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Motivation and Justification in the
Tragedies of Aeschylus

Alison C. Burke

Master of Letters

University of Glasgow

Department of Classics

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Abstract

The focus of this thesis is that of the central role which personal responsibility plays in determining action viz; that ultimately, an individual carries the full weight of responsibility for his actions regardless of any mitigating or seemingly justifiable circumstances. This contention is examined within the context of justification and motivation in six of the seven extant plays of Aeschylus, namely; *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi*, *Eumenides*, *Supplices*, *Septem Contra Thebas* and *Persae*.

Each of these plays is analysed with respect to the extent to which this thesis can be validly upheld in the text. Whilst these texts illuminate the concepts of motivation and justification, both are held to be subsumed to the primary role of personal responsibility, that is, despite the fact that the protagonist may seek to rationalise or excuse action through motivation or justification, the action speaks for itself and it is the action alone, the outcome, by which the individual is judged.

Significant factors which contribute to this key concept of personal responsibility for action are explored, the most important being the tragic paradox of the nature and role of the gods in inciting action and the influence of the inherited family curse. Both these aforementioned factors reveal firstly, the predominance of cosmic/ divine will and secondly, the nature of suffering through which atonement for action is made to the gods, Olympian and Chthonic. Herein, it is shown, nevertheless, that in acknowledging the importance of this tragic paradox the same is true that personal responsibility is the overriding force in accountability for action.

The depth of analysis reflects the degree to which the nature of personal responsibility is evident in the extant plays of Aeschylus. Thus, significantly more scope is given to the *Oresteia* as it is a trilogy in which the issues are developed in sequence and thus are understood to a greater extent. *Septem Contra Thebas* and the *Supplices* are also discussed in detail but concrete understanding is limited by the fact that they are surviving parts of trilogies. The *Persae* is discussed briefly, for the aforementioned issues are not held to be paramount in this text.

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Introduction

In the earliest of extant dramatic texts we find the timeless universal questions concerning man's role in the universe. The works of Aeschylus all contain to a greater or lesser degree an examination of the reasons for suffering. In an age when advances of thought were being made rapidly, Aeschylus takes time in his work to reflect upon why people suffer even when they are seemingly innocent of wrong-doing. This question still haunts us today; why are some people life's victims and others not? Why so often is there no correspondence between goodness and reward? In an attempt to reconcile the gulf between virtue and fortune we often resort to concepts of fate and predestination, but these concepts have no place in the vocabulary of fifth century Greece and therefore do not provide us with any assistance. Often, we attempt to disclaim responsibility for our actions by attributing all our sufferings to the will of God or even the influence of evil but this will not be allowed by Aeschylus, for through our understanding of each tragic scenario, what we appreciate is the vital importance of personal responsibility.

Aeschylus' view on personal responsibility is difficult to determine with confidence. Although he was a prolific writer, producing over ninety plays, fortune has denied us the majority of his works; only seven plays have survived and those manuscripts are in various degrees of completeness. For the purposes of this thesis, only six of the seven plays will be discussed. The omission of the *Prometheus* is justified on two points. Firstly, there is the possibility that the play was not written by Aeschylus; and secondly, in a limited time scale and linguistic scope it is impossible to discuss all of the works attributed to Aeschylus. With regard to the remaining plays, they will not all be discussed at the same length. The *Persae* is examined in an appendix, not because this play is in any way marginalised, but because the questions that are being discussed are not of the same complexity. Although there can be no doubt that the *Persae* is a tragedy rather than a historic dramatic pageant, Aeschylus does not present Xerxes as caught in a tragic dilemma nor has he chosen to discuss motivation except in the briefest manner. Our interest in the *Persae* is the effect of a tragic scenario on

Persia and her king and not on the reasons for the tragedy, although Aeschylus does offer an explanation of the Persian defeat.

With regard to the remaining plays, the questions that are asked are; what are the motives that drive the characters to their actions? and how do they attempt to justify themselves? However, juxtaposed with this is the nature of responsibility. If we determine motivation and evaluate justification accordingly then we must also examine to what extent characters are responsible for their own actions. With regard to the *Oresteia* there are three areas to be examined; the motives of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Orestes. In the *Agamemnon*, the first chapter will examine what drives Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter at Aulis, why he should punish Troy and ultimately, why he deserves to die. The discussion will concentrate on the whole text but with reference to particular areas. Firstly, the parodos which narrates the events at Aulis. Secondly, the Herald's report on the events at Troy. Thirdly, the 'carpet scene' in which we see Agamemnon defeated by Clytemnestra and finally, the scene in which Cassandra tells the Chorus the past, present and future of the house of Atreus. Through this examination what will be proved is that Agamemnon's actions were all personally-motivated and the justification for his deeds does not diminish his personal responsibility and therefore, he deserves to die for his excesses.

The human agent of his death, Clytemnestra, also has motives and these will be examined in a second chapter on the *Agamemnon*. The questions that will be asked are what motivates Clytemnestra to kill her husband and whether these motives are adequate to justify her crime. Ultimately, we must ask, if she is driven to murder her husband by grief for her daughter, then is she responsible for her actions? The same structure as the first chapter will be used; again the whole text will be examined. However, the emphasis in this chapter will be on the interplay between the Chorus and Clytemnestra which expresses the antithesis between loyalty and deceit with particular attention to the final scene in which Clytemnestra justifies herself to the Chorus. What will be proved in this chapter is that Clytemnestra's motivation is two-fold and that whilst we appreciate the necessity of Agamemnon's death we also conclude that Clytemnestra's actions are themselves a crime for which she bears full responsibility.

The fact that Clytemnestra deserves her punishment will be of crucial importance in the third chapter in which the position of Orestes is discussed with reference to the *Choephoroi*. In this chapter, Orestes' personal motivation will be explained. Special emphasis will be given to how Aeschylus creates in the minds of the audience the impression that Clytemnestra's death is a necessity but juxtaposes this impression with a horror for the crime of matricide. To appreciate this, Orestes' motivation will be determined, but it will also be shown how he must slowly take upon himself the necessity that vengeance will mean matricide. Consequently, it will be appreciated that as Orestes takes upon himself the responsibility for his mother's death, and simultaneously the audience also develop the understanding that Clytemnestra deserves to die.

Through this journey through motivation, personal motivation will be established. However, alongside the personal element is the divine. No study of the *Oresteia* would be complete without an examination of the role that the gods play as causal agents. With regard to the *Agamemnon*, the role of Zeus will be concentrated upon. To do this, the many provinces of Zeus will be explored. Firstly, we must appreciate Zeus as god of the guest, thereby ascertaining that Paris' elopement with Helen offends Zeus and requires punishment, and secondly, Zeus' role as protector of the family which demands that Agamemnon must atone for taking the life of his daughter. The position of Zeus must also be questioned in the light of the actions of Artemis. Ultimately, what we must ask is whether Aeschylus is promoting the ascendancy of Zeus and therefore making the first tentative steps to a concept of monotheism or fulfilling traditional Greek concepts of polytheism.

Through understanding the role of the gods, personal motivation must be re-examined. What will be asked is whether human action is in any way excused by the fact that it is motivated by a divine command. In each of the tragic scenarios, concomitant with personal desire is divine will. In the *Agamemnon*, Agamemnon will be sent to Troy for the purposes of Zeus but to fulfil Zeus' command he must abide by Artemis' condition that to sail to Troy he must sacrifice his daughter, which will in turn offend Zeus. This tragic scenario is repeated in the actions of Clytemnestra and Orestes, who are both agents of the gods but whilst they fulfil divine will they commit crime. This paradox is furthered by a third level of causation - that of the family curse, which operates as a supernatural power. What haunts

the *Oresteia* is the spectre of the curse of Atreus. What this thesis hopes to challenge is the view that the curse motivates action, that the tragic character's actions arise from the fact that he is a cursed man and therefore is in some way destined to act as he does, thereby negating personal responsibility. In contrast, what will be shown is that although each member of the family of Atreus is cursed, they each have personal motivation which in turn implies responsibility. Consequently, each generation adds to the curse through its own actions whilst still being its victim.

The importance of motivation is the key to understanding the *Suppliants*. In this play, motivation is divided into two areas; that of the Chorus of Danaids, and that of Pelasgus, king of Argos. With regard to the Danaids, our attention is focused by Aeschylus on why they are fleeing Egypt. What this chapter will attempt to ascertain is whether the Danaids are fleeing marriage because their cousins are in some sense disagreeable to them, or whether they have an objection to the concept of marriage. Through determining motivation, the question of whether the Danaids are justified will then be asked. What will be seen is that the Danaids are right to revolt against a forced union with their violent cousins, but not against all marriage. Consequently, they are both justified and not justified, and therefore, we are again faced with the tragic paradox that in their actions they are both right and wrong. The actions of the Danaids precipitate the tragedy of Pelasgus, who is possibly the most tragic figure in all of Aeschylus' texts. Ultimately, what must be asked is why Pelasgus is put in a position of choice between offending Zeus who protects the suppliant or risking a major war that will jeopardise the safety of his city and his life? In asking this question, again the role of the gods must be examined. Firstly, the possibility must be faced that Pelasgus, for no reason of his own, for no crime or family curse will have to die. Consequently, we must ask whether he is simply the puppet of the gods with only a limited role in his own destiny? To address this possibility, the position of Zeus must again be questioned. As the pre-eminent divinity in this play, Zeus will be seen as the ultimate causal agent. Although the reasons for Zeus' actions are nebulous, what will be shown is that through our speculations on the possible content of the lost parts of the trilogy, the design of Zeus is ascertainable. The proposal of this chapter will be to establish that the will of Zeus is that the destiny of Argos is to be exalted by the investiture of the descendants of Zeus on the throne of Argos. Consequently, it will be appreciated that the will of Zeus is only

understandable if a wider view is taken; only through the series of events that constitute the trilogy can we hope to know what Zeus' purpose is.

The importance of the development of understanding throughout a trilogy is essential to the *Seven Against Thebes*. Unfortunately, the fact that this is the final part of the trilogy of the line of Laius mean that the areas of personal motivation that Aeschylus intended his audience to understand have been lost. The problem is readily understood if a comparison is made with the *Oresteia*. It would be impossible to appreciate the interwoven complexities of motivation and justification of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* if only the *Eumenides* survived. This is true also for the *Septem Contra Thebas*. However, what we can determine is that Aeschylus is again examining the idea of personal responsibility in the cursed man. Consequently, again the question of whether a cursed character is responsible for his own actions must be asked. The argument that this chapter will adopt is similar to that in the *Oresteia*. Again, the proposal will be made that personal desire to commit a crime amounts to personal responsibility and that this desire is not simply to be understood as a consequence of a family curse. With reference to Eteocles and Polynices, what will hopefully be proved is that they both desire to fight and kill each other for their own personal motivation and that alongside this is the curse that the house has laboured under since the disobedience of Laius.

What will become apparent is that an understanding of personal motivation is vital to appreciating Aeschylus. In all of his plays the protagonists are all responsible for their own actions, and this responsibility can be determined by the evident desires of each character to commit actions that are in themselves crimes. The role of the gods in this is to provide another level of causation. In each action there is the will of a divinity, most often this is Zeus because as the Chorus of Elders in the *Agamemnon* say, what can come to pass that is not the will of Zeus? This, however, does not mitigate personal responsibility but simply adds another level of causation. The same will be said for the agency of the family curse which operates as a chthonic power. What will be appreciated is that the son of a cursed father is not an innocent sufferer but each generation adds to the mounting crimes of the family, but it does so from its own personal desire.

The interpretation in this thesis of the plays of Aeschylus owes a heavy debt to the works of previous scholars. It is impossible to note all the erudite work by the many scholars that have been cited but it is essential to acknowledge the works of pre-eminent authors. Much of this thesis is indebted to the books and articles of A.F. Garvie and broadly agrees with his observations on Aeschylus. A debt must also be acknowledged to the prolific works of Hugh Lloyd-Jones who, although I have not always agreed with him, has prompted many of my observations. An obligation must also be expressed to R.P. Winnington-Ingram, H.D.F. Kitto and Michael Gagarin whose works have been a stimulus. With regard to stage direction, the work of Oliver Taplin is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of Aeschylean theatre. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the many commentaries without which the texts would remain a mystery. Regretfully, the recent work of Sommerstein could not be included except in the briefest of manners.

Chapter One - *Agamemnon*

The Case of Agamemnon

The questions concerning decision and responsibility, motivation and justification in the *Agamemnon* are the most complex in all the extant plays of Aeschylus. For the most part, critics have concentrated on these questions in order to determine whether or not we can even ask the question 'Is Agamemnon guilty?', let alone answer this problem. Aeschylus confounds any simple reading of his text with deliberate ambiguities and complexities which render readers confused as they try to unravel the interwoven net of decision and responsibility evident in the text. At some point we must ask ourselves how an Aeschylean audience could possibly have understood all the complexities of this play given the limited time of dramatic action. This is not to say that Aeschylus' work in its entirety was beyond the comprehension of the contemporary audience - they are separated from us through time, experience, attitudes and beliefs (though this is not an unbridgeable gulf). Therefore, in bringing to the theatre their cultural heritage, perhaps they could understand far more clearly the problems that today's critics can find no agreement on.

Initial pessimism aside, we can begin an analysis of the *Agamemnon* by first understanding our own role, be it as a reader or as a member of an audience. Aeschylus frames the whole trilogy in a legalistic manner; he employs legal terminology¹, he establishes key premises that we must understand as universal laws and, ultimately, the resolution for the house of Atreus will be decided by a trial, which in turn establishes the Areopagus. In a sense, we are the initial jurors of the Areopagus court, trying not only the defendant Orestes, but also Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. To do so, however we do not simply need to be aware of human motivation but also of divine motivation, not simply because the gods are the law-makers but because they are involved as causal agents in human events. As such, any human responsibility can only be determined by understanding the divine. Consequently, we cannot see the *Oresteia* as only a work of crime and punishment, but we must appreciate the moral and theological debate inherent in the text.

¹ Sommerstein (1989) p.19.

At present, we are concerned with the guilt of Agamemnon as presented by the Chorus of old men of Argos in the parodos. The choral entrance song is structured according to their own thought progression. Firstly, they sing of the war begun on both a human and divine level. Secondly, they introduce who they are and acknowledge the actions of Queen Clytemnestra, daughter of Leda and wife of Agamemnon. Introductions over, they progress to the events at Aulis, exactly ten years previously, breaking their narrative with an agitated hymn to Zeus. Within this space of time they will introduce to us the nature of Agamemnon's first transgression against divine law and human sensibilities and make us aware of the theological problems that underscore the text.

The outset of the parodos (40-83) explains the motivation for the war with Troy; that is, the abduction of Helen, sister of Clytemnestra and wife to Menelaus. As a modern audience we appreciate the war as the recovery of a beloved wife. The aphorism 'the face that launched a thousand ships' concentrates our attention on the personal loss of Menelaus (cf.403ff.). However, a contemporary audience would appreciate that the war was not so much an act of recovery as an act of revenge. What was at stake was not just love but honour, not only of the wronged husband but of Zeus Xenios himself. In terms of the brothers, we must appreciate that perceptions of classical Athens of the Heroic age in which they are the leading figures were dominated by the drive for arete by each hero, and the preservation of honour was an essential part of arete. For Helen to elope with Paris was an inexcusable assault on Menelaus' honour and, therefore, the honour of the whole family. In some ways, this is similar to the Franco-romantic version of the Arthurian mythic cycle; what binds the Knights of the Round Table is honour and chivalry, without which the society cannot function. The same is true for the Greek Heroic age; Menelaus and Agamemnon cannot allow Paris to escape punishment for attacking their honour by abducting Menelaus' wife, for it undermines both personal and family honour and, importantly, the heroic principles on which the society stands. Juxtaposed with this is divine law. The guest-friendship law embodied by Zeus Xenios demands punishment, for Paris and Helen are transgressing a law that is a cornerstone of heroic conduct and, again, they cannot be allowed to undermine the society. Additionally, we must also acknowledge that, although the outrage against the law is explained in human terms, it is also in need of punishment by divine. As stated, Paris and

Helen have offended Zeus Xenios and the flagrant disrespect of the law of the gods needs to be punished in order that the relationship between gods and men should not be thrown into conflict.

Having transgressed divine law, family and guest honour Paris returns to Troy and by accepting him Troy becomes implicated in his guilt. Immediately, our modern concern for the innocence of civilians may cloud our judgement. We may think that Paris and Helen alone are guilty and that Troy itself is merely implicated. However, as Dodds comments², the Greek moral presuppositions are different. According to Dodds, guilt is, by its nature, infectious and therefore, to punish the guilty man, the whole community will have to be destroyed. This is, in essence, the concept expounded by Hesiod (*W&D* 240-1) where he envisages that a whole city can be destroyed for the crime of one man and that this Justice is indisputable.³

Having determined that Paris and Helen must suffer, the debate must now concentrate on how they are to suffer and who is to be the executioner of Justice. To answer this, we must first seek to understand the relationship between Zeus and the two kings. Winnington-Ingram argues that we must not confuse the will of Zeus with the desires of the Atridae. He states;

‘It is essential to observe that the reference to a “sending” by Zeus does not come until it has been firmly established (40ff.) that Agamemnon and Menelaus are pursuing a human quarrel (recounted at 62); and that it is led up to by the simile of the vultures.’⁴

This theory is also adhered to by Peradotto⁵ who counsels the reader not to envisage the Atridae as receiving an ‘epiphany’ from Zeus. He further argues that the choral interpretation of Zeus ‘sending’ the Atridae (60-61) simply expresses their belief that the support of Zeus is the claim which justifies the war, which is distinct from obliging it.

² Dodds (1960) p.26.

³ Whilst this seems to be the case for Troy, guilt is not always infectious. For example, Argos does not become polluted because of the actions of Agamemnon or Clytemnestra. However, Orestes’ repeated assurances that he is purified in the *Cho.* are designed to allay Athena’s fears concerning the safety of Athens.

⁴ Winnington-Ingram (1983) p. 85-86.

⁵ Peradotto (1969) p.251.

Objecting to this theory we can suggest that what the Chorus say in this instance is correct and not simply a subjective interpretation of events. The text explicitly states three times that Zeus sent Agamemnon and Menelaus to Troy (cf. 59, 61, 111). The Chorus, at 42ff., state that the brothers' power is derived from Zeus and at 60-61 it is clear that Zeus is actually sending them as a mortal fury to exact revenge. Whilst Peradotto has a case in arguing that Zeus has sent no epiphany, we do not hear of an actual command; Aeschylus' intention in his clear connection between the brothers and Zeus by the Chorus is to encourage the audience to believe that the expedition to Troy is the will of Zeus. Furthermore, when we come to examine Calchas' prophecies, we realise that it is the apportionment of Troy to fall. There is no indication so far that the Moirae and Zeus are not in accord; however, without doubt, Agamemnon and Menelaus are most probably agents of destiny⁶. However, in accepting this, we arrive at the first paradox of the play. The Chorus indicate that all is not well, that the brothers are launching Greece into war, 'all for a woman manned by many' (62). Coming immediately after the reference to the sending by Zeus, we must ask ourselves whether the Chorus are, in fact, being impious in questioning whether Zeus' reason for the war is valid. However, as we have discussed above, Zeus' motives are not as specific as those of Agamemnon and Menelaus. The brothers are pursuing a human quarrel while Zeus, on the other hand, is pursuing something more timeless - the proper conduct between gods and man and between man and man. It is possible that the Chorus are questioning here whether the human motivation of the war (that is, Helen) justifies the inevitable loss of so many Greek men. At this stage in the text, the issue is raised but is not developed; it is saved for elaboration in the first stasimon (403ff.), however already, before the forces have embarked, all is not well.

The final point that we must examine in this first section of the parodos is one of imagery. The Chorus describe the Atridae as grief-stricken vultures robbed of their young (50ff.). This seems a strange image for Aeschylus to use, for Menelaus has been robbed of his wife, not a child. It is possible that the image is used to simply describe the loss of a loved one,

⁶ The relationship between the Moirae and Zeus is not developed by Aeschylus in the *Agamemnon* or in the *Choephoroi*. The issue is saved until the *Eumenides* in which the Erinyes whose power is protected by the Moirae are challenged by Apollo - the spokesman of Zeus. The implications of this are discussed below Ch.4.

but if Aeschylus meant only Helen, then surely he would have chosen a different simile. Knox develops this point, maintaining that the reference to the eagles (sic. vultures) at 49-59;

‘...cannot fail to suggest to the audience Clytemnestra robbed of her daughter Iphigenia, for the image is more appropriate to her situation than it is to theirs.’⁷

Edwards also remarks on the incongruity of the vulture simile⁸ but he differs from Knox by interpreting the reference as the loss of children, not with Clytemnestra, but with the loss of Thyestes’ children. Although we cannot doubt the connection between the loss of Thyestes and the vultures, to stress the point seems to be reading the play backwards from Cassandra to the parodos. The audience have had no indication that the Atridae family history is going to have any significant part to play in the events of the trilogy. Whereas, the build-up of the parodos is definitely leading to the sacrifice of Iphigenia. The Chorus are singing of the reasons for the war and the events at Aulis, and the Watchman in the prologue has indicated that all is not well in the house (36-39) and all is not well with Clytemnestra (10-11). Thus, the audience are being prepared for the emotions and actions of the queen and, therefore, could grasp the meaning that the loss of young will have for her and identify that with the vulture simile. However, as a note of caution, if we question further the logic of this interpretation, we are confronted with a dilemma. The point of the simile is that the vultures are crying out for punishment over the loss of their young. If we identify Agamemnon and Menelaus with the vultures then it is difficult to consider Iphigenia as their ‘young’ that is being avenged, for Agamemnon and Menelaus are not making war upon Troy to avenge Iphigenia but Helen. It is probable that Aeschylus, in creating a dramatic image, is not requiring us to push the logic too far. The point is that we sympathise with the vultures and thereby with Agamemnon and Menelaus but there is also a cautionary undertone which would be evident to the audience. Thus, we can fairly conclude that, although Aeschylus is referring directly to Agamemnon and Menelaus, the audience can grasp the point that the simile is also applicable to the queen. Thus, together with the references made by the Watchman, we are slowly being made aware of the emotions that will drive Clytemnestra to murder her husband.

⁷ Knox (1952) p.18.

⁸ Edwards (1977) p.23.

Perhaps because of the possible entrance of the queen⁹ or perhaps because the Chorus have frightened themselves with their speculations over validation of the war, they break their narrative to introduce themselves as the old men of Argos who were, ten years previously, too old to sail for Troy (79ff). They then proceed to question Clytemnestra as to why Argos is ablaze with torches (100ff). Clytemnestra does not answer them, not because of any psychological state of the queen, but because Aeschylus intends the Chorus to progress to tell of the events at Aulis.

The next section of the parodos encapsulates the greatest problems for the reader. The Chorus, emboldened by their power of song, relate the omen (traditionally sent from Zeus) which appeared to the Atridae. The Chorus describe how two eagles, one black, one white devoured a hare in the advanced stages of pregnancy. Calchas interprets the omen as the eventual destruction of Troy;

‘In course of time this expedition captures Priam’s town; and all the
herds before the walls, the plentiful possessions of the people, shall
fate lay waste with violence: let only no envious grudge from the gods
strike beforehand and overcloud the great bit for Troy’s mouth, the army
on its campaign.’ (126ff)¹⁰

This we understand to mean that Troy is apportioned to fall and to be destroyed down to the unborn young. The objection that it is the Trojan cattle (κτῆνῃ) that are being discussed is dealt with by Lloyd-Jones, who argues that we are not to envisage the herds of the people, but rather, the herds that are the people. Thus, herds is to be understood as a metaphor for the Trojans.¹¹ However, κτῆνῃ could also give the sense of ‘possessions’. Therefore, the destruction of the cattle could also be considered as the destruction of the possessions of the

⁹ Whether Clytemnestra is onstage for all, part or none of the parodos is discussed below (Ch2.p.55ff.). However, at this point we can pre-empt the conclusions of our investigation and have Clytemnestra onstage throughout the parodos.

¹⁰ All translation from Fraenkel (1950) I.

¹¹ Lloyd-Jones (1962) p.189.

people rather than the people themselves.¹² In following the logic of Calchas' interpretation, the eagles are taken to stand for the two kings (two royal birds for two monarchs) and the hare bursting with young, the Trojan inhabitants. The phraseology of Calchas' interpretation is ambiguous; he identifies the nature of the eagles with that of the Atridae;

‘Now when the wise seer of the army saw the two Atridae, twain in
temper, he knew the warlike devourers of the hare for the conducting
chiefs...’. 123-125

The continuity of the bird of prey image is noticeable; Agamemnon and Menelaus are represented as both vultures and eagles. However, the nature of the similes seems paradoxical. The vultures are sympathetically portrayed as grief-stricken for their young (50), whereas the nature of the bird is to be a scavenger. In contrast, the royal bird, the eagle, with all its associations with monarchy, is presented in horrific terms devouring the young of the hare. We can but speculate on the ‘temper’ of the Atridae if they are synonymous with the eagles. Calchas clearly identifies the ‘temper’ of the Atridae with the eagles which means that the Atridae are presented as warlike, which fits well with the repeated concerns of the Chorus with regard to the human cost of the war for the sake of Helen. As with the image of the vultures, we feel that Aeschylus is employing a great deal of ambiguity. Consequently, the innocence of the hare is suggestive of the innocent Iphigenia and the loss of the unborn hare points towards the loss of Clytemnestra. As the hare's offspring are sacrificed to the war effort, so too will be the offspring of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Furthermore, the fact that the hare is considered a sacrifice encourages the audience to contemplate the impending sacrifice of Iphigenia. At 150 σπευδομένα θυσίαν ἑτέραν clearly means that Iphigenia is the second sacrifice necessitated by the first sacrifice of the pregnant hare¹³. Another possible level of interpretation of the devouring of the hare and the unborn children can be applied to the family history of the Atridae. Aeschylus may be encouraging the audience to contemplate the crime of Atreus, Agamemnon's father who, as an act of revenge served his brother's children to their father,

¹² See Fraenkel II pp.77-79 ‘Good store of cattle represents an important, and to a besieging army a particularly welcome, part of the enemy's wealth; that the Trojans preserved considerable supplies of food throughout the siege is mentioned again in 331.’ p.79.

¹³ Page (1957) p.82.

Thyestes.¹⁴ The connection is not immediate for, as we have noticed, the intricacies of the crimes of the Atridae have not, as yet, been developed as an underlying theme. Therefore, we must not stress the connection, but simply accept that Aeschylus is perhaps indirectly referring to the family hybris which will be developed later by Cassandra.

Thus, Calchas' interpretation of the omen is, in itself, ominous and this sense of foreboding is furthered by the caution that the ramifications of the omen precipitate. Calchas at first fears that some god may, out of 'envious grudge', overcloud the expedition. He then specifically names Artemis;

'For out of pity pure Artemis bears a grudge
against the winged hounds of her father which
slaughter for a sacrifice the poor trembling hare
with her young before birth; and she loathes the feast of the eagles.' (131ff.)

Calchas prays to Apollo to deflect the anger that Artemis may harbour away from the Greek fleet in case they are pressed into another unholy, unlawful sacrifice which will have far-reaching consequences. Thus, Calchas, in his riddling, prophetic manner, makes the first clear reference to the sacrifice of Iphigenia and the results of the sacrifice for Agamemnon.

The sacrifice of Iphigenia in order to quell the wrath of Artemis has aroused great controversy among scholars. What we need to ask ourselves is what Artemis is angry at and what the theological implications of her actions are. Opinions on these questions vary. The first scenario would be that Artemis is angry simply because a wild animal, of which she is patron goddess, has been killed; that she does not attach any significant meaning to the omen but is solely concerned with the act proper. Whallon dismisses this line of argument stating;

'But if she bears a grudge against the Atridae for a reason unconnected
with the sack of the city, the omen is dramatically misleading'.¹⁵

In addition, if Artemis is angry at the sacrifice of a hare for an omen and not because of what the omen foretells, then her anger is better directed at Zeus, the orchestrator, rather than at Agamemnon, the recipient. Furthermore, we must ask ourselves whether Artemis is an

¹⁴ Discussed at length by Edwards (1977) p.24.

¹⁵ Whallon (1961) p.18.

arbitrary goddess who demands the life of an innocent child to satisfy her anger towards her father and, in the process, condemns Agamemnon. If this was the case then Agamemnon would be absolved of all responsibility and reduced to a pawn in the struggle between Artemis and Zeus. Yet, there can be little doubt that Agamemnon is considered guilty of many crimes, the sacrifice of his daughter uppermost. Therefore, it seems nonsensical that he who will be seen as guilty of so much could possibly be condemned for the one crime that he could be seen as having no responsibility for. Rather, it is clear that we are meant to think of Agamemnon as clearly responsible for his actions.

Yet we cannot simply assume that, because Agamemnon bears the brunt of Artemis' anger, it is he that is the motivating factor for it. Fraenkel comments that Aeschylus has 'eliminated the act of Agamemnon which has incensed the goddess,¹⁶ in order to further his responsibility for his actions.¹⁷ It is certainly true that Aeschylus has departed from the mythic tradition which clearly motivates Artemis' wrath. In other literature dealing with the same event, Agamemnon is held guilty as a result of his own actions.¹⁸ Proclus (fifth century A.D.) tells us in the *Cypria* that Agamemnon boasted when he shot a deer that his skill in archery surpassed Artemis'. Sophocles also attributes her wrath to the death of a stag (*El.* 566-69), as does Apollodorus. However, Apollodorus also states that Artemis' wrath is long-standing, since Atreus neglected to sacrifice to her a golden ram (*Epit.* 3.21)¹⁹. Euripides departs from this tradition in *Iphigenia in Taurus*, instead presenting Agamemnon as promising to Artemis the most lovely thing the year produced (*I.T.* 20ff, 209ff). Since Aeschylus has decided to suppress this element of the myth, he has faced the reader with a dilemma; without his having ostensibly committed any crime, is Artemis even angry at Agamemnon? The text clearly states that she is angry with the nature of the omen. Calchas states 'she loathes the feast of the eagles' (138). To this, we must decide whether Artemis

¹⁶ Fraenkel (1950) II p.99.

¹⁷ Ibid. 'From the point of view of Aeschylus it was all-important that nothing but Agamemnon's deliberate decision should appear as the primary cause of his sufferings, πρωτοπῆμων. That effect would have been impossible if the king had first, by a comparatively minor offence, brought upon himself the revenge of Artemis and had consequently been forced to sacrifice Iphigenia. In that case, the moral dilemma which Aeschylus wanted to be the fountain-head of Agamemnon's fate would have been degraded to secondary importance.'

¹⁸ Summarised in Edwards (1977) pp. 22-23; Fraenkel II pp.98-99.

¹⁹ Although Apollodorus writes that Iphigenia at the point of her death was replaced by a doe by Artemis. This substitution is also upheld by Proclus and Euripides (*I.A.* 1541ff.).

hates the eagles for what they do, or simply hates the feast itself. Another scenario is suggested by Lloyd-Jones²⁰, who believes that if the eagles are taken to mean the Atridae, then it follows that the hare with young must be taken to represent figures of the real world, that is, the Trojans. Artemis is angry at what will happen to Troy not specifically with Agamemnon and Menelaus. However, it is hard to see how Artemis could be angry at the destruction of Troy and not be angry at those who do it, as to do so would be to remove the causal factor and to concentrate upon the act alone.

If Artemis is angry with both the Atridae and what they do, the motivation for her anger must be found in their actions, or more specifically, their proposed actions. Realistically, this must surely mean that Artemis is angry at what is going to happen in Troy. However, why she should be angry at this is not immediately obvious. Thiel²¹ suggests that Artemis is calling Agamemnon's bluff and that, by confronting him with the choice of Troy or Iphigenia, she is attempting to dissuade him from even embarking on the expedition. However, to believe that she is angry about events that Calchas has interpreted as destined (126ff.), and that she is trying in effect to halt the war indefinitely, misunderstands the nature of the relationship between Moirae and the gods. Artemis cannot possibly prevent the war from happening, for the omen has made it clear that Troy will definitely fall. In contrast, Artemis may be asking for atonement, making Agamemnon pay for his victory in advance with the life of his daughter. The concept of Agamemnon paying for Troy with the life of Iphigenia definitely lacks textual evidence and it seems paradoxical for Artemis, who is described as 'pure' (135) and 'The Fair One' (140) to be so vindictive as to demand payment in human terms. Lloyd-Jones also detects the motivation for Artemis' wrath in Troy. However, he finds the justification for this not in Aeschylus' text but in Homer's *Iliad* in which Artemis, along with Apollo, Ares and Aphrodite range themselves on the side of Troy. Hence, he sees Artemis as striking a pre-emptive blow at her enemies;

'Artemis' blow against Agamemnon is one move in the struggle;
it is the attempt of a pro-Trojan goddess to strike at the invaders
before the invasion: Artemis must not be seen as a judge punishing

²⁰ Lloyd-Jones (1962) pp.180-90.

²¹ Thiel (1993) pp. 60-61.

a sin, but as a powerful enemy striking at an enemy.’²²

Whallon and Peradotto both take issue with Lloyd-Jones over this theory. Peradotto argues; ‘Furthermore, it is a dangerous practice to assume anything in Greek tragedy from so variegated a tradition of poetry and cult as lies back of it, unless substantial support in the text warrants our doing so.’²³

Additionally, for Peradotto, Artemis is more specifically memorable for bringing death to pregnant women than for holding a Trojan bias. Simply because a goddess favours one particular side in the war does not mean that she will hate the commanders on the opposing side. Apollo, Peradotto comments, is pro-Trojan but at *Eum.* 631ff. he is commendatory of Agamemnon. Whallon further states that neither Artemis’ bias towards Troy nor her role in pregnancy are any causal factor in her wrath.

Against Lloyd-Jones, both Whallon and Peradotto believe that Artemis’ anger is a result of her love of all that is innocent and helpless and her distaste for the destruction caused by the war.²⁴ However, although they both arrive at the same conclusion, they do so from different arguments. Whallon believes that Artemis has conceived a hatred for the whole Atridae household as a consequence of the crime of Atreus. He further believes that Calchas interprets only the ‘particular and momentary significance’ of the sacrifice, but the nature of it is suggestive of the recurring crimes of the house. Again, we can object to this reasoning in terms of the guilt of Agamemnon. Whallon, in removing responsibility from Agamemnon and transferring it to the house of Atreus as a whole, has then to deny that Agamemnon was responsible for the sacrifice of Iphigenia and place this responsibility on a family curse which the audience has not yet heard about properly. How can an audience understand Artemis being angry at a crime in the history of the family when they have, as yet, not heard which particular crime is being discussed? Furthermore, Whallon seems to be misunderstanding the dramatic evolution of the plot. Our attention at this point in the play is directed by Aeschylus via the Chorus to the interplay between Menelaus and Agamemnon against Artemis at Aulis.

²² Lloyd-Jones (1962) p.190.

²³ Peradotto (1969) p.241.

²⁴ See especially Whallon (1961) pp.81-82.

Peradotto's theory is in some respects more convincing. The premise of his belief that Artemis is angry over the destruction of the innocent is based on both textual and archaeological evidence. As we have already noted, Artemis is described as 'pure' (135) and 'The Fair One' (140) and her love of all the wild animals is noted at 140ff. Additionally, Iphigenia, who is also innocent and will be a second sacrifice, which results from the first sacrifice of the hare which also stands for Troy. Therefore, with all factors put together, the common denominator is innocence - the hare, Iphigenia, the unborn of Troy are all victims in this war. Peradotto finds further justification in archaeological evidence of the cult of Artemis at Brauron, where votive offerings of young girls with hares have been discovered along with offerings from pregnant women. Consequently, an Athenian audience would grasp all the factors and conclude that Artemis is angry at the loss of all the innocents. Peradotto anticipates the argument that it is paradoxical to presume that Artemis is angry at the destruction of innocence when it is the sacrifice of the innocent Iphigenia that will appease her. He believes that we cannot see Artemis as demanding the sacrifice. Calchas makes the demand and Agamemnon does not contest it. Furthermore, he envisages Artemis creating a situation rather than compelling Agamemnon, because the king has another option open to him - to abandon the expedition all together.

This theory is certainly attractive as all elements of the provinces of the goddess are interwoven, yet there remains a doubt that cannot be ignored. Peradotto fails to acknowledge the important fact that the sacrifice of Iphigenia presumably achieves the desired result; we hear no more of adverse weather conditions after her death and, further, Clytemnestra appears to uphold the idea that the sacrifice worked;

'[Agamemnon] sacrificed his own child, the dearest fruit of
my travail, to charm away the winds of Thrace'. (1417-8)

Thus, if the sacrifice was what was being asked for and Calchas, whom we understand as only speaking the truth, was correct in his prophecy, then Artemis did in fact make the stipulation and is appeased by the death of the innocent Iphigenia.

Nevertheless, Peradotto has a strong case. The alliance of all Artemis' prerogatives is convincing, but the paradox remains that the sacrifice was acceptable. It is this point that we must take issue with if we are to accept that Artemis loves the innocent. Peradotto's belief

that Artemis does not compel the sacrifice but merely creates the situation is attractive, but what we need to ask is why she does so. Peradotto answers this question by arguing that the act is necessitated by the kind of man that Agamemnon is, and it certainly does appear, by virtue of the fact that he can carry out such a horrific act, that he has a propensity in his nature to do so. This is not a psychological reason; it is Aeschylus creating a character which has to be capable of horrific actions for the plot to progress. Therefore, Artemis creates the situation in which Agamemnon can condemn himself. This is perhaps the clue to why Artemis abates her anger. It is possible that she stops her winds because Agamemnon has, out of his own free will, chosen to sacrifice his daughter and thus has entered into a chain of events which result in his murder by his wife. Once Agamemnon has murdered his child he becomes a guilty man with the capacity to incur more guilt. Sacrificing his daughter will be the prime motivation for Clytemnestra's revenge. Consequently, we can envisage the sacrifice of Iphigenia as that which will precipitate the death of Agamemnon. Thus, the act becomes acceptable to Artemis, for the one who destroys the innocent will himself be destroyed.

The actions of Artemis raise questions over the relationship between gods and man. If we accept Peradotto's basic theory, then Artemis cannot be seen as an arbitrary goddess who values the life of a hare over the life of a young girl, yet the fact remains that she does create the situation for Agamemnon to condemn himself. If we employ both conclusions attained thus far, (that is, Zeus has sent the Atridae against Troy and Artemis' anger results in condemnation for Agamemnon), then we have the paradox that Zeus, who sends Agamemnon as the executioner of Troy, will stand back while his daughter places Agamemnon in a fatal dilemma. We must ask ourselves why Zeus does not involve himself and save Agamemnon. Again, we can look to Lloyd-Jones for an interesting theory. He advocates that behind the action of Artemis is Zeus' own will - that Zeus desires Agamemnon to be placed in this position. He states;

'The chorus, then, is faced with a dilemma; Zeus has sent the Atridae against the Trojans, but Zeus will concede to Artemis her demand for vengeance against the tearers of the hare. True, Zeus' responsibility is most obscurely indicated; but it may fairly be argued that the reluctance of both Kalchas and the chorus to admit it openly supplies

a good reason why it should be darkly suggested instead of clearly stated'.²⁵

However, as yet the will of Zeus is so obscure that it would be presumptive to suppose that behind the workings of Artemis is his will. If Aeschylus wanted the audience to understand the anger of Artemis as, in effect, the anger of Zeus, then why is it not so indicated in the text? We may argue that Aeschylus was bound by the mythic tradition which stipulates Artemis as the goddess who prevented the fleet sailing, but he has already shown, through making Clytemnestra the murderer rather than Aegisthus (as usually in Homer), that he was prepared to manipulate the content of the myth to suit his dramatic purpose. Therefore, if Aeschylus had wanted, he could have created the intensely tragic situation in which Zeus demands that Agamemnon embark for Troy and then orders the sacrifice of his daughter in order to do so. Consequently, we must ask ourselves why Aeschylus continued to use Artemis as the goddess who prevented the fleet from sailing. It cannot be that it is just because she is pro-Trojan in the *Iliad*, for so also are Apollo, Ares and Aphrodite. The reason must be as has been discussed above; that she is chosen as a consequence of the nature of her provinces (these are; wildlife, innocence and pregnancy) which are all blended in the oracle.

Further evidence can be detected in the interpretation of the omen by Calchas. He clearly states that Artemis;

‘..bears a grudge against the winged hounds of her father...’ (135)

We understand this line to mean that both the eagles and the Atridae are the ‘winged hounds’, yet it is also important that both belong to her father who is, without doubt, Zeus. However, this raises the question of whether Aeschylus intended the audience to believe that Artemis is also angry with Zeus. Therefore, unless we are to presume that Zeus deliberately sent the omen to provoke Artemis (which will, in turn, condemn Agamemnon), a conjecture that has absolutely no basis in the text, then we must conclude that there is no other reason behind Artemis’ anger other than her own motivation. Consequently, we must acknowledge that Artemis is acting as a free agent and does not require the sanction of Zeus. To understand this, we must seek to understand a polytheistic religion, in which the personalities of anthropomorphic gods are as important as the powers they hold. A goddess such as Artemis can act as freely as she wants or, more correctly, as freely as divine laws and order facilitate

²⁵ Lloyd-Jones (1956) p.61.

free action.²⁶ This does not mean, however, that Zeus and Artemis are in conflict over the dilemma in which Agamemnon has been placed. Although Homer implies that a god should respect the wishes and action already undertaken by another god, he presents Zeus as able, through superior power, to threaten or dissuade a god from embarking on a course of action. In our text we can detect no occurrence of disagreement between father and daughter, therefore we must assume that the will of Zeus is either in alliance with Artemis or acquiesces to her and, therefore, he accepts that Agamemnon be confronted with the dilemma at Aulis.

The relationship of gods to man is further developed by Aeschylus in lines 160-183, in what is now known as the Hymn to Zeus. Why the Chorus sing the 'hymn' at this point and what it means are open to debate. In the first stanza the Chorus invoke Zeus;

'Zeus, whoever he be - if to be called and invoked by this
name is pleasing to him, even thus do I address him' (160f.)

Immediately, we wonder why the Chorus are speculating over the name of Zeus. Arguably, Zeus is an overall name which encompasses all the different aspects of his divinity. This concept becomes intelligible when we realise the many provinces that Zeus controls. Golden²⁷ categorises the twenty references to the god in the text as follows: As an agricultural deity at 970, 1014; guardian of specific moral and spiritual qualities at 56 and 526; god of hospitality at 61-62, 362 and 748; defender of hearth at 704 and the remainder, variations on the concept of Zeus the Accomplisher. Subsequently, we can understand the choral concern to avoid offending Zeus by unwittingly omitting one of his titles if they were all to be listed. The Chorus then sing that he is incomparable and only he can lift the 'burden of vain thought from the care-laden mind in real truth' (163-166). What they mean here is ambiguous. Modern scholars have proposed several interpretations of this line. Lloyd-Jones²⁸ argues that we must choose between two alternatives; firstly, the Chorus may be concerned with the burden of trying to find anyone to compare to Zeus and secondly, they may be burdened with worry which results from the fortunes of the house of Atreus. If we accept the former then we are confronted with the problem of relevance - why should they suddenly be so

²⁶ Cf. Od. 6.329-31, 13.341-3. Athena explains her reason for not helping Odysseus, which is her *aidos* for her uncle, Poseidon.

²⁷ Golden (1962) pp. 159-160.

²⁸ Lloyd-Jones (1956) p.62.

troubled when they have not been so before, they have not expressed any previous difficulty in likening Zeus to any other power. Hence, their ‘hymn’ seems completely unmotivated and incongruous to the dramatic scheme. To understand why they are so burdened, we must find a motive in the text. The key to understanding their sentiments is context. The hymn is evenly placed between the omen and subsequent interpretation by Calchas, in which we have already noted the element of foreboding and the clear statement that Artemis’ suspected wrath has manifested itself, which necessarily entails Agamemnon’s choice. As the Chorus are reminiscing and not relating events as they happen, they are aware of all of the implications of Calchas’ interpretation. Thus, once they have narrated the words of Calchas, they know what will follow next. What Agamemnon is about to do is understood by the Chorus as a hideous crime that demands punishment, therefore what must be burdening them is the inevitable repercussions of Agamemnon’s action. This is furthered by the use of the line;

‘ἀλινον ἀλινον εἶπέ, τὸ δ’ εὖ νικάτω.’ (121,139,159)

Each time this line is sung is in response to the omen; its nature, the interpretation and the possibility of the wrath of Artemis. With context established, we must now ask what is their ‘woe’ and what ‘good’ they are hoping to prevail. It cannot be that they hope for Artemis not to be angry, for they know that she was and what the results were. Therefore, again the Chorus must be burdened with their thoughts concerning the consequence of Agamemnon sacrificing his daughter. This concept is not totally divorced from Lloyd-Jones’ theory but he, however, believes that it is the crimes of the house. What concerns us is what specific crimes are being referred to. We know that each successive generation from Tantalus onwards has offended the gods, yet in the play the only clear reference made to the family history will be made by Cassandra concerning Atreus. The crimes of Tantalus and Pelops are not referred to by Aeschylus and Cassandra will not appear on stage until two thirds of the play are over. Therefore, how can the audience understand the crimes that the Chorus are presumed to be worried about if they have not, as yet, been made aware of them. Awareness can be argued only if we are to presume that the audience were familiar with the family history and, although this is probable, the fact remains that the audience’s attention is focused primarily on the position of Agamemnon in the present dramatic situation rather than the preceding generations. Thus, what we can conclude is that the attention of the Chorus and, therefore, the audience is specifically concentrated on Agamemnon, hence, again, what

is causing concern are the king's actions.

The second stanza of the hymn poses many theological problems regarding the position of Zeus. The two possibilities are that Aeschylus was an advanced religious thinker, tentatively leaning towards a concept of monotheism,²⁹ or that he was upholding traditional theological concepts³⁰. At this stage in the whole trilogy we cannot possibly decide upon our understanding of Aeschylus' concept of Zeus. Instead, we must delay our decision until we have examined the role of Zeus throughout. Nevertheless, we must familiarise ourselves with the theological possibilities inherent in the stanza. The Chorus relate the defeat of Uranos and Cronos and the subsequent coronation of Zeus as god of gods. Lloyd-Jones argues that this is, in effect, popular Hesiodic cosmology rather than bold religious innovation. Additionally, the juxtaposition of Zeus' power with that of his predecessors' loss of power is an indication that even the mighty fall. It appears as though Aeschylus is recognising the boundaries of divine power, that is time. The rules of his predecessors lasted for an apportioned period of time and, arguably, precedent suggests, so will Zeus'. In contrast to this, the Chorus progress to sing that to worship Zeus is to attain understanding which, if read with the other references to Zeus as 'Cause of all, the doer of all' (1486), may be presenting Zeus as the supreme causal deity of the universe.³¹

The third stanza realises Zeus' power on Earth. It establishes Zeus as the creator of the law that through bitter experience or suffering we can attain understanding (176-180). This is a difficult concept as, using hindsight, we may surmise that the characters of the *Oresteia* learn nothing, that they only suffer, that Agamemnon and Clytemnestra go to their graves none the wiser for their experiences.³² Dodds³³ counsels us not to look for a moral learning but an intellectual one. He argues that, apart from Agamemnon, whose ability to reason has been

²⁹ Kitto (1964) pp.70-78.

³⁰ Page (1957) p.xv. 'Aeschylus is first and foremost a great poet and a most powerful dramatist: the faculty of acute or profound thought among his gifts. He takes for granted certain long established opinions about man's relation to the supernatural world; and he is not concerned to criticize doctrines which Solon in his time would have thought conventional.' See further Lloyd-Jones (1956) p.64; 'An examination of the surviving plays apart from the *Prometheus* seems to lead to what many people will find the startling conclusion that Aeschylus' concept of Zeus contains nothing that is new, nothing that is sophisticated, and nothing that is profound.'

³¹ Golden (1962) p.160.

³² See further Lloyd-Jones (1956) p.62.

³³ Dodds (1960) p.30.

negated by the alastor, Clytemnestra and Orestes gain insight into their actions.³⁴ With regard to Clytemnestra, Dodds argues that in her final stichomythia with the Chorus she learns the rules of the daemonic world, that what she did was done as the instrument of the daemon (1496-1504). Thus when she realises that unto the doer is done she breaks down and puts on the 'harness of necessity', thus following her determined path;

'Thus she has gained her insight, unwillingly; but it is an insight only
into the daemonic level of causation, and it serves only to
torture her.'³⁵

Dodds pictures Orestes as different; only he is aware that his actions are a crime and that he must suffer. Consequently, his μάθος is what saves him. This however is debatable for as we shall see in the *Eumenides*, all that Orestes learns is that killing his mother was justifiable for she was not of her blood. Therefore, he can escape the punishment that his revenge necessarily entailed. It is not his μάθος that saves him, rather it is an arbitrary decision on Athena's part.

Perhaps the most important element of Dodds' theory is regarding the suffering experienced by the fleet; starvation, dissipation of the forces and the breaking up of the ships all jeopardise the expedition to Troy. Ultimately, Calchas attributes the cause to Artemis, whom the Atridae and the audience see as necessitating Iphigenia's death. Agamemnon's reaction to Calchas' divination has prompted a great diversity of opinion amongst modern scholars. The debate centres on the question: Is Agamemnon guilty of a crime and, if so, does he commit this crime as an act of free will or by compulsion? Fontenrose³⁶ stands alone in his belief that the sacrifice of Iphigenia was not a crime that entails punishment but a 'horrible deed' committed out of necessity. Fontenrose argues that Agamemnon must carry out the sacrifice because he is Zeus' agent and to thwart the will of Zeus would entail punishment for disobedience. Thus, the only guilt incurred by Agamemnon is that he acted as a 'king and commander with sovereign right, doing what he had to do'. Consequently, Zeus would not be angry with Agamemnon's actions but accept the fact that the situation is a result of

³⁴ But cf. Knox (1972) p.123 who argues that Clytemnestra learns nothing, only the Chorus through the intermediacy of Cassandra learn to see reality.

³⁵ Dodds (1960) p.30.

³⁶ Fontenrose (1971) pp.82-83.

Artemis' anger. Fontenrose is certainly correct in arguing that Agamemnon is Zeus' agent, the Chorus, who are the commentators for the audience, envisage the sacrifice as, without doubt, a crime that presumably angers Zeus, god of hearth and home. Furthermore, the Chorus stipulate at the outset of the parodos that Zeus always punishes those that transgress the laws of correct behavior (57-59). How then is it possible for Agamemnon to avoid retribution unless he is to be considered the exception to the rule. Aeschylus chose to introduce the reciprocal law at the outset of the parodos in order that the audience interpret the actions of Agamemnon accordingly. He commits the most hideous crime, therefore he will atone with his own life. Nevertheless, Fontenrose's thesis raises questions that we need to resolve. Does Agamemnon have a choice in his actions or is he compelled? If he has a choice why does he choose to sacrifice his daughter? What is the relationship between the will of Zeus and the dilemma that Agamemnon is in? Ultimately we must ask ourselves, is Agamemnon responsible for his actions?

Scholarly opinion divides over whether we consider Agamemnon as having a choice at Aulis. Fontenrose is in one respect in alliance with Page³⁷, considering that the yoke strap of necessity (218) is the requirement of Agamemnon to sail for Troy. Page believes that Aeschylus presents abandoning the fleet as 'not a real alternative' and that Aeschylus is at pains to show that Agamemnon cannot desert. Furthermore, if he were to desert, he would not save Iphigenia as, once demanded, her death was necessary. Regarding Iphigenia, we cannot possibly know whether she would have been saved if the fleet did not sail, for such speculation lies beyond the text and is thus a fruitless exercise in conjecture. What concerns us is the fact that Aeschylus proposes two alternatives which we understand as being the life of Iphigenia or the expedition to Troy. Page raises the possibility that desertion is not actually an alternative at all, that Agamemnon raises the possibility of desertion only to dispel it as inconceivable. Peradotto takes issue with this argument, arguing that, in the whole Greek mythic tradition there is no other instance where a person is punished for not avenging an assault on the guest-friendship law. However, in order to substantiate this view, Peradotto has to maintain that Agamemnon and Menelaus are not the agents of Zeus. Yet, as has been discussed above, there is little doubt that Aeschylus meant the audience to understand the Atridae as avenging furies sent to Troy by Zeus. If they were not the agents

³⁷ Page (1957) p.xxiv *ff.*

of Zeus then there would be no recriminations if they forgo the expedition. However, this is to deny the central paradox of the parodos that Zeus sends Agamemnon to Troy but allows him to condemn himself in the process and to use other literature to try and explain the deliberate dramatic contradictions inherent in Aeschylus' text, instead of accepting them as part of the dramatic scheme. Tragedy is, in essence, paradoxical, therefore we must accept that Agamemnon has a choice although both outcomes will entail destruction, for either course of action will arouse the wrath of Zeus in either of his provinces (these are Xenios and Hikesios).

Justification for the belief that Agamemnon has a choice is evident in the text. The king envisages both alternatives;

‘A heavy doom indeed is disobedience, but heavy
too, if I rend my child, the delight of my house,
defiling a father's hand with streams from the
slaughtering of a virgin at the altar's side’. (206-211)

Aeschylus here is presenting Agamemnon weighing up two alternatives between which he must choose.³⁸ If we misunderstand Agamemnon's words as encapsulating only one possibility, then we are faced with the theory that Agamemnon is sent to Troy by Zeus and then allowed to perish as a result of the whim of Artemis in order to fulfil Zeus' ordinances. To accept this theory would deny Agamemnon any realistic role in his own fate, would deny him any free will and ultimately negate his responsibility. Thus, in this scenario his murder would no longer be a justifiable act of reciprocation but a senseless murder for which there is no possible justification. Furthermore, this theory would call into question the very nature of Zeus, who would consequently be seen as a vengeful, arbitrary and manipulating deity without any concept of benevolence. Dodds counsels us that;

‘If we follow the promptings of logic, we shall conclude that
δρᾶσαντι παθεῖν stands for something as dramatically
senseless as it is morally revolting - the suffering wantonly

³⁸ With Fraenkel II. pp.98-9 ‘After a violent struggle he resolves to sacrifice his daughter, fully aware that what he is going to do is an unpardonable sin and will have to be atoned for. His fatal step puts him under the yoke of compulsion; there can be no way back; on and on he must go, and in the end, he knows as well as the elders, will be utter ruin.’

inflicted by an all-powerful deity upon a human marionette.’³⁹

Agamemnon knows what the result of either course of action will be so he makes his choice and vainly hopes for the best. Consequently, we cannot see Agamemnon as a figure whose life has been predetermined and is now merely fulfilling what fate has decreed for him. The Moirae (who apportion to each man his lot in life) have determined that Agamemnon will be in this position while still retaining the freedom to decide on his own course of action. Whilst Aeschylus does not discuss the apportionment of Agamemnon himself, the fact that it is fated that Troy will fall (126ff.) and Agamemnon is the divinely appointed agent of destruction, means that we must then surely understand that it is Agamemnon’s Moirae that place him in this position. Whilst it is true that in Agamemnon’s case his choices are without doubt limited, a Greek audience would envisage his decision as one which entails his own responsibility and is therefore necessarily his own choice. To justify this, we can cite one example among many from the *Iliad* (19: 81-127). Agamemnon blames his behaviour towards Achilles on Ate but he does not try to evade his responsibility for his actions, this can be seen in his attempt to make adequate recompense. From this we can understand that to the Greeks, even though an action or decision is limited either in scope or motivation, it is still made with the understanding that the individual is held responsible.

