truth of insight and sympathetic realisation. . . . (2) It was a hoped-for event that Orestes, now grown to manhood, would soon return; his arrival had just been prayed for (v. 138) and was uppermost in his sister's mind. (3) The moral certainty that no one but Orestes would make the offering is of much greater weight than critics have allowed."  

Not only was this recognition subjectively convincing to Electra, it was also effective with the audience. Tucker argues that since "the

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32 In Euripides' Electra, she is almost a Lady Macbeth, so forceful is she in urging her brother to his mother's murder.

33 Tucker, pp. lxv-lxvi.
recognition by the lock was almost certainly a constant and favourite part of the legend, the audience of Aeschylus would be expecting, even demanding the traditional recognition. This Aeschylus gave to them, but not without adding to it his own creativity, clearly manifest in the speeches of Electra and Orestes which follow immediately on the recognition.

Significant for another reason is the speech of Orestes immediately before the kommos (vv. 269-305). Here the command of Apollo is set forth as the prime motivation driving Orestes on. The burden of bloodguilt Orestes places squarely on the god of Delphi, thus establishing the remote conditions which will lead into the final play of the trilogy in which the role of Apollo's responsibility outweighs the deed of Orestes performed in obedience to the Pythian authority. Here we see clearly that the Delphic influence which was very influential in transforming the myth as presented by Stesichorus and Pindar has also fixed the general outline of the version Aeschylus was using in the Choephoroi.

Yet there is possibly something novel in Aeschylus' description of the oracle's inspiration of Orestes. The innovation is seen in the positive command of Apollo which ordered Orestes' slaying of his mother, and also in the god's threat of horrible punishments if the command went unfulfilled. The Stesichorean version had, it is true, portrayed Apollo as promising his sanction and purification to Orestes. All this was in keeping with his role as god of purification as seen in the Υμνός to Apollo, and in the feast of Septeria as it has been described. But the notion of a god of absolution is far from the

34 Ibid., p. lxvi.
concept of a divinity who instigates a man to matricide as a religious obligation. This certainly implies a very special concept of the Delphic god, but not a unique one. In this regard, another poem, the Alcmeonid, probably dating from the sixth century, records a similar command from the Pythian god to Alcmeon, son of Amphiarous. Apollo ordered him to avenge his father's death by killing his mother Eriphyle who had been bribed with a golden necklace to persuade her husband to join an expedition which proved fatal for Amphiarous.35 Commenting on such a command, Croiset says: "Il semble qu'Apollon, selon cette conception, représentait le vieux droit domestique, qui imposait au chef de la famille, à l'héritier du pouvoir paternel, le devoir de punir tout crime commis dans l'intérieur de cette famille. Mais en défendant ce droit, il le sanctifiait, pour ainsi dire, en ce sens qu'il protégeait l'exercice contre toute vengeance ultérieure."36 And in his edition of the Oresteia Mason says that the terrors leveled at Orestes for the non-completion of the vengeful act can well be linked "à un recueil d'oracles exposant la doctrine delphique sur le devoir de la vengeance et dépeignant le châtiment réservé à celui qui s'y dérobe."37

Although Aeschylus had undoubtedly been influenced by the Delphic doctrine on the sacred right of paternity, it is important to realize that the doctrinal inspiration is not presented primarily as a religious dogma, but as the motive

35 Croiset, Eschyle, p. 217.
36 Ibid.
for the dramatic action of Orestes. Furthermore, the punishment threatened by Apollo and the sanction offered to Orestes are all interwoven with the personal motivation that Orestes felt at the loss of honor and kingdom. Indeed Orestes remains a very human instrument in the execution of the god's will; he is no mere puppet of the Delphic oracle.

This same mixture of personal emotion and reliance on divine aid is continued in the long choral section beginning at v. 306 and ending at v. 478. It is really a dirge, a litany sung in honor of the dead king and the preternatural powers that are to assist them in their vengeance. Thus do Orestes, Electra, and the chorus whip themselves into a frenzy of hateful passion against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, while at the same time they bolster their mutual conviction of the justice of their proposed action. For a modern audience this long choral piece proves too long; it delays the action which they are waiting for. Yet in reality for a person who can enter imaginatively into the Greek mentality, recapturing the same belief in the power of invoking a ghost against its murderers, this kommos lies at the heart of the play's action. It is, as it were, the spiritual drama which has its physical counterpart in the actual murder of the guilty pair. Far from lyric padding, it is Aeschylus' way of projecting into the externals of the myth the inner significance he sees in Orestes' deed. There is nothing esoteric about this core of meaning. In Orestes' act Aeschylus sees not only the will of Orestes, but also the will of

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38 Choephoroi vv. 297-301.

