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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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THE OMEN OF THE EAGLES:
MOTIVATION, CIRCUMSTANCES, AND
IMPLICATIONS OF THE SACRIFICE
OF IPHIGENIA IN
THE AGAMEMNON
OF AESCHYLUS

by Guy Parent

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CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

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INTRODUCTION

This study had its beginning in a feeling of uneasiness with the interpretation of a well-known scholar of certain parts of the Agamemnon. Further examination of the text and of critical literature produced a strong suspicion that a really fruitful examination of the omen of the eagles could most reliably be expected to come from the application of surviving knowledge of Fifth-Century Athenian religion. The difficulties, of course, are many.

The language of Aeschylus, especially in the choral odes, is splendid and exceedingly expressive, but often obscure. There are a number of words, especially compounds, which do not recur in surviving Greek works. The author's vocabulary is large, and he often uses words for special effect in strained and puzzling ways. In this splendor and expressive complexity, among surviving authors he resembles only Pindar, being with him the last surviving poet of the great Doric school of Stesichorus. In temperament and aim the two poets are different enough, but they have alike suffered from scholarly mistreatment, Pindar accused of dealing in galimatias, Aeschylus, his verses ignored, made to espouse "advanced" or "evolved" religious and philosophical views.

Both were men who remembered the Persian War. Both survived to live among younger men who wrote poetry very different from what they had learned to write. And both, regarded as "difficult" within 30 years of their death, enjoyed a great succès d'estime within their lifetimes.

These poets were certainly not as difficult, as dark for their contemporaries as they are for us. The men of their age knew the language better than even the finest of modern scholars, and most important, they had the advantage of knowing a great mass of poetry which has since been lost. We have but small fractions of the total work of Pindar and Aeschylus, Bacchylides has survived, badly mutilated, by a mere chance, and Alcman, Terpander, Stesichorus, Simonides, and others have survived only as handfuls of fragments. These latter poets formed a sort of poetic background of language and thought. Our interpretations of Fifth-Century poetry would certainly be different if more of it, and of the poetry of the two preceding centuries had survived.

The attention of modern critics has made us aware that the Oresteia is a work of great verbal, emotional and intellectual complication: Words, situations, and ideas echo each other in various places within each play, and among the three plays. (If the satyr-play had survived,

we would perhaps see some of these echoes repeated in it, and put to comic effect.) This poses a problem. Whoever undertakes the interpretation of a single passage of the Oresteia is usually led almost irresistably on to consider a number of others. If the study undertaken is to remain a limited exegesis of a single part of the work, then at some point the investigation must be cut off, almost arbitrarily.

At every step in the production of this study, the awareness of the interconnection of the parts has imposed an unrelenting difficulty, providing all the while a most stimulating challenge.

Chapter I

The Sacrifice of Iphigenia

For a Greek tragedy, the Agamemnon is long, and the relation of the sacrifice of Iphigenia does not take up a very great amount of space. At the time of the action, the sacrifice is already years in the past, and the description of the deed is the substance of a mere two strophes, packed full of meaning though they are.

But the sacrifice of the girl is more than merely a horrible memory for the chorus, since in effect it sets into motion the terrible machinery of revenge, which dominates the action of the entire trilogy. The sacrifice is a weighty and undeniable fact, a particle of the past which must and will demand a frightful retribution. For Iphigenia has died by the hand of a close relative, wound about with rich cloth and crying piteously, and so will Agamemnon.

This study will be devoted less to the death of Iphigenia than to the circumstances which lead up to it, and to the significance of her father's consequent murder. However, the account of the sacrifice in Aeschylus contains a number of exceptions to what we know as the received tradition. These exceptions must be studied, or at least pointed out, since they may represent significant elements in the meaning of the poem.

Here we must broach discussion of a constant source of uncertainty in the judgements of modern critics. Our losses in terms of ancient literature have already been pointed out, and we must bear these losses in mind at all stages of our work. Derivations and borrowings which seem clear to us, who are in possession of only a few versions of any given myth, were not perhaps so obvious for a poet of the Fifth Century, who was aware of a score of important treatments. . What is more, our losses of cult and temple traditions, as well as traditions of cities, demes and great families, are greater still. Even when a scholar of later antiquity reports a tradition of this sort, he can rarely locate it accurately in place and time. This latter loss is serious, for it should be clear that traditions of this sort were always available to ancient poets as sources of inspiration. In the light of the poverty of surviving tradition, we must in no wise be quick to assume that an anomaly is but a "poetische Erfindung."

The parodos of the Agamemnon is devoted to the sacrifice of Iphigenia, and to the events which lead to it. First, a strange omen is described, and then a speech of Calchas, prophesying victory, is quoted. However, Calchas warns that Artemis will be angry. In fact, when the fleet is at Aulis, the goddess sends contrary winds.

Calchas announces that the remedy of their ills can only be found in the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Agamemnon reluctantly consents, and then we read the following lines:

λιτὰς δὲ καὶ κληδόνας πατρῶους
παρ' οὐδὲν αἰῶ τε παρθένειον
ἔθεντο φιλόμαχοι βραβῆς.

φράσεν δ' ἄδζοις πατὴρ μετ' εὐχὰν
δίκαν χιμαίρας ὑπερθε βωμοῦ
πέπλοισι περιπετῆ παντὶ θυμῷ
προνωπῆ λαβεῖν ἄέρδην,

στόματόν τε καλλιπρόφρου
φυλακῆ κατασχεῖν
φθόγγον ἀραῖον οἴκοις.

βίᾳ χαλινῶν δ', ἀναυδῶ μῆνει,
κρόκου βαφᾶς (δ') ἐς πέδον χέουσα,
ἔβαλλ' ἕκαστον θυτῆ-

ρων ἀπ' ὄμματος βέλει φιλοῖκτῶ,
πρέπουσα τῶς ἐν γραφαῖς, προσεννέπειν

θέλουσ', ἐπεὶ πολλάκις

πατρὸς κατ' ἀνδρῶνας εὐτραπέζους
ἔμελφεν, ἀγνῆ δ' ἀταύρωτος αὐδῆ πατρὸς
φίλου τριτόσπονδον εὐποτμον
παιῶνα φίλως ἐτίμα.

The chorus then stops, sparing us the very last moment. But what have they not already told us? The pathos of the scene, reinforced as it is by so many strong touches, is very great, and nothing shows more clearly the moral values of the chorus than this violent picture of outrage. This version of the incident is the first surviving one in point of time. Our criticism of its mythological and religious significance must proceed from two points of view, for if the heroine Iphigenia figures in literature, she also has a place in the history of Greek cult. We will explore the literary aspect of the question first.

The earliest known version of the sacrifice of Iphigenia is the account in the Cypria. Now, of course, that poem is lost, but there does survive a late plot-summary of it in the Chrestomathia of Proclus. It reads as follows:

Καὶ τὸ δεύτερον ἠθροισμένου τοῦ στόλου ἐν Αὐλίδι
 Ἀγαμέμνων ἐπὶ θήρας βαλὼν ἔλαφον ὑπερβάλλειν ἔφησε
 καὶ τὴν Ἄρτεμιν. μηνίσασα δὲ ἡ θεὸς ἐπέσχεν αὐτοῦς
 τοῦ πλοῦ χειμῶνας ἐπιπέμπουσα. Κάλχαντος δὲ εἰπόντος
 τὴν τῆς θεοῦ μῆνιν καὶ Ἰφιγένειαν κελεύσαντος θύειν
 τῇ Ἄρτεμιδι, ὡς ἐπὶ γάμον αὐτὴν Ἀχιλλεῖ μετα-
 πεμφάμενοι θύειν ἐπιχειροῦσιν. Ἄρτεμις δὲ αὐτὴν
 ἐξαρπάσασα εἰς Ταύρους μετακομίζει καὶ ἀθάνατον ποιεῖ,
 ἔλαφον δὲ ἀντὶ τῆς κόρης παρίσθησι τῷ βωμῷ.

This is a Greek heroic myth of a fairly ordinary sort, a foolish boast followed by divine punishment, and a miraculous escape of the innocent victim. Of the surviving poetic treatments dating from the Fifth Century, not one follows the Cypria in every detail (assuming the very minimum, that Proclus is quite accurate.) The most notable departure is the fact that in the later versions, the girl herself is sacrificed, and there is no miraculous intervention of the goddess. Even in the Iphigenia Taurica, in which Iphigenia has indeed been saved by the goddess, Orestes is under the impression that she died on the altar at Aulis. (vs. 564). The explanation which Iphigenia herself gives is difficult to visualize- that Artemis substituted a hind for her, but that Agamemnon who performed the sacrifice was not aware of this (vv. 783-787). Of course, if it were the case that this is the account of the Cypria, then one of the elements of difference between the Cyclic poem and the Fifth-Century versions would be eliminated.

We possess some meagre references to treatments of the Iphigenia story in Hesiod and Stesichorus, and Carl Robert, using these fragments and the evidence of certain vase-paintings, evolved a well-received theory of the derivation of the Orestes-myth from a celebrated poem

by Stesichorus, about which we will have more to say in a subsequent chapter.¹

The first Fifth-Century reference which we possess is that of Pindar, in Pythia XI, written in 474.² He limits himself to saying that Iphigenia was butchered upon the banks of the Euripus (i.e. at Aulis, vv. 22-23).

The next surviving treatment in point of time is that of Aeschylus. Iphigenia is sacrificed because Artemis "detests the feast of the eagles," (vs. 138). The virgin goddess sends contrary winds, and the girl is sacrificed in order for the fleet to be able to sail for Troy. It has been suggested that the phrase προτέλεια ναῶν (vs. 227) implies that the sacrifice is intended as a sacrifice of consecration as well as a sacrifice of appeasement.³

The idea has much to recommend it, for the word προτέλεια appears several times in the trilogy, with varying connotation.⁴ The most remarkable fact in the version of Aeschylus is the odd source of the motivation of Artemis. We devote a very considerable amount of space in a subsequent chapter to the explanation of her wrath. For the moment it suffices to point out that by contrast the account in the Cypria is very straightforward.

Of surviving authors, only Aeschylus and Euripides give us a picture of the sacrifice, and what a contrast there is between Aeschylus' Iphigenia, bound and gagged

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and pleading for pity with her eyes, and the heroine of Euripides, quietly addressing her father with encouraging words!

In the Electra of Sophocles, Iphigenia is the subject of an exchange between the protagonist and her mother. The epic version is followed in nearly every significant point; the deer which Agamemnon kills is, in addition, within a grove sacred to Artemis. However, both Electra and Clytemnestra are unaware of any substitution of a hind for the girl (vv. 563-576).

In his two surviving tragedies about Iphigenia, Euripides probes the emotions and motivation of his characters with his acid talent. The goddess demands the sacrifice because Agamemnon had vowed to sacrifice to Artemis the most beautiful thing born in a given year. This turns out to be his daughter. Artemis holds the king to his words, but saves the girl (Iphigenia Taurica, vv. 17-24). And Euripides extends our knowledge of Athenian tradition concerning Iphigenia, because in the Iphigenia Taurica the long speech of Athena contains the following interesting passage:

οὐδ' ἄμφι σεμνάς, Ἰφιγένεια, κλίμακας
Βραυρωνίας δεῖ τῆδε κληδουχεῖν θεῶν:
οὐδ' καὶ τεθάψῃ κατθανοῦσα, καὶ πέπλων

ἄγαλμά σοι θήσουσιν εὐπῆνους ὑφάς,
 ἄς ἂν γυναῖτες ἐν τόκοις ψυχόρραγεῖς
 λίπωσ' ἐν οἴκοις. (vv. 1462-1467).

With this Attic tomb of Iphigenia, we pass to the consideration of Iphigenia in Greek cult.

Wherever Iphigenia appears, she is in the presence of Artemis. Whether the figure of Iphigenia represents an ancient goddess whom Artemis engulfed, or whether the heroine grew out of an epithet of Artemis or out of a ritual connected with the cult of Artemis, is a question often discussed, without issue.⁵ The names themselves tell us but little. The name of Iphigenia is a simple compound, formed from two roots which remained current in classical Greek, and is either adjectival or substantive in form. As is common with Indo-European compound words, the sense of the verbal root may be either transitive or reflexive. Thus the name could mean either "she of mighty birth"⁶ or "she who causes the birth of strong offspring."⁷ The etymology of the name of Artemis is uncertain, as neither the fancies of the ancients nor the conjectures of modern scholars have convinced the learned community. It is fairly likely that the name is not of Indo-European origin.⁸ It would be interesting to know whether the Greek Iphigenia, the priestess:

of a foreign or pre-Hellenic Artemis represents a phenomenon of cultural adaptation.

At any rate, there is some evidence of a cult of Iphigenia outside of Attica. For instance, Pausanias mentions a temple in *Aegeirae* in Achaea dedicated to Artemis and Iphigenia. However, the old xoanon was that of Iphigenia, while the statue of Artemis was a modern one. From this, Pausanias sensibly concluded that the temple belonged to Iphigenia in the beginning (Periegesis, VII, xxvi, 5).

But as is so often the case in matters of cult, we are best-informed concerning Attica. The passage quoted from Euripides is one of the prime indications, but it is by no means the only one. There is a difficulty of interpretation connected with this passage and that which proceeds it. Mention is made of Artemis Tauropolos at Halae, and of Artemis Brauronia at Brauron. For geographical reasons we have no certain means of knowing whether these are two different cults with different temples, or different names applied to the same cult.⁹ We may in effect ignore the question, since the sources which speak of the rites of Brauron do not mention the Artemis Tauropolos, except for Euripides.

Our chief, and best source on the peculiar rites connected with Artemis of Brauron is a long scholion to Aristophanes, Lysistrata, 645.

This scholion tells us that the Athenians had a "bear rite" which was performed by little girls. From other sources we know that this was called the ἀρκτεία.

A number of facts are known about this rite, and several of them will be mentioned in subsequent discussion.

A number of factors limit our knowledge, however. One is that our most explicit sources are fairly late (scholia, the Suda, Hesychios.) In addition, even when all the information is put together, we still are not particularly well-informed. Finally, though the site of the temple of Artemis at Brauron has been excavated, the findings made there have yet to shed much light on the cult.

Study of the objects uncovered in the excavations has been severely crippled by the Greek bureaucracy, but even before the materials were put under lock and key the students who examined and published some of them had to resort to scouring the written sources in order to explain their findings, which were far from exciting.

Indeed, when archaeologists venture into the field of religious history, the results are not always very happy.