Having determined that Agamemnon can make a choice between two alternatives, we must now decide why he chooses in the manner that he does. As a rule, opinion divides as to whether he chooses as a result of a personal motivation inherent in his nature or whether he is driven only by the will of Zeus. With regard to Agamemnon’s nature, Murray, Hammond and Winnington-Ingram all envisage Agamemnon’s desire to embark for Troy as the motivating factor. Murray believes that the destruction of Troy is Agamemnon’s life-ambition and that although he may turn back, he believes that the end justifies the means - an end which has precedent in ancient religious custom. Murray conceptualises this as blindness caused by desire, equivalent to the blindness of Paris, who knows that eloping with Helen will entail Trojan suffering yet cannot stop himself because his desire for her is so great.⁴⁰ Hammond also believes that desire is the motivating factor, not for Troy but for the pomp and ceremony afforded him as commander general of the Achaean alliance. As a result,

³⁹ Dodds (1960) p.27.

⁴⁰ Murray (1940) pp.188-189.

Agamemnon's belief that the sacrifice is Themis is a statement of gross hypocrisy motivated out of passion for war and fear of public opinion.⁴¹ Desire is again the key to Winnington-Ingram's theory but he believes that the shame of desertion and the subsequent loss of glory far outweigh the life of his daughter as the heroic code must be preserved at all costs.⁴²

All these theories have a common strength and a common weakness. Agamemnon certainly believes that the need to sack Troy is of more importance than the life of his daughter, for he states at 212-213;

‘Which of these courses is without evil?
How can I fail in my duty to the alliance and
thus become a deserter of the fleet? [I cannot]’

It is certainly true that the war is needed to maintain the status of the heroic code. As we have discussed above,⁴³ Paris has made an unforgivable assault on the heroic society which, if unpunished, questions the existence of the society. Furthermore, the *raison d'être* of kings and heroes is the quest for glory. Whether this means that Troy is Agamemnon's life-ambition or the forum to attain glory is debatable. We might conjecture that the sacking of a city provides a forum for individual heroes to excel and therefore gain honour and that to be a commander in this scenario is the epitome of glory. However, if Aeschylus wanted us to consider Agamemnon as desirous of glory then he would have said so explicitly. But in fact he does not choose to give any explanation of Agamemnon's reasoning at all. The important point is that the audience understand that he has made one decision over another. If glory is the sum total of his motivation then the audience's attitude to him would be one of total condemnation, yet at the point of his death we cannot help but feel pity for him, not because he does not deserve to die but because he is a noble king. The above motives are common to nearly all the heroes who embarked for Troy⁴⁴ and, as such, they are all consistent with the actions of Agamemnon, but we must surely believe that it takes something extraordinary to slit the throat of his firstborn child who had been such an asset to his house (243ff.).

⁴¹ Hammond (1965) pp.47-48.

⁴² Winnington-Ingram (1983)p.83. The quest for glory is certainly important in Euripides. Consider Menelaus' speech in *I.A.* 334ff. in which he reminds Agamemnon of the reason why he wanted to be overlord of the Achaeans. This statement of motivation is not included by Aeschylus who provides no indication of Agamemnon's reasoning.

⁴³ See above pp. 9-10.

⁴⁴ The exception being Odysseus whom Agamemnon claims to have forced (841-2).

Dawe⁴⁵, in evaluating Agamemnon's character, maintains that what we see of him prior to his stage entrance at 782 is favourable. He believes that the expedition to Troy is a result of divine requirement rather than desire. Consequently, Aeschylus has constructed the scene in a manner that encourages the audience to empathise with the agonised father rather than his horrific actions. Agreed, we do witness the pain of the necessity of making a choice but this does not lessen our unfavourable opinion of him when the Chorus begin to relate the sacrifice. From 228ff. the Chorus describe the lead up to her death in a beautiful but horrific way. They contrast her beauty and innocence with the brutality with which she is treated; she is held like a kid, as little more than a sacrificial animal and they compare her gagged state with how she would entertain her father's friends with her melodious voice. The Chorus cannot bring themselves to sing of the actual deed, for it is too horrific to contemplate. Why Aeschylus chose this manner of recollection is of immense interest. On the one hand, he could be presenting the sacrifice as too horrific even to relate, or he could be encouraging an audience familiar with sacrificial rites to use their imagination, to dare to think what the Chorus believes unthinkable. Either way, Agamemnon is resolutely condemned by the audience, who feel the 'pitiful arrow' of Iphigenia's eye strike home. In comparison with the events of the sacrifice, Agamemnon's anguish loses all its power and our emotions, thus channelled, ensure that we cannot uphold his decision. Additionally, as we have discussed at length, the need for Trojan atonement cannot be seen as simply motivated by divine wrath or human desire. Both elements are there, for the Atridae are both the vultures and the eagles.

In feeling the need for another factor of causation other than personal desire, we can turn to those who envisage the curse of Atreus as the reason why Agamemnon chooses as he does. The most convincing exponent of this theory is Lloyd-Jones⁴⁶, who believes that Agamemnon had no choice but to sacrifice his daughter, but that it is also a crime. He dispels the theological problems this raises by envisioning Zeus as not unmotivated and arbitrary. In contrast, he believes that Zeus' judgement is brought down as a result of crime - not, in this case, prosperity but inherited guilt (that is, inheriting the sins of Atreus). This

⁴⁵ Dawe (1963) p.47.

⁴⁶ Lloyd-Jones (1962) p.192.

is, in essence, similar to the belief of Kitto who, contemplating the guilt of Agamemnon, states;

‘The curse in the house of Atreus, that moral violence which provokes further violence in like-minded men, has him firmly in its grip from the beginning, from before the beginning.’⁴⁷

The essential difference between Kitto and Lloyd-Jones is in the question of responsibility. Kitto believes that Agamemnon is guilty because he is ‘like-minded’, he is driven onwards because of the force of his deeds and because he is his father’s son. Thus, it is his own decision, but it is a decision he was bound to make. For Kitto, the question of motive is beside the point, for the act is all-important. What we must understand is that Agamemnon was capable of the actions that we witness and there was the possibility of an alternative. In contrast, Lloyd-Jones dismisses the possibility of an alternative as a result of divine orchestration and considers Agamemnon capable of his actions because Zeus has negated his wits by sending Ate. However, in regard to both theories, the problem again remains that the audience have not, as yet, heard of the curse and therefore, if this is the reason why Agamemnon is placed in this dilemma then the audience cannot appreciate it when he is making his decision. In reality, this is treating the curse as a missing jigsaw piece without which we cannot see the full picture and is an attempt to understand the dramatic development of the play by reading it backwards. As Hammond comments;

‘In a play the dramatic evolution is of sovereign importance. One cannot reverse the sequence on the stage as readily as one can read back a motive in a written text.’⁴⁸

Furthermore, with regard to Lloyd-Jones’ belief that Ate has taken away Agamemnon’s wits before he makes his decision, this idea seems to run contrary to the text. The Chorus firstly describe Agamemnon as agonising over what to do and then, once he has put upon himself the yoke of necessity (218-219), he is possessed by ‘wretched infatuation’ (224). The Chorus then proceed to relate the nature of the sacrifice. The dramatic evolution is central and the Chorus’ thought progression is thus: Agamemnon makes his decision; he is then possessed; thus deranged, he can commit the horrible deed. If Aeschylus had meant that Agamemnon was possessed from the outset, then the Chorus would have stated this before

⁴⁷ Kitto (1962) p.66.

⁴⁸ Hammond (1965) p.42.

they describe his process of decision-making. Furthermore, it is more tragic that Agamemnon chooses as he does in full possession of his mental faculties than in a deranged state of mind, for although action motivated by Ate does not negate responsibility, it is more dramatically satisfying for the audience to believe that Agamemnon has chosen his own destiny.

Whilst we do not uphold the curse of Atreus as the ultimate causal agent, we can appreciate the attractiveness of the theory. Akin to our comments on the theories of those who look to Agamemnon's nature to solve the problem of responsibility, Kitto and Lloyd-Jones have a particular strength to their arguments. Agamemnon will be seen as an accursed man and the fact that because we do not, at this stage, witness the nature of the curse does not mean that by the end of the play we are not to understand that he is so afflicted. Although dramatic evolution is paramount, audience hindsight is also of importance. When the play is over we look back and say that Agamemnon was an infatuated man (and because of his genealogy is bound to be so) but there must always remain a misgiving because we can also say that he chose his own fate because he desired one alternative as opposed to the other. This does not negate the criticism so far made concerning the curse as a causal agent, for until this point in the play, we have not witnessed any events in which Agamemnon is directly involved.

Consequently, any conclusions that we determine must acknowledge the dual elements of personal and supernatural motivation. There is nothing original in this statement; Lesky pioneered the same argument; concluding his examination over the events at Aulis, he states;

‘Thus, what Agamemnon is forced to do under the yoke of *Ananke*
is at the same time what he wants to do, the crime that entails guilt
and atonement, that he will have to atone for with his own fall.

The words of the chorus also clearly indicate that the king is not
just carried away by irrational forces but rationally accepts his fatal

deed: τὸ παντοτόλμων φρονεῖν μετέγνων (221)’⁴⁹

However, Lesky also acknowledges that Zeus wills Agamemnon's punishment too, but in contrast, Lesky does not try to explain away the paradox that Agamemnon is Zeus' agent and will be punished by him. He simply accepts this as having no rational consistency; such is

⁴⁹ Lesky (1966) p.82.

the nature of Tragedy.

With these observations in mind, we must now turn to the text. To resume our investigation of the parodos, Calchas reveals that Artemis is in fact angry, to which there is the unspoken understanding that appeasement will be secured only if Iphigenia is sacrificed. The Chorus then proceed to relate Agamemnon's dilemma. At 206-211, Agamemnon weighs both in the balance - disobedience to Zeus or the doom which results from the death of his daughter. 'Which of these courses is without evil?' he asks himself. In agreement with Lesky, at this stage there is nothing to choose between the two; the reversal within 'the soul of the hesitant hero'⁵⁰ comes at line 212 where Agamemnon asks how he can fail the alliance and become a deserter. With Lesky, we can conclude that now Agamemnon has limited himself and the two alternatives are no longer even, but as Garvie states;

'He went under the ἀνάγκας λῆπαδνον, the yoke strap of necessity (218), which I take to mean, not that the sacrifice was somehow predetermined or beyond his own control, but either, quite simply, that he was forced to make the choice (cf. *Supp.* 440) or that, like Pelasgus at *Supp.* 478, he felt in his dilemma that the pressure on him to adopt one course of action was overwhelmingly greater than the other.'⁵¹

Therefore, with Garvie, he will be considered guilty as he bears full responsibility for his desires. Juxtaposed with this is the fact that Agamemnon is his father's son who has inherited the guilt of the house. This does not mean that the curse is what causes him to choose a particular path, rather it allows him the capability to choose in the manner that he does. Garvie encapsulates this when he states;

'In Aeschylus it seems that the son who inherits the family curse is never an innocent sufferer. He inherits not just guilt but a propensity to incur fresh guilt himself, and he is thus always in some degree responsible for his suffering.'⁵²

⁵⁰Lesky (1966) p.81.

⁵¹ Garvie (1986) p.xxix.

⁵² Ibid. p.xxviii See also Rosenmeyer (1982) p.295 who argues that the next generation always in some way contribute to the curse. This is especially true in the *Septem*, consider how Eteocles and Polynices add to the crimes of Oedipus and Laius. See further Edwards (1977) p.26.

The Chorus envisage this choice as Agamemnon submitting to the yoke strap of necessity. With Edwards, we understand this to mean the compulsion that he must make a choice, rather than the requirement that he make any particular choice. The necessity that he must do so is a result of the fact that because he has the propensity to make such a decision he is put in the position of choice. We understand his predicament as caused by the wrath of Artemis, but her anger is in part motivated by Agamemnon's own propensity to sacrifice his daughter and not because he was predetermined to choose as he did.

Once Agamemnon has made his decision, the Chorus believe that his spirit becomes 'impious, impure, unholy' and he 'reversed his mind and turned to utter recklessness' (219ff.). The reversal of his mind does not mean that he has changed his mind over what he intends to do, as though he had decided not to sacrifice his daughter, but where Agamemnon's mind has been pious, holy and pure it has now reversed into being the antithesis of what it was before. Once his mind has become contaminated, he has the capability to sacrifice Iphigenia. In describing his actions, the Chorus leave us in little doubt that the path Agamemnon has chosen is the more distasteful one. The tenderness with which they describe Iphigenia cannot fail to arouse the sympathy of the audience. To do so, they contrast her youthful innocence with the 'war-thirsty commanders' (228-230) and stress the irony that an innocent virgin (245) will be killed in order to facilitate a war, the aim of which is to repossess a woman who is unchaste and, according to the Chorus, of dubious worth (61ff.). Ultimately the Chorus leave us with the belief that Agamemnon has chosen his own path and will be held accountable, for all-in-all the deed outweighs any motive and it is on his actions rather than his intentions that Agamemnon will be judged. In the closing lines of the parodos the Chorus fear what that judgement will be, therefore they alleviate their worries by convincing themselves what will be will be and therefore, not to worry about it in advance.

The will of Zeus in this is nebulous and unfathomable and therefore we cannot as yet understand why Zeus will allow his agent to perish. This is not simply an inability to solve the problem posed by Aeschylus. Rather, we are appreciating the fact that Zeus' will is never apparent in any particular instance. As with Zeus in the *Supplikes*, in the *Oresteia* Aeschylus presents Zeus as hard to know and if he is to be understood it is only when the

trilogy has run its course. This is due to Zeus' Justice being understandable only in the long term, or in our case, over several generations, for mortals are without the foreknowledge that makes divine acts understandable. Consequently, again we must wait until the resolution of the trilogy to appreciate the motivation of Zeus.

Thus, the *parodos* of the *Agamemnon* establishes its namesake as guilty of the most heinous offence against Zeus Hikesios, but guilt is, by its nature, infectious. It involves others who are affected by it and it multiplies within the offender. Consequently, Agamemnon embarks for Troy a guilty man and once there he will incur fresh guilt both for sacrilege and because so many have died. As a result of the fact that the events at Troy are in the most recent past, Aeschylus can no longer use choral hindsight but a process of foreboding and fulfilment. After Clytemnestra's beacon speech, the Chorus ask her to tell them from start to finish how Troy was sacked. Why Clytemnestra is in receipt of this knowledge is a redundant question. Aeschylus does not choose to explain why, therefore we must simply accept the fact that it is dramatically necessary that she can relate the last hours of Troy. The logic of this argument can be seen in the final words of Clytemnestra's speech. At 338-342, Clytemnestra tells us that the forces ought to respect the city-gods and altars to avoid incurring the wrath of the gods, but from 340ff. she ironically fears that the Greeks, overcome with desire, may commit sacrilege by not respecting the gods and therefore, not gain a safe return.⁵³

This element of foreboding is furthered by the unwitting Chorus. At 370-384, the Chorus are ostensibly discussing Paris in relation to the principle that a man grown rich beyond all rights is a target for divine displeasure and that once sin is entailed there is no defence against the workings of Justice. However, these lines are ambiguous; the context may be Paris but they are equally applicable to Agamemnon in Troy. The Chorus sing;

‘Men have said that the gods disdain to care about
such mortals as trample on the grace of things
not to be touched; but they who say it lack piety.’ (370-3)

This could also be understood as a reiteration of Clytemnestra's warning, for what should not be touched are the altars of the gods. To do so lacks piety and reverence and, as we have noticed above, there is no defence for the man who spurns Justice.

⁵³ Clytemnestra's motives for these ironic fears are discussed below Ch.2 pp.64-6.

This sense of foreboding is fulfilled by the Herald who unwittingly boasts that Troy has been destroyed to the last seed (526ff.) and in the process the Greeks have desecrated the temples of the gods (578f.) which is exactly what Clytemnestra warned about. Thus, we realise that the fears expressed by Clytemnestra and the Chorus have been realised. The punishment for this offence is the destruction of the returning fleet as described by the Herald at 644ff. and furthermore, he explicitly states that the storm was a result of divine wrath (649) concerning sacrilege. Furthermore, the mythic tradition of the Trojan War blames the returning disasters on the rape of Cassandra by the lesser Ajax at the altar of Athena. We might speculate that Aeschylus refrained from specifying one act of sacrilege in favour of general impiety in order to focus our attention on Agamemnon, thereby holding him responsible by virtue of the fact that he is the commander-in-chief. The immediate objection to this is that the Herald tells us that Agamemnon's ship was saved by the hand of divinity (664-6), which could be interpreted as the gods choosing to save Agamemnon from the fate suffered by the rest of the fleet. This thesis is argued by Fontenrose⁵⁴, who believes Agamemnon was saved from the storm because he had committed no offence in Troy (as the gods, when they expect a city to fall, leave their altars). Furthermore, even if the gods were angry, then the fleet atoned but Agamemnon retained divine favour. Against this, Menelaus was the twin commander with his brother but he is reported as lost. Therefore, we might ask why Agamemnon is in receipt of greater favour than Menelaus. Additionally, Clytemnestra is ironic when hoping for their safety; she is directing her sarcasm at Agamemnon, envisaging him as responsible for the actions of the whole Greek force and furthermore, no member of the audience who witnessed the sacrifice of Iphigenia in the parodos could possibly accept that Agamemnon is guiltless. Consequently, in contrast to Fontenrose, we might conclude that Agamemnon is saved by Fortune in order to meet a more fitting end at the hands of the mother whose daughter he mercilessly sacrificed. Nevertheless, without firm textual evidence to substantiate either conjecture, it is perhaps wiser to argue that Agamemnon returns home because, if he were not to do so, there would be no trilogy.

The third count of Agamemnon's guilt is again motivated by the events at Troy. The Chorus'

⁵⁴ Fontenrose (1971) pp. 78-79.

first stasimon, as has been noted above, is concerned with the Justice meted out to the Trojans and Menelaus' grief when Helen eloped with Paris. Lines 366-384 have been discussed above with reference to the guilt incurred by sacrilege, but there is also an indication that the reference to the man who tramples on 'the grace of things not to be touched' and who cannot thereby avoid Justice, also recalls Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia. It is possible that the preservation of the familial bond between father and daughter could be considered as part of the universal order protected by δικη and to violate that bond is to violate Justice. Furthermore, the Chorus (at 381-384) clearly state that Justice will take note of violation. If we are correct in this theory then Justice will take aim at Agamemnon for the sacrifice of Iphigenia and the destruction of the temples.

Further textual evidence is afforded by the second stanza (385-403). The context is again Paris, but the ambiguities are apparent. The Chorus describe Paris as possessed by Πειθῶ (persuasion), child of Ἄτρεα (infatuation), but only 161 lines previously, the Chorus have stated that Agamemnon was 'emboldened' by impurity of spirit and impiety. If we understand that infatuation is possessing Paris and, to certain extent Agamemnon, then we can appreciate that the Chorus are ambiguously telling us that Agamemnon will become 'indelibly black when brought to justice...'. No god will save him and his people will suffer as Paris' people suffered. The Chorus, as if to clarify exactly whom they are referring to, name Paris for the first time at the end of the second stanza (399).

The concept of the people suffering as a result of Agamemnon's infatuation is clearly stated in the fifth and sixth stanzas (437-474). Here, the Chorus delineate the parallel circumstances of Paris and Agamemnon and concentrate on the reaction of the populace to the war. They envisage the wrath of the people, arisen out of grief for those who will not return and those who will return in urns. This grief is motivated by their anger that their sons, husbands, fathers and fellow citizens have died for the sake of another man's fickle wife. It is the Atridae that they hold responsible (449-451). In addition to the dangers that arise from the people's curse is divine enmity. At 459ff. the Chorus acknowledge their 'anxious thought' that the gods take note of the man who murders many and the man that

prosper without Justice is stalked by the fearful Erinyes. These are difficult concepts, for Zeus in sending Agamemnon to Troy must surely accept that the outcome will entail the loss of many Greeks and the destruction of Troy. Furthermore, if Agamemnon is Zeus' agent, does he not then have Justice on his side? Again, we are faced with the seemingly irreconcilable paradox that we were confronted with over the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Although, as we have discussed above, we cannot come to any firm conclusions regarding the will of Zeus on the evidence of one part of the trilogy, we can speculate that human and divine motivation are not interchangeable. Zeus' need to prevent further assault on his rule necessitates that he cannot allow Paris to remain unpunished. Paris has transgressed the natural order between gods and men, so the punishment is justified. Agamemnon, although he is Zeus' agent, has his own motivation, as we have previously noted; pride, honour, ambition and the preservation of the heroic society. Justice may extend to his actions in his role as Zeus' agent but we might argue that his own motivation for the war lacks Justice, for the punishment is out of proportion to the crime committed on a human level. Therefore, we might assume that the paradox here is that Agamemnon has Justice but that what he does is also wrong. As a result of the fact that he is held accountable for his own motivation and actions, he is deemed guilty and is subsequently held responsible, whereas as Zeus' avenging fury, he is not. The presence of divine sanction does not mitigate Agamemnon's own actions, for we must see them as independent and committed out of his own desires.

Nevertheless, if we reject this concept then we can seek recourse to the theory that, regardless of motivation, divine or human, it is the action that is all-important. In contrast to our modern concept of God, who we hope evaluates the motive and the deed, and our judicial system that also takes account of motive, is the Greek theological system and the legal system where, if a person admits to committing a crime, he is considered *kakourgos* and is summarily executed. To ensure that a jury would be able to hear his motive, he would have to deny that he was a *kakourgos* and hope that the jury would be moved by an appeal. Thus, we can tentatively suggest that a Greek audience would regard Agamemnon as guilty of causing great loss of life on both sides and not allow his motivation to affect their judgement. These speculations aside, the Chorus, in reality, conceptualise Agamemnon as a guilty man; guilty in the eyes of the people for the waste of men for an unworthy woman and guilty in the eyes of the gods for being responsible for the death of so many men. In

response to this, the Chorus advocate the mean as the process to ensure a *sophron* life. From 470, the Chorus state that it is better not to be a sacker of cities or a conquered slave, never to receive too much praise, for to do so will arouse the anger of Zeus. What the Chorus are seeking to avoid is, in effect, all that Agamemnon has achieved. He is responsible for the sack of Troy and, additionally, the Herald will speak in terms of excessive praise of his king (524), calling him a man blessed by Fortune. This bodes ill for Agamemnon, for the man who is considered fortunate, happy or honoured in his own lifetime runs the substantial risk that he will be abandoned by fortune.

Taking all into account, Agamemnon is held responsible for a catalogue of crimes; Iphigenia, a war for the sake of Helen and the loss of so many lives at Troy, all of which he will have to atone for. The people, the gods and Clytemnestra all require Agamemnon to atone for his crimes. How this situation has arisen, how one man can entail such disaster is explained by the Chorus in the second stasimon. As with the *parodos* and the first stasimon, the Chorus begin triumphantly. The first two stanzas describe Helen as a bridal fury, who came disguised by grace and emerged as the daemon sent to destroy Priam's citadel. The third and fourth stanzas; the Chorus allegorise Helen as a seemingly innocent lion cub who shows its nature only as it matures when it becomes the destroyer of the house. However, Knox, examining both stanzas closely, concludes that the allegory should not simply be understood as Helen, but as the Atridae as well. With regard to Menelaus, Knox⁵⁵ argues that ἀνὴρ (719) could be understood as Menelaus accepting Helen into his house as a bride, especially since the numerous marriage references in the first and second stanzas are more applicable to Menelaus and Helen than to Paris and Helen. Thus, again, perhaps the Chorus are discontented with their kings, not just for the war but for even accepting Helen in the first place. The acceptance of a wife who has the nature of a lion is, for Knox, also applicable to Clytemnestra for Agamemnon accepts her but she becomes the matured lion cub incarnate. However, it is questionable whether Aeschylus intends us to think of Clytemnestra here. Whilst Cassandra does consider her a lioness (1258), at this point we have not yet heard her metaphor, therefore the connection with Clytemnestra is remote.

⁵⁵ Knox (1952) p.19.

Knox⁵⁶ believes that the allegory also extends to the position of Agamemnon. The description of the young cub could refer equally to Agamemnon as a young prince, as the lion cub loves children and so too did Agamemnon, but he sacrificed his daughter to undertake the war, which Knox describes as a 'savage ironical effect'. The allegory to Agamemnon is also furthered when the lion cub matures, bringing death and destruction. Although we understand this as Helen and Troy it is also true of Agamemnon. With Knox, he has brought death to his house in the form of Iphigenia and the death of the Greek forces and Trojan people. Knox cites further evidence when he states that, at 141, lions are mentioned in connection with the provinces of Artemis. However, the point of this line is that Artemis is kind to the lion cub. By her actions she cannot be seen as kind to the Atridae; rather they are the eagles which she loathes (135). Additionally, the single reference at the outset of the play is hardly memorable as the point of reference in the second stasimon and there is absolutely nothing in the text to suggest anything concerning Agamemnon as a young prince or his having a love of children. However, we can agree with Knox that the imagery used to represent Agamemnon is evident at 1259 where Cassandra calls her captor the 'noble Lion'.

The importance of the allegory is that it contributes to the thematic development of the trilogy, the recurrence of evil which is clearly argued by Knox, who states;

'The lion cub image is thus associated with the process of the reappearance of evil from generation to generation which is the central problem of the trilogy, and thus indirectly associated with the house of Atreus and the individual characters in whom the whole process is worked out to an end and the problem to a solution.'⁵⁷

The concept of the reappearance of evil is then considered by the Chorus as the reason why a house is destroyed (750-782). Firstly, the Chorus reject the idea that excessive prosperity is enough to destroy a race (750-756). They then propose that it is acts of impiety that breed further impiety, for the house that is kept in a just state produces same-minded children. However, if this is not the case, and the house is unjust, then at an apportioned time, the

⁵⁶ Knox (1952) p.21.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

nature of the children will reveal itself and bring ruin on the house through infatuation. We must be very careful not to interpret this as children of a house automatically acting as their parents did. The Chorus are not saying that the child is innocent and suffering as a result of parental misdeeds. We cannot use these lines to argue that Agamemnon was so cursed and therefore his crimes are motivated by those of Atreus, thus diminishing his responsibility. Rather, as we have noted above, the child inherits a propensity to incur further guilt, but whether he does so or not depends on the nature and desires of the child. With reference to Agamemnon, we can surmise that the actions of his forefathers created in him the ability to sacrifice his daughter, but the decision to do so was made out of his own desire for the war, and once guilty his state of recklessness encouraged further guilt. Thus, ultimately, he himself has chosen his own apportionment and will be held accountable thereof.

Immediately after the Chorus' ominous words at 783ff. Agamemnon enters the stage as guilty as a man could possibly be, and it is in this state that he addresses the Chorus and Clytemnestra. However, in his first speech to the Chorus, to our surprise he is a man characterised by confidence, in himself, his achievements and his belief that he is favoured by the gods. It immediately dawns on us that Agamemnon is blind, as only the infatuated man can be. He lingers over his destruction of Troy (813-829), believing that his actions are divinely sanctioned, but he never pauses to consider that, although the gods may grant victory, this does not mean that they approve of his actions. Furthermore, he cites the reason for the war (Helen) without considering that the recovery of Helen was not worth the destruction that it entailed (832).⁵⁸ The dramatic irony is prevalent; his pious reference to the gods some six times in number⁵⁹ is intensely ironic, for the gods must surely consider Agamemnon as crime-laden. So also are his disparaging comments over his populace and his comrades in arms. He does not realise that his fellow citizens' malevolence is not concerning his prosperity but the cost of his victory. Similarly, he has emptied Greece of men, yet he has no tribute for their sacrifice, only for Odysseus. Thus, Agamemnon has no real grasp of his precarious position; rather, he simply hopes that all will continue to be well for him. This hope has echoes of his wish at 217 in response to his decision to sacrifice

⁵⁸ Dawe argues this point convincingly. He states; 'In reality no person of whatever character would try to glorify his warlike deeds by emphasising that the whole enterprise was undertaken for the sake of a woman.' (1963) p.48.

⁵⁹ Dawe (1963) p.47.

Iphigenia, but at that point and now again, we know that the converse is true, that Justice is about to catch up with Agamemnon, for waiting in the wings is his apportioned avenger.

Agamemnon's second speech introduces what is commonly referred to as the 'carpet scene' in which Clytemnestra debates with her husband, attempting successfully to make him walk over the embroidered tapestries into the house. To understand this scene, we must seek to answer key questions; why is the scene there? What is it for? How and why is Agamemnon made to do what he claims he does not want to do? What does this scene mean for Agamemnon and for the dramatic development of the play? To consider first why the scene is included by Aeschylus, what purpose does it serve? Aeschylus' intent is to show Agamemnon being defeated in argument with his wife. The reason why this should be the case has not yet been discussed⁶⁰. Throughout the play, gender roles are confused; Clytemnestra is presented as intensely masculine. She rules the house and she is in control. In order to present her as capable in actuality of what has been said of her and capable of what she is about to do, we need to see her as able to defeat her husband. Additionally, as with all Greek tragedy, we do not witness the final act of violence, therefore we can appreciate Clytemnestra's defeat of Agamemnon as a precursor to what will happen behind the palace doors. Dramatically, this scene also makes sense, for until this point in the play, Clytemnestra has controlled the stage. Only she has used the stage door and thus the palace has been her domain. In keeping with this, Agamemnon will now enter subject to her will and thus her dominance is maintained. As a final point, the image created is magnificent. Clytemnestra stands at the door with the carpets, blood red in colour, stretched forth from the palace. It would seem as though Agamemnon is conveyed to his death on a river of blood, the blood he has shed at Aulis and Troy. As Clytemnestra closes the door behind him, we cannot help but know that Agamemnon's fate is sealed; he is bound to die but we also cannot help but be horrified.

How and why Agamemnon is defeated is a contentious question. As with the situation at Aulis, scholars divide between those that seek an explanation of Agamemnon's actions within his nature and those that detect divine causation. Hammond, Hetherington and Page all believe Agamemnon's desires to be the reason he allows himself to be persuaded.

⁶⁰ The theme of the perversion of gender roles and sexual imbalance is discussed below - Ch.2 p.64 n.34.

Hammond argues that this is the final test he will face, which he fails out of arrogance or weakness or over-confidence.⁶¹ Hetherington again states that he allows himself to be swept along by the persuasive skills of Clytemnestra.⁶² Page expands this thesis, claiming that Agamemnon's nature is vain and frivolous and he therefore desires to make a triumphant entry. All these theories adopt a condemnatory approach to Agamemnon's nature which Dawe believes is contradictory to the text. Agamemnon's character, if we are permitted to use the term, is not simply good or bad. Admittedly, his actions can all be seen as sinful, but they do not negate the praiseworthy references made to him by the watchman at 34-35 and the warm, faithful address to him that the Chorus begins with at 782ff⁶³. Consequently, with Dawe, we can further conclude that it is impossible to piece together from the fragmented pieces of evidence in the text a consistent psychology of Agamemnon that would account for hidden desires. However, this does not mean that we cannot detect personality traits. Agamemnon is certainly over-confident and unaware, which is a correct description of his behaviour, but not of his psychological state.⁶⁴

In contrast with the above, Fraenkel believes that it is because Agamemnon is such a gentleman that he allows himself to be persuaded. Fraenkel argues that Agamemnon defers to Clytemnestra because she is a woman and because he is too exhausted to debate with her. Again, it is to Dawe that we can look to question this thesis. He states;

‘Verses 942 and 944 certainly show Agamemnon yielding in response to a tiresome request, but even Fraenkel himself would not pretend that this moment's decision hangs on a point of etiquette. As for mental fatigue, certainly the herald's lengthy description of the hardships at Troy and thereafter was not intended merely as a pictorial excursus...obviously the poet wishes us to think of Agamemnon as anything but chirpy.’⁶⁵

⁶¹ Hammond (1965) pp.47-49.

⁶² Hetherington (1986) p.119.

⁶³ However, they do tell Agamemnon their misgivings over his actions (799ff.).

⁶⁴ Cf. Easterling (1973) pp. 5-10 who comments that the audience with a concept of historical reality are prepared to accept a lot and to add to it. That Agamemnon is defined by his status as a monarch, therefore we expect him to act like a king. Furthermore, all that we have heard of his actions focuses our minds not on what sort of man he is but on what he is going to say and do.

⁶⁵ Dawe (1963) p.49.

Additionally, we might ask why, if Agamemnon is so chivalrous did he try on three counts to defeat his wife, and why, if he was a man of proper conduct, could he slit the throat of his daughter at Aulis.

Against the above theories, Lloyd-Jones⁶⁶ believes that Agamemnon treads on the carpets as a consequence of the curse of Atreus or, more specifically, Zeus has taken away his wits because he is accursed, in order that he should succumb to Clytemnestra, who is Zeus' agent of destruction. In alliance with this, Edwards⁶⁷ also believes that Agamemnon has fallen victim to persuasion inherent in Clytemnestra although the causal agent for Edwards is not Zeus but Agamemnon himself because he has within his nature the tendency towards temptation. In these observations, Edwards is in alliance with Dodds, who believes that Agamemnon has given away his freedom once he goes under the yoke of necessity and therefore he can no longer make a rational decision but cannot avoid being tempted on towards his death.⁶⁸

There is a definite strength to these theories. As we have discussed, Agamemnon is a man characterised by infatuation. Therefore, it would not be surprising that he would succumb to temptation. However, the problem lies with those who motivate that infatuation with the family curse. As we have examined on several occasions, the curse only allows a character to have the ability to choose a certain direction, rather than actually determining the choice. Consequently, we can surmise that because Agamemnon has been previously affected by infatuation, he may again be possessed, preventing him from making the correct choice.

Nevertheless, as with our conclusions concerning Agamemnon's decision at Aulis, we feel that not only supernatural motivation is at work but so also is human. Agamemnon is tempted because he can be tempted but the temptation used by Ate or, more specifically, Clytemnestra as the personification of Ate, must have to appeal to something within Agamemnon's nature, for one cannot be tempted to do what is abhorrent to oneself. To determine what this might be, we can look at the arguments put forward by Clytemnestra.

⁶⁶ Lloyd-Jones (1962) p.197.

⁶⁷ Edwards (1977) p.29.

⁶⁸ Dodds (1960) pp.27-28.

Her first argument at 933 is to establish that, given a certain set of circumstances, Agamemnon would perform this act, and therefore to do so cannot be seen as universally wrong. Easterling mentions that Clytemnestra is deliberately obscuring the difference between spoiling the vestments out of reverence and out of pride and that Agamemnon should point out the difference. Clytemnestra's second argument is that Priam would have done it (935). Thus, she is comparing Agamemnon with Priam, presenting Priam as the more glorious. Easterling argues that Agamemnon should state that he is not Priam, but he concedes the point. This leads Easterling to conclude;

‘Clytemnestra has now won two admissions from Agamemnon;
first, that he can imagine himself doing it in certain circumstances
and secondly, that he can imagine someone else doing it in these.’⁶⁹

Clytemnestra's third argument is to assure Agamemnon that he need not fear the reproach of the people (937). What she is in effect saying is that Agamemnon fears the people, whereas Priam would not. Agamemnon makes the wrong response (938) when he states that the people's voice carries power whereas, according to Easterling⁷⁰, he should have said that he was not worried about the people but about the gods. To this, Clytemnestra argues that one needs to be envied to be admired, and thus she plays on his need to be considered ἐπὶ ζήλος, an essential requirement of heroic arete. With Easterling we can conclude that Agamemnon's response at 940 is tantamount to defeat, for Clytemnestra can use her supposed feminine weakness to force him to comply.

Looking at the thought progression behind Clytemnestra's arguments we realise that she is undermining Agamemnon's sense of logic through superior argument. She sweeps away his objections by establishing that he could envisage himself committing the act and then she undermines his own position by contrasting him with Priam, a fellow king, by subtly suggesting that Priam is the more glorious. Thus, she appeals to his sense of pride and ultimately when she dares him to display how enviable he is and thus tempted he cannot refuse, for to do so would call into question his heroic status. Consequently, in agreement with Easterling we can conclude that as far as the act itself is concerned he does not want to commit it but he cannot help himself. This is because he is tempted by infatuation and his

⁶⁹ Easterling (1973) p.13.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

pride in his own status⁷¹.

The final question we must ask is what is contributed by the scene to the play as a whole. We have discussed above the dramatic benefits of the scene, but arguably there must be something more than just good 'nail-biting' drama. Therefore, Aeschylus must have included this scene in order to develop further the thematic content. Throughout this work we have posed the question of whether or not we can consider Agamemnon guilty in each situation. In each, what we hear are second-hand reports; we never actually witness Agamemnon's crimes in action. Therefore, we can argue that Aeschylus is here presenting Agamemnon in the moment of committing crime in order that we fully condemn him for ourselves without being prompted by the Chorus. However, to substantiate this theory, we need to prove that the act of stepping on the tapestries is in itself a crime. Agamemnon himself seems to consider that in doing so he may arouse the anger of the gods, for he believes that such beautiful tapestries should be reserved for divine pleasure (948-949).

To aid our understanding of this we can concur with Lucas⁷², who argues that to waste one's property is to put one's trust in continuous prosperity, which we might add is gained only from the nebulous will of Fortune. Additionally to believe that one will continue to be prosperous is pre-emptive, for it is based on the belief that one will retain divine favour and such over-confidence would not remain unpunished. Thus, according to the Greeks it is hybris to destroy one's own property. Consequently, if we consider that Agamemnon has committed an act of hybris we can state that this is the final crime, witnessed by ourselves, which conveys him to the palace and to Justice.

Agamemnon enters the palace drawing attention to the hitherto unmentioned silent figure of Cassandra the prophetess. Silent she remains through the Chorus' final stasimon, which is characterised by fear, silent again through Clytemnestra's return to the stage to try and force her into the palace; she only begins to sing in the form of a plea to Apollo. Why Aeschylus

⁷¹ See also Lucas (1959) p.95 'To put it on the most primitive level, he is claiming to be more than a man and so a fit object for divine resentment. Aeschylus did not believe in jealous gods, and when Agamemnon yields to his wife's temptation it is rather as when Eteocles determines to fight his brother, a sign that *Ate* is in the ascendent. No one but a man ripe for doom would do such a thing.'

⁷² Ibid.

should now delay Agamemnon's death which we have been awaiting, with a lengthy scene between the Chorus and Cassandra, requires explanation. In doing so we are indebted to the excellent article by Knox. He argues that the break in action to focus on Cassandra does not interrupt the dramatic continuity, for Agamemnon's fate is the mainstay of her dialogue with the Chorus. The function of the scene, according to Knox, is to make the connection between past, present and future, and to explain the cause, the effect and the result.

In terms of past and cause, Cassandra, through her knowledge of prophecy, is the only person thus far who can explain why the house is being brought to ruin. At 1090-1092 and 1095-1097 she blurts out insensibly to the chorus the crimes of Atreus, but they cannot understand, for to them she is speaking in riddles. Eventually they understand, for at 1185ff. she states clearly for the benefit of the Chorus that she sees the adultery of Thyestes with the wife of Atreus, and then at 1217ff. she sees the children of Thyestes being eaten by their father. For Knox and Lloyd-Jones the past equates with cause, for it is the Erinyes who have become embedded in the race, that have brought all to pass. The events at Aulis and at Troy can therefore be understood as part of the chain of crime and punishment which results in the activation of the curse by Atreus. As Agamemnon is his father's son he inherits the curse and is therefore capable of sacrificing his daughter and committing sacrilege. However, we must ask ourselves why Aeschylus has waited until now to tell us this; why he has allowed us to misunderstand the play up until this point. The answer is that he has not. The purpose of Cassandra's mention of the curse is to provide another level of understanding to Agamemnon's actions. We have understood that he has chosen his own path out of his own free will and we now have confirmation that the path he chose is also motivated by his father's Erinyes, which are embodied within Agamemnon, allowing him the capability to do what he does. Thus, we cannot see the curse of Atreus as the missing element that affords understanding for the whole play.

Cassandra also explains the present situation with regard to Agamemnon by virtue of her presence onstage and her knowledge of imminent events. According to Knox, her presence highlights what the Chorus seek to avoid and the crimes committed by Agamemnon at Troy. Accompanying him in the chariot they embody all that the Chorus wish to avoid at 472, for the king is the sacker of cities and Cassandra is the slave, both of which bode ill.

Additionally, her subject status (a slave from Troy, and a priestess as well) hearkens back to the destruction of the city and the sacrilege committed there, of both of which Agamemnon has been deemed guilty. With regard to the fate of Agamemnon, Cassandra can tell us what is going to happen imminently. She visualises Clytemnestra's adultery with Aegisthus and the plan between them to murder herself and Agamemnon. Again we can appreciate this on a dramatic level; we will not witness the scene of his death, but Cassandra's description of it, again in riddles, which is clear to the audience but not the Chorus (1100*ff.* cf. 1246) indicates that Agamemnon will be brutally murdered in his bath. Thus, when Clytemnestra appears at the palace threshold we know exactly what she has done. This is an interesting variation on the traditional messenger's report of what happens offstage, and all the more immediate because as we hear Agamemnon's death cries we know in detail what is happening to him. Additionally, the brutality of the murder allows us to feel sympathy with him, not that we condone his actions in any way, but such an ignoble end for such a capable man encourages us to feel pity.

The future that she relates is not the immediate future that we have just discussed, but the future of the house after the death of Agamemnon. This is in essence the result of all that has gone before; Cassandra and Agamemnon will not go unavenged, for Orestes is destined to return to slay Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in revenge (1283*ff.*). Thus, the moral that violence begets violence holds true for both Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, and this is the principle that will dominate the next section in the fate of the house of Atreus.

The knowledge that Cassandra brings is a result of suffering experienced on several levels. Cassandra gains her knowledge through physical suffering as a consequence of the demands of prophecy and mental suffering as she realises her fate. Of her own free will she enters the palace of certain death. Yet she also brings knowledge to the Chorus, for it is only through her that they realise all their sense of foreboding was accurate and that Agamemnon is going to atone for the crimes he has committed. As Knox states, it has taken them the whole length of the play to learn this. It is only through the knowledge of Cassandra that the chorus learn;

‘to face reality, bitter though it may be, to see things

as they actually are and must and will be.’⁷³

⁷³ Knox (1972) p.123 However, see above pp.24-5 n.34.

We can understand that the *Agamemnon* is a progression from one tragic situation to another, in which we evaluate responsibility through the universal premises of Justice. Agamemnon at Aulis is faced with a choice of his daughter or his command and the need for a decision is precipitated by both divine and human motivation. Zeus is sending the Atridae against Troy, while Artemis is preventing them from sailing. Zeus is motivated by the defence of the universal order which ensures that the correct relationship between gods and men is maintained. Artemis' anger is motivated both by her hate for the destruction of Troy and her wrath over the death of the innocent. The result of this wrath is the demand for the sacrifice of Iphigenia, which places Agamemnon in the paradoxical predicament that either course of action will offend Zeus in one aspect of his divinity. Agamemnon chooses his command because he feels that the destruction of Troy is more important and his father's Erinyes allow him the capability to make the choice. Although this paradox can be seen as divinely orchestrated, the choice that Agamemnon makes results from his own free will and he is therefore held responsible for his actions.

Agamemnon in choosing as he does incurs guilt, which in turn incurs fresh guilt, which takes the form of the events at Troy. Here Agamemnon is held responsible for the sacrilege that was committed and the loss of so many lives. On a divine level, the gods always punish impiety and take note of a man who murders many and therefore Agamemnon will be punished accordingly. On a human level of understanding, the war in which so many Greek men have died was waged in order to win back another man's wife, Helen, who cannot be shown to be worthy. Therefore the populace curses the Atridae for the wanton waste of men.

Agamemnon returns from Troy a guilty man, but unaware of his status. As we need to witness the requirement for Justice, Aeschylus presents Agamemnon committing an act of hybris before our eyes. In walking over the tapestries, he places his belief in continued prosperity and runs the risk of arousing divine displeasure at his over-confidence and self-elevation to almost divine status.

Agamemnon goes to his death guilty because it is the one who acts that must suffer and

ultimately the act outweighs any motive. Therefore Agamemnon is guilty of many crimes, all committed through his own free will. However, although we know that we cannot condone his actions and that he deserves his fate, his death is still a tragedy and arouses all the sympathy of the audience.

Chapter Two - *Agamemnon*

The Case of Clytemnestra

It is by no means an exaggeration to state that Clytemnestra is perhaps one of the greatest female figures in all the extant plays of Greek tragedy. Her power and her strength affect the audience; we cannot help but admire and respect her and grudgingly concede that, although she becomes an Erinyes herself, she has the sympathy of the audience for a substantial part of the *Agamemnon*. Within the character of Clytemnestra, Aeschylus has fused hypocrisy and manipulation but has coupled them with strength, intelligence and resolve. The outcome of this is that she can both horrify and delight. This masterpiece of ambiguity is created by a complex process of irony, facade and domination of the stage. In a dramatic era where masks denied the actor the use of facial expression, hidden meaning must be detected in the speech of the character and it is through this that Aeschylus slowly and steadily builds a character capable of the crime which she commits. For the majority of the play we witness a queen who cannot reveal her thoughts and genuine desires. She wears a metaphorical mask that the Chorus cannot penetrate, that an audience can only vaguely see beyond and, ultimately, only Cassandra (the prophetess who alone has knowledge of past, present and future) can see the real face beneath.

The character of Clytemnestra was familiar to an Athenian audience through Stesichorus' *Oresteia*, the odes of Pindar and Homer's *Odyssey*. Homer's concept of her does not afford any sympathy. Rather, she is vilified in order to maximise sympathy with Agamemnon and to provide a contrast with Penelope, the archetypal faithful wife of Odysseus. At *Od.*11387ff. it is important for Odysseus to ascertain that Agamemnon died a noble, heroic death at the hands of enemies or Poseidon, which befits a king and a warrior but, in contrast Agamemnon relates how Aegisthus and Clytemnestra plotted his death, murdering him at a banquet in Aegisthus' house. Interestingly, Agamemnon describes his death at the hands of Aegisthus rather than Clytemnestra; her crime is the murder of Cassandra. Sympathy for Agamemnon's ignoble death is reinforced in 24.30ff. in which Achilles laments that Agamemnon was not killed at Troy where he would have been honoured by all the

Achaeans. Agamemnon agrees with this and contrasts his own pitiful death and burial with the great honours paid to Achilles on his death by both gods and men. This motif is further exploited by Aeschylus in the *Choephoroi* (345-53) and *Eumenides* (see esp. *Eum.* 625ff.) in order to alienate Clytemnestra from the sympathies of the audience and to strengthen the case for Orestes' matricide. The villainous nature of Clytemnestra is furthered by the contrast with Penelope. At *Od.* 11.437ff. Agamemnon states that a wife should not be favoured too far but that Odysseus need never fear for Penelope 'has true judgement, and all her thoughts are thoughts of virtue', whereas Clytemnestra is the abomination that contrives her husband's death. Again in *Od.* 24.192-202, the two wives are compared. Agamemnon, responding to the complaints of Amphimedon (one of Penelope's suitors) again highlights the difference between Penelope's faithful chastity and Clytemnestra's plotting of evil. Interestingly, Agamemnon's criticisms of his wife do not in the main concern her adultery but her scheming mind. Lefkowitz¹ finds in this the precedent for Aeschylus' Clytemnestra. In the *Oresteia*, she is the master-strategist concentrating the audience's attention on her ability as a tactician rather than as an adulterous wife.

The major differences between Homer's account and Aeschylus' dramatisation are in terms of responsibility and motivation. In the *Odyssey* Agamemnon is killed at the hands of Aegisthus; Clytemnestra schemes his death but does not actually kill him². Consequently, we must ask whether Aeschylus himself has transformed the responsibility from Aegisthus to Clytemnestra. Garvie³, in addressing this possibility, provides considerable evidence that Agamemnon's murder by Clytemnestra is represented in art as early as the seventh century B.C. which leads him to conclude that it is probable that there were different versions already in existence in the time of Homer. With regard to motivation, Homer does not give an account of Clytemnestra's motives or suggest that her actions were in any way justifiable, and in agreement with Garvie 'There is no explicit mention of matricide, or any suggestion

¹ Lefkowitz (1986) pp.119-121. She further argues that the story of Clytemnestra's adultery narrated by Nestor concentrates on her 'intelligence'. At *Od.* 3.264-6 she rejected the advances of Aegisthus because she had 'good intelligence' but succumbed once Aegisthus sent away the bard that Agamemnon had left to watch over her.

² Garvie (1986) pp. x-xi draws our attention to the fact that the relevant passages in the *Odyssey* are not always consistent. He establishes that Clytemnestra has a more important part at 11.453ff. and 24.200ff. than she does at 3.234f. and at 3.310.

³ Garvie (1986) pp.xi-xiii wherein Garvie discusses the body of archaeological evidence that depicts Clytemnestra as the murderer of Agamemnon (see especially xii-xiii).

that Orestes' act of vengeance was itself a crime⁴. The earliest surviving account of Clytemnestra's motives is given by Pindar⁵ (*Py.*11.15ff.) and it is perhaps this account that inspired Aeschylus' examination of motivation in the *Agamemnon*. Pindar questions whether it was the sacrifice of Iphigenia (at Euripos) or adulterous love for Aegisthus that impelled her to kill her husband. Aeschylus juxtaposes both these motives but adds divine orchestration.

In order that we may believe that a woman is capable of such an act and that we appreciate the intricate problem of Justice and personal responsibility, Aeschylus builds Clytemnestra's character in two distinct dramatic movements. For the majority of the play, Clytemnestra is characterised as the dominant, intelligent woman whose purpose is never clearly stated but implied in word (11) and presence. Then, at the climax of the play she stands, weapon in hand, relishing her actions. The mask is stripped away and we appreciate her character in all its glory. These movements are hinged by the Cassandra scene in which we realise for the first time what we may have long suspected - that it is to be Clytemnestra and not, as in Homer, Aegisthus who will be the prime agent⁶. Thus, to fully understand the whole picture of Clytemnestra's personal responsibility, we must once again return to the beginning of the text and progress through each movement detailing how Aeschylus created this triumph of character.

In examining the first dramatic movement, we are confronted with the substantial problems of stage direction and line allocation. In evaluating the character of Clytemnestra we must decide at what points she is actually on stage, thereby determining what she hears and what effect her presence has on our understanding of the words of the Chorus, the Herald and Agamemnon. Initially, we must acknowledge that it is an impossibility to argue with any

⁴ Garvie (1986) p.x.

⁵ This is obviously dependent on our accepting 474 B.C. as the most probable date for *Py.*11. However, it has been argued that the ode was not written until after the production of the *Oresteia* (454B.C.). For a full discussion on this, see Garvie (1986) p.xxv and especially n.50 p.xxv. This thesis agrees with Garvie's view that '...Pindar's search for the motives seems altogether too tentative to make it probable that he had *Agamemnon* before him.'

⁶ The dramatic importance of Aeschylus' decision to make Clytemnestra the murderer of Agamemnon is explained by Weir-Smyth (1924) p.166 who states; '...the theme of the drama had been a brutal murder done in part for revenge, but primarily for possession of a woman and a throne. In that case, Agamemnon's fall had awakened no other feeling than compassion. But in making the wife kill her husband, Aeschylus transformed the deed into a crime of tragic value.'

degree of certainty what the original stage directions were (although this would not have been problematic for the original audience). Separated by time and hampered by the transmission of manuscripts, it is an impossible task to determine Aeschylus' own stage direction of the original performance and at points who is actually speaking. With regard to Clytemnestra, we have several possibilities for her first entrance and an infinite number of possibilities for her exits and re-entries up until 940. From the text, we have only one certain exit line at 974 and it is up to each reader to determine whether simply to have Clytemnestra present from the parodos until the firm exit line or to allow her a series of exits and entrances where dramatically appropriate.

The majority of commentaries and translations on the *Agamenon*⁷ favour entrances and exits for Clytemnestra at dramatically relevant moments. Taplin summarises these as 258-350, 587-614, 855-974 and 1035-1068⁸. But, as Taplin admits, there is nothing in the text to prove conclusively that Clytemnestra is not present throughout the whole of the first dramatic movement⁹. The first problem we must address is whether Clytemnestra is present at any time during the parodos. At 83ff. the Chorus address Clytemnestra, asking a host of questions. Taplin, Lloyd-Jones and Fraenkel all believe that the Chorus at this point are apostrophising an off-stage Clytemnestra. Indeed, it would be dramatically acceptable here for the Chorus to turn to the skene which represented the palace and ask their questions of an empty shape, for it is possible to consider the palace as synonymous with the figure of Clytemnestra¹⁰. However, if Clytemnestra is not yet shown to be the sole monarch of Argos, then it is debatable whether a connection can as yet be made between the palace, Clytemnestra and monarchy. Furthermore, the constant questioning of the Chorus must surely seem excessive if there is never anybody to answer them. Therefore, if she is not on stage at this point, the Chorus are interrupting the parodos with a host of futile questions to which they must surely expect no answer. Conversely, in agreement with Page¹¹ we might

⁷ Lloyd-Jones *Aga.* (1970), Fraenkel (1950), Murray (1952), Fagles (1977), Thomson (1938), Headlam (1910).

⁸ Taplin (1972) p.89.

⁹ Taplin (1972) pp.90-91.

¹⁰ Taplin compares the possible apostrophising of Clytemnestra with *S.Aj* 134ff. and *E.Hipp.* 141ff.

