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The Influence of Myth on the Fifth-century Audience's Understanding and Appreciation of the Tragedies of Aeschylus

by
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Department of Classics

A thesis submitted
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Durham

December 1991

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to establish how the fifth-century audience's perception of Aeschylean tragedy was influenced by their prior knowledge of the myths on which the dramas were based. Thus we study references to these myths in earlier epic and lyric sources in an attempt to detect borrowings and deviations from the earlier material on the part of the poet. The earliest surviving tragedy, the *Persae*, has a historical basis and so mythical knowledge is supplanted by the audience's own first-hand experience of the recent war. We see how foreknowledge of the Greek victory at Salamis will prove a deep influence on the audience's perception of the presentation of the enemy court and how Aeschylus presents the Persians as being utterly devastated by the defeat. Likewise an appreciation of the *Seven Against Thebes* is greatly enhanced if we remember that from the very beginning of the drama the audience were anticipating the double fratricide from their knowledge of this events in previous versions of the myth. During the *Supplices*, the audience would have suspected that not only would the Argives accept the supplication of the Danaids but also that these helpless girls would shortly murder their bridegrooms on their wedding-night, and Aeschylus includes many dark hints at this future event during the course of his play. Our study of the myth of Agamemnon will enable us to appreciate the exploitation of audience expectation throughout the *Oresteia* and their foreknowledge that murder is plotted against Agamemnon on his return and that Orestes will return to exact vengeance proves vital to the tragic effect. In addition we detect certain areas in which Aeschylus may diverge from his inherited material, such as his presentation of Clytemnestra as the sole unaided killer of her husband and his inclusion of a trial of Orestes before the court of the Areopagus. Thus it is hoped that by considering the mythical knowledge shared by both Aeschylus and his audience we are able to gain a fuller appreciation of the effects sought by the poet in the fifth-century theatre.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the help of Professor Michael Stokes who oversaw the early period of my research. Also I am deeply grateful to Mr. Gordon Cockburn who devoted much time and a great deal of patience to many useful discussions on the topic of this thesis.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is a record of my own research, that no part of it has been submitted previously for a degree in this or any other university, and that all sources of information have been duly acknowledged.

For Roy

Contents

Introduction *page* 1

Chapter One
Audience Appreciation of the Persae *page 40*

Chapter Two
The Seven Against Thebes *page 80*

Chapter Three
The Danaids and the Wedding-night Murder *page 144*

Chapter Four
The Homecoming of Agamemnon *page 204*

Chapter Five
Cassandra *page 240*

Chapter Six
Who Murders Agamemnon and Why? *page 260*

Chapter Seven
Orestes' Revenge *page 291*

Chapter Eight
The Erinyes in the Oresteia *page 325*

Conclusion *page 356*

Bibliography *page 359*

Introduction

As we read the tragedies of Aeschylus today, concentrating by necessity solely on the text, we gain merely a faint impression of the impact and effect of the original production with its visual and musical effects. Nothing survives of the music, dance, mime and gesture which must have been an integral part of the total effect experienced in the theatre. The tragic poet did not merely write a script, but was personally responsible for all aspects of the performance, including the choreography, music and general visual effects. Stanford (p65) suggests that he be compared to the modern composer/conductor of music but he also acted as director, producer and choreographer. He was fully responsible for almost every aspect of the whole production, just as earlier rhapsodes and kitharodes had presented their own compositions personally to a live audience. Herington (p23) notes how Alcman, a Spartan composer of early choral lyric working in the mid seventh century, not only composed the poetry, melody and choreography but also drilled the chorus himself (see *Poetae Melici Graecae* p30) and how "*the tragic poet seems also to have inherited the function and the very title of didaskalos* (teacher) *from the choral lyricists*" (p40). The texts then are the mere skeleton of the live performance and even these are imperfect and many corruptions, omissions and interpolations may have occurred even before, according to Plutarch (*Vit Orat* 841f) an official state copy was made by order of Lycurgus in 330BC. Thus our conception of the original production is severely impaired by both the fallibility of the text and our lack of knowledge about the aural and visual components of the drama[1].

In addition to our inheritance of the text alone, there are

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[1]We shall consider below the question whether vase-paintings shed any light on these aspects of the dramatic production but as we shall see, any evidence drawn from such a source must be treated with great caution.

further barriers to a full appreciation of the drama for the modern reader. Many commentators regard the tragedies as works of literature which, if not actually written with us in mind, were intended to be preserved down the centuries and provide subject matter for scholarly debate today. This is certainly not the case however and we should remember at all times that Aeschylus composed his plays some two and a half thousand years ago to be performed before a mass audience of his contemporaries and that it was their reaction which would dictate his success or failure in the tragic contest. Naturally contemporary Greek ideas, opinions and prejudices pervade the dramas and the poet could assume that his audience shared an intimate acquaintance with the culture, religion, politics and values of the day. The poet directed all his energies towards finding favour with a particular audience on a particular day in the fifth century BC and there would have been a sense that what they were witnessing was spontaneous and unique. What we possess today is merely the skeleton of this single live performance.

The plays of Aeschylus then, or rather their imperfectly preserved dialogue element, are somewhat removed from our own experience in the twentieth-century. They are written in a foreign language and embedded in a culture very different to our own. In addition a vast amount of time has elapsed since they were first composed and so any attempt to appreciate the plays today requires a considerable degree of effort on our part. In this thesis we shall endeavour to see the dramas consistently through the eyes of the original Greek audience and attempt to trace how and why Aeschylus manipulates their sympathies and anticipations. As Sourvinou-Inwood rightly comments, "*if we want to read fifth-century images through fifth-century eyes, we must reconstruct the relevant assumptions and expectations and try to read the images through these fifth-century perceptual filters, rather than our "naked eyes*" (p131). If our efforts enable us to gain merely a glimpse of the effect of the original production on its fifth-century audience, then we shall have been well rewarded

indeed.

a) The Festival of Dionysus

Since the fifth-century audience who attended the original productions of Aeschylus are central to our study, let us begin by considering the nature and composition of this group of people. The tragedies were designed to be performed at the Great Dionysia, a festival held in Athens every spring[2]. This was a public holiday to herald the end of the harsh winter-time and so the modern reader should remember that the original audience witnessed the plays amidst an atmosphere of festivity and communal enjoyment. Pickard-Cambridge gives an excellent over-view of the festival (see especially p57-101) but he tends to regard it as a fixed entity, whereas there can be little doubt that many modifications and innovations were introduced with the passage of time. It is unfortunate for us that almost all evidence about the Dionysia comes from the fourth-century or later which means we can say little with certainty about the form of the festival in the time of Aeschylus, although certain basic elements, such as the torchlight procession escorting the statue of Dionysus into the theatre at dawn on the first day[3], the suspension of public business[4], and the judgement of the dramatic and dithyrambic contests by individuals chosen from each of the ten tribes[5], may have been early components of the festival. However the festival of Dionysus had risen to prominence during the sixth century BC,

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[2]There is some dispute over whether it lasted for three or four days - see Pickard-Cambridge p63ff.

[3]See IG ii2 1006 122-121BC, quoted by Pickard-Cambridge p60 n1

[4]See Demosthenes *Meid* 10

[5]See Pickard-Cambridge p95-99

perhaps through the policy of Peisistratus[6] and so by the time of Aeschylus, the dramatic performances must have been of deep significance in the lives of the Athenians, eagerly anticipated by all those eligible to attend.

We have no exact parallel in our own time to the dramatic performances of the City Dionysia, although particular elements occur separately in certain of our modern institutions. The dramatic festivals of today, such as the one held annually in Edinburgh, naturally share some some characteristics, but a major difference is that these are on a much smaller scale and consist of several individual performances, not one central one. We shall see below how the audience's anticipations arising from their acquaintance with the general outline of the plot adds a vital component to the impact of the dramas and perhaps the closest modern parallel to this occurs in pantomimes where the plots are based on familiar fairy-tales. However our pantomimes are mainly directed at children whereas myths were regarded as deeply relevant to the whole community. The audience of a medieval Mystery Play also enjoyed great religious knowledge beforehand which was exploited in the course of the presentation, but here again there are differences since the biblical themes were known to them from one definitive written version and so could be treated with far less freedom by the dramatist. The visual and aural side of the drama is similar to that of a ballet or operatic performance and indeed the general form of the drama is closer to these than to most modern dialogue-based drama. Herington compares the audience to those of the concert halls of the late eighteenth century, early nineteenth century Vienna who were also "*trained almost to a person in musical practice and theory and able therefore to respond to the subtlest touch of musical wit and pathos*" (p144). The atmosphere of shared enjoyment might be compared to the way a whole community packed into the cinema

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[6]See Pickard-Cambridge p58

during the 1930s, and the great air of festivity and fun might be reflected in the atmosphere at a modern village carnival. Baldry compares the mood of the festival to that of a crowded football match attended by a higher proportion of citizens (p20) and indeed, although the contest was open to the whole Greek world, there may have been a large degree of partisanship and support for one's fellow demesmen and native poets, as well as a good deal of excitement about which production would win the prize (compare also international competitions like the Eurovision Song Contest or the Olympic Games). However the Athenian audience were gathered, not for a regular sporting event, but for an annual festival of drama, based on myths which were an integral part of their culture, and no equivalent is to be found in our own society.

The audience of Aeschylus was massive by modern standards and we should think in terms of thousands of people packed together into the theatre[7]. Most of these would be native Greeks, many of them Athenian, but there would also have been a considerable number of foreigners in Athens at this time when the seas were once again navigable. Participation in the dramatic contest was open to the whole Hellenic world and Pickard-Cambridge notes how it "*was an effective advertisement of the wealth and power and public spirit of Athens, no less than of the artistic leadership of her sons*" (p58). This may be more applicable to the festival in later times but Herington notes that of the first twenty-five tragedians who exhibited at Athens[8] no less than seven were non-Attic. Thus there would have been a cosmopolitan flavour to the festival and Aeschylus may have been regarded by the Athenians as one of their own native poets.

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[7] For comparison, the reconstructed theatre of Lycurgus is said to have held between 14000 and 17000 spectators - see Pickard-Cambridge p263

[8] These are listed more or less chronologically in Snell's *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* - see p91

Demosthenes declared that had he not provided seats of honour in the theatre for Philip's ambassadors in 346, they would have watched the performance ἐν τοῖν δυοῖν ὀβολοῖν ἐθεώρουν ἄν "*from the two-obol seats*" (*de Corona 28*). Pickard-Cambridge (p266) notes the general assumption that this implies a uniform price for theatre seats, but this is by no means certain and we simply do not know if or how much the audience of Aeschylus had to pay for their seats. The fact that under Pericles the attendance of citizens was subsidized by the state suggests that the Greeks considered tragedy to be an integral part of citizenship but we have no evidence that the less well off were excluded from attending the dramatic performances in the time of Aeschylus.

It is not certain whether women attended the dramatic performances at the City Dionysia or not. In Aristophanes *Peace*, Trygaeus instructs a servant to throw corn amongst the audience in a parody of sacrificial preparations. On learning that every man has received an ear, he declares:

Τρ καὶ τοῖς θεαταῖς ῥῖπτε τῶν κριθῶν. Οι. ἰδού.
Τρ ἔδωκας ἤδη; Οι. νὴ τὸν Ἑρμῆν ὥστε γε
τούτων ὅσοιπέρ εἰσι τῶν θεωμένων
οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδεὶς ὅστις οὐ κριθὴν ἔχει
Τρ οὐχ αἱ γυναῖκέςγ᾽ἔλαβον Οι. ἀλλ' εἰς ἑσπέραν
δώσουσιν αὐταῖς ἄνδρες

Trygaeus *Throw the barley among the spectators*
Servant *See*
Trygaeus *Have you done it already?*
Servant *Yes by Hermes so that there is no one in the audience who has not received an ear of barley*
Trygaeus *But the women have not received one*
Servant *No but the men will given them all one later*
(962-67)

This bawdy joke fails to clarify whether women were among the audience or not, since, Trygaeus may be referring to the presence of the women at the sacrifice in the play rather than in the theatre. Earlier in the *Peace* the servant declares that he will tell his tale to boys, youths and men (50-53) and makes no mention

of the presence of females. Meanwhile in the ***Frogs***, Aeschylus tells Euripides that many a noble lady has drunk hemlock αἰσχυνθείσας διὰ τοὺς σοὺς Βελλεροφόντας "*ashamed at your Bellephron scenes*" (1050–1) but it is not clear whether they had personally witnessed the play or merely knew about it from hearsay. Of course we must be wary of laying undue weight on these comments since Aristophanes was writing in and about the comic theatre long after Aeschylus but in fact his words concerning women do not help us decide this question either way. On balance I believe that women probably did attend the performances although they may have been segregated and it is most unlikely that their presence would have influenced the form of the drama in any respect.

Plato states that tragedy δημηγορεῖν πρὸς παῖδάς τε καὶ γυναῖκας καὶ τὸν πάντα ὄχλον "*speaks to children and women and the whole populace*" (*Laws* vii 817c) but again this is ambiguous and may mean merely that the dramas were spread by word of mouth following their performance. The *Life of Aeschylus* suggests that women attended the performance of the *Oresteia* when the terrifying appearance of the Erinyes caused some to suffer miscarriages (9, Pollux iv 110) but again this is unreliable since it may refer to subsequent performances of the dramas following Aeschylus' death. Thus the question of the presence of women at the tragedies, although of great interest, is unanswerable on present evidence and it probably makes little difference to our study of audience perception. Aeschylus no doubt directed his dramas towards the male spectators who would have regarded, for example, the presentation of the manly, domineering Clytemnestra with unmitigated censure and it seems unlikely that Aeschylus would have made any concessions to the female element of his audience, if indeed women were present. The tastes of the female elements of the audience were not Aeschylus' concern and we should not be influenced by twentieth-century ideas in this respect.

Walcot estimates that the performance of three tragedies, a

satyr play and a comedy would have taken about six hours each day for three successive days (p12-20) although we cannot gauge how far they were prolonged by music and dance and nor do we know how much time was devoted each day to civic business. The chorus of the *Birds* suggests that the spectators remained in the theatre all day without returning home for a midday meal:

> αὐτίχ' ὑμῶν τῶν θεατῶν εἴ τις ἦν ὑπόπτερος
> εἶτα πεινῶν τοῖς χοροῖσι τῶν τραγῳδῶν ἤχθετο,
> ἐκπτόμενος ἂν οὗτος ἠρίστησεν ἐλθὼν οἴκαδε,
> κᾆτ' ἂν ἐμπλησθεὶς ἐφ' ἡμᾶς αὖθις αὖ κατέπτατο.
>
> *For example if any of you in the audience had wings and then felt hungry and bored by the tragic choruses, he would spread his wings and go home for lunch and then fly back to us again* (786-9)

Naturally a journey home at midday would not have been feasible for the majority of the audience who lived some distance from the theatre. Whether there was a break or not in the time of Aeschylus, the length of the dramatic performances required the audience's attention for extremely long periods of time compared to modern standards. This suggests that their ability to concentrate on and appreciate drama at long stretches was far greater than that usually required of a modern audience and we shall see below how poetic performance and appreciation were central elements of Greek society.

b) Poetry in Ancient Greece

A central characteristic of Greek society, in contrast with our own, was its deeply oral and aural nature. The spoken word played an essential role in the spheres of politics and the law, while the memorizing of poetry for recital, either spoken or to lyre accompaniment, was the major component of traditional Athenian education[9]. Thus many in the audience would have enjoyed

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[9] See Plato *Protagoras* 325e-326b and *Laws* 7 810e-811a.

a high degree of poetic and musical knowledge and many would themselves perform regularly at symposia. Herington has done an excellent study of the important role played by poetry in many spheres of Greek society. He notes that we should lay aside our view of poetry in modern times, where it is usually the solitary and passive pursuit of a select few, and regard it instead as a lively performing art, active and competitive, integral to the celebration of various religious festivals. He gives an outline history of the main poetic genres - rhapsody (spoken verse), kitharody (solo singing of verse to one's own accompaniment on the kithara), ele gy (long narrative or personal poems) and choral lyric (performance by a choir with musical accompaniment "*usually reinforced by the power of dance*") - and notes that tragedy represented a combination of these various forms (p10). Little about the new art of tragedy was unique or novel per se but "*the unprecedented achievement of Attic tragedy was its fusion of the known, metrical genres within the compass of a single work*" (p75). Thus tragedy retains the competitive element of earlier poetry as well as its emphasis on live oral performance.[10]

Earlier poetry was kept alive by continual reperformance at various festivals which set a very high standard for new composers. Herington comments that "*the poetry composed in all previous eras coexisted at any given moment*" (p62) and each new production must compete with tradition. We see that the treatment of the mythical stories by earlier poets was familiar and easily accessible to the audience from live performances and we shall see in this thesis how audience anticipation arising from their familiarity with these old stories played a vital role in their appreciation of tragedy. Herington notes, for example, that the rhapsodes regularly performed the works of Homer, Hesiod,

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[10]We shall discuss below the question of whether poetry was ever read by the individual, but no doubt it was essentially a living art which reached its public through performance.

Archilochus, Solon and Simonides (p174-5)[11]. Thus the Greeks were expert listeners and their appreciation of different types of poetry would have been immediate and intuitive. They would have had intimate knowledge about the different types of metre used in tragedy both from their education and live performances of rhapsody, kitharody and choral lyrics. Cicero notes how the Roman audience also had an intimate knowledge of metre so that if a mistake were made *theatra tota reclamant* "*the whole theatre cries out*" (*De Oratore* III L 196) and this must have been equally true of the Greeks. Walcot (p23) notes that skill at listening and comprehension depends on conditioning and habit - "*we have sacrificed the habit of concentrated listening*" (p45) - and we must acknowledge that there is a great difference between ourselves and the Greek audience in this respect.

The long passages of narrative poetry spoken by individuals to be found in the plays must have been reminiscent in style and form to rhapsodic performances, while the unaugmented past form is often used during messenger speeches suggesting a close relationship with the epic style. Although messenger-speeches relating large-scale or violent events may have been supplemented by gesture and mime, the emphasis is on the verbal descriptions themselves and the invitation to the audience to use their imagination would encourage a closer relationship with the stage action than if everything was described in great detail. It is likely that the audience agreed with the sentiments expressed at Euripides' *Orestes* 640-1 - "τὰ μακρὰ τῶν σμικρῶν λόγων/ἐπίπροσθεν ἐστι καὶ σαφῆ μᾶλλον κλύειν" - "*a long speech is better than a short one and much clearer to hear*"[12] and they would have enjoyed greater involvement in the drama resulting from the necessity to

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[11]Most evidence is Platonic or later, but this must surely have been the custom at an earlier stage also.

[12]Although see also Aristophanes' comment at *Frogs* 787, quoted above, that one could become bored by the tragic choruses.

listen carefully.

Another major difference between ourselves and the original audience then is their deep poetic awareness. It is impossible for us to imagine the importance of poetry in a society completely divorced from the wealth of information in print, on screen and from computers with which we are bombarded today. Nor had they any conception of the high degree of realism facilitated by the medium of film or TV. Poetry surrounded all Greeks from birth and their intimacy and familiarity with it must have been immense.

c) Dance and gesture

The texts of the plays then are of a highly poetic nature and it was important that the audience, with their great experience and skill in listening, should hear the words of the dramas clearly. Arnott notes how the theatre of Epidauros, built in the mid fourth century is "*acoustically perfect*" and that the sound of a coin falling on the stone floor may be heard even from the upper tiers (p5). Vitruvius stresses the importance of good acoustics for a theatre (*De Architectura* V 3-8) and we may suppose that, even at this earlier stage, the majority of the audience could both hear and appreciate fully the verbal element of Aeschylean drama. Nonetheless the visual and musical elements of the performance also made an important contribution to the effect of the whole. The stage was filled with music and movement, mime and gesture, and the total effect, choreographed by the poet himself, must have come close to a realization of his artistic intention. The poet was judged on the whole performance presented in the theatre and it must have been outstanding in every respect if he was to be victorious in the tragic contest. Stanford declares that "*poets are artists in words not in visual effects*" (p76) but we should not assume that this aspect was any the less impressive or innovative than the poetry merely because it has not survived the passage of time.

We know nothing of the procedure by which a poet was awarded

a chorus by the archon basileus and thereby selected for participation in the contest. The importance of the visual and oral elements to the whole effect argues against the theory that the poet read out a sample of his work, as Pickard-Cambridge believes (p84), or that he presented the archon with a written version, devoid of directions for music and dance (see Herington p47). A passage from Plato's *Laws* is often cited as evidence for the procedure for the selection of tragedies:

> ἐπιδείξαντες τοῖς ἄρχουσι πρῶτον τὰς ὑμετέρας παρὰ τὰς ἡμετέρας ᾠδάς, ἂν μὲν τὰ αὐτά γε ἢ καὶ βελτίω τὰ παρ' ὑμῶν φαίνηται λεγόμενα, δώσομεν ὑμῖν χορόν, εἰ δὲ μή, ὦ φίλοι, οὐκ ἄν ποτε δυναίμεθα.
>
> *First show your songs to the authorities for comparison with ours (the philosophers) and if your message appears similar to ours or better, we shall grant you a chorus, but if not, friends, we can never do so* (vii 817 d)

However we should note that this is not a description of how plays were selected in fifth-century Athens but a prescription for an ideal state yet to be founded, and in addition the verb ἐπιδείκνυμι - to "exhibit" or "display", while it suggests some sort of performance, offers little clue about the precise form of this audition or the criteria on which the plays were to be judged. I find it difficult to believe that the plays were chosen on the basis of poetic merit alone (this would be like judging an opera solely on its words) and tentatively suggest, given the highly oral nature of Greek society, that the poet may have conveyed a general idea of all aspects of the proposed performance verbally to the archon, without the aid of a chorus.

It seems that tragic actors indulged in a considerable amount of gesturing and posturing in order to reinforce the meaning of their words and Mymniscus, who performed in Aeschylus' later plays according to the *Life*, calls Callippides πίθηκον "*the ape*" because his use of gesture was so extreme (*Poetics* 26 1461b34). The chorus also seem to have echoed the dramatic action with their bodies for according to Athenaeus, Aristophanes commented on a

lost play of Aeschylus:

τοὺς Φρύγας οἶδα θεωρῶν
ὅτε τῷ Πριάμῳ συλλυσόμενοι τὸν παῖδ' ἦλθον τεθνεῶτα
πολλὰ τοιαυτὶ καὶ τοιαυτὶ καὶ δεῦρο σχηματίσαντας

I know about his Phrygians for I was in the audience when they came to help Priam ransom his dead son. They made many gestures this way and that way and the other way (i 21.d-f)

Thus it seems that actors did not deliver their words passively but reinforced them by their physical actions. The forerunners of the tragic actors were the rhapsodes and it seems that these too were accustomed to playing their parts with great enthusiasm. Herington notes how the many long first-person speeches in Homer would invite the rhapsodes to adopt the persona of the narrator and share his emotions, and Plato's Ion claims to suffer strong emotions when reciting poetry:

ἐγὼ γὰρ ὅταν ἐλεεινόν τι λέγω, δακρύων ἐμπίπλανταί μου οἱ ὀφθαλμοί. ὅταν τε φοβερὸν ἢ δεινόν, ὀρθαὶ αἱ τρίχες ἵστανται ὑπὸ φόβου καὶ ἡ καρδία πηδᾷ.

Whenever I say anything pitiable, my eyes fill with tears, and when it is fearful or terrible, my hair stands on end with fear and my heart pounds (*Ion* 535b)

Thus the role of the rhapsode is clearly related to that of the tragic actor, although the latter's use of a mask would force him to reinforce his words, not with facial expressions, but by gesture and the posture of his whole body.

The almost constant stage presence of a chorus often strikes the modern reader as rather unusual and restrictive. This group performed the lyric passages which occur at regular intervals in the drama, thus providing interludes to the main action during which time might pass while the audience digested what had happened and speculate on future events. This kind of choral

singing was a common feature in the fifth-century[13] and a contest in dithyramb between teams of men and boys was held during the Dionysia itself. In addition to their more detached commentary on the drama however, the chorus also had a definite dramatic identity and, although they never emerge as individuals, the group were able to enter the drama and interact with the main actors to some extent, although, as we shall see, their influence on the action is severely limited. Herington notes how the "*dramatization*" of the chorus was occurring as early as the seventh-century, for the lyric poet Alcman[14] presents his chorus of ten female singer-dancers not merely as anonymous reciters of poetry but as named individuals who discuss the contest in character (p21). Thus the idea of a lyric chorus with a dramatic identity will be already familiar to the audience from their experience of earlier choral performances. Taplin notes that "*a chorus lent ceremony and depth to all "festive" occasions in Greek life*" (p13) and far from seeming intrusive or unusual to the original audience, a fifth-century tragedy without a chorus would have been inconceivable.

The tragedies are composed throughout in verse, which is natural when we recall that they embody "*a deliberate synthesis of most of the previously independent genres of greek poetry into a new art*" (Herington p79), and its essentially rhythmic form easily accommodates elements of song and dance. Dancing choruses are found on vases from the ninth-century and the movements of a large group of figures on the stage would have been highly impressive in the theatre. Estimates of their number range between twelve and fifty. Aristotle comments:

> καὶ τό τε τῶν ὑποκριτῶν πλῆθος ἐξ ἑνὸς εἰς δύο πρῶτος Αἰσχύλος ἤγαγε καὶ τὰ τοῦ χοροῦ ἠλάττωσε καὶ τὸν λόγον πρωταγωνιστὴν παρεσκεύασεν.

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[13] See Herington p20 and appendix IV

[14] Fragment 1 *Poetae Melici Graeci*

> *Aeschylus was the first to increase the number of the actors from one to two and to decrease the size of the chorus and he prepared the way for the words to become predominant* (*Poetics* 4 1449a15ff)

but it is impossible to establish this question on present evidence. The drama falls into three main categories - spoken, chanted to instrumental accompaniment, and sung and danced to music - and Webster notes that the pace of the dances fluctuated between "stately" or "walking" time, "striding" or "dance" time and "excited" time. These different styles of movement and changes in tempo would add great variety to the live performance. A change of metre and tempo could reflect a new event or mood, such as the use of dochmiacs to convey high emotion, and the dramatic potential of this was fully exploited by the poet[15].

The dance then is of great importance to the total effect. Athenaeus comments:

> Ἀριστοκλῆς οὖν φησιν ὅτι Τελέστης ὁ Αἰσχύλου ὀρχηστὴς οὕτως ἦν τεχνίτης ὥστε ἐν τῷ ὀρχεῖσθαι τοὺς Ἑπτὰ ἐπὶ Θήβας φανερὰ ποιῆσαι τὰ πράγματα δι᾽ ὀρχήσεως.

> *Aristocles says that Telestes, Aeschylus' dancer, was so skillful that when he danced the* Seven Against Thebes *he made the action clear from the dance (alone)* (1 22 a)

He continues with the observation that the old poets, Thespis, Pratinas, Cratinus and Phrynichus were called dancers:

> διὰ τὸ μὴ μόνον τὰ ἑαυτῶν δράματα ἀναφέρειν εἰς ὄρχησιν τοῦ χοροῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔξω ἰδίων ποιημάτων διδάσκειν τοὺς βουλομένους ὀρχεῖσθαι.

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[15] We do not know whether the choral odes of our plays were always sung completely in unison or whether the parts could be divided and complimented by dance. In Homer we find a kitharode performing amidst a group of dancers (*Odyssey* 4.17-19, 8.256-65, *Iliad* 18.590ff) and *Clouds* 1355-58 suggests that a solo rendition of choral lyric was at least possible.

not only because they depended on the dancing of the chorus in their own dramas but also, besides their own compositions, they taught dancing to all who wished (I 22.a).

There seems to be another tribute to Phrynichus' skill at dance and choreography at the end of the *Wasps* (1479, 1490, 152), and Plutarch claims that he boasted:

> σχήματα δ' ὄρχησις τόσα μοι πόρεν, ὅσσ' ἐνὶ πόντῳ κύματα ποιεῖται χείματι νὺξ ὀλοή
>
> *The dance offers me as many forms as a dreadful night of storms makes waves upon the sea* (*Quaest Conv* viii 732f)

Aristophanes attributes Aeschylus with the words τοῖσι χοροῖς αὐτὸς τὰ σχήματ' ἐποίουν "*I myself devised the forms of the dance*" (i.21.e) and there can be little doubt that he was a skilled practitioner in this art, probably acting as composer, choreographer and musical director for his dramatic performance.

It is most unfortunate that we know absolutely nothing about the form and style of the dance in Aeschylean drama but in fact no hint about the music or choreography of the original performance has survived. Herington suggests that the melodies and dance steps would have been preserved through the re-performance of the dramas (p44) and indeed the Aristophanic parodies of Aeschylus' work suggests that the plays were familiar to the later audience and that they already appeared dull and old-fashioned by that stage. It may be that the songs from a successful drama would enter the repertoire of Greek poetry, mainly through oral transmission and we simply do not know whether there was any attempt to preserve the musical element of the original in written form. The performance of a drama at the festival may have been considered unique and spontaneous and, even if certain passages were subsequently repeated elsewhere, the emphasis would remain on live performance and oral transmission, not written notation.

In addition to singing and dancing, the chorus may also have

reflected and reinforced the stage action by gesture and mime as well as by their general posture and grouping on stage. Aristotle notes how the chorus is active in this respect at a later stage:

> διὰ τῶν σχηματιζομένων ῥυθμῶν μιμοῦνται καὶ ἤθη καὶ πάθη καὶ πράξεις
>
> *Through the rhythms embodied in gesture, they mimic characters, sufferings and actions* (*Poetics* I 144 7a27)

This may have been true of Aeschylean drama too and a physical reflection of the main dramatic action would have been most impressive in the theatre. Later Roman writers praise the skilful effects produced by dancers merely by the use of their hands - χειρονομία (see Pickard-Cambridge p248f) - and there are many ways in which the chorus could reflect the drama by the physical use of their bodies. Thus the effect of a group of singers dancing and miming the action must have been an impressive spectacle as well as making a great contribution to the dramatic impact of the whole. We must read the texts today without the accompaniment of music, dance, mime and gesture and even had the musical and visual elements survived the passage of time, they would have been far less meaningful to us than they were for those who had been surrounded by the song culture from birth.

d) Costume

Our sources tell us nothing about the costumes worn by those on stage in the time of Aeschylus but it seems likely that these were distinct in some way from normal Athenian dress. Aristophanes' Aeschylus declares of his actors:

> κἄλλως εἰκὸς τοὺς ἡμιθέους τοῖς ῥήμασι μείζοσι χρῆσθαι. καὶ γὰρ τοῖς ἱματίοις ἡμῶν χρῶνται πολὺ σεμνοτέροισιν
>
> *In other ways, it seems likely that the demi-gods used finer words for to be sure they wore clothes far grander than ours* (*Frogs* 1061)

In the Roman period, Aeschylus is widely credited with the

introduction of tragic costume (see Horace *Ars Poetica* 278) and later Athenaeus claims that he introduced τὴν τῆς στολῆς εὐπρέπειαν καὶ σεμνότητα "*the beauty and majesty of the costumes*" (1.21.d). However this belief may have been based on the above comment in the *Frogs* and Aristotle never refers to costume as an Aeschylean innovation. Likewise in later times Aeschylus is said to have been the first to use coloured or terrifying masks (Suidas s v quoted by Pickard-Cambridge p190 n5) but again this appears a little too convenient and we simply do not know when or how the characterization of masks was introduced.

In later times fine clothes are certainly associated with the torch-light procession which escorted a statue of Dionysus into the theatre for the start of the festival. Alcibiades wore a purple robe on more than one occasion (Athenaeus xii 534) and Demosthenes had intended to parade as choregus in a golden crown and an gold-embroidered cloak (*Meidias* 22). However Plutarch contrasts the homeliness and simplicity of this procession with the excessive pomp and display found in his own time (*de cupid divit* 527d). Pickard-Cambridge comments that he "*must have overlooked the magnificence of the Athenians processions of the fifth and fourth centuries BC (some 500 to 600 years earlier*" (p62) but it is perhaps more likely that Plutarch was exploiting this idea for the purposes of rhetoric rather than reliable knowledge. However we should be careful not to treat tragedy as a fixed entity and it is possible that costume had been rather simpler in this relatively early period relating to Aeschylean drama. In a similar way, Herington is puzzled by the fact that Plato's Ion performs in colourful clothing and golden garlands (535b-e) while the rhapsode shown on a vase by the Kleophrades painter (Herington plate 1 ARV2 p183 no 15) is wearing "*the ordinary civil dress of an Athenian gentleman*" (p14). He concludes that this earlier scene must relate to an amateur or private rhapsodic performance or that Ion was a particularly wealthy rhapsode (of which there is no indication in the text) but a simpler explanation is that this costume, probably like that of

tragic actors, became more splendid with the passage of time.

We hear how considerable amounts of money were spent on tragic performances in later times. A client of Lysias (21.1-5), who undertook eight choruses in nine years, claims to have spent 30 minae on tragic choregia in tragedy in 411-410BC and 5000 drachmae on a male chorus at the Dionysia in the following year. We do not know however what proportion was allocated to costume. Plutarch relates how Nicias procured popularity and won many prizes through his extravagance in this respect - ὑπερβαλλόμενος πολυτελείᾳ καὶ χάριτι τοὺς πρὸ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἅπαντας "*excelling in costliness and grace all of his predecessors and contemporaries*". However this refers to the post-Aeschylean period and the tone of criticism shows clearly that Nicias' liberality is regarded as abnormal and excessive. Aristotle also condemns overspending, such as bringing on a comic chorus dressed entirely in purple, as vulgar and unnecessary (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1123a20). Thus I would suggest that costume and masks in the time of Aeschylus were rather modest and unpretentious, at least in comparison with later times.

Pickard-Cambridge relies heavily on evidence from vase-paintings in his discussion of stage costume but this is a most unsatisfactory source of information, simply because we do not know how far a scene has been embellished by elements drawn solely from the artist's imagination. His aim was not to provide a photographic record for posterity but to create a pleasing design and he naturally enhances reality and removes more mundane elements from the scene. Thus masks are dispensed with and faces portrayed naturalistically, male actors are depicted fully as the females they represent[16] and stage satyrs are not distinguishable

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[16] A stage maenad reveals a naked breast on a pelike in Berlin, Pickard-Cambridge figure 35 ARV2 p586 no 47 circa 460bc

from "real" ones[17]. Often only the presence of a flute-player reveals the subject to be dramatic in origin. Depictions of masks should also be treated with considerable caution since, even when not worn, the artist often paints-in the eyes, as on the fragmentary oinochoe from the Athenian agora of 470-60 BC which also shows an impossibly small mouth[18]. Thus we shall treat any evidence from vases with great caution and with a clear awareness of their unsatisfactory nature, particularly where they are fragmentary or of uncertain date.

Bearing in mind the fact that the vases may have distorted and exaggerated the dramatic scene they portray, they seem to support the theory that Aeschylean costume was much simpler than that found in later times. Compare for example the plain chiton and soft pointed boots shown on the bell-krater in Ferrara (460-450BC)[19] with the more elaborate costume of the volute-krater in Naples by the Pronomos painter[20]. Pickard-Cambridge believes that the latter provides "*the most complete and magnificent piece of evidence for C5 stage costume*" (p187) but this was produced long after Aeschylus and therefore can tell us little about the period with which we are concerned. Only in the case of foreigners do we find any hint of splendid costume. A fragmentary hydria in Corinth 480-450 by the Leningrad Painter[21] shows an oriental king bearing two sceptres, rising from a flaming pyre, accompanied by at least four other astonished orientals. They

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[17]Pickard-Cambridge produces the splendid phrase "*the tights have melted*" with reference to a volute krater in Ferrara of around 450BC - see p185 and Figure 43.

[18]See Pickard-Cambridge figure 32, ARV2 p495

[19]See Pickard-Cambrige figure 33.

[20]See Pickard-Cambrige figure 49 ARV2 p1336 no 1.

[21]See Pickard-Cambridge p182 and figure 36 ARV2 p571 no 74.

wear a flapped head-dress and a thick garment ornamented with a pattern of black circles marked with a spot, worn over a decorated, sleeved undergarment. At least one figure wears trousers patterned with rows of lozenges and wavy lines, and has bare feet. The king has additional ornament on his kidaris and a dark wrap with a light border. The presence of a flute-player shows its subject to be tragedy and Pickard-Cambridge concludes that "*there seems no reason to doubt the artist, who may well be giving us a relatively accurate account of theatrical Oriental costume*" (p183). Nevertheless the usual caveats about vase-paintings should be applied and we should note that the masks have been removed from the scene. In addition Taplin states that the flames of the pyre could not have been represented realistically in the theatre and suggests that this is a depiction of some off-stage scene (p119)[22]. Since then we know that the artist has altered his model, for example by removing the masks, how far can we determine the extent of this and assume with any confidence that the costumes are a faithful rendition of what was presented on stage?

We simply do not know whether stage costume was used to reflect the characters portrayed by the actors, and it seems likely that Greek standards of realism with regard to both costume and stage properties would have differed greatly from those which we have come to expect from our own modern plays and films. Each main actor and chorus member played various different roles in the course of the trilogy and it would have been far easier, as well as less expensive, if a complete change of costume were not required for each new role. Any aspect of an actor's apparel which is of significance, such as Cassandra's prophetic garb or Xerxes' rags, is clearly described verbally in the text which

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[22]Taplin favours the fate of Croesus, as did Page while Webster believed it was a scene from the *Persae*. Pickard-Cambridge rejects both, since a pyre is not a tomb and the king is rising from it not on it, and concludes that identification is impossible on present evidence.

makes an exact representation of these things on stage unnecessary. Thus the fact that the Danaids are dark-skinned - νειλοθερῆ παρειὰν (71) "*sunburnt cheek*", μελανθὲς ἡλιόκτυπον "*a dark sun-smitten race*" (154-5) - and wear fine exotic clothes Σιδονίᾳ καλύπτρᾳ *Sidonian veil* (121), πέπλοισι βαρβάροισι καὶ πυκνώμασι/ χλίοντα προσφωνοῦμεν "*revelling in barbarian robes and wrappings*" (235-6), πολυμίτων πέπλων "*fine woven garments*" (432) is mentioned repeatedly, as is the fact that they carry suppliant branches (21, 241-2, 334). We cannot assess to what degree of realism their words were reflected by their stage appearance but Geddes is surely wrong to suppose that a chorus could appear in national dress merely because the chorus of Danaids claim to do so (p314).

Had the exotic appearance of these foreigners been clearly displayed to all in the theatre, there would have been no necessity for these frequent references to it, and the audience may have been required to lend a great deal of their imagination to the scene before them, just at they were required to accept male actors as women (even when Clytemnestra bares her breast) and masks as representations of the human face. Likewise the fine clothing of the foreigners in the *Persae* may have been presented on stage in a modified form and there is a reference only to Darius' tiara and shoes which may have been the only features of his appearance to reflect his oriental character (p152).

We find that in the *Frogs* (1062-3) and *Acharnians* (412ff) it is not Aeschylus, who describes Xerxes' rags repeatedly in the *Persae* 469, 833-6, 847-50, 1017, 1030, nor Sophocles, who presented a poorly-dressed Elektra and Philoctetes, but Euripides who is accused of portraying characters dressed in rags. Heath rightly points out that "*if such things were not made visible at all, these jokes would be pointless*" (p143) but he continues "*one assumes that there was some basis for the joke; but it may have been very tenuous*" (p143). However it is possible that the depiction of ragged costume had become more realistic by the time of Euripides and that this is the point of the joke as well as the

frequency with which he employed this element[23].

I believe that Aeschylus did not employ character costume in the modern sense and that when Pickard-Cambridge complains that "*there is no description in any extant play of the dress in which kings and queens and their children would normally appear in the theatre*" (p202), this is probably because their costume was not significantly different from that of anyone else and the identity of individuals on stage was established predominantly by the skill of the actors rather than by their physical appearance. In support of this theory is the fact that our sources state clearly that the choregus paid for the costumes of the chorus while nowhere is mention made of special clothing for the actors themselves (see Pickard-Cambridge p90).

Taplin asks "*is there any point in* not *using costume visually as well as verbally...What is the point of the actors* not *doing what they say they are doing, provided it is practicable?*" (p36). However we might as easily ask why the audience were required to accept a male actor as a female or masks as representative of the human face and and many tragic conventions must have been followed by the poets simply because certain elements, which we today would consider more "realistic", simply had never been presented before. It is important to remember that tragedy was the direct descendant of earlier forms of poetry which required neither props, masks nor characterized costumes but a great deal of audience imagination.

Chancellor believes that the details about stage directions and properties were incorporated into the text for the benefit of the reading public - "*there must have been a text available for those who could not attend and for those who wanted to study the*

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[23] Euripides' ridicule of Orestes' tokens in the *Choephori* also suggests that his audience were accustomed to a greater degree of "dramatic realism" - see below.

plays more closely" (p139)[24] - but they are probably included because of the close relationship between tragedy and the poetic genres from which it had developed. Thus in drama anything vital to the plot, including entrances and exits, is still clearly described and so there was far less necessity to present it with exactitude on stage, or at least to nothing like our own standards of realism. In Greek drama, much of the actors' skills will have depended on their gesture, voice and movements, rather than the physical appearance of the masked figures on stage, and the more the audience were required to use their imagination, the closer they would identify with the drama.

The lock of Orestes' hair, for example, which Elektra describes as matching her own (168, 172, 174, 176) would have been far too small for the vast majority of the audience to see and, especially since Orestes probably described it when he laid it at the tomb (the prologue is corrupt), there was no real necessity for it to be represented physically on the stage. A representation of Orestes' footprints is equally unnecessary (205-6) and a certain ambiguity about the precise form of the piece of weaving solves the problem of what it is supposed to represent[25]. I believe that stage properties and costumes were kept to minimum in the time of Aeschylus and that great emphasis was placed on the use of mime and audience imagination. Taplin disagrees - "*the poet did not risk the unclarity of dumb-show*" - but this is at least possible, especially when we remember that tragedy was the direct descendant of narrative poetry in which verbal description and imagination were predominant.

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[24]See further on written texts below

[25]Euripides ridicules the use of these tokens in his play *Elektra* - εἰ δὲ κἄκρεκον πέπλους,/ πῶς ἂν τότ' ὢν παῖς ταὐτὰ νῦν ἔχοι φάρη,/ εἰ μὴ ξυναύξοινθ' οἱ πέπλοι τῷ σώματι; "*If I had woven his garments, how could he now wear his childhood clothes, unless they had grown with him?*" - and we shall discuss below how tragic conventions may have been modified by his time.

We are unable to define with any certainly the degree of dramatic realism to be found on the Greek stage although it seems highly likely that the audience was required to lend themselves to the dramatic allusion to quite a high degree compared with modern theatre. In fact stage action and the use of props is kept to a minimum and often verbal narrative is preferred for the evocation of certain actions rather than any attempt to present them on stage[26]. Greater realism was surely introduced with the passage of time[27] but at this earlier stage tragedy was surely far simpler in appearance and more akin to its poetic roots.

e) Myth

Having indulged in speculation about the physical side of the performance - the gesture, mime, song and dance of those on stage - let us now consider the type of plots which were portrayed in the dramas. Apart from the *Persae*, the plays we shall consider are all based in outline on pre-existing mythical stories with which the audience were already familiar[28]. Myth played a central role in the spheres of education and religion, as well as supplying an endless source of inspiration for sculptors, vase-painters and poets of all kinds, and the fifth-century audience would have been surrounded by the old stories from birth. It is difficult for us today to imagine the importance of myth in Greek culture and the instant familiarity with the old stories which all enjoyed. This mythical foreknowledge is another factor which modern readers do not share with their Athenian counterparts

[26]Consider for example the snake-hair of the Erinyes which is powerfully described long before they appear.

[27]We have seen that there may have been great changes even by the time of Euripides.

[28]I have not included the *Prometheus Bound* in this study - see Griffith *The Authenticity of the Prometheus Bound* on the question of authorship - although our methods would be equally applicable to a play by a poet other than Aeschylus.

and we shall see how audience anticipation of events is exploited in the drama to great effect. Within the broad framework of the earlier myth however, the poet enjoyed a considerable degree of choice and freedom. The audience would have known several slightly different versions of the same myth and they could never be certain how any particular story would be portrayed or what would be added by the poet himself. Herington notes that "*by the time of the earliest extant poets, there was a vast repertoire of myths, reaching back through the Iron age to the Bronze age*" (p64) and these remained highly fluid in form.

A passage in Aeschines (*in Ctes.* 153-4) refers to a Proagon, a spoken preview of the drama, taking place in 346 BC, in the Odeum according to the scholiast, while the scholia on Aristophanes *Wasps* (1109) describes the Odeum as ἀγὼν καὶ ἐπίδειξις ὧν μέλλουσι δραμάτων ἀγωνίζεσθαι ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ "*the place for spectators where it is the custom to announce the poems before they are recited in the theatre*". However the Odeum was not built by Pericles until around 444BC and the proagon may have been introduced after Aeschylus. In the *Symposium*, Socrates declares to Agathon:

> εἰ ἰδὼν τὴν σὴν ἀνδρείαν καὶ μεγαλοφροσύνην ἀναβαίνοντος ἐπι τὸν ὀκρίβαντα μετὰ τῶν ὑποκριτῶν καὶ βλέψαντος ἐναντία τοσούτῳ θεάτρῳ, μέλλοντος ἐπιδείξεσθαι σαυτοῦ λόγους καὶ οὐδ' ὁπωστιοῦν ἐκπλαγέντος...
>
> *If seeing your bravery and great-mindedness when you mounted the platform with your actors, and looked faced such a great audience, about to display your* λόγους *and were not at all frightened, then now...* (194)

However this is a reference to the Lenaia and may even relate to the period preceding the play itself. There is no evidence that the proagon was customary in Aeschylean times and, even if it were, the internal evidence suggests that it did not reveal very much about the form of any particular drama. Plato refers to the poet revealing his λόγους which means "*plot*" at *Wasps* 54 and *Peace* 50, but in his commentary Rogers states that this word denotes

here "*not the actual plot or story which he is about to unfold but the preliminary circumstances, a knowledge of which is requisite for the right understanding of the play*". This seems very unlikely however and if we study the plays we find that all important details are supplied either from the audience's own awareness of the story or from the text itself, vital information about identity[29] and location[30] usually being imparted during the prologue. Thus perhaps the strongest argument against the existence of the Proagon in the time of Aeschylus is the fact that the audience simply did not require any supplementary information about the dramatic situation before the play began. In addition we shall see that there is a considerable element of suspense in the dramas which would be lost if the audience knew all about the form of the plays beforehand. The fact that Clytemnestra will kill Agamemnon without the aid of Aegisthus, for example, is revealed gradually and the impact of this realization would be lost if the audience were certain of this from the very beginning. Thus I shall leave aside the question of the Proagon in dealing with audience expectation and assume that they knew little about the precise form any particular drama would take.

As we try to assess the impact of the plays of Aeschylus on his original audience then, we must seek to establish, as far as possible, their background knowledge about the myths in question. The fact that the spectators already enjoyed a fair idea of what might happen seems unusual to modern readers and even Aristotle sought to minimize the influence of this one hundred and fifty years later:

> ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰ γνώριμα ὀλίγοις γνώριμά ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ὅμως εὐφραίνει πάντας.
>
> *What is well-known is well-known only to a few, but*

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[29] *Agamemnon* 1-2, *Persae* 1-7, *Septem* 1-6, *Supplices* 1-11

[30] *Agamemnon* 3, *Persae* 1, *Septem* 1, *Supplices* 15

nevertheless it pleases everyone. (*Poetics* ix 1451b25)

Pickard-Cambridge agrees - "*the general level of education among the audience should not be too highly rated...the Athenian audience could not, as a whole, be expected to be familiar with the background of heroic legend on which the tragedians drew*" (p275). However I do not believe that this was the case in the time of Aeschylus and would suggest that his audience had a higher degree of familiarity with the mythical background. Earlier epic and lyric poetry, based on myth, was kept alive by constant re-performance alongside more modern works (see above) and even the least alert member of the audience must have known, for instance, that Agamemnon was to meet his death on his return from Troy from their knowledge of the *Odyssey* (the audience's attitude may also have been influenced by earlier dramatic presentations on the same theme - see below on the possible influence of Phrynichus in the *Persae*). It may be that by the time of Euripides the older, more familiar myths had been well used by the tragedians and that he was compelled to seek a novel effect based on more obscure and diverse material. However Aeschylus was working at a period when the most popular stories were still relatively fresh and ripe for stage adaptation[31].

The comic poet Antiphanes[32] makes a joke about the exploitation of mythical knowledge in tragedy:

> μακάριόν ἐστιν ἡ τραγῳδία
> ποίημα κατὰ πάντ', εἴ γε πρῶτον οἱ λόγοι
> ὑπὸ τῶν θεατῶν εἰσὶν ἐγνωρισμένοι,
> πρὶν καί τιν' εἰπεῖν. ὥσθ' ὑπομνῆσαι μόνον
> δεῖ τὸν ποιητήν.
>
> *Tragedy is a fortunate genre of poetry in all*

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[31]The myths may also have been more compact in this earlier period and the Oidipous myth, for example, did not yet include the story of Antigone - see later on the ending of the *Septem*.

[32]First plays produced 386-3BC

respects for from the very beginning his stories are familiar to the spectators, before anyone even speaks, so that the poet has merely to remind them (fragment 191K)

He proceeds to describe how the moment Oidipous appears on stage, immediately the audience knows all about him - his father, his mother, the names of his daughters and sons, and what he has done[33] - while the comic poet enjoys no such advantage. Pickard-Cambridge calls this an easy and obvious joke rather than a balanced observation (p276) but it is true that a major difference between tragedy and comedy lies in the former's exploitation of mythical knowledge.

As we have noted however, the poets were not excessively constrained by their mythical framework and tragedy was far more than the empty acting out of a predictable ritual. Herington calls myth the "*least innovative feature in the new art of tragedy*" (p128) but in fact once a poet can assume certain pre-conceptions and anticipations among his audience, he is then free to exploit these to good dramatic effect. Within certain boundaries, the myths had a high degree of adaptability and could be treated with great freedom by the poet. Taplin, speaking of its almost limitless capacity for variation, describes myth as "*the product of centuries of re-arrangement and invention, a process which the tragedians themselves continued...the constraint is minimal; the scope for artistry enormous*" (p5).

Thus there would have been an air of uniqueness about each performance and the audience could never be sure how a particular story would be presented nor whether the poet would decide to follow one of his previous sources or introduce something new into his inherited material. Thus instead of restricting him, in fact myth adds an extra dimension to the drama and Aeschylus was free to tease his audience by diverging from the basic story or by

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[33] And, I would add, what awaits him in the future.

hinting at earlier versions which he then ignores. A change of emphasis, such as Clytemnestra's increased role in her husband's murder, produces fresh implications and extends the drama into newer, less familiar territory. Since many sources, which would have been of immense value to our study, are lost, we must be wary of assuming that everything not found previously is necessarily an Aeschylean innovation. However, as Baldry comments, "*where (as in most cases) the source of their version is unknown, the very fact that it is moulded to suit a dramatic purpose should lead us to give the author, rather than a hypothetical and perhaps imaginary tradition, the benefit of the doubt*" (*DTL*).(p24) Thus we shall consider those areas where Aeschylus may have contributed most to the evolution of a particular myth and not dismiss the possibility that he was responsible for certain important innovations. Another important influence on the audience's attitude to a myth may have been its earlier treatment by other dramatists and it is most unfortunate that we know so little about this subject. The fact that a vast repertoire of tragedy is lost is emphasized by the fact that Aristotle lists the most frequently chosen tragic themes as "*the actions and passions of Alcmaeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes and Telephos*" (*Poetics* 1453a20-21). Although these themes may have been more popular later, this still serves as a reminder of how much is lost and Hall notes we know something of only three hundred of the thousand tragedies produced in fifth-century Athens, often only a title or a short fragment (p1).

An important consequence of the use of myth as a basis for tragedy is the fact that the audience often enjoys a deeper understanding of a particular dramatic situation than those on stage, thus creating great opportunities for dramatic irony. They watch the activities of the figures before them almost like seers or gods, able to predict the future but unable to intervene. Baldry notes that dramatic irony is "*one of the ways in which the audience is given a feeling of participation in the play*" (p84). He continues "*because the audience is aware of the realities of the situation, line after line can have a significance for them*

which it lacks for one or more of the characters. They are in the secret and wait with heightened expectancy for the character to discover the truth" and often there would have been a great feeling of suspense about if, when and how the truth will finally be revealed to those on stage.

Irony may be employed by the poet to foreshadow future events which he intends to portray or which the audience may anticipate from their knowledge of the myth but which will not in fact occur. Different types of irony may be found in the plays of Aeschylus. It may be simple and unconscious as when words spoken on stage convey a deeper meaning to the audience alone, as in the *Supplices* where we shall detect many hints at the coming murder which is still far from the thoughts of all on stage. The irony may be deliberate and conscious, as when Clytemnestra professes excessive fidelity to Agamemnon, which the audience knows to be a direct lie. Some statements merely confirm the audience's suspicion of what is about to happen, like the prediction that Orestes will return at the end of the *Agamemnon*, or prepare them to expect an event which will never happen, as when Darius bids his wife to welcome Xerxes with fresh clothes or the Watchman imagines a joyful reunion with his master. All of these types of irony depend on the audience's mythical knowledge for their effect and so this adds an important extra dimension to the drama.

It is as though the poet and audience are in league, both sharing some knowledge of the future, and in a superior position to those on stage. The former has the advantage over the latter however and may surprise them or thwart their expectations. The individuals represented on stage do not always share the same degree of knowledge however, and often the poet skillfully portrays a variety of different levels of conception at the same time. The Cassandra scene is a good example of this. Clytemnestra believes that she is in full command of the situation and naturally she is fully aware of the imminent murder of her husband. Cassandra also foresees this and in fact has the

advantage over the queen since she can see beyond the murder to its consequences and the revenge of Orestes. The audience shares much of this knowledge, but unlike Cassandra and Clytemnestra, they are not yet certain about Aegisthus' role in the murder. In contrast to this, the chorus of Argive elders seems unable to grasp the true situation and they do not appear to treat Cassandra's predictions seriously. They accept at face value Clytemnestra's invitation to the girl to enter the house and join the sacrifice and display the most innocent possible interpretation of events. Vickers calls them "*an instrument of ironic ignorance*" (p13) and their obtuseness must have seemed extremely tantalizing and sinister to the audience who fully appreciate Cassandra's words. Thus the audience can appreciate the different levels of knowledge presented on the stage and we should note that this scene would lose much of its impact before an audience ignorant of the fact that both Agamemnon and Cassandra are about to meet their deaths.

Thalmann comments with reference to the *Septem* that "*even the spectators at the first performance must have known that the brothers would kill each other*" (p125). This is true and in fact, far from being grounds for criticism, an anticipation of the fratricide is vital if the play is to succeed. The audience will watch with great interest and suspense to see if, when and how Eteocles will realize his fate and how it will be presented. Those on stage do not always reach an understanding of the truth of their situation however and Agamemnon and Aegisthus both exit unwittingly to their deaths. Thus Lesky is misguided in his assertion that the protagonist must be "*fully aware of his situation...there will be no tragic effect when a passive victim, dull and dumb, is led to a place of execution*" (p10). However in most cases, such as that of Cassandra, Clytemnestra and Eteolces, most characters reach some understanding of their imminent fate of which the audience has been aware from the very beginning. Thus we see that the audience's prior mythical knowledge makes an important contribution to their appreciation of the plays and we

shall devote much effort to establishing this in the case of each play, at least as far as our incomplete sources allow.

f) Audience Response

Taplin comments that "*tragedy is essentially the emotional experience of its audience*" and indeed the performance must affect the spectators strongly if it is to succeed as drama. No doubt the Greek audience felt and expressed their emotional response to the drama with great freedom in the theatre. Plato notes that when the multitude is seated together in the assembly or theatre:

> ὅταν ξὺν πολλῷ θορύβῳ τὰ μὲν ψέγωσι τῶν λεγομένων ἢ πραττομένων, τὰ δὲ ἐπαινῶσιν, ὑπερβαλλόντως ἑκάτερα, καὶ ἐκβοῶντες καὶ κροτοῦντες, πρὸς δ' αὐτοῖς αἵ τε πέτραι καὶ ὁ τόπος ἐν ᾧ ἂν ὦσιν ἐπηχοῦντες διπλάσιον θόροβον παρέχωσι τοῦ ψόγου καὶ ἐπαίνου.
>
> *With loud uproar they censure some of the things that are said and done and approve others, both to excess, with loud shouts and clapping and in addition to them, the rocks and the spot where they are resounds and redoubles the din of their censure and praise* (*Republic* 6 492b)

and the audience of Aeschylus may have expressed their opinions volubly also. A passage in the *Laws* states that οὔτε γὰρ παρὰ θεάτρου δεῖ τόν γε ἀληθῆ κριτὴν κρίνειν μανθάνοντα, καὶ ἐκπληττόμενον ὑπο θορύβου τῶν πολλῶν καὶ τῆς αὑτοῦ ἀπαιδευσίας "*a good judge should not be taught his judgement by (listening to) those in the theatre, being distracted by the yelling of the mob or by his own inexperience*" (2.659b-c) which suggests that the audience's reaction to the drama was expressed loudly in the theatre, at least by this later stage. The anecdote in the *Life*, which relates how children fainted and women miscarried at the sight of the Erinyes, suggests that violent reactions to the dramas were common, as does the story that Phrynichus was fined by order of the assembly after the performance of his play *The*

Capture of Miletus (Herodotus iv 21.2)[34] . We learn that later bad comic actors at the Rural Dionysia were bombarded on occasion with figs, grapes and olives (Demosthenes *De Corona* 262) and so it would seem that the audience were far from being quiet and passive as is generally the case today. Plato states that the poet's aim was to evoke a strong emotional response:

> οἱ γάρ που βέλτιστοι ἡμῶν ἀκροώμενοι Ὁμήρου ἢ ἄλλου τινὸς τῶν τραγῳδοποιῶν μιμουμένου τινὰ τῶν ἡρώων ἐν πένθει ὄντα καὶ μακρὰν ῥῆσιν ἀποτείνοντα ἐν τοῖς ὀδυρμοῖς ἢ καὶ ᾄδοντάς τε καὶ κοπτομένους, οἶσθ' ὅτι χαίρομεν τε καὶ ἐνδόντες ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἑπόμεθα συμπάσχοντες καὶ σπουδάζοντες ἐπαινοῦμεν ὡς ἀγαθὸν ποιητήν, ὃς ἂν ἡμᾶς ὅτι μάλιστα οὕτω διαθῇ.
>
> *When the best of us hears Homer or some other tragedian imitating one of his heroes who is singing in distress and is delivering a long tirade in his lamentations or chanting and beating his breast, you know that we feel pleasure and surrender ourselves and accompany him with fellow-suffering and praise him enthusiastically as an excellent poet the one who most strongly affects us in this way* (*Republic* 605c-d)

He condemns the fact that a show of intense grief by those on stage evokes a similar response in the spectators since in real life control of one's emotions is admired while in the theatre one takes pleasure in what one would normally condemn. Xenophon refers in the *Symposium* to an actor's skill in arousing emotion - Δικαιότερόν γ', ἔφη, οἴομαι, ἢ Καλλιππίδης ὁ ὑποκριτής, ὃς ὑπερσεμνύνεται ὅτι δύναται πολλοὺς κλαίοντας καθίζειν "*he said, yes and with better right I fancy than Callipides the actor who gives himself such pompous airs, thinking that he can make the crowds weep in the theatre* (3.11) and so a strong emotional response to the tragedies of Aeschylus may have been customary.

Stanford points out that the familiar maxim of Aristotle - δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων

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[34]We do not know the precise grounds for complaint but it may have arisen from the audience's emotional reaction to the play.

κάθαρσιν" (*Poetics* 1449b 27-8) is best translated as "*through intense compassion and terror effecting a catharsis of these emotions*", and that the usual phrase "*pity and fear*" is far too weak for the intense emotions experienced by the audience (p57). The sharing of this deeply emotional experience in the theatre would greatly enhance the impact of the original production and these feelings were probably far more intense than is often imagined.

The passages of highest emotion were probably conveyed predominantly by those elements of the drama which are now lost to us, that is by the music, gesture and dance. The lament at the end of the *Persae* for example, the emotional climax of the whole play, appears rather dull and repetitive when merely read, but this lament of 170 lines must have been highly effective and intensely moving in the theatre. Thus while expressions of grief, like those found at the end of the *Persae* - ἰή, ἰώ, οἰοῖ, ἠή, ὀτοτοτοτοῖ - look strange on the printed page they would have had a deeply moving effect on the listeners when translated into deep, prolonged cries of woe resounding round the theatre. Thus another difference between the Greeks and ourselves may have been the depth and extent of their emotional response to the dramatic performances as well as their utter entrancement by them.

g) Aristophanes

The *Frogs* of Aristophanes, which won first prize at the Lenae a in 405BC, is often used as evidence for popular attitudes to Aeschylus and his work. The play takes the form of a competition between Aeschylus and Euripides in Hades and may indeed present a distorted picture of popular conceptions of the two poets. Aeschylus' work is considered to be dignified and weighty and most modern readers would accept this distinction. Euripides exaggerates this feature in the play, complaining that the work of his predecessor was dull and incomprehensible to its audience. The language and tone are obscure - σαφὲς δ' ἂν εἶπεν οὐδὲ ἓν "*they say nothing clearly*" (927) while his words are :

ὀφρῦς ἔχοντα καὶ λόφους, δεῖν' ἄττα μορμορωπὰ,
ἄγνωτα τοῖς θεωμένοις.

Terrible things, hideous to behold and incomprehensible to the spectators (925-6)

However after much debate Aeschylus wins the contest and is considered most fitting to improve the citizens δεξιότητος καὶ νουθεσίας "*by cleverness and advice*" (1008). Naturally we can make no firm statements about contemporary attitudes to Aeschylus based on a comic play and the final judgement itself may be intended ironically (Euripides often suffers at the hands of Aristophanes). However the greatest irony of the exercise may be that the competition itself is basically untenable. The work of the two participants was separated by a gap of some two generations while Aristophanes was working at an even later period. Thus if the poetry of Aeschylus appears grandiose and difficult in comparison with later plays, this should be regarded as evidence for the way drama developed as an art-form, not necessarily as an indication that Aeschylus was an inferior craftsman. Aeschylus won first prize in the contest on many occasions and we may assume that the original audience appreciated his work and found it to their taste. He cannot be blamed if his dramas met with less approval in later ages. Thus, since these two poets were writing for different audiences and were separated by some fifty years, it is futile to seek to establish whether Aeschylus or Euripides were the better poet by means of a direct comparison of their work. The *Frogs* offers a good illustration of how the interval of time would have affected the tastes and knowledge of the audience. Dionysus declares:

νὴ τοὺς θεοὺς, ἐγὼ γοῦν
ἤδη ποτ' ἐν μακρῷ χρόνῳ νυκτὸς διηγρύπνησα,
τὸν ξουθὸν ἱππαλεκτρυόνα" ζητῶν, τίς ἐστιν ὄρνις.

By the Gods, I have spent many long nights in anxious thought, wondering what sort of bird was a tawny cock-horse! (930-933 A reference to the *Myrmidons fragment* 212f Mette)

Aeschylus must explain that this was engraved on the ship's prow and it seems that by 405 the audience also would have shared Dionys us' ignorance in this matter. However Taplin notes how a fowl with a horses front appears on late sixth century vases and in fact a sculpture of this animal stood among the votive statues on the Acropolis until these were destroyed by the Persians. Thus the reference would have been immediately appreciated by the relevant audience and Aeschylus should not be accused of obscurity. If fifty years can affect understanding in this way, how much more careful should we be of labelling passages as inferior or obscure after such an immense interval of time. I believe that Aristophanes was aware of this basic flaw in the form of the competition and that he deliberately exploited this for comic effect. He was certainly not concerned with serious literary criticism and we should not regard his discussion of Aeschylus' work in this light.

We should ensure that we ourselves do not regard the plays as literary texts which were designed to be preserved for comparison with later drama. They were intended for one single spontaneous performance before a particular audience and all the poet's energies would be directed towards this one event. We do not know whether written texts of the dramas were widely available to the public but it would seem likely that, as with all poetry, the emphasis remained on live performance, not solitary study. At Frogs 52-3 Dionysus describes how he was ἀναγιγνώσκοντί μοι/ τὴν 'Ανδρομέδαν πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν "*reading over to myself the* Andromeda"and the Nurse of the Hippolytus comments ὅσοι μεν οὖν γραφάς τε τῶν παλαιτέρων/ ἔχουσιν αὐτοί τ' εἰσὶν ἐν μούσαις ἀει,/ ἴσασι "*those who have books of ancient matters and themselves always wander among the Muses know...*" Stevens notes how the third century *Life of Euripides* by Satyros[35] describes how some of the Athenians captured in Sicily were treated better or even freed by their

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[35]See M Delcourt Les *Biographies Anciennes d'Euripide*, L'Antiquite Classique II 1933 p271-90

captors because they were able to recite or sing passages from the plays of Euripides (p90). However these may have entered the poetic repertoire through verbal communication and Taplin notes that "*musical instruction was purely a matter of ear and memory*" as at *Clouds* 964-71[36]. Although reading did occur, I do not believe that it was a common activity, particularly in the period with which we are concerned.

Chancellor puts forward the argument that the poet wrote with both his theatrical audience and the reading public in mind (p133) and suggests that Aristophanes and his audience must have had access to these texts of Aeschylus and Euripides in order for his parodies to work (p140). However often only a very general knowledge of the original is required in the case of parody and surely Chancellor fails to appreciate the highly verbal nature of Greek society where both study and literature were lively, communal activities. Even if the texts were available in Aeschylus' time, they would surely have been regarded as merely a partial element of the whole performance - "*a convenient abstract of the real work*" (Taplin p16). Participation in the tragic contest was surely predominant in the poet's mind and it is this which determined the success or failure of the work. The plays were not designed for a "run" in the modern sense, and although after his death Aeschylus was awarded the honour that his plays could be produced at the festival,[37] this would not have affected his own attitude to the dramas. He wrote for one specific audience and all his energies would be directed towards winning the prize on that particular day before the gathering of his fellow citizens. In studying the plays of Aeschylus then, we must try to imagine the spontaneity of each performance and not regard them as fixed entities. Spring commented in 1917 "*the* Choephori *is intelligible without assuming for the audience any knowledge of*

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[36]See *Protagoras* 325e-326b

[37]See *Archanians* 10 and *Frogs* 866ff

the Agamemnon" (p148)..."*he was careful to make each play an intelligible dramatic entity without reference to the other plays of the group*" (p155). It is clearly wrong to regard a connected trilogy in this way for it was designed primarily to be performed consecutively and we should study the plays with this consideration in mind.

Conclusion

Thus we have noted several of the ways in which the tragedies are removed from the experience of the modern reader and we must acknowledge these difficulties and seek to compensate for them if we are to gain a fuller appreciation of the original performance. Vickers stresses the accessibility of the plays to us today, noting how the *Oresteia* continues to live in the theatre (p6) and that we should offer "*no concessions to those who hold Greek Tragedy to be unapproachable or irrecoverable*" (p347)[38]. It is true that the tragedies of ancient Greece in their present imperfect form have much to offer us but we must remember also that the original performance with its music and dance is indeed unapproachable and irrecoverable. The poet's primary aim was to present one particular version of events for a single performance before a particular audience in the hope of winning their approval and therefore the contest. We are fortunate that any trace of the plays has survived and that we are privileged to be able to look in upon this private entertainment uninvited. We are separated from the Greek audience by a vast amount of time and the fact that the dramas can still speak to us, despite these many disadvantages and corruptions, distortions and omissions, is a tribute to their greatness.

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[38]A reference to Jones *Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*

Chapter One

Audience Appreciation of the *Persae*

A) Introduction

a) The play

The Argument of the *Persae* states that Aeschylus won first prize at the contest of the Greater Dionysia in 472BC with a tetralogy consisting of the Φινεὺς, Πέρσαι, Γλαῦκος and Προμηθεὺς. Since the re-dating of the *Supplices*, it is generally agreed that the *Persae* is the earliest extant play by Aeschylus and therefore the oldest complete Greek tragedy we possess. Many have detected marks of primitivism in its style and Michelini believes that the play illustrates how the art-form was evolving in this period from musical chorus-dominated to non-musical actor-dominated drama (p64). Others have regarded certain aspects of the drama as marks of Aeschylus' inexperience, but in fact his earliest play was composed around 497 BC and so he had been producing tragedies for over twenty five years by the time the *Persae* was performed. Thus while Castellani believes that the play did not quite work as a tragedy, claiming that its exaggerations were "*presumptuous and embarrassing...the silences and anomalies were awkward*", we have no reason to believe that it failed to meet the approval of its original audience. It is more likely that any unusual feature of the drama may reflect the conventions which were popular at this relatively early period and we should accept that Aeschylus was competent at his craft by this stage and able to achieve the effects he desired.

We cannot tell to what extent the *Persae* in its present form is genuine[1] and we shall see later that certain features of the

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[1]For example, Athenaeus III 86b attributes a quotation to it which does not feature in our text.

play, such as the Queen's failure to reclothe Xerxes as she intended, have been thought to show evidence of textual corruption. According to the *Life of Aeschylus*, Hiero requested a performance of the *Persae* at Syracuse shortly after its first production[2], and the merging of these two versions might explain certain textual inconsistencies. However for the purposes or our study, in which we are seeking the reaction of the original audience to the production, we shall accept the text as it stands as genuine as far as possible and seek to justify it in dramatic terms.

During the play, Aeschylus requires his audience to imagine themselves within the enemy court and invites them to pity the great effect of their defeat at Salamis upon the Persians. This was surely an emotive theme since the Greeks had beaten back the mighty Persian invasion only eight years previously and the ruins of the Acropolis remained as a strong visual reminder to the audience of the recent conflict. Greek victory over the Persians had been "*an event of intense significance for the Greek world and to be recalled only with a deep glow of patriotic enthusiasm*" (Broadhead pxvi). Thus it was surely ambitious of Aeschylus to present a play on this theme[3] and we shall consider below the question whether Aeschylus succeeded in winning Greek sympathy for their Persian enemies. Let us note here however that the trilogy to which the *Persae* belonged was awarded first prize at the Festival of Dionysus in 472 and so must have met with a considerable degree of approval.

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[2]Hiero died in 467BC.

[3]Although it seems that Phrynichus had done so at an even earlier stage - see below.

b) Historical Drama

The *Persae* is strikingly different from any other surviving play by Aeschylus since it does not rely on a mythological framework which, as we shall see, plays such a vital role in audience appreciation elsewhere. Instead of the plot centering on some familiar, long-established mythical story, a recent historical event, of which the audience themselves had personal experience, is presented in dramatic form. Thus it is most unlikely that Aeschylus would choose to depict anything that strongly conflicts with the Athenian conception of the war and the audience will *know*, not merely suspect, that the Persians will be defeated at Salamis.

There has been much discussion among scholars about whether the *Persae* should be classed as a tragedy at all. Some have considered it predominantly nationalistic[4] or religious[5] in tone, while others suggest that its undignified and melodramatic elements would have incited laughter and ridicule among the audience. Craig, for example, found "*undignified*" and "*comic*" features (p98), while Sidgwick considered it "*a satire on the ways of Oriental royalties*" (note on 847). Blomfield objects particularly to the entrance of Xerxes in rags, still bearing an empty quiver as though he has come straight from battle, and finds it ridiculous that the chorus should continue to accept such a man as their king (Praefatio pxiv)[6]. We shall see below however that the entrance of Xerxes has been prepared with the utmost care by

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[4]Murray p115, although there is no evidence to support his theory that this type of drama was performed annually at the Dionysia from 477 to 472 to celebrate the Greek victory over the Persians.

[5]Croiset p185 and Kitto p38.