One archaeologist, a specialist in ceramics, wrote a paper on the Brauronian Artemis, and actually said of the goddess that she was, "celle à laquelle les femmes après leurs couches dédient leurs vêtements."¹⁰ The only source from which this could have come would be the passage

from Euripides which we have cited, and that says that the clothes of women who died in childbirth would be dedicated to Iphigenia.

Some of the same sources which speak of Artemis Brauronia and the bear-dance provide us with material concerning an Attic Iphigenia. Of course Euripides says that Iphigenia's tomb was to be seen at Brauron. More to the point, the scholion to Lysistrata 645 relates two stories. One, from Euphorion, recounts that Iphigenia was sacrificed at Brauron, not at Aulis, and that a bear was substituted for the girl, not a hind. The second story, which has alternative endings, says that a tame bear sacred to Artemis was killed, and that the goddess commanded all young girls to be "bears." before they could be married. The alternative ending says that because the bear was killed, Artemis sent a plague to Athens which was removed when the little girls began the bear-dance. The scholars have not been slow to connect these stories with one in the Anecdota Graeca¹¹ in which there is a plague in Athens, which can only be averted if a citizen will sacrifice his daughter. A man saves the city by sacrificing a goat which he calls his daughter. Eustathius has a similar tale, in which a man dresses up the goat in his daughter's clothes.¹² It should now be clear that there is a well-attested Attic Iphigenia, albeit reconstructed from recent sources.

In a classic article, Paul Clement expanded the field of research on Iphigenia, considering the literary versions and the Attic material, as well as certain inscriptions from Thessaly, suggesting that the relation between the literary version and the Attic stories was merely one of local differences. Clement suggested that similar rites were performed all along the eastern coast of mainland Greece, and that the epic version thus came from a complex of myths and practices similar to those of the Attic bear-dance, but connected with a hind and located in Aulis.¹³

Of course, so far the excursus on Iphigenia as an Attic heroine has not had a direct application upon Aeschylus, but now we come to the consideration of a brilliant conjecture. John A. Peradotto has assembled evidence which, he claims, points to a reference to the Brauronian ritual in the account of the sacrifice of Iphigenia in Aeschylus.¹⁴ Peradotto wishes to make his conjecture go rather far, since he then attempts to use the shadowy Artemis Brauronia to explain the anger of Artemis in the play, but that does not affect the argument itself.

Peradotto explains his thesis as follows: Aeschylus introduced elements from the familiar ritual of Brauron into his tragedy in order to make clear to his listeners

the nature of the anger of Artemis. The elements are the hare, the saffron-colored clothes of Iphigenia, the pregnancy of the hare, and finally the statement of the chorus that Iphigenia is held over the altar "like a she-goat." Before we proceed to the consideration of these elements singly, we should remark that no one of them carries undoubted faith, so that in the end we are not completely convinced that Peradotto is right, but must owe him admiration for a conjecture which might in the future point the way for research.

Peradotto cites the hare as an element of the sacred system of the Artemis of Brauron. For evidence, he points out that statuettes have been found at Brauron which show a young girl holding a hare.¹⁵ This is, of course, true. A number of such little statues have been found, but a number have also been found in which the little girls were holding doves. The fact that the statuettes were found at Brauron, and that the human figures are those of little girls, who were precisely the group who performed the bear-rite, leads one to suspect that the hares or doves were animals involved in the rite, perhaps as sacrificial animals.¹⁶ But beyond this, we can hardly go. As we shall see later, there is evidence that Artemis was connected with hares, though not specifically the Artemis of Brauron. Peradotto goes on to engage in

a sort of poetic attempt to justify the use of a hare in the omen: "the hare is particularly appropriate to her cult because it is fecund, timid and innocent in appearance, and wild."¹⁷ Indeed! But this does not mean that mention of a hare would cause an Athenian audience to think of Artemis Brauronia, and that is what remains to be proven. The evidence of the little statuettes is not unequivocal, but it is the only one which we possess.

Peradotto is on rather more solid ground when he speaks of the saffron-colored clothes of Iphigenia. For the words κρόκου βαφᾶς (δ') ἐς πέδον χέουσα (v. 239) mean, of course, that Iphigenia is being held over the altar wrapped in the saffron cloth, and that the robe trails down, as Lloyd-Jones pointed out.¹⁸ Further, Anne Lebeck related the saffron robe to the imagery of nets and to that of bright cloth flowing to the ground.¹⁹ But the ἄρκτοι wore a saffron-colored dress called the κροκωτῆς, and Peradotto proposes that Iphigenia is in fact being sacrificed in the character of an ἄρκτος. In light of the tradition mentioned above, that Iphigenia was sacrificed at Brauron, it is hard to discount this audacious suggestion. Of course, there does exist a reason for doubt, in that as saffron cloth was expensive, it occurred often enough in poetry as an accessory of heroic

or royal life. One remembers, in the Fourth Pythian of Pindar, the κρόκεον εἶμα (vs. 230) which Jason throws off, and the κροκωτὸν σπάργανον (vs. 38) of the baby Hercules in the First Nemean. But the suggestion remains potent. For the stories in the Anecdota Graeca and Eustathius hint at the prior existence of a rite of sacrifice in which a goat is dressed as a girl and called "my daughter." by the sacrificing priest. Lacking more information, we cannot at present go further.

Peradotto says that the fact that the hare is pregnant alludes to the role of Artemis Brauronia as a patron of pregnancy." Perhaps this is so, but the evidence which Peradotto brings forth does not compel belief. In particular, his citation of Papadimitriou saying that Artemis here stands for the Earth-Mother, and the fact that the pregnant creature is not a human being but an animal makes one uneasy about the whole point.²²

Lastly, Peradotto proposes that the words δίκαν χιμαίρας ὑπερθε βωμοῦ (vs. 233) refer to the goat sacrificed in the Brauronia, according to Hesychius, and others.²³ In fact, goats were common enough victims in Greek cult to make the suggestion much less than convincing.

In the end, Aeschylus' version of the death of Iphigenia presents a curious historical-religious situation.

In Greek myth, as well as in the earliest historical period of the Celts and Germans, and surviving into Mediaeval sorcery, the sacrifice of human beings is the ultimate recourse of religious action, the most sacred and powerful sacrament.²⁴ In time of extreme national peril, human sacrifice, particularly of a member of a family of consecrated kings, is the right and proper duty of the priests. In effect, this is what happens in Aeschylus. However, with the change in moral values caused by changing times and by the powerful purifying influence of Delphi, Agamemnon is presented, not as a great and worthy king who is willing for the state to sacrifice even his daughter, but as a man who, free or forced, commits a great crime. In this respect, the calm and resigned Iphigenia of Euripides represents a step backwards into time.

In subsequent chapters, we will examine the conditions of Agamemnon's act, and the moral significance of his own murder, whereby Iphigenia is (incidentally) avenged.

Notes to Chapter I

1. cf. Carl Robert, Bild und Lied: Archaeologische Beiträage zur Geschichte der Griechischen Heldensage, Berlin, 1881, pp. 149-191.
2. Or in 454, according to certain scholars. We follow the finely-weighed study of Peter Von der Muehl, "Wurde die elfte Pythia Pindars 474 oder 454 gedichtet?" Museum Helveticum, XV, 1958, pp. 141-146.
3. Henri Gregoire, "Notice," on Iphigenia Taurica, in Leon Parmentier and Henri Gregoire, eds., Euripide, Vol. IV, Paris, 1925, p. 88.
4. The problem lies in the fact that the word is usually employed to speak of the preliminary rites which precede a wedding. Should we attempt to find a reference to marriage in each use, or should we merely regard it as a word meaning "preliminaries?" The meaning is well investigated in Eduard Fraenkel, Aeschylus: Agamemnon, edited, with a commentary, Vol. II, pp. 40-41.
5. cf. Lewis Farnell, Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality, Oxford, 1921, pp. 55-58.
6. Ibidem, p. 55.
7. Paul Clement, "New Evidence for the Origin of the Iphigenia Legend," L'Antiquite Classique, III, 1934, p. 396.
8. Pierre Chantraine, Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Grecque, Paris, 1968, Vol. I, pp. 116-117.
9. See the discussion in Henri Grégoire, op. cit., pp. 89-90.
10. Lilly G. Kahill, "Autour de l'Artemis Attique," Antike Kunst, VIII, 1964, p. 32.
11. Immanuel Bekker, ed. Anecdota Graeca, Berlin, 1814, Ept. Graz, 1965, Vol. I, p. 444.
12. Eustathius, Commentarii, p. 331.

13. Paul Clement, op. cit., pp. 393-409.
14. John J. Peradotto, "The Omen of the Eagles and the ἩΘΟΣ of Agamemnon, Phoenix, XXIII, 1969, pp. 244-247.
15. Ibidem, p. 244.
16. Lilly Kahil, op. cit., p. 22.
17. John Peradotto, op. cit., p. 245.
18. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "The Robes of Iphigenia," Classical Review, N.S., II, 1952, pp. 132-135.
19. Anne Lebeck, "The Robe of Iphigenia, in the Agamemnon," Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies, V, 1964, pp. 35-41.
20. John Peradotto, op. cit., p. 245.
21. Ibidem, p. 245.
22. Ibidem, pp. 244-245.
23. Ibidem, pp. 245-246.
24. Jacob Grimm, Deutsche Mythologie, Basle, 1953, Vol. I p. 37.

Chapter II

The Omen: Symbolic Interpretations

In this chapter, we will first isolate and quote the relevant portions of the text, and then proceed to discuss the main current of critical interpretation.

The ode opens with description of the omen, in highly-wrought style:

κύριος εἰμι θροεῖν ὄδιον κράτος αἴαιον ἀνδρῶν
 ἐντελέων· ἔτι γάρ θεάθεν καταπνεύει
 πειθῶ, μολπᾶν ἀλκάν, σύμφυτος αἰών·
 ὅπως Ἀχαιῶν δίθρονον κράτος, Ἑλλάδος ἦβας
 ζύμφρονα ταγάν,
 πέμπει σὺν δορὶ καὶ χερὶ πράκτορι
 θούριος ὄρνις Τευκρίδ' ἐπ' αἴαν,
 οἰωνῶν βασιλεὺς βασιλεῦσι νεῶν ὁ κελαινός, ὃ τ' ἐξόπιν
 ἀργᾶς,
 φανέντες ἴκταρ μελάθρων χερὸς ἐκ δοριπάλτου
 παμπρέπτοις ἐν ἔδραισι,
 βοσκόμενοι λαγίναν, ἐρικύμονα φέρματα, γένναν,
 βλαβέντα λοισθίων ὀρδῶμων.
 αἴλινον αἴλινον εἶπέ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.

(vv. 104-121).

Two eagles, of different species, have appeared near the palace (presumably in Argos) as the army was setting out for Troy. They are devouring a pregnant hare, standing upon a place which is only described as *παμπρέπτοις ἐν ἔδραισι* (vs. 118). It is reasonable to assume that they are eating their prey on the palace roof. Such was the opinion of Casaubon, whose note Fraenkel quotes in his introduction: "vescebantur in sedibus undique splendentibus i.e. in ipso palatio."¹ A further suggestion may be made - that possibly the birds are not standing on the palace roof, (for we are told that they are "near to the palace") but on an elevated throne for augural bird-watching. Such seats are mentioned in Sophocles' *Antigone* (vs 999) and in Euripides' *Bacchae* (vs. 347.)

In the next two stanzas, we hear a version of Calchas' speech of interpretation:

κεδνός δὲ στρατόμαντις ἰδὼν δύο λήμασι διισσοῦς
 Ἀτρείδας μαχίμους ἔδῃ λαγοδαίτας
 πομπούς τ' ἀρχάς· οὕτω δ' εἶπε τεράζων·
 χρόνῳ μὲν ἄγρεϊ Πριάμου πόλιν ἄδε κέλευθος
 πάντα δὲ πύργων
 κτήνη πρόσθε τὰ δημιοπληθέα
 Μοῖρα λαπάξει πρὸς τὸ βίαιον·
 οἶον μὴ τις ἄγα θεῶθεν κνεφάση προτυπὲν στόμιον μέγα Τροίας.

στραωθέν. οἴκτῳ γὰρ ἐπίφθονος Ἄρτεμις ἄγνῶ
 πτανοῖσιν κῆσι πατρὸς
 αὐτότεκνον πρὸ λόχου μογερὰν πᾶσα θυομένοισι
 στυγεῖ δὲ δεῖπνον αἰετῶν.
 αἴλινον αἰλινον εἶπέ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.

(vv. 122-139)

To attempt much in the way of commentary would mean at once straying onto controversial ground, the matter indeed of this chapter and the next. It suffices to say that the omen portends the fall of Troy, and at the same time is connected with the angry phthonos of Artemis.

Calchas continues:

τόσον περ εὐφρων ἂ καλῶ,
 δρόσοις ἀέπτοις μαλερῶν λεόντων
 πάντων τ' ἀγρονόμων φιλόμαστοις
 θηρῶν ὄβρικάλοισι τερπνά,
 τούτων (μὲν) αἰτεῖ ξύμβολα χερῶναι
 δεξιὰ μὲν κατὰμομφα δὲ φάσματα.

(vv. 140-145).

The reasons for the anger of Artemis are further expounded, and what follows, to be quoted in a subsequent chapter, amounts to a prediction of the consequences of the wrath of Artemis, going to the end of the system (vs. 159).

As the phthonos of Artemis is later given as the reason for the sacrifice of Iphigenia, scholars have been hard-put to explain the omen, and most critics have had recourse to a dodge of some sort, for, it is argued, Artemis could hardly be angry at Agamemnon because of the eagles. Most frequently, we are told that, because the eagles eating the hare represent the Atreidae despoiling Troy, then the anger of Artemis is directed against the action of war. This is the "symbolic interpretation."

The first critic we shall speak of, Eduard Fraenkel, does not properly belong to the group of those who propound some version of the above line of thought. Professor Fraenkel devotes a long note in his commentary to the matter of the reason for the sacrifice. He first goes over some of the material which is to be found in our first chapter, pointing out that in most versions of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, Agamemnon had committed an hybristic act—according to the Cypria he had boasted of being a better hunter than Artemis. Concerning this motive Fraenkel says: "Such a motive, simple and consistent, is in keeping with the spirit of fairy-tales, sagas, epic poetry. But with Aeschylus it was different. Any attempt to accept a story of that type or to compromise with it would have struck at the very heart of his tragedy."² The great scholar's

words are puzzling, for the motives which move the characters in the entire Oresteia are simple enough, and moreover, a splendid tragedy like the Persae is based on a "story of that type." And in the end, Fraenkel goes on to claim precisely that Aeschylus was compromising with such a story. For after stressing the element of choice in Agamemnon's action in sacrificing his daughter, Fraenkel goes on:

By a bold stroke, the poet fought his way out of the difficulty: he followed the traditional story in maintaining the wrath of Artemis and her appeasement through the sacrifice of Iphigenia but eliminated the act of Agamemnon which had incensed the goddess. ...Aeschylus might be confident that the power of his song would keep the hearers firmly in its grip and leave no room for idle speculation or curiosity about details.