¹¹ Page (1957) keeps Clytemnestra onstage throughout the majority of the play. Our only departure from his thesis is to remove her at 615 after her speech to the Herald and bring her back at 854, rather than with Page who keeps her on stage until 974.

conclude that Clytemnestra is present during the *parodos* in order that the Chorus' address is specifically directed to a tangible person and dramatically relevant. However, this creates further problems. Taplin¹² asks whether it is possible for a character to remain silent when asked a series of questions. Either Clytemnestra does not deign to answer or the Chorus, after asking the questions, do not wait for an answer. Furthermore, now that attention has been called to her, how is it possible that her silence is not explained? In addition, Page also raises the issue of introduction, commenting on the extraordinary manner in which the protagonist enters the stage without being announced. Nevertheless, the issue is resolved for Page by maintaining that the silent figure of Clytemnestra is dramatically effective, which we take to mean that Clytemnestra's silence is dramatically beneficial. This is certainly the case if we consider that throughout the play the relationship between Queen and Chorus is strained. The antitheses of betrayal and loyalty will be presented in their interplay and thus it is perhaps the laying down of the nature of their relationship that possibly motivates Aeschylus' decision not to have the Queen even acknowledge the urgent questions of the Chorus.

The question of announcement needs further explanation. Throughout Greek tragedy the appearance of a character on stage is usually announced by the Chorus or by another character¹³. It appears that, in this case, the fact that Clytemnestra is unannounced may further the claim that she is not actually present. But what purpose would an announcement serve? For an audience with no programme there is a need to rely on information given in the text, and therefore, in order to know who a character is, the audience require to be told. Although Clytemnestra is not announced by means of a Choral introduction we must ask whether we are left in any doubt that it is the Queen on stage. The Watchman, raising a cry of joy, bids Clytemnestra rise from her bed and give thanks for the fall of Troy (26ff.). Thus, we must surely understand that the first figure to enter through the skene door will be that of Clytemnestra. Thus, we can appreciate that Clytemnestra, whilst not being announced, is actually called to the stage. This is furthered by the fact that the Watchman calls to her to raise a cry of triumph and the Chorus ask why Clytemnestra is sacrificing - whether she has received or is hoping to receive good news (262). The Watchman has told

¹² Taplin (1972) p.90.

¹³ However, cf. 1577. Aegisthus enters unannounced. Aeschylus however, does name him at 1612 in the response of the Chorus to Aegisthus' opening speech.

us what Clytemnestra should do and the Chorus have asked her why she is sacrificing, which we must assume is in response to the fall of Troy. Therefore, in effect, Clytemnestra's presence and her actions are not unmotivated but are introduced by the Watchman and commented upon by the Chorus. As a final point of qualification, Clytemnestra at 349 echoes the refrain of the Chorus at 121, 139 and 159.¹⁴ Although here Clytemnestra is being ironic, the irony can best be appreciated if it is in response to the genuine wishes for good expressed by the Chorus in the parodos. Thus, in the interest of continuity, it would be better if Clytemnestra is present for the majority of the parodos simply in order to be able to parody the words of the Chorus in ironic fashion.

The second area of contention is the first stasimon, which is a yet more complicated section of the play, as the ode leads into the announcement of the Herald, the allocation of which is controversial. In effect, we have three choices: Firstly, Clytemnestra is not on stage and does not announce the Herald¹⁵; secondly, she is absent for the duration of the ode and enters to announce the Herald; thirdly, she is present throughout and performs the announcement¹⁶. In support of the first theory, Taplin argues that in Aeschylus, for the majority of act-dividing songs, the actors are not on stage (*Prometheus Bound* excepted; out of 19 choral stasima only 5 have an actor present on stage) and if they are present then they are dramatically relevant to the ode¹⁷. Furthermore, in Aeschylus, announcements are almost always made by the Chorus or Chorus-leader and while it may be permissible for Clytemnestra to be silent throughout the ode, she cannot remain silent throughout the Chorus and Herald's exchanges. However, the presence of Clytemnestra here is of dramatic relevance. As we have seen previously¹⁸, Aeschylus deliberately obscures the subject of the stasimon between Paris and Agamemnon. The Chorus begin by singing of Justice taking aim at Paris and end by

¹⁴ Cf. the Chorus' use of 'ἀλλινον ἀλλινον εἶπε, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω' with Clytemnestra's use of τὸ δ' εὖ κρατοίη (349).

¹⁵ As proposed by Fraenkel, Taplin, Fagles, Murray.

¹⁶ Page (1957).

¹⁷ Taplin (1977)p.289; 'But there is no such justification for the presence of Clytemnestra. And while there are many places when the stage is not cleared of actors during an act-dividing song, there are many fewer where there is no exit before one.' However, we can compare Taplin's theory with Conacher's speculation; 'On examination, however, some of these "relevances" and "dramatic considerations" are no more special than such as may be found for Clytemnestra's presence. It could be argued, for example, that there is an ironic effect gained by having Clytemnestra present in the background as the Chorus sing (460ff.) of "the gods watching out for those guilty of much bloodshed" and of "the black Erinyes setting at nought the man who is prosperous without justice".' (p.99).

¹⁸ Discussed above Ch.1 pp.37-8.

charging Agamemnon with the curses of the Argive populace, the pivotal point being the description of the beauty of Helen. The subtle change of subject would surely be clarified by the presence of Clytemnestra, for through her we can appreciate that Agamemnon is also a man who has trampled on the inviolable as a result of the sacrifice of his daughter. Consequently, the transition from Paris to Agamemnon is unhampered and logical¹⁹. To the second charge that it is a choral function in Aeschylus to announce an approaching character, we feel that such confidence is perhaps misplaced. We must ask ourselves whether or not it is possible that, in the volumes of lost plays, Aeschylus never chose to depart from this convention but that his work was formulaic rather than that each play was an individually constructed creation. Additionally, as Conacher establishes, in Euripides it is commonplace to have an announcement made by a character rather than by the Chorus or Chorus-leader²⁰ and furthermore, if this announcement is not made by Clytemnestra then this would be the longest speech by a Chorus-leader in Aeschylus. Taplin's final objection that Clytemnestra remains silent for the majority of the first episode can be challenged by precedent. Queen Atossa in the *Persae* is kept silent from 249 until 289 while the Chorus question the messenger concerning the fate of the Persian forces and, in the *Supplices*, Danaus enters the stage unannounced and remains quiet throughout the supplication scene²¹.

Thus, having determined it is at least possible to accept the manuscript tradition and allow Clytemnestra to announce the approach of the Herald, we must now determine whether it is preferable to remove Clytemnestra at a certain point prior to the first stasimon and bring her back to make the announcement. Undisputedly, with this scenario, we combat the problem of her unexplained silent presence during an act-dividing song. But nevertheless, with the exception of the dramatic gains made by her presence, we are faced with a problem of

¹⁹ This is in agreement with Scott (1984) p.266 who argues that the transition from Paris to Agamemnon is shadowed by the presence of Clytemnestra. Scott states; 'As the chorus sings of the law which calls determinedly for revenge, she visually represents that law as its agent. The visual and the oral here complement each other as so often in Aeschylean drama - and in all the best drama.'

²⁰ Additionally Danaus at *Supp.* 711ff. announces the arrival of the Aigyptioi' ship, therefore we understand that the Messenger who will next appear onstage is from the Aigyptioi.

²¹ This is in agreement with Scott (1978) n.3 pp.259-260, who in response to Taplin's arguments concerning Clytemnestra's silence states; 'But there are similar problems with Atossa who remains silent from 246 to 290. In the *Supp.* Danaus is continually falling silent: he enters with the chorus at line 1, but is a silent presence until 176; then he makes no contribution while his daughters argue their case with Pelasgus (234-489); and finally he is brought back at 980 but says nothing from 1014 through to the end of the play'.

continuity. If Clytemnestra leaves the stage at the outset of the ode then she leaves victoriously. The Chorus have accepted her word as truth and announce that they will give thanks to the gods (351-54). However, at 475ff., the Chorus about-turn and question the validity of the news. At 483-487 they specifically challenge Clytemnestra's sex and her rule as being too eager to accept rumour and too easily persuaded. If Clytemnestra speaks 489ff. then she must be present to hear the Chorus cast their aspersions over the validity of the fire beacons. It would surely be extraneous to hearken back to their earlier doubting status after her last contact with them was when they were totally convinced²². It does seem better to conclude that Clytemnestra remains throughout the ode in order that she hears their insulting words and thus rises to the challenge by claiming that the Herald will validate her.²³

Thus, we must conclude that Clytemnestra is most probably on stage throughout the first stasimon and the manuscript tradition of attributing 489-500 to Clytemnestra makes greater dramatic sense. However, how then do we account for her silence towards the Herald? Queen Atossa remains silent in order that the audience's attention is focused upon the fate of Persia and, when she questions the messenger, the attention is directed to Xerxes. Danaus remains silent in order that his daughters can manipulate Pelasgus. Hence, both of these examples are inspired by dramatic considerations. The same is true with regard to Clytemnestra. She knows for certain that Troy has fallen, as a result of her elaborate beacon system and she has a fair idea of what has actually taken place during the sack of Troy. Hence, Clytemnestra needs no confirmation from the Herald that she is right and, therefore, she has no reason to question him. Rather, the Chorus, who have capitulated on their early assurances, are the ones who need validation and therefore it is they who seek to question the messenger. Clytemnestra, having thus addressed the Herald, now states that she must

²² See further Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.104 n.16; 'Thus it is the male Chorus, not Clytemnestra, whose beliefs and disbeliefs are conditioned by their hopes and fears.'

²³ However, we must acknowledge the observations of Flintock (1989) pp.148-9 who, considering the connection between *δνειράτων δίκην* (491) with the Chorus' use of *δνειρών* (274) and Clytemnestra's use of *πεπορθῆσθαι* (591) echoing the Chorus' use of *πεπορθηται* (278) argues that; 'It would seem better, then, to interpret the sonorous-sounding nouns of 489f. in a sarcastic manner rather than a self-vindictory way....There seems no real doubt that in almost every detail in these lines the speaker is attempting to devalue Clytemnestra's earlier claims in the face of the certainty about to be brought by the Herald and on aprioristic grounds it is far more likely that the Chorus would have undertaken this rather than the queen herself. However, the point of the Herald is to validate Clytemnestra's knowledge of the fall of Troy, therefore, the certainty given by the Herald is to Clytemnestra and not to the Chorus. Furthermore, without doubt the audience would have understood immediately that the announcement of the Herald would validate Clytemnestra, hence it is fitting that she should announce the Herald's arrival.'

make haste to make preparations (600-601) and she instructs the Herald to take a message to her husband telling him to hurry home to his most faithful wife (604-614). The difficulty here is that it would appear that Clytemnestra now plans to leave the stage to make preparations, seemingly to welcome her husband but in reality to murder him. The Chorus then progress to question the Herald over the fate of Menelaus. Aeschylus seems to be assuming that Menelaus and Agamemnon are in fact both kings of Argos, rather than Sparta and Mycene respectively and the absence of Menelaus makes Clytemnestra's plans easier to execute²⁴. Therefore, with Lloyd-Jones we might conclude that the disappearance of Menelaus is essential news that Clytemnestra must hear. Consequently, we are faced with the question; does Clytemnestra not leave to make the preparations and stay to hear the vital news or does she leave and give no thought to the returning brothers? It is questionable whether a single character in Greek tragedy announces that he is going to perform an action and then does not carry out his intentions²⁵. Yet, we ought also to acknowledge the requirement that Menelaus has been lost in the storm. A solution to this problem would be to keep Clytemnestra on stage for the ten lines between her last line and the Herald's confirmation that Menelaus is lost. Although this resolves the issue, it may not make dramatic sense. Clytemnestra has said that she must make haste, so why then should she tarry about the stage? The audience's attention would then be focused upon the stichomythia between the Herald and Chorus, and Clytemnestra's presence in an active capacity would detract from that. Better that she remains silent or leaves at the end of her speech. Ultimately, neither course of action is completely explained, and thus we must choose between two possibilities, neither of which seems conclusive. Clytemnestra must enter the palace at some point in order to assemble the household slaves and the sacrificial animals. She must prepare her murder weapons - the bath, the robe and the sword. At this stage in the play, we now appreciate that we will witness Agamemnon's death at the hands of his wife, and therefore her claim that she must make preparations is sinister and her absence is perhaps now more compelling than her presence, for we must surely wonder what form her preparations will take.

²⁴ Lloyd-Jones *Aga.* (1970) p.50.

²⁵ Cf. Eteocles in the *Septem*. At 283ff. Eteocles announces that he will choose six champions and return to the stage to post them at their respective gates. However, whether he makes his choices concerning postings on or off stage is a matter for debate. For further discussion see below Ch. 6 pp.174-5.

In removing Clytemnestra from the stage, we are now faced with the dilemma of when to bring her back. Fraenkel and Taplin both advocate her return at 854 approximately and this has significant dramatic effect. Taplin comments²⁶ that the dramatic tension is increased if, when Agamemnon chooses to enter his house, his way is blocked by his wife. Therefore, he cannot enter except on her terms. Thus Aeschylus chooses to present Agamemnon making the decision to go within, but he is thwarted by his wife who will not allow his entrance unless he enters walking on the tapestries, committing a crime of excessive pride for all to see. In agreement with Taplin; 'he enters a conqueror and goes off himself conquered'²⁷. The one objection to this entrance would be that Clytemnestra on entry does not address Agamemnon until 877, but from 855-876 she is speaking to the Chorus. We might argue that if Clytemnestra is entering the stage in order to challenge Agamemnon in word and deed, then it would be to him she would make her first address. Why Clytemnestra should choose to ignore the presence of her ten-years absent husband for 22 lines needs explanation. In contrast, if Clytemnestra is present from the entrance of Agamemnon then her first address to the Chorus is motivated. Agamemnon's salutation is directed towards the Chorus (from 810 until 854) and bears no reference or greeting to his wife. It is dramatically possible that, since Agamemnon's first words are to the Chorus, Clytemnestra retorts with the same. As he did not address her, neither will she address him until she is prepared to. However, the problem here is reciprocal, for to explain away Clytemnestra's address one must face the problem of Agamemnon's conspicuous silence towards his wife²⁸. It is possible that Agamemnon entering Argos in triumph is entering as king and returning warrior, to which his position as husband is secondary. Consequently, his first thoughts are for his military glory and the loyalty of his people. After a ten year absence, he must impress himself upon his subjects as their king. Additionally, Agamemnon addresses the Chorus as the Chorus are first to address him. Why Clytemnestra does not make the initial speech is perhaps because it is the Chorus who need the assurance of Agamemnon's presence. They are the ones who have been afraid. Clytemnestra, in contrast, has waited for ten years for her revenge and she can wait while the Chorus grovel at the foot of a guilty man. Furthermore, as Clytemnestra has dominated the stage, Aeschylus desires her to make

²⁶Taplin (1977) pp.306-8.

²⁷ Ibid p.308.

²⁸ Cf. Thomson (1978) p.243 who comments; 'He addressed the assembled people, ignoring her. She retorts by doing the same. there has never been any love between these two.'

the first move, to confront Agamemnon with excessive praise before the Chorus can raise doubts as to her fidelity.

To decide between these alternatives is an impossible task, for they both rest upon what we feel creates the greater dramatic effect; Clytemnestra making an incisive entry at a key moment (855), thwarting the plans of Agamemnon or her being present throughout his entry, quietly waiting for her opportunity to speak and repay him in kind for what must be considered as an affront to her marital status. Both readings are attractive; sudden, dramatic impact or subtle tension. Possibly the earlier entrance fits better with Clytemnestra's character for at 905ff. where Clytemnestra encourages Agamemnon to walk on the tapestries through subtle argument and persuasion we witness her at her most manipulative. Furthermore, throughout the first dramatic movement, she has done nothing abrupt but has remained quietly sinister throughout. The time for strong dramatic action is to come and the less intrusive Clytemnestra's presence is, the greater the contrast will be as she shows her true face when the murders are revealed. However, the later entrance of Clytemnestra (855) considerably heightens the atmosphere of suspense. The dramatic sequence would then be that Agamemnon enters the stage, addresses the Chorus and is received. When he is about to make his way into the palace (854), he is thwarted by the entrance of Clytemnestra (855). As she has dominated the stage thus far, she now controls his entrance, for it is only to be on her terms. Thus we understand that Aeschylus in delaying their confrontation is maximising tension. Only when we have seen Agamemnon enter under the shadow of death, unaware of the danger he is in, will Aeschylus allow the long-awaited confrontation to take place. To decide between these two scenarios is difficult, for both possibilities are attractive. However, in terms of dramatic effect, the latter is preferable. Consequently, we can decide that Clytemnestra enters the stage at the same time as the Chorus and remains there until the Herald relates the news that Troy has fallen. Then at 615 she leaves the stage, ironically proclaiming her chastity and sinisterly promising to make the preparations for Agamemnon's return. She then returns to the stage at 854 to confront Agamemnon just as he is about to enter the palace.

Having determined the stage directions, we must now turn to how Aeschylus builds Clytemnestra's character to leave us in no doubt that she is the prime agent. Winnington-

Ingram²⁹ counsels the reader always to take note of the first reference to a character - in our case, the Watchman's perception of his queen at line 11;

‘γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ’

In expressing these sentiments, the Watchman prepares the audience for several facets of Clytemnestra's character; her masculinity and her intelligence, both of which will be borne out through her relationship with the Chorus. The Watchman also introduces the fact that all is not well in the house and that he lives in fear (12ff.). Why this is the case he does not say but he prepares us to be aware that all may not be what it seems. The Chorus then enter to sing the parodos. From 40-82 they establish that the Trojan War is the punishment of Troy sanctioned by Zeus and enacted by the Atridae. Then they turn to their queen asking her why she is sacrificing. To their insistent questioning she makes no answer. Obviously, Clytemnestra cannot interrupt the parodos with a reply, so why does Aeschylus choose to have the Chorus question her in this manner? The dramatist's intention here is specifically to have Clytemnestra seem to refuse to speak to the elders of Argos³⁰. But why she should refuse cannot be clarified until we understand the relationship between queen and Chorus that is developed throughout the play, but at this stage we detect that the relationship between them is not overly friendly. Clytemnestra's presence during the parodos is paramount for it is at this stage that we are first introduced to the main motive behind the murder of Agamemnon; the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigenia. In detail, the Chorus sing of the sacrifice, its purpose and its procedure. With the silent queen in the background the words of Calchas carry an ominous tone;

‘a worker of quarrels born in the house and grown one with it,
without fear of the husband; for there abides a terrible,
ever re-arising, treacherous housekeeper; unforgetting,
child-avenging wrath.’ (152-155)³¹

We must realise that Calchas, ten years previously, was prophesying the position of Clytemnestra now. She has no fear of her husband and she will be seen to be child-avenging, guileful and unforgiving. Subsequently, we must make the connection between the ‘architect of quarrels’ and the silent figure of the dread queen. This concept of

²⁹ Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.102.

³⁰ See above pp.54-55.

³¹ All translations from Fraenkel (1950) I.

Clytemnestra as child-avenger is further developed by the Chorus' description of the sacrifice. In agreement with Winnington-Ingram³² we feel that the barbarity of the sacrifice of a child must have an effect on the mother.

In the first episode we witness the first outright conflict between Chorus and queen (ostensibly concerning the defeat of Troy but beneath the surface of her words there is a sinister element). Clytemnestra announces that Troy has fallen in a matter-of-fact manner and the joy that she shows is obviously hypocritical. She does not mention Agamemnon or offer any sentiments towards the Argive victory. Her response to the Chorus' doubts concerning her reliability culminates in the beacon speech in which she describes the complex system of fire signals that she herself has organised. Several important factors emerge from her agon with the Chorus; her pride in her intelligence and their scepticism of her rule. At 275 and 277, Clytemnestra chastises the Chorus for accusing her of being a victim of dreams and rumour, to which she asserts her intelligence and demonstrates it through her superior knowledge. Thus, we can appreciate that the earlier suggestion of conflict between queen and elders is confirmed, that the thought of the return of Agamemnon brings no joy to Clytemnestra and, ultimately, that she is in possession of greater knowledge as a consequence of greater intelligence. For each of these premises, Aeschylus provides motivation. With respect to the Chorus, we understand that the conflict arises out of a question of loyalties. At 271, Clytemnestra comments on their loyalty towards Agamemnon in such an abbreviated form that we cannot consider that her words express genuine feeling. Rather, for her, their loyalty is a threat. Hence, Aeschylus creates a conflict between the genuine loyalty of the Chorus and the superficial loyalty of Clytemnestra. This lack of loyalty and lack of expression of feeling towards the Argive victory is motivated by her thoughts on Agamemnon. We have previously noted that she is the child-avenger and it is this, her desire to avenge her sacrificed child, that motivates her attitude towards the Chorus and Agamemnon's victory, for it is a victory gained at her child's expense. We can justify this through the parodos and an awareness of the language she uses. She repeatedly uses the language of nativity, for example at 264ff. and 279 she describes the night as giving birth to the day, which encourages the audience to reflect upon her concentration on motherhood, a

³² Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.102.

status in which she has been outraged³³. This conflict between Clytemnestra and the Chorus allows us to recognise the disparity between two opposing forces which we may consider masculine and feminine. The Chorus' doubts as to her assertion are based on their perception of her as a woman and the nature of a woman's rule. Their accusations are based upon a belief that women are susceptible to dreams and rumour, investing truth in flights of fancy. At this point in the play, the Chorus challenge the perceptions of the Watchman at 11. Clytemnestra, however, replies to this challenge with an explosion of rhetoric. Her description of the beacon system is so complete and overpowering that the Chorus accept its truth wholeheartedly. Thus, the queen dominates them and so secures her first victory over the Chorus and the first victory for the female forces in the trilogy. The irony here is that the sexual roles of male and female are reversed, for Clytemnestra is the manly woman capable of action whereas the Chorus are weak-willed. They accept Clytemnestra's knowledge that Troy has fallen and then they recant, claiming that a woman's rule is too accepting of hearsay, yet they themselves have believed her and therefore are themselves guilty of accepting her word as fact (351ff.). Their vacillating nature will be seen again once Cassandra has entered the palace; knowing that Clytemnestra is about to kill Agamemnon they cannot formulate any cohesive plan of action.³⁴

The Chorus, thus convinced, ask Clytemnestra to repeat her news from beginning to end. Her speech describing the sack of Troy is in fact a continuation of her beacon speech, employing the same motivation but introducing a new motif; respect for that which is inviolate so as not to provoke the anger of the gods. Clytemnestra's description of the fall of Troy is puzzling. For the most part, she pictures the pitiful image of the vanquished, contrasting this with the spoils of the Achaeans (325ff.). She claims to hope that the Greek

³³ Considering the beacon speech Betensky (1978) p.13, argues that; 'She immediately shows a tendency to think of events in terms of human fertility by saying twice that salvation will be born from "kindly Mother Night" (265,279).' See also Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.103.

³⁴ Gender roles are thrown into confusion at the outset of the *Agamemnon*. Agamemnon, in sacrificing his daughter, outrages Clytemnestra's status as wife and mother and therefore she becomes masculinised, whereas Agamemnon, because he is infatuated, becomes the weaker of the two. In this, we agree with Gagarin (1976) pp.91ff. who argues that the sacrifice of Iphigenia upsets the balance between male and female. The masculine and militaristic values that demand the sacrifice are counteracted by the aggression of the ostensibly female forces as represented by Clytemnestra and, in the *Eumenides*, championed by the Erinyes. Gender roles are also examined by Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.101ff. who states; 'The trilogy treats of the relationship between man and woman and of the institution of marriage. Against this institution Clytemnestra rebels, partly because it is ill adapted to her, partly because, in the matter of Iphigenia, her husband has violated the basis of mutual respect upon which marriage should stand.' p.129.

forces remain temperate and do not indulge themselves in offending the gods, for they must win a safe passage home. This speech is laden with double meaning. To the Chorus, her words are wise and sage, but to the audience, who know what happened at Troy and on the homeward journey and who suspect that Clytemnestra is not pure of motive, her speech is ominous and sinister. The audience are aware that Clytemnestra's description of the fall of Troy is accurate and that Priam's citadel will be destroyed down to the very seed in the ground. However, this carries with it repercussions, for the gods hate those who murder many (461ff.) and the excessiveness of the revenge must surely be understood as outweighing the crime of Paris. Thus, we realise that Agamemnon is now responsible for the sacrifice of his daughter and the death of a city in order to avenge a crime against hospitality³⁵. We must feel that his actions are beyond the realm of excessiveness and verging on criminal. This is furthered by Clytemnestra's warning to respect the gods. The audience at this point would reflect on the crime of the lesser Ajax at the altar of Athena, which caused the destruction of nearly the entire fleet. Hence, we know that Clytemnestra's supposed fears are in fact reality. However, there is more to this speech than the simple relaying of information, for if this was what Aeschylus intended then it is better said by the messenger who can speak the truth rather than conjecture. Aeschylus gives this speech to Clytemnestra not simply to convince the Chorus, as she has already done this, but to develop further her character. As with her proclamation that Troy has fallen, there is absolutely no real joy to her speech, no real delight in the victory, what she delights in is that victory will return Agamemnon to her and to the revenge that she has long awaited. We feel that grief for the fallen Trojans is not what encourages her to contemplate their fate. It is probable that Aeschylus intended his audience to understand Clytemnestra's fears as her desires, not in the sense that she wants the whole Greek fleet destroyed, or that she wants the whole of Troy devastated - these are merely incidental to the greater requirement; that Agamemnon be held responsible for the destruction. It is Clytemnestra's desire that Agamemnon should return as guilty as a man can be; guilty in her eyes, guilty as a king and guilty in the eyes of the gods, but she wants him to return home safely so that she can have the satisfaction of avenging herself. Her repetition of the Chorus' refrain at 349 must surely be ironic, for we understand that the 'good' that she wishes to prevail is not the same 'good' as the Chorus. The good that she wishes for is that Agamemnon will be revenged upon, thereby avenging

³⁵ The crimes of Agamemnon in Troy are discussed above Ch. 1p.35-39.

her daughter.

Clytemnestra's two subsequent speeches - the announcement of the Herald and the address to the Herald - form a couplet in response to the Chorus' reaffirmed doubts at 475-487. Having previously determined that Clytemnestra makes the announcement and why she does so, we can now evaluate the effect. Clytemnestra's announcement of the Herald is in response to the challenge made by the Chorus. They mock her beacons, they mock her belief in herself and charge her again with falling prey to rumour, accusations made against her as a result of her sex. Thus it is with a triumphant air that Clytemnestra announces the Herald, for she knows that his arrival will validate her. The irony of this is commented upon by Winnington-Ingram³⁶. He argues that previously the Chorus had accepted and given thanks for the defeat of Troy. Totally convinced, they accepted her word and her speculation on what was happening at Troy, although they had no more evidence than the fire signal received by Clytemnestra. If any are accepting of rumour it is the Chorus themselves. Their doubts prepare for Clytemnestra's second triumph. The Herald confirms to the others that Troy has fallen and that, under the command of Agamemnon, even the seed in the land has perished. This confirmation has a two-fold effect; once again, the male Chorus is defeated by the queen but, more importantly, Clytemnestra has been proved right in her 'fear' that the Argives would fall prey to the temptation of excess. This vindication is reflected in the triumphant speech of Clytemnestra at 587ff. She rounds on the Chorus, delighting in the knowledge that she has been proved right. She hearkens back to their accusations against her sex, relishing the fact that she has been vindicated, and again the female forces in the play gain the upper hand. However, her joy is not only for her simple victory over the Chorus, but rather for the news that Agamemnon has, without doubt, indulged in excess and trampled on the inviolate (that is, the desecration of the temples) and this will speed him on his way to Justice³⁷, Clytemnestra's Justice, which amounts to no more than an eye for an eye. When she states that she must make haste to make preparations, we can only shudder at the thought of what they might be. This is intensified by Clytemnestra's assertions of

³⁶ Winnington-Ingram (1954) p.25.

³⁷ The actions of Agamemnon at Troy recall the words of the Chorus at 67ff. and 387ff. wherein there is no defence for the man who tramples on the inviolate or brings ruin on the people. This Agamemnon has done through the desecration of the temples at Troy, he has not respected the gods and the fleet will not return, thus punishing the whole of Greece.

faithfulness and fidelity. We know that she has no loyalty to Agamemnon and her mention of fidelity reminds the audience of her adultery with Aegisthus. There can now be no doubt that every word that Clytemnestra speaks is hypocritical. Her sheer audacity, whilst being admirable, proves (if more proof is needed) that she is the woman who speaks fair but plans foul³⁸.

As we have discussed above³⁹, it is probable that Clytemnestra now leaves the stage (614) to return to challenge Agamemnon (854). In this scene, before Cassandra announces that Clytemnestra will be the executioner, we witness her at her most brilliant and most terrifying. Clytemnestra's first address to the Chorus is a masterpiece of deceit. She laments the fate of the women left at home, she pictures herself as the grieving, faithful wife, living on hope and responding to rumour with attempts at suicide, a description which must surely be considered a lie. Gagarin's belief⁴⁰ that her speech contains probable truths that highlight Agamemnon's offence against marriage, whilst being of interest, is probably not Aeschylus' main intention here. It is not possible that Clytemnestra should fear the absence of a man, for she is the child-avenger who has no fear of the husband, she is the adulterous woman who has received the comforts of another man. Her attempts at suicide are as hollow as they sound. The only reason that she may have attempted to hang herself is not as a result of grief for a supposedly stricken husband, but out of grief that it is not by her hands that he shall die. However, bearing in mind Clytemnestra's previous assertion that she is of too great an intelligence to be a victim of rumour (277), we can hardly believe that she had previously planned to take her own life as the result of one.

Expressing her fear of civil unrest, she turns to Agamemnon, offering this as an excuse for the absence of their son, Orestes. Although her reference to their child is in the masculine, she delays the name 'Orestes' until several lines later, during which she has presented a

³⁸ This in essence reaffirms Thomson's view (see above p.60 n.28) that there is no love between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. However, the lack of love between them begins at Aulis. Their relationship previous to that is not discussed by Aeschylus and is irrelevant to our present study. Betensky's (1978) p.15 view that 'vibrant tension' is created by the conflict of love and hate within Clytemnestra is not evidenced by the text, as her words of 'love' to Agamemnon are designed to cajole him to commit greater excess. If they recall previous feeling then Aeschylus would have made it clear that love did once exist, which he chooses not to do.

³⁹ p.59.

⁴⁰ Gagarin (1976) p.24.

child as the bond between man and wife. Aeschylus' intention here must be to focus the audience's mind on the absence of Iphigenia, whose sacrifice is then understood as the betrayal of the marriage bond. Thus, if Clytemnestra is about to destroy the bond of marriage, it is because Agamemnon has outraged it. Consequently, we are reminded of the original crime, the evil deed that begat all others, that marks Agamemnon as a guilty man.

Perhaps to avert suspicion, perhaps to encourage Agamemnon's pride, Clytemnestra heaps compliment on compliment;

'Now, after enduring all this, with a mind freed
from mourning I would pronounce this man here the
watchdog of his abode, the saving forestay of a
ship, the grounded pillar of a high roof, a
sole-born child to a father, land appearing to
sailors beyond their hope, to the thirsty
wayfarer a flowing spring.' 895-900

Clytemnestra ends her eulogy by instructing her handmaidens to spread before Agamemnon the rich tapestries and inviting him to walk upon them and, with Justice, enter 'his unhopedor home'⁴¹. In purpose and meaning, Clytemnestra's intentions are typically not what they would appear. In asking Agamemnon to walk upon the tapestries, she is asking him to commit hybris before our eyes. Not because the tapestries are sacred but because to walk upon them is to destroy one's wealth. The destruction of one's property is to place one's belief in continual prosperity and therefore in the continual good will of the gods⁴². To walk upon the tapestries is, therefore, to commit a sin of pride. Thus, it is Clytemnestra's intention to encourage Agamemnon to commit his final act of hybris and enter the palace as a guilty man and so we understand what is meant by the Justice of Agamemnon's exit within. Clytemnestra creates a paradoxical situation in which Agamemnon, while committing an act of gross indulgence, will do so seemingly with Justice. This echoes the sentiments of Page who states;

'Clytemnestra's conduct is consistent throughout:

⁴¹ Clytemnestra means here not simply the palace but Hades wherein Agamemnon is to forever dwell. Here we are in agreement with Page (1957) 911 p.148.

⁴² The nature of the dispute between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon has been discussed above Ch.1 pp.42-46.

she wishes to alienate sympathy from him, to
 expose him as arrogant and sacrilegious, an
 orientalized despot, a victim deserving of his fate.’⁴³

However, through our understanding of Clytemnestra’s duality of meaning, we can appreciate that Agamemnon is now to be subject to her concept of Justice, and the law that the Chorus will formalise as the law that abides while Zeus is enthroned - unto the doer is done - will now be applied to Agamemnon (1563-4). Hence, he will now receive judgement for his sacrifice of Iphigenia, the loss of so many men for the sake of a fickle woman and the sacrilege that has been committed at Troy. The agent of Justice is to be the fitting avenger for his crime - Clytemnestra.

However, as we have noted, Clytemnestra has had to be shown to be capable of her actions; now we must believe that she is capable of defeating Agamemnon. Aeschylus solves this problem with the agon between husband and wife. Agamemnon refuses to set foot on the tapestries and Clytemnestra employs all her powers of rhetoric and persuasion to force him to capitulate. Agamemnon is a doomed man; he cannot formulate the arguments effectively to meet those put forward by his wife⁴⁴. Entrapped by her rhetoric he leaves the stage to be entrapped in the robe that will become his shroud. Agamemnon exits within, while Clytemnestra makes her final prayer;

‘Zeus, Zeus Consummator, consummate my prayers;
 and may’st thou take thought for what thou
 dost intend to consummate.’ 973-4

Through this prayer, we appreciate that by the will of Zeus and by the hand of Clytemnestra, Agamemnon will be brought to Justice. The important point here is that the imminent death of Agamemnon is not only fulfilling Clytemnestra’s desire for revenge, but is also a divine requirement in atonement for the manifold crimes he has committed.

The first dramatic movement has shown us Clytemnestra as a woman capable of her actions and able to defeat Agamemnon. Throughout her interaction with the Chorus and her silent, ominous presence during the parodos and first stasimon, she is characterised as a woman

⁴³ Page (1957) 931ff. p.151

⁴⁴ The inability of Agamemnon effectively to argue with Clytemnestra has been discussed above. See above Ch.1 pp.45-6.

who can never speak her mind but is disguised by a veil of deceit. Her ambiguity in speech, appreciated by the audience, only once suggested by the Chorus (615ff.)⁴⁵ suggests to the audience that her purpose is revenge. Parallel to the development of Clytemnestra are the mounting crimes of Agamemnon. His sacrifice of his daughter offends both the gods (Zeus, who protects the family) and the marriage bond. Thus Agamemnon, as well as Paris, has trampled on the inviolate (cf. 371-2). Furthermore, he has excessively avenged Troy, committing sacrilege in the process and causing the loss of many Greek men for the sake of a woman married by many husbands. Therefore, when he enters the stage and commits his last, symbolic crime of pride, he is guilty on every count. The law that demands that the doer must suffer (1563) ensures that Justice will take the form of reciprocal action - his murder by Clytemnestra. Hence, when the skene door opens and reveals the body of Agamemnon swathed in blood-stained robe, lying in the bath with his concubine Cassandra dead beside him, we feel that Justice has been done, but a Justice that is as horrific as it is complete. Clytemnestra strides forth, sword in hand, covered in the blood of her husband and relishes her greatest triumph thus far.

To answer the horror of the Chorus, Clytemnestra must now justify her actions and it is through her attempt at justification that Aeschylus now turns the question of responsibility and punishment on the guilty queen. Our evaluation of responsibility and subsequent guilt must first take account of motive and whether the crime itself was a just act. Clytemnestra's first speech claims the Justice of the deed, juxtaposed with her obvious delight at the manner in which she has killed her husband - a sacrifice, a fitting revenge for the man who sacrificed her daughter. She relishes the fact that she has executed the murder and dwells on her responsibility;

‘this is Agamemnon, my husband
made a corpse by the work of this right hand,
a righteous craftsman. So stands the case.’ 1404-1406

From the premise that her act has been in accordance with human and divine *δίκη*, she explains in two related speeches the motives that support her claim to Justice. Her first

⁴⁵ 615f. is however corrupt, cf. Page 615-6 p.127 who argues: “it is not possible to offer more than a makeshift text and translation here”. The general sense of the lines does point towards the understanding that the Herald does not realise Clytemnestra's hypocrisy, but that the Chorus do.

charge against Agamemnon is Iphigenia and she accuses the Chorus of double standards as they cannot threaten her with exile when they accepted the actions of Agamemnon at Aulis (1415ff.). She concentrates on her husband's barbarity by picturing her daughter's death as required for a good weather forecast (1414ff). Like Agamemnon in debate with Clytemnestra, the Chorus fail to give the right answers. At no point do they challenge Clytemnestra with the argument that it was Zeus' will that Agamemnon should avenge Troy or that the wrath of Artemis demanded the death of Iphigenia. It would appear that Aeschylus intends to give Clytemnestra a stronger case by suppressing any information that would mitigate Agamemnon's guilt. Thus, the Chorus are allowed only to accuse Clytemnestra of great daring and madness (1426ff).

If Clytemnestra's only motive was revenge for Iphigenia, then there could be no denying the quality of her action. We would consider it a triumph of maternal love. However, at the Chorus' threat that they will meet her blow for blow (1430), Clytemnestra changes tactics and accuses Agamemnon of infidelity;

'Low lies the man who did outrage to this woman,
the charmer of each Chryseis before Ilion, and she too,
this captive here and augress, the prophesying bedfellow
of this man, a faithful concubine, and...of (?) the benches
of the ship'. 1438-1443

The hypocrisy of this statement is boundless; she charges Agamemnon with infidelity only moments after she has announced that Aegisthus, her paramour, will light the fire in her hearth, thereby securing her position of monarch on Argos. It is possible that her infidelities arose only after she had received word of Agamemnon's adultery and only then did she seek comfort in the arms of another. However, this is perhaps inventing a history to the play to which the text does not attest. It is in no way possible to determine who first betrayed the other and there is no profit in doing so. As Winnington-Ingram comments⁴⁶, the charge of adultery from the adulterous simply cancels out the charge. Further, he proposes the concept that Clytemnestra's charge against Agamemnon does not really concern adultery but concerns sexual jealousy;

'But if Clytemnestra was jealous, she was jealous primarily of

⁴⁶ Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.109.

Agamemnon himself, who went to Troy and came back a conqueror
while she, knowing herself to be the stronger, was left to keep the home'⁴⁷

Winnington-Ingram raises the possibility that Clytemnestra's main motivation is, therefore, not adultery, not grief for Iphigenia but desire for the power that Agamemnon has as king and commander. To the question whether Clytemnestra desires to hold sovereign sway as king; this is to suggest that she does not wish to be feminine but masculine. Admittedly, she is referred to as the masculine woman by the male watchman and Chorus, but whether she actually wishes to be a man is doubtful. Clytemnestra's upbraiding of the Chorus does not rest upon their concept of her as a woman, but that they associate femininity with being subject to persuasion and idle fancy. Thus, she takes offence at what she sees as an attack on her intelligence, claiming that she is not a victim of slumbering fancies, nor to be treated like a young girl. The 'masculine' qualities that the Chorus commend her for are wisdom and prudence, which is not the equivalent of calling her a man. Furthermore, while her wisdom and prudence are undeniable, they are, in effect, a mask to hide a more devious face. In reality, Aeschylus is not showing a woman who wants to be a man but the effect of manly qualities on a woman. Clytemnestra cannot be seen to be using the manly attributes of wisdom and intelligence in the masculine, productive manner. Although we appreciate her sole rule of the city and for that admire her, for the most part her intelligence is put to scheming the death of her husband. Surely a Greek audience would have felt that Clytemnestra is a typical woman; given her masculine qualities, she uses them to murder a noble warrior who deserved a better fate.

To deny that Clytemnestra desires to be a man does not mean that she does not desire power. Clearly Clytemnestra does intend to wield power, not as sole monarch, but as the consort of the cowardly Aegisthus. In reality, as will be seen in the *Choephoroi*, she will be the force behind the throne, the dominant partner who is, to all intents and purposes the subsidiary. However, this does not mean that her motive in killing Agamemnon was simply a desire to be powerful. Her only mention of Aegisthus is as a bulwark against reprisal and in the *Choephoroi* as her beloved; they are never represented as usurpers. Thus, we must conclude that her motives in the first two speeches are as they appear; grief for Iphigenia and Agamemnon's adultery, of which the latter can only be considered hypocritical in light of her

⁴⁷ Winnington-Ingram (1983) pp.109-10.

own actions⁴⁸. Therefore, the importance of power is that it defends her after she has killed Agamemnon. Through the defence afforded by Aegisthus, his bodyguard, through keeping control of Argos and the removal of Orestes, she believes that she can effectively escape reprisals. She never at any point says that the desire for power has driven her to kill Agamemnon and furthermore, the references to her as masculine (11, 363) or to her as the monarch of Argos whilst Agamemnon is in Troy (270ff.) in effect prove nothing. They are the perception of a vacillating male Chorus and in no way amount to a motivation on behalf of Clytemnestra. Aeschylus clearly and consistently attributes to her two motives - the sacrifice of her daughter and the adulteries of Agamemnon. Consequently, her motives are balanced between genuine maternal love and hypocrisy. Ultimately, it is this hypocrisy that Orestes will challenge when he confronts his mother. Aeschylus, in order to undermine Clytemnestra, chooses to concentrate on both her adultery with Aegisthus and the hypocrisy of her charge of unfaithfulness to Agamemnon. If Aeschylus wanted us to think of Clytemnestra as murdering her husband for political power, then he would have exposed her in the confrontation between mother and son. Aeschylus has little to say on the subject; only at *Cho.*301ff. does Orestes list as one of his motives the emancipation of Argos from the rule of two women, but the focus is on Aegisthus (304) not Clytemnestra and additionally, after the issue is raised it is forgotten about and our concentration is focused on the relationship between the dead Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Orestes.

From her position of accepting personal responsibility in her first speeches, Clytemnestra reneges on her affirmations. In response to the choral lyrics in which they envisage the house as possessed by a daemon of ruin since Tantalus (1468ff.), she imagines herself not as an active agent but the embodiment of the 'thrice gluttoned spirit of this race'. How Clytemnestra can now seek to deny her responsibility after such protestations of her delight in the deed needs explanation⁴⁹. Aeschylus' intention here must be to reinterpret Agamemnon's fall as a consequence not only of his own personal will but of a supernatural causation. Cassandra has shown us that the fates of the generations of the house are

⁴⁸ This belief that Clytemnestra is solely motivated by revenge is in accord with Weir-Smyth (1924) p.171, who states; 'No desire for "sovereign sway and masterdom" actuates her as it did Lady Macbeth. She is the spirit of revenge incarnate. But when that revenge is accomplished, then she professes to be content if now she may make a compact with the daimon that it quit the house and ravage some other race.'

⁴⁹ The renegeing of Clytemnestra is discussed in detail by Conacher (1987) pp.48-53. Conacher traces Clytemnestra's gradual depersonalisation of the deed.

interlinked - the crime of Atreus begets the crime of Agamemnon which begets the crime of Clytemnestra which will in turn motivate the revenge of Orestes. Thus we understand that the Chorus' belief that evil deed begets evil deed stretches back and forth in time forming an unbreakable chain since Tantalus stole the food of the gods. Each generation of the race will take upon themselves the mounting guilt of the previous generations and add to that their own crimes committed out of personal desire and out of an inherited propensity towards crime.

Nevertheless, Clytemnestra's assertion that she is the embodiment of the *alastor* does not in any manner diminish her responsibility. Aeschylus' intention to interpret events in a chain of reciprocal action does not negate personal responsibility. Clytemnestra is possessed by the *daimon*, but only in as much as the will of the *daimon* coincides with her own personal desire for vengeance. The Chorus agree at 1507ff. that the *daimon* was helping her achieve revenge, but they do not accept that this absolves her from blame (1505-7). In essence, this is the same principle of double-determination that Lesky applied to Agamemnon and Pelasgus. With regard to Agamemnon, his sacrifice of his daughter was divinely inspired but was also his personally-motivated choice⁵⁰. Having made the decision to commit the original offence, he is possessed by *ate* and thus carries on to greater and greater crime, and is subsequently held to be guilty. Clytemnestra is in the same predicament. She chooses her path and was helped along by the *daimon* but, for her choice and for her personally-desired action, she is guilty.

~~Behind this action is the will of Zeus and the rule of Law. It was Zeus' will that Clytemnestra should avenge Agamemnon and that she should be the agent of Justice. This is clearly stated by the Chorus;~~

‘woe, woe, through the will of Zeus,
the cause of all, the doer of all,
for what is fulfilled for men without Zeus?

What is there herein that is ordained by the god?’ (1485 -1488)

This creates the paradox that it is the will of Zeus that Agamemnon be punished, but it is also the will of Zeus that the avenger, Clytemnestra, will also be punished. The immutable law

⁵⁰ The fact that Agamemnon makes a choice is discussed above Ch.1 pp.26-28.

that the doer must suffer will be applied to Clytemnestra regardless of the validity of her motives, of the aid she received from the daimon and ultimately, regardless of the fact that the will of Zeus can be detected at every turn. Thus with Garvie we can appreciate that;

‘But, as the play proceeds, we see that this is a world in
which the act is all-important, and the
motives and intentions make no or little difference to the
evaluation of the guilt.’⁵¹

Clytemnestra’s attempt to make a pact with the daimon of the race is doomed to failure. The law requires that as she has acted, so must she suffer (1563). The *Agamemnon* ends on an immensely tragic note with Clytemnestra doomed for a crime for which her motives offered justification. We must ask ourselves; does the Law of reciprocal action ever amount to Justice?

Throughout the first dramatic movement of the play Clytemnestra is a woman with a masked purpose that we can only glimpse. She stands predominantly silent, a mistress of deceit with her intelligence fixed upon revenge. In her relationship with the Chorus Aeschylus embodies the antithesis of loyalty and deceit, for even though the Chorus question Agamemnon’s campaign against Troy they are at heart his loyal subjects. The interplay between queen and Chorus constitutes much of the tense atmosphere, for the Chorus waver between accepting her pronouncements on Troy and deriding them as based upon rumour or flights of fancy. The character of Clytemnestra is determined mostly by her grief for Iphigenia. Her presence in the parodos ensures that we understand her as the child-avenging fury and therefore we appreciate that her dominant motivation is grief for her sacrificed daughter. Once Agamemnon returns, we witness Clytemnestra at her most influential and disingenuous as she encoils him in her persuasive arguments to commit his last act of hybris.

When she returns to the stage having murdered her husband and his paramour Cassandra she stands triumphant in exultation. In the ensuing stichomythia she clearly lays before the Chorus the motivation for her act. The two motives she gives are grief for Iphigenia and the adulteries of Agamemnon which have outraged her position as mother and wife. However, the charge of adultery rings false in the mouth of Clytemnestra for the audience understand

⁵¹ Garvie (1986) p.xxiv.

and are about to witness the fact that Clytemnestra has herself taken a lover, the wolf-like Aegisthus. Pursuit of power has been attributed to Clytemnestra but as we have seen, power is a requirement rather than a motivating factor. She needs to maintain her position in order to defend herself against reprisals but she does not murder Agamemnon so that she can become monarch of Argos.

As she enters the palace she prays to Zeus the accomplisher. This reminds the audience that all that comes to pass is ultimately the will of Zeus, for nothing can be that Zeus does not will. Therefore, Aeschylus ensures that we understand that the death of Agamemnon is both a humanly and divinely motivated deed. Thus, we appreciate why Aeschylus has chosen to condemn Agamemnon for many crimes, both at Aulis and at Troy. His outrageous behaviour necessitates divine punishment, therefore Zeus will allow Clytemnestra to be the agent of that punishment. Clytemnestra eventually realises that in her revenge is not only her desires but also the workings of divine will. In response to the Chorus she agrees that the alastor has possessed her but she believes that she can appease the thrice-glutted daemon of the house of Atreus. The audience however realise that it is not in the nature of a family curse to be assuaged. Ultimately, the revenge of Clytemnestra is triply determined; her own desires, the will of Zeus and the family curse all coincide to necessitate Agamemnon's death. However, the paradox remains that whilst Zeus will allow Clytemnestra her revenge, the law that justifies her action - unto the doer is done - will in turn require that she be judged by that same law. Consequently, we realise that Justice is reciprocal and absolute. No amount of motivation will excuse the act itself and therefore the *Agamemnon* ends on an immensely tragic note, for to be the executioner of Justice is in itself a crime.

Chapter Three - *Choephoroi*

Orestes: Judge or Avenger?

The legal premises laid down in the *Agamemnon*, the law that demands that unto the doer is done and that fact that blood, once shed, cannot be recalled but clots upon the earth and calls forth in vengeance further blood to be shed, continue in the *Choephoroi* as the principal reasons for the workings of Justice. Thus, the cycle of crime and punishment turns. Agamemnon was a guilty man and deserved his death but now the executor of Justice, Clytemnestra, must be judged by the very law by which she executed her husband and king. Aeschylus, in dramatising the death of Clytemnestra, chooses to develop the same formula of Justice. The reciprocal nature of Justice means however, that although Agamemnon's punishment was necessary, Clytemnestra's actions must be considered a crime. Therefore, the principle of a retributive Justice which demands an eye for an eye will demand the death of Clytemnestra at the hands of her son.

The final scene of the *Agamemnon* shows us Clytemnestra ostensibly triumphant, through her skills of dialectic, bringing the Chorus to an uneasy understanding of the necessity of her actions (Ag.1560ff.). However this peace is shattered by the blusterings of Aegisthus, which call forth the threat that Orestes will return to enact vengeance. Nevertheless, our lasting impression of Clytemnestra is paradoxical; whilst we acknowledge that she has committed an offence we are also aware of the righteousness of her deeds. How Aeschylus, having created this impression in the minds of the audience, then manipulates us to believe that regardless of her motives she deserves to die for what she has done is a slow and subtle process, indeed so covert that often we do not stop to question how it is possible that in enacting Justice Clytemnestra deserves this fate. Rather, our sympathies are identified with Orestes and Electra and (although with a sense of foreboding) we too will see the death of the Queen as a necessity. To achieve this, Aeschylus suppresses the crimes of Agamemnon. No longer will we dwell upon the suspect justification for the loss of many Greek lives, the sacrifice of a virgin daughter to win back a promiscuous woman or the sacrilege committed in the process. Agamemnon will be restored in honour and praise, no longer the crime-laden

man acting under the power of Ate but a king of Homeric proportions. In contrast, Clytemnestra will now be shown not as the mother who could not accept the merciless sacrifice of her daughter, but the unnatural mother who spurns her two remaining children for an adulterous love.

The fact that our sympathies will be directed towards Orestes and Electra is even more surprising when we consider that Orestes is not to be portrayed in the same manner as Agamemnon at Aulis. Before his entry upon the stage he has determined to take vengeance and thus, with only one moment of hesitation (899), we see him fixed in resolve. Orestes, for the majority of dramatic time, does not vacillate and does not consider whether it is themis for him to act as he does, but neither does he face up to what vengeance will mean, that he will have to commit matricide in order to avenge his father, whereas Agamemnon struggles to accept that the sacrifice of Iphigenia is required to further his own martial ambitions and the upholding of divine law. Hence, we appreciate that Aeschylus is not writing a thesis play. *Agamemnon* is not the thesis and the *Choephoroi* the antithesis. Rather, in the *Choephoroi*, we see the analogous circumstances in which Justice is synonymous with revenge. Thus, in agreement with Garvie, we can contend that the plays of the trilogy 'are bound together in a single dramatic unity by the tragic situations which they present, by their structure and by their imagery and language'¹. Without doubt, the parallelism between the two plays is striking. Aeschylus in the *Agamemnon* shows us a man returning to receive punishment at the hands of his wife, Clytemnestra, who will stand over the bodies of a man and a woman slain in revenge. In the *Choephoroi*, Orestes will return to mete out punishment and will also form part of a tableau, standing above the bodies of a man and a woman slain in vengeance².

According to Homer, seven years of power were enjoyed by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus before Orestes returned to regain his father's kingdom. In contrast, Aeschylus does not stipulate the interval that has passed between the end of the *Agamemnon* and the return of Orestes. However, the prologue, which introduces us to Orestes, has lost a number of lines

¹ Garvie (1986) pp.xxix-xxxiv. Garvie's comments are challenged by Van Erp Taalman Kip. Her objections are dealt with below see pp.88-9, 91-2.

² The parallelism of the first two plays of the trilogy has been often discussed. See especially Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.33.

from the manuscript³ and the first lines are given to us from Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1119ff.), the scholion on Pindar *Py.*4.82 and Euripides *Alc.*786. In *Frogs* the characters of Aeschylus and Euripides debate the meaning of the first line. They argue over whether the reference to 'father' is a reference to Zeus or Agamemnon⁴. This duality of meaning serves to introduce to us the super- and preternatural powers which will operate in the play. Orestes will be considered to be acting in accordance with the will of Zeus but also with the aid of Agamemnon. Garvie draws our attention to the fact that the prayer to Hermes in his chthonic aspect looks forward to the great kommos with its emphasis on the chthonic powers⁵. This downwards emphasis is also highlighted by Conacher, who maintains that the downwards direction of the prayers will dominate the action until the conspiracy is planned⁶.

The note of hope in the prologue contrasts with the darkness at the end of the *Agamemnon*. Orestes appears in the *Choephoroi* as the dutiful son avenging a beloved father. Interestingly, he does not mention what that revenge will be; neither Orestes nor the audience are quite prepared to contemplate the matricide at this early stage. Consequently, Aeschylus turns our attention to the approaching Chorus and Electra, and Orestes, having prayed to Zeus for success, retires leaving the Chorus to enter and sing the parodos⁷. According to Garvie the parodos initially takes the form of a dirge (22-31), the dirge that should have been sung at Agamemnon's funeral but was denied him by Clytemnestra⁸. Thus, we are introduced to the first charge against Clytemnestra - that she has offended sensibilities and custom by not burying Agamemnon properly (46) - the gravity of which will be developed to a greater

³ The number of lines missing is dealt with by Garvie (1986) pp.47-48. Garvie agrees with Turyn (1943) p.18 n.22 that probably under ten lines are missing. Garvie discusses the possibility that the content of these lines may have included a statement by Orestes concerning Apollo's charge that he should use deceit to avenge his father. However, Garvie concludes that the emphasis of the prologue is on the Chthonic powers, the role of Apollo not being developed until later in the play.

