ZEUS IN THE *PERSAE*

Aeschylus was a dramatist of ideas—of religious ideas. His ideas may have been old or new, clear or confused, crude or profound, but it was in terms of religious ideas that he interpreted the story of the house of Argos; and it was in terms of religious ideas that he interpreted a great event in the history of his own time. It is, therefore, of considerable interest and importance to discover, if we can, a relationship between the way he thought in 472 and the way he thought in 458. In 458 he made a Chorus reject[1] an old doctrine: that prosperity and good fortune in themselves give rise to disaster—the doctrine, that is to say (though the word is not used), of the jealousy of the gods (φθόνος τῶν θεῶν). No, sings this Chorus, it is the impious deed that begets after its kind, the old *hubris* that gives birth to new and to a train of evil consequences. In 472, in the *Persae*, we seem to find both doctrines. We find the Chorus singing of the crafty deceit of a god from which no mortal can escape, and we find the Messenger speaking of the jealousy of the gods. But we also find Darius speaking of the stern punishments of Zeus and attributing the disasters of the Persians to their own acts of *hubris*. As though such seeming contradictions were sent to test our ingenuity, eminent scholars—I mention no names[2]—have tied themselves in knots to demonstrate that the contradiction does not exist. I would suggest that the contradiction not only exists but is essential to the thought of the play, and that it has, to some extent, imposed upon the play its form.[3]

This form is very simple, just as the dramatic action is simple. The Persian elders express their anxiety at the long-delayed return of Xerxes and his mighty army; Atossa tells them about her sinister dream; a messenger brings news of the disaster at Salamis. By the closing words of Atossa, before she leaves the stage at 531, the poet seems deliberately to have left open in the mind of his audience the possibility of a speedy arrival of Xerxes;[4] and, if the news of Salamis had been followed, after a short choral ode, by the return of Xerxes in rags and a scene of lamentation closing the play, it would have been a sequence very gratifying to Athenian pride. But it does not happen that way. Between the news of disaster and the return of Xerxes comes the evocation of Darius from his tomb. Not only so, but this episode occupies roughly a quarter of the play, of which, in point of action, it is manifestly the most striking—and surprising—feature. We are of course free to say that Aeschylus, observing that his play lacked action, decided to expand it with a characteristic exhibition of what ancient critics called τὸ τερατῶδες—'the portentous', 'the sensational'. We can even regard Darius as a rather uneconomical device for introducing the battle of Plataea. Such explanations are, however, best kept in reserve to be brought forward if no reason more creditable to the dramatic skill of the poet can be found.

We are faced, then, with a formal problem. Why does Aeschylus hold up the return of Xerxes, while the ghost of Darius is evoked from the tomb? And why does he devote so large a part of the play to this scene? It is perhaps by asking ourselves such questions and attempting to answer them that we stand the best chance of reaching plausible interpretations of Aeschylus. There is another question—not this time of form—which should be

[1] *Agam.* 750 ff.

[2] Except to say that Professor E. R. Dodds is not among them. 'What to the partial vision of the living appears as the act of a fiend, is perceived by the wider insight of the dead to be an aspect of cosmic justice' (*The Greeks and the Irrational* 39). If there is any originality in my article, it is in regard to the art rather than to the thought of Aeschylus.

[3] I am not concerned to deny that the play has patriotic and political aspects. It is indeed obvious that, in some degree, it was bound to evoke a patriotic response, at which certain features may have been aimed. On the political aspect, *cf.* A. J. Podlecki, *The political background of Aeschylean tragedy* 8–26, and my review in *Gnomon* 39 (1967) 641 ff.; E. R. Dodds, *PCPS* n.s. 6 (1960) 22 n. 1.

[4] *Cf.* R. D. Dawe, *PCPS*, n.s. 9 (1963) 27.

asked and can be answered.[5] Why, in a play produced in Athens about the Athenians' finest hour,[6] is the goddess Athena mentioned only once (no more often than Poseidon or Hermes, Phoebus or Pan) and not even then as herself the saviour? The answer is that Athena would be too patriotic, too local. Aeschylus is going to interpret the campaign, not in terms of Athena saving her city, but of Zeus maintaining a moral order in the world. The answer to this question will perhaps enable us to answer the other question—the question of form.

It is unnecessary to expatiate upon the importance of Zeus in the thought of Aeschylus. But that great name is not bandied about in his plays. In the *Persae* it occurs five times: five times as often as the name of any other Olympian god, but five times only. Three of these occurrences are in the Darius-scene, out of the mouth of Darius himself (740, 762, 827). One opens the choral ode (ὦ Ζεῦ βασιλεῦ, 532) which ends the first half of the play and precedes the evocation. The remaining instance lies on the far side of the Darius-scene, in the first outburst of Xerxes on his entrance (915). After that outburst Zeus is not mentioned in the closing scene; he is not mentioned in the first half of the play at all (until 532). Perhaps, then, it would not be unfair to say that Zeus belongs particularly to the Darius-scene and its immediate environment. This said, let us now return to the beginning and consider the religious standpoint which is expressed in the play's first half.