In effect, Fraenkel strikes at the religious system of the Oresteia, for the text says that Artemis is angry, but Fraenkel says that she is angry without reason, for dramatic effect. And then, he assures us that Aeschylus could be confident that no one would notice! In fact, the strange omen and the words about the attitude of Artemis are very striking, and surely the average reader notices at once that Iphigenia has to die, according to the text, because some birds have eaten a hare. The single major virtue of Fraenkel's view is that it avoids the excesses of the "symbolic interpretations" to which we will next proceed.

A sort of classic statement of the symbolic view may be found in Paul Mazon's introduction to his edition of the Agamemnon.

Dans le présage des aigles dévorant une hase pleine avec toute sa portée, Calchas a su reconnaître un avertissement d'Artemis. Artemis protège les faibles; ils sont à elle et doivent être épargnés. Si Agamemnon veut détruire toute la race troyenne, et immoler des innocents, qu'il donne donc d'abord à la déesse le prix qu'elle exige, le sang d'Iphigénie.⁴

Stated thus clearly, the interpretation at once encounters some simple, virtually automatic and unavoidable objections. The first to make, and it is a violent one, is that Mazon disregards the text in making of the omen "un avertissement d'Artemis." Nothing, nothing in the text can be construed so as to make Artemis the cause of the omen. We are told that she loathes the feast of the eagles, and if this be disregarded, we still must realize that the eagles are directly connected with Zeus, both by tradition and by the text.

Next, the protection which Artemis tenders to the innocent is based upon words which refer to her protection of little animals- her especial $\tau\alpha\mu\eta$. To make them refer to human children is to force them oddly.

But the final objection is the most important. The idea of Iphigenia as a price to pay in order to take Troy come from the interpretation of some difficult

language, and in plain terms it is un-Greek. Greek gods exacted the full price of transgressions, but they never punished intentions, only words and acts. The capture of Troy is in the future, and thus it is simply not true to ancient Greek thought to speak about this "prix qu'Artemis exige," before she will give up her innocents. In fact, the thought is post-Mediaeval and Christian, belonging to the same group of ideas which spawned the Faust legend. The closest thing to this modern myth-pattern which is to be found connected with the Iphigenia-myth occurs in certain passages of Euripides' Iphigenia-plays. And there, Iphigenia as the price to pay in order to take Troy does not enter onto the divine plan, because the motive of the vow of Agamemnon explains the action of Artemis.

There inheres in the symbolic interpretation the germ of a nagging question- if Artemis is angry because of the young and innocent, why then does she ask for the sacrifice of the young and innocent Iphigenia?

Two American scholars, John Finley, Jr. and John J. Peradotto, attempt to answer this question.⁵ They believe in the validity of the symbolic interpretation, but they modify it so as to eliminate this difficulty. In sum, they declare that the apparent causal chain of the events related is illusory. By the "apparent causal

chain" we mean the following series of linked events:
 Agamemnon wishes to get revenge for the crime of Alexander.
 He sets out for Troy. The omen occurs, and Artemis is
 angry. She sends the wrong winds, and Iphigenia must
 be sacrificed in order to obtain favorable winds. But let
 us see Finley's argument as he presents it:

Artemis, the hare and Iphigeneia are associated figures, like in their sex and their innocence, and contrasting to the warlike eagles, the Atreidae, and the army. In the absence of previous offense by the king against the goddess, his offense becomes the act of war itself. Aeschylus is not saying that, because the eagles devoured the hare, Artemis held the fleet at Aulis and offered Agamemnon his terrible choice. Rather, the devouring of the hare by the eagles expresses his act of choice itself. The seeming sequence from the eagles to Iphigeneia's death is less a set of causal steps than a mythological statement of implicit meaning. Agamemnon's final and decisive act of guilt was in killing his daughter, but the choice followed from his decision for war. By destroying the calm and fruitful order of peace, war commits an offense against nature, and this offense is portrayed in the eagles' devouring of the hare. The maiden Artemis is herself the innocence of peace. Despite the justice of his claim against Paris, Agamemnon is touched by the evil to which he consents. His choice is in fact between the calm and quiet sequence of the family and the glory of conquest.

It is something of a blunder to mention "the calm and quiet sequence of the family" in speaking of the Tantalidae, but this is admittedly far more sophisticated than Mazon. Finley is right in seeing in the sacrifice the savage nature of the Atreidae, but losing the causal links of the text and substituting others, he must ignore facts

on which the text is very positive, such as the contrary winds. Naturally, Finley does not believe in Zeus and Artemis, nor do we. . . But Aeschylus did. And the entire trilogy is based on very close and strong causal links—it is a revenge-story as primitive, if not as fiendish, as the Lay of Weland. Yet, we are told that this dreadful series of avenging murders was set off by a "mythological statement of implicit meaning." And we must ask ourselves where Dr. Finley is getting the religious material to make of Artemis "the innocence of peace." We possess sufficient materials on Artemis to know whether the ancients regarded her in this light or not. Rather not, considering that she was often named in connection with human sacrifice. The words of Aeschylus which Finley is using to make this statement can only be vv. 135-145, which are about animals, and which concern Artemis in her well-known and basic function of $\pi\acute{o}\tau\nu\iota\alpha \theta\eta\rho\acute{\omega}\nu$.

Peradotto pursues much the same argument, with rather more elaboration in detail, and with even greater contempt for workaday causal sequences.⁷

These two critics work upon the early Twentieth-Century assumption that poetry and poetic drama are expressions (of the subconscious, and thus are not subject to everyday prose logic. That this is to a great extent

true for Attic Tragedy is a very moot question, and we believe that in general Greek poetry moves the subconscious through the inevitable rather than through the mysterious or absurd.

Hugh Lloyd-Jones devoted a celebrated paper to the subject of the guilt of Agamemnon. It is perhaps the best treatment of the subject extant. Yet in explaining the wrath of Artemis, Lloyd-Jones finds no adequate reason within the trilogy, and has recourse to the Iliad:

She has, in fact, an excellent motive; for in the Iliad and in the whole poetical tradition Artemis together with her brother Apollo appears as a loyal partisan of Troy against the invaders. This supplies a motive for her hostility to the Atreidae that is fully sufficient to explain her action... Artemis must be seen... as a powerful enemy striking against an enemy.⁸

With regard to the Iliad, Lloyd-Jones is of course quite correct, and the argument is seductive. Aeschylus may indeed have had something like this in mind in planning his play. However, the only weakness of the idea, which to some has seemed conclusive, is the fact that it explains an important element in the play by something quite outside it. We have not found a subsequent treatment in which a critic inclined to this view, yet it is far more worthy of attention than most previous explanations, and the arguments against the traditional view (e.g. that of Mazon) are very well put.

The last treatment of which we will speak is that of William Whallon, a paper which is as rich as it is confused.⁹ It is unfortunate that so much of the article is devoted to making the Oresteia serve as an example of Miss Harrison's reconstruction of the origin of tragedy. (This is not to say that Whallon is not ingenious and scrupulous, or that Jane Harrison was not a great scholar, or even that her attempted reconstruction is wrong, but the very nature of such an attempt renders it inconclusive.)

Whallon suggests that there was present in the mind of Aeschylus the folk-etymology that the name of Artemis was derived from ἀρταμος - "butcher," and that in the parodos, she merely fills a role provided by her name.¹⁰

After the discussion of the origin of tragedy, the argument grows dense, as Whallon points out the relation of individual crime to the clan in the Oresteia, each generation providing its quota of murders. Whallon says (a powerful suggestion, this) that Artemis is angry about the little hares, the children of Thyestes, and the children of Troy. This attempt to find the reason for the wrath of Artemis, not in the future, but in the past, especially in the process of repeated murders which characterizes the progeny of Tantalus, is commendable.

Notes to Chapter II

1. Eduard Fraenkel, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 71.
2. Ibidem, Vol. II, p. 98.
3. Ibidem, p. 99.
4. Paul Mazon, in the "Notice," to his edition of the Agamemnon, Eschyle II, Paris, 1952, p. 3.
5. John Finley, Jr., Pindar and Aeschylus, Cambridge, Mass., 1955. ~~pp. 251-253~~.
6. John J. Peradotto, op. cit.
7. John J. Peradotto, op. cit., pp. 237-239 and passim.
8. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "The Guilt of Agamemnon," Classical Quarterly, N.S. XII, 1962, p. 190.
9. William Whallon, "Why is Artemis Angry," American Journal of Philology, 82, 1961, pp. 78-88.
10. Ibidem, p. 80.

Chapter III

A Literal Interpretation

The last chapter has consisted of exposition of, and in some cases criticism of, views of various scholars. In this chapter we will develop a different view. We do not agree with those who pointedly claim, as does Page, that the omen makes no sense,¹ nor do we believe that the best critical tack is to ignore it. Aeschylus would not have put this quite remarkable thing into his drama if it did not mean something.

What we have termed the 'symbolic interpretations' assume that the meaning of the omen is conveyed in the religious sphere by mimetic action. In other words, the two eagles, eating a hare full of young, are a figure of the two Atreidae, capturing Troy full of spoil. And the anger of Artemis is directed against the spoil-taking, the slaughter of the Trojan children. That we find a goodly number of difficulties in accepting this interpretation we have already made clear. We will now proceed, one step at a time, and taking some pains, to propose that Artemis is angry for exactly the reason which Calchas alleges- that she hates the feast of the eagles.

Some preliminary observations are in order. Ornithomancy in drama or poetry is present only because this form of divination was current in the Hellenic world. This is of course an obvious remark, but a necessary one. For in treating of ornithomancy in literature we must remain within the framework of the practice among the Greeks. Now we may assert without quotation that ornithomancy in the ancient world, like psychoanalysis in the modern, was the province, properly, of specialists- serious ornithomancy was strictly in the hands of seers. An ordinary man ~~was~~ not expect^{ed} to interpret omens of any sort himself, at least in the Fifth and Fourth centuries, and to the best of our knowledge, in the time before. Thus, if an omen occurs in literature, it is interpreted as a rule by a professional, and the interpretation by that expert may seem very arbitrary to us, yet it has a right to stand, since it represents the author imitating ancient practice.

The classic omen of the capture of Troy is that which occurs in the second book of the Iliad. A snake eats eight baby sparrows and their mother, from which Calchas predicts that the Achaean host will spend nine years before Troy, and will take the city in the tenth year (II, vv. 308-329).

It is quite possible that this classic passage was the inspiration for Aeschylus. One should notice that the interpretation offered by Calchas is far from being the only possible one, but it is accepted. A qualified seer had interpreted the omen thus, and the interpretation was accepted.

We have already cited the relevant passage in the previous chapter. Calchas sees the two eagles as the Atreidae, the hare as Troy, and thus predicts victory, while he realizes that Artemis abominates the feast of the eagles, and will be angry. Later in the chapter we will examine why Artemis might be angry because of the eagles themselves, not because of the Trojan war. For the moment, we will take issue with such critics as Mazon, Fraenkel, Peradotto, and other, cited in the previous chapter, who maintain that the omen predicts the destruction of everything in Troy. This idea rests upon the assumption that as the eagles totally devour the hare and her unborn young, and as the act of the eagles is a prediction of victory, so the act also predicts total destruction of all life in Troy. This is not the case.

In the first place, such an interpretation contradicts the most widespread epic tradition- the princesses of the royal house of Troy were carried into captivity

as slaves of the Greek chiefs. Those who incline to the view that all will be destroyed frequently cite a speech of Agamemnon in the sixth book of the Iliad (57 sq.) to the effect that all in Troy, even the unborn babies, will be killed. Yet this is likely a passing mood, or a vain boast. Surely, when in the ninth book, verse 139, Agamemnon promises Achilles twenty Trojan women, he means living ones.

In the second case, this interpretation contradicts ancient practice. The most severe treatment of a captive city among the Greeks was the execution of all free males of military age, and the sale of the rest of the population into slavery. Indeed, when Thucydides recounts that some Thracian mercenaries who had been hired by Athens and sent back to Thrace fell upon Mycalessos and proceeded to butcher everyone, he remarks upon the action as characteristic of barbarians, and finishes by saying that the disaster which befell Mycalessos was more sudden, more total, and more terrible than any other in the war. (VII, 29). Thucydides' Fifth-Century sensibilities were outraged by such an action. We should also on such evidence as the omen gives us beware of assigning motives or actions to the characters of the Agamemnon which are directly contrary to the practice and ideas of the age, in default of a clear indication of the text.

And in fact, the text in several points contradicts this view. When Troy's fall has been announced by the fire-beacons, Clytemnestra pointedly and with much elaboration speaks of the cries of the captives (vv. 324-329), and in the succeeding stasimon, the chorus mentions the μέγα δουλείας γάγγαμον (vs. 360) which Zeus has thrown over Troy. And in final proof of the normality of his conduct of war, Agamemnon appears on the scene with a Trojan princess standing behind him in his chariot. In saying that the omen portends the slaughter of the entire population of Troy, the critics have flown in the face of ancient tradition and practice and of the evidence of the text, and have, incidentally, engaged in some dubious amateur ornithomanteia.

What, then, does Calchas say? About the prediction of victory we know enough at present for our purposes. But let us return to the verses about the wrath of Artemis. We are told that the goddess is moved by pity (ὄλιτος) and that her attitude is one of divine jealousy or anger (φθόρος). And then we are told that she is favorable even to the young of raging lions and to all other baby animals (vv. 140-144). Why, then, given these words, should Calchas not anticipate the anger of Artemis with regard to the baby (rather the foetal) hares?

There is some evidence of a connection of hares with the figure of Artemis. Farnell points out that "in the legend of the colonization of Boiae, the hare appears to be the embodiment or representative of Artemis."²

And then we possess the capital evidence of Xenophon, speaking of the attitude of hunters toward very young hares: τὰ μὲν οὖν λίαν νεογνὰ οἱ φιλοκυνηγεῖται ἀφιᾶσι τῇ θεῷ (*Cynegetica*, V, 14.) With this, we may perhaps attempt a skeleton explanation of the wrath of Artemis. The little hares are animals sacred to Artemis, and she is angry because the house of the Atreidae is polluted with their blood. Iphigenia is offered in expiation for this pollution. If we are right in assigning this sacred character to the hare (and we must not forget to remind the reader of the statuettes from Brauron, mentioned in chapter I) then the Athenian audience would have recognized that the omen had a sinister import at once.