[6]Summarized by Broadhead pxv.

the poet and the sight of the mighty Persian king entering, not in ragged battle dress, but in the tatters of his splendid royal garments torn in grief by his own hand, would have been a powerful symbol of Xerxes' utter devastation by the conflict[7]. This is a most serious image and would have been reflected by the deeply solemn and momentous lament which forms the finale of the play. Like Broadhead (pxvi) I can find nothing in the text to suggest comedy or ridicule of the king and we should assume that the play would have been considered a serious tragedy by its original audience.

Aeschylus was certainly not the first poet to have based a drama on a recent historical event. Herodotus (iv 21.2) relates how, seventeen years before the *Persae*, Phrynichus had produced a play concerning the Persian capture of an Ionian colony called *The Capture of Miletus*, which so upset the audience that they fined him 1000 drachmas. We do not know whether this was due to the fact that his suggestion that the Greeks seek peace with Persia at any price suggested cowardice, as the scholia to *Wasps* 1490 suggests, or whether the work conveyed a reproach towards the Athenians for failing to aid Miletus. Whatever the reason for the fine, this anecdote suggests that Aeschylus took a considerable risk of alienating the sympathies of his audience by presenting a play based on real events. This might even explain why this type of drama died out in favour of that with a mythical basis, whose political message, if any existed, was less direct, although as Hall points out, in each of the three historical tragedies which we know existed "*the effect of the physical remoteness of their setting is at least analogous to the effect in other plays of a mythical ambience*". (p66 n39) Sidgwick suggests that this type of drama

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[7]Taplin p80 notes that this is one of the few occasions when an important character may enter without any mute attendants, and this would certainly serve to emphasize Xerxes' complete isolation from the company with which he left for war.

ceased with the *Persae* (pvi) while Thalmann notes that historical dramas belonged to "*a sub-genre that never flourished at Athens*" (p260). However Hall points out that at least one thousand plays were produced in fifth-century Athens and that we know something of only three hundred of these, often merely the title or a short quotation.(p1) Thus other historical dramas may have been performed of which we know nothing. In fact we seem to be aware of the existence of the two historical dramas by Phrynichus through pure chance, for the *Capture of Miletus* is noteworthy for the fine it incurred while we are aware of the Salamis play only because Aeschylus chose to use the same subject matter and it is mentioned in the Argument to his *Persae*[8]. We cannot assess how many other historical plays have disappeared without trace and this genre may have enjoyed a degree of popularity before it was superseded by plays based on legends.

Thus the *Persae* is not unique in form and the *Argument* states that it is based on another historical play about Salamis by Phrynichus, dated to 476 (the *Persae* is 472), quoting the first line, Τάδ' ἐστὶ Περσῶν τῶν πάλαι βεβηκότων. Aeschylus echoes this closely in his opening line:

Τάδε μὲν Περσῶν τῶν οἰχομένων

We, since the Persians departed... (1)

Two fragments are attributed to the earlier play - fr.11 Nauck is a reference to singing songs in response to the harp, while *Oxyrh Pap* 2 No221 refers to many men losing their lives in the space of an afternoon. Verrall (p14-15) and Michelini - "*the Phoinissai was probably the sole direct predecessor of the*

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[8]Although it seems to be given the wrong title of *Phoenissae* suggesting a play with a chorus of Phoenician women which seems unlikely. Taplin suggests that the hypothesis has been mutilated - see HSCP 76 1972 68n 36.

Persians" (p131) - believe that Phrynichus was a major influence on Aeschylus and that there were many allusions to the earlier play throughout the *Persae*. We shall note below possible examples but since almost nothing of the earlier play survives, a true comparison is impossible and we cannot be certain where Aeschylus is alluding to the earlier drama and where he deliberately diverged from it. In addition the play may allude to other lost historical dramas whose influence we can no longer trace and we know, for example, that Simonides composed a lyric poem about the heroes at Salamis[9]. Even if the Salamis play by Phrynichus of four years earlier were a major influence and an important source of reference for a full appreciation of this play, it is unlikely that Aeschylus imitated it to any great extent - "*a playwright with an obvious model tends, in any case, to diverge no less than he coincides*" (Taplin p65) - and Aeschylus' treatment of the material was surely unique. In the *Frogs* Aeschylus is made to stress his divergence from Phrynichus, when he declares of the word τὸ φλαττοθραττοφλαττόθρατ:

> ἀλλ' οὖν ἐγὼ μὲν ἐς τὸ καλὸν ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ
> ἤνεγκον αὔθ', ἵνα μὴ τὸν αὐτὸν Φρυνίχῳ
> λειμῶνα Μουσῶν ἱερὸν ὀφθείην δρέπων.
>
> *I brought it from a fine source for a fine purpose so that I might not be seen plucking the same sacred meadow of the Muses as Phrynichus* (1298-30).

Even the *Argument* to the *Persae* states that Aeschylus did not follow his model closely, for it continues:

> πλὴν ἐκεῖ εὐνοῦχός ἐστιν ἀγγέλλων ἐν ἀρχῇ τὴν Ξέρξου ἧτταν, στορνύς τε θρόνους τινὰς τοῖς τῆς ἀρχῆς παρέδροις
>
> *...except that there it is a eunuch who announces Xerxes' defeat at the very beginning as he lays out seats for*

[9]See Suda s.v. Σιμωνίδης 439 iv 361 Adler in Page *Poetae Melici Graeci fragment* 536.

the officers of the kingdom

This suggests that in the play by Phrynichus, unlike in the *Persae*, the defeat at Salamis is revealed at the beginning and that the prologue was followed by a council of elders. Thus the audience will have been unsure about when and how the news will be conveyed to the Persians in this play and what their reaction will be. We should not therefore over-exaggerate the influence of the Salamis play or indeed any other historical drama on the *Persae* for the major influence upon the audience's perception of the drama will surely be their own experience of the recent war and popular attitudes and Aeschylus must take care not to violate popular attitudes to Salamis.

B) The War

a) Herodotus

For many scholars the main interest of the *Persae* has been the historical information it provides about the Persian war. Unfortunately some have mistakenly cast Aeschylus in the role of historian, supposing that his aims were similar to those of Herodotus, and he has been strongly criticized for inaccuracies and even for deliberately distorting facts. The freezing of the River Strymon in a single night in mid-autumn to allow the passage of the Persian army over it is not attested elsewhere and Castellani believes that this was "*physically impossible*" (p3)[10]. Despite the fact that he was a dramatist and not a historian, Aeschylus is likely to be more reliable than Herodotus in some respects, firstly because he had lived through the events described and, according to Pausanias (1.14.5) and the *Life*, had actually fought at Salamis. Secondly the poet was constrained to a high degree of accuracy by the fact that his presentation of

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[10]See further Broadhead on lines 495-7.

recent events would come under the close scrutiny of his fellow Athenians who also had personal experience of the battle. Surely they would not have countenanced any great departure from the truth and their approval of his presentation may be assumed from the fact that the trilogy was awarded first prize in the contest.

It is true that in matters of detail about the Persian side Herodotus is to be preferred by the historian since he would have had access to Persian accounts of the war as well as Greek[11]. Lattimore notes that "*in Aeschylus all is confusion and inconsequence*" (p86) and comments, on his use of Persian names, that "*the list is to a great extent fictitious or at least historically insignificant and misleading*" (p87)[12]. However it is unlikely that either Aeschylus or his audience would have been familiar with many prominent figures of the enemy side and so there is no necessity for accuracy in this matter. The purpose of this profusion of names is to give an oriental flavour to the text while also creating the impression of enormous Persian losses and historical accuracy is not a priority. In the same way, Aeschylus does not seek to give a full and balanced view of the Persian empire but concentrates on the Ionian cities in and around the Aegean which were familiar to himself and his audience. Gagarin notes that "*the detail with which these cities are described in 880-886 is quite out of proportion to their importance for Persia*" (p32) but the composer of a tragedy designed for one major performance would have no conception of preserving accurate details for future generations.

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[11]Although see John Gould "*Herodotus*" on his rather relaxed style of writing history, very different to that of Thuycidides.

[12]Herodotus devotes 37 chapters - 7.61-97 - to a list of the thirty-nine Persian leaders, twenty-eight of which do not appear in Aeschylus. He mentions a Persian hero called Amistres (21) while this is the name of Xerxes' wife at Herodotus 9 109-12 and so foreign-sounding names have been used at random.

The most serious criticism of Aeschylus' account of the war is that he has vastly exaggerated the importance of Salamis in order to promote the role of Athens in the defeat of Persia. Podlecki writes "*it is as if Aeschylus were compressing the whole agonized resistance of Hellas to the barbarian invader into this one engagement*" (p12). Lattimore agrees "*the climax has come and gone*" and Platea, a major battle led mainly by Spartans, which marked the end of Persian presence on Greek soil, is "*reduced to an insignificant mopping-up operation*" (p90) - "*it is not (Aeschylus') fault that we can correct his account, since he could not have foreseen Herodotus*" (p93). However even though the play concerns the homecoming of Xerxes and must therefore be set just after the defeat at Salamis, Aeschylus manages to include a reference to Platea through his use of the ghost of Darius (796-822)[13]. Besides which, as a dramatist, Aeschylus is completely justified in placing Salamis at the centre of his drama and it would be natural for the Athenians to regard their moment of greatest glory as the focal point of the whole war. Salamis was the first real set-back for the Persians and Aeschylus conveys a clear impression that there is worse to follow. Thus any criticism of the value of Aeschylus as an historian is misplaced here and our attention should be directed rather to the question of whether the Persae succeeded as drama and achieved the desired effect upon its fifth-century audience.

b) The Battle of Salamis

The effect of the original performance of the *Persae*will have been greatly intensified by the fact that many in the audience had fought at Salamis only eight years before and would view the drama

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[13]The Battle of Marathon of ten years earlier is also mentioned by the Queen 474-5.

in the light of their own experience. The threat from Persia had been terrifying and immediate for the people of Athens and modern readers lack this vital factor in their appreciation of the drama. Little is said about the war from the Greek viewpoint however and the defeat at Salamis is seen through the eyes of those who had remained behind in the Persian court at Susa. The mood of tension among people awaiting news at home would be well understood by those in the audience who had shared a similar experience. The Elders declare that the army has disappeared "σμῆνος ὣς" "*like a swarm of bees*" (128). Vergil in *Georgics* IV 178-90 states that the aged bees were left behind when the swarm set forth and if the audience were familiar with this idea also, they may regard the image of the deserted hive as a good illustration of the atmosphere at Susa[14]. The chorus describe the sufferings of those left behind:

> Περσίδες δ' ἁβροπενθεῖς ἑκάστ-
> α πόθῳ φιλάνορι
> τὸν αἰχμάεντα θοῦρον εὐνατ-
> ῆρ' ἀποπεμψαμένα
> λείπεται μονόζυξ.
>
> *Each Persian woman, indulging in grief of husband-loving longing, has sent away her eager, warlike husband and is left single-yoked* (135-9)

Pathos is added to this image by the fact that the audience, as often enjoying a wider overview of events than those on stage, anticipate defeat and heavy losses for the Persian side from the very beginning. However even before this is reported, the Persians suffer grim forebodings about the outcome of the war. The mood of the play would have been very different had those on stage appeared arrogant and confident of success from the outset

[14]Although they would probably not associate the Persian queen with the queen bee, since the leader of the bees was widely believed by the Greeks to be male and so would be equated rather with Xerxes who has departed with the host.

and this would have served to alienate the sympathies of the audience. Instead they will identify with the fears of those waiting at home for news and regard their forebodings as appropriate and well justified.

From the very beginning of the play, the chorus expresses its great fears for the army. In mimicking the first line of Phrynichus (see above), Aeschylus has replaced βεβηκότων with οἰχομένων which, like our term "*departed*" can convey the idea of dying, as well as setting out. Sheppard notes that the use of οἰχομένων sounds the first note of disaster (p34) and the chorus repeat this word shortly afterwards:

> πᾶσα γὰρ ἰσχὺς 'Ασιατογενὴς
> οἴχωκε
>
> *The entire strength of the Asian land has departed* (12-13)

Winnington-Ingram believes that the significance of οἰχομένων will become clear to the audience when the term is repeated at lines 13 and 60 (p38) - "*Aeschylus has gradually and deliberately unfolded the implications of* οἰχομένων". While it is true that these phrases will have a cumulative effect upon the audience, they have known that the Persians would be defeated from the very beginning of the play and so will surely be alert to oblique hints of the imminent future from the very first line. Broadhead rejects the idea that Aeschylus is hinting at Persian losses here - "*this opening sentence is purely factual so that it would be out of place to anticipate there the forebodings expressed in lines 8-11*" (p38) - but no doubt the audience would have appreciated the double meaning conveyed by the use of οἰχομένων. The substitution will be particularly apparent if the original line of Phrynichus was already well-known.

The forebodings of the chorus continue:

ταῦτά μοι μελαγχίτων
φρὴν ἀμύσσεται φόβῳ,
ὀᾶ Περσικοῦ στρατεύματος,
τοῦτο μὴ πόλις πύθητ-
αι κένανδρον μέγ' ἄστυ Σουσίδος.

It is thus that my gloom-shrouded heart is torn with fear - oh for the Persian army! - let not the city discover that the great city of Susa is desolate of men. (115-9)

They hint further at misfortune when they greet the Queen:

θεοῦ μὲν εὐνάτειρα Περσῶν, θεοῦ δὲ καὶ μήτηρ ἔφυς,
εἴ τι μὴ δαίμων παλαιὸς νῦν μεθέστηκε στρατῷ.

You were wife of the Persians' god and mother of a god, unless the ancient fortune has changed now with regard to the army (157-8)

Sidgwick criticizes this - "*it is too plainly the Greek poet, not the Persian guard, who speaks*" (p12) - but Aeschylus is fully justified in foreshadowing the Persian defeat at Salamis in this manner and the forebodings of those on stage play an important role in confirming the audience's suspicions about what is to happen next.

The Queen's dream of Xerxes being thrown from a chariot may have been already familiar to the audience from Phrynichus and so we cannot state with any certainty how far it was original. As in the *Choephori* and the *Septem*, a dream is used as a device for foreshadowing future events which are anticipated by the audience but unclear to those on stage. The chorus makes no effort to interpret the dream here, hoping that it is a good omen[15], but the audience will easily identify it as a prediction of Xerxes' downfall. The dream is correctly interpreted once the news of Salamis is known (518-9) when those on stage join the audience in

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[15]The dreams of Eteocles and Clytemnestra are misinterpreted anyway.

their awareness of its true meaning. The presence of Darius in the dream looking down on the prostrate Xerxes in pity (οἰκτείρων 198) acts as preparation for his subsequent appearance on stage although it is also slightly misleading since later Darius shows little sympathy for his son and blames him severely for the recent disaster. This event in the dream may also suggest to the audience that father and son will meet on stage but in fact this never occurs. Anderson's suggestion that the ghost remained silently on stage for the remainder of the play (p174) seems most unlikely - Xerxes does not refer to him - although if the tomb were represented by some stage device, the continuing presence of this might act as a visible reminder to the audience of the ghost scene and the words spoken by Darius[16].

In the Queen's dream Xerxes attempted to yoke the two beautiful women, (ἅρμασιν δ' ὕπο ζεύγνυσιν 190-1) and this verb is applied also to his taming of Greece (50 ζυγὸν ἀμφιβαλεῖν), and his bridging of the Hellespont (722 ἔζευξεν). He is cast in the role of an enslaver which was surely an emotive idea for the audience:

> ὅστις Ἑλλήσποντον ἱρὸν δοῦλον ὥς δεσμώμασιν
> ἤλπισε σχήσειν ῥέοντα, Βόσπορον ῥόον θεοῦ.
>
> *He who thought to hold from its course the sacred Hellespont by shackles as if it were a slave, the divine stream of Bosphorus* (745-6)

However Xerxes' attempt on Greece is universally condemned by those on stage (see below) which will enhance the Persians in the eyes of the audience and their knowledge of his failure will also deeply influence their perception of the stage action. They know

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[16]See Devereux for a psychological interpretation of the dream, although it is unlikely that the original audience would detect any deeper meaning than a simple prediction of Xerxes' imminent downfall.

that the body of brave young men will not return and will easily interpret the dream of Xerxes' being thrown from the chariot (176ff) and the omen of the mighty eagle overcome by the small hawk (205ff) as intimations of the coming defeat. This knowledge will have a great effect upon their appreciation of the play and Aeschylus presents the war very effectively, portraying the Persians as sympathetically as possible.

Podlecki is surely wrong in his belief that "*the name of Athens and its citizens is brought to the center of the stage again and again*" (p9), for as we have noted the war is seen consistently through the eyes of the Persians and no individual Greek is named. Aeschylus does however include a hearty battle cry which would suddenly remind the Greeks about what the encounter meant for themselves:

> ὦ παῖδες ῾Ελλήνων ἴτε
> ἐλευθεροῦτε πατρίδ', ἐλευθεροῦτε δὲ
> παῖδας, γυναῖκας, θεῶν τε πατρῴων ἕδη,
> θήκας τε προγόνων. νῦν ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀγών.'
>
> *Oh sons of the Greeks, advance! Liberate your fatherland, liberate your children and your wives, the temples of your ancestral gods, the tombs of your forebears. Now is the contest which decides all!* (402-5)

The description of the actual battle is, however, restrained and brief (408-28). Broadhead comments "*there must have been many details that would interpret a Greek audience and flatter its pride*".(pxviii) However by now the events of the battle would have been common knowledge to the audience and no doubt a play simply concerned with celebrating the Greek victory would have been regarded as rather mundane by this stage. Glorification of Greece does not seem to have been Aeschylus' primary aim and would have been neither dramatically appropriate nor emotionally effective in the *Persae*, for as we shall see later, Aeschylus' main aim in the drama was not flattery of his fellow-Athenians but a promotion of

the idea that the Persian threat was truly over.

C) The audience and the Drama

a) Audience Expectations

The audience cannot have been certain which characters would appear on stage during the *Persae* but when it became clear that the drama was set in the Persian court of Susa and would portray events surrounding the Battle of Salamis[17], they may have anticipated the appearance of their hated enemy Xerxes at some stage of the action[18]. The theme of Xerxes' return is introduced early in the play when the chorus expresses fears ἀμφὶ δὲ νόστῳ τῷ βασιλείῳ "*about the return of the king*" (8) and his entrance becomes a focal point of the drama, anticipated by the messenger, the Queen and Darius. In fact his arrival is delayed for a considerable length of time and Xerxes makes his entrance at line 908, at an even later stage than Agamemnon in the *Oresteia*[19]. Thus the moment of the king's return may provide a considerable source of suspense for the audience and references to Xerxes' clothing, which begin at 198-9, will fuel their interest about what he will wear and how he will react to his recent defeat.

It seems likely that the appearance of Darius came as a great surprise to the audience (see below) and the participation of the Queen also may not have been foreseen, although we cannot tell

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[17]Either from the Proagon or when the play began - see General Introduction.

[18]The manner of Xerxes' appearance in the Salamis play of Phrynichus, if this occurred, will also have influenced their expectations in this matter.

[19]Here, as there, details of the recent battle are discussed in advance allowing the poet to concentrate dramatic attention on other matters when the king arrives on stage.

whether either of these characters featured in Phrynichus. We do not know if the audience knew anything about the real Persian Queen but this is perhaps unlikely for her identity is stressed on her entrance (150-2, 155-7) and she remains unnamed throughout the play. Broadhead finds her presence in the play superfluous and suggests that the chorus could easily have fulfilled her role (pxxvi). However the Queen plays an important role in the drama and the sympathies of the audience will be greatly influenced by the sight of the eager mother awaiting the safe return of her son. While the chorus represents the Persian people and concentrates on the hardship caused by the great disaster, the Queen displays a personal and sympathetic attitude towards Xerxes. Thus the audience are encouraged to view their enemy through his mother's eyes which may be a novel experience and they will gain the impression that Xerxes' attack on Greece has had an adverse effect not only on the Persian state but also on his own immediate dynastic family.

From the beginning of the play, the audience will await the arrival of bad news at the Persian court and this is prepared for at a very early stage (14ff). When a messenger is seen running up, they will suspect that the revelation of defeat is imminent. The chorus cries:

> ἀλλ' ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν τάχ' εἴσῃ πάντα νημερτῆ λόγον.
> τοῦδε γὰρ δράμημα φωτὸς Περσικὸν πρέπει μαθεῖν,
> καὶ φέρει σαφές τι πρᾶγος ἐσθλὸν ἢ κακὸν κλύειν.
>
> *But I think you will soon know the whole story clearly, for the running style of this man is plain to understand as Persian and he brings clear news for all to hear, be it good or bad* (246-248)

Many have wondered why the messenger is specifically described as running like a Persian and some believe that oriental

messengers were distinguished by their greater speed[20]. However the mention of the messenger's nationality just before he gives a report on Salamis may be included as a reminder to the audience that they are about to hear an account of the war from the enemy viewpoint and that this will contrast strongly with their own conception of it.

Thus the audience will witness the reaction of the Persians to the news of Salamis with great interest as the news which was so welcome to themselves is presented to their defeated enemy. Initially the messenger speaks to the chorus rather than to the Queen, as does Darius later, which Broadhead regards as an archaism, reflecting the fact that the second actor was still new and that earlier choruses had played a more active role - "*is it not strange that such an important personage should thus stand by like a* κωφὸν πρόσωπον?" (pxli). However we should remember that the chorus of aged Persians are regents of the land in the absence of the king (4) and that it is natural for news of the war to be brought to them first. The Queen remains a private citizen and the audience would have approved of her modest attitude far more than that of Clytemnestra who takes what would have been regarded as an unnatural interest in the affairs of Argos. The Queen explains that she was shocked into silence at the news (290-2) and then assumes the role of interlocutor[21]. Broadhead complains that "*the Queen does little else but ask questions*" (p105) but it is common in tragedy for messengers to deliver their news with few interruptions. In addition it is important that the Queen is present to hear this news for while the chorus reflects the

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[20]See Broadhead p94 - he quotes Bothe who suggests that this phrase is a cruel comment on the swiftness of the Persian retreat.

[21]If the chorus echoed the action by their movements - see General Introduction - it would be a good opportunity to represent the effect of the defeat on the Persian people in visual terms as the messenger and Queen are speaking.

reactions of the Persian people, her greatest concern is for the personal safety of her son. The national and political effects of the defeat are thus juxtaposed with the mother's fear for Xerxes' safe return and his future as ruler of the land. Since the audience knows that the historical Xerxes returned to Persia safely, there is little dramatic point in Aeschylus exploiting the possibility that he has died in battle and the Queen's concern for her son prepares the audience to anticipate his imminent return.

b) The Queen's Exit

The Queen's failure to return and greet her son at the end of the play has provoked much discussion among scholars. After hearing the news of Salamis, she declares that she will go to the palace and return with offerings (523-4), giving clear instructions to the chorus as she departs:

> καὶ παῖδ', ἐάν περ δεῦρ' ἐμοῦ πρόσθεν μόλῃ,
> παρηγορεῖτε, καὶ προπέμπετ' ἐς δόμους,
> μὴ καί τι πρὸς κακοῖσι προσθῆται κακόν.
>
> *And, as for my son, if he comes here before me, comfort him and escort him to the palace, so that misfortune should not be added to misfortune* (529-31)

Since Xerxes' entrance does not occur for another 400 lines, Taplin regarded the inclusion of this phrase here as "*a confusing and inconsequential counter-preparation for meagre dramatic ends*" (p96) while Broadhead demands "*why raise an expectation that is not fulfilled?*" (pxxxix) and Ley wished to omit them altogether as an actor's interpolation (p170). It is generally agreed that these lines should be transposed to precede the Queen's second (and final) exit at 851, where she declares:

> ἀλλ' εἶμι, καὶ λαβοῦσα κόσμον ἐκ δόμων
> ὑπαντιάζειν παῖδ' ἐμὸν πειράσομαι.
> οὐ γὰρ τὰ φίλτατ' ἐν κακοῖς προδώσομεν
>
> *But I will go and bringing fine clothes from the palace will try to meet my son. I will not desert my*

dearest in misfortune (849-51)

If lines 529-31 (quoted above) were spoken at this point, then, as Taplin notes "*the insignificant and confusing counter-preparation is removed from the earlier exit while alleviating the problem of the queen's failure to return after her second exit*" (p 8). Nevertheless there have been strong hints that the Queen will return to greet Xerxes herself, possibly after he has been welcomed initially by the chorus, and the audience may anticipate the reunion between mother and son on stage. The ghost of Darius also foresees this event, stressing to his wife that she should meet Xerxes in person and ensure that he is redressed in fine clothes:

> σὺ δ', ὦ γεραιὰ μῆτηρ ἡ Ξέρξου φίλη,
> ἐλθοῦσ' ἐς οἴκους κόσμον ὅστις εὐπρεπὴς
> λαβοῦσ' ὑπαντίαζε παῖδα...
> ἀλλ' αὐτὸν εὐφρόνως σὺ πράυνον λόγοις.
> μόνης γάρ, οἶδα, σοῦ κλύων ἀνεξέται.

> *You, oh beloved aged mother of Xerxes, go to the palace and, taking whatever vestments which are seemly, greet your son... You affectionately comfort him with your words for to you alone, I know, will he endure to listen* (832-4, 837-8)

Thus the audience will anticipate a meeting between these two characters but in fact, having uttered these lines, the Queen leaves the stage never to reappear. Broadhead suggests that there must have been "*some personal reason for the Queen's change* (of intention about meeting her son with fresh clothes), *not that it should be merely a sign-post for the spectators*".(p143) However the action of the play has no independent existence beyond what the audience perceives and everything is included solely for their benefit. He further suggests that lines 529-31 are "*put into the queen's mouth by way of characterization; they reveal her practical nature and her maternal solicitude*" (pxxxvii). However no doubt these strong intimations that the Queen would comfort Xerxes on his return are included in order to stress his complete

isolation at the end of the play[22] and the audience will witness how the desire of Xerxes' family that he be reclothed in his former finery is thwarted. It is possible that a fond reunion between Xerxes and his mother had featured in the play by Phrynichus and that Aeschylus is alluding to this in order to mark his own divergence from the earlier version. Thus, far from receiving the anticipated words of comfort from his mother, Xerxes is escorted from the stage friendless and in tatters, with the criticism of the people ringing in his ears.

D) Darius

While the audience may be anticipating the arrival of Xerxes on stage, instead they are suddenly presented with the startling appearance of the ghost of Darius above his tomb. This must have produced a spectacular effect in the theatre and provided an impressive climax to the invocation, no doubt marking a complete divergence from the version by Phrynichus. The presentation of the former Persian king allows Aeschylus to place the defeat at Salamis in a wider historical context and also to depict the father's attitude to his son's actions[23]. The invocation scene must have had a great visual impact upon the audience and they may have recognized elements drawn from hero worship as well as the normal tendence of the dead[24]. These two cults were similar and involved the tending of tombs with blood sacrifices, food offerings, libations and weeping on the supposition that the deceased were present at the tomb and capable of influencing the world of the living. Hero-cult differed from normal tendence of

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[22]Orestes is similarly abandoned in the *Choephori*.

[23]Note that it was Darius who advised the expedition against Greece in Herodotus.

[24]See Burkert *Greek Religion* p194ff.

the dead in that it took the form of worship at the tombs of famous individuals and was not confined to the relatives of the deceased. According to Burkert (p203) there had been a cult of Agamemnon in Mycenae and Sparta since the last quarter of the eighth century and it would be natural for the audience to assume that the Persians honoured their own rulers in this way. The consultation of the spirits of the dead for advice occurs in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus converses with Tiresias, having performed an elaborate ritual[25]. The Homeric ghosts must drink the offerings before being able to speak to the living but there is no indication that Darius follows that procedure here. The audience's perception of this scene will be influenced by their own experiences rather than any literary version and any anomalies will be regarded as a consequence of either the dramatic context or the oriental setting (see below).

Michelini states that "*the choice of a ghostly narrator is a bold dramatic innovation*" (p129) and believes that the location and costume of Darius is described in such detail because the audience would have great difficulty in accepting his sudden appearance. We noted above that the ghost of Darius probably did not feature in Phrynichus and indeed representatives of the dead may have been considered more likely to appear in mythical rather than historical drama. In later Aeschylean tragedy, ghosts reveal themselves to the living only in dreams[26] and indeed Darius himself has already featured in the Queen's dream here. A similar invocation occurs in the *Choephori* at the tomb of Agamemnon where the pleas of the living fail to produce a ghost and so, if this sudden manifestation of Darius was unprecedented in the theatre,

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[25] See Broadhead Appendix 3A.

[26] Agamemnon's ghost appears to his wife as a snake in the *Choephori* and Clytemnestra herself, although she may not have appeared on stage (see below), speaks to the Erinyes as they sleep.

it would have made an immense impression on the audience.

However, unfortunately, we cannot be certain that Darius was the first tragic ghost to appear on stage and the audience may have been prepared for the possibility of his appearance by their experience of ghosts in earlier tragedies which have not survived (Aeschylus himself wrote a play called "*Psychagogoi*" "*the Spirit-raisers*". Broadhead complains that the invocation of Darius is introduced too abruptly but in fact the kommos in the *Choephori* occurs equally unannounced. The sudden introduction of the summoning of the spirit of Darius may suggest either that it came as a complete surprise to the audience or that Aeschylus wished to divert attention away from the tomb and the possible appearance of a ghost for as long as possible.

Even if ghosts were a relatively familiar feature in drama however, there is no guarantee that the invocation of Darius will prove successful, especially since in the *Choephori* Agamemnon fails to appear, despite the insistent pleas of the living[27]. It is most unfortunate that we cannot tell whether the appearance of Darius here or the non-appearance of Agamemnon there were the greater surprise to the audience, although the oriental setting may have prepared them for the portrayal of less orthodox events. Darius himself hints that his passage was difficult and not possible for everyone:

> ἐστὶ δ' οὐκ εὐέξοδον,
> ἄλλως τε πάντως χοἰ κατὰ χθονὸς θεοὶ
> λαβεῖν ἀμείνους εἰσὶν ἢ μεθιέναι.
> ὅμως δ' ἐκείνοις ἐνδυναστεύσας ἐγὼ
> ἥκω.

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[27] ἐς φάος μολών "*coming to the light*" 459, ὦ γαῖ', ἄνες μοι πατέρ' "*Oh Earth, send up my father*" 489, ἆρ' ἐξεγείρῃ τοῖσδ' ὀνείδεσιν, πάτερ; ἆρ' ὀρθὸν αἴρεις φίλτατον τὸ σὸν κάρα " *Are you not raised up by these taunts, father? Do you not raise up your dearest head?*" 495–6.

> *It is by no means an easy escape especially since the gods beneath the earth are better at receiving than letting go. Nevertheless I have come here since I have gained some influence among them* (688-92)

This seems to suggest that, as in the case of Polydorus in Euripides' *Hecuba*, ghosts of royal birth have a greater chance of returning to earth. However King Agamemnon fails to appear at his tomb in the *Choephori* and so high status is no guarantee of success. If Darius really were the first dramatic ghost to appear on stage, the audience may suspect that it is his skill at persuasion, possibly combined with the oriental setting, rather than his royal status that makes this possible, or perhaps the question of how the ghost may appear would have been considered of very little interest, being overshadowed by his spectacular arrival itself.

We may imagine that the evocation of Darius was accompanied by an elaborate and impressive choreography, culminating in the appearance of the ghost and the abrupt silencing and prostration of the chorus. Whether or not the audience expected Darius to appear in person, the amazed reaction of the chorus of elders will enhance the impact of the apparition. The ghost declares στένει, κέκοπται, καὶ χαράσσεται πέδον "*the ground groans and is cut and furrowed*" (683) which suggests that the invocation has involved beating or stamping on the ground, while a passage from the "*Frogs*" suggests that clapping and lamentation formed part of the ritual - "*Indeed I rejoiced when I heard the lament for dead Darius and at once the chorus clapped their hands and cried alas!*" (1028-9). Headlam does not believe that the chorus danced during this scene or indeed elsewhere (p58) - "*imagine these aged venerable men skipping and scoring the ground with their old hooves*" - but no doubt both the invocation and the final lament would have been complemented by an elaborate choreography. The function of any chorus is to emphasize and reflect the meaning of the drama through dance, mime and gesture and it is unlikely that

one representing elders did this less proficiently than any other.

This loud invocation is suddenly silenced by the appearance of the king above his tomb. We do not know exactly how this effect was stage-managed but it seems likely that the actor either ascended into view from behind a mound or emerged onto the stage from an underground passage[28].

Even if ghosts were possible within the conventions of tragedy, we do not know whether their appearance were common enough for the audience to have held specific expectations about their behavior. Hickman fails to find any clear rules governing "ghostly etiquette" in tragedy - "*dramatic ghosts have a way of adapting themselves and their actions to the whim and fancy of their respective authors*" (p218) and we see that the ghost of Clytemnestra in the *Oresteia* for example, differs greatly from Darius here. Nevertheless it may have been more common for ghosts to offer useful advice with benevolent intention and no doubt the audience will attend to the utterances of Darius with great interest.

E) Xerxes' Entrance

Michelini claims "*the Dareios episode is the play's crowning event, overshadowing and displacing the ending scene with Xerxes*". This seems most unlikely however and no doubt the audience will regard the ghost scene as an important element in the preparation for the entrance of the defeated king and the emotional climax of the lament. Gagarin believes that neither Darius nor Xerxes is the central focus of the play but that they both portray important

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[28]See Taplin p116ff who notes in this context the fragmentary Attic red-figure hydria dated 480-450 (Pickard-Cambrige p182f and figure 36) which shows an oriental king rising from a burning pyre. As we noted above, this probably does not represent Darius.

aspects of the Persian defeat. On the contrary,the audience will be chiefly interested in the latter, their own particular enemy, and his appearance is delayed while they witness his actions being severely condemned by all on stage. No doubt they would have watched with interest to see how Xerxes himself had been affected by this terrible defeat.

The harshest condemnation of the invasion of Greece comes from Darius, Xerxes' father and former ruler of the Persian empire. The audience would remember him as the leader of the Persians in the time of their fathers and his appearance in the drama in the form of a ghost is a brilliant dramatic device. Darius pitied his son in the Queen's dream but on stage he strongly condemns his actions, lamenting the great sorrow he has inflicted upon the Persians. He regards Xerxes' bridging of the Hellespont as sacrilegious (749-50) and condemns the desecration of Athenian shrines and temples (809-12), the ruins of which would have been a familiar sight to the audience. In addition, by introducing the ghost of Darius, Aeschylus is able to include a prediction about Platea:

> τόσος γὰρ ἔσται πέλανος αἱματοσφαγὴς
> πρὸς γῇ Πλαταιῶν Δωρίδος λόγχης ὕπο
> θῖνες νεκρῶν δὲ καὶ τριτοσπόρῳ γονῇ
> ἄφωνα σημανοῦσιν ὄμμασιν βροτῶν
> ὡς οὐχ ὑπέρφευ θνητὸν ὄντα χρὴ φρονεῖν.

> *So great will be the clotted gore of bloodshed in the land of Platea beneath the Dorian spear. And heaps of corpses will show without words to the eyes of all, even to the third generation, how one who is mortal should not be arrogant of thought* (816-820)

Darius declares that he is able to make this prediction of harsh defeat because of an oracle (800-2) and Spring believes that this must have been referred to in the previous drama (p159). However there is no evidence to suggest that the *Persae* was

connected to the other plays of the trilogy[29]. Sidgwick regards Darius' sudden understanding of the situation as a sign of Aeschylus' inexperience (px) but surely it is natural for the meaning of the oracle to suddenly become clear once he learns of Salamis[30]. Thus the oracle is used as an effective dramatic device to enable Darius to remain ignorant about the present while still able to predict the future.

The ghost lists all former Persian kings and concludes:

> ἅπαντες ἡμεῖς, οἱ κράτη τάδ' ἔσχομεν,
> οὐκ ἂν φανεῖμεν πήματ' ἔρξαντες τόσα.
>
> *All of us who ruled this empire cannot be shown to have caused such sorrows* (785-6)

Thus Xerxes receives harsh criticism from his father and is shown to be out of harmony with all previous rulers of Persia for the purposes of the drama. He is further isolated by the fact that most of his contemporaries lie dead, as the messenger reveals:

> εὖ γὰρ τόδ' ἴσθι, μηδάμ' ἡμέρᾳ μιᾷ
> πλῆθος τοσουτάριθμον ἀνθρώπων θανεῖν.
>
> *Know well, that never on a single day died such a great number of men* (431-2)

He proceeds to name countless lost Persian leaders which suggests the terrible effect of the defeat upon Persia and stresses Xerxes' isolation as the sole survivor of his generation. The Queen reiterates this idea:

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[29] See Broadhead plv-lx for a discussion of these.

[30] The oracle in the *Septem* was probably discussed earlier in the trilogy - see Chapter Two - but there seems to be no necessity for this here.

μονάδα δὲ Ξέρξην ἔρημόν φασιν οὐ πολλῶν μέτα

Xerxes alone (has survived) and they say he is destitute with a few followers only (734)

The chorus reveals that Xerxes will find no support among the older generation either as they contrast his rule most unfavourably with that of Darius (852-7, 861-3) and blame him fully for the disaster:

Ξέρξης μὲν ἄγαγεν, ποποῖ,
Ξέρξης δ' ἀπώλεσεν, τοτοῖ,
Ξέρξης δὲ πάντ' ἐπέσπε δυσφρόνως
βαρίδεσσι ποντίαις

Xerxes led them forth, alas! and Xerxes lost them, alas! and Xerxes managed everything foolishly with his ocean ships (550-3)

Thus Aeschylus skillfully creates the impression that the Persian attack on Greece was the sole responsibility of Xerxes and that this has alienated him from his fellow citizens, his father and all former rulers of Persia. The natural hatred of the audience for Persia will be focused on this one man and they would doubtless approve of this general condemnation of his invasion of Greece. The extended criticism of Xerxes' actions will also increase their interest in his long-awaited return as they wonder how he himself will react to the defeat - will he be humbled and accept his father's advice never to invade Greece again or will he stride onto the stage with arrogant pride, unbowed by circumstances? The latter course of action would surely have alienated the sympathies of the audience and in fact Xerxes appears greatly humbled, accepting full responsibility for the disaster, and mournful for the grief he has brought to his people:

ὅδ' ἐγών, οἰοῖ, αἰακτὸς
μέλεος γέννᾳ γᾷ τε πατρῴᾳ
κακὸν ἄρ' ἐγενόμαν.

Here I am, lamentable and wretched, born to be an evil curse on my descendants and fatherland (931-3)

His subdued manner makes the arrogant Persian king into a tragic figure as well as conveying the political message that the Persians no longer pose any threat to Greece, which as we shall see below may be the central message of the drama.

F) The Theme of Clothing

Let us review the visual aspect of the *Persae* and see how the movement of the drama is reflected by the use of costume. The Greeks despised the Persian taste for splendid clothes, so unlike their own plain style of dress[31], and they may have expected those on stage to display a great love of ostentation. We do not know if there were any attempt to symbolize the greater richness of Persian dress on stage and, if so, how this was achieved. A fragmentary Attic red-figure vase depicts a group of Persians dressed in flapped head-dresses, with tunics and trousers heavily patterned with black circles and lozenge-shapes, which Pickard-Cambridge believes represents, "*a relatively accurate account of theatrical Oriental costume*" (p183 and plate 36). However, although the presence of a flute-player suggests that this scene reflects some tragic subject, the king is visible only from the waist upwards being consumed on a flaming pyre. These flames must have been imagined by the audience if this scene were presented on stage (and a successful presentation seems unlikely) and the actors are shown without masks so why should we suppose that the oriental costumes are not also an artistic embellishment? This is probably not a scene from the *Persae* anyway, since it depicts a king rising from a pyre not a tomb and Taplin suggests that this shows offstage events and probably depicts Croseus.

[31]See Geddes p307-331 on Thuycidides 1.6.3-5.

(p118-9). The question of stage costume is discussed more fully in the general introduction but, as we discuss costume here, let us remember that greater importance may have been placed on verbal description and the imagination of the audience than a realistic display on stage.

The Queen's first entrance is full of pomp and splendour, confirming the audience's pre-conceptions about how an oriental monarch should look and behave. Her stress on the great wealth of the Persian dynasty[32] was probably reflected by a dignified and majestic entrance and the aged chorus prostrate themselves in a body before this apparition of grandeur - προσπίτνω (152). After the news of Salamis has been absorbed however, the Queen's subsequent entrance is of a very different nature:

> τοιγὰρ κέλευθον τήνδ' ἄνευ τ' ὀχημάτων
> χλιδῆς τε τῆς πάροιθεν ἐκ δόμων πάλιν
> ἔστειλα
>
> *I have set out from my home a second time without either chariot or* χλιδῆς *as before* (607-9)[33]

The visual impact of these respective entrances will be further emphasized by the fact that the chorus fails to prostrate themselves before the Queen on the second occasion. Taplin argues that the chariot is "*retrospectively important and demonstrative*" (p78) but in fact it is the Queen's more modest return which is striking and thrown into relief. The shedding of royal accessories is an important action for any Queen, particularly for a Persian one and this change to a more modest bearing was directly inspired by the arrival of the news from Salamis. No

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[32]χρυσεοστόλμους δόμους (159), μέγας πλοῦτος (163), χρημάτων πλῆθος (166), πλοῦτός (168)

[33]LSJ note that χλιδῆς may denote "*any sign of accessory or luxury*" and is used of clothing at Euripides' *Ion* 26.

doubt the audience would have approved of this new simplicity and modesty of bearing, which contrasts so strongly with the Persian extravagance which they so despised, and this modification will surely increase their sympathy for the Persian dynasty.

In a similar manner, Xerxes enters the stage dressed, not as the mighty ruler of the Persian empire, but in garments torn to tatters by his own hand in reaction to the terrible defeat at Salamis. The Queen's dream foretold that he would act in this manner and the messenger confirms that this is so (ῥήξας δὲ πέπλους 468). Darius reveals that Xerxes still wears these same garments:

> παντὶ γὰρ
> κακῶν ὑπ' ἄλγους λακίδες ἀμφὶ σώματι
> στημορραγοῦσι ποικίλων ἐσθημάτων.
>
> *For because of grief at his misfortune, all around his body tatters of his embroidered robes are hanging in shreds* (834-6)

Gow believes that Aeschylus mentioned only the Persian shoe and tiara of Darius (662) in order to allow his choregus great freedom with regard to Darius' costume (p151), which may be true, but in fact we know little about what he wore on stage (see General Introduction). He bids his wife to ensure that Xerxes is reclothed on his return and the Queen shares his horror that their son should appear still dressed in his tattered robes:

> μάλιστα δ' ἥδε συμφορὰ δάκνει,
> ἀτιμίαν γε παιδὸς ἀμφὶ σώματι
> ἐσθημάτων κλύουσαν, ἥ νιν ἀμπέχει.
> ἀλλ' εἶμι, καὶ λαβοῦσα
> κόσμον ἐκ δόμων...
>
> *This is the misfortune that wounds me most of all, to hear of the dishonoured garments around the body of my son which envelop him. But I will go and fetch fine clothes from the house...* (846-49)

Many have found this concern for Xerxes' appearance in the

face of defeat rather ridiculous. Richardson believes that the drama conveys an oriental Queen mother's concern for clothes "*exaggerated a little, perhaps, by the poet for satiric effect*" (p60) while Sidgwick regarded it as "*a satire on the ways of Oriental royalties*" (p49). However the appearance of Xerxes, the mighty Persian king, dressed in tattered robes as a symbol of his great personal grief, must have been a highly serious image of the devastating effect of Salamis on the king and his people. It has been suggested that Xerxes has already met the Queen offstage and enters in finery[34] but why then, Craig asks (p101), would he have retained his empty quiver (1020)? Avery (p182) believes that Xerxes dons fresh clothes on stage during the final scene, brought by the silent Queen or an attendant, and that this is why he assumes greater authority from line 1038 onwards. However even so the Queen would then fail in her stated task to speak words of comfort to her son on his return and it seems much more likely that Xerxes was neither comforted nor reclothed on his return as his parents wished. The whole question of the reclothing of Xerxes may be an allusion to events in the play by Phrynichus and mark Aeschylus' divergence from the earlier version.

The tearing of one's garments as a sign of intense grief is highly symbolic of the Greek defeat upon Persia. The chorus predicts that many women will tear their veils at the news (537-8) and at the end of the play Xerxes bids the chorus to rend their garments and join him in his ragged state - πέπλον δ' ἔρεικε κολπίαν ἀκμῇ χερῶν "*tear your billowing robes with your fingers*" (1060). The final lament and sad procession offstage, shared by Xerxes and his people in mutual grief, will contrast visually with the great awe and respect shown to the former king. Earlier in the drama, the Queen has reminded the audience that in Persia,

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[34]The phrase τὸ λοιπὸν τόδε τᾶς ἐμᾶς στολᾶς 1018 would then refer to his depleted band of followers.

unlike democratic Athens where every general or holder of public office was answerable for their actions, Xerxes cannot be called to account by his subjects:

> οὐχ ὑπεύθυνος πόλει,
> σωθεὶς δ' ὁμοίως τῆσδε κοιρανεῖ χθονος
>
> *He is not answerable to the state. If he survives he remains ruler of this land as before* (213-14)

When Darius entered however, the chorus fell to the ground in a body:

> σέβομαι μὲν προσιδέσθαι,
> σέβομαι δ' ἀντία λέξαι
> σέθεν ἀρχαίῳ περὶ τάρβει.
>
> *I fear to look at you, I fear to speak to you face to face, through ancient dread of you* (694-6)

This sudden mass prostration would be visibly impressive in the theatre and illustrate the well-known respect held by the Persians for their rulers which the Greeks regarded as excessively servile. Sider believes that this would call to mind the recent defeat of the Persians in battle (p190) while Couch (p316) links this to the Persian prostration in terror when they discover that the flight north is blocked προσκυνῶν (499). I believe rather that this falling to the ground is echoed in the final scene of the play where the chorus makes no obeisance but it is Xerxes himself who falls to the ground - λέλυται γὰρ ἐμοὶ γυίων ῥώμη "*the strength of my knees is relaxed*" (913). He may even have prostrated himself on the ground in order to stress the contrast between this scene and the former obeisance made by the chorus before the Queen and Darius, rising to his feet again at line 1020 in order to reveal his tattered clothing and prepare for the final procession off stage. Thus the attitude of the chorus here will be in sharp contrast to their awed respect for Darius and the Queen on her first appearance and there will be a sense of greater equality between ruler and subjects.

Thus Persian love of fine clothes is seen to be deeply affected by the recent defeat and the audience will no doubt approve of the move towards greater modesty and equality on the part of the Queen and the chorus, which will contrast with their usual prejudice against Persian arrogance, and even Xerxes fails to regain his former fine clothing. Adams regards the lament as a "*miniature satyr-play...lighter in mood and thinner in content*" (p53) but while a bare reading of the text is rather ineffective, much of the power of this scene would arise from the visual and musical content and it would have been powerfully effective in the theatre and provide a marvellous climax to the depiction of the effect of the defeat on Persia. Sidgwick complains that in the last scene "*there is no surprise or unexpected event*" (pix) but on the contrary the sight of the mighty Persian monarch in tatters, humbled and prostrate on the ground, would be a highly striking image of the Persian defeat.

G) Conclusion

a) Athens and Persia

The *Persae* presents a picture of the Persian court at Susa seen through Athenian eyes and Hall has produced an excellent study of the way the Greeks sought to establish their own national identity by stressing the difference between themselves and barbarians - "*portrayal of the enemy has thus become self-definition and self-praise*" (p100). Aeschylus attempts to reflect the "foreignness" of his setting in various ways. Excessive Persian wealth is suggested at an early stage (πολυχρύσων ἑδράνων 3-4, πολυχρύσου 9) but, as with costume, we do not know how far this was presented realistically and how much was left to the audience's imagination (see General Introduction). The chorus reflects Persian servility towards their king and, although Gow denies that there is any ruler worship in the play,

the Queen is called θεοῦ μὲν εὐνάτειρα Περσῶν, θεοῦ δὲ καὶ μήτηρ ἔφυς "*consort of the Persian god, born the mother of a god*" (157). The elders prostrate themselves at her first entrance (προσπίτνω 152) just as they fall to the ground before the ghost of Darius, full of respect and fear (694-6). We saw in the previous section how these two Persian characteristics - the love of fine clothes and servility to rulers - are modified in the final scene of the play and the audience would surely approve of this move towards greater equality.

The lists of names of Persian leaders adds an oriental flavour to the drama (20-32, 302-330 and 955-1001). Aeschylus includes Ionic words and forms (see Headlam p189ff and Broadhead pxxx), and refers to the Greeks as Ἰάονες or Ἰάνες, as they were known to foreigners, and Hall suggests that the oriental flavour of this play was reflected by Aeschylus' choice of music and metre (p82). However these oriental touches are combined with Greek elements, for the Persians constantly refer to themselves as barbarians (187, 434, 475, 337, 391, 423, 635, 798) and worship Greek gods. This amalgamation of the two cultures will not affect the audience's appreciation of the play and the picture of Persian life would have been both acceptable and convincing within the dramatic framework. Gow suggests that "*Aeschylus and his audience knew, at least by hearsay, a great deal more about Persia and Persians than we are ever likely to know*" (p133) and indeed Hecataeus' geographical *Periegesis*, produced some twenty-five years before the *Persae* may have provided much of this background material (although there is no direct link between any surviving fragment of this work and the *Persae*, it is generally believed to have influenced Aeschylus' geography in the Beacon-speech of the *Agamemnon*[35] and so may had considerable influence on the general geographical ideas held by the fifth century audience). Thus

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[35]See Hall p75.

while the factual value of Aeschylus' presentation of Persia and the Persian way of life may be doubted, we may assume that it reflected the common conceptions and prejudices of his day.

Before the news of Salamis arrives, the Queen asks "ποῦ τὰς Ἀθήνας φασὶν ἱδρῦσθαι;" "*In what land do you say the Athenians live?*" (231). This sudden "tragic ignorance" acts as a useful device to facilitate the inclusion of details about Athens and a discussion of Athenian government by their enemy is highly effective at this point. It is unlikely that the audience would have found this type of inquiry ridiculous and in fact it has a literary precedent in Homer when, after ten years of fighting, Helen is requested to point out the enemy leaders to Priam (*Iliad* 3 161ff). This discussion between Queen and chorus on the nature of Athenian rule is enhanced by the fact that the audience anticipates the imminent arrival of news from Salamis:

Ατ. τίς δὲ ποιμάνωρ ἔπεστι κἀπιδεσπόζει στρατῷ;
Χο. οὔτινος δοῦλοι κέκληνται φωτὸς οὐδ' ὑπήκοοι.
Ατ. πῶς ἂν οὖν μένοιεν ἄνδρας πολεμίους ἐπήλυδας;
Χο. ὥστε Δαρείου πολύν τε καὶ καλὸν φθεῖραι στρατόν.

Queen *Who is their leader and commander of the army?*
Chorus *They are called the slave of none and are subject to no one person.*
Queen *How then can they endure the attack of a foreign enemy?*
Chorus *So well that they destroyed the fine mighty army of Darius* (241-4)

However although Athenian pride in this victory must have been great, it is now some eight years after the war and the theme of self-glorification must have been regarded as rather predictable by this stage. The power of the drama surely lies in Aeschylus' attempt to present the war through Persian eyes (as Phrynichus seems to have done) and invite Greek sympathy for their plight.

Sidgwick suggests that Aeschylus fails in his depiction of the Persians when it comes to their flattering regard for Athens - "*this matters less, since at the time the play was addressed to the whole of Athens assembled in one place, and every subsequent reader has been on the Athenian side*" (pxi). Likewise Broadhead suggests that details of the Persian sack of Athens are minimized in the drama because this "*would not be relished by an Athenian audience - and, after all, Aeschylus had to bear their feelings in mind*" (p118). However it is natural that Aeschylus should present the material in a way which might find favour with the Athenians, since his drama was designed to be performed at the Greater Dionysia in Athens, and I believe that he was remarkably successful in presenting the Battle of Salamis from the point of view of the Persian enemy.

Aeschylus creates the impression that Persia is no longer to be regarded as a threat. Most of the young men are dead - τὰς ὠγυγίους κατιδόντες, στυγνὰς Ἀθάνας "*having seen hateful Athens*" (975-6) - and Platea will kill the rest. In answer to their request for advice, Darius warns his people:

> εἰ μὴ στρατεύοισθ' ἐς τὸν Ἑλλήνων τόπον,
> μηδ' εἰ στράτευμα πλεῖον ᾖ τὸ Μηδικόν
>
> *(You will find good fortune) if you do not make any expeditions into Greece, not even if the Persian army is greater in number* (790-1)

Before descending, he declares - μέμνησθ' Ἀθηνῶν Ἑλλάδος τε - "*remember Athens and Greece*" (824)[36] which may relate to an anecdote told by Herodotus whereby Darius had a servant repeat to him thrice daily at dinner the words δέσποτα, μέμνεο τῶν Ἀθηναίων "*master, remember the Athenians*" (V 105). Thus while in

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[36]Compare also the earlier phrase of the messenger τῶν Ἀθηνῶν ὡς στένω μεμνημένος "*how I groan when I remember the Athenians*" at 285.

Herodotus, Darius wishes to be reminded to punish the Greeks, in the *Persae* Darius warns Xerxes to remember not to attack them and it may be that Aeschylus has modified a familiar anecdote here in order to emphasize the idea that the Persian threat is truly at an end. Xerxes was still on the throne in 472 and the Greeks cannot have predicted the future, especially since the Persians took ten years to return to Greece after Marathon. In fact the Battle of Eurymedon lay 4-5 years in the future. Nevertheless the drama suggests that Xerxes was an aberration, an impetuous youth who made a dreadful mistake and his people will not support further attacks on Greece. Anderson notes of Darius that "*giving advice is hardly his most important function*" (p2) but surely his declaration that the Persians should never again make an attack on Greece will have an important influence on the audience's conception of the drama. Had either Darius or Xerxes given the slightest hint of a desire for revenge the whole mood of the play would have been very different. All blame is focused on Xerxes himself, who humbly accepts his father's advice to make no more attacks, and his citizens are portrayed as the victims of his folly.

Thus the audience are invited to have enough confidence that the threat is now at an end to pity the defeated Persians. Broadhead believes that the audience would feel no pity at all for '*the discomfiture and humiliation of the arrogant monarch who had attempted to reduce them to slavery*' (pxvi) but this certainly seems to have been Aeschylus' aim. In the *Frogs*, Aeschylus says:

> εἶτα διδάξας Πέρσας μετὰ τοῦτ' ἐπιθυμεῖν ἐξεδίδαξα
> νικᾶν ἀεὶ τοὺς ἀντιπάλους, κοσμήσας ἔργον ἄριστον

> *Then when I produced the* Persae, *at the same time I taught (the audience) always to desire to conquer their enemy, and I composed a very fine work* (1026-7)

However the idea that Aeschylus intended to make the spectators more aggressive after seeing the play may be facetious,

for as we have seen he intended to convey the impression that the Persian threat was truly at an end and the audience may have the confidence to pity the effect of Salamis on the enemy. Xerxes was no mythical character but a Persian tyrant who had threatened the lives and liberties of those who attended the performance of the *Persae*. If Aeschylus has succeeded in gaining the sympathy of the Athenians for his plight and convincing them that Persia was no longer a threat, he has achieved a great deal indeed.

b) The Political Message of the *Persae*

It is often thought that Aeschylus' decision to base his play on the Battle of Salamis related in some way to Themistocles who had played an important role in this Athenian victory and who was facing a charge of medism when the tragedy was performed (he was subsequently ostracized and forced to flee Greece - see Bury and Meiggs p205-6). Podlecki comments "*the tragedy of Xerxes cannot be separated from the victory of Athens (and) Athens' victory was due mainly to the near-prophetic foresight and political manoeuvring of one man*" (p26). We have noted how the play promotes the idea that the Persians were utterly defeated and determined to launch no further attacks against Greece and so it may indeed have been designed to support Themistocles' policy of conciliation towards Persia.

Podlecki relates how in the decade after 480 a propaganda battle developed between Cimon, son of Miltiades, the hero of Marathon, and Themistocles, and how both parties enlisted the help of poets, painters and sculptors in order to promote the idea that either Marathon or Salamis was the greater victory (p13). Plutarch relates how Themistocles had been choregus for the political play by Phrynichus which was performed four years earlier, perhaps to mark the resumption of dramatic contests following the Persian invasion (*Themistocles* 5.4) which Forrest believes was "*at least supported by Themistocles in an attempt to*

shame the Athenians out of their appeasement policy of the mid-nineties" (p235). Thus the close similarity between this play and the *Persae* (see above) may itself suggest some support for Themistocles on the part of Aeschylus, and we should note that Pericles, who acted as choregus for the *Persae* (*IG* II2 2318,9), was also to adopt the strong naval policy of Themistocles later.

Aeschylus never names Themistocles during the *Persae* however and any possible reference to him is made very obliquely. Herodotus relates how Themistocles sent a slave to the Persian generals in secret with the false message that the disillusioned Greeks were planning immediate flight and that now was the time to escape (8.75). Aeschylus includes the idea that the Persians were tricked by a false message but he is careful to avoid crediting Themistocles with this idea:

> ἀνὴρ γὰρ Ἕλλην ἐξ Ἀθηναίων στρατοῦ
> ἐλθὼν ἔλεξε παιδὶ σῷ Ξέρξῃ τάδε
>
> *A Greek man from the Athenian army came and said to your son...* (355-6)

Likewise when the Persian chorus refers to the silver mines at Athens:

> ἀργύρου πηγή τις αὐτοῖς ἐστι, θησαυρὸς χθονός
>
> *They have a spring of silver, a treasure from the earth* (238)

they avoid any reference to Themistocles, who according to Herodotus (7.144) had been responsible for persuading the citizens to devote the revenue from these mines to the construction of two hundred warships which proved vital at Salamis. Thus if Aeschylus did intend that his drama should support Themistocles, his point is made very obliquely, perhaps through fear of alienating the

sympathies of certain factions of his audience[37]. The indirectness of this support for Themistocles makes it very difficult for us in the twentieth-century to be certain that it is present in the drama at all, and this very failure to mention any particular hero might be interpreted as an attempt to stress the fact that the victory was due to the efforts of the whole of the Greek army working together. However on balance I suspect that Aeschylus did indeed intend to support Themistocles through this drama and that this was his main inspiration in producing a play based on the recent war.

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Thus the *Persae* would have made a deep impression on its original audience in 472 and Aeschylus was awarded first prize for the trilogy to which it belonged. Allen suggests that timber from Persian ships captured at Salamis was used as supports for seating when the theatre was rebuilt after the devastation of 480-479 (p175), which would explain why such timber was available some thirty years later for the roof when Pericles restored the Odeum as Vitruvius claims (V 9). This is an attractive idea, especially since the play by Phrynichus about Salamis of 476 may have been the first production in the restored theatre. O'Neill notes that "*every reader of the* Persae *should keep in mind the clear possibility that if he had attended the performance he would have been sitting on seats made from Persian ship timber*" (p427) and this would surely have added greater immediacy to the drama. Whether this were the case or not, the *Persae* is a fine play with a deep message for each Athenian citizen in the audience, for it presents their hated enemy Xerxes in the role of a tragic hero brought low by a deserved fate and creates the impression that the Persian threat is now truly over.

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[37]See Chapter Eight on the political message at the end of the *Oresteia* which also seems to be presented with great ambiguity.

Chapter Two

Seven Against Thebes

A) The Trilogy

a) Introduction

During the *Septem*, Aeschylus invites his audience to imagine themselves within the city of Cadmeia as the citizens await the dreadful Argive attack. Thalmann comments that "*doubtless there were many, in that audience of 467BC who could remember vividly the urgency of the Persian threat, and who knew what it was like when one's native city was sacked*" (p38). Many in the audience will have had first-hand experience of military encounters and so any references to battles and fighting will have had a far greater immediacy for them than for the modern reader. Eteocles calmly delivers the prologue and receives the scout's report but then the scene is suddenly disrupted as the chorus of terrified women rushes in uttering wild shrieks of terror and prostrating themselves before the statues of the gods (181-6). The audience will appreciate the sudden change of mood from one of quiet control to panic and distress and no doubt this scene would have been enhanced in the theatre by spectacular movements and expressive stage-groupings. The audience cannot fail to be deeply moved by this wild excitement and an imaginative use of choreography will have reinforced the general mood of terror[1].

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[1]Athenaeus comments ᾿Αριστοκλῆς οὖν φησιν ὅτι Τελέστης ὁ Αἰσχύλου ὀρχηστὴς οὕτως ἦν τεχνίτης ὥστε ἐν τῷ ὀρχεῖσθαι τοὺς ῾Επτὰ ἐπὶ Θήβας φανερὰ ποιῆσαι τὰ πράγματα δι' ὀρχήσεως "*Aristocles therefore says that Telestes, Aeschylus' dancer, was so skillful that when he danced the* Seven Against Thebes *he made the action clear simply by dancing*" (1 22a), which suggests that dance may have made a major contribution to the original production of this drama.

The women give a vivid impression of the huge, menacing army waiting to attack:

> ποτᾶται, βρέμει δ' ἀμαχέτου δίκαν
> ὕδατος ὀροτύπου.
> ἰὼ ἰὼ θεοὶ θεαί τ' ὀρόμενον
> κακὸν ἀλεύσατε...
> κῦμα περὶ πτόλιν δοχμολόφων ἀνδρῶν
> καχλάζει πνοαῖς Ἄρεος ὀρόμενον.

> *(The army) hovers, it roars like a resistless torrent dashing down a mountain side! Oh gods and goddesses, avert this rising evil!...for around the city a wave of slanting-crested warriors is seething, aroused by the blast of war!* (85-88, 114-5)[2]

Thus the theme of the play, the Argive attack on Cadmeia, is established at the very beginning and the audience will wonder when this will occur and how it will be presented on the stage.

The idea that Cadmeia will withstand this attack was already an established part of the myth[3] and it will soon become clear to the audience that the dramatic action will concentrate on the attack by the Seven and not extend to the later sacking of the city by their sons. In fact Aeschylus takes pains to show that this future successful attack on Cadmeia lies beyond the scope of the drama for both Eteocles and Polynices are said to be ἀτέκνους "*childless*" (828) and the term τοῖς ἐπιγόνοις at 903, if indeed

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[2]Thalmann gives an excellent summary of the chorus' description of the approaching army - first they see only dust, then they hear the clash of weapons and the sound of roaring, next they see seven chieftains, the wave surrounds them, they hear the sounds of chariots and spears, stones hit the ramparts and shields rattle at the gates - see p89.

[3]See *Iliad* 4.372-409 where Sthenelus boasts that his generation, the epigoni, captured Thebes, and the fragments of the epic poem the *Epigoni* which also took this as its theme - the opening line is quoted at *Peace* 1270 νῦν αὖθ', ὁπλοτέρων ἀνδρῶν ἀρχώμεθα "*now let us begin with younger warriors...*"

genuine[4], probably refers to themselves as the descendants of Oedipus. In the description of the Seven preparing for battle and possible death, there is no mention of their sons but in fact they arrange for their spoils to be taken back to their parents should they die (49-50), not their sons who avenge their deaths in other versions[5]. It may be that the story of the second attack on Cadmeia by the epigoni had been added to the earlier myth shortly before Aeschylus and so the *Septem* may not have been the only version familiar to the audience to have excluded these later events. As the action of the trilogy proceeds, no doubt the second attack by the epigoni will be dismissed from the immediate thoughts of the audience[6].

Strongly suspecting that the city will withstand the attack, the audience will no doubt consider the great fears for the safety of Cadmeia, shared by both Eteocles and his citizens, as misdirected and slightly ironic. Their thoughts will be focused, not on the public threat to the city, but on the fated confrontation between Eteocles and Polynices in fulfillment of the curse, and they will no doubt wonder whether those on stage will reach a clearer appreciation of the situation and come to share their own perspective. From the outset of the play, their awareness that Eteocles will shortly die will influence their sympathies towards this character and his own ignorance of the future will provide a great source of pathos and suspense. He declares:

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[4]See below on the authenticity of the ending of this play.

[5]Dawe cites seven passages where the epigoni seem to be excluded - 734-8, 742-5, 812-3, 911-14, 955, 959-60, 1054-6. (p20)

[6]See Hutchinson p195-6 on the possibility that lines 749, 843 or 903 refer to the epigoni. This does not appear to be an explicit theme here and there are serious doubts about the authenticity of these final passages anyway.

μή νυν, ἐὰν θνῄσκοντας ἢ τετρωμένους
πύθησθε, κωκυτοῖσιν ἁρπαλίζετε.

Do not now, if you hear of men dying or wounded, receive the news with cries of woe (242-3)

The audience suspects that news of the king's own death will be reported to the citizens before the trilogy is ended and the central source of suspense in the drama will surely be the question whether he will come any closer to a realization of this fact beforehand, like Cassandra, or whether, like Agamemnon, he will exit to his death in ignorance.

The *Septem* is the third part of a connected trilogy and the expectations of the audience will have been deeply influenced by the content and presentation of the previous two plays, the *Laius* and the *Oidipous*. Hutchinson comments "*we must concentrate on the allusions in the Septem itself in considering the reactions of the audience during that play*" (pxxix) and indeed this is what we are compelled to do since the earlier dramas have not survived. However our ignorance of the preceding plays is a severe handicap to our appreciation of the *Septem* and we must acknowledge that the audience had a great advantage over us, particularly over the question of the presentation of the terms of Oedipus' curse and the reason for the attack of the Seven, as we shall see. Although we cannot hope to reconstruct these earlier plays with any confidence, let us begin by reviewing how the Oedipus myth had been presented up to the time of Aeschylus in the hope of gaining some general impression of what sort of things may have been presented or discussed in the preceding drama.

b) The Oedipus Myth

By the time of the *Septem* it seems that the Oedipus myth stretched at least from the oracle given to Laius down to the destruction of Cadmeia by the epigoni and so it already embraced a considerable amount of material. It was probably composed of several independent stories which were merged into a single whole

at various stages and so the audience may have known versions of the different myths in their earlier unrelated forms. This mythical knowledge will have had a great influence on their expectations of the drama and we shall attempt to discover how Aeschylus exploits these during the *Septem.*

The Odyssey provides the first reference to the fact that Oedipus killed his father and married his mother (xi.271-80), events which March calls "*unchanging and unchangeable, the two fixed points amid a wealth of variables*" (p121). It is related thus:

> μητέρα τ' Οἰδιπόδαο ἴδον, καλὴν Ἐπικάστην,
> ἣ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν ἀιδρείῃσι νόοιο,
> γημαμένη ᾧ υἷι· ὁ δ' ὃν πατέρ' ἐξεναρίξας
> γῆμεν· ἄφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν
> ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυηράτῳ ἄλγεα πάσχων
> Καδμείων ἤνασσε θεῶν ὀλοὰς διὰ βουλάς·
> ἡ δ' ἔβη εἰς Ἀίδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο,
> ἁψαμένη βρόχον αἰπὺν ἀφ' ὑψηλοῖο μελάθρου,
> ᾧ ἄχει σχομένη· τῷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω
> πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσι.
>
> *I saw the mother of Oidipous, beautiful Epikaste, who did a mighty thing in the ignorance of her mind when she married her son. He killed his father and married her. At once the gods made all known to mortals. He, suffering distress in beloved Thebes, continued to rule over the Kadmeians through the terrible designs of the gods but she went down to Hades the strong gate-keeper, fastening a noose from the high ceiling, in the constraint of her grief and she left behind to him many sorrows that arise from a mother's Erinyes* (*Odyssey* 11.271-80)

Here then we see the story of Oedipus at an early stage in its evolution when the incestuous union is not yet complicated by the production of children. By the time of the Theban Cycle however a second marriage of Oedipus is introduced into the story in order to accommodate the apparent existence of Oedipus' sons elsewhere in Homer, as Pausanias relates:

> παῖδας δὲ ἐξ αὐτῆς οὐ δοκῶ οἱ γενέσθαι, μάρτυρι Ὁμήρῳ χρώμενος...πῶς οὖν ἐποίησαν ἀνάπυστα ἄφαρ, εἰ δὴ

τέσσαρες ἐκ τῆς Ἐπικάστης ἐγένοντο παῖδες τῷ Οἰδίποδι. ἐξ Εὐρυγανείας δὲ τῆς Ὑπέρφαντος ἐγεγόνεσαν. δηλοῖ δὲ καὶ ὁ τὰ ἔπη ποιήσας ἃ Οἰδιπόδια ὀνομάζουσι.

But I do not think that (Oidipous) had children by (Epikaste) and I use Homer as my witness...for how could the gods have made it known "at once" if Epikaste had borne four children to Oidipous? The children were born of Euryganeia, daughter of Hyperphas. This is clear also from the author of the poem they call the Oidipodeia (ix.5.11)

March agrees that in the earlier myth, Oedipus' sons must have been the product of a second marriage and that this fact is not mentioned in the above Homeric passage (*Odyssey* 11.271-80) simply because it was of no relevance there. However a simpler and more convincing explanation is surely that although Eteocles and Polynices are referred to on several occasions in Homer, they were not yet known as sons of Oedipus at this early stage and the second marriage was introduced later purely to accommodate this development in the myth[7]. By the time of the *Septem* the brothers are the product of Oedipus' first marriage to his mother (752-6, 926-32) and so they have an incestuous relationship to their father. March believes that the question of incestuous offspring was introduced in the *Septem* - "*Aeschylus took the Oidipous legend as it had been handed down by earlier poets and recreated it*" (p145) - but it may be that Oedipus' mother and the bearer of his children had already been combined into a single woman prior to this. The mother of Eteocles and Polynices appears in the *Lille Stesichorus* attempting to reconcile her sons. The authorship of this fragment remains strictly unknown and there is no external evidence to suggest who composed it, although Parsons notes that the "*theme, manner, metre and dialect suit Stesichorus*"(p7) and we shall assume that the work is his[8]. However despite her

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[7]See also the Pherecydes fragment quoted below - *FGH* 3 F 95 - in which Oedipus begets two pairs of sons from different marriages.

[8]See Parsons for a full discussion - lines 201-233 are almost complete.

references to misfortunes, we cannot decide with any certainty whether the woman who speaks is also the mother of Oedipus or his second, unrelated wife. In fact neither the father nor mother of Polynices and Eteocles are named in our fragment and so it is even possible that this fragment reflects an earlier version of the myth about the brothers before it had any connection at all with Oedipus. The dispute over the kingdom occurs close to the beginning of the poem, so even if Oedipus has been mentioned, he cannot have been discussed at any great length, while if the prophecy about future strife replaces the father's curse in this version, it is possible that Oedipus was excluded altogether. Even if this is the case, the vast amount of lost evidence does not permit us to state with any certainty that the idea of incestuous birth was introduced by Aeschylus.

Even if the incestuous birth were not a completely new element however, the audience cannot have been sure beforehand that it would be included in this trilogy. March believes that the blinding of Oedipus was also introduced by Aeschylus and this is perhaps a little more likely, although the vast amount of lost material should make us cautious in these matters[9]. Little of the poetry of the Theban Cycle has survived and Proclus states that in the *Cypria* Nestor told Menelaus in a digression τὰ περὶ Οἰδίπουν "*the story of Oidipous*" of which we know nothing. March believes that the incestuous offspring and the blinding "*point to a deliberate reshaping by the tragedians of the myth as told by earlier poets*" (p138) but even if these are innovations, we should regard the evolution of the myth as a natural process and acknowledge that the stories underwent continual modifications with each new presentation on stage.

The epic poems of the Theban Cycle - the *Oidipodeia*, the

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[9]Aristotle at *Poetics* 1453a20-21 states that the life of Oedipus was one of the most popular themes among the tragedians - see General Introduction.

