

## POLITICS AND THE ORESTEIA

In memory of Eduard Fraenkel  
'Nil me paeniteat sanum patris huius'

As a drama and a poem the *Eumenides* is often regarded with unease.<sup>1</sup> It brings the *Oresteia* to a conclusion; but its account of Athens and the Areopagus seems to many readers inspired more by patriotism (of whatever partisan tinge) than a sense of dramatic unity. Hence much attention has been devoted to Aeschylus' supposed political message in the play; as a result, the question of its fitness to crown the trilogy recedes into the background or even vanishes. On the other hand, those whose concern is with Aeschylus' poetry tend to ignore his 'politics'. The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it seeks to vindicate Aeschylus the artist: to show, that is, how the founding of the homicide court and the cult of the Semnai on the Areopagus in Athens properly marks the end of the troubles of the Argive Atridae, and how the sufferings and guilt of individual men and women are resolved in a city's institutions. In pursuing this aim, it also has to consider, and try to define, the relation of the tragedian to his audience and to contemporary society. My concern, then, is with the individual and the community, both within the play and behind it.

### I

In 1960 E. R. Dodds published an article called 'Morals and Politics in the *Oresteia*'.<sup>2</sup> Some of the valuable insights this piece of work gives into Aeschylus will find a place later in this paper; here I wish to make two criticisms of it, which concern particularly the implications of its title and which bear on two fundamental questions posed by my theme.

First, the word 'politics'. When it is said of the *Eumenides* that the play has a political element, that usually means that it is commenting on the events of the writer's time; and it is clearly in that sense that Dodds uses the term. The 'political' character of the *Eumenides* should, I believe, be understood rather differently; it will, then, be necessary to consider how far the play is in the usual sense 'political'. This in its turn requires the close examination of a number of individual passages.

#### 1. Athenian campaigns

(a) 292–7 (Orestes praying to Athena):

ἀλλ' εἴτε χώρας ἐν τόποις Λιβυστικῆς  
Τρίτωνος ἀμφὶ χεῦμα γενεθλίου πόρου  
τίθησιν ὀρθὸν ἢ κατηρεφῆ πόδα  
φίλοις ἀρήγουσ', εἴτε Φλεγραϊαν πλάκα  
θρασὺς ταγοῦχος ὡς ἀνὴρ ἐπισκοπεῖ,  
ἔλθοι . . .

'Whether she be moving or sitting, whether she be in Libya around the waters of Triton where she was born, helping those she loves, or whether like a bold war-lord she be surveying the Phlegraean plain, let her come. . . .'

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a revised and slightly enlarged version of one published in Italian in *Maia* xxv (1973) 267–92. I should like to thank Richard Gordon for acute and helpful criticisms, and to thank again David Lewis, Hugh Lloyd-Jones and Oliver Taplin for their valuable comments on an earlier draft. The *Maia* article appeared about the same time as Brian Vickers' *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London 1973), whose chapter on the *Oresteia*

has said very effectively much that I was trying to say, and more. I hope this paper may be considered complementary to his work.

<sup>2</sup> Reprinted, with corrections, from *PCPS* clxxxvi (1960) 19–31, in his *The Ancient Concept of Progress* (Oxford 1973) 45–63. In what follows I refer to the page numbers of the reprint.

Dodds suggests (47) that there is an allusion to the Athenians who were then fighting in the Nile Delta on behalf of the Libyans. But even if we allow that the poet and his audience might not distinguish Libya from Egypt, the main reason why that part of the world is mentioned emerges clearly from the text: Athena might be near Lake Tritonis because that is where she was born; and if she is said to be 'helping those she loves', that is because Orestes is calling on her to help him now. So too she might be in the Phlegraean fields (Chalcidice), because they were the theatre of the gods' mythical battle with the Giants in which she played an important part.<sup>3</sup> This the poet recalls in the phrase 'like a bold war-lord'. So any contemporary reference is at least secondary. The point of mentioning these two, rather than any other regions, is presumably that they mark a northern and southern extremity of Athena's sphere of operation. Since the area in between is large, there is implicit—as always in such invocations—a praise of the goddess.<sup>4</sup>

(b) 397–402

πρόσωθεν ἐξήκουσα κληδόνος βοῆν  
 ἀπὸ Σκαμάνδρου γῆν καταφθατουμένην,  
 ἦν δῆτ' Ἀχαιῶν ἄκτορές τε καὶ πρόμοι,  
 τῶν αἰχμαλώτων χρημάτων λάχος μέγα,  
 ἔνειμαν αὐτόπρεμνον ἐς τὸ πᾶν ἐμοί,  
 ἐξάϊρετον δῶρημα Θησέως τόκοις.

'I heard your cry from far off, from the Scamander where I was taking possession of the land which the Achaean leaders and chieftains assigned to me, a large share of the spoils, to be entirely and for ever a choice gift for the sons of Theseus.'

In fact, then, Athena has been in the Troad taking up the Athenians' portion of the spoils. The post-Homeric *Sack of Ilium* includes Demophon and Akamas among the warriors at Troy;<sup>5</sup> for the mythical kings Aeschylus substitutes the goddess representing her people.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, if Akamas and Demophon's booty in the epic was a purely private one, here the booty is a piece of land for the whole state. Now there were struggles between Mitylene and Athens over Sigeum in the sixth century; possibly this piece of mythology was invented to support Athens' claims then. But these lines do not refer, so far as we know, to any specific disputes or battles at the time of the play.<sup>7</sup> Their purpose is rather to point back from a distance to the sack of Troy which bulked so large in the *Agamemnon*. There the destruction of the town made the Atridae guilty, even as they triumphed, and it led to a divine punishment for the Achaeans as a whole, the storm which shattered their fleet; so when the messenger tells of that storm he compares his news to the news of a city conquered (636–45): it is a 'victory-hymn of the Erinyes' (παῖάνα τόνδ' Ἐρινύων) for the Greeks. But here the sack of Troy is the cause of an honourable reward: the Athenians have conquered, but conquest for them is not ruined by their leaders' guilt. Thus there is here a myth corresponding to the formation of the alliance with Argos later in the play: both show a united people getting a just recompense for their labours. Further, both stories validate something about contemporary Athens, one of her territorial claims or one of her alliances; and that applies too to the account of how the Areopagus and the cult of the Semnai were set up, which is the mythical charter for two of her institutions. So if this passage is relevant to its time it is so in a larger than a merely topical way; and it is also part of a coherent artistic design.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. K. J. Dover, *JHS* lxxvii (1957) 237.

<sup>4</sup> Comparable are the Augustan poets' references to Roman power as stretching from Britain to Arabia, or the like: see, e.g., Hor. *Carm.* i 35. 29–32; iii 5.3–4; iv 14.41–52; Virg. *Aen.* vi 798–800. See further, Woodman on Velleius Paterculus, ii 126.3. In tragedy, cf. Eur. *Hipp.* 3–4.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Schol. Eur. *Tro.* 31; *RE* i 1143–4.

<sup>6</sup> Θησέως τόκοις is like Θησιδᾶν in Soph. *OC* 1066, Ἐρεχθεΐδαι in Eur. *Med.* 824, Πριαμίδαι in *Ag.* 537 or παῖδες Κραναοῦ in *Eum.* 1011. The phrase can hardly refer to Theseus' sons in the literal sense since the play gives no indication that Athens is a monarchy.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Dover (n. 3) 237. L. H. Jeffery, *BSA* lx (1965) 45 n. 21, is more inclined to find a topical reference, but grants that caution must prevail.