39 This rite over the tomb of Agamemnon was prescribed by Apollo according to Sophocles (Electra v. 82); this may have been mentioned in the prologue's missing lines.
Agamemnon crying for revenge; and beyond Orestes and his father Aeschylus presents us with a view of the supernatural forces that guide the world. He sums up this outlook in the words of Orestes' prayer:

Zeū Zeū, kátwthēn ámpēmpovn
óstepoipōinov ãtav
brotoan tlmōn; kai πanōbrwpf
kheirf, tokeūs; ñ'õmav teleniav. 40

With the lengthy kommos at an end, Orestes would seem to have exhausted every source from which he could draw inspiration; already he is aflame to execute the task of vengeance. Not so. Here Aeschylus displays the depth of his creativity by making Orestes ask the chorus why Clytemnestra has sent them with libations, why she tries to wash clean the stains of blood now that the deed is done. The chorus tells him of Clytemnestra's nightmare in which she dreamt that she gave birth to a serpent which she fed at her breast, only to have the snake's fangs tear her breast and draw blood. Although this nightmare was presented in Stesichorus' version of the myth, Aeschylus makes it serve his own original purposes by introducing it at the proper time. Earlier in the play, as has been noted, Aeschylus allowed the dream to be alluded to; but only when Orestes is ready to realize the significance of the dream does he relate all the details of Clytemnestra's vision. Now in confirmation of Apollo's command, Orestes can see himself symbolized by the serpent in his mother's nightmare:

40Chosophor t v. 381-385. This kommos also shows how idle it is to complain of the restrictions imposed on the Greek drama by the use of classical myths. Here without transgressing the limits of the traditional myth, Aeschylus is at his best.

"Zeus, Zeus, force up from below
ground the delayed destruction
on the hard heart and the daring hand, for the right of our fathers (p. 106)."
With this encouragement, Orestes plots the intrigue that will get Pylades and himself inside the palace and in a position to kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. The plan is simple. Electra and the chorus of women are to keep their eyes open and their mouths shut. Orestes and Pylades will shoulder the responsibility of the action.

Orestes and Pylades then present themselves at the palace as travelers from Daulis in Phocia, are greeted by Clytemnestra herself, and Orestes imitating the Phocian dialect tells his mother of a stranger named Strophius who asked him to carry the news of Orestes' death to his parents. Whether or not this intrigue to gain entrance into the palace was original with Aeschylus cannot be determined. What appears to have been Aeschylus' own invention is the absence of Aegisthus when Orestes enters the palace, and the added suspense this involved in the action of the play. As Harsh notes: "It may be that Aeschylus is making the risks of Orestes great in order to increase 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 on a "throne," and in this play (572) Orestes suggests that he may find Aegisthus on the "thrones" of Agamemnon."\(^2\) Perhaps the absence of Aegisthus was also used so that Orestes would be greeted first

\(^1\)Ibid., vv. 548-550.

\(^2\)Harsh, p. 75.
by his mother: a scene electric with emotion as Clytemnestra responds to the news of Orestes' death before the very eyes of her son.

After receiving Orestes and Pylades, Clytemnestra sends Orestes' old nurse Cilissa to summon Aegisthus and his armed guardsmen so that he can interrogate the visitors himself. In the versions of Pindar and Stesichorus the old nurse was a mere cog in the action, the necessary hand that saved Orestes from his father's murderers. Aeschylus rejected the version of the myth that included the rescue, but he did not do away with the nurse. She provided rich subject matter to be transformed from a faceless actor into a captivating character whose maternal love for Orestes offers a striking contrast to the hate and duplicity of Clytemnestra. She also became an integral part of the plot to murder Aegisthus; for at the advice of the chorus of women, she does not tell Aegisthus to come with his armed guard. Furthermore, her prating speech about the chores of a nurse, the comic relief she offers with her observations on baby Orestes' diaper service, her sincere grief at the news of Orestes' death—all these show that Aeschylus could give as vivid a vignette of human character as could Shakespeare. Though it is true that character development, so essential to the tragedy of Sophocles, is by and large, absent from Aeschylus' drama, it would be pure inanity to deny him the power of presenting the vivid intensity of personality which his concept of tragic drama demanded.

Aegisthus now arrives on the scene to question the foreign visitor who has brought the news which affords him great relief. Orestes, the most likely avenger of Agamemnon's murder, is dead. The chorus obligingly directs Aegisthus inside the palace, but immediately afterwards adds its prayers that
Orestes becomes the "flame and light of liberty." In the midst of the petition Aegisthus cries out from within the palace. Orestes' sword has found the breast of Aegisthus.

It was noted before that the vase motifs collected by Robert show Clytemnestra's efforts to strike Orestes with an axe while he is plunging his sword into Aegisthus; but Aeschylus has altered the scene slightly, for at the time of the deed Clytemnestra is in the women's quarters and comes on the scene only after Aegisthus' cry. When she realizes what has happened, that Orestes is still alive and here to pay her back in kind for her treacherous murder of Agamemnon, she calls for an axe. Thus the wife who did not hesitate to kill her husband has become a mother who has no qualms about axing her own son. But before an axe can be brought, Orestes is facing his mother. Now, without other defense, she pleads her maternity in words she hopes will persuade her son.

Her words are strangely ironical, for they remind us of Clytemnestra's other offspring: the revenging serpent begotten and nursed in her nightmare:

Why has Aeschylus altered the scene so that Clytemnestra never receives the weapon she called for? Commenting on the discrepancy between Stesichorus' and Aeschylus' versions, Robert says: "Aischylos hat den gräßlichen Zug, dass die Mutter gegen den Sohn---mag sie ihn nun erkannt haben oder nicht---das Beil

\[\text{Choephoroi, v. 863.}\]