Thebais and the *Epigoni* - must have related the story in great detail and therefore have been a major influence upon popular conceptions of the myth. It is most unfortunate that very little of this important source survives which would have proved an invaluable help in assessing audience expectations during the trilogy. The single remaining fragment of the *Oidipodeia* preserves the earliest extant reference to the Sphinx:

> ἀλλ' ἔτι κάλλιστόν τε καὶ ἱμεροέστατον ἄλλων
> παῖδα φίλον Κρείοντος ἀμύμονος Αἵμονα δῖον
>
> *But then (the Sphinx) killed the finest and loveliest boy, dear son of blameless Creon, noble Haimon*[10]

It seems likely that the myth of the Sphinx had been merged with that of Oedipus at some stage and so the audience may have known earlier versions of both stories in their independent forms. Hesiod (*Theogony* 326-7) refers to the Sphinx as Καδμείοισιν ὄλεθρον "*destruction to the Kadmeians*" and she appears on vases from 530BC onwards, but we simply do not know when the connection with Oedipus was made and what Aeschylus himself contributed to this development. The chorus of the *Septem* relate how Oedipus τὰν ἁρπαξάνδραν κῆρ' ἀφελόντα χώρας "*rid the land of the man slaying-monster*" (776-7) but fails to mention whether this was by means of the riddle or merely by force. March suggests that force was used against the Sphinx in the earlier myth (p124) and indeed the riddle may have been introduced as a more sophisticated means of banishing the monster as the myth developed[11]. During the shield-scene, it is revealed that the Argive warrior Parthenopaeus bears a Sphinx upon his shield to symbolize his antagonism towards Cadmeia (539f). Hutchinson (p128) doubts that this is intended to remind the audience of Oedipus' defeat of the monster but on the contrary

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[10]Schol cod Mon 560 in Euripides' *Phoenissae* 1760 Schwartz

[11]It may even be post-Aeschylean.

no doubt the audience will recognize that this symbol has a great personal significance for Eteocles through its connection with his father and note a reference to the earlier action of the trilogy here[12].

The Argive attack on Cadmeia seems to have been the subject of the second poem of the Cycle, the *Thebais*, for it begins Ἄργος ἄειδε θεὰ πολυδίψιον ἔνθεν ἄνακτες... "*Sing goddess of very thirsty Argos whence lords...*". In this poem we find the first reference to Oedipus' cursing of his sons[13] and we shall discuss this in greater detail below. We do not know whether the myth about the warring brothers originally contained the curse or whether this was added when or shortly after they became identified as the offspring of Oedipus, possibly in an attempt to extend the boundaries of the original story into fresh territory. The idea of the father's curse may even have originated in a separate and unrelated form elsewhere. Nevertheless by the time of the *Septem*, Oedipus' cursing of his sons is established as part of the story and so the audience will have been anticipating this from the very beginning of the trilogy.

It seems likely the mighty attack on Cadmeia had been a major independent episode in the mythical repertoire which became linked to the myth of Oedipus only at a later stage. During the *Septem* the war is supplanted in importance by the story of Eteocles and Polynices but in previous versions this attack must have been important in its own right for, as we shall see later, there were a cluster of stories about events on the battle-field at which Aeschylus hints, and with which therefore he assumes his audience were familiar. It is unfortunate that we do not know whether the

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[12]The Sphinx was also the subject of the satyr play belonging to this trilogy.

[13]See Athenaeus 465e and schol Laur in Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus* 1375

Lille Stesichorus fragment continued on a domestic theme, perhaps describing Polynices' marriage and Eriphyle's bribing of Amphiaraus, or whether it contained a detailed description of the battle, possibly drawing on earlier versions of poems solely about the war[14]. Certainly by the time of the *Septem*, events on the battle-field have become a mere back-drop to the working out of the double fratricide. Nevertheless we should not assume that the audience had little background knowledge about the attack merely because it is not the focus of attention here.

Homer speaks of a great war at Cadmeia - οἱ δὲ τότ'ἐστρατόωνθ'ἱερὰ πρὸς τείχεα Θήβης "*they then marched against the holy walls of Thebes*" (*Iliad* 4.376-9), ὅτ'ἐν Θήβῃσιν ἀπώλετο λαὸς Ἀχαιῶν "*when the host of Achaeans died at Thebes* (*Iliad* 6.222-3), and mentions Ὑποθήβας "*lower Thebes*" upon which the modern city was built (*Iliad* 2.505) - and describes Oedipus as dying δεδουπότος "*having fallen in battle*" (*Iliad* 23.679 "*to the clash of arms*" LSJ). Hesiod comments:

> καὶ τοὺς μὲν πόλεμός τε κακὸς καὶ φύλοπις αἰνή,
> τοὺς μὲν ὑφ' ἑπταπύλῳ Θήβῃ, Καδμηίδι γαίῃ,
> ὤλεσε μαρναμένους μήλων ἕνεκ' Οἰδιπόδαο
> τοὺς δε...
>
> *Evil war and dreadful battle killed them, some while fighting for the flocks of Oidipous at seven-gated* Thebes *and others (in battle at Troy)* (*Works and Days* 161-4)

Pherecydes, the fifth-century mythographer, comments:

> Οἰδίποδι Κρέων δίδωσι τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα Λαίου, μητέρα δ' αὐτοῦ Ἰοκάστην, ἐξ ἧς γίνονται αὐτῷ Φράστωρ και Λαόνυτος, οἵ θνήσκουσιν ὑπὸ Μινυῶν καὶ Ἐργίνου. ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐνιαυτὸς παρῆλθε, γαμεῖ ὁ Οἰδίπους Εὐρυγάνειαν τῆς Περίφαντος, ἐξ ἧς γίνονται αὐτῷ Ἀντιγόνη καὶ Ἰσμήνη (...) υἱοὶ δὲ αὐτῷ ἐξ αὐτῆς Ἐτεοκλῆς καὶ Πολυνείκης

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[14]Stesichorus composed an *Eriphyle* - Page *Lyrica Graeca Selecta, fragments* 148-50 - to which the *Lille Stesichorus* fragment may belong - see March p132

Creon gave the kingdom to Oidipous together with the wife of Laius, his own mother Jocasta, with whom he begot Phrastor and Laontes who were killed by the Minyans and Erginos. At the end of a year, Oidipous married Euryganeia, daughter of Periphas, who bore for him Antigone and Ismene...and his sons by her were Eteocles and Polynices (*FGH* 3 F 95, quoted by Bremer p165)

If this reflects earlier versions of the myth, it would seem that two separate stories have been merged. In the first, Oedipus produced two incestuous sons who were killed in battle at Thebes, possibly together with their father[15]. The second wished to link the story of Eteocles and Polynices to that of Oedipus and so they become the product of his second marriage and their death in battle is isolated from that of their father. We do not know to which pair of brothers the double fratricide was linked originally but I would suggest it is the latter and that with the passage of time they become the incestuous offspring of Oedipus, the curse being introduced to account for their cruel fate. On the other hand, Pherecydes may reflect a post-Aeschylean form of the myth and we should perhaps not lay too much emphasis on this fragment. It seems likely that, as the older stories of the fighting become rather well-worn, the fratricide came to prominence and the fate of the brothers, possibly of relatively little dramatic significance up to that point, became the mythical focus.

Our sources suggest that elaborate funeral games were held in honour of Oedipus, perhaps following his death in battle, for the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* relates:

> ...ὅτι βασιλεύοντα ἐν Θήβαις φησὶν ἀπολέσθαι, οὐχ ὡς οἱ νεώτεροι. καὶ Ἡσίοδος δέ φησιν ἐν Θήβαις αὐτοῦ ἀποθανόντος Ἀργείαν τὴν Ἀδράστου σὺν ἄλλοις ἐλθεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν κηδείαν τοὺ Οἰδίποδος.

> *...because Homer unlike later writers, says that*

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[15]Note the use of δεδουπότος above

Oidipous died while ruling in Thebes. And Hesiod says that after he had died in Thebes Argeia, the daughter of Adrastus, came with others to the funeral of Oidipous (MW 192)

March reconstructs a further Hesiodic fragment as a reference to these funeral games:

> 'Αμφίλοχόν τ'ηύν] 'Αλκμάονα π[οιμέ]να λα[ῶν·
> τοὺς ἄρ' ἐπερχομέν]ους Καδμηίδες ἑλκεσίπε[πλοι
> εἶδός τ'εὔαν]θές τε δέμας εἰσάντα ἰδοῦ[σαι
> θαύμασαν ἀμφὶ] ταφὰς πολυκηδέος Οἰδιπό[δαο
>]α ενου κτήνου πολ[ύ]δηριν.
> τοῖς δ'ἅμα ἥρωε]ς Δαναοὶ θεράποντες Ἄρη[ος
> ἐς Καδμηίδα γῆ[ν Πολυνείκει ἦλθο[ν ὀπηδοί·
> οἶος δ'Οἰκλεί[δης] Ζηνὸς πάρα θέσφατα [ἤδη.
>
> *(Amphiaros brought) brave Amphilochos and Alkmaon shepherd of the people. The Kadmeian women, with their trailing robes, marveled at them as they came, seeing face to face their beauty and fine stature near the tomb of Oidipous of the sorrows...With these to the Kadmeian land came the Danaan heroes, warriors all, and following Polynices; but the son of Oikles alone of them knew the oracles from Zeus.* (193 MW)[16]

It is easy to see how the idea of funeral games of their father could generate a contest for the throne between Eteocles and Polynices which might easily develop into an actual armed conflict between the two sides. Oedipus' death and funeral provides a logical reason why Polynices should arrive in his mother-city with a group of armed supporters and it seems very likely that the war arose as a natural consequence of the brother s' disagreement in the previous myth. A further passage of the *Iliad* relates:

> Εὐρύαλος δέ οἱ οἶος ἀνίστατο, ἰσόθεος φώς,
> Μηκιστέος υἱὸς Ταλαιονίδαο ἄνακτος,

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[16] March suggests that Hesiod's reference to Argeia, whom Polynices marries in most versions of the myth, marveling at the wealth of Cadmeia when she attended the funeral games - MW 192 above - signifies that it was she who persuaded Polynices to attack the city through a desire for the kingdom.

ὅς ποτε Θήβασδ'ἦλθε δεδουπότος Οἰδιπόδαο
ἐς τάφον, ἔνθα δὲ πάντας ἐνίκα Καδμείωνας.

Euryalos alone stood up to face him, a man like the gods, son of Lord Mekisteus, son of Talaus, who once came to Thebes and to the tomb of Oidipous who had fallen in battle and there defeated all the Cadmeians. (23.679-80)

We see how the term ἐνίκα fails to clarify whether Mekisteus defeated the Cadmeians in games or in battle but there are also several references in the *Iliad* to Tydeus' utter defeat of the Cadmeians in games (πάντα δ'ἐνίκα ῥηιδίως 4.388-9). As early as Homer, anger aroused by these games inspires a murderous ambush on Tydeus but he manages to defeat all of his attackers πάντας ἔπεφν' ἕνα δ' οἶον ἵει οἶκόνδε νέεσθαι "*he killed them all, allowing only one to return home*" (Iliad 4.397)[17]. I believe that the idea of a crushing defeat on the Cadmeians must have referred to the games originally since from at least as early as the Theban Cycle, the attack fails to take Cadmeia and that only later was this translated into military terms We simply do not know whether Aeschylus referred to these funeral games, or even included them, in our trilogy but the final dual between the brothers may reflect the earlier idea that they competed for their father's throne by means of games[18].

Thus we see how the formation of the myth by the time of the *Septem* was probably quite complicated and the audience may have had wide and often conflicting knowledge about the various elements. To summarize, I would suggest that there were originally several independent stories - Oedipus' parricide and marriage to his mother, a mighty attack on a city, funeral games,

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[17] See also Iliad 4.376-99, 5.800-808, 10.285-90.

[18] We should also perhaps note that, according to Pindar *Nemean* 9.12-20, Adrastus was associated with the institution of chariot races in honour of Phoebus and so his association with games may have been long established.

a dispute between brothers over power, and a father's curse. These various strands may have been familiar to the audience in their unrelated forms and it is possible that our extant sources often treat them in isolation- for example, the story of Oedipus and his funeral games is found in Homer, tales about the Argive attackers in Pindar, the brothers' dispute in Stesichorus and the curse in the *Thebais.* It is impossible to trace the exact process of amalgamation of the various stories but I would suggest that it was along the following lines. The story of a mighty attack was linked to that of Oedipus[19], the tale of a double fratricide amidst the general fighting being already a part of the former or added after they were joined. The brothers become sons of Oedipus and the father's curse is introduced to explain their cruel fate. Funeral games have been connected with Oedipus at some stage and these later provide the occasion for the meeting of the brothers. With the passage of time, Oedipus' death is brought forward so that the armed conflict itself provides the setting for the encounter between Eteocles and Polynices. This is pure speculation but it may be that the myth developed something like this and the audience may have known versions of these stories in their separate forms, as well as their relationship to one another from their knowledge of the Theban Cycle.

Cameron (p12) notes Wilamowitz's suggestion that Aeschylus was the first to merge the invasion of Cadmeia with the story of Laius but in fact it is impossible to gauge exactly what Aeschylus himself contributed to this process of the merging and molding of the original stories. We should also bear in mind that there may have been earlier tragedies on the same theme which will have greatly influenced the audience's expectations during the *Septem.* We have devoted much time to the myth of Oedipus but we shall see below how it is vital to understand that the audience may have known older stories of the attack on Cadmeia with which Eteocles

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[19] One or both may have been transferred to Cadmeia at this stage.

and Polynices were unconnected or in which they merely met later during the general fighting, which would explain, for example, why it is Adrastus, not Polynices, who leads the expedition against Cadmeia in the *Septem.* Thus the pairing at the gates may be a new element and will have had a great effect on the audience's appreciation of the drama.

c) The Trilogy

The above survey of the pre-Aeschylean myth reveals what sort of events the audience may have been anticipating when the trilogy began. The surviving fragments of the first two plays, the *Laius* and the *Oidipous,* offer few clues about the course the drama actually did take however[20]. Fortunately we are able to gain some conception of the preceding drama for the chorus of the *Septem* give a summary of the misfortunes of the family of Oedipus:

παλαιγενῆ γὰρ λέγω
παρβασίαν ὠκύποι-
νον, αἰῶνα δ'ἐς τρίτον
μένειν, Ἀπόλλωνος εὖτε Λάιος
βίᾳ τρὶς εἰπόντος ἐν
μεσομφάλοις Πυθικοῖς
χρηστηρίοις θνάισκοντα γέν-
νας ἄτερ σώιζειν πόλιν,

κρατηθεὶς ἐκ φιλᾶν ἀβουλιᾶν,
ἐγείνατο μὲν μόρον αὐτῷ,
πατροκτόνον Οἰδιπόδαν,
ὅστε ματρὸς ἁγνὰν
σπείρας ἄρουραν ἵν'ἐτράφη
ῥίζαις αἱματόεσσαις
ἔτλα·

For I say that the transgression so swiftly avenged was of ancient origin and it remains to the third generation, when Laius cheated Apollo who had thrice told him at the Pythian Oracle at the centre of the earth that he would save the city if he died childless. But overcome by his own bad counsel, he begot his own

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[20]See Hutchinson ppxvii-xxiii for a full review of these together with the fragments of the satyr play, the *Sphinx.*

destruction, father-murdering Oidipous who dared to sow the sacred field of his mother, from whence he had sprung, with a root of bloodiness (744-56)

They proceed to describe how Oedipus was honoured above all other men when he banished the Sphinx from Cadmeia (772-777) but, realizing the truth, he became maddened at heart and blinded himself:

> τέκνοις δ'ἀθλίας ἐφῆ-
>   κεν ἐπίκοτος τροφᾶς, αἰαῖ,
> πικρογλώσσους ἀράς,
> καί σφε σιδαρονόμῳ δι-
>   ὰ χερὶ ποτε λαχεῖν
> κτήματα.

In anger at their ἀθλίας τροφᾶς *he let loose a bitter-tongued curse against his sons so that they would one day divide up their inheritance with an iron-dividing hand* (785-790)

It is unlikely that this summary offers any new information[21] but rather serves to remind the audience of earlier events and consolidate the main points of the previous action. Thus it offers us a vital insight into what has gone before.

Eteocles states his name early in the prologue of the *Septem* (6) which suggests that this is his first appearance on stage - "*the use of one's own name is always significant in Greek poetry*" (Hutchinson p43). Taplin suggests that his emphasis on his leadership of the city (2-3) is also stressed because this is a new state of affairs and so the previous play may have ended with the death of Oedipus. It seems likely then that Eteocles and Polynices have remained in the background until the *Septem* begins and that the *Oidipous* was concerned predominantly with its eponymous hero. It is most unfortunate that we know neither if nor how the action of the third play was prepared for in the preceding drama.

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[21] Compare *Eumenides* 454-469.

When our play begins Polynices has returned to Cadmeia with an army and later refers to his previous banishment from the city (637ff). We do not know whether his departure and subsequent return have been hinted at in the earlier part of the trilogy, possibly in the ambiguously-worded curse, or even whether he left Cadmeia while Oedipus was still alive[22] and clearly our ignorance of the preceding drama is a severe handicap in this matter. Hutchinson believes that the audience will supply the information about Polynices' adventures away from Cadmeia, such as his marriage to a daughter of Adrastus and his gathering of the army, from their own prior acquaintance with the myth - "*the distinction between such a source of knowledge and disclosures within the drama is for Greek tragedy fundamental*" (pxxx) - but, unless directly referred to by some means, the audience may regard these events as lying beyond the scope of the trilogy and so will not consider them relevant here.

From the very beginning of the *Septem*, the audience will be wondering when Polynices' presence with the opposition will be mentioned and whether a reference to this will lead Eteocles to an immediate realization of his fate. However he is completely excluded from the earlier drama and his desire for his inheritance, the impetus for the expedition, is not referred to explicitly until 631ff when his presence at the seventh gate is revealed explicitly. This may have been mentioned in the preceding trilogy, possibly in the terms of the curse, but in the early part of the *Septem*, all on stage are too busy with the attack itself to discuss its cause. Both Eteocles and the chorus must know that Polynices is in the vicinity, since his claim to his inheritance is the inspiration for the war, but this knowledge

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[22]In fact, it is never stated explicitly in the *Septem* that Oedipus is now dead although the original audience, having witnessed the earlier part of the drama, would have been in no doubt about this question - see below.

is not active at this early stage and no one guesses that his presence with the enemy holds any particular significance. This suppression of all discussion about Polynices and the cause of the attack will create great tension and allows the poet excellent opportunities to employ dramatic irony.

Far from acknowledging Polynices' presence, those on stage regard their attackers as completely foreign to themselves, ignoring the fact that the expedition was inspired by their fellow-kinsman and Eteocles' own brother. Thus irony is created when the chorus calls the enemy ἑτεροφώνῳ [γε] στρατῷ "*the army of foreign speech*" (170), while Eteocles regards them as ἐπηλύδων ὅμιλον "*a band of aliens*" (34-5) and he cries of the chorus with unconscious irony αὐτοὶ δ'ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἔνδοθεν πορθούμεθα "*we are being ruined by those within*" (194)[23]. Thus the audience will wonder when those on stage will gain a clearer understanding of the situation.

As the *Septem* develops, the audience will be awaiting the first reference to Polynices. Eteocles announces at the beginning of the play that he is awaiting scouts bringing news from the enemy camp (36f) and the audience will expect him to be informed presently that Polynices is close by. The scout duly appears and indeed seems about to reveal all:

> ἥκω σαφῆ τἀκεῖθεν ἐκ στρατοῦ φέρων·
> αὐτὸς κατόπτης δ'εἴμ' ἐγὼ τῶν πραγμάτων.
> ἄνδρες γὰρ ἑπτά...
>
> *I have come bearing clear reports from the army of matters there and I myself was an eye-witness of these events. For seven warriors...* (40-42)

The audience will no doubt be wondering whether the Scout has seen Polynices among this group and if and when he will

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[23]Similarly Polynices invokes the help of his native gods θεοὺς γενεθλίους - 639 - in attacking his mother city.

communicate this knowledge to Eteocles[24]. Once the fact that Polynices is present with the enemy is clearly stated, Eteocles will be forced to express an opinion about it and the delayal of this moment will create great suspense in the drama. However, instead of naming the main warriors, the Scout mentions only Adrastus in his report (50) which may cause the audience to wonder if he will be one of the Seven, as is the case in several later writers[25]. However he is supplanted by Eteoclus elsewhere[26] and we shall see how there was considerable variation in the composition of the Seven both before and after Aeschylus.

Attention remains on the large-scale conflict rather than the clash between the brothers and the Scout gives a highly-emotive picture of hordes of warriors advancing upon the city - βοᾶι γὰρ κῦμα χερσαῖον στρατοῦ "*the surge of the army is roaring over the land* (64). The report ends without any specific reference to Polynices and the scout declares he will return to the enemy camp and report back to Eteocles:

> καὶ σαφηνείαι λόγου
> εἰδὼς τὰ τῶν θύραθεν ἀβλαβὴς ἔσῃ.
>
> *And knowing through clear report the invaders' actions, you will remain free from harm* (67-68)

The audience will suspect that this next report must bring Polynices' presence to attention and that Eteocles can by no means remain ἀβλαβὴς "*unharmed*" in the ensuing conflict. When they see the scout hurrying back, one semichorus cries:

στρατοῦ

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[24]Cameron suggests that it was too dark for the Scout to see who was there but this is not made explicit for the audience. (p31)

[25]Euripides' *Phoenissae* 1100ff, Apollodorus, Hyginus *Fabulae* LXX 70, Diodorus Siculus.

[26]*Oedipus Coloneus* 1284ff, Euripides' *Supplices*.

πευθώ τιν' ἡμῖν ὦ φίλαι νέαν φέρει

He is bringing us some fresh news about the army, friends (369–370)

At the same moment the chorus spots Eteocles rushing in from the opposite direction and cry that the son of Oedipus is here λόγον μαθεῖν (373) "*to hear/understand the report*". Now at last the audience will anticipate some reference to Polynices but in fact this is suppressed until almost the end of the Shield Scene as the gods seem to conspire towards the final fateful pairing. A direct mention of Polynices occurs at 576ff, more than half way through the play[27] and shortly afterwards Eteocles submits to the power of the curse, finally joining the audience in their conception of the true emphasis of the coming encounter. Burnett believes that there is no surprise here since "*it has been a struggle for the throne all along*" (p352) but this is an over-simplification for Aeschylus has taken pains to show that the curse and Polynices' presence have been "forgotten" in dramatic terms by those on stage, causing considerable tension and doubt. Aeschylus succeeds in suppressing the fact that the brothers will fight as long as possible to great dramatic effect and the audience witnesses how the meaning and power of the curse strike Eteocles with a terrible suddenness.

Thus Polynices' name is delayed for a considerable length of time and great tension will be created as the audience wait for his presence to be realized in dramatic terms. In the early part of the drama all on stage are too busy with the immediate threat of the attack to discuss its cause and although they are aware that Polynices is with the enemy, they do not yet see any special significance in this. This will provide a good source of tension and suspense and provoke the audience's interest in the development of the drama. It is also important to establish that

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[27] Although Eteocles is already committed to fighting at that stage, see below.

when Eteocles leaves the stage to appoint the Cadmeian warriors at the gates, not only does he have no conception about who is at which gate, he is not even actively thinking of Polynices' presence within the enemy. This will prove a vital factor in our later discussions.

B) The Seven

a) The Identity of the Seven

We have noted how the myth of a great attack on Cadmeia probably originated independently to that of the other strands of the story and the audience may have known many tales about the fighting there. It is uncertain at what stage seven Argive warriors were singled out from the Argive host and when and how this became connected with pairings at each gate. Cadmeia was known as ἑπταπύλος "*seven-gated*" as early as Homer (*Iliad* 4.406) and Wilamowitz argued that these gates were introduced into the myth in order to accommodate the seven pairs of heroes (*Kleine Schriften* v 1 26ff). However the number of gates may pre-date the introduction of the Seven and the play makes far better drama if the pairings of the heroes were a relatively recent addition to the story, allowing the poet a high degree of flexibility in this matter. Indeed the pairings do not feature in any of our earlier sources and so may be an Aeschylean innovation. Pausanias comments on the statues in Corinth of Polynices and his fellow-chieftains who died at Cadmeia:

> τούτους τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐς μόνον ἑπτὰ ἀριθμὸν κατήγαγεν Αἰσχύλος, πλειόνων ἐκ Ἄργους ἡγεμόνων καὶ Μεσσήνης καί τινων καὶ Ἀρκάδων στρατευσαμένων. τούτων δὲ τῶν ἑπτὰ - ἐπηκολουθήκασι γὰρ καὶ Ἀργεῖοι τῇ Αἰσχυλου ποιήσει - πλησίον...

> *These men Aeschylus has reduced to the number of seven only, although there were more chiefs than that in the expedition, from Argos, from Messene, with some even from Arcadia. And close by these seven - for even the Argives have adopted this number from the drama of Aeschylus - (are statues of the Epigoni...* II.xx.5)

This supports our theory that there had been stories about an attack on Cadmeia by a large opposing force before the idea of seven major champions developed, and that these had survived until Pausanias' time. However Pindar speaks of there being seven funeral pyres at Thebes - ἑπτὰ δ'ἔπειτα πυρᾶν νεκρῶν τελεσθεισᾶν "*when the seven piles of corpses had been consumed*" *Olympian* (6.22) - which the scholiast believed to come from the *Thebais* and also at *Nemean* 9.57 - ἑπτὰ γὰρ δαίσαντο πυραὶ νεογυίους φῶτας "*for seven funeral pyres feasted on the limbs of the young men*" - and so it is unlikely that it was Aeschylus himself who first reduced the number of major warriors to seven. *Olympian* 6 is dated to 468 and *Nemean* 9 to 476 so although both are close in date to our trilogy of 467, they probably preceded it. March states that since Pindar refers to the special fates of Amphiaraus and Capaneus - the one buried beneath the earth and the other killed by the bolt of Zeus - then his reference to seven pyres assumes that there were nine heroes in the original attack. This is surely being too pedantic and the idea of seven attackers seems to have been established before the performance of the *Septem*, although if this were a relatively new development, the audience cannot have been certain that Aeschylus would include it here. Even when the seven warriors are mentioned, their precise identity will have remained the source of considerable speculation and even after Aeschylus, the composition of the seven individuals is far from fixed, varying even between two plays by Euripides[28]. It is unclear whether Eteocles and Polynices were considered members of the respective pairings of the seven in the Pindaric odes for, although the double fratricide is mentioned at *Olympian* 2.38ff, dated 476BC, it is not clear whether this occurred at the battle of Cadmeia. Instead Pindar concentrates upon the Seven, particularly Adrastus and Amphiaraus, and so may be reflecting some earlier form of the myth in which the battle was the predominant factor. Thus Aeschylus

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[28] *Phoenissae* 1100ff and *Supplices*. 860ff

may have exploited the audience's uncertainty about the composition of the Seven to great dramatic effect and they cannot have been certain until the very last moment that Polynices would be at the seventh gate[29].

Since this is a dramatic production, Aeschylus is constrained to portray predominantly one army at the expense of the other. However at an early stage the messenger describes how the Seven are preparing themselves for battle by loading the chariot of Adrastus with memorials for their parents and swearing either to take Cadmeia:

ἢ γῆν θανόντες τήνδε φυράσειν φόνῳ

Or dying, to stain this land with gore (48)

The audience's suspicion that none will survive will increase the pathos of this scene and Hutchinson notes how the terms of their oath lays "*the strongest emphasis on blood and destruction*" (p48)[30] and the loading of the chariot may indeed be a pre-Aeschylean idea, linked in the minds of the audience to the versions which were unconnected with Eteocles and Polynices[31]. As we have noted, the spoils are to be sent back to their parents (τοῖς τεκοῦσιν ἐς δόμους 49) which avoids all question of the revenge attack of their descendants and so presents the warriors in a more admirable and pathetic light. Pausanias comments:

ἐν δὲ τῇ Θηβαΐδι ὡς Ἄδραστος ἔφευγεν ἐκ Θηβῶν,
"εἵματα λυγρὰ φέρων σὺν Ἀρείονι κυανοχαίτῃ"

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[29]Particularly since Adrastus leads the expedition - see below.

[30]Hutchinson comments that Aeschylus "*seems to be exploiting a scene visually familiar to Athenians*" p50.

[31]It probably acted as preparation for the later part of the story when the news of the deaths of the Seven reached their respective homes, just as the fratricide story was extended to include Antigone's exploits.

> *In the Thebaid it is said that Adrastus fled from Thebes* "wearing wretched clothes, and with him was dark-maned Arion" (8.xxv.8)[32]

Thus the audience will suspect that this preparation for death in battle is appropriate and they will expect the warriors' spoils to reach their destination. Hutchinson believes that the loading of the chariot and the heroes' tears indicate that the Seven anticipate certain death (p40) but in fact although they acknowledge the possibility of defeat, they speak also of success (46-7) and pray that they may sack the city. Verrall (p7) points out that Adrastus' chariot is loaded with memorials, not because the Seven are certain that only he will survive the encounter, but because the leader's chariot is the one most likely to be preserved. However it is possible that in some versions the prophet Amphiaraus had foretold Adrastus' survival, a factor which may be reflected in the choice of his chariot here. He clearly predicts Argive defeat in this play (568ff) but, although the audience are almost certain that the attack will prove disastrous for the Seven, the heroes themselves are by no means without confidence and their bravery in the face of death creates a mood of great pathos, soon however to be contrasted with their arrogant boasts described in the Shield Scene..

Let us now consider the seven warriors of the *Septem* and what the audience may have known about them already. Tydeus features widely in the *Iliad*, and these frequent references may refer to a myth or myths in which he was prominent. Homer describes him as a brave warrior[33] who married a daughter of Adrastus[34], fought at the

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[32] Arion is also Adrastus' horse at *Iliad* 23.346f.

[33] 4.375, 5.801, 14.124f.

[34] 14.114-21

Battle of Cadmeia[35] and is buried there[36]. The *Iliad* also describes his defeat of the Cadmeians in games and how he killed them all when they ambushed him in their anger[37]. We have discussed above the possibility that athletic contests belong to the formative stage of the myth and the audience may have known earlier stories about these in which Tydeus played an important role. It seems unlikely that Tydeus has been mentioned in the preceding trilogy but the audience would already associate him with Cadmeia and be prepared for his participation in the battle.

Capaneus also appears to have been a well-known hero with an established history when the play begins. Later writers describe how he is killed by the thunderbolt of Zeus for his arrogance in imitating his power with burning torches[38] and although this event is not described in the *Septem*, there are clear hints that this story was already familiar to the audience. The frightened chorus cries:

> ὦ παγκρατὲς Ζεῦ, τρέψον εἰς ἐχθροὺς βέλος.
>
> *Oh all-powerful Zeus, turn your bolt against our enemies!* (255)

The scout describes how Capaneus likens lightning flashes to the warmth of the noonday sun (430-32) and on his shield a man, bearing a blazing torch, announces that he will burn the city. Eteocles replies that this arrogance of Capaneus will anger the gods:

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[35] 6.222-3

[36] 14.114-21

[37] 4.376-99, also at 5.800-8, 10.285-90

[38] See Euripides' *Phoenissae* 1167ff, *Supplices* 496, and *Antigone* 131-7.

πέποιθα δ' αὐτῷ ξὺν δίκῃ τὸν πυρφόρον
ἥξειν κεραυνὸν

I believe that the fiery thunderbolt will come to him as is just (444-5)

The chorus echoes his prayer - κεραυνοῦ δέ νιν βέλος ἐπισχέθοι "*may the thunderbolt restrain him*" (453, also at 630). Thus the audience may wonder whether the fate of Capaneus will be related in the subsequent drama. In fact the ending of the play concentrates almost exclusively on the fates of the brothers alone and these oblique hints at future events on the battle-field are the closest Aeschylus comes to describing these matters.[39] In Euripides' *Supplices* (934) we find that Capaneus is given a separate pyre from his fellow heroes which may indicate that he had been quite an important mythical figure in his own right in some versions of the story.

Amphiaraus also seems to have been an important mythical figure long before the *Septem*. Odysseus in the Underworld comments ἴδον στυγερήν τ' Ἐριφύλην, ἣ χρυσὸν φίλου ἀνδρὸς ἐδέξατο τιμήεντα "*I saw hateful Eriphyle, who took precious gold as the price of her own husband* (11.326-7) and Homer refers to Amphiaraus later:

οὐδ' ἵκετο γήραος οὐδόν,
ἀλλ' ὄλετ' ἐν Θήβῃσι γυναίων εἵνεκα δώρων

Yet he did not reach the threshold of old age, but he died in Thebes because of a woman's gifts. (*Odyssey* 15.247-8)

Stesichorus also composed a poem called the *Eriphyle* and so the story of how Polynices bribed her to persuade her husband, Amphiaraus, to fight at Cadmeia may have been familiar to the audience. It is unlikely that this has been mentioned in the

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[39] Although see below on the possibility that the ending is spurious.

preceding trilogy because there seems to be no obvious opportunity for this, and Aeschylus may not expect this particular strand of mythical knowledge to be active in the thoughts of the audience. However Amphiaraus' opposition to the expedition of which he himself is a member is made clear in the drama which may reflect a traditional idea. Amphiaraus was probably a familiar figure to the audience for a Hesiodic fragment also reads:

> δ[ῖα δ'] Ὑπερμήστρη λαῶν ἀγὸν Ἀμφιάρηον
> γε[ί]νατ' Οἰκλῆος θαλερὸν λέχος εἰσαναβᾶσα
> Ἄ[ρ]γει ἐν ἱπποβότῳ πολέων ἡγήτορα λαῶν.
> ὅς ῥ'ἀγαθὸς μὲν ἔην ἀγορῇ, ἀγαθὸς δε μάχεσθαι,
> ἐ[σ]θλὸς δ'ἐν πραπίδεσσι, φίλος δ'ἦν ἀθανάτοισι

> *The noble Hypermestra bore Amphiaraus leader of the people, having entered the fruitful marriage bed of Oekles,and he was leader of many people in horse-pasturing Argos. He was good in the assembly, good in battle, wise and beloved by the gods* (MW 25).

Pindar relates the unusual fate of the seer:

> ὁ δ'Ἀμφιάρῃ σχίσσεν κεραυνῷ παμβίᾳ
> Ζεὺς τὰν βαθύστερνον χθόνα, κρύψεν δ'ἅμ' ἵπποις,
> δουρὶ Περικλυμένου πρὶν νῶτα τυπέντα μαχατὰν
> θυμὸν αἰσχυνθῆμεν

> *But for the sake of Amphiaraus, Zeus with his all-powerful thunder-bolt, split the broad breast of the earth and buried him with his steeds before his warrior soul would be dishonoured by being struck in the back by the spear of Periclymenus...* (*Nemean* 9.24ff)

Amphiaraus may be referring to this phenomenon in the *Septem* when he imagines himself buried in this enemy land - μάντις κεκευθὼς "*a hidden prophet*" (588) and Herodotus (8.134.1) refers to his dream oracle at Thebes which may have existed in Aeschylean times.

It seems likely that Amphiaraus' prophetic powers would have played a role in any myth in which he featured and indeed his chief role may have been as a prophet rather than as a warrior in the earlier myth. Unfortunately we do not know what he may have predicted nor to whom in previous versions, nor whether his role

is to be connected with that of Teiresias in the Stesichorus fragment[40], who predicts strife between the brothers and advises them to decide the matter by drawing lots. This question of prophecy may even belong to the myth of the dispute between the brothers before it was linked to the curse and so may have provided the source for dramatic irony in these early versions. Later, when combined with the curse in the myth of Oedipus, this prophecy would increase the sense of impending doom for the brothers. Early in the *Septem*, Eteocles declares νῦν δ', ὡς ὁ μάντις φησίν..." "*now as the prophet says...* (24) and the audience may wonder whether the confrontation between the brothers will be openly discussed at this point. They are kept in suspense for four lines however, while Eteocles digresses on the nature of seer ship, before it is revealed that the prophet warned only of the mighty Achaean attack which is now in progress. The scholiast on 24 believes that the seer mentioned here is Teiresias and it may be that there has been some sort of prophecy in the preceding trilogy, perhaps concerning the battle, which is now being fulfilled. On the other hand, this reference to a seer may be included primarily to mislead the audience into believing that the fratricide, or at least the presence of Polynices, is about to be revealed at this early stage.

The Scout describes Amphiaraus at the sixth gate as ὁ μάντις "*the prophet*" (379) and μάντιν σοφόν "*the wise prophet*" (382) and so the audience will no doubt wonder if and how his powers of prophecy will affect the drama. Clearly he shares their own knowledge of future events and, as with Cassandra, there will be great suspense over whether he will manage to communicate this to anyone else and what the consequence of this will be. He certainly warns his fellow warriors that their expedition is doomed (568ff) which may reflect his role in the earlier myth. He also states boldly that Polynices is with the opposition (576ff)

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[40]See above.

and the audience will suspect that Eteocles must shortly acknowledge the implications of this. The drama is far more effective if Eteocles goes knowingly to his death, rather than departing in ignorance of his fate, and the audience may be conditioned by the conventions of tragedy to anticipate this[41]. Thus the audience will pay close attention to the words of the seer and will wonder how his presence may affect the position of those on stage. However the seer does not in fact make the double fratricide explicit and the revelation that this is now about to occur is delayed for as long as possible.

In the *Septem* Parthenopaeus is stationed against Actor (555). Pausanias comments:

> ...καθὰ οἱ Θηβαῖοι λέγουσιν, ἐπεὶ τά γε ἐν Θηβαΐδι ἔπη τὰ ἐς τὴν Παρθενοπαίου τελευτὴν Περικλύμενον τὸν ἀνελόντα φησὶν εἶναι
>
> *This is the Theban account, (that Asphodicus killed Parthenopaeus) for according to the passage in the* Thebaid *which tells of the death of Parthenopaeus, it was Periclymenus who killed him* (9 18 6)[42]

Thus these heroes - Tydeus, Capaneus, Amphiaraus and Parthenopaeus - may have been well-known to the audience and they are members of the Seven in all versions from Aeschylus onwards, although we cannot tell how influential the *Septem* itself was in this respect. We hear nothing of Hippomedon or Eteoclus in our earlier sources however and very little about the identity of the seven defenders. We do not know whether the original audience shared the same emphasis of knowledge and lost sources may have promoted those heroes of which we know least. In fact earlier myths about the battle may have contained stories about many

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[41]Agamemnon and Aegisthus die in ignorance in the *Oresteia* but they may be the exceptions to the general rule and specifically linked as a result of this.

[42]This occurs also at Euripides *Phoenissae*1153.

heroes, not just the seven major ones, and we hear how Periclymenus tried to kill Amphiaraus in Pindar's pre-Aeschylean ode, *Nemean* 9 26-8, while Mekisteus, whom Homer describes as going to Cadmeia[43], often appears as one of the Seven in later writers[44]. On the other hand, it is possible that these four heroes may have formed the core of the Seven and that there was greater flexibility in the identity of the remaining three.

Naturally the question whether Polynices had featured as one of the Seven in earlier versions is of vital importance to our study. He appears in every one of our post-Aeschylean lists[45] but since the *Septem* must have played some role in emphasizing the importance of the mutual fratricide, we cannot discount its own influence here. Apollodorus includes Polynices (and Adrastus) in his list of heroes but comments:

> τινὲς δὲ Τυδέα μὲν καὶ Πολυνείκην οὐ καταριθμοῦσι, συγκαταλέγουσι δὲ τοῖς ἑπτὰ Ἐτεόκλον Ἴφιος καὶ Μηκιστέα
>
> *Some however do not reckon Tydeus and Polynices among them, but include Eteoclus, son of Iphis, and Mekisteus in the list of the seven* (III.vi.3)

It may be then that the myth telling how Adrastus married his daughters to Polynices and Tydeus[46] was attached to the attack on Cadmeia at a later stage and so versions still existed in which Polynices was not numbered among the Seven. His coming to Cadmeia to kill Eteocles in the fighting was introduced later and later still, possibly not even until Aeschylus, did he become one of the

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[43]See *Iliad* 23.679-80.

[44]See Herodotus 5.67.3, Apollodorus III.vi.3, Pausanias 9.18.

[45]See *Oedipus Coloneus* 1284ff, Hyginus *Fabulae* LXX 70, Diodorus Siculus, Euripides' *Supplices* and *Phoenissae*.

[46]A lion and a boar, see *Iliad* 14.119ff.

Seven. Thus the audience cannot have been certain that he would be at one of the gates.

Thus the audience may have had a range of expectations about the identities and behaviour of the warriors at Cadmeia and Aeschylus is free to guide and exploit these as he wishes. Very little detail is given about the fighting in the *Septem*, at least as our text stands, and Aeschylus may have expected his audience to supply certain information, such as the special fates of Capaneus and Amphiaraus, from their independent knowledge of the myth. On the other hand, these events lie beyond the scope of the drama, which focuses on the personal fortunes of the sons of Oedipus, and so an exact account of the battle is unnecessary. What matters for the audience is their foreknowledge that each of the Seven is doomed to die in the fighting and this will have a great influence upon their perception of the drama.

b) The Pairing of the Heroes

When the chorus spots the messenger and Eteocles rushing up from different directions[47] bringing news πευθώ τιν'...νέαν (370), there is a great sense of haste and the audience will suspect that at last Polynices' presence is to be revealed. Instead they are presented with the magnificent Shield Scene, the centrepiece of the drama, which serves to delay Eteocles' exit to the battlefield for well over three hundred lines. Great tension and suspense are created as the Scout describes the seven attackers and Eteocles reveals which of the Argive heroes he has stationed against them. These speeches will help the audience to imagine the mighty pairs of warriors who are about to engage with one another and also counterbalances the lack of detail given about the battle at the end of the play[48]. The pairings of the warriors during this scene

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[47] σπουδῇ 371 and σπουδῇ 374 is used respectively.

[48] If indeed this is genuine, see below.

has inspired a great deal of debate since it makes a crucial difference to our understanding of the play whether the brothers are matched deliberately or not. I believe that Aeschylus uses immense dramatic skill to illustrate how Eteocles is not actively aware that he will meet Polynices at the seventh gate and appears unconscious that the powerful curse is about to be fulfilled. Only when the fateful pairing suddenly becomes clear does he cry out in anguish at the knowledge that this is the gate already assigned to himself.

We have seen how the Argive host was probably already reduced to seven main attackers by the time of the *Septem*. It is impossible to establish in what ways Aeschylus has embellished this story and whether, for example, he introduced or inherited the idea of the lot to determine which warrior stood at which gate. It may be that the lot was used originally to elect the seven and that Aeschylus has modified its use here, including it to determine merely which Argive hero is to be stationed at which gate. I believe that when the story of the fratricide was merged with that of a mighty attack on Cadmeia, Eteocles and Polynices killed one another during the general fighting on the battle-field, and Polynices' words that he will seek out his brother (636) may be an oblique reference to this. We simply do not know whether Polynices has been one of the Seven in any pre-Aeschylean version (see above) or whether the idea of the brothers meeting at the same gate is completely new. I believe that the *unwitting* pairing of the brothers, at least, is an Aeschylean innovation and indeed he may have contributed a great deal more than this to his inherited material. The pairing of Eteocles and Polynices is a brilliant dramatic device which places full emphasis on the coming fratricide and creates a greater impression of the relentless workings of the curse than if the brothers had merely met later amidst the general fighting, as may have happened elsewhere.

When the Scout left the Argive warriors, they were drawing lots (55-6) and so it is important to note that, as well as failing to identify the Seven, it is also impossible for him to offer any clue to Eteocles about who will receive which gate. Eteocles declares, as he is about to leave:

> ἐγω δέ γ'ἄνδρας ἓξ ἐμοὶ σὺν ἑβδομῳ
> ἀντηρέτας ἐχθροῖσι τὸν μέγαν τρόπον
> [ ]
> εἰς ἑπτατειχεῖς ἐξόδους τάξω μολών,
> πρὶν ἀγγέλου σπερχνούς τε καὶ ταχυρρόθους
> λόγους ἱκέσθαι καὶ φλέγειν χρείας ὕπο.

> *But I shall go and station six champions with myself as seventh as opponents of the enemy (in the same proud way as they are doing) at the seven gates before speedy messages and hasty words arrive to set us on fire with the need.* (282-6)

Kitto believes that Eteocles chooses to stand at a gate in order to calm the frightened chorus and his anger is inspired by the knowledge that this means he must place himself against Polynices. This is clearly not the case however for the chorus is already calm when the king declares that he himself will be one of the seven defenders - σιγῶ· σὺν ἄλλοις πείσομαι τὸ μόρσιμον "*I shall be silent and make trial of my fate with the others*" (263). His intention is clear and there is nothing in the text to suggest that he failed in this. We saw in the previous chapter how in the *Persae* the Queen fails in her clearly stated intention to greet Xerxes with fresh clothing but while she never reappears on stage, Eteocles arrives back, making no suggestion that he has failed to complete his intended task. Thus it is clear that both sets of warriors are chosen and stationed simultaneously in complete ignorance of the choices being made by the opposite side[49]. Eteocles and the messenger run up from different directions (369f)

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[49]See further below on the possibility that Eteocles makes his decisions about the gates on stage, which I doubt.

- Taplin (p146) notes that this consists of "*the only two spoken entry announcements in Greek tragedy which are consecutive without a break*" - and both reveal in turn which heroes have been chosen to defend which gate. Up to that point neither side knows who is at which gate or even the identity of the opposing seven warriors.

Many scholars, including Taplin, Kirkwood and Ferrari, disagree with this interpretation, preferring to believe that during the Shield Scene Eteocles chooses warriors spontaneously in direct response to the words of the scout, while Lesky, Dawe and Brown suggest that Aeschylus wished there to remain a high degree of ambiguity over whether the choices were already made or not. Many suggest that Eteocles failed in his declared intention to choose his warriors and assign them to a particular gate (282-6 quoted above) and Hutchinson suggests that "*the deceptive suggestion heightens the impact of the extraordinary central scene*" (p89). Thus, they argue, Eteocles places himself against Polynices deliberately and is punished for this arrogant and unwise action. Thalmann, following Wilamowitz and Lesky, prefers the theory that Eteocles abandoned his task half-finished and completes his choices on stage (p125) and many, such as Thalmann, Brown, Cameron and Ryzman assume that Eteocles is fully aware that his brother is stationed at the seventh gate.

However we have seen how Aeschylus purposely contrived the drama so that neither side should know in advance which heroes the other has chosen and accordingly has no conception about who will be stationed at each gate when they make their respective decisions. Had the poet wished to present Eteocles making a conscious and deliberate decision to meet his brother in combat, this could have been easily achieved, but in fact it is clear that Polynices is far from Eteocles' thoughts during the earlier part of the drama and instead the king clearly remains ignorant that he will be paired with Polynices until the very last moment. Cameron complains "*it is a weakness of the play that Aeschylus has given no reason that Eteocles himself should stand at one of the gates.*

This is the first step towards the encounter with his brother" (p35). However it was natural for Eteocles as king of the Cadmeians to fight and indeed this may not have been a new feature. In fact the audience may have been surprised that the leader of the opposition, Adrastus, is not included among the Seven[50].

It is certainly possible that in some earlier version or versions, a report had reached Cadmeia concerning the identities and positions of the Seven before their own champions had been appointed and Eteocles' declaration that he will go and station his warriors before messengers arrive to advise this might be a reflection of this. It seems likely that in such a version Eteocles would choose to fight his own brother in all consciousness and so Aeschylus might be deliberately alluding to this alternative line in order to highlight his own divergence from this. A dramatic allusion to another source, now lost, certainly seems an attractive possibility and might help explain the confusion of modern scholars concerning this scene, in which Eteocles cannot have engineered a pairing with his brother deliberately since he has no idea that Polynices will be stationed at one of the gates, much less which one.

Perhaps the strongest argument against the theory that Eteocles purposefully chooses the same gate as his brother is the fact that Aeschylus has taken great pains to sublimate Polynices' presence in the preceding drama. The audience are awaiting Eteocles' realization that his brother is present with the enemy, but even they cannot be certain that the pairing will occur especially if it is a new element and previously the brothers have encountered one another only by chance amidst the general fighting. Whether the pairing at the gates were a new idea or

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[50]There is no evidence that this was ever the case in the earlier myth, but he was, after all, leader of the expedition.

not, however, the audience cannot have been certain that Eteocles and Polynices will be placed as opponents until the very last moment. In particular the mention of Adrastus early in the play may mislead the audience into supposing that he will be one of the Seven, as occurs in later myth, and since it would be appropriate for the leaders to be paired, the audience cannot be certain that this will not be the case and that the brothers will encounter one another at a later stage of the battle.

It has been suggested that Eteocles must be choosing heroes spontaneously as he speaks since the pairings are all appropriate in some way. However it is more likely that Eteocles' speeches are designed to illustrate his great skill in selecting the particular advantage of each of his own, already appointed warriors in a particular sphere and in fact he comments on the pairing of Hippomedon with Hyperbius Ἑρμῆς δ'εὐλόγως ξυνήγαγεν "*with good reason did Hermes pair them*" (508), thus explicitly disclaiming all credit for the appropriateness of the pairing and attributing it wholly to the gods. The audience too will suspect that it is the gods and not Eteocles who have conspired towards the particular pairing of Eteocles and Polynices and will attribute it rather to divine intervention. The audience will gain the impression that the appropriateness of the pairings is due to Eteocles' skill with words and they will suspect that the gods are conspiring towards a particular pairing, that of Eteocles and Polynices, in fulfillment of the curse.

Naturally we would expect Eteocles' own words to make it clear whether he is making spontaneous choices or reporting former decisions but in fact the tenses he uses are confusing and add weight to neither argument. There is one present[51], two futures[52],

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[51] ἔστιν 553

[52] ἀντιτάξω, ἀντιτάξομεν 408, 621 - and the Scout asks τίν' ἀντιτάξεις "*whom will you station?*" at 395.

two aorists[53] and two perfects[54]. Many, like Wilamowitz, Lesky and Thalmann, believe that this indicates that only some of the choices have been made and that Eteocles completes his decisions in conversation with the scout. This would explain the different tenses but in fact there is no indication in the text that Eteocles was forced to break off his task only half completed when Aeschylus might easily have made this clear. It may be true that the different tenses are included for dramatic effect[55], or it may be that the future tenses could be used loosely as the actual clash will occur in the future, but it is perhaps more likely that these vital words have become corrupted or deliberately modified, possibly in connection with the dubious ending of the play and all problems disappear by simply changing the two futures to aorists.

There are serious doubts concerning the ending of the *Septem*. The last seventy lines in particular are unlikely to be genuine for right at the end of the trilogy they appear to introduce entirely new characters, Antigone and Ismene, and raise the topic of the brothers' burial which surely lies beyond the scope of the trilogy. Cameron (p51) suggests that the end of the play was altered in order to facilitate a joint performance with the *Antigone* of Sophocles, the burial of the brothers being mentioned at the end of the *Septem* in order to blend the two, and this is certainly a possibility. Thus the Shield Scene may have been altered by the same hand, perhaps to create a grand effect with the seven actors actually leaving the stage to go to their respective gates as Eteocles speaks (see Ryzman), and the unusual tenses may be traces of this. If indeed this scene has been

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[53] ᾑρέθη, ξυνήγαγεν 505, 508

[54] τέτακται, πέπεμπται 448, 473

[55] Hutchinson notes how the move from past to present and back again means that the tension is thus eased during the choice of the middle gates and builds again to give an increasing sense of urgency to the later postings p104.

tampered with, this may be connected with the possible corruption to be found at the very end of the play.

The authenticity of the play's ending was first doubted by Bergk in 1848. Lloyd-Jones points out that this coincided with the discovery that the *Septem* was the final play in the trilogy and not the second and that no one had doubted the ending on any other grounds up to that point. He therefore defends the ending, arguing that we should not base the precept that a new issue cannot be raised at the end of a trilogy merely on the form of the Oresteia. He suggests that Aeschylus "*happened to have fastened upon a slice of epic saga too big for comprehension in a single trilogy*" (p92), apparently forgetting that the poet was free to omit future events if he chose. More recently Flintoff has produced an excellent defence, stating 1) that the end of both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* look forward, 2) that Antigone and Ismene were known as daughters of Oedipus before Aeschylus (on the premise that Pherecydes, quoted above, is pre-Aeschylean), and 3) that other tragic characters such as Darius appear as suddenly and unannounced as these. Orwin meanwhile points out that Polynices' honourable burial must be discussed in order to redress the balance of honour between the brothers. I would also add as a possible defence of the play's ending that the sisters' appearance would seem less unexpected if they had already appeared in the earlier trilogy.

However Dawe gives an excellent criticism of the ending in a series of two articles, one concentrating on content and the other on style and metre[56]. He notes that the *Septem* must change into a three-actor drama at the end or that Ismene is transformed into the Herald in the pause between lines 1004 and 1005. Also there is a sudden preoccupation with the polis as a political entity in these final lines of the play (see 1006 and 1026). He believes

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[56]See *Classical Quarterly* 17 1967 17-28 and *Dionysica* 1978 p87-103.

that 822-31, 848-74 and 1005-78 are spurious on metrical and linguistic grounds and that 996-7 have been tinkered with, and believes that the interpolator was influenced to some extent by Sophocles' *Antigone* (p23). Thalmann also wishes to reject our present ending, believing that a new problem would "*run counter to the movement of the myth, the trilogy, and the play itself*" (p141). At the end of the play we seem to find evidence of the idea that the death of the brothers occurs in exchange for the preservation of the city in some sense - in the *Lille Stesichorus* the queen fears the possibility of παῖδας ἐνὶ μμεγάροις θανόντας ἢ πόλιν ἁλοῖσαν' "*the children dying in the house or the city destroyed*". Thus Aeschylus may be alluding to a traditional element in the many prayers offered by those on stage that Cadmeia will be preserved and Eteocles' concern for his city, at 69-77 for example, will assume a greater irony for the audience if they know that he is doomed to die in order to ensure its survival. The chorus cries:

> δέδοικα δὲ σὺν βασιλεῦσι
> μὴ πόλις δαμασθῇ
>
> *I fear lest with her kings, the city will be brought low* (764-5)

However lines 804 and 820-1 where the messenger makes this connection explicit are open to suspicion[57] and so the whole idea may be part of the general corruption of the ending and convey a post-Aeschylean idea, especially since this "either/or" situation is excluded from the drama elsewhere[58].

Perhaps there is something to be said for both sides of this

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[57]See Hutchinson 804n.

[58]In Euripides' *Phoenissae* 912ff Teiresias tells Creon that Cadmeia can only be saved by the sacrifice of his son Menoeceus which may also reflect the idea of human death in exchange for the survival of Cadmeia, although this too is later than Aeschylus.

argument, but it seems to me highly unlikely that the whole of our present ending is reliable and some corruption may have occurred here, which possibly extended to the confusing variety of tenses to be found in the Shield Scene.

c) The Revelation

The order in which the seven gates are named by the Scout may have been traditional but, even if not, it is natural for the vital pairing of Eteocles and Polynices to be delayed until the very last moment for dramatic effect. Tydeus is at the first gate, the gate of Proetus, and Eteocles declares:

> κόσμον μὲν ἀνδρὸς οὔτιν' ἂν τρέσαιμ' ἐγώ
>
> *I shall not tremble at the finery of any man* (397)

For a moment the ἐγώ may suggest to the audience that Eteocles himself will stand against Tydeus and it is not revealed for a further ten lines that this will not be the case. Kitto believes that Eteocles should choose to fight Eteoclus - "*surely the king will accept an omen?*" (p51) but this is impossible since in this scene he is not consciously choosing his combatant. Nevertheless the audience may consider this accidental by-passing of an omen as most unfortunate.

Amphiaraus is at the sixth gate and he is revealed as a far nobler character than the previous five heroes - the scout calls him ἄνδρα σωφρονέστατον "*the most decent of men*" (568) while Eteocles regards him as δίκαιον ἄνδρα "*a just man*" (598) and εὐσεβὴς ἀνὴρ "*a righteous man*" (602). Unlike the other heroes, there is no device upon Amphiaraus' shield:

> οὐ γὰρ δοκεῖν ἄριστος ἀλλ' εἶναι θέλει
>
> *For he does not wish to seem to be excellent but actually to be so* (592)

In Euripides' *Phoenissae* (1100ff) the shield devices differ from those found in the *Septem* except in the case of Amphiaraus whose shield there is also blank, and so this may reflect a traditional idea. That Amphiaraus is a decent and admirable man also seems to have been a well-established idea[59] and there may have been a considerable cluster of myths about this figure in his own right. However since Pindar refers to seven funeral pyres and the special fate of Amphiaraus[60], he may not have featured among the central seven warriors always, in which case the audience cannot have been certain that he would be at a gate, and his presence may even increase the number of possible heroes available to stand at the seventh gate.

Amphiaraus is described as sternly rebuking Tydeus (571ff) and Polynices (580ff) for their cruel attack upon the city. He condemns the latter in particular:

> "ἦ τοῖον ἔργον καὶ θεοῖσι προσφιλές,
> καλόν τ'ἀκοῦσαι καὶ λέγειν μεθυστέροις,
> πόλιν πατρῴαν καὶ θεοὺς τοὺς ἐγγενεῖς
> πορθεῖν, στράτευμ'ἐπακτὸν ἐμβεβληκότα;"
>
> *Is such a deed really acceptable to the gods or a fine thing to hear or for those who come after to relate, to seek to destroy your father city and (the shrines of) the native gods by launching against them an army of mercenaries?* (580-583)

This is the first reference to Polynices in the *Septem* and this strong condemnation by a fellow warrior, the respected seer Amphiaraus, will strongly influence the audience's attitude towards him and his subsequent claims that Justice is on his side (631ff). The seer knows that the expedition is doomed, as in the

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[59] See Hesiod 25 MW, quoted above, and Pindar *Olympian* 6 22ff and *Nemean* 9 57ff where he is praised in Adrastus' lament as a good prophet and warrior and rescued by Zeus from an ignoble death.

[60] See *Olympian* 6.19-29.

earlier myth, and calmly predicts his own death:

> ἔγωγε μὲν δὴ τήνδε πιανῶ χθόνα...
> ...οὐκ ἄτιμον ἐλπίζω μόρον
>
> *I shall enrich this soil with my blood...I hope for a death which is not dishonourable* (587-89)

Eteocles admires his bravery and pities this good man:

> ἀλλ' οἶδεν ὥς σφε χρὴ τελευτῆσαι μάχῃ,
> εἰ καρπὸς ἐστι θεσφάτοισι Λοξίου
>
> *He knows that he must die in the battle, if the oracles of Loxias bear fruit* (617-8)

The audience suspects that Eteocles is fated to die in this same conflict, a fact which he himself does not yet anticipate, and so his pity is heavy with irony. Amphiaraus does not make a prediction of Eteocles' death but in fact the latter demonstrates further similarity with the seer when he suddenly interprets the future for himself. Both Amphiaraus and Eteocles foresee and accept their fate and their stoical attitudes would have been greatly admired by the Greek audience.

Kitto believes that Eteocles loses this last chance of avoiding confrontation with his brother because of the presence at the sixth gate of a man admired by himself and all others on stage. He calls this "*a searing flash of tragic irony, hardly to be paralleled in Aeschylus, not approached elsewhere*" (p51). If we accept for a moment that Eteocles was making decisions on the spot, it is true that he would be unwilling to fight against this good man whom he admires. However, even in that case, he could not be sure that Polynices would be at the seventh gate and he might understandably be reserving himself for a possible pairing with Adrastus. In fact Eteocles is merely reporting his former decisions and the possibility of changing his gate does not enter the drama. Indeed the audience may feel relief that he is not to oppose this good man but they may also wonder whether the seventh

warrior will not also be nobler than the rest. Thus the presence of Amphiaraus may contribute to the suspense over whether the final hero will be Adrastus or Polynices although it soon becomes clear that the seventh warrior is, in fact, far worse than all the rest.

On learning that Polynices is to be his opponent (653-5), Eteocles cries out in sudden agonized shock, clearly illustrating that he never anticipated the truth of the situation until it was too late. Undoubtedly Aeschylus wished to show that Eteocles remains unaware that he is matched with his brother until the very last moment and the audience cannot have been absolutely certain that this would be the case until this point also. They will suspect that the Cadmeians will defend their city bravely and will thwart the attack. Thus they will approve of Eteocles' calm dismissal of the threatening shield devices and wild boasts of the enemy (397) and suspect that he is acting as a good general on behalf of his people[61]. The scene builds up to a climax in the disclosure that Eteocles will face his brother at the seventh gate and interest lies not in the possibility that he has chosen this pairing deliberately or might somehow reject it, but in the revelation of his fate and his acceptance of it when it is presented so clearly. His "free will" is shown by this noble acknowledgement of his appointed destiny, not in his deliberate choice to fight his brother, as Ryzman maintains (p119). Thalmann comments, "*the scene's effect, of course, can never have depended upon suspense in the audience about the identity of Eteocles' adversary. Even the spectators at the first performance must have known that the brothers would kill each other*" (p125). It is true that the fratricide will have been anticipated but, especially if the pairing of the brothers at the gates is a new feature, there will be some degree of suspense as the audience wonder if the fate of the brothers will be delayed or even somehow diverted at the

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[61] Although see below on his earlier harsh treatment of the chorus.

final moment.

The audience witnesses how Eteocles suddenly realizes his fate after a long period of ignorance, and at last he joins them in their knowledge that his death is imminent and that his only course is to accept his destiny with dignity. He refuses to entertain the possibility of substituting another man at the gate, for this would involve a great loss of honour. In addition Polynices has vowed that he will seek out his brother and kill him anyway, so he wisely recognizes the power of the curse and submits to it. Naturally there was a variety of ways in which Aeschylus could have chosen to portray the revelation that the brothers are to be paired at the same gate and he presents Eteocles' realization of his dreadful fate to great dramatic effect.

C) The Curse

a) The Curse and the Dream

Much of the dramatic effect of the revelation that the curse of Oedipus is to be fulfilled during the *Septem* will depend on how this theme has been treated during the earlier part of the trilogy, and naturally the original audience has a great advantage over us for they know what, if anything, has been said about this matter already. In addition they would have been aware how the curse had been presented in previous versions of the myth and so it is even possible that Aeschylus relies completely on this prior knowledge to create tension during the earlier part of the *Septem.* However it is perhaps more likely that Oedipus' curse has been discussed in some sense during the preceding plays of the trilogy in order to verify the audience's suspicions about the impending fratricide and thereby make their appreciation of the play more specific.

It is important to remember that the audience will have been aware of the curse upon Eteocles and Polynices from the very

beginning of the play, even though Aeschylus excludes all mention of it from the first part of the drama[62] and none on stage seem aware of its application to their present situation. We have seen how the development of this myth involved the merging of several previously independent stories and how it is impossible to establish to which strand the father's cursing of his sons originally belonged. The idea that Oedipus cursed his sons to suffer strife and death at each other's hands is found as early as the *Thebais*, and so the audience will doubtless be aware of this formula and wonder if and when it will come under discussion in the *Septem*.

However the curse may have been treated during the preceding drama, the *Septem* makes little dramatic sense if it has been clearly presented and understood by Eteocles and Polynices before the play begins. Had Oedipus' words been correctly interpreted by those on stage, then the significance of the brothers participating on opposite sides in the same encounter would have suggested immediately that the curse is about to be fulfilled, yet we have seen that while Eteocles must have been aware that Polynices was with the enemy during the earlier part of the play[63], he simply did not see any particular danger in this nor connect it with their father's curse in any way. Thus the *Septem* can only succeed as drama if Eteocles were unaware of the precise terms of the curse hanging over him and only when his dream is correctly interpreted does the impending double fratricide become apparent. In fact, up until the moment when the final pairing is revealed, it is clear that neither brother regards death in battle as inevitable. Polynices declares to Eteocles that he will either take Cadmeia by force or:

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[62]Except for line 70, which we shall discuss below.

[63]The attack is inspired by his desire for his inheritance - see above.

σοὶ ξυμφέρεσθαι καὶ κτανὼν θανεῖν πέλας

I will engage with you and, having killed you, will die beside your body (636)

The audience will appreciate this unwitting reference to their appointed fates and, even though this is a common phrase in tragedy[64], they will note how it is particularly appropriate here. However, at the same time Polynices foresees the possibility that he will survive and drive Eteocles from the kingdom, as the messenger reveals:

ἢ ζῶντ' ἀτιμαστῆρα τόν τ'ἀνδρηλάτην
φυγῇ τὸν αὐτὸν τόνδε τείσασθαι τρόπον

Or if you live (he vows) to punish you, who dishonoured him by driving him from his home, with banishment in the same manner (637-8)

While the survival and banishment of Eteocles is possible within the drama, the audience will have strong suspicions that he will die at the hands of his brother as in earlier versions of the story. Eteocles, meanwhile, does not regard his death in battle as inevitable until his pairing with his brother becomes clear and the dream is correctly interpreted. Thus even if the brothers have heard of some general curse placed on them by their father, they appear to have no conception that it is about to reach fruition during the coming encounter.

It is possible, of course, that the precise terms of the curse had been openly discussed on stage earlier in the trilogy and that this information had been kept from the brothers in some way. However the chorus of Theban women appears equally ignorant of the fact that the brothers are doomed to kill each other by the terms of the curse, and there seems no obvious reason for secrecy. Either Oedipus had issued his curse only in very general terms,

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[64] Compare *Agamemnon* 1610f, *Choephori* 438, Euripides' *Elektra* 281.

clearly understood by the audience alone, or the brothers are being extremely obtuse in not realizing the danger they are in as they prepare to engage in the same battle!

Clearly Eteocles has heard something about this curse for he offers a prayer to it early in the play:

> ὦ Ζεῦ τε καὶ Γῆ καὶ πολισσοῦχοι θεοί,
> Ἀρά τ' Ἐρινὺς πατρὸς ἡ μεγασθενής,
> μή μοι πόλιν γε πρεμνόθεν πανώλεθρον
> ἐκθαμνίσητε δῃάλωτον...
>
> *Oh Zeus and Earth and gods who guard the city, Curse, the mighty Erinys of my father, do not uproot my city, taken by an enemy attack and utterly destroyed* (69-72)

Cameron suggests that Eteocles calls on the curse because he supposes it to refer to war over the division of Oidipus' inheritance and that this invasion in itself constitutes its fulfillment (p32) but in fact he only appreciates this later towards the end of the play (657ff). No doubt the real purpose of this invocation is to serve as a brief reminder to the audience about the curse of Oedipus, informing them that foreknowledge about the imminent fates of the brothers is to remain active during the earlier part of the drama, even though it will not be openly discussed on stage (the Watchman's dark hints in the *Agamemnon* about the adultery and projected murder play a similar role). Hutchinson notes this initial suppression of the curse and suggests that "*the effect of this structure on its original spectators must have been overwhelming*" (pxxxi). We should remember however that the curse will have been central to the thoughts of the audience from the outset and that thev will anticipate and witness Eteocles' sudden discovery of the truth, rather than participate in it themselves.

Eteocles' fearless reference to his father's curse, requesting its aid in saving the city, will also serve to remind the audience that he is completely ignorant of the personal danger

which it represents for himself. They will suppose that he is correct in assuming that the curse has the power to influence human affairs and that his prayer that the city be saved will be answered. However his innocent attitude towards the curse will increase their suspense over if and how he will realize the truth. After this brief mention of the curse it is then forgotten for some 585 lines until the moment when Eteocles suddenly appreciates the full significance of the pairing of the brothers at the gates and cries out:

> ὤμοι, πατρὸς δὴ νῦν ἀραὶ τελεσφόροι
>
> *Alas! The curses of my father are now being fulfilled!* (655)

Shortly afterwards the general curse of Oedipus is linked to a dream experienced by Eteocles and the threat of the double fratricide suddenly becomes clear:

> ἄγαν δ' ἀληθεῖς ἐνυπνίων φαντασμάτων
> ὄψεις, πατρῴων χρημάτων δατήριοι
>
> *Too true were the visions in dreams during sleep, dividers of our father's wealth* (710-11)

After Eteocles has departed to almost certain death, the chorus further elaborate on the dream:

> ξένος δὲ κλήρους ἐπινωμᾷ
> Χάλυβος Σκυθᾶν ἄποικος,
> κτεάνων χρηματοδαίτας
> πικρός, ὠμόφρων Σίδαρος,
> χθόνα ναίειν διαπήλας
> ὁπόσαν καὶ φθιμένους [-] κατέχειν
>
> *The Chalybian stranger has come from his Scythian home to apportion their shares, a bitter distributor of possessions (for he is) the cruel steel who has allotted to each as much land to dwell in as a corpse can fill* (727-32)

As with the curse, we do not know how the dream has been presented in the earlier drama, or even whether it has been

included at all. Hutchinson comments that "*we may suppose that the dream had not been heard of before this moment*" and he notes how in a similar manner the oracles in *Persae* 739-41 and Sophocles' *Trachinae* 1159-61 "*appear only at the moment of understanding*" (pxxvii). As with the curse, the audience may be familiar with the dream from its presentation of the story in earlier versions in which case there is no strict necessity for Aeschylus to refer to it explicitly. However the chorus enjoys full knowledge about Eteocles' dream (727-38) so even if Eteocles has not appeared on stage before the *Septem* begins, his dream may well have been discussed or predicted in the previous drama. We find no reference to the dream in our sources and it is at least possible that this was an Aeschylean innovation. If so, the dream may have been discussed already, perhaps in the form of a riddle as the words of the chorus suggest. If so the audience will surely have appreciated its true meaning, aided by their knowledge of the myth, and have been awaiting the revelation of this to Eteocles and his companions. Podlecki suggests that this riddle "*seems to be sprung upon the audience here as if it were something novel*" (p12) but it will surely have a more powerful dramatic effect if the audience have been awaiting the correct interpretation of the dream for some time and, when this is combined with the curse, all suddenly becomes clear. The idea of solving riddles may even reflect the story of Oedipus and the Sphinx if this was part of the myth by this stage (see above).