The Chorus of Persian elders, faithful counsellors of the King, are anxious because no news has come from the great host. They recall the vast man-power and the vast wealth of the Persian realm; they recite the names of princes from all parts of the empire who had departed. If this gives the measure of their anxiety, it is also their ground of confidence. For who could resist this great army advancing like a wave of the sea? ἀπρόσοιστος γὰρ ὁ Περσῶν στρατὸς ἀλκίφρων τε λαός (91 f.). At this point we come up, as so often alas in Aeschylus, against a textual problem. Is the order of stanzas, as we find it in the MSS., correct? Many editors have followed O. Müller in placing the pair of stanzas θεόθεν γὰρ . . . λαοπόροις τε μηχαναῖς (101–14) before δολόμητιν δ' ἀπάταν . . . ἀλύξαντα φυγεῖν (or whatever we read there, and whether we accept 93–100 as a mesode or make a pair of stanzas out of it); and for a variety of reasons I am sure they are right.[7] With this transposition, the Chorus now explain the irresistible character of Persian might by singing of a *moira* or allotted portion of divine origin (θεόθεν) which has imposed upon the Persians a career of wars and sieges and sacks. (No specific god is mentioned, and this, as we shall see, is characteristic. The idea of *moira*, of a divinely appointed portion or lot, is a common feature of Greek thought in the archaic period.) When the Chorus add that the Persians learnt to look upon the rough waters of the sea, the audience may perhaps wonder whether this was something that was not (in the Homeric phrase) κατὰ μοῖραν, but that idea cannot be in the minds of the Chorus. When they sing that their countrymen have put their trust in 'slender cables and devices for transport of a host', *they* will be thinking of ships, but (after 71 f.) the audience may well remember the bridging of the Hellespont.[8] And thus on two levels this stanza leads into the sinister themes which follow. For, if the audience

[5] The point is made by M. Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie*[2] I 61.

[6] *Cf.* Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1027.

[7] The case for the transposition is well argued by Broadhead on 93–106. D. Korzeniewski's suggestion (*Helikon* 6 [1966] 573 ff.) that the *mesode* should be placed between Str. γ' and Ant. γ' seems an awkward and unrewarding compromise. W. C. Scott, *GRBS* 9 (1968) 25–66, defends the MS order, arguing that, in the mind of the Chorus, it is the Greeks who, in resisting the Persians, are victimized by the divine deceit.

[8] Broadhead (on 100–3) and A. H. Coxon (*CQ* n.s. 8 [1958] 46) argue conclusively that the first part of the stanza refers not to the Hellespont but to the sea in general. It is therefore very awkward if, as Broadhead (on 104–6) holds, the subsequent lines refer to the bridge of boats, the Chorus having 'passed from the general to the particular'. Coxon and Groencboom (and others) seem to be right that the Chorus is thinking of the sea, generally, throughout.

thinks of the rash act of Xerxes, the Chorus is pursuing a different train of thought. May not the power and success of Persia be in itself a cause for alarm? They have sung of a dispensation divinely given: but can men trust the gods? δολόμητιν δ' ἀπάταν θεοῦ τίς ἀνὴρ θνατὸς ἀλύξει; (107 f.). 'What mortal man can escape the crafty-minded deceit of god (or of a god)?'

Again we run into textual difficulties, but fortunately they do not obscure the nature of the ideas employed, which are familiar commonplaces of archaic thought.[9] With a false show of fawning friendliness the god (a god) leads a mortal man on into a net from which he cannot escape. The subject of the sentence (97–100 *or* 111–14) may be ἀπάτα, but more likely it is ἄτα: in any case the notion of *ate* is introduced and means here 'infatuation'. For the smiling favour of heaven induces the mortal victim to commit some fatal error which brings him down at the height of his prosperity. So far as the language of the Chorus goes, the notion is quite unmoralised, though of course the audience may already be disposed to supply a moral. There is a strong emphasis upon *deceit* (δολόμητις ἀπάτα), which implies that the divine purpose is concealed, until it is too late. If the gods are deceitful, they are also fickle: friendly at one moment, hostile at the next. Notice, then, the words with which the Elders greet their queen, when she enters at the end of the *parodos*: θεοῦ μὲν εὐνάτειρα Περσῶν, θεοῦ δὲ καὶ μήτηρ ἔφυς, εἴ τι μὴ δαίμων παλαιὸς νῦν μεθέστηκε στρατῷ (157 f.). *Daimon* here is perhaps something less than 'god', certainly something more than 'destiny' (in the faded sense which we find in Euripides and later writers). It is related to the θεόθεν μοῖρα of the *parodos*. It was characteristic of the archaic period[10] to use this half-personification of the *moira* which stressed its divine origin—most commonly of course of the individual destiny, but here of the *moira* and *daimon* of the Persian host, though these are closely linked to the personal fate of the despotic ruler. But the *daimon* is changeable (μεθέστηκε): the man or nation that was once *eudaimon* may become *dusdaimon*.