"Hold, my son. Oh take pity, child, before this breast where many a time, a drowsing baby, you would feed and with soft gums sucked in the milk that made you strong (p. 124)."
erhebt, ausgemerzt, aber so mächtig war diese Tradition, so tief war sie der
Volkspantasis eingeprägt, dass er mit den Worten δοιν τις ἀνδροκυνήτα πε-
λεκυν ὡς τάχος. wenigstens daran erinnern zu müssen glaubte. Hier sehen
wir den selbständig schaffenden Dichter im Kampf mit der poetischen Sagen-
tradition. 145 This opinion is not without its merits, but perhaps it relies
too exclusively on an archaeologıcal argument about the influence of vase
painting on a dramatic artist's creativity. Goldman would rather see in
Aeschylus' innovation his emphasis on Clytemnestra's rights as a mother. She
writes:

If Aeschylus, a resourceful and daring playwright, really felt the need,
at the very height of the tragedy, of throwing a meagre sop to a possi-
ble conservative element by thus referring to older tradition, what,
one must ask, would have been the actual psychological effect upon the
spectators? Would they have been more impressed by the apparent con-
cession to tradition, or by the contrast between what is implied in the
call for arms and what really takes place when mother and son have been
brought face to face? Aeschylus, in thus contrasting the old savage
motif with the more humane one, meant, I believe, to throw the emphasis
on the latter, and by causing a sudden revulsion of feeling in his
audience, to make the emotional effect of the scene all the more poignant. 146

From the hesitation that Clytemnestra's motherly appeal causes Orestes, it
seems that Goldman's understanding of the passage is sounder than Robert's.
And besides, Robert seems to pit the independent creativity of Aeschylus
against the traditional form that the myth had taken in poetry. Aeschylus,
however, has clearly shown that his talent for innovation moved easily within
the framework of the traditional myth. Where that version wanted changing,
Aeschylus changed it without scruple.

146 Goldman, p. 136.
As Orestes faces his mother, his sword still fresh with Aegisthus' blood he waivers in his resolve. Even though the Delphic god had commanded the deed, Orestes is still a man; he can still feel the utter revulsion of sinking his sword into his mother's breast. He appeals to Pylades: "What should he do?"

Up till this point in the action of the play Aeschylus has given Pylades an important role as the companion of Orestes, but also a silent role; often spoken to, Pylades has not said anything in the drama so far. Now for three lines, Pylades breaks his silence, and encourages Orestes to obey Delphic Apollo:

πού δὲ τὰ λοιπὰ Λοξίου μαντεύματα
tὰ πυθὸρηματα, πιστὰ δ' έυφρακμματα;
ἀπαντᾶς ἐχέροις τῶν θεῶν ἦγου πλέουν. 47

Orestes follows the advice spoken by his friend; and in allowing himself to be guided by Pylades he acknowledges the supremacy of the Pythian oracle. He sees in it the true mouthpiece of Zeus's will.

Thus Aeschylus has retained the Delphic influence in his version of the myth, but he has retained it as a dramatist should. By introducing the hesitation of Orestes, Aeschylus has kept his play truly human. When Pylades counsels obedience to the oracle, we do not see in it a dogma of religion presented in a purely juridical manner; rather do we experience Orestes' dilemma as the source of anxiety it really was. In this there is the truth of human nature and not the falsifying abstraction from a treatise on ethical obligation.

Like Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, so Orestes' vengeance on his mother makes

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47 Choephori vv. 900-902. Pylades' role in the murder of Clytemnestra seems to be the ultimate justification of Robert's statement that he is "ein Hypostase des pythischen Apollon." See page 47, n. 53.

"What then becomes thereafter of the oracles declared by Loxias at Pytho? What of sworn oaths? Count all men hateful to you rather than the gods (p. 125)."
of him a hero of faith. This is the message chanted by the chorus after
Orestes has left the stage with his mother: Orestes has rid the house of Atreus
of its sin and guilt by following the command of Apollo. 48

As in the Agamemnon the action of the Choephoroi continues beyond the main
event that would have closed a narrative presentation of the myth. Just as
Clytemnestra tried to defend her murder of Agamemnon, so in the last scene
does Orestes, standing over the bodies of Aegisthus and his mother, make his
defense. He simply shows the robe in which Clytemnestra had trapped his father,
and which she herself had displayed after her deed.

Thus with this image-symbol Aeschylus finds a nexus that gives the
Agamemnon and the Choephoroi an "inner dimension and strength," 49 for Orestes' 
attempt to justify himself recalls Clytemnestra’s vain attempt to win her own
purity and absolution. Orestes fears that he has won a hollow victory:

εδρασεν ἦν οὐκ ἐδρασε; μαρτυρεῖ δὲ μοι
φάρος τὸδ’, ὡς ἐβασεν Αἴγυπτου ἡμός.
φόνου δὲ κηκὶς ξίνχ χρόνῳ εὐμβάλλεται,
πολλὰς βαφάς φθείρουσα τοῦ ποιήματος
νῦν αὐτῶν αἱμα, νῦν ἀποιμᾶτο πάραν,
πατροκτόνοι θ’ ὑματια, προσσωμὼν τόδε.
ἀλγῷ μὲν ἔργα καὶ πάθος γένος το πάν,
ἀγια νικής τῆς ἐξαι καλώς μιασματα. 50

48 Ibid., vv. 931-972.

49 Richmond Lattimore, "Introduction to the Oresteia," in The Complete Greek

50 Choephoroi vv. 1010-1017.

"Did she do it or did she not? My witness is
this great robe. It was thus she atained Aegisthus' sword.
Dip it and dip it again, the smear of blood conspires
with time to spoil the beauty of this precious thing.
Now I can praise him, now I can stand by to mourn
and speak before this web that killed my father; yet
I grieve for the thing done, the death, and all our race.
I have won; but my victory is soiled, and has no pride (p. 129)."
As Orestes speaks, his words become violent. A strange anguish seizes him as he realizes that now his hands are stained with his mother's blood. In desperation and in fear Orestes falls back on the only source from which his justification can come: Pythian Apollo's command and sanction of his deed. Only with Apollo is there any hope, so in voluntary exile Orestes sets out for Apollo's oracle and purification.