Clytemnestra's dream of the snake in the *Choephori* is also in riddle form and misinterpreted by those on stage as a sign of Agamemnon's anger instead of a portent of Orestes' return. Likewise during the *Septem*, Eteocles' dream seems to have been misinterpreted as a reference to a stranger who would allot the inheritance fairly between the brothers. He finally realizes that this apparent prediction of reconciliation was in fact a cruel reference to mutual death, for the stranger is a sword and the land he allots to each brother a grave. In the *Oedipus Coloneus*, Oedipus also curses his sons (421ff) and later declares, when its

terms become specific:

> ἔστιν δὲ παισὶ τοῖς ἐμοῖσι τῆς ἐμῆς
> χθονὸς λαχεῖν τοσοῦτον, ἐνθανεῖν μόνον
>
> *My sons will receive only enough of my land in which to be buried* (789-90)

If this formula is traditional, Aeschylus may have chosen to present it in the form of the dream rather than in the actual words of Oedipus. The idea of the brothers inheriting just enough land in which to be buried is cruelly ironic and the audience may even have wondered whether Amphiaraus would assume the role of an arbiter and inform the brothers of their appointed fate.[65]

Thus it seems likely that the riddle of the dream had been discussed in the previous drama and misinterpreted as a prediction that Eteocles and Polynices would somehow be reconciled. When combined with the curse, it reveals the dreadful fate awaiting the brothers. Hutchinson notes how this sudden interpretation of the future "*serves to make Eteocles' fatalism seem all the more*

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[65]Thalmann notes how "*the language of allotment occurs more frequently in the* Seven *than in any other extant drama by Aeschylus*' (p78) and links this to the practice whereby an arbiter divides the property into portions of the same value and the heirs cast lots for them - see *Hermes* CX 1982 p385-91. This features at *Odyssey* 14.199-210 and with direct reference to Eteocles and Polynices in the *Lille Stesichorus*. In the *Septem* the lot is used to assign the gates to the Seven and this would suggest to the Greeks some divine hand at work in the final pairing - see Plato *Laws* 741b on the divinity of the lot and the *Lille Stesichorus* 224 λάχῃ ἕκατι Μοιρᾶν. There also seems to be some play on the term μοῖρα during this play which may mean either "*portion*" or "*fate, death*" and it may be that Aeschylus is alluding to contemporary practices here. Cameron wishes to develop the idea and suggests that the trilogy was concerned with "*the change in the Greek law of inheritance from a system of primogeniture to a system whereby all sons received an equal share of the patrimony*" (p14). However we should perhaps not be too influenced by the "legal" character of the *Oresteia* trilogy in these matters and we simply do not know whether the audience would extract this idea from the drama.

natural" (p159) and the general curse is seen to refer to the mutual fratricide only when combined with the extra clues given in the dream.

b) The Reason for the Curse

The Thebais presents the reason for the curse thus:

> αὐτὰρ ὁ διογενὴς ἥρως ξανθὸς Πολυνείκης
> πρῶτα μὲν Οἰδιπόδῃ καλὴν παρέθηκε τράπεζαν
> ἀργυρέην Κάδμοιο θεόφρονος, αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα
> χρύσεον ἔμπλησεν καλὸν δέπας ἡδέος οἴνου.
> αὐτὰρ ὅ γ' ὡς φράσθη παρακείμενα πατρὸς ἑοῖο
> τιμήεντα γέρα, μέγα οἱ κακὸν ἔμπεσε θυμῷ
> αἶψα δὲ παισὶν ἑοῖσι μετ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἐπαρὰς
> ἀργαλέας ἠρᾶτο. (θεῶν δ' οὐ λάνθαν' Ἐρινύν)...
> ὡς οὔ οἱ πατρῷ ἐνηέι φιλότητι
> δάσσαιντ', ἀμφοτέροισι δ' αἰεὶ πόλεμοί τε μάχαι τε...
>
> *The godlike hero, golden-haired Polynices first set a fine silver table which had belonged to devout Cadmus beside Oidipous. The he filled a fine golden goblet with sweet wine. But when Oidipous noticed that the things lying before him were the honoured prizes of his own father, a great evil fell upon his heart and he suddenly cursed both of his sons with grievous curse and he did not escape the notice of the divine Erinyes...that they would not divide their father's kingdom with respectful friendship but both might always have wars and battles.*
> (Athenaeus 465e–466a)

Thus in our earliest source, the curse is said to have arisen because Polynices used treasures belonging formerly to Laius. However the fragment fails to clarify the specific reason for Oedipus' anger and we are not told whether he resented any reminder of his father per se or whether his main objection was to Polynices' use of his future inheritance in this manner. If the latter, it is not clear whether Polynices' insult were intended deliberately or not, nor is there any mention of Eteocles' participation, although he shares the weight of the curse equally with his brother. A second fragment[66], also attributed to the

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[66]Schol Laur in Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus* 1375 Pap

Thebais, suggests that Oedipus cursed his sons for sending him the wrong joint from a sacrificial victim:

> εὖκτο Διὶ βασιλῆ καὶ ἄλλοις ἀθανάτοισι
> χερσὶν ὑπ'ἀλλήλων καταβήμεναι Ἄιδος εἴσω
>
> *And he prayed to Zeus the king and the other gods that his sons might die at each other's hands and go down to Hades*

Oedipus' words appear harsher and more specific here and we must conclude that either these fragments come from different sources or that Oedipus cursed his sons on two separate occasions in the *Thebais*. In fact we should note that Amphiaraus' name means "*he of the double curse*"' and we find the idea of a double curse, one general and one specific, later, in the *Oedipus Coloneus*. Ismene comments that the rivalry between the brothers arises from the old curse on their race τὴν πάλαι γένους φθοράν (369). Later Oedipus himself lays a general curse of death upon his sons (421ff) and subsequently links it to the coming military encounter:

> τοιάσδ' ἀρὰς σφῷν πρόσθε τ'ἐξανῆκ'ἐγὼ
> νῦν τ'ἀνακαλοῦμαι ξυμμάχους ἐλθεῖν ἐμοί
>
> *Such a curse I lately launched against you both, now I invoke this to fight for me* (1375-6)[67]

Thus here again we have the idea of a delay during which Oedipus' curse lies dormant, and then suddenly becomes active when the brothers take up weapons on opposite sides, and this may also relate to myths earlier than Aeschylus. Again in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Theseus is surprised when his own curse is suddenly fulfilled (1164ff) and so the idea of dramatic curses lying dormant for an interval may have been a common device. It seems probable that the idea of a double curse in the *Thebais* and *Oedipus Coloneus* and the combination of curse and dream in the

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[67] For the terms see OC 1385ff.

Septem reflect how the myth evolved from the combination of several separate stories which on occasion may lead to the confusion or repetition of certain themes. It may also show how two separate versions of the father's curse have been amalgamated into one.

We noted how Oedipus cursed his sons in the *Thebais* concerning their misuse of Laius' possessions or their sending of the wrong joint from the sacrificial victim. Thalmann notes a suggestion by one scholiast that the reason for the curse in the *Septem* is similar (p19) but this may be mere supposition and we should consider more deeply the question of what may have provoked Oedipus' curse in this version. In their summary of the preceding trilogy, the chorus declares:

> τέκνοις δ'ἀθλίας ἐφῆ-
> κεν ἐπίκοτος τροφᾶς,
> αἰαῖ, πικ ρογλώσσους ἀράς

> *In anger at their wretched* τροφή, *alas! he laid bitter-spoken curses on his sons* (785-786)

There is some dispute over the meaning of the term τροφή here. Hutchinson translates it as *origin* or *birth* and cites other examples of this usage[68]. March agrees that the most likely reason for Oedipus to curse his sons was over their incestuous birth rather than because of some "*petty irritation*" over being sent the wrong joint of meat (p144). However since this is tragedy, it is much more likely that, as in the *Thebais*, Oedipus utters his curse in direct response to some insult or neglect to himself, real or imagined. The word τροφὴ may be deliberately ambiguous in order to remind the audience of Eteocles' and Polynices' incestuous birth, but now that the story has been translated into tragic form, they may suppose[69] that the brothers have committed some

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[68]Compare Euripides' *Ion* 263, Sophocles' *Ajax* 1229.

[69]Or indeed even have witnessed direct references to this

specific sin and are therefore both worthy of their cruel fate. The audience may know stories in which there is a particular reason why Eteocles and Polynices incited their father's wrath and this accords better with the conventions of tragedy than if they were cursed for the circumstances of their birth for which they were not personally responsible.

It is generally agreed that Eteocles is presented in a far nobler light than his brother during the course of the *Septem.* This led Cameron, Orwin and Solmsen to believe that he is guiltless of any crime and does not deserve to die. However the totally unmerited death of a tragic hero seems unlikely and it may be that Eteocles' behaviour has been less praiseworthy in the preceding drama to counterbalance his present attitude. In the *Oedipus Coloneus* we discover that the blame is equal on both sides for while Eteocles, the younger brother, seized the throne and banished his brother (374ff, 1291ff), Polynices allowed his aged father to be driven from the kingdom when he enjoyed power prior to this (1355ff). Likewise in Euripides' *Phoenissae*[70] and Apollodorus III.v.6ff, Oedipus is chiefly angered by the fact that neither of his sons tried to prevent him from being sent into exile but were ashamed of their blind old father. The audience will know what crime Eteocles and Polynices have committed to bring their father's curse upon them in this trilogy and it is possible that we may find some hint at these former mistakes within this third play.

Many have supposed that Eteocles is a misogynist and it is true that he speaks to the frightened Argive women with unwarranted harshness, calling them θρέμματ' οὐκ ἀνασχετά...σωφρόνων μισήματα "*intolerable creatures...hated by*

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earlier in the trilogy.

[70]Where Eteocles is the greater villain, see 51ff and 843ff.

those with sense (181, 186) and declaring:

> μήτ' ἐν κακοῖσι μήτ' ἐν εὐεστοῖ φίλῃ
> ξύνοικος εἴην τῷ γυναικείῳ γένει
>
> *Neither in misfortune nor in welcome success may I be an associate of the female sex* (187-8)

Winnington-Ingram suggests that this hatred of women would have been perfectly natural and understandable - "*Eteocles might indeed have been affected by the horror of the sexual relation in his immediate family, linked as it is with his accursed state*". (p14) However tragedy is not concerned with the psychological causes of behaviour and in fact we find that Eteocles' above comment was proverbial[71]. It is important to note however that Eteocles does not confine his death threat only to the women but in fact extends it to all Cadmeians - ἀνὴρ γυνή τε χὤ τι τῶν μεταίχμιον "*to man, woman or anyone in between*" (197) and so the audience would regard this, not as evidence of misogyny, but as a harsh and unmerited outburst of angry words. He is angered by the chorus' open references to the destruction of the city (223-252, see also at 232, 238, 242, 250, 262) and it is incidental that his harsh comments are directed solely against females.

However it may be that it was a sudden outburst of anger such as this which provoked his father's curse in the past and we see from the very first line of the play his fear of ill-omened words and his great desire always to say the right thing (χρὴ λέγειν τὰ καίρια 1). Likewise during the Shield Scene Eteocles demonstrates great care and skill in his use of words as he diverts the power of the threatening shield devices of the attackers back upon themselves. Thalmann comments that "*the shields are a form of omen and Eteocles' task is to interpret and accept the omen...The battle is virtually fought out in words and symbols before the*

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[71]Compare *Choephori* 1005ff, Sophocles' *Antigone* 373-5, Euripides' *Hippolytus* 640ff.

event itself" (p107),[72] and so it is, of course, ironic that he failed to interpret the riddle of the dream correctly before the pairing becomes apparent. Thus the mistake of Eteocles, and perhaps Polynices, may have taken the form of a verbal insult to their father and his present fear of ill-omened words reflects this former crime.

It is also possible that it was another such burst of angry, ill-chosen words which led Eteocles to seize the throne of Cadmeia and banish Polynices from the land. This event is suppressed during the earlier part of the *Septem* but the audience may have been aware of it, perhaps from references to it in the earlier part of the trilogy, before it is openly discussed during this play[73] and this may be related to the rather noble image of Eteocles which Aeschylus sought to promote in this play. Polynices' departure from his kingdom was a feature of the myth as early as Homer[74], although initially he may have been absent from the kingdom of his own free will during his father's lifetime. Pindar relates how Adrastus was forced to flee his throne in Argos on account of sedition before he led the expedition against Thebes (*Nemean* 9.30ff) and so it is possible that the myth of his unwilling departure from his kingdom was transferred to Polynices at some stage in the development of the myth. These two characters are certainly closely linked and Adrastus leads the expedition in many versions when it would seem more natural for

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[72]Thalmann makes some very good points about the imagery of the shields but perhaps he overestimates a little the capacity of even such trained listeners as the Athenians. See also Zeitlin p46 who believes that like Laius and Oidipous, Eteocles proves himself a skillful interpreter of riddles, seeking out the flaw in the enemy's chosen symbols and using it against them.

[73]At 638, 979, 991, although the later parts of the text may not be reliable - see below.

[74]See for example *Iliad* 4.376-8.

Polynices to do so.

In the *Lille Stesichorus* the Queen suggests a solution to the brother's conflict:

> τὸμ μὲν ἔχοντα δόμους ναίειν π[αρὰ νάμασι Δίρκας]
> τὸν δ'ἀπίμεν κτεάνη
> καὶ χρυσὸν ἔχοντα φίλου σύμπαντα [πατρός],
> κλαροπαληδὸν ὃς ἄν
> πρᾶτος λάχῃ ἕκατι Μοιρᾶν.
>
> τοῦτο γὰρ ἂν δοκέω
> λυτήριον ὔμμι κακοῦ γένοιτο πότμ[ου]...
>
> *One will have the house and dwell besides the streams of Dirce...the other will leave with all the possessions and gold of your dear father. Whoever first by the shaking of the lot obtains it by the will of fate. I think that this will release you from an evil death* (219-25)[75]

In Euripides' *Phoenissae* the brothers agree to rule for a year at a time but Eteocles refuses to surrender power at the end of his appointed period but banishes his brother, while in the *Oedipus Coloneus* Polynices claims the throne on grounds of seniority but again is sent into exile by his more popular younger brother. Hellanicus[76] notes a version in which Polynices' departure with the movable possessions was through choice but this may belong to the post-Aeschylean myth. We do not know whether Eteocles and Polynices made any sort of pact about ruling the kingdom in the earlier part of this trilogy but it seems clear that the former has banished his brother and usurped power without justification.

While Eteocles is clearly guilty of banishing his brother from his share in the kingdom, Polynices is likewise openly

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[75]This process is referred to at Plato *Laws* 740c 923a.

[76]See *FGH* f98.

condemned during the *Septem* for his wicked desire to sack his mother-city Cadmeia (570ff). It may be that it was similar arrogant boasts and foolish actions on the part of the brothers which had angered Oedipus in the past and the audience would be reminded of these flaws in their natures during the *Septem*.

We should consider the further possibility that it is these very actions - Eteocles' act of banishment and Polynices' aggression against his homeland - which inspired their father's curse. These outrages may have been foretold to Oedipus in some way, provoking his angry curse, or it is even possible that he is still living during the action of the *Septem* and deeply angered by his sons' abuse of their inheritance and neglect of himself. Admittedly there is nothing in the play to suggest that he is still alive but neither is there any direct reference to his decease. In many later versions, such as the *Oedipus Coloneus* and Euripides' *Phoenissae*, Oedipus remains alive during his sons' disputes over the kingdom and at the end of the latter he returns to the stage to hear of the sad deaths of his wife and sons. Thus it is not inconceivable that Oedipus abdicated his throne during the earlier part of the trilogy and remains in exile during the *Septem*, his curse inspired by Eteocles' banishment of his brother, Polynices' planned attack on his homeland and possibly by the former neglect of both at the time of his exile. Then the brothers' inheritance of just enough land in which to be buried assumes a cruel appropriateness, since it was the desire for land and possessions which inspired their conflict. If our theory is correct, then it is even possible that Oedipus reappeared on stage at the end of the *Septem* which would account for the possible tampering with the text at this point. Anyone wishing to modify the *Septem* for a joint performance with Sophocles' *Antigone*[77], would surely excise Oedipus from the play since his presence might interfere with his daughter s' solitary plight. The possibility

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[77]See Cameron p51.

that Oedipus outlives his sons in this version must remain pure speculation but I find his reappearance at the end of the play less unlikely than that of Antigone and Ismene.

D) Conclusion

a) Exit and death

Once the meaning of the curse becomes clear to Eteocles, he bursts out in a sudden cry of woe:

> ὦ θεομανές τε καὶ θεῶν μέγα στύγος,
> ὦ πανδάκρυτον ἁμὸν Οἰδίπου γένος·
> ὤμοι, πατρὸς δὴ νῦν ἀραὶ τελεσφόροι.
>
> *Oh maddened by the gods and greatly hated by them, oh our wretched race of Oidipous! Alas now the curses of our father are being fulfilled!* (654-6)

Many, including Ryzman and Otis, have supposed that Eteocles is suddenly overcome by madness at this point and undergoes a complete change of character. Cameron claimed that the change in Eteocles "*nearly rends the play in two*" and believes that Aeschylus failed in his attempt to present this myth effectively (p97) while Solmsen believed that Eteocles became possessed by an Erinys which urged him towards certain death - "*caution, prudence, self-control are cast to the winds*" (p198). Vidal-Naquet meanwhile regarded him as "*a desperate man, overmastered by the curse*" (p120). It was clearly not Aeschylus' intention to portray any great change in Eteocles' character however for after this brief display of grief, he quickly restrains his emotions and accepts his appointed fate with great dignity and resolution:

> ἀλλ' οὔτε κλαίειν οὔτ' ὀδύρεσθαι πρέπει,
> μὴ καὶ τεκνωθῇ δυσφορώτερος γόος
>
> *But it is not fitting to weep or wail lest it produce lamentation still harder to bear* (656-7)

Thus there is no great delay in dramatic time while Eteocles

laments his fate, which the audience has suspected all along and which the chorus will mourn at length later, but instead he continues with a speech similar in tone to the previous six, although without his former confidence in the superiority of the Cadmeian opponent. Although he comments on Polynices' misuse of justice, He fails to answer Polynices' shield device as he had done with the previous pairings which will confirm the audience's suspicions of the outcome of their encounter. Ryzman comments that "*Aeschylus is truly one of the first great psychologists. He recognizes that a "curse" will come to fruition as long as a belief in it is fertilized, nurtured and made a part of one's inner self*" (p114). It is highly unlikely that the audience would regard Eteocles' behaviour in this light however and his noble and immediate acceptance of the curse, perhaps in contrast to the earlier behaviour of Laius and/or Oedipus, will appear admirable and dignified. His fate is almost certainly deserved in dramatic terms and praiseworthy behaviour here will counterbalance any former error or "tragic mistake" committed in the past.

He declares his intention to fight Polynices:

> εἶμι καὶ ξυστήσομαι
> αὐτός· τίς ἄλλος μᾶλλον ἐνδικώτερος;
> ἄρχοντί τ'ἄρχων καὶ κασιγνήτῳ κάσις,
> ἐχθρὸς σὺν ἐχθρῷ στήσομαι.

> *I myself will go and engage with him. Who else has a greater right? King against king, brother against brother, enemy against enemy I shall take my stand.* (672-5)

The audience has anticipated this encounter all along and now Eteocles too shares their awareness of the destined outcome of his meeting with Polynices. The fact that he exits knowingly to his death, like Cassandra and Clytemnestra were to do in the *Oresteia*, creates a far better dramatic effect than if he left the stage completely ignorant of his imminent fate. The pairing of the brothers at the same gate makes their confrontation more specific and the double fratricide "*much subtler, more thought-provoking*

and more dramatically effective" (Brown p313).

To emphasize his grim determination and the immediacy of the encounter, Eteocles calls for his greaves (675-7), the piece of armour usually donned first. Thalmann believes that Eteocles arms himself on stage during his final speech but this seems unnecessarily realistic and this comment is probably included in order to emphasize the imminency of his departure for battle, the consequence of which the audience well knows.

Eteocles' exit to certain death is delayed by the attempts of the chorus to persuade him not to enter the battle, just as Cassandra's final exit is delayed by the chorus of the *Agamemnon*. While the Cadmeian women try in vain to persuade him not to fight, he fully comprehends and accepts his appointed fate:

Χο. ἀλλ' αὐτάδελφον αἷμα δρέψασθαι θέλεις;
Ετ. θεῶν διδόντων οὐκ ἂν ἐκφύγοις κακά.

Chorus: *Do you wish to shed the blood of your own brother?*
Eteocles: *There is no escape from misfortunes sent by the gods* (718-9)

In the *Lille Stesichorus* fragment and later in Euripides' *Phoenissae* (22ff), the mother attempts to mediate between her sons and prevent their mutual deaths. We do not know if or how Eteocles' and Polynices' mother has been presented earlier in this trilogy but the insistent attempts of the chorus to avert Eteocles' fate at the last moment - μὴ φίλτατ' ἀνδρῶν, Οἰδίπου τέκος, γένῃ ὀργὴν ὁμοῖος τῷ κάκιστ' αὐδωμένῳ "*dearest of men, son of Oidipous, do not be like in temper to that one who has the worst of names (Polynices)*" 677ff - may reflect this maternal role in earlier versions. Far from deterring Eteocles however, these pleas serve rather to highlight his great determination and unquestioning acceptance of the curse. Both the audience and Eteocles now regard his fate as inevitable and, as with Cassandra, the chorus' delay of his exit will heighten the pathos of the

situation rather than suggest any real possibility of escape. The chorus understand the curse and dream but at the same time are not fully convinced that the future is inevitable and the audience will see how their conception of events is less clear than their own and that of Eteocles. The audience will appreciate the presentation of the various levels of understanding on the stage and see how that of Eteocles in particular has changed.

After Eteocles' departure, the audience will have little hope that he will survive the battle and return to the stage and when the messenger appears, they will anticipate his news. At first, however, he speaks in positive tone, bidding them θαρσεῖτε "*take courage*" (792) and he rejoices in the survival of the city for some eight lines before revealing that Eteocles and Polynices have died by each other's hand. At last the curse is fulfilled and the audience's suspicions of the future are fully realized.

In the *Frogs*, Aeschylus is made to declare:

AI. δρᾶμα ποιήσας Ἄρεως μεστόν. ΔΙ. ποῖον;
AI. τοὺς ἕπτ' ἐπὶ Θήβας. ὃ θεασάμενος πᾶς ἄν τις
  ἀνὴρ ἠράσθη
δάιος εἶναι. ΔΙ. τουτὶ μέν σοι κακὸν εἴργασται.
θηβαίους γὰρ πεποίηκας ἀνδρειοτέρους ἐς τὸν πόλεμον...

Aeschylus I composed a drama full of Ares.
Dionysus Which one?
Aeschylus The Seven against Thebes. Anyone who saw it would have longed to be a warrior.
Dionysus But you did wrong in this for you made the Thebans braver for the war. (1021-4)

As often with Aristophanes, we are tantalized by the exact point of the joke, for did the *Septem* really inspire bravery among its spectators or is he simply being ironic? I would suggest however that Eteocles' stout resolution and brave stand in battle did impress the audience favourably and that Aristophanes' comical complaint is that Aeschylus succeeded in making the Thebans braver rather than their own Athenians.

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Thus we have seen how our appreciation of the *Septem* is severely curtailed by the loss of the first two plays of the trilogy. The main irony of the drama arises from the audience's awareness that the brothers are destined to kill one another in fulfillment of the curse, which adds an extra dimension to the play and will greatly increase the audience's appreciation of it. From the very beginning of the play, Eteocles' piety will strike the audience as ironic[78]. He declares

> καὶ νῦν μὲν ἐς τόδ' ἦμαρ εὖ ῥέπει θεός·
>
> *And up until this day the gods have inclined the weight in our favour* (21)

The audience will know that in fact the gods are busy conspiring towards the fulfillment of the curse and his brave words at the beginning of the play are tinged with irony:

> εὖ τελεῖ θεός
>
> *The gods will bring all to a successful conclusion.* (35)

Unless Aeschylus intended to diverge widely from the pre-existing story, the audience knows that Eteocles and Polynices will kill one another and the power of the drama arises from their very knowledge that this is so. They will be wondering, not whether the fratricide will occur or not, but rather when and how. Solmsen asks "*did Aeschylus see no way of saving Eteocles from the curse in which he is involved?*" (p204). However the poet was seeking to present the old story in tragic form rather than to remould it completely. The poet may assume that his audience knows of the curse threatening mutual death to Eteocles and Polynices and, as elsewhere, he exploits this background knowledge

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[78] See for example lines 4, 8 and 15.

to good effect in order to highlight the full irony and pathos of the dramatic situation. If, as we read the *Septem* we remember that the fratricide predicted by the curse will have been constantly in the thoughts of the original audience, we come a little closer to an appreciation of the dramatic impact of the first production.

Chapter Three

The Danaids and the Wedding Night Murder

A) Introduction

The Danaid Trilogy was awarded first prize at the festival of the Greater Dionysia, probably in 463BC[1]. We noted in the previous chapter how the *Septem* was the third play of a connected trilogy and that we can only speculate about what had happened in the previous two dramas. The *Supplices* is the first play of three and here again our understanding and appreciation of the drama is severely limited by our loss of the rest of the trilogy, although at least here the fifth-century audience has not witnessed anything previously and will share our own uncertainty about the future development of the drama. Although very little is known about these later plays, we shall be considering the *Supplices* in the light of what may have happened in the ensuing drama, trying to detect those passages in which Aeschylus is hinting to his audience about future events which were already familiar to them from the earlier myth. Thus we shall consider various elements which feature in post-Aeschylean treatments of the story and so may have played some part in the ensuing trilogy, such as war between the Argives and the Egyptians, the wedding-night murder and the punishment of the Danaids in Hades. Even where Aeschylus appears to hint at a particular event however, we cannot be certain that this was to be included in the later drama and we should regard these hints as the exploitation of audience expectation rather than reliable indications of the path the trilogy was to follow. Nonetheless much of the power of the *Supplices*, a play which strikes many modern readers as rather linear and uneventful, must lie in the audience's anticipation of the fact that Aeschylus is setting the scene for rather more

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[1]See Johansen and Whittle p21ff, hereafter referred to as FJW.

dramatic events in the future and we shall see how the dreadful wedding-night murder may be in their thoughts from the very beginning.

Garvie comments that "*when Aeschylus decided that the Danaids made a suitable theme for a trilogy, he was bound to set that trilogy in Argos*" (p143). However it may be that Aeschylus chose this myth precisely because the acceptance of the suppliants allows him to present Argos in a favourable light and indeed it appears that Athens and Argos were on good terms with each other in the 460s[2]. Forrest suggests that Aeschylus chose to portray the Danaids' supplication in order to convey a political comment about the recent fate of Themistocles - "*he writes of refugees in Argos at a time when the most important political figure of Athens had himself been a refugee in Argos*" (p236). There is a problem with this interpretation however for while the Argive protection of the suppliants may be regarded as unreservedly praiseworthy, we shall consider below the strong possibility that the Danaids will commit murder at some later point in the trilogy and so any political allusion to Themistocles in this context might have proved rather dubious. In addition, since they drove Themistocles into exile, the Athenians would be equated with the barbaric Egyptians in this scenario - an idea unlikely to be welcomed by the fifth-century audience! Therefore let us assume either that there is no specific political message in this play or that we are unable to determine it with any confidence at this stage.

There are few references to the Danaids in our earlier sources and these are far outnumbered by allusions to the adventures of their ancestress Io[3]. Nevertheless this need not

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[2]See Garvie p144ff.

[3]She is mentioned frequently in the Hesiodic fragments - 124, 125, 294, 296 - and features in the epic poems the Φορωνίς fragment 4K, the Ἠοῖαι fragment 146 163 Rz and the Αἰγίμιος fragment 3-6 - see Garvie p177-8.

necessarily signify that the Danaid myth was little-known in the fifth century. There was, for example, at least one long epic poem on this subject entitled the Danais, of which little survives[4], and there may have been many other lost treatments of the myth which were well-known in the fifth-century. Garvie rejects the idea that the Danais was Aeschylus' source since the single surviving fragment appears to refer to a war in Egypt between the Danaids and the Aegyptiads and we find no mention of this in the *Supplices*. We shall see below how the Danais fragment may bear a different interpretation but, even if this poem did include a war which Aeschylus chose to omit from his own version, this does not mean that he had not been influenced in many other areas by this long poem about the Danaids. Rather than following a single source, the dramatists of the fifth-century would expect their audience to be aware of many different versions and would positively exploit that knowledge during dramatic productions. Thus it may be that the Danais made a great contribution to audience expectation during the *Supplices* which, unfortunately, we today can neither trace nor appreciate.

The few sources that do mention the Danaids appear to preserve single, unrelated episodes. Hesiod described their irrigation of Argos[5] and also mentioned the fifty sons of Aegyptus[6]. Pindar, on the other hand, tells how Danaus brought about a swift wedding for his forty-eight daughters in Argos:

> ἔστασεν γὰρ ἅπαντα χορὸν
> ἐν τέρμασιν αὐτίκ' ἀγῶνος·
> σὺν δ' ἀέθλοις ἐκέλευσεν διακρῖναι ποδῶν,
> ἅντινα σχήσοι τις ἡρώων, ὅσοι γαμβροί σφιν ἦλθον.

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[4] See below.

[5] See below.

[6] See the scholiast on Euripides' *Orestes* 872, fragment 127 MW.

For all at once he set the whole band at the end of a racetrack and ordered those who had come as their bridegrooms to decide with the aid of a footrace which hero should receive which girl (*Pythian* 9.112-195)[7]

We know that Phrynichus also produced tragedies with the titles *Aegyptioi* and *Danaides* but the dates of these are uncertain[8] and we know nothing of his treatment of the story except that Aegyptus arrived in Argos with his fifty sons[9]. Given the rather disjointed nature of our sources, it seems possible that the stories of the irrigation of Argos, the unwelcome marriage, the wedding-night murder, the footrace and the punishment in Hades may have evolved independently and become associated with the Danaids at different periods. It is most unfortunate that we do not know whether Aeschylus included any or all of these elements in the later part of his trilogy, nor can we tell which elements of the *Supplices* constitute his own contribution to the myth.

We are unable to reconstruct the evolution of the myth with any degree of certainty but the Danaids' migration from Egypt to Argos is mentioned as early as Hesiod[10] and it seems likely that the irrigation story predates their connection with husband-murder. Although there is no evidence to support this supposition, one possibility is that the myth of a bloody reaction to an unwelcome marriage developed independently and that it centred upon a single girl rebelling against her father's wishes

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[7]The most likely date of this ode is 474 which would make it pre-Aeschylean - see Young p2.

[8]See FJW I p45 - Wilamowitz Interp 243 dated them before Aeschylus.

[9]According to the scholiast on Euripides' *Orestes* 872, Hesiod *fragment* 127 MW.

[10]See Fragment 127MW.

in its original form. On this theory, this story would then have been transferred to the Danaids as a group at some stage, and their punishment for the murder would have become associated with water on account of their original link with irrigation.

It is unfortunate that we do not know how the Danaids' reception in Argos had been presented in earlier versions and whether a supplication was already an expected element of the story. The *Supplices* is our earliest extant example of the suppliant plot although this story-pattern would probably have been familiar to the audience already from their acquaintance with, for example, Aeschylus' own lost *Eleusinioi* and *Herakleidai*. Phrynichus' lost works on the Danaid theme may have influenced the audience's expectations in this respect also. These lost plays and literary treatments in epic and lyric poetry, as well as instances of supplication in real life, will have had a great influence upon the audience and helped to shape their expectations about the behaviour of suppliants and their protector-hosts. Gould notes thirty-five occurrences of supplication in Homer and, where the outcome is clear, twenty-two are accepted and ten rejected (p80). It seems that a supplication may be refused if any detail of the ritual is not perfectly executed and so the actions of the Danaids on stage may conform to strict guidelines, familiar to the audience but not to ourselves. Taplin notes, for example, that the Danaids' call for help is technically a βοή and the king's rescue a βοήθεια - "*four of the surviving suppliant plays have a* βοή *which is answered by the resident protector*" (p219). Thus for the audience, much of the play's interest will have arisen from the inclusion of this familiar ritual and they will have regarded the action of the *Supplices* in the light of their knowledge of the behaviour of suppliants, pursuers and protectors elsewhere. As often the modern reader is at a great disadvantage and much of the effect of the original drama may be hidden from us.

Taplin notes further that "*in a suppliant play the arrival of*

the protector-host tends to be the object of anxious expectation, since the fate of the suppliants depends on him" (p198). It is even possible that the Argive king had featured in earlier versions of the myth in which case the audience would have been anticipating his appearance on stage. Some have been puzzled by the king's highly democratic nature for he insists that the supplication is referred to the Argive assembly and is reluctant to make a decision himself (605-6). Besides widening the scope of the drama, however, this consultation with the demos (398-401) presents the Argives in a very democratic and so favourable light[11]. It is possible that in earlier non-dramatic versions of the story, the Danaids' suit had been taken directly before the Argive assembly and so, when the play was translated into dramatic form, although a single Argive representative is introduced, this same basic pattern is retained[12]. Thus Aeschylus is able to retain the idea that the whole Argive people accept the Danaids while at the same time stressing the responsibility towards the suppliants of the individual protector-host[13].

The king discusses the supplication for some 244 lines before proposing that the matter be put to the vote before the Argive assembly[14]. Since the audience will be almost certain that the Danaids are destined to remain in Argos under the protection of

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[11]Compare also the idea of "democratic kingship" found in the *Agamemnon* and the *Persae*.

[12]We do not know how Phrynichus presented the Argive decision nor whether Aeschylus was deliberately marking a departure from this .

[13]We shall see below how Danaus may supplant this figure as the Argive king later in the trilogy which may be an additional reason why stress is laid on the acceptance of the Danaids by the Argives, rather than merely by this individual.

[14]There is a similar long deliberation of 266 lines in Euripides' *Supplices* while Theseus' acceptance of Oedipus' supplication after only eighty lines in the *Oedipus Coloneus* is rather different since the two are already acquainted.

their hosts, there will be little suspense about whether or not the supplication will be accepted, although the large amount of time and dramatic attention devoted to it will suggest that the Argives' acceptance of the girls will have deep implications during the ensuing drama[15].

The protection of a suppliant is decreed by divine law, as Hesiod notes:

> ἶσον δ' ὅς θ' ἱκέτην ὅς τε ξεῖνον κακὸν ἔρξη...
> τῷ δ' ἢ τοι Ζεὺς αὐτὸς ἀγαίεται, ἐς δὲ τελευτὴν
> ἔργων ἀντ'ἀδίκων χαλεπὴν ἐπέθηκεν ἀμοιβήν.
>
> *alike with one who does wrong to a suppliant or a guest...truly Zeus himself is angry with him, and at last lays on him a heavy requital for his evil doing.* (*Works and Days* 333-4)

and, as Apollo comments in the *Eumenides*, once accepted, one's responsibility towards a suppliant was binding:

> δεινὴ γὰρ ἐν βροτοῖσι κἀν θεοῖς πέλει
> τοῦ προστροπαίου μῆνις, εἰ προδῶ σφ'ἑκών
>
> *For terrible among gods and men is the anger of a suppliant, if I abandon (Orestes) of my own accord* (233-4)

Thus the protection of suppliants is not to be undertaken lightly and the king is correct to treat the matter with great caution. The Argive decision to help the Danaids is clearly established in this first play and the audience will regard this as a serious matter, particularly if they already anticipate the wedding-night murder[16]. How the future actions of the Danaids will affect their protector-hosts may prove a great source of suspense

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[15]Likewise Creon has cause to regret his granting of Medea's request for a short reprieve from banishment, see *Medea* 324ff.

[16]See below.

for the audience as the trilogy unfolds.

B) The Wedding-night Murder

It is extremely likely that the Danaid trilogy presented the murder of the Aegyptiads on their wedding-night. Admittedly there is no undisputed evidence for this event in our pre-Aeschylean sources, but we shall see below how the *Danais* fragment may refer to the wedding-night murder rather than to a war and Pindar's reference to Danaus' forty-eight daughters[17] suggests that Hypermestra has already spared and married Lynkeus[18]. In addition, the murder features in every subsequent version of the myth[19], and Garvie notes that it is one of the central elements of the story - "*if we ask what is essential, and what Aeschylus could not have failed to use, we find only four elements which are common to all the versions, or at least not contradicted by one or more of them*" (p164).

It is possible that Aeschylus himself first associated the wedding-night murder with the Danaids but, on the other hand, we cannot be certain that it did not feature in one of the many lost versions of the story, such as Phrynichus' own tragic treatment of the myth. Let us assume therefore that the murder of the bridegrooms was a familiar feature of the story before Aeschylus and that the fifth-century audience would have been on the alert for allusions to it during the course of the *Supplices*. After all, the Danaid trilogy proved successful in the dramatic competition and Aeschylus would surely have found imitators had his plot developed in a strikingly different manner. Working on

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[17] See *Pythian* 9 196-205.

[18] On the fate of the other sister Amymone, see pseudo-Apollodorus 2.14 and Sutton *GRBS* 15 1974 p193-202.

[19] See, for example, Horace Odes 3.11.

this hypothesis, let us now consider possible allusions to the wedding-night murder within the text of the *Supplices*.

a) War and the Danaid Myth

It has been suggested that there has been a war in Egypt between the Danaids and their cousins before the action of the *Supplices* begins and that, defeated, these girls are fleeing to Argos to seek protection from their vanquishers[20]. Our earliest source, a short fragment of the *Danais* which was an epic poem of about 6500 lines from C7 Cyrene, is preserved by Clement of Alexandria:

> φασὶ δὲ καὶ τὰς ᾿Αργολικὰς ἡγουμένης αὐτῶν Τελεσίλλης τῆς ποιητρίας Σπαρτιάτας τοὺς ἀλκίμους τὰ πολέμια φανείσας μόνον τρέψασθαι καὶ ἐκείνας τὸ ἀδεὲς τοῦ θανάτου περιποιήσασθαι. τὰ ὅμοια λέγει και ὁ τὴν Δαναίδα πεποιηκὼς ἐπὶ τῶν Δαναοῦ θυγατέρων ὧδε·
>
> "καὶ τοτ' ἄρ' ὡπλίζοντο θοῶς Δαναοῖο θύγατρες
> πρόσθεν ἐυρρεῖος ποταμοῦ Νείλοιο ἄνακτος"
>
> *They say that the Argive women also, with Telesilla the poetess leading them, simply appeared and put to flight the Spartans who are mighty in war, and their lack of fear of death saved them. And the composer of the* Danais *says similar things about the daughters of Danaus:*
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> "*And then the daughters of Danaus swiftly armed/prepared themselves, he who was formerly lord of the fair-flowing river Nile*" (*Stromata* 120.3-4)

Garvie comments that the *Danais* fragment is "*clearly a reference to a battle fought by the Danaids in Egypt*" (p179) and indeed the Danaids' flight and supplication of the Argives would suit these circumstances. However a previous war does not feature in the text of the *Supplices* and indeed the Danaids implicitly

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[20] Wilamowitz believed that the Danaids' equation of marriage with slavery at 335 and the Herald's harsh treatment of them was due to the fact that the girls were considered the war booty of their cousins - see Interp 15.

differentiate such a situation from their own:

> ἔστι δὲ κὰκ πολέμου
> τειρομένοις βωμὸς ἀρῆς φυγάσιν
> ῥῦμα, δαιμόνων σέβας
>
> *Even for those who are hard pressed by war, the altar is protection for the fugitive from destruction, sacred to the gods.* (83-5)

Thus, even if a war in Egypt had featured in certain early versions of the myth, the audience will assume that this is not to be included here.

We should note that the *Danais* fragment describes Danaus as "*formerly*" (πρόσθεν) ruler in Egypt and so, unless this is merely authorial comment, these lines would seem to refer to an event which occurred after the Danaids had departed from their homeland. Thus the slaying of the Aegyptiads in open conflict outside Egypt may have featured in earlier forms of the myth and it would have been appropriate for Clement to refer to this as an occasion when female warriors prevailed over their male opponents. On the other hand, another possibility is that this fragment contains a reference to the Danaids' preparations for the wedding-night murder and both meanings of the verb ὁπλίζω "*to prepare*" or "*to arm with weapons*" would be appropriate here. If so either Clement is using the Danaids merely as an example of women who successfully attacked men, or his analogy is rather dubious, which would be understandable given the scarcity of ancient literary examples of female encroachment into the male sphere of warfare. It seems preferable to interpret the *Danais* fragment as a reference to the wedding-night murder simply because this is universally attributed to the Daniads in later versions while no other source suggests an armed conflict. At the same time a battle between the Danaids and Aegyptiads in the earlier myth is certainly a possibility and it is easy to see how the slaying of unwelcome suitors in a fight could have been transformed into the wedding-night murder as the story evolved. Therefore a

conventional war may have featured in the very earliest versions of this myth, and this had been supplanted by the wedding-night murder even as early as the *Danais*.

As first play of the trilogy, a major function of the *Supplices* will be to increase suspense about the ensuing action. The play ends with deadlock between the two sides, for while the Argives have sworn to protect the Danaids from the unwelcome marriage, the fierce Aegyptiads are equally determined to claim their brides. No doubt the audience will anticipate some resolution of this situation during the ensuing drama, guided of course by their knowledge of treatments of the myth elsewhere. In the *Supplices*, all intimations are that there will be a battle between the Argives and Aegyptiads to determine which side will prevail, but the audience may suspect that the threat of the Aegyptiads will be finally removed, not by conventional warfare, but by the terrible slaughter of the suitors on the wedding-night.

If the earliest forms of the myth had presented a battle between the Argives and Aegyptiads, Aeschylus may be alluding to these in his treatment of this theme here. Danaus describes the warlike appearance of the Argives as they approach[21] which may prepare the audience to anticipate their engagement in military warfare. Danaus later advises his daughters:

> ἐπεὶ τελεία ψῆφος 'Αργείων, τέκνα,
> θάρσει, μαχοῦνται περὶ σέθεν, σάφ' οἶδ' ἐγώ
>
> *Since the vote of the Argives was absolute, children, take courage. They will fight on your behalf, I know it well* (739-40).

The Argive king has grave forebodings that there can be no peaceful settlement to the dispute and foresees a terrible

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[21]Note the use of language at lines 180-190 - κόνιν, στρατοῦ, ὄχλον δ' ὑπασπιστῆρα καὶ δορυσσόον, ξὺν ἵπποις καμπύλοις τ' ὀχήμασιν, τεθηγμένος ὠμῇ ξὺν ὀργῇ (180-190)

conflict:

> βαρέα σύ γ'εἶπας, πόλεμον ἄρασθαι νέον...
> ἄνευ δὲ λύπης οὐδαμοῦ καταστροφή

> *You speak of a serious matter, to undertake a new war...the outcome can by no means be without grief* (342, 442)

This certainty that armed conflict is imminent and unavoidable is shared by the Egyptian herald (950)[22].

Thus by the end of the play all on stage regard war as inevitable. Many commentators believe that this battle takes place in the later drama[23] and FJW suggest that it was reported at the beginning of the second play as having occurred in the interval after the *Supplices* (I p50). However, despite these many hints, it is far from certain that a battle took place in the ensuing drama at all and Aeschylus may merely be teasing the expectations of his audience with red-herrings, particularly if they knew versions in which the wedding-night murder had not yet supplanted the more traditional armed conflict[24] and so could not be absolutely sure which course Aeschylus would follow.

The marriage of the Danaids and Aegyptiads must take place if the wedding-night murder is to occur and so the Argives must be defeated if any form of armed conflict took place. It would surely be a great disgrace for them if their offer of protection failed in this way and the wishes of the Aegyptiads prevailed. War might be averted however if the Danaids agreed to marry their cousins voluntarily in order to avoid the shedding of kindred

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[22] Although this line is corrupt the words ἤδη πόλεμον...νέον "*now a new war*" seem sound.

[23] See Garvie p188.

[24] See above.

blood. In that case the Argives would not lose face while Aeschylus remains free to exploit the suspense and excitement of a threatened war without any danger of the military encounter detracting dramatic attention from the central horrendous murder. Admittedly it might seem rather unusual for suppliants to retract a recent request for protection in this manner, but the Argives and Aegyptiads are related through Io and there was a great taboo against the killing of kindred in the Greek world, even in battle[25]. The Argive king gives a hint that some means of avoiding war with the Aegyptiads may be found:

> ὅπως δ'ὅμαιμον αἷμα μὴ γενήσεται,
> δεῖ κάρτα θύειν καὶ πεσεῖν χρηστήρια
> θεοῖσι πολλοῖς πολλά, πημονῆς ἄκη·
>
> *So that there may be no shedding of kindred blood, there must be many sacrifices and many victims must fall to many gods as a cure of suffering* (449-50)

As in the *Septem*, irony is created when those on stage fear for the safety of their kinsmen in battle, unconscious of the fact that their words apply equally to their enemy. The Danaids declare:

> μήποτε λοιμὸς ἀνδρῶν
> τάνδε πόλιν κενῶσαι
> μηδ' ἐπιχωρίοις [στάσις]
> πτώμασιν αἱματίσαι πέδον γᾶς
>
> *May pestilence never empty this city of men and may civil strife never stain the surface of the land with the blood of fallen natives* (659-62)

Naturally the audience will assume that the Aegyptiads themselves are also native to Argos through their descent from Io and that their kinship with the Argives is at least as close as that of the Danaids. Thus all fears expressed in the drama for the deaths of native Argives assume an ironic overtone, as the

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[25] Compare the end of the *Septem*.

audience recalls that it is the Aegyptiads who are fated to die, also the natives of Argos in some sense. We do not know whether Aeschylus chose to symbolize on stage the dark complexions (70 and 154) and exotic dress (120 -2) of the Danaids in any way. FJW comment "*the Chorus presumably not only wear black masks but also have all their exposed skin darkened*" and they suggest likewise for the Herald and Aegyptiads (II p128). We noted in the General Introduction that such a tribute to realism is unnecessary and that the audience may have supplied many details from their own imagination[26]. Nevertheless the nationality of the two groups of Egyptians may have been symbolized in some way, such as by boldly patterned costumes which might serve to distance the Danaids from the Argives with whom they claim kinship and equate them rather with the Aegyptiads (115ff)[27]. If so, this would emphasize the fact that their action involves kindred murder and so will prove a very grave offence worthy of the direst penalty. Thus I believe that the wedding-night murder replaced the war in the ensuing trilogy and find it unlikely that Aeschylus included any form of armed conflict in this version. As in the *Septem*, the audience will suspect that the fears of those on stage concerning the future are somewhat misdirected.

A major and important reason why Aeschylus should wish to hint at future conflict is because any mention of violent death and bloodshed will act as an oblique allusion to the Danaids' wedding-night murder. This is what the audience will be anticipating rather than the male military encounter envisaged by those on stage. At the same time they may wonder whether the battle will indeed take place and we see how Aeschylus employs

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[26]Compare for example the convention that male actors play the part of females and native Egyptians converse in fluent Greek.

[27]The males in the audience might be comforted a little if the Danaids were clearly differentiated from their own Greek wives in some way!

subtle irony in order to retain tension and anticipation about future events in the trilogy.

b) The Conflict between Male and Female

A major source of dramatic irony within the *Supplices* may arise from the fact that while the audience suspects that the Danaids are destined to rid themselves of their unwelcome suitors by a bold act of murder, they are presented on stage consistently as weak, defenceless females, pleading for Argive protection. Their suppliant state emphasizes the vulnerability of the Danaids and they are depicted throughout as friendless girls, newly-arrived in a strange land and clinging to the altars in desperate fear of their cousins. It seems likely that they behaved with great modesty and humility, as Danaus commands:

> αἰδοῖα καὶ γοεδνὰ καὶ ζαχρεῖ' ἔπη
> ξένους ἀμείβεσθ', ὡς ἐπήλυδας πρέπει...
> θρασυστομεῖν γὰρ οὐ πρέπει τοὺς ἥσσονας.
>
> *Reply to your hosts with words respectful, mournful and suppliant as befits foreigners...it is not fitting for those who are weak to be bold of tongue.* (194-5, 203)

The frightened girls regard their cousins as mighty warriors μάχης τ' ἄπληστον "*insatiable for battle*" (742) and consider themselves in great danger (734ff). This contrast between these terrified maidens and the violent, brutish nature of their suitors, would have assumed a terrible irony if the audience enjoyed foreknowledge about the cruel murder of the suitors on their wedding night.

The supplicatory position of the Danaids is reflected in their appearance and behaviour, as the words of the king suggest:

> τί φῄς [μ'] ἱκνεῖσθαι τῶνδ'ἀγωνίων θεῶν,
> λευκοστεφεῖς ἔχουσα νεοδρέπτους κλάδους;
>
> *Why do you say you are supplicating before these*

gods of assembly, holding fresh-plucked branches wreathed in white? (333-4)

We do not know if or how far the dress and accessories traditionally associated with suppliants were symbolized on the stage[28] but it seems certain that the physical aspects of this ritual would be evoked in the theatre by an imaginative use of mime, gesture, and dance. In addition to stressing the helpless situation and vulnerability of the Danaids however, the supplication may act as an oblique reminder of future events, since this same ritual was also practiced by those requiring purification for murder[29]. Thus when the Danaids first appear as suppliants, the audience may wonder fleetingly whether they have already slain the Aegyptiads before reaching Argos, as may have happened in earlier versions with which they were familiar[30]. However the Danaids quickly clarify their situation:

φεύγομεν
οὔτιν' ἐφ' αἵματι δημηλασίαν,
ψήφῳ πόλεως γνωσθεῖσαι,
ἀλλ' αὐτογενῆ φυξανορίαν,

We are fleeing, not having been sentenced to exile for murder by the popular vote but because of a self-generated fleeing[31] *from men.* (5-8)

Nevertheless, it is ironic that those destined to commit murder in the future follow the ritual practiced by those already guilty of this crime and so the supplicatory behaviour of the

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[28]See the General Introduction.

[29]We shall see how after murdering his mother Orestes supplicates at the altar of Apollo in the *Eumenides.*

[30]Eustathius with reference to the phrase πολυδίψιον Ἄργος "*very thirsty Argos*" at *Iliad* 4.171 relates a version in which the wedding occurs before the quarrel between Danaus and Aegyptus and both events are set in Egypt.

[31]We shall discuss the meaning of this phrase in more detail below.

Danaids throughout this play may act as a constant visual reminder to the audience of the murder they are destined to commit at a later stage. Similar irony occurs when Danaus bids his daughters to tell of their "*bloodless flight*" from Egypt (ἀναιμάκτους φυγάς 196). FJW believe that this declaration is included in order to "*avert the possible misapprehension that (the exile) has been imposed on Danaus and his family for homicide* (II p155). This is true as far as the Argives are concerned but by this stage of the drama, the audience is already aware that the murder has not yet occurred and so will regard Danaus' words rather as a hint of bloody deeds that lie ahead.

The Danaids' denial of murder is followed by a sinister hint:

> τίν' ἂν οὖν χώραν εὔφρονα μᾶλλον
> τῆσδ' ἀφικοίμεθα
> σὺν τοῖσδ' ἱκετῶν ἐγχειριδίοις
> ἐριοστέπτοισι κλάδοισιν;
>
> *To what more friendly land than this could we come with these suppliant tools of wool-wreathed branches?* (19-22)

ἐγχειριδίοις means, of course, something held in the hand, but as a substantive, τὸ ἐγχειρίδιον has the particular meaning of a *hand knife* or *dagger*[32]. FJW note that "*the oxymoron conveys the paradox that the very symbols of the Danaids' helplessness constitute a sort of weapon* (II p21) and although it is immediately made clear that the phrase refers to the branches, this will act as a bold reminder to the audience that these defenceless suppliants are in fact potential murderesses[33]. The

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[32]See Herodotus 1.12 214 and Thuycidides 3 70.

[33]At *Eumenides* 40-42, Orestes is described as bearing an olive branch and a newly-drawn sword as he sits at the suppliant seat. There is no further evidence that it were conventional for a suppliant guilty of murder to bear a sword, but if so, this would add further irony to the Danaids' description of their olive branches as daggers.

audience will be alert to any hints at the future murder and the phrase σὺν τοῖσδ' ἱκετῶν ἐγχειριδίοις "*with these suppliant weapons/tools in our hands*" will surely strike them as deeply ominous.

Female participation in any sort of violent activity was considered most unusual in the Greek world[34] and the horror of the Danaids' murderous act, like that of Clytemnestra and Medea, is intensified by the fact that they are female. The bold action of the Danaids is further highlighted by the fact that Aeschylus presents them consistently as poor defenceless females in desperate need of male protection. Early in the play the king tries to identify the Danaids from their appearance[35]:

> καὶ τὰς ἀνάνδρους κρεοβόρους [δ'] Ἀμαζόνας
> εἰ τοξοτευχεῖς ἦτε, κάρτ' ἂν ἤκασα
> ὑμᾶς
>
> *If you carried bows, I would have likened you very much to unmated flesh-feeding Amazons* (287-9)[36]

It is ironic that this appropriate comparison with women who fight and kill men is rejected on the grounds that the Danaids do not carry weapons but appear weak and helpless, particularly in the light of the above ambiguous reference to their dagger-branches. FJW comment, "*Pelasgus' assimilation of the Danaids to these notorious* ἀνδροκτόνοι *(Hdt. 4.110.1), who murdered their husbands, who had misused them according to one tradition (Ephor. 60(a)J), is pregnant with unconscious prophecy*" (II p230) and indeed the audience may indeed suspect that in fact

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[34] The Amazons are famed because their engagement in armed conflict is so unusual.

[35] As indeed the audience may have done when they first entered the stage - see the General Introduction on the Proagon.

[36] FJW postulate a lacuna between these two lines.

these apparently helpless girls will themselves take up arms against men in the near future.

Danaus expresses the conventional Greek view that this oppression of the girls is condemnable and issues a warning to the Aegyptiads:

> πολλοὺς δέ γ' εὑρήσουσιν ἐν μεσημβρίας
> θάλπει βραχίον'εὖ κατερρινωμένους
>
> *They will find many here with their arms toughened in the heat of the midday sun.* (746-7)

He is referring of course to his tough warrior Argives who have undertaken to defend the girls, but the audience may recall earlier references to the Danaids' own dark complexions[37] even if these were not portrayed realistically on stage. Thus, with a change of gender, the king's words may be applied to the Danaids and the audience suspects that indeed it is they who will constitute the true threat to their cousins. The Danaids themselves stress that they are completely helpless in the face of their domineering pursuers:

> γυνὴ μονωθεῖσ' οὐδέν· οὐκ ἔνεστ' Ἄρης
>
> *A woman alone is nothing - there is no war-spirit in her* (749)

The audience suspects that these girls will shortly disprove this statement and kill their aggressors by their own hand. The conflict between male and female, the former brutish in their insistent claims, the latter helpless in a physical fight, reaches a climax in the final scene with the herald. We may imagine that

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[37]Note Νειλοθερῆ παρειὰν "*my cheek summered (or warmed) by the Nile*" (see FJW I p68) and μελανθὲς ἡλιόκτυπον γένος "*our dark sun-smitten race*" 154-5. See Herodotus 2.22.3 on the Greek belief that certain races were dark-skinned as a direct result of the sun's rays.

the theatre became filled with the frightened cries of the women - the herald bids them ἴυζε καὶ λάκαζε καὶ κάλει θεούς "*howl and shout and call upon the gods (as you wish)*" (872) - and no doubt the violence of the attack would have been evoked by a lively use of dance and mime on stage. As in the *Septem*, the presentation of a large group of women thrown into sheer panic by an external threat would have been a deeply impressive dramatic spectacle and no doubt the audience would be greatly affected by their mood of terrified excitement. In both cases the women supplicate at altars and there may have been conventions of action and movement, such as prostration, connected with such scenes. We do not know how far his attempt to pull the girls from the altars would involve actual physical contact between the actors however and much of the action may have been symbolic of force[38]. The brutal manner of the herald is the first actual representation of the Aegyptiads' behaviour on stage and this will deeply influence the audience, although their depiction as heartless barbarians may be modified as the drama proceeds.

The Herald's cruel and violent attempt to drag the defenceless girls from the altars to which they cling would have been a moment of great drama and, deeply shocked by this brutish behaviour, the king demands:

> ἀλλ'ἦ γυναικῶν ἐς πόλιν δοκεῖς μολεῖν;...
> ἀλλ' ἄρσενάς τοι τῆσδε γῆς οἰκήτορας εὑρήσετ'
>
> *Do you think you have come to a city of women?...indeed you shall find that it is men who live in this land!* (913, 952-3)

Thus he regards the settling of the dispute as lying strictly

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[38]Similarly Euripides' *Andromache* cries καὶ νῦν με βωμοῦ Θέτιδος...ἄγουσ' ἀποσπάσαντες "*and now they tear me away from the altar of Thetis, dragging me off*" (565-7) when Menelaus has done her no physical violence but merely employed cruel blackmail (314ff).

within the male sphere of warfare and assumes that this question will be settled by men, as does the herald who foresees a conventional military encounter, declaring εἴη δὲ νίκη καὶ κράτος τοῖς ἄρσεσιν "*May victory and mastery be with the males!*" (951), to which the Danaids reply in their final words καὶ κράτος νέμοι γυναιξίν "*May* (*Zeus*) *assign mastery to the women!*" (1068–9). The audience suspects that these weak and helpless girls, cowering in fear at the altars, will indeed prevail over their male aggressors and that the dispute will be resolved, not in battle, but by means of a devious murder-plot. Thus while the helpless plight of the suppliants depicted on stage will invite the audience's sympathy, from the very beginning, their attitude may have been tempered by their foreknowledge of the murder and their suspicion that the Danaids will rid themselves of their unwanted suitors unaided before the trilogy is over.

c) The Murder of the Aegyptiads

We saw earlier how the theme of war is used to evoke images of the death and bloodshed of young men and also how the helpless state of the suppliants will contrast with the audience's anticipation of their future role as murderesses. Now let us consider some further passages in which Aeschylus appears to be conveying hints at the wedding-night murder for the benefit of the audience. We shall see below how in the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra makes sinister allusions to the audience's awareness of the plot to kill her husband but it is never openly discussed until after the deed is completed. Similarly in the *Supplices* the audience's foreknowledge of the murder renders any clear reference to it unnecessary and so it may enter the drama solely through oblique hints contained in the words of those on stage. There is a major difference between the two situations however, for the Danaids' murder-plot has not yet been conceived and therefore all hints at it are made unconsciously, for the appreciation of the poet and his audience. Had the murder of the Aegyptiads' been planned from the very beginning, then the whole supplication of the Danaids

would have been ironic and would have constituted a great abuse of the Argives' offer to protect them. It is far more likely that the supplication is genuine and the murder plot conceived later, perhaps, as we have seen, as a desperate means to avert the armed conflict. Thus the imminent murder of the Aegyptiads at the hands of these girls remains a secret shared by the poet and his audience, and those on stage remain entirely unconscious of it.

The conflict between the Danaids and the Aegyptiads arises from the males' insistent desire for marriage and the girls' utter abhorrence of any kind of sexual union with them. The Danaids declare:

> ὄλοιντο
> πρίν ποτε λέκτρων...ἀεκόντων ἐπιβῆναι
>
> *May they perish before ever they enter our unwilling beds* (36-7,39)

Later they pray that their own deaths will avert the sexual union - ἐλθέτω μόρος, πρὸ κοίτας γαμηλίου τυχών "*let death come before marriage ensues*" (804-5). Thus sex and death are juxtaposed for ironic effect and the audience will suppose that the wedding-night will bring to the Aegyptiads, not sexual fulfillment, but a cruel and ignoble death. Seaford has executed an excellent study on the close association between marriage and death in Greek thought. In both wedding and funeral, a girl is washed, anointed and given special clothes for a journey into an unknown future far from family and friends, while a girl who died unmarried was buried in her wedding attire and considered the bride of Hades (p107-113). Thus while the Danaids themselves envisage a straightforward supplication, this situation represents a kind of ironic reversal since it is their bridegrooms for whom the wedding will have a particular association with death, not their new brides.

In a passage littered with sexual terms (104-11)[39], the Danaids hint that their cousins' sexual desires will prove their doom, and that they have "*an inescapable spur*" κέντρον ἄφυκτον (110). The term κέντρον, a "*sting*" or "*spur*", which refers specifically to sexual desire at Euripides' *Hippolytus* (39 and 1303), may be an oblique reference to Io who was stung by the gadfly. Thus it is appropriate that her descendants are also pursued overseas by those "stung" with sexual desire for them. Later the Danaids express grave fears for the young men of Argos in the event of war:

> ἥβας δ'ἄνθος ἄδρεπτον
> ἔστω, μηδ'᾽Αφροδίτας
> εὐνάτωρ βροτολοιγὸς ῎Α-
> ρης κέρσειεν ἄωτον
>
> *may the flower of (Argive) youth be unplucked and may not Ares, bane of men, bedfellow of Aphrodite, crop their bloom* (663-6)

While this passage is ostensibly about death, again we find many references to sex[40], which the audience may find appropriate in the case of the Aegyptiads, who are fated to meet not sexual gratification on their wedding-night but a cruel death at the hands of their new brides.

At the beginning of the first ode the Danaids declare that they will display πιστὰ τεκμήρια "*trustworthy proofs*" (55) so that ἀελπτά περ ὄντα φανεῖται "*things, although unexpected, will become clear*" (56). This may prepare the audience for a possible reference to the wedding-night murder in their following words, as is indeed the case, for the girls proceed to liken themselves to Procne who was transformed into a nightingale as punishment for

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[39]See FJW II p97.

[40]See FJW III p31 and 32.

murdering her son[41]:

> εἰ δὲ κυρεῖ τις πέλας οἰωνοπόλων
> ἐγγάιος οἶκτον [οἰκτρὸν] ἀίων,
> δοξάσει +τις+ ἀκού-
>   ειν ὄπα τᾶς Τηρείας
> Μήτιδος οἰκτρᾶς ἀλόχου,
> κιρκηλάτας ἀηδόνος
>
> *If some native happens to be nearby who knows about birds and hears my lament, they will imagine that they hear the voice of Tereus' wretched wife Metis, the hawk-chased nightingale* (57-63)

The Danaids imagine that they resemble Procne solely in their great distress and longing for home, although the audience will surely detect an ironic allusion to the wedding-night murder in this comparison, since in Greek folklore the nightingale's song was thought to be Procne mourning for her lost kindred, the child slain by her own hand[42].

FJW comment, "*no ordinary bystander, but a seer (58) has been specified as the hypothetical listener to their lament: only a person gifted with special powers of discernment and prophecy can perceive the full extent of the resemblance between their situation and that of the nightingale, whose past will be their future*" (II p64). This reference to a seer may indeed alert the audience to the deeper meaning of the reference to Procne, as we discussed above. However while FJW dismiss this merely as an allusion to some imaginary Argive seer, Aeschylus may have intended his audience to regard this as a reference to themselves, for they too secretly witness the scene before them in the theatre and are able to appreciate the full meaning of the Procne

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[41]See *Odyssey* 19 518-23. This myth was also the subject of the lost *Tereus* of Sophocles.

[42]We shall discuss the punishment of the Danaids later but let us note here that Procne suffered a divine punishment for her crime of kindred murder.

reference through their awareness of future events.

The Danaids cry:

> ὕπαστρον δέ τοι
> μῆχαρ ὁρίζομαι γάμου δύσφρονος
> φυγάν
>
> *I prescribe flight up to (or under) the stars as the means (of escaping) from this distressful marriage* (393-5)

Unfortunately these lines are corrupt and the word ὕπαστρον is unique. FJW interpret this as a declaration by the Danaids that they will flee from their cousins "*beneath the stars*", in other words, during the night, in order to avoid the consummation of their marriage - "*their declaration here will take on for the audience, aware of what is actually to occur on that wedding night, a subtle - perhaps too subtle - irony*" (II p310f). However we have no means of knowing whether an attempt at foreshadowing the future murder failed at this point, particularly since our text is corrupt, and it may be that the audience will detect some reference here to a possible flight of the Danaids from the scene of the murder. However at Euripides' *Phoenissae* 504-6, flight to the stars expresses a strong desire to flee an unpleasant situation and the lines may convey no more than this. Whatever the correct interpretation of these lines, they suggest that the Danaids are prepared to go to great extremes in order to avoid the union with their cousins and the audience may already suspect what form this extreme rejection of marriage will take.

We have seen how the theme of death, specifically that of young men, is introduced into the drama through references to the threatened battle. Similarly, the Danaids refer to their own demise at 804-5 and when they threaten to hang themselves from the altars by their girdles (455ff). When they mention these accessories the king comments:

> τάχ' ἂν γυναικὶ ταῦτα συμπρεπῆ πέλοι

Such things would seem to be suitable for women (458)

The Danaids' suicide threat is revealed gradually during this passage of stichomythia and the audience may wonder at first if the girls are about to reveal their willingness to kill their suitors. We do not know whether these articles will be used to kill or overcome the Aegyptiads later in the trilogy but it is at least possible that, like the net-robe in the *Oresteia*, the murder weapon is introduced into the drama beforehand. Thus the king's comment may be ironic, since the audience suspects that these girls will act in a most unfeminine manner in the near future and also that these girdles are indeed suitable for a woman to use as a murder-weapon. Danaus too fears for his life in this strange land, commenting with unconscious irony - καὶ δὴ φίλον τις ἔκταν' ἀγνοίας ὕπο "*indeed a person may kill a friend/dear one through ignorance*" (499). Later he is glad that the Argives have presented him with a bodyguard:

> καὶ μήτ' ἀέλπτως δορικανεῖ μόρῳ θανὼν
> λάθοιμι
>
> *so that I might not be taken off guard and be slain by the spear unexpectedly* (987-988)

We do not know what precise method of murder was used in earlier versions but the trick would seem to rely greatly on the element of surprise. Thus the audience will appreciate the irony of Danaus' fear of a treacherous murder attack against himself and also the Danaids' references to their own deaths, when it is the Aegyptiads who are fated to die.

The Argive king cries:

> εἴη δ' ἄνατον πρᾶγμα τοῦτ' ἀστοξένων,
> μηδ' ἐξ ἀέλπτων κἀπρομηθήτων πόλει
> νεῖκος γένηται·
>
> *May this matter be without harm to the* ἀστόξενοι *and may there by no strife for the city arising from*

things unexpected and unforeseen. (356-7)

The audience will note how the wedding-night murder lies hidden from those on stage at present - unexpected and unforeseen - and, while the king refers to the Danaids as ἀστόξενοι "*foreigners connected to the city by race*", the audience will note that this term may be applied equally to the Aegyptiads.

The king foresees that he cannot help the suppliants βλάβης ἄτερ "*without harm*" (377) and has grave fears about the future:

> ἄνευ δὲ λύπης οὐδαμοῦ καταστροφή
>
> *The outcome can by no means be without grief* (442)

The audience will regard the king's forebodings as justified but will suspect that the source and object of the harm is other than he anticipates. The herald himself, the representative of the Aegyptiads, also conveys dark unwitting hints about the approaching murder. Unfortunately much of what he says is corrupt but we may assume that his threats to kill the girls and references to the spilling of blood illustrate the fact that those who are destined to commit murder in the future are here being threatened with murder themselves. He predicts that the solution of the conflict will involve the loss of life:

> οὔτοι δικάζει ταῦτα μαρτύρων ὕπο
> Ἄρης, τὸ νεῖκος δ' οὐκ ἐν ἀργύρου λαβῇ
> ἔλυσεν, ἀλλὰ πολλὰ γίγνεται πάρος
> πεσήματ' ἀνδρῶν κἀπολακτισμοὶ βίου
>
> *Ares does not decide this matter on the evidence of witnesses, nor are quarrels resolved by the giving of silver, but first there happen the deaths of many men and ceasings of life* (934-7)

The audience will agree that the matter will be resolved by bloodshed but not in the manner anticipated by those on stage, and here again references to war enable the poet to include an oblique hint at the murder.

Thus the audience's knowledge of the wedding-night murder is exploited to great effect throughout the *Supplices* and I believe that this event was included in the ensuing trilogy. A fragment of the third play seems to refer to the waking-song which was sung to the newly-married couple on the morning after their wedding:

> κἄπειτα δ' εὖτε λαμπρὸν ἡλίου φάος
> ἕως ἐγείρῃ, πρευμενεῖς τοῖς νυμφιοῖς
> νόμους μεθέντων σὺν κόροις τε καὶ κόραις

> *And then when dawn arouses the radiant light of the sun, let them sing songs with the youths and girls to the bridegrooms with kindly intent*[43].

This fragment is corrupt[44] but any reference to the morning following the marriage of the Danaids and Aegyptiads cannot fail to be deeply ironic and closely linked to the discovery of the bridegrooms' corpses. It is unfortunate that we do not know who spoke these lines but they may have been uttered in complete innocence by one who knew nothing of the plot, perhaps a servant, and Aeschylus appears to be exploiting the familiar custom of the wedding-song to great effect here. Seaford suggests that the final song of the *Supplices* was shared by the Danaids and their Argive bodyguard and this too may remind the audience of the wedding-song and its ironic application to this particular marriage (p114), which will end not in rejoicing but in a bloody slaughter.

It is also deeply ironic when the Danaids declare:

> μηδέ τις ἀνδροκμὴς
> λοιγὸς ἐπελθέτω
> τάνδε πόλιν δαΐζων

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[43]Hermann *Fragment* 124 with Seaford's emendations p115)

[44]See Garvie p228.

May no murderous slaughter come upon this city to destroy it (678-80)

The word ἀνδροκμὴς (678) may be an Aeschylean coinage and so would draw attention to the irony of this phrase, while λοιγὸς means violent death either in battle or be deliberate murder[45]. Thus the Danaids' wish is tinged with irony since it is they themselves who will execute a terrible slaughter in Argos. The audience will suspect therefore that the deaths of young men will occur not in the more conventional circumstances of warfare envisaged by those on stage but in the context of the treacherous murder of the suitors on the wedding-night by the Danaids themselves.

C) The Rejection of Marriage

One of the most intriguing questions about this trilogy is how the presentation of the Danaids was modified as their determination to reject the marriage assumed the form of murder. It seems certain that the wedding-night murder was to feature in the later drama - how else could the trilogy progress? - and no doubt this killing of bridegrooms would have been considered a terrible crime by the Greek audience. It is often assumed without question that the Danaid trilogy must follow the same basic form as the *Oresteia* when in fact this is far from certain. Nevertheless it seems likely that the Danaids, like Orestes, will be called to account for their murder in some sense before the trilogy is over. As with Orestes' matricide, the death of the Aegyptiads is deserved, and when they express fears about being snatched from the altars, Danaus tells his daughters:

καλῶς ἂν ἡμῖν ξυμφέροι ταῦτ', ὦ τέκνα,
εἴ σοί τε καὶ θεοῖσιν ἐχθαιροίατο

It would be well for us, children, if they were to

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[45] See for example *Choephori* 402.

incite the hatred of the gods as well as yours (753-4).

Nevertheless it seems likely that they will be redeemed a little as the trilogy progresses and the Danaids must surely face the consequences of their action and either be absolved of their deed or face a dire penalty. The terrible and eternal punishment suffered by the Danaids in Hades as a result of their murderous act became the most famous element of the story in later versions. If the audience were already familiar with this, from the very beginning of the drama they will suspect that the Danaids will not be absolved and purified of their murderous crime but found guilty and condemned for it. Thus while the Aegyptiads are presented as rough and brutish in the *Supplices*, cruelly persecuting the poor suppliant women, this division of sympathy may become modified as the drama progresses, and the audience may expect the Danaids to be condemned and punished for their cruel act of murder.

Throughout the *Supplices* there are hints at the dangerous consequences of inciting divine wrath and the audience may suppose that the Danaids themselves should fear this above all. The Argive king comments:

> πῶς οὐχὶ τἀνάλωμα γίγνεται πικρόν,
> ἄνδρας γυναικῶν οὕνεχ' αἱμάξαι πέδον;
>
> *How can it not be a bitter expense for the blood of men to stain the ground because of women?* (476-7)

Naturally he is referring to an armed conflict between the Argives and Aegyptiads, although the audience may be thinking of men dying in another context and suspect that it is the Danaids themselves who will pay a bitter price for this. The girls' assumption that Zeus will protect them and support their supplication will be tinged with irony, especially if the punishment is to be decreed by divine command[46].

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[46] See below on the possibility of a divine trial.

A dramatic supplication is found in several of our later tragedies, including the *Eumenides*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus* and Euripides' *Heracleidae* and *Supplices*. Taplin notes how all of these portray "*the reception of fugitive suppliants by a virtuous city or ruler and the repulse of aggressive pursuers*" (p192). In each of these later tragedies, the audience's sympathies are directed wholly towards the suppliants and their plea appears to be just. However, if the Danaids and Aegyptiads are to marry in the ensuing drama, the apparent failure of this supplication may indicate that it differs somewhat from these other instances. Indeed the audience may suspect that while the Argives' offer of protection is noble and praiseworthy, the future actions of the Danaids may cause them to regret their behaviour[47].

Thus it is difficult to see how the trilogy could develop unless the Argives' offer of protection will prove problematic, the Aegyptiads' will claim the girls by some means and the justice of the wedding-night murder will be questioned. Since the very basis for the Danaids' objection to the marriage may have come under closer scrutiny in the ensuing drama, let us consider how this is presented in the *Supplices*.

a) The Supplication

Let us begin with a consideration of what the Danaids themselves say about their rejection of the Aegyptiads' suit. Ireland comments that the difficult y in establishing the Danaids' motivation "*stems from the unique position held by the chorus*" as a main actor in the drama, thus making "*a unified approach*" to what they say impossible (p28). We do not know that this use of the chorus was "*unique*" in tragedy, although it may be that the Danaids' comments in lyric passages are more distanced from their

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[47]Compare Medea's supplication of Creon noted above.

immediate situation and that they come closest to discussing their own position during the spoken dialogue. They express a wish to avoid the beds of men "*unwed and unsubdued*" ἄγαμον ἀδάματον (143), and when the Argive king questions them more closely about the reason for their supplication, they reply with the brevity allowed by stichomythia:

ὡς μὴ γένωμαι δμωῒς Αἰγύπτου γένει

So that I may not become a slave to the sons of Aegyptus (335)

There is no other example of δμωῒς meaning "*wife*" in surviving tragedy, although Medea refers to a husband as δεσπότην τε σώματος "*master of one's body*" (*Medea* 233). However she, like the Danaids, is using hyperbolic language in order to exaggerate the undesirability of marriage and the equation of marriage with slavery was probably not a normal Greek sentiment. The Argive king certainly does not regard an objection to the constraints placed on women by marriage alone as sufficient grounds for their refusal of the Aegyptiads and he questions the girls further about the reason for their objection:

πότερα κατ' ἔχθραν, ἢ τὸ μὴ θέμις λέγεις;

Is it out of enmity or do you refer to that which is illegal?