⁴ The ramifications of the interpretation of the first lines of the prologue are dealt with by Garvie (1970) p.79ff. What Garvie proves is that we cannot wholly accept the interpretation of the comic characters, as it is possible that Aristophanes gives that character of Aeschylus the wrong meaning in order to generate humour from the fact that Aeschylus does not understand his own poetry. Hermes may be considered as watching over his father Zeus' kingdom as his loyal son, or looking after Agamemnon's interests as Hermes is the god who bridges life and afterlife.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Conacher (1987) p.103.

⁷ It is possible that Orestes does not leave the stage but hides behind the tomb of Agamemnon, which is located in the orchestra.

⁸ Garvie (1986) pp.53-55.

extent in the kommos. Although the Chorus do not specifically name Clytemnestra in conjunction with this (they refer to the 'godless woman'), we are left in little doubt that it is she that they mean. Furthermore, we remember her words at the end of the *Agamemnon* (Ag. 1547ff., 1551ff.) wherein Clytemnestra, in response to the Chorus' concerns over Agamemnon's funeral, states that she will inter him without lament.

Maintaining the chthonic emphasis of the prologue and the first strophe of the parodos, the antistrophe relates for us the reason why the Chorus are bearing libations. Clytemnestra has received a nightmare sent from the powers below the earth (32-41). Conacher highlights that this is in fact a fulfillment of both of Orestes' speculations at 13-15; disaster for the house is foretold in the dream and Clytemnestra is hoping to appease the shade of Agamemnon with paltry, belated offerings⁹. A Greek audience would be familiar with the fact that dreams were sent from the underworld powers and therefore it would be understood that Orestes' prayer for assistance has been answered. Furthermore, Hermes is a god connected with dreams and it is to Hermes that Orestes has prayed in the first line of the play. Interestingly, Aeschylus does not choose to relate the content of the dream at this juncture. Rather, the nature of the dream is saved until after the kommos (523ff.) at which point Orestes has acknowledged that revenge means matricide. Aeschylus chooses this structure because he wants Orestes to interpret the snake in the dream to mean himself and furthermore, the description of the dream immediately after the great appeal to Agamemnon proves that Orestes, through the assistance of his father, is assured of success. Furthermore, the dream points directly to the matricide and at this point Aeschylus does not want to focus our attention on the nature of Orestes' enactment of Justice.

The dirge for Agamemnon and the haunting of Clytemnestra focus attention on the murder of Agamemnon and, with this in mind, our interpretation of the second strophe (42-53) points towards the precarious position of Clytemnestra. The Chorus sing;

'For what payment can atone for blood spilt upon the ground?

Ah, hearth of utter misery!

Ah, destruction of the house!

Sunless, hateful to mankind

⁹ Conacher (1987) pp.103-104.

is the darkness that shrouds the house

through the death of its master.' (48-53) ¹⁰

Aeschylus, through the Chorus, is encouraging the audience to view Clytemnestra as the subject here - as she has acted, so too must she suffer; there is nothing she can do, no offerings that she can make that will atone for her crime. There is no indication that her crime had a motive or was once thought just. Neither do the Chorus consider that the destiny of the house has a history of crime. Its destruction is not thought of as originating from Thyestes' banquet nor the crimes of Agamemnon. Rather, they envisage Clytemnestra as the progenitor of the destruction. Ostensibly, this exemplifies the point made in the introduction that Clytemnestra must be presented as a criminal so that we sympathise with Orestes and Electra¹¹. Furthermore, the third strophe and antistrophe establish that bloodshed calls for further bloodshed and pollutes the guilty (66-70) just as for the person who violates virginity there is no cleansing (71-74). Again, it is of Clytemnestra that we are encouraged to think, it is she that has polluted hands from the shedding of blood and the reference to the bridal bower at 71-72 may encourage us to think that she has outraged the marriage bond, which is sacrosanct, with adultery and murder¹².

Nevertheless, this legal exposition of the Chorus strikes a discordant note. These sayings are reminiscent of the *Agamemnon* (cf. 755ff., 381ff.) whereby the Chorus of Elders apply them to Paris and imply them of Agamemnon. Both Paris and Agamemnon violated the sacrosanct; Agamemnon shed the blood of his daughter which can never be cleansed and was responsible for the loss of so much blood for a fickle woman, both of which call forth further bloodshed. Consequently, although the partisan nature of the Chorus of the *Choephoroi* will not allow them to think of Agamemnon's crimes, there is surely some sense within the audience that the matter is not as simple as they would have us believe. Vellacott stresses this and adds that it reflects upon the crime of matricide which the Chorus are

¹⁰ All translations from Lloyd-Jones *Choephoroi* (1970).

¹¹ The theory that Aeschylus suppresses the crimes of Agamemnon to further implicate Clytemnestra is developed by Garvie in his *Choephoroi* and furthered in 'The Tragedy of the Oresteia; Response to Van Erp Taalman Kip' in *Tragedy and the Tragic*. The fact that this theory is consistently adhered to is because this chapter is in agreement with Garvie and has based many observations upon his.

¹² There is, however, some difficulty in the translation of νυμφικῶν which may mean 'bridal bower' (Lloyd-Jones, *Cho.* 1970 p.13) or a 'violation of virginity' (Garvie, 1986 p.65). The sense, however, remains the same; there is no purification for the stain of murder and it is Clytemnestra that the Chorus and the audience are thinking of.

contemplating;

‘But how can it fail to be obvious to those who reflect on the text that, though the chorus of slaves clearly has no second thought, the poet in writing these words was aware that they applied in every case with at least equal force to the other, and more immediately relevant, crime spoken of in the prologue, which Orestes has come to Argos to commit? and, similarly, to the earlier crime, ignored by Orestes, for which Agamemnon paid with his life...’¹³

However, it is probable that although the Chorus raises these issues once again, their application to Agamemnon or the forthcoming matricide should not be overstressed. We may remember that they have been used before but we must also keep in mind that their intention is to evaluate Clytemnestra. It is she to whom we must attach priority of reference. This is furthered by the fact that we hear nothing of the Trojan war and very little of Iphigenia subsequently. Thus we must conclude that, although reminiscent of the *Agamemnon*, they must not be allowed to absorb our attention, directing it away from the matter at hand. Consequently, it may be enough to conclude with Garvie that of importance here is that ‘...we are still in the world of Agamemnon, where blood once shed cannot be recalled and where a harsh Justice dominates...’¹⁴. What is sure is that Justice will always win through, be it swift, late or in the afterlife (61ff.).

Having thus sung, the Chorus return in the epode to lamenting both their fate and the fate of their masters (79-84) and thereby bring the parodos full circle. In agreement with Garvie¹⁵, we can appreciate this lamenting as a framing device - the coming of Justice for Clytemnestra framed by mourning for Agamemnon which therefore creates the impression of Agamemnon as a king to be mourned and Clytemnestra as the offender who will receive punishment. Thus, the parodos marks the beginning of the process by which our sympathies are removed from the Queen and transferred to the avengers.

In lamenting their own fate, the Chorus dwell upon their servile position and their masters’

¹³ Vellacott (1984) p.108.

¹⁴ Garvie (1986) p.55; see also Kitto (1961) p.79.

¹⁵ Garvie (1986) p.55.

fate; they provide a cue for Electra to speak¹⁶ for she is, in effect, both a slave and a master. Her relationship with Clytemnestra and Aegisthus makes her servile yet her birth position makes her a master. In doing this, the Chorus mark the transition to the first episode. For the purposes of discussion, we can divide this scene into three parts: Firstly, (84-164), Electra and the Chorus at the tomb; secondly, (165-235), the Recognition Scene; finally, (235-305), the prayers of Orestes and Electra and the statement of motivation.

The first section concerning Electra and the Chorus introduces us to the former's character and provides greater evidence of the latter's partiality. In bringing the libations to the tomb of her father Electra is confronted with a dilemma. ~~She asks the Chorus how to deal with the libations - it would be hypocritical to pour them in the manner that Clytemnestra wishes and insulting to the shade of Agamemnon to pour them on the ground without comment (84ff.).~~ In the stichomythia which follows Electra's opening speech the Chorus tutor Electra to pray for all those who hate Aegisthus (that is, themselves and Orestes) and then for those who will take vengeance upon the murderers. Interestingly, they do not name Clytemnestra. Rather, they focus attention upon Aegisthus. In the parodos, they have referred to that 'godless woman' (46) but they have never named her and in this section of the play they refer to her most obliquely. Aeschylus' purpose must surely be to distract our attention from the matricide until he can exploit it with greater effect in the kommos, thereby ensuring that we have no major doubts until the swift action of the second section of the play is to begin. Yet, when the Chorus-leader instructs Electra to pray for the one who murders in return, she raises several important issues. She asks at 120 whether the Chorus mean a judge or one who acts in vengeance. This is an important distinction and raises the question of whether Orestes is a judge acting with Justice or executing Justice which is tantamount to revenge. The Chorus' answer of a life for a life is somehow morally unsatisfactory after Electra has made the distinction. Furthermore, Electra questions at 123 whether this is impious, to which the Chorus retort that it cannot be impious to wish harm to one's enemies. What we appreciate is that Aeschylus is raising the question that Plato will later pose in the *Republic*

¹⁶ Conacher (1987) p.104.

of whether this is Justice¹⁷. The matter is not stressed, yet it raises an important point. The nature of Orestes' revenge upon Clytemnestra puts the audience in the difficult position of attempting to evaluate δίκη. The question that is being raised by Electra is whether Justice can be distinguished from revenge. What we realise in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* is that the reciprocal nature of Justice means that every just action which is an act of vengeance is also in turn a crime. Consequently, we appreciate that this form of Justice is irreconcilable; there can be no end until all those involved are destroyed. However, the very surety that Justice will be received means that it is impossible to escape the repercussions of any crime. Nevertheless, the moral paradox that this raises, the seeming fact that enacting Justice is also criminal, is developed by Aeschylus into one of the greatest problems of the trilogy. Whether he provides an answer to this we shall discuss with reference to the *Eumenides*.

The hesitant nature of Electra provides a contrast with the scheming deceitfulness of Clytemnestra. At 139-141 she prays to be more pure;

‘and for me, grant that I may be more right-minded by far
than my mother, and in my acts more innocent.’

However, at the end of the kommos, Electra will not be more innocent than her mother. In fact, she will become embroiled in the very system of Justice that she naively questions. Consequently, we must ask ourselves why Aeschylus chooses to present Electra in two very different lights. Initially, we might suspect that to be a member of the family that is cursed means that no matter how innocent any member appears, they have the propensity to commit crime. However, there has thus far been limited mention of the curse that hangs over the destiny of the household members. We have been made aware of its existence through Cassandra and through Clytemnestra's disclaimer to the Chorus, but thus far in the *Choephoroi* we have only thought of Agamemnon as its victim. Orestes and Electra are not yet thought of as being in its clutches. In fact, it is only after the double murder (1065ff.) that we will understand that Orestes is also possessed by the spirit of destruction that haunts

¹⁷ Plato in *Republic* i 331e - 336a envisages Socrates questioning the view of Simonides (5th/6th century B.C. lyric poet) that Justice means giving every man his due. Socrates ascertains that this means good to one's friends and harm to one's enemies. Socrates exposes the inadequacy of this explanation in various respects. Principally, that if men are mistaken in their judgements then it is possible to do harm to their friends and good to their enemies. As a result Socrates concludes that a just man should harm no one.

the house. It is possible that the very nature of a Justice which is reciprocal means that all those who are involved in its process cannot remain untainted. Nevertheless, although this is true, this issue is surely reserved for the *Eumenides* and we are not encouraged to think upon it in this play. Perhaps the closest we can come to understanding Aeschylus' intention here is to consider the process of dramatic necessity. Lloyd-Jones comments that Aeschylus has no interest in character for its own sake and that this is particularly evident in *Electra*. Comparing the very dominant roles *Electra* has in the plays of Sophocles and Euripides, he argues that Aeschylus gives her;

'[the] conventional qualities of a princess in the heroic age. Deeply loyal to her father and brother, bitterly hostile to her father's murderers, she is not yet required to exhibit the ferocious hatred portrayed in later tragedy.'¹⁸

Rosenmeyer further diminishes the role of *Electra*, calling it negligible in comparison with the other tragedians because Aeschylus is writing a tragedy concerning a house, and therefore the focus of attention is on the heir who will restore it. However, he does acknowledge that *Electra* provides the function of 'social involvement' which places Orestes in a scheme of 'progressive socialisation'¹⁹. Whilst agreeing with these authors that Aeschylus does not devote the same attention to *Electra* as the other tragedians and that she does not have as fully developed a character as, for example, Clytemnestra, it is perhaps doubtful that she embodies or symbolises any process of socialisation. Rather, her attempts to distinguish herself from her mother reflect more upon Clytemnestra; what really concerns us is not that *Electra* is more 'pure' but that Clytemnestra is less so, thus further alienating us from her. Additionally, Aeschylus has provided a clear function for *Electra*. It is through the prayers of *Electra* that Clytemnestra's libations are turned against her²⁰. With dramatic irony, the means by which she hoped to pacify the dead are used to provoke Agamemnon against her and to secure success for *Electra*, for her prayers are about to be answered with the revelation of Orestes. Having poured libations, *Electra* prays to Hermes, the chthonic powers, Earth and her father (165ff.). Concordant with Garvie²¹, her prayer to Hermes

¹⁸ Lloyd-Jones *Cho.*(1970) p.5.

¹⁹ Rosenmeyer (1982) p.243.

²⁰ Conacher (1987) p.105.

²¹ Garvie (1986) p.88.

echoes Orestes' prayer in the prologue and thus frames the opening sequence and so the drama moves on to the next section - the recognition scene.

The recognition scene between Orestes and Electra receives treatment from all three tragedians. Sophocles delays his until near the end of the play (*El.* 1174-1226) in order that we appreciate Electra as a heroine willing to go to any lengths to avenge her father. Euripides, however, parodies Aeschylus' use of hair, footprints and tokens (see *El.* 524ff.). Euripides has Electra deride the use of hair and footprints. She questions whether an athlete's hair could be as soft as a girl's, dismisses the footprints as impossible on rocky ground and argues that women have smaller feet than men. What convinces her is the scar that Orestes received as a child when chasing a deer²². Euripides' criticisms are logical and practical and, as a result, some modern scholars feel that the scene is naive and unsophisticated. Like some of his predecessors Fraenkel, considering the footprints, brackets 205-11, 228-9, believing these lines to be an interpolation. However, in support of authenticity, Lloyd-Jones argues that to delete this section is 'to fail to recognise that the technique of tragedy in Aeschylus' time was of a simplicity utterly removed from modern naturalism'²³. Additionally, Garvie draws our attention to the fact that a Greek audience would know that Orestes is present and were therefore disposed to accept Electra's reasoning. Furthermore, Garvie contends that the 'similarity of hair is inseparable from the realization that only a member of the family is likely to have left it' and that the similarity of the footprints is evidence that Orestes has not sent the hair, so that hope wins through²⁴.

The intention of Aeschylus here must surely be to involve us in the nature of Electra, for it was possible he could have dealt with the recognition scene in a more economical manner. In contrast, he chooses to delay the action with a scene showing Electra's diverse emotions - grief and hope fused in her response. Yet, we have appreciated that Aeschylus is not interested in character for its own sake and therefore we must ask ourselves why Aeschylus introduces us to a scene of Electra's vacillating emotions. According to Kitto, Aeschylus

²² Euripides' parody of Aeschylus is essentially good-natured rather than derisive. See further Garvie (1986) pp.86-87, and Lloyd-Jones (1961) p.180.

²³ Lloyd-Jones *Cho.*(1970) p.5 and (1961) pp.171-181.

²⁴ Garvie (1986) pp.86-88.

may be developing further the dramatic art. He states;

‘The important point is that this study of Electra’s emotions at a crisis has no bearing on the theme of the play. In exchange for what he is renouncing or reserving, Aeschylus has leisure to do other things, to develop one of the new possibilities of his art for its own sake.’²⁵

Kitto bases this theory on the belief that suspending the issue of Orestes’ responsibility until the *Eumenides* allows Aeschylus the time and leisure to develop our interest in Electra. Certainly, since Electra is to play no part in the conspiracy and death of her mother and her mother’s paramour, it could seem as though Aeschylus has no purpose here other than writing a scene which we can enjoy for only emotional purposes. Yet, the argument that his sole interest in Electra is because he is not at this point interested in the responsibility of Orestes is to justify the existence of one at the expense of another and does not explain to us what Aeschylus has achieved in so doing. The clearest interpretation of the recognition scene is supplied by Garvie. He argues that Aeschylus is interested in Electra’s emotional response, not in a recognition scene for its own sake and this is evidenced by Orestes’ prompt recognition of her, but that his purpose in being so is dramatic. He argues that ;

‘Aeschylus wants to make it clear that Electra is very different from her mother. In her emotional wavering and irrational hoping she is portrayed as essentially feminine (cf. Ag.592), unlike Clytaemestra.’²⁶

From Garvie’s observation we can detect the continuation of a process begun in the parodos. Clytemnestra, whom we once considered as having ample motivation to kill Agamemnon, is now to be seen as the woman who prevented a decent and proper burial for the best of kings. Subsequently, she is considered a ‘godless woman’ (46) whom Electra prays not to be like (139-141) and now, in comparison with her daughter who is the embodiment of femininity, the antithesis of that. Thus, the image we have of Clytemnestra is being tarnished. Without having committed any further crime she is being alienated from our sympathies in favour of the young innocent girl who appears as the victim of cruelty. Thus, we appreciate the continuing process of the dehumanisation of Clytemnestra. At the end of the *Agamemnon*

²⁵ Kitto (1961) p.80.

²⁶ Garvie (1986) p.88.

she stood sword in hand²⁷, blasphemously claiming to have sacrificed Agamemnon. Now, in the *Choephoroi*, the nobility of Agamemnon is stressed and the perversion of Clytemnestra is again highlighted by the polarisation of her and Electra.

Furthermore, this lack of concentration on the motivation of Clytemnestra combined with subtle manipulation of emotion is further developed by the recognition scene. Although Clytemnestra is no longer being thought of as the avenging daemon acting with the will of Zeus, Aeschylus is not yet ready for us to think of her as the victim of Justice. It will take the mounting crimes explained in the *kommos* to do this. Thus, in concentrating our attention on the emotional waverings of Electra, we are less inclined to dwell upon the impending matricide. Again, this idea is developed by Garvie who states; 'The recognition is given an extended treatment so that we may sympathise with those involved, and forget the tragedy that is to follow.'²⁸

Having met, Electra and Orestes pray to Zeus. Electra's prayer, however, is introduced by a welcome to her brother²⁹ in which she greets him as father, mother, brother and sister who was 'ruthlessly smitten' (239-242). As a result of the refusal of Orestes, Electra and the Chorus to contemplate the crimes of Agamemnon or the motivation of Clytemnestra's actions, this reference is particularly striking and could be seen as drawing our attention to the fact that Agamemnon should not be considered guiltless. Yet according to Van Erp Taalman Kip the sacrifice, although spoken of in a disapproving manner, is not presented as

²⁷ Whether Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon with an axe or a sword has caused debate. For a full discussion, see Fraenkel iii pp.806-809. To briefly summarise the problem, the text of the *Agamemnon* clearly implies the use of a sword. At 1612ff. the Chorus accuse Aegisthus of joint responsibility with Clytemnestra because he lent her his sword to execute the murder of Agamemnon. However, in support of an axe, at *Cho.*889, Clytemnestra calls for a 'man-slaying axe'. Consequently, it would be a nice dramatic parallel if she were calling for the very axe with which she killed her husband to now use against her son. Nevertheless, in agreement with Fraenkel, Clytemnestra's use of the sword parallels Agamemnon's use of a sword to sacrifice Iphigenia. We might add that an equally good dramatic parallel is achieved if Orestes kills his mother with a sword, for then the audience would conclude 'live by the sword, die by the sword'. This parallel is appreciated by Clytemnestra at *Cho.*888; 'By guile shall we perish, just as we slew by guile'.

²⁸ Garvie (1986) p.88.

²⁹ The opening of Electra's speech has been attributed to the Chorus Leader. Garvie (1986) p.103 discusses the arguments in favour of a reallocation. He comments that 235-7 has a less personal quality which may be considered more suitable for household slaves and furthermore some reaction is needed on behalf of the Chorus. However, Garvie concludes that these objections are not wholly convincing, as it can be equally argued that Electra's joy makes it natural for her to speak first whilst the Chorus are checking Orestes and Electra for giving way to exuberance rather than encouraging them further.

involving either Agamemnon or Clytemnestra. Furthermore, she states that;

‘The sacrificer is not named, and hatred for the victim’s mother is voiced in the preceding line. Apparently it is mentioned here solely to enhance Electra’s past loneliness and present joy. If it were intended primarily as a reminder to the audience, then there would be some meaningful follow-up.’³⁰

Whilst agreeing with Van Erp Taalman Kip that Electra’s fourfold greeting does emphasise her solitary position, it can hardly be possible that we are not reminded of the gruesome image generated by the Chorus in the parodos of the *Agamemnon*. By Electra not mentioning Agamemnon as the sacrificer and stating her hatred for her mother, Aeschylus does not deny a frame of reference to Iphigenia, rather he creates one. We can hardly expect Electra, who is her father’s loyal supporter, to suddenly censure him and profess an understanding for her mother³¹. Without doubt, this would be dramatically inconsistent. Furthermore, a sudden understanding on Electra’s part would surely weaken the case against Clytemnestra and raise the issue of whether she deserves the fate that her children have in store for her. Nevertheless, we must ask whether, in raising the issue of Iphigenia, Aeschylus is not creating an inconsistency. We have been at pains to show that Clytemnestra is to be thought of as receiving Justice but can this be so if we see her deeds as justifiable? However, Aeschylus does not dwell upon the sacrifice, he does not offer an application of it to the events at hand. In terms of dramatic action it does not create a reaction on behalf of Orestes or the Chorus, but it does strike a note with the audience who have been accepting the impending fate of Clytemnestra and must be disturbed by the mention of Iphigenia. Yet we do not have the time to consider the implications of this and thus the sacrifice may be seen as jolting our memory, making us slightly uneasy at what is to come. This is a classic example of Aeschylus’ manipulation of the audience’s emotions. In the prologue, we have witnessed Orestes as a saviour of the house but hope has been dampened by the legal premises of the parodos. We have been swept along with Electra’s emotional response to

³⁰ Van Erp Taalman Kip (1996) p.121.

³¹ However, cf. Tucker (1901) p.62; ‘Aeschylus nowhere defends the sacrifice of Iphigenia...but Electra would hardly be condemning her father at this moment. The fault lay with the Greeks in general, and particularly with Calchas (Ag.194-260).’ Whilst we agree with Tucker that Aeschylus does not defend the sacrifice, we have seen that Agamemnon is clearly held responsible for his daughter’s sacrifice.

meeting Orestes, but again we are troubled that all is not as we might hope. The same technique was used in the *Agamemnon*. For example, in the parodos, the Chorus sing of the avenging war of Troy but they then question the justification for it - Helen. As an audience, we are led from supporting Agamemnon to questioning the war, to fearing what the consequences will be, yet always the Chorus try to encourage hope. Aeschylus is a master at manipulating emotions; at times we feel a sense of foreboding and then our attention is diverted away from the cause of uneasiness and we are absorbed.

This sense of uneasiness is furthered in Orestes' prayer to Zeus in which he compares himself and Electra with the orphans of the eagle who is killed by a viper and the young too weak to bring home their quarry (246ff.). Winnington-Ingram draws attention to the similarity between Orestes' metaphor and the omen of the *Agamemnon* (114ff.). Winnington-Ingram shows how the eagle, the royal bird, symbolised Agamemnon and foretold the destruction of Troy, but that the price of Troy would be the life of Iphigenia³². Thus, again we are reminded that Agamemnon was not a guiltless victim. This is furthered by Orestes' reference to Agamemnon as θυτήρ - famous sacrificer (255). Orestes' meaning here is that Zeus should be pleased at the many sacrifices that Agamemnon has offered him. However, the audience would remember the parodos of the *Agamemnon* wherein he sacrificed his daughter. Furthermore, Garvie³³ comments that θυτήρ is used only once elsewhere in the extant plays of Aeschylus and then with reference to Iphigenia (224). Thus again, the imagery is reminiscent of the *Agamemnon* and serves to suggest the suspect nature of Agamemnon.

With almost a perfunctory manner, Orestes proceeds from his prayer to the much-debated command of Apollo and the statement of his own motivation. Orestes relates how Apollo commands him to avenge his father by slaying the slayers or face the consequences. From 276-290 Orestes lists the ills that would befall him - the growth of white hair (associated with leprosy), ulcers, and plague devouring the flesh - all motivated by the Erinyes generated from the shedding of his father's blood. From the underworld powers also come madness

³² Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.134.

³³ Garvie (1986) pp.108-9.

and nightmares (286-290) and a pollution that prevents the appointed avenger participating in religious ceremonies. Orestes comments that, although this is motivation enough, he wishes to take revenge for three further reasons; revenge for his father, lack of patrimony and freeing the conquerors of Troy from the rule of two 'women' (297-304). From this speech we realise that there are three forces all demanding atonement for Agamemnon's death: Apollo, whom we might consider synonymous with Zeus by virtue of his celestial divinity; the chthonic powers named here as the Erinyes, and Orestes' own desire for revenge. However, again we are not encouraged to contemplate matricide for Apollo's charge to Orestes is general; he does not name Clytemnestra and Orestes talks of revenge but does not envisage the matricide it will necessarily entail.

Once again, we must pose the question of whether Orestes is to be considered responsible for his actions in a world in which the commands of divinities are tantamount to law³⁴. With Agamemnon, we have determined that although he passes under the yoke strap of necessity, he has a choice whether to kill his daughter or not. We must now ask whether this is also true for Orestes. Van Erp Taalman Kip believes that Orestes is compelled to act and is justified in doing so by the lack of support for Clytemnestra. She states;

'First of all, in the case of Orestes, there is a divine command. Whatever his motives, he is forced to act as he does; the price of disobedience would be his own destruction. To reinforce the idea that Apollo's orders must be executed, the murder is amply justified beforehand and dissenting voices are absent.'³⁵

Rosenmeyer has similar objections to the view that Orestes is personally responsible. For him, Orestes' statement of motivation is almost an afterthought to the command of Apollo. He states;

'Orestes ponders the threats at considerable length; their effect seems to be to relieve him of the need for taking a personal position in the matter. It comes as a surprise, therefore, that he adds, by way of a

³⁴ However, men are free to disobey the laws of the gods as can be seen in the *Agamemnon* through the punishment of Paris who, as a consequence of transgressing the laws of hospitality, brings upon himself and Troy divinely-motivated punishment.

³⁵ Van Erp Taalman Kip (1996) p. 127.

codicil, that there are also personal reasons guiding him.³⁶

While not denying Orestes' statements of motivation, Rosenmeyer does not believe that they amount to a personal responsibility as he argues that they are present only to offer a personal involvement in what is essentially a divine command.

However, we may pose several objections to this. If Aeschylus did not want Orestes to be considered responsible, then why did he attribute to him a statement of his own motivation, however brief? It is conceivable that Orestes could describe the oracle of Apollo and accept that this is his destiny which he has no choice but to accept. But obviously, Aeschylus wanted to convey to the audience Orestes' own personal desire so that we do not fall into the trap of believing him the puppet of the gods. Furthermore, there may have been no dissenting voices in favour of Clytemnestra but there is definitely a sense that all is not well and that Orestes will have to answer to Justice in turn. In the parodos we have been reminded of the laws that underpin Justice; unto the doer is done, and this is affirmed in Apollo's oracle. Orestes describes the god as demanding a life for a life (274). Both of these mean that the Justice which has been done to Agamemnon will be done to Clytemnestra but we can only fear for Orestes. Thus, we are reminded of the fact that Clytemnestra did at one point have Justice on her side. Additionally, the inclusion of Iphigenia by Electra and the metaphor of the eagle by Orestes must surely lead the audience to question the Justice that Orestes will execute. Van Erp Taalman Kip, in not accepting that these passages refer to the *Agamemnon*, is in fact not recognising that Aeschylus wants the audience to question whether reciprocal Justice will ever reach an end without destruction. In contrast, we can argue that Aeschylus is at pains to explain to the audience that the deaths of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are what Orestes personally desires. In agreement with Lesky, we can understand that Orestes, as the next of kin to Agamemnon, is under the compulsion of necessity and that the underworld powers will ensure this is so, yet necessity does not stop Orestes' passionate desire and therefore, responsibility³⁷.

The divine command to Orestes has several aspects; the will of Apollo (therefore of Zeus) and the Erinyes of Agamemnon. Thus, we can appreciate that Orestes' actions are triply

³⁶ Rosenmeyer (1982) pp.245-246.

³⁷ Lesky (1966) p.51.

determined. In *Orestes*, all three collide. This is essentially the same as the actions of Clytemnestra. By the end of the first play her desire for revenge upon Agamemnon was coincidental with the will of Zeus and the family daemon, the embodiment of the curse of Atreus. Thus, with a symmetry that is typical of the *Oresteia*, we realise that the *Choephoroi* does not offer any significant hope for an end and we fear that the fact that he has a divine command to assist him will not save him from the reciprocal Justice that he, the gods and the underworld powers all uphold. The Chorus at 264ff. may envisage Orestes and Electra as the saviours of the house of Atreus but the salvation that they envisage is the fatal atonement of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. However, the audience, whilst appreciating the necessity of this, are also aware that unto the doer is done and therefore understand that if Orestes takes revenge according to this law, he will have to suffer in return.

The issues of responsibility are again paramount in the kommos, the great lyric dialogue between the Chorus and Electra and Orestes (306-478). Criticism has for the most centred upon whether Orestes is seen to be taking the decision and therefore the responsibility of the matricide upon himself. Before we come to any conclusions it is profitable to consider briefly prior criticism. Wilamowitz was the first to consider that the kommos presented Orestes' inner struggle that would lead him to the decision to commit matricide. In response, Schadewaldt³⁸ challenged this view by maintaining that the kommos is intended only as an evocation of the dead Agamemnon to secure his aid in murdering Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. However, Lesky has provided a synthesis of these polarised views. For Lesky, the kommos manipulates at one point Agamemnon and at others Orestes. He believes that the prior decision of Orestes at 297-305 has been forced upon him by Apollo, whereas the kommos shows him to be taking the decision and responsibility for it upon himself. Before we attempt to evaluate these criticisms, it is perhaps best to discuss textual considerations.

The kommos of the *Choephoroi* is one of the most complicated in all the extant plays of Greek tragedy. Its structure forms four distinct parts; the first part (306-422) of four triads with choral anapaests (excepting the final triad), the second section (423-455) of three strophes followed by three antistrophes. The third section (456-465) which returns again to the triad structure of strophe and antistrophe divided among Orestes, Electra and Chorus.

³⁸ Schadewaldt *Hermes*, 67 (1932), 312-54.

The final section (466 -475) is standard strophe and antistrophe. The kommos ends with anapaests as it began. The metre of the first and third section is primarily aeolic and the second section is iambic .

The first triad is introduced by a reaffirmation of Justice (306-314) - unto the doer is done - which has been fulfilled three times. This could be either Thyestes, Agamemnon and Iphigenia or Thyestes, Agamemnon and the impending murder of Clytemnestra. However, if the Chorus are referring to Clytemnestra, it is doubtful whether they would consider the law fulfilled three times as the atonement of Clytemnestra is yet to happen. The call for Justice for Agamemnon provokes Orestes to call to his father who is to him far away in Hades. He hopes to reach him or give him honour by lamenting him (315-322). The Chorus respond in the second strophe with the belief that the dead are not far away and distant but take an active interest in the world above. Here, Aeschylus is exploiting the two concepts of life after death. One, that the dead have no interest in the lives of the living and the other that the spirit lives on, in or near the tomb and can be awakened by lament³⁹. In response to Orestes' invocation and the Chorus' assurance of success, Electra at 332-339 again calls upon Agamemnon to receive them as suppliants. In the anapaests, the Chorus counsel Electra not to lose hope but, by the will of god, they will sing a victory paean in the palace.

As if unhearing of the Chorus' positive affirmations, Orestes laments in the second triad that Agamemnon did not enjoy a hero's death at Troy (345-353). This echoes the lament of Achilles in Homer's *Odyssey*, where he complains of the ignoble death of Agamemnon (*Od.*24.30ff.)⁴⁰. In response to Orestes' complaint the Chorus remind him that Agamemnon is still a great king and honoured in the underworld. Electra however, further wishes that Agamemnon had not died at Troy but that those who conspired in his death had undergone that fate (363-372). In response, the Chorus almost chastise Orestes and Electra for indulging in wishful thinking and they counsel him that now is not the time to dream but for them to act with the already secured underworld powers. In these anapaests we realise that the role of the Chorus here is to force the necessity for action upon Orestes and Electra.

³⁹ Weir Smyth (1940) p.179.

⁴⁰ Discussed above Ch.2.p.51-2.

They have encouraged them to believe that the gods will take an interest and lend a helping hand and have assured them that Agamemnon is able to hear their prayers. Their focus on Agamemnon as still a powerful king is designed to assure Orestes that with his father's aid he will be successful and therefore he should rouse himself to action. This demand prompts Orestes to pray for vengeance in the third triad. He calls upon Zeus for assistance and makes the positive statement that the 'debts due to parents shall be discharged' (385). This probably implies Clytemnestra but she is not named because as yet Orestes is not quite prepared to face up to the fact that revenge means matricide. This vagueness however, is challenged by the Chorus who, in strophe five (386-392), specify those whom Orestes implies;

'May it be granted me to raise a piercing
cry of triumph when the man
is smitten and the wife
perishes!...' (386-388)

Interestingly, the murder of Aegisthus is given priority; Clytemnestra perishes but her paramour is struck. The difference is subtle but important. Even here, in the most emotionally charged section of the play, the time is not quite right; the audience are not quite absorbed enough for the mention of 'mother'. The increased concentration on the nature of the revenge finds support in Electra. In the fourth antistrophe she responds to the prayer of Orestes, also calling upon Zeus asking when he will sever the heads of those who deserve Justice (394-399), but again Electra, like Orestes, does not refer directly to her mother but rather she cries for revenge in general terms.

The violence of this outburst seems to upset the Chorus. At 400-404 they have envisaged that blood once shed cannot be absorbed by the earth, but remains and calls for further blood. At that point we thought of Agamemnon and how his death requires the atonement of Clytemnestra. However, the Chorus at 410-417 momentarily lose their confidence. As with the parodos (60ff.) there is a vague sense of uneasiness. The Chorus' comments on the nature of bloodshed must remind the audience that Agamemnon had to die in atonement for shedding the blood of his daughter and if Orestes kills his mother will not the law require

his punishment in return. Yet, hope must win through. Their desperate belief that hope will remove their troubles is reminiscent of the parodos of the *Agamemnon* when the Chorus repeat the refrain;

‘αἶλινον αἶλινον εἶπέ, τὸ δ’ εὖ νικάτω’ (121, 139, 159)

Then, as now, we know that hope will not prevent tragedy. The second strophe of the first part of the *kommos* shows us Orestes at his lowest point (405-9). In response to Electra’s hope that Justice will be executed by Zeus and the concerns that the Chorus provoke in the audience, Orestes laments his helplessness and calls to Zeus for advice and to the infernal gods for assistance. The important point of this stanza is that we witness Orestes in the climax of despair. His desperate appeal to Zeus is not a question of whether or not to enact vengeance (on this he is already decided) but simply, Orestes feels ‘entirely overwhelmed with a sense that there is nowhere on earth to which he can turn, nothing that he can do’⁴¹.

In the second part of the *kommos*, the change of metre and structure quickens the pace and action. In this section, the Chorus and Electra join forces to relate to Orestes the actions of Clytemnestra. Electra charges her mother with burying Agamemnon unlamented (429-433), to which Orestes responds with a clear statement that he will make her atone (434-438). The Chorus further describe his mutilation, which probably took the form of removing the hands and feet and tying them to a rope around the victim’s neck⁴². Now at last Orestes exhorted by what his mother has done to his father, accepts that revenge means matricide. Provoked by Electra’s use of ‘mother’ (422,430), and the increasing focus on Clytemnestra as the prime agent in the death of Agamemnon, Orestes can finally accept and desire her death at his hands.⁴³

In agreement with Garvie, we can conclude that the decision of Orestes is a climax of the

⁴¹ Garvie (1986) pp. 151-2.

⁴² Lloyd-Jones *Cho.* (1970) p.34.

⁴³ The strophic order is odd here. It is possible to move Orestes’ ninth strophe (434-438) to after 455, thus having Orestes’ decision made at the climax of the description of Clytemnestra’s mutilation of Agamemnon. Those in favour of this transposition regard Orestes’ decision as climactic of the *kommos* and therefore find it unacceptable that it should take place before all the details of Clytemnestra’s crime is known. However, Garvie (1986) p.157, comments that; ‘Orestes’ decision does indeed represent a dramatic climax, but the *kommos* has more than one strand. It begins as an appeal to Agamemnon and this too is why Electra embarks on the narrative.’

second part of the kommos. The narrative of Electra and the Chorus serves not only to rouse the indignation of Agamemnon's ghost and to encourage Orestes, but also to encourage the audience to condemn Clytemnestra. The doubts that we have experienced in the last triad of the first section of the kommos are now lost in our growing sense of indignation. Against the evidence we forget the crimes of Agamemnon, remember him as the noble king and feel the injustice that his burial provokes. Aeschylus mounts crime upon crime - she has mutilated the corpse of a heroic king, buried him without honour and finally she has treated her daughter as little more than a slave. The Justice that Clytemnestra had when she killed Agamemnon is mostly suppressed⁴⁴. We are no longer encouraged to think of Clytemnestra as the mother who is consumed with grief for her sacrificed daughter, but as a perversion of motherhood who condemns her children to slavery and exile.

The kommos nearly ends on the tripartite appeal. That appeal is developed in the dialogue immediately after the kommos. Orestes and Electra, now powered by their own impetus, call upon their father. Firstly, they call upon him with the promise of all that custom requires (479-488) which responds to the criticisms made in the first part of the kommos. Secondly, they remind him of the shame done to his corpse, the bath that lured him, the fabric that constrained him and the shackles that bound him (489ff.), which correspond to the second section in which the mutilation is described. The appeal to Agamemnon develops further the appeal in the kommos. Orestes and Electra are united against Clytemnestra and are resolved with even greater intensity to demand retribution. However, in the kommos, the appeal was juxtaposed with Orestes' and Electra's invocation to their father are the misgivings of the Chorus, who fear that the doom they pray for may yet come upon them (463ff.). The impression that Aeschylus creates is one of anxiety. The Chorus, who have been a driving force in the kommos, urging Orestes and Electra onwards, assured of success, now realise the danger that threatens the avengers. Hence, we are in agreement with Garvie who comments that;

‘It is most effective that the Chorus, who have been so confident

⁴⁴ Whilst this is on the whole true, at 461 Orestes cries that Ares will clash with Ares and Justice with Justice. However, this does not mean that Orestes believes that what Clytemnestra did was in any way just; rather, he anticipates her claim to Justice in a legal capacity. See further Garvie (1986) p.169. The audience are reminded that Clytemnestra had ample motivation and consequently appreciate that if she deserves to die then so does Orestes.

throughout the kommos (except at 410ff.), should at the very end, now that Orestes' determination has at last been expressed, experience a sudden trembling as they think of the future. What should have been a moment of optimism turns to fear and foreboding'⁴⁵

Garvie has drawn our attention to the fact that the kommos has many strands and an understanding of the shifting emphasis of the kommos is needed to appreciate the plethora of ideas contained within it. With reference to previous criticism we can agree with Schadewaldt that the kommos' main emphasis is to ensure the assistance of Agamemnon but, as we have seen, the driving of Orestes by the Chorus must also be seen as encouraging him to matricide. Therefore, we must believe that Orestes' decision plays a major part in the kommos. Without believing that Orestes is consumed by an inner struggle, we can accept that he does come to a decision at 434ff. However, we have seen previously that Orestes clearly stated his desire for revenge at 398ff. Thus, we have several statements of determinism in addition to the rigidity of purpose that has been portrayed since the prologue. To explain this, Lesky argues that the first statement of determinism is made under divine compulsion and the kommos presents Orestes taking the necessity of matricide upon himself so it becomes his passionately desired deed. However, Lesky, in order to concentrate Orestes' personal motivation in the kommos questions the authenticity of 297 -305, but we feel such drastic action is unwarranted and this would be to remove the 'prelude to what is essentially the material of the kommos'⁴⁶. How then can we reconcile two statements of determinism? At 289ff., Orestes, for tripartite reasons, demands revenge. This we clearly understand. Nevertheless, his emotions at 434ff. do not negate this. The fact is that Orestes desires Clytemnestra's death at 434ff. more than ever. In response to the mounting crimes presented in the kommos and the affronted honour of Agamemnon, Orestes climbs to greater emotional heights. However, this does not mean that he was not committed beforehand; he states that he will have revenge and we believe him, it is simply that he now desires her death even more for now he is fully aware of the full extent of her crimes. In believing that it is possible to have more than one statement of determinism which does not negate any previous resolve we can cite the support of Garvie, who argues;

⁴⁵ Garvie (1986) p.170.

⁴⁶ Conacher (1987) p.109.

‘The three statements of determinism are not related to one another like stages in a real person’s life; they form a *dramatic* sequence. Orestes reaches his decision, not so much at different and consecutive times, as paratactically, in different but parallel ways.’⁴⁷

The increasing condemnation of Clytemnestra serves not only to motivate Orestes but also to condemn her. The increasing lamentations for Agamemnon and the catalogue of offences committed by Clytemnestra serve to further condemn her in the view of the audience. We have appreciated how Aeschylus establishes a dichotomy between Electra and her mother so that we sympathise with Electra and now we understand further that Clytemnestra thoroughly deserves her fate. This process is akin to the *Agamemnon* in which we see its namesake increase in guilt. Agamemnon is charged with a series of crimes that, when amalgamated, make the audience believe that he is as guilty as a man can be. The same is true here for Clytemnestra. Not only has she murdered her husband but she has dishonoured him and exchanged the love of her children for that of her paramour. Thus, at the end of the kommos we believe Clytemnestra must deserve her fate.

Yet, nothing in Aeschylus is ever straightforward or simplistic. He will not allow us to condemn the queen without reservation and this is the function of the doubts expressed by the Chorus. Juxtaposed with Clytemnestra’s crimes, the Chorus express fears. They realise that the laws expounded at 400ff. amount to foreboding for Orestes (410ff.). What we begin to fear is that Justice for Clytemnestra may involve the destruction of Orestes. This is the paradox of Justice. As Garvie states;

‘The complexity lies, not in the suffering of someone who is partly blamable and partly blameless, but in the paradox that it is wrong to give her what she clearly deserves.’⁴⁸

The dramatic importance of the kommos is not only thematic but also dramatically progressive. The kommos serves as a binding song. Orestes returns from exile and is welcomed by Electra in the first episode but the kommos serves to unite them in purpose. Thus, at the end, the surviving family members are in one accord in the Justice that they

⁴⁷ Garvie (1986) p.124.

⁴⁸ Garvie (1996) p.144.

uphold. This is why the character of Electra changes from the naive young girl to one who prays to Zeus for 'severed heads' (394-396), for Electra and Orestes must come together and take upon themselves the cursed nature of reciprocal Justice. In doing so, they become like Agamemnon and Clytemnestra (421-422), possessed of impious desires and the true children of their parents. Hence, we appreciate the cyclical nature of the *Oresteia*, that every agent of Justice must in turn become the victim of δίκη.⁴⁹

The sustained emotional impetus of the *kommos* prepares us for the second section of the play in which the majority of dramatic action occurs. The second episode returns to the dream motif of the *parodos*. It is now that Aeschylus chooses to reveal the contents of Clytemnestra's dream; that she gave birth to a snake, swaddled it and gave it to her breast to suckle but mixed with the milk were clots of blood. A Greek audience would understand that dreams were sent from the underworld. Hence, coming immediately after the invocation of Agamemnon, they would appreciate that the dream is proof that Agamemnon and the chthonic powers have answered the prayers of Orestes and Electra. The content of the dream is of particular interest. Aeschylus inherited the tradition from Stesichorus in which the snake probably symbolised Agamemnon; however, in Aeschylus the nativity of the snake and the suckling of it point to Orestes. Indeed, Orestes (at 540ff.) interprets it thus. Aeschylus' use of the dream may in fact be an acceptance of tradition, yet we must ask why then he transformed the subject matter to concern Orestes. It is true that it proves the underworld forces are assisting Orestes, but this could have been determined without changing the subject matter. It may be that Aeschylus uses the dream to indicate that Orestes will be successful, yet we feel that a Greek audience would know and expect this. Therefore, we must find a further explanation. Whallon, examining serpent imagery in the trilogy, points out that Cassandra (at *Ag.* 1233) calls Clytemnestra a snake, an image that is repeated by Orestes at *Cho.* 248-9. The Chorus encourage Orestes to have the courage of Perseus, who killed the snake-clad Gorgon Medusa (831-7), and finally congratulate him at 1047 for having killed two serpents. Whallon maintains that, with the appearance of the Erinyes, the serpent imagery is two-fold. He states;

⁴⁹ The concept of the *kommos* binding together the avengers is not new. Lucas (1959) p.98 believes that the *kommos* brings Electra and Orestes into closer unity with each other and with the people who are vaguely symbolised by the Chorus.

‘In this way, the serpents appearing to him suggest his mother, while the serpent that appeared to her suggested her child. The image does not represent either person only, but becomes a symbol of the unnatural relationship between them.’⁵⁰

The connection of Orestes with the snake image raises an uneasiness in the minds of the audience. Winnington-Ingram⁵¹ explains this in terms of deceit. Orestes, as the child-snake and child of the snake, will be of the nature of the parent: as Clytemnestra used deceit so she shall die by guile (274 cf. 556-7). Yet, the connection is troubling, for in the *Agamemnon* the image of the child returning to the parent type (Ag. 717ff.) was disturbing. Remembering the image of the lion cub we must ask ourselves if Orestes, by proclaiming the snake connection and by using the same means of revenge as his mother is not also returning to type. Consequently, the identification of mother and son as vipers only further proves that there is no great difference between Clytemnestra’s Justice and Orestes’.

Having discussed several schemes of revenge (554ff.), Orestes dismisses Electra into the house to take no further part in the drama. The Chorus then break the dramatic events to sing the first stasimon (585-651). The Chorus sing of the many marvels of the earth in which the reckless pride of men and the desperate passion of women are what brings destruction on mankind (594-598). From this premise, they proceed to describe the worst examples of feminine passion; Althea, Scylla and the women of Lemnos who are the most evil, for they killed their husbands. The Chorus draw a parallel in the third strophe and antistrophe. At 623-630 they describe Clytemnestra as the husband-killer and adulterous wife and then relate this to the women of Lemnos (631-639), thus suggesting that Clytemnestra is the worst of women, more polluted than those who would kill a child or parent. This, in essence, looks forward to the *Eumenides* in which Apollo will argue that the killing of a spouse is the greatest crime as it outrages the marriage bond upheld by Zeus, Hera and Aphrodite, goddess of Love (*Eum.* 211ff.)

The ode, however, is not without ambiguity; as Lebeck points out, the connection between Althea and Scylla with Clytemnestra is indirect. The first paradigm of Althea concerns the

⁵⁰ Whallon (1958) p.271.

⁵¹ Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.135.

death of a child at a parent's hand. In dramatic terms, the child killed in this trilogy is Iphigenia. In the second paradigm, the image is reversed; Scylla murders her father and in the trilogy it is Orestes, the child, who will kill Clytemnestra, the parent. In appreciating this, we can understand the thought progression of the Chorus. Firstly, a child killed by a parent - this is too reminiscent of Iphigenia, so the Chorus develop another motive - Scylla, but in this myth a child kills a parent which points directly at Orestes. Therefore, they shift the emphasis again, this time to Clytemnestra, where they are on surer ground and then in doing so typify the Lemnian women as the greatest evil.⁵²

Thus, the function of the ode must be to present a microcosm of the whole trilogy in which all the crimes are related but the Chorus, with its partiality to Agamemnon and Orestes and to the masculine values, naturally see Clytemnestra's as the worst. Additionally, Lebeck and Garvie both detect in the Chorus' position as lyric commentators the universalising nature of this ode, the first example in extant Greek tragedy. Garvie comments;

‘The Chorus's new function coincides with the appearance of a new role also for the actors. We have embarked upon the first scene of intrigue in extant tragedy. The Chorus by its nature is less actively involved and instead is given the task of universalizing the situation, in the interval while we wait for the actors to develop the intrigue.’⁵³

The deceit of Orestes arouses our interest in terms of the reaction of Clytemnestra. Having heard of Clytemnestra in the most gruesome of terms, she then appears from her palace domain as the epitome of hospitality, a far cry from our image of a serpentine fury. However, Aeschylus will not allow us to forget that this is the murderer of Agamemnon. In welcoming Orestes with ‘hot baths and bedding that charms away fatigue, and the presence of honest eyes’ (671-673), the audience are reminded of the fate of Agamemnon, how he died in the bath entangled in his robe through the scheming dishonesty of his wife. However, it is difficult to accept that Clytemnestra is being deliberately provoking as she has no reason to be so ironic. Therefore, with Lloyd-Jones, we can assume that the ironic reference here is that of the poet⁵⁴. Thus, in our first version of Clytemnestra, we see a

⁵² Lebeck (1967) p.183.

⁵³ Garvie (1986) p.202.

⁵⁴ Lloyd-Jones *Cho.* (1970) p.47.

woman and queen attending to the needs of guests according to custom. Yet, we are also reminded that this is a woman who trapped her husband in the bath and struck him down three times. Again, Aeschylus confounds expectations; we do not see what we expect; rather the first meeting of Orestes and Clytemnestra, victor and victim, is conducted with civility and, if we were not reminded of the last bath of Agamemnon, it would be difficult to reconcile this Clytemnestra with the presentation of her in the kommos.

In deceiving Clytemnestra, Orestes fabricates a story of his own death. Orestes' 'death' receives three reactions; Clytemnestra's, Aegisthus' and Cilissa's. Clytemnestra's grief for her son at 691*ff.* has been considered to be completely insincere. Her alleged pleasure has been considered to be shown by the nurse's belief that Clytemnestra, whilst making an outward pretence of grief, is secretly enjoying the fact that Orestes is 'dead' (737-741). Without any evidence to suggest that the nurse is lying (for Aeschylus sketches her with simple naturalism) and with considerable evidence that Clytemnestra is a master of deceit, are we to suppose that Clytemnestra is without motherly love? If we accept this, then we must also accept that she could not have been so consumed with maternal affection for Iphigenia and therefore we would have to discredit Clytemnestra's prime motive for killing Agamemnon. Rather, it is preferable to keep our image of Clytemnestra as the avenging mother-fury and attempt to understand her motive for grief here.

Garvie⁵⁵ comments that there is nothing in Clytemnestra's words that is not natural and sincere and that it is right that at the moment of the impending matricide we should witness her motherly qualities. His view is supported by Margon, who states;

'But how more effective and dramatic the scene is if we understand that Clytemnestra is facing death at the hands of a son whom she not only fears but also loves.'⁵⁶

For Margon, the sincerity of Clytemnestra is essential to the complexity of the trilogy, without which the queen would become two-dimensional. Furthermore, the efforts to

⁵⁵ Garvie (1986) pp.233-4.

⁵⁶ Margon (1982-3) p.297.

transpose the speech to Electra show its sincerity⁵⁷. However, whilst this proves the genuineness of Clytemnestra, it does not afford an explanation of the nurse. Arguably, both the nurse and Clytemnestra are telling the truth. What the nurse perceives as the secret joy of Clytemnestra could be interpreted as relief, for Orestes is the single person who offers a threat to her position in Argos. Hence, we realise the complexity of Clytemnestra's emotions. Although she loves her son, she feels relief at his death. In establishing this, Aeschylus creates a subtle dramatic irony. Again, we can look to Garvie for a convincing explanation. He states;

‘In so far as Clytaemestra is hypocritical, the irony lies in the fact that the hope that she really thinks fulfilled is to be destroyed, but by Orestes’
homecoming not his death. In so far as she is sincere, it is ironical
that her lamentation is unfounded, though it would be better for her
if Orestes were really dead.’⁵⁸

The reaction of Aegisthus is a clear example of hypocritical grief. Aegisthus, whilst making grand statements about the fate of the house (841-843) is far more concerned with determining whether the report is true. In keeping with his image as the wolf, or cowardly lion, and his blusterings in the final scene of the *Agamemnon*, Aegisthus strolls on stage full of self-importance and on his exit, where he will meet with his fate, we will feel no grief.

The only expression of pain that is not unclouded is made by Cilissa. Aeschylus inherited the character of the nurse from the mythic tradition⁵⁹, but Aeschylus removed her from the realms of the heroic and invested her with the attributes of a loving nurse. From 748-765 Cilissa rambles on telling of the many responsibilities in caring for a baby. Although the

⁵⁷ This speech is transposed by Headlam (1909) Thomson (1938) and Winnington-Ingram (1983) pp.216-218, who states; ‘In short, some of these associations might have some ironical force if the lines are spoken by Clytemnestra, but if Electra speaks them the effect is one of sustained double irony. She thinks that what she says is in every particular untrue (or not true of Orestes and herself): that so far from being ruined they are saved; that the curse of the house has been turned successfully and finally against her enemies...’ p.218. However, the dramatic gains in attributing the speech to Clytemnestra significantly outweigh the irony of Electra. It is better to have Clytemnestra genuinely grieve for the son who is planning her death, for this superbly contrasts with her call for a man-slaying axe (889) to kill the son whom she once lamented as dead. Additionally, the contrast is further developed in the *Eumenides* where the shade of Clytemnestra demands his persecution at the hands of the Erinyes (*Eum.* 110ff.).

⁵⁸ Garvie (1986) p.234.