If the elders are anxious, so, because of her dream, is Atossa. Like them, she fears a great reversal of fortune. She fears that the prosperity which Darius raised 'not without some god's aid' will be overturned. Again the text—or its interpretation—is perplexed (163 f.),[11] but the general sense must certainly be that, as the gods gave, so they may take away; and again we have a vague expression: οὐκ ἄνευ θεῶν τινός. Atossa has nothing more to add to our understanding of the situation, as she goes on to tell her dream to the elders and receive their well-meant if futile advice.

The first speech of the Messenger reveals that the fears of Atossa were justified: ὡς ἐν μιᾷ πληγῇ κατέφθαρται πολὺς | ὄλβος, τὸ Περσῶν δ' ἄνθος οἴχεται πεσόν (251 f.). Her fear for the wealth, her fear for the men.[12] Note that to the Chorus, despite their earlier forebodings, this is a monstrous and unthought-for blow which they describe as κακὰ νεόκοτα (256) and πῆμ' ἄελπτον (265). The Messenger, when he has assured Atossa of the personal survival of Xerxes, gives a catalogue of fallen princes which echoes ironically the catalogue in the *parodos*.[13] With the details of his narrative we are not now concerned, but only with the light in which he sees the events recounted. He sees, naturally, the operations of a god or gods. It was a god that gave the glory of the naval battle to the Greeks (454 f.); a god that raised the storm in Thrace and froze the Strymon, so that men prayed who had previously been indifferent to religion (495 ff.). His last words speak of the evils that a god had brought down upon the Persians (514).

This closing comment echoes more briefly the judgment which he had already expressed in answer to a question from Atossa. She had asked whether the numbers of the Greek ships had been so great. No, he replies, it was the Persians who had the advantage: ἀλλ'

[9] The textual problems are too complex for discussion here. On *ate* see E. R. Dodds, *GI* 2–8.

[10] *Cf.* Dodds, *GI* 23 n. 65, 42, 58 n. 79.

[11] See n. 21 below.

[12] On the difficulties of 159–69 see my review of Broadhead in *CR* n.s. 12 (1962) 124.

[13] On the third catalogue see n. 35 below.

ὧδε δαίμων τις κατέφθειρε στρατόν, | τάλαντα βρίσας οὐκ ἰσορρόπῳ τύχῃ. | θεοὶ πόλιν σῴζουσι Παλλάδος θεᾶς (345 ff.). It was the gods that saved the city of the goddess Pallas; it was a *daimon* that destroyed the Persian navy, weighting the scales of fortune against them. But the most interesting piece of interpretation is that with which the Messenger begins his narrative, again in answer to a question from Atossa. Who began the battle? ἦρξεν μέν, ὦ δέσποινα, τοῦ παντὸς κακοῦ | φανεὶς ἀλάστωρ ἢ κακὸς δαίμων ποθέν (353 f.). And the destructive spirit, the evil *daimon*, we learn was incarnate, as divine agencies in Aeschylus so often are, in a human person—in the emissary that Themistocles (not here named) sent to Xerxes. Xerxes, when he had heard him, gave the fatal instructions: οὐ γὰρ τὸ μέλλον ἐκ θεῶν ἠπίστατο (373). But more significant still is this expression: οὐ ξυνεὶς δόλον | Ἕλληνος ἀνδρὸς οὐδὲ τὸν θεῶν φθόνον (361 f.). The trick of a Greek man, the *phthonos* of the gods.[14] δόλον recalls the δολόμητις ἀπάτα θεοῦ of 107 (93); φθόνον makes explicit what was only implied in the *parodos* and attributes a motive to the gods.

Atossa has her comment, and so does the Chorus-leader have his. At 471 there is a pause in the narrative. ὦ στυγνὲ δαῖμον, exclaims the queen, ὡς ἄρ' ἔψευσας φρενῶν Πέρσας (472 f.). 'Hateful *daimon*, how you have cheated the Persians of their wits.'[15] The comment of the Chorus at the close of the Messenger's speech is similar in tone: ὦ δυσπόνητε δαῖμον, ὡς ἄγαν βαρὺς | ποδοῖν ἐνήλου παντὶ Περσικῷ γένει (515 f.). The disaster is seen, then, as a cruel and excessive blow dealt by a deceptive divinity.