2. *The Argive alliance*

762–74 (cf. 287–91; 667–73)—Orestes addressing Athena:

ἐγὼ δὲ χώρα τῆδε καὶ τῷ σῶ στρατῷ  
 τὸ λοιπὸν εἰς ἅπαντα πλειστήρη χρόνον  
 ὀρκωμοτήσας νῦν ἄπειμι πρὸς δόμους,  
 μή τοί τιν' ἄνδρα δεῦρο πρυμνήτην χθονὸς  
 ἐλθόντ' ἐποίησιν εὖ κεκασμένον δόρυ.  
 αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἡμεῖς ὄντες ἐν τάφοις τότε  
 τοῖς τὰμὰ παραβαίνουσι νῦν ὀρκώματα  
 ἀμηχάνοισι †πράξομεν† δυσπραξίαις,<sup>8</sup>  
 ὁδοὺς ἀθύμους καὶ παρόρνιθας πόρους  
 τιθέντες ὡς αὐτοῖσι μεταμέλῃ πόνος.  
 ὀρθουμένων δὲ καὶ πόλιν τῆς Παλλάδος  
 τιμῶσιν ἀεὶ τήνδε συμμάχῳ δορὶ  
 αὐτοῖς ἂν ἡμεῖς εἶμεν εὐμένεστεροι.

I am now going off home; and I swear an oath valid for all the future to this land and your people that no leader of my country shall bring against them a well-equipped army. For I in my grave will punish(?) those who offend against this oath of mine with insurmountable failure: I will make their marches despondent and their paths ill-omened, so that they will repent of their labours. But if my oath is respected and they pay honour to Pallas' city with their alliance, I shall be more favourable to them.'

It is generally agreed that these passages imply approval of the Argive alliance of 462 B.C. which reversed the pro-Spartan policies of Cimon, the leading 'conservative' at Athens at the time, and ushered in a 'radical' democracy.<sup>9</sup> Nor do I wish to contest that assertion. But the Argive alliance is also a motif which forms a significant part of Aeschylus' play. Paris' guilt, his offence against *ξενία*, brought war between Argos and his own city: Athens, which has freed Orestes from guilt, is now bound by an eternal alliance to his city. (*συμμαχία* is here, as often, a relationship of *ξενία* in its military aspect.)<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the phrase 'I will make their marches despondent and their paths ill-omened, so that they will repent of their labours' recalls the situation at Aulis described in the parodos of the *Agamemnon*: the bad omen of the eagle and the hare, the gloom of the Achaean troops and their leader's hopeless decision; and so too, if in *Agamemnon*'s case respect for his allies (*Ag.* 212–13) led to a crime, the sacrifice of his daughter, the Argives' respect for their alliance with Athens will bring them good fortune. Further, Orestes' position should be compared to that of the Erinyes: they remain, he goes home; they become *μέτοικοι*, he becomes a *σύμμαχος*. This alliance, like their co-residence, is a continuing relationship which expresses both parties' gratitude. Both also are to protect the city for the future and bring it 'victory' (*Eum.* 777, 903): the alliance will save it in war, the Erinyes will guarantee its internal harmony and prosperity. As we shall see, the alliance is also closely linked to the Areopagus. In short, what is significant about the Argive alliance is not what it implies about Aeschylus' political views, but what it represents within his dramatic creation. It is a good and guiltless relationship between states; it is the expression of Orestes' gratitude; and it is one guarantee of Athens' safety. Above all, it reflects, but reverses, the horrors and sufferings of the past.

It is sometimes held that Aeschylus chose to set the centre of *Agamemnon*'s kingdom in Argos rather than in Mycenae, like Homer, or in Lacedaemon, like Stesichorus, Simonides

<sup>8</sup> Probably the corruption in this line is confined to the word *πράξομεν*; but it may be that, as Page suggests, something has dropped out after the preceding line.

<sup>9</sup> See J. H. Quincey, *CQ* xiv (1964) 190–206;

G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 183–4.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. LSJ, s.v. *ξενία*, 2. For *ξενία* abused, see *Ag.* 1590–93; *Cho.* 700–6, 914–15, and below on *Ag.* 699–706 (cf. 60–2, 362–7, 399–402).

(Schol. Eur. *Or.* 46) and Pindar (*Pyth.* xi), in order to prepare for an allusion to the Argive alliance of 462 B.C. in the *Eumenides*. That is no doubt true as far as it goes, even if the term 'allusion' in such a context needs careful definition (see below pp. 131–2). But there are also artistic reasons for this choice. Aeschylus represents Agamemnon and Menelaus as reigning together in Argos, a notion he derived from some passages in the *Odyssey*.<sup>11</sup> Argos is a suitable place for this joint rule, because the city carries the same name as the whole region the two Atridae govern,<sup>12</sup> and because it is not the traditional seat of either of them; so to set their kingdom there avoids subordinating one to the other. And as an Athenian, Aeschylus would hardly have adopted Stesichorus' version with its pro-Spartan *tendance*. The notion of the double kingship is important in the *Oresteia* because it means that Agamemnon is involved no less than Menelaus in punishing the rape of Helen; and so the Trojan war is in large measure the cause of his guilt and his death. It also means that the murder of Agamemnon by Clytaemnestra is more directly linked to Helen's misdeeds and their consequences: the two daughters of Tyndareus exercise a common 'dominion' (*Ag.* 1470) grotesquely parallel to the joint rule of the Atridae.<sup>13</sup> So if the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* are set in Argos, that is a small, but deliberate, part of a poetic design.

### 3. *The Areopagus*

(a) 681–4 (Athena establishing the Areopagus):

κλύοιτ' ἄν ἤδη θεσμόν, Ἀττικὸς λέως,  
 πρῶτας δίκας κρίνοντες αἵματος χυτοῦ.  
 ἔσται δὲ καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν Αἰγέως στρατῶ  
 αἰεὶ δικαστῶν τοῦτο βουλευτήριον.

'Hear now what I lay down, you citizens of Attica, who are judging the first trial for spilt blood. In the future too the people of Aegus shall have this council of judges for ever.'

In 462 B.C. the Areopagus, a body composed of all former archons which had in the previous period gained some larger powers, had its functions confined to the trial of murder. This was the work of the 'radical', Ephialtes. So it has often been asked whether in describing the Areopagus' foundation Aeschylus takes up any partisan position over this matter. The passages quoted show that any notion of the Areopagus as other than a judicial power is quite foreign to the dramatist, for two reasons. First, because the Areopagites are identified with the Athenian people. For it is the people (Ἀττικὸς λέως) who are said to be judging the case; and these judges we also know to be the Areopagites. So the two are one; and indeed the court is addressed or referred to as the people throughout the play (566, 638, 775, 997, 1010).<sup>14</sup> So if the Areopagus is 'the best of the citizens' (487 ἀστῶν . . . τὰ βέλτατα), that is to emphasize not that they are superior, but that they perfectly represent the city, being the flower of its manhood. A 'conservative' too might have spoken of the council in this way, to stress that its membership was drawn from the two highest property-classes in the state; but if Aeschylus echoes such language, it is to give it a larger, and no longer partisan, sense.

Second, because the Areopagus is a body of 'judges'. This is to impress on the audience that it is conceived here to be what it was when the *Oresteia* was produced, a court of law. Further, Aeschylus has excluded from his trial scene all the specific features of procedure on the

<sup>11</sup> For the evidence, see B. Daube, *Zu den Rechtsproblemen in Aischylos' Agamemnon* (Zürich 1938) 11–25; note also *Od.* iv 561–2 where it is implied that the Argolid is Menelaus' homeland. The *Oresteia's* use of Argolian motifs deserves a systematic treatment.

<sup>12</sup> See Jebb on Soph. *El.* 4; and in Euripides'

*Heraclidae Μυκηναῖοι* and *Ἀργεῖοι* are interchangeable terms.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Daube (n. 11) 24–5.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) 392–5.

Areopagus;<sup>15</sup> the court thus becomes in our play the representative of law as a whole, and all the more because it is judging the first murder-case of all time.