⁵⁹ The character of the nurse is familiar from Stesichorus and Pindar. She is also represented in art; the Foce del Sele metope 24 possibly shows the nurse attempting to restrain Clytemnestra who is attacking Orestes with a double-headed axe.

inclusion of the nurse has a dramatic purpose, in that she is to ensure that Aegisthus comes without a bodyguard, her inclusion in the drama seems otiose at first. Why Aeschylus bothers about a bodyguard and allows Cilissa to ramble on needs explanation. According to Conacher, she provides a warmth of emotion lacking in the trilogy, her genuine affection for Orestes alienates Clytemnestra further from us, and ultimately her negating of the bond between natural mother and son looks forward to the arguments of Apollo in the *Eumenides*.⁶⁰ We can broadly agree with the emphasis of this thesis; Cilissa does certainly appear the more 'natural' mother of Orestes. However, we must not allow the fact that she claims to have been more motherly to Orestes to detract from the power generated when Clytemnestra bares her breast to her son whilst pleading for mercy. To consider Cilissa the wet-nurse of Orestes detracts from the horror of the matricide, a horror that Aeschylus has fostered by subverting the mention of it until the emotionally charged kommos. If we do not consider Clytemnestra as Orestes' mother then the whole symmetry of the tragedy is thrown out of balance. Rather, we should gently smile at Cilissa's reminiscing, appreciate the level of hypocrisy in Clytemnestra but not attempt to put Cilissa in the place of mother. That is surely to be kept for Clytemnestra, however ill she performed the duty.

The reactions of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus foreshadow the treatment of their deaths. For Aegisthus we will feel no sorrow. Orestes promptly dispatches him without a second thought and the Justice that is dispensed to him raises no question or concern in the minds of the audience. However, the death of Clytemnestra is treated at length by Aeschylus. The climax of the play, the tension that is created when Orestes reveals himself to his mother is reminiscent of the agon between Clytemnestra and her husband in the *Agamemnon*. However, the clear difference is that Orestes justifies himself to his victim whereas Clytemnestra deceives Agamemnon and justifies herself to the Chorus after the fact. Clytemnestra realising her danger cries;

'Ah woe! I understand your words, despite the riddle!

By guile shall we perish, just as we slew by guile!

In all speed give me a man-slaying axe!

Let us know if we are the victims or the vanquished;

yes, so far along the path of catastrophe have I come!' (887-8910)

⁶⁰ Conacher (1987) p.120.

Aeschylus, in giving this speech to Clytemnestra, reminds us of the commanding figure of the *Agamemnon* and in the process reminds us of her barbarity. However, there is a sense of pathos in her words and we detect a realisation, an understanding of the disaster that she has brought upon herself. As discussed in the *Agamemnon*, the concept that it is through suffering that we gain wisdom; Clytemnestra's wisdom may not be profound, but she has understood that every action has a reaction and in her own case it is the path of catastrophe. Finally, Clytemnestra understands the reciprocal nature of Justice - that as she has acted so must she suffer.

The dichotomy of feeling within the audience is furthered in the agon between Orestes and his mother. In contrast with the stichomythia between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, she will be defeated in every argument. At the outset Clytemnestra, in a master stroke of attack, bares her breast to her son and begs him not to dishonour the breast that nourished him (896-898). Our reaction to this is two-fold. We remember that Cilissa claimed to be more motherly towards Orestes and consequently we feel that Clytemnestra is being dishonest for she, in comparison with Cilissa, appears the less maternal. Thus, we do not completely uphold her appeal. However, the breast may be considered a symbol of motherhood and in begging Orestes to respect it, Clytemnestra appeals to his sense of *aidos*. At this point the audience must feel the weight of her claims and we ask ourselves how can it ever be right to kill the person that bore you? Her gesture provokes the same response in Orestes, who at 899 questions for the first time whether the revenge that he has been planning is right. However, the moment is fleeting for Pylades intervenes in the most dramatic of ways. Pylades who has remained silent throughout the play suddenly counsels Orestes to fear the gods rather than mankind. Consequently, we consider Pylades as the spokesman of Apollo brought in to shore up Orestes' determination.⁶¹

From this point onwards, Orestes experiences no more doubt or hesitation. To each of Clytemnestra's arguments he provides ample defence. When he charges her with the death of Agamemnon, she replies that it was fate, hence he tells her to consider her own death in the same manner (909-911). He accuses her of pawning him for a lover and, in dismissing Agamemnon's infidelities as acceptable in war, he discounts her objections of unfaithfulness

⁶¹ Garvie (1986) p.275.

(915-921). Her final attack is to threaten Orestes with her Erinyes which Orestes parries with the threat of being pursued by his father's Furies (924-925). Although Orestes displays no further doubts and is steadfast in the necessity of his actions, the audience feels trepidation as a result⁶². His belief that fate answers fate upholds the Lex Talionis, but the audience know that this is always reciprocal and if fate answers fate, will not Orestes also be held to account? His precarious position is furthered by Clytemnestra threatening the revenge of her Erinyes. Orestes believes that he must defend himself from his father's Erinyes, but the audience must feel that he is between two parallel fates. In dramatic terms this threat looks forward to the Erinyes' pursuit of Orestes and the division of the celestial and chthonic forces in the *Eumenides*; and in terms of the tragedy of the *Oresteia* we fear that Orestes is damned if he does, damned if he does not.

Aeschylus' treatment of the confrontation between mother and son parallels the stichomythia between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. In the *Agamemnon*, Agamemnon did not use the most effective arguments to defeat Clytemnestra, and now in the *Choephoroi* she does not use the most effective arguments to defeat her son. Whilst she appeals to his sense of *aidos* in a devastating manner, she does not defend her killing of Agamemnon as we might have expected her to. Clytemnestra argues that fate and adultery motivated her actions, but she says nothing about the death of Iphigenia, which we would consider to be her best motive. However, we can envisage how difficult a position Orestes would be in if Aeschylus chose to give Clytemnestra the significant motives that she has in the *Agamemnon*, for then the audience might consider that Orestes' motives are flawed. Consequently, Aeschylus is silent about Iphigenia, Clytemnestra is not allowed to remind Orestes of what Agamemnon did, nor is his familial relationship with Iphigenia developed. Aeschylus does this in order to weaken Clytemnestra's case. At the point of her death we are to be convinced that she deserves her fate, whilst still acknowledging that her death is also a crime.

Our fears for the fate of Orestes are justified in the final scene. In a visual tableau Orestes appears before the corpses of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and displays the robe in which Agamemnon was trapped. The connection of the robe reminds the audience of the similar

⁶² In agreement with Garvie (1986) p.302, Orestes at 930 is not expressing doubts about the righteousness of the matricide. Rather, Aeschylus' intention is to further in the minds of the audience that although Clytemnestra deserves her punishment, it is wrong of Orestes to enact it.

tableau created when Clytemnestra stood triumphant over the bodies of her husband and Cassandra. Yet the overpowering emotion is sadness that the House of Atreus has come to this. We cannot doubt that Clytemnestra deserved her fate, but the execution of it brings no release. The justification that Orestes offers at 1010ff. does not negate the horror of what he has done and we realise that the world of the *Agamemnon* where Justice equates with slaughter is still predominant. The increasing madness of Orestes brought on by the appearance of the Erinyes leaves us little hope of resolution. Orestes' belief that Apollo will protect him is a small amount of light in the darkness of the tragedy, but we remember when Orestes himself was considered to be the purifying light by the Chorus of the *Agamemnon*. At this point we hold little hope that the House will ever be set to rights.

Throughout the *Choephoroi*, Aeschylus manipulates our emotions from hope to foreboding to fear. In the prologue we believe that Orestes will save the House from the darkness that has descended upon it. However, the parodos introduces a note of caution as we suspect that the law that validates Orestes' revenge will in turn demand his atonement. This fear, however, is subverted by the first episode in which we are encouraged to identify with the fate and character of Electra. In doing so we condemn Clytemnestra and forget the impending matricide. Our alienation from the Queen is furthered by the kommos in which we are told of her amassed crimes and the necessity for her punishment is further impressed upon us. Yet Aeschylus with characteristic complexity juxtaposes condemnation with foreboding, as the Chorus warn the audience that Justice will be met with Justice. These fears reach fulfillment in the final scene of the *Agamemnon* : the prologue of the *Choephoroi* is a false light and we are once again in the realms of darkness.

Chapter Four - *Eumenides*

Trial and Resolution

In reading the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus it is essential that we do not allow ourselves to forget the force of the dramatic action of the original performance or the surprise with which we first approached the play. Too often repeated readings of the text diminish our appreciation of the spectacular pageantry that Aeschylus brings to his stage. The evidence of Pollux¹, which states that the appearance of fifty Erinyes caused women to miscarry and children to faint, may be anecdotal and exaggerated but it does encapsulate the essence of the resolution of the trilogy; that fear and suspense will eventually give way to hope and that the good will always win through.

As we have seen in the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*, Aeschylus fuses expectation with surprise. He has taken certain elements of myth to confirm what the audience thought to be true and elaborated upon them. Folklore for the aftermath of Orestes' matricide is vague. All that can be ascertained is that he lived on and ruled in Mycene². However, in the sixth century the stories of Orestes' travels begin to embody two themes; firstly, that he becomes insane and is subsequently cured and secondly, that he is pursued by the Erinyes of his mother. Stesichorus' treatment of the myth is evidenced only from the scholia of E. *Orest.* which states that Orestes' calling for his bow, which is a gift from Loxias, follows that Stesichorean tradition. The connection of Apollo and Delphi with the actions of Orestes is also to be found in Pindar *Py.* 11. in which he envisages an association between Orestes, Strophius and the straight 'justice of the navel of the world'³. Nevertheless, with Sommerstein, Pindar does not allow any of the responsibility to rest with Apollo. There is no indication of an oracle or a command to commit matricide. Thus, Aeschylus may have inherited the association with Delphi, but it is impossible to state with any accuracy the nature of the involvement of Delphi prior to Aeschylus. Evidence is also provided by the

¹ Pollux 4.10.

² For the differing treatment of the myth see Sommerstein (1989) pp.1-5 and also Podlecki (1989) pp.1-7.

³ The evidence of Pindar depends upon the date of *Py.* 11. See above Ch.2 p.53 n.5.

metopes from Foce del Sele (from approximately 540 B.C.) which depict scenes from the *Oresteia* (numbers 24, 25, 26). Metope 26 depicts a snake coiled around a man's legs, as the man attempts to defend himself with a sword. This is interpreted as Orestes attempting to defend himself from the Erinyes. There is, however, no suggestion of Apollo or Delphi; Orestes attacks the snake with a sword rather than with a bow and arrow.

In addition to folklore and the works of Athens, Aeschylus inherited an Athenian connection; *Od.* 3-307 relates how Orestes returned from Athens to kill Aegisthus⁴. It is possible, considering the lack of evidence prior to the production of the *Oresteia*, that Aeschylus first introduced the concept that Orestes is the first defendant of murder in the first case of homicide to be tried on the Areopagus hill by a human jury. It is of particular interest that Athena at 681ff. establishes that this is the first trial on the Areopagus and that the hill is named after Ares. She tells the story of how the Amazons sacrificed to Ares before attacking Theseus who had assisted Heracles in stealing the girdle of their queen Hippolyte⁵. What interests us here is that Aeschylus chooses the Amazon myth to justify the use of the Areopagus hill for legal purposes rather than the established foundation myth that told how Ares was tried by a council of gods for killing Halirrothius, the son of Poseidon, for the assault on Ares' daughter⁶. This trial would have provided a divine precedent for the human court, yet Aeschylus does not employ its use. Perhaps the reason for this lies in the words of Athena. At 681-684 she stresses that this is the first time a homicide court has been convened which tacitly suggests that this is the first time that Justice is put to the test in a democratic court.

Nevertheless, the nature of the trial is not universally accepted. Whereas Aeschylus employed a human jury, Euripides' *Orest.* (1650-2) states that, although harried by the Erinyes, his case was to be decided by the gods. Furthermore, Demosthenes' *Orat.* 23.66 also describes a tribunal of gods. There are also differing accounts of who prosecuted Orestes; the Erinyes or relatives of Clytemnestra or Aegisthus. We would be wise to keep the words of Apollodorus in our minds;

⁴ Evidence post-Aeschylus has Orestes coming to Athens after the matricide.

⁵ Discussed by Lloyd-Jones *Eum.* (1970) p.53-54.

⁶ See Sommerstein (1989) p.3.

‘He [Orestes] is variously said to have been brought to trial by the Furies, or by Tyndareus, or by Erigone, daughter of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra; and the votes at his trial being equal he was acquitted.’⁷

Nevertheless, this account can be traced to the late fifth century and therefore it is highly probable that Sommerstein is correct in attributing three major innovations to the story of Orestes: Firstly, that he was the first to be tried on the Areopagus hill; Secondly, that the Erinyes prosecuted Orestes rather than any human relations of the victims; Finally, that the jury was composed of Attic citizens rather than gods.

The opening of the *Eumenides* has much in common with the prologues of the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*. All the plays open on a note of hope and light. The watchman wants alleviation from his labours and hopes that the light from the beacon fires from Troy will bring him relief from his labours; Orestes prays to Hermes, his father and Zeus for assistance; and the Pythia appears before the temple of Apollo, the god of light, and proudly declaims the ancestry of the oracle. However, Aeschylus juxtaposes this hope with fear. The watchman fears what the return of Agamemnon will bring; the black robes and mourning song of the Libation Bearers remind us of the dark world which we are in; and soon, we are to see the Pythia, the proud priestess of Loxias crawling on stage, horrified at what she sees inside the temple. The black world of the *Agamemnon* stretches forth and embraces the prologue of the *Eumenides*.

In each prologue, Aeschylus takes great care to divert our attention from the troubles of the previous play. The last time we have seen Orestes, he ran from the stage (1062) in a frenzy of madness, the Chorus questioning when an end will come⁸. Now, however, the Pythia stands before us calmly relating the history of the Delphic oracle. She describes how control of the oracle has passed from Earth to Themis to Phoebe who gives it as a birthday present to Apollo (1-8). The most important aspect of this transference is the peacefulness with which it has been accomplished; ‘with no violence done to any’⁹ which is not the more traditional

⁷ Apoll. *Epit.* 6.25. Loeb translation (1921).

⁸ In agreement with Sommerstein (1989) p.79.

⁹ All translations from Lloyd-Jones *Eum.*(1970).

account of Apollo taking upon himself the mantic seat¹⁰. Euripides in *IT*.1249ff. relates how Apollo killed the dragon and forcibly dispossessed Themis. Thus, Aeschylus dispenses with any atmosphere not only of violence but also of any discord between the older and younger deities. This atmosphere of calm and order is not to last; the Pythia calling on Zeus the fulfiller (28) enters the sanctuary only to return on her hands and knees horrified at what she has seen¹¹. She describes Orestes, who we had expected to see with her, his hands and sword covered with blood, holding a suppliant wand (39-45) and surrounded by goddesses which she cannot put a name to (47-59). The dramatic importance of this is twofold. Firstly, the image immediately forces us back into the world of the *Choephoroi*. Gone is the light of Pythia's first speech and in place, Orestes is surrounded by those spirits that were once only in his mind and are soon to be a physical reality on the stage. Secondly, the facade of the temple is no longer a welcoming shrine of purity but hides the repulsiveness of the Erinyes. The audience awaits with trepidation and nervous expectation for the appearance of those goddesses that have brought the dignified Pythia to her knees.

Prior to the parodos the prologue is a long complicated affair with unprecedented breaks in action, but what does it contribute to the resolution of the drama? The short scene between Orestes and Apollo had twofold importance. On a dramatic level, Apollo's orders to Orestes at 74ff. prepare for the change of scene to the temple of Athena at Athens and look forward to the trial. They also allow us to sympathise with the trials of Orestes as Apollo cannot or will not save Orestes from the pursuit of the Erinyes. Whilst he will champion Orestes, he foretells the wide-ranging wanderings, harried by the Erinyes, that he must endure before he reaches Athens. Thus, when we next meet Orestes clasping the image of Athena, he is exhausted and wasted with his ordeal. The fact that Orestes must go through this is important. At the end of the *Choephoroi* we are horrified at what Orestes has done. Consequently, it is important, especially if we are to accept his acquittal, to feel that he has in some measure suffered for his crime. If Orestes arrived at Delphi and was spirited away by

¹⁰ The importance of the peaceful transference of the Oracle is discussed by Conacher (1987) 141f.; Kitto (1956) p.54 and Lloyd-Jones *Eum.* (1970) p.9.

¹¹ The re-entry of Pythia is somewhat controversial. Here, we agree with Taplin who states; 'But the wording seems to be unequivocally explicit: she is on her hands as opposed to only her legs (σκελῶν) and so is like a crawling child (ἀντίπαις). Clearly, Aeschylus meant her to be on all fours.' Taplin (1977) p.363.

Apollo who disempowers the Erinyes, then we might feel that Orestes has escaped his crime without any degree of suffering, a scenario that would be morally unsatisfactory.

The second level of importance is thematic. Apollo's championship of Orestes leads to the first statement of dual responsibility. Apollo at 84 says'

'for it was I who persuaded you to slay your mother.'

Apollo's acceptance of responsibility has led some scholars to believe that the responsibility of Orestes disappears from the final play. For example, Garvie argues;

'Such moral complexities are no longer the concern of the play. Motives, whether of Orestes or of Clytaemnestra, are hardly mentioned, and the whole problem of doubly-determined actions disappears.'¹²

Whilst we can agree with Garvie that the Chorus at 199*f.* certainly believe that Apollo is wholly rather than partly responsible, this is perhaps more to do with their attempt to argue with him rather than absolve Orestes, for how could it be dramatically consistent for the Erinyes to consider Apollo as completely responsible and then to continue harassing Orestes? Aeschylus' purpose here is to polarise the divine forces and this is achieved by the Erinyes' laying the responsibility for the matricide firmly at Apollo's feet. This, however, does not mean that the audience suddenly understands that it is Apollo who is responsible and therefore they should not have worried about Orestes; rather they have considered Orestes' actions as personally-motivated in the *Choephoroi* and now he must face the consequences and Apollo, who is also responsible in the *Choephoroi*, is now held to account. Ultimately, what is important is that our interest in the motivation of Orestes is suppressed in order that we concentrate on Apollo, but this does not mean that we no longer consider Orestes responsible. Hence, we understand that although Orestes committed the matricide for his own reasons¹³, Apollo who has persuaded him must also share responsibility. In doing this, Aeschylus is subtly preparing the ground for the role of Apollo in the trial scene. What we will realise is that the trial is not only of Orestes but also of the Delphic shrine¹⁴. Apollo will have to defend the command he gave to Orestes or his prophecy will lose credibility. Furthermore, the fact that he admits persuading Orestes entrenches the forthcoming dispute

¹² Garvie (1996) p.144.

¹³ i.e. lack of patrimony and championship of the Argive people who are being governed by two women. See above Chapt 3 pp.90-3.

¹⁴ 'And I bid you respect my oracles / and those of Zeus, and do not deprive them of fulfilment' 713*f.*

with the Erinyes. No compromise or mutual understanding can exist between two parties where one precipitates a crime and one punishes it¹⁵.

This entrenchment is furthered in the ghost scene. As Orestes has Apollo to champion him, the Erinyes have Clytemnestra spurring them on. Aeschylus juxtaposes claims of Orestes to defence with those of Clytemnestra to revenge. As a shade she loses none of the dramatic force she enjoyed previously. Assured still of the righteousness of her deeds she berates her appointed agents. In keeping with her previous nature she retains all her passionate force, reminding the Erinyes of the tributes they received from her (106ff.). Gone is the mother that genuinely grieved at the death of her son (*Cho.* 691ff.) and who knelt to Orestes asking him to revere the breast that fed him (*Cho.* 896ff.); now she demands his death in atonement;

‘Waft your bloody breath upon him!

Dry him up with its vapour, your womb’s fire!

After him, shrivel him up in a renewed pursuit!’ (137-139)

In a masterful reversal of image, Clytemnestra who once gave birth to and nurtured her son, now seeks his death. The dishonour that Clytemnestra experiences as a shade should not confuse us or encourage us to revoke that previous understanding of her motives. Aeschylus, in choosing to present her so alienated, is not diminishing her but is preparing the ground for the argument that the death of a divinely-appointed king and a man is of more importance than the death of a woman, which ultimately is to be the key to understanding the acquittal of Orestes. Nevertheless, the equality of crimes is also to be stressed; the masculine is to triumph but that does not negate the claims of Clytemnestra. Well did Orestes cry δίκην with δίκην, Ares with Ares (461) and Aeschylus will not now allow us to forget that Clytemnestra has a claim to δίκην;

‘Do not be ignorant of my pain, made soft by sleep!

Let my just reproaches sting your heart!

For to the righteous these are goads.’ (133-135)

The fact that Clytemnestra appears as a dream shade is well prepared for in the previous plays. Winnington-Ingram draws the attention to the fact that in *Aga.* 274f. she claims that

¹⁵ The impossibility of the situation is discussed by Livingston (1925) p.121.

she is not the victim of dreams. In the *Choephoroi*, she instructs Electra to offer libations to Agamemnon on account of a dream and now in the *Eumenides* she has become a dream in the minds of the Erinyes¹⁶.

In response to Clytemnestra, the Erinyes enter or awaken to sing the parodos¹⁷ and confirm what we have previously expected; the conflict between the older and younger gods is declared. The parodos serves to further polarise the two forces. We have heard from Apollo (66ff.) and Clytemnestra (136ff.) the nature of their power and now they confirm all that we have feared (174ff.). The purpose of the parodos has several aspects - the conflict between the Erinyes and Apollo and the implacable nature of their power. In the first strophe and antistrophe (143-154) they lament the treatment they are receiving from Apollo who, by his actions, is undermining their power. The theme that the Erinyes will constantly refer to, the undermining of their ancient prerogatives, is first introduced; Apollo by his actions is interfering in the province of other gods. This is why they attack him at 151f. for respecting the suppliant. To the Erinyes the harbouring and possibly purifying of the suppliant is alien to what they believe, for purifying absolves - something they cannot understand, for no absolution for them can wash away the stain of matricide (174ff.). (It is worth remembering that purification of a suppliant is relatively 'modern' to the Erinyes. Athena refers to Ixion (441) who is understood as the first suppliant and is forgiven by Zeus for murdering his father-in-law. Consequently, the rights of the suppliant cannot have existed

¹⁶ The importance being that the shade status of Clytemnestra signifies the decline in "personal interest which the broad design of the trilogy imposed upon the dramatist". Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.119.

¹⁷ Exactly when the Chorus enter has caused considerable controversy. Firstly, the Chorus could be present from before the beginning of the play. Rosenmeyer (1982, pp.68ff.) believes that they are seated on stools around the altar in the centre of the orchestra surrounding Orestes. Secondly, the Chorus could enter prior to the parodos with Apollo and Orestes at 64 (Müller, Lloyd-Jones, Brown) or at 94. Thirdly, they could enter at the outset of the parodos at 140 (Verrall, Taplin). The problems with an earlier entry are significant. It would be difficult to bring the Chorus on-stage when they are supposed to be fast asleep (at 140-142 the Chorus-leader makes it quite clear that they are waking each other up). To bring them on asleep they would need to ride the eccyclema and even though Brown (1982, pp.26-29) believes that it could support the weight of the Chorus, Apollo and Orestes, Scott (1937, p.107) argues that this is doubtful. Against the later entry at 140 is the speech by Clytemnestra who berates the Chorus as if they are present beforehand. Taplin (1977, p.366ff.) appreciates this problem; she must either face through the open doorway and the responses of the Erinyes are heard from within or face the audience and abandon any attempt at naturalism (although there is a possibility that Clytemnestra's part may be spoken by a disembodied voice). Arguments concerning the greater dramatic effect of either entry do not convince either way and therefore, the choice must remain the decision of each individual director; for our purposes the awakening of the Chorus from their on-stage slumbers is not nearly as exciting and shocking as if they burst through the temple doors shouting as they come, spilling into the orchestra to begin their violent diatribe against Apollo.

prior to Zeus and since the Erinyes are the daughters of Night (414*f.*) they belong to the first generation of Gods). Thus, at this stage we can tentatively suggest that the purification of the suppliant is the antithesis to the Erinyes' power. They are operating on the law that has dominated the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* that blood once shed cannot be recalled and therefore, never forgiven or washed away. Consequently, we begin to understand that the dispute between the Erinyes and Apollo is not simply confined to Orestes. Whether he is to live or die is the focus for a more cosmic battle; whether or not the rule of Zeus and the prerogatives of the ancient gods are to be reconciled is to be the arena of contention. This is the importance of the Erinyes' defence of their powers and the accusation that Apollo has defiled his own hearth (165*ff.*) and for them, participating in this is overriding the law that has always constituted Justice (154).

Determining the precise nature and the extent of the Erinyes' power is complex. With Sommerstein, it is possible that Aeschylus was the first to present them in anthropomorphic terms¹⁸; that he has inherited a disparate tradition which he can manipulate in order to satisfy his own dramatic purposes. The earliest reference that we have to the Erinyes is the Linear B tablets from Knossos where their name is translated as wrath (*erinu*)¹⁹. However, Sommerstein connects this with the Arcadian goddess Demeter Erinys not with the Erinyes of the poets. The majority of evidence is provided by Homer and Hesiod. In Homer, whilst he never actually says exactly what types of being they are, he attributes to them many prerogatives. Firstly, they are the guardians of oaths, punishing those who foreswear their oath. At *Il.*19.259 Agamemnon swears the traditional oath formula that he has not violated Briseis;

‘Let my witness now be Zeus first of all, highest and
greatest of gods, and Earth and Sun and the Erinyes who
punish men below the earth, when any has falsely sworn.’

The reason for this is that to foreswear an oath offends the god whose name it is made in²⁰. The suggestion is that once an oath is broken, the implacable nature of the Erinyes pursues the transgressor even beyond death (*Il.* 3.278). Secondly, they represent the curses of a

¹⁸ On the nature of the Erinyes see Sommerstein (1989) pp.6-12 and Müller (1835) pp.186-202.

¹⁹ See further Podlecki (1989) p.7.

²⁰ Müller (1835) p.189 and Sommerstein (1989) p.7.

wronged parent (*Il.* 9.459, 571; 21.412; *Od.* 2.135, 11.280). This extends to elder brothers (*Il.* 15.204) and beggars (*Od.* 17.475-6). Thirdly, the Erinyes are considered the guardians of the proper universal order, the sense of δίκη that keeps all things in their rightful place. At *Il.* 19.418 they silence Xanthos, Achilles' horse when Hera empowered it to prophesy his master's death. Finally, they are associated with Ate, the mental blindness that leads us into folly. Homer presents this as an alliance of divine powers; the Erinyes in this function are fulfilling the will of Zeus. At *Il.* 19. 87ff. Agamemnon laments his treatment of Achilles;

‘But I am not to blame, but rather Zeus and Fate and the
Erinys that walks in darkness: they put a cruel blindness
in my mind....This blindness is Ate, eldest daughter of
Zeus, the accursed goddess who blinds all men.’²¹

In these many functions there is one overriding principle; respecting your parents, your oaths and not committing acts that upset the natural order of balance, are all part of the balance that is δίκη. When any act upsets this balance, the Erinyes are roused to action and once activated are implacable.²²

In Hesiod the Erinyes are given a clear genealogy. They are born from the severed genitals of Uranus and under their own name are associated again with the sanctity of oaths (*W&D.* 803-4) and the embodiment of a parental curse (*Th.* 472). However, the function of the Erinyes is also identified with the Keres²³, who are the children of the Night (*Th.* 213) and closely associated with the Moirae and with death.

From the function of the Erinyes in Homer and Hesiod we can understand further the use that Aeschylus makes of the primeval goddesses. They are referred to in only two of his works - the *Septem* and the *Oresteia*. Their main purpose in the *Septem* is the embodiment of the curse of Oedipus upon his sons²⁴. In the *Oresteia* however, the Erinyes have a wider

²¹ Translated by Hammond (1987).

²² Cf. Heraclitus fr. 94 D-K which says that the Erinyes, who are the assistants of δίκη, will find out if Apollo overreaches his powers.

²³ Sommerstein (1989) p.8 and Brown (1983) p.14.

²⁴ *Septem* 70f. The nature of Oedipus' curse on his sons is discussed below Ch. 6 p.168.

scope. Again they embody the rights of parents - Orestes at *Cho.* 269ff. is threatened with manifold ills if he does not avenge the wrong done to Agamemnon and at *Cho.* 924, Clytemnestra clearly warns Orestes that her Erinyes (the embodiment of her curse) will repay him. However, aside from the rights and curses of parents, the Erinyes have other functions. In the *Agamemnon* they are associated with bringing disaster in accordance with Zeus' will. At *Ag.* 739-749 the Chorus envisage Helen as an Erinyes sent by Zeus Xenios to enact revenge on the sons of Priam. Consequently, we can see that the Erinyes are in fact allied to Zeus, at least for the first two plays of the trilogy. Furthermore, alongside the Erinyes is Ate; in the same stasimon the Chorus relate how once a house (in this case Priam's) has embraced insolence, Ate rules as an avenging daemon. Ate may not be considered here as the child of Zeus as she is in *Il.* 19.87ff., but alongside the Erinyes they are the instruments by which Zeus enacts his Justice. Additionally, the Erinyes have the capacity for independent action; not only can they be motivated by all curses, they can be activated by all impious behaviour. At *Ag.* 1183, Cassandra tells the Chorus of the dirge of the Erinyes that haunt the house, a dirge that has come from the blood of Thyestes' children. What we realise is that Aeschylus has not made any innovation or addition to the power of the Erinyes²⁵. He has taken their functions from Homer and Hesiod to develop the multifaceted goddesses and, where it suits his purpose, he has identified them with the Keres, being born of night (cf. 745) and merciless avengers (*Th.* 217, 220-2, 472).

While this explains the Erinyes in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*, in the *Eumenides* they undergo a slight alteration in their prerogatives. At 212 the Erinyes claim that they only avenge kin-murder and not those that have no blood tie. At first this appears as a contradiction to everything else that we have ascertained. Possibly, to push the point is perhaps to force too great an amount of logic on the drama. Aeschylus here is manipulating the role of the Erinyes in order to further the dramatic action. In limiting their provinces he is further entrenching the incompatibility of Apollo and the Erinyes. The importance here is that although they are both operating under the same law, they are both adding a proviso that further polarises them which, in turn, makes any resolution apparently impossible. This

²⁵ The innovation that Aeschylus makes is not in regard to their functions but possibly with their identification with the cult of the Σεμναὶ Θεαί. The transformation of the Erinyes to the Eumenides (well-wishers) and their institution as patron goddesses of the Areopagus court, may correspond to the Semnai, whose habitation was on the Areopagus hill. For further discussion, see Sommerstein (1989) pp. 10-12 and Müller (1835) pp. 191-202.

point is developed by Sommerstein;

‘When the Erinyes disdain interest in the murder of a husband, Apollo is given an opening to expatiate on the solemnity and sanctity of marriage, and can thus evade the question whether he was justified in condoning matricide, and point out that the Erinyes, while jealously defending their own τιμαί, ignore the τιμαί of Zeus, Hera and Aphrodite.’²⁶

The dispute between Apollo and Erinyes forms a pre-trial in which the arguments are almost rehearsed for the main trial at Athens. Immediately the battle lines are drawn. In Apollo’s first speech (179ff.) he treats the Erinyes abominably, threatening (180-3) and insulting (184ff). Apollo’s attitude is surprising, especially since the response of the Chorus is tempered with restraint. It is interesting that Aeschylus chooses to represent Apollo, the most ‘Greek’ of gods, in such an aggressive manner. The answer to this most probably lies in the resolution of the trilogy. The myth categorically assures us that Orestes lived on, but Aeschylus, in creating an unsolvable dilemma, must guard against creating the impression that Orestes was right to commit matricide. He does this by not allowing Apollo to convince us of the complete righteousness of the matricide as the justification for it. In presenting Apollo as partial and prejudiced, he maintains the balance, for not only are the Erinyes of a clearly delineated rationale, but so is Apollo. Thus, we cannot at this stage determine from where the resolution is to come, for there seems no possibility of any compromise.

This polarisation is furthered by the role that each party adopts. To the Erinyes, Apollo alone is responsible for Orestes’ action (198ff.) because his oracle ordered the matricide (202) and he has exacerbated the situation by accepting the suppliant (204). As with the parodos, the increasing focus of attention on Apollo’s complicity has dual importance; preparing for his role in the actual trial and raising the conflict to a cosmic level. However, it prompts the questions, have we been wrong in assuming that Orestes bears the responsibility for his own actions? Is Apollo, in accepting responsibility, absolving Orestes? And are the Erinyes mercilessly pursuing an innocent whose only crime is obeying the gods? In the interest of continuity, to accept that Orestes abdicates all responsibility would throw into confusion everything that we have previously noted. As has been seen in the *Choephoroi*, Orestes clearly states his motives for killing his mother. The oracle of Apollo is only one of them;

²⁶ Sommerstein (1989) p.119.

his lack of patrimony, the demands of his father's ghost and the claims of the Argive people, all converge to make his revenge amply motivated. Apollo does bear responsibility for his own oracle and he will have to defend that, but this does not absolve Orestes. Furthermore, the continued pursuit of the Erinyes further justifies what we have long suspected, that the motive for a crime, however justifiable, does not absolve the perpetrator from its consequences. If it did, we could have appealed to mitigating circumstances for both Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, but as it was right that each should be punished it is also wrong to enact that punishment. Apollo, in trying to do so, is attempting to operate above the law²⁷, and the Erinyes that embody the automatic nature of the law by virtue of their *raison d'être*, cannot cease to demand atonement. This is why they repeatedly stress their ancient prerogatives (208, 210, 227, 229ff.) for Apollo has challenged their very reason for being. However, while we still acknowledge Orestes' responsibility, Aeschylus turns our attention away from it. As this is the final play of the trilogy, a resolution must be found. As Aeschylus cannot simply put Orestes above the law, he concentrates our attention on the widening gulf between the supernatural forces. In focusing the responsibility for the matricide upon Apollo and diminishing the role of Orestes, Aeschylus further polarises Apollo and the Erinyes. Thus, our attention is directed towards their dispute in which resolution is possible rather than on Orestes, whom if we are to judge according to the law 'unto the doer is done', must be condemned. Consequently, although Orestes is still held accountable, we are not encouraged to contemplate it further; rather we are now concerned with the developing dispute between the Olympian and the chthonic powers.

The shift in the nature of the Erinyes' power (210, 212f.) also raises questions concerning the oracle of Apollo. At *Cho.* 269ff., he threatens Orestes with the Erinyes of his father. However, in this scene, the Erinyes claim that they only avenge kin-murder. We have noted the dramatic importance above but we must now question whether this change of status actually calls into question the accuracy of Apollo's oracle. There is nothing in the text to assist us with this dilemma. It is apparently a contradiction that is irreconcilable. Logic tells us that either of the parties must be inaccurate or that there is some unexplained element that we are missing. It is surely impossible that Apollo is telling a falsehood, for he tells us that he is the seer that cannot lie (615) and the nature of the Erinyes is automatic - there is no

²⁷ On Apollo's sub-judicial activities see especially Thomson (1978) p. 262 and Gagarin (1976) p.81.

decision-making process and therefore, they cannot avoid executing punishment. To press the point is perhaps futile; Brown²⁸ counsels us against being 'too literal-minded' and it is indeed possible that the audience would have accepted what the Erinyes say because the importance is not in what they say, but in their opposition to Apollo. It is possible that there are different Erinyes all pursuing their own particular province, according to Brown;

'Aeschylus leaves open the possibility that other Furies exist,
but he knows that no normal member of his audience will
think of them.'²⁹

Ultimately, what we must do is accept that Aeschylus has chosen to limit the scope of the Erinyes' provinces in order to satisfy dramatic requirements, for if they avenged all murder there could be no possible escape; in championing the blood-tie they prepare for the precedence of the father over the mother.

At the end of this pre-trial scene we are no closer to a resolution. Apollo, by focusing the arguments on marriage, evades his moral responsibility over the righteousness of commanding matricide. The scene now changes and we see Orestes exhausted, clutching the statue of Athena. We cannot condone what Orestes has done but we cannot help but sympathise with him as we see this tragic scene of him drained, clutching his only hope, surrounded by the fearsome Erinyes who are planning to devour him alive (303ff.). The fact that we know that he is to live on does not make us immune to the fear that the Erinyes now have their quarry in their hands and are preparing to take him to Tartarus and eternal torment. The suspense is gripping; from the epiparodos the Chorus converge upon him, threatening him with what they are planning. Orestes cries to Athena for help, promising an alliance with Argos (287ff.) and claiming his purity (235ff., 276ff.). Athena's entry is, however, delayed until after the binding song. Aeschylus is not going to provide any hope until all seems lost and Orestes consumed by the spell of the Erinyes.

This scene introduces two new aspects, the political undertones that will become increasingly important until the play's end, and the nature of Orestes' purification, for if Orestes is purified of his mother's blood then is he still to be considered guilty of it? While we

²⁸ Brown (1983) p.28-29.

²⁹ Brown (1983) p.29.

acknowledge the major importance of the political nature of the play, its importance does lie beyond the scope of this thesis and therefore we shall confine ourselves only to the most obvious of observations. The purification of Orestes is of more importance for it calls into question the mode of action of the Erinyes and the continuing justification therein. The questions we shall attempt to answer are when and where was Orestes purified? and how is it possible for the Erinyes to continue their pursuit after the stain of his mother's blood has been washed from his hands?

A superficial reading of the text suggests to us that Orestes is purified at Delphi by Apollo. At 282*f.* he describes how at Phoebus' hearth he received purification by means of pig's blood, and at 578 Apollo reinforces this claim by maintaining that he has performed the ritual. All this would be well if it were not for the fact that Pythia describes Orestes as 'god-polluted' (40)³⁰ so that he cannot have been free from stain at that stage, which implies that he has not been purified prior to the opening of the play. Furthermore, there is no suggestion during the prologue that Orestes has received purification in any form. But to complicate the matter further, Orestes' expressed purpose at *Cho.*1038*f.* is to attain purification from Apollo at Delphi. Nevertheless, Dyer argues that an Athenian audience would not have considered Delphi as a place for purification or thought that Apollo would perform the ritual, even though Apollo is thought of in association with purity;

'Indeed we find extensive evidence that Apollo was regarded as a god of purity and that purification rituals were held in some cities in association with his cult, but it does not follow either that purification was regarded as a function of the god himself or that Delphi was an "institut hellénique de purification"'.³¹

The problem cannot be dismissed by simply avoiding the evidence. While we can agree that the importance of the Eumenides Painter can be minimised by understanding the vases as correctly or incorrectly influenced by the Eumenides, we cannot explain away the lines so easily. Brown raises the possibility that 282*f.* and 578 may have become interpolated in a revised version of the play in order to make it more contemporary with fourth-century

³⁰ Conacher (1987) p.148.

³¹ Dyer (1969) p.40.

thought, as reflected in the vase-painting³². However, this does not take into account *Cho.*1059f. nor the general sense that Apollo is defending Orestes through absolution and advocacy.

Furthermore, we face an additional problem in the wanderings of Orestes. If he has been purified why does he wander from place to place? Why at 451f. does he claim to have been purified at other 'houses'? Is it the case that he has participated in this ritual more than once? Taplin stresses that this must be significant and cannot be simply traces of an epic version of the myth³³. We have seen above that Orestes' trials serve the purpose of engaging our sympathies after we have been horrified by the matricide, but perhaps we can now add another explanation. It is possible that Taplin has provided the answer; Orestes may have received purification in some form at Delphi³⁴ but this is not quite enough and more rituals are needed to make sure of his purity. Additionally, Orestes at 286 says; 'Time purifies all things as it grows old with them.'³⁵. Thus, his wanderings would serve the purpose of allowing the blood to fade from his hands aided by repeated rituals, so that by the time he reaches Athens the blood has disappeared and without fear he can embrace the idol of Athena, suitably assured on account of the lack of harm he has brought to the others he has encountered (285). This, however, does not explain how the Erinyes still manage to pursue him, for they claim at 247 that they are following the trail of his mother's blood. Whether he has been purified at Delphi or somewhere else, the Erinyes can still follow his trail and if the stain of matricide has been washed from his hands how can the Erinyes still affect him? This problem is exacerbated when we consider that the pursuit of the Erinyes originates in madness. Orestes sees the Erinyes when he begins to lose his mind at the end of the *Choephoroi*. If purification allows him to regain his sanity then how is it possible that the Erinyes can still physically appear to him? This problem is adeptly handled by Brown³⁶ who

³² Brown (1982) p 32.

³³ Taplin (1977) p.382-383.

³⁴ Even with the weight of evidence against purification at Delphi, if Orestes is not purified then, as argued by Taplin, we are being positively misled. Taplin (1977) p.382.

³⁵ This obviously depends on whether this line has been interpolated. Cf. Lloyd-Jones *Eum.* (1970) p.28; 'This line seems otiose to modern taste, and it may well be a parallel passage written in the margin by a reader and later copied by mistake into the text; but it is not safe to assume that this is so since the ancients often allowed such generalizing comments in places where no modern writer would insert them.'

³⁶ The concept of the Erinyes singing to cause madness is familiar from *Aga.* 1191ff. wherein Cassandra envisages their song about Ate. Cf. Thomson (1978) pp.262-263.

counsels us not to interpret this in terms of guilt, that guilt remains even after the ritual of purification. Brown argues that the Erinyes' continued pursuit of Orestes results from dramatic considerations, for once the Erinyes appear on stage they cannot disappear. He states;

‘Now that they have acquired a visible existence as anthropoid beings played by human choreutae, they must obey the logic of this new dramatic presentation. They cannot suddenly vanish when Orestes is purified, or even when he is acquitted, any more than human avengers could, for, if the manner of their onset in *Cho.* was “realistic” in terms of the psychology of Orestes, they have now acquired a psychology of their own, and “realism” must now be judged in terms of this.’³⁷

This in essence answers our original question ; how can they maintain their pursuit? Possibly, it is because firstly, they are the Chorus and thus a dramatic requirement, and secondly because they do not consider that purification of Orestes for they are the avengers of Clytemnestra. Therefore, they are interested only in her rights. The condition of the perpetrator is immaterial to them for, as we have seen, they are implacable and nothing except satisfaction can appease them. As aforementioned, it is not in the Erinyes' interests to accept purification for if they do it allows the perpetrator to escape Justice as they understand it.

Orestes' supplication of Athena and the binding song of the Erinyes is the pivotal point of the drama. The ode is a climax in the pursuit of the Erinyes, for it is the spell that shall bind Orestes to them. It is at this point that the deadlock is at its blackest. The first refrain at 328ff. and 341ff. stresses the lack of hope for Orestes, for their song fetters the brain and causes madness, which is a precursor to death. Our fear for him would be intensified by the violence that accompanies the song. At 370ff. the Erinyes indicate how they are dancing full of instinctual malice and arrayed in black raiment. We can only imagine the intense spectacle that the audience witnessed.

The deadlock is further intensified by the increasing alienation of the Erinyes from the

³⁷ Brown (1983) p.25.

Olympian gods. At 349ff. they sing how their worship is kept separate from the celestial deities and at 360ff. the sense of the corrupted text seems to suggest that Zeus had ordained that the Erinyes shall have no contact with the Olympians. Lloyd-Jones suggests that Zeus has done this in order to save one of his fellow Olympians, possibly Ares, over the murder of Halirrhothius³⁸. Furthermore, the Erinyes seem to believe that Zeus himself hates their existence (365) which does not stop him from using them for his own purposes when it suits. Interspaced with this conflict, the Erinyes again dwell on their ancient prerogatives; that their offices are ordained by Fate (333ff., 349) and that they accomplish a man's fall by a blight on his reason (376)³⁹. Consequently, we are still in the world of the *Agamemnon* where all transgressions are punished mercilessly. However, there are the beginnings of the transformation of the bloodcurdling Erinyes to the sombre Erinyes who protect society from evil. At 354ff. they claim they pursue houses that have embraced violence and thus they have no interest in righteous houses. This is the first suggestion that living a life free of violence is an essential part of personal responsibility; a concept that will be further developed at 530ff. Additionally, the Erinyes prize the fear and dread that they evoke (389ff.) and we shall soon witness how Athena agrees with them over how important fear is in ensuring that society remains on the right track.

The entry of Athena brings a new perspective and hope is fostered by her involvement. For Thomson the choice of Athena is political. Besides the fact that she is the patron goddess, she embodies qualities that are needed to negotiate with the Erinyes. To the audience, Athena brings with her the ideals of bravery, moderation, restraint and the Arts of peace⁴⁰. This is evidenced in her first speech; Aeschylus presents her arriving from Troy supervising the distribution of spoils. This has manifold importance; not only is the great distance she can travel effortlessly a symbol of her divinity, but her involvement with Troy prepares us for her sympathy with Orestes, as Agamemnon was the overlord of the Achaean forces. Immediately, she is established in a martial, masculine environment that presages her agreement with male dominance and establishes her in a supervisory context. Unlike Apollo, who is characterised by his prejudice and partiality, Athena is immediately

³⁸ Lloyd-Jones *Eum.* (1970) p.33.

³⁹ This may be a reference to the parodos of the *Agamemnon* in which Agamemnon, once he has decided to sacrifice Iphigenia is possessed by infatuation. Discussed above Ch.1 p.34.

⁴⁰ The political nature of the choice of Athena is discussed by Thomson (1978) p.263-264.

respectful. Although she is clearly taken aback at the sight of the Erinyes (406ff.) she tempers her language with moderation. This is the first element of hope, that the will of Zeus and the Erinyes must be reconciled but Apollo, who may be the spokesman of Zeus, is too aggressive and insulting to make any headway. In contrast, Athena (who is also connected with Zeus) is far more reverential. Indeed, according to Thomson the poets considered her to be Zeus' favourite daughter and, as Murray states Athena by virtue of her birth completely belongs to him - she is 'pure undiluted Zeus'⁴¹. Ultimately, it is Athena's respectfulness that appeals to the Erinyes and achieves the first significant breakthrough. At 433 they agree to submit Orestes to Athena's judgement on the basis of mutual respect and, interestingly, respect for her parentage (435). Hence, the first obstacle to resolution is over. Athena has engaged in dialogue with the Erinyes and brought forth from them an admission of regard for her wisdom and, more importantly, for the wisdom of Zeus. Zeus' will is what will be behind the resolution through the mediation of Athena. Thus, in regarding Zeus, the Erinyes take the first step towards reconciliation.

Athena envisages this in the form of a trial but the trial is not to follow what would have been the normal procedure in fifth century practice. The Erinyes consider the act as all-important for them and Orestes' guilt is evident as he will not swear an oath of innocence (429). However, Athena sees beyond this and she tentatively tells the Erinyes that they wish to seem just rather than actually be just (430), for it would be wrong to win an unjust victory on the strength of an oath (432). Athena is here 'shifting the goal-posts'; where the law has always rested upon the deed and not the motive, she is now introducing the possibility of justifiable homicide and creating the environment in which Orestes can, in effect, prosecute Clytemnestra as his own defence. It is a subtle but significant change of direction and if it were not that the myth required a 'happy ending', we should suggest that the Erinyes, in acquiescing to this are being trapped by Athena's rhetoric.

As if Aeschylus pre-empted our concerns, he breaks the action with the second stasimon which transposes the Erinyes from the world where Justice equates with gruesome punishments to Justice as the guardian of civilised society and the prosperity thereof. Thus, in agreement with Sommerstein;

⁴¹ Murray (1940) p.201.

‘The chorus here present themselves under an aspect that differs from anything we have heard from them before. They are no longer hounds chasing a fawn (246) or bloodsucking demons encircling a sacrificed victim; they are now the embodiments of Justice, voicing moral sentiments that are both familiar and acceptable to the audience and some of which will presently be echoed almost word for word by Athena herself (cf. 690-9)’⁴²

This transition is, however, not to be too abrupt. The Erinyes introduce the ode with their previous concerns. This new Areopagus court will not survive the acquittal of Orestes (490-3), for if he is acquitted then matricide will become common practice (494-8) and the Erinyes will let loose their unabated fury (501) while humanity will cry in vain for release (503ff.). To escape their wrath, they recommend a life in fear of their power (516-525), lived in moderation (526-537), and thereby Justice will prevail. None will succeed without Justice, for if profit is put before righteousness then payment shall be exacted (540ff.) through atonement, as shall also be the case for those who do not honour their parents (544-8).

The effect of the second stasimon is critical. While we have sympathised with Orestes’ persecution, we are now made further aware of the importance of the Erinyes’ punishment of him. The stress upon Justice reminds us that the unalterable fact remains that he has murdered his mother and no motive, however justifiable, will make what he has done right. Under the law of Justice, as it stands at present, Orestes must atone. In essence, we are back with the *Agamemnon*; the Erinyes’ pronouncements on Justice are startlingly similar to those of the Elders of the *Agamemnon*. In the second stasimon, the Elders sing how impiety begets impiety and Justice will punish the offender through Ate (*Ag.*750ff.). Furthermore, Justice is to be found in the righteous way of life and wealth is no bastion against punishment. These are the same sentiments of the Erinyes who, at 541f., have envisaged the result of profiteering and who have advocated moderation and piety as the just life. Additionally, the Justice that requires the atonement of Orestes is the same as that which demanded the death of Clytemnestra at *Cho.*306ff. The Chorus demand her death according to the law that unto the doer is done. Well might we ask ourselves, has Justice developed at all from the parodos of the *Agamemnon* to this point? We may be looking forward to the trial but a note of foreboding is struck; Justice has not changed and is not

⁴² Sommerstein (1989) p.171-172.

going to change. The Erinyes tell us that wisdom comes 'under constraint' (520) and the elders of the *Agamemnon* tell us 'wisdom comes through suffering' (180f.) but none yet have learned wisdom. It may simply be that the moderate pious life is what is just and therefore that this is what the sufferings we have witnessed tell us. This, however, is surely optimistic. Orestes does not live by this; he benefits by impiety.

The strength of the Erinyes' case is greatly increased by the second stasimon. Now that the case against Orestes is seen to have greater significance, we understand further the need of the Erinyes and we must re-evaluate our sympathies. The association with the *Agamemnon* brings back our thoughts on the necessity of the king's punishment. It was justifiable of Clytemnestra to murder her husband but it was also justifiable of Orestes to murder his mother. The unsolvable paradox is brought back to us; no possible solution is obvious to us at this point⁴³. It is fitting that, as we enter the trial scene, the scales are balanced. The law tells us that Orestes must atone with his life, but our sympathies coupled with the myth, tell us that he must be vindicated.

The stage set, the scene changes to the Areopagus Hill. Athena returns with her chosen jurors⁴⁴ but as the proceedings are about to get underway, Apollo enters and claims his responsibility⁴⁵. Consequently, Orestes' case takes an upwards turn. Undeterred, the Erinyes begin to question Orestes. Their reasoning is simple; they ask, did he kill his mother (586)? How did he kill her (591)? and on what authority did he act (593)? This, to the Erinyes, is sufficient for Orestes' condemnation. Orestes however, is not going to be undone. He defends himself with the charge that Clytemnestra had a double pollution, for she killed, in effect, her husband and his father (600, 602). To the Erinyes that is unimportant on two grounds; firstly, the fact that she has paid with her life is atonement

⁴³ Cf. Sommerstein (1989) p.171-173.

⁴⁴ The entrance of Athena with jurors is probably all that is needed to signify the change of scene. She has implied at 484 that it is the Areopagus court that she is founding and she explicitly tells us at 685 that that is where they are. See Conacher (1987) p.159, Taplin (1977) p.390-391.

⁴⁵ The entry of Apollo is difficult to determine because it is a silent entry unique in Aeschylus. Difficulties arise in the attribution of 574 where the address to Apollo may be made by Athena (Podlecki, Sommerstein) or by the Chorus-leader (Lloyd-Jones). Here we accept that Athena makes the announcement because in agreement with Conacher (1987, n.54 p.185), it is preferable that she should ask the newcomer to state his role because she is the president of the court. However, the important point of Apollo's entry is its unobtrusiveness. This point is explained by Sommerstein (p.189); 'in his own house at Delphi he was absolute master; at Athens he is brought on-stage and taken off again like a person of no importance.'

enough (603) and secondly, her crime is of limited interest as she did not shed kindred blood (605). The same argument has been used with Apollo, who answered in terms of marriage. Orestes however makes the mistake of questioning whether he is of his mother's blood. This allows the Erinyes to ask incredulously how could he not be? (607*f.*). Those of the audience who were unaware of the physical doctrines of Anaxagoras may well have agreed⁴⁶. For Kitto; 'to disregard the mother's claims is to flout one of the deepest human instincts..' ⁴⁷. Orestes cannot disprove his bond with his mother and therefore turns to Apollo to pronounce on the Justice of his case⁴⁸.

Apollo begins his case convincingly, establishing himself as the prophet that can speak only truth and furthermore, his oracle is in accordance with Zeus' will. Hence, Zeus has greater power than an oath. We might also add that Zeus is therefore, above not only an oath but also the law, for it is the oath that guards the inviolability of Justice. Athena, when instituting the Areopagus court (484*f.*) did not say 'respect your oath for all time unless Zeus orders you otherwise'. The seeming improbability of setting Zeus above the law is reflected in the Erinyes' response (622-624). They cannot believe that Zeus would set at naught the rights of the mother. Apollo's answer is tactical; he envisages the death of Agamemnon by the hands of the female Amazons as not ignoble, for it would be in war. This is, in effect, the same principle that we found in the *Choephoroi*; that Clytemnestra's crime was all the more abhorrent because of its dishonourable nature. Winnington-Ingram questions the convincing nature of Apollo's speech. He writes;

'This speech must be read in the light of the earlier plays. Craft (which it is perhaps not for Apollo to disparage) was imposed upon Clytemnestra, since in the circumstances of her life it was impossible for her to fight as an Amazon (or as a goddess)' ⁴⁹

The reference to Agamemnon again highlights the equality of the situation. Not only does it remind us of how Clytemnestra brutally murdered her husband and compounded the crime by mutilating his corpse and denying him a suitably honourable funeral, it also focuses our

⁴⁶ Aristotle *de.gen.anim.* iv. 764a. Aristotle also cites the theories of Empedocles and Democritus of Abdera, who both argue for joint responsibility for reproduction by both male and female. However, the probable date of Democritus' birth is 460 B.C. which places him outwith the timescale of the *Oresteia*.

⁴⁷ Kitto (1956) p.39, cf. Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.120.

⁴⁸ The importance of this is discussed below p.130-1

⁴⁹ Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.121. n.99.

attention on why Clytemnestra acted as she did. We cannot help but question why she murdered her husband and in doing so we must remember the pitiful image of Iphigenia presented in the parodos of the *Agamemnon*.