Thus the girls are presented with the opportunity to explain their case in full and it would have been a simple matter for Aeschylus to introduce some specific reason for their objection to their cousins at this point, such as a family quarrel. A dispute between Danaus and his brother Aegyptus features widely in later versions[48] where the wedding and the murder are elements in their struggle, but this is not mentioned here. It is most unfortunate that the text of the following line is unreliable. One possible

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[48]See for example Pseudo-Apollodorus and Hyginus.

reading of this line is τίς δ' ἂν φίλους ὠνοῖτο τοὺς κεκτημένους; "*who would care to buy* relations *for their lords and masters?*". It is true that the girls would have no independent protectors if they married their kindred but this practice was not uncommon in the Greek world and many in the audience would have considered that the advantages of such an arrangement would vastly outweigh the personal preferences of the girls. Few in the audience would be likely to expect, or support, an objection to this expedient practice on the part of females. We do not know why the Aegyptiads are so insistent about marrying their cousins, but considerations of wealth would be regarded as natural and wholly justified by those in the audience.

FJW translate the line τίς δ' ἂν φιλοῦσ' ὄνοιτο τοὺς κεκτημέμους "*what woman would reject a master whom she loved?*", suggesting that their objection is indeed based on enmity, κατ' ἔχθραν. However this reading requires one to assume a lacuna of two lines after 337, perhaps in the form of another interchange about the desirability of marriage. A better reading, again implying that their objection is on the grounds of enmity, may be:

τίς δ' ἂν φιλοῦσ' ὄναιτο τοὺς κεκτημένους;

Who would benefit *from loving one's master?* (337)

and indeed this would complement their earlier references to slavery. If they are to be forced to marry, the Danaids declare, then their own feelings can make little difference to the situation. The king's reply may then follow, as a general comment that relationships are improved where there is affection, while omitting any reference to loss of liberty:

σθένος μὲν οὕτως μεῖζον αὔξεται βροτοῖς

Thereby strength is increased for mortals. (338)

Although we cannot establish the text at this point with any certainty, it does seem clear that in reply to the king's question

whether they object to the union because of hatred (κατ' ἔχθραν) or because of some legal impediment (τὸ μὴ θέμις), the girls reply strongly that their objection is based upon the former, not on law or custom, without offering any valid reason for their enmity at this stage.

The Danaids' reply to the king's suggestion that they should accept the position of wives (338, quoted above) is also regrettably obscure:

καὶ δυστυχούντων γ' εὐμαρὴς ἀπαλλαγή

If the text is sound, this comment directly precedes the king's offer of help but again we have difficulty in determining the exact meaning of the Danaids' words here. The term ἀπαλλαγή usually means "*deliverance, release, relief*" from something[49]. Thus this line could constitute a rebuke of the king for his attempt to reconcile them to the detested union and also a means of returning the attention of the audience back to the supplication:

> *And when people are in trouble, it is easy to desert them.* (339)

The idea of release may also be a dark hint at suicide[50], and the idea of escape from a detested union may even convey an oblique hint to the audience about the solution the girls actually do employ, the murder of their bridegrooms. Garvie and Wolff prefer the above reading and a rebuke of the king's reluctance to offer help might indeed shame him into accepting the supplication in the following line. However, the line may also be interpreted as:

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[49]See *Agamemnon* 1 and 20.

[50]As occurs at 447ff.

And when things go wrong, divorce is easy. (339)[51]

In the *Medea* the term ἀπαλλαγή is used twice to mean "*divorce*" (236, 1375) and Harrison notes that divorce was relatively easy for an Athenian woman, particularly if she was supported by her father (p21). A comment on the ease with which they may rid themselves of the Aegyptiads seems odd at this point however and the Danaids may be implying that in fact the very opposite is the case. Denniston notes how even when not followed by an interrogative, καί may be used to introduce surprised, indignant or sarcastic questions[52], giving the sense of an abrupt retort - "*and I suppose that divorce is easy when things go wrong!*". Thus it may be that the rights of women to divorce were established later in the drama, perhaps during a trial scene, in which case this comment may be an ironic allusion to the girls' present unenviable situation. Sommerstein (p81) prefers to transfer the line to the king in which case it would be a further recommendation to marriage, but this would upset the balance of the stichomythia. In addition it makes better sense for this line to be spoken by the Danaids since it directly inspires the king to make an offer of help. Thus this may indeed be a wry comment on the ease with which the Danaids could be forced into marriage and then abandoned by the Aegyptiads at will[53].

If, as seems likely, the audience's sympathies towards the Danaids were destined to change as the trilogy progresses, it would seem natural for Aeschylus to hint that the Aegyptiads have some right to claim the girls as their brides. Indeed the Argive

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[51]Headlam interpreted it thus.

[52]See *Greek Particles* p311.

[53]See FJW II p271ff for a further discussion of the textual difficulties here.

king wonders about the legal position of the Danaids' case:

> εἴ τοι κρατοῦσι παῖδες Αἰγύπτου σέθεν
> νόμῳ πόλεως, φάσκοντες ἐγγύτατα γένους
> εἶναι, τίς [δ'] ἂν τοῖσδ' ἀντιωθῆναι θέλοι;
>
> *If the sons of Aegyptus have power over you by the law of your city, stating that you are their next-of-kin, who would be willing to oppose them?* (387-9)

Obviously this is not a direct statement that Egyptian law supports the Aegyptiads and it is likely that the audience shared the king's ignorance of these matters. Although he himself appears to reject this notion, it may be that the king is raising an important question here, which may be discussed in greater detail at some point later in the trilogy. We should note that the Danaids leave aside all discussion of the legal side of the situation and stress only the moral aspect of the dispute. At the end of the play, the king informs the herald:

> ταύτας δ' ἑκούσας μὲν κατ' εὔνοιαν φρενῶν
> ἄγοις ἄν, εἴπερ εὐσεβὴς πίθοι λόγος
>
> *You may take these girls if they are willing and kindly disposed (towards you) and if you are able to persuade them with righteous words.* (940-1)

The Aegyptiads make no attempt to justify their claim in the *Supplices*, preferring to gain their wishes by violence, but this does not mean that their case was completely without justification. It may be revealed in the later drama that they had some legal right to the Danaids as brides which will immediately modify the justice of the Danaids' claim to Argive protection. As it is, the king offers to help the suppliants without having heard a clear and valid reason for their objection to the marriage and the audience will fear that any association with these girls may bring trouble to the Argives. Let us consider now the various theories which have been devised to explain the Danaids' hatred of their cousins.

b) The Reason for the Danaids' Rejection of the Marriage

It is natural for the modern reader to assume that the personal wishes of the Danaids should be paramount in the matter of their marriage and that the moral question should predominate over any legal considerations. The fifth-century audience would perhaps take a less romantic view however and Athenian girls were often married off to their closest male relatives in order to keep the family wealth intact. Thus political and economic considerations would be expected to predominate over personal preference in the question of marriage. Romantic love would be held of little account and it rarely features in tragedy as a motivating force. In fact in the *Frogs* (1044) Aeschylus boasts that he never exploited this theme in his dramas and Euripides agrees[54]. Thus the fifth-century audience would expect the Danaids to agree to a marriage with their cousins if the match were advantageous and there were no valid and specific reason for their antipathy, such as a family quarrel. It would be unusual in tragedy for the Danaids' aversion to their cousins to be based merely on a vague personal dislike and, even if this were the case, this objection would hold little weight with the fifth-century audience who might expect the girls to accept an advantageous match without regard to their personal feelings.

Ireland maintains that the Danaids object to their cousins because of their violent, brutish natures. They charge them with hubris[55] on several occasions[56] and anticipate their outrageous attempt to drag them from the altars (428-30). However the

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[54]οὐδ' οἶδ' οὐδεὶς ἥντιν' ἐρῶσαν πώποτ' ἐποίησα γυναῖκα "*and none can say that I ever portrayed a woman in love*".

[55]"*having energy or power and misusing it self-indulgently*" (MacDowell).

[56]At 81, 104, 426, 487, 528, 817, 845, 881.

Aegyptiads have been provoked to this violent behaviour by the girls' rejection of them and nowhere do the Danaids inform the king of some specific brutal crime committed by the Aegyptiads in the past, even though this would easily win immediate sympathy for their supplication.

In the prologue the Danaids declare that they have fled their homeland because of an αὐτογενῆ φυξανορίαν (8)[57]. Wilamowitz translated this as "*aus angeborener Männerfeindschaft*" "*an inborn hatred of men*"[58] and constructed a theory that the Danaids reject the Aegyptiads because they hate all men and are opposed to marriage per se. However this interpretation is undermined by the fact that nowhere in the *Supplices* do the Danaids go beyond rejecting this particular union and it seems unlikely that Aeschylus wished his audience to regard the Danaids as unfeminine[59]. Hence a better translation of this phrase may be "*a fleeing from men who are of the same family*"[60]. The precise meaning of the phrase αὐτογενῆ φυξανορίαν may have been equally obscure to the original audience, combining as it does two compounds which are unique in classical Greek, and whatever its meaning, it can offer little explanation of the reason for the Danaids' hatred[61]. Garvie comments of this phrase "*since it would*

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[57]See FJW II p12ff on the various readings of this line.

[58]See *Interp* 15.

[59]Melanippides, quoted by Athenaeus 14.651f describes how the Danaids hunted in chariots like men, but this is not used here and may be a later idea.

[60]This would merely identify the suitors as their own cousins rather than suggest that the kinship is a problem - see below.

[61]See Earp *The Style of Aeschylus* p6ff on compound adjectival phrases in Aeschylus. He notes that compounds which are hapax legomena or peculiar to classical Greek occur once every 18.8 lines in the *Supplices*.

have been so easy for (Aeschylus) to avoid it if he had wished, this vagueness seems to be intentional and here the ambiguity is introduced at the very beginning of the play" (p62).

A certain degree of unwillingness to marry was considered normal among Greek girls[62]. The Danaids declare:

> θέλοιμι δ' ἂν +μορσίμου
> βρόχου τυχεῖν +ἐν σαργάναις,
> πρὶν ἄνδρ' ἀπευκτὸν τῷδε χριμφθῆναι χροί
>
> *I would prefer to meet+ my fate in the bands of+ a noose before a hated man touches my body* (787-90)

However this does not imply that the Danaids are against marriage per se, but only to men whom they hate, and their antipathy seems to be directed solely against the proposed union with their cousins. Wilamowitz laid great stress on the king's comparison of the Danaids with Amazons (287-9) to support his theory that Aeschylus wished to present them as unfeminine and full of hatred for men. However although the legendary Amazons participated in the male sphere of warfare, they also indulged in normal sexual relationships with men and do not appear to have had any special aversion to the opposite sex. Nor are the Danaids presented as devotees of chastity as Wilamowitz suggested, especially since Danaus feels compelled to advise them to avoid shameful contact with men during their stay in Argos (992ff). The Argive king is probably referring to the Danaids' exotic appearance when he compares them with Amazons[63] but the main purpose of his words may be to convey an oblique reference to the wedding-night murder, on which occasion the Danaids will indeed take up weapons against men. Thus the term ἀνάνδρους "*manless*"

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[62] See Seaford, and Sourvinou-Inwood who discusses "*the notion of the girl as a wild thing to be captured and tamed through marriage* (p138).

[63] They are to be imagined as Egyptians after all.

which the king applies to the Amazons may assume the more sinister sense of "*husbandless*", as indeed they will be after the wedding-night murder, for the more alert members of the audience.

While it has sometimes been assumed that the Danaids' resist all forms of marriage because of phrases such as:

> μή τι ποτ' οὖν γενοίμαν ὑποχείριος
> κράτεσί γ' ἀρσένων·
>
> *May I never be subject in any way to the power of men.* (392-3)

In fact their words usually relate specifically to the Aegyptiads, here the topic of the previous passage. Later in the play the Danaids ask:

> ἀμφυγᾶς τίν' ἔτι πόρον
> τέμνω γάμου [καὶ] λυτῆρα;
>
> *What path of escape may I still follow in order to release me from (this) wedlock?* (806-7)

This again is an objection to the imminent forced union with the Aegyptiads rather than a rejection of marriage in general, and in fact they urge the gods to preserve the sanctity of legitimate unions:

> ὕβριν δ' ἐτύμως στυγόντες,
> πέλοιτ' ἂν ἔνδικος γάμος
>
> *If you truly hate hubris there would be righteous marriage* (81-2)

This comment may have a sinister overtone when the audience remembers that the Danaids themselves will commit an outrage towards this sacred institution on their wedding-night. Thus while it is possible that the motive for the wedding-night murder in earlier versions of the myth may have been inspired by a general aversion to men and marriage, the objection in this play seems to be confined to the specific union with the Aegyptiads.

Many have supposed that the Danaids wish to avoid this marriage to their cousins because they regard it as incestuous. Paley took this view, citing the Danaids' own words as evidence:

> ὄλοιντο,
> πρίν ποτε λέκτρων ὧν θέμις εἴργει,
> σφετεριξάμενοι πατραδελφείαν
> τήνδ', ἀεκόντων ἐπιβῆναι.
>
> *May they perish, before ever, making us their cousins their own, they enter unwilling beds from which themis bars them* (36-9)

At first glance this would seem to imply that blood kinship is indeed the obstacle to the marriage but, in fact there does not seem to have been any taboo about cousin marriage in fifth-century Greece. In fact Harrison notes that marriage between brothers and sisters of the same father but a different mother was practiced in Athens (p22) and that after a man's death, the right to marry his daughter passed to the nearest male relative, usually her uncle or male cousins, even if this necessitated a divorce from another man[64]. These intermarriages often took place with the primary consideration of keeping the family wealth intact, as related by Isaeus where Eupolis is censured for failing to marry off either of his daughters to their cousin Apollodorus for this very reason[65].

Thus it seems likely that the marriage of close kindred would not have been regarded as a problem by the Greek audience, and this was known to be common practice in Egypt also, the home of the Danaids and Aegyptiads. When the Argive king learns that the Danaids are fleeing from marriage to their cousins (335), he does

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[64]See Harrison p10.

[65]See *Speech* 7 chapters 11-12, and also Demosthenes *Speech* 41 chapters 3-4 on the practice of uncle/niece marriage.

not immediately regard their close kinship as a problem but proceeds to ask why they object to such a marriage. The herald also boldly describes the Danaids as γυναικῶν αὐτανέψιον στόλον "*this band of women their cousins*" (933), showing no attempt to conceal the close relationship between the two groups. Thus. far from regarding marriage between cousins as unusual, the audience may regard it is as natural, and possibly of financial benefit to the family[66]. In addition, the audience may already anticipate that the union of Hypermestra and Lynceus will provide the foundation of the Argive line[67] and there is no evidence that this marriage was regarded as incestuous by the Greeks. Thus it is clear that the audience were not conditioned by their society or influenced by the text of this play to consider cousin-marriage sinful and we may conclude that the reason for the Danaids' flight was not fear of incest.

Clearly Danaus shares his daughters' antipathy towards the match, declaring:

> πῶς δ' ἂν γαμῶν ἄκουσαν ἄκοντος πάρα
> ἁγνὸς γένοιτ' ἄν;
>
> *How may one be pure who seeks to marry an unwilling girl against her father's will?* (227-8)

In fifth-century Athens, the wishes of a father were supreme in the question of his daughter's marriage but this is clearly not the case in the Supplices. FJW note that "*Danaus is not represented as being legally next of kin and kurios of his daughters...the virtual avoidance of the question of Danaus' paternal rights in* Supplices *is most remarkable*" (I p35). Nowhere do the Danaids bring forward their father's support in

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[66]The question of the Danaids' dowries is not prominent in the Supplices but again this question may have been discussed in great detail later in the trilogy.

[67]See Hesiod *fragment* 135 MW.

defence of their stand and obviously it does nothing to deter the Aegyptiads from pressing their claim. Perhaps most important of all, the Argive king, while fully aware that Danaus is opposed to the proposed marriages, does not thereby regard the matter as settled beyond dispute but continues to question the girls and even suggests, perhaps correctly, that the legal advantage is on the side of their cousins[68]. Thus the opposition of the girls' father holds little weight with anyone on stage and the audience may assume therefore that the play is set at a time before the supremacy of paternal rights in marriage was established, just as the action of the *Oresteia* takes place before the procedure for murder trials has been laid down. This situation may be ratified later in the trilogy, possibly during a trial scene, so that bloody acts like those of the Danaids may be avoided in the future.

We noted above the possibility that it may have been the father who instigated an unwelcome marriage in the very earliest forms of the myth and so here in the *Supplices* we see how Danaus' support adds respectability to the position of his daughters without interfering with the broad outline of events. However even if Danaus' opposition to the marriage were central to the drama and the girls portrayed as merely acting in obedience to him, this still does not solve the problem of what specific action or characteristic of the Aegyptiads has inspired such an intense opposition to the marriage, a reference to which might easily have been included to support their supplication, and this question remains unanswered.

Thus none of these reasons - personal dislike, the particular brutality of these men, hatred of all men or the fear of incest - offers any valid explanation of why the Danaids should refuse to

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[68]Although he appears to be satisfied that there is no legal case - see above.

marry their cousins. Several scholars have dismissed the question of the Danaids' motivation, maintaining that it has no particular significance to the drama. Lattimore, for example, felt that the reason for the Danaids' flight from Egypt is irrelevant and that all dramatic attention should be focused upon the Aegyptiads' crime of attempting to force a union. It is true that in this first play the Argive king is encouraged to concentrate on the helplessness of the Danaids and the brutality of their hopeful suitors, without considering the justification of the supplication too closely. However the reason for the girls' rejection of marriage will surely come under close scrutiny later in the trilogy and we should note the important conclusion that throughout the *Supplices*, the Danaids choose to make no clear statement concerning the reason for rejecting their suitors.

D) The Danaid Trilogy

a) The Punishment of the Danaids

We know very little about how the Danaid trilogy developed in the plays following the *Supplices*. Both FJW (I p48ff) and Garvie (p163-7) offer a good summary of post-Aeschylean treatments of the story but it is unlikely that any later literary version will faithfully reproduce the Danaid trilogy, nor can we ever hope to establish this from the writings of the mythographers and scholiasts with any confidence. We may suppose however that the Danaids will murder their cousins in the ensuing drama and be compelled to answer for this in some way. We shall see later how even though Orestes' matricide is ordained by the gods and essentially justified, nevertheless he is called to account for it and forced to undergo a difficult process of purification. However, whereas Orestes is finally vindicated for his action, the dominant attribute of the Danaids in later myth is the fact that they were condemned to spend eternity attempting to carry water

from the river Styx in leaking vessels[69]. This suggests that, in later Greek thought at least, the wedding-night murder was regarded as a crime worthy of the severest divine punishment. If then the water-carrying were already a familiar element of the story by the time of Aeschylus, the audience will suspect that the Danaids will not receive purification and absolution from the gods, but are destined to suffer eternal punishment in the underworld for their crime, and this foreknowledge would surely influence their attitude towards the drama from the very beginning.

Even if the water-punishment were not yet part of the myth, the audience will surely expect the justice of the wedding-night murder to come under close scrutiny at some point in the ensuing drama. It may be that this discussion occurred within the framework of a trial, as in the case of Orestes, and indeed a legal investigation features in several post-Aeschylean versions of the Danaid myth[70]. The following fragment, believed to come from the third play of the trilogy, is quoted by Athenaeus:

> καὶ ὁ σεμνότατος δ' Αἰσχύλος ἐν ταῖς Δαναίσιν αὐτὴν παράγει τὴν 'Αφροδίτην λέγουσαν·
> "ἐρᾷ μὲν ἁγνὸς οὐρανὸς τρῶσαι χθόνα,
> ἔρως δὲ γαῖαν λαμβάνει γάμου τυχεῖν·
> ὄμβρος δ'ἀπ'εὐνάοντος οὐρανοῦ πεσὼν
> ἔκυσε γαῖαν· ἡ δὲ τίκτεται βροτοῖς
> μήλων τε βοσκὰς καὶ βίον Δημήτριον,
> δενδρῶτις ὥρα δ'ἐκ νοτίζοντος γάμου
> τέλειος ἐστί. τῶν δ'ἐγὼ παραίτιος"
>
> *And the most august Aeschylus in his* Danaids *introduced Aphrodite herself saying "the chaste heaven loves to violate the earth and love lays hold on earth*

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[69]See for example Horace *Odes* 3.2.20ff, Ovid *Metamorphoses* 4.462-3, 10.43-4, Lucretius 3.1008-10.

[70]Hypermestra is tried and acquitted by the Argives (Pausanias 2.19.6, 2.20.7, 2.21.1) while Danaus is put on trial (Euripides' *Orestes* 872-3, Theodectes 3a) with Lynceus acting as mediator (ΣΣ *Orestes* 871 and 872).

to join in wedlock. The rain from the streaming heaven falls down and impregnates the earth; and she brings forth for mortals the pasturage of sheep and Demeter's sustenance; and the ripe season for the trees is perfected by the watery union. Of all this I am the cause"[71].

Many assume that Aphrodite's praise of the power and function of Eros should occur during a trial of Hypermestra at the end of the trilogy. However Hypermestra's sparing of Lynceus, if included, may have been considered just and praiseworthy, as in all later treatments of the myth, and it is more likely that her sisters will be tried for the murder of their new husbands, particularly if the audience already anticipates their punishment.

Considering the supernatural nature of the Danaids' punishment, some sort of divine trial seems an attractive possibility, and we shall see later how Athene plays a prominent role at the trial of Orestes. The wedding-night murder may be considered a violation of the laws of both marriage and the laws of hospitality, the special preserve of Hera and Zeus respectively. The Danaids pray to these two deities early in the play, together with Artemis and Peitho, but we cannot tell which of these divinities, if any, featured in the drama along with Aphrodite and were instrumental in dictating the terms of the Danaids' punishment or absolving their blood-guilt. The latter is possible[72] but perhaps less likely when we consider the great emphasis laid on the Danaids' punishment in later myth.

Seaford suggests that the end of the trilogy may have

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[71]Athenaeus 13.600a-b *fragment* 125 M (44N2). The only other surviving fragment of the trilogy is the single word "*Zagreus*" which is believed to come from the second play.

[72]In pseudo-Apollodorus 2.1.5.11, Hypermestra's sisters are purified of their murder by Athena and Hermes at the command of Zeus.

presented the foundation of the Thesmophoria, a festival conducted by married women in the interests of fertility (p115). This is possible and we noted earlier that the father's supreme right in the question of his daughters' marriage, as well as divorce rights, may also have been established. Thus it is may be that the Aegyptiads' original desire to marry their cousins was justified and it is only at the end of the trilogy that the claims to marry a girl by her next of kin become applicable after her father's death. Whatever guidelines are laid down at the end of the trilogy however, these would be unlikely to absolve the Danaids of the responsibility for the murderous crime and they would still merit the severest punishment.

On the other hand, there is no firm evidence that a trial occurs at the end of the trilogy and the Danaids' punishment might be suggested solely by means of dark, unconscious hints. Most commentators have assumed that Aphrodite is speaking within the context of a trial, but in fact her praise of love may refer to a second marriage of the Danaids, especially since this goddess was believed to preside over all Greek marriages (see Seaford p117). Pindar relates how Danaus organized a footrace to select bridegrooms for his forty-eight daughters, τεσσαράκοντα καὶ ὀκτὼ (*Pythian* 9.113)[73]. This refers to the period after the wedding-night murder, as the scholiast explains:

> ζητεῖται δὲ, διατί τεσσαρακονταοκτὼ εἶπε πεντήκοντα οὐσῶν; καὶ ῥητέον, ὅτι Ἀμυμώνη μὲν προδιαφθαρεῖσα ἦν Ποσειδῶνι, Ὑπερμήστρα δὲ ἐρασθεῖσα Λυγκέως, αἱ δὲ ἄλλαι συνδραμοῦσαι τῷ πατρῴῳ βουλήματι ἀνεῖλον τοὺς Αἰγύπτου παῖδας.
>
> *It is asked by he said forty-eight instead of fifty. One must conclude that Amymone was seduced beforehand by Poseidon, Hypermestra was loved by Lynceus, while the others, complying with their father's wishes, killed the sons of Aegyptus*[74].

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[73]Dated 474BC - see above.

[74]The footrace is also subsequent to the wedding-night murder in

It may be that the story of the footrace belonged to the very earliest versions of the myth and that originally a girl had murdered a husband who had been chosen for her by her father in this arbitrary manner. As the myth developed, this event was transferred to the period following the murder. Wilamowitz suggests that "*the second marriage is a punishment or a humiliation for the girls*" (*Interp* 23)[75] and Winnington-Ingram notes (p130) that the Danaids' final acceptance of husbands would seem appropriate to the Greek audience and reflect the promotion of marriage found at the end of the *Oresteia*[76]. A second marriage is certainly a possibility, whether or not it occurs as a result of a trial, and Danaus himself suggests that his daughters will find admirers in Argos (989ff), but we have no means of knowing whether Aeschylus chose to include this, or a footrace, in the ensuing drama.

In Plato's *Gorgias* the task of filling leaking vessels in Hades is imposed upon impious souls, as at *Republic* 2 363D-E, and particularly on those who were uninitiated in the mysteries (493 a-c). This particular form of punishment is not connected to the Danaids however before the pseudo-Platonic *Axiochus* of the first century BC[77] and there is no undisputed artistic representation of it before the end of the Roman Republic (see Garvie p177).

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the version by Pausanias (3.12.2) where no one wishes to marry these polluted girls and so Danaus offers them without dowry to the fastest runners.

[75]This of course accords with his view of the girls as anti-male which we noted above.

[76]See *Eumenides* 959-60.

[77]371e, quoted by Bonner - Δαναΐδων ὑδρεῖαι ἀτελεῖς "*the eternal water-carrying of the Danaids*".

Nonetheless it is at least possible that the water-punishment was already part of the myth by the time of Aeschylus - Bonner comments "*it is hard to believe that the punishment of the Danaids, which in the post-classical period of Greek literature was a hackneyed proverb, did not belong to the earlier form of the myth also*" (*DM* p35).

It seems that the Danaids' connection with water belongs to the very earliest forms of the myth, for Eustathius comments

> πολυδίψιον δὲ τὸ Ἄργος καλεῖ...ἢ καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν Δαναΐδων, αἳ παραγενόμεναι ἐξ Αἰγύπτου φρεωρυχίαν ἐδίδαξαν, ὡς Ἡσίοδος·
> Ἄργος ἄνυδρον ἐὸν Δαναὸς ποίησεν εὔυδρον.
>
> *He calls Argos very thirsty...or from the Danaids, who having arrived from Egypt, taught them to dig tanks, as Hesiod says "Danaus made waterless Argos watered"*[78]

Megas suggests that the irrigation story may have become linked at some stage with the ancient myth of how water nymphs murdered their unwelcome bridegrooms and water sprang from the places on the Argive plain where their heads were buried (p415-28). It seems likely at least that when the Danaids became connected with the husband murder, their punishment took the form of carrying leaking pitchers in order to complement their established connection with water. Assuming that the audience was aware that the Danaids' murderous action will be judged a crime, let us consider those passages in the *Supplices* where Aeschylus seems to convey hints to his audience about their future punishment.

Early in the play, the suppliants warn the Argive king against the danger of angering the gods:

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[78]On Homer *Iliad* 4.171. Strabo 8.6.8 has Δαναaὶ instead of Δαναὸς - see Hesiodic fragment 128.

οὐδὲ μὴ 'ν Ἅιδου θανὼν
φύγῃ ματαίων αἰτίας πράξας τάδε·
κἀκεῖ δικάζει τἀμπλακήμαθ' ὡς λόγος,
Ζεὺς ἄλλος ἐν καμοῦσιν ὑστάτας δίκας...
μένει τοι Ζηνὸς Ἱκταίου κότος
δυσπαράθελκτος παθόντος οἴκτοις.

One who does so will not escape the charge of wickedness even in the house of Hades after death, for there too it is said another Zeus judges our sins amongst the dead with a final judgment...the wrath of Zeus Petitionary remains, unsoftened by the pleadings of one who suffers (228-31, 385-6)

This reference to the terrible punishments which await sinners in Hades is issued by the Danaids with unconscious irony and throughout the drama they stress the great power of Zeus, as at 598-9 for example:

πάρεστι δ' ἔργον ὡς ἔπος
σπεῦσαί τι τῶν βούλιος φέρει φρήν.

His deed is as swift as his word to urge to completion anything which his counselling mind suggests.

If a divine trial were already part of the myth, these hints at the great power of Zeus may prepare the audience to anticipate his appearance, or that of other gods, later in the drama. The girls are completely unaware that they themselves are destined to incite the anger of the gods and suffer gravely for it. Danaus reminds his daughters with unconscious irony:

χρόνῳ τοι κυρίῳ τ'ἐν ἡμέρᾳ
θεοὺς ἀτίζων τις βροτῶν δώσει δίκην

In time and on the day appointed a mortal who dishonours the gods will pay the penalty (732-3)

There are similar warnings in the *Oresteia* concerning the consequences of wrong-doing but we have noted that, unlike Orestes, the Danaids may not be finally vindicated for their murderous act but condemned to a cruel, eternal punishment in

Hades. Thus their desire to fly ὕπαστρον "*up to the stars*" (393)[79] will strike the audience as ironic if they suspect that the Danaids' true fate lies below the ground in Hades. The girls cry in their panic:

> ποῖ φύγωμεν 'Απίας
> χθονός, κελαινὸν εἴ τι κεῦθός ἐστί που;
>
> *To what part of the Apian land can we flee, if there is some dark hiding-place somewhere* (777-8)

FJW (III p125) note that this desire for a hiding-place could also convey an oblique reference to Hades[80] and no doubt this secondary meaning would be appreciated by the audience. Rather than marry their cousins, they declare:

> πρόπαρ θανούσας [δ']'Αίδας ἀνάσσοι
>
> *I would sooner die and let Hades by my lord* (791)

Girls who died before marriage were considered the brides of Hades by the Greeks (see Seaford p106) and so the Danaids are thinking of their own possible imminent death here. However this reference to the Danaids in Hades may convey an oblique hint at their destined punishment there for the benefit of the audience.

It is ironic that the Argive king fears punishment in Hades for not accepting the girls, at 413ff for example, when in fact it is they who are famed in myth for suffering eternal agony in that place. He fears that if the girls are dragged from the altars by force, an avenging power will bring heavy destruction upon his people:

> 'Αλάστορα,

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[79] See above for alternative interpretations of this phrase.

[80] See *Odyssey* 24.204 and *Iliad* 22.482 'Αίδαο δόμους ὑπὸ κεύθεσι γαίης "*the home of Hades beneath the depths of the earth*".

ὅς οὐδ' ἐν Ἅιδου τὸν +θανόντ'+ ἐλευθεροῖ

An Alastor, who does not set free +the dead+ even in Hades (415-6)

This is in fact the destined fate of the Danaids who also, with unconscious irony, regard death as a means for mortals to escape their present distress:

ὁ γὰρ θανὼν ἐλευθεροῦ-
ται φιλαιάκτων κακῶν

For the one who dies is freed from troubles that cause lamentation (802-3)

However the audience suspects that death will bring to the Danaids eternal suffering, not a release from sorrow. The girls express a wish that the Aegyptiads will never win them as brides but:

Στύγιον πέλοι τόδ' ἆθλον

May theirs be a Stygian prize! (1033)

The audience will suspect that the Aegyptiads' prize, the reward for their efforts, will indeed be death, although the punishment at the Styx will be reserved for the Danaids themselves. Thus this reference to the river of Hades from which they are sentenced to fill leaking pitchers in later versions will be a deeply ironic comment on their destined fate.

So we have seen that there are many occasions when Aeschylus appears to refer obliquely to the future punishment of the Danaids in Hades through words spoken by characters unconscious of their meaning. FJW believe that the water-punishment is a post-Aeschylean addition to the story and "*would be incompatible with the indications of reconciliation contained in the* Supplices" (I p50), although they fail to define these. Macurdy also doubts that the Danaids will be punished - "*they have the sympathy of everyone in the drama (except the Egyptian herald) and they must*

have had the sympathy of the audiences before whom the play was performed" (p99)[81]. However much of the power of this trilogy must have arisen from the ironic contrast between the helpless suppliants and the cruel and treacherous murder anticipated by the audience. Surely the Danaids will be punished in some way for this, even if this had not yet assumed the specific form of collecting water in leaking vessels which features so widely in later versions. If so, this will provide a possible additional source of irony in the trilogy[82].

As the Danaids wonder what their future is to be - τί πεισόμεσθα "*what shall we suffer?*" (777) - the audience suspects that they are destined to suffer in the fullest sense. Gantz comments, "*despite its lack of physical action, Aeschylus'* Suppliants *contains a wealth of dramatic movement in its language and imagery, especially at those points where the playwright expands the statements of his characters to include implications beyond what the characters themselves perceive*" (p279). Thus Aeschylus may share allusions to future events with his audience through the words of those on stage and the points we have noted suggest that Aeschylus is exploiting his audience's anticipation of the Danaids' punishment in Hades for the murder of their husbands to great effect through the unwitting comments of those on stage.

b) Characters of the Later Plays

The Danaid trilogy consisted of the *Supplices*, the *Aegyptii* and the *Danaids* and was performed together with the satyr play *Amymone* (see FJW I p24). Many, like Winnington-Ingram, believe

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[81] We of course are concerned only with the audience of the first performance.

[82] Or if this element were introduced by Aeschylus himself, then the above ambiguous hints will act as preparation rather than dramatic irony.

that the Danaids remained the chorus for all three plays (p146 n31). It seems to have been conventional for the chorus to vary greatly in age and gender throughout the various plays of a trilogy[83] but since here the Danaids enter the drama as characters in their own right to a far greater extent than usual, it is possible that this same group remained on stage throughout. Thus Aeschylus would be able to present a discussion between the chorus and Danaus about the murder-plot, just as in the *Supplices* the girls are often alone on stage with their father. Others assume, from its title, that the Aegyptiads formed the chorus of the second play but this raises the question of how the murder plot could have been concocted within the presence of the victims themselves. However, just as Agamemnon's imminent death is evoked solely through ambiguous hints in the *Oresteia*, so there is no real necessity for the Danaids' murder to be outlined beforehand if it were already anticipated by the audience. In both cases the audience's foreknowledge may be confirmed by means of ironic hints within the text which fail to alert the chorus to the true situation[84]. We may receive a foretaste of these hints, for example, when the Danaids describe their cousins as οὐλόφρονες δὲ καὶ δολιομήτιδες "*murderous hearted and crafty of counsel*" (750) for the audience may suspect that it is the suppliants themselves who will shortly engage in evil plotting and murder. Thus the Aegyptiads may indeed have formed the chorus of the second play, with Danaus acting as spokesman for his daughters, while the Danaids may have reappeared in the final play to answer for their crime in some way.

During the *Supplices* Danaus is of minor dramatic importance and we noted above how his opinion is held of little account by

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[83]See Taplin p196.

[84]Compare the obtuseness of the chorus concerning the deaths of Cassandra and Eteocles in the *Agamemnon* and the *Septem* respectively.

those on stage. Ireland dismisses him as "*a shadowy father-figure, almost eclipsed dramatically by his daughters*" (p27) while Garvie suggests that Aeschylus felt compelled to include him merely because he featured in the inherited myth (p136). However in later versions of the Danaid myth Danaus, the eponymous ancestor of the Danaans, gains the throne of Argos and this same event may occur here also[85]. He acquires a bodyguard by vote of the Argive assembly and FJW (III p277) suggest that this acquisition of "the royal prerogative" will act as a constant visual reminder to the audience that he is destined to become king.

Thus Danaus may play an important role in the ensuing drama, particularly if he is to devise the murder plot, and his rather negligible role in the first play may be designed to illustrate that the Danaids are acting of their own volition and are by no means merely the puppets of their father. We have seen how the Danaids may not form the chorus of the following play and it is even possible that they do not reappear on stage as a group again. Thus it is important that their attitude towards the marriage is clearly established during the *Supplices*, so that even if the wedding-night murder is undertaken on the advice of their father, the audience will know that this coincides with their own wishes and that they are fully responsible for their actions[86].

Danaus devises the murder-plot in most later versions[87] and we

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[85]The Argive king may die, abdicate or merely promise him the throne - see Garvie p198ff. If the Argive king is to disappear at some point in the ensuing drama, this might explain the emphasis upon his inclusion of the Argive people in the decision to protect the suppliants.

[86]We do not know whether Danaus will be blamed for his part in the murder later in the drama, although we find that he is put on trial in certain later versions - Theodectes 3a, Euripides' *Orestes* 872-3.

[87]See for example Ovid *Heroides* 14.

find that he is presented in the *Supplices* consistently as the Danaids' mentor and advisor. They introduce him as "Δαναὸς δὲ πατὴρ καὶ βούλαρχος καὶ στασίαρχος *Danaus our father, deviser of our plans and leader of our group*" (11-12) and his opening words reinforce this idea:

> καὶ τἀπὶ χέρσου νῦν προμηθίαν λαβὼν
> αἰνῶ φυλάξαι τἄμ' ἔπη δελτουμένας
>
> *Now taking thought for your landfaring, I bid you to keep safe my words, noted down in your hearts* (178-9)

Just as Danaus planned the voyage to Argos (11-15) so now he is considering what further steps may be taken to avoid the marriage of his daughters. Already suspecting the means by which the Danaids will indeed rid themselves of the Aegyptiads, the audience may wonder briefly whether Danaus is about to reveal the plot to kill them on the wedding-night at this point. Instead he advises his daughters to behave with great modesty and subservience as befitting their position as suppliants (176ff) and he repeats similar advice at the end of the play when they are about to take up residence in Argos:

> καὶ ταῦτα μὲν γράψασθε πρός γεγραμμένοις
> πολλοῖσιν ἄλλοις σωφρονίσμασιν πατρός,
> ἀγνῶθ' ὅμιλον ὡς ἐλέγχεται χρόνῳ...
> ὑμᾶς δ' ἐπαινῶ μὴ καταισχύνειν ἐμέ,
> ὥραν ἐχούσας τήνδ' ἐπίστρεπτον βροτοῖς
>
> *And add this to the many other wise words of your father which are written in your hearts, that an unknown band is proved in time...I bid you not to bring shame to me, you who have a bloom so admired by mortals* (991-2, 996-7)

Danaus' opening words may suggest to the audience that he is on the point of outlining the murder plot but again his advice proves of a more mundane nature, although these warnings to the Danaids to behave modestly may remind the audience that they are destined to act with great boldness in the near future. The Danaids express complete obedience to their father (205-6) and

later when the Argive king asks how they will live in Argos - either communally πολλῶν μετ' ἄλλων (960) or alone μονορρύθμους (961) - they beg him to refer the matter to their father:

πρόνοον
καὶ βούλαρχον· τοῦ γὰρ προτέρα
μῆτις, ὅπου χρὴ δώματα ναίειν

the one who takes forethought for us and the deviser of our plans, for primary consideration of where we should live belongs to him (969-71)

The question of the Danaids' abode is further discussed (970-4, 1009-11) and this may be of importance later in the trilogy for it will be the setting for the wedding-night murder. Thus Danaus is firmly established as the girls' sole adviser and mentor in this first play of the trilogy which may confirm the audience's suspicions that he will be responsible for plotting the murder[88].

It may be that Danaus' brother Aegyptus is to appear in the ensuing drama. The scholion to Euripides Orestes 872 comments:

ἡ πολλὴ δόξα κατέχει μὴ ἀφῖχθαι τὸν Αἴγυπτον εἴς Ἄργος, καθά περ ἄλλοι τέ φασι καὶ Ἑκαταιὸς γράφων οὕτως[89]]· ὁ δὲ Αἴγυπτος αὐτὸς μὲν οὐκ ἦλθεν εἰς Ἄργος, παῖδας δὲ... ὡς μὲν Ἡσίοδος[90], ἐποίησε πεντήκοντα, ὡς ἐγὼ δὲ, οὐδὲ εἴκοσι· καὶ Διονύσιος ὁ κυκλογράφος[91] ἐν +τούτῳ

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[88]Ryzman speaks of the "*penetrating psychological realism of the playwright*" (p5), suggesting that the Danaids have failed to mature and detach themselves from their father and that they reject marriage as a result of his emphasis on chastity. It is surely misguided to regard the play in this manner however and the audience would have regarded filial obedience and modesty as praiseworthy qualities.

[89]See *FGH* 4.

[90]*Fragment* 50. MW frag 127

[91]See *FGH* 4.

τὰ παραπλήσιά φησι. Φρύνιχος δὲ ὁ τραγικός φησι σὺν Αἰγυπτίοις τὸν Αἴγυπτον ἥκειν εἰς Ἄργος

In the opinion of the majority Aegyptus did not come to Argos, among whom Hecateus writes thus, "Aegyptus himself did not come to Argos but his sons (did)...fifty in number according to Hesiod but in my version not even twenty". And Dionysius the cyclograph says roughly the same. Phrynichus the tragedian says that Aegyptus came to Argos with the Aegyptians

Thus although Aegyptus' arrival in Argos is not mentioned in the *Supplices*, he would be a convenient interlocutor for Danaus and spokesman for the Aegyptiads. In addition, since he is destined to survive the massacre of his sons, he may be instrumental in calling the Danaids to account for their murderous act. Thus the audience may wonder if Aegyptus will appear and what role he will play[92].

The marriage of Hypermestra and Lynceus is suggested as early as Hesiod[93] and they became important characters in later versions. Lynceus kills Danaus[94], or Hypermestra's sisters[95] or both father and daughters, and Hypermestra herself is put on trial in the version by Pausanias[96]. In most later versions the couple marry and Lynceus succeeds Danaus as king of Argos[97]. Thus the audience may have been wondering whether Hypermestra and Lynceus will

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[92]In later myth, for example Euripides' *Orestes* 872-3, Aegyptus comes to Argos to prosecute Danaus, but we do not know if that featured here.

[93]Their son Abas is mentioned at *fragment* 135.

[94]Pseudo-Archilocus ap. Malal. 68.1 D20, Serv. Dan. A. 10.497.

[95]Euripides' *Hecuba* 886. (scholia)

[96]2.19.6, 2.20.7, 2.21.7.

[97]Pseudo-Apollodorus 2.2.1.1, Pausanias. 2.16.1, ΣΣ *Hecuba* 886, *Orestes* 872.

feature as individuals in the later part of the Danaid trilogy. FJW note that "*it is without parallel in extant Greek tragedy for one member of a collective group to appear as a named and individually acting character in a play where that group forms the chorus*" (I p52). However too much tragedy has been lost to allow any generalization in this matter, and, even if the appearance of Hypermestra or Lynceus would have been considered unusual within the conventions of tragedy, there was nothing to prevent Aeschylus choosing to portray them. On the other hand, the refusal of one daughter to murder her husband may have been reported in a messenger speech with the main dramatic focus remaining on her sisters. Thus we do not know whether or not the tale of Hypermestra and Lynceus was included in the drama, and if so, how it was presented. Again the tragedies of Phrynichus may have been deeply influential in this respect and we can only speculate about which characters appeared in the later plays.

E) Conclusion

So we see that it is impossible to reconstruct the trilogy with any degree of certainty and one level of speculation must rest upon another. Our discussion of the Danaids' punishment in Hades, for example, assumes that the wedding-night murder takes place, for which there is no firm evidence. Garvie issues the pertinent warning (p183) that had we only the first play of the *Oresteia*, we might assume that Menelaus would return (675), that Clytemnestra would be banished (1410) and that the entire family of Agamemnon would be wiped out (1603)! Thus even when we feel certain that there is an intentional allusion in the text to, say, the wedding-night murder, we cannot be certain that Aeschylus is not merely teasing the expectations of his audience and had no intention of including these events in the later drama. Thus by the end of the *Supplices*, we, like the original audience, have many doubts about how exactly the drama is to proceed and it is most unfortunate that we are unable to share their experience any further. It does seem certain however that while the initial

desire of the Danaids to avoid the marriage is considered justified, their reaction, the murder of bridegrooms, will be considered a crime worthy of the direst penalty, and that the succeeding plays of the trilogy presented these events to great effect.

Chapter Four

The Homecoming of Agamemnon

Our study of the *Oresteia* falls naturally into various separate sections but we should remember at all times that the audience witnessed these three dramas as one, closely-linked, continuous performance. This is the only complete trilogy which has survived to modern times and it offers us a unique opportunity to trace the exploitation of audience anticipation through to its conclusion. Thus in this latter part of the thesis we shall be concentrating more fully on the effect of the performance upon the audience as the drama unfolds before them. Our study is further aided by the fact that there are frequent references to the *Oresteia* myth in our earlier sources which allows us to reconstruct the audience's perception of the story with a greater degree of confidence than elsewhere. On the other hand, we should not forget that there must have been many other relevant sources which are now lost to us and so our conception of the audience's perception of the myth must remain incomplete. Let us begin by considering the important role played by the audience's mythical knowledge during the very first scenes of the trilogy.

a) Introduction

The fact that Agamemnon is murdered on his return from the Trojan War in earlier versions of the myth was well-known in the fifth-century and would have proved a great influence on the audience's perception of the early part of the *Oresteia*. The murder of the king features widely in our pre-Aeschylean sources, being mentioned in Homer, Hesiod, the epic poem the *Nostoi*, and Pindar, and it almost certainly occurred in the versions by Xanthus, Stesichorus and Simonides. In addition, the killing of Agamemnon is depicted on several vases, such as the Attic

Red-figure kalyx krater by the Dokimasia Painter[1], while Orestes' revenge, a story famous in art and literature, is itself inspired by his desire to avenge his father's murder. Thus when the *Oresteia* begins, no doubt the audience will be anticipating the murder of Agamemnon and wondering how it will be presented on stage.

In the opening lines of the *Agamemnon*, the Watchman reveals both the location of the drama and the moment in the story where the action of the play will begin. He invites the audience to imagine themselves witnessing the scene outside the house of Agamemnon and Menelaus (3) just as news arrives that the Trojan War is at an end (22). This suggests that Agamemnon is about to return to his homeland and all dramatic attention is focused upon his homecoming during these opening scenes of the trilogy. No doubt the audience will be wondering whether there will be any open reference to the murder-plot beforehand, or whether it will be suppressed entirely until after the deed is completed. Likewise they will wonder whether the adulterous relationship enjoyed by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in earlier versions is to feature in the *Oresteia* and, if so, when and how this will be revealed. In fact Aeschylus chooses to avoid any direct mention of either the murder-plot or the adultery until after Aeschylus is dead. Thus the audience's mythical knowledge plays a vital role in creating suspense in the drama and Aeschylus includes oblique allusions to events which they would have been anticipating. At the same time, however, these hints are presented in highly ambiguous terms and will leave the audience uncertain about whether they will be included in the trilogy or not[2].

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[1] c470-465, see Prag plate 3.

[2] We shall see below how Aegisthus' anticipated role in the murder and as Clytemnestra's partner remains ambiguous throughout most of the *Agamemnon*.

In the earlier myth Agamemnon and Menelaus lived apart[3] but they shared a house in Sparta in the versions by Stesichorus and Simonides[4], possibly reflecting some contemporary political alliance (see Baldry). Aeschylus adopts this development and sets his drama at the house shared by the sons of Atreus, στέγαις 'Ατρειδῶν (3). This early reference to Atreus may remind the audience of the ancestral curse and Cassandra will reveal how the crimes of the previous generation still cling to the house. In addition, Paris' abduction of Helen is a great offence against the laws of hospitality and Agamemnon is all the more deeply involved if this crime occurred at his own house. Thus Zeus Xenios, god of hospitality, might be expected to support Agamemnon's leadership of the expedition against Troy - provided that it is executed with due moderation and respect for the gods.

A further important consequence of locating the drama at the house of Agamemnon is that the audience cannot be absolutely certain that the king will in fact return to this spot. In the *Odyssey*, the only extant sources which makes any specific reference to the location of the murder, Agamemnon does not reach home in his ship but is blown off course and lands:

> ὅθι δώματα ναῖε Θυέστης
> τὸ πρίν, ἀτὰρ τότ' ἔναιε Θυεστιάδης Αἴγισθος.
>
> *Where Thyestes had lived previously and which was now the home of his son Aegisthus.* (*Odyssey* 4.517-8)

Aegisthus then kills him οἶκόνδε καλέσσας "*having invited him to his house*" (*Odyssey* 11.410), and again at *Odyssey* 4.530ff and 24.22 the murder is located οἴκῳ ἐν Αἰγίσθοιο "*in the house of Aegisthus*". We should note that at *Odyssey* 3.234 Athene tells Telemachus how Agamemnon was killed ἐφέστιος "*at the hearth*" which

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[3]See *Iliad* 2 569-90, *Odyssey* 4.1 ff, 11.460 and the *Cypria*.

[4]According to the scholion to Euripides' *Orestes* 46.

may be an indication that there were versions which set the murder at Agamemnon's own palace as early as Homer. On the other hand, the seat by the hearth had been offered to guests and suppliants by tradition since Homeric times and so was the place where one should least anticipate an attack. Thus Athene may merely be stressing the domestic setting of Agamemnon's murder and the great pathos of his death rather than suggesting that he died in his own home. Certainly the predominant idea presented in the *Odyssey* is that Agamemnon dies at the palace of Aegisthus before reaching his own palace, and this may be the audience's predominant expectation, particularly at the very beginning of the drama.

We cannot tell where the murder occurs in our more fragmentary sources but it may be that the shifting of attention from Aegisthus towards Clytemnestra, which is occurring at least by the time of Stesichorus, was reflected by the change of location of the murder from the palace of Aegisthus to Agamemnon's own home. Nevertheless, even if the murder had occurred at Agamemnon's palace in earlier versions, the audience cannot be absolutely certain that Aeschylus will adopt this change and the possibility remains that Agamemnon will not fulfill his homeward journey and appear before them on stage but die before this at the home of his enemy as in the Homeric version. As the drama develops and the return of the king grows increasingly likely, this may lead to a good deal of speculation among the audience about how this newer element will be presented. Let us begin by considering the manner in which Agamemnon's homecoming is anticipated by those on stage and then proceed to a discussion of the presentation of the relatively brief appearance of the long-awaited king.

b) The News of the Return

As soon as the audience learns that the figure on stage is a Watchman, they may recall the role played by this character in previous versions. The *Odyssey* describes the news of Agamemnon's

return thus:

> τὸν δ' ἄρ' ἀπὸ σκοπιῆς εἶδε σκοπός, ὅν ῥα καθεῖσεν
> Αἴγισθος δολόμητις ἄγων, ὑπὸ δ' ἔσχετο μισθὸν
> χρυσοῦ δοιὰ τάλαντα· φύλασσε δ' ὅ γ' εἰς ἐνιαυτόν,
> μή ἑ λάθοι παριών, μνήσαιτο δὲ θούριδος ἀλκῆς.
> βῆ δ' ἴμεν ἀγγελέων πρὸς δώματα ποιμένι λαῶν.
> αὐτίκα δ' Αἴγισθος δολίην ἐφράσσατο τέχνην·

> *But a Watchman saw (Agamemnon) from his lookout, a man whom Aegisthus had taken and stationed there with treachery, and had promised two talents of gold as payment. For a year he had been watching so that Agamemnon would not pass by unnoticed, remembering his furious valour. The man ran to the house of the shepherd of the people with his news, and at once Aegisthus devised a treacherous stratagem.* (*Odyssey* 4.524-29)

Thus Aeschylus inherited the idea that a Watchman is set to alert the adulterous pair of the king's return and the inclusion of this familiar figure will indicate to the audience the point in the story at which the action will begin. It is most unfortunate that we do not know whether earlier presentations of the myth had taken the news of Agamemnon's return as their starting point also, nor what role, if any, had been played by the Watchman. Here he is weary of his year-long watch, φρουρᾶς ἐτείας (2), and the chorus in their opening words intimate that the army have been away fighting for ten years, δέκατον μὲν ἔτος (40). Since in earlier myth Troy falls in the tenth year of fighting after a watch was kept at home for a year also[5], this will confirm the audience's suspicion that the long-awaited news is about to arrive and it is unlikely that they will share the doubts of its veracity expressed here by the Watchman[6] and later by the chorus (268ff, 475ff). With their wider knowledge, the audience will have little doubt that the war is truly over and that Agamemnon will soon begin his homeward journey.

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[5] See *Odyssey* 4.526, quoted above.

[6] εἴπερ Ἰλίου πόλις ἑάλωκεν "*if indeed Troy has fallen*" 29-30.

In Homer, and perhaps elsewhere, this watch is stationed for deeply sinister reasons and no doubt the audience of the *Oresteia* will suspect that here too the adulterous pair desire an early warning of Agamemnon's return purely in order to facilitate his murder. The Watchman stresses the length of his weary watch, giving the impression that Agamemnon has been long-awaited by those at home and the audience will suspect that Aegisthus and Clytemnestra's anticipation of this event is of a rather different nature. However this man displays a deep and genuine loyalty towards Agamemnon, crying out in joy at the news of his master's return - ἰοὺ ἰού (25) - and fondly imagining meeting him again face to face (34-5). He predicts great rejoicing throughout the land (23) and breaks into a dance (31), crying:

τὰ δεσποτῶν γὰρ εὖ πεσόντα θήσομαι

Matters have turned out well for my master. (32)

However the audience will regard Agamemnon's apparent good fortune as deceptive and it is ironic that death in battle at Troy would have been a far nobler end than his actual fate, which is to die by the treachery of close kindred in his own home[7]. The audience will suspect strongly that Clytemnestra will not share the Watchman's delight concerning Agamemnon's return and it is with deep irony that he bids the queen to rejoice ὀλολυγμὸν εὐφημοῦντα "*give a loud cry*" (28). No doubt the audience would appreciate the ambiguity of the term ὀλολυγμός which may refer to a loud cry of either joy or lamentation (LSJ), knowing that the queen will anticipate this event with eagerness, not as a true and faithful wife should, but so that her husband's death may come the sooner. Thus the Watchman plays an important role here and his innocent joy and unwavering loyalty towards Agamemnon will contrast with the audience's forebodings about the actual welcome

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[7]Orestes states this contrast explicitly at *Choephori* 345ff.

prepared for the king. Far from being an occasion for rejoicing, this event will herald the beginning of fresh sorrows for the house of Atreus and the Watchman's simple attitude highlights the underlying pathos of the situation.

Since the audience will be almost certain that the news from Troy is true and that Agamemnon will shortly return to his homeland, the Herald Scene has a dramatic rather than an informative function. It prolongs the suspense about the entrance of the king and the contrast between the respective homecomings of these two warriors serves to emphasize the cruelty of Agamemnon's fate. The king's arrival in his homeland in the *Odyssey* is a moment of great joy:

> ἦ τοι ὁ μὲν χαίρων ἐπεβήσετο πατρίδος αἴης
> καὶ κύνει ἁπτόμενος ἣν πατρίδα· πολλὰ δ' ἀπ' αὐτοῦ
> δάκρυα θερμὰ χέοντ', ἐπεὶ ἀσπασίως ἴδε γαῖαν.
>
> *Agamemnon stepped onto his fatherland with rejoicing and kissed it as he touched it. Many warm tears fell from his eyes when he saw the land so welcome to him.* (*Odyssey* 4.521-3)

Thus the ironic contrast between the joyful return of the victorious warrior and the cruel fate which awaits him at home had been established since Homeric times. In the *Agamemnon*, the Herald expresses similar jubilation on beholding his dear homeland once again:

> οὐ γάρ ποτ' ηὔχουν τῇδ' ἐν Ἀργείᾳ χθονὶ
> θανὼν μεθέξειν φιλτάτου τάφου μέρος.
>
> *I never thought that I should die in this Argive land and gain my share in a tomb most dear to me.* (506-7)

The audience will surely note here an oblique allusion to Agamemnon's imminent fate and the term "φιλτάτου τάφου" could also imply burial by those who are (or should be) most dear, one's closest relatives. Joy and sorrow are juxtaposed many times during this Herald Scene, as when the chorus bids the herald to

rejoice (χαῖρε 538) and he replies:

χαίρω +τεθνᾶναι δ' οὐκέτ' ἀντερῶ θεοῖς+.

I rejoice and would no longer object to being dead. (539)[8]

He speaks of weeping for joy, ὥστ' ἐνδακρύειν γ' ὄμμασιν χαρᾶς ὕπο (541) which the chorus calls τερπνῆς νόσου "*a pleasant disease*" (542). In the wider context his references to the joyful homecoming of the army are juxtaposed with the hardships they suffered and the sad tale of the shipwreck:

εὔφημον ἦμαρ οὐ πρέπει κακαγγέλῳ
γλώσσῃ μιαίνειν·

It is not fitting to defile an auspicious day with evil-sounding words. (636-7)

This contrast between joy and sorrow will highlight the ambiguous nature of Agamemnon's homecoming, where what is ostensibly an occasion for rejoicing will in fact culminate in his death.

Just as the news that Troy had fallen released the Watchman from his weary watch, so it marks the end of the harsh overseas campaign for the Herald. He cries εὖ γὰρ πέπρακται "*all has turned out well*" (551) and suggests that all former suffering be now forgotten (567). He bids the native gods and the Argives who remained at home:

εὐμενεῖς πάλιν
στρατὸν δέχεσθαι τὸν λελειμμένον δορός.

To receive back with kindness that part of the army spared by the spear. (516-7)

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[8]See Fraenkel II p274 on the textual difficulties here, although the basic meaning appears sound.

The audience fears that Agamemnon will definitely not be received εὐμενεῖς "*with kindness*" and that he has escaped death in battle and at sea only to return home and die at the hands of those who should most love and welcome him. The Herald bids the palace itself to welcome its master δέξασθε κόσμῳ βασιλέα...ἀλλ' εὖ νιν ἀσπάσασθε, καὶ γὰρ οὖν πρέπει "*receive the king duly...give him good welcome as is right*" (521, 524), without referring directly to his reception by its human inhabitants. He declares:

> εὐδαίμων ἀνὴρ
> ἥκει, τίεσθαι δ' ἀξιώτατος βροτῶν
> τῶν νῦν·
>
> (*Agamemnon*) *has returned home a blessed man, the most worthy to be honoured of all living people.* (530-2)

However the audience will fear that far from being honoured Agamemnon will be brutally murdered by those at home. Although the Herald gives a clear prediction that Agamemnon will return to the palace (518ff) we noted above how this homeward journey was never completed in the Homeric version of the myth and in fact no other pre-Aeschylean source states explicitly that Agamemnon died in his own home[9]. Even if this had been the case in more recent versions of the story, until he arrives on stage, the audience cannot be absolutely certain that Agamemnon will not die at the palace of Aegisthus as in the *Odyssey*, and this possibility may be increased by the failure of the Herald to clarify the exact whereabouts of the king anywhere in his speech.

The cheerful Herald exits at line 680 and, like the Watchman, this loyal supporter of Agamemnon never reappears. Fraenkel notes that "*he is the only character in this tragedy who displays an unqualified optimism*" (II p293) and after his departure, the mood of the play becomes grim. The Herald's simple pleasure on

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[9]Stesichorus may have located the murder there but this is not preserved in our fragments.

reaching his homeland will form a sharp contrast with Agamemnon's destined fate and the two homecoming scenes may have contained visual parallels in the theatre to emphasize this effect. Both of these faithful servants, the Watchman and the Herald, highlight the ironic contrast between the joyful homecoming of the successful army and the true nature of the welcome which awaits Agamemnon, while their great respect and loyalty towards their king suggests that he is worthy of their devotion and will act as favourable preparation for this character.

As he enters the stage, Agamemnon offers thanks to the native gods for his safe homecoming with unconscious irony and calmly assumes that he will resume his throne and continue to rule Argos as before (810ff). Pathos is created by his ignorance of his perilous position and he innocently makes plans for the future which the audience fears will never be fulfilled[10]. The king mentions Odysseus, who proved a loyal friend to him (841ff) and the very different fates met by these two heroes on their return from the Trojan War had been famous since Homeric times. The audience will recall how in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus overcame his enemies and reclaimed his former position as king, while Agamemnon was taken by surprise and killed on his return. In the Underworld, the soul of Agamemnon warns Odysseus:

> ἄλλο δέ τοι ἐρέω, σὺ δ' ἐνὶ φρεσὶ βάλλεο σῇσι·
> κρύβδην, μηδ' ἀναφανδά, φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν
> νῆα κατισχέμεναι, ἐπεὶ οὐκέτι πιστὰ γυναιξίν.
>
> *Put away in your heart this other thing that I tell you. Bring your ship to your dear homeland in secret, not openly for on e can never trust a woman.* (*Odyssey* 11.454-6)[11]

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[10]Note the repeated use of the future tense - βουλευσόμεσθα "*we shall take counsel*" 846, πειρασόμεσθα "*we shall try*" 850, δεξιώσομαι "*we shall show*" 852.

[11]The phrase εἴδωλον σκιᾶς "*image of a shadow/phantom*" (839) may help to evoke this scene for the audience.

Thus while Odysseus secured a successful homecoming by returning in secret and taking his enemy by surprise, Agamemnon himself is caught off guard and killed. This idea is reflected in the *Oresteia* where Aeschylus clearly indicates that the news of Agamemnon's return is clearly understood by his enemies and that it is they who enjoy the advantage of a surprise attack.

Odysseus' safe homecoming is further facilitated in the Homeric version by the fact that he gains important allies within the palace from among those close to him and is helped particularly by his son Telemachus and faithful servant Eumaeus. In contrast Agamemnon was killed before he even reached his own palace and so was thwarted in his desire to greet his household:

> ἦ τοι ἔφην γε
> ἀσπάσιος παίδεσσιν ἰδὲ δμώεσσιν ἐμοῖσιν
> οἴκαδ' ἐλεύσεσθαι·
>
> *I had thought that I would be welcomed by my children and servants when I came home.* (*Odyssey* 11.430-2)[12]

In the *Oresteia* also, even though Agamemnon reaches his own home, he remains isolated from all possible sources of help. The Watchman fondly imagined a joyful reunion with his master:

> γένοιτο δ' οὖν μολόντος εὐφιλῆ χέρα
> ἄνακτος οἴκων τῇδε βαστάσαι χερί.
>
> *May it be that the master of the house returns and that I clasp his dear hand in mine.* (34-35)

but in fact neither he nor the Herald, both loyal servants of Agamemnon, ever greet their dear master or even see him alive again.

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[12]See also *Odyssey* 11.450-3.

The palace is shared by Agamemnon and Menelaus and both brothers will be expected to return home now that the Trojan War is over. The story of how a storm scattered the returning fleet is related by Sappho[13] and Homer[14], and so the audience may anticipate the Herald's announcement that Menelaus' homecoming has been delayed (636ff) with the result that another possible ally is lost to Agamemnon. The Herald suggested that the storm was evidence of divine wrath (649) from which Agamemnon is exempt since some god - θεός τις (663) - steered his ship safely home. The audience will fear however that Agamemnon's swift return serves only to accelerate his downfall and isolate him from his companions. In the *Odyssey* (3.311, 4.543-7) Menelaus reaches the scene of his brother's murder after Orestes has exacted his revenge and so the audience may wonder if he will appear on stage later in the trilogy. The Herald encourages them to anticipate his arrival:

> Μενέλεων γὰρ οὖν
> πρῶτόν τε καὶ μάλιστα προσδόκα μολεῖν...
> ἐλπίς τις αὐτὸν πρὸς δόμους ἥξειν πάλιν.
>
> *Above all you must first expect Menelaus to come...there is hope that he will come home again.* (674-5, 679)

For the present however the audience will see how neither Menelaus, the Watchman nor the Herald are present to help Agamemnon, and later Clytemnestra reveals that Orestes too has been sent away (877-9). Thus whereas Telemachus supported his father and facilitated his homecoming, Agamemnon is never reunited with his son on his return home. His procession across the red carpet, severs him from the small retinue from Troy, even from Cassandra with whom he is destined to die, and this marks the final stage of his complete isolation. He enters the house alone

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[13]See *fragment* 17.

[14]See *Odyssey* 3.286ff and 4.512ff.

and the audience will fear that this mighty warrior, who has neither allies within the palace nor the advantage of secrecy, will meet an ignoble death in this domestic setting.

So we have seen how Agamemnon's homecoming is discussed in the drama for almost eight hundred lines before he appears. The audience will appreciate the fact that his return is viewed in various ways by those on stage. For the Watchman and Herald, it is an occasion for unmitigated rejoicing, marking the end of personal hardship and they, like Agamemnon himself, confidently assume that the palace will now be set in order. However the audience will suspect that Agamemnon's return will be regarded in a rather different light by his enemies since for them it heralds the opportunity to carry out their cruel murder-plot. Thus Agamemnon's confidence in a bright future is misguided and, on the brink of death, he cries will unconscious irony:

> νίκη δ'ἐπείπερ ἕσπετ', ἐμπέδως μένοι.
>
> *Since victory has attended me, let it remain securely!* (854)

c) Clytemnestra

From the very beginning of the drama, Clytemnestra is presented as a cruel, calculating and fear-inspiring woman. Her adulterous relationship with Aegisthus had been infamous since Homeric times and was considered a grave sin by the Greeks. The *Odyssey* relates how, while the other heroes were away fighting at Troy, Aegisthus πόλλ' Ἀγαμεμνονέην ἄλοχον θέλγεσκεν ἔπεσσιν "*tried often to charm the wife of Agamemnon with his words*" (3.264). She resisted at first but then, becoming entangled with μοῖρα θεῶν "*divine fate*" (269) and:

> τὴν δ'ἐθέλων ἐθέλουσαν ἀνήγαγεν ὅνδε δόμονδε
>
> *He eagerly led the eager woman to his own home.* (*Odyssey* 3. 272)

This suggests that Clytemnestra took up residence with Aegisthus in his palace and we have noted how this is the location for the murder in earlier versions of the myth. There is a further reference to the adultery in the Hesiodic fragments:

> ὣς δὲ Κλυταιμήστρη (προ) λιποῦσ' Ἀγαμέμνονα δῖον
> Αἰγίσθῳ παρέλεκτο καὶ εἵλετο χείρον' ἀκοίτην.
> ὣς δ' Ἑλένη ἤσχυνε λέχος ξανθοῦ Μενελάου.
>
> *Thus Clytemnestra, deserting the god-like Agamemnon, lay beside Aegisthus and chose an inferior bed-fellow and thus Helen shamed the bed of golden-haired Menelaus*[15].

and Pindar suggests that it may have been the inspiration for Clytemnestra's part in the murder:

> ἢ ἑτέρῳ λέχει δαμαζομέναν
> ἔννυχοι πάραγον κοῖται;
>
> *Or conquered by another lover, did nightly love makings lead her on?* (*Pythian* 11.24-5)

Clytemnestra is linked with her sister Helen as a wanton and faithless woman in Greek thought and Stesichorus relates how Tyndareus angered Aphrodite so that she made his daughters διγάμους τε καὶ τριγάμους τίθησι καὶ λιπεσάνορας "*twice marrying and thrice marrying and husband deserters*"[16]. Clytemnestra is cited by Homer as the direct antithesis of the faithful wife, Penelope (*Odyssey* 11.444-6, 24.191-202), and, although these passages may reflect later developments in the myth[17], these ideas would nevertheless have been accepted as genuine by Aeschylus and his audience. The different characters of their respective wives

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[15] *fragment* 176 MW = Euripides' *Orestes* 249.

[16] See the scholion to Euripides' *Orestes* 249.

[17] Since books eleven and twenty-four appear to contain a high degree of interpolation.

will further contribute to the theme of the contrast between the homecomings of Odysseus and Agamemnon.

Thus the audience will have a strong suspicion that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are lovers in the *Oresteia*, even though this is not revealed explicitly until after the murder. Aeschylus presents the queen consistently on stage as a powerful, manipulative and clever woman and the audience will already suspect that she is involved in the plot to kill Agamemnon in some way. We should note however that although the importance of Clytemnestra had been increasing as the myth developed, it may be that Aegisthus has taken an active role in the murder of Agamemnon in all previous versions, and so while the presentation of the queen as powerful and ruthless may hint to the audience that she will play an important role in the murder, they may be far from certain that she is to kill Agamemnon herself[18].

The Watchman conveys the attitude of the servants of the house towards their mistress before she appears on stage. She is a cruel ruler and the household is οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ' ἄριστα διαπονουμένου "*not well-managed as in former times*" (19). Although in Homer it was Aegisthus who set the watch, this Watchman reveals that he has been stationed by order of the queen herself:

> ὧδε γὰρ κρατεῖ
> γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ
>
> *For in this manner rules the expectant heart of a woman which counsels like a man.* (10-11)

The use of the rare epithet ἀνδρόβουλον may remind the audience that Clytemnestra has usurped Aegisthus's role in setting

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[18]The shift of emphasis from Aegisthus to Clytemnestra will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6, "Who Murders Agamemnon and Why?".

the Watchman and so will prepare them for her more active "masculine" role in the ensuing drama. The Watchman gives a clear impression of Clytemnestra's terrible cruelty in the very first lines of the play for he fears for his life should he fail in his task:

> Φόβος γὰρ ἀνθ' Ὕπνου παραστατεῖ
> τὸ μὴ βεβαίως βλέφαρα συμβαλεῖν ὕπνῳ·
>
> *For instead of sleep, fear stands beside me lest I close my eyelids soundly in sleep.* (14-15)

This will confirm the audience's suspicion that Clytemnestra is a cruel and pitiless woman, although they may suppose that her main concern at present is the death of her husband, rather than that of anyone else. The Homeric Watchman was promised financial reward for his task but it appears that this man is inspired to maintain his weary watch solely through fear of the queen. Thus the Watchman scene illustrates the great power and cruelty of the mistress of the house and will influence the audience's conception of this character before she appears.

The chorus of Argive elders are considerably less in awe of Clytemnestra than was the Watchman, although they greet the queen respectfully:

> ἥκω σεβίζων σὸν Κλυταιμήστρα κράτος
>
> *I have come, Clytemnestra, reverencing your power.* (258)

However they proceed to point out that this respect is wholly due to her position as Agamemnon's wife:

> δίκη γάρ ἐστι φωτὸς ἀρχηγοῦ τίειν
> γυναῖκ' ἐρημωθέντος ἄρσενος θρόνου.
>
> *For it is right to honour the wife of a king when the male's throne is left empty.* (259-60)

It was a common Greek idea that a woman should not wield

power in her own right but that control of a kingdom, and on the smaller scale, a household, was a purely male preserve. This idea is paralleled in other myths and we find that Penelope does not rule Ithaca in the absence of Odysseus but her hand in marriage brings with it the crown, while Oedipus becomes ruler of Cadmeia by his marriage to the queen. These old men continue to patronize the queen, and dispute her assertion that Troy has fallen (268ff). Finally convinced by the queen's beacon speech, they allude wryly to their former dismissive attitude:

> γύναι, κατ' ἄνδρα σώφρον' εὐφρόνως λέγεις.
>
> *Woman, you have spoken like a wise and temperate man.* (351)

The audience will fear that the chorus gravely underestimates Clytemnestra's control of the situation and will suspect that the plot to murder Agamemnon, in which she is surely involved, will unfold as planned. Thus the audience will appreciate that Aeschylus has adopted the traditional picture of Clytemnestra as a wicked, faithless woman and will regard her in this light from the very beginning of the play.

d) Hints and Warnings

From their acquaintance with the earlier myth, the audience will suspect that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus have been engaged in an adulterous liaison while Agamemnon has been away at Troy and that they are plotting to kill him on his return. As the drama proceeds, they may wonder whether either the adultery or the murder-plot will be openly discussed by those on stage and, if so, what effect this will have on the dramatic situation. In fact both of these elements are suppressed and made explicit only after the murder is completed, although in the meantime Aeschylus keeps these issues active in the thoughts of the audience by means of oblique hints and references. Since the poet could assume that his audience was familiar with the respective positions of

Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, he was able to depict how different characters enjoyed varying degrees of understanding about the dramatic situation. Thus whereas neither Agamemnon nor the Herald has any conception of either the adultery or the murder plot, Clytemnestra and the absent Aegisthus are both fully conversant with both of these matters. The Watchman and chorus lie between these two states of knowledge and suffer grave, if rather vague, forebodings about the situation in the house.