(b) 690–5

ἐν δὲ τῷ σέβας  
 ἀστῶν φόβος τε ξυγγενῆς τὸ μὴ ἀδικεῖν  
 σχήσει τὸ τ' ἡμαρ καὶ κατ' εὐφρόνην ὁμῶς,  
 αὐτῶν πολιτῶν μὴ †πικαιόντων† νόμους  
 κακαῖς ἐπιρροαῖσι· βορβόρω δ' ὕδωρ  
 λαμπρὸν μαιίνων οὔποθ' εὐρήσεις ποτόν.

'... there will sit Reverence, with its kinsman Fear, that belongs to my people: and it will prevent wrong-doing night and day, if only the citizens themselves do not pollute(?) the laws with evil additions—if you foul clear water with mud you will never find it fit to drink.'

Dodds (48) argues against Dover that these lines cannot refer to the powers which had accrued to the Areopagus before Ephialtes, because it is very unlikely that these came by legislation in the assembly (which is the natural implication of 'the citizens themselves'): he suggests in his turn that the lines concern the admission of the *Zeugitai*, a lower property-class, to the archonship, which in fact took place a year later. We might object to his objection that *πολιτῶν* could be used here, as words meaning 'the citizens' are used elsewhere, to refer to the Areopagus itself.<sup>16</sup> But what Athena says is in danger of pollution is neither the powers nor the membership of the court, but the 'laws'.<sup>17</sup> So these lines recall an important Athenian principle, the stability of homicide laws, which is guaranteed in their formulation (Dem. xxiii 62) and which Antiphon (v 14 = vi 2; i 3) dwells on with pride.<sup>18</sup> And so it is that Athens will surpass two models of law and order (*εὐνομία*), the Scythians and the Spartans (700–3). The foundation of such laws is implicit in what Athena here lays down, since this is the first trial for murder, and one of these is later made explicit, namely the principle that equal votes lead to acquittal.<sup>19</sup> If, then, any contemporary event is relevant it is the introduction of the *γραφὴ παρανόμων* (a restraint on legislation contrary to existing statutes) which may well belong to this period;<sup>20</sup> and that the laws are better unchanged is a commonplace of democratic oratory.<sup>21</sup> The Areopagus' functions risk being impaired by such a change because it is a court for the trial of murder; it is therefore dependent on the laws which guide its conduct.

(c) 700–6

τοιόνδε τοι ταρβούντες ἐνδίκως σέβας  
 ἔρυμά τε χώρας καὶ πόλεως σωτήριον  
 ἔχοιτ' ἂν οἶον οὔτις ἀνθρώπων ἔχει,  
 οὔτ' ἐν Σκύθησιν οὔτε Πέλοπος ἐν τόποις.  
 κερδῶν ἄθικτον τοῦτο βουλευτήριον,  
 αἰδοῖον, ὀξύθυμον, εὐδόντων ὑπερ  
 ἐργηγορὸς φρούρημα γῆς καθίσταμαι.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Aristoteles und Athen* (Berlin 1893) ii 333; Jacoby, *FGrH* iii b Suppl. pp. 24–5. Jacoby makes it plain that it was Aeschylus who made Orestes' the first trial for murder.

<sup>16</sup> Nor would Aeschylus speak of his own class in such insulting terms: cf. Jacoby, *FGrH* iii b Suppl., Notes p. 528. Dodds' answer (49 n. 1) scarcely meets Jacoby's point.

<sup>17</sup> For the metaphor of *ἐπιρροαί* applied to laws, cf. Plato, *Legg.* 793d 5; it need not therefore be used of persons, as Dodds, *CQ* iii (1953) 20, suggests.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Thomson *ad loc.*, whose view I share; also H. Lloyd-Jones' translation (1970) 54–5, 75–6.

<sup>19</sup> The formulation of homicide law in Athens is normally ascribed to a historical figure, Draco. But the myth of the *Eumenides*, like the other myths about the

foundation of the Areopagus, presupposes a forerunner of Draco's code; and Demosthenes can speak of the Attic law of murder as due to 'heroes or gods' (xxiii 70); see further K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality* (Oxford 1974) 255.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. C. Hignett, *A History of the Athenian Constitution to the End of the Fifth Century* (Oxford 1952) 210–13; *contra*, see Andrewes on Thuc. viii 67.2. The same principle is behind the formation of an apparently more short-lived institution, the board of *νομοφύλακες* mentioned by Philochorus: cf. A. J. Podlecki, *The Political Background of Aeschylean Tragedy* (Ann Arbor 1966) 96–7.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Dover (n. 3) 234; add Dem. xxiv 24, 139–43; [Dem.] xxvi 25; Aeschin. i 6.

'If you stand in just awe of such a reverend body you will have a bulwark to safeguard the country and the city such as no one, whether in Scythia or the Peloponnese, possesses. I establish this tribunal, untouchable by gain, worthy of respect, keen in its wrath, a wakeful guard in the land for those who sleep.'

The functions ascribed to the Areopagus here are often compared to later writers' characterizations of it as it was before Ephialtes: *φύλαξ τῶν νόμων* (*Ath. Pol.* 4.4), *ἐπίσκοπος τῆς πολιτείας* (*ibid.* 8.4), *ἐπίσκοπον πάντων καὶ φύλακα τῶν νόμων* (Plut. *Solon* 19). But these parallels prove nothing; there are many ways in which the Areopagus might be 'guardian' of the city, and which is meant here depends first and foremost on the context.<sup>22</sup> We have already had occasion to stress that the Areopagus is in Aeschylus a court for the trial of murder; and Dover (*JHS* lxxvii [1957] 234–5) has argued powerfully that precisely in virtue of that function it can be conceived to be the guardian of the community as a whole; for homicide law is the basis of all law and order. So even if Aeschylus echoes the language used of the Areopagus' powers before Ephialtes, he gives it a new sense. The court is also closely parallel to the Argive alliance. Both the alliance and the court are to stand 'for all time' (572, 683, 708 and 670, 672, 763); and both are to be 'saviours' (701 and 777 *σωτήριον*). The alliance is to save Athens in war; the court is to save her from bloodshed and its consequences for the community. In short, they guarantee what every city needs: internal harmony and security against others.

The epithets which Athena goes on to use are also suited to a court of law as such. 'Untouchable by gain', because a jury must be incorruptible (*ἀδέκαστος*); 'worthy of respect', because Demosthenes (xxiii 65) calls the Areopagus itself in the same breath *δικαστήριον* ('a court') and *σεμνότατον* ('most reverend'); 'keen in its wrath', because there is an anger proper to a judge,<sup>23</sup> most memorably embodied in antiquity in the chorus of Aristophanes' *Wasps*, or, in the words of a great modern sociologist,<sup>23a</sup> legal punishment is in essence 'une réaction passionnelle'. Likewise, the Areopagus incorporates, but for the good of society, the anger or lust for vengeance we hear so much of in the trilogy (e.g. *Ag.* 214–17; *Cho.* 40–1, 454; *Eum.* 981). The metaphor of sleep and waking is used to say, again, something about justice; compare the Hindu *Laws of Manu* vii 18 (tr. Derrett): 'Punishment rules all the people, Punishment alone protects them, Punishment is awake while they sleep.' And that metaphor too points back to the past. At the beginning of the play the Furies are asleep: there they are both bloodthirsty and ineffectual, unlike the Areopagus which is to be just and effective. So too when both Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra meet their deaths, help is 'asleep' (*Ag.* 1356–7, *Cho.* 881); the Areopagus on the other hand is to be a 'wakeful guard'. A different, but also significant, contrast is with the sleepless watchman of the *Agamemnon* (see esp. 12 ff.) whose loyal performance of his task serves only to alert the king's murderers: the Areopagus' 'sleeplessness' will prevent wrongdoing.

To summarize: Aeschylus' account of the homicide court's foundation is clearly the mythical charter for the post-Ephialtean Areopagus. That need not mean he is a 'radical'; it could equally imply a hope that the warring factions might be calmed by accepting things as they had become. But again, what counts in the play is the significance ascribed to the Areopagus; and it is significant, to Athens no less than to us, as part of the basis on which any just and happy community must rest.