For, if to modern scholars Artemis appears as a fostering deity, to the ancients she was equally a cruel one, connected with sinister tales of human sacrifice, with the savage rites of the Scythians:

ὦ πότνια, πότνια, θύμασιν βρότησίους χαρεῖσα

(*Iph. Aul.* vv. 1524-1525).

And we should not forget that Artemis was also a goddess who like Hermes, had power over roads, whose favor was important for those who travelled.³

The external working of the omen may be thus simply defined: the action of the birds is symbolic, in that the eagles mime the spoiling of Troy. But, at the same time, their action works on a literal level, in that by spilling the blood of the little hares upon, or near to, the palace, they defile it in the eyes of Artemis, and the pollution may only be washed away by the blood of the chosen victim of the goddess, the princess Iphigenia.

Of course, a serious and inevitable objection makes itself felt at once- stated this way and left at that, the omen, and the resulting sacrifice, do not fit into the trilogy, which is after all a story about people, not about birds.

In fact, the omen does fit into the ~~vengeance~~-pattern of the trilogy, and serves as the bridge between the present and the past. This is done through the chain of images related to dogs. The reader will recall that the eagles are called "winged dogs," (πτάνοι κύνες). The scholiast termed this a γροῖφος, but as there is no doubt as to the meaning of the veiled expression, it is better for us to call it a "kenning," for it functions like the ornament of the Anglo-Saxon and Norse poets, in establishing relationships and interlocking themes. It is not an exaggeration to say that this expression is

the key to the meaning of the omen, and to its place in the trilogy. We shall in fact have to explore the role of dogs, or rather of persons likened to dogs, in the economy of the trilogy. We shall find it a rich field. Before we go on to this highly interesting investigation, however, there is the problem that in the text, Artemis is said to be angry at "the winged dogs of her father," (vv. 135-136). This aims, it seems, at an opposition of divine wills. Yet this should not surprise us, since the Eumenides is almost all concerned with such an opposition. The subject of whether the eagles were sent by Zeus to do exactly what they did or whether the kenning simply expresses the well-known relationship of eagles to the sky god is a subject too complex to take up at present.

Within the complex imagery of the Oresteia, dogs recur a number of times in various contexts, invariably connected with the theme of vengeance. The meaning is very often not obvious to those who use the images, but in fact, they invariably point to uncovering hidden crimes, or to avenging known ones.

In the prologue, the Watchman says of himself that he is laying on his elbows, like a dog:

ἀγκαθεν, κυνός δίκην

(vs. 3).

The primary meaning of the line is one of servile degradation, for the Watchman finds his lot hard under the harsh law of Clytemnestra. But in effect, the expression has another meaning. For though the Watchman is himself a good and guileless creature, and though he dances with joy when he sees the fire-beacon, yet he fits into Clytemnestra's scheme of revenge, for he warns her of the approach of her husband.

The next reference to dogs occurs in the parodos, and is in fact our puzzling reference to the "winged dogs of (Zeus)." This kenning is identical to that used when Prometheus warns Io (in the Prometheus Vincetus) to beware of the

ὄξυστόμους γὰρ Ζηνὸς ἀκραφεῖς κύνας
γρῦπας (vv. 803-804).

We will have more to say about this passage below.

When Agamemnon comes upon the scene, Clytemnestra launches into a long false speech of self-eulogy, in the course of which she describes herself as the "watchdog of the house," τῶν σταθμῶν κύνᾳ (vs. 896). In fact, she has not been the faithful guardian which her words have meant to imply, for she has betrayed her husband, and is even at the moment when she is speaking bringing to fulfillment her long-laid plans of revenge for her child.

to do

Yet what has the reference to a dog have^a in these plans of revenge? The reader must be patient for a moment. The effect of these images about dogs is cumulative, and although we must wait for the appearance of the Erinyes for the theme to pass from seemingly casual imagery to living horror, yet the final image from the Agamemnon will give us an inkling of the meaning of this image-complex.

The image in question appears in the scene between the chorus and Cassandra. When the prophetess is told that the house which is before her is that of the Atreidae, the following exchange occurs:

Κασσάνδρα: μισόθεον μὲν οὖν· πολλὰ συνίστορα,
αὐτόφωνα, (κακὰ καρτάναι)
ἄνδρὸς σφαιεῖον καὶ πέδον ῥαντήριον.

Χóρος: ἔοικεν εὖρις ἢ ξένη κυνὸς δίκην
εἶναι, ματεύει δ' ὧν ἀνευρήσει φόνον. (1090-1094)

Here, as when she turns to enter the house and recoils crying out:

φόνον δόμοι πνέουσιν αἱματοσταγῆ (vs. 1309)
she is using her mantic gift, powerful as it is to look before and behind. And for her, nothing is so clear, so striking about the splendid and opulent house of Atreus as the fact that here, a king committed an unspeakable

atrocities against his brother's children. This is the sense in which she is "keen-nosed, like a dog." She is aware of the blood of the slaughtered children, which still reeks from the floor of the house, and which calls for vengeance. We will shortly explain our position in more detail, but in this place we should state our basic view about the eagles and the anger of Artemis, for it is in fact closely related to the matter of the Cassandra-scene- the eagles are, like Cassandra, "dogs" in that they smell blood, and are aware of the blood of the murdered children. If the tearing of the little hares brings down the wrath of Artemis, it is in fact in no random way, ~~for~~ it is central to the economy of the Oresteia that blood calls for blood and sacrilege for sacrilege. The birds pollute the house of Atreus with the blood of the hares only because it is already polluted with the blood of the children of Thyestes, and if the little hares are the concern of Artemis, the children are the concern of Zeus. Before we relate this view to ancient tradition and to a remarkable parallel in another Attic tragedy, let us go on to the ultimate epiphany of avenging birds and avenging, blood-tracking dogs- the Erinyes. The dreadful goddesses are several times called, or compared to, dogs, most notably in the last scene of the Choephoroi, where Orestes, horrified by the sight of the Erinyes, says

to the chorus, for whom the goddesses are invisible:

σαφῶς γὰρ αἶδε μητρὸς ἔγκοτοι κύνες. (vs. 1054)

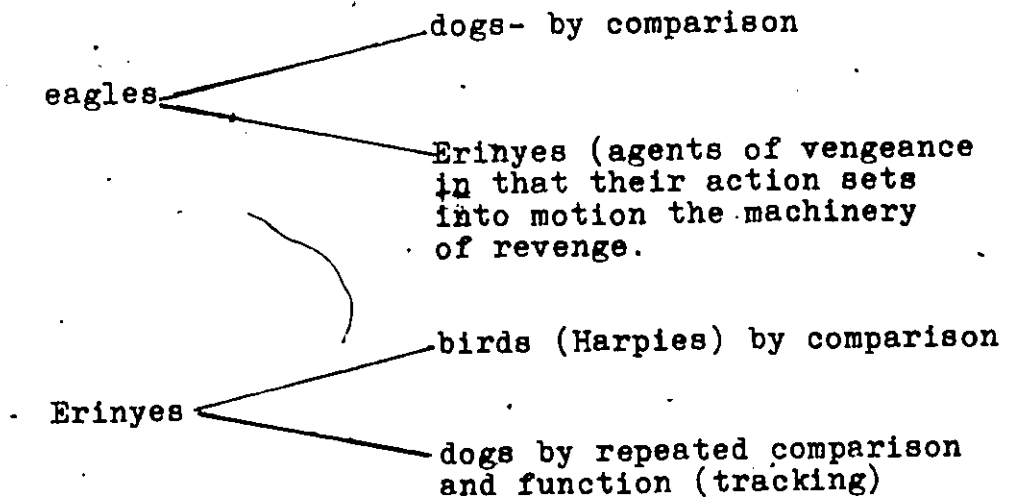
This, then, is the term to which the references to dogs have aimed, as the repeated legal metaphors have prepared the way for the trial scene which ends the trilogy. These repulsive and fearsome trackers follow their victim by the scent of blood (Eum. 244-247). In calling the eagles dogs, Aeschylus then meant that they performed a function similar to that of the Erinyes. The blood with which the house of Atreus was stained called to the eagles as the blood on the hands of Orestes, the blood of his mother, called to the Erinyes. The eagles bring about the sacrifice of Iphigenia, in order that the murders perpetrated by Atreus may be revenged.

But the eagles as polluting birds are further related to the Erinyes in the first scene of the Eumenides. When the Pythia comes out of the temple, terrified by the sight of the Erinyes, she likens them to Gorgons, only to reject the comparison, and then she says that they are like Harpies:

εἶδόν ποτ' ἤδη Φινέως γεγραμμένας
 δεῖπνον φερούσας· ἄπτεροί γε μὴν ἰδεῖν
 αὐταί, μέλαιναί δ', ἐς τὸ πᾶν βδελύκτροποι·

(Eum. 50-52).

The dreadful bird-women, snatching and polluting sacrificial food, come into the system which we schematize below, by way of likening, which is a major Aeschylean way of relating and connecting matters. The scheme for the eagles and for the Erinyes may be resumed thus:



But further, by calling birds dogs and saying that Artemis is angry and disgusted by the feast of the eagles, Aeschylus introduces a well-known theme from epic and tragedy- the theme of birds and dogs eating those who have fallen in battle, or murder victims. It is especially useful to quote the following long speech of Teiresias from the Antigone of Sophocles.

γνώση, τέχνης σημεῖα τῆς ἐμῆς κλύων.
 ἐς γὰρ παλαιὸν θᾶκον ὄρνιθοσκόπον
 ἴζων, ἴν' ἦν μοι παντὸς οἴωνοῦ λιμύη,
 ἀγνώτ' ἀκούω φθόγγον ὄρνίθων, κακῶ

κλάζοντας οἷστρῳ καὶ βεβαρβαρωμένῳ
 καὶ σπῶντας ἐν χηλαῖσιν ἀλλήλους φοναῖς
 ἔγνων· πτερῶν γὰρ ῥοῖβδος οὐκ ἄσημος ἦν.
 εὐθύς δὲ δρῖσας ἐμπύρων ἐγευδόμεν
 βωμοῖσι παμφλέκτοισιν· ἐκ δὲ θυμάτων
 "Ἡφαιστος οὐκ ἔλαμπεν, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ σποδῶ
 μυδῶσα κηκίς μηρίων ἐτήκετο
 κᾶτυφε κἀνέπτυε, καὶ μετάρσιοι
 χολαὶ διεσπείροντο, καὶ καταρρυεῖς
 μηροὶ καλυπτῆς ἐξέκειντο πιμελῆς.
 τοιαῦτα παιδὸς τοῦδ' ἐμάνθανον πάρα
 φθίνοντ' ἀσήμων ὀργίων μαντεύματα.
 ἐμοὶ γὰρ οὗτος ἡγεμών, ἄλλοις δ' ἐγώ.
 καὶ ταῦτα τῆς σῆς ἐκ φρενὸς νοσεῖ πόλις.
 βωμοὶ γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐσχάροι τε παντελεῖς
 πλήρεις ὑπ' οἰωνῶν τε καὶ κυνῶν βορᾶς
 τοῦ δυσμόρου πεπτῶτος Οἰδίου γόνου. (vv. 998-1018).

This speech of Teiresias and that of Calchas are couched
 in somewhat the same terms, and describe what is essentially
 the same situation, in a religious sense. A professional
 seer describes and interprets a bird-omen. The portent
 has baleful import, since the birds behave in an unusual
 fashion, eating or having eaten a sacred or forbidden
 food. In the one case, the birds and dogs have polluted

the altars and sanctuaries (with their droppings?) because they have eaten human flesh (that of Polyneices). In the other, the birds pollute the house by eating a sacred animal upon its roof. In both cases the savagery of the birds, and the pollution come from a crime committed by human beings, and the birds serve as agents of divine retribution.

Artemis is angry because the house has been stained with the blood of her sacred animal. But what has drawn the eagles to the house is the blood of the children of Thyestes. Zeus is just, and he brings about retribution for crimes, but slowly, in his own time, and the instruments of his justice are imperfect. Agamemnon wreaks vengeance upon Alexander, and Clytemnestra upon him—both are guilty, in intention and in act, yet both bring about works of justice which Zeus desires. Zeus will compass vengeance for the innocent, even bringing it to pass by means of the birds of the air.

This interpretation is, we believe, novel. But the unsatisfactory character of traditional interpretations has led us to put this one forward, at least as an endeavor in the direction of explaining the omen in terms which will be consistent for the trilogy and which will truly reflect Greek religious belief.

Notes to Chapter III

1. John Dewar Denniston and Denys Page, Aeschylus: Agamemnon, Oxford, 1957, p. xxv.
2. Lewis Richard Farnell, The Cults of the Greek States, Oxford, 1896, Vo. II, P. 432.
3. Otto Kern; Die Religion der Griechen, Berlin, 1963, Vol I, p. 107.

Chapter IV

Agamemnon's Choice

Given the omen of the eagles and the speech of Calchas, does Agamemnon have any choice concerning the sacrifice of Iphigenia? If so, what are his alternatives? What is his state of mind? These are questions which have been the actual source of the controversy surrounding the parodos. Given the modern awareness of, and concern about motivation in literature and life, this is inevitable. The omen itself has often been given short shrift by critics, because modern people of European origin set little store by such things as omens. But of the problems of motivation we are keenly aware.

We will not in this chapter consider a plurality of individual critics, because the nature of the question imposes a certain lack of variety in response. All writers who have treated of the question have told us that Agamemnon's decision lay in one of the following three cases:

I. Agamemnon is a bloodthirsty criminal, who is under no constraint.

II. Agamemnon has made a voluntary and criminal decision, and the question of constraint is not relevant,

although constraining influences were doubtless present.

III. Agamemnon is technically guilty, but he had no choice at all, since he was impelled both by external constraint and an internal, categorically imperative duty.

Before we plunge into the fray, however, we must isolate and quote the (extensive) pertinent portions of the text, confining ourselves to the most literal and least-controversial commentary possible.