Pindar suggests that the adulterous affair of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus was a matter of common knowledge:

> τὸ δὲ νέαις ἀλόχοις
> ἔχθιστον ἀμπλάκιον καλύψαι τ'ἀμάχανον
> ἀλλοτρίαισι γλώσσαις·
> κακολόγοι δὲ πολῖται
>
> *(Adultery) in young wives is the most hateful offence and difficult to conceal from the tongues of others, for the citizens are fond of evil gossip.* (*Pythian* 11.25b–28)

It seems that in the *Agamemnon* too the Argive citizens, represented by the Watchman and Herald, have strong suspicions about this liaison. The Watchman hints that all is not well in the house (19) and when he imagines the moment of Agamemnon's homecoming, suddenly breaks off:

> τὰ δ'ἄλλα σιγῶ· βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσσῃ μέγας
> βέβηκεν· οἶκος δ'αὐτός, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι,
> σαφέστατ'ἂν λέξειεν·
>
> *About the rest I keep silent. A great ox has stepped upon my tongue. The house itself, if it could find a voice, would speak most clearly.* (37–8)

Although apparently alone, the Watchman fails to detail the precise cause of his fears but leaves the stage with an ambiguous hint:

> ὡς ἑκὼν ἐγὼ
> μαθοῦσιν αὐδῶ κοὐ μαθοῦσι λήθομαι

I wish to speak to those who understand and to those who do not, my words will pass unnoticed. (38-9)

Likewise the chorus hints obliquely that there is something νυκτηρέφες "*covered by night*" (460) and they attempt to warn the Herald and Agamemnon that all is not well[19]. Thus their knowledge of the liaison between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus creates a mood of deep foreboding among the citizens and they have grave fears concerning Agamemnon's return. The audience will consider this attitude towards the imminent future justified but will suspect that the situation in the house is even worse than anticipated and that Agamemnon's very life is in danger.

Throughout the *Agamemnon* Clytemnestra emerges from the palace and returns within on at least five occasions, perhaps exploiting the newly-introduced skene. This creates the impression that she is keeping abreast of affairs outside as well as overseeing preparations for Agamemnon's return within. Neither the Watchman nor the chorus dares refer explicitly to the adultery lest they be overheard and this will contribute greatly to the atmosphere of deep suspicion and fear. The chorus addresses the queen for the first time at line 83:

σὺ δέ, Τυνδάρεω
θύγατερ, βασίλεια Κλυταιμήστρα,
τί χρέος; τί νέον;

You, daughter of Tyndareus, queen Clytemnestra, what is the matter? What is new? (83-5)

There is some dispute over whether Clytemnestra is on the stage at this point and chooses not to reply or whether this is merely a rhetorical question. Pool believes that the queen appears between lines 72 and 82 and the chorus, respecting her decision to ignore their question, turn their thoughts to other

[19]We shall discuss this in further detail below.

matters while they wait for her to speak. He points out that the old men address the queen with far greater respect the second time (258-63) and conclude their request for news with a possible reference to her former reaction:

> οὐδὲ σιγώσῃ φθόνος
>
> *But if you remain silent, I do not begrudge it.* (263)

This theory that Clytemnestra makes an early entrance is attractive, although Pool's suggestion that she leaves the stage again at line 103 is less convincing. While this would fit the pattern whereby she keeps coming out of the house to survey the scene outside[20], there seems to be no valid reason why she should not remain on stage during the remainder of the choral ode. It has been suggested that the chorus suddenly breaks off their description of the sacrifice of Iphigenia out of respect for the queen and her continued presence would also explain why they dare not speak openly about the adultery. Nonetheless, it is not clear what Clytemnestra would do during the choral ode and there seems to be no clear solution to the staging here. Taplin believes that Clytemnestra's first entrance occurs much later, at 258, shortly before she utters her first words at 264, and he cites parallels of characters being questioned in their absence in the parodoi of Sophocles' *Ajax* 134ff and Euripides' *Hippolytus* 141ff (p280). Even if this were so however, the chorus' direct question implies that Clytemnestra hears all that is said, even in her absence, and they declare later:

> πάλαι τὸ σιγᾶν φάρμακον βλάβης ἔχω
>
> *For a long time now silence has been my remedy against harm.* (548)

Likewise the Watchman displayed a great fear of Clytemnestra

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[20]Bringing the total to six.

and dared neither sleep on his watch nor speak openly about his fears, even in her absence. Thus this air of unease among those on stage will create great tension in the drama and their suspicion about the adultery, which the audience shares, remains unvoiced.

During the Beacon Speech, Clytemnestra demonstrates her superior knowledge of the current situation and also her great command of the spoken word as she convinces the chorus that the news from Troy is reliable. Dawe regards this as merely "*a speech about beacons*" in which there is no hidden meaning (p62) and believes that there is little significance in the way Clytemnestra adopts the role of messenger here. We do not know whether the beacon signals had featured in any earlier version of the story and it is possible that the news that the war was over had been conveyed by a messenger elsewhere. However it is surely significant that Clytemnestra herself delivers this speech for it will remind the audience of her deep understanding of all aspects of the current situation of which the chorus has only a limited conception.

When the chorus suggests to the Herald that he inform Clytemnestra that the war is over (585-6), she haughtily rejects the idea that he can tell her anything of value:

> ἀνωλόλυξα μὲν πάλαι χαρᾶς ὕπο...
> καὶ νῦν τὰ μάσσω μὲν τί δεῖ σ'ἐμοὶ λέγειν;
> ἄνακτος αὐτοῦ πάντα πεύσομαι λόγον.
>
> *I cried out with joy long ago...and what need is there for you to tell me a fuller story now? I shall learn everything from my lord himself.* (587, 598-9)

In the *Odyssey* there is a fond reunion between husband and wife and they have much to tell one another of their time apart[21].

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[21]τερπέσθην μύθοισι "*they delighted in conversation*" *Odyssey* 23.300ff.

The audience will suspect that this will not be the case here and Clytemnestra displays absolutely no interest in her husband beyond the fact that he is about to return, declaring:

> ὅπως δ'ἄριστα τὸν ἐμὸν αἰδοῖον πόσιν
> σπεύσω πάλιν μολόντα δέξασθαι·
>
> *I must hurry to receive back my revered husband on his return in the best possible way.* (600–1)

Thus Clytemnestra attempts to conceal her disinterest in the Herald's news by pretending that her main concern is to prepare a proper welcome for Agamemnon and the audience will appreciate the irony of this.

When the Herald arrives, the chorus attempts to warn him that all is not well and he asks them outright the cause of their forebodings:

ΧΟ.	πάλαι τὸ σιγᾶν φάρμακον βλάβης ἔχω.
ΚΗ.	καὶ πῶς; ἀπόντων κοιράνων ἔτρεις τινάς;
ΧΟ.	ὡς νῦν, τὸ σὸν δή, καὶ θανεῖν πολλὴ χάρις
ΚΗ.	εὖ γὰρ πέπρακται.

Chorus	*For a long time, silence has been my protection from harm.*
Herald	*Why? Did you fear something in the absence of rulers?*
Chorus	*So much so that now, in your words, to die would be a great joy.*
Herald	*Yes for all has turned out successfully...* (547–51)

There will be a moment of great suspense as the audience wonders whether the adultery is about to be revealed and, if so, what effect this will have on the drama. However, instead of questioning the chorus further about their fears, the Herald launches into a long speech about the past sufferings of the army at Troy and this vital opportunity is lost. Again it may be that Clytemnestra's continued presence on stage curtails open discussion on this point.

When Clytemnestra enters to dismiss the Herald, the audience will appreciate that those on stage enjoy varying degrees of understanding of the true situation in the palace. Naturally the queen, like the audience, is fully aware of both her adulterous relationship with Aegisthus and the plot to kill Agamemnon on his return. The chorus, meanwhile, displays no conception of the imminent murder but has deep suspicions about the adulterous liaison, although they dare not openly contradict the queen's bold professions of fidelity in the presence of the Herald. The Herald, on the other hand, remains blissfully ignorant of both the adultery and the murder-plot and innocently accepts Clytemnestra's assertions at face value. Thus the audience's background knowledge plays a vital role in this scene and they are able to appreciate the conflicting views of the different characters to the full.

The chorus makes a further attempt to warn the Herald about the queen's great powers of deception at 615-17:

> αὕτη μὲν οὕτως εἶπε, μανθάνοντί σοι
> τοροῖσιν ἑρμηνεῦσιν εὐπρεπῆ λόγον.
> σὺ δ'εἰπέ, κῆρυξ·

These lines are ambiguous and this may be intentional if Clytemnestra is still on the stage. On the one hand, οὕτως may be taken with εἶπε "*she has spoken thus and you understand this well-seeming speech through clear interpreters*" which is how the Herald interprets this line. However εὐπρεπῆ may also mean "*specious*" or "*well-seeming*" and if οὕτως is taken with μανθάνοντί, then perhaps what the chorus are really trying to say is "*she has spoken and you should understand her thus - a speech full of lies to those who are clear interpreters*". Naturally the audience will clearly detect Clytemnestra's lies, as when she professes her fidelity to Agamemnon (611-12) just as they constitute those "*in the know*" μαθοῦσιν, addressed earlier by the Watchman (39). However the chorus swiftly changes the subject to the fate of Menelaus, perhaps because Clytemnestra is still close

by, and the Herald departs, still suspecting nothing.

Although the chorus' attempts to warn the Herald failed, the audience will wonder if they will be more successful in conveying their fears to the king himself. They warn Agamemnon to beware of those whose show of friendship is insincere (795ff) and declare:

> γνώσῃ δὲ χρόνῳ διαπευθόμενος
> τόν τε δικαίως καὶ τὸν ἀκαίρως
> πόλιν οἰκουροῦντα πολιτῶν.
>
> *In time, you will learn by inquiry which of those citizens left at home acted justly and who acted out of season.* (807-9)

In the *Odyssey* Odysseus carries out a thorough investigation of the state of the household during his absence and immediately puts to death those maidservants who had consorted with the enemy (*Odyssey* 22.458ff). Thus the Greeks would consider Clytemnestra worthy of a similar fate, since she too has betrayed the absent master of the house by forming a liaison with his enemy. However although Agamemnon assumes that, like Odysseus, he will learn all in due course and punish his enemies as they deserve, εἰδὼς λέγοιμ' ἄν "*I shall speak when I have full knowledge*" (838ff), the audience will suspect that he will die shortly after entering the palace with the result that all references to his future plans convey a deep sense of irony. Thus although Agamemnon acknowledges the chorus' warnings that he may have enemies at home (830-1), he remains complacent, confident that he will distinguish friend from foe with ease (831ff). Clytemnestra herself marvels at his astonishing boldness:

> ἐν χρόνῳ δ' ἀποφθίνει
> τὸ τάρβος ἀνθρώποισιν
>
> *In the course of time, the fear of men dies away.* (857-8)

and Agamemnon displays no conception that his life is in danger.

So we have seen how it is unnecessary for Aeschylus to refer directly to the adultery, since the audience is already aware of the situation in the house from their knowledge of the myth, and how this suppression of the truth creates a general air of suspicion and fear among those on stage. We noted how the Watchman has a deep fear of Clytemnestra and that his forebodings concerning the king's return are justified. The chorus shares this mood but, underestimating the danger Agamemnon is in, their warnings are not sufficiently intense and fail to alert the king. The Herald, on the other hand, suspects nothing and, although Agamemnon acknowledges the possibility of danger (832f), he boldly assumes that he will handle everything with ease and restore the palace to good order. Thus the audience's mythical knowledge makes an enormous contribution to this early part of the *Agamemnon* and, fully aware of the complexities of the situation, they will witness the inevitable unfolding of the murder-plot.

e) Clytemnestra's Deceit

The herald lays great stress on the reliability of his words and departs with the declaration:

> τοσαῦτ'ἀκούσας ἴσθι τἀληθῆ κλυών
>
> *Having heard this, know that you have heard the truth.* (680)

The Argive elders likewise display blunt honesty when they confess to Agamemnon their former disapproval of the Trojan expedition οὐ γάρ (σ') ἐπικεύσω "*for I shall not conceal this from you*" (800). The audience will suspect that Clytemnestra, on the other hand, must practise great deceit in order to conceal both the adultery and the murder-plot from others on stage. Thus her first speech in the presence of the newly-returned king is heavy with lies and the audience will watch with interest to see whether or not she will succeed in concealing from her husband the true

situation in the house.

We noted above how the adulterous relationship was a familiar idea to the audience and how Clytemnestra had been regarded as the epitome of the unfaithful wife since Homeric times. Thus it is with deep irony that she claims to have remained loyal to Agamemnon in his absence:

> γυναῖκα πιστὴν δ'ἐν δόμοις εὕροι μολὼν
> οἵανπερ οὖν ἔλειπε, δωμάτων κύνα
> ἐσθλὴν ἐκείνῳ, πολεμίαν τοῖς δύσφροσιν,
> καὶ τἄλλ' ὁμοίαν πάντα, σημαντήριον
> οὐδὲν διαφθείρασαν ἐν μήκει χρόνου.
>
> *Coming home, may he find a faithful wife in his house, just as he left her, a fine watchdog of his house, hostile to his enemies and constant in all things, having broken no seal in all this time.* (606-10)[22]

The audience will have little doubt that these professions of fidelity are untrue and that far from being πολεμίαν τοῖς δύσφροσιν "*hostile to his enemies*", in fact Clytemnestra has taken Agamemnon's greatest enemy as her lover. The queen assumes a false show of modesty, as though overawed at meeting her husband again after their long separation, and addresses herself to the chorus:

> οὐκ αἰσχυνοῦμαι τοὺς φιλάνορας τρόπους
> λέξαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς·
>
> *I am not ashamed to tell you of my husband-loving character.* (856-7)

Clytemnestra has been portrayed as a bold and forceful woman up to this point and the audience, aided also by their mythical knowledge, will strongly suspect that this diffidence is assumed

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[22]Fraenkel (II p302-3) believes that this refers to the fact that the wealth of the house remains intact but there is surely some sexual reference here.

in order to mask her true feelings. Clytemnestra's professions of wifely loyalty challenge the chorus to contradict her but they are too overawed to express their true opinion in public. The term φιλάνορας may be interpreted either as "*husband-loving*" or simply "*man-loving*", and the audience will surely appreciate the ambiguity of this phrase.

Clytemnestra describes the loneliness of a warrior's wife:

> τὸ μὲν γυναῖκα πρῶτον ἄρσενος δίχα
> ἧσθαι δόμοις ἐρῆμον ἔκπαγλον κακόν
>
> *Firstly, it is a fearful grief for a woman to sit at home all alone without a man.* (861-2)

Here again the audience and chorus will suspect that this has not been the case with Clytemnestra and that she is speaking with deep, conscious irony.

Clytemnestra proceeds to relate how she sent Orestes from the kingdom, and concludes:

> τοιάδε μέντοι σκῆψις οὐ δόλον φέρει
>
> *In this at least there is no deceit.* (886)

Although from their knowledge of the previous myth the audience may suppose that Orestes is indeed absent from the kingdom, considering the dubious nature of the rest of her speech, they will doubtless suppose that the queen did not banish him out of fear for his safety, as she claims, but for far more sinister reasons. Thus the audience will witness this interchange between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon with great interest and note how this contrasts strongly with the nature of the reunion of Penelope and Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. Clytemnestra's professions of wifely loyalty during this scene will remind the audience of her traditional infidelity, and while for example she claims to have spent long nights weeping alone (889), awakening at the slightest sound (912-3), they will suspect that on the contrary she had been

enjoying a passionate adulterous affair in her husband's absence. Thus Clytemnestra's lies are exploited to good dramatic effect and the audience will suspect that the very opposite of what she says is true.

While the chorus will detect Clytemnestra's ironic allusions to the adultery, her hints at the murder-plot, on the other hand, are designed for the appreciation of the audience alone. When she describes Agamemnon's return as χάρμα μεῖζον ἐλπίδος κλύειν "*a joy to hear beyond all our hopes*" (266) they will suspect that she is glad, not that the long-awaited reunion with her husband may now take place, but so that the murder plot may be put into operation at last. During the scene with the Herald, she declares with deliberate irony:

> ὅπως δ'ἄριστα τὸν ἐμὸν αἰδοῖον πόσιν
> σπεύσω πάλιν μολόντα δέξασθαι· τί γὰρ
> γυναικὶ τούτου φέγγος ἥδιον δρακεῖν,
> ἀπὸ στρατείας ἄνδρα σώσαντος θεοῦ
> πύλας ἀνοῖξαι;
>
> *I must hasten to receive my revered lord on his return in the best possible way. For what day is sweeter for a wife to behold than this one, on which she may open the gates to her husband, returning from the war, preserved by the gods?* (600-4)

The audience anticipates the true nature of the welcome prepared for the king and Clytemnestra proceeds to make an oblique reference to both her adultery and the projected murder:

> οὐδ'οἶδα τέρψιν, οὐδ'ἐπίψογον φάτιν,
> ἄλλου πρὸς ἀνδρὸς μᾶλλον ἢ χαλκοῦ βαφάς.
>
> *I know no more of enjoyment, nor censure, with respect to anther man than of the tempering of bronze.* (611-12)

Clytemnestra's suggestion that bronze is tempered[23] is surely

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[23]As of course it is not.

designed to convey the impression that she is merely a foolish woman who little understands the affairs of men. The audience will suspect however that the queen is well-acquainted with both adultery and the preparation of weapons, and indeed she may have been connected specifically with the latter in previous versions of the myth.

Clytemnestra tells Agamemnon how rumours reached her of his wounding and death in battle:

> καὶ τραυμάτων μὲν εἰ τόσων ἐτύγχανεν
> ἀνὴρ ὅδ' ὡς πρὸς οἶκον ὠχετεύετο
> φάτις, τέτρηται δικτύου πλέω λέγειν
>
> *And if this man had met with as many wounds as rumour brought to the house, he would have been pierced more than a net.* (866-8)[24]

The audience will suspect that if indeed Clytemnestra were distressed by reports of her husband's death at Troy, it was purely because this would render the plot to kill him unnecessary. Agamemnon is destined to meet this kind of violent death now he has returned home and the audience may note Clytemnestra's reference to a net in this context. It will be revealed later that this object was used to trap Agamemnon in his bath and this may have been associated with his murder in the tradition, perhaps even being linked specifically with Clytemnestra's role as assistant[25].

Clytemnestra claims that the enormity of her grief led her to attempt suicide (875-6) but the audience will suspect that her main concern has been the death of Agamemnon, not her own. She refers to the palace as δῶμ' ἄελπτον "*the home he never hoped*

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[24]See also 869-73.

[25]We shall discuss this further in Chapter Six, "Who Murders Agamemnon and Why?".

for/expected" (911) and it is clear that Agamemnon little suspects the true nature of the reception which awaits him. Even though the chorus reproduced the words of the prophet Calchas in their opening ode:

> μίμνει γὰρ φοβερὰ παλίνορτος
> οἰκονόμος δολία, μνάμων Μῆνις τεκνόποινος
>
> *For there remains a fearful, ever re-arising, treacherous housekeeper, unforgetting Wrath, avenger of children.* (154-5)

they fail to interpret these and it is clear that no one on stage, besides the queen, is conscious of the imminent murder. Thus here again we see Aeschylus exploiting the various levels of knowledge enjoyed by those on stage and the audience will appreciate how, up until the king's exit, the murder-plot remains a secret shared only by themselves and Clytemnestra.

f) The Carpet Scene

We noted above how Agamemnon was killed at the palace of Aegisthus before reaching home in the Homeric version of the myth:

> τὸν δ'οὐ εἰδότ' ὄλεθρον ἀνήγαγε καὶ κατέπεφνε
> δειπνίσσας, ὥς τίς τε κατέκτανε βοῦν ἐπὶ φάτνῃ.
> οὐδέ τις Ἀτρείδεω ἑτάρων λίπεθ' οἵ οἱ ἕποντο,
> οὐδέ τις Αἰγίσθου, ἀλλ' ἔκταθεν ἐν μεγάροισιν.
>
> *Aegisthus led in Agamemnon, who had no suspicion of the murder, and killed him as he feasted, as one strikes down an ox at his manger. Not one of Agamemnon's followers was left alive nor one of Aegisthus' but all were killed in the palace.* (*Odyssey* 4.534-7)[26]

In the *Oresteia* however, instead of dying at the house of his enemy amidst a scene of general carnage, Agamemnon is killed in his own home, isolated from all companions. We do not know

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[26]See also *Odyssey* 11.405-21 and 24.19-32.

whether this transference of the scene of the murder had featured in other pre-Aeschylean versions or whether this is presented here for the first time. The moment of Agamemnon's entrance into his palace is accentuated by his procession across the blood-red path and the highly visual nature of this scene suggests that it evolved within the context of tragedy, rather than epic or lyric. Thus the use of the carpet, and indeed even the fact of Agamemnon's return home, may have been introduced by Aeschylus himself. This spectacular entrance into the palace will compensate a little for the brevity of the king's appearance on stage and also emphasize the importance of his death, which is to have a great influence on future events of the trilogy.

Despite Clytemnestra's professions of devotion, the audience will suspect that there is a great division between husband and wife and this is illustrated on stage by their quarrel over whether or not Agamemnon should traverse the red carpet. The mighty warrior-king is easily overcome by the arguments of his wife, and while he gently mocks her victory over him - κατέστραμμαι "*I am utterly defeated*" (956) - the audience will suspect that Clytemnestra is truly in the dominant position and that indeed the king will soon suffer an actual physical defeat. The reason why Agamemnon agrees to cross the carpet against his better judgement has provoked much discussion[27] but the audience will not be surprised when Clytemnestra prevails, since she has been presented as a clever and manipulative woman from the very beginning of the play.

Clytemnestra describes the cloth as a πορφυρόστρωτος πόρος "*a path spread with purple*" (910), and this adjective is associated with blood as early as Homer:

αἵματι δὲ χθὼν
δεύετο πορφυρέῳ

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[27]See Konishi for a summary of the main ideas.

"*he made wet the ground with purple blood*" (*Iliad* 17.360-1)

Goheen suggests that the queen refers to "*an ambiguous blood-color, probably the dark purplish red or deep reddish brown which blood takes on after it is exposed to the air - or when it forms stains in the dust*" (p116). Knowing that death awaits Agamemnon within the house, the audience will find it highly appropriate that Clytemnestra arranges a blood-coloured pathway to lead him within.

Agamemnon refers to the material as εἵματα at 921 "*a dress, garment, or cloak*" (LSJ) and twice describes it as ποικίλος "*embroidered*" or "*intricately designed*" (923, 926). This adjective bears the secondary meaning of "*riddling, ambiguous, cunning*", and no doubt the audience will appreciate the application of this appropriate epithet to the device used by Clytemnestra to lure her husband within to his death. We do not know to what degree of realism this finely-woven, delicate cloth was presented on the stage - it seems unlikely that any embroidered details would be discernible by the audience and its colour is established verbally - but the power of this object will arise predominantly from the descriptions of those on stage and their intense reactions to it[28].

Naturally the audience would regard the trampling of this fine material as an outrage and will share the king's fears that such an action is likely to incite divine anger. Earlier in the play, the chorus issued a grave warning:

οὐκ ἔφα τις
θεοὺς βροτῶν ἀξιοῦσθαι μέλειν

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[28]See General Introduction. Hall suggests that entrances on a chariot were always connected with foreign extravagance but her theory that Clytemnestra or the chorus actually prostrated themselves on the ground like barbarians seems unlikely.

ὅσοις ἀθίκτων χάρις
πατοῖθ'· ὁ δ'οὐκ εὐσεβής.

Whoever asserts that the gods do not bother to care about mortals who trample on the grace of things which should not be touched, that person is impious. (369-73)

Yet during this scene the audience witnesses Agamemnon committing this very action, and he departs to certain death with the cry:

εἶμ'ἐς δόμων μέλαθρα πορφύρας πατῶν.

I enter my house treading purple underfoot. (957)

Clearly Clytemnestra intended her husband to commit this final act of sacrilege and her earlier prayer "φθόνος δ'ἀπέστω" "*let envy be far away*" (904) is deeply ironic.

Lattimore suggests that Agamemnon had no real choice in this scene since he is destined to enter the palace, but his attempted resistance shows that the progression across the carpet is by no means inevitable and that he should have remained firm in his refusal to comply with his wife's wishes. However, in the final moments of his life, Agamemnon l oses this final opportunity of redemption and consciously commits this dreadful act of sacrilege. Stepping onto the tapestries, he cries:

μή τις πρόσωθεν ὄμματος βάλοι φθόνος.

May no envious eye strike me from afar. (947)

However while the king's fears are centred upon the possibility of inciting divine retribution, the audience will suspect that he should concentrate instead on the possibility of an imminent human attack, the true source of immediate danger.

The chorus issues repeated warnings about the danger of inciting divine wrath:

οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ἔπαλξις
πλούτου πρὸς κόρον ἀνδρὶ
λακτίσαντι μέγαν Δίκας
βωμὸν εἰς ἀφάνειαν.

For there is no shelter for a man when once in excess of wealth he has kicked the great altar of Justice out of sight. (381-4)

Earlier Clytemnestra suggested that the victorious army would desecrate Trojan shrines (338f) and the Herald confirms that the devastation was extensive (524ff). The chorus issue a grave warning:

τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ ἄσκοποι
θεοι

For the gods are not unmindful of those who cause much bloodshed. (461-2)

They are speaking ostensibly of Paris but the audience will suspect that Agamemnon's trampling of the cloth is a symbol of his cruel desecration of Troy for which he must now suffer.

In her attempts to persuade him, Clytemnestra suggests that Agamemnon would have crossed the carpet had he been advised to do so by a seer, to which he readily concedes (933-4), failing to note that this behaviour is advised, not by a seer, but by this woman who wishes him ill. This may remind the audience of how previously Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigenia on the advice of Calchas μάντιν οὔτινα ψέγων "*blaming no seer*" (186). Thus they may suspect that on both of these occasions, Agamemnon exhibited insufficient resistance to the persuasion of others and yielded far too willingly. So, just as at Aulis he sacrificed his daughter in the hope of appeasing the goddess Artemis, so here he seeks to placate Clytemnestra, removing his shoes in a futile gesture which illustrates a deep awareness that what he is doing is wrong.

So we see how Agamemnon leaves the stage, trampling underfoot

fine garments in defiance of the gods, and the audience will fear that an undignified and lonely end awaits this great Trojan warrior within the house. He departs in silence. Taplin comments "*a character of high status will normally have the last word when he goes off...Agamemnon's silence would be noticed: Clytemnestra has the initiative*" (p310)[29]. Taplin maintains that the confusion of the chorus following the carpet scene (975ff) is "*an explicit sign that it is to be to some extent difficult to interpret* (p311)*...Agamemnon's scene has led us into a tangle of dark questions*"... (p316). However the audience will clearly interpret Agamemnon's progress along a blood-red path as a clear symbol of both his cruel destruction of the Trojans and his imminent death. Thus the dramatic moment of Agamemnon's entrance into the house is enhanced by the symbolism of the carpet and the audience will appreciate the full significance of Agamemnon's departure into the palace.

g) Conclusion

Thus we have seen how, although Agamemnon's homecoming is the major theme of the early part of the drama, he is on stage for a relatively short time[30], before he departs to certain death. The swift and safe return of the Trojan army is regarded as a sign of divine favour by both Agamemnon and the Herald, but the audience will appreciate how this merely serves to facilitate the murder of the king. After Agamemnon's final departure, Clytemnestra utters a heart-felt prayer:

> Ζεῦ Ζεῦ τέλειε, τὰς ἐμὰς εὐχὰς τέλει·
> μέλοι δέ τοί σοι τῶνπερ ἂν μέλλῃς τελεῖν.

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[29]Chancellor observes that if the actors wore thick-soled shoes on stage in this period, then Clytemnestra may have towered over her husband once these were removed.

[30]Less than two hundred lines.

> *Zeus, Zeus, Fulfiller, fulfil my prayers; and take thought for those things you intend to fulfil!* (973-4)

Everyone in the audience will appreciate the significance of this moment as the queen turns to follow her husband within and indeed it will seem as though the gods are conspiring towards Agamemnon's death.

Thus we have seen how the audience's awareness of the adultery and the murder-plot makes an enormous contribution to their appreciation of the drama during this early part of the play. The audience's foreknowledge of the basic form of the story plays a vital role in their appreciation of this play, and the use of inherited material, far from being restrictive, allows the poet great opportunity for irony and suspense. By failing to outline clearly beforehand what is to happen on Agamemnon's return, Aeschylus will retain his audience's interest and involvement in the drama, as they wait to discover whether their interpretation of the situation will prove correct and, if the modern reader approaches the *Agamemnon* without any conception of the adultery or the plot to murder Agamemnon, then most of the power and irony of the drama is lost. Hopefully our study has allowed us to appreciate a little better the vital role played by the mythical background in the audience's appreciation of the drama.

Chapter Five

Cassandra

a) Cassandra in the Myth

Cassandra appears for the first time in extant sources in a passage from the *Iliad* in which she is described as Πριάμοιο θυγατρῶν εἶδος ἀρίστην Κασσάνδρην "*the most beautiful of the daughters of Priam, Cassandra*" (13.365-66). Her beauty is mentioned again in the *Iliad* (24.699, quoted below), to which may be added a fragment of Ibykus:

> γλαυκώπιδα Κασσάνδραν, ἐρασιπλόκαμον κούραν Πριάμου
>
> *Beautiful-eyed Cassandra, daughter of Priam, with the lovely hair.*[1]

The audience may also have been aware of the story of Ajax' attempted rape of Cassandra, which is ascribed to Arctinus (C8-C7BC) and is preserved for us in Proclus' summary of the *Iliupersis*. It relates how Ajax tried to drag Cassandra from the altar of Athene which so angered the Greeks that he was forced to take refuge at the altar himself. Pausanias (10.26.3) describes a mid-C5 painting of the sack of Troy by Polygnotos in the Lesche of the Cnidians at Delphi which is believed to be based on Cyclic material. This shows Ajax standing at the altar of Athene while Cassandra is seated on the ground, clasping a broken image of the goddess. The Ajax scene became a popular theme for vases in the sixth and fifth centuries and Cassandra is often depicted without clothes[2]. Robert suggested that this nakedness was linked to her role as prophetess[3] but it is more probably connected with the

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[1] *Fragment* 16D, see Mason p83.

[2] See Mason p83.

[3] *Heldensage* 1268 n2.

sexual attack.

So it seems that Cassandra was a familiar figure in the fifth-century and she may have been associated chiefly with the attack by Ajax[4]. However the audience may suspect that these earlier events relating to Cassandra's life at Troy will have little relevance to the *Oresteia* and that this play will be concerned predominantly with her return with Agamemnon and death at the hands of Clytemnestra. In the *Odyssey*, the ghost of Agamemnon declares:

> οἰκτροτάτην δ' ἤκουσα ὄπα Πριάμοιο θυγατρὸς
> Κασσάνδρης, τὴν κτεῖνε Κλυταιμνήστρη δολόμητις
> ἀμφ' ἐμοί·
>
> *And most pitiful was the voice of Priam's daughter Cassandra which I heard, killed by the treacherous Clytemnestra over me. (Odyssey* 11.421-24)

However Cassandra's presence at Agamemnon's murder is never mentioned elsewhere, even though this scene is referred to on no less than eleven other occasions in the *Odyssey*, and we should note that book eleven is believed to contain many corruptions and later interpolations. This suggests that at some time between Homer and Aeschylus, possibly in some lost epic or lyric poem which sought to extend the Ajax story, the role of Cassandra was enhanced and the beautiful princess at Troy was given the additional role of accompanying Agamemnon home and sharing his death. Thus the reference to Cassandra in the above passage may have been added by some later hand who sought to project this story backwards to Homer.

It is most unfortunate that, besides this single reference to

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[4] Although it is possible that we have inherited an unbalanced view of the various elements through the loss of certain versions.

Cassandra's death in *Odyssey* eleven, which as we have noted may be a later addition, none of our literary sources contains any reference to her return from Troy with Agamemnon. Prag suggests that Cassandra features on two pre-Aeschylean artistic representations of Agamemnon's murder. On a red-figure kalyx krater by the Dokimasia Painter[5], a small girl is shown running away from the murder, wearing a dress of exactly the same material as that of Agamemnon's net-like robe. The similarity of dress would suggest a close connection between these two figures, but in fact the girl may be Elektra rather than Cassandra. Two much earlier panels of bronze relief on sheathing from the Argive Heraion[6] are also believed to have been inspired by the myth of Agamemnon's death. The upper panel shows a warrior and a woman walking along together, he carrying a sheathed dagger and she a spindle, while in the lower picture, one woman is shown stabbing another in the back. Vermeule suggests that these two panels show Agamemnon bringing Cassandra home from Troy and Clytemnestra's subsequent murder of the girl, although she admits that the latter scene would represent "*the only one of its kind until after Aeschylus'* Oresteia" (p13). If it is true that Cassandra's death were part of the story and considered neither interesting nor relevant by the artists, then the audience of the *Oresteia* also may have regarded her as a minor character who is of little importance to the main theme of Agamemnon's death. However, since the identification of Cassandra in the above scenes remains highly uncertain, and considering the corresponding absence of references to this character in our literary sources, it seems more likely that the story of her return with Agamemnon was added to the myth much later and therefore had been unavailable as a theme to these early commentators.

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[5]Dated 470-465, see Prag plates 3 and 4.

[6]Dated 660-650, see Prag plate 37a.

Were it not for the brief reference to Cassandra's death in *Odyssey* eleven, it would be tempting to suppose that it was Aeschylus himself who first associated her with Agamemnon's homecoming. However, the Homeric reference suggests that at least one pre-Aeschylean version connected Cassandra with the king's death and we are reminded of the danger of assuming that any particular element is an innovation simply through lack of evidence to the contrary. It is Clytemnestra's particular task to kill Cassandra in the *Odyssey* and also, we may presume, in the lost version which this reflects. Thus it may be that Cassandra was introduced into this scenario so that Clytemnestra's killing of the girl might counterbalance Aegisthus' dispatch of Agamemnon. This suggests that, while Aeschylus may have been the first to portray Clytemnestra as the sole unaided murderess of her husband, her murder of Cassandra indicates that her role was already developing in this direction. The possibility that Cassandra is Agamemnon's concubine[7] may also have been introduced into the story originally in order to explain why Clytemnestra kills her and to provide the queen with a further reason for hating Agamemnon in addition to the sacrifice of Iphigenia.

It seems likely then that Aeschylus inherited a version of the myth, possibly quite a recent one, in which Agamemnon brought with him a girl from Troy to meet her death at the hands of his wife. Thus he is able to present the encounter between victim and intended killer on stage to great effect and Clytemnestra's concern about getting the girl within may support the audience's expectation that she will be the Queen's special concern as in the tradition, thus leaving Aegisthus to take care of the death of Agamemnon.

b) Cassandra the Prophetess

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[7] We shall discuss this possibility in the following chapter.

Let us consider what preconceptions the audience may have had about Cassandra and in particular whether they would have expected her prophetic powers to feature in the story of her return with Agamemnon. Later in her scene Cassandra states that she is casting aside the special costume that distinguishes her as a prophetess:

> τί δῆτ' ἐμαυτῆς καταγέλωτ' ἔχω τάδε
> καὶ σκῆπτρα καὶ μαντεῖα περὶ δέρῃ στέφη;
> σὲ μὲν πρὸ μοίρας τῆς ἐμῆς διαφθερῶ.
> ἴτ' ἐς φθόρον· πεσόντα γ' ὧδ' ἀμείβομαι.
>
> *Why then do I keep my sceptre and prophetic garlands around my neck to mock me? Before I die I shall destroy you. Go to perdition. As you lie on the ground, I thus avenge myself.* (1264-7)

Unfortunately we do not know whether this apparel was represented realistically on stage or whether Cassandra merely mimes this casting aside of garments. If Cassandra were clearly distinguished as a prophetess from the moment she enters the stage, then it would seem that Clytemnestra failed to appreciate the possible danger of leaving her alone with the chorus, which she does at 974 *before* Cassandra's inability to communicate is assumed. This may suggest that Clytemnestra was unaware of Cassandra's prophetic skills and indeed her special costume may easily have been concealed by her position on the chariot[8]. On the other hand the chorus later reveals that they are aware of Cassandra's special powers (1098) and it may be that Clytemnestra knew of them also and simply did not suspect that they would have any application to the current situation, possibly reflecting the audience's own view.

We find that there is no undisputed reference to Cassandra as a prophetess in any of our pre-Aeschylean sources. The *Iliad*

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[8]Lines 1178-9 may suggest the casting aside of a cloak, for example.

relates:

ἀλλ' ἄρα Κασσάνδρη, ἰκέλη χρυσέῃ 'Αφροδίτῃ,
Πέργαμον εἰσαναβᾶσα φίλον πατέρ' εἰσενόησεν
ἑσταότ' ἐν δίφρῳ, κήρυκά τε ἀστυβοώτην·
τὸν δ' ἄρ' ἐφ' ἡμιόνων ἴδε κείμενον ἐν λεχέεσσι·
κώκυσέν τ' ἄρ' ἔπειτα γέγωνέ τε πᾶν κατὰ ἄστυ·
"ὄψεσθε, Τρῶες καὶ Τρῳάδες, Ἕκτορ' ἰόντες

But indeed Cassandra, she who was like golden Aphrodite, having gone up to the citadel, saw her dear father standing in the chariot with the herald, crier to the city. She saw the man lying in the waggon drawn by mules. Then she cried out and called throughout the city, "Come, men and women of Troy, behold Hector..." (*Iliad* 24.699-704)

Leaf comments '*there is nothing here to indicate that she possesses the gift of prophecy...at the same time there is nothing in the words inconsistent with such an idea*'.(p586) The Scholiast on 24.699 comments, οὐ γὰρ οἶδεν αὐτὴν μάντιν ὁ ποιήτης "*for the poet did not know that she was a prophetess*" and since here Cassandra is simply reporting an event she has just witnessed, the most likely explanation is that the gift of prophecy was not yet attributed to her. At the same time it is easy to see how this picture of Cassandra in the *Iliad*, informing those around her of incidents of which they are previously unaware may have provided the foundation for a later belief in her special powers.

Proclus writes in his summary of the *Cypria*:

Ἕλενος περὶ τῶν μελλόντων αὐτῷ προθεσπίζει...καὶ Κασσάνδρα περὶ τῶν μελλόντων προδηλοῖ

Helenus foretold the future to him...and Cassandra predicted the future.[9]

Thus it is possible that the *Cypria* contained a prediction by Cassandra. On the other hand, we should remember that this is

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[9]See Homer *OCT* 5 p102ff.

merely a summary of the earlier poem and Proclus may easily have confused the names of the famous prophet Helen us and Cassandra, mistakenly involving the latter in the action of prophesying, as Bethe believes[10]. Apollodorus relates how Cassandra attempted to warn the Trojans against accepting the wooden horse:

> Κασάνδρας δὲ λεγούσης ἔνοπλον ἐν αὐτῷ δύναμιν εἶναι, καὶ προσέτι Λαοκόωντος τοῦ μάντεως...
>
> *Cassandra said that there was an armed force inside and so did Laocoon the seer. (Epitome* 5.17)

Austin suggests that this line should be translated "*and Laocoon added his words to those of the seer*"[11] but this seems unlikely and the evolution of the myth is illustrated by the fact that two people are allotted the task of warning against the wooden horse. Thus it may be that Cassandra was famed for issuing warnings in the earlier myth while her connection with prophecy was introduced later. She is represented issuing warnings about the wooden horse on the Tabula Iliaca, a fragmentary marble relief in the Capitol Museum from about the first century AD, thought to be based mainly upon the *Iliad*, the *Aethiopis*, the *little Iliad*, and the *Iliupersis* of Stesichorus. It has been suggested that one of the two latter poems contained the first reference to Cassandra's prophetic powers but this is far from certain and the picture may easily show influence of later sources. In addition, here again Cassandra may be merely issuing warnings rather than prophesying.

Thus there is no clear reference to Cassandra's prophetic skills in our sources. Nonetheless we should not assume that Aeschylus himself was the first to attribute the power of foresight to Cassandra simply through lack of evidence to the

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[10]See *RE*x2 1919 p2290ff.

[11]See his commentary on Aeneid 2.40-56.

contrary. Were the idea of Cassandra's prophetic powers completely new it would have been necessary for Aeschylus to present it to the audience with great clarity and emphasis whereas in fact this merits little discussion, with the chorus simply declaring ἦμεν κλέος σοῦ μαντικὸν πεπυσμένοι "*we have heard of your fame as a prophetess*" (1098). However the chorus have not heard the story of how Apollo bestowed prophetic powers upon Cassandra (1222ff) and then ensured that she would never be believed (1212) and the fact that this receives far greater attention in the drama may suggest that this was an even later and so possibly less familiar addition to the myth[12]. Cassandra claims that she concealed her seduction by Apollo through shame (1203) which provides a convenient reason why this episode does not feature in earlier versions, as well as explaining why there are no stories about Cassandra's prophecies proving effective at Troy, concerning the wooden horse or anything else.

Thus while the audience may have been aware of many earlier versions in which there was no mention of Cassandra's special powers, at the same time the image of her as an unbelieved prophetess at Troy may not have been a completely new one. It is most unfortunate that we do not know whether Cassandra's prophecies played any part in the version or versions which related her return and death with Agamemnon. Like her prophetic gift, Cassandra's association with Agamemnon appears to be a later addition to the story and it is possible that her accompaniment of the king was introduced into the story specifically so that she might attempt to warn him of his imminent murder in some earlier version. Prophecies are an excellent literary device for foreshadowing future events while the fact that Cassandra is never

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[12]In Apollodoros (3.12.5) Apollo was angered by Cassandra's refusal to make love to him but Kovacs argues that line 1206 refers to their sexual union and that Cassandra's offence here was either in failing to produce children or in taking another lover. In Euripides' *Trojan Women*, Agamemnon is said to have taken Cassandra as his secret bride (249-55), which may reflect an earlier idea.

believed ensures that her words will not interfere with the progression of the traditional story. Thus it may be that Cassandra attempted to warn the king of his fate in some previous version of this myth, thereby confirming the audience's suspicions and heightening the tension. Agamemnon's dismissal of Cassandra's words may have been presented as further evidence of his arrogance and indeed this element might be reflected in this play by the way the king calmly dismisses the warnings of the chorus to be on his guard (805ff). The problem of Cassandra alerting the king to his fate is avoided in the *Oresteia* since her visions do not become active until after he has entered the palace up to which time she has remained conveniently silent. Thus her visions may add to the impact of the drama without interfering with the inevitable progression of fate. Nevertheless we simply do not know whether Cassandra had predicted Agamemnon's death in any previous version or whether Aeschylus himself was the first to apply Cassandra's special powers to this scenario.

For a considerable time after her entrance, Aeschylus encourages the impression that Cassandra's role will be strictly passive in nature and that her sole function will be to die at the hands of Clytemnestra without making any contribution to the drama, as may have been the case in all previous versions of the myth. On the other hand, if there had been some equivalent to the Cassandra Scene in some earlier presentation of the story of Agamemnon's homecoming, then Aeschylus teases his audience until the very last moment that this will not be reflected in the *Oresteia*. Let us now examine how Aeschylus purposefully diverts dramatic attention away from Cassandra, skillfully creating the false impression that she will not affect the action in any way.

c) Cassandra's Silence

Cassandra is not mentioned in the Herald's report, which is perhaps understandable, but no reference is made to this character even when she arrives on stage with the king. Taplin notes that

simultaneous entries of major dramatic characters were unusual in early tragedy and suggests that "*the audience is bound to be curious about her, and yet to pay her no close attention*" - she is simply a "*disquieting presence seen out of the corner of the eye*" (p306). However the audience, like those on stage, will concentrate predominantly upon the newly-returned king and his reunion with Clytemnestra and so will have little interest in this silent girl, particularly if they suspect that her role is merely to enter the palace and die. In addition they may not differentiate Cassandra to any great degree from the other attendants in the king's retinue[13], particularly if it were customary for prisoners-of-war to appear on stage in tragedy purely to symbolize some recent victory. Thus the audience will have little time to notice Cassandra and her unmarked entrance and continuing silence, far from arousing their curiosity as Taplin suggests, will suggest that this girl will play no active role but follow Agamemnon meekly within the house, as she is repeatedly urged to do.

The Carpet Scene provides a superb and ominous climax to the homecoming of Agamemnon. Just before the king steps onto the rich fabric, he draws attention to his silent companion:

> τὴν ξένην δέ πρευμενῶς
> τήνδ' ἐσκόμιζε...
> αὕτη δὲ πολλῶν χρημάτων ἐξαίρετον
> ἄνθος, στρατοῦ δώρημ', ἐμοὶ ξυνέσπετο.
>
> *Bring this stranger into the house with kindness...She is the flower chosen from much wealth, the gift of the army, who has come with me.* (950-1, 954-5)

These words will prepare the audience to anticipate Cassandra's imminent disappearance within the palace while

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[13]These probably went off down the eisodos at the end of the scene, see Taplin p80.

Agamemnon's request that she be treated with kindness, πρευμενῶς (950) will be regarded as unconsciously ironic since she is destined to die at the hands of the Queen. Meriodor suggests that Agamemnon commends Cassandra to his wife in the hope that she will accept the girl into their household as some sort of consolation for his submission to her wishes concerning his treading of the carpet (p41). He certainly refers to Cassandra just before stepping onto the rich fabric and so indeed it may be that Aeschylus sought to create the impression that she influences his decision to tread the purple path. When Agamemnon finally completes his long-anticipated homecoming and enters the palace, the audience may suspect that the play, now already almost one thousand lines long, is almost over and that Cassandra will follow him swiftly inside to share his fate.

Thus we have seen how Cassandra makes a considerable contribution to the drama merely by her presence on stage. As a prisoner-of-war she is a physical reminder that the Trojan war is over, while her accompaniment of Agamemnon emphasizes the distance between husband and wife. We have noted also how her death may be considered the particular concern of Clytemnestra, implying that it will be Aegisthus' task to kill Agamemnon, and also how her presence may influence Agamemnon's decision to tread the purple path. After the king's departure Cassandra plays a further important albeit entirely passive role, for her refusal to enter the palace as the queen commands constitutes the first challenge to Clytemnestra's authority by anyone on stage, including the king, no doubt reflecting the audience's suspicions that her control of the situation will be removed later when Orestes returns. Indeed Agamemnon's recent failure to overcome his wife in argument will contrast sharply with Cassandra's mute resistance to her requests. Let us see how Aeschylus portrays this encounter between Clytemnestra and this girl she intends to kill.

Clytemnestra follows Agamemnon inside the palace at the end of the Carpet Scene and the audience may suppose that Aegisthus is

lurking somewhere within, awaiting his victim. The chorus, ignoring the silent and motionless girl on the chariot, proceeds to express grave if rather vague forebodings and there may be considerable suspense in the theatre about what is happening to Agamemnon at this very moment. In the *Odyssey*, the dying king heard the cries of Cassandra, killed ἀμφ' ἐμοί "*on top of me*" or "*because of me*" (11.423)[14]. This suggests that the two deaths were closely linked but Aeschylus is under no compulsion to present the murders simultaneously in his version and the audience may wonder whether Cassandra's death will be postponed here. If the skene is relatively new[15] the audience may not yet be conditioned to anticipate the death cry of the king and may be wondering whether a messenger will arrive shortly to relate Agamemnon's fate. However instead of a messenger Clytemnestra suddenly reappears in the doorway and issues a harsh command to the silent girl, naming her at last:

> εἴσω κομίζου καὶ σύ, Κασσάνδραν λέγω
>
> *You too come inside, I'm talking to you Cassandra.* (1035)

This brusque order will contrast with Agamemnon's request that the girl be taken within with kindness (950ff) and the audience will have little doubt about what Clytemnestra intends to do with the girl once she is inside. Having witnessed the queen's great powers of manipulation, no doubt the audience will expect this solitary slave-girl to obey her and meekly enter the house, having made no active contribution to the drama.

In contrast to Agamemnon's concern for the girl, Clytemnestra cruelly pretends to console Cassandra on her future life as a slave (1038ff) but in fact, as the audience suspects, she will not

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[14]As we have noted, this may not be Homeric.

[15]See Taplin Appendix C.

live long enough to endure these things and is destined to die shortly at the hands of the Queen. She must tread the same path as Agamemnon from the chariot into the palace[16] and Clytemnestra echoes her former command to Agamemnon - ἔκβαιν' ἀπήνης τῆσδε, μὴ χαμαὶ τιθεὶς τὸν σὸν πόδ' - "*Descend from this chariot, but do not place your foot upon the ground*"(906) - when addressing Cassandra - ἔκβαιν' ἀπήνης τῆσδε μηδ' ὑπερφρόνει - "*Descend from this chariot and do not show arrogance*" (1039). The close resemblance of these two phrases links the fates of the two victims and shows that while Clytemnestra encouraged Agamemnon to commit an act of proud arrogance, she expects Cassandra to behave with modest resignation to her lot.

Cassandra's silence throughout the Carpet Scene has been acceptable in dramatic terms, especially since she is a prisoner-of-war and so may be assumed to symbolize the recent victory at Troy merely by her presence on stage. However this silence becomes deliberate and striking when she fails to comply with the queen's invitation to go inside the palace but remains silent and motionless upon the chariot. Cassandra's refusal to speak may be paralleled at lines 83ff where, I believe, Clytemnestra fails to acknowledge a direct question from the chorus on first entering the stage[17], but even if not, the fact that a slave-girl dares to ignore the direct address of a queen will be deeply striking in the theatre. No doubt the audience will regard this figure with fresh interest as the mighty queen tries, and fails, to persuade her to enter the palace, and if Cassandra had played any active role in previous versions, they may begin to suspect that this may be the case here also.

The chorus are deeply surprised by the girl's boldness - σοί

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[16]Although probably not over the precious material.

[17]See above.

τοι λέγουσα παύεται, σαφῆ λόγον "*It's you to whom she has spoken, a clear story*" (1047) - while Clytemnestra, unable to believe that this slave-girl would defy her, assumes that she cannot understand Greek (1050-2). This kind of problem seldom arises in tragedy and most tragic foreigners are able to converse in the vernacular with ease[18]. However once Cassandra's inability to communicate has been suggested, the audience may assume that this is indeed the reason for her prolonged silence which may restore their former suspicion that she will not enter the drama in any active sense. We noted earlier how the chorus tried to warn the herald about Clytemnestra's powers of deceit:

> αὕτη μὲν οὕτως εἶπε, μανθάνοντί σοι
> τοροῖσιν ἑρμηνεῦσιν εὐπρεπῆ λόγον.
>
> *She has spoken thus, if you understand her through clear interpreters, a well-seeming speech.* (615-6)

They echo this thought later when Cassandra fails to respond to the Queen:

> ἑρμηνέως ἔοικεν ἡ ξένη τοροῦ
> δεῖσθαι·
>
> *It seems that the stranger needs a clear interpreter.* (1062-3)

However it will soon become apparent that Cassandra, unlike the chorus, enjoys a clear and accurate appreciation of the current situation and that in fact *she* will attempt to elucidate matters for *them*. As she herself comments later, far from not comprehending:

> καὶ μὴν ἄγαν γ' Ἕλλην' ἐπίσταμαι φάτιν
>
> *Indeed I understand the Greek language only too well.* (1254)

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[18] Compare for example the Danaids.

For the present, Clytemnestra is clearly shaken by this unexpected recalcitrance and expresses angry impatience with the unresponsive girl:

> οὔτοι θυραίᾳ τῇδ' ἐμοὶ σχολὴ πάρα
> τρίβειν·
>
> *I have no leisure to waste time here out of doors.* (1055)

The audience will be fully aware that Clytemnestra is impatient for Cassandra to enter the palace so that she may kill her. The chorus has no conception of this sinister undertone however and innocently joins Clytemnestra in urging the girl to go within:

> ἐντὸς δ' ἁλοῦσα μορσίμων ἀγρευμάτων
> πείθοι' ἄν, εἰ πείθοι'· ἀπειθοίης δ' ἴσως...
> πείθου λιποῦσα τόνδ' ἁμαξήρη θρόνον.
>
> *Caught within the nets of fate, obey if you will obey. Perhaps you will not obey...leave your seat on the chariot and obey.* (1048-9, 1054)

The audience will agree that Cassandra is trapped by fate and the term μορσίμων ἀγρευμάτων "*the nets of fate/death*" may convey a terrible double meaning undetected by the chorus[19]. Thus the Argive elders unconsciously conspire with Clytemnestra to facilitate the murder of Cassandra as they urge her to bow to the wishes of their mistress, as did Agamemnon in the previous scene. Taplin believes that the repeated references to Cassandra entering the house emphasize the inevitability of this event (p321). It also creates dramatic tension, revealing that this silent girl alone can resist the power of the queen and the audience may begin to wonder whether indeed she may somehow escape her fate. The chorus assumes that Cassandra is objecting to a life of servitude

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[19]See below on the possibility that the net was already part of the story.

and sympathize with her on these grounds - ἐγὼ δ', ἐποικτίρω γάρ, οὐ θυμώσομαι "*I shall not be angry for I pity her*" (1069). The audience will also pity this poor girl, but they will perceive that in fact what awaits her within the house is not a life of servitude but a cruel and merciless death.

Finally Clytemnestra is forced to abandon her attempts to summon her victim within and enters the house alone (1071), having suffered the first real challenge to her authority. The audience will regard Cassandra's brave resistance as admirable and note that she has succeeded in disquietening and worrying her would-be killer as well as achieving a far more dignified entry into the house than was enjoyed by Agamemnon. Left alone with the girl once more, the chorus continues their efforts to persuade her to descend and enter the house - ἴθ', ὦ τάλαινα, τόνδ' ἐρημώσασ' ὄχον ἑκοῦσ' ἀνάγκης τῆσδε καίνισον ζυγόν "*come, poor girl, and leave the chariot, adopting the unfamiliar yoke of this constraint*" (1070) and at last Cassandra steps down from the chariot and moves towards the palace. The audience may suppose that she will now disappear inside for ever, having fulfilled her role in the drama and that, even if they knew of versions in which Cassandra played an important part, Aeschylus skillfully creates the impression that this will not be included here.

On reaching the door however, Cassandra suddenly halts and breaks into loud, disjointed cries of woe - ὀτοτοτοῖ ποποῖ δᾶ· Ἄπολλον, Ἄπολλον (1072-3=1076-7). In an instant the audience will appreciate that her earlier failure to communicate was self-imposed and she is suddenly revealed as a speaking character in the drama. Thus all the previous indications that Cassandra's role was to be strictly passive were misleading and she proceeds to make her own important contribution to the audience's perception of Agamemnon's death.

d) Cassandra's Visions

On seeing the palace Cassandra bursts out into wild cries of sorrow and proceeds to relate various images from the past, present and future which appear before her. The audience will recognize that Cassandra shares their ability to foresee future events and will expect her words, unlike those of Clytemnestra, to be reliable, even though she is famed in myth for never being believed. In fact she herself alludes to this:

> καὶ τῶνδ' ὅμοιον εἴ τι μὴ πείθω· τί γάρ;
> τὸ μέλλον ἥξει· καὶ σύ μ' ἐν τάχει παρὼν
> ἄγαν [γ'] ἀληθόμαντιν οἰκτίρας ἐρεῖς·
>
> *And if there is anything in what I have said that you do not believe, it is all the same. How could it be otherwise? The future will unfold and very soon, a present witness, you will call me in pity a true prophet.* (1239-41)

Whether or not it had featured before, the exploitation of Cassandra's gift of foresight here provides Aeschylus with an excellent opportunity to broaden the scope of the drama, while her clear references to Agamemnon's murder add to the suspense of the current situation. When she begins to speak, no doubt the audience will wonder just how far Cassandra will go in predicting the imminent future and what effect, if any, her words will have on the dramatic situation. The chorus suggests that she will concentrate solely upon her own fate - χρήσειν ἔοικεν ἀμφὶ τῶν αὑτῆς κακῶν "*it seems she is about to prophesy about her own misfortunes*" (1083) - referring of course to her future life as a slave, but the audience may suspect that Cassandra will speak instead of her own murder, and possibly also that of Agamemnon.

At first Cassandra focuses attention upon the house in which Agamemnon is now ensnared, referring to past events in order to prove her veracity as a prophetess. Fraenkel comments "*thus the customary idea about the nature of true seership provided the dramatic poet with an excellent means of widening his story beyond the time of the actual plot*" (p625) and the audience may wonder whether these visions will relate only to past events, avoiding

all reference to the present situation. However Cassandra suddenly cries out as she catches sight of a new and terrible vision:

> ἰὼ πόποι, τί ποτε μήδεται;
> τί τόδε νέον ἄχος
>
> *Oh alas! What is this plot that is being devised? What is this new agony?* (1100-1)

At this moment, the audience may wonder just how far Cassandra will go in describing the murders prepared within and indeed an exact revelation of what is going on, including a direct reference to the murderer's identity, may not be believed by the chorus and so would not disrupt the course of the drama. The chorus fails completely to understand Cassandra's references to Agamemnon's death - ἀμηχανῶ (1113), τέρμα δ' ἀμηχανῶ (1177) - and the audience may feel some sense of superiority in their ability to appreciate the meaning of these prophetic visions. The chorus does however grasp Cassandra's frequent references to her own approaching doom[20]:

> νεογνὸς ἂν ἀίων μάθοι
>
> *A child hearing this would understand.* (1163)

However they fail to appreciate that Cassandra is referring to a double murder and may suppose that she fears death as a slave at the hands of her cruel mistress whom she has just defied and who may suspect that she is Agamemnon's concubine[21]. As Cassandra finally approaches the palace door - Ἅιδου πύλας "*the gates of Hades*" (1291) - there is great pathos as she bravely accepts her fate - ἀρκείτω βίος "*let there by enough of life*" (1314) and her

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[20]See for example 1139, 1149, 1160-1.

[21]We shall discuss the relationship between Agamemnon and Cassandra in the following chapter.

repeated attempts to enter emphasize the dramatic importance of crossing the threshold.

On the point of entry however, Cassandra turns back just as she did at the beginning of the scene and in fact repeats this action no less than four times. This will emphasize the fact that the interlude is now at an end and she is to go inside the palace as she appeared about to do on first stepping down from the chariot. She leaves the stage with dignity and in full consciousness of her fate, and Taplin comments that "*the quiet pathos of Cassandra's exit is perhaps unsurpassed in Greek tragedy* (p321). The 258 lines which occur between her initial attempt to enter the house and her actual entrance has had no real effect upon the action, although she makes a great contribution to the mood of the drama and enhances the image of the impending murders in the minds of the audience. This silent motionless girl has flourished unexpectedly into a proud heroine of immense stature and great pathos is created by the audience's awareness that she is on the point of death and will be brutally murdered as soon as she enters this terrible house, as she herself knows:

ἐγὼ δὲ +θερμόνους+ τάχ' ἐμ' πέδῳ βαλῶ

I shall soon pour the hot stream of my blood upon the ground. (1172)

Taplin comments, "*Cassandra will painfully lead the chorus and the audience out of their bewilderment towards some kind of insight and understanding*" (p316). This is not quite true however for the audience, far from being bewildered, strongly anticipate the impending murders from their background knowledge of the myth and Cassandra's words will act as confirmation of their suspicions rather than enlightenment:

'Αγαμέμνονός σέ φημ' ἐπόψεσθαι μόρον

You shall look upon Agamemnon's death, I tell you. (1246)

On the other hand Cassandra fails to communicate to the chorus the fact that Agamemnon is about to die and the audience may have been prepared for her warnings to prove ineffectual by the story that her prophecies are never believed. Thus while the chorus appears excessively obtuse in failing to understand her predictions, these will correspond with the audience's background knowledge of the myth and confirm their suspicion that Agamemnon is destined to die shortly. However we shall see in the following chapter how Cassandra's words fail to clarify that it is Clytemnestra who kills Agamemnon, not Aegisthus, and so the audience may not interpret her visions as well as they imagine.

Thus we have seen how although Aeschylus skillfully creates the impression that Cassandra will not make any significant contribution to the drama here, the audience sees her emerge as a heroine of immense stature, full of dignity and keen perception. This silent girl who gave every indication that she would contribute nothing to the drama proves a vital instrument in confirming the audience's anticipation of Agamemnon's death and creating suspense and this scene adds greatly to the impact of the play.

Chapter Six

Who Murders Agamemnon and Why?

Clytemnestra is famous today as a cruel woman who callously plots and executes the murder of her husband. However an examination of the pre-Aeschylean myth reveals that, particularly in the earliest versions, her part in the murder of Agamemnon was negligible compared to that of her lover Aegisthus and that her role was always strictly secondary. The shift of attention from Aegisthus to Clytemnestra was probably a gradual process to which Aeschylus himself may have contributed a great deal. During the *Oresteia* the poet preserves an air of ambiguity about who will actually perpetrate the murder until the last possible moment and only when the corpse of Agamemnon is revealed does it becomes clear that Clytemnestra acted alone and unaided, no longer merely the accomplice of her lover but the evil killer herself. Let us examine how the suppression of the murderer's identity during the *Agamemnon* enhances the impact of the drama and then proceed to consider the question of motivation.

a) Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in the *Odyssey*

The fifth-century audience would certainly have been familiar with the many references to the *Oresteia* story which occur in the *Odyssey* and these create an overwhelming impression in the listener that the murder of Agamemnon is solely the concern of Aegisthus:

> ὣς καὶ νῦν Αἴγισθος ὑπὲρ μόρον Ἀτρεΐδαο
> γῆμ' ἄλοχον μνηστήν, τὸν δ' ἔκτανε νοστήσαντα
>
> *Aegisthus beyond his fate wooed the wedded wife of the son of Atreus and killed him on his return.* (*Odyssey* 1.35-6)

Aegisthus is by far the central character in the story and attention is fixed upon him both as killer of Agamemnon and victim

of Orestes. Homer relates how he seduced Clytemnestra, despite her initial resistance[1] and then, on learning of Agamemnon's return, devised the murder[2]. He set an ambush and, inviting Agamemnon to his palace, murdered him[3] together with all his men[4]. Aegisthus then assumed control of the kingdom[5] until Orestes returned and killed him:

ἐπεὶ ἔκτανε πατροφονῆα
Αἴγισθον δολόμητιν, ὅ οἱ πατέρα κλυτὸν ἔκτα

Since he killed his father's murderer, the guileful Aegisthus, for he slew his glorious father. (*Odyssey* 1.299-30)

We should note the use of the singular for the killer of Agamemnon (πατροφονῆα, ἔκτα) found at the very beginning of the poem and the above phrase recurs at *Odyssey* 3.197-8, and 3.307-8 where the narrative continues:

ἧ τοι ὁ τὸν κτείνας δαίνυ τάφον Ἀργείοισι
μητρός τε στυγερῆς καὶ ἀνάλκιδος Αἰγίσθοιο·

When he had slain him, he made a funeral feast among the Argives for his hateful mother and the cowardly Aegisthus. (*Odyssey* 3.309-10)

This suggests that Clytemnestra met her death together with Aegisthus but the manner in which she died remains ambiguous. Some have suggested that she committed suicide but there is nothing to support this in the text. It is possible that this

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[1]See *Odyssey* 1.35-6, 3.264f.

[2]See *Odyssey* 3.303, 4.529, 11.409.

[3]See *Odyssey* 4.512-47, 11.389, 24.22.

[4]See *Odyssey* 4.536-7.

[5]See *Odyssey* 3.304-5.

phrase was interpolated at some later stage and may reflect the fact that the matricide became more prominent as the myth developed.

Aegisthus is referred to directly as the murderer of Agamemnon on no less that eight occasions in the *Odyssey* and, while Clytemnestra's support of him and compliance in the plot remain constant, her contribution to the story is clearly subordinate and of little interest or importance. Her presence at the murder of her husband is not even mentioned in four of the Homeric passages[6] which may suggest that her role there was negligible and unworthy of mention rather than that she was absent from the scene altogether. Elsewhere she is described as merely assisting her lover in devising the plot[7] and nowhere is there any reference to her taking any active role in the murder, although it is she who kills Cassandra[8] and she is twice described as Aegisthus' assistant[9]. Two further Homeric passages have been interpreted as references to Clytemnestra killing Agamemnon unaided and alone:

> ἡ δ' ἐμὴ οὐδέ περ υἷος ἐνιπλησθῆναι ἄκοιτις
> ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἔασε· πάρος δέ με πέφνε καὶ αὐτόν
>
> *But my wife would not allow me even to feast my eyes upon my son, for before that she killed me.* (*Odyssey* 11.452-3)
>
> οὐχ ὡς Τυνδαρέου κούρη κακὰ μήσατο ἔργα,
> κουρίδιον κτείνασα πόσιν
>
> *Not so did the daughter of Tyndareus devise her*

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[6] *Odyssey* 1.35-6, 3.193-206, 4.91-2 and 4.512-47.

[7] *Odyssey* 3.234-5, 4.91-2.

[8] *Odyssey* 11.421-3.

[9] *Odyssey* 11.410-11 - ἔκτα σὺν οὐλομένῃ ἀλόχῳ, *Odyssey* 24.97 - Αἰγίσθου ὑπὸ χερσὶ καὶ οὐλομένης ἀλόχοιο.

evil deeds, when she killed her wedded husband. (*Odyssey* 24.199-200)

Thus it would appear that the degree of Clytemnestra's involvement in the murder varies in the different passages and since Homer is exploiting the *Oresteia* story solely for its relevance to his own tale of Odysseus, it is natural that he gives a rather uneven and disjointed account of it. March comments "*it is not clear whom Homer saw as the principal criminal in Agamemnon's murder, since the guilt of either Aegisthus or Klytaimestra is stressed depending on who is telling the story and to whom*" (p84-5).

Garvie[10] agrees that this variation is due to the fact that Homer was not compelled to follow a uniform version of the *Oresteia* story but could exploit the elements of the story at will according to context. This is why, for example, Orestes' glory is stressed only during the Telemachy where he is recommended as a model to Telemachus and is no longer mentioned once this topic recedes. Prag suggests that there were two main versions of the story available to Homer in which responsibility was apportioned differently between Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. In the first, earlier version, Aegisthus is the main murderer and he is killed by Orestes while in the second Clytemnestra plays a full part and there is no revenge (p68ff).

However we should note that those passages in which Clytemnestra plays a more active role all occur in books eleven and twenty-four of the *Odyssey* which, while they would have been accepted as genuine by Aeschylus and his audience, are generally considered today to contain extensive interpolations, corruptions and additions. Leaving these aside, Clytemnestra's role at the murder appears to have been regarded as very minor in Homeric times and it is possible that the interpolated passages reflect

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[10]See his introduction to the *Choephori* pxff.

how her importance was increasing with the passage of time. Thus even if the audience were familiar with versions in which Clytemnestra played the major role in killing Agamemnon, which I doubt, nevertheless they cannot be certain that Aeschylus would not show influence here of these earliest versions in which her role was negligible. On the other hand, the mention of Clytemnestra in the two passages quoted above[11] may be a rather general reference to her part in the murder which is exaggerated in order to highlight the contrast between herself and Penelope and even if they are indeed intended to convey the idea that she acted alone, as I doubt, their importance will be vastly outweighed by the great emphasis placed on Aegisthus elsewhere in the *Odyssey*. March comments, "*it would seem that both partners-in-crime were equally guilty of the plot against Agamemnon and possibly also of the execution of the deed although it is perhaps more likely that it was Aegisthus who in fact performed the actual murder*" (p85).

Thus the idea that Clytemnestra shared the guilt of the crime with Aegisthus is clearly established in the *Odyssey* and her adultery and compliance with the murder plot appear to be clearly established in the earliest versions of the myth. Nevertheless the main emphasis remains on Aegisthus which may prepare the audience to expect him to play a major role in the *Oresteia* also. However let us now consider the portrayal of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in the post-Homeric myth to see whether this may have alerted the audience to the possibility that Clytemnestra will carry out the murder unaided in this presentation.

b) The murderer in post-Homeric myth

Thus in Homer and probably other epics it seems likely that Aegisthus was the main protagonist in Agamemnon's murder and no

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[11] *Odyssey* 11.452-3 and 24.199-200.

doubt this idea would be firmly established in the minds of the audience. Nonetheless it seems that Clytemnestra's role was increasing as the myth evolved and we noted in the previous chapter how she acquires her own personal victim in the shape of Cassandra. However it appears that before the *Oresteia* the main focus remained on Aegisthus and it seems likely that he undertakes the killing of Agamemnon in every pre-Aeschylean version, albeit supported and encouraged by Clytemnestra.

Proclus' summary of the *Nostoi* states:

> ἔπειτα 'Αγαμέμνονος ὑπὸ Αἰγίσθου καὶ Κλυταιμνήστρας ἀναιρεθέντος ὑπ' Ὀρέστου καὶ Πυλάδου τιμωρία...
>
> *Then Agamemnon was killed by Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, and Orestes and Pylades avenged him.*

Perhaps we can glean little from Proclus' summary since it offers us merely a bare skeleton of events but as March comments, "*it seems that Aegisthus' part in the murder of Agamemnon was at least as great as or greater than that of Clytemnestra, since Proklus names him first, just as he names Orestes before Pylades when he thinks of the later vengeance*" (p87 n36). Clearly Aegisthus is deeply involved in the murder here and although Clytemnestra ranks equally with him, this does not necessarily mean that she physically assisted him at the killing of Agamemnon. Nonetheless the fact that Clytemnestra is punished by Orestes for her part in the murder suggests that attention was indeed shifting towards the role of the female partner. Orestes' killing of his mother is also mentioned by Hesiod:

> ὅς ῥα καὶ ἡβήσας ἀπε[τείσατο π]ατροφο[ν]ῆα,
> κτεῖνε δὲ μητέρα [ἣν ὀλεσήν]ορα νηλέι [χαλκῷ
>
> *(Orestes) reached manhood and took vengeance on his father's killer and he killed his murderous mother with the pitiless bronze.* (*Fragment* 23a)

We see that here again Aegisthus is the prime object of Orestes's revenge, suggesting that he played a major part in the

murder of Agamemnon and, although she is punished equally for her betrayal, Clytemnestra's role in the actual murder remains unspecified. The matricide may also have featured in the *Oresteia* of Stesichorus where Apollo offers Orestes a bow with which to ward off the Erinyes but again the fragments offer little information about Clytemnestra's actual role at the murder[12]. So although there appears to be a growing interest in the matricide which was a direct consequence of Clytemnestra's involvement in the murder, this does not imply that she had adopted the role of killer in any previous version and her infidelity and acquiescence in the plot to kill her husband would be regarded as terrible crimes per se by the Greek audience.

It is most unfortunate that our few fragmentary sources do not allow a detailed study of the way in which Clytemnestra's role developed and which authors were largely responsible for this. March suggests that Clytemnestra's importance at the murder was established predominantly by an influential version of the *Oresteia* produced by Simonides. The Scholion to Euripides' *Orestes* 46[13] states:

> Ὅμηρος δέ ἐν Μυκήναις φησὶ τὰ βασίλεια Ἀγαμέμνονος, Στησίχορος δέ καὶ Σιμωνίδης ἐν Λακεδαίμονι
>
> *Homer says that the kingdom of Agamemnon was in Mycenae, Stesichorus and Simonides that it was in Sparta.*

However we do not know that this refers to a complete poem by Simonides based on the *Oresteia* myth or whether it was merely mentioned incidentally. The only other possible reference to the existence of this poem is found in a fragment which appears to describe the mourning of the people of Mycenae for a sacrificed

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[12] We shall consider this source in greater detail below.