Just as the chorus is reassuring him of the justice of his deed which has liberated Argos from the tyrants, Orestes sees the black-robed Furies that are coming to seek revenge for his mother's death. Then Orestes realizes that the source of his anxiety is no merely subjective feeling of a guilty conscience, but in fact the dread Furies which "exist apart from man, living creatures of flesh and blood, embodiments of a moral law." 51

With the bloody black bags in pursuit, Orestes rushes off for Apollo's oracle.

Thus what was to be the end of bloodguilt and crime offers no finality. And even the guarantee of Apollo seems to fail Orestes.

The chorus ends the play with the question that leads us to the final solution, the lasting synthesis, of the problems of the first two plays of the trilogy:

\[ \text{ποί δῆτα κρανῇ, ποί καταλήξει μετακομίσθεν μένος ἀτής; 52} \]

\[ \text{δράσαντα παθεῖν 'He who has wrought shall pay.' Is this the fullness of justice? Is there nothing beyond?} \]

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52 Chosphori, vv. 1075-1076.

"Where is the end? Where shall the fury of fate be stilled to sleep, be done with (p. 131)?"
CHAPTER V

THE EUMENIDES: A MYTH TRANSCENDED

The Eumenides is Aeschylus' answer to the moral chaos that he traced through the Agamemnon and the Choephori. But if he answers the apparently hopeless moral conundrum into which Orestes had fallen, he does so with a religious solution that is at once patriotic and political. The realm of the ancient morality was too narrow to contain the test case presented by Orestes; but what did not give way under the strain was the will of Zeus manifesting itself through the Apolline religion and the wisdom of Athena as it had become incarnated in the Athenian civilization.

All this had an impact on the myth of Orestes. As Harsh has noted: "The patriotic and religious themes of this play have overwhelmed the story of Orestes."\(^1\) The myth has thus been transcended, for the action central to the Eumenides is carried out on a different level. "Orestes," says Kitto, "has now become the occasion of conflict between certain moral powers of the Universe and the resolution of this conflict, however poignant our interest in Orestes, must be the chief interest of the play—a moral and intellectual rather than a tragic interest."\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Harsh, p. 83.

\(^2\) Kitto, p. 93.
Still an emphasis on the religious and political ideas that Aeschylus stresses must not be considered a lessening of his dramatic art. He is not a religious philosopher but a dramatist who makes the core of his theatrical interest rest in a religious problem, not in the thrills of melodrama. There is nothing in his treatment of the myth of Orestes that does not spring from his tragic idea as it works its way through the trilogy.

Although Aeschylus followed the legend closely in the first two plays, he did not leave it in its pure narrative form, and merely pad the story with appropriate lyrics and stage effects. He made of it a true drama wherein human action and religious idea are thoroughly interpenetrated and interpenetrating. And since in the Eumenides there is greater emphasis on religion, there will be in Aeschylus' dramatic art a greater focus on the divine characters in the play than on the human; but focus, action, and interest there will be.

The main lines of the play will be sketched first; then some comment will be in place on the transcendence of the myth of Orestes and on the relation of this transcendence to the experience which the inventive genius of Aeschylus was trying to present.

The Eumenides is divided into two broad sections according to the place of the action. The first part of the play is located at Delphi; the rest of the drama is in Athens upon the Acropolis. In the first part the action begins with the prologue of the Pythian priestess which relates the history of the Delphic oracle. After this she enters the temple, but terrified at the sight of the Erinyes she finds sleeping before the suppliant Orestes, she comes bursting out of the temple. Then the audience is permitted to see the gruesome sight; the temple doors are flung open to reveal Orestes surrounded by the
Erinyes, and with Apollo and Hermes standing guard over Orestes. As the Erinyes sleep on, Apollo, with an acknowledgement of the command he had given to the matricide Orestes, sends Orestes to Athens in the protective custody of Hermes, so that there he might be judged and finally acquitted of his crime. After Apollo leaves the scene, the ghost of Clytemnestra arouses the Furies to the pursuit of her son. With much moaning and groaning, the sleepy Furies awake realize their prey has slipped from their grasp, and then form a chorus to chant of this new outrage and loss of their ancient prerogatives at the hands of Apollo. Facing the ancient goddesses the young god Apollo orders them from his sanctuary, but not without the Furies first accusing Apollo of despoiling them of their ancient privilege of pursuing matricides. To this argument Apollo replies ad hominem, asking why they failed to harass Clytemnestra for her crime which was a denigration of the marriage union. Then with a reference to the trial Athena will conduct in Athens to solve the case, Apollo closes this first section at Delphi with a promise of aid to the suppliant Orestes.