In the parodos, once the omen itself is described, in lines discussed in previous chapters, Calchas first declares that it portends the fall of Troy, and implies the anger of Artemis, and then, having come to the sinister things portended, he invokes Apollo:

ἰήμιον δὲ καλέω Παιῶνα,
 μὴ τινὰς ἀντίπνδους Δαναοῖς χρονίας ἔχενῆδας ἀπλοίας
 τεύξη, σπευδομένα θυσίαν ἑτέραν, ἄνομόν τιν', ἄδαιτον,
 νεικέων τέκτονα σύμφυτον,
 οὐ δεισήνορα. μίμνει γὰρ φοβερὰ παλίνορτος
 οἰκονόμος δολία μνάμων μῆνις τεκνόποινος.

(vv. 146-155).

Apollo is invoked before the threat of the wrath of Artemis, as in the anapestic portion of the parodos he is one of the gods who may hear the cry of the desolate vultures, and as later in the trilogy he takes an active part in the disarming or pacification of the Erinyes.

In calling upon him here, Calchas anticipates his role in the later parts of the trilogy. In addition, Apollo as Paian would naturally be called upon by a seer in cases where something was to be feared from a pollution of blood, as Delphi held a pre-eminent place in Hellas in matters dealing with purification. The meaning of the words "another sacrifice" is hardly obscure, as the language used in speaking of the action of the eagles is sacrificial. It is interesting that the motive of Clytemnestra, whose action is only too clearly prophesied, is urged to be the death of Iphigenia. One would be tempted rather to think that she acted out of her guilty love for Aegisthus, but in fact the claim of revenge for her child is taken most seriously throughout the Agamemnon.

There then follows the invocation of Zeus, and the anguished affirmation of trust in his design, which is followed by a capital account of the attitude of Agamemnon:

Καὶ τόθ' ἡγεμῶν ὁ πρέ-
 σβυς νεῶν Ἀχαιικῶν,
 μάντιν οὔτινα φέγων,
 ἔμπαίσις τύχαισι συμπνέων,
 εὔτ' ἀπλοῖα κεναγγεῖ βαρύ-
 νοντ' Ἀχαιικὸς λεώς,
 Χαλκίδος πέραν ἔχων παλιρρό-
 χθοῖς ἐν Αὐλίδος τόποις·

The chorus is about to speak of contrary winds, and so the imagery which they use in speaking of the king is that of being tossed by gales. We should remark that it is clearly said that Agamemnon finds fault with no prophet. Concerning this, we will have more to say later. Then, what is the meaning of these words of 'letting his spirit go before the blasts of fortune' (Fraenkel's translation)? It is rather clearly a disapproving phrase to say the least. Does it not imply gross folly? The literal situation of the host at Aulis should be remarked- they are in grave peril, so long as they cannot sail away. The chorus' account continues:

πνοαὶ δ' ἀπὸ Στρυμόνος μολοῦσαι
κακόσχολοι, νῆστιδες, δύσορμοι,
βροτῶν ἅλαι,
ναῶν (τε) καὶ πεισμάτων ἀφείδεις,
παλιμμήκη χρόνον τιθεῖσαι
τρίβῃ κατέξαινον ἄνθος Ἀρχεί-
ων· ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ πικροῦ
χείματος ἄλλο μῆχαρ
βριθύτερον πρόμοισιν
μάντις ἔκλαγξεν
προφέρων Ἄρτεμιν, ὥστε χθόνα βάκτροις
ἐπικρούσαντας Ἀτρείδας
δάκρυ μὴ κατασχεῖν·

The host is held in port by contrary winds, and threatened with starvation. The 'other and more grievous remedy' is the sacrifice of Iphigenia. The Atreidae are greatly and genuinely distressed.

ἄναξ δ' ὁ πρέσβυς τόδ' εἶπε φωνῶν·

ἄβαρτα μὲν κῆρ τὸ μὴ πιθέσθαι,

βαρεῖα δ', εἰ

τέκνον δαΐξω, δόμων ἄγαλμα,

μιαίνων παρθενοσφάγοισιν

ρεῖθροισ πατρώους χέρας πέλας βω-

μοῦ. τί τῶνδ' ἄνευ κακῶν;

πῶς λιπόναυς γένωμαι

ξυμμαχίας ἀμαρτῶν;

παυσανέμου γάρ

θυσίας παρθενίου θ' αἵματος ὀργᾶ

περιόργως ἐπιθυμεῖν

θέμις. εὖ γὰρ εἶη.'

(vv. 205-217).

This speech is very important. It has the effect of making a speaking character of Agamemnon long before his actual appearance on the stage, and it is the only account which he gives of the action which seals his fate. We will have something to say about this speech later, but for the present it suffices to say that Agamemnon gives a clear account of what he perceives to be his alternatives:

the sacrifice of his daughter, or desertion. The second path he declares impossible; therefore he claims that it is right to eagerly wish the accomplishment of the sacrifice.

Then the chorus give their impression of his choice:

ἐπεὶ δ' ἀνάγκας ἔδου λέπαδνον
 φρενὸς πνέων δυσσεβῆ τρῆπαίαν
 ἄναγνον, ἀνίερον, τόθεν
 τὸ παντότολμον φρονεῖν μετέγνων.
 βροτοῦς θρασύνει γὰρ αἰαχρόμητις
 τάλαινα παρακοπὰ πρωτοπήμων.
 ἔτλα δ' οὔν θυτῆρ γενέσθαι
 θυγατρὸς, γυναικοκρίνων
 πολέμων ἀρωγὰν
 καὶ προτέλεια ναῶν.

(vv. 218-227).

It would not be easily possible to outdo this in the way of condemnation. We should especially assume that the chorus mean what they say- Agamemnon is, in Hellenic terms, mad.

We now turn to the opinions of certain scholars. First, we will treat of the opinions of John Finley and John J. Peradotto. The reader will recall from Chapter II our judgement of the interpretation which these gentlemen share. Finley and Peradotto say, in effect, that the omen, the anger of Artemis, and the sacrifice of Iphigenia do

not fit into a real, causal situation, but that they are reflections of the sanguinary nature of Agamemnon. That this is unacceptable we have already strongly asserted. This sort of interpretation fits well into criticism of symbolist work by, say, Maeterlinck, d'Annunzio, or Yeats, but it has no place in criticism of Greek drama, and its presentation necessarily involves ignoring very large parts of the text. Nor do these authors use the text very much to support this particular version.

The second class of opinion, viz., that one must stress the voluntary character of Agamemnon's decision, irrespective of constraint, has attracted a number of scholars, and may be taken as representing something of a consensus. E.R. Dodds puts the matter strikingly enough:

...logic may assure us that Agamemnon at Aulis can neither have made a choice nor have incurred any intelligible guilt; for it is the will of Zeus that Troy should fall... But may it not be better to follow the text instead? There we see the King go through all the motions of a man in the act of choice.¹

In his judgement, previously cited, Professor Fraenkel similarly stresses the element of the choice of Agamemnon. This is indeed because the text makes a point about speaking of Agamemnon's act of choice, most especially in that vitally important speech in which Agamemnon announces his alternatives and chooses the sacrifice. Such an opinion has the advantage of being close to the text, and of taking

the text seriously. But it would seem to ignore, without explaining away, the compelling role of the omen and the action of Artemis in sending the winds. In evaluating the alternatives of Agamemnon, Fraenkel remarks upon the phrase πῶς λιπόνους γένωμαι, pointing out that it is spoken as a rhetorical question, implying impossibility. He goes on to remark that there was in Athenian law a γραφή λιπονῶν and that:

...when the poet deliberately chose that clear-cut, ugly word λιπόνους, the Athenian audience could not feel the faintest doubt that here a possible criminal act had been mooted, and rejected. Such an action would be criminal for any member of the expedition, how much more for the supreme commander.

That Agamemnon seems to go through the process of choice is clear from the speech that the chorus quotes, and so far we may safely go with this school of critics. But thereby these learned gentlemen ignore the issue of the very real compulsion which is placed upon Agamemnon, if we believe the text, which twice mentions famine as being the lot of the army at Aulis. In pointing out that 'desertion' was a crime, he seems for the moment to wish to cause his readers to forget that the other alternative, the sacrifice, is also a serious crime. If Agamemnon is compelled, he is not free, and can make no choice, however deliberate he may wish to seem to be. Of course, this may prove not to be impossible, for Agamemnon, when

he actually appears and speaks, proves to be a fussy, pompous and ill-natured man, who makes much use of pious formulae to accompany his often ill-considered actions. Such a man might, when in a narrow corner, as Agamemnon plainly is here, use a barrage of language to cover the fact that he is quickly taking the only way out possible.

In 1957, Denys Page published an edition of the play based upon his own work and that of John Denniston. The introduction, however, represents the opinions of Professor Page. This introduction, which is of some length and which has gained a certain celebrity, propounds the following thesis: that the world in which Aeschylus lived was one in which there acted a swarm of irrational powers, and that Agamemnon is caught in a conflict of two of these, and has no choice whatever in the matter of his daughter's slaughter.³ Page supports this surprising view by a theory of the "highest form" of tragedy. It is not at the moment our purpose to speculate upon "forms" of tragedy, so let us proceed to quote a long passage from Page, but one in which his entire position on the choice of Agamemnon is summarized.

As Aeschylus actually tells his story, Agamemnon is compelled, through no fault of his own, to sacrifice his daughter. Zeus has approved, indeed he has dispatched the expedition to Troy: it is

his will that Troy should fall; it is nowhere suggested that Agamemnon might have disbanded his army; indeed it is said that the army will think it 'right and proper' that Iphigenia should be sacrificed. Iphigenia is clearly doomed, whatever Agamemnon may do. His only way out is to desert... that would be contrary to the will of Zeus, and it would not save his daughter. Desertion is not a real alternative; nobody except Agamemnon even mentions it as being even theoretically possible; and he mentions it only to rule it out at once on the grounds that it would not save his daughter. The sacrifice of Iphigenia, once demanded by Artemis, is an absolute necessity, and necessity is the word by which Aeschylus describes Agamemnon's submission to the will of Artemis; what he bowed to was (it could not be more plainly sated) compulsion, ἀνάγκη.

Page's view must be considered point by point, as he raises issues on which any critic who *claims* to put forth a complete view must take a stand. The first thing to be observed is the fact that Page comes to issue, and very directly, with the question of compulsion, with the desperate straits in which the army finds itself. He quotes Sophocles' Electra in an attempt to prove that the army could neither go to Troy or return home.⁵ This is not entirely sound, as differences among the tragic dramatists are frequent, but Aeschylus tells us sufficiently that the army was in a desperate case, either suffering from, or threatened by, starvation (vs. 193).

Page tells us that Agamemnon is forced to the sacrifice "through no fault of his own." Of his own previous personal history we are pointedly told nothing, but as

we have pointed out in a previous chapter, there is a very real guilt hanging over the head of Agamemnon, coming from the atrocities perpetrated by Atreus upon Thyestes and his children. Agamemnon has inherited the wealth of the house of Atreus, and its guilt. Thus, rather than his situation being that of a man who is forced by his position as head of state to do something pour raisons d'état which causes him to incur personal guilt, it is rather that the royal house, polluted with unspeakable crimes, is bringing death to the people.

Now very many authors have pointed out that the expedition to Troy is just and necessary, because Zeus has commanded it, and Page merely insists upon this idea rather more than most other critics. Of course, Zeus is described as sending Agamemnon against Troy, and in no uncertain terms:

οὕτω δ' Ἀτρέως παῖδας ὁ κρείσσων
 ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πέμπει ξένιος
 Ζεὺς πολυάνορος ἀμφὶ γυναικός,

(vv. 60-62).

Yes, for the crime of Paris demands justice, Zeus prospers the work of justice, and so Troy falls. But hold! If in Aeschylus, especially in the Oresteia, there is something terrible, mysterious and dark, it is this same will of Zeus. The Atreidae are wronged by Alexander, and exact their

vengeance, but Clytemnestra also has suffered a great wrong, and when the chorus upbraids her and threatens her with vengeance for the murder of Agamemnon, she haughtily, and with all the force of her great nature hurls at them her claim to avenge her child. In the end, they fall silent, and acknowledge that here, too, justice has been done:

ὄνειδος ἦκει τόδ' ἀντ' ὀνειδούς,

δύσμαχα δ' ἐστὶ κρῖναι.

φέρει φέροντ', ἐκτίνει δ' ὁ καίνων.

μίμνει δὲ μίμνοντος ἐν θρόνῳ Διὸς

παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα· θέσμιον γάρ.

τίς ἄν γονᾶν ἀραῖον ἐκβάλῃ δόμων;

κεκόλληται γένος πρὸς ἄτq. (vv. 1560-1566).

Clytemnestra, finally, has a claim to justice as good as that of the Atreidae. Does it therefore follow that Zeus approves of her action? The will of Zeus is to justice, but the very acts of justice are crimes, or involve crimes in order to come to completion. Further, the mouthpiece of the will of Zeus in the drama is the chorus, composed, as we know, of men who meditate much and deeply on right and wrong, on man and god. Their reaction to the Trojan war, although they pronounce it approved by Zeus, is one of measured horror. They pointedly argue that the war is over an adulterous woman (vs. 62) yet they know, and

later it comes out into the open, that Agamemnon's queen is also a πολυανήρ γυνή. But most of all, the chorus' hostility to the Trojan war comes out in the first and second stasima, and especially in the great passage, from verse 429 to verse 474. The theme of the ode is that of the sack of Troy, of the evil which Helen brought to the city, but the chorus pass from Ilium to the sorrows and longing of Menelaus, and suddenly to the sufferings of the men of Hellas. The great strophe which begins τὸ χρυσαμοιβὸς δ' Ἄρης σωματῶν is not to be equalled as an expression of noble pity, of indignation. Most important, the anger is turned against the sons of Atreus. For the ode begins with talk of the punishment of Alexander, and with the evil of Helen, and by skillful and almost insensible transition, we see anger expressed against the Atreidae:

τάδε σῖγά τις βαύζει·
 φθονερὸν δ' ὑπ' ἄλγος ἔρπει·
 προδίκοις Ἀτρεΐδαις.

(vv. 449-451).

And while we are still surprised and uneasy about this, there follows a passage which is perfectly astounding:

Βαρεῖα δ' ἀστῶν φάτις ζῦν κότφ·
 δημοκράτου δ' ἀρᾶς τίνει χρέος.
 μένει δ' ἀκοῦσαι τί μοι

μέριμνα νυκτηρεφές.
 τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ
 ἄσκοποι θεοί.

(vv. 456-462).