Neither here nor elsewhere, in this part of the play, is there mention of any specific god. Chorus, queen and messenger, are alike in speaking always of θεός or θεοί, δαίμων or δαίμων τις.[16] There are two reasons for this which amount to much the same thing. (i) The name of the great god who is ultimately responsible for all will come with the greater effect for the preceding anonymity; and it does in fact come at the beginning of the following stasimon: ὦ Ζεῦ βασιλεῦ (532). (ii) The set of ideas in terms of which the events are interpreted by Chorus, queen and messenger, were in fact associated in Greek popular thought, not so much with clearly envisaged personal gods as with vaguely conceived divine powers—with a *daimon*, with θεῶν τις, with τὸ θεῖον. We have the evidence in Homer and Herodotus. It has been observed that, in Homer, while the poet attributes events to the intervention of a named Olympian god, his characters often use the vaguer terms;[17] and in Herodotus we are familiar with this unspecific use of τὸ θεῖον and ὁ θεός.[18] τὸ θεῖον πᾶν φθονερὸν καὶ ταραχῶδες (Hdt. i 32): indeed Herodotus is the best commentator on the first half of the *Persae*, giving us the range of ideas within which the Aeschylean characters are moving. The ideas are these: that the gods are jealous, that they grudge men excessive prosperity; that they deceive men, luring them on; that their favour cannot be depended upon; that their ways are unpredictable; that they are cruel, deceptive, and fickle. The view of the supernatural taken in this part of the play is, I suggest, hardly at all moralised. True, since Xerxes has met with disaster, Xerxes has evidently made a big mistake. This is part of the process by which the gods curtail the prosperity that has earned their jealousy; they lure the

[14] On double causation or 'over-determination' in Homer and Aeschylus see Dodds, *GI* 30 f. (with specific reference to this passage) and *PCPS* n.s. 6 (1960) 27 n. 5.

[15] See Broadhead on 472 (and App.): the scholiast is wrong. This is the *apate/ate* of the *parodos*. *Cf.* 552, 724 f.

[16] Here I reluctantly part company with Professor Kitto who has so much of value to say about the play, when he asserts (*Poiesis* 56, 88) that 'it is a matter of indifference to Aeschylus' how the divine power is named. For Aeschylus himself no doubt, but not for the attitudes of his characters and the form of the play.

[17] *Cf.* e.g. M. P. Nilsson, *Greek piety* 59 f.; Dodds, *GI* 10 ff. (with special reference to the *Odyssey*); P. Chantraine, *Fondation Hardt Entretiens* I 50 ff. (with special reference to *daimon*). The name of Zeus is sometimes used to stand for the divine world in general, which perhaps facilitates the transitions in the *Persae*, the Aeschylean Zeus fading in at 532, fading out at 915.

[18] The possible influence of the *Persae* on Herodotus is too big a question to be handled here: the modes of expression which we find, e.g. in Hdt. i and vii, are in any case appropriate to the proverbial wisdom which he is expounding.

prosperous man into making such a mistake, and he makes it in over-confidence, believing, in the words of Atossa, that, when his *daimon* is in fair course, the same wind of fortune will blow for ever (601 f.).[19] So Atossa asked if it was Xerxes that began the battle: πλήθει καταυχήσας νεῶν (352), but I do not think she means to criticise her son in moral terms. No more do the Chorus imply criticism, when they speak of the Persians as τῶν μεγαλαύχων (533). But here the word, coming as it does immediately after the address to Zeus the king, may, like that address, be the poet's way of pointing forward to the scene which is to follow.[20]

The divine world is jealous of human success, of human prosperity; the tangible evidence of prosperity is wealth, and the pre-eminent symbol of wealth is gold. So, in the opening anapaests of the Chorus, the word πολύχρυσος occurs four times. So Atossa leaves the gold-bedecked palace (χρυσεοστόλμους δόμους, 159) to express her fear not only for the men but for the wealth of Persia. Textual and interpretative difficulties again, but she seems to be saying that great wealth may be a danger and may overthrow the prosperity it represents.[21] And the Messenger, in his first words, apostrophises Asia as πολὺς πλούτου λιμήν (250): not only the flower of the Persians is gone, but great prosperity (ὄλβος) has been overthrown at a blow. We are not surprised that the theme recurs in the Darius-scene, in association with the motives and the punishment of Xerxes. For there is a problem in the relationship between wealth and disaster. In the *Agamemnon*, the Chorus reject the notion that it is prosperity and good fortune that are the cause of misery; if the goddess of Justice leaves 'gold-bespangled mansions' (χρυσόπαστα ἔσθλα), it is when hands are defiled (σὺν πίνῳ χερῶν).[22]

We thus return to our original issue. The beliefs which are, if I am right, reflected in the utterances of Chorus and characters up to this point of the play were common beliefs of the average Greek. If I say (what is obvious) that they were not the beliefs of Aeschylus when he wrote the *Agamemnon*, I am not of course suggesting that his rejection of the old *phthonos*-doctrine was a revolutionary innovation, though nowhere else is this rejection so strongly and sharply put. In that amalgam of ideas and feelings which Gilbert Murray called the Inherited Conglomerate there was more than one explanation of the disasters which befall mankind. If the Greeks often felt the gods to be malevolent, they longed for them to be just;[23] and generations before Aeschylus writers such as Hesiod and Solon had seen disasters in the light of punishments. Yet Aeschylus, when he wrote that chorus in the *Agamemnon*, thought it was worth while explicitly to reject the doctrine that wealth and prosperity were in themselves sufficient to generate woe in favour of the Solonian doctrine which found in *hubris* a middle term between *koros* and *ate*. He found it worth while, I am suggesting, to interpret a historical event of his own time upon exactly the same lines. To give this interpretation is the function of Darius.