4. Contemporary references are also sometimes detected at the end of the play. Thus Dodds (51–2) finds in lines 858–66 an allusion to a danger of civil war after the assassination of Ephialtes,<sup>24</sup> just as Wilamowitz<sup>25</sup> did in 976–83:

<sup>22</sup> For similar language used of the fourth-century Areopagus, see Thomson on *Eum.* 704.

<sup>23</sup> See further R. Hirzel, *Themis Dike und Verwandtes* (Leipzig 1907) 416–18.

<sup>23a</sup> E. Durkheim, *De la division du travail social* (Paris

1893) ch. ii 2.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Wilamowitz, *Aischylos-Interpretationen* (Berlin 1914) 226–7.

<sup>25</sup> *Arist. u. Athen* (n. 15) ii 342.

τὰν δ' ἄπληστον κακῶν  
 μή ποτ' ἐν πόλει Στάσι  
 τᾷδ' ἐπεύχομαι βρέμειν,  
 μηδὲ πιούσα κόνις μέλαν αἷμα πολιτῶν  
 δι' ὄργαν πονὰς  
 ἀντιφόνους ἄτας  
 ἀρπαλίσαι πόλεως.

'I pray that faction insatiable for evil may never roar in this city, and that the dust may not drink the dark blood of the citizens and in anger gulp down vengeance, murder answering murder, the city's ruin.'

Now the genuineness of 858–66 is open to grave suspicion;<sup>26</sup> but to pray for a city that it should be free of faction is natural and normal at any time, as indeed the Eumenides' song as a whole asks for the blessings which a city's prayers normally seek, and freedom from the evils they try to avert.<sup>27</sup> Thus an Attic drinking-song (PMG 884 Page):

Πάλλας Τριτογένει', ἄνασσ' Ἀθάνα,  
 ὄρθου τήνδε πόλιν τε καὶ πολίτας  
 ἄτερ ἀλγέων καὶ στάσεων  
 καὶ θανάτων ἀώρων, σύ τε καὶ πατήρ.

'Tritonis-born Pallas, queen Athena, keep this city and its citizens upright without sufferings or faction or untimely deaths, you and your father.'

And to prefer war to faction is another conventional and natural wish. So Herodotus (viii 3) writes: 'Internal discord is as much worse than war waged in concord as war is than peace'<sup>28</sup> (στάσις γὰρ ἔμφυλος πολέμου ὁμοφρονέοντος τοσούτῳ κάκιόν ἐστι ὅσω πόλεμος εἰρήνης); and Horace expresses the same idea (*Carm.* i 2.21–2; i 35.33–40). So there need be no topical reference in the passages from the *Eumenides*. What is more, 976–83 are designed to recall the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*; for they bring to mind the series of vengeance unfolded there. The imagery of those lines with its vivid personification of the dust is particularly reminiscent of *Cho.* 66–7:<sup>29</sup> 'Because of blood drunk by earth the nourisher, avenging blood clots and will not dissolve' (δι' αἵματ' ἐκποθένθ' ὑπὸ χθονός τροφῶν / τίτας φόνος πέπηγεν οὐ διαρρῦδαν) and both passages recall the Furies' threat to drink Orestes' blood (*Eum.* 264–6). Now with murder goes civil discord (στάσις): the killing of Agamemnon and of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus are both acts of στάσις, the one because it sets up tyranny in place of kingship, the other because it liberates Argos from the tyrants (*Ag.* 1355, 1365; *Cho.* 973, 1046). In Cassandra's mouth στάσις is even personified (*Ag.* 1117–18): 'Let insatiable Discord raise for the race a jubilant shout over this sacrifice worthy of stoning' (στάσις δ' ἀκόρετος γένει / κατολολυξάτω θύματος λευσίμου). The murder of the king generates στάσις; it also provokes the threat of stoning, which in ancient Greece is the community's way of removing the miasma induced by murder.<sup>30</sup> The chorus of elders in the *Agamemnon* in fact utter that threat against Aegisthus; and this is one of a number of ways in which popular discontent makes itself felt there. Clytaemnestra has been afraid of 'anarchy with popular clamour' (883 δημόθρους ἀναρχία); the people have murmured against their king for involving them in a war for Helen's sake (449–51), and they have even put

<sup>26</sup> See Dodds 51. The reasons he gives for deleting these lines are far more cogent than his reasons for preserving them.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Aesch. *Suppl.* 661–2; Pind. *Pae.* ix 13–20. In general on cult-poetry like the Eumenides' hymn, see E. Norden, *Aus altrömischen Priesterbüchern* (Lund 1939) 160–1, 268–74.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted by Thomson on lines 977–9; he also adduces the Attic skolion on 957–8.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. further *Ag.* 1017–24; *Cho.* 48, 400–4, 520–1; *Eum.* 647–8. The language also brings to the mind the symposium: for distorted sympotic imagery, cf. *Ag.* 1188–93, 1385–7, 1395–8; *Cho.* 577–8; V. Di Benedetto, *L'ideologia del potere e la tragedia greca* (Turin 1978) 232–3.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Fraenkel on line 1117. On that passage in connection with *Eum.* 976–87, cf. Di Benedetto (n. 29) 207–10.

their curse upon him (456–7); the chorus threaten his murderers, as with stoning, so also with the people's curse and with its sentence of exile (1407–11, 1615–16).<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the chorus of elders throughout the *Agamemnon*, and even sometimes the chorus of slaves in the *Choephoroi* (esp. 55–9, 973–82),<sup>32</sup> stand for the city harmed or worried by the deeds of their rulers. So the reference to *στάσις* in the *Eumenides* is amply prepared for.<sup>33</sup>

In 996–1002 Dodds finds a reference to recent 'economic conflicts' (52–3). But as he himself observes, questions about the proper use and the dangerous consequences of wealth arise in the choruses of the *Agamemnon* (esp. 750–81, 1001–16); and we have heard the Furies say (*Eum.* 535–7): 'From soundness of mind comes wealth that all love and greatly pray for' (ἐκ δ' ὑγείας / φρενῶν ὁ πᾶσιν φίλος / καὶ πολύευκτος ὄλβος). Nor is 'economics' foreign to the plots. In the *Agamemnon* it is powerfully suggested that the Greeks' victory and spoils at Troy are ill-gotten (341–8, 636–80); and the king ruins the substance of his house by treading on its precious robes,<sup>34</sup> as Clytaemnestra boasts outrageously that its supplies are inexhaustible (*Ag.* 958–62). The robe in which she then ensnares him represents an 'evil wealth' (*Ag.* 1382 *πλοῦτον εἴματος κακόν*). In the *Choephoroi* the poverty of Orestes, his rightful inheritance expropriated while his mother and Aegisthus enjoy the regal luxury, is one of the motives that impel him to do the deed (249–50, 301, 973–4; cf. 135–7); and when he is acquitted he rejoices that he will now again be called an Argive and come into his father's heritage (*Eum.* 757–8; cf. *Cho.* 865). In short, the Furies' concern with wealth grows out of the plot as Aeschylus shapes it. And at the end of the *Eumenides*, in this as in so much else, there is realized in Athens the just counterpart to the wrongs and horrors of the past.