The next scene opens in Athens before the statue of Athena at the feet of which Orestes has taken a suppliant's posture. As he prays the goddess to honor his petition, the chorus of Erinyes stalk onto the scene. They have followed the scent of blood and tracked down Orestes. It is his blood they seek in lieu of Clytemnestra's. But Orestes will not be shaken, for now his confidence has returned with his trust in the purification he received from Apollo. Thus fully cleansed of his mother's blood he calls on Athena to rescue him from the Furies. The goddess appears, demands to know the office of the strange creatures before her statue, and finally receives their assent to let her judge the case. Now it is Orestes' turn to plead his case: his bloodguilt has been
cleansed by Apollo; furthermore, his deed was just vengeance for his father which had been commanded by Apollo. But as Orestes presents his case Athena realizes that a murder trial is beyond her jurisdiction, so she selects the best of her citizens in order to form a court. Before the court convenes, the Furies in exasperation prophesy the ruin of the moral order of the universe if their case is not victorious. Then when the court is met, Apollo appears as witness for the defense, assuming full responsibility for Orestes' deed. The prosecuting Furies now have their opportunity to examine Orestes. He does not deny his deed, but turns to Apollo to defend him from the charge of shedding mother-blood. Apollo argues that Agamemnon's murder was essentially different from the deed of Orestes. Agamemnon, lordly king and conqueror, was foully murdered; surely this is not to be compared with the death of a mother who is only a nurse to the seed planted by the father who is the real parent. Of this fact, Athena, born from the head of Father Zeus, is witness; so that Orestes did not actually shed kindred blood in killing his mother.

The testimony for both sides complete, Athena establishes the present court on the Areopagus as a permanent judiciary for mankind; then she orders the judges to cast their votes, promising that she will cast her vote for Orestes, who will win the case, if the other votes are equally divided. There is a split decision and Orestes is exonerated.

To Athena and her city Orestes bids farewell, and promises that his native Argos will be the lastling ally of Athens in peace and war. After Orestes' departure the Furies explode with hatred, pouring out threats of ruin to be visited on Athens because of their neglected rights. But Athena pleads with them to realize that behind the oracle and command of Apollo there stands the
will of Zeus. Although the Erinyes are slow to be persuaded, they finally yield to the promises Athena makes to them, and change their hymn of hate to a loving hymn of benediction on the Athenians, in whose hearts hereafter the Erinyes, now the Eumenides, will hold a place of honor.

In a solemn, torchlight processional, the ancient Daughters of Night are escorted to their sanctuary beneath the Hill of Ares, as the women who form their escort sing of the ultimate, all-embracing harmony of Zeus and Destiny.

Thus in brief is the story Aeschylus developed in the Eumenides. Much, if not most, of the action is Aeschylus' own. This independence and creative invention have a significance that calls for comment.

In the very opening prologue of the Pythian priestess, Aeschylus has foreshadowed the final harmony of the two Athenian cults of the chthonic and Olympian powers; for instead of making Apollo the first and only tenant of Delphi, as in the Hymn to Apollo, he sees the prior occupants of Delphi peacefully passing along their title of ownership to Apollo, the Spokesman for Zeus. Thus with a striking use of inclusio, Aeschylus begins his play with the same harmony of new and old that concludes his trilogy and solves the problem of justice as typified in Orestes, and then later in the Furies vs. Apollo.

The rest of the scene at Delphi is Aeschylus' own, especially his terrifying conception of the Erinyes, so dreadful that an ancient story of doubtful value related that the children in the audience fainted and pregnant women miscarried. Whether or not the tale is true, the Erinyes must have been ghastly enough: Gorgon-like women dressed in robes of black, their hair entwined with writhing snakes, their eyes exuding blood. It is easy to forget in our
too chaste and ascetic sense of what makes for good theater that Aeschylus here displays creativity in his stage effects which must have contributed immeasurably to the spectacle that made of his play a true dramatic action.

There is no question of Aeschylus' originating the notion of the Erinyes; they were already well-known, both as avengers of souls unjustly murdered, and also as the embodiments of the vengeance that follows on sin, true ministers of justice. But they were mostly cultless, ill-defined, and consequently a part of the spiritual make-up of the universe hard to visualize. It is to Aeschylus' credit that he has put flesh and bone onto these avengers, thus symbolizing on the earthly level the conflict that was taking place on the spiritual.

He has done the same with Apollo and Athena almost by necessity; for with the importance of Orestes as an individual subordinated to the workings of cosmic justice, Apollo and Athena had to compensate the loss of action. As Croiset has said: "À cette insuffisance dramatique du principal personnage, Eschyle a supplée ... par l'action qu'il a prêtée aux deux divinités secourables, Apollon et Athéna. Son Apollon, en effet, n'est dépourvu ni de volonté ni même de passion; il plaît par sa noblesse et sa générosité, par une fierté juvénile, par la protection dont il couvre son suppliant, et aussi parce qu'il représente, en face des Erinyes, puissance aveugle, une idée supérieure de justice et d'humanité." Croiset's position is verified at the beginning


6 Ibid., pp. 238–239.

7 Croiset, Eschyle, p. 264.
of the play when the sacred shrine of Apollo is shown in immediate and manifest conflict with the befouling Erinyes; but Croiset's words find truer application to the Apollo who stands as witness for Orestes during the trial scene. Here it is the god who is in the forefront of the action; and his very presence at the debate sets the dramatic conflict in its proper context: brutal, unthinking vengeance and the new order of justice pitted one against the other.