He serves this function mainly by what he says but also, partly, by what he is and was. The choral ode which follows the news of Salamis (532 ff.) closes the first half of the play with a lamentation. In the first stanza, the Chorus put the full responsibility upon Xerxes,

[19] Weil's emendation is compelling. One cannot accept the attempts of Groeneboom and Broadhead to defend δαίμονα . . . τύχης by reference to such expressions as θεοῦ μοῖρα, τύχη δαίμονος, which clearly are not reversible.

[20] Contr. 827, 831. This seems to be an example of the way in which the implications of a word or theme are unfolded during the course of an Aeschylean play, on which I have a note in *BICS* 20 (1973), with particular reference to the use of οἴχομαι in this play.

[21] πλοῦτος should by all means be retained, but the force of the image has not been determined beyond doubt. See recently Korzeniewski, *op. cit.* 577 ff.

[22] *Agam.* 773 ff.

[23] Dodds *GI* 32: 'Man projects into the cosmos his own nascent demand for social justice; and when from the outer spaces the magnified echo of his own voice returns to him, promising punishment for the guilty, he draws from it courage and reassurance.'

whose name is thrice repeated. They go on: τίπτε Δαρεῖος μὲν οὕτω τότ' ἀβλαβὴς ἐπῆν τόξαρχος πολιήταις, Σουσίδαις φίλος ἄκτωρ; (554–7). Some editors have wished to change the text, and some perverse interpretations have been given. But, as Broadhead has seen, there is only one natural interpretation: 'Why was *Darius* (μέν) in his time so undisastrous a lord of the bow over his citizens?' And there is only one difficulty, which is why the Chorus should (as Broadhead puts it) 'have chosen to express their judgment in the form of a question'. Perhaps they are made to do so, because this is a question they cannot answer and Darius can. And he will do so in terms of the Zeus whom the Chorus had, we might say, ignorantly hailed (532). Note, then, the words with which the ghost of Darius is first addressed by the queen: ὦ βροτῶν πάντων ὑπερσχὼν ὄλβον εὐτυχεῖ πότμῳ, | ὡς ἕως τ' ἔλευσσες αὐγὰς ἡλίου ζηλωτὸς ὢν | βίοτον εὐαίωνα Πέρσαις ὡς θεὸς διήγαγες, | νῦν τέ σε ζηλῶ θανόντα πρὶν κακῶν ἰδεῖν βάθος (709 ff.).[24] He had exceeded all men in prosperity and good fortune; he had been the object of envy (ζηλωτός); taking Πέρσαις ὡς θεός together, as they should probably be taken, he had been regarded by his subjects in the light of a god. All of which things, according to the traditional view of the jealousy of heaven, were a prescription for ultimate disaster. And yet he lived out (διήγαγες) a life of blessedness through to the end and, by dying before ill befell, was truly *eudaimon* in the Herodotean sense. What, then, was Darius? He was the good king who brought no great disaster upon his people; and his career of lasting success was evidence that wealth and prosperity and enviability are harmless, if men know how to bear them.[25]

Let us now turn to what Darius says. As soon as he hears that an expedition has been made against Athens, he recognises it as an act of folly (719). Then Atossa tells him of the bridging of the Hellespont (722). 'Did he actually do that (καὶ τόδ' ἐξέπραξεν;)', exclaims Darius, 'close the great Bosporus?' 'Yes', replies the queen, 'some *daimon* surely lent its aid to his decision' (or however we should translate γνώμης . . . ξυνήψατο).[26] 'Alas, it was some great *daimon* that came upon him so that his judgment was at fault.' Darius gives no name, though he soon will; and I think it was of deliberation that Aeschylus here, at first, makes him use language which recalls the theology of the early part of the play. Indeed what he has said so far hardly carries us beyond the range of ideas we have already met. Atossa knew that the Persians had been cheated of their wits (472 f.); the elders knew that the trickery of the gods led the prosperous man into a state of infatuation (111 ff.). But why was Darius so struck by the bridging of the Hellespont? This he tells us in a speech which begins with Zeus and ends with Poseidon. For he has recognised that Xerxes, by his own impetuous folly, had brought an early fulfilment of destined and prophesied disasters (739–41). In his ignorance and youthful rashness he had precipitated the fatal train of events, putting shackles upon the Hellespont, thinking that he, a mortal, could master the gods (744–50).