What, then, emerges from the discussion of these passages about the 'political' character of the *Eumenides*? First a few words must be said in general about the tragedian and his city. To present a tragedy to the Athenians as an audience at the Dionysia is not the same as speaking to them in the Assembly or even as producing before them a comedy; for in tragedy there is no direct address to the spectators<sup>35</sup> and no reference to contemporaries from the Greek world. It is therefore fair to assume that the audience, who had an intimate and instinctive knowledge of the nature and limits of the genre, would respond accordingly. Indeed, the function of tragedy in its social and historical context is not to comment directly on the times, but to raise to universality and touch with emotion the experience of the dramatist and his fellow-citizens, to interpret in myth and drama their deepest concerns as human beings.<sup>36</sup> Sometimes that includes the use of myths which explain and legitimate something historical, as we have already seen in the *Eumenides*, or the treatment of overtly political subjects, like the value of democracy (Euripides, *Supplikes*), and the authority of the state as against that of the gods (Sophocles, *Antigone*); but such themes are completely bound up with the actions and sufferings of figures who belong in a drama. So it is not surprising that Attic tragedy is set almost invariably in the world of myth; and the one surviving play which deals with contemporary events only confirms what has been said here.<sup>37</sup> For Aeschylus' Persians represent human delusion, fear and suffering; and if there is praise of Athens in that play, it is designed to intensify the bewilderment and gloom of the characters on the stage.<sup>38</sup> So it is with the *Oresteia*. Even when Aeschylus draws closer to his own

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Dodds 45–6; but these things are surely more than 'straws in the wind'. The presence of a discontented people (*δῆμος*) when kingship is violated is another Odyssean motif: cf. above all the assembly in Book ii.

<sup>32</sup> In these lines Orestes is addressing the chorus. There is no reason to suppose that he enters with some citizen-extras: cf. Taplin (n. 14) 357–8.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. on the plane of imagery, *Ag.* 650–2: fire and water 'conspired' (*ξυνώμοσαν*) to destroy the fleet. Disorder in nature is, as all over the *Oresteia*, bound up with social disorder. For literal 'conspiracy', see *Cho.* 978.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. J. Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek tragedy* (London 1962) 86–9.

<sup>35</sup> See D. Bain, *CQ* xxv (1975) 13–25; Taplin (n. 14) 129–34.

<sup>36</sup> See further Vickers (n. 1) 100–56.

<sup>37</sup> H. D. F. Kitto, *Poiesis* (Berkeley/London 1966) 74–115 demolishes the notion that the *Persians* is a merely patriotic play. On *Eur. Suppl.*, cf. C. Collard's commentary (1975) i 29.

<sup>38</sup> Miletus, like Athens an Ionian city and originally one of her colonies, was sacked by the Persians in 494 B.C. When the tragedian Phrynichus produced a tragedy



time, he is rather giving a certain significance to something contemporary than commenting on it for its own sake: the Areopagus and the Argive alliance, as we have begun to see, have in the trilogy a meaning and a value which are not confined to any historical situation; and if the audience recalls those institutions in their contemporary form, it is meant to see that, since they were indeed, as the play says, set up 'for all time', their value is confirmed by history. We have begun to see too that in those places in the *Eumenides* where topical allusions have been detected, there are rather—or at least also—links with the rest of the trilogy. So if we speak of 'politics' in the *Oresteia* it may be helpful to give the word a different sense, 'a concern with human beings as part of a community'. This will also in itself do much to bridge the apparent gap between the *Eumenides* and the other two plays. For if in the *Eumenides* Athens is above all an ideal representation of human society which pointedly reverses the social disorder of the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*, then the unity of the trilogy is in essence vindicated.

The second criticism of Dodds' article can be dealt with more briefly; for the nub of it is in his own opening sentence: 'When Aeschylus wrote, no distinction between morals and politics had yet been drawn.' Now the thesis of his whole paper is, very broadly, that the moral lessons implicit or explicit hitherto are in the *Eumenides* addressed to the city as political lessons, and that Aeschylus was impelled to unfold his trilogy in this way by the pressing problems of Athens in the present. But the *Eumenides*, I suggested, is a political play in the sense that it is concerned with human beings in a πόλις: it dramatizes, like the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*, social problems. And if we take seriously Dodds' opening remark, it follows that it is in the very nature of morality as Aeschylus conceived it to include the political sphere. The distinction between ethics and politics goes back to Aristotle; but for him the one was in fact contained in the other (*EN* 1094a18–b11; cf. 1099b29–32, 1142a9–10). And the purpose of the city is 'living well' (*Pol.* 1252b30). This is because the *summum bonum* is thought of as a common good, and the common good is the sum of every individual's morality. So the laws' task—and the task of the Areopagus in the *Eumenides*—is, quite simply, to make people good;<sup>39</sup> and the word εὐνομία (literally, 'having good laws') commends not only, not even principally, a city's institutions, but the behaviour of its inhabitants.<sup>40</sup> What is true of good is also true of evil. As we see throughout the *Oresteia*, the consequences of wrong-doing cannot be limited; just as it extends from one generation to another, so also it affects the whole community and its institutions (cf. Hes. *Op.* 240–1). Thus the murderer or wrong-doer can be said not only to endanger the laws<sup>41</sup> or pollute the city,<sup>42</sup> but even, quite directly, to 'kill' them.<sup>43</sup> So by fashioning in mythical Athens the image of an ideal city, Aeschylus is presenting goodness achieved; he is also portraying the reversal of the state of

about the event, the Athenians fined him 1,000 drachmas for 'having reminded them of their own troubles' (ὡς ἀναμνήσαντα οἰκῆϊα κακά) and forbade the play to be read or staged again (*Hdt.* vi 21.2). Now what it *did*, we are told, was move them to tears; we have no warrant for thinking it was inspired by a political *arrière-pensée*. And the reason for the Athenians' outrage was simply that, unlike any other known tragedy, it dealt with a disaster for Athens. Phrynichus offended against the *nomoi* both of the city and its drama. The proper material of Attic tragedy was suffering which could move the audience to pity and fear, but which was not their own; and thus its proper effect required, as all art requires, detachment as well as involvement in its public. For the tragic emotions of fear and pity are evoked by the plight of men like ourselves (*Arist. Poet.* 1453a4–5) and by suffering we can envisage ourselves or those closest to us undergoing (*Rhet.* 1385b3–5); Herodotus himself makes the distinction between pity for another's suffering and feeling it as one's own in his story of Psammenitus (iii 14; cf. *Arist.*

*Rhet.* 1386a17–24); see also Gorgias, *Hel.* 9. For a helpful discussion of the Herodotus passage, see F. Marx, *RhM* lxxvii (1928) 343–8.

<sup>39</sup> See also *Arist. Pol.* 1280b6–12, 1333a11–16; *Pl. Protag.* 326c–d; *Apol.* 24d; *Isoc.* ii 3; *Dem.* xx 154; [*Dem.*] xxv 16–17. Note also *Isoc.* vii 41–2 on the Areopagus in olden times: its function, as in Aeschylus, was to make people good and prevent, not merely punish, wrongdoing.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. A. Andrewes, *CQ* xxxii (1938) 89–91.

<sup>41</sup> Cf., e.g., the conventional phrase 'come to the laws' aid' (βοηθήσατε τοῖς νόμοις) and the like in forensic speeches: e.g. *Dem.* xxii 1; xxvi 27; xliii 84; xlv 87; xlvi 28; *Lys.* xxx 35.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. L. Moulinier, *Le pur et l'impur dans la pensée des Grecs d'Homère à Aristote* (Paris 1952) 212–25.

<sup>43</sup> See *Soph. OC* 842 (where ἐβαίπεται is not to be emended): cf. W. Schulze, *Kleine Schriften*<sup>2</sup> (Göttingen 1966) 181 n. 3, and *Solon* 4a West (if καινομένην is right); *Cic. Pro Mil.* 14; *II Verr.* iv 26.

things in the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*. If, then, the *Eumenides* concentrates on society, that need not be explained by his concern about contemporary Athens. The *Oresteia* is unmistakably the work of an Athenian citizen and addressed to Athenian citizens; but its author's patriotism does not have to be invoked to explain his artistry.

It is now time to look closer at Aeschylus' poetic design; and if there is any truth in these reflections, they indicate a path to take. We need to see in more detail how moral and social considerations are one throughout the trilogy, and in particular how the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* prepare for that emphasis on the community which is often thought peculiar to the *Eumenides*; at the same time we shall have to define more closely the 'political' character of the last play. To this end I shall group my remarks under two headings which are also words Aeschylus continually uses, *δίκη* and *τιμή*.