[13] *PMG* 549.

maiden[14]. However the identification of this passage is far from certain and again may be not more than a digression to the main theme of the poem. Furthermore, it is far from certain that Simonides composed this passage and so we can see that there is no firm evidence for his composition of an Oresteia at all. March claims that the sudden popularity of vase-paintings depicting the death of Aegisthus which appeared just before 500BC and continued in popularity for a further thirty to forty years[15] "*strongly suggests the moving presence of a powerful literary work current in Athens*" (p93). It seems far more likely that this upsurge of interest in this particular point of the *Oresteia* story, in which an usurping tyrant is justly killed, was due to the current political climate in Athens[16] even if, as March suggests, Simonides was the first to adapt the myth for this purpose (p93).

If we accept March's hypothesis for a moment, we would naturally expect the vases to depict the outstanding scenes from Simonides' *Oresteia* and show, presumably, the increased importance of Clytemnestra. However in fact the major elements of the story remain Aegisthus' murder of Agamemnon and his own subsequent death at the hands of Orestes, while Clytemnestra's involvement in the murder and the matricide remain subordinate side-issues. Had Simonides produced a major work based on the *Oresteia* story, which I doubt, especially since not a single fragment survives, it is most unlikely that it greatly increased the stature of Clytemnestra as March believes. Indeed the sudden popularity of this scene in art shortly before the performance of the *Oresteia* will serve to reinforce the importance of Aegisthus in the story in the minds of the audience and place Clytemnestra firmly in the

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[14]See *POxy* 2434.

[15]Prag cites twenty-six extant examples of this one scene, eighteen of which seen certain to me - see p10-32 and plates 6-21.

[16]See Prag p102-5.

background. If the story were indeed employed as propaganda against the tyrants, this suggests that Clytemnestra has no place here since politics was the exclusive sphere of men.

Let us now turn briefly to a more detailed study of how the artists had depicted the respective roles of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra in the murder of Agamemnon. March suggests that in art "*Klytaimestra may sometimes be the actual murderer*" (p85 n29) but a closer inspection of the evidence reveals that this is not the case. Prag believes that a terracotta plaque from Gortyn[17] may be the earliest extant representation of the death of Agamemnon and claims that it depicts Clytemnestra stabbing Agamemnon with a dagger while Aegisthus grasps his spear and hair. However there are several objections to this interpretation, not least the fact that no weapon is visible! Prag suggests that Agamemnon is being stabbed in the back by his wife with an unseen sword or dagger, held in her left hand[18] and that the murder weapon is hidden from the viewer because the idea was such a novel one! Prag comments "*this is the first time that Clytemnestra is shown as the murderess, and so the artist was reluctant to do more than imply her guilt, just as a century and a half later Aeschylus still felt horror at the concept of a woman committing such a murder*".

But why would the artist - or indeed Aeschylus - choose to depict this particular scene from this particular myth if he were too horrified by the subject-matter to portray it clearly? Prag's argument is unconvincing and the fact that Clytemnestra as actual killer is not found elsewhere argues strongly against this interpretation. It is much more probable that the characters depicted on the plaque are not Clytemnestra and Agamemnon at all and Prag himself offers the more probable suggestion that the

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[17]Dated c630-610, see Prag p1-2.

[18]Although he can only find two examples of left-handedness elsewhere in the whole of extant Greek art.

scene shows Elektra helping Orestes to apprehend Aegisthus. The same criticism applies to the similar scene on an early seventh century disc seal from Crete[19], an Argive-Corinthian bronze shield-band from Olympia[20] and a bronze shield band from the temple of Athena Aphaia, Aegina[21], the latter two of which are particularly fragmentary and disputed.

An Etruscan black-figure hydria[22] shows a male and female attacking a fallen man but this is unlikely to be connected to the *Oresteia* since all of the participants are very youthful and the couple use staffs. Even if this does show the murder of Agamemnon, which, with Prag, I doubt, the attack is undertaken jointly and the male partner plays a full role. On the kalyx krater by the Dokimasia Painter[23], Clytemnestra runs up with her axe at the time of Agamemnon's murder, obviously eager to participate, but again it is Aegisthus who does the actual killing and the queen's physical assistance proves unnecessary. Clytemnestra is often shown wielding an axe against Orestes at the murder of Aegisthus and her carrying of it on this vase may merely be a transference from the other scene, especially since this is depicted on the reverse of the same vase, rather than evidence of a version in which she helped Aegisthus at the murder with weapon in hand. It is unlikely that the Dokimasia Vase was influenced by the *Oresteia* itself, since the main events it depicts remain Aegisthus' murder of Agamemnon and his own death at the hands of

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[19]See Davies p224ff, this certainly does seem to portray a male and female but their activity is far from certain and may be erotic.

[20]Dated c575-550, see Prag plate 2a.

[21]Dated c550-525, see Prag plate 2 b-c.

[22]By the Painter of the Vatican, late fifth/early sixth century - see Prag plate 2d.

[23]Dated c470-465, see Prag plates 3-4.

Orestes. Nowhere in art do we find an undisputed depiction of Clytemnestra killing Agamemnon by her own hand and the matricide is likewise ignored, not because of the sensitiveness of the issue, but simply because Clytemnestra's actions and fate were considered less important than those of Aegisthus.

So we can see that there is no undisputed artistic representation showing Clytemnestra actively assisting at her husband's death, and absolutely no depiction of her executing the murder unaided. Aegisthus is always present and takes the dominant part. Prag comments, "*one would like to think that the story was more popular in the archaic period than our present very slender evidence suggests*" (p3) but this lack of pictorial evidence for Clytemnestra's role is easily explained if, prior to Aeschylus, dramatic attention was focused wholly on Aegisthus as the main protagonist at the murder. In addition to the mythical background, we must not forget that general Greek attitudes concerning the respective roles of men and women will be an important influence on the audience. The idea of a single woman killing a mighty warrior, freshly returned from Troy, is an unusual and shocking one, and, as Vickers comments, "*one of the fixed points in the archaic Greek code of blood-revenge was that a woman was not allowed to take any active part in such revenge - this was the man's job*" (p380). Naturally we cannot be certain that Clytemnestra had not murdered Agamemnon by herself in any previous version, in which case the audience may experience some suspense over whether this development will be included here. Nonetheless it remains possible that Aegisthus' non-participation and absence from the scene may be an Aeschylean innovation and thus came as a great surprise to the audience.

c) Clytemnestra in the *Oresteia*

Thus the audience of the *Oresteia* may have been deeply influenced by their knowledge of the preceding myth and suspect that Aegisthus will play a major role in the murder of Agamemnon.

Even though he is excluded from the earlier part of the drama, they may suppose that he lies hidden within the palace, awaiting Agamemnon's arrival, and that while it is Clytemnestra who receives the news of the king's return and devises and engineers his procession across the purple path, it may be assumed that her main task is to facilitate a meeting between Aegisthus and his intended victim. Thus Aeschylus skillfully conceals the fact that Clytemnestra will commit the murder alone and unaided for as long as possible and only later is it revealed that Aegisthus was not actively involved in the death of Agamemnon or even present at the time of the murder but that Clytemnestra carried out the murder alone.

Where the location of the murder is mentioned in our earlier sources, Agamemnon meets his death not in his own house but in the palace of Aegisthus[24]. However, when Agamemnon enters the stage, it becomes apparent that the murder will occur within his own palace and his procession across the red garments serves to stress the grave implications of his final exit. The relocation of the murder allows a greater degree of unity of place[25], while also adding a deeper sense of pathos to the king's supposedly joyful homecoming from the war[26]. Naturally the main reason why the murder occurs here is that Clytemnestra is now the main protagonist but earlier in the drama the audience may suppose that Aegisthus is close at hand, ready to take an active role. Clytemnestra's complete and careful control of the palace doors[27]

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[24]As we discussed in Chapter Four, "The Homecoming of Agamemnon".

[25]Suggesting a possible tragic origin.

[26]In a similar way Orestes' return to this palace as a wronged exile come to exact just vengeance and claim his father's kingdom presents him in a better light than if he had gone to the palace of Aegisthus to assassinate the king, as appears to have been the case in the tradition.

[27]See Taplin p299.

may contribute to the impression that Aegisthus is hidden within, awaiting his victim, and she firmly blocks the path of the chorus, herald and Agamemnon when they attempt to enter. Later Cassandra refers to Aegisthus as οἰκουρόν "*one who stays in the house*" (1225) which may suggest to the audience that he is in Agamemnon's palace at this very moment and nothing Cassandra says specifically excludes him from the murder scene. Only Agamemnon is allowed to go inside under the queen's close direction and there will be the impression that his entrance is stage-managed in close accordance with the murder plot. As we turn now to consider the presentation of Clytemnestra in the early part of the *Agamemnon*, we should remember that the audience may suppose that she is acting in close association with Aegisthus and that they may expect him to play the dominant part at the murder.

We saw in Chapter Two how Clytemnestra is presented on stage as a mighty and powerful woman who inspires well-founded fear in her subjects. Her adulterous nature is proverbial in Homer and the audience will strongly suspect that she is party to the murder plot and busy with secret arrangements for her husband's death. The Watchman exhibits a deep fear of his mistress and declares:

> ὧδε γὰρ κρατεῖ
> γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ
>
> *Thus rules the hopeful heart of a woman who counsels like a man.* (11)

The fact that the Watchman informs Clytemnestra of Agamemnon's return - Ἀγαμέμνονος γυναικὶ σημαίνω "*to the wife of Agamemnon do I signal*" (26) - when this news was taken to Aegisthus in earlier versions[28] also suggests that some of Aegisthus' traditional importance has been transferred to the Queen and may raise further doubts in the minds of the audience

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[28]See *Odyssey* 4.528-9.

concerning his whereabouts. Thus the fact that Clytemnestra has an ἀνδρόβουλον κέαρ "*a heart that counsels like a man*" (11) and that it is she who set the watch and receives the news of Agamemnon's return, added to her control of the palace doors, will strongly suggest to the audience that she has adopted some of the role usually played by the male partner, although they may be far from certain how far this male/female role-reversal will extend.

When Clytemnestra appears on stage no doubt the audience will regard this wicked woman with great interest and suspect she is deeply involved in the plot to kill her husband. At first the chorus patronizes the Queen, doubting the news from Troy on the grounds that it was reported to them by a female and the audience will suspect that they gravely underestimate Clytemnestra's capabilities. At the end of the beacon speech, Clytemnestra declares with heavy sarcasm:

τοιαῦτά τοι γυναικὸς ἐξ ἐμοῦ κλύεις

Such things you have heard from me, a woman. (348)

and the chorus of aged Argives are forced to acknowledge the veracity of her words:

γύναι, κατ' ἄνδρα σώφρον' εὐφρόνως λέγεις

Lady, you speak wisely like a sensible man. (351)

As we noted earlier, it is with deep irony that Clytemnestra seeks to present herself as a woman of conventional modesty and great fidelity and indeed she betrays her true, more forceful nature during the conflict with Agamemnon over his treading of the purple path. With unconscious irony, Agamemnon rebukes her gently for her unbecoming persistence:

οὔτοι γυναικός ἐστιν ἱμείρειν μάχης

It is not for a woman to desire battle. (940)

Clearly he little suspects the true nature of his wife and the audience will see how he is easily manipulated by this clever woman who adopts the feminine role only when appropriate. They have witnessed Clytemnestra's rather "masculine" nature and no doubt will be wondering how far she will go in supplanting the role traditionally played by the male partner.

d) The Identity of the Murderer in the Cassandra Scene

When Agamemnon finally disappears inside the palace to his death, no doubt the audience will be far from certain how and by whose hand he will die and will no doubt wonder what role will be played in his murder by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus respectively. Far from being mad - μαίνεται (1064) -or ignorant of the language (1050-2), Cassandra proceeds to exhibit a deep understanding of the situation in the palace, and her knowledge proves superior even to that of the audience, since she alone knows that Clytemnestra will kill Agamemnon unaided. However, although Cassandra's visions place the murder firmly at the centre of dramatic attention, they also conceal the precise identity of Agamemnon's killer and Aegisthus is never specifically excluded from the murder scene.

Cassandra's first vision is of the children of Thyestes whom Atreus served up to his brother at a feast (1096-7)[29]. She hints that these past crimes against his family have inspired Aegisthus to plot the murder:

> ἐκ τῶνδε ποινάς φημὶ βουλεύειν τινὰ
> λέοντ' ἄναλκιν ἐν λέχει στρωφώμενον
> οἰκουρόν, οἴμοι, τῷ μολόντι δεσπότῃ

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[29]On Thyestes see Alkmaionis *fragment* 6 p77 Kinkel and Pherekydes *FGH* 3 F133=Schol Euripides' *Orestes* 995. Rabel (p211) believes that earlier in the play the chorus' description of how the vultures (49ff) and the hare (119ff) lost their young will also suggest Thyestes' feast and the latter is even described as δεῖπνον αἰετῶν "*the feast of eagles*".

On account of this I say that some vengeance is being plotted against the master on his return by some unwarlike lion, who wallows in bed, a stay-at-home. (1223-5)

This description of Aegisthus as a *cowardly* lion will suggest to the audience that he has lost much of his former heroic stature, while the term οἰκουρόν will remind them how he seduced Clytemnestra while others were away fighting at Troy[30]. Thus the linking of the murder with the terrible feast of Thyestes suggests that Aegisthus will have a deep interest and close involvement in the murder of Agamemnon and only later will it be revealed that in fact this was confined to his plotting of the deed (1609, quoted below).

Cassandra suddenly receives a terrible vision of the present:

ἰὼ πόποι, τί ποτε μήδεται;
τί τόδε νέον ἄχος; μέγα
μέγ' ἐν δόμοισι τοῖσδε μήδεται κακόν,
ἄφερτον φίλοισιν,
δυσίατον

Oh alas! Whatever is this that is being plotted? What is this new agony? One is planning a mighty evil in this house, unbearable to friends, beyond cure! (1100-3)

The subject of μήδεται is not stated although Clytemnestra assisted Aegisthus in this task in the *Odyssey* (4.91-2), and it may be that, as with the killing of Cassandra, the plotting of the murder had come to be regarded as her own particular sphere as the myth developed. Clytemnestra was described earlier as ἀνδρόβουλον "*plotting like a man*" and she seems to have devised and engineered Agamemnon's entrance into the palace across the red path, so the audience may suppose that it is she who plotted the murder. Thus the audience may be surprised when they later learn that the

[30] And possibly hint that he lies in wait within the palace at this moment, as we noted above.

traditional male/female roles have been reversed and that while Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon, Aegisthus claims sole responsibility for devising the murder-plot:

πᾶσαν συνάψας μηχανὴν δυσβουλίας

I put together the whole device of this fateful plan. (1609)

Suddenly Cassandra receives a vivid image of the current scene within the palace:

ἰὼ τάλαινα, τόδε γὰρ τελεῖς;
τὸν ὁμοδέμνιον πόσιν
λουτροῖσι φαιδρύνασα· πῶς φράσω τέλος;
τάχος γὰρ τόδ' ἔσται·
προτείνει δὲ χεὶρ ἐκ
χερὸς ὀρεγμένα

(ὀρέγματα Hermann e scholio)

Oh wretched woman, will you complete this deed? Washing the husband of your bed in the bath - but how shall I tell the end? For it will be soon. She stretches forwards hand after hand, reaching out. (1107-1111)

The main emphasis here is clearly on Clytemnestra[31] but at the same time there is nothing which specifically excludes Aegisthus from the scene. The disjointed nature of Cassandra's visions allows Aeschylus to preserve a great sense of ambiguity concerning who is present and what they are doing in a way that would have been impossible in a less passionate iambic passage, and the audience may expect Aegisthus' presence to be revealed at any moment. It would seem natural for the newly-returned warrior to receive the honour of being bathed[32] and would place Agamemnon in a highly vulnerable position. Seaford notes how in epic a woman in

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[31]Note the use of the female participles - τάλαινα, φαιδρύνασα, ὀρεγμένα.

[32]Compare Eurynome's bathing of Odysseus at *Odyssey* 23.153-5.

high society may attend a man in his bath but that in fifth-century Athens a man is washed by female relatives only when he is a corpse. (p248) Thus the audience may appreciate the irony of Clytemnestra bathing her husband just before he suffers a fatal attack.

The idea that Agamemnon dies in a bath may not be a new one since the Dokimasia Vase[33] depicts him naked beneath a thin net-like robe. In her next vision Cassandra appears to see some sort of net:

> ἒ ἔ, παπαῖ παπαῖ, τί τόδε φαίνεται;
> ἦ δίκτυόν τί γ' Ἅιδου;
> ἀλλ' ἄρκυς ἡ ξύνευνος, ἡ ξυναιτία
> φόνου
>
> *Alas, alas! What is this appearing? Is it some net of Hades? No, the one who shares the bed is the net who shares the guilt of murder.* (1115-8)

Fraenkel suggests that ξύνευνος might reflect σύνευνος "*the embracing one, wife*" and LSJ agree that it means "*bed-fellow or consort*" and usually means wife[34]. However it may on occasion mean "*husband*" or "*male lover*"[35] and so the audience may suspect that there is a reference here to Aegisthus, the word φαίνεται suggesting that he has just entered the scene. Later in the trilogy it becomes apparent that Clytemnestra did indeed use a net/robe to ensnare Agamemnon in his bath[36] but at this stage the audience may wonder whether her accomplice is Aegisthus rather than an actual net. On the other hand it is possible that the idea of the

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[33]Dated c470-465, see Prag plates 3-4.

[34]See for example Pindar *Olympian* 1 88 and *Agamemnon* 1442.

[35]As at Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* 866 and Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* 953.

[36]See *Choephori* 981f 998ff and *Eumenides* 634f.

bath and the net-robe shown on the Dokimasia vase was influenced by the *Oresteia* itself* and the increased vulnerability of the king at this moment may have coincided with the introduction of the idea that he is killed by a woman's hand. Nevertheless Aegisthus remains the killer of Agamemnon on the Dokimasia Vase which suggests that either this ignores newer developments in the story or that the idea of the bath was already familiar to the audience[37].

Cassandra proceeds to give a clearer hint that the struggle will be between a single male and female:

> ἄπεχε τῆς βοὸς
> τὸν ταῦρον· ἐν πέπλοισιν
> μελαγκέρῳ λαβοῦσα μηχανήματι
> τύπτει· πίτνει δ' (ἐν) ἐνύδρῳ τεύχει.
>
> *Keep the bull from the cow. Catching him in a robe she strikes with the black-horned device. He falls into a vessel of water.* (1125-8)

She then confirms the audience's suspicions that Clytemnestra is an evil woman who rejoiced at the news of Agamemnon's return only so that he may die the sooner (1227-38), thus undermining all of her earlier claims to be a modest and faithful wife. However this follows the reference to the crimes committed by Atreus against Thyestes (1223-5) which suggests that Aegisthus also has a deep interest in Agamemnon's death.

Cassandra drops increasingly explicit hints that Clytemnestra will be the main, perhaps the only, murderer, calling her:

> θῆλυς ἄρσενος φονεύς
>
> *Female, slayer of the male.* (1231)

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[37] Burkert suggests that Agamemnon's death in the bath may be connected to the idea of hero cult which involved both libations and blood sacrifice - see p205.

*Although an earlier date seems more attractive - see above.

and finally she speaks her prophecy plainly:

᾿Αγαμέμνονός σέ φημ' ἐπόψεσθαι μόρον

I tell you that you will look upon the death of Agamemnon. (1246)

By this stage the audience must have realized that Clytemnestra will play a prominent role in the murder although the ensuing lines show that the chorus has completely failed to grasp this fact:

Χο. τίνος πρὸς ἀνδρὸς τοῦτ' ἄχος πορσύνεται;
Κα. ἦ κάρτ' +ἄρ' ἂν+ παρεκόπης χρησμῶν ἐμων.
Χο. τοὺς γὰρ τελοῦντας οὐ ξυνῆκα μηχανήν.
Κα. καὶ μὴν ἄγαν γ' Ἕλλην' ἐπίσταμαι φάτιν.

Chorus *By what man will this grief be accomplished?*
Cassandra *How very much you have lost the track of my oracles.*
Chorus *Yes for I do not understand who are the executers of the plan.*
Cassandra *And I understand the speech of Greece only too well.* (1251-4)

Thus Cassandra fails to communicate effectively her prediction that Clytemnestra will act as sole murderess of Agamemnon, although by this stage the audience must have realized that her role in the murder will be an important one. Cassandra receives a further vision of the present and sees Clytemnestra preparing the murder weapon:

ἐπεύχεται θήγουσα φωτὶ φάσγανον
ἐμῆς ἀγωγῆς ἀντιτείσθαι φόνον.

She boasts as she whets the sword of her man that she will exact the penalty of murder for my being brought here. (1262-3)

These words are ambiguous since they may refer merely to Clytemnestra's preparations to kill Cassandra and indeed the chorus may interpret them in this way. However the audience knows

that Clytemnestra is busy with preparations for Agamemnon's murder also and we should note that the above phrase could also mean "*she is whetting the sword for her man*" ie on Aegisthus' behalf. Thus the audience may appreciate the reference to Agamemnon's death here without realizing that Aegisthus will not be present at the scene.

The chorus appreciates the references to the feast of Thyestes but remain perplexed over what Cassandra is trying to tell them:

> τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἀκούσας ἐκ δρόμου πεσὼν τρέχω
>
> *In all else that I have heard, I run wildly, having lost the track.* (1245)

The audience will wonder why the chorus is being so slow-witted but we have seen how the idea of Cassandra as the unbelieved prophetess may be significant here. Their incapacity to appreciate what Cassandra is saying also stresses the horrific nature of the murder since the possibility of such a cruel action lies far beyond the scope of their thoughts. The audience, on the other hand, aided by their background knowledge that Agamemnon is fated to die on his return, will now appreciate that Clytemnestra will play an important role in the murder of her husband and will no doubt await a more detailed revelation of this with great interest. They may remain in considerable doubt about the precise role to be played by Aegisthus in the murder however, although Cassandra indicates that he will play some part and share the guilt of the murder with Clytemnestra when she foresees a joint punishment:

> ὅταν γυνὴ γυναικὸς ἀντ' ἐμοῦ θάνῃ
> ἀνήρ τε δυσδάμαρτος ἀντ' ἀνδρὸς πέσῃ
>
> *When a woman dies for me, a woman, and for the man unluckily wed there falls a man.* (1318-9)

Thus the precise roles to be played by Clytemnestra and

Aegisthus respectively at the murder may remain a considerable source of speculation for the audience and they will await the disclosure of this with great interest.

e) The Murderer Revealed

Agamemnon's death cry finally rings out at line 1343 - ὤμοι, πέπληγμαι καιρίαν πληγὴν ἔσω[38] - and one of the elders suggests that they rush in to find the fresh-flowing sword - σὺν νεορρύτῳ ξίφει (1351). This weapon is associated solely with men and warfare and so emphasizes the chorus' misconception that the murderer is male. The audience will expect a revelation of the murderer(s) to follow shortly and to discover at last the precise role played by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus respectively. They may expect a messenger to arrive or that the couple will emerge from the palace together but, when the doors open at line 1372, the solitary figure of Clytemnestra is revealed standing over the corpses and Aegisthus is nowhere to be seen. Thus at last it becomes clear to both the chorus and the audience that Aegisthus did not attend the murder and that his involvement in the killing of Agamemnon was of an entirely passive nature. The traditional role of male and female has been reversed and Clytemnestra stresses the fact that she acted alone throughout her ensuing speech, suggesting that this was an unfamiliar idea to the audience. Although there have been many indications that Clytemnestra is to play an important role in the drama, it is only now that they learn without doubt that this woman carried out her husband's murder unassisted and there is an interval during which this knowledge is absorbed.

In order to remove all possible suspicion that Aegisthus was physically involved in the deed, Clytemnestra avoids all mention

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[38]Possibly this was a new convention linked to the introduction of the skene - see Taplin Appendix C.

of him for a considerable length of time and declares:

νεκρὸς δὲ τῆσδε δεξιᾶς χερὸς
ἔργον

This murder is the deed of this very right hand. (1405)

Fraenkel suggests that Clytemnestra re-enacts the murder as she describes in the present tense how she wrapped Agamemnon in a net as he lay in the bath and stabbed him to death. This is an attractive idea and, if mime featured in tragic productions[39] it would be highly appropriate for it to be included here to emphasize the fact that Clytemnestra carried out the murder without assistance. The queen further stresses the fact that she herself murdered Agamemnon by her repeated use of the first person:

ἕστηκα δ' ἔνθ' ἔπαισ' ἐπ' ἐξειργασμένοις...ἔπραξα...οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι...περιστιχίζω...παίω...ἐπενδίδωμι

I stand where I struck beside the deed...I did it...I will not deny it...I throw around...I strike...I add. (1379-86)

At last the chorus appreciates the situation fully and expresses great wonder at Clytemnestra's boldness:

πρὸς γυναικὸς δ' ἀπέφθισεν βίον

By a woman's hand he has lost his life. (1453)

The audience will now appreciate this also and will no doubt wonder what part Aegisthus played in the murder-plot and if and when he will enter the drama.

Only when her responsibility is firmly established does Clytemnestra refer to Aegisthus by name:

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[39]See General Introduction.

οὔ μοι Φόβου μέλαθρον 'Ελπὶς ἐμπατεῖ,
ἕως ἂν αἴθῃ πῦρ ἐφ' ἑστίας ἐμῆς
Αἴγισθος, ὡς τὸ πρόσθεν εὖ φρονῶν ἐμοί·
οὗτος γὰρ ἡμῖν ἀσπὶς οὐ σμικρὰ θράσους

Not for me does expectancy step into the house of fear, while the fire on my hearth is lit by Aegisthus, well-minded towards me as formerly. For he is no small shield of confidence to me. (1433-7)

This long-awaited mention of Aegisthus occurs some sixty-four lines *after* the corpses are revealed to view and it is finally confirmed that that the couple are lovers and that Aegisthus is deeply involved in the murder of Agamemnon. Clytemnestra's declared dependence on Aegisthus' support may suggest to the audience that Aeschylus is now returning to the traditional form of the myth in which the male partner played the central role in Agamemnon's death. Aegisthus himself finally enters some two hundred lines after Clytemnestra was revealed standing alone above the corpses and Taplin notes that "*no other character in Aeschylus enters when an act is anything like so far progressed from the previous act-dividing song...he is a late addition to something approaching a self-sufficient unit*" (p327). Nevertheless it is essential for Aeschylus to introduce Aegisthus and establish his complicity in the murder for, having established that Clytemnestra committed the deed by her own hand, he now wishes the adulterous pair to share the guilt for the crime as in previous versions.

Aegisthus declares the full extent of his role in the murder, confirming that Clytemnestra was the sole perpetrator in his attempts to claim credit for the deed himself:

κἀγὼ δίκαιος τοῦδε τοῦ φόνου ῥαφεύς...
καὶ τοῦδε τἀνδρὸς ἡψάμην θυραῖος ὤν

I am the one who justly planned this murder...and I laid hands upon the man, although I was absent myself. (1604, 1608)

He dismisses the surprise of the chorus that Clytemnestra

acted alone, declaring:

τὸ γὰρ δολῶσαι πρὸς γυναικὸς ἦν σαφῶς

Trickery is clearly the sphere of women. (1636)

So from his arrogant behaviour on stage and his attempts to take the credit for the murder, the audience will have no doubt that Aegisthus deserves to be punished by Orestes as in the tradition, even though he took no part in the actual deed. At the end of the play however Clytemnestra once again assumes the dominant role, settling the dispute between Aegisthus and the chorus and then leading her lover within the palace. She speaks the final words and the chorus of aged Argives departs in silence, displaying a "*dejected yet hostile subordination*" (Taplin p331) to their new rulers.

So we have seen how Aeschylus, while emphasizing Clytemnestra's role during the main body of the play, later picks up the threads of earlier versions and indicates that the traditional punishment of Aegisthus, perhaps the best known part of the *Oresteia* story, is to be retained. Nevertheless they may also suspect that Orestes' murder of his mother is now thrown into prominence by Clytemnestra's increased role in the murder of Agamemnon and await the consequences of this with great interest.

f) The Motive

In previous versions Agamemnon is murdered because Aegisthus and Clytemnestra had been enjoying an adulterous liaison during his absence. As the myth developed however more complex motives may have been introduced and the audience may wonder if these will be reflected here. Finally let us consider what motives for the murder are suggested during the *Oresteia* and how Aeschylus wished these to be interpreted by his audience.

Cassandra makes a direct link between the present murder and

Atreus' crimes against Aegisthus' father Thyestes:

> ἐκ τῶνδε ποινάς φημι βουλεύειν τινὰ
> λέοντ' ἄναλκιν ἐν λέχει στρωφώμενον
> οἰκουρόν, οἴμοι, τῷ μολόντι δεσπότῃ
>
> *On account of this I say that some vengeance is being plotted against the master on his return by some unwarlike lion, who wallows in bed, a stay-at-home.* (1223 -5)

This may suggest that Aegisthus is motivated by a desire to avenge past crimes against his family and later he does indeed claim to rejoice in the fact that now Agamemnon:

> χειρὸς πατρῴας ἐκτίνοντα μηχανάς
>
> *has paid the penalty for the contrivances of his father's hand.* (1582)

The myth of the dispute between Atreus and Thyestes is presented as a male dominated affair, with the vengeance passing from father to son (1583ff), and indeed there may have been versions in which this is stressed as Aegisthus' chief motivation in killing Agamemnon. However when it becomes apparent that it was not Aegisthus who killed Agamemnon but Clytemnestra, the audience may suppose that she would have felt little interest in this ancient feud and after the murder she hints that her hatred of Agamemnon was inspired by his treatment of their daughter:

> ἔθυσεν αὑτοῦ παῖδα, φιλτάτην ἐμοὶ
> ὠδῖν'
>
> *He sacrificed his own child, dearest product of my labour.* (1417-8)[40]

This is perhaps her best defence, likely to gain most sympathy with both the audience and those on stage, and the chorus agrees that there is some justice in Agamemnon's murder on those

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[40] She mentions Iphigenia repeatedly - 1412ff, 1432, 1521ff, 1551ff.

grounds - ἐκτίνει δ' ὁ καίνων "*the slayer pays the price*" (1562). However the audience has just witnessed how initially Clytemnestra exalted in the murder - χαίροιτ' ἄν, εἰ χαίροιτ', ἐγὼ δ' ἐπεύχομαι "*rejoice if you will rejoice,* I *glory in it!*" (1394) and only when the chorus expresses their horror and condemnation of the deed, did she make any reference to the sacrifice of her daughter. Zeitlin states that she merely "*raises the ghost of Iphigenia to suit the occasion*" (p491) and Clytemnestra's great powers of deceit and manipulation have been clearly established from the very beginning of the play. Thus the audience may suppose that her adoption of the role of grieving mother may be as insincere as her earlier portrayal of the faithful wife, and as the trilogy proceeds, it becomes increasingly apparent that the sacrifice of Iphigenia had little to do with Agamemnon's death. After these few brief references to the sacrifice, Clytemnestra never refers to it again, not even in her own defence when Orestes is about to kill her in the *Choephori*, nor later as a ghost in the *Eumenides*. The cruel, callous attitude which the Queen displays towards her other children, Orestes and Elektra[41], will further undermine her claims to have acted out of love for Iphigenia.

Clytemnestra's portrayal of herself as grief-stricken over Iphigenia's death is seriously weakened by the fact that she produces further possible motives for the murder, at one moment styling herself as a divine avenger (1500f), at the next referring to her sexual jealousy of Chryseis (1439)[42] and Cassandra (1445f). The audience may indeed suppose that Clytemnestra is motivated to kill Cassandra by her suspicion that she is her husband's lover. Cassandra is presented as a beautiful princess in the earlier myth and she has many suitors, including Ajax and Apollo[43]. What is

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[41]Both complain in the *Choephori* that they are treated like slaves by their mother - 915 and 135 respectively.

[42]See *Iliad* 1.109-115.

[43]Her hand was also sought by Coroibos - see *Ilias Parva fragment*

more, Agamemnon's liaison with Chryseis, whom he prefers to his wedded wife at *Iliad* 1.109-115, was also a familiar theme and Cassandra may have been regarded as her counterpart in some sense. It is possible that the couple were lovers in the version which first introduced Cassandra's participation in Agamemnon's homecoming and death, a circumstance which may have been concealed in order to form a parallel with the relationship between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. If so this passage from Euripides' *Trojan Women* may reflect the earlier myth:

Τα. ἐξαίρετόν νιν ἔλαβεν ᾿Αγαμέμνων ἄναξ
Εκ. ἦ τᾷ Λακεδαιμονίᾳ νύμφᾳ δούλαν;
ἰώ μοί μοι
Τα. οὔκ, ἀλλὰ λέκτρων σκότια νυμφευτήρια
Εκ. ἦ τὰν τοῦ Φοίβου παρθένον, ᾇ γέρας ὁ
χρυσοκόμας ἔδωκ' ἄλεκτρον ζόαν;
Τα. ἔρως ἐτόξευσ' αὐτὸν ἐνθέου κόρης

Talthybius	*King Agamemnon has chosen (Cassandra) as his prize*
Hecuba:	*To be a slave to his Spartan wife? Alas!*
Talthybius	*No, to be the secret bride of his bed*
Hecuba	*The maid of Phoebus, who gave her virgin days as a gift to the golden-haired one?*
Talthybius	*Yes, for love for the possessed girl has speared him* (249-55)

The term σκότιος, referring to a secret liaison out of wedlock, is found as early as *Iliad* 6.24. In this play Agamemnon describes Cassandra as πολλῶν χρημάτων ἐξαίρετον ἄνθος, στρατοῦ δώρημ' "*the flower chosen from much wealth, the gift of the army*" (954-5) which might suggest a sexual relationship, although the audience may have been further guided in this matter by the behaviour of the couple towards one another on stage. In fact although Agamemnon treats the girl with kindness in the *Oresteia*, there is no certain indication that they are to be regarded as lovers and indeed both Clytemnestra and the chorus foresee a hard life of servitude ahead of the girl rather than the privileges of

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16, Pausanias 10.27.1, Homer *OCT* 5 p134 - and Othryoneus - see *Iliad* 13.360-80 - both of whom die at Troy.

a royal concubine (1035ff). This suggests that if there were any liaison, it was to remain a secret, just as Clytemnestra conceals her own adulterous affair. On the other hand Hyginus records a strand of the myth in which Oeax, son of Nauplius, caused the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra by concocting the false story that they were lovers in order to avenge the death of his brother Palamedes. Prag (p76) notes that Palamedes is mentioned in the second book of Stesichorus' *Oresteia*[44] which may reflect an old story. Thus the audience may have been aware of versions in which the liaison between Cassandra and Agamemnon was concealed and still others in which the idea proved to be entirely without foundation.

The true nature of the relationship between Cassandra and Agamemnon is never clarified in the *Oresteia* and indeed in some respects it is irrelevant since both are doomed to die shortly. However this question is important in assessing Clytemnestra's justification in murdering her husband and had Agamemnon flaunted a new lover on his return this would have placed her own adulterous affair in a very different light. Since this is not the case however, the audience may suppose that Clytemnestra misinterprets the relationship between her husband and the girl, or even deliberately twists it in order to justify her actions, and so will not regard it is a just motive for the murder.

Thus the fact that Clytemnestra produces a variety of motives serves to undermine each of them and it is unlikely that the audience will believe that she was inspired to kill Agamemnon either through grief for Iphigenia or jealousy of Cassandra, although these elements may have played a central role in previous versions. Pindar asks:

> πότερόν νιν ἄρ' Ἰφιγένει' ἐπ' Εὐρίπῳ
> σφαχθεῖσα τῆλε πάτρας ἔκινισει βαρυπάλαμον

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[44]See *PMG* 213.

ὄρσαι χόλον;
ἢ ἑτέρῳ λέχει δαμαζομέναν
ἔννυχοι πάραγον κοῖται;

Was it Iphigenia slain far from her homeland on the banks of the Euripus that caused (Clytemnestra's) heavy-handed anger to rise up? Or, conquered by another lover, did nightly lovemakings lead her on? (*Pythian* 11 22-5)

March believes that this question was influenced by the *Oresteia* of Simonides in which, she suggests, Clytemnestra is inspired to kill Agamemnon *solely* on account of the death of her daughter. However, as we noted above, there is no firm evidence for the existence of this, and we should note that Pindar merely suggests the sacrifice of Iphigenia as a possible cause and then appears to reject this by adding the alternative motive of adultery. Thus it may be that there, as here, Iphigenia's death had little to do with Agamemnon's murder and that the true motivation was the adulterous relationship between Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, as in earlier versions. Thus the alternative motives suggested by Clytemnestra after the murder are no more than red-herrings and the true cause of Agamemnon's death remains the fact that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus had become lovers in his absence.

g) Conclusion

So we have seen how Clytemnestra may have been considered of secondary importance at the murder in all versions prior to the *Oresteia* and how Aeschylus skillfully conceals for as long as possible the fact that Aegisthus plays no active role in the murder at all, even during the Cassandra Scene where we come closest to a revelation of the truth. Earlier hints that Clytemnestra is rather "masculine" in nature and her skillful powers of manipulation as exhibited by her control of the palace doors will prepare the audience for the later revelation that she has killed Agamemnon by her own hand and fully adopted the role played by her male partner in the tradition. Even if

Clytemnestra had been presented as sole murderess of her husband in some previous version, which I doubt, the audience will remain in considerable doubt about whether Aeschylus will follow this course right until the moment when the Queen is revealed standing alone above the corpses. By the end of the *Oresteia* no doubt the audience will be looking forward with great interest to see how the form of Orestes' revenge may be influenced by Clytemnestra's enhanced participation in the murder of Agamemnon.

Chapter Seven

Orestes' Revenge

a) Introduction

Let us now consider the role and presentation of Orestes in the *Oresteia*. The fact that Aegisthus dies at the hands of Orestes in atonement for his killing of Agamemnon appears to have been the central event of the pre-Aeschylean myth and no doubt would have been anticipated by the audience during the course of the trilogy. Orestes had been identified as Agamemnon's son by the time of the *Iliad* (9.142-5) and there are frequent references to his act of vengeance in the *Odyssey*.[1] The fact that Orestes was exiled from his homeland also featured in the story as early as Homeric times:

> τῷ δέ οἱ ὀγδοάτῳ κακὸν ἤλυθε δῖος 'Ορέστης
> ἂψ ἀπ' 'Αθηνάων, κατὰ δ' ἔκτανε πατροφονῆα
>
> *But in the eighth year the evil came upon Aegisthus, for bright Orestes returned from Athens and killed his father's murderer.* (*Odyssey* 3.306-7)[2]

The audience learns that Orestes has been banished here also when Clytemnestra claims to have removed him for his own safety:

> ἐκ τῶνδέ τοι παῖς ἐνθάδ' οὐ παραστατεῖ,
> ἐμῶν τε καὶ σῶν κύριος πιστωμάτων,
> ὡς χρῆν, 'Ορέστης
>
> *Because of this, our child does not stand here now as guardian of our pledges as he should, Orestes.* (877-881)

In the *Odyssey*, the ghost of Agamemnon laments the fact that

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[1]At 1.40-41, 1.298-302, 3.196, 3.306-7, 4.546, 11.430-32.

[2]See also *Odyssey* 1.40-41.

he was never reunited with Orestes:

> ἡ δ' ἐμὴ οὐδέ περ υἷος ἐνιπλησθῆναι ἄκοιτις
> ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἔασε· πάρος δέ με πέφνε καὶ αὐτόν
>
> *My wife did not allow me to feast my eyes upon my son, for before that I myself was killed by her.* (11.447-53)[3]

Thus the audience may have expected Orestes to arrive home only after his father is dead, as is the case, and the joyful reunion of Odysseus with his son Telemachus or his faithful servant Eumaeus in the *Odyssey* has no equivalent here.

Orestes' return to exact vengeance is foreshadowed several times in the course of the *Agamemnon* as when Cassandra declares:

> ἥξει γὰρ ἡμῶν ἄλλος αὖ τιμάορος
> μητροκτόνον φίτυμα, ποινάτωρ πατρός·
> φυγὰς δ' ἀλήτης, τῆσδε γῆς ἀπόξενος
>
> *For there shall come another to avenge us, the off-spring who kills his mother, who exacts vengeance for his father, an exile and a wanderer.* (1280-3)[4]

and the chorus of aged Argives long for Orestes to come and rid them of their cruel oppressors (1646f, 1667f). Roberts comments that "*no other character fulfills so many (prophecies)*" (p286) and notes that Orestes' act of vengeance fulfills a sequence of predictions, portents and prayers. We should remember however that these hints about Orestes' return are designed to confirm the audience's suspicions about the ensuing drama rather than offer them new information.

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[3]The idea of Agamemnon in Hades occurs also at 24.19ff and these two passages may be interpolated backwards from some post-Homeric treatment of this theme.

[4]See also 1317-9.

When a young man appears at the beginning of the *Choephori*, the audience will swiftly identify him as the newly-returned son of the house, come to avenge his father and claim the throne. He declares:

ἥκω γὰρ ἐς γῆν τήνδε καὶ κατέρχομαι

I have come to this land and returned from exile. (3)[5]

Thus the audience will expect Orestes' revenge to form the subject of the ensuing drama and they may wonder how Clytemnestra's dominant role in the preceding drama will be reflected in the presentation of the revenge.

b) The Tyrannicide

The death of Aegisthus at the hands of Orestes appears to have been the outstanding feature of the *Oresteia* story before Aeschylus. Homer relates:

ἑπτάετες δ' ἤνασσε πολυχρύσοιο Μυκήνης
κτείνας Ἀτρείδην, δέδμητο δὲ λαὸς ὑπ' αὐτῷ
τῷ δέ οἱ ὀγδοάτῳ κακὸν ἤλυθε δῖος Ὀρέστης
ἄψ' ἀπ' Ἀθηνάων, κατὰ δ' ἔκτανε πατροφονῆα

For seven years (Aegisthus) ruled Mycenae, rich in gold, having killed Agamemnon and the people were subjugated beneath him, but evil came upon him in the eighth year when bright Orestes returned from Athens and killed his father's murderer. (*Odyssey* 3.304-7)

The murder of Aegisthus suddenly became popular as a theme for vase-paintings around the beginning of the fifth century and Prag describes no less than nineteen surviving examples of this

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[5]This line is ridiculed at *Frogs* 1163-5 as a tautology but this suggests a failure, perhaps deliberate, to appreciate that the second verb applies more specifically to one returning from exile - see Garvie p50.

scene, dating from 510-465[6]. Thus this scene would have been extremly familiar to the audience and would doubtless influence their anticipations during the *Oresteia*. Not only is Orestes' vengeance a highly dramatic moment from the familiar story but it also provides a respectable precedent for the killing of an unjust tyrant, and so the scene may have been exploited by the artists for its relevance to contemporary politics.

In the *Choephori* we find traces of the idea that Orestes is the dispossessed heir come to avenge his father and claim his possessions. Elektra declares:

> ἐκ δὲ χρημάτων
> φεύγων 'Ορέστης ἐστίν, οἱ δ' ὑπερκόπως
> ἐν τοῖσι σοῖς πόνοισι χλίουσιν μέγα
>
> *Orestes is in exile from his inheritance, while they revel arrogantly in the fruit of (Agamemnon's) labours.* (135-7)

Orestes himself admits that his vengeance is inspired in part by a desire to regain his rightful possessions[7] and the Greek audience would have regarded this as legitimate and praiseworthy[8].

The essential justice of Orestes' act of vengeance is suggested by his presentation as the liberator of the citizens from a harsh and tyrannical rule. The Watchman of the *Agamemnon* revealed that the household was suffering under a cruel regime and the chorus goes so far as to attempt violence against Aegisthus

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[6]See pages 13-32 and plates 6-21 Note for example an unattributed red-figure lekythos where Aegisthus holds a sceptre in one hand and stretches out the other to Orestes in supplication - Prag p16-17 and plate 10a.

[7]ἀποχρημάτοισι ζημίαις ταυρούμενον "*I am made savage by the loss of my belongings*" 275, πιέζει χρημάτων ἀχηνία "*the lack of possessions presses hard upon me*" 301.

[8]See Walcot p80.

(*Agamemnon* 1651ff). Fraenkel considers the threatened attack by these feeble old men a dramatic inconsistency, typical of the flexible role of the chorus (III p783-4), but in fact the futility of their attempt merely emphasizes their great hatred of Aegisthus and their loyalty towards the old regime which Orestes seeks to restore. This hatred of the Clytemnestra and Aegisthus continues into the *Choephori*, where the chorus longs for the death of the rulers (284, 386-9) and advises Elektra to consider as a friend:

> πρῶτον μὲν αὑτὴν χὤστις Αἴγισθον στυγεῖ
>
> *Firstly yourself and whosoever hates Aegisthus.* (111)

and after Orestes has completed his murderous deeds, they cry:

> ἐπολολύξατ' ὢ δεσποσύνων δόμων
> ἀναφυγᾷ κακῶν
>
> *Oh raise the cry of joy that the house of our masters has escaped from evil.* (942-3)

These women may be represented on stage as Trojan prisoners-of-war[9] in which case their support for Agamemnon, who sacked their mother-city will reflect well on the king and Orestes' vengeance, and perhaps mirror Cassandra's attitude in the previous play.

We shall see later how the nurse also exhibits an intense dislike of the rulers of the house and although Clytemnestra declares that she is left bereft of friends by Orestes' death (χειρουμένη φίλων 695), after the disguised Orestes and Pylades enter the palace a few lines later, she contradicts this by claiming κοὐ σπανίζοντες φίλων "*I do not lack friends*" (717). The audience will suspect however that the rulers are hated by all in

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[9]See Tarkow p11 who refers to the scholion on 75.

the house and the attitude of the ordinary people provides a strong indication that Orestes has justice on his side.

Thus the idea of a justified tyrannicide may have been exploited in previous versions of the story and may prepare the audience for Orestes' final vindication for his act of vengeance. However since the audience has just witnessed Clytemnestra's single-handed murder of her husband in the previous play, they may suspect that her death is destined to overshadow that of Aegisthus in the ensuing drama. He certainly deserves to die, even though he was not present at the scene[10], and the chorus stresses his part in the murder:

> σὺ δ' ἄνδρα τόνδε φῂς ἑκὼν κατακτανεῖν,
> μόνος δ' ἔποικτον τόνδε βουλεῦσαι φόνον;
>
> *Do you say that you willingly killed this man – that you alone planned this piteous murder?* (1613-4)

However in the previous play Aegisthus has been presented as a weak and pompous bully, and the chorus declares that they cannot imagine him capable of assuming the throne:

> ὡς δὴ σύ μοι τύραννος Ἀργείων ἔσῃ,
> ὃς οὐκ, ἐπειδὴ τῷδ' ἐβούλευσας μόρον,
> δρᾶσαι τόδ' ἔργον οὐκ ἔτλης αὐτοκτόνως
>
> *As if I shall see you ruler over the Argives, you who when you had plotted the death of this man, had not the courage to do your deed with your own hand.* (1633-5)

In addition Clytemnestra has been portrayed as a strong and capable woman throughout and her domination of events culminated in the single-handed murder of her husband. At the end of the *Agamemnon*, she takes charge in settling the dispute between the chorus and Aegisthus, declaring:

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[10] See Fraenkel III p763 on the ancient legal principle that conspiracy to murder carried as much guilt as actually doing the deed.

ἐγὼ
καὶ σὺ δωμάτων κρατοῦντε * * θήσομεν καλῶς

Myself and you as joint masters of this house will make all well. (1672-3)[11]

Thus as the *Choephori* begins the audience may be wondering whether Clytemnestra will retain her position of dominance now that the new order is established or whether Aeschylus will proceed to place greater emphasis on Aegisthus and his assassination, as in the traditional story.

Contempt for Aegisthus' effeminate and cowardly nature was clearly established in the *Agamemnon*[12] and at the king's murder he played the role which both the myth and Greek social attitudes would normally allocate to a woman. In the *Choephori* Orestes also regards Aegisthus as "unmanly" and hates to see his citizens:

δυοῖν γυναικοῖν ὧδ' ὑπηκόους πέλειν·
θήλεια γὰρ φρήν

thus subject to two women! For his mind is womanly. (302-4)

In addition Clytemnestra appears to have retained considerable power in the household for just as she commanded the servants in the *Agamemnon* (10, 258), so in the *Choephori* the chorus are sent out at her bidding - ἰαλτὸς ἐκ δόμων...μ' ἰάλλει δύσθεος γυνά "*I have been sent from the house...the impious woman sends me*" (22, 44). The audience may share this contempt, especially since they are familiar with Aegisthus' more active role in earlier versions, and regard his heroic stature as overshadowed by that of Clytemnestra.

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[11]Note the use of the dual to emphasize their partnership.

[12]See for example 1224-5 and 1625.

Thus there are strong hints that, although Aegisthus will meet a deserved death, Clytemnestra remains the dominant figure and the audience knows that Orestes must kill her if he is to avenge his father, since she carried out the deed unaided in this version. This indicates that the vengeance is to prove more problematic than in the earliest versions of the myth and will involve the terrible crime of matricide. Orestes reflects the traditional view by assuming that Aegisthus is to be his prime target and major challenge and makes no indication that he is aware that Clytemnestra was guilty of the murder[13]. Nevetheless, perhaps guided by their knowledge of more recent developments in the myth, the audience may suspect that the killing of Clytemnestra will prove the central element in the ensuing drama and would no doubt look forward to the depiction of Orestes' revenge with great interest.

c) The Throne Scene

After the excitement of the kommos, Orestes concentrates on his immediate task of killing Aegisthus and lays detailed plans for this alone (554ff)[14]. His plan to gain entry to the palace disguised as a stranger (560) and kill the usurping tyrant on sight will concentrate attention on this traditional murder of the male tyrant. Orestes suggests that if he is not invited within, then those passing the house will cry:

> τί δὴ πύλῃσι τὸν ἱκέτην ἀπείργεται
> Αἴγισθος, εἴπερ οἶδεν ἔνδημος παρών;
>
> "*Why does Aegisthus shut his gate against the suppliants, if indeed he is present at home and knows they are here?*" (569-70)

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[13] Unless, as seems doubtful, this occurs in the missing part of the prologue - see below.

[14] We shall discuss later his initial neglect of preparation for Clytemnestra's murder.

Clearly the newly-arrived Orestes assumes that Aegisthus will be in control of the palace and he appears to know nothing of his mother's dominance in the prece ding play. The audience, on the other hand, who witnessed the queen's close control of the palace doors throughout the *Agamemnon* may suspect that Orestes is misguided in his supposition that the power of entry now lies with the king. Thus they may wonder if and how Orestes will gain a clearer idea about who carried out the murder and now probably retains greatest power in the palace.

We have noted how the death of the tyrant on the throne would have been familiar to the audience through its popularity as a subject for vase paintings. Orestes himself hints at this scenario, intimating that he will waste no time but kill Aegisthus as soon as they meet:

εἰ δ' οὖν ἀμείψω βαλόν ἑρκείων πυλῶν
κἀκεῖνον ἐν θρόνοισιν εὑρήσω πατρός
ἢ καὶ μολὼν ἔπειτά μοι κατὰ στόμα
ἐρεῖ...

If only I can cross the threshold of the house gates, I shall find that man seated on my father's throne, or if he comes up to me to address me face to face... (571-3)

Thus the audience may expect the traditional throne scene to occur. Orestes continues:

πρὶν αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν "ποδαπὸς ὁ ξένος;" νεκρὸν
θήσω, ποδώκει περιβαλὼν χαλκεύματι

Before he can say "from what land is the stranger?", I shall strike him dead, piercing him with the swift bronze. (575-6)

Thus Orestes makes a specific plan for his encounter with Aegisthus and there will be a moment of great suspense as he approaches the palace and demands:

τίς ἔνδον, ὦ παῖ παῖ μάλ' αὖθις, ἐν δόμοις;
τρίτον τόδ' ἐκπέραμα δωμάτων καλῶ,
εἴπερ φιλόξεν' ἐστὶν Αἰγίσθου διαί...
ἐξελθέτω τις δωμάτων τελεσφόρος
γυνὴ τόπαρχος, ἄνδρα δ' εὐπρεπέστερον

Who is within? Boy! Boy! Once again, who is in the house? For the third time I call for someone to come out of the house, if indeed it is Aegisthus' wont to be hospitable...Let someone come out with authority over the house, a female ruler, or the man, as is more fitting. (654-6, 663-4)[15]

Orestes' banging at the door and shouts for admittance will serve to focus all attention upon the palace doors and the audience will wonder who will emerge and what will happen next. He expects to meet Aegisthus shortly, either at the gates or when he is taken within and it is possible that he will meet his death as planned. On the other hand, having seen Clytemnestra emerge from these palace gates so often in the *Agamemnon*, the audience may wonder if she will now appear and, if so, whether Orestes will transfer to her his threat to exact an immediate revenge. A further possibility is that the couple will enter together - Orestes demands to see τοῖσι κυρίοισι δωμάτων "*the rulers of the house*" (658) - especially since they entered the palace together at the end of the previous play and this image will be fresh in the minds of the audience. It is most unfortunate that we do not know how this matter had been treated in previous versions of the story but the audience may recognise allusions here to earlier treatments of Orestes' first encounter with his victims.

Finally Clytemnestra appears in the doorway to greet the strangers, unaware that she is in the presence of her own son (658ff). The audience, knowing that she is destined to die at the hands of Orestes and, aware as they are of his plan to act swiftly, may wonder whether her death is imminent and will precede

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[15]The idea of Aegisthus welcoming a stranger with hospitality may reflect those earlier versions in which Agamemnon died as a guest in his house - see above.

that of Aegisthus. She offers her disguised son θερμὰ λουτρὰ "*warm baths*" (670), making an oblique reference to the murder of Agamemnon, and Whallon suggests that she is "*delighting in an ironic rememberance of her ruthlessness*" (p272). However this is more likely to be unconsciously ironic, appreciated by the audience alone, since, although were she to recognise her son there is no doubt that Clytemnestra would wish his father's fate on Orestes, at this point she has no conception of the messenger's identity and the fact that he wishes to kill her. Taplin notes that this scene contains many parallels to Clytemnestra's welcome of Agamemnon - "*again the rightful lord of the house is met by Clytemnestra, who again will dictate the terms of his entry into the house*" (p343). The audience will no doubt appreciate the visual parallel with the former scene as the queen greets the new arrival and the silent figure of Pylades may recall that of Cassandra[16]. The vital difference is however that whereas before Clytemnestra was in full control of events, the audience knows that it is now the queen herself who is deceived and in great danger.

Orestes indicates that his thoughts are still fully on the murder of Aegisthus for he hopes that the male ruler emerges rather than the female:

> πρὸς ἄνδρα κἀσήμηνεν ἐμφανὲς τέκμαρ
>
> *For man speaks to man boldly, indicating his meaning clearly.* (666-7)

The audience can be in little doubt about the consequence of such a meeting.

In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is often assumed to be dead by those dear to him, an idea which is adopted here by Orestes who brings

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[16]This similiarity with Cassandra is further reflected when he suddenly breaks this silence 900-2.

the news of his own supposed death, although the latter is unwittingly welcomed into his own palace by Clytemnestra in contrast with the suitors' treatment of the disguised Odysseus. The queen declares that she will share this important matter with Aegisthus - κοινώσομεν "*we shall share*" (673, 716) - and the audience may detect here an unconscious allusion to the murderous fate they will meet together. Thus as the queen leads Orestes and Pylades within the palace, having declared that she intends to consult with Aegisthus on this matter, the audience may suspect that he is already inside, and will possibly receive the messengers while seated on his throne. Thus all is prepared for the traditional throne scene and the audience may expect Aegisthus' death cry to follow shortly. As in the previous play, the fact that Aegisthus is in fact absent from the palace and must be summoned from elsewhere may come as a surprise to the audience.

Clytemnestra probably speaks the concluding words (707ff) after Orestes has entered the palace, thus creating a parallel with the king's exit in the *Agamemnon* (972), although here "*the victim takes her sacrificer into the house*" (Taplin p343). No doubt the audience will appreciate the irony of this encounter between Orestes and his mother whom he is destined to kill and may wonder if she will appear on stage again. Aegisthus' subsequent entrance into the house, dismissing any possible threat to himself, also forms a parallel with the return of Agamemnon, who boldly ignored the attempts of the chorus to warn him of danger within. Now it is Aegisthus who is lured into the palace by a deceptive trick and both leave the stage for the last time, completely ignorant of their impending doom. At the parallel point in the *Agamemnon*, after the entrance of the king, the chorus was in great confusion about what was happening within the palace, whereas now they are fully aware of the murder plot and strongly support the executors of it.

After the party disappears within the palace, there will be great suspense about what is happening within and the chorus asks:

πότε δὴ στομάτων
δείξομεν ἰσχὺν ἐπ' 'Ορέστῃ;

How soon may we display the strength of our voices in honour of Orestes? (720-1)

This lyric passage is short and urgent. The word νῦν "*now*" is repeated four times in as many lines (723-6) and the chorus refers to ξιφοδηλήτοισιν ἀγῶσιν "*the contest of the deadly sword*" (729), heightening the expectations of the audience. However no death cry is heard and instead the nurse enters to summon Aegisthus.

We cannot tell what the role of Orestes' nurse had been in the earlier myth but she is shown on several vases depicting scenes from the Oresteia and so would have been a familiar figure to the audience. She featured in the *Oresteia* of Stesichorus:

Κίλισσαν δέ φησι τὴν 'Ορέστου τροφόν, Πίνδαρος δὲ 'Αρσινόην, Στησίχορος Λαοδάμειαν

Aeschylus says that the nurse of Orestes was Cilissa, while Pindar says she was Arsinoe and Stesichorus that she was called Laodomaeia. (*fragment* 88 418 14d)

Prag suggests that Stesichorus' choice of name indicates that his poem was pro-Spartan (p75) but this tells us nothing about the role of the nurse in that version. It is commonly believed that the nurse had rescued the infant Orestes at the time of his father's murder in previous versions, although there is no evidence for this. In the *Odyssey*, eight years elapse before Orestes returns to exact vengeance (*Odyssey* 3.306-7, quoted above) but there is no indication that there is any great interval between the king's death in the *Agamemnon* and the beginning of the *Choephori* and indeed Orestes returns to find Elektra and the chorus still mourning Agamemnon's death. His laying of the lock of hair at the tomb (*Choephori* 6) indicates that he has just

reached adulthood[17] and so it seems that the necessity for the nurse to rescue him at his father's death is om itted from this version. We may only speculate whether the audience will suppose that she played any part in Orestes' former departure from the kingdom, but she herself makes no mention of this and refers only to her care of him as a baby.

Turning to art, on Metope 24 from the first Heraion at Foce del Sele[18] a woman is shown restraining Clytemnestra while on a fragmentary red-figure cup from Vulci[19] and an unattributed fragmentary red-figure cup from the same period[20], a female runs up to the throne together with Orestes, Chrysothemis and Elektra. It is unfortunate that we cannot state with certainty that the figure in either scene is the nurse, but if her assistance of Orestes at the death of Aegisthus were familiar to the audience, her reappearance on stage[21] will suggest that she will support him here also and emphasize the imminence of Aegisthus' murder.

Whatever the role of the nurse in previous versions, in the *Choephori* she fulfills serveral important functions in a very short time. She expresses a deep love for Orestes and reveals that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus only pretend to mourn his death (737f, 742f). The audience may wonder whether she will recognise her dear one and be reunited with him, as Eurycleia recognised the disguised Odysseus (*Odyssey* 19.467ff) but in fact, like his father, Orestes is denied a reunion with his faithful servants.

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[17]See Garvie p50.

[18]Dated c570-550, see Prag plate 7a.

[19]Dated 510-500BC, see Prag plate 8.

[20]See Prag plate 9a-b.

[21]Albeit probably unexpected at this late stage of the drama.

The fact that the nurse is sent by Clytemnestra to fetch Aegisthus (734-5), informs the audience that he has been absent from the palace up to this point and reveals that, just as Clytemnestra waited within the palace for Cassandra, so now Orestes awaits Aegisthus before his murderous plans can be put into effect. We have noted how the nurse shares the general hatred of the household towards their rulers and in fact this proves a vital element in their downfall, since it is through this that Clytemnestra's foresight in warning Aegisthus to come to the palace to receive the messengers with an armed body of men (769) is thwarted. The chorus of maidservants urge the nurse to omit Clytemnestra's warning, well aware that Aegisthus should indeed take this precaution:

> μή νυν σὺ ταῦτ' ἄγγελλε δεσπότου στύγει,
> ἀλλ' αὐτὸν ἐλθεῖν,
>
> *Do not now report that message to our hated master, but tell him to come alone.* (770-1)

The nurse's compliance is a direct result of the popular hatred of the rulers and her love of Orestes, ἐλπὶς δόμων "*the hope of the house*" (776). Thus the scene with the nurse serves as a dramatic retardation, just as the Cassandra Scene delayed the death of Agamemnon, and her absence after the murder stresses his isolation from all former supporters.

At last Aegisthus himself enters (839) and remains on stage for a mere sixteen lines. The audience, primed by the nurse, will suspect that his show of grief is feigned and appreciate the irony of him pretending to mourn the death of the person who will in fact kill him. Aegisthus correctly treats the news of Orestes' death with some sceptism (843-47)[22] but arrogantly assumes that he

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[22]His doubts of it on the grounds that it came from a woman may reflect the chorus' earlier sceptism that Clytemnestra's news that Troy had fallen was true (272ff).

is invincible:

οὔτοι φρέν' ἂν κλέψειεν ὠμματωμένην

(This messenger) will not deceive my mind for my eyes are open. (854)

The chorus urges Aegisthus within ἔσω παρελθών (849) , knowing that Orestes awaits inside and he foolishly enters the house unarmed. The audience will not expect to see him alive again and may suspect that his murder will be carried out swiftly since there is now nothing lacking to the throne scene. The chorus adds to these expectations.

τοιάνδε πάλην μόνος ὢν ἔφεδρος
δισσοῖς μέλλει θεῖος Ὀρέστης
ἅψειν

Being the sole challenger against two, godlike Orestes is about to wrestle for such a a stake. (866-8)

The single death cry of Aegisthus rings out some thirteen lines after his entrance (869) and the chorus demands πῶς κέκρανται δόμοις; "*how have things been decided for the house?*" (871). The audience too will await confirmation of their suspicions that Orestes has successfully killed Aegisthus and at last the servant announces:

Αἴγισθος οὐκέτ' ἔστιν

Aegisthus is no more. (877)

We do not know whether Aegisthus died on his throne but later Orestes declares that he will kill his mother not on stage but πρὸς αὐτὸν τόνδε "*near this man*" (904). Thus it is possible that in the original production the empty thrones were presented on the ekkyklema with the corpses beneath - a visible reminder of the fact that the rulership of the kingdom is now vacant. Orestes

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[23]See also 851-4.

comments:

> σεμνοὶ μὲν ἦσαν ἐν θρόνοις τόθ' ἥμενοι
>
> *Then they used to sit majestically on their thrones.* (975)

This may contrast with the present tableau or merely be an oblique hint at the earlier use of this scenario.

So the famous Death of Aegisthus is now accomplished and Orestes has completed the task for which he was renowned since Homeric times. The major features of the myth - that Aegisthus was involved in the murder of Agamemnon and that Orestes subsequently avenged his father - have now been presented and the backbone of events has remained constant, at least as far as Aegisthus is concerned. His death filled Orestes' thoughts as his most immediate and pressing confrontation and only the audience, with their superior knowledge will suppose that Orestes' assessment of the situation is misguided and that Clytemnestra is the chief sinner who will prove his major challenge. The tyrannicide is unproblematical, unlike the matricide, as Orestes himself knows well:

> Αἰγίσθου γὰρ οὐ λέγω μόρον
> ἔχει γὰρ αἰσχυντῆρος, ὡς νόμος, δίκην
>
> *I say nothing of the death of Aegisthus. He paid the penalty of one who acted shamefully, as is the law.* (989-990)

This suggests that the killing of Clytemnestra will be a far greater problem, as the audience may already suspect, and that it will bring great suffering to Orestes in consequence.

d) Elektra and the Recognition

Elektra appears to have been a very minor character in the pre-Aeschylean myth and so the audience may have expected her to

play a fairly minor role in the *Oresteia*. She does not feature in Homer where Agamemnon's daughters are Chrysothemis, Laodice and Iphianassa (*Iliad* 9.144-5) and Hesiod is the first to describe the offspring of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon as Iphimede and:

Ἠλέκτρην θ' ἣ εἶδος ἐρήριστ' ἀ[θανά]τῃσιν

Elektra who rivalled the goddesses in beauty. (*fragment* 2.16)

Xanthus attempts to identify this girl with one of Agamemnon's daughters in the *Iliad*:

Ξάνθος...λέγει τὴν Ἠλέκτραν τοῦ Ἀγαμέμνονος οὐ τοῦτο ἔχειν τοὔνομα πρῶτον ἀλλὰ Λαοδίκην...ἄλεκτρον οὖσαν καὶ καταγηρῶσαν παρθένον Ἀργεῖοι Ἠλέκτραν ἐκάλεσαν διὰ τὸ ἀμοιρεῖν ἀνδρὸς καὶ μὴ πεπειρᾶσθαι λέκτρου

Xanthus says that Elektra, daughter of Agamemnon, had not that name previously, but was called Laodice...who being unwed and growing old as a maiden, the Argives called Elektra because of her lack of a man and her inexperience in bed. (*fragment* 405 LGS)

Thus it may be that the story of Elektra, the unmarried one, had evolved independently of the story of Agamemnon and that she became his daughter at some stage so that her purity might highlight her mother's profligacy. Part of her function in the *Choephori* is certainly to provide a strong contrast to Clytemnestra's behaviour in the Agamemnon, and she herself prays that this may be so:

αὐτῇ τέ μοι δὸς σωφρονεστέραν πολὺ
μητρὸς γενέσθαι χεῖρά τ' εὐσεβεστέραν

As for myself, grant that I may be far more prudent than my mother and more innocent of deed. (140-41)

She treats the chorus of handmaidens with great respect and

humility, repeatedly seeking their advice and guidance[24], while her joyful and spontaneous welcoming of Orestes provides a sharp contrast with Clytemnestra's deceitfully ironic reception of Agamemnon in the previous play. At all times she displays the conventional feminine modesty of which the audience would approve, thus providing a foil to the deceitful Clytemnestra with her ἀνδρόβουλον κέαρ "*heart that counsels like a man*" (11) and this may reflect an idea already established in the earlier myth.

Elektra appears on several of the vase paintings depicting the Death of Aegisthus scene, supporting and encouraging Orestes in his act of vengeance. Her name appears for the first time on a red-figure stamnos by the Copenhagen Painter[25] and is included on all six of the later extant examples of the scene. We find an unnamed female, encouraging Orestes to kill Aegisthus on his throne on two fragmentary and unattributed vases dating from 510-500[26] who may be Elektra, although on a similar near-contemporary vase[27], this figure is named as Chrysothemis, Agamemnon's daughter at *Iliad* 9 144-5[28]. There was also a recognition scene in the *Oresteia* of Stesichorus and so the idea that Orestes could be supported by his sister at the murder would have been familiar to the audience, and it may be that this role was transferred from Chrysothemis to Elektra when she came to be identified as Agamemnon's daughter. Thus although there is no reference to any daughter of the house during the *Agamemnon* and the audience may have been uncertain whether this character would

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[24]At for example 87ff.

[25]Dated c475-70, see Prag p19-20 and plate 12a-b.

[26]See Prag p137f and plates 8 and 9 a-b.

[27]A red-figure pelike by the Berlin painter from Caere - Prag p15-16 and plate 9c-d.

[28]See above.

appear at all, when Orestes identifies her as his sister (16-18), the audience will expect her to support his vengeance and possibly assist at the murder-scene in person.

As Elektra discourses with the chorus at the beginning of the *Choephori*, ignorant that Orestes is close by, she reveals that she has little conception of the coming revenge which must by now be consuming the minds of the audience. She is slow to grasp the meaning of the chorus when they urge her to pray for an avenger ὅστις ἀνταποκτενεῖ "*one who will kill in return*" (121) and changes this into a passive request:

> καὶ τοὺς κτανόντας ἀντικατθανεῖν δίκῃ
>
> *And may those who murdered die in return with justice.* (144)

This scene presents an interesting inversion of the situation in the Cassandra Scene for whereas there the chorus of Argive elders could not grasp Cassandra's message, here it is the chorus of handmaidens who share the audience's awareness of the imminent future and it is Elektra who appears obtuse. She refers to her mother on one occasion as ἡ κτανοῦσ᾽...ἐμή γε μήτηρ "*murderess*" (189) but this declaration is unconnected with any of the prayers for vengeance and she appears to have no preconceived ideas of murder. Thus this illustrates a further contrast between mother and daughter, for whereas Clytemnestra was deeply involved in plans for murder during the early part of the *Agamemnon*, here Elektra's thoughts are far removed from such matters. This displays the proper feminine role and also suggests that the murder must be undertaken at the divine command of Apollo if it is to prove justified.

Orestes' laying of the lock of hair at the tomb followed by his concealment at the entrance of his sister will prepare the audience for the recognition scene which was already an established feature of the story. The reunion of brother and

sister at their father's tomb features on several vase paintings[29] and we have at least three undisputed examples of this scene dating from between 480 and 460BC[30]. This element also featured in Stesichorus:

> τὸν ἀναγ[νωρισ-
> μὸ]ν διὰ τοῦ βοστρύχο[υ·
> Στ]ησιχόρῳ γάρ ἐστιν
>
> *(Aeschylus borrowed) the recognition by means of a lock of hair. For it is in Stesichorus.* (*PMG* 217)

It is unfortunate that we have no further details about how the recognition was presented in that version, nor whether it was merely included for dramatic effect to emphasize Orestes' homecoming or whether Elektra/Chrysothemis proceeded to play an important role in the drama. It seems that Aeschylus' use of the lock of hair was not original but we do not know whether the ideas of the footprints and the woven cloth were also inherited or introduced here for the first time. In fact, as often in our study, it is most unfortunate that we cannot assess how far Aeschylus exploits a scene already familiar to his audience and what constitutes his own contribution to his inherited material.

The recognition of one who has been absent is a common poetic convention used to emphasize the fact of the newcomer's return. As preparation for a recognition, it is usual for the ignorant party to express longing for the return of their dear one[31] and the audience will watch the chorus and Elektra indulge their grief for Orestes, naming him repeatedly (115, 131, 136 and 138), without realizing his close proximity. A similar kind of irony is

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[29]See Prag plates 33b-34b, on two of these Pylades and another man are present.

[30]See Prag plates 33b, 34a, 35a.

[31]See Murnaghan p51.

exploited later in the play when the audience witnesses the nurse grieving at the false news of Orestes' death when it is he himself who has brought this message.

Recognition also plays an important role in the homecoming of the Homeric Odysseus and the audience may detect certain parallels between the two situations. Orestes returns to his palace after a long absence to find that his position as ruler has been usurped, just as Odysseus discovered the suitors revelling in his home. Both assume a false identity to gain entrance to their palace and then exact a bloody vengeance with the support of only a few insiders. Odysseus must kill the suitors, just as Orestes slays Aegisthus, and both sets of victims are taken offguard, without ever recognising their assailant. In addition, just as there are hints at the end of the *Odyssey* that there are further wanderings in store for Odysseus, the audience of the *Oresteia* may foresee continuing hardship awaiting Orestes, arising from his matricide. Murnaghan notes that the homecoming of Odysseus is "*only possible with the aid of certain human accomplices, whose help is secured in a series of private scenes of recognition*" (p20). Similarly, the disguised Orestes confirms the loyalty of Elektra and the chorus before revealing his true identity. This contrasts with the homecoming of Agamemnon, whose return was heralded by the beacons and was a matter of public knowledge. Thus these Homeric ideas may condition the expectations of the audience as well as the presentation of this particular recognition in earlier versions of the Orestes story.