The modern reader may at first feel some disappointment here. Was it all, then, a formal insult to the gods in general and to Poseidon in particular? But of course the act of Xerxes was symbolical, as the act of Agamemnon in treading the scarlet draperies was symbolical; and the significance of a symbolical act must be seen not only in what it is but in what it symbolises. Agamemnon's act symbolised (as I believe) a state of

[24] I should take ὡς (with Groeneboom) as explanatory rather than exclamatory. The only real problem in the lines concerns Πέρσαις, and the best solution seems to be in taking it with ὡς θεός (*cf.* 157 f., 654 f., 856). This carries matters a step beyond the normal Greek description of continuous prosperity (*cf.* Plato, *Gorg.* 473c).

[25] A portrait of doubtful historicity, no doubt. But Aeschylus treats history as myth—and could do so, as long as he did not flagrantly disregard facts well known to his audience. Marathon could not be omitted but demanded—and received—cautious handling. Darius' own bridging of the Bosphorus is quietly disregarded. (*Cf.* J. H. Quincey, *CQ* n.s. 12 [1962] 184). Kitto, *Poiesis* 74 ff., has a good discussion of the relationship between the historical events and the dramatic treatment. See also n. 29 below.

[26] See n. 28.

mind, and so did that of Xerxes. But the act of Xerxes does more: it symbolises the wider implications of the whole expedition. The *Persae*, in one aspect, interprets world-history.

By bridging the Hellespont, Xerxes was in effect seeking to abolish a natural boundary between East and West. The contrast between the two races—the Greeks and the oriental barbarians—diverse in their ways of thought and life must have impressed itself strongly upon this generation (and was later to dominate the history of Herodotus). In the *Persae* Aeschylus seeks to give an intelligible account of this world-fact. The two races were different, and they were intended by Zeus to remain different. It is no accident that the comments of Darius upon the bridging of the Hellespont are immediately followed by another of the infrequent mentions of the name of Zeus—but in a new connection. Never, says Darius, had such a disaster befallen the Persians: ἐξ οὖτε τιμὴν Ζεὺς ἄναξ τήνδ' ὤπασεν, | ἕν' ἄνδρα πάσης 'Ασίδος μηλοτρόφου | ταγεῖν, ἔχοντα σκῆπτρον εὐθυντήριον (762 ff.). It was Zeus, then, that had ordained monarchy as the proper mode of government for Asiatics. No less, however, was it the will of Zeus that Greeks should be free. This is not stated—it could hardly be stated by Persians—but it is implied. And this is also the significance of Atossa's dream, in which she saw the futile attempt of Xerxes to yoke to one chariot the two women, Greek and barbarian: ἅρμασιν δ' ὕπο | ζεύγνυσιν αὐτὼ καὶ λέπαδν' ὑπ' αὐχένων | τίθησι (190 ff.). There can be little doubt that the yoking of the two women and the yoking of the Hellespont have the same symbolical reference.[27]

Why, then, should Xerxes have attempted this fatal enterprise? Why should he have inaugurated it with an act so ominous as the bridging of the Hellespont? There was the initial folly of the expedition (719), but it is in the context of the symbolical act that Darius speaks of the faulty judgment of his son (725, 749), of a 'disease of the mind' (νόσος φρενῶν, 750). For such such a disease a divine cause is likely, and indeed it is clear that Darius accepts Atossa's view that the ill-judged act of Xerxes was done under divine influence. He accepts her very word (ξυνήψατο, συνάπτεται), but prefaces it with the phrase: ὅταν σπεύδῃ τις αὐτός (742). Disaster for Persia was among the inscrutable purposes of the gods, but it was Xerxes—and not the gods—who was in a hurry. To Atossa, when she first raised the theme (472), the failure of judgment was due to a cheating *daimon*. But Darius, who equally believes in divine distraction, sees farther into the causes which evoke it: it is when a man is himself bent upon an evil course that the ironical divine helper lends his aid.[28] It is when Xerxes has come to feel that at all costs he must add by conquest to his wealth that he is immediately inspired with the maddest and most fateful of all ways of doing so. It is no accident that in the closing words of Darius' speech we return to an earlier theme, when he fears that the wealth he laboured to acquire is now at the mercy of the first-comer (751 f.).[29] And this leads Atossa to reveal how her son had been taunted for not adding to that wealth (753 ff.).[30]

Responsibility lay on Xerxes, but not, humanly, on Xerxes alone, for he had been led astray by evil associates. Human responsibility radiates in widening circles. First Xerxes,

[27] Observe the phrases which come so close to one another in the *parodos*: ζυγὸν ἀμφιβαλεῖν δούλιον Ἑλλάδι (50), ζυγὸν ἀμφιβαλὼν αὐχένι πόντου (72).

[28] Groeneboom has helpful notes on 724 and 742. His parallels suggest strongly that συνάπτομαι has a sense akin to συλλαμβάνω, and we can therefore compare the use of συλλήπτωρ at *Agam.* 1508. These are the passages in which Aeschylus comes closest to formulating the relationship between divine and human responsibility: on which see Dodds' admirable discussion in *PCPS* n.s. 6 (1960) 25 ff.