## II

It is plain to the most casual reader that *δίκη* ('justice') is a central notion in the trilogy. The plots and choruses of the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* describe a self-perpetuating series of crimes and punishments, which begins with the rape of Helen and goes on through the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the sack of Troy and the murder of Agamemnon to the murders of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. A converging line of wrongs is revealed in the Cassandra scene. There we learn of the Thyestean banquet and the guilt which hangs about the house; and these too lead to the revenge Aegisthus takes with his consort. *Δίκη* is constantly invoked as a goddess when these punishments are recalled or enacted (e.g. *Ag.* 383, 911, 1432; *Cho.* 646). So at the very beginning of the parodos of the *Agamemnon*, the imagery sets us in the context of not only justice, but even law. Agamemnon and Menelaus are the *ἀντίδικος*, the 'plaintiff',<sup>44</sup> against Paris and they set out with an *ἀρωγά*, 'aid', another term with legal associations. This line of thought is extended in the simile which follows: the two kings are compared to vultures who raise the *βοή*, the cry which both calls for help and testifies to the injury they have suffered; and a god answers them—for the birds are the gods' *μέτοικοι* ('co-residents', yet again a word with social and legal overtones)—by sending the Erinyes. But the image fits its context less than perfectly; and these imperfections are meant to trouble the spectator. Agamemnon and Menelaus, unlike the vultures of the simile, are themselves the avengers. The gods defend their *μέτοικοι* not by acting as their *προστάται* ('spokesmen at law'), but by direct punishment. The loss of children and the mourning of their parents is scarcely like the flight of the 'woman of many husbands' (62 *πολύανδρος* . . . *γυναικός*) who was to bring all the toils of war to both Greeks and Trojans; if anything, it squares rather with the death of Iphigenia and reminds us that Agamemnon too is guilty.<sup>45</sup>

The use of legal language is disturbing here, as it is elsewhere in the *Agamemnon*. So at 813–17:<sup>46</sup>

δίκας γὰρ οὐκ ἀπὸ γλώσσης θεοὶ  
κλύοντες ἀνδροθνήτας Ἴλιοφθόρους  
ἐς αἵματηρὸν τεῦχος οὐ διχορρόπως  
ψήφους ἔθεντο, τῷ δ' ἐναντίω κύτει  
ἐλπὶς προσήει χειρὸς οὐ πληρουμένω.

'The gods, without having heard in speech the parties' claims, cast unambiguously into the urn of blood the verdict of death to the men and destruction to the city, and only hope came to the other urn, that was never filled.'

<sup>44</sup> Cf. 451 *προδίκους Ἀτρείδαις* and Fraenkel *ad loc.*

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Daube (n. 11) 125–78; D. Kaufmann-Bühler, *Begriff und Funktion der Dike in den Tragödien des Aischylos* (Diss. Heidelberg 1951) 59–60; F. I. Zeitlin,

*TAPA* xcvi (1965) 481–2; A. Lebeck, *The Oresteia* (Washington 1971) 8–10.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Lebeck (n. 45) 204–5.

When the gods judge a case they do not hear it; they proceed at once to execution. Or *Ag.* 532–7:

Πάρις γὰρ οὔτε συντελής πόλις  
 ἐξεύχεται τὸ δράμα τοῦ πάθους πλεόν·  
 ὀφλῶν γὰρ ἀρπαγῆς τε καὶ κλοπῆς δίκην  
 τοῦ ῥυσίου<sup>47</sup> θ' ἤμαρτε καὶ πανώλεθρον  
 αὐτόχθονον πατρῶον ἔθρισεν δόμον·  
 διπλά δ' ἔτεισαν Πριαμίδαι θάμάρτια.

'Neither Paris nor the city that pays jointly with him can boast that they did more than they underwent. Convicted of rape and theft, he has lost what the Greeks seized in reprisal and has stripped his father's house, left it utterly destroyed with all the land. The sons of Priam have paid twofold for their offence.'

Payment twice over is a known form of legal retribution; but here such payment means the total destruction of the city. Similarly the word *πράσσεσθαι* and its cognate *πράκτωρ*, which are normally connected with the exaction of debts or fines, are applied to Agamemnon's punishment of Paris' rape and robbery (*Ag.* 111, 705, 812, 823); only here the 'fine' is again ruin for the whole of Troy.<sup>48</sup>

What then is this *δίκη* and why is it so disturbing? It is a retribution which strikes not only the offender but his whole city; it is also a summary justice in which punishment follows directly on crime and whose agents, even though the gods will the punishment, are themselves guilty. It thus stands in contrast to the legal justice of the *Eumenides*. This contrast becomes particularly clear in the scene where Athena questions the Furies and Orestes before the trial (397–489). Only the doer is to be punished, if anyone is; and she refuses a justice which consists simply in both parties' swearing an oath: the case must be heard on either side (428). Further, the plea that the murder was a just one may cause the murderer to be spared (*Eum.* 612–13—contrast *Ag.* 1563–4, *Cho.* 313–14), a principle Demosthenes (xx 157, xxiii 74) finds enshrined in Attic homicide law and in the story of Orestes' acquittal on the Areopagus. Nor can she, for all that she is a goddess, decide it on her own (470–2). There must be a collaboration between gods and man—men are no longer to be simply the instruments, conscious or otherwise, of divine wrath; and this results in a judgement after trial, not immediate destruction. This collaboration is dramatically represented when Athena votes together with the other jurors.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Apollo is no more what he was in the *Choephoroi*, the author of a terrifying and oracular command to kill: he is present in a supporting and subordinate role to share with Orestes the charge of murder and to be his witness and advocate (576–80). Hence the apparently curious unobtrusiveness of his entry and exit in the trial scene:<sup>50</sup> he stands, as it were, beside or behind Orestes, he no longer looms over him.

The two notions of justice are already briefly contrasted at *Cho.* 120 when Electra interjects, as the chorus instruct her how to pray: 'Do you mean a judge (*δικαστήν*) or an executioner (*δικηφόρον*)?' And the first time the word *δικαστής* appears in the *Eumenides* it has the same implication (81):

κάκει δικαστὰς τῶνδε καὶ θελκτηρίου  
 μύθους ἔχοντες μηχανὰς εὐρήσομεν  
 ὥστ' ἔς τὸ πᾶν σε τῶνδ' ἀπαλλάξαι πόνων.

<sup>47</sup> This word can keep its normal sense 'something taken in reprisal', if we take it as the *Greeks' ῥύσιον*.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Daube (n. 11) 108. For violent punishment treated as the exaction of a fine or debt in the *Oresteia*, see also *Ag.* 458, 1503; *Cho.* 275 (where Tucker's interpretation is right), 311, 805; *Eum.* 319, 624. Ultimately, cf. Hom. *Od.* xii 382. Note also the grim analogue of legal justice practised by Hades that the Furies appeal to (*Eum.* 316–20).

<sup>49</sup> Wilamowitz, *Aisch.-Interp.* (n. 24) 183–5, is an unassailable statement of this view of the *calculus Minervae*: hers is not a casting vote, it creates an equality of votes.

<sup>50</sup> Noted by Taplin (n. 14) 395–407. His suggestion that the text of the trial-scene is gravely disrupted is stimulating, but mistaken; see further *ibid.* 398 n. 1, 399 n. 1.

'There with judges and with persuasive speeches we will find a way to release you completely from these troubles.'

In the court persuasion has a place; and Athena again uses the word *θελκτήριος* of her placating the Erinyes (886). Persuasion (*πειθώ*), which she invokes there and later (970), is no longer as earlier in the trilogy a force that leads to crime or death (*Ag.* 385, *Cho.* 726)—it has been dramatized most vividly in the scene where Agamemnon yields to Clytaemnestra's arguments and walks on the precious robes:<sup>51</sup> it is now the agent of the continuing peace and happiness of the city. And whereas the chorus in the *Agamemnon* (1406–25) could only make a vain attempt to 'sentence' (*δικάζειν*) Clytaemnestra, now there is a court to pass judgements with authority and power.