In championing the rights of the father over the mother (instead of the superiority of wedlock which he did previously at 214ff.), Apollo unwittingly prepares a trap for himself. The Erinyes are now able to accuse Zeus of hypocrisy for he shackled his own father Kronos. Apollo's reaction is fury at being caught in a contradiction. Again, we can agree with Winnington-Ingram when he considers Apollo;

‘He loses his temper because the charge of inconsistency which they make, and to which the attention of the jury is specially called (642f.), is true. His abusive language (644) recalls 68ff. and 185ff., and it is this abuse of the beings with whom he is really so closely involved that gives the clue to his inconsistency.’⁵⁰

The closeness of the Erinyes and Apollo is clearly seen in the next argument. Apollo parries the argument that Zeus bound Kronos, by the fact that chains can be loosened but blood once shed cannot be recalled (645-651). This, however, the Erinyes point out, is exactly what Orestes has done. The rights of Orestes and Clytemnestra are vividly juxtaposed. We have come full circle and now we are again faced with the stark reality of the law; blood once shed is lost forever and calls forth pollution that demands atonement. Regardless of the status of the victim this is the ultimate truth and there is no escaping the fact that Orestes, according to the law by which he executed his mother, must now be subject to that same law.

In essence, Aeschylus has created a dilemma to which there is no answer. In agreement with Lloyd-Jones; ‘The analogy of the Theban trilogy might suggest that Orestes should be allowed to perish. But in this case the legend was that he survived....’⁵¹. It is as if the scales were so finely balanced that no solution will break the deadlock. However, an answer must be found and Aeschylus provides one in the doctrines of Anaxagoras, which explains reproduction in terms of masculine supremacy⁵². Apollo describes how the mother is not the

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.122. n.99.

⁵¹ Lloyd-Jones (1983) p.91.

⁵² Whether by Anaxagoras or by Pythagoras has been disputed. Here we follow Conacher's citation of Aristotle *de.gen.anin.*iv 376b.30 but cf. Thomson (1978) p.268-9.

true parent of the child but the incubator, while the man is the progenitor and it is his seed that begets the offspring. Fortunately for Apollo he has evidence to hand; Athena herself was born from the head of Zeus and thus no mother took part in her birth. It is this argument that Athena will base her decision on and consequently will acquit Orestes and therefore, it is the argument that Aeschylus intended to break the deadlock with. While it seems unsatisfactory to our modern sensibilities, the attitude of the contemporary audience is debatable. Possibly, many of the audience would not have believed in this considering the bond between mother and child, but it is also possible that some would have accepted this as fact. The question that is of the utmost is; does this undermine the case of Apollo? Winnington-Ingram exposes the problems in believing this, for if we are not to appreciate the intense horror of matricide, then why at the climax of the *Choephoroi* were we so outraged? If the death of Clytemnestra was not so horrific then why did we worry and why did Orestes quail before the sight of the breast that fed him? Consequently, we might suggest that our sympathies with Clytemnestra outweigh the finality of the argument and the equality of the jurors' votes satisfies us that she has not been completely undermined. Again we share the feelings of Winnington-Ingram, who argues;

‘The mother carries the child, nourishes it in the womb, gives birth to it
in pain, suckles it at the breast: all these things remain untouched by
Apollo’s argument, and it is upon them that rests the universal sentiment
of mankind which is outraged by matricide.’⁵³

The physiological arguments bring the trial to an end and Athena charges the jury to make their votes. The voting procedure has sparked the greatest controversy of the play.

The question of the vote of Athena is an extremely complex area. No clarity is furthered for us by the text or stage action and external evidence serves only to exacerbate the dilemma. To consider first the textual evidence, Winnington-Ingram argues that we would not be in such a quandary if it were not for Athena’s speech at 734-41. Maintaining the argument that the vote is a casting vote, he believes that if the equality of the arguments is to be upset by the human jurors condemning Orestes, then it is strange that Aeschylus chooses to do this almost as an afterthought rather than drawing our attention to it more specifically⁵⁴.

⁵³ Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.121.

⁵⁴ Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.125: n.110.

However, with Sommerstein, the text expresses a *prima facie* case for an equal vote. He establishes that at 735 Athena clearly states her intention to vote unconditionally, whereas if she was going to cast a deciding vote then this would have to take the form of a conditional intention. Furthermore, she actually announces her decision to vote and therefore it would seem strange if she then did not⁵⁵.

Nevertheless, Hester questions why, if the votes are equal, does Orestes praise Athens? Would it not be more logical if he were indignant with Athens and grateful to Athena and, conversely, the Erinyes would be better disposed to Athens and not towards Athena, which they evidently are not⁵⁶. However, Sommerstein offers a serious challenge to this, considering the unification of Athena with her people. He states;

‘But if Athena is one of the jury, why should Orestes or the Erinyes draw distinctions between her and her human colleagues any more than they draw distinctions between the human jurors who voted for conviction? In fact, both sides seem to regard the verdict as that of the *πόλις* as a whole, of its divine and human population collectively (cf. 1015-1016).’⁵⁷

The text may give us a clue as to the number of jurors that appear on stage. If Athena’s vote is a casting vote then the jury members must be equal and if it is not then they must be odd. Although we cannot know with any certainty, the text does suggest that there are ten jurors, for at 713ff. the Erinyes and Apollo begin a bitter exchange that lasts for ten couplets and a final triplet. Hester believes that this triplet possibly provides for Athena to cross the stage to the voting urn or for two jury men to vote together. Whilst possible, it is not conclusive for, as Kitto points out, two jury men would destroy the formal nature of the stage picture and further, the triplet could provide time for the eleventh jury man to vote, retake his seat and Athena to come forwards. There are no stage directions to prove or disprove either possibility so consequently, two scenarios are possible. If Athena’s vote is a casting vote then, with Hester, it must be added to the pile of already counted votes after her speech at

⁵⁵ Sommerstein (1989) p.221-223.; Gagarin (1975) p.122.

⁵⁶ Hester (1981) p.270-1.

⁵⁷ Sommerstein (1989) p.225. However, Sommerstein’s opinion has lately changed. In his recent work *Aeschylean Tragedy* (1996 p.372) he envisages Athena as voting alongside the human jury and she is therefore ‘jointly responsible’.

752*f*. However, if it is to be counted along with the other votes then, with Gagarin, she must cast it at some point between 735 and 742. Both situations are possible and all that we can determine is that the audience would not have experienced the same difficulties. All that we can be certain of is that at some point Athena must have cast an actual voting pebble. The concept that the vote that she refers to is a metaphorical one is not substantiated by the text, which clearly suggests at 735 that she is holding her ψῆφον. Therefore, it has to be put either in the urn or the pile of votes waiting to be counted⁵⁸.

Possibly the best way to decide on the result of the vote is according to our personal preference on the judgement of Orestes. To put the matter simply, if the vote is equal then this reflects the equality of the arguments of the trial or if Athena creates the tie then the human jury have actually condemned Orestes. The former view is staunchly defended by some of the most pre-eminent scholars; Müller, Hester, Lloyd-Jones, Podlecki and Winnington-Ingram are all united in the belief that the equality of the votes represents the equality of the case between the Erinyes and Apollo. Lloyd-Jones states;

‘The votes are equal, and when Athena gives her casting vote, she does so for a reason that has nothing to do with the issue that is being judged; that is essential, for neither party is in the wrong and neither party must be defeated.’⁵⁹

The equality of right has repeatedly been stressed by Aeschylus. However, it could be argued that while Clytemnestra and Orestes both have ample justification, this does not triumph over the law. As we have seen in the second stasimon, the importance of Orestes is minimalised and the need for law to be upheld by fear becomes the more pressing issue. If Orestes is to be judged according to the law of the *Agamemnon*, that the doer must suffer (which we have never been told has been superseded by any other), then Orestes must be convicted. However, if this is the case, would the intervention of Athena not be undermining the law and therefore, Justice? This would certainly be the case if her judgement was considered to be setting a precedent, which with Gagarin, it is not. Her reasons are so specific to Orestes that they cannot possibly be interpreted as setting the standard for future trials. Yet, there remains a doubt as to whether Athena is not in fact

⁵⁸ Cf. Thomson (1978); Gagarin (1975) p.126.

⁵⁹ Lloyd-Jones (1983) p.92.

extricating Orestes from his legally-justifiable punishment simply because it is the will of Zeus who, as we have seen, is stronger than the oath that protects Justice.

The final point that we must examine is whether external evidence can influence our final decision. For Gagarin, later references are ambiguous. The apparently supporting evidence for the casting vote in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* is not explicit. At *IT*.965*f*. Athena weighs the votes in her outstretched arms and at 1470*f*. she is said to have saved Orestes by deciding the equal vote. This does not amount to conclusive proof, for not only is it equivocal, but it is contentious as to whether Euripides necessarily follows that tradition of Aeschylus. The only explicit evidence for the casting vote is Aristides (2.20-21D), but this can be countered by Lucian (*Prisc.*21, *Harm.*3) in which Athena is envisaged as producing a tied vote⁶⁰.

At the outset of this study of the trilogy we placed ourselves in the position of jurors and now the evidence has been heard, we must decide whether we condemn Orestes and what his acquittal means for the concept we have had of Justice. Our observations in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* have been based upon the legal premises that blood once shed cannot be recalled but clots upon the earth and calls forth further blood and that evil deed begets evil deed and the impious who act will suffer. This is the concept of Justice as the universal order, the inviolable laws that, once they have been transgressed, incur the implacable wrath of the Erinyes. In this world punishment of transgressors is not only confined to those who act. They are polluted and as a result, that pollution infects those who become involved. This is evidenced by the fact that the innocent among the Trojans, the unborn, will die alongside those whose only crime is to be part of the city to which Paris belongs. Moreover the Greeks, while they are the agents of Zeus, also suffer in their attempt to execute Justice (*Ag.*63-7, 432-55, 568-71).

Accordingly, the punishment of transgressions is enacted under the authority of Zeus, for it is Zeus who brings all things to pass (cf. *Ag.*56-67, 355-69, 525-6, 581-2, 748, 973-4, 1485-8). Therefore, every act of punishment on a transgressor by an appointed agent is in compliance with Zeus. Thus, Clytemnestra's execution of Agamemnon and her subsequent

⁶⁰ Gagarin (1975) p.125-126.

death at the hand of her son are all divinely appointed. Although Zeus ordains what will be, personal motivation is also an essential factor in terms of *δικη* both as the universal order and also in the sense of an individual claim. To wrong a parent is a transgression of the universal order, but the individual's claim of justification also represents a personal concept of Justice. For example, in the *Septem* both Eteocles and Polynices can claim Justice, although at loggerheads, and both Clytemnestra and Orestes can say that they have *δικη* on their side. This exists almost as a legalistic claim, fusing the concepts of justification with Justice. However, the personal claim of justice must always be subject to the abstract form of Justice. Personal claims of motivation does not override the universal laws that constitute *δικη* and this is why the human jury must condemn Orestes.

The Eumenides introduces another form of Justice; legal proceedings through the institution of the Areopagus court. The *raison d'être* of the Areopagus court is controversial. The question is; does the acquittal of Orestes betoken a new understanding of Justice? Are we now to examine the motive as well as the act? Is the personal claim to Justice now to supersede the universal form of *δικη*?

This may be evidenced by Athena's questions at 422ff. Her concern for the plight of Orestes and consideration of what drove him to matricide could indicate the beginnings of a more humanitarian form of Justice. However, it is possible that this is looking at the resolution of the drama through 'rose-tinted glasses'. If Athena had chosen to acquit Orestes upon grounds of compassion, this would be true. However, Athena votes as she does on purely arbitrary grounds - her preference for the male over the female. Moreover, her concept of Justice echoes that of the Erinyes in the second stasimon. At 690ff. Athena envisages the just as the mean in all things, the preservation of piety and the maintenance of fear as the essential component of a society that respects Justice. Consequently, although the Erinyes become reconciled to the Areopagus court, it is because it embodies the same principles as they uphold. Gagarin states;

'Thus, the establishment of the Areopagus and the reconciliation of the Furies do not introduce a new kind of justice or a new stage in the

development of society, but rather ensure that the positive aspects of the earlier system will prevail. "The doer suffers" is still the law, but now the Furies will bring good to the land and will obtain good in return.⁶¹

In view of this, what are the implications of the acquittal of Orestes? The reason for his exoneration is based on the gender battle that has underpinned the trilogy. Clytemnestra upset the balance; she as a man-woman transgressed the boundaries by murdering her husband and lord. However, in taking revenge, Orestes pushed them too far in the opposite direction and as a result, conflict emerges between two principles; the feminine upheld by the Erinyes and the masculine, championed by Apollo and vindicated by Athena. Nevertheless, the restitution of masculine supremacy undermines the law of Justice for it is clear that Orestes, if he be judged by the letter of the law should not be allowed to go unpunished; why then should he? Apollo and Athena both tell us that Zeus requires that Orestes be released (616ff., 797) and Athena implies that Zeus will defend his decision by force (826ff.) Does this then mean that Zeus is above Justice? Possibly, in this particular circumstance, Zeus has exercised his power to override the law that undo the doer is done. We know from Apollo that Zeus has the capacity (619ff.) and his championing of marriage over the oath (218) further evidences this⁶². Perhaps the reason why Zeus risks conflict with the guardians of Justice is simply because he prized Agamemnon as a king and his appointed agent; even though Agamemnon's crimes certainly justified his death. However, does this not mean that Zeus is an arbitrary god meddling with the law when it suits. This certainly seems to be the case and we know from 360ff. that he has done so before. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Justice is no longer inexorable; it still is, unless in those occurrences Zeus intervenes according to his own particular interests.

There is perhaps something unsatisfying above this. Well might we ask why he did not intervene for Clytemnestra when she too had reason enough. Yet, an end has to come and this is Aeschylus' choice, but it could be argued that he avoids the complication by not

⁶¹ Gagarin (1976) p.83.

⁶² If the oath referred to is indeed the jurors' oath and not the oath sworn by Clytemnestra and Aegistheus. See Kells (1961) p.170.

allowing us the time to dwell on the matter. As soon as the verdict is given, Orestes makes his speech of gratitude and leaves the stage. Aeschylus here is simply closing the issue down and concentrating our attention on more pressing matters. The issue now is completely supernatural. Zeus has alienated the Erinyes, trespassed on their powers and now must face their wrath. We are not given time to reflect, for the Erinyes on hearing the verdict begin their diatribe against the Olympians (778). Athena here faces the last dilemma of the trilogy; to acquit Orestes was the will of Zeus, but to do so brings the risk that the Erinyes will blight the land of which she is patron goddess. To defend Athens and reconcile the Furies, Athena make five attempts to pacify them, each coupled with the promise of honour and respect. Firstly, she assures them that they were not defeated because the votes were equal which was the will of Zeus (795-800) and asks why do the Erinyes not stay in Athens and be honoured with 'gleaming thrones' (804-807). Secondly, she threatens them that if they do not listen to her they will answer to the wrath of Zeus (826f.). Therefore, they should stay in Athens, forget their anger and be honoured with sacrifices. Thirdly, she flatters them, praising their ancient origins and defers to their superior wisdom (852ff.), the point that they have consistently made. Again, she offers honours - a seat near the Erechtheus procession with gifts they have never before received (853ff.). Fourthly, she tells them that to destroy Athens would not be just but rather, they should allow themselves to be persuaded by her by being charmed and soothed. Finally, she adds the promise of increased powers, taking upon themselves the responsibility for the fertility of Athens. Through this process, Athena brings the trilogy full circle. Again, a dilemma is faced but this time through the superiority of Athena's wisdom and peace-making skills, an answer is found. For the first time in the trilogy, persuasion is no longer the 'maddening child of ruin' (*Ag.* 385f.) which it was in the *Agamemnon*, but instead a conciliatory force that brings good. As Gagarin says;

'Those who can persuade have power, but it is the power to do harm:

Clytemnestra uses persuasion to kill Agamemnon (*Ag.* 943), and Orestes

uses "crafty" persuasion (*peitho dolian*) to kill her in return (*Ch.* 726; cf. 781).

Only Athena at the end shows how to use *peitho* constructively for

compromise (*Eu.* 885, 970; cf. 794)'⁶³

The Erinyes accept the offer of Athena; they are robed in red raiment and escorted to their new seat of power. But does this mean that they have left off their ancient privileges, left to

⁶³ Gagarin (1976) p.85.

the Areopagus the jurisdiction on homicide. Aeschylus is unclear on what the functions of the Erinyes will now be. It is probable that although Athena has added to their prerogatives the power to bless, there has been no indication or implication that they have surrendered their previous provinces. Justice has remained unchanged therefore, the Erinyes are still needed to protect it and furthermore, the fear that was needed to make society *sophron* must still be represented by the Erinyes. Thus, in the end, nothing has really changed; Justice is still the same, the Erinyes are still the same and the world still follows the same laws; the doer of impiety will still be punished.

Chapter Five - *Supplices*

The issues of motivation and justification in the *Supplices* of Aeschylus are of an incredibly complex nature. Our study of this play is immediately hampered by textual corruption and the probability that the play was the first part of the Danaid trilogy¹. Therefore, the thematic elements are being introduced rather than resolved. In contrast, the *Septem* is more readily understandable because we witness a kind of reconciliation which, although it will entail the total destruction of the line of Laius, is still a resolution. In the case of the *Supplices*, it is not as easy to evaluate action without knowing the results of the action undertaken in the first part of the trilogy. In addition to this, clarity is also hampered firstly by the condition of the text and secondly, by Aeschylus' deliberate ambiguity on points of motivation and justification. Although Aeschylus' dramas were of simple plot construction, this construction is simply a vehicle for a complex web of motivation that drives characters to undertake actions and then to justify them. It will be argued that in the *Supplices* Aeschylus presents different motives that, although not united in this play, would definitely be brought together in the final play through the superior wisdom of Aphrodite (akin to Athena of the *Eumenides* who also triumphs and resolves the conflict between the supernatural powers through the wisdom associated with her divine status). To attempt to untangle the thoughts of Aeschylus we must examine firstly the various motives and justification presented by the chorus of Danaids and secondly, the influence on these by the character of Danaus and the silent forces of Zeus and Io. Finally, we shall turn to Pelasgus who is the epitome of the tragic hero and whose dilemma rivals Sophocles' Oedipus in the intensity of his encroaching doom. The Chorus of the fifty daughters of Danaus (almost certainly represented by twelve choreutae) are, in effect, the protagonists of the play and, as such, they dominate the action from beginning to end. The active role that they play is almost unparalleled in any extant tragedy; only the *Eumenides* has as active a Chorus that affect the development of the plot in the same manner as the Chorus of the *Supplices*. This choral pre-eminence encouraged many scholars to believe that the *Supplices* was an example of early tragedy but now we have contrary evidence which dates the production of the play as post 468B.C.(probably

¹ The order of the trilogy has lately been challenged by Sommerstein (1996) pp.142-146.

463).²

The only safe premise that we can begin with is a statement of fact; the Danaids have fled from Egypt to Argos, accompanied by their father, to escape from marriage with their cousins, the sons of Aegyptus. In order to do so, they supplicate and claim kinship with the Argives, to whom they are related from earlier days through Io, an Argive priestess and progenitor of the Danaids and Aegyptiads via Zeus. In response to their attempted escape, the sons of Aegyptus pursue them in order to force the match. This is fact, whereas everything else in the trilogy is subject to debate. The most difficult question we must first ask is why the Danaids are fleeing from marriage. However, this is also the most controversial area of the play. At different points in the play the Danaids appear to have a specific objection to marriage with respect to their cousins, while at others they seem to object to all marriages. The crucial reason why this dilemma demands to be resolved is that it affects our presumptions of the content of the later parts of the trilogy. With our knowledge of the Danaid mythic tradition we can state with confidence that forty nine of the fifty daughters murdered their cousins on the nuptial night (the exception being Hypermnestra). If we are correct in that assumption then what is now paramount is to determine their justification. If they murdered their cousins simply because they have a pathological fear of marriage then it is they who are in the wholly unnatural state, and thus the sons of Aegyptus are murdered simply for asking for their cousins' hands. Even though they are presented to us as violent and forceful, this is only the perception of women which would, according to the audience of fifth century Athens, be considered warped. Consequently, we are then left with the theory that the sons are murdered for no good reason and the Danaids could be condemned as the Lemnian women are³. Additionally, the role of

² For full discussion, see Garvie (1969) pp.10-28. The later date of the *Supplices* is now universally accepted. The discovery of papyrus fragment Pap. Oxy. 2256.3 (from the second or early third century A.D.) tells us that Aeschylus defeated Sophocles with four plays. The last two are the *Danaids* and *Amymone* and therefore the first two were presumably the *Supplices* and the *Egyptians*. The date for Sophocles' first production in 469-8 is evidenced by the Parian marbles and further by Eusebius (*Chronika* ii 101-3) who states that it was in the 77th Olympiad (Dionysian festival 468). Consequently, the Danaid trilogy must have been produced post 468.

³ Cf. *Cho.* 613ff. at which the female slave Chorus consider the women of Lemnos the worst example of the results of feminine passion because they murder their husbands. However, it must be acknowledged that their purpose is to discredit Clytemnestra. See further Thomson (1978) p.287; 'It would, however, be unwise to press the details further, and perhaps the most we can say is that both legends sprang out of changes in the social status of women.'

Zeus would be questionable, for we are told in the text that it is he who makes all things come to pass⁴ and therefore, for no good reason at all he has sanctioned the bloodshed of forty nine men and a fine reverent king. If this were so then the Danaids would be punished but it is now almost universally accepted that their famous punishment in Hades was devised at a later date than the production of the trilogy⁵ and there is little evidence of any other punishment involving their deaths⁶. Furthermore, in none of the plays of Aeschylus do we witness a character who is wholly wrong; Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Orestes, Eteocles and Polynices are both right and wrong in their actions and it will be argued that the same formula can be applied here. We may also state that Zeus in Aeschylus is not concerned with the wanton destruction of men. Even if we were to accept that the *Prometheus* trilogy is by Aeschylus, we suspect that Zeus would have an equally strong case in *Prometheus Unbound* and a resolution would be found in the final play. Zeus always employs the motivation of the character to implement both his and their desires. Thus, it is possible to dispute those theories (for example, Caldwell's⁷, which defends the suitors and presents the Danaids as having an unresolved Oedipal fixation - a psychology alien to the characters in Aeschylus).

However, these arguments do not challenge the eminent work by Thomson, whose theory does rest on the rejection-of-marriage concept but not the concept of warped instincts, rather the principle of exogamy and endogamy. For Thomson, the Danaids are wrong to reject the marriage because they are kin to the proposers and wrong to consider such a match to be unlawful and unholy, while the cousins push the match because they are kin and the laws of marriage are such that an heiress would be expected to marry her next of kin on her father's

⁴ Zeus would be held accountable since Io's descendants appear to be free from curse and pollution (5f.). Only the ancient anger of Hera could be invoked here. However, she has not exercised any evidence of anger in the subsequent generations since Zeus' seduction of Io.

⁵ See Garvie (1969) pp. 176ff. The earliest literary evidence for the condemnation of the Danaids to endlessly carry water is from Pseudo-Plato *Axiochus* (371e) and the earliest representation in art dates from the late Roman Republic. Rohde (1925) p.292 n.1 argues that the punishment of the Danaids derives from the Mysteries - those who were uninitiated were condemned to endlessly carry water. However, Bonner (1902) pp.164-167 raises doubts about this theory. Therefore, we cannot completely rule out that Aeschylus may have known about this punishment from another source.

⁶ The scholia to E.*Hec.*886 states that Lynceus avenged his brothers by killing Danaus and all the daughters with the exception of Hypermnestra.

⁷ Caldwell (1974) p.49; '...the Danaids typify the oedipus situation; because of their excessive attachment to their father and their identification with a mother-substitute, they are unable to love other men and are therefore consumed by an incapacitating anxiety concerning sex and marriage.'

death. Thus, property remains to strengthen and enrich the family. For Thomson, it is important to acknowledge that Pelasgus, when asked to accept the Danaids' supplication, does suspect that the Egyptian marriage laws have a proviso for the peculiar position of an heiress⁸. Thus, he maintains that they may be accountable to the law of their own land (388-391). To the question of law, the Danaids do not even attempt to defend themselves⁹. Rather, they refuse to engage Pelasgus by simply stating that they will not marry their violent cousins (392ff.). Secondly, when asked why they will not be bound to the sons - is it hatred or because it is wrong to do so (at 336) - their reply is possibly based upon kinship;

‘Chorus - ‘What girl would buy a master of her own family?’

King - ‘Marriage within the family gives increase of strength.’

Chorus - ‘Yes; and if trouble comes, divorce is all too easy.’ (337-339)

However, the interpretation of the Greek is doubtful and complicated¹⁰. The first problem is with ὄνοιτο. Friis Johansen and Whittle argue that this may be a misaccentuation of ὀνοῖτο (purchase) or a misspelling of ὄνοιτο (find fault with). The emendation to ὄνοιτο is accepted by most modern scholars (Friis Johansen and Whittle, Garvie, West and Page). The second problem is with φίλους (friend) which may be emended to the participle φιλοῦσ’ (the woman who loves). What Garvie shows is that φιλοῦσ’ corresponds better with κατ’ ἐχθραν (because of hatred) in the preceding line. If we do not accept these emendations, then Thomson would be correct to argue that the Danaids fear that in a marriage of kinship they would lose the traditional family support and be subject to their cousins’ will without any defence. However, as Garvie points out, why should the Danaids not want a marriage for fear of divorce when divorce is exactly what they would want? However, in accepting the emendation to ὄνοιτο and φιλοῦσ’ we have a different translation;

- ‘What girl would object to a master that she loved?’

⁸ Thomson (1978) highlights the analogy between the Attic provision of an heiress and the Egyptian marriage laws which allowed a brother to marry his sister or his sister's daughter.

⁹ Lattimore (1958) p.18 argues that the Danaids should have said to Pelasgus ‘“there is nothing unlawful: but we hate them.”’

¹⁰ This problem is dealt with briefly, but for a full discussion see Garvie (1969) pp.220-1 and Friis Johansen and Whittle (1980) ii pp.271-273.

- 'Marriage may be advantageous in strengthening power, even if it is not based on love.'
- 'Yes, and when people are in trouble it is all too easy to desert them.'

The problem that Thomson finds in the emendation is that if the Danaids object to their cousins at 337 solely on the grounds of the Aegyptiads' personal unacceptability then this contradicts other passages in the text. Furthermore, Thomson considers that Pelasgus' line at 338 does not make sense in response to the Danaids' objection that they cannot marry without love, but 338 does make sense if they object to marrying kin, which they consider to be unholy. The plausibility of both readings defies conclusion at this stage, but any theory needs to take account of both readings until such time as either can be conclusively proven or that a papyrus find would prove that Wilamowitz's theory of a lacuna is right, and both readings would then be evaluated in that light.

The whole question of the legality of the proposed marriage is also questionable. It cannot be doubted that Pelasgus is concerned about the matter, that the women are evasive and that the Herald, in debate with Pelasgus, considers the Danaids the property of the Aegyptiads. However, against these facts stands the figure of Danaus. Many criticisms have been levelled at Aeschylus' use of the second actor in this play and there is a definite tendency to dismiss his presence. Additionally, his presumed 'inactive' role furthered arguments for an early dating of the play. In terms of legal rights, however, because Danaus is still alive, he is far and away the greatest obstacle in supposing that the Aegyptiads have the law on their side and the Danaids are, according to Thomson, evading their responsibilities in rejecting the marriage¹¹. It is certain that Athenians sanctioned the marriage of first cousins and, in terms of property, such a union would be considered preferable if it was what the father of the daughter concerned wanted (and it would be extremely questionable to force a union against the wishes of the father). We might conjecture that if the Danaids are to be considered the property of anyone then they are the property of Danaus. But if this were not the case then there would be three options: Firstly, it was possible for the next of kin to usurp the rights of the father; secondly, the Danaids are acting on their own, without the sanction of Danaus; thirdly, that Danaus had no concern about the matter and is simply deferring to his

¹¹ Thomson (1978) p.289.

headstrong daughters. With the first of these options the immediate objection is that it must be the father who determines the marriage for his daughters¹². With regard to the relationship between Danaus and his daughters, we are on firm ground. In terms of his own will, we are told explicitly by Danaus that he objects to and abhors the marriage;

‘Now worship at the altar common to these kings
and queens, and sit inside this sacred place like doves
swarming in fear for refuge from those hawks,
the kindred who are enemies, defilers of the family.
How could bird eat bird, and claim purity?
How can a bridegroom take a girl against her will
from an unwilling father, and be undefiled?’¹³ (224-228)

In further support of this, we may also argue that the Danaids acknowledge that it has been their father’s wise helmsmanship that has so far conveyed them to safety and they have accepted his advice on how to act and taken his instruction on prayer. Thus, the text abounds with evidence to prove that Danaus is, without doubt, controlling events and we can further presume that it will be Danaus who will control the action when the Danaids arrange to murder their husbands. Nevertheless, against this it could be maintained that, in the actual act of supplication, Danaus has no actual input and certainly in the agon between Pelasgus and the Danaids he is kept quiet by Aeschylus. Why Aeschylus chooses this method is obviously dramatic, for the supplication scene has a charged atmosphere and our attention is directed to the dilemma of Pelasgus, who is under a constant assault from the Chorus. Thus, there is no respite for the king from the desperate women. Lloyd-Jones¹⁴ correctly argues that Danaus’ silence is essentially dramatic and preceded by Queen Atossa’s silence during the messenger scene in the *Persae*¹⁵. As Lloyd-Jones says;

¹² The marriage laws in fifth century Athens are discussed in detail by MacDowell (1978) pp.86-89 and with regard to heiresses, pp.95-98. MacDowell states; ‘If he [a potential husband] wished to marry, he had to come to an agreement with the father or other *kyrios* of a suitable woman, because a marriage was legally valid only if it was preceded by the act called *engye*. (The only exception was that, when a woman’s father died, *epidikasia* could be a substitute for *engye*...)’

¹³ All translations from Ewans (1996).

¹⁴ Lloyd-Jones (1964) pp.363-5.

¹⁵ As we have discussed above, Ch.2 pp.54ff. Aeschylus makes dramatic use of the silent presence of Clytemnestra. She is present on-stage but silent throughout the parodos and first stasimon of the *Agamemnon*.

‘If in the supplication scene the Chorus does the talking, that does not mean that Danaus simply obeys his daughters’ will. They tell us he is their leader, and there is no reason why we should not believe them. Throughout the play identity of purpose between father and daughters is complete, and when they speak together, Danaus is always in command.’¹⁶

One final point of legality has yet to be considered; the moral element which raises the question of whether the Danaids object to the marriage because they consider union with their cousins as incestuous. They present the marriage as contravening Themis. However, Garvie¹⁷ conclusively challenges this view by means of the presumed content of the trilogy. According to the mythic tradition, forty nine of the Danaids murdered their husbands, but one daughter (Hypermnestra) spared her husband out of love or the desire for children¹⁸. Although we know that dramatists had a free hand to interpret myth, the actions of Hypermnestra are a cornerstone of the myth and an essential part of Argive tradition. Bearing this in mind, we can conclude with Garvie’s argument that incest could not be an issue; for if it were then the marriage of Hypermnestra and Lynceus would be considered incestuous. It would therefore be unacceptable for this marriage to be confirmed at the end of the trilogy or accepted as a basis for the monarchy of Argos.

If we accept the view of the Danaids as regards their cousins, then the cousins are presented as forceful, violent and irreverent while the Danaids themselves are, for the most, respectful of the gods and properly subject to the will of their father and the protection afforded them by Pelasgus. Hence, we may believe that the Danaids are the very antithesis to the Aegyptiads. This antithesis has encouraged scholars to examine why there is such a gulf between the two parties and, as a result, to determine their motivation accordingly. Couch¹⁹ argues that the motivation of the Danaids is essentially political and that the antipathy between the Aegyptiads and the Danaids embodies the antipathy between the two represented cultures. On the one hand, the Aegyptiads adhere to their barbaric Egyptian culture and on

¹⁶ Lloyd-Jones (1964) pp.369-70.

¹⁷ Garvie (1969) p.216. See also Winnington-Ingram (1983) pp.51-60.

¹⁸ Cf. Thomson (1978) p.286 who considers that Hypermnestra spares Lynceus because he agrees to spare her virginity.

¹⁹ Couch (1932) p.iv.

the other, the Danaids adhere to the Greek culture from which the whole family have originated. Couch further argues that the Danaids believe it is better to flee in order to preserve their Greek traditions and worship than to surrender themselves to the irreverent cousins for whom they have no respect. However, an immediate objection to this is that both Danaids and Aegyptians are all of the same family, and further difficulty arises with the lack of supporting textual evidence. Whilst it is true that the Danaids' name is Greek, while the Aegyptiads name is foreign²⁰ and that the Herald is clearly impious, whether the figures of the Danaids represent the desire for the maintenance of Greek culture is questionable. In the supplication scene we have clear evidence of their passionate oriental natures. For example, in response to Pelasgus' desire to put their case to the people's assembly, the Danaids react by expounding an oriental concept of monarchy in which the power of the king needs no mandate and is certainly not accountable to the people. They state;

'You are the city, you are the people.

A lord subjected to no scrutiny,

You rule the altar of this country's central hearth,

With just one vote - your own assent;

And sitting with one sceptre on the throne

You decide everything; now ward away pollution.' (372-376)

Furthermore, their respect for all things Greek can be called into question when they state that they will profane the sanctuary by committing suicide by the statues of the gods. If they respect what is Greek then why do they threaten the most outrageous pollution on the Greek city of Argos? Thus, although they worship the same gods, their excessive nature is far from the typical national Greek as embodied by Pelasgus. In contrast, Pelasgus sees them as typifying orientalism. He cannot believe that they are Greek and he marvels at their appearance (276ff.). With the case of the cousins, we must ask ourselves whether they are, in fact, any more oriental than the Danaids. This is perhaps impossible to ascertain, for they are a silent force in the play and we have no sure testimonial to the effect that they are of greater oriental persuasion than the Danaids. All we have is hearsay concerning their *hybris* which, although it is probably correct, does not equate with barbarism. The Herald certainly shows no respect for the gods in the manner that he attempts to wrench the suppliant women

²⁰ Finley in McCall (1972) p.65.

from the altar. Yet this does not prove that the sons of Aegyptus sanction the act. Even if the Herald is the physical embodiment of the suitors then again we have hybristic men rather than increased orientalism. Thus, we cannot equate hybris with orientalism and we can appreciate that Aeschylus did not do so, especially since Aeschylus' only other surviving play with an oriental setting (*Persae*) far from equates orientalism with hybris. Rather, Darius (*Pers.*808ff.) understands as hybris the sacrilege committed by the forces that Xerxes left in Greece who are attempting to overreach the power allotted to Persia. Darius does not consider them hybristic simply because they are oriental, for he catalogues a long list of Persian kings who conquered without committing hybris or angering the gods.

Consequently, if the objection of the Danaids to the specific marriage with their cousins is neither political, legal nor indeed moral, then we are left with the view that it may be personal and, indeed, this is the most prevalent theory. Hence, we arrive at the argument that the suitors are personally unacceptable to the Danaids. Why they would be so unacceptable is clear enough; the Danaids see them as forceful, violent and trying to foist their will on them against their own will and against their father's. In the agon with Pelasgus, when asked whether they object to them because of hatred, their answer is clear. They say 'we will not marry these men because they are forceful, violent men'²¹. Their constant allusions to the cousins are in terms of their being aggressive and violent. Within the imagery they employ is the embodiment of the theme of hunted and hunter (see especially 349, 788, 816ff.). Nevertheless, whilst it is morally wrong to force a girl to marry against her will,²² there is definitely more in the Danaids' motivation than the *prima facie* objection to violence and forcefulness. The Danaids also object to the cousins in terms of Justice and righteousness and, more ominously, desire to remain unwed with their virginity unconquered. Consequently, we find ourselves returning to our original problem - what are the Danaids objecting to? Is it marriage to their cousins or marriage *qua* marriage? The dilemma has no easy answer as within the text there is enough evidence to support each concept and deny both. As Garvie²³ observes, references to both concepts are equal. Against marriage in

²¹ This, however, depends on the reading of 337. See below pp.142-3.

²² Although legally a woman did not need to actually consent to a marriage, see MacDowell (1978) p.86; 'It was not legally necessary for the woman to be present or to consent or even to know that she was being married.'

²³ Garvie (1969) p.221.

general the text provides numerous examples at; 144ff., 392, 426, 528, 643, 790, 798-9, 804-7, 818, 1017 and against marriage with respect to the sons of Aegyptus; 30, 80, 104, 223ff., 335, 741, 750, 817, 1063.

Perhaps the best way to evaluate this is to establish a set of choices for ourselves. Either, firstly, the Danaids are fanatically virginal and, as a result, not only object to their current suitors but would object to any. Thus, they are Artemis devotees and pray to her to remain ever virgin. Or, secondly, that the force and violence of their suitors has warped their instincts to make them terrified of the concept of marriage. Or, thirdly, that because they object to a specific marriage they are simply stating that they object to all marriages. Our first choice is perhaps the least sensible one for we know that, although they desire to be virgins, they only make two references to Artemis (145-7, 1030). As Garvie²⁴ argues, how can we support a theory based on two minor appeals in the text²⁵. Also, if they are fanatically virginal then why does Danaus feel the need (at 980ff) to advise them to remain chaste? With our second choice presented by Winnington-Ingram²⁶ we are closer to understanding the Danaids. However, as Garvie²⁷ further argues, the references against marriage qua marriage are too numerous and specific to be reactive psychology and again, the advice of Danaus must be taken into account. Subsequently, we must attempt to explain why the Danaids repeatedly claim to abhor marriage, but while they also abhor marriage with their cousins, they still receive moral guidance from their father. At this stage, having examined several prevalent theories, we are no nearer to providing an answer to the motivation dilemma. Thus, it is perhaps best to suspend our judgement until we have evaluated the motivation of the other characters in the play.

As with all Aeschylean tragedy, behind the workings of human affairs is the nebulous will of divinity. Without doubt, the prime divine character in this play is Zeus. From the very first

²⁴ Garvie (1969) p.215.

²⁵ The reference to Artemis at 145-7 has been questioned and *Διὸς κόρα* has been considered to be Athena. *σεμνὴ ἐνώπι* considered to be a building on the Acropolis visible to the audience which would symbolise Athena's power and protection. However, in agreement with Garvie, Aeschylus probably did not have any specific place in mind but was highlighting the Danaids' defenceless status. Also, as Friis Johansen and Whittle (1980 ii p.121) observe, the use of *Διὸς κόρα* often signifies Artemis.

²⁶ Winnington-Ingram (1983) pp.60-61.

²⁷ Garvie (1969) p.222.

word of the text Zeus is presented in his many roles which Lattimore²⁸ lists as; Zeus ancestor, Zeus of the guest, Zeus saviour, Zeus the sky/ weather god²⁹, and Zeus the supreme mind (83-103) and to this we can add Zeus, god of suppliants. The importance of Zeus in the play cannot be over stressed. As Fris Johansen and Whittle³⁰ observe, the name Zeus occurs fifty five times, making an average of once every twenty lines, more than in any other Aeschylean text. In terms of motivation, the aspects of Zeus we are concerned with are Zeus the ancestor, Zeus of the supreme mind and Zeus the upholder of *δικη*.

Throughout the play, the Danaids appeal to Zeus as their father, the begetter of their race. In the parodos and in the hymn to Zeus the Danaids repeatedly state the accountability to them of Zeus. From a dramatic point of view, the immediate purpose of their connection with Zeus is to establish their kin relationship with Argos which they will use with effect on Pelasgus. But, more importantly, the Danaids believe that their paternal relationship with Zeus allows them to challenge him, thus challenging his benevolence;

‘Could Zeus not be assailed
by just reproaches, if
he does not pay respect to Epaphos,
The offspring of the cow
And his own son -
if his eyes turn away
from our appeal?’ (167-170)

Zeus, as the Danaid’s ancestor, may also provide a beginning to understanding the question of motivation in the play. Zeus in the parodos and in the hymn is the lover of Io and, as such, he is her pursuer, not with violence or aggression but with tenderness and love, eventually bringing her respite from her sufferings which were inflicted by Hera (586*f.*). The fact that Io was impregnated by his breath rather than sexual consummation should not cause undue concern, for what is important is that the Danaids do acknowledge that the union of Io and Zeus was motivated by love. However, as yet, they do not seem to be

²⁸ Lattimore (1958) p.21.

²⁹ When the Danaids appeal to Zeus to scupper the Aegyptiad’s ship to prevent them reaching Argos.

³⁰ Fris Johansen and Whittle (1980) ii. p.5.

capable of love. If, in Aeschylus, divinities sometimes provide the example of correct attitudes then perhaps it is for the Danaids to look to the union of love between Zeus and Io to begin to resolve their apparent problems with love, sex and marriage and, subsequently, to appreciate the beauty of marital love. The description of Zeus as a tender lover (574ff.) is also the very antithesis of the sons of Aegyptus, who pursue the Danaids unremittingly. Thus, instead of gently wooing them as Zeus did Io, they stalk the Danaids like a bird of prey looking for a victim. Hence, marriage becomes not a union but a violent hunt. However, doubts are expressed by Murray³¹ concerning the position of Zeus. Murray argues that Zeus is held indirectly responsible for the Danaids' flight. Consequently, for Murray, Aeschylus' intention with the Io motif is to parallel the suit of Zeus with that of the Aegyptiads as both result in flight. Zeus is certainly presented as a violent forceful lover in the *Prometheus*, but in the *Supplikes* it is Hera that is considered to be the orchestrator of Io's woes. In the *Prometheus*, Zeus is presented as inflamed by desire for Io; he haunts her dreams, demands that she should be thrown out of her father's house and distorts her physical appearance and her sanity (P.V. 640ff.). However, in the *Supplikes*, Zeus is the gentle lover pictured as easing Io's pain with his breath and impregnating her at the same time. As a result of the marked differences in these accounts, Murray's thesis is questionable. Firstly, if we are meant to think of Zeus' pursual of Io as paralleling that of the Aegyptiads, then why do the Danaids present Zeus in such a gentle manner and attribute Io's suffering to Hera. Secondly, it would be paradoxical to consider Zeus as sexually aggressive when he is constantly referred to as a god of Justice and a god who protects suppliants. Consequently, it makes greater dramatic sense to consider that Zeus in the *Supplikes* is presented as what a lover ought to be, tender and loving rather than violent and aggressive as are the sons of Aegyptus. If there is a question concerning the beginning of his advances then it is definitely suppressed by Aeschylus in favour of a more gentle approach. However, as a cautionary note, although any violence of Zeus' is not stressed, the jealousy of Hera is and it is her jealousy that results in Io's suffering. If there is any doubt concerning the actions of Zeus, then it is that his actions provoke his wife and his adulterous love does not correspond with the concept of faithful matrimony.

Their perception of the sons of Aegyptus hunting the marriage is arguably what the Danaids

³¹ R.D. Murray (1958) pp.56-76.

consider to be *hybris* and contravening Justice. Therefore, perhaps their constant references to their cousins' proposal as impious and against Right are based not upon the fact that the cousins are kin (and it is thus impious to marry them), or that they object to marriage *qua* marriage, but that their cousins hunt marriage in an aggressive manner. Gagarin³² observes that the Danaids believe that they have the support of Zeus, which they claim at; 1, 26, 41, 91-93 and the support of *δίκη*, claimed at; 78, 343, 395, 406, 430 and 437. However, Gagarin also notes that simply claiming to have Justice on your side does not mean that you do and it is certainly true that the Herald (at 916) also claims to be acting with Justice. This is a similar situation to that of Eteocles and Polynices - we do not know what alienated Polynices from Thebes so we cannot really determine for sure on whose side Justice lies, the point being that both can claim *δίκη*. Additionally, at *Cho.*461, Orestes envisages that in his revenge, Justice will clash with Justice and Ares with Ares³³. Gagarin³⁴ further argues that when asked to support their case, the Danaids are vague and use the threat of suicide to win their cause rather than any legal or moral arguments. However, we do feel that the Danaids are closer to Justice, not because of kinship with Zeus, as the sons of Aegyptus also share in this claim, but because of their repeated claim of the cousins' *hybris* and the violent, irreverent behaviour of the Herald, who may not be symbolic but who certainly does succeed in ensuring that the audience's goodwill lies with the Danaids.

With regard to Zeus as the upholder of Justice, the Danaids believe that in his golden scales their case is by far the stronger (402ff.)³⁵. However, understanding Zeus' Justice is always a difficult matter. Nevertheless, we can determine that Justice is already at work. The Danaids repeatedly pray that Zeus will protect them from their cousins and believe that they have come so far (to Argos) with his aid. However, by the end of the play, the suitors have also made the journey to Argos without trouble. It could be argued that if the Danaids had

³² Gagarin (1976) p.129.

³³ However, Orestes is not acknowledging that Clytemnestra's actions are just, simply that she may claim to have Justice. See above Ch.3 p.97 n.44.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ The text presents Zeus' Justice as *ἐτεροπρεπής* which possibly means that his scales may incline either way or alternatively now one way, now the other (Tucker 1889 p.88). However, the point of the Danaids is that although Zeus' scales are evenly balanced, leading the just life tips the scales in their favour for they consider their flight as just and the Aegyptiads pursuit as unjust. Consequently, Zeus will uphold their claim.

Justice completely on their side then Zeus could effectively assist them. Why Zeus has not, as yet, done so could be for a variety of reasons. We know that the suitors are proud, aggressive men and that Zeus abhors such qualities, so once again we can present ourselves with choices. Firstly, Zeus does not hold the sons of Aegyptus to be demanding anything unnatural and this could certainly be the case if the Danaids objected to marriage qua marriage, which would be unnatural. Secondly, that Zeus has not, as yet, acted for either party. Why this should be, we do not know for we cannot fathom the inscrutable mind of Zeus. For our aid, we can speculate using presumption of the contents of the latter parts of the trilogy. As aforementioned, we can safely assume that forty nine of the suitors were murdered, so it can be assumed that they were, to some extent, deserving of their fate. However, we know that violence begets violence³⁶, so the Danaids (who may have the will of Zeus and Justice on their side, being the victims) will still be guilty of hybris and must, therefore, atone. Thus, Justice will be taken upon them in return. Consequently, we can decide that, in this first part of the trilogy, the beginnings of Zeus' purpose can be witnessed. The Danaids realise that Zeus' purpose is hard to see;

‘May Zeus make sure all this comes true.

What he desires is hard

to hunt down, for the paths

inside his understanding stretch

through thick and shady woods

and they seem infinite.’ (86-90)

Though we may speculate that Zeus' Justice is at work, it is difficult to appreciate what the motivation of Zeus is. We feel that the scheme of Zeus is not simply regarding the Danaids but has been at work since his love of Io. Zeus may have come to Io in Egypt as the gentle lover but the union was forced to begin with, for even though he is the gentle lover, his actions do arouse the jealousy of his wife Hera who brings Io manifold sufferings and it is these sufferings that the Danaids identify with. However, we know that the Chorus of the *Agamemnon* perceived that, in Zeus' rule, suffering brings with it greater understanding;

‘It is Zeus who has put men on the way to wisdom by establishing

as a valid law “By suffering they shall win understanding”.’ (176-178)

Nevertheless, although the Danaids relate how the suffering of Io resulted in greater glory

³⁶ See further Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.57.

for her, they have not, as yet, learned that her reward was gained through the acceptance of the love of Zeus and thus, her acceptance brings its own knowledge³⁷. Consequently, although the Danaids identify with her and envisage her as the prime mother, they are as yet only experiencing the pain and are without the knowledge needed for greater understanding. Thus, we can conclude with Murray, who states that 'their perception of the similarity between themselves and Io is woefully limited and superficial'³⁸.

Zeus' love for Io is essentially what begins the Danaid trilogy. It is from this love that all events will occur. As a result, the suffering experienced by all characters in the play can be seen as part of divine planning. The aim of this planning is far from certain for without the other parts of the trilogy we do not know how the tragedy was resolved. However, a clue can be found in the placing of events. Io was originally from Argos and it is to her homeland that the Danaids flee. As a result of their supplication to Pelasgus, King of Argos, they also implicate Argos in the events. Furthermore, according to the legend, Hypermnestra and Lynceus become the monarchs of Argos and thus, the progenitors of the Argolid monarchy. In their ascension to the throne they bring to the monarchy the genus of Zeus and thus all generations henceforth can claim descent from Zeus. As Finley comments;

'In describing himself and his kingdom, Pelasgus made no claim of divine descent. The Greece over which he rules, though vigorous and incorrupted, is parochial. Zeus's love for Io was the hand of divinity touching Argos, and the destiny which it imported was at once higher and harder.....In the question whether to repatriate her [Io's] descendants, Argos confronts an element of immensity in things which endangers its earlier security, and the troubling destiny which has been Io's alone now touches the city.'³⁹

Consequently, we can conclude that the suffering of Io through to the suffering of Pelasgus and Argos is preparation for the greater destiny they will receive. Nevertheless, we must anticipate the argument that Argos is presented in a favourable light and, without the other plays, it is uncertain that Argos was implicated in subsequent events. Although, to dispute

³⁷ As we have seen, the concept of learning through suffering is difficult to reconcile with the characters of the *Oresteia*. See above Ch.1 pp.24-5.

³⁸ R.D. Murray (1958) p.69.

³⁹ Finley in McCall (1972) pp.67-68.

this, we need to seek refuge in presumptions on the final plays, it is arguable that trouble for Argos is evident from the *Supplices*. The whole Argive Assembly accepts the Danaids' supplication and repatriates them as citizens. As a result, when the Danaids murder their husbands, presumably within the walls of Argos, they bring upon the city a great pollution, as great as if they had hanged themselves in the shrine of the gods⁴⁰. With Argos now fully implicated in the action it is certain that the city would also have to be part of the resolution. Subsequently, we can appreciate that the vast expanse of the mind of Zeus incorporates all elements of the play and we can imagine that Argos, the Danaids and perhaps Danaus, will all gain greater stature and knowledge through their experiences.

The Danaid trilogy is ostensibly the tragedy of the Danaids but as we have seen, as a consequence of the will of Zeus and the actions of the Danaids, both Pelasgus and Argos become involved in the action. With Pelasgus, our immediate conception of this character is akin to an Homeric king. Proudly he relates his lineage and extent of his power (at 251ff.) and in his first encounter with the Danaids he assumes the air of confidence and self-control. However, this image of a self-controlled Pelasgus will be annihilated when he becomes aware of the ramification of the Danaids' supplication claim. As Garvie⁴¹ comments, for the first time in the extant plays of Greek tragedy we witness a genuine conflict in the mind of a character. What the suppliants demand of Pelasgus is that he should offer them safe harbourage and protection against the sons of Aegyptus. However, Pelasgus is not immediately convinced and again we have to face the problem of the disputed lines 337-339.⁴² The problem is whether Pelasgus is arguing that marriage with kin increases family strength or whether marriage, even if it is not based on love, increases power. Whatever the correct reading of this, we can deduce that Pelasgus is attempting to reason with the Danaids, for he realises that what the Danaids are asking for may well result in war for Argos (342, 356-8, 412). Pelasgus does not feel confident that he has Justice on his side since he has not been involved in the dispute from the outset (344). The reason for this lack of confidence is shown at 387ff. where Pelasgus suspects that the sons of Aegyptus may have the law on

⁴⁰ The fact that the Danaids bring pollution upon Argos by murdering their husbands is ironic considering their prayers for Zeus' blessing upon the city at 630ff. However, it is not surprising when we consider that they are, in effect, blackmailing Pelasgus with the threat of pollution entailed by suicide in the shrine of the gods.

⁴¹ Garvie (1969) p.130.

⁴² See above pp.142-3.

their side. Pelasgus is not aware of any actual law in Egypt but he suspects that the next of kin may have rights. This may be as a result of the marriage laws operating in Greece.⁴³

Although Pelasgus' concerns are essentially worldly, the Danaids appeal to him religiously and to each reservation of his they threaten him with the anger of Zeus, who protects the suppliant. Firstly the suppliants threaten Pelasgus as a result of his fear that he cannot determine the Justice of their cause (347). Secondly, at his reservation that he cannot assist without harm, the suppliants again assault him with the threat of the wrath of Zeus (381). Finally, when Pelasgus feels that the dilemma needs time for greater thought and debate, they threaten him with the endless wrath sustained on future generations by refusing a suppliant (428ff.). Pelasgus remains somewhat vacillating, as if the threat of the wrath of Zeus was not enough. To this, the Danaids play their trump card - that they will hang themselves from the statues of the gods, thereby bringing upon Argos the ultimate pollution. The dilemma that Pelasgus faces is clear. If he protects the suppliants in accordance with divine law, he will bring a destructive war on the city of Argos simply for the sake of women. However, if he averts the war by refusing the suppliants then he will bring upon the city the wrath of Zeus, thus entailing such pollution as can never be purified and generations will suffer. As Finley comments;

'He stands at the lonely moment of decision which all Aeschylus'

heroes face and in which Hypermnestra will follow him (vv. 407-417)'.⁴⁴

In response to this dilemma, Pelasgus takes unusual action; he plans to refer the whole issue to the Argive assembly (365ff.). Pelasgus presents two reasons for this action. Firstly, he states;

'You do not sit as suppliants beside
my hearth alone; if pollution falls on all
the city, it should be the people's task to find a cure.'

Secondly he fears the reproach of this citizens;

'....even though I rule; may they never say
if some disaster falls on us, "Paying respect
to strangers you destroyed your native land."' (400-402)

⁴³ See above p.144 n.12.

⁴⁴ Finley (1972) p.67.

Why Aeschylus chose to present Pelasgus deferring the ultimate decision to the Argive assembly has aroused great interest, for as Burian⁴⁵ comments, it would be incongruous that the tragic agent is incapable of acting on his own. Kitto⁴⁶ conclusively rejects the political analysis which suggests that Aeschylus is presenting the correct relationship between ruler and ruled. Kitto maintains that Aeschylus is not concerned with promoting the ways of Argos or theorising over the correct behaviour of leader and led, or allowing contemporary ideas of democracy to intrude in the play. Furthermore, Lloyd-Jones⁴⁷ considering whether Pelasgus' dilemma reflects fifth century Argolid politics also cautions us to remember that we know so little concerning whether Argos was governed by a democracy in the 460s that we cannot conclude beyond conjecture that Pelasgus' decision was motivated by political reasons. Burian also contends that;

‘Aeschylus, in fact, never clarifies the relations of power between king and *demos*; he is not describing a constitution, but constructing a drama.’⁴⁸

Consequently, if Aeschylus is not presenting an incapable tragic figure or presenting Pelasgus as motivated by democratic concerns then it is for a dramatic purpose that Pelasgus decides for his people. Immediately, Aeschylus presents an excellent contrast of atmosphere. When Pelasgus enters he is confident in his power but, when faced with such an immense decision, he feels that he should not decide all alone. As Burian⁴⁹ states, although he does not lack the *κράτος* to act on his own, he is unwilling to do so without consent. Thus, for Burian Pelasgus' decision is simply his own refusal and not some limitation on his power. However, in addition to this, we feel that the involvement of the Argive assembly was a deliberate choice by Aeschylus and will become more important in the development of the trilogy. As discussed above, the placing of events and the outcome for the Argolid government implicates Argos in the action and is especially perhaps part of the scheme of Zeus. Hence, we feel that Argos too must have its part to play in the responsibility of events. Garvie observes that;

⁴⁵ Burian (1974) p.7.