[29] For his purposes Aeschylus deliberately and grossly exaggerates both the military and the economic effects of the Persian defeat (*cf.* H. Lloyd-Jones, *The justice of Zeus* 89). When we read 751 f,. we should not however forget that the aims of the Delian Confederacy included reprisals as well as liberation.

[30] Of the two motives attributed to the Persians in Herodotus—retaliation and expansionism—Aeschylus, for fairly obvious reasons, places the emphasis on the latter. Atossa speaks of retaliation at 473 ff., but after that the theme is silent, except for divine *talio*.

then his counsellors, but soon we find the whole Persian host to blame; and the moral climax comes in the context, not of Xerxes and Salamis, but of Plataea.

For the knowledge which Darius had of the oracles enabled him to foretell yet more disasters. Aeschylus may have had more than one reason for wishing to introduce Plataea (dramatically forced though his means of doing so may appear). In any case we need not be surprised that he reserves his strongest condemnation—and his clearest statement of the principles of crime and punishment—for this context. He was writing for an audience which had seen the sanctuaries of the Acropolis plundered and burnt. And so he makes Darius state that the blood shed in the plain of the Asopus was the 'penalty of *hubris* and godless thoughts' (ὕβρεως ἄποινα κἀθέων φρονημάτων, 808) on the part of those who had not reverenced the images, altars and temples of the gods. τοίγαρ κακῶς δράσαντες οὐκ ἐλάσσονα | πάσχουσι, τὰ δὲ μέλλουσι (813 f.). The heaps of dead will bear silent witness even to the third generation: ὡς οὐκ ὑπέρφευ θνητὸν ὄντα χρὴ φρονεῖν. | ὕβρις γὰρ ἐξανθοῦσ' ἐκάρπωσεν στάχυν | ἄτης, ὅθεν πάγκλαυτον ἐξαμᾷ θέρος (820 ff.). But these are terms no less applicable to Xerxes; and it is to Xerxes that the thoughts of the audience will turn back, when Darius says: μηδέ τις | ὑπερφρονήσας τὸν παρόντα δαίμονα | ἄλλων ἐρασθεὶς ὄλβον ἐκχέῃ μέγαν (824 ff.), and when he sums up the moral lesson in the tremendous couplet: Ζεύς τοι κολαστὴς τῶν ὑπερκόμπων ἄγαν | φρονημάτων ἔπεστιν εὔθυνος βαρύς (827 f.). These then are the causes of disaster: not wealth, but the lust to add to it; more than mortal thoughts, and the acts of *hubris* and impiety to which they lead. It is Zeus who judges these matters and inflicts the heavy punishment. ὦ δυσπόνητε δαῖμον, ὡς ἄγαν βαρὺς | ποδοῖν ἐνήλου παντὶ Περσικῷ γένει (515 f.): so had spoken the leader of the Chorus. Now we can give a name to the βαρὺς δαίμων.[31] Now we know on what principles he acts.

Nothing, to my mind, is more interesting in the artistic technique of the *Persae* than Aeschylus' handling of the closing scene. Darius has come and gone, having interpreted events upon the highest moral and religious level. His closing instructions to the Chorus are that they should bring Xerxes to a proper understanding by the admonitions of reason (εὐλόγοισι νουθετήμασιν, 830), so that he may cease in his overweening rashness (ὑπερκόμπῳ θρασεῖ) to offend the gods. Atossa leaves the stage on an errand concerned rather with his body than his mind.[32] The Chorus remain to greet their king. Is there any sign whatever that they have taken the words of Darius to heart? When Xerxes enters full of remorse, he is received with lamentations, recriminations. But of the 'admonitions of reason' there is no trace. For the Chorus, loyal subjects and faithful counsellors though they may be, are but ordinary Persians. Xerxes and his subjects are upon the same moral level, and it is not the level of Darius. The last scene returns to the moral level and to the religious ideas of the first half of the play; and it is as though Darius had never spoken.

Most significant of all are the opening words of Xerxes. ἰώ, δύστηνος ἐγὼ στυγερᾶς μοίρας τῆσδε κυρήσας ἀτεκμαρτοτάτης, ὡς ὠμοφρόνως δαίμων ἐνέβη Περσῶν γενεᾷ (909 ff.). These words arouse echoes: of Atossa's 'hateful *daimon*' (472), of the final comment of the Chorus on the news from Salamis (515 f., just quoted). When Xerxes complains: δαίμων γὰρ ὅδ' αὖ μετάτροπος ἐπ' ἐμοί (942 f.), we can compare the words of the Chorus at 158: εἴ τι μὴ δαίμων παλαιὸς νῦν μεθέστηκε στρατῷ, and Atossa's reference to a veering wind (601 f.). Xerxes attributes his disaster to the cruelty of a fickle *daimon* who has turned against him—who has turned against him inexplicably. His hateful *moira* he describes as ἀτεκμαρτοτάτη:

[31] Some might prefer to see the βαρὺς δαίμων as a minister of Zeus: perhaps it does not matter greatly.