The transfer of scene from Delphi to Athens, and the motivation behind this change are not at first apparent. For at Delphi Apollo had made it clear that he had utterly cleansed Orestes from bloodguilt. And in the Choephori Orestes also expressed his confidence in the Pythian process of purification. Yet for some reason Orestes is pursued over land and sea by the Furies until he reaches Athens. There under the aegis of Pallas Athena he appears to be subjected to a second purification, a second exoneration; this seems to be a needless duplication, a sequence of events with no causal relation nor with a foundation in the myth of Orestes.

One possible reconciliation rests on the knowledge that after bloodshed there was a two-fold absolution that was required. The rites of a ceremonial purification (καθαρμός) were necessary to rid the country and its holy places of infection and contamination, and also a ceremonial expiation (λασμός) to appease the angry ghost of the dead. Since both of these rites were administered by the god of Delphi, it was in his power to purify Orestes, but

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8 Choephori vv. 1034-1036. Cf. also Eumenides vv. 280-286 where Orestes' purification from his matricidal pollution is linked with a cleansing sacrifice of swine.

9 Smyth, p. 216.
to delegate his authority in the expiation to another, in Orestes' case, to the juridical process established by Athena. 10

It is clear, therefore, that Apollo's purification is not Athena's work of appeasement and reconciliation of the Furies. Their tasks are separate: Apollo sanctions the act of Orestes, and as a sign of that approval has his return to Delphi for purification; Athena adds national interest by founding the court of the Areopagus and transforming the Erinyes to Eumenides. For a modern reader it is perhaps difficult to enter into the political and patriotic inspiration of the final scenes of the Eumenides, but he can still appreciate the dramatic intensity which Aeschylus infused into the trial scene and final conversion of the Furies. These two actions of Athena are not accessory to the main action; they form a part of the play's development, and hence a part of the play's meaning. Their importance warrants a closer look at Aeschylus' intentions in the trial and reconciliation scenes.

Although the parricide of Orestes and his purification after the pursuit of the Erinyes was established by Stesichorus before Aeschylus, the final resolution of his guilt by the establishment of the Areopagus cannot be said with certainty to have predated Aeschylus. There was, it is true, a tradition, contrary to Aeschylus' version, that the first trial of the Areopagus met to judge Ares who had murdered Halirrhotius, son of Poseidon, for violating his

10 Cf. Eumenides vv. 79-84. Robert sees in the combined rites at Delphi and Athens an attempt on the part of Aeschylus to join the two versions of his purification, the Attic and the Delphic. As evidence he cites the Attic version of Orestes' purification (given in Apollodorus, Epitome, 6, 25) which says nothing about the scene at Delphi. Cf. Preller-Robert, p. 1324.
daughter Alcipe. Euripides also relates what was an ancient Attic tradition, that after Orestes had been accused by the Erinyes he was judged and acquitted on the hill of the Areopagus by a tribunal of the Twelve Great Gods. However, between this exceptional judiciary body and the fifth century Areopagus with its jury of mortal men tradition had formed no connection. These various traditions are not certainly prior to Aeschylus, but it would appear probable that at least some of the traditions predate that of Aeschylus.

It was the insight of Aeschylus to make of Orestes' trial at Athens before a court of Athenian judges a mythic symbol of the reconciliation between the chthonic deities represented by the Erinyes and the Olympian gods represented by Apollo and Athena. He thus further developed the logical structure of his drama; but since the trial scene also functioned as a mythic aition of the origin of the court, Aeschylus was not overlooking the political situation in the Athens of 458 B.C.

The years that preceded Aeschylus' *Oresteia* were critical for the evolution of Athens; for from the years 465 B.C. to 460 B.C. Pericles and the democrats achieved power and consolidated the empire. One of the main moves whereby

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14Euripides, *Orestes* vv. 1648-52.

15Pearson believes that the trial of Ares was invented in the middle of the fifth century for political reasons, and that it was Aeschylus who captured the popular imagination with his version of the trial scene, and not the prior accounts. (Cf. Lionel Pearson, *The Local Historians of Attica* (Philadelphia, 1942), pp. 15-16.

16For the development of these ideas T. B. L. Webster's *Political Interpretations in Greek Literature* (Manchester, 1948), pp. 34-36 has been followed.
the democrats enforced their position was the diminution of the influence of
the Areopagus which had held wide juridical and indirect political power. The
domination of the conservative Areopagus ended when Cimon was off on an expedi-
tion to aid Sparta in quelling a slave revolt. Ephialtes, leader of the
democrats, attacked the Areopagus in Cimon's absence, stripping the court of
all the powers it had appropriated to itself, and restoring them to the
Council of the Five Hundred, to the people, and to the law courts. The only
function left to the Areopagus was the adjudication of murder cases. And Mason
considers it probable that even this single duty was attacked, and an attempt
made to leave it absolutely powerless. At any rate such radicalism was in
the air, for after Pericles succeeded to Ephialtes' leadership of the democrats
--the conservatives had assassinated Ephialtes—he did reduce the power of the
court.

This was the turbid condition of the political scene at Athens when
Aeschylus wrote his *Oresteia* in 458 B.C. It is no wonder that the trilogy
which vividly portrayed the reconciliation of the Erinyes and Apollo could also
be interpreted on the political level as a proof of the benefits of peaceful
concord. Indeed, what the drama Aeschylus presented was the drama of Greek
life, lived in essential dependence on the city-state; so that the drama, like
all other art, reflected the society in which Aeschylus lived, and also had a
distinctly aesthetic effect through its relevance to the human situation in
which the spectators found themselves.