⁴⁶ Kitto (1961) p.10.

⁴⁷ Lloyd-Jones (1964) pp.357-60.

⁴⁸ Burian (1974) p.7 n.10.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

‘It is not only Aeschylus who involved the Argive demos in the story of the Danaids. It seems to have been connected independently in the tradition.’⁵⁰

Thus, if we conclude that Pelasgus, by virtue of deciding that the Argive assembly should be consulted, desires their support and the assembly, by virtue of its decision, offers that support then we can definitely concur with Garvie that;

‘The truth seems to be that Aeschylus is concerned to show us that the decision is a joint one, that both Argos and its king are responsible for granting asylum to the Danaids. Or, rather, Pelasgus is the representative of Argos. His dilemma is really the dilemma of the city itself.’⁵¹

The alliance of king and assembly can be witnessed in Danaus’ speech (at 610ff.). Danaus, relating the events of the assembly to his daughters, describes firstly how the decision was unanimous. This is important, as we feel that once the results of their decision manifest themselves, it can be said that it was the judgement of the assembly without dissension. After he has related this he then tells how the king spoke so eloquently in favour of the Danaids and warned of the inevitability of pollution of the assembly should they reject the suppliants. It has been argued that the eloquence of Pelasgus undermines the decision of the people⁵², but this does not take into account the construction of the speech. It is important that Danaus first relates how the assembly voted and then the speech of Pelasgus. Thus, we see the Argives in their own light. Furthermore, what Pelasgus says is simply a statement of fact; that pollution will be entailed by the rejection of the suppliants. Thus, the assembly is voting in accordance with religious observances and not under manipulation. Further evidence for the connection between the fate of Argos and the fate of the Danaids can be found in the fact that Danaus attributes their success with the Argive assembly to the will of Zeus (624). Although it can be said that Danaus’ believing that Zeus’ will is at work does not mean that it is necessarily so, it does seem that the wealth of evidence we have examined so far proves that Danaus is correct in maintaining that the will of Zeus is in harmony with human motivation.

⁵⁰ Garvie (1969) p.153.

⁵¹ Garvie (1969) p.154.

⁵² Burian (1974) p.11.

In this intensely tragic scenario, the will of Zeus becomes questionable, for we may ask ourselves whether, although Argos as a whole may benefit from a greater destiny, the same can also be said of Pelasgus. Winnington-Ingram⁵³ speculates that Pelasgus is killed, probably in the war with the sons of Aegyptus in the second play and that Danaus becomes an interim king between Pelasgus and Lynceus. Winnington-Ingram justifies this with the fact that Danaus being king of Argos was a solid part of the tradition and that it would be impossible for him to become so after he had orchestrated the murder of the bridegrooms. Thus, we are left with the assumption that Pelasgus dies as a result of the tragic dilemma. In response to this, Kitto⁵⁴ asks why this tragedy has come upon the individual figure of Pelasgus who, through no fault in character, sense, intellect or morality that we are made aware of, is made to suffer. We feel that in Pelasgus we witness the true tragic hero; unlike Agamemnon and Eteocles he does not labour under a curse or have a propensity to commit any untoward action, yet in events where he has taken the most advisable course of action, he has to pay the ultimate price, to die in the forthcoming war with the Aegyptiads. We may explain this contradiction by arguing that although we believe that Pelasgus has made the best decision, in the course of the trilogy his decision to accept the supplication of the Danaids may not be as wise as we first thought⁵⁵. Or we may accept the theory of Lloyd-Jones⁵⁶ that Pelasgus had no choice but to act as he did. This, however, creates a difficult scenario of Zeus orchestrating the destruction of a human being for no purpose and we would be left with the conclusion that Pelasgus is simply the puppet of the gods. However, we hope that there is a less fatalistic conclusion. Perhaps we might picture a totalitarian Zeus who subverts the individual to the good of the cause but it is doubtful whether Zeus was so politically inclined. Furthermore, Pelasgus does have a choice, albeit a difficult one; he can reject the Danaids and face the wrath of Zeus if he so chooses but he simply chooses what he believes to be a more advisable course of action. Perhaps the closest we will get to understanding why the king faces this tragedy is through the reading of Kitto⁵⁷ who attributes the tragedy of Pelasgus to a fault in the universe. To this we may add - such things happen, such is the nature of Tragedy.

⁵³ Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.57.

⁵⁴ Kitto (1963) p.9.

⁵⁵ Gagarin (1976) p.128.

⁵⁶ Lloyd-Jones (1964) pp.370-1.

⁵⁷ Kitto (1963) p.9.

We have now reached the end of our preliminary examination of motivation in the *Supplices* but we have as yet come to no firm conclusion of what the Danaids are actually opposed to. To assist in this last phase we can recall the firm conclusions we have drawn. Importantly, we have determined that, as yet, Justice does not solely belong to any single character but that it is closely bound-up with the will of Zeus. We are now aware that although each character is personally motivated, their motivation is in accordance with the scheme of destiny being planned by the will of Zeus. Having ascertained this, it is now essential that we can determine why the Danaids are so ambiguous in their motivation. The thesis we must present must take into account certain undeniable factors; the Danaids express aversion to both marriage with their cousins and marriage in general and Danaus counsels then to remain chaste.

The Danaids' objection to the marriage with their cousins is perfectly understandable as it is based upon the violence and forcefulness of their suitors. We have examined above the argument that for them to simply accuse the suitors of these qualities may not be enough evidence and that the Herald may not be representative of the cousins. However, is it really possible, after the repeated use of the word 'hybris' to describe the suitors (a word used most sparingly by Aeschylus), that we are meant to simply disregard it as the rambling of an hysterical chorus? Additionally, the only contact of the suitors is through the Herald and, if we are to accept that the suitors are making a claim backed up by a belief in Justice via the Herald, then we have to accept that the Herald is their representative, otherwise we are simply picking and choosing the lines that fit our particular theory. Since, then, the Herald must be the representative of the suitors, he also typifies what the Danaids find abhorrent in their cousins.

The Danaids also object to their cousins on the grounds that the marriage is against Themis. We have seen that this cannot be because it would be incestuous to do so, therefore, their objection must be based upon another 'legal' premise. As examined previously, the probable reason why the Danaids object to the marriage is because the Aegyptiads, as kin, are the traditional protectors, yet they are presented as hunters stalking a marriage (816ff.). Additionally, they are persisting in a suit that is not only against the will of the Danaids but

also against the will of their father, Danaus. Insofar as the Danaids object to their cousins on these grounds, δίκη is on their side. However, we know that at points they object to marriage entirely. To answer this, we are wisest to contemplate why Aeschylus wanted their motivation to remain ambiguous. The key to this perhaps lies in the remaining plays of the trilogy. We know that the Danaids murdered their bridegrooms, but if they acted solely because their cousins are guilty of hybris then it could be argued that they had a strong case for Justice on their side. Therefore, there would be no real need for resolution in the final play. Furthermore, there would also be difficulties in the reconciliation between the view of Danaus and his daughters with that of Hypermnestra. However, if we align their hatred of their cousins with an irrational hatred of marriage, then the question of Justice is far from certain. Consequently, they would be held to account for the murder on two counts, as violent agents and for murdering the bridegrooms for irrational motives. Thus, they are half right and half wrong, as Kopff argues;

‘While they are right in fleeing a forced marriage, they are regarded as wrong in extrapolating their fear of *this* marriage into aversion to *any* marriage.’⁵⁸

The same scenario can also be seen with other Aeschylean protagonists. For example, Eteocles desires to fight Polynices, not only because he feels the conflict is inevitable or that he is sacrificing himself, but because he actively desires to kill his brother. Hence, with Eteocles, we have both a noble and dishonourable motivation. The same can also be said of Clytemnestra; ostensibly, she murders Agamemnon in revenge for Iphigenia, but she also desires his death for less honourable reasons and it is debatable whether it is desire for power or hatred of her husband that drives her.

If we accept that the Danaids murder their husbands as a result of dual motivation rather than trying to dispute either of their apparent motives, then we come closer to understanding the will of Zeus and the question of Justice. We know that, although the Danaids claim to have Justice on their side, we have as yet little evidence to support their claim. From the events of the trilogy we might suppose that neither side has a clear claim on Justice. However, this can only be so if the Danaids are fundamentally wrong in their objection. If their hatred of the cousins was inspired only by the cousins’ actions then they would have a straightforward

⁵⁸ Kopff (1981) p.105.

claim, yet we know that this is not the case. Therefore, if the Danaids' motivation was less straightforward (perhaps an element of it was completely wrong) then we can more readily understand why Justice takes neither part until the resolution offered in the final play. Additionally, it is hard to believe that Justice in any case could be wholly attached to women who show, in the agon with Pelasgus, a potentiality for violence and a lack of concern for their ancestral kin.

With regard to the will of Zeus, we have already determined that, in the grand scheme of the trilogy it is the purpose of Zeus to establish a divine progenitor to the Argolid monarchy. The Danaids have their part to play in this scheme. Zeus, who has foreknowledge, is himself arranging for the rule of Hypermnestra and Lynceus, which can only come about by the events of the trilogy - the murdering of all but one cousin, the punishment of their executioners and the involvement of Argos in these events. However, it is the dual motivation of the Danaids and the hybris of the sons of Aegyptus which allow the will of Zeus to be realised.

The dual motivation theory is perhaps best challenged by the advice of Danaus. Again, we must ask ourselves why Danaus is made to advise his daughters to guard their chastity if they are fanatically against marriage. Any theory arguing that the Danaids are against marriage qua marriage will have to reconcile this dilemma. The best that we can offer is to cite the argument of Robertson⁵⁹ who argues that Danaus' instruction (178) is in order to make clear the contrast between the Danaids and their hybristic cousins. This may not be entirely convincing, but any analysis of Danaus is difficult given his limited role in the play. We must, therefore, satisfy ourselves that the answer was provided in the missing plays.

Strong support for dual motivation can be found in the exodus song of the second chorus and in the fragment of Aphrodite's speech in the final play. In response to the Danaids'

⁵⁹ Robertson (1963) p.105.

rejection of Aphrodite, the subsidiary chorus⁶⁰ counsel them to remember the extent of the power of Aphrodite and the need for a sophron attitude to the gods. The Danaids obviously at this point are on the verge of causing offence to Aphrodite and are presented as excessive in their refusal to even contemplate sexual union. Consequently, any resolution to the trilogy must reconcile the Danaids with the concept of marriage. The fragment of Aphrodite's speech may have been part of a defence of Hypermnestra or it may be an extract from her judgement in a trial. Using the Oresteia as a model, Hypermnestra may have been brought to trial in the final play⁶¹. However, whether it was Hypermnestra that was tried or whether we are safe to assume that there was even a trial is discussed by Garvie⁶². Firstly, the only literary evidence for Hypermnestra's trial is from Pausanias⁶³ which cannot be considered reliable for a dramatic text. Secondly, that it seems unlikely that it should be Hypermnestra's actions that need explanation rather than her sisters, who actually murdered their husbands. Additionally, Lynceus must surely have had to avenge the murder of his brothers. Finally, the themes of the *Supplices* could not be reconciled if Hypermnestra stood trial alone. Either way, what the speech praises is eros, as the driving force of the universe. As Zeus loved Io with gentle passion, so the Danaids will have to learn that marriage for them is a prerequisite to resolution.

In conclusion, the motivation in the Danaid trilogy is almost impossible to determine with only the evidence of the first play and a short extract from Aphrodite's speech in the final play. However, it could be that the Danaids object to marriage with their cousins for legitimate reasons but as perpetrators of violence they will be held to account. Additionally, the objection to marriage qua marriage, which is repeatedly expressed, also motivates them and the resolution of this is what must resolve the trilogy. For Argos, the assembly has voted in unison to accept the Danaids, thus bringing upon itself a destiny which, although it

⁶⁰ The attribution of lines in the exodos of the play has caused controversy. The possibility that the Danaid Chorus splits in two is dismissed by Friis Johansen and Whittle. They argue that nothing has prepared the audience for a split in the sentiments of the Danaids and that the sentiments expressed at 1034-51 and 1062-73 reflect those of Hypermnestra, we cannot believe that any of her sisters follow in her attitude, for all of them killed their husbands. Two other possibilities can be considered; either a Chorus of handmaids which have been addressed at 977 or a possible Argive bodyguard which Danaus has been given (985ff.). The issue is too complicated to be considered here. For a full discussion, see Taplin (1977) pp.230-8 and Friis Johansen and Whittle (1980) iii pp.306-9.

⁶¹ R.D. Murray (1958) p.85.

⁶² Garvie (1969) pp.205-8.

⁶³ Pausanias ii 20-7.

will be greater, will also cost the suffering of the whole city. However, it would be wise to keep in mind the sentiments of Pelasgus, expressed at 242;

‘Conjecture well might breed conjecture endlessly

Where there is no voice to answer with certain truth.’

Chapter Six - *Septem Contra Thebas*

In the *Septem Contra Thebas* (hereafter *Septem*) similar problems are faced to those in the *Supplices*. However, as the *Supplices* was the first part of a trilogy in which the issues of motivation and justification were introduced, the *Septem* is the final play of a trilogy and conversely, the same issues are resolved. However, the loss of the first two plays (*Laius* and *Oedipus*) means that our understanding of the *Septem* is limited, for if we consider the *Oresteia*, there is no doubt that we could not have discerned the complex web of motivation and justification if only the *Eumenides* had survived. The *Septem* differs from the previous plays in that we see the protagonist throughout the play going step by step to his death, which contrasts with Pelasgus who would most probably have died in the second play of the trilogy and with Orestes who, as the audience would have been aware at the back of their minds, lived on in Argos. However, the audience knew that Eteocles was going to die in this play. Consequently, it is possible to consider the *Septem* as to a certain extent autonomous from the previous plays, for what the audience witness is the demise of the tragic hero who begins the play full of confidence¹, a heroic leader, but the trilogy ends with his death.

To determine what motivates Eteocles to fatally fight with his brother requires us to conjecture as to the content of the first two plays. Eteocles' actions are, to a certain extent, influenced firstly by the actions of Laius, the progenitor of the family and secondly by Oedipus, who curses his sons for their mistreatment of him. Speculations of the content of *Laius* and *Oedipus* are based primarily upon a number of surviving papyrus fragments, but more particularly upon the choral ode (720-91) which reflects upon the nature of the crimes of the household. The content of the plays has caused much speculation but the most convincing reconstruction is written by Hutchinson². The content of *Laius* is evidenced by a series of papyrus fragments and scholia comments³. P.Oxy 2256 fr 1 suggests that Laius

¹ 68ff. - the invocation of the curse is the single exception to the otherwise confident Eteocles.

² Hutchinson (1985) pp.xxiii ff.

³ On the nature of the fragments see Hutchinson (1985)pp.xviii ff.

spoke the prologue to the play⁴ and this, together with the title and Septem 745-9, clearly suggests that Laius was the protagonist of the play. Furthermore, another fragment suggests that Oedipus had already been born and exposed in a cooking pot (fr.122R). Finally, the scholia on Sophocles' *O.T.*733 describes the road junction at which Laius was killed⁵. Consequently, it is a distinct probability that this play concerned the final days of Laius' life rather than the begetting of his son Oedipus. The *Septem* tells us that Laius received an oracle from Apollo telling him three times to die without issue and thereby save the city (748f.) but it is not explained what this oracle is in response to⁶. However, Hutchinson counsels us to treat the evidence of the *Septem* with caution, for oracles can alter within the space of a single play (as for example in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, where the prophecy of Helenus changes to suit the dramatic development of the play). Furthermore, at 801f. the oracle seems to be fulfilled by the death of Eteocles and Polynices. However, it is possible that the oracle had two aspects to it; firstly, the ramifications for the Labdacidae and secondly, for the city itself. This would certainly make sense for, as will be seen, the fates of the line and the city are inextricably linked⁷. For the purposes of this thesis, the most important questions that must be asked are why Apollo gave the oracle to Laius and why Laius disobeyed it. The first question is perhaps unanswerable but several possibilities can be discussed. It may be that Laius did nothing wrong and it was simply the destiny of Thebes to end in violence as it began with violence; that, as Cadmus began Thebes with the sown men, Laius his descendant will begin the chain of events that will destroy the city⁸. This is perhaps somewhat fantastic and there is no evidence that Cadmus has any role in this trilogy. Indeed, the Chorus at 742ff. consider that it is only the last three generations that have offended. However, it is still possible that the gods have, for some unknown reason,

⁴ Although prologues are not always spoken by the protagonist of the play (cf. *Aga.*1-39) it would seem odd if Laius spoke the prologue and then did not appear in the drama, for he is one of the central *dramatis personae* of the myth.

⁵ Interestingly Potniae not Daulis as in Sophocles' *O.T.* For further discussion see Sommerstein (1996) p.122. There is however, a possibility that this fragment is from the *Oedipus*.

⁶ See further Cameron (1971)p.19 who contrasts Aeschylus' interpretation of the oracle with Sophocles' which states that if Laius had a son, the son would kill him.

⁷ However, whether the oracle made any reference to the city is questioned by Hutchinson (1985) p.xxviii who discusses the possibility that the reference to Thebes at 749 is 'rhetorically necessary'. However, Hutchinson does show that the oracle could not simply refer to the line of Laius. He states; 'It would be self-contradictory to confront Laius with the choice of saving the line or producing no children.' Thus, the oracle must have included a reference to the city or to Laius' death.

⁸ Cameron (1971) p.17 considers that the trilogy cannot be understood without examining the whole genealogy of the family from Cadmus onwards.

decided to afflict Laius with childlessness although he has done no wrong. The problem that Lloyd-Jones⁹ raises with this scenario is that he believes that the gods in Aeschylus do not punish men without a reason. However, as has been seen in the previous chapter, Pelasgus is put in the position of choice not because of any personal wrong-doing but simply because it is his responsibility as king and Zeus has determined to ennoble the throne of Argos by placing upon it his descendants. Consequently, if Pelasgus suffers for no personal wrong-doing, it is possible that Laius does also.

Possibly, the real difficulty with this scenario is that while there is no tradition that Pelasgus offended the gods, there is a tradition that Laius did. The mythic tradition does involve Laius in an act of hybris that provokes divine enmity. According to Lloyd-Jones¹⁰, Euripides' *Chrysippus* most probably told how Chrysippus, who was greatly admired for his beauty, was abducted by Laius and taken away to Thebes where he killed himself and, as a result, Pelops cursed Laius. This legend may have had a part to play in *Laius*, for there is an attractive element of reciprocity. As Pelops is robbed of his son, so Laius will atone by being condemned to childlessness and if he disobeys he will involve his city in catastrophe and also lose his own life. Consequently, we would have a situation similar to the *Oresteia*; the trouble starts with an abduction that offends hospitality¹¹ and, as a result, not only the transgressor but his whole city must atone. The parallel with the *Oresteia* may also assist with helping us to determine the timescale of *Laius*. If the conjecture is right that the play dealt with the death of Laius, we must then determine how it could be that Aeschylus could weave into his work the original oracle of Apollo, an act of hybris by Laius and the birth of Oedipus. Perhaps the parodos of *Laius* could have combined all three factors and concerns over the complicated nature of this could be addressed by considering the parodos of the *Agamemnon*. At that point, the Chorus of Elders sing of how the war with Troy began, the omen of the eagles, the reaction of Artemis and the sacrifice of Iphigenia. With all these included in one Choral song, it becomes conceivable that in the parodos of *Laius* (sung possibly by a Chorus of old Theban men¹² who would remember the oracle) the Chorus

⁹ Lloyd-Jones (1983) p.120.

¹⁰ Lloyd-Jones (1983) pp.120-1.

¹¹ Ibid. Lloyd-Jones is certainly correct in that this offence would be considered a crime against hospitality rather than the homosexual element being considered as a sexual offence.

¹² See further Hutchinson (1985) p.xviii.

easily narrate a crime of Laius, the reaction of a god and the subsequent birth and exposure of Oedipus. This would serve a distinct dramatic purpose; the Chorus could, by their reminiscences, bring the past into the present. If Laius is going to die at the end of this play then it is important for the audience to understand why and this would be easily achieved by a Choral song which relates the origin of the problems of the house. Consequently, as with the parodos of the *Agamemnon*, we understand why it is that the play's namesake must atone. Nevertheless, this must remain conjecture and, as we have seen above, using the *Oresteia* as a model for all of Aeschylus' trilogies is a dangerous premise on which to work.¹³

The second question that must be addressed is why Laius chose to disobey the oracle of Apollo. If the oracle did point to manifold disasters for the city or indeed pointed towards Laius' own death¹⁴, then why did Laius wilfully disobey Apollo and place himself and his city in such danger? The only evidence that can help us with this problem is in the *Septem* (750 which is textually obscure¹⁵, 802 and 842). At 750, Hutchinson argues that the sense of φιλᾶν ὀβουλιᾶν is that it is children that are dear to Laius' heart rather than sexual gratification, but that the desire for them is ill-advised. The sense of Laius' imprudence is again echoed at 802 Λαῖο δυσβουλίας and 842 βουλαὶ δ' ἄπιστοι Λαῖου, and thus Laius' actions do seem to be motivated by a particularly ill-advised desire to fulfil his need, which is the desire for children¹⁶.

The death of Laius would most probably have occurred in the first play, rather than in the second. The most probable reconstruction of *Oedipus* is that of Hutchinson, who argues that the play must have contained Oedipus' discovery, his subsequent blinding, and finally

¹³ Discussed with reference to the conjectures on a possible trial in the *Danaids*. See above Ch.5p.162.

¹⁴ Cf. Pindar *O*.2.39f.

¹⁵ The understanding of this line depends upon the acceptance of φιλᾶν the doric form of fem.gen.plur of φίλων rather than the acc.sing. φίλον. Thus, the text would suggest longing for dear ones, meaning children, rather than sexual desire for Jocasta.

¹⁶ As opposed to sexual desire brought on by drunkenness cf. Euripides *Ph*. 20-22. Discussed by Sommerstein (1996) p.122.

the curse upon his sons¹⁷. The two problems that must be addressed with regard to this play are what is the nature of the curse of Oedipus? and did the play include a dream of Eteocles which foreshadowed the double fratricide? The reason why Oedipus cursed his sons and the nature of the curse itself are obscure. Fragments of the *Thebais* seem to point to two curses; firstly, Oedipus cursed his sons when Polynices placed before his father the table and cup of Laius, which Oedipus had expressly forbidden anyone to do. Secondly, Oedipus was motivated by the lack of respect shown by his sons when they did not send him the choicest portion of meat. The evidence in the *Septem* is vague; according to Sommerstein¹⁸ ἐπίκοτος τροφῶς (786) suggests that Oedipus' anger was motivated by his sons' disrespectful maintenance of him¹⁹. However, this does not show that Oedipus used either of the curses known from the *Thebais* for both are, in essence, disrespectful acts. Furthermore, if this were the case, then the *Oedipus* must have been set late in Oedipus' life when Eteocles and Polynices had already begun to rule in his place. Whilst this is possible, it is problematic; firstly, the tragedy of Oedipus is increased if he is still the king of Thebes, and secondly it would be more logical to assume that the quarrel between Eteocles and Polynices should take place immediately after Oedipus has vacated the throne rather than after they had been ruling in Thebes for some time. Consequently, it makes more dramatic sense if Oedipus, on discovering his actions, abdicates leaving his sons to rule in his place and then, in the dramatic space between the *Oedipus* and the *Septem*, the audience understand that the brothers have quarrelled. Considering the free hand that dramatists often took when interpreting the myth, it is possible that Aeschylus chose not to include the nature of the curse from the *Thebais* in his trilogy. Accordingly, Hutchinson²⁰ proposes another explanation for Oedipus' curse. He argues that Oedipus would have been angry at the incestuous begetting of his sons and therefore curses his line. Hutchinson draws parallels between this possibility and Ag. 1602, wherein Thyestes curses the line of Pleisthenes (which therefore includes his own surviving child Aegisthus) and Medea in Euripides' *Med.* 112ff. who avenges herself on Jason by cursing their children. This certainly seems

¹⁷ The fact that the *Oedipus* could not have picked up where the *Laius* finished and portrayed Oedipus coming to Thebes and defeating the Sphynx is proved by Hutchinson (1985) p.xxiv who concludes that as this was the subject of the Satyr-play it could not have been included in the *Oedipus*.

¹⁸ Sommerstein (1996) p.123.

¹⁹ Or possibly at the origin of his sons, see further Hutchinson (1985) p.xxv.

²⁰ Hutchinson (1985) pp.xxv.ff.

understandable considering the origin of Eteocles and Polynices but, it must remain conjecture until further evidence can be found.

Considering the content of the curse, the evidence is again vague, but the point is that the action of the *Septem* must fulfil it. Therefore, the curse must have concerned the inheritance of Polynices and Eteocles. Consequently, although it is possible to dispute how the curse was worded, the fact remains that the dispute over patrimony between the brothers must have been the central point. Whether this dispute was to end in the death of both the brothers or misleadingly spoke of a reconciliation is debatable. The fact that Eteocles dreams that they would be reconciled by a stranger from Chalybes at 727-8 (signifying iron, which is understood as their weaponry) does not mean that it was not also implied in the curse, for we have no way of knowing whether the dream was actually related in the *Oedipus*.

According to Hutchinson, it is impossible for the curse and the dream to form part of the same dramatic progression and indeed it is difficult to see how a dream of Eteocles could have fitted into the dramatic action of Oedipus' revelation. For Hutchinson, it is distinctly possible that the dream did not appear at all until the point of its fulfillment²¹. Nevertheless, this is disputed by Sommerstein, who argues that Eteocles' description of the dream is too vague to be understandable unless a more detailed account was given in the *Oedipus*. However, whilst the lack of evidence makes any conclusion impossible, the very vagueness with which the dream is treated by Aeschylus suggests that we should not allow ourselves to dwell on the point.

What the dream, the curse and the oracle of Apollo to Laius all contribute to is the responsibility of the crimes committed by each generation of the house. Consequently, before our analysis of the text begins we are aware of several influencing factors. Firstly, divine enmity that may have arisen from some action of Laius and involves both the city and the house. Secondly, the importance of patrimony; Eteocles and Polynices are the cursed sons of Oedipus who is in turn the cursed son of Laius. Consequently, we can again determine that juxtaposed with the element of personal motivation are Olympian and

²¹ Hutchinson (1985) p.xxvii argues that sometimes oracles are not related until their point of fulfillment, cf. *Pers.* 739-41 and Sophocles' *Tr.* 1159-61.

Chthonic influences.

Before the analysis of the play begins the last point that we must keep in mind are the words Aristophanes attributes to Aeschylus in the *Frogs*. Aeschylus, in debate with Euripides, seems to be saying that *Septem* raised a truly noble spirit in the audience, urging them to greater patriotism. Our immediate response to Aristophanes' sentiments is scepticism. It is possible that because our comic dramatist's ambition is to generate humour and not to provide textual analysis of Tragedy he is presenting a parody of Aeschylus in which the dramatic result is of far more importance than critical accuracy. This is furthered by the fact that Aristophanes is writing fifty years after the event. Although plays of the great tragedians were reproduced in Athens it is far from certain whether or not he was aware of the original audience's reception of the play. Nevertheless, Aristophanes is the closest we have to understanding how Aeschylus' audience, the generation that fought so gloriously at Marathon, would have perceived the thematic elements of the play. The sentiments attributed to Aeschylus as a character in *Frogs* which are expressed in terms of the audience's reaction cause debate; an audience may have felt such emotion because they have been inspired by a noble self-sacrificing hero, or equally, they may have felt that the result of Laius selfishly disobeying the gods and putting the city at risk is perhaps the greatest hybris a citizen can commit. However, at this stage we cannot hope to provide answers; these points must be kept in reserve until our final conclusions are drawn.

The *Septem* develops in three dramatic movements: Firstly, the prologue to the second episode (1-368); secondly, the Redepaare, encompassing the fatal revelation and its subsequent effects; thirdly, the results and lamentations of the war. These movements are not divisive however, but are linked, not just through character and atmosphere but also in the duality of theme (the fates of Eteocles and the city itself).

In the prologue both these themes are introduced. Initially, Eteocles, King of Thebes, relates how the city is under siege and that it is his responsibility to ensure her safety. From the outset until line 70 the emphasis is on protection with divine assistance and patriotic feelings. With subtle dramatic irony, Eteocles believes that through foreknowledge he can save all and these sentiments are furthered by the Soldier;

‘being forewarned you’ll take no harm.’ (68)²²

Several important factors emerge here that we as a modern audience may not realise. It is probable that to a Greek audience Eteocles’ belief that Zeus the protector will save Thebes would be a vain hope. Although at this stage we cannot assume what the fate of the city will be (it is known from *Il.* 4.405-10 that Thebes was sacked in the next generation) it is possible that the audience knew and we feel that the fates of the line of Laius and the city are interlinked. Furthermore, Athenians may have thought that Eteocles’ very existence was abhorrent to the immortals, having been begotten from such an incestuous union. The gods have never loved this line since the original crime of Laius, so, realistically, a stay of execution is all an Athenian audience would expect. The dramatic irony is also indicative. Eteocles’ emphasis on planning through knowledge will certainly take on a tragic note, for through his planning he will arrange for himself his own doom. Another point emerges from 39ff. where the Soldier relates how the Argive champions have been chosen and the oaths that they have sworn. Neither a Greek nor a modern audience would suspect at this stage that the brothers are going to engage at the seventh gate. Additionally, the oath sworn (to destroy Thebes) will become important when we assess the position of Polynices. Further importance will also arise from the process by which the champions will be assigned to their gates. It is not without reason that the Soldier says;

‘I have left them drawing lots, letting the fall of luck

Decide how each should lead his troops against our state.’ (55-56)

Having established the grave danger to the city, Eteocles makes a sombre prayer. The divinities Eteocles first invokes come as no surprise - Zeus, Earth and the city gods. However, the king proceeds to invoke the curse of his father Oedipus. Why Aeschylus desires that Eteocles should do this is puzzling; it seems that the father’s curse calls for his destruction, so why should he call upon such a power which will entail his death? It is unlikely that he has forgotten the nature of the curse, as a curse would not be treated so lightly. In contrast, he may be calling upon the curse to ask it to avert its power away from the city and its populace and indeed this is a distinct possibility considering his prayer at 71 where he asks that the city at least could be saved. However, a contemporary audience would realise that it is not in the nature of a curse to be negotiable, nor to be selective in how

²² All translations from Vellacott (1961).

it is accomplished²³. Additionally, we might conjecture that the curse is only an aspect of the punishment of the family and, although the wrath of the gods is not as yet a factor, it is possible that the audience watching the play immediately after the first two plays of the trilogy would be well aware of the stated consequence of Laius' disobedience, for three times Apollo told Laius that to save the city he must die without issue (745-9). Nevertheless, whatever the reason, Eteocles activates the curse at this stage so we may assume that throughout the rest of the play the curse is an active agent.

The calm, rational, organising atmosphere of the prologue is now supplanted by an hysterical Chorus characterised by fear as they enter for the parodos. The women of Thebes have driven themselves into a frenzy of fear on the basis of what they know and what they hear. The Chorus correctly assume from the din made by the approaching horses and the dust raised by the oncoming forces that Thebes is under siege. They then proceed to pray to the Olympian pantheon and the city gods for deliverance. Aeschylus here is deliberately exploiting the traditional prayer formula. Consequently, for the most part their prayer is typical of that of the suppliant, begging the gods for protection, but within this prayer several important factors emerge. Firstly, after the prayer to father Zeus they relate the reason for their prayer - the positioning of the Argive champions at the seven gates and the manner in which they have been chosen (that is, by lot). Before we assess the importance of this, the position of the lines must be discussed. If this were simply a restating of information, then would the Chorus not sing these lines somewhere between lines 78-115 where they describe what panics them? But following the traditional formula, Aeschylus chooses to have these lines sung during the prayer to the gods. Thus, a connection is tacitly suggested between the events and the gods. It would definitely be too strong a statement to say at this stage that the gods are determining the lots, but the position of the lines does suggest, albeit slightly, that the gods are taking an active interest. This is further justified when the Chorus question;

‘What is the end that God ordains?’ (157)

Thus, the Chorus know and we realise that divine planning is now another force along with the curse and human actions.

²³ Cf. Clytemnestra, who at *Ag.* 1567ff. attempts to make a compact with the family daemon, but the audience knew that such attempts were in vain. See above, Ch.2 pp.73-4.

To the Chorus' frenzied prayers, Eteocles returns in order to establish discipline in the city. The stichomythia that follows is perhaps one of the most difficult scenes to reconcile to the modern audience. Eteocles' vicious attack on the Chorus is motivated by his concern that they will spread fear and panic through the city and therefore he would face two problems; disorder within and attack from without. As was shown in the prologue and furthered here, Eteocles places great emphasis on objective and rational thought and to his disdain the Chorus are the antithesis of this. Consequently, his anger is evident; he attacks them not only for their actions but also for their sex;

'Women! In wartime, or amid the blessings of peace,
Save me from living among them! Give women their own way,
They're bold past bearing; but once they're alarmed, they double
Every difficulty, in the city and in the home.
Look now: by rushing panic-stricken here and there
You flood our citizens' hearts with fear and cowardice.
The enemy thus gets all the advantage he could wish,
While we inside the walls are cutting our own throats,
this is what comes of living amidst a crowd of women.' (187-195)

The sentiments here have caused great consternation among scholars and words like misogyny have been used. It has even been suggested that his own birth and his fear of repeating an incestuous union have made him hate women²⁴. Arguably, the only reason that we find Eteocles' words difficult to accept is that they are unsuitable in our society and as a result, we are in danger of removing the play from its context. In defence of Aeschylus, if a defence is needed, Eteocles is encapsulating a common opinion held by men in Ancient Greece. Evidence abounds which highlights the Greek love of the objective, the rational and the active, qualities which the Greeks believed were the prerogative of the male. In contrast, the traditional roles of women (for example, to lead in mourning and certain rituals where strong emotions were evident) highlight the male conception of women's hysteria²⁵.

²⁴ Hecht and Bacon (1974) pp.8-9; 'And, indeed, as the drama unfolds, we come to see that this play is not merely the culmination but the terrible re-enactment of the tragedies of Laios and Oedipus, of disobedience, patricide and incest. And Eteocles' misogyny might be not only an unconscious sense of his inheritance, but a fear that he is doomed to repeat it.'

²⁵ Although the character of Clytemnestra stands out against this. The Chorus of Elders in the *Agamemnon* repeatedly associate her with manly counsel (for example, *Ag.* 351ff.), but they also believe that women are prone to give way to idle fancy and rumour (*Ag.* 485ff.). See above Ch.2 p.64.

Consequently, a Greek audience would perhaps not question Eteocles' aspersions of the female sex. Additionally, the conflict between Eteocles and the Chorus has dramatic importance. In the prologue we witness the responsible ruler planning how best to defend his city and in his actions with the Chorus we see how the nature of this responsibility isolates him. Eteocles has to be calm, rational and in complete control and there is no one to assist him in this. Furthermore, dramatic irony is also achieved by the fact that, once Eteocles realises that he will fight his brother at the seventh gate, he becomes the antithesis of what he is here and it is the Chorus who will take on the mantle of rationalising the action. Importantly, Aeschylus, in presenting this image to the audience and in focusing our attention on the interplay between protagonist and Chorus, is in effect diverting our attention from the invocation of the curse and concentrating on the capable figure of Eteocles. However, as Lesky²⁶ observes, Eteocles is the cursed son of Oedipus, a fact that will necessarily entail destruction and this is never far from our minds. Thus, at the end of the episode we are left with the concept that this is a king well equipped to deal with the crisis and although we are not encouraged to contemplate the curse, by virtue of its existence it is present nevertheless.

Once Eteocles has reconciled the Chorus to a more sedate manner of prayer, he again turns to planning for the forthcoming attack;

‘Meanwhile, I’ll choose six men, and then return and post
 Them, with myself as seventh, to guard our seven gates,
 Matching the enemy in pride and strength; otherwise
 The roar of hasty rumour will reach all our people
 And fill them with a fever of ill-advised alarm.’ (282-6)

However, in recent years these lines have been vigorously debated. The text seems to suggest that Eteocles has already chosen the champions and, as a result, Wolff focuses attention on 282-6, arguing that these lines show that Eteocles has made the postings at the seven gates prior to the Redepaare, and thus Eteocles has no choice but to face Polynices at the seventh gate. However, in response, Von Fritz argues that although these lines are inconsistent with the Redepaare, this should not be allowed to distort Aeschylus' clear intention in the Redepaare to present Eteocles making up his mind where to place the Theban

²⁶ Lesky (1965) p.64.

champions²⁷. Thus, Von Fritz concludes that the audience should not be troubled with this inconsistency and when the Redepaare begins, their attention is focused solely upon Eteocles deciding on how best to defend the city. Therefore, they would not remember or be concerned with the fact that Eteocles seems to be saying that he has already attended to the postings. Nevertheless, Taplin²⁸ finds this explanation too convenient. He proposes three different solutions to the problem. Firstly, from 369ff. the scene has changed location and Eteocles arrives to carry on the postings that he had previously begun. However, Taplin finds this problematic, for there is no indication to the audience that there has been a change of scene. Furthermore, it could be added that this affects the linear plot progression that is essential to appreciating that Eteocles, by his own choice and by the influence of the curse, is treading the steps to catastrophe. Secondly, Taplin envisages that these lines could have been interpolated or transposed and that 281 would make a better exit line than 286. However, Taplin again considers that this is not without difficulty, for the language cannot be shown to be un-Aeschylean. Furthermore, if only 285f. was interpolated then Eteocles' resolution becomes vague and inconsistent with the next act and 284 would not be an adequate exit line. The final possibility that Taplin discusses is the emendation of $\tau\acute{\alpha}\xi\omega$ to $\acute{\alpha}\xi\omega$ in 284; the meaning would then be that Eteocles would say that he is going to 'fetch' the champions. However, the echoing of $\tau\acute{\alpha}\xi\omega$ in Euripides' *Phoen.* 784f. seems to rule this out²⁹. Thus, Taplin concludes that 282-6 may be interpolated or displaced. However, these lines must have been interpolated prior to Euripides' *Phoen.* which seems unlikely, and therefore it would be more likely that they have been dislocated from some point in the text. Nevertheless, whilst Taplin's innovative efforts to explain the inconsistency of these lines are admirable, it is perhaps safer to accept a less drastic course. The point must be acknowledged that these lines taken on their own do give strength to Wolff's hypothesis. However, Aeschylus has guarded against this view by altering the tenses in the Redepaare scene between past and future, so that the audience are left with the impression that Eteocles is making his mind up on-stage with regard to some of the postings and has previously considered some of the others. Additionally, according to Kitto³⁰, the Chorus through their

²⁷ The whole Redepaare scene is discussed below, p.177.

²⁸ Taplin (1977) pp.144-146.

²⁹ Further reasons for the difficulty with this emendation are discussed by Taplin (1977) p.145 n.2.

³⁰ Kitto (1961) p.48.

fear have necessitated Eteocles' decision to fight personally at one of the gates and therefore this considerably increases the possibility that the two brothers will meet in combat, thus fulfilling the curse. However, Kitto does not state exactly when such knowledge is imparted to the audience. We know that Eteocles will fight, but as yet we have not even heard the name Polynices. This may seem a technicality, but it is an important one, for the concept that Eteocles is deciding his apportionment will be crucial. Eteocles clearly makes the decision to fight and it will entail his death, but as yet this is not an important issue - to stress the point is perhaps reading the play backwards. Aeschylus has made Eteocles make what is apparently a natural decision for a king to make, for his personal *arete* must never be called into question. Hence, Eteocles has taken the decision because it is his duty to do so and he desires to do so, therefore there is no clear evidence that he is being manipulated by the fates along a predestined path. This is perhaps why the name Polynices has been held back so far. Aeschylus intends that we witness Eteocles making a significant choice of his own accord and of his own free will; thus, the all-important choice is evident.

At this point in the play this choice is not in itself ominous, but once Eteocles has left the stage and the Chorus sing the first stasimon, the atmosphere significantly changes. Here the Chorus sing of the destruction and pain experienced by the populace once a city's defences are breached. Their descriptions are purely hypothetical and will not be borne out in the text, so why does Aeschylus create such a beautiful, horrific ode? The superficial intention may be to introduce a feminine perspective to the masculine martial atmosphere, an acknowledgement of how those who do not gloriously fight still suffer the consequences of war. This is reason enough if the play was a thesis play about war, but it is not. It is also possible that the Chorus are presenting a horrific image in order to enhance the stature of Eteocles. We can anticipate that the death of Eteocles is what will save Thebes from the destruction the Chorus envisage, so thus the king sacrifices himself to save the city. It is also possible that the Chorus are, without knowing, being prophetic. In terms of the mythic tradition their fears will come true, when the sons of the seven will return and complete the task in which their fathers failed. Although we must always be careful not to justify the text by anticipating beyond it, it may be true that the Greek audience knew of the eventual destruction of Thebes and would, therefore, take the point³¹. Consequently, the decisions of

³¹ Burnett (1973) pp.346-7.

Eteocles become more ominous, for it is these that will in part speed the eventual destruction.

Thus is completed the first dramatic movement of the play and the preparation made for the second. The Redepaare and the subsequent results form the second dramatic movement and the most critical section of the play. The Soldier is to relate who is at which gate and Eteocles is to respond. The dramatic outcome of this scene is the realisation by Eteocles that he is to face his brother Polynices at the seventh gate, but the process by which he comes to this decision has been widely debated. The main problem to understanding this scene lies in the tenses used by Eteocles. In response to the Proetid, Homoloean and the fatal seventh gate Eteocles uses future tenses (see 408, 621, 672 respectively). This changes to the present tense at the fifth, Borraean gate (553). At the Electran gate (448) and the Athena Onca gate (505, 508) Eteocles switches to the past tense. The tense of the Neistan gate is debatable; according to the text as we have it Eteocles appears to be saying he will send Megareus and in fact he has sent him (472-3). This could possibly mean that Megareus would be the suitable champion now that we know the disposition of the Argive challenger and by chance he has been sent. However, the logic of this is questionable. Hutchinson³² argues that 472 should be expelled thus leaving us with a clear past tense.

Wolff and Kitto are essentially united in the belief that Eteocles is being guided along a set path in order that he will meet Polynices and thus fulfil the curse. However, this view has been challenged on the grounds that Eteocles' use of the future tense suggests that he is making his decision on-stage and the use of the past tense implies deliberation; thus, the audience do not feel that only supernatural forces are working upon him, forcing him into a mechanical action of which the curse, the Moirae or the gods are perpetrators³³. Winnington-Ingram³⁴ suggests an explanation for this confusion of tenses by raising the possibility that Eteocles has made several decisions but has been interrupted (off-stage) and therefore completes the process on stage in the future tense. However, Burnett³⁵ offers a serious challenge to this by arguing that if a character states that he is going to do something then, unless we are told otherwise, when he returns we assume that the deed is done.

³² Hutchinson (1985) p.120 follows Harbeton in the deletion of 472.

³³ See further Burnett (1973) p.348.

³⁴ Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.24.

³⁵ Burnett (1973) p.347.

All sides in this debate have valid grounds for their arguments and we are at a push to decide which was Aeschylus' intention. Therefore, to aid our decision it would be wisest to look for other evidence. What is immediately apparent is that the decisions made by Eteocles, either on- or off-stage, are the right ones and will be vindicated by the end result. In each case, Eteocles chooses the man fitted to the attacker, either through matching of character or through an inescapable omen. In the first two gates, it does seem that Eteocles may actually place himself. Against Tydeus he states;

‘What a man wears about him will not frighten me;’ (397)

yet he chooses to place Melanippus instead. Against Capaneus he holds back his decision instead concentrating on Capaneus' pride and folly and as a result we are kept in suspense. At the Neistan Gate, at which the figure of Eteocles stands, Eteocles' immediate response is to send Megareus, but we feel that Eteocles may have missed an inescapable omen by not pairing himself with a man so close in name. However, the reasoning why the king chooses these champions is apparent; in each case the aggressors are proud, boastful and blasphemous whilst the Theban champions are modest and pious and we feel that the gods will uphold the cause of the righteous men. At the fourth gate, Eteocles accepts the omen from the shields; the power of Typhon against the power of Zeus. Again, in the fifth gate, the emphasis is upon the shield, this time with the figure of the Sphinx who has already been defeated. Eteocles could, if he chose, place himself at either of these gates yet he feels that the shields provide the best omen for victory so yet again he defers his own appointment. At the penultimate gate stands the tragic figure of the prophet Amphiaraus, who realises his own doom is imminent. Eteocles knows from an oracle of Apollo that Amphiaraus will not in fact assault the gate (see 615ff.) therefore, against him he proposes a man of wisdom and courage simply to act as a safeguard.

Again, it is to Kitto³⁶ we can look for an interesting analysis. He argues that for various reasons Eteocles cannot place himself at the gate in the first five instances, and in the sixth the piety of the assailant makes it impossible for him to do so. Thus, he is ‘heralded’ to his death in the form of the seventh gate. Whilst Kitto is correct that the opponents do seem particularly well matched regardless of when they were chosen, it would seem that he is

³⁶ Kitto (1961) p.50.

mistaken over the options available to Eteocles. As we have seen, it is probable that he can fight at all of the six gates rather than none of them, but it is his choice not to do so. In the case of those who are proud and blasphemous, the champions who face them do not have any greater qualities than the king. Eteocles himself at this point in the play is modest, reasoned and presumably an excellent combatant or he would not have offered himself to give reassurance to the Chorus. He is also a pious man, respectful of the gods and those who are reasoned like himself, hence his compassion towards Amphiaraus. So why should Eteocles not accept any of these challenges? To this question Aeschylus provides the answer in the speech of the Soldier as regards the seventh gate and from the hints given so far. As has been stated before, Eteocles has himself invoked the power of the father's curse, but now the appeal to the curse has gained further momentum, not from Eteocles but from Polynices. The Soldier quotes Polynices as calling curses and destruction on the city;

‘Polynices, your own brother. Upon Thebes and you
He calls down curses and destruction; prays that he,
Standing upon our walls, proclaimed as conqueror,
Chanting over our land wild shouts of victory,
May fight with you, and killing you, die at your side;’ (631-6)

Thus, Polynices, while not actually naming the curse proper is still asking for it to be fulfilled. Whether or not Polynices is right to do so is immaterial, for the Erinyes that carry out the curse are not interested in the rights and wrongs of it but simply in accomplishing it. Consequently, Eteocles has by his own words activated the curse and Polynices has prayed for its fulfillment; is it not then in the interests of the Erinyes to ensure that the brothers receive their due. Furthermore, standing in alliance with the Erinyes is Ares, to whom the Chorus have prayed and to whom the champions have sworn through the name of Cruelty and bloodthirsty Terror at 39ff. Hence, Ares himself is an active agent not allied to any one side but driving both sides onward.

The dramatic input of the Redepaare is unmistakeable as Garvie³⁷ comments;

‘Aeschylus contrives to surprise us by what we always knew was going to happen, yet at the same time gives us hints that make the surprise less than complete.’

³⁷ Garvie (1978) p.74.

The dramatic structure of the scene is of remarkable symmetry. The Herald describes the aggressors, Eteocles chooses the appropriate champion on four instances and has previously selected three others. After each posting the Chorus respond in agitated stanzas. From this structure Garvie³⁸ argues that there is a feeling of inevitability which is manipulated by our expectations. As discussed above we expect Eteocles to accept the first challenge but he does not. We then suspect that he will acknowledge the omen in the name of Eteocles but he rejects it. Finally, in the tragic figure of Amphiaraus our attention is diverted from the imminent doom of Eteocles and concentrated on the fate of a pious man. Thus at the seventh gate we are caught unaware; we have been expecting the result but it still manages to shock the audience and it is now that we realise that the curse mentioned at the beginning of the play is about to be brought to fruition.

One last piece of evidence that can now be brought to bear is that of the process by which the champions were assigned their gates. We have already heard several mentions of the lot system; to these we can add another two at lines 376 and 457-8³⁹. Noticeably, the last mention is to describe the lots leaping from the helmet, which suggests that it is not merely chance that is at work but that some power which has foreknowledge is ensuring that the right adversaries will meet, specifically Eteocles and Polynices at the seventh gate⁴⁰. However, we feel that Eteocles is not in this position simply because the curse of his father has determined his apportionment. It is also apparent that from the outset of the play and at points in the Redepaare Eteocles has made crucial choices which will determine his fate. Thus, we can tentatively suggest that the choices Eteocles makes are in alignment with the divine powers evident in the play.

With these observations in mind, we can now return to the question of the postings. It is possible to argue that Eteocles has made all the correct postings simply because he is an expert commander invested with foresight, and therefore it is on these virtues alone that we must assess his actions. However, it does seem apparent that Aeschylus intends the audience to appreciate that although Eteocles has all the above virtues, the decisions that he

³⁸ Garvie (1978) pp.71-2.

³⁹ However, 457 is deleted by Wolff.

⁴⁰ The influence of supernatural forces is again evidenced at 548 at the Athena Onca gate where Eteocles, considering the match of Hippomedon and Hyperbius, says; 'Hermes did well to match these two.'

makes are inspired by the curse of his father and the fact that he is an excellent commander proves that the decisions he makes are what we believe to be the best decisions to ensure victory for Thebes. Thus, it would seem that Kitto is correct in assuming that Eteocles is guided into making his postings, by his own will and by divine will. Nevertheless, we must recognise the fact that because the positioning of the Argives has been supernaturally controlled, the fact that Eteocles never thinks to offer himself as a suitable substitute and the fact that they are all successful could mean that Eteocles has been inspired to make the decisions, which may suggest that Eteocles bears no responsibility for his actions.

If we accept this, we could create for ourselves a difficult hypothesis - that Eteocles has become a senseless, tragic puppet. However, Aeschylus has guarded against this through the use of the future tense, which shows us Eteocles making his decision on-stage, and by the use of the past tense, implying deliberation. Additional evidence is seen in the reaction of Eteocles to the seventh posting and the subsequent debate between Eteocles and the Chorus. To the realisation that he is paired against his brother, Eteocles, now bereft of his objective and reasoned nature, sees clearly the divine workings of apportionment. He recognises that the curse of his father and divine will are conspiring against him. To every argument put forward by the Chorus, for every attempt they make at persuasion, Eteocles answers that the gods and the curse have decided his apportionment and it is for him to accept it. Most scholars are united in the understanding that the divine powers have indeed combined to bring about the inevitability of Eteocles' doom but debate remains as to the role that Eteocles is prescribed. It has been argued that Eteocles, in realising his position, sacrifices himself to divine will and in the process saves the city. This would be justified if Eteocles did not himself desire the deed, had absolutely no other plan of action, the city was indeed saved and his brother was the abhorrent criminal. However, this play is not an equivalent of Cain and Abel with right and wrong clearly defined, nor is it a Euripides play in which man is perhaps more the plaything of the gods. In contrast, through Eteocles' response we can detect that he sees himself as the proper adversary for a fight that he desires desperately to win;

'In this faith I will go and face him - I myself.

Who has a stronger right than I? Chief against chief

I'll match him, brother to brother, enemy to enemy.' (672-4)

But Eteocles is not allowed to simply announce his intentions and leave; he is now subjected

to the same attempt at persuasion that he had previously used on the Chorus. The Chorus desperately plead with him not to bring down such pollution on the city and try to avert the anger of the gods by giving way. Eteocles will not give way, for he desires the glory and justifies this through fate and divine enmity. For this, the Chorus know the real reason. They state;

‘You are goaded on by a wild craving
For a ritual of blood; but the fruit will be bitter,
For the flesh you tear is man’s flesh
And the blood is not lawful.’ (692-4)

Hence, Eteocles leaves the stage to fight his brother and fulfil the curse and divine will, but ultimately to satisfy his own enmity.

In addition to the hatred of Eteocles, the character of Polynices is further evidence. It is true that for the majority of the play he has been presented as the absent enemy. The oaths he has sworn, the curses he has made and the destruction he has promised all build a significant case against him. Nevertheless, our final picture of him before the battle is very different. On his shield he claims to have Justice on his side (644-8) and although a claim is not tantamount to fact, Eteocles cannot present any clear argument against it; rather he simply denies that Polynices has ever at any stage of his life been interested in Justice and this is evidenced by his attack on his native city (660ff.). Consequently, we can agree with Gagarin⁴¹ who observes that Eteocles only ever thinks how to best defend the city and not whether he should. As a result, we are encouraged to ask whether Polynices’ actions are not also justifiable. Aeschylus, however, does not provide in the *Septem* any reason why the brothers have quarrelled and, as we have seen, it would be impossible to have included this in the dramatic progression of the *Oedipus*; thus, the quarrel must have occurred within the dramatic time between the end of the *Oedipus* and the beginning of the *Septem*. Sommerstein⁴² argues that it is probable that the audience’s familiarity with the myth meant

⁴¹ Gagarin (1976) pp.121-2 and Rosenmeyer in McCall (1972)p.56.

⁴² Sommerstein (1996) p.126 draws our attention to the Stesichorean tradition that Jocasta and Teiresias suggest that they draw lots for the division of property, Eteocles becoming king and keeping the palace and Polynices receiving all the moveable property. However, 637-8 suggests the tradition followed by Apollodorus (3.6.i) in which Eteocles and Polynices made an agreement to share the throne but Eteocles refused to let Polynices rule in his turn, and thus Polynices attacks Thebes. See Gagarin (1976) pp.120-121 on the possibility that this may have been the version used by Aeschylus.

that it was possible for Aeschylus to leave the reason for the quarrel vague, but considering the different versions of the quarrel in the myth, this is doubtful. More likely, why they quarrelled is possibly not of great importance; the fact that the rights and wrongs of the dispute are nowhere discussed points to the possibility that Aeschylus did not want the audience to dwell upon the matter but to consider the brothers with equality, for they are both right and both wrong simultaneously. The parity of the brothers is reflected by the response of Amphiaraus at the sixth gate, who is considered to be a wise and temperate man (568-9, 592-4, 598, 610). Amphiaraus berates Polynices for attacking his home city but the fact that he is there in support of Polynices' claim rather than Polynices' actions suggests that he considers that Eteocles was wrong to expel his brother⁴³.