In the *Eumenides*, then, legal justice, a pacific and effective solution of quarrels and wrongs, ends and supersedes the *lex talionis*. And in this Aeschylus is again giving expression to something implicit in Attic homicide law, which prevents an infinite series of reprisals by prohibiting revenge against the murderer (Demosthenes, xxiii 39), or indeed in the notion of law itself, which, as Plato puts it, 'civilized' or 'pacified' (*ἡμέρωκε*) all human life (*Legg.* 937e1). This is not to say that divine justice, which still punishes violently and still visits the sins of the father on the children, is overthrown; the Erinyes remain in the city to enforce it,<sup>52</sup> though it is now not they, but Athena, who asserts that function (930–7, 950–5). But here they are not the blood-sucking avengers, concerned only with the rights of kin; they represent universal justice. We have seen them or heard of them in both these roles in the *Eumenides*, and before (e.g. *Ag.* 1190, *Eum.* 210–12 and *Ag.* 59, *Eum.* 269–75). What they lose here by giving up their angry threats is their partisan character, which is the basis of the *lex talionis* and the evils it brings with it. And their sphere of competence is now not merely the family but the human community as a whole.

But to see more clearly how *δίκη* is achieved at the end of the *Eumenides* we need to consider the two concluding events of the play: the foundation of the Areopagus and the incorporation of the Erinyes.

Athena's speech (681–709) which sets up the court for all time is what above all expounds its meaning. It is to embody *τὸ δεινόν* ('what instils fear'), in it will reside reverence and fear to prevent wrong-doing; as long as this remains so, then there will be neither 'anarchy' nor 'despotism'. All this echoes the words of the Furies in the previous chorus (517–37). Now their prime concern in the whole ode seems to be with individuals; so that they too should speak of 'anarchy' and 'despotism' is striking. But the sense of these terms is not a narrowly political one.<sup>53</sup> The chorus and Electra in the *Choephoroi* (58, 102) speak of a bad fear, contrasted with reverence for the true king, in the face of their unjust rulers; and Clytaemnestra in the *Agamemnon* (883) mentions the risk of 'anarchy' when the king is away. In other words, 'anarchy' or 'despotism' can be set against monarchy no less than against democracy. So these words do not refer to forms of constitution; they are what comes about when fear is absent from the state. And fear is at once and indistinguishably both an individual and a collective thing: it is the right measure and manner of control whether in the person or in the city.

What then exactly is this fear? It is powerfully contrasted with the foreboding or horror in the face of violence and guilt which we have witnessed continually in the trilogy.<sup>54</sup> It is identified with 'soundness of mind' (534 *ὑγιείας φρενῶν*); it is also the basis of spontaneously just behaviour (550). We have already met this emphasis on free will in *Eum.* 217–18. There Apollo

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Lebeck (n. 45) 40–1; R. F. Goheen, *AJP* lxxvi (1955) 126–32.

<sup>52</sup> For one specific way in which their functions reinforce the state's justice, see Thomson on 935–8: participants in trials on the Areopagus had to swear on oath sanctioned by a curse on themselves and their descendants, and a prosecutor can refer to the nether gods in pressing for a conviction (Antiphon i 31). In general, to punish a wrongdoer's descendants is charac-

teristic of divine, as opposed to human, justice: cf. Hdt. vii 137.1–2; Lysias vi 20.

<sup>53</sup> Cf., broadly, Dover (n. 3) 233. Note also M. Lefkowitz, *HSCP* lxxxiv (1980) 38–9 on a similar passage in Pindar, *P.* xi 51–4.

<sup>54</sup> For the word, see esp. *Ag.* 14, 976; *Cho.* 46, 58, 102, though naturally fear is also widespread in the action. Cf. J. de Romilly, *La crainte et l'angoisse dans la tragédie d'Eschyle* (Paris 1958) 107–14.

says marriage is guarded not just by an oath, but by *δίκη*. In this context *δίκη* clearly implies spontaneous recognition of a bond which has an intrinsic value and is not an arbitrarily imposed duty. Much the same contrast occurs in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (811–12) where Philoctetes refuses to constrain Neoptolemus by an oath to take him away and the younger man replies: 'Indeed it is not *right* for me to go without you' (*ὡς οὐ θέμις γ' ἐμοί 'στι σοῦ μολεῖν ἄτερ*).<sup>55</sup> Naturally there is also punishment for those who scorn *δίκη*. The Chorus make this quite clear: behind their morality is the recognition of the gods' superior power (*Eum.* 517–25). But this recognition, what Aeschylus calls *σωφρονεῖν*, corresponds to the 'learning through suffering' (*πάθει μάθος*) of the hymn to Zeus in the *Agamemnon*; what was there only a dimly hopeful speculation, is now achieved.<sup>56</sup> To know the gods' power induces justice inspired by a conscious fear, not blindness—and then terror of punishment for the misdeeds that blindness prompted.

We might then even call the Areopagus the 'conscience' of the city;<sup>57</sup> it embodies an enlightened, not an unseeing fear. It is also within the community what *τὸ δεινόν* should be within each of its members: the parallelism of city and individual is part of Aeschylus' thinking as much as it is of Plato's.<sup>58</sup> So too the philosopher used an ideal city to express a permanent and universal image of justice; and the dramatist does the same through the Areopagus, an institution set up for all time in a community. Thus the foundation of the court substitutes for the horrors of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' not only legal justice, but justice in a far wider sense; and in that notion of justice is naturally implicit a vision of society.

Let us now turn to the conciliation of the Furies. As we have seen, they remain in the city as agents of universal justice. Just as the Areopagus is its human guarantor, so are the Furies on the divine plane. For human justice needs to be supplemented by divine supervision (992–5):

*τάσδε γὰρ εὐφρονας εὐφρονες ἀεὶ  
μέγα τιμῶντες καὶ γῆν καὶ πόλιν  
ὀρθοδίκαιον  
πρέψετε πάντως διάγοντες*

'If you honour them and show them kindness, as they themselves are kindly, you will surely be pre-eminent, guiding your land and city in the straight path of righteousness.'

The picture of what the Eumenides are to bring to the city is long and complex. The benefits are of two kinds, social and material. Let us consider these in turn so as to see what light they throw on the notion of *δίκη* and the unity of the trilogy. We have already seen that if the Eumenides pray against faction and for a just prosperity, their prayers reverse what has come about in the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*: we should now try to pursue this relation between the last scene of the trilogy and the rest a little further.

(1) The Eumenides are to be goddesses of marriage and child-bearing (834–6) and they pray to their gods as a whole and to their sisters, the Moirai, for fertility in matrimony (956–67). They thus come in their own way to agree with Apollo about the sanctity of marriage (213–18). We have heard before of the unholy wedding of Helen, the adulteress; we have seen Agamemnon enter with his concubine<sup>59</sup> or Clytaemnestra monstrously posing as the faithful wife and then slaughtering her own husband. These breaches of marriage are reflected in the imagery. The word *προτέλεια*, which means particularly a sacrifice before marriage, occurs in a sinister way twice in the *parodos* (65–6, 227), associated with war and death and in contexts where the evil marriage of Helen and the frustrated marriage of Iphigenia are in our minds. It recurs (720) in the

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *OC* 650–1.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Dodds 59–62.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Durkheim (n. 23a) ch. ii 1: penal law is a manifestation of 'la conscience collective ou commune', which in its turn is 'le type psychique de la société'. Note also *Isoc.* xvii 14: the 'soul' of the state is its constitution (which determines its laws).

<sup>58</sup> For an explicit expression of it, see *Eum.* 522–5; also, e.g., *Thuc.* ii 64.6; vi 85.1; *Eur. Hec.* 903–4; *Suppl.* 493.