[32] On the instructions of Darius (832 ff.). A device no doubt for removing her from a scene in which she is not needed. But also preparation for the man who has by his folly squandered his great wealth. Darius' closing words (839–42) have caused difficulty, but they too have a point in reintroducing the *ploutos*-theme, with a reminder of the ultimate futility of amassing wealth. *Cf.* B. Alexandersen, 'Darius in the *Persians*', *Eranos* 65 (1967) 7.

'most unforeseen', 'most unforeseeable'. But he can only call it so, because he fails to understand the principles upon which it is based. He uses the vague anonymous *daimon* and *moira*, but couples them with a call upon Zeus (915)—without, however, understanding the role of Zeus. This final naming of the name of Zeus is of course intended to remind the audience of the words of Darius; and it might also seem to be the cue for the Chorus, if they had learnt their lesson, to repeat it. But nothing comes from them except the familiar mention of a *daimon* of destruction (921).[33] At 1005 ff. the text is unfortunately corrupt, but there is a reference to *ate*, a reference to a *daimon* or *daimones*, and to an 'unthought-of' evil (ἄελπτον κακόν) that has been wrought. When Xerxes picks up the theme, he uses the very words (πῆμ' ἄελπτον, 1028) which the Chorus had applied to the news from Salamis (265).

That Aeschylus should return at the end of the play to words and themes from the beginning is not surprising. This is a traditional device of style which in Aeschylus is so common as to be almost regular—in speeches, in odes, in scenes and in entire plays—a device to which the term ring-composition has been given.[34] Nor do the echoes I have already mentioned stand alone.[35] It is a traditional device of style, but it is not merely a piece of formal symmetry. By these repetitions—and particularly by those which have religious implications—Aeschylus is deliberately recalling the mood, the ideas, the standards and the religion of the *parodos* and indeed of the whole first half of the play. Everything is made to seem the same. And yet everything is different, because Darius has spoken. By designing the play, as it were, in three panels, of which the third repeats the first, the dramatist has given to the central section the greatest possible emphasis. Through this design, the religious thought of Darius, which is also the poet's, is made to stand out like a peak above the lowlands of traditional commonplace belief which surround it on either side.

Everything has been transformed by the Darius scene. But not, it would appear, for the Chorus. Aeschylus must have hoped that his audience would be more perceptive. Yet the subsequent course of fifth-century history may well make us doubt whether the lesson of Ζεὺς κολαστής was really grasped by the Athenians. Aeschylus might indeed have felt it a deplorable thing, if the patriotic emotions which the play aroused did more to determine Athenian policy and actions than the warning against acts of *hubris* which he had employed the resources of his art to make effective.

In conclusion, the *Persae* is not the greatest of the surviving plays of Aeschylus: it may well be the least great. The interpretation of East-West relations which it embodies is interesting, but does not seem to go much farther than might be expected from an intelligent Greek of the time. Morally, it is a study in black and white, and so lacks subtlety. The theological doctrine is fundamentally the same as that of Aeschylus at his greatest, but it is not put to the severer tests—that is to say, it is not developed in a context which, like those of the *Oresteia* or the Danaid trilogy, raises well nigh insoluble problems about the nature of Zeus and his justice. The victims are all guilty! Perhaps the *Persae* demonstrates the superiority of myth over history as a theme for tragedy; perhaps it shows how wise Aeschylus

[33] Note that Atossa addresses the *daimon* at 845.

[34] Many instances will be found in Korzeniewski *op. cit.* and in E. B. Holtsmark, 'Ring composition and the *Persae* of Aeschylus', *SO* 45 (1970) 5–23, who however seems to attach an exaggerated importance to this stylistic feature. One can agree that ring composition has an 'ideational' as well as a structural purpose, since it can be used as a mode of emphasis and is perhaps most effective when what intervenes between the two occurrences casts a new light upon word or theme. It is interesting to find Mr Antony Hopkins (*Talking about sonatas* 18) saying much the same about the effect of Recapitulation in sonata-form—and reminding us (*ibid.* 52) that it is not the 'ground-plan in itself' which has significance but the use to which it is put.

[35] There are echoes of the *parodos* in 916 (*cf.* 1 and n. 20 above); 925 (*cf.* 59); 926 (*cf.* 26); 1013 (*cf.* 87 ff., esp. 91). The catalogue of fallen princes (955–1001)—*cf.* Holtsmark *op. cit.* 19 f.—echoes not only the *parodos* (21–58) but the Messenger's report (302–28).

was, normally, to write trilogies; perhaps, in 472, there were depths of thought and insight to which he had not yet attained. But all this, if true, is no reason why the play should not be given its due. I suggest that, in point of construction and dramatic craftsmanship, it is a finer piece of work than it is sometimes credited with being.

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