The transition of Eteocles from a rational, objective king to an irrational and frenzied character is counterbalanced by the Chorus' transition from a hysterical rabble to a Chorus of rational citizens⁴⁴. This new status is reflected in the second stasimon which brings the second dramatic movement to a close. Here, the Chorus encapsulate the whole trilogy in a straightforward manner and present the justification for all the events. They begin with the present; the curse of Oedipus made in a frenzy of anger is partly responsible for driving the two sons against each other, the result of which will be the parity of inheritance i.e. the graves they will receive (see 723-34). The Chorus now fear that blood once shed cannot be recalled and that this blood is a sin that cannot be purified (735-42)⁴⁵. This is the consequence of the chain of crimes that have grown and multiplied from the original disobedience of Laius (742ff.). This is the sin that was most probably without divine assistance; Laius chose for himself and paid for his selfishness with his death. His guilt

⁴³ See further the discussion by Sommerstein (1996) pp.110-111; 'the motivation of both is not far to seek: each wanted sole control of Thebes and of Oedipus' property. Many a pair of brothers have quarrelled for that reason, both in fiction and in reality, without needing a paternal curse to make them do so.'

⁴⁴ This transition is discussed by Rosenmeyer in McCall (1972)p.57 who convincingly argues that the gulf between Eteocles and Polynices is narrowing and his transition into self-centredness and selfishness, which rejects his public status, means that the Chorus must adopt the role he previously held and concentrate on the safety of the city. However, cf. Solmsen (1937) pp.201ff. who attributes the sudden heedlessness of Eteocles to the working of the Erinyes (the embodiment of Oedipus' curse) who are ensuring that Eteocles is driven onwards to meet his brother at the seventh gate. Whilst it is true that the curse is working to bring about the brothers' deaths, it must not be allowed to overshadow the fact that both Eteocles and Polynices desire to fight each other. Consequently, in the fratricide, we witness again the alliance of supernatural will and human motivation.

⁴⁵ This is reminiscent of the *Oresteia*, where the law that blood once shed cannot be recalled but clots upon the earth and calls forth further bloodshed, underpins all our judgements on the *dramatis personae*.

however, was inherited by Oedipus who, although he committed his crime without understanding, still brought destruction upon himself. Oedipus here is not of the Sophoclean type; rather his own doom was necessitated by the fact that he had gained honours too great when he killed the Sphinx (768ff.) and hence he was struck down by the gods through his realisation of his incestuous marriage. Thus, Oedipus added to the crimes as a result of his fate and of his own free will and, ultimately, he perpetuates the crimes by cursing his sons. Eteocles and Polynices are not without guilt; possibly they did not give their father the appropriate respect⁴⁶ and therefore, to an extent, brought trouble upon themselves (785). However, more important is their own participation in the events that have brought us up to this point in time. Eventually, we realise that the whole trilogy is one of crime and punishment. Each generation offends the gods, not simply because they have inherited sin but because they have also added to it. Consequently, in the case of Eteocles we can appreciate that although he is a tragic and noble figure, he is not an innocent character in terms of the guilt of the house. He must accept his own responsibility for his dismissiveness of his father and the pollution created by the mutual fratricide. Hence, Eteocles must be seen as participating and thus deserving of his ultimate apportionment.

The prophetic nature of the second stasimon prepares us for the final dramatic movement of the play in which the death of the brothers will be related to the Chorus and the audience. Our attitude to their deaths and the whole text is now dependent on the ending⁴⁷. The majority of scholars believe that 861-74 and 1005-exeunt omnes are fourth-century interpolations inspired by Sophocles' *Ant.* and Euripides' *Phoen.*⁴⁸, but this belief has been challenged by Lloyd-Jones⁴⁹. The anapaests 861-74 are problematic as the Chorus announces the entrance of Antigone and Ismene and then says that they will sing a lament before the sisters arrive, which is awkward and according to Brown⁵⁰ intolerably bad

⁴⁶ However, on the reasons for the curse, see above, p.169.

⁴⁷ This discussion on the ending of the *Septem* is a very brief analysis on only what is germane to the topic of this thesis, viz. the joint responsibility of Polynices and Eteocles and the position of Thebes after the dual fratricide.

⁴⁸ The most recent argument for interpolation is by Sommerstein (1996) pp.130-4 who argues that the additions were made by a later poet of uneven talent, possibly for a reproduction of the *Septem* as a single play. Cf. Taplin (1977) p.169 that the ending may have been added by actors.

⁴⁹ Lloyd-Jones (1959) and supported by Hecht and Bacon (1974) pp.8ff. Brown (1976) believes that the question of the ending would not have arisen if it were not for 1026-53 and he concludes that this should be removed.

⁵⁰ Brown (1976) p.206 discusses all the possibilities of the redistribution of the Choral ode.

stylistically. However, if these lines are removed then there is no announcement for the sisters at all and as a result, it could be argued that Aeschylus did not intend them to be there. According to Sommerstein⁵¹, this should not cause any difficulties, for the audience can hardly be told that the line of Laius has been destroyed (696, 720, 813, 881-2, 951-5) and then be confronted with two female descendents. Once 861-74 has been removed, it is then necessary to remove 1005-78, for this section revolves around Antigone⁵². 1005-25 prepares the audience for her defiance, 1026-53 directly involves her and 1054-78 is sensible only in light of her challenge to the city magistrates. Further support for the spurious nature of the ending gains credence from the question of stagecraft⁵³. Until the point of the Herald's entrance we have had a two-actor drama and it is questionable whether Aeschylus would introduce another actor so late in the play's development. Although the Herald and Ismene do not engage in any dialogue it would surely be impossible for the actor playing Ismene to leave the stage and change costume in the time that it takes the actor who plays Antigone to speak one line. Furthermore, if Ismene were to leave the stage so that the actor could instantly change to play the part of the Herald, then Ismene leaves the stage with no exit line at all⁵⁴. However, if we accept that the end of Aeschylus' text is in fact immediately prior to the entrance of the Herald then we have an artistically satisfactory ending⁵⁵. The curse has run its course and has ended with the death of the line. Thus, the city can breathe easily and the tensions of the whole trilogy are resolved and therefore, no new elements are introduced at the end of the play⁵⁶. There is justification for this in the text at two points; 815 and 820, wherein the Messenger asserts that the city is safe and the same belief is echoed by the Chorus at 826 and 902-3. This is definitely an attractive theory and if we use the end of the *Oresteia* as our model it seems probable. However, it does not seem safe to assume that all Aeschylus' trilogies had a formula which guaranteed a 'happy ending' based upon only one example.

⁵¹ Sommerstein (1996) p.131.

⁵² Sommerstein (1996) p.132.

⁵³ The ending of the *Septem* is discussed at length by Taplin (1977) pp.169ff. Taplin has no doubt that the scene with Antigone and Ismene and from 1005 to the end of the play is an addition, as are the introductory anapaests at 861-74. Thus, he concludes that Aeschylus' text has been cut and altered in order to facilitate the different ending.

⁵⁴ Brown (1976) p.206.

⁵⁵ Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.19.

⁵⁶ This theory is supported by Solmsen (1937) p.207.

Conversely, we can discuss the ending of the MSS and propose another theory. The lament of the Chorus and the sisters raises the question of parity. To them, the brothers are now equal with an equal claim to earth for burial. Consequently, the audience would feel that, as the brothers were both guilty of fratricidal desires, neither of them is more or less guilty than the other⁵⁷. This is furthered when we consider that at points it is difficult to establish exactly which brother is being referred to⁵⁸. If this is accepted as the end of the trilogy then the curse has run its course, but the manuscript has the Herald arrive at 1005 with the news that Polynices will not be buried, hence evoking a Sophoclean response from Antigone. The ramifications of this are important; the state, by denying the funeral, is acting contrary to divine law and therefore is entangling itself in the crimes of the family. We might remember that the oracle of Apollo stated three times that Laius would save his city only if he died without begetting offspring. Thus, we might argue that his disobedience meant that the city would not be safe. The Chorus clearly state this at 742ff. and we know from 619⁵⁹ that Apollo only speaks the truth or does not speak at all. Therefore, if the city is to be saved from destruction via the death of the whole family then we must conclude that Apollo is either not telling the truth or has been inaccurate from the outset of the trilogy. Realistically, neither of these can be the case, for it is surely impossible for a god to be wrong and we know that Apollo as the god of prophecy should not lie. Thus, the actions of the Theban elders in refusing the burial (which is against divine law) could be seen as the final workings of divine will (leading to the destruction of the whole city). Evidence in support of this can be found in the text. As aforementioned, the first stasimon is prophetic of the final destruction of Thebes, which concludes the Theban cycle. Aeschylus may have had a free hand with the workings of the myth but not with the ultimate outcome as the original audience knew *de facto* the sack of Thebes. Additionally, we must ask ourselves whether mutual fratricide can leave the city without sin. Throughout the debate between the Chorus and Eteocles, they beg him to refrain from combat with his brother, for the shedding of kindred blood is unlawful (694). In this sentiment they echo their previous words at 677ff. wherein they claim that the pollution of fratricide can never be purified. Therefore, can we

⁵⁷ This agrees with Lloyd-Jones (1959) p.85 that neither brother's guilt outweighed the other's. However, this thesis departs from Lloyd-Jones' argument that it is the family curse that is all-important rather than any motivation of the brothers. As has been seen, their quarrel and subsequent fratricide must be understood as their own personal desire combined with Oedipus' curse, not simply the curse itself.

⁵⁸ Gagarin (1976) p.129.

⁵⁹ This line is deleted by Pearson. See further Hutchinson (1985) p.140.

really expect all to be well for the city after such a crime has been committed⁶⁰? Furthermore, it is not impossible that Aeschylus could introduce a resolution that takes place beyond the remit of the text, for as Lloyd-Jones⁶¹ establishes, Sophocles' *O.C.* looks forward to the action of *Antigone*. Firstly, the concept that the city is in danger from the assault and from the sins of the family has been evident throughout and therefore is not technically a new issue. Secondly, a precedent is provided in the *Persae* in which Darius looks forward to the destruction of the Persian forces in the battle of Plataea (see Darius' speech at *Pers.* 800ff.).

However, we must ask ourselves how the city is to be destroyed. In the mythic tradition the Epigono⁶², the sons of the seven, return to avenge their fathers' deaths. Herodotus tells us at 4.32 that there was an epic Epigono⁶³ which was attributed to Homer and with which the audience may have been familiar. We also know from *Il.* 4.405-10 that the sons successfully attacked the city with fewer men. Nevertheless, the provision for this expedition in the text is doubtful; only at 903 is there any reference to them. However, the Chorus state at 828 that the brothers die childless⁶⁴. Hutchinson⁶⁴ suggests alternative meanings but he admits that they are not desirable, preferring to remove 'childless' altogether. Consequently, we can either accept that the Epigono⁶² are not expressly catered for in the play or that, if they are meant by the frequent allusions to the safety of the city then it is, as the *Iliad* states, an expedition with fewer men.

Hence, if we accept that Aeschylus has ended his trilogy in a prophetic way by embroiling the city in the chain of sin and disobedience, then we have to reconcile the problems of the lack of direct reference to the Epigono⁶² and the many references to the safety of the city as a result of the ending of the curse via the brothers' deaths. Perhaps our only consolation is that the debate between the Herald and Antigone comes after the Chorus' claims that Thebes is safe and it is only then that we realise the full extent of the wrath of the gods and the inclusion of Thebes therein. This, however, does not account for the dramatic lack of continuity evident in the sudden introduction of the third actor. Nonetheless, the rejection of

⁶⁰ This question is also posed by Lloyd-Jones (1959) p.86.

⁶¹ Lloyd-Jones (1959) p.86.

⁶² For a full discussion on the Epigono⁶², see Gantz (1993) pp.522-5.

⁶³ See further Lloyd-Jones (1959) p.90.

⁶⁴ Hutchinson (1985) p.185.

the ending creates its own problems of continuity of theme. As discussed above, how can the city be saved when Apollo has clearly given terms to Laius which he has broken and how can the city escape from the pollution of fratricide? Thus we have an insoluble dilemma, for the evidence and counter-evidence are both so strong that a final decision seems impossible.

Although it is impossible to decide between the above theories concerning the fate of Thebes, we can propose a reading of the tragedy of Eteocles. Eteocles is a man under a curse as a result of his father's enmity and the unlawful fratricidal desires of the two brothers. Several factors are at work, patrimony and the brothers' own responsibility. In addition to the inheritance from Oedipus there are the crimes of Laius which are infecting the whole house and perhaps the city in general. Thus, as a consequence of his birthright Eteocles has the propensity to make certain decisions. These are; the decision to fight in the first instance, the positioning of each of the Theban champions, and ultimately the decision to fight his brother. Juxtaposed with this are the desires of Polynices who is also creating an environment for the curse to be fulfilled. Thus, although the curse and hatred of the gods are conspiring to ensure that this generation will receive punishment, they are not simply scheming the death of a blameless and noble individual but participating in the desires of the brothers and thus allowing them to engage as they both desire. If we favour the destruction of Thebes theory and accept the ending given in the MSS, then the fates of Eteocles and the city are interlinked but not in a saving capacity. Eteocles, in choosing to fight his brother, is not trying to avert destruction of the city; he gives no thought to the pollution that will entail as a result of his action. Therefore, the city absorbs the pollution of the sin and, coupled with the original oracle, is now in a threatened position. However, the city is not without blame, for the government now defy the laws of the gods in refusing the burial of Polynices. The final outcome of this will be the destruction of the city in accordance with the information given to Laius at the outset of the myth. However, if we reject the ending and the implication of the fate of the city in the crimes of the family, then the city is saved by the fact that the curse has run its course with the deaths of the last members of the family, and thus the wrath of the gods is at an end.

Appendix - *Persae*

Aeschylus' *Persae* is perhaps the most difficult to explain in terms of motivation and justification. For the most part the play is an account of the effects of tragedy upon firstly Persia and secondly Xerxes. However, as has been noticed by many scholars, Aeschylus' account of the Persian invasion of Greece in 480 B.C. is explained in terms of traditional religious beliefs¹ and the *dramatis personae* interpret the motivation of divinity and the responsibility of humanity accordingly. In order that we appreciate that the *Persae* is not to be a play of simply historical interest, Aeschylus, although using the actual for his subject matter, places the emphasis on the universal. The audience witness in glorious colour the call to arms of a nation, the fall of nobility and the stalwart defence of kith and kin, but most importantly, behind human actions we detect the divine players moving in an ambiguous fashion, controlling and motivating the events we witness. Thus, in essence, the *Persae* is without doubt a tragedy of a country and a king.

Aeschylus begins the *Persae* with a parodos which is charged with both pride and foreboding. Immediately, the emphasis is on the impending loss of the Persian host. The Chorus constituted of Persian Elders relate how the forces of Aisa have departed for Greece but the use of the verb ὀλομένων (departed) strikes an ominous note, for ὀλομένων has the sense of 'left never to return', and the repetition of this verb at 12 and 60 further stresses the fact that the whole army and fleet will never return home. As if to try and alleviate their fears the Chorus seek refuge in cataloguing the Persian forces (21ff.), but this increases their doubts, for it stresses that the whole of Persia has been emptied of men, and asks what would happen if they did not return.² Thus, the Chorus introduce the first theme of the play, the tragedy of Persia, whose very strength of numbers will be turned against them at land

¹ Kitto (1963), Gagarin (1976), Adams (1983), Winnington-Ingram (1983), Goldhill (1988).

² The wavering of the Chorus between hope and foreboding is reminiscent of the parodos of the *Agamemnon*, wherein the Chorus, again of Elders, fluctuate between fearing divine wrath as a result of the events at Aulis and hoping for the best.

and at sea. Thus, in agreement with Sommerstein³ the emphasis on the strength of the army is not to highlight Persian invincibility but to show how its destruction will devastate Persia. Indeed, the very roll call of the glorious forces and of their commanders will become a death list in the final scene of the play.

What is causing the Chorus to have misgivings has caused much debate and any conclusions are dependent on the position of the stanza 93-100. To discuss the matter briefly, the manuscript has the Choral thought progression thus: first strophe and antistrophe presents the Persian host as invincible; second strophe expresses the Chorus' fear that the gods delude men with 'soft deceitful wiles'; second antistrophe states that it is the apportionment of Persia to dominate her own continent; and the final strophe explains the Chorus' misgiving that Xerxes has cast a yoke over the Hellespont in order to cast a yoke of slavery over Greece. According to this strophic order the first evidence of divine motivation for the defeat of Persia would be based upon racial segregation; the Persians and other barbarians should remain in Aisa and the Greeks in Greece, and 'never the twain shall meet'⁴. Furthermore, the emphasis is placed upon the crossing of the Hellespont as the major cause for concern. Hence, according to Adams⁵, the sense of uneasiness is brought back to the Chorus by the fact that Xerxes has yoked the sea thus making a slave of the sea and therefore of Poseidon. Consequently, Xerxes is rashly placing himself at odds with a god and, in the process, committing hybris.

The strophic order has, however, been challenged by Müller who proposes the transposition of 93-100 to follow 136. As a result, the Choral thought progression changes. Now the first strophe and antistrophe (109-22) describes Persia as invincible in strength and courage, the second strophe and antistrophe (123-136) describes how the gods have granted great victories to Persia thus far and now her forces have crossed the sea to conquer Greece. Then the final strophe returns to the element of foreboding that the gods delude mortals. The arguments to support this transposition are both structural and thematic. In terms of structure, it is usual in this ode for the antistrophe to develop or repeat the theme of the

³ Sommerstein (1996) p.72.

⁴ This theory is proposed by Kitto (1963) pp.37-8.

⁵ Adams (1983) pp.36-7. See also Anderson (1972) p.167.

preceding strophe. If we compare both thought progressions, we see that Müller's transposition makes more sense because the strophe and antistrophe (123-136) are now on the same theme and, as a couplet, also expand upon the first strophe and antistrophe (109-122). Additionally, the final strophe also prepares us for the lament that closes the parodos. Furthermore, the fact that the final strophe has no answering antistrophe means that the lyric is brought to an abrupt end with all the audience's thoughts focused on the precarious position of Xerxes.

In terms of thematic development, the above structure affords greater thematic clarity. Broadhead⁶ argues that not to follow Müller results in the acceptance that the crossing of the sea is what the Chorus fears, but considering the casual nature of the Chorus' reference to it this seems inadequate as a reason for Xerxes' defeat. However, with the transposition, the Chorus seem to fear that because Persia has been so successful she may now suffer as a result. They fear that in their quest for glory they are being deluded into risking everything so that they will be laid low. Thus, the Chorus relate to the audience the fifth-century Greek fear that excessive success is in itself a cause for alarm. This interpretation gains further credence when we consider the emphasis placed upon wealth in the parodos. Sommerstein⁷ comments that the Chorus would have been sumptuously costumed, typifying the Greek idea of oriental luxury. Furthermore, Persia itself is described as full of gold (3). Similarly, so is Sardis (45) and Babylon (47*f.*) and ultimately Xerxes himself is considered as descended from gold⁸. Consequently, the impression that is gained from the parodos is that Persia has always been favoured by the gods with success, but to put faith in continued prosperity and divine grace is rash and presumptuous. Thus, any member of the audience would be inclined to think that Xerxes in rashly believing in his continuing good fortune is overreaching himself, and in doing so will inevitably bring the wrath of the gods upon himself and his army⁹. As a result, the yoking of the Hellespont (with its association with slavery) becomes ominous, not as a reason for divine wrath, but as a symbol of the excessiveness that Xerxes is willing to commit.

⁶ Broadhead (1960) pp.53-4.

⁷ Sommerstein (1996)p.72. See also Anderson (1972)p.169.

⁸ Perseus is considered to be the founder of Persia and ancestor of Xerxes. Perseus is the child of Danaë who was conceived when Zeus came to her as a shower of gold.

⁹ See further Thomson (1978) p.281.

Further evidence for the working of divine will can be seen in the first episode in which the Chorus encounter Atossa, wife of Darius and mother of Xerxes. She enters with all the state and dignity that accompanies her status which again reflects the wealth of the empire. As with the Chorus, her first sentiments are of fear and anxiety. An analysis of the fears of Atossa is again dependent on the transposition of the stanza in the parodos. If we accept the order in the manuscript then Atossa, by focussing on the precarious nature of success (62ff.) is introducing a new perspective to the atmosphere of foreboding. Thus, it would be now that the amoral principle is introduced; that is, that the gods take note of those grown rich beyond all right, and consequently divine resentment is aroused. However, if Müller's thesis is right then obviously Atossa is developing the divine motivation already expressed by the Chorus. She states;

‘My heart, too, is rent with anxiety; and unto you my wise friends, will I
make a disclosure, being in no wise free from an apprehension prompted by
my own thoughts, lest our great wealth shall, in its headlong course, have
overturned that prosperity which Darius raised on high not without the favour
of some god.’ (161-64)¹⁰

However, the question that arises is what limits are applied to men, how wealthy can a man be without provoking divine enmity? We may conjecture that Persian wealth has been accrued by Darius with ‘Heaven’s help’ and that the success he was allowed did not arouse the ill-will of heaven. It is possible that he was permitted such wealth because he had a sophron attitude, whereas Xerxes is to be shown as proud and impetuous. Indeed, it would seem that Aeschylus intends to present Darius as the wise king and Xerxes as the rash son. However, at no point does Aeschylus make any character state that the gods are resentful of the wealth of Persia under Xerxes and not so under Darius. Thus, we may further speculate that the wealth of Persia without annexing Greece was acceptable but including Greece in the Empire would, in the eyes of the gods, be excessive. Yet, although this would make a convenient ‘get-out clause’, it is not specifically stated; hence we find that it is perhaps safer to conclude that, as mortals, we do not know when we have become too successful. The gods are sometimes arbitrary beings and thus it is probably impossible to set a limit on what is acceptable and what is not.

¹⁰ All translations unless otherwise stated are from Weir Smyth (1922).

These speculations aside, Atossa has grounds for her fears, having been visited by a recurring dream and an omen which are both heavy with symbolism. To a Greek audience it was a fact that dreams and omens were heaven-sent; thus we might conclude that this is the first concrete example of divine interest in the events. The meaning of Atossa's dream is obvious; Persia will be ruled by Xerxes but Greece will not, hence the Persian woman's willingness to accept the yoke and the Greek woman's refusal¹¹. By refusing to accept the yoke, Greece will bring Xerxes down, hence the destruction of the chariot in the dream. What is by no means clear is why the gods have decided that Xerxes will not be master of both races. Winnington-Ingram¹² argues that Atossa's dream is symbolic of how the gods (Zeus in particular) want the world to be governed, that is Persia is to be a monarchy, Greece a democracy (hence the reaction of the two women) and thus, Xerxes' attempt on Greece is to work against the Moirae that govern the universe. This thesis may gain further credence by an examination of the eagle and falcon omen. The eagle, which is savaged by the falcon whilst seeking revenge in Apollo's hearth, can be seen as the symbol of monarchy (cf. the eagles in the *Agamemnon* 118ff.¹³), thus representing Xerxes. The eagle is by far the stronger bird and should be able to defeat a falcon, much the same way that an army of five million (if this figure is true) should have been able to destroy the Greek resistance. Importantly, the eagle gains no refuge from Apollo, traditionally seen as a Greek god. From this, we might conclude that the gods are actively against the Persians in Greece but arguably, the omen explains nothing further concerning divine motivation; the omen, as with the dream, only further states that the Persians will not be victorious.

To what Atossa has seen and dreamt, the Chorus have no answers; they merely encourage her to pray to the gods to avert any ill omens. There then follows a brief interlude in the tension in which Atossa questions the Chorus about Athens. Thus, the audience is allowed some respite from the mounting suspense. However, this rest is shattered by the Messenger, who arrives with the news of the defeat of the Persian fleet at Salamis.

¹¹ Interestingly, Aeschylus describes the Greek woman as Doric, which would encourage the audience to think of Sparta rather than Athens. It is clear that Aeschylus does not want his audience to think that the purpose of the play is to glorify Athens; the defeat of Persia was achieved by a united Greece not by Athens alone cf. 817. For a full discussion on this see Sommerstein (1996) p.76.

¹² Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.11.

¹³ See above Ch.1 p.13ff.

Although the Chorus have feared the worst they are, once told, virtually speechless. They perceive the events as the inevitable working of fate;

‘Lament with loud despair
The cruel and crushing fate
Of those whom the gods’ hate
Condemned to perish there.’¹⁴ (280-283)

The Messenger’s subsequent description of the battle of Salamis is not only a thematic necessity (that we witness the Persian tragedy), it also throws more light upon divine motivation. In response to Atossa’s questions the Messenger relates how Xerxes began the battle under the influence of an alastor (in the physical form of Themistocles)¹⁵. At this point, Xerxes is akin to Agamemnon at Aulis; both have made judgements that offend the gods. The infatuation possesses Agamemnon and allows him to act upon the choice he has made; similarly, Xerxes has made the choice to engage in battle with Greece and now he is induced to adopt the fatal position. It is at this stage in the play that we have the final evidence and ultimate proof that the gods are in fact conspiring against Xerxes and the Persians. Until now it has been feared by the Chorus, suggested by Atossa but it is only the actual defeat at Salamis that clearly shows that Heaven is on the side of Greece. However, this clarity of position is not accompanied with a full statement of motivation. The Messenger states that resentment by the gods is to blame (362) but he does not state what the gods are resentful of. To determine Aeschylus’ meaning we must examine the play as a continuous whole and again look to the parodos for assistance. Arguably, it is now that we have to decide over the stanza order in the parodos. If we accept the traditional order, the development is as follows: the Chorus believe that the gods will not allow Persia success over the sea, for Xerxes to attempt it is against the divine order; Atossa introduces a separate argument, that the wealth of Persia is enough to destroy them. However, if we transpose the stanza then the Chorus and Atossa are in agreement; they both believe that wealth in itself can arouse divine jealousy and therefore, the Messenger’s accusation of ‘resentment’ is surely that Xerxes and Persia have simply transgressed an unknown limit of success.

¹⁴ Translated by P.Vellacott (Penguin Books 1961).

¹⁵ However, Themistocles is not named. The messenger calls him; ‘a Greek man from the Athenian forces’. This is an important detail, for Aeschylus has constructed this drama without using a single Greek name, thereby highlighting that this is a tragedy about Persia rather than a victorious pageant about Greece.

With the defeat of Persia a fact, the Chorus look for who is to blame. Until now the gods have been sinister but have not as yet been presented as particularly active agents. However, now the Chorus recognise that the divine beings are responsible for the final defeat but it was not the gods who placed Persia in a position where defeat was an issue, it was Xerxes who did so. Consequently, the Chorus now apportion the blame between their gods and their king. In the first stasimon, the pain of Persia is juxtaposed with Xerxes' responsibility. They describe the loss and pain of those left behind, the 'accusing groan' (548) that condemns the king. Clearly they blame him;

'For now in truth the whole land of Asia, dispeopled
maketh moan: Xerxes led forth (woe!)
Xerxes laid low (woe!) Xerxes disposed
all things imprudently with his sea-faring barques.' (550-553)

What must be made clear is that they blame Xerxes simply because he has lost, because the good fortune that has attached itself to the Persian kingly household has gone (554ff.). If Xerxes had won the battle (and with the strength of his forces it is conceivable that he may have), then his status would have exceeded all his predecessors. However, in their grief they believe that the expedition has been one great, destructive mistake and therefore Xerxes is held responsible for his hamartia, and, this his error has resulted in the wrath of the gods. This gives further credence to the amoral argument; if the Chorus thought that Xerxes had been impious (as he would have been if he was working against the Moirae) then surely the Chorus would have stated thus. However, in contrast, they never mention any act of hybris.

What remains is to ascertain exactly why Xerxes' mission was doomed to fail, why the gods have been so merciless towards the Persian forces. In their fear and pain the Chorus and Atossa appeal to Darius for wisdom and advice, and in some way we also appeal to Darius to be *Deus ex Machina* and reveal to us a deeper understanding of the events. Aeschylus' presentation of Darius is of particular interest; therefore it is profitable to take time to assess why Aeschylus wanted to delay the constantly expected entrance of Xerxes with this bold innovative scene. Ostensibly, Darius is called upon to give advice on what to do, but his advice is somewhat limited¹⁶. Firstly, he counsels the Persian Elders to never again take up

¹⁶ For an excellent discussion on the importance of Darius see Alexanderson (1967) pp.1-11 and Broadhead (1960) pp.xxi-xxii.

arms against Greece. Secondly, he recommends that his son should change his attitude to the gods (829-831) which suggests that it is partly Xerxes' rashness that has caused offence. Finally, he tells Atossa to get Xerxes new clothes and to speak calmly to him (832-838) but when Xerxes arrives on stage he has clearly not meant to have met Atossa. Darius' advice fulfils a number of functions. His advice not to attack Greece is based upon his belief that the land cannot support a large force. This prompts the Chorus to suggest another attack with a smaller force, a suggestion which gives Darius the opportunity of relating the long-awaited narrative of the events at Plataea. In highlighting this, Alexanderson¹⁷ comments that Salamis is presented as the result of an attack with a large force and Plataea is the result of a smaller one, thus all attempts at conquest are doomed to failure. Darius' advice to Atossa concerning Xerxes' physical appearance, taken on its own seems somewhat extraneous, especially since he arrives in rags¹⁸, but in terms of the dramatic development of the play his advice is wholly consistent. As has been seen the wealth of Persia is a dominant motif, the constant references to wealth in the text and the luxurious physical appearance of the Chorus and Atossa highlights this. Furthermore, Atossa's dream clearly foreshadows Xerxes' entrance in rags and leads us to expect his physical appearance, thus Darius' advice simply reminds the audience of what has been at the back of their minds. What is important is that this contributes to the motif of wealth, as the gods give wealth, so can they take it away. In having Xerxes appear thus humbled, Aeschylus draws the parallel between father and son. Darius is seen as the wise king who did not offend the gods, while Xerxes is the rash son who does¹⁹. This contrast has again been prepared for in Atossa's dream wherein Darius pities his son his misfortunes (197-8) and Xerxes rends his clothes (198-9), and again at 554 where the Chorus consider Xerxes as the cause of destruction, but consider Darius to have ruled scathelessly over his people.

The most important function of Darius is to provide some answers to why the Greeks have defeated the Persians. Some scholars have argued that the bridging of the Hellespont is what

¹⁷ Alexanderson (1967) p.10.

¹⁸ Xerxes clearly arrives in rags; he has not met Atossa and changed his clothes and had his torn clothes brought on by a servant. Furthermore, whether these are the clothes that he tore at Salamis and then wore across two continents is not supposed to be rationalised by the audience or the scholar. The important point is that he fled Greece with only the clothes on his back.

¹⁹ Alexanderson (1967) p.2.

motivates divine wrath, and this is evidenced by Darius²⁰. However, although Darius marvels at the ability of his son to bridge the Hellespont, he condemns him for doing so, but this is not the original crime. Darius perceives that although Xerxes' action was divinely inspired, there must have been some previous act of folly;

‘Alas! ‘Twas some mighty power that came upon him so that he lost
his sober judgement.’ (725)

and further;

‘Mortal though he was, he thought in his mortal folly that he would gain
the mastery over all the gods, aye even over Poseidon.’ (747-50)

If it was only the Hellespont that provoked anger then Poseidon alone would be the outraged divinity, but Darius stresses the fact that all the gods are provoked by his actions, thus it is probable that the Hellespont alone cannot be considered as the single act which has provoked divine enmity. Winnington-Ingram²¹ convincingly argues that the Hellespont is not so much an act of *hybris* as a symbol of an already guilty man. Xerxes has become again like Agamemnon. Agamemnon walks towards his palace on the tapestries, in the process committing an act of gross pride and sacrilegious behaviour, but that is not his crime. His initial crime was committed ten years earlier in Aulis and to this he has added many more at Troy. Similarly, Xerxes binds the Hellespont which is also a sacrilegious act, but he does so because he has already made the choice to invade Greece, and it is this choice that originally offends the gods. Thus, we appreciate the snowball effect of rashness and excessive pride;²² once man has committed one offence then he is deluded into making many more. Consequently, the gods have deluded Xerxes into making a bad judgement at the Hellespont and will do so again over the scene at Salamis²³. For Darius, the assistance of Divinity is inevitable. He cites oracles given to him concerning the destruction of Persian power as ordained by Zeus. Importantly, however, he sees the working of these oracles not as fate guiding Xerxes on a path of ruin but instead he sees the gods as lending a hand to already determined action;

²⁰ For example, Adams (1983) p.40 states; ‘The truth is home. The yoking of the Sea has been shown to the Chorus as the damning act of *hybris*; the *daimon* has been identified as Poseidon. They understand now that the Sea rejected the yoke and has taken vengeance through Ionian ships and hands on the man who tried to enslave it - and on all the Persian race as well; that was inevitable’.

²¹ Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.11 and recently supported by Sommerstein (1996).

²² On the nature of insolent pride, *hybris* and *Ate* see Broadhead (1960) pp.204-5.

²³ See further Murray in McCall (1972) p.38.

'But heaven takes part, for good or ill, with man's own zeal.'

Again, Winnington-Ingram interestingly analyses this;

'Disaster for Persia was among the inscrutable purposes of the gods, but it was Xerxes - and not the gods - who was in a hurry.'²⁴

So, if not the gods acting for no reason at all and not the binding of the Hellespont, what is responsible for the Persian defeat? There is no clear answer to this. It does not seem to be a matter of race, for Cyrus was allowed to defeat Ionian Greeks. Possibly, the gods will not grant Xerxes victory because conquering Greece would transgress the limits of wealth that the apportionment of the Persian Empire allows. Thus Darius and his predecessors were granted success because it was acceptable. Hence, the gods are withholding victory as a consequence of the limits of prosperity and as a punishment for seeking too much; the gods put Xerxes in a position in which he can commit greater and greater excess. However, whilst this is probable there must remain a doubt that the audience are never told what the limit of wealth is, we only know that Xerxes wanted too much by the fact that he did not achieve it. Perhaps the only answer is to accept that the gods did not want the Persians to be victorious, hence Xerxes is defeated and Darius warns never to make another attempt on Greece. Therefore, Xerxes is guilty simply by transgressing the gods' will and to do so is a crime, even if unpremeditated or done in ignorance. Thus it is simply the fate of man to accept the will of the gods without question and often without understanding.

This however, does not mean that the audience absolve Xerxes of his responsibility for the catastrophe. Aeschylus clearly intends that the audience hold Xerxes as responsible, for both the Chorus (550ff.) and Darius (747ff.) attribute the disaster to him. The important point is that the decision to invade Greece was made by Xerxes, albeit from bad counsel (753ff.) and it is this decision that ensures that the gods conspire against him. Once he has made this decision he then enters on a chain of actions that add crime upon crime. Aiding and abetting his actions are the gods who through Ate negate his reasoning, and thus possessed he makes the fatal mistake to bridge the Hellespont and adopt the fatal position at Salamis. Consequently it should not be considered that the enmity of the gods resulted from some act of *hybris*.

²⁴ Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.11.

The only clear statement of an act of *hybris*, as defined by outrageous behaviour, is concerning those forces left in Greece. Darius relates how they will fall to the Dorian spear on the plains of Plataia. However, the sin of these forces is distinct from that of the whole force and Xerxes. Darius describes how the remaining forces have committed the most heinous offence, that is, the desecration of holy places. We might compare how even the favoured Greeks on their return from Troy paid the price for their sacrilegious behaviour in the sacking of Troy. As a result the audience understand that not only Xerxes, but also those who accompanied him bear responsibility for the defeat. For the sacrilege committed by the remaining force, Persia is held responsible. This is essential for we are not to think that the Persian tragedy is solely Xerxes' fault, to a certain extent Persia is also responsible²⁵. Hence, the tragedy for Persia is complete; the fleet has gone at Salamis, the nobility at Psyttaleia and the hand-picked forces at Plataia.

What motivates Xerxes to attempt an invasion of Greece is explained by Atossa at 753ff. where she describes how Xerxes has been taunted by other men that he has not added to the wealth of the Persian Empire like his father Darius, but remained at home and enjoyed his inheritance. The taunt that contrasts Xerxes with Darius has been well provided for in the text. As has been seen, Atossa's dream first introduces the disparity between the kings, Xerxes reaction to Darius in rending his garments possibly suggests how it was possible for the counsellors to use the exploits of his father to convince him to risk a major war. Further, the fact that Darius is a foil to Xerxes is clearly understood in the invocation scene wherein Darius' wisdom is contrasted with his son's rashness. As a result, the involvement of Persia in her own fate becomes linked to the responsibility of Xerxes and her complicity in her tragedy is further understood.

The unification of all strands of the tragedy is presented in the final scene. The emotional lament of the Chorus and King, which contrasts the victory paeon of the Greeks at Salamis, unites the dual tragedy of Persia and Xerxes. Sommerstein²⁶ divides the lament into three sections: 950-1001 in which the Chorus lead the lament; 1002-37 wherein Xerxes displays

²⁵ See further Winnington-Ingram (1983) p.12 'Human responsibility radiates in widening circles. First Xerxes, then his counsellors, but soon we find the whole Persian host is to blame; and the moral climax comes in the context, not of Xerxes and Salamis, but of Plataea.

²⁶ Sommerstein (1996) pp.95-6.

his torn clothes and empty quiver; and finally 1037 to *exeunt omnes* where the Chorus and Xerxes join together to make their way to the palace crying and beating their breasts. In the first of these movements the emphasis is on the tragedy of Persia; the Chorus again name the commanders that have met their deaths in a grim parallel to the parodos. Thus, the tragedy that Persia has been emptied of wealth is now complete. The second movement, led by Xerxes, focuses upon him. He shows his torn garments, fulfilling the expectation that arises from Atossa's dream. In his tragic status the audience see the effect of transgressing divine will, even when that will is not known.

In conclusion, Aeschylus has interpreted the history of his own time in religious terms. In accepting Müller's transposition, we have a clear religious progression from the parodos to the appearance of Darius. In this part of the play, Aeschylus pays tribute to the principle that prosperity and good fortune can in themselves cause disaster, but it is impossible to know when that limit has been transgressed. Darius however, sees beyond this, as he knows that the destruction of Persia is inevitable at some point in time. Yet it is not necessarily Persia's appointed time, it is simply that Xerxes has acted against divine wishes and is therefore led on to commit greater sacrilege. We know this simply because he is defeated. Thus, responsibility lies in the decision to undertake the expedition in the first place. Therefore, Xerxes is a complete tragic figure; in not knowing the will of the gods or having the wisdom to divine it, he brings about, through error, the destruction. The responsibility for the tragedy of Persia lies not only with Xerxes, but with Persia herself. The ill-counsel given to Xerxes and the hybris committed by the forces left in Greece results in the devastating defeat at Plataea. Thus, Persia and Xerxes are jointly responsible for their own fate.

Conclusions

What has been proved in this thesis is that an understanding of motivation and justification is essential to appreciating the complexity of the works of Aeschylus. Through examining these key areas it is possible to evaluate the importance of personal responsibility inherent in each tragic scenario. What has been realised is that, for the most part, each tragic character is put in the position of choice; although this is circumscribed by the will of a divinity or by a chthonic power, the character nevertheless has a choice in his destiny and therefore is held responsible for his actions. Furthermore, the motivation for that choice further evidences the nature of responsibility, for the personal desire of a character is often the basis of why a choice is made. Nevertheless, juxtaposed with personal responsibility is divine causation. Both the Olympian gods and chthonic gods demand that certain rules and codes of behaviour be upheld and when those rules are broken they demand that the transgressor should atone.

The three levels of causation; personal desire, Olympian will and chthonic will, are all evident in the *Oresteia*, in which each tragic scenario of the Atridae family is played out. However, to understand the complexity of the interwoven themes, an understanding of the key role of Justice is paramount. What has been seen is that certain laws are the cornerstone of the heroic society; unto the doer is done, and the fact that blood once shed cannot be recalled. Throughout the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* it is upon these laws that both men and gods base their actions and in the *Eumenides* these laws are again reaffirmed in the alliance of Athena and the Erinyes. Ultimately, it is upon these laws that the audience base their judgements of each tragic character.

With regard to the *Agamemnon*, what is understood is that Paris, by eloping with Helen, has transgressed the correct laws of behaviour that underpin the heroic society and, in doing so, has offended Zeus who is the god of guests. Consequently, Paris (and by virtue of their acceptance of him, the whole of Troy) must atone for his actions. Subsequently, Agamemnon must avenge the insult to the family because Paris has made an unforgiveable assault on the family honour. However, Agamemnon is also the agent of Zeus for, as

evidenced by the omen of the eagles, it is clearly Zeus' will that Paris and Troy should atone. However, in a polytheistic religion the action of one god can provoke the anger of another, which is seen in the actions of Artemis. On account of the omen of the eagles devouring the pregnant hare, she demands the sacrifice of Iphigenia as payment. This creates the first tragic dilemma of the trilogy; Agamemnon must avenge the honour of his family because of the assault upon it by Paris and Troy and because it is the will of Zeus that he should, but to do so he must sacrifice his daughter. This will in turn mean that he must atone according to the law of unto the doer is done. However, in this tragic scenario, Aeschylus has guarded against the interpretation that Agamemnon is simply a senseless puppet who is no more than the plaything of the gods or a man whose actions are simply fulfilling some predestined path. What has been appreciated is that Agamemnon considers that he is in a position of choice and it is that choice which means that the audience understand him to be personally liable for the decision he makes and that he will therefore be held responsible accordingly. Why Agamemnon is put in that position of choice has been thoroughly examined and what can be concluded finally is that, by virtue of his ability to sacrifice his daughter, Artemis puts him in the position of condemning himself. Thus, the audience understand that although Agamemnon's actions are circumscribed by divine will, ultimately his actions are his own responsibility and, according to the laws of Justice, as he has acted so must he suffer. Consequently, Agamemnon enters into a fatalistic chain of events in which he progresses to acts of greater and greater excessiveness. At Troy, he is held responsible firstly for the loss of so many Greek lives for the sake of an adulterous wife and secondly for the sacrilege committed under his command. Thus, when Agamemnon enters the stage he is as guilty as he could possibly be. When he walks into the palace on the tapestries he commits his last great act of hybris and thus, when the skene doors close behind him, the audience appreciate that his death is deserved.

Once the audience have understood Agamemnon's own personal liability, Aeschylus then introduces a third level of causation, that of the family curse which overshadows the whole family. Aeschylus does not introduce the curse so that the audience should suddenly reject everything that they have upheld thus far and consider Agamemnon's actions as a simple result of the fact that he is cursed and that he therefore should not be held accountable but simply because it provides another level of causation. Importantly, Agamemnon is not

allowed any attempt at justification in which the curse of Thyestes or the will of the gods could be invoked. However, that need not affect our understanding of the requirement for his death, for when Clytemnestra attempts to mitigate her personal responsibility for his death by claiming that she is the embodiment of the family daemon, whilst the audience would acknowledge that this was so, they would not consider her as any less responsible for her actions.

The revenge of Clytemnestra is again motivated by three levels of causation: Firstly, her personal desire; secondly, that it is the will of Zeus that she should accomplish Agamemnon's death (for nothing comes to pass that is not the will of Zeus); and finally, the prompting of the family daemon. However, it is Clytemnestra's personal motivation which means that we hold her responsible for her actions. This motivation is two-fold; the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigenia and the adulteries of Agamemnon at Troy (physically embodied in Cassandra). Her grief for Iphigenia is the understandable motive and the audience agree with her that this is ample justification for her actions. But the charge of adultery is hypocritically made by Clytemnestra, for the audience were aware of her own infidelity with Aegisthus. Juxtaposed with this is the will of Zeus, who will concede revenge to Clytemnestra for the many crimes that Agamemnon has committed and the spectre of the family curse which encourages all that it affects to greater acts of excessiveness. However, as with Agamemnon, this divine level of causation does not mitigate Clytemnestra's own personal responsibility because the laws by which she has executed her husband are now equally applicable. Agamemnon's blood, once shed, cannot be recalled and because she has acted, so now must she suffer. Consequently, the universal laws of Justice that ensure balance and reciprocity mean that Clytemnestra must atone, regardless of the validity of her justification.

Consequently, what is apparent is that Justice, in effect, equates with revenge and therefore, once a transgression has been committed the whole family is involved in a series of crime and punishment and what has been consistently proved is that the enactment of Justice is in itself a crime. However, what has been shown in this thesis is that Aeschylus, although expressing the inadequacies of this system, is not advocating its abolition but simply its depersonalisation and this can be seen with particular reference to Orestes. With regard to

the actions of Orestes, what has been appreciated is again the tripartite level of causation; his own personal motivation, divine will (expressed through the command of Apollo) and the will of the underworld powers (the Erinyes). Orestes' own personal motivation is clearly delineated; the command of Apollo, grief for his father, his lack of patrimony and the emancipation of Argos all coincide as reasons for Orestes' revenge. However, in the *Choephoroi*, Orestes' personal responsibility is ascertained. Regardless of the fact that Apollo commands him to take vengeance or suffer the consequences from his father's Erinyes, Aeschylus clearly intends that we see Orestes as personally desiring revenge, through his statement of motivation and that this revenge means matricide, through the emotional impetus of the kommos. The position of Orestes reflects that of Agamemnon at Aulis, not in that the audience see him as being in a position of choice (he is determined from the prologue of the *Choephoroi*) but that he is in the tragic dilemma where he is damned by the gods and his father's Erinyes if he does not kill Clytemnestra but damned by his mother's Erinyes if he does. Neither course is without evil but Orestes acts as he does as a result of his own aforementioned personal desires and therefore is judged accordingly.

Perhaps, according to the laws that have underpinned our judgements so far, Orestes should have been condemned and indeed, the majority of the human jury in the *Eumenides* agreed, but the mythic tradition clearly had Orestes living on in Argos. Consequently, Aeschylus must provide for Orestes' acquittal and this is done by raising the question of the nature of Justice to a divine level. In the *Eumenides* there is a significant shift of focus from the previous emphasis on personal responsibility to that of divine. In order to bring the trilogy to a close, Aeschylus focuses our attention on the interplay between the divine forces; the Erinyes championing the rights of Clytemnestra and Apollo the rights of Orestes. The most important point however, is that although they disagree on the fate of Orestes, they are both upholding the same law and it is this that is the key to the resolution of the trilogy. For the Erinyes, Orestes has acted and therefore he must atone; for Apollo, Clytemnestra has acted and therefore she atoned and as it was just that Orestes killed Clytemnestra, he should suffer no consequences, but the point here is that the law that justified Orestes' actions also requires his death and this is the fact that Apollo consistently tries to ignore.

The incompatibility of this situation is suppressed in the trial scene and the decision of

Athena is based on a minor issue, the primacy of the male in reproduction. Whilst it is possible to think this unsatisfactory, the point is that Aeschylus, in focusing the audience's attention on the disagreement of the gods and the very real danger threatening Athens, diverts our attention away from the reasons for Orestes' acquittal. The fact that he is allowed to walk free is simply because it is the will of the Olympian gods (Zeus in particular) that he should do so. There is no rational consistency in this but Aeschylus does not intend the audience to dwell on the matter but simply to accept it. What absorbs the audience is the predicament of Athena, who now faces the dilemma that to uphold the will of her father is to place her city in grave danger from the Erinyes. By virtue of her divine status and superior wisdom, Athena finds the way out through the power of persuasion, a process that the human characters could not do. She reconciles the Erinyes to her judgement by persuading them that it is in their best interests, and thus persuasion changes from a negative to a positive force. However, in this happy reconciliation there remains a significant doubt; the view of Justice as upheld by Athena is not materially different from that of the Erinyes and thus, Justice will continue to ensure that he who acts will suffer. Consequently, what this study of the *Oresteia* has proved is that, regardless of the motivation or justification for any action or the influence of a supernatural power upon any action, personal responsibility is not negated, for it is the act that is all-important.

This conclusion is also the key to understanding the complexity of the *Suppliants*, where the tragic dilemma is again faced by the protagonist (in this case, Pelasgus). Like Agamemnon, Pelasgus is in a position of choice but the pathos of his position is perhaps the most intense of all Aeschylus' protagonists. Pelasgus must choose between respecting the gods by honouring the rights of the suppliants and thereby risking a major war or bringing upon himself and his city the wrath of the gods by not acknowledging the claims of the suppliant Danaid Chorus. The tragedy of Pelasgus is intense. It has been seen that he chooses the most advisable course of action open to him but that this decision will entail his death. Why Pelasgus is put in this position cannot be determined with any conclusiveness. What has been understood is that it is the will of Zeus, but this will is so nebulous and unfathomable that it is difficult to determine at any given instance. It is probable that the actions of Zeus form a plan stretching over many generations. His love of Io, which produces the line to which the Danaids and Aegyptiads belong, overshadows the play and is perhaps the key to

understanding Pelasgus' position. As has been seen, it is possible that the intention of Zeus is to raise the destiny of Argos by placing his own descendants Hypermnestra and Lynceus upon the throne but this means that Pelasgus must die to facilitate Zeus' plan. Consequently, for no crime of his own but by virtue of being a king, Pelasgus is placed in the position of choice and he chooses the most advisable course. However, although Pelasgus chooses and is directly responsible for that choice, his fate is of an essentially tragic nature. There is no reason on a human level why Pelasgus must be faced with a decision that will entail his death but tragedy is often inexplicable, and, ultimately, simply some flaw in the make-up of the universe will mean that a fine and noble king must die for his city. This is tragedy at its most pure and simple.

Pelasgus' dilemma is in response to the actions of the Danaids, who are fleeing marriage with their cousins. As has been seen, the motivation for the flight is questionable; the issue revolved around whether they objected to marriage because their cousins were personally unacceptable because of their violent natures or whether it was because the Danaids had an aversion to marriage in general. What has been seen is that the play contains evidence in support of both premises, and thus it is probable that in the missing subsequent parts of the trilogy the Danaids may have been considered justified in not wanting specifically to marry the Aegyptiads, but not in generally refusing marriage. Like Clytemnestra, to have a valid motive and a non-valid motive does not mitigate responsibility in any way and therefore, the Danaids would ultimately be held to account for the murder of their cousins. Only Hypermnestra stands apart from this by refusing to murder Lynceus and presumably, they are thus rewarded with the throne of Argos. How the resolution of this play was achieved is open to speculation but all the evidence of Aphrodite's speech is that the force of love must have been recognised by the Danaids at some point.

The problems encountered by the incompleteness of a trilogy are again faced in the *Septem*. Without the first parts of the trilogy it is difficult to determine with confidence the actions of Laius which place the family in a precarious position. Consequently, as with the *Supplices*, conclusions on this play are dependent upon conjecture. Firstly, that the command of Apollo was in response to some transgression of Laius' (most probably the abduction of Chrysippus) and that once Laius had disobeyed divine will, the enmity of gods stretched

forth to encompass the succeeding generations. Secondly, that Oedipus most probably contributed to his own fate in some way, possibly by over-reaching the limit of human success, and therefore, as a result, his own actions and the fact that he is Laius' son, who should never have been conceived at all, conspire to necessitate his punishment. Thirdly, that for some unknown reason, Oedipus cursed his sons (possibly because of their incestuous origin or because they have dishonoured him). As a result, another level of divine causation is introduced, for juxtaposed with the personal motivation of Laius and Oedipus and the enmity of the gods is the curse of Oedipus, which overshadows both Eteocles and Polynices.

Divine will and the implacable nature of the Erinyes, who embody the curse, both coincide in the actions of the brothers and fuel their fratricidal desires. They are both driven on blindly to their mutual fate by Ares and by the Erinyes, whose only end in this play is the complete annihilation of the line of Laius. However, this does not mean that the brothers are without personal motivation; Polynices clearly expresses a wish that he could fight and kill Eteocles, and thus it is understood that this is his personal desire which, in turn, evidences his responsibility. The fact that it is distinctly possible that Polynices' claim that his attack on Thebes is upheld by Justice does not negate the criminality of his actions, for as the wise Amphiaraus comments, he is wrong to attack his native city. Polynices must be seen as ultimately deserving of his fate because it is the consequence of both his desires and actions.

The parity that the brothers receive at the end of the play reflects the nature of their joint responsibility and it is this point that must be kept in mind when evaluating the actions of Eteocles. It is tempting to think of him as being guided along a set path to his destruction because he has been cursed by his father. However, what has been proved in this thesis is that although the curse and his patrimony mean that he has the propensity to make certain decisions, he is still held accountable for his actions because of his personal motivation to fight Polynices, which no amount of reasoning by the Chorus can dissuade him from. Thus, although Eteocles at the beginning of the play is the calm, rational leader, once he decides to fight Polynices he becomes the antithesis to reason. He is prepared to jeopardise the safety of the city in order to gratify his own desires because of which, regardless of how justifiable those desires are, he is personally responsible and deserves his fate.

The focus of attention in the *Persae* is on what motivates Xerxes to invade Greece to begin with and why the gods deny him victory but condemn the whole Persian host to destruction. With regard to Xerxes' personal motivation, we are told by Atossa that he was ill-advised by his counsellors. However, the fact that he chooses to act upon their recommendations does not in any way absolve him of his personal responsibility. Furthermore, the glorious lineage of conquerors, described by Darius, was most probably a factor in Xerxes' decision to further expand the Persian empire. Why this should be denied to Persia is complicated. However, the conclusion of this thesis is that the addition of Greece to the already immense Persian power simply overstretches some unknown limit of success and therefore, the gods punish Xerxes for attempting to overreach the limit established for mortals. Although the gods deny Xerxes victory, this does not mean that it is only the fault of the gods that Persia is defeated, for repeatedly the Chorus consider Xerxes as responsible. Thus, although Persia was at some stage destined to collapse, it is brought about by Xerxes' desires and thus, regardless of the fact that the gods conspire against him, he is held personally responsible.

Consequently, the issues of motivation and justification are paramount to determining to what extent tragic characters are held to be personally responsible. What has been seen successively is that it is the act that is most important and it is the act on which each character is judged. The influence exerted upon a protagonist by the Olympian gods or by a chthonic power may contribute to the tragedy of the character but does not mitigate personal responsibility.

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