<sup>59</sup> An Athenian could at least sympathize with the wife whose husband slept with other women: witness Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. See also K. J. Dover *Aristophanic Comedy* (London 1972) 160 n. 16.

sinister analogy of the lion-cub who grows up to bring destruction to the house with Helen or her fateful wedding;<sup>60</sup> the mildness of the lion-cub in the 'prelude of life' (ἐν βιότου προτελείοις) contrasts with the 'bitter consummation of the marriage' (γάμου πικρὰς τελευτάς). I shall have more to say of this theme in dealing with the trial-scene; further documentation will follow then.

(2) The Eumenides are to have a cult and receive sacrifices (834–6, 854–7; cf. 1006, 1037). We recall the sacrifice Agamemnon performed on his daughter, Iphigenia—'a sacrifice without music and without feasting' (Ag. 151 *θυσίαν . . . ἄνομόν τιν' ἄδαιτον*)—or the deceptive sacrifice of thanksgiving performed by Clytaemnestra (Ag. 587–97). The language of sacrifice is also used in a distorted way of the death of Agamemnon (Ag. 1092, 1118, 1277, 1409, etc.): so, for example, for Clytaemnestra Agamemnon is the victim she has offered up to the goddesses Dike, Ate and Erinys (1432–4). Again, when the Eumenides find Orestes clinging to Athena's statue they see him as their sacrificial victim, who has been 'fattened and consecrated' to them (ἐμοὶ τραφεῖς τε καὶ καθιερωμένος), and whom they will not kill, but devour alive (*Eum.* 304–5).<sup>61</sup>

Clytaemnestra's sacrifices were accompanied by an ὄλολυγή, a jubilant cry (Ag. 587, 595) particularly associated with sacrifice or victory. Here again there are recurrent sinister uses of the same word. The chorus in the *Choephoroi* pray that they may raise an ὄλολυγμός for the death of the tyrants (386–8); and they do so when it happens (942). In the *Agamemnon* we have already seen the hideous ὄλολυγή of Discord in Cassandra's prophecy (1118–19). Most fearful and most concrete of all is the one Clytaemnestra makes over the doomed Agamemnon (Ag. 1236). This disturbance of ritual is also set right at the end of the trilogy, where the chorus of escorts utter a joyful ὄλολυγή as they take the Eumenides to their home (1043, 1047).

(3) The Furies sing a song and a prayer, a ὕμνος, for 'a not evil victory' (*Eum.* 903 *νίκης μὴ κακῆς*). There have been terrible victories before: Agamemnon's over Troy, Clytaemnestra's over Agamemnon (see esp. Ag. 940–3, 956, 1237), Orestes' over Clytaemnestra (see esp. *Cho.* 148, 244, 490, 868, 874, 890, 1017). But now the desperate hope of the chorus in the *Agamemnon*, 'May the good prevail' (121 = 139 τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω), comes true: the victory imagined here is an unambiguously good one. So is the song which hymns it. But hitherto song itself has been perverted. The most striking example is the 'binding-song' of the Furies which both echoes the magical process of *κατάδεσις* ('casting a spell') and hideously caricatures a sacrificial hymn (*Eum.* 304–6, 328–33 = 341–6), the victim eaten being the living Orestes himself. Likewise the central chorus in the *Choephoroi* (306–478), besides being the lament owed to the dead man, is the instrument of his retribution; the dirge, which is right and proper, is bound up with the spirit of revenge.<sup>62</sup> The singers not only bewail Agamemnon (*θρήνος*), but call on his shade (*ψυχαγωγία*) to help in the coming murder, and incite his son to perform it. (So too among the proper prayers which accompany the libation to the murdered king Electra includes an 'evil prayer', for the death of the murderers [*Cho.* 145–8].) In the *Agamemnon* the chorus likens its utterance to a song which, unlike the normal singer, 'prophesies uninvited and unrewarded' (979 *μαντιπολεῖ δ' ἀκέλευστος ἄμισθος ἀοιδά*); or the ode which is to be a thanksgiving for the victory (353–4) becomes a gloomy record not only of Paris' crime justly punished, but of Menelaus' loneliness, of the anger and bereavement of the Argive citizens, of premonitions of doom for the victor. So song itself has to have its value renewed at the end of the trilogy.<sup>63</sup>

(4) The Eumenides also pray for benefits in the natural world. Here again the last play reverses the horror of what went before. In a wealth of images connected with vegetation, with begetting, with weather and with light, Aeschylus had reflected the evil-doing of men. So

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Lebeck (n. 45) 48–9, 68–73; Vickers (n. 1) 421. Note also H. Lloyd-Jones, *HSCP* lxxiii (1969) 99–104.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Zeitlin (n. 45); Lebeck (n. 45) 60–3; P. Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1972) 135–58.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in the Greek Tradition* (Cambridge 1974) 178–9.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. J. A. Haldane, *JHS* lxxxv (1965) 37–40; Zeitlin (n. 45) 496–7.

Clytaemnestra rejoices when Agamemnon's blood spurts over her 'no less than the sown earth at the bright showers from heaven at the birth time of the bud' (*Ag.* 1391–2 οὐδὲν ἦσσαν ἢ διοσδότη | γάνει σπορητὸς κάλυκος ἐν λοχεύμασιν). Or the chorus describe Agamemnon when he decides to sacrifice Iphigenia as 'breathing a reverse wind, impious, impure, unholy' (*Ag.* 219–20 φρενὸς πνέων δυσσεβῆ τροπαίαν | ἄναγνον, ἀνίερον). They speak too of the gestation and deliverance of Hybris (763–71); or, in relation to Paris' crime, of the 'baneful brightness' of evil (*Ag.* 389 πρέπει δὲ, φῶς αἰνολαμπές, σίνος). These natural images have been recently studied in some detail;<sup>64</sup> here it is enough to recall how they echo the plot: the storm which shattered the Greek fleet, the ill winds that blew at Aulis (both signs of divine anger); the relay of beacons which announces the capture of Troy, whose fire is apparently a light of salvation (φῶς σωτήριον), but in reality the precursor of the conqueror's death and the symbol of the destruction coming to his house; the dream in which Clytaemnestra gives birth to a serpent, her matricidal son.<sup>65</sup> In short, in the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* there is, both in the imagery and in the events the plays describe, a disturbance and a distortion of nature, which mirrors or even results from human crimes. Such a notion is familiar to English readers from *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth* or *King Lear*; it is all the more natural in a language where δίκη can mean the world-order as a whole.<sup>66</sup> At the end of the whole trilogy these disturbances are calmed and the distortions straightened. The torch-light procession heralds an epoch of prosperity; and the Eumenides pray for crops and trees to be safe from blasting winds and the young of animals and women from mortal disease. We have already observed how social and religious institutions are also renewed at the end of the *Eumenides*; and the beneficence of nature and the prosperity of the people go naturally with this establishment of δίκη.<sup>67</sup> For δίκη is conceived to bring wealth and fertility both in Hesiod (*Op.* 225–37) and the *Odyssey* (xix 109–14).<sup>68</sup> There is a significant difference in that in those contexts it is the just judgements of a ruler which bring prosperity; in Aeschylus it is respect for an institution and a cult. In this he writes indeed as the citizen of a democracy.<sup>69</sup> But in either case δίκη affects a whole community and nature itself, just as the individual's crime has been seen to do in the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*. For δίκη is manifested or upturned in a city and in a world; it is not the lonely righteousness of an individual.<sup>70</sup>

### III

That the framework of the action in the *Agamemnon* is a state goes with the fact that Aeschylus never completely separates even his great individuals from the collective ties which encircle them. The clan and the state have a far greater importance for the action in his work than in Sophocles' . . .

Daube (n. 11) 50<sup>71</sup>

This quotation will pave the way for the consideration of our second word, τιμή. It may be