Surely, "those who have killed many" are none other than the Atreidae. The question could be drawn out, and reinforced with further citation, but it should be clear that it is not possible to undo the Gordian knot of this problem simply by saying that the expedition is right and that Agamemnon could not possibly refrain from it, as it is the will of Zeus. The will of Zeus in the Oresteia is as delicate a question as the favor of the Lord in the Book of Job.

To return to the argument of Page, we are further told that "indeed it is said that the army will think it 'right and proper' that Iphigeneia should be sacrificed." Now, we will acknowledge Page's analysis of Agamemnon's situation- he is being coerced by a diviner and an eager army. (The βαρεῖα ἀσπῶν φάτις of the first stasimon is arguably only the feeling of the army after a long and exhausting war.) And nothing in the text disproves Page's contention that Iphigenia is "clearly doomed," that the army was in a position to sail off after sacrificing Iphigenia, whether Agamemnon willed or no.

But we are not, in fact, told that the army will think the sacrifice 'right and proper.' The word which Page's three words translate is of course, θέμις. And it is spoken by Agamemnon, in that remarkable quoted speech. His language is very oddly strained and hyperbolic- of course, he delights in haughty speech, as we see when he appears in person, but this talk of desiring the sacrifice with "overimpassioned passion" (Fraenkel) as consonant with θέμις is the best single proof before the walk across the purple carpet that Agamemnon is mad. That the sacrifice was expedient, or necessary, might be alleged, but it could never be θέμις, and no one except Agamemnon says that it is, and a moment after quoting him the chorus goes on to say of him:

ἐπεὶ δ' ἀνάγκας ἔδου λέπαδνον
 φρενὸς πνέων δυσσεβῆ τροπαίαν
 ἀναγνον, ἀνίερὸν, τόθεν
 τὸ παντότολμον φρονεῖν μετέγνώ.

(vv. 218-221).

θέμις indeed!

The possibility of refusing to give his sanction to the sacrifice, which Agamemnon characterizes as "desertion" is thus also taken by Page. But Agamemnon gives no reason for rejecting "desertion." Page says that he mentions it only to rule it out at once on the grounds that it

would not save his daughter.' Yet Agamemnon presents no such grounds. He gives no reason, and the rhetorical question implies rather that such an action is unworthy of Agamemnon's political position- it should be interpreted as indicating, not a cool grasp of political realities, but an hybristic refusal of any diminishment of power and pride. For the issue is not whether Iphigenia could be saved- given the wrath of Artemis, her fate is perhaps sealed. The issue is that if Agamemnon had taken the consequence of refusing to sanction his daughter's death, he would have escaped the consequences of the act of blood. That he did not is fact, and is understandable, since he in effect partakes of the sanguinary and ambitious nature of his family.

It seems to us that insufficient attention has been given, as we have pointed out in previous chapters, to the omen as a divine phenomenon. It is also the case that the human mechanism of the omen has also been slighted. We must remember that this drama was written by a man of the Fifth Century, for an audience of his contemporaries, and that oracles and omens had a very decided political and military importance in that period. In the words of Martin Nilsson, "Whoever has read the accounts of Greek historians knows that no battle was waged, no river crossed, before victims had been slaughtered

and the signs of the sacrifice were favorable."⁷ The decided role of the seers, men important in time of peace, far more so in time of war, is an ever-present reality for whoever studies the history of the Fifth Century. That Pausanias, faced with evil signs, should delay at Plataea until favorable ones were obtained, was natural for the men of the age; his conduct passed for a sign, not of imbalance, but of great piety. The audience of Aeschylus would have recognized in Calchas just such a powerful seer as they themselves might know, a Lampon, a Tisamenos. That such a man could have a strong coercive influence upon a general, especially in time of military emergency (as is plainly the case at Aulis) no Athenian would be likely to doubt.

We must, as we have seen, neither ignore that Agamemnon is in a difficult position, nor perhaps assume that he is in a hopeless one. Aeschylus would be unlikely to show Agamemnon making up his mind if really he had no choice. In addition, if Agamemnon really has a choice of sorts, then the crime fits in with the pattern of the other crimes in the Oresteia. (We must remember that the Agamemnon is a part of a densely-woven fabric.) The fate of Agamemnon is a parallel to that of Clytemnestra and to the narrowly-avoided fate of Orestes. And the crimes of Agamemnon's wife and son are voluntary, the result of a choice.

The key to Agamemnon's attitude may lie in line 186,

μάντιν οὔτινα φέγων,

Commentators have not been slow to contrast this with the speech of Agamemnon to Calchas during the quarrel in the first book of the Iliad:

μάντι κακῶν, οὔ πώ ποτέ μοι τὸ κρήγυον εἶπας·
αἰεὶ τοι τὰ κάκ' ἐστὶ φίλα φρεσὶ μαντεύεσθαι,
ἐσθλὸν δ' οὔτε τί πω εἶπας ἔπος οὔτε τέλεσσας.

(vv. 106-108).

Professor Fraenkel quotes the most important of the verses cited above, with the comment, "Agamemnon does not behave as others in corresponding circumstances usually behave towards the seer in question."⁸ What must one therefore conclude? That Agamemnon is thereby displaying exemplary piety? One suspects that this is implied.

It is, in fact, not the case at all, and the problem at once ceases to belong only to the domain of literature and passes as well to that of the history of religion. An omen, an oracle, or a divinatory sacrifice is not a clear and irreversible guide to the future. Experts existed, and they often disagreed. As W.R.Halliday pointed out, the taking of an auspice or the observation of an omen was as much an act of magic attempting to control and force the future, as it was an observation of an established

destiny.⁹ Further, and most important, cases such as that of Agamemnon's abuse of Calchas in the Iliad have a valuable religious function, for an interpretation of an omen had to be either accepted or rejected, and it was quite possible to reject an omen. But we will let Nilsson speak here:

Hat man darauf hingewiesen, dass ein Orakel nicht immer unbedingt in Erfuellung geht, also keine einfache Konstatierung eines kommenden Ereignisses ist, sondern dass man es entweder annehmen oder ablehnen kann.
 ...Dass ein Orakel unbedingt in Erfuellung gehen muss, liegt gar nicht in dem einfachen Begriff; die Erfuellung beruht darauf, ob die Verkoppelung zustande oder gebrochen wird, und daran kann der Betreffende selbst bis zu einem gewissen Grade mitwirken, er kann das Orakel annehmen oder ablehnen, wie in volkstuemlichen Aberglauben ein boeses Wort oder der boese Blick durch Ausspucken, bestimmte Gebaerden usw. unschaedlich gemacht wird.¹⁰

The refusal of an omen was, of course, perilous. But it was regularly practiced. We are pointedly told that Agamemnon did not blame any prophet. He therefore accepted the omen with all its consequences. Why? For the very simplest of reasons- the omen offers him victory, and if it means victory at the price of his daughter, he is willing, then to sacrifice her, he even wishes it ὀργῆ περιδργως (215-216).

This is further the force of the use of a proverbial expression in the first stasimon:

ἐπεὶ / διώκει παῖς ποτανὸν ὄρνιν
 (vv. 394-395).

Of course, the proverbial meaning is obvious enough, but considering the amount of bird-imagery in the trilogy, it is unlikely that a reference to birds should be made gratuitously. One is tempted to think that here ὄρνις is used in the traditional^{al} sense of οἰωνός, meaning "omen." Thus, it would be a glancing reference to Agamemnon's seizing at the bird-omen which offered him victory.

This is not to say that Calchas is wrong, and that Artemis is not angry and will let the army off at a lesser price than that of Iphigenia's life. What it means is that Agamemnon does not make the slightest attempt to save his daughter. This sets the speech which he makes about his choice in a different light. It is not to say that he does not regret his choice, and that the tears which he sheds are not real, and bitter. But he will fulfill his purpose, even at this cost.

But what of that contemptible alternative of "desertion?" The discussion of it is rather futile, since of course Agamemnon dismisses it, but if Agamemnon had a choice to make, then this was at least possible, and we may study it. We have already cited Fraenkel on the fact that desertion was a civil crime in Athens. Should Agamemnon refuse to sanction the sacrifice, one of a number of things would happen. Page suggests that the army would have sacrificed

the girl, and gone without him. Of this, we have no trace in the text, but it might have been supported by tradition—without the Cypria and the Oresteia of Stesichorus we must fall back upon works later than the Agamemnon, especially onto the dangerous evidence of the Iphigenia Aulidensis of Euripides. Here, we plainly see pressure being placed upon Agamemnon, and Clytemnestra openly remarks upon her husband:

μακός τις ἔστι καὶ λίαν ταρβεῖ στρατόν.

(vs. 1012).

But this is not conclusive.

Should the action have been taken in spite of Agamemnon, the king would clearly have lost his hegemony over the other kings of Hellas. It is this sacrifice of honor, this diminishment of his prestige which Agamemnon wards off by sacrificing his daughter.

C.H. Reeves suggests that both the play and tradition present the Atreidae as the prime movers of the Trojan expedition. From this, he gives us a variant of the "will of Zeus" argument which we have examined in speaking of Page's view: if Iphigenia is not sacrificed, then the expedition cannot go to Troy, and justice will not be done, against the will of Zeus.¹¹ Now, even if in fact as a consequence of Agamemnon's refusal, the expedition disbanded, we must not assume that therefore the will of

Zeus would be foiled, for though Zeus wills justice, and though the universe over which he rules inevitably brings justice to pass, Zeus is infinitely patient, and he wreaks justice upon the family, so that, for instance, Atreus enjoyed impunity for the crimes which he committed, but his sons reaped the harvest of wrath.

At any rate, what was to be lost by refusing the sacrifice was clearly of importance to Agamemnon. The side of the Trojan war which we are presented with is the personal one- the rape of Helen is a private quarrel between the Atreidae and Alexander. And this is treated by the chorus with undisguised horror.

Finally, there occur in the play some strange images upon two themes, which tend at times to merge. They are the theme of wealth, and that of throwing things away. Their purpose may be a glancing reference to the pride and honor for which Agamemnon chose to pay a great price.

The theme of wealth occurs in several contexts, most especially in what might be termed one of evil wealth, wealth which corrupts, entraps, destroys. The prime example of this occurs in the words which describe the robe in which Clytemnestra entraps Agamemnon: πλοῦτον
εἴματος κακόν . Evil wealth is also the theme of the powerful irony in the words of Clytemnestra, when she encourages Cassandra to come into the house, for masters

old in wealth are milder than parvenu ones (vv. 1040-1046). The chorus also meditates upon the commonplace of pride born of wealth, in words that apply as well to the house of Atreus as to the house of Priam. In the first stasimon, we are told that:

οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἔπαλξις
 πλοῦτου πρὸς κέρρον ἀνδρὶ
 λακτίσαντι μέγαν Δίκας
 βωμὸν εἰς ἀφάνειαν.

(vv. 381-384).

And in the second stasimon, the chorus says that justice adorns the houses of the poor:

Δίκη δὲ λάμπει μὲν ἐν
 δυσκάπνοις δώμασιν,
 τὸν τ' ἐναίσιμον τίει (βίον).

(vv. 772-775).

Strange and related images occur in the third stasimon. The ode was probably always an obscure one, and the matter is many times complicated for us by the fact that the opening verses of both strophes are very corrupt. We are concerned here with the second strophe. In it, there occurs the image of casting away possessions in order to avoid shipwreck:

καὶ πρὸ μὲν τι χρημάτων
 κτησίων ὄκνος βαλῶν

σφενδόνας ἀπ' εὐμέτρου-
 οὐκ ἔδου πρόπας δόμος
 πλησμονᾶς γέμων ἄγαν,
 οὐδ' ἐπόντισε σκάφος.

(vv. 1008-1013).

This is the central one of three images. The first is about sickness, and it is easy to conjecture that the lines should mean that sickness could be cured by medicine. This is the second, and of course the image is a literal one- in a storm it is a practical measure of safety to throw out ballast, and in addition there may be something here of the belief that disaster could be averted by throwing something valuable away. But we have a case here of the meaning of an image being reinforced by having the literal meaning break through the metaphor, in the words οὐκ ἔδου πρόπας δόμος . The words are not appropriate to the situation of men at sea threatened by shipwreck, but they fit the situation of Agamemnon, at least before he made his fateful decision to sacrifice his daughter.

It would be possible, although perhaps not fruitful, to push the inquiry further, for the refusal of the sacrifice is but a possibility, and one which Agamemnon pushes violently from him. His family lies under a curse, and while upon the human plane his action is voluntary

and based upon a clear assessment of what he wants and how to achieve it, for the heavenly and infernal powers which attend to the revenge of the children of Thyestes, his choice is all-but-determined. Yet by acting righteously, Agamemnon might have succeeded in stopping the curse, as Orestes does later, with the help of Apollo. Anne Lebeck put the matter clearly:

This choice may seem no more than bait dangled by the gods, at which, knowing his antecedents, they know he will snatch. Nonetheless, Agamemnon still has the possibility of adopting another alternative ^{ὑπὲρ μέρους} His response may be predictable; it is not determined.¹²

Notes to Chapter IV

1. E.R.Dodds, "Morals and Politics in the Oresteia," Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society, N.S., VI, 1960, pp. 19-31.
2. Fraenkel, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 123.
3. Denniston and Page, op. cit., pp. xxiii-xxiv.
4. Ibidem, p. xxiv.
5. Ibidem, p. xxiv.
6. Fraenkel's translation, op. cit., Vol I, p. 103.
7. Martin P. Nilsson, Greek Popular Religion, New York, 1940, p. 128.
8. Fraenkel, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 115.
9. W.R.Halliday, Greek Divination, 1913, reprinted, Chicago, 1967, p. 42.
10. Martin P. Nilsson, Geschichte der Griechischen Religion, Munich, 1955, pp. 165-166.
11. C.H.Reeves, "The Parodos of the Agamemnon," Classical Journal, LV, 1960, p. 168-169.
12. Anne Lebeck, The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure, Washington, D.C., p. 36.

Chapter V

The Death of Agamemnon: *A Political Moral*

Aeschylus was a great poet, and the Oresteia exhibits his creative genius, in its brilliant speeches and magnificent lyrics. As an integral part of that creative effort, it also displays his reaction to a myth, taken as an exemplar of the human situation. The story of the House of Atreus was something which he inherited from his fathers, like the Greek tongue itself. He may have changed some things, or have chosen specific elements of the action from among the various versions available to him. But the work must grow, nurtured by his genius, out of the old story.

The men of his generation were among the last of the Greeks who could intelligently accept the ancient mythology quite free from the questions and doubts of the sophists. They received the stories of gods and heroes reverently, and as true records of the past, as true guides for the future. These myths in effect defined the moral world of men, and their relationships with the gods. Thus myth was seen as a powerful didactic tool. The repetition, the presentation of one of the ancient stories was supposed to teach men a lesson about the life of men or about the gods. Myth was a tool and a teacher of moral thought.