Once Orestes and Elektra are reunited, there follows the kommos which no doubt was a deeply impressive piece of theatre, accompanied by an elaborate choreography. Brother, sister and chorus are united in a joint desire for revenge and Agamemnon himself is addressed repeatedly[32]. In the *Persae* of 472BC the

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[32]See for example κλῦθί νυν, ὦ πάτερ "*hear now, father* (332), ἆρ' ἐξεγείρῃ τοῖσδ' ὀνείδεσιν, πάτερ "*are you raised up by these*

invoked ghost of king Darius actually appeared on stage, although this may be attributed mainly to the oriental setting[33]. Nevertheless there will be a strong impression in the theatre that Agamemnon hears their pleas and supports the revenge, and this idea may have been enhanced further if there had been a cult of Agamemnon in Mycenae and Sparta since the eighth century[34]. In addition to the audience's religious knowledge, the image of Agamemnon's ghost in Hades, venting his hatred of Clytemnestra and full of interest about his son[35] was already familiar to the audience and the support of Orestes by his father will suggest that his deed of vengeance is essentially justified.

As in the *Odyssey*, further secrecy is required following the recognition of an accomplice and Orestes tells his sister how she can help him::

> νῦν οὖν σὺ μὲν φύλασσε τἀν οἴκῳ καλῶς,
> ὅπως ἂν ἀρτίκολλα συμβαίνῃ τάδε
>
> *Now you keep good watch within the house so that all will happen exactly as planned.* (579–80)

Likewise Odysseus bade Telemachus to go within the palace and support his homecoming[36] and so the audience may note a parallel with Elektra here.

Thus Elektra remains on stage throughout the first half of

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rebukes?", 495 ἆρ' ὀρθὸν αἴρεις φίλτατον τὸ σὸν κάρα; "*Do you not raise your dearest head?*" (496).

[33]We discussed this earlier in Chapter Two.

[34]See Burkert p203.

[35]See *Odyssey* 11.385-464, 24.19-32.

[36]See *Odyssey* 16.270ff.

the *Choephori* and her presence at the throne scene on vases, her identification with Telemachus as assistant in the house, and her support of Orestes during the kommos will all create the impression that she will remain an important figure in the drama and assist Orestes at the murder. In addition a pattern of male/female partnerships appears to be emerging - Agamemnon and Cassandra, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra - which may also prepare the audience to expect Orestes and Elektra to act together[37]. Thus it may come as a great surprise when Elektra disappears from the action entirely upon entering the house and there is no suggestion that she attended the murder scene at all. Taplin comments "*this uncompromising abandonment of a named character is remarkable...she has played her part and so is dispensed with*" (p340). Having made a considerable contribution to the drama, neither Elektra nor the nurse reappears to support Orestes once his vengeance is completed and he is left to face the consequences alone, isolated from all family and friends.

e) The matricide

We have seen how the death of Aegisthus in atonement for his evil deeds was considered the central event of the myth before Aeschylus while Clytemnestra's fate is largely ignored in extant sources. Homer alludes to it only once:

> κατὰ δ' ἔκτανε πατροφονῆα,
> Αἴγισθον δολόμητιν, ὅ οἱ πατέρα κλυτὸν ἔκτα.
> ἦ τοι ὁ τὸν κτείνας δαίνυ τάφον Ἀργείοισι
> μητρός τε στυγερῆς καὶ ἀνάλκιδος Αἰγίσθοιο
>
> *Orestes killed his father's murderer, treacherous Aegisthus, who had slain his glorious father and, having killed him, he ordered a grave feast among the Argives for his hateful mother and the cowardly Aegisthus.* (*Odyssey* 3.307-10)

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[37]Note the use of the dual, ἔχοντε 254 and νῷν at 234, to emphasize their partnership.

This suggests that the evil pair died together but offers no details about the circumstances of Clytemnestra's death. It has been suggested that the queen took her own life at the overthrow of Aegisthus in earlier versions, in which case Clytemnestra's claims to have attempted suicide through grief at Agamemnon's absence in the *Oresteia* (875ff) may convey an unconsciously ironical reference to this. On the other hand, Clytemnestra's murder may not have been regarded as of any special significance to the story and the fact that it constituted matricide may simply have been ignored. There is certainly no direct reference to Orestes' matricide nor of his subsequent pursuit by the Erinyes in any of the Homeric passages, and so it may be that these were later additions to the myth and that the tale of the matricide was added to the older story of Orestes' killing of Aegisthus as the tale developed and expanded into fresh territory.

The attack by the Erinyes, and therefore presumably the matricide, featured in Stesichorus[38] and so these ideas would have been familiar to the audience. However there is no surviving artistic representation of the matricide in Archaic or Classical art, in contrast to the abundance of the scene depicting the death of Aegisthus[39] which suggests that this theme constitutes a relatively new stage in the myth's development. Thus it is most unfortunate that we cannot assess how far Aeschylus showed influence of other recent versions in his treatment of the matricide and what constituted his own original contribution to the story. Although far from certain, it may be that Aeschylus was the first to make Clytemnestra the sole murderess of Agamemnon and to make her death the focus of the revenge.

Initially Orestes avoids all direct mention of the matricide

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[38]We shall discuss this fragment in the following section.

[39]See above.

and refers to the revenge only in general terms.

> ὦ Ζεῦ, δός με τείσασθαι μόρον
> πατρός, γενοῦ δὲ σύμμαχος θέλων ἐμοί
>
> *Oh Zeus, grant that I may avenge the death of my father, be a willing ally to me.* (18–19)

His victims are θῆραν πατρῴαν "*a father's quarry* (251) while Apollo has sent him here κίνδυνον περᾶν "*to undertake danger*" (270) and to kill τοὺς αἰτίους "*the guilty*" (273). He concentrates all his efforts on planning the death of Aegisthus and makes no intimation that he is aware that Agamemnon's murder was in fact perp etrated by Clytemnestra alone[40]. The audience may wonder if, when and how he will learn of this and how this information might affect his plans for vengeance. Between 5 and 40 lines of the prologue are missing and Griffith suggests that Frogs 1141-3 contains a direct quotation from this missing passage - βιαίως ἐκ γυναικείας χερὸς δόλοις λαθραίοις "*by this hand of a woman by force with stealthy cunning*". An early reference to his mother's part in the murder would certainly prepare the audience for the matricide but this is far from certain and the decision to kill Clytemnestra appears to be made later[41]. Even if there were a reference to Clytemnestra's guilt here, this is soon overshadowed by the frequent references to the murder of Aegisthus and all intimations are that this is to be considered of chief importance to Orestes.

On the other hand the audience will be anticipating the matricide from its treatment in earlier versions of the story[42] and also because Cassandra regarded Orestes as μητροκτόνον φίτυμα,

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[40]Although he is aware of the use of the bath and net-robe - see 491-2.

[41]At 435-38, quoted below.

[42]It occurs in Stesichorus and possibly elsewhere.

ποινάτωρ πατρός "*the offspring who slays his mother and avenges his father*" (*Agamemnon* 1281). Clytemnestra's increased role in the murder makes her death inevitable if Agamemnon is to be avenged and the Greek idea of retribution recurs throughout the trilogy, as when the chorus of Handmaidens cries:

> ἀντὶ δὲ πληγῆς φονίας φονίαν
> πληγὴν τινέτω. δράσαντα παθεῖν
>
> *Let murderous blow be the payment for murderous blow. The doer suffers.* (*Choephori* 312-3)[43]

Orestes agrees that Clytemnestra's attempts to appease the spirit of Agamemnon are futile:

> τὰ πάντα γάρ τις ἐκχέας ἀνθ' αἵματος
> ἑνός, μάτην ὁ μόχθος
>
> *For should someone pour away all they own in atonement for one deed of blood, the labour would be all in vain.* (520-1)

Thus Clytemnestra's death is inevitable, and the audience will wonder how this will be presented and how it will relate to the death of Aegisthus. Orestes' avoidance of the subject will not diminish their interest.

Orestes is finally provoked to declare his intention to kill his mother when he learns of her shameful treatment of the corpse of Agamemnon:

> πατρὸς δ' ἀτίμωσιν ἆρα τείσεις
> ἕκατι μὲν δαιμόνων
> ἕκατι δ' ἀμᾶν χερῶν·
> ἔπειτ' ἐγὼ νοσφίσας (σ') ὀλοίμαν
>
> *You will pay for this dishonour to my father by the help of the gods and by the help of my own hands. When I have killed you may I perish!* (435-8)

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[43] Compare Hesiod *fragment* 286.

However immediately after this declaration Orstes at once returns his attention to the immediate task of killing Aegisthus and no detailed plan is laid for the murder of Clytemnestra. The chorus advises Orestes not to falter once he has murdered Aegisthus but to kill Clytemnestra at once:

> ἐπαύσας θροεούσᾳ
> "τέκνον", "ἔργῳ†πατρός"†αὖδα,
> καὶ πέραιν' ἀνεπίμομφον ἄταν
>
> *And as she cries, "my child!", you must say "for the deed against my father", and accomplish a revenge that none can blame.* (828-30)

This is the first actual plan made for Clytemnestra's death but Orestes is not there to hear this advice and in fact Aeschylus chooses to delay the matricide in order to emphasize its importance.

Clytemnestra appears on many vases portraying Orestes' murder of Aegisthus, often being restrained by the nurse or Pylades and frequently wielding an axe against her son[44]. The axe seems to appear concurrently with the spate of Death of Aegisthus vases around 500BC which suggests that the idea that Orestes murdered his mother in self-defence may have been introduced at this time[45]. If Orestes' homecoming in disguise also featured in the earlier myth, it is even conceivable that Clytemnestra attacked her son ignorant of his identity in some versions.

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[44] See Prag p10-34 and plates 6-21.

[45] There is some dispute about the weapon used by Clytemnestra and this is not clear from the text. Davies believes that the snake with a bloody head in Stesichorus suggests that she struck her husband on the head with an axe while Sommerstein suggests that Clytemnestra enters bearing Aegisthus' sword after the murder while he himself enters unarmed.

When Clytemnestra ushered Orestes and Pylades within the house, she declared her intention to take the news straight to Aegisthus:

> ἡμεῖς δὲ ταῦτα τοῖς κρατοῦσι δωμάτων
> κοινώσομέν τε κοὐ σπανίζοντες φίλων
> βουλευσόμεσθα τῆσδε συμφορᾶς πέρι
>
> *We shall consult the master of the house about these matters and, not lacking friends, we shall take counsel about this event.* (716-8)[46]

This repeated declaration that she is going to join Aegisthus - κοινώσομεν (673, 717) - will suggest that Clytemnestra herself will attend the confrontation, as is often shown on vases, and the presence of both Pylades and the nurse in the drama may prepare the audience for their restraining of this violent woman with her axe. However after Aegisthus is dead it becomes apparent that Clytemnestra was in fact absent from the scene, for Orestes calls for the womens' gates to be unbarred (878-9) and demands ποῦ Κλυταιμήστρα; τί δρᾷ; "*where is Clytemnestra, what is she doing?*" (883). The audience will share his curiosity and wonder whether Clytemnestra's attack with the axe and death will ensue immediately. Instead the queen suddenly appears on stage (884) to find out what the clamour is about, and it becomes apparent that Aeschylus will present the final confrontation between mother and son on stage. In answer to her questions, the servant declares:

> τὸν ζῶντα καίνειν τοὺς τεθνηκότας λέγω
>
> *I say the dead are slaying the living.* (886)

Clytemnestra instantly solves the riddle and declares:

> δόλοις ὀλούμεθ' ὥσπερ οὖν ἐκτείναμεν
> δοίη τις ἀνδροκμῆτα πέλεκυν ὡς τάχος·

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[46]There is some dramatic irony in this line for the word βουλευσόμεσθα may recall the murder-plot and συμφορᾶς is suitably ambiguous - see also 672-3.

εἰδῶμεν εἰ νικῶμεν ἢ νικώμεθα

We shall die by treachery just as we murdererd. Someone bring me a manslaying axe as quickly as possible. We shall see if we are conquerers or conquered! (888-90)

Davies believes that this cry for the axe "*presupposes an earlier successful use of it against her husband*" (p69) but it is more likely to be an allusion to her attack of Orestes in earlier versions when he was forced to kill her in self defence. Thus like Cassandra she is aware of her imminent fate, although she accepts it far less stoically and calls for a weapon. In fact an axe does not appear and Robert comments, "*here we see the independantly creative artist in conflict with poetic legendary tradition*" (Bild und Lied). However this call for the axe illustrates Clytemnestra's wicked nature and hatred of her son, while at the same time highlighting Aeschylus' decision to diverge from the earlier myth. Instead of attacking her son with an axe, Clytemnestra bares her breast and Orestes must kill his defenceless mother deliberately as she pleads for her life.

The baring of the mother's breast[47] would have been deeply striking in the theatre, and instead of attacking Orestes, Clytemnestra cries out:

ἐπίσχες, ὦ παῖ, τόνδε δ' αἴδεσαι, τέκνον,
μαστόν, πρὸς ᾧ σὺ πολλὰ δὴ βρίζων ἅμα
οὔλοισιν ἐξήμελξας εὐτραφὲς γάλα

Cease, my son, show respect for this breast, my child, at which you often sucked the nurturing milk with your gums as you dozed. (896-8)

Clytemnestra's claims will be undermined by the recent scene with the nurse who revealed that it was she who was the true

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[47]Although this could not have been presented realistically on stage since the actors were male!

mother of Orestes:

ὃν ἐξέθρεψα μητρόθεν δεδεγμένη

I reared him, having received him from his mother. (750)

Prag believes that Aeschylus makes the nurse into "*a garralous and ineffective old woman*" (p75), but in fact her revelation that Clytemnestra is not the true mother of Orestes but that she will secretly rejoice at the news of her son's death (737) make a vital contribution to the drama[48]. Margon suggests that Clytemnestra's words of grief at 691-99 contain no hint of falsity and that the nurse's suggestion is misleading, designed merely to reveal her as a possible ally. He complains that if the audience were not to regard Clytemnestra as Orestes' true mother, then "*the pleas she makes for her life would seem hollow and self-serving out of mere desperation*" (p297). This is surely Aeschylus' intention however and the audience will see that Clytemnestra is lying even on the point of death, adopting the role of the caring mother just as earlier she pretended to be the faithful wife.

However Clytemnestra's baring of her breast does cause Orestes to waver and, at this moment of great drama, he appeals to his companion:

Πυλάδη, τί δράσω; μητέρ' αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν;

Pylades, what shall I do? Shall I shrink from killing my mother? (899)[49].

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[48]Elektra also denied that Clytemnestra is a true mother at 190.

[49]At 831-2 the chorus encouraged Orestes to act like Perseus, and Loraux notes how Orestes may turn away from the sight of his mother just as Perseus had to kill his mother the Gorgon with averted eyes. Unfortunately for Clytemnestra, Orestes' eyes fall upon Pylades who encourages him in his task (p90).

At last he describes his action clearly and speaks of Clytemnestra as his mother, as though only now appreciating that the vengeance of Agamemnon's death entails matricide. The audience will also appreciate his dilemma and see that he cannot avenge his father without committing a great sin. Pylades is Orestes' assistant in the *Nostoi* and is often shown on vases, at the tomb of Agamemnon with Orestes and Elektra[50]. He has been silent up to this point and the audience may suppose he will remain a κωφὸν πρόσωπον especially since he is the lesser of a fixed pair of characters[51]. As the audience might anticipate, when he does speak it is to warn Orestes to obey the oracle (900–1) and to recall him to his former resolve to avenge his father:

ἅπαντας ἐχθροὺς τῶν θεῶν ἡγοῦ πλέον

Make all men your enemies rather than the gods. (902)

We have already noted that Pylades' entrance into the palace with Orestes may suggest that he will restrain Clytemnestra from inflicting mortal blows upon her son with her axe[52]. However nothing is said about his presence at the murder and he never reappears as Orestes' companion in the ensuing drama, contributing to the sense of Orestes' isolation.

Clytemnestra makes repeated passionate appeals to her son, (908ff)[53] but these are of course weakened by the earlier contribution of the nurse. At last she accepts that the matricide

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[50]See Prag plates 33b, 34b and 35 a–b.

[51]See Taplin p334.

[52]See for example Prag plate 12c–d.

[53]The word τέκνον appears four times.

is inevitable:

κτενεῖν ἔοικας, ὦ τέκνον, τὴν μητέρα

It seems, my child, you will kill your mother.
(922)

The words "*child*" and "*mother*" are juxtaposed for maximum effect and the horror of Orestes' revenge is now stated clearly. As he leads her within, the audience will not expect to see Clytemnestra alive again and indeed the two corpses are shortly revealed (970), possibly arranged in a similar manner to those of Agamemnon and Cassandra earlier in order to stress the parallelism of their fates.

Orestes is now in control of the palace doors, and Taplin notes several parallels with the entrance of Agamemnon - "*different people, a new generation; but still the same deed, vengeance taken on kindred*" (p357). He notes that again a man and woman dispute over entering the palace, in both cases the victor having the final comment. On the other hand, while Clytemnestra acted from her own selfish desire and glories in her wicked deed, Orestes acts involuntarily and fearful of the consequences, conpelled to murder by the command of Apollo and his fear of the nether gods[54]. Thus while this may be the first occasion when Orestes kills his mother deliberately and not in self defence, there are strong indications that he will be finally absolved from guilt for his murderous action, even if the purification will prove a difficult process.

Thus Aeschylus makes the matricide the climax of Orestes' revenge, not the death of Aegisthus as in the tradition, and the

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[54]After the murder both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus claim to be divinely-appointed avengers (1500ff and 1577ff respectively). There is no evidence that their actions enjoyed divine support here, although this may have been the case in other, earlier forms of the story.

audience will suspect that he must answer for this in the following play, even though they will expect a pattern of justice to emerge by the end of the trilogy. Let us now turn our attention to the problems raised by Orestes' vengeance as Aeschylus now becomes less concerned with the mythical world of Argos and the scene moves to a more contemporary location in Athens for the third play of the trilogy.

Chapter Eight

The Erinyes in the *Oresteia*

A) Introduction

The third play of the trilogy presents the consequences of Orestes' vengeance and his atonement for the murder of his mother. There is no hint in the Homeric summary that Orestes suffered in any sense for his act of vengeance:

> ἦ οὐκ ἀίεις οἷον κλέος ἔλλαβε δῖος Ὀρέστης
> πάντας ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους, ἐπεὶ ἔκτανε πατροφονῆα,
> Αἴγισθον δολόμητιν, ὅ οἱ πατέρα κλυτὸν ἔκτα;
>
> *Have you not heard what glory noble Orestes won among all mankind for killing his father's murderer, wily Aegisthus who killed his glorious father?* (*Odyssey* 1.298-9)[1]

However the fact that the consequences of the matricide featured in the *Oresteia* of Stesichorus[2], suggests that the theme of Orestes' purification was coming to prominence in more recent treatments of the myth of Agamemnon, as the myth developed and expanded into new territory. Nevertheless there may have been considerable variation in the treatment of this new theme of Orestes' absolution from guilt in these later versions and these elements probably remained in a highly fluid state by the time of the *Oresteia*. Thus it seems likely that the role of audience foreknowledge would have been considerably lessened as the drama progressed away from the older, more established part of the myth and much of the third play may constitute Aeschylus' own contribution to the legend. Let us consider the presentation of Orestes' vindication in this final play of the trilogy.

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[1] See also *Odyssey* 1.30, 3.196-205 and 3.306.

[2] See *PMG* 217, scholion to Euripides' *Orestes* 268, quoted below.

a) Orestes and Apollo

At the beginning of the third play, the Pythia declares that all hope of banishing the Erinyes now rests with Apollo (60-63). The audience may have been expecting this god to support Orestes here, as in the *Oresteia* of Stesichorus:

> Στ]ησιχόρῳ γάρ ἐστιν [
> ..]., Ε[ὐ]ριπίδης δὲ τὸ τ[όξον
> τὸ Ὀρέστου ὅτι ἐστὶν δε[δο-
> μέ]νον αὐτῷ δῶρον πα[ρὰ
> τ]οῦ Ἀπόλλωνος· παρω
> γ]ὰρ λέγεται· δὸς τόξα μ[οι
> κ]ερουλκά, δῶρα Λοξίου, [οἷς εἶ-
> π'] Ἀπόλλων μ' ἐξαμύ[νασ]θαι
> θ]εάς· παρὰ δὲ Στησιχόρῳ· τό-
> ξα] τάδε δώσω παλά-
> μα]ισιν ἐμαῖσι κεκασμένα
> ..]..[ἐ]πικρατέως βάλλειν·
>
> *For this is in Stesichorus...Euripides that the bow of Orestes was given to him by Apollo as a gift, for he says, "Give to me the bow drawn by horns, the gift of Loxias, with which Apollo told me to ward off the goddesses". This is in Stesichorus - "I shall give the bow, well-fitting my hands...to strike powerfully".* (*PMG* 217)

It is unfortunate that we know nothing further concerning the attack of the Erinyes in that version, but this fragment strongly suggests that some sort of physical conflict had taken place between Orestes and the Erinyes in the earlier myth and this may be reflected later at Euripides' *Orestes* 251ff where the maddened Orestes fights the invisible Erinyes with his bow.

We find no reference to this in our other sources however and the scene showing Orestes and the Erinyes is not found in pre-Aeschylean art[3]. This scene became popular only after the

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[3]Two pre-Aeschylean scenes show a youth defending himself from giant snakes - see Prag p44-51 and plates 28b, 28d and 29a - but

production of the *Oresteia* "*in this episode in the story as in no other*"[4] (Prag p48), overshadowing in popularity the famous Death of Aegisthus scene. Thus the idea that Orestes must fight the snake-monsters may have been a relatively recent addition to the story, possibly even introduced by Stesichorus himself. It is important to note however that the idea that Apollo fought and defeated a giant snake in order to win the Delphic Oracle would have been firmly established in the audience's minds and it may be that the tale of Orestes and the Erinyes had developed from this much older myth[5].The Pythia alludes to this story at the beginning of the play (1ff, although in her version the oracle is surrendered by Themis willingly - οὐδὲ πρὸς βίαν τινός *without violence towards (or from) anyone* (5) - and Apollo himself warns the Erinyes to leave his temple:

> μὴ καὶ λαβοῦσα πτηνὸν ἀργηστὴν ὄφιν
> χρυσηλάτου θώμιγγος ἐξορμώμενον
> ἀνῇς ὑπ' ἄλγους μέλαν' ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ἀφρόν,
> ἐμοῦσα θρόμβους οὓς ἀφείλκυσας φόνου.
>
> *Lest you may receive a winged glistening serpent speeding from the golden string and in pain disgorge the dark foam of men, vomitting the clots of blood that you have sucked.* (181-3)

Thus it is possible that the idea of Apollo's protégé Orestes fighting the snake-Erinyes developed from the older story and indeed the god was believed to overcome the python with the very weapon which he presents to Orestes in order to defend himself against the Erinyes in Stesichorus - ὃς τῇ γ' ἀντιάσειε, φέρεσκέ μιν αἴσιμον ἦμαρ, πρίν γέ οἱ ἰὸν ἐφῆκε ἄναξ ἑκάεργος Ἀπόλλων καρτερόν "*everyone who met (the dragoness) met his fateful doom*

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the identification of Orestes here is far from certain and the figure is more likely to represent Cadmus or Apollo.

[4]See Prag plates 30b, 31b-c and 32a.

[5]It is related in the *Hymn to Apollo* 300-74.

until far-shooting Lord Apollo shot a strong arrow at her" (*Hymn to Apollo* 356-8). Therefore the audience may appreciate that the trial and final appeasement of the Erinyes at the end of the *Oresteia* departs from earlier myths in which the conflict between the Olympian gods and the older, nether powers was settled far less peacefully, reinforcing Aeschylus' message of divine justice.

b) Orestes' Purification

The support of Apollo might have been represented on stage by Orestes' carrying of a bow, but in fact the god himself appears in person and declares οὔτοι προδώσω "*I shall not betray you*" (64). After the murder Orestes cries:

> ἕως δ' ἔτ' ἔμφρων εἰμί, κηρύσσω φίλοις
> κτανεῖν τέ φημι μητέρ' οὐκ ἄνευ δίκης,
> πατροκτόνον μίασμα καὶ θεῶν στύγος.
>
> *While still sane, I proclaim to my friends and say I killed my mother not without justice for she was the polluted killer of my father and a hateful thing to the gods.* (*Choephori* 1026-8)

The chorus of the *Choephori* also regards his matricide as ἀνεπίμομφον ἄταν "*an act of horror none can blame*" (830) and declares Λοξίας δὲ προσθιγὼν ἐλεύθερόν σε τῶνδε πημάτων κτίσει "*the touch of Loxias will set you free from these afflictions*" (1059-60). However the theme of retribution has featured widely in the earlier drama,[6] and the audience's moral and religious beliefs will warn them that Orestes must atone for his murderous deeds in some way. Orestes himself regards the vengeance as a clash between two justices - Ἄρης Ἄρει ξυμβαλεῖ, Δίκᾳ Δίκα "*might shall clash with might, justice with justice* (461)[7] - and, while he considers the murder of Aegisthus as fully justified

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[6]See for example *Choephori* 313 - δράσαντα παθεῖν.

[7]Possibly foreshadowing the trial at the end of the trilogy.

(987-90) he says of his mother:

> ἔκανες ὃν οὐ χρῆν, καὶ τὸ μὴ χρεὼν πάθε
>
> *You killed one you should not and now suffer as you should not.* (930)

It seems likely that the necessity for Orestes to be absolved from guilt had entered the story as the role of Clytemnestra and the matricide came to prominence and it may be that initially he travelled to Delphi and was completely absolved from guilt by Apollo. This is where he flees as an exile for the murder of kindred at the end of the *Choephori* (1035ff) and, at the opening of the third play, the Pythia describes the scene within the temple:

> ὁρῶ δ' ἐπ' ὀμφαλῷ μὲν ἄνδρα θεομυσῆ
> ἕδραν ἔχοντα προστρόπαιον, αἵματι
> στάζοντα χεῖρας, καὶ νεοσπαδὲς ξίφος
> ἔχοντ' ἐλαίας θ' ὑψιγέννητον κλάδον
> λήνει μεγίστῳ σωφρόνως ἐστεμμένον,
> ἀργῆτι μαλλῷ
>
> *I saw on the omphalos a polluted man sitting on the suppliant seat, his hands dripping with blood and holding a freshly-drawn sword and a high-grown branch of olive wreathed carefully with a large amount of wool, a bright fleece.* (40-45)

Thus the image of Orestes as a polluted suppliant at Delphi may have been familiar to the audience and it seems likely that they would know versions in which his absolution there proved successful. The Pythia declares:

> ἔπειτα μάντις εἰς θρόνους καθιζάνω...
> μαντεύομαι γὰρ ὡς ἂν ἡγῆται θεός
>
> *Now I shall take my seat as prophetess...for I shall prophesy as the god dictates.* (29, 33)

Thus the audience may expect Apollo's advice to Orestes to take the form of an oracle, as with the original command to kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, but instead the god himself appears in

person. He informs Orestes that a simple visit to the Delphic oracle will not be sufficient to cleanse him of blood-guilt and that he must continue to Athens (79ff), where μηχανὰς εὑρήσομεν ὥστ' ἐς τὸ πᾶν σε τῶνδ' ἀπαλλάξαι πόνων "*we shall find means to release you from this distress altogether*" (82-3). The audience of the *Oresteia* may have been anticipating neither the appearance of the god nor Orestes' subsequent journey to Athens[8].

The question of whether or not Orestes received any form of purification at Delphi remains ambiguous and has provoked a great deal of debate. Lloyd-Jones, in his commentary (p14) suggested that the blood on Orestes hands as he sits in the temple (42-3, quoted above) is pigs' blood which was used in the ritual of purification for homicide[9] and so he is already cleansed of guilt when the play begins. This is not the case however for Orestes is described as polluted throughout the scene at Delphi (41, 176, 205) and Apollo again calls him προστρόπαιος "*the one seeking purification*" just before the scene changes to Athens at 234. Thus the audience will regard this blood as symbolic of Orestes' guilt, reflecting the common Greek belief that the blood of a victim clings to the hand of a murderer until he is cleansed[10] and it remains upon Orestes' hands in some sense until he reaches Athens (280), enabling the Erinyes to track him there (253, 261ff). However on arriving in Athens, Orestes begs Athene to receive him as a suppliant with the declaration:

> οὐ προστρόπαιον οὐδ' ἀφοίβαντον χέρα,
> ἀλλ' ἀμβλὺν ἤδη προστετριμμένον τε πρὸς
> ἄλλοισιν οἴκοις καὶ πορεύμασιν βροτῶν
>
> *not requesting purification nor with unclean hands,*
> *but (my guilt) is already blunted and rubbed away in*

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[8]See below.

[9]See Parker Appendix 6 p370-74.

[10]See Parker chapter 4 p104ff.

other dwellings and by journeys with men. (237-9)

and shortly afterwards declares:

> βρίζει γὰρ αἷμα καὶ μαραίνεται χερός,
> μητροκτόνον μίασμα δ' ἔκπλυτον πέλει·
> ποταίνιον γὰρ ὂν πρὸς ἑστίᾳ θεοῦ
> Φοίβου καθαρμοῖς ἠλάθη χοιροκτόνοις.
>
> *The blood on my hands is slumbering and fading, the pollution of the matricide has been washed away. For while still fresh, it was driven out at the hearth of the god Phoebus with purges of slain swine.* (280-3)

On meeting the goddess he declares:

> οὐκ εἰμὶ προστρόπαιος, οὐδ' ἔχων μύσος
> πρὸς χειρὶ τῇμῇ τὸ σὸν ἐφεζόμην βρέτας
>
> *I am no suppliant in need of purification nor with pollution on my hand did I take my seat near your image.* (445-6)

and states that he has received ritual purification at many other houses on his journey (451-2). In addition, before the trial begins, both Athene[11] and Apollo[12] acknowledge that he is now pure. However there was no indication that Orestes was purified by Apollo before leaving Delphi and Hermes was instructed to take him straight to Athens (90)[13], and we have noted that he arrives in Athens with blood still on his hands (246-7). Thus there remains a certain ambiguity over whether or not Orestes received purification from Apollo, probably because Aeschylus wished to

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[11] At 474 - ἱκέτης προσῆλθες καθαρὸς ἀβλαβὴς δόμοις "*you have come to my house as a suppliant pure and harmless*".

[12] At line 578 - φόνου δε τῷδ' ἐγὼ καθάρσιος "*I have cleansed him of murder*".

[13] The god probably did not appear on stage, but this may be an allusion to some earlier, possibly non-dramatic version in which Hermes featured as Orestes' escort.

combine the original story of Orestes' visit to Delphi with the tale of his further wanderings to Athens. Aeschylus chose to avoid the question of whether Apollo had refused to purify his suppliant or whether somehow this ritual had failed to release him from the Erinyes, and instead stresses Apollo's support of Orestes and his deep involvement in the process of his vindication in Athens. Thus the poet retains a close connection with the earlier myth in which the purification was probably completed by Apollo himself.

The fact that Orestes is apparently purified by his subsequent wanderings may be linked to the Greek custom whereby a period of exile was imposed upon those guilty of homicide, although Parker points out that this normally followed a trial rather than preceded it as here (p387). Unintentional homicide required an exile of one year[14] and a period of exile may have featured in those versions in which the murder of Clytemnestra was first introduced as an act of self defence. Orestes' exile is ended by the decision of the jury in his favour (755) and, as Parker comments, "*the Erinyes in a sense correspond to the victim's relatives, whose pardon was necessary before an involuntary killer could return from exile*" (p387).

It is unfortunate that we do not know whether Orestes' journey to Athens to receive his final vindication was already an established part of the myth. He spends time as an exile there in the Odyssey (3.305-8) but this occurs prior to the vengeance, as does his exile to Phocis near Delphi in the *Nostoi.* On the other hand, the arrival of the polluted Orestes in Athens may have been an old story and Burkert suggests that this is reflected in the Athenian Day of the Choes, part of the spring festival, the Anthesteria, which dated back to the sixth century. On this day the citizens were not allowed to enter the temples or share a

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[14]See *Inscriptiones Graeci* 1.3 104.11f.

communal meal, but each had their own table and pitcher - "*the clear antithesis of the usual festival meal*" (Burkert p219) - to reflect the way their ancestors had eaten when Orestes arrived in their city, not wishing to refuse him hospitality outright but at the same time unwilling to share a meal in the normal way with a polluted man. Thus it may be that the period of exile was transposed to follow *Orestes'* murderous acts at some stage of the myth's development, although the first occasion when *he* is explicitly connected with this custom is found at Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* 947-60, and so we do not know when the link was established. It is unfortunate too that we know so little about the *Oresteia* of Stesichorus and whether the Erinyes pursued him to Athens in that version or merely harassed him until he could be purified, possibly by Apollo at Delphi or by a period of exile.

Thus there seems to be some variation about when exactly Orestes visited Athens or Delphi and older versions name both of these as his place of banishment while still a child. He suffers a double exile in the *Oresteia* and it may be that his first visit to Athens is postponed until after the murder here for the first time. Even if the audience did know of versions in which the polluted Orestes travelled to Athens, the opening of the third play suggests that the drama will be set in Delphi and the audience may be most surprised when the scene suddenly shifts to the immediate vicinity of the theatre in which they are sitting. This change of location requires some unusual staging[15] such as a vacant stage, and a time lapse which shows that Aeschylus is prepared to go to considerable lengths in order to include both Delphi and Athens in the process of purification. Thus it may be that he wished to merge the newer story of a trial on the Areopagus with the older myth of Orestes' purification at Delphi and to extend events into new territory while still retaining the

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[15]See Taplin p377-9.

vital elements of his inherited material, above all the support of Apollo. It is most unfortunate that we do not know to what extent Aeschylus was alluding to earlier versions in these matters but it seems to be a reasonable assumption that much of what happens in Athens is original.

B) The Appearance of the Erinyes

That the Erinyes were involved in avenging murder was an ancient idea and the belief that they embodied the curse of a wronged parent goes back at least as far as Homer[16]. Let us see how Aeschylus may allude to these monsters in the earlier part of the trilogy and how this contributes to the terrible moment of their appearance on stage, which may not have been anticipated by the audience.

a) The Nether Powers

We have seen how an attack on Orestes by the Erinyes of his mother had already featured in Stesichorus and so the audience may be on the alert for references to these monsters during the earlier part of the drama. In fact Cassandra is the first to mention these creatures when she receives a vision of them besieging the palace of Agamemnon:

> και μὴν πεπωκώς γ', ὡς θρασύνεσθαι πλέον,
> βρότειον αἷμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει
> δύσπεμπτος ἔξω, συγγόνων Ἐρινύων

> *And to be sure having drunk deep of human blood, so as to be the more insolent, they remain in the house, hard to expel, a band of kindred Erinyes.* (1188-90)

Later the chorus of the *Choephori* repeats the old belief:

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[16] See *Iliad* 9.454, 571-2, 21.412, *Odyssey* 2.135, 11.280 - the Erinyes introduce themselves to Athene in this play as Ἀραὶ "*Curses*" at 417.

βοᾷ γὰρ λοιγὸς 'Ερινύν
παρὰ τῶν πρότερον φθιμένων ἄτην
ἑτέραν ἐπάγουσαν ἐπ' ἄτῃ

Murder summons up the Erinys of those who perished before, who brings one ruin on top of another. (402-4)

Clytemnestra herself warns Orestes that, by killing her, he may provoke the wrath of her Erinyes:

οὐδὲν σεβίζῃ γενεθλίους ἀράς, τέκνον;...
ὅρα, φύλαξαι μητρὸς ἐγκότους κύνας

Do you not fear a parent's curse, my child?...Take care, beware the angry hounds of your mother! (912, 924)

The audience will suspect that Orestes will indeed be troubled by these monsters of vengeance, although in fact Clytemnestra herself must spur them into action at the beginning of the third play (94ff). Conacher notes that "*the ghost of Clytemnestra...is the only shade to play such an aggressive role in extant Greek tragedy*" (p141) but much material has been lost and we can say little about the conventions of ghostly behaviour on stage[17]. Orestes sums up his dilemma in his reply:

τὰς τοῦ πατρὸς δὲ πῶς φύγω παρεὶς τάδε;

But how do I flee those of my father, if I fail to do this (ie to kill my mother)? (925)

and he referred earlier to the terrible fate threatened by Apollo if he disobeyed the oracle:

ἄλλας τ' ἐφώνει προσβολὰς 'Ερινύων
ἐκ τῶν πατρῴων αἱμάτων τελουμένας

He spoke of other attacks by the Erinyes, arising from my father's blood. (283-4)

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[17] See Hickman.

The future involvement of the Erinyes is further suggested by the recurring theme that the nether spirits take a keen interest in events above. Clytemnestra supposes that Agamemnon's spirit is deeply concerned with the upper world, an idea familiar from *Odyssey* 11.385ff, and she sends offerings to appease him (22ff), while the snake dream is thought to signify that:

> μέμφεσθαι τοὺς γᾶς νέρθεν περιθύμως
> τοῖς κτανοῦσί τ' ἐγκοτεῖν
>
> *Those beneath the earth complain bitterly and are angry with the killers.* (40-1)

The kommos also emphasizes this idea that the nether powers are closely involved in events in the upper world and hear the whole appeal. It is described as θεῶν (τῶν) κατὰ γᾶς ὅδ' ὕμνος "*this hymn to the gods beneath the earth*" (475) and the chorus sings of how Zeus sends avenging harm κάτωθεν "*from below*" (382). Elektra calls upon the Erinyes to help in their revenge - κλῦτε δὲ Γᾶ χθονίων τε τιμαί "*hear, Oh Earth and you honoured Nether Powers*" (399) and Orestes also addresses himself to νερτέρων τυραννίδες "*the rulers of the underworld*" (405), certain that his father supports his act of vengeance (583-4). Pylades meanwhile says nothing during this appeal to the nether gods, and he speaks only to reiterate the Olympian decision, strengthening Orestes' resolve to obey Apollo (900-2)[18]. Thus the theme of the nether powers is prominent in the earlier part of the drama and this will help to prepare the audience for the later participation of the Erinyes.

b) The Snake Theme

Let us now explore Aeschylus' use of the snake theme in the earlier part of the trilogy and consider if and how this prepares

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[18] Cassandra failed to obey this same god and met a cruel fate - see *Agamemnon* 1208.

the audience for the appearance on stage of the snake-haired Erinyes in the third play. Clytemnestra's dream featured in the *Oresteia* of Stesichorus and so would have been a familiar idea to the audience:

> τᾷ δὲ δράκων ἐδόκησε μολεῖν κάρα βεβροτωμένος ἄκρον,
> ἐκ δ' ἄρα τοῦ βασιλεὺς Πλεισθενίδας ἐφάνη
>
> *A snake seemed to come to her, the top of its head stained with gore, from which appeared the Pleisthenid king.* (fragment 219 *PMG*)

Presumably the snake represents Agamemnon, from whom Orestes arises[19]. It is striking that this appears to omit the role of the mother and during the trial Apollo puts forward the argument that the mother is not the true parent of the child[20]. In the *Oresteia*, Orestes himself is the snake-baby born to his mother in the normal manner, which may link him more closely to Agamemnon[21], if the snake was known to symbolize his father in previous versions.

The audience may wonder whether Clytemnestra will experience a similar sort of dream during the *Oresteia* and Aeschylus exploits this by his use of the recurring themes of both dreams and snakes during the earlier drama. At the very beginning of the trilogy the Watchman bewails the fact that he dare not sleep:

> εὐνὴν ὀνείροις οὐκ ἐπισκοπουμένην
> ἐμήν
>
> *No dreams visit* my *bed.* (13-14)

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[19]See Devereux p173ff on Greek conceptions about the birth of snakes. The scholion on Hesiodic fragment 194 states that Pleisthenes is Agamemnon's father so this lineage may have co-existed with, or even predate, the decent from Atreus.

[20]See below.

[21]Whom he never meets on stage.

Later the chorus supposes that Clytemnestra believes that Troy had fallen because of a dream (274), an idea which she dismisses with contempt:

οὐ δόξαν ἂν λάβοιμι βριζούσης φρενός

I would not accept the fancy of a slumbering mind. (275)

However Clytemnestra is deeply disturbed by her subsequent dream of the snake and immediately sends offerings to try and appease Agamemnon. Clytemnestra mentions her dreams once again when she claims to have awoken at the slightest noise in her husband's absence (*Agamemnon* 891-3), and so the audience may have been prepared to hear of her dream of the snake during the *Choephori*[22].

The chorus describes Clytemnestra's dream to Orestes:

Χο. τεκεῖν δράκοντ' ἔδοξεν, ὡς αὐτὴ λέγει.
Ορ. καὶ ποῖ τελευτᾶι καὶ καρανοῦται λόγος;
Χο. ἐν σπαργάνοισι παιδὸς ὁρμίσαι δίκην.
Ορ. τίνος βορᾶς χρῄζοντα, νεογενὲς δάκος;
Χο. αὐτὴ προσέσχε μαστὸν ἐν τὠνείρατι.
Ορ. καὶ πῶς ἄτρωτον οὖθαρ ἦν ὑπὸ στύγους;
Χο. ὥστ' ἐν γάλακτι θρόμβον αἵματος σπάσαι.

Chorus *She seemed to give birth to a snake, so she herself says.*
Orestes *And what is the conclusion and sum of her account?*
Chorus *She wrapped it in swaddling clothes like a baby.*
Orestes *What food did it want, this new-born monster?*
Chorus *In the dream she herself offered her breast.*
Orestes *Surely the teat was wounded by the beast?*
Chorus *So that amongst the milk it sucked a curd of blood.* (529-33)

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[22]The theme of sleep and dreams continues into the third play where Clytemnestra herself appears as a dream image - ὄναρ (116), ἐξ ὀνειράτων' (155) - and the sleeping Erinyes dream of tracking Orestes (131-2).

This will contrast strongly with the Nurse's later description of Orestes as a very normal infant (748ff), and the fact that the snake drew blood from his mother's breast is a clear reference to the coming matricide[23]. On hearing this account, Orestes declares:

ἐκδρακοντωθεὶς δ' ἐγὼ
κτείνω νιν, ὡς τοὔνειρον ἐννέπει τόδε

Becoming a snake, I shall kill her, as this dream foretells. (549-50)

and later does indeed draw blood from his mother's breast, even though she bares it in supplication, just as she offered it to the snake in her dream - προσέσχε μαστὸν (530).

Later, at the moment of death, Clytemnestra too appreciates the full meaning of her dream:

οἲ 'γώ, τεκοῦσα τόνδ' ὄφιν ἐθρεψάμην

Alas is me, I nourished a serpent when I bore this son. (928)

In the *Agamemnon* Clytemnestra was described as an Amphisbaena, a two-headed serpent (1233) and later in the trilogy Orestes speaks of his father as:

θανόντος ἐν πλεκταῖσι καὶ σπειράμασιν
δεινῆς ἐχίδνης

(The one) who died in the coils and meshes of a dread viper. (*Choephori* 248-9)

After the vengeance is completed Clytemnestra is twice more described as a snake (994 and 1047),

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[23] See Devereux for a psycho-analytical interpretation of the dream p182ff.

Naturally this snake imagery in the earlier part of the trilogy will serve to remind the audience of the role of the Erinyes in this myth since they were originally conceived as spirits of the dead who could appear at tombs in the form of a snake[24]. Thus this emphasis on the traditional form of Erinyes as snakes may suggest to the audience that they cannot appear on stage and so will add greatly to the impact of their entrance.

c) The Entrance of the Erinyes

The *Life of Aeschylus* relates:

> τινὲς δέ φασιν ἐν τῇ ἐπιδείξει τῶν Εὐμενίδων σποράδην εἰσαγαγόντα τὸν χορὸν τοσοῦτον ἐκπλῆξαι τὸν δῆμον ὡς τὰ μὲν νήπια ἐκψῦξαι, τὰ δὲ ἔμβρυα ἐξαμβλωθῆναι
>
> *Some say that at the performance of the* Eumenides, *by bringing on the chorus one by one, Aeschylus so terrified the audience that children fainted and fetuses were aborted.* (Vita Aeschyli 9 Pollux 194 4.110)

Naturally we cannot rely upon the veracity of this anecdote but one may suppose that it has its basis in truth and that the appearance of the chorus of Erinyes provoked an immense and violent response among the audience of the *Oresteia*. The extent of this reaction may have become exaggerated with the passage of time but Calder refers to a similar reception of the German premiere of Shakespeare's *Othello* in Hamburg 1776 and it may have been customary for the Greek audience to express their emotional reaction with great freedom in the theatre.

We saw in the previous section how the theme of snakes may remind the audience of the future involvement of the Erinyes in the fate of Orestes. Prag notes how before the Oresteia the spirit of a dead person seems to be denoted in art by a large

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[24] This was a popular decoration for tombs - see Prag plate 33b-c and Harrison p214.

snake or snakes, and only after the Oresteia do they appear as women with snakes in their hands or hair, often with wings (p48). Pausanias comments:

> πρῶτος δέ σφισιν Αἰσχύλος δράκοντας ἐποίησεν ὁμοῦ ταῖς ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ θριξὶν εἶναι
>
> *Aeschylus was the first to depict them as having snakes amongst the hair on their head.* (1.28.6)

If indeed the Erinyes had always been conceived in snake-form prior to the *Oresteia*, the audience will have no inkling that they will appear on stage in the form of women with snakes in their hair, and even though Cassandra saw a chorus of Erinyes at the house (χορός *Agamemnon* 1186), they may not have expected them to form the chorus of the third play. The poet skillfully delays revealing these terrible women to view in order to enhance the impact of their final entrance and this may indeed have been their first appearance in a dramatic presentation. Let us see how the revelation of the Erinyes is delayed for dramatic effect.

We do not know whether the idea that Orestes was maddened by the Erinyes was traditional or not but it features in the later play by Euripides[25] and the chorus of the third play sings of its power to do this (329f). Thus the audience may not be surprised when Orestes appears to be driven mad at the sight of Erinyes which are visible only to himself (*Choephori* 1048ff). He describes them clearly:

> +δμοιαὶ+ γυναῖκες αἵδε Γοργόνων δίκην
> φαιοχίτωνες καὶ πεπλεκτανημέναι
> πυκνοῖς δράκουσιν...
> σαφῶς γὰρ αἵδε μητρὸς ἔγκοτοι κύνες...
> αἵδε πληθύουσι δή,
> κἀξ ὀμμάτων στάζουσιν αἷμα δυσφιλές
>
> *Here are +slave women+, like Gorgons, dark-robed and entwined with swarming snakes...clearly these are*

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[25] *Orestes* 251ff.

the angry hounds of my mother...they are growing in number and from their eyes they drip hateful blood.
(1048, 1054, 1057-8)

He tells the chorus ὑμεῖς μὲν οὐχ ὁρᾶτε τάσδ', ἐγὼ δ' ὁρῶ "*you do not see these but I do*" (1061) and the audience may suppose that they will appear only in Orestes' imagination, as in the case of Cassandra (at *Agamemnon* 1186ff). However at the start of the third play the Pythia crawls from the temple on all fours, overcome by the abominable sight of the monsters within. She too declares they are a little like gorgons or harpies (47-51) but:

ἄπτεροί γε μὴν ἰδεῖν
αὗται, μέλαιναι δ', ἐς τὸ πᾶν βδελύκτροποι,
ῥέγκουσι δ' οὐ πλατοῖσι φυσιάμασιν,
ἐκ δ' ὀμμάτων λείβουσι δυσφιλῆ λίβα...

These appear wingless, black, altogether horrible in their ways and they snore out blasts that none can approach, while from their eyes they drip hateful drops.
(51-4)

Thus the Erinyes are once again clearly described to the audience without being seen, which may lead them to suppose that they will remain within the temple, represented by the skene, throughout the drama[26]. Thus the final entrance of the Erinyes must have been deeply impressive in the theatre, and Goldman comments that it was probably the "*sight of certain features, hitherto associated only with the supernatural, in combination with a more human countenance, (which) aroused the horror and disgust*" (p140). However, much of the dramatic impact of their first appearance must have arisen from the detailed descriptions of these horrible monsters and the devastating effect they have on Orestes and the Pythia. This intense revulsion at the sight of

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[26]Naturally they will have no conception that the scene will shortly be transferred to Athens.

the Erinyes[27], no doubt combined with the grotesque and deeply terrifying behaviour of these monsters on stage, surely created far more horror than, say, any attempt to mimic snake-hair in the fifth-century could ever do and, as often, I believe that the physical appearance of the actors was of relatively minor importance in the drama.

d) The Moment of Entry

The Erinyes are not present on stage from the beginning since the Pythia reemerges from the temple to describe the scene within (34ff) and indeed there is great controversy over the question of precisely when and how these hideous creatures first appear before the audience. They are heard for the first time as they groan in their sleep in answer to the ghost of Clytemnestra (118f), which suggests that they cannot have entered the stage on foot by this point. The scholion M on 64 reads:

> στραφέντα γὰρ μηχανήματα ἔνδηλα ποιεῖ τὰ κατὰ τὸ μαντεῖον ὡς ἔχει· καὶ γίνεται ὄψις τραγική
>
> *For the turning of the device makes visible the things in the sanctuary and it is a fearful sight.*

Many, including Sommerstein, have assumed, with the scholiast, that the tableau of Orestes and the sleeping Erinyes was revealed to the audience at line 64 by means of the ekkyklema and Brown postulates the use of "*a specially enlarged and strengthened ekkyklema*"(p28) in answer to Taplin's comment that the fifth-century device could not hold so many actors at once (p370). Conacher also believes that the sleeping Erinyes were revealed to the audience after the exit of the Pythia at 64 through the opened doors of the temple (p140). However I believe with Taplin that the Pythia's description would be redundant if

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[27] Orestes flees from the stage in terror while the priestess crawls from the temple on all fours.

the interior scene were revealed to the audience a mere four lines later and that a far better dramatic effect is created if the appearance of the Erinyes is delayed for as long as possible. Thus it may be that the Erinyes do not appear on stage until line 140 when full dramatic attention is devoted to them and the audience is no longer distracted by the presence of the Pythia or Orestes and Apollo.

However prior to this, Apollo declares to Orestes:

> καὶ νῦν ἁλούσας τάσδε τὰς μάργους ὁρᾷς
>
> *And now you see that these monsters are overcome.* (67)

and the ghost of Clytemnestra also appears to address the Erinyes face to face - ὅρα δὲ πληγὰς τάσδε καρδίᾳ σέθεν "*see with your heart these wounds*" (103). However Sommerstein suggests that the phrase καρδίᾳ σέθεν is equivalent to "*in your mind's eye*", ie as you sleep, and so it is unnecessary for Clytemnestra to be visible to them at this point. Flickinger suggested that neither the queen nor the Erinyes were visible during the ghost scene but that their voices were heard from behind the skene, which was after all a new device in the early stages of experimentation. Taplin points out that if only the actor's voice were heard, the audience may have been confused about who begins speaking at 94 (p367), but surely the audience will be prepared for the queen to encourage her Erinyes in this manner, possibly from their knowledge of the previous myth or at least from the dramatic context itself. Taplin further notes how it would be unnecessary for Clytemnestra to come out onto the stage in order to address those within the skene (p366), but in fact we know nothing about the conventional entrance of ghosts and this character may have entered via one of the eisodoi or even by some more spectacular means such as a trap-door[28]. Thus Flickinger's theory that not

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[28]See Sommerstein p100f. He suggests that the ghost would wear the

only the Erinyes but also Clytemnestra were heard from off-stage would certainly solve many problems concerning the staging of the ghost scene, and it is unfortunate that there is no evidence to support his idea.

Thus it is possible that both Apollo and Clytemnestra merely gesture towards the skene as they mention the Erinyes and indeed the queen's reference to δεινῆς δρακαίνης μένος "*the dread serpent's power*" (127) may further mislead the audience into supposing that these monsters take a form which cannot be shown on stage, although naturally as time passes the audience will wonder increasingly of whom the chorus will be composed. In addition the idea that the Erinyes were invisible, found at the end of the *Choephori*, could also be being exploited here, and the murmurings of the unseen Erinyes may cause the audience to wonder whether they will play a role in the drama without manifesting themselves on stage. Thus although any decision on this question is highly subjective, I believe that the later entrance of the Erinyes (at 140) will have a greater dramatic impact than if they were revealed at 64 straight after the Pythia's description.

Following the exit of Orestes and Apollo at 139 therefore, the terrible women may reveal themselves one by one[29], creating the impression of a multitude of monsters. At this point, unlike previously, full dramatic attention is on these terrible monsters, while at the same time, as Taplin notes, the confrontation between Orestes and his persecutors is effectively delayed (p369). Much of the Erinyes' hideousness must have arisen from a dramatic choreography as they joined together in a terrifying dance:

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same clothes as previously but with blood stains and tears but this is unnecessarily realistic.

[29]The term σποράδην "*one at a time*" is found in the *Life of Aeschylus* 9.

ἄγε δὴ καὶ χορὸν ἅψωμεν, ἐπεὶ
μοῦσαν στυγερὰν
ἀποφαίνεσθαι δεδόκηκεν,
λέξαι τε λάχη τὰ κατ' ἀνθρώπους
ὡς ἐπινωμᾶι στάσις ἁμή

Come let us join in the dance, since we have decided to display our hateful song and tell of the destiny of mortals, how our company allots it. (307-311)[30]

The theatre would have been filled with noise and movement and elements such as blood-drinking[31] and tracking like hounds (131-2) may have been reflected in their sinister and terrifying movements. Thus the entrance of the Erinyes is presented with great effectiveness and it makes an enormous contribution to the impact of the final play.

C) The Appeasement of the Erinyes

a) The Trial

The third play of the trilogy enters the realm of the supernatural, and the deep involvement of Apollo and Athene in Orestes' vindication may reflect the myth in which the first ever trial for homicide was that of Ares before a jury of Olympian gods - hence Areopagus, the hill of Ares[32]. Although we find no reference to this story before Aeschylus, its divine setting suggests that this is the oldest form of the myth concerning a trial on the Areopagus and so Aeschylus may allude to his audience's knowledge of this story during his presentation of the

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[30]Their dance is referred to again at 370-376.

[31]Mentioned at *Agamemnon* 1188, *Choephori* 66-7 and frequently in this play.

[32]See Euripides' *Elektra* 1258-62 and *Iphigenia in Tauris* 945-6 - he was tried for the murder of Poseidon's son Halirrothius who had raped his daughter.

trial. When Orestes first mentions a trial as a possible solution to his dilemma, he calls upon the sun god Helios:

> ὡς ἂν παρῇ μοι μάρτυς ἐν δίκῃ ποτὲ
> ὡς τόνδ' ἐγὼ μετῆλθον ἐνδίκως φόνον
> τὸν μητρός
>
> *So he will be present as witness to me at a trial one day, how I justly murdered my mother.* (*Choephori* 987-9)

and in the following play Apollo's advice to Orestes is to go to Athens where:

> δίκας δὲ Παλλας τῶνδ' ἐποπτεύσει θεά
>
> *The goddess Pallas Athene will oversee the trial of this case.* (224)

Thus there are strong intimations that the gods will play a prominent role in the third play which may mislead the audience into supposing that Orestes too will be tried before a divine jury. According to Hellanicus[33], the trials of Cephalus for killing his wife Procris and of Daedalus for killing his nephew Talos also predate that of Orestes, and these myths may also have been familiar to the audience if they pre-date the Oresteia. However in the third play, Athene declares that she is now instituting πρώτας δίκας αἵματος χυτοῦ "*the first trial for the shedding of blood*" (682) and claims that the hill of Ares is so called because the Amazons, defeated by Theseus, settled there and made sacrifices to their god of war (685ff). Thus the audience will appreciate that the trial of Orestes is to supplant the older story and Aeschylus may exploit elements from the other myth, or myths, during his presentation of the trial in the third play.

Most of the male Athenian citizens in the audience would sit

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[33] Scholion to Euripides' *Orestes*=*FGH* I.82.

on a jury at some time of their lives and so they would have had a close acquaintance with Aeschylus' references to the contemporary judicial process. For example, the Erinyes binding song - ὕμνον δέσμιον (306) - may be related to the specific kind of curse tablet used in fifth century Athens which was intended to bind the opponent's ability to think and speak clearly in court[34]. Before the trial, it is clear that both sides have a degree of justice on their side and no doubt the audience will have enjoyed the closely reasoned debate:

Ορ. ἀνδροκτονοῦσα πατέρ' ἐμὸν κατέκτανεν.
Χο. τί γάρ; σὺ μὲν ζῇς, ἡ δ' ἐλευθέρα φόνῳ.
Ορ. τί δ' οὐκ ἐκείνην ζῶσαν ἤλαυνες φυγῇ;
Χο. οὐκ ἦν ὅμαιμος φωτὸς ὃν κατέκτανεν.
Ορ. ἐγὼ δὲ μητρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς ἐν αἵματι;
Χο. πῶς γάρ σ' ἔθρεψεν ἐντός, ὦ μιαιφόνε, ζώνης;

Orestes	*She was her husband's murderess and killed my father.*
Chorus	*And what of it? While you live, she is freed from guilt by her death.*
Orestes	*Why did you not drive her into flight when she was alive?*
Chorus	*She was not related by blood to the man she killed.*
Orestes	*And am I of the same blood as my mother?*
Chorus	*How else did she nourish you within her womb, polluted one?* (602-608)

The audience will watch with interest to see how this difficult problem will be solved on the nearby Acropolis by their own democratic process of law. Taplin believes that the text of Athene's inaugural speech is corrupt and that many details have dropped out, such as the calling and registration of witnesses, and the juror's oath (p395ff)[35]. However since Athene is not really laying down a prescription for future trials on the Areopagus, but merely giving a general impression of the practices

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[34]See Faraone p150.

[35]He suggests a lacuna of some forty lines.

which were already familiar to the audience, precise details are unnecessary at this point.

Athene's declaration that she casts her vote in favour of clemency in the event of a tie (734ff) may also allude to the myth in which she herself was a member of the divine jury. Conacher believes that "*to many readers*" (!) the fact that Athene's lack of a mother leads to Orestes' acquittal would seem disappointing after "*so much dramatic energy has been spent in distinguishing Orestes' bloody deeds from those which have preceded them*" (p167). However the audience may not have considered the actual reason for the "vote of clemency" of great importance and this may have varied from myth to myth[36]. Far more important is the idea that the Athenian custom that the equal vote always ends in an acquittal has a divine origin. It seems unlikely that Athene had a double vote, that is, as one of the jurors and then the silent vote in favour of clemency as some believe, since she is stressing the fact that the decision lies with the Athenian people themselves.

It is unfortunate that we do not know whether Aeschylus was the first to associate the idea of a trial on the Areopagus with Orestes. As we noted above, Burkert asserted that the Athenian celebration of the Day of the Choes indicates that the arrival of the polluted Orestes in Athens was a long-established idea (p222), but even if this were true, it does not necessarily follow that he had stood trial there in any previous version and he may have received some other form of purification in that city by which to rid himself of the Erinyes. Nor do we know whether a trial had featured in the *Oresteia* of Stesichorus, although Clytemnestra's dream that Agamemnon in the form of a snake engendered his son without his wife's aid (*fragment* 89 *PMG*) may be alluded to during

[36]In Euripides' *Elektra* (1266-9) for example the equal vote acquits Orestes because the matricide was instigated by Apollo.

the trial when Apollo declares:

> οὐκ ἔστι μήτηρ ἡ κεκλημένη τέκνου
> τοκεύς, τροφὸς δὲ κύματος νεοσπόρου.
> τίκτει δ' ὁ θρῴσκων
>
> *The so-called mother is not the parent of the child, but the nurse of the new-sown embryo. The father gives it birth.* (658-8)

This may have been a familiar argument to the Greek audience[37] and it is possible that the argument that the mother is not the true parent of the child was used by Apollo in Orestes' defence in Stesichorus, although naturally this need not have occurred during the course of a legal trial. Even if this argument released Orestes from the Erinyes' pursuit in that version however, and this is pure speculation, it proves far less effective here, although the equal vote ensures Orestes' acquittal. Thus Orestes is finally vindicated and the audience will witness how the dispute, which may have led to physical conflict in earlier versions, is now ended peacefully with the appeasement of the Erinyes. The trial provides a highly satisfying solution to the problem of the matricide and although as we have seen there may be allusions to the treatment of this theme elsewhere, many elements of this third play may be the creation of the poet himself.

b) The Transformation

On seeing the hideous band of Erinyes, Athene cries:

> θαῦμα δ' ὄμμασιν πάρα·
> τίνες ποτ' ἐστέ;
>
> *Wonder is before my eyes - who* are *you?* (407-8)

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[37] Aristotle in *The Generation of Animals* 4.763b 31-3 ascribes the idea that the man provides the seed and the women merely the receptacle to Anaxagoras.

Harrison comments "*the audience must have waited breathless to hear what answer the Erinyes would make to the question when officially challenged*" (p250). They reply:

ἡμεῖς γάρ ἐσμεν Νυκτὸς αἰανῆ τέκνα
'Αραὶ δ' ἐν οἴκοις γῆς ὕπαι κεκλήμεθα

We are the terrible children of Night and in our home beneath the earth we are called the Curses. (416-7)

However Hesiod describes how the Erinyes were born of Gaia from the blood shed by castrated Ouranos and how they had the power of fertility over the land[38]. Harrison believed that as older Greek beliefs about the nether powers were overlaid by stories of the Olympian gods, the beneficial side of these goddesses was eclipsed and their role as avengers unduly emphasized (p206). Thus when the Erinyes are honoured by the Athenians as goddesses of fertility and given a dwelling-place on the Acropolis at the end of the trilogy, she claims that Aeschylus was merely restoring them to their former status and cheating his audience into believing that they were transformed into something new (p250). However Aeschylus promotes the idea that the Erinyes had been goddesses of both good and bad since ancient times by setting their transformation, not in contemporary Athens, but long ago in the mythical past, and he probably wished to establish an early association between them and the Semnai Theai, goddesses of fertility who were worshipped by the Athenians at a cave near the Areopagus. However the transformed Erinyes are called neither Semnai Theai, nor Eumenides, by Aeschylus and so we cannot be certain that the audience would have regarded them as such[39].

Thus Aeschylus provides a peaceful means of soothing the

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[38]See *Theogony* 183 - 85.

[39]The title "*Eumenides*" may have been added to the play much later - see Verrall p35.

defeated Erinyes by giving them respectable functions and honours and they promise blessings in return (916ff), while at the same time retaining their darker powers as avengers of murder as necessary for a stable society (490f). Athene declares:

> φοινικοβάπτοις ἐνδυτοῖς ἐσθήμασι
> τιμᾶτε, κἆιτα φέγγος ὁρμάσθω πυρός
>
> *Honour them with donned garments dipped in blood-red dye and let the blazing fire move on.* (1028-9)

and all depart in a joyous procession, the chain of murder now broken and the Erinyes appeased[40]. Thus the dreadful chain of murders portrayed in the trilogy is finally ended and all depart amidst a mood of great gladness and rejoicing.

D) Conclusion

Many have detected political allusions in the third play of the trilogy and events are certainly more closely linked to contemporary Athens here than in the earlier part of the drama. The scholion to Euripides' *Orestes* 46 (549 *PMG*) reads Ὅμηρος δὲ ἐν Μυκήναις φησὶ τὰ βασίλεια 'Αγαμέμνονος, Στησίχορος δέ καὶ Σιμωνίδης ἐν Λακεδαίμονι "*Homer says that Agamemnon's palace was in Mycenae, Stesichorus and Simonides say in Sparta*". Thus Aeschylus' decision to set the trilogy in Argos may reflect the recent alliance made with Athens, which marked the end of the traditional link with Sparta[41] and Orestes himself appears to refer to this new alliance:

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[40]This colour would recall the red path crossed by Agamemnon and illustrate that it is no longer the symbol of death but of appeasement and reconciliation, although we do not know that it was actually shown in the theatre - even Taplin doubts this, assuming that Athene is giving a prescription for the future, thus presumably referring to contemporary Athenian practice (p413).

[41]461-460BC, see Thuycidides 1.102.

κτήσεται δ' ἄνευ δορὸς
αὐτόν τε καὶ γῆν καὶ τὸν Ἀργεῖον λεὼν
πιστὸν δικαίως ἐς τὸ πᾶν τε σύμμαχον

(Athene) shall gain without the use of the spear myself and my land and the Argive people in a firm bond of justice and eternal alliance. (289-91)[42]

It is also thought that Athene's claim that she was absent from Athens in the Trojan region when Orestes arrived (397ff) may be designed to justify Athenian claims to territory in that area[43]. However the main political message of the play is thought to lie in Aeschylus' presentation of the court of the Areopagus whose powers had been reduced to jurisdiction over cases of homicide by Ephialtes' recent reforms of 462-1[44]. This seems to be a reasonable assumption, although it remains impossible to establish whether Aeschylus wished to support these reforms or not through his drama. On the one hand the stress on the antiquity and status of the Areopagus as a homicide court, combined with the references to the new reformist alliance with Argos, suggests that the drama was intended to support the recent changes. However on the other hand Athene declares lines which may be interpreted as anti-reformist in nature:

αὐτῶν πολιτῶν μὴ 'πικαινούντων νόμους·
κακαῖς ἐπιρροαῖσι βορβόρῳ θ' ὕδωρ
λαμπρὸν μιαίνων οὔποθ' εὑρήσεις ποτόν

Justice will be preserved as long as the citizens themselves do not try to make new laws. If you pollute clear waters with evil influxes and mud, you will never find water to drink. (693-5)

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[42]He refers to friendship between the two nations again after the trial at 762-74.

[43]See Sommerstein p151f, who gives a good summary of contemporary Athenian politics p25-32.

[44]See Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* 5.2 and 27.1.

Naturally we should not assume that words spoken by a dramatic character express the poet's own sentiments but here if anywhere we might expect Aeschylus to address the Athenians directly through the mouth of their patron goddess. Dodds (p19ff) interprets κακαῖς ἐπιρροαῖσι "*evil influxes*" as the impending measure to open the Archonship and hence membership to the Areopagus to the Zeugitae[45], but this is far from certain and these words would appear to be a condemnation of the recent reforms.

Dodds suggested that Aeschylus wished to promote the view that the recent reforms were acceptable but should go no further, while Sommerstein suggests that he made a clear distinction between foreign and domestic policy (p32). Dover meanwhile regarded the above lines as a defence of the original judicial function of the Areopagus. However it seems more likely that they allude to the recent attempts to make major changes to Athenian law and so it may be that Aeschylus was being deliberately ambiguous on this point, not wishing to promote any particular view of contemporary politics and run the risk of alienating any specific faction of his audience. As Sommerstein comments, "*everybody could agree that crime must be repressed, the country defended, and anarchy and despotism avoided, and likewise that the Areopagus council must be vigilant, upright and incorruptible...all else is ambiguous, and each spectator will understand it in the light of his own preconceptions*" (p218)[46]. Thus it seems likely that Aeschylus did not overtly support either the reformists or the conservatives among his audience and his diplomatic treatment of this theme may be reflected by the fact that the trilogy won first prize and so must have met with general approval.

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[45]Which was actually passed in 458-7 within a year of the *Oresteia*.

[46]See also MacLeod on the view that any political message was secondary, or merely incidental to the drama.

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This concludes our review of the third play of the trilogy and indeed of the *Oresteia* as a whole. The audience have witnessed the murder of Agamemnon, the punishment of the guilty and Orestes' final absolution from guilt for a deed executed at the will of the gods. As the action progresses away from the older, established part of the story, much more of the drama may represent the original contribution of the poet, and the role of audience anticipation arising from their background knowledge of the myth diminishes. Nevertheless a review of the final play of the trilogy from the viewpoint of the audience has proved very rewarding and hopefully has revealed much about the dramatic impression sought by the poet.

Conclusion

This concludes our study of the influence of myth on the fifth-century audience's understanding and appreciation of Aeschylean tragedy and we have seen how foreknowledge and anticipation played a vital role in the impact of the original performances. In Chapter One we noted how the audience of the *Persae*, our earliest surviving tragedy, would have been aware of the Persian defeat at Salamis from the very beginning of the play and will witness how the revelation of this brings great distress to those on stage, knowing that they themselves had participated in this event in reality.

The dramatic effect of the *Seven Against Thebes* is greatly enhanced by the fact that the audience is aware that the brothers are destined to kill each other by the terms of their father's curse and will have been awaiting the realization of this by those on stage. We considered how the audience may have known many tales about the exploits of the various heroes on the battlefield at Cadmeia, before this story became linked to the myth of Oedipus, and how Aeschylus exploits the audience's ignorance about the exact identity of the seven warriors to great dramatic effect, delaying the revelation of the final pairing until towards the end of the drama. Since this is the third play of the trilogy we have some difficulty in establishing not only the audience's conceptions of the pre-Aeschylean myth, but also how certain elements had been depicted on stage in the preceding drama, particularly the curse and dream. Nevertheless they will have been aware that Polynices is among the attackers, even though this fact is entirely suppressed during the earlier part of the drama, and will await an acknowledgement of this by those on stage together with a realization of its implications for the fulfillment of the curse of Oedipus. Eteocles' sudden appreciation of the fact that he is fated to meet his own brother at the seventh gate is presented to great dramatic effect and the audience witnesses his noble acceptance of his appointed fate.

We noted how in the *Supplices* the audience's foreknowledge that the Argives would offer protection to the Danaids will influence their whole perception of the supplication and how their attitude towards these helpless suppliants will be greatly affected by their suspicion that they are destined to murder their husbands on their wedding-night. We also considered the question whether the terrible punishment of the Danaids in Hades, whereby they are condemned for eternity to carry leaking pitchers, may also be foreshadowed during this first play of the trilogy.

Turning to the *Oresteia*, we concentrated more fully on the text itself in order to trace the exploitation of audience anticipation throughout a connected trilogy. In the *Agamemnon* the audience's awareness of both the adultery of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and the murder plot plays a vital role in the dramatic portrayal of the king's homecoming from war and they will have fully appreciated the queen's great powers of deceit and manipulation. We noted how Aeschylus skillfully created the impression that Cassandra will silently enter the house and take no active role in the drama but in fact her visions play a vital role in confirming the audience's suspicions that the murder of the king is imminent. She also offers strong hints that these murders will be executed by Clytemnestra alone, in contrast to the audience's expectations, and this is finally revealed to great effect.

The audience may have expected Orestes' killing of Aegisthus to constitute the climax of the *Choephori*, since this seems to have been the most well-known element of the myth before Aeschylus, but instead this is overshadowed in importance by the murder of Clytemnestra and the matricide becomes the focal point of the drama. The audience may have anticipated the recognition at the tomb between Orestes and his sister from their knowledge of the earlier myth and the failure of Elektra to reappear on stage after the murder serves to highlight Orestes' isolation as he

faces the consequences of his deed. The role of the nurse may also have been anticipated by the audience and this is exploited to great effect here. As the trilogy progresses towards its conclusion, the mythical knowledge of the audience may be severely lessened as Aeschylus strikes out into less familiar territory. However their suspicions that Orestes will be ultimately vindicated for his deed will prove a great influence on the presentation of his purification in the third play of the trilogy and they may have suspected that he would receive divine support from their knowledge of the earlier myth. The appearance of the Erinyes on stage may have been most unexpected and we saw how this was delayed to great dramatic effect. The final appeasement of these monsters and their transformation into more benign deities may have been a new idea, as may the trial, and the audience would have enjoyed the fact that this complex problem is solved at their very own court of the Areopagus which lay close to the theatre.

Thus I hope that our attempt to establish the mythical knowledge of the audience, which would have proved a deep influence on their expectations of the dramatic action during the tragedies, has helped us to gain a clearer idea of Aeschylus' dramatic intentions. A study of this kind can never be exhaustive since our attempts to reconstruct the pre-Aeschylean versions of any particular story are severely handicapped by the amount of ancient Greek literature which has been lost and the often fragmentary state of those sources which do survive. Thus perhaps the value of this study is to emphasize how little we do know about the myths presented to the audience in dramatic form, but it is to be hoped that we have come a little closer to a true and fair appreciation of the tragedies of Aeschylus by seeking to establish the effects sought by the poet in his original production.

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