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17 Mason, pp. xvii-xviii.

18 Since the Greek theater was truly a symbolization of the feelings and
aspirations of the Athenians, why deny the proper value to their patriotic
Thus did Aeschylus present Orestes' trial on the Areopagus as the first of its kind, the mythic explanation of the functions of the court as recently limited by the democrats. 19

Much has been made of another aspect of the trial scene: the debate over the matriarchal rights of Clytemnestra vs. the patriarchal right of Agamemnon. In their prosecution of Orestes, the Erinyes explained their failure to pursue Clytemnestra after her murder of Agamemnon by saying that their task was only to avenge blood that had been shed by kindred hands. From this fact, some have concluded that the Erinyes are defending the old tribal, matriarchal concept of justice. Along these lines Thomas argues that the Erinyes stand for the tribal order of society, in which kinship, traced through the mother, had been a closer bond than marriage and the murder of a kinsman had been punished instantaneously and absolutely by the outlawry of the murderer. 20 This argument is perhaps a false generalization of the meaning of Aeschylus' thought.

emotions, and to the thrill they would experience to see a play attempt to picture the harmony of the liberals and the conservatives? Plainly Aeschylus was showing to his city the advantages of a middle course. He makes Athena and the chorus deplore the civil war which the aristocrats, friends of exiled Cimon, were contemplating, as well as the exaction of vengeance by the democrats for the murder of their former leader Ephialtes (cf. Eumenides vv. 861-66; 979-83). Aeschylus was no partisan therefore. In fact, his use of the mythical version that made Orestes ruler of Argos shows his approval of the newly formed alliance between the democrats of Athens and Argos (Cf. Friedrich Solmsen, Hesiod and Aeschylus /Ithaca, N. Y., 1947, p. 207).

19 If Aeschylus portrays the powers of the court as limited in comprehension, he does not fail to hint that the decree of this divinely inspired tribunal of justice were to be universally valid in extension. On this point see Eumenides vv. 470-489; 681-710. Perhaps this points to the imperial ambitions of the city.

Throughout the other plays of the trilogy the Erinyes were omnipresent. For example, they were invoked as the ministers of revenge for Iphigenia by Clytemnestra (Agamemnon v. 1133), and in the Choephoroi Orestes refers to the Fury as the spirit of Agamemnon demanding justice (vv. 577-78), and these same Erinyes are linked with Apollo's threats to Orestes if he does not revenge his father (vv. 283-84). Therefore when we see the Erinyes in the trial scene arguing for the matriarchal rights of Clytemnestra, we should not narrow their function to one duty, thereby making Aeschylus' dramatic presentation of the court scene a statement of religious dogma. In the quibble over the role of the mother, Aeschylus is rather intent on producing an effective illusion of suspense. However, although his purpose is dramatic, the courtroom scene does highlight a religious fact: "Apollo and the Erinyes are radically opposed, and he [Aeschylus] looks for words relevant to the occasion to express the sharp opposition."21 Such an opinion preserves a substantial part of Thomson's theory; it rejects only the over-emphasis on the rights of the mother. The Erinyes are for parents in general; they are the embodiments of the ancient notion of the inevitable punishment for all bloodshed.22 And if the Erinyes ought not to be restricted to a defense of the matriarchal order, nor should Apollo who argues that the mother is only a nurse of the infant, not its parent, be interpreted as the defender of the patriarchal order of society. Harsh points out that the

21 Owen, p. 114.

22 The whole interpretation of Thomson is suspect. Biased with a Marxian interpretation of history, he distinguishes the primitive tribal society in which property is held in common and murder of kin almost absent from later society in which the tribal commonalty breaks down.
even split in the jurors' votes invalidates such an analysis of Aeschylus' meaning. 23

The court scene could have been a colossal flop; it might have bogged down in mere legal formalities with relevance to current Athenian law practice; but instead it holds our interest. The emotional impact of the trial equals that of a Clarence Darrow defense: we have taunting conflict, not rational debate. Verrall's remark correctly interprets the secondary place of the legal processes: "The whole debate, though adequate and effective for the poet's purpose, is curt, superficial, and without pretense to accuracy." 24 Unless the instrumental role of these legal technicalities is appreciated, there is danger that Aeschylus' greater interest in the final religious and patriotic solution will be overlooked by concentrating too intensely on the fate of Orestes; that is, the Orestes of the traditional myth, and not the Orestes of Aeschylus' version of the myth-transcended.

Nowhere else does this transcendence appear so manifestly as in the final scene of reconciliation between Athena and the Erinyes. From the first moment that Athena entered the action the focus on Orestes began to dim; a new importance was given to Athens and the relation of the Erinyes to the enlightened

23 Harsh, p. 87. For other theories on the split vote, cf. the statement of Croiset, Aeschylus, pp. 257-258; he says that the vote showed the Furies that the people of Athens respected their traditional rights, yet honored the decision of the gods. Or else it was to show the validity of natural human sentiments along with the new morality. See also Owen's statement: "What is indicated by the equal division of the human judges is not that the acquittal of Orestes shows that he was in the right, but that his case illustrates the unendurable rift in the moral governance of the world, and man's demand that it be healed. A house divided against itself cannot stand (p. 119)."

morality of the city. With Athena the ultimate resolution of the conflict of the trilogy is achieved.