A number of Greek myths were created, or more likely, profoundly revised, during the Archaic age, and they reflect the concerns of that period- belief in the great oracle of Delphi, concern with purification, conviction that the arrogance of prosperity was visited with destruction. These convictions survived into the Fifth Century, and no doubt the popularity of the stories of the House of Atreus and the House of Oedipus with tragedy-writers reflects this fact. The prevalent belief that ὕβρις born of κόρος draws the baleful φθόρος of the gods was so normal a part of the moral climate that the astute Thucydides, who was one of the most reasonable men of his age, cast his great history in the moral pattern of a tragedy.

In this chapter, we will explore one aspect of the moral import of the myth of the murder of Agamemnon, an aspect which may in general terms be called "political." After seeing the use to which the poet of the Odyssey puts the myth, we will go on to show that both Pindar and Aeschylus use the myth with similar political meaning, a fact which argues a 'climate of moral opinion' concerning the myth.

The theme of the Odyssey is, of course, the long trials and ultimate happiness of its hero. But with what Rhys Carpenter characterized as "needless frequency" the story of the murder of Agamemnon or of the revenge of Orestes

is alluded to or told in this epic.¹ The story in effect serves several purposes; it is "a warning to Odysseus, an example to his son Telemachus, and a foil to his own good fortune with Penelope."² The latter is by far the most important motive. If Zeus mentions Aegisthus in the council of the gods as a prime specimen of human perversity (I, 33-34) and if Athena disguised as Mentor and Nestor uses the story of the revenge of Orestes in order to encourage Telemachus (Book III, passim), yet the chief accounts of the melancholy fate of Agamemnon occur in the Eleventh and Twenty-Fourth books, and they come from Agamemnon himself, now a shade. When Odysseus, who has gone to the place of the dead in order to consult Teiresias, meets Agamemnon, the ghost tells part of the tale, and later when the shades of the suitors arrive in the house of Hades, Agamemnon speaks with Achilles, and tells more of his fate.

The story is told in pointed praise of Penelope, for although in Homer Agamemnon is murdered by his cousin Aegisthus, great stress is laid upon the co-operation of the unfaithful Clytemnestra. The two wives are in fact in a similar case, courted by suitors in the absence of their husbands.

The moral message of Homer's account stresses Homeric qualities, as the daring and courage of Orestes, the wifely virtue and fidelity of Penelope. The Homeric version is straightforward and simple, and exploits the pathos of the

death of Agamemnon immediately after victory and safe return to his home. It lacks the murder of the husband by the wife, the matricide and Erinyes of Aeschylus. It is possible that the version found in the Odyssey is, however, discreetly bowdlerized. In the speech of Nestor to Telemachus, there is just the slightest hint of matricide:

ἦ τοι ὁ τὸν κτείνας δαίλυ τάφον Ἀργείοισιν
μητρὸς τε στυγερῆς καὶ ἀνάγκιδος Αἰγισθοῖο

(III, 309-310).

Of pre-Homeric versions of this myth we know nothing whatever, in spite of a fearsomely documented study by T.T. Duke, in which an attempt is made to demonstrate a connection between Agamemnon killed in his bath and a number of primitive practices. The assumptions of Duke's study are uncritically Frazerian.³

Carl Robert's classic study of the revenge of Orestes is based upon examination of the tragic versions, certain Fifth-Century vases, and scattered notices of ancient scholars.⁴ Robert convincingly traced certain details common to the vases and the dramas, and proved that in fact these were derived from a common source, the Oresteia of Stesichorus. Given the certainty of the attribution of the details, including such things as Clytemnestra's dream about a snake, it is difficult not to follow Robert's

conclusion that in fact the entire Fifth-Century tradition of the myth derives from Stesichorus. In addition, the very prominent role played by the oracle at Delphi in the Fifth-Century version suggests the influence of the Delphic priesthood, either independently, or more likely, through the medium of Stesichorus.⁵

In Pythia XI, Pindar treats of the revenge of Orestes. The stress on the figure of Clytemnestra, the question concerning her reasons for killing Agamemnon, the words concerning Cassandra form points of similarity which have led to speculation whether one poet may have influenced another, and to a fruitless search for verbal similarities. In fact, the resemblance may rest simply upon a shared derivation from the prestigious treatment of Stesichorus.

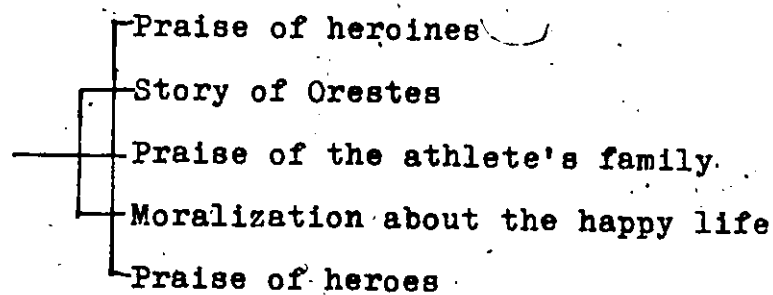
Pythia XI has a reputation for great obscurity, which recent work has attempted to reveal as ill-founded. Before briefly touching upon a part of the traditional controversy, we will describe the various parts of this brief ode.

The poem is written for a Theban athlete, and Pindar begins by summoning a number of Theban heroines to a feast in the Ismenion (vs. 1-16). With virtually no transition, the poet passes to the myth of the revenge of Orestes, which he treats in his brief and allusive way (vv. 17-37). Then follows a transitional passage, in which Pindar says that he seems to have lost his way:

ἦρ', ὦ φίλοι, κατ' ἀμεισιπόρους τριόδους ἐδινηθήην,
 ὀρθὰν κέλευθον ἰῶν
 τὸ πρίν· ἦ μὲ τις ἄνεμος ἔξω πλόου
 ἔβαλεν, ὡς ὄτ' ἄκατον ἐνναλίαν;
 Μοῖσα, τὸ δὲ τεδόν, εἰ μισθοῖο συνέθει παρέχειν
 φωνὰν ὑπάργυρον ...

(vv. 38-42).

This passage has usually been taken as an apology for using an unsuitable myth. We do not think this in fact to be the case, but choose to postpone the discussion until later. There follows upon this passage the enumeration of the athletic victories of the victor's family (vv. 50-58). The poem closes by holding up as examples certain heroes. It is a specimen of simple ring-composition, of a sort which connoisseurs of poetry in Fifth-Century Greece could doubtless easily recognize and follow (taking into account, no doubt, their celebrated love of poetry and childhood rote-learning):



It is concerning this ode that Boeckh wrote, "Interpretis munere si quis rite fungi constituerit, vix illi

ulla oda tantam, quantam haec, difficultatem obicit,"⁶
and he has been fervently echoed by several later critics.

The question of the date of the poem has been often discussed. There are, in fact, two alternate dates, and the extant scholia, which ascribe the poem either to 474 or 454, are sufficiently confusing and inconsistent. Formidable authorities have spoken for both, but we hold, as we have previously said, with the earlier date, after the very careful judgement of the evidence produced by Peter Von der Muehll. In recent times, C.M. Bowra has been the chief advocate of the later date, but his opinion rests heavily upon his own rather personal view of the poem's meaning.⁷

The moralizing passage which extends from verse 50 to verse 58 is plainly the core of the poem. The most important question is this: what does the passage mean, and what relation does it have to the myth? The reader will have remarked that in the ring-composition scheme of the poem, the myth and the moral are corresponding members. The myth has often received scant attention, since the transitional passage which we have quoted has been taken as a disclaimer, an admission that the myth is irrelevant. Even the scholiast remarked that Pindar made use of a very irrelevant digression: ὁ Πίνδαρος... σφόδρα ἀκαίρῳ παρεμβάσει ἐχρήσατο.⁸

The myth has often been regarded as one of Pindar's lapses, something which is nothing to his present purpose. But the handling of the myth is masterly. As Burton wrote in his very solid essay on the poem,

Pindar's art is seen in this myth at its greatest: it is hard to find in Greek poetry a passage of comparable length which can match these lines for energy and pathos.⁹

Are we to believe that Pindar squandered his splendid art on something totally irrelevant? Rather with Boeckh we should say, "Nihilo magis tamen adducor ut credam Pindarum nihil inepte molientem."¹⁰

It has been the normal assumption of most critics to seek for the reasons which would explain the inclusion of this myth in the ode, not in literary investigation, but in historical conjectures. The problem is not regarded as a literary one, but as a personal problem concerning either the athlete or the poet. This of course amounts to a total capitulation in the attempt to make the myth relevant to the rest of the poem.

In most interpretations, the relation of the myth to the moralizing passage in vv. 50-58 has been recognized, and this raises an additional cluster of problems. We shall quote the most critical pair of verses:

τῶν γὰρ ἀγὰ πόλιν εὐρίσκων τὰ μέσα μακροτέρῳ
ὄλβῳ τεθαλότα, μέμφομαι αἴσαμ τυραννίδων.

(52-53).

Here, the usual interpretation has been Heyne's, that "the lot of tyrannies" stands for "the lot of tyrants."¹¹

Literary solutions to the questions raised by the poem have been suggested. For instance, Boeckh hit upon what we believe to be precisely the right interpretation; "quod sortem tyrannidis Pindarus improbet, id infelicibus Atridarum casibus, sive Agamemnonis, sive Clytemnestrae et Aegisthi manifesto aptatum est."¹²

If this is the case, why continue with an extended attempt to give the poem personal applications? Yet this is precisely what Boeckh goes on to do, and he is not the only critic to preface a long discussion of possible "tyrants" with this modest, purely literary solution. Boeckh suggests that either the family of the athlete Thrasydaeus or Pindar himself, or both, were compromised in the Medizing politics of Thebes during the Persian war, and this is their proclamation of faithfulness to the city.¹³

Wilamowitz popularized another interpretation.¹⁴ Like Boeckh, he dated the ode from 474, and claimed that Pindar, having returned from Thebes, felt obliged to defend himself from suspicions of friendliness with the Sicilian tyrants. What is more, having returned to Thebes: "Unter haemischen Neide hat er zu leiden, schwer zu leiden, wenn er von αἰὴν ὕβρις reden kann. Wir verstehen nun,

weshalb er auch in der Geschichte Klytaimestras von
κακόλογοι πολῖται geredet hat."¹⁵

This is conjecture, and rather extreme. It supposes that Pindar in fact went to Sicily, and that there was bad blood in Greece about the Sicilian tyrants (and in Doric Thebes at that) and that a poet's professional relations with paying clients were likely to affect his standing in his city. Apparently, in 474 Pindar was accused of not praising his native city, as we may perhaps gather from Pythia IX, vv. 76-100. But if he really was smarting under criticism, his answer is singularly evasive and inept.

Wilamowitz' interpretation is conjecture, and rather extreme, but subsequent critics have not been lacking who have been full willing to go farther. For instance, Gilbert Norwood attempted to unify the poem by saying that it was composed with the bee as a controlling symbol.¹⁶ His exegesis is ingenious, but tenuous, and it has convinced almost no one, except perhaps Jacqueline Duchemin. This critic wrote, "Il nous paraît probable que le symbole de l'ode est en effet l'abeille. Mais il est clair que Cassandre l'inspirée représente ici le poète. Après un séjour en Sicile, accueilli à son retour chez lui par la violence de ses détracteurs, Pindare leur fait observer, à travers le récit mythique, que l'on peut bien assassiner

l'interprète des dieux, mais que ceux-ci le vengeront tôt ou tard."¹⁷ This is a fair specimen of Duchemin's criticism, and it may be passed over with only this comment, that Wilamowitz' interpretation, founded upon conjectures, is here used as a base to build still further and fancier conjectures.

A more recent advocate of the later date, and thus, of another set of "tyrants" was C.M. Bowra. Bowra argues for 454 and then goes on to say that in his attack upon tyrants the poet, "probably has in mind the illegal or imposed government which was established in Thebes after Oenophyta."¹⁸ In other words, the tyrants are the Athenians. Bowra assumes that the reasons for the famous disclaimer are very personal, "He would not have said this if he had not been accused of supporting the local tyrants, and this for a time he may have done."¹⁹

To this group of critics, with their personal interpretation of the poetic first-person, one can only reply that if Pindar was indeed subject to criticism, or indeed, as Duchemin would have us think, in danger of death, then surely the poet who brought forth a fire-storm-like the glorious Pythia I could have shot back at his enemies a thunderbolt of more Cyclopean work than this rather slight opus.

The last twenty years have been exciting ones in Pindaric scholarship. A school of critics who follow the lead of E. Bundy have affirmed that the meaning of the Pindaric poems must be found within the poems themselves, without looking to external events which the poems might allegedly reflect. The reasoning behind this view is simple: if Pindar is viewed as an artist who is constantly making veiled compliments or attacks upon people, like the maiden aunts in Proust, he must emerge as a very imperfect artist, and his poems, of whatever historical value, must be seen as frivolous peuvres à clef set off with some scattered, glittering passages. The glorious seriousness and austere splendors of the greatest odes should suffice to make this doubtful. Perhaps we must be prepared to admit that Pindar took Greek mythology and Archaic moral ideas far more seriously than we are likely to.

A Scholar of Bundy's school, D.C. Young, published a study of Pythia XI several years ago. In this paper, it seems that most of the vexed questions have been answered in a simple and satisfactory manner.²⁰ Like most critics, Young regards the words μέμφομαι ἄλλοιαν τυραννίδων as forming the interpretative center of the poem. Then, in the simplest manner possible, he proceeds to establish that this statement may be placed within a well-established topos. The burden of the commonplace is this: that absolute power

in a state is one of the extremes which vitiate human happiness, even for the one who holds it, and that happiness is best attained by the choice of a middle condition, rejecting such wishes as absolute power, fabulous wealth, or eternal life. (We must remember that the fact that this is a commonplace in no way rules out the poet's utter sincerity- it merely implies what we may call a consensus of opinion. For instance, the beauty of the Alps is quite a common topos in the poetry and prose of the various Romantic national schools, but this does not mean that this beauty was any the less intensely felt by the various poets who described it.)