But did not the final exoneratation of Orestes by the court of the Areopagus liberate the house of Atreus from all its troubles? And if this is true, then the play which tells of his absolution should have reached its conclusion with his departure from Athens. For this reason, the final dénouement of over 250 lines after Orestes' exit seems to some commentators a blemish on the unity of the Eumenides and of the complete trilogy. Harsh says: "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." Such a view of the trilogy's ending undermines the notion of myth as a true category of human expression. On this analysis, the Orestes myth would be equated with a purely narrative account such as Homer gave of the story; it would necessarily follow the outlines of its saga form, ending perhaps in an account of Orestes' further adventures as developed by Euripides in the Iphigeneia in Tauris.

But with Aeschylus it is different; a romantic ending was not his purpose. In Owen's explanation of the close of the trilogy, Aeschylus' original and creative intentions are made clear:

The mistake is in thinking that his subject is the story, that his intention is confined to the dramatic development of a legend. I say that if he had ended with the acquittal of Orestes, not the Eumenides only, but the trilogy would have been incomplete, imaginatively truncated . . . He is dramatizing the legend's ultimate significance, and he does so by dramatizing and universalizing the functional purpose and method of a choral rite [I.e., the final section of the play in which

25 Harsh, p. 60.
Athena and the chorus of the Furies have their exchange; also the final solemn procession. The object of the ceremony in its simplicity as a religious rite is to win the favour and aid of heaven for the welfare of the community; this ceremony Aeschylus has dramatized and universalised by making it the dramatic spectacle of the ultimate establishment of man's welfare in the world. Thus the controlling plot is not the working out of the given story to the end appointed by its internal necessities or probabilities. The plot is imposed upon the story from the outside by the artistic form into which it is put. The poet uses the form to make the story show the slow shaping of many sorrowful and terrible events to a prosperous and beneficent issue. For that is his reading of man's destiny, so he would have man read his destiny. These incidents are great and significant moments, not in the lives of individuals, but in the life of the world; to make us see them so is the poet's great task: we see them being translated; being transformed, into their superhuman, universal equivalents, see them therefore in their full context.

Thus the reader follows the story of Orestes as he would the search of man to discover justice in the world. And when that search transcends the individual, Aeschylus had the ability to pass beyond the limits of the Orestes myth by presenting the mystic conversion of the goddesses of vengeance, the Erinyes, to the gracious goddesses, the Eumenides and the Semnai Theai. In this change of the Erinyes' name to the Eumenides, Aeschylus intended more than a euphemistic avoidance of an ill-omened name. For him a change in the Erinyes' name meant a change in their function. They, the chthonic representatives of a bloodguilt which knows no mitigating circumstances and of the archaic private blood feud, are converted. Their transformation symbolizes their new office as protectors of the Areopagus, the public legal trial wherein justice is tempered by equity, mercy, and reason. Henceforth the pattern of divine justice

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26 Owen, pp. 119-120. Italics not in the original.

27 Verrall argues that Aeschylus was the first to make the triple identification of the Erinyes, the Semnai Theai, and the Eumenides which was later common. Aeschylus' inventiveness extended even into religion (Eumenides, p. xli).
on earth will be found in the impartial tribunal of the city-state of Athens.

Indeed, through his creative interpretation of the myth of Orestes, Aeschylus revealed that the essential glory of Athens was based upon the ordered life of law and justice within the polis. For he was no reactionary looking to the past for old solutions to new problems. In the past of myth and legend the dilemma of Orestes had appeared, so that in the past with its inchoate ideas of justice as typified in the Erinyes there was no answer for Aeschylus. Nor was Aeschylus a revolutionary looking to the uncertain future for certain solutions. Rather it was in the present, the present with its harmony of Olympian justice and chthonic nature as symbolized in Athens, that he found his answer, for behind the law of man he saw the governance of Zeus.

Thus in the final scene of the Eumenides Aeschylus pictures the law and will of Zeus as the ultimate answer to the moral problems that arose in the Agamemnon, were furthered complicated by Orestes' vengeance, and which were finally solved in the reconciliation of the Erinyes. The Erinyes are subsumed into a higher, an Olympian, order; for now as authentic voices of human nature in its search for justice, they may speak for Zeus whose laws are not contradictions of man's moral conscience, but rather are identical with that harmony between man's knowing and his doing which is morality.

Aeschylus sees Zeus revealing not a code of laws alien to man, but Himself as the moral force that guarantees the inner meaning of man's life in
the universe. Thus in the final lines of the play he has the chorus sing: 28

Zeús ὁ πανόπτας
οὔτω Μοίρα τε συγκατέβα. 29

In the fusion of legend, fictional story, and etiological myth which is
the Oresteia, the creative mind of Aeschylus, with full respect for the tradi-
tional story of Orestes, has fashioned a new myth, a new symbol expressing the
meaning of man.

Good theater, significant theater are the only words that can describe his
masterpiece.

28 These last lines are especially significant when one realizes that Zeus
meets not with Fate in general, but with "the particular fate which causes the
appropriate penalty to follow inevitably upon every sin (Fraenkel, III, 728)." Thus Fraenkel sees the ultimate harmony of the moral sphere with its debts and
payments, guilt and atonements typified by this concord of Zeus with Moira.

29 The translation of these last lines is taken from Verrall's translation
of the Eumenides:
"Zeus All-seeing, and Moira,
so assuredly have agreed (p. 181)."

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Richard Thomas Lambert, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Classical Languages.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

December 24, 1967
Date

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Signature of Adviser