However, Young says nothing about the passage which gave earlier critics the most evidence, the passage, already quoted, about having gone astray. The omission is glaring, but we need not for that be led back into the critical quicksands of Bowra and Duchemin. Two easy explanations suggest themselves. One is that the poet is reacting to the horror of the myth which he has just recounted, aware as he is that the poem is to be performed at a solemn feast. Another, and more probable one is that Pindar is anticipating such a reaction on the part of his audience. The story of the House of Atreus is one of the prime ancient specimens of the grand guignol. The poet begs the question, asking out loud "Am I lost? Where does

this lead to?" And at once he shows the drift of what he has been saying- a life of civic duty and of striving for victory in the games is the true happy life, beside which the seeming happiness of despots is something blameworthy.

We thus in the end return to the simple first impulse of Boeckh, the terrible story of the Pelopids, told with such art and such compression, is, in the end, used as an example of the moral- it illustrates as perhaps no other Greek myth could, the sad lot of tyrants.

Pindar, then, felt the myth to be a political one, with a very specific politico-moral point. For Pindar, it was not merely the story of a son's revenge for an unhappy father, as in the Odyssey.

We must now ask ourselves if Aeschylus saw this as being in any way a political myth as well, and if he did not indeed draw the same political conclusions from it which Pindar did.

The reader is doubtless aware that there has been for some hundred years a fairly warm discussion of the question of the political meaning of the Oresteia.²¹ The discussion has mainly been about the foundation of the Areopagus in the Eumenides, and its significance for an Athens which had recently been rocked by the reforms and the murder of Ephialtes. Athenian politics are obviously in the air in the Eumenides, but there is little consensus as to just what is being said.

It is well-known that the Oresteia is a closely-knit whole. In the Agamemnon, little violences are done to the language in order to prepare for the trial scene in the Eumenides; for instance, in the very beginning of the parodos, the Atreidae are called the ἀντιδίκος of Priam. Much good Aeschylean criticism has been written since Livingstone wrote that the trial scene in the last play was something "stitched on its outside."²² We are more aware than ever of the great unity of the trilogy. Pindar told the story of Orestes in 21 verses, and drew a simple conclusion from it. Aeschylus tells a more complete version of the same story in over 2700 verses—we have every reason to expect that his reaction will prove in fact more complex, given the greater breadth of his treatment. It is interesting to note that the Erinyes echo Pindar's promotion of the μέσος.

μήτ' ἀναρκτον βίον
μήτε δεσποτούμενον
αἰνέσης.

παντὶ μέσῳ τὸ κράτος θεὸς ὤπασεν, ἄλλ'
ἄλλα δ' ἐφορεύει.

(Eum.: 526-531).

In cautioning against the formation of an opinion regarding Aeschylus' specific political views on the strength of this passage, K.J. Dover writes that "μέσος... is among the

oldest "value-words" in Greek ethics, and what a democrat would call an extreme an oligarch would represent as a mean."²³ He further says that Aeschylus is "using words which, if we view them from the standpoint of Archaic Greek morality in general, merely recommend a reflective rather than a violent attitude to politics."²⁴

Now, our business is not with the Eumenides, but we must remember the great unity of the Oresteia- if there is a politico-moral message in the Eumenides, there is likely something of the same in the Agamemnon as well, albeit perhaps in a less-developed and less-explicit form. Two remarkable papers should be mentioned here. In 1948 P.R.B. Forbes published his study of "Law and Politics in the Oresteia."²⁵ The author places the events of the trilogy within the history of law as it developed within the Athenian polis. He defines the Archaic ideal of eunomia and devotes a good deal of space to the use of eunomic vocabulary in the Oresteia, with parallels in other Archaic authors. The following passage is rich in suggestions:

Aeschylus aligns himself politically with Hesiod, Tyrtaeus, Solon, and Pindar. In Eum. 529 ff., 699 ff., the mean is that between the two extremes of masterless lawlessness, of the despot and of the multitude. It is not a matter of wealth, class, or number. The piloting of a eunomic state may be done by rich or poor, eupatrid or hoplite, one or more... provided always that the government no less than the subordinate is bound by law.²⁶

The reader has only to think back to the choruses of the Agamemnon in order to realize that "politics" should perhaps be far more an issue in critical discussions of that play than has been the case up to now.

E.R. Dodds has devoted an article to the subject of "Morals and Politics in the Oresteia."²⁷ He begins with the statement that "when Aeschylus wrote, no distinction between morals and politics had yet been drawn."²⁸ He then goes on to suggest that political implications should be sought in the Oresteia before the scenes set in Athens, if the unity of the trilogy is assumed. However, the body of the paper is devoted to the familiar loci in the Eumenides on which political discussion has been engaged, and the "theological" meaning of the two gnomai from the Agamemnon: καθεῖν τὸν ἔργοντα and πάθει μάθος.

But in the first part of the article there occur two observations of great interest. The first of these is that there is considerable mention of the demos in the Agamemnon, and that this indicates that the "author is already thinking in political as well as moral terms."²⁹ The second is that "in the Eumenides, alone among Greek tragedies, Athens lacks a king..."³⁰ This fact, and the references to the contemporary "foreign policy" of Athens would impress upon listeners the fact that Aeschylus was

speaking urgently of Fifth-Century Athens. To this theme we will return shortly.

In beginning consideration of the text of the Agamemnon as a political document, leading to the political scenes of the Eumenides, we must refer to the idea propounded above, to the effect that Agamemnon in sacrificing his daughter was refusing a diminishment of power and pride, that he should have refused to sacrifice her, even at the risk of the loss of his kingdom. For the Agamemnon is a brilliant and hostile picture of those who hold absolute power, even as the Choephoroi is a tortured and sordid one.

In the Agamemnon distinct differences of social class are indicated by differences in language. The chorus, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon and Cassandra belong to court circles, and know how to speak correctly. The watchman, the herald and Aegisthus all indicate their inferior origins or upbringing by the use of "substandard" speech, chiefly by beginning sentences or clauses which are then left hanging. The peculiarities in the speech of all three have been very frequently noted, although the use of these peculiarities for purposes of characterization has not been generally explored. In fact these idiosyncrasies isolate these three characters as outsiders to the world of measured rhetoric and stately compliment of which Clytemnestra is such a mistress.

Each of them speaks too plainly of unpleasant things. They, and the chorus, create the unbearably tense mood of the play, and inform us on the less-brilliant side of the despotic state.

We will speak first of the Watchman, and of his long wearisome vigil. "Die Stimmung des Waechters," says Bruno Snell, "ist ewige Angst."³¹ Yes, he pities himself, he is weary, but when the beacon flames in the distance, he is so happy that he begins to dance (vs. 31). He wishes to take Agamemnon's hand into his own, but then he falls to dropping hints, saying that an ox has stepped upon his tongue, that the very walls of the house would speak, if they could. All is not well, and the fellow is clearly not happy with his lot under the eye of Clytemnestra. He has apprehensions, but finally he does not give any precise information (vv. 36-39). It is significant that when the chorus enters, they too have apprehensions, at which they will only hint slightly more clearly (vv. 153-155).

The herald's scene is set between the terrible and powerful first and second stasimons, both of which deal with the punishment of misdeeds and with Troy. The entire scene is disturbing. For if he comes to announce that the victorious Agamemnon has come home, and if he greets the Argive land with high words and with tears of joy, yet

most of what he has to say is about doubt, suffering, and hardship. For the army encamped before Troy, there were cramped quarters and lice. There was a constant danger of death, so that the Herald did not even dare hope that he might return to die in Argos. And if Agamemnon's ship has indeed made port, yet they have ridden out a great storm at sea during the night, and dawn showed them a sea strewn with wreckage and corpses:

ἐπεὶ δ' ἀνῆλθε λαμπρὸν ἡλίου φάος,
 ὀρῶμεν ἀνθοῦν πέλαγος Αἰγαῖον νεκροῖς
 ἀνδρῶν Ἀχαιῶν ναυτικοῖς τ' ἐρειπίοις.

(vv. 658-660).

Tradition attributed the storm to the anger of the gods, and the Herald says that indeed the holy places of Troy have been destroyed (vv. 527-528), and by Agamemnon.

But when so many others have died, he has survived, arriving alone of all his fleet. Clytemnestra makes a speech, fulsome and false, and the chorus cannot be restrained from giving her the lie when she has gone out. The chorus has already said (doubtless in Clytemnestra's absence):

Χόρος: πάλαι τὸ σιγᾶν φάρμακον βλάβης ἔχω.
 Κήρυξ: καὶ πῶς; ἀπόντων κοιράνων ἔτρεῖς τινάς;
 Χόρος: ὡς νῦν τὸ σὸν δὴ, καὶ θανεῖν πολλή χάρις.

(vv. 548-550).

Of course, the government of Clytemnestra is evil, so that the return of Agamemnon is urgently wished.

But whatever the justice of the war against Troy, it has visited Argos with great evil, as sacrifice of a princess, death of many citizens in the war, and now, loss of many more at sea. Agamemnon has sacrificed his people to his ambition. Before the death of Agamemnon, there are no open accusations, but only hints, muttering in the shadows, complaints in solitude. But the war is accused, and its terrible cost is shown. The closest thing to an accusation directed to Agamemnon while he still lives occurs in the greeting of the chorus:

οὐ δέ μοι τότε μὲν στέλλων στρατιάν
 Ἑλένης ἕνεκ', οὐ γάρ (σ') ἐπικεύσω,
 κάρτ' ἀπομούσως ἦσθα γεγραμμένος,
 οὐδ' εὖ πραπίδων οἴακα νέμων,
 θάρσος ἐκούσιον.

ἀνδράσι θνήσκουσι κομίζων.

νῦν δ' οὐκ ἀπ' ἄκρας φρενὸς οὐδ' ἀφίλως
 εὐφρων πόνος εὖ τελέσασιν.

γνώση δὲ χρόνῳ διαπευθόμενος
 τὸν τε δικαίως καὶ τὸν ἀκαίρως
 πόλιν οἴκουροῦντα πολιτῶν.

(vv. 799-809).

There is, in other words, no arguing with success, but of course the chorus ventured no criticism of Agamemnon when he actually set out, as now they make only a distant reference to the exceedingly disordered affairs of his own house. They do not warn him, for their counsel is unwanted, and unexpected. In her great speech of greeting, the queen takes them for witnesses of a great pile of barefaced lies, nor need she fear in the least that she will be contradicted.

When Clytemnestra is tempting Agamemnon to walk upon the purple cloths, he implies that one must not insult the people (by such blasphemous prodigality):

φήμη γε μέντοι δημόθρους μέγα σθένει.

(vs. 938).

This concern for the people is of course unusual in tragedy. The observer is being prepared for the triumphant action of the Athenian people in the Eumenides. In the end, the people of Argos count for nothing in the calculations of Agamemnon, and he walks upon the rich stuffs.

The scene with Cassandra contains some revealing lines. For when the prophetess, who like the eagles, foretells the future and sees the past, speaks first of the crime of Atreus and then of the (coming) crime of Clytemnestra, the chorus say that they know nothing of the second crime, but as for the first,

ἐκεῖνα δ' ἔγνω· πᾶσα γὰρ πόλις βοᾷ.

(vs. 1106).

The city cries out at these things, indeed, but the will, and the judgement of the city are but poor things, and while their master is being murdered the chorus takes counsel on the matter. They are as ineffectual as they are wise, and in the end, they choose to wait and see. But in the course of their discussion, it emerges that one of them advises drastic action, for

ὄρᾶν πάρεστι· φοιμιάζονται γὰρ ὧς,
τυραννίδος σημεῖα πρᾶσσοντες πόλει.

(vv. 1354-1355).

and another answers several verses later:

ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀνεκτόν, ἀλλὰ κατθανεῖν κρατεῖ·
πεκαυτέρα γὰρ μοῖρα τῆς τυραννίδος.

(vv. 1364-1365).

Pindar is not alone in associating this myth with the idea of tyranny.

Clytemnestra appears, spattered with her husband's blood, and when she glories over his fall, there ensues an exchange, throughout noble and courtly enough, in which the chorus threatens her with the hatred of the people, with exile. (vv. 1407-1411) In the end, she haughtily pleads the unavenged death of Iphigenia, and brings the chorus round to see the will of Zeus (vv. 1485-1486) and

finally, justice (of the same sort which is to be seen in the fall of Troy) in her acts, for the killer has been killed indeed, and justice done for foul deeds (vv. 1560-1566).

But then the cowardly Aegisthus enters, not without his tyrant's bodyguard. He gloats over the dead king's body. There ensues a violent exchange, and sword-play is averted only by the intervention of Clytemnestra. In trying to re-establish the old aristocratic ton, she calls Aegisthus "dearest of men," the chorus "reverend elders." It works, and violence is avoided, but since Aegisthus has met a threat of popular violence with his own threat of oppression, the play ends in angry mutterings, the raw and naked structure of power laid open, and the mood set for the opening of the Choephoroi.

We have reserved discussion of the choral odes. The first, which we have studied in the earlier chapters, tells of an act of sacrilegious murder by Agamemnon. The second is the great indictment of war. The third is the tale of the crime of Troy in receiving Helen, the lion cub. The fourth is the dark song of foreboding and fear. These together give a thoroughly devastating picture of the moral condition of the city. Forbes points out that eunomia was an ideal connected with the idea of the polis, as a term of Greek political thought. Part of the moral

turpitude of the rulers in the Agamemnon lies in sacrificing their cities to lust or ambition, or even to the more respectable passion of revenge, whether the rulers in question are Atreus, Paris, Agamemnon, or Clytemnestra.

This is the point of the fact that Athens has no king—the drama is an accusation of the government of a city under a monarchy, the elders, powerless and wise, forming a counterpart to the elders of Athens, guardians of the state, the Areopagus.

For the Fifth Century, or at least for Pindar and Aeschylus, the myth of the death of Agamemnon was a myth which told of misgovernment. It is as much a story of the folly of absolute power as the mythic story which Herodotus and Aeschylus make of the expedition of Xerxes into Greece.

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ABSTRACT

The sacrifice of Iphigenia in Aeschylus' Agamemnon has been traditionally interpreted in such a way that it is in fact presented as an anomaly in the history of Greek religion. This study is an attempt, after weighing traditional views, to bring the interpretation into line with the beliefs of the age in which the play was written. The following ideas are propounded:

I. That the omen of the eagles is a pollution of the house of the Atreidae, brought on by the unavenged blood of the children of Thyestes.

II. That in evaluating the decision of Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter, attention should be paid to the fact that Agamemnon could have refused to accept the omen, but did not.

III. That comparison with Pythia XI and examination of the text reveal that the Agamemnon anticipates the glorification of the Athenian state and of the court of the Areopagus by presenting an hostile picture of a state under a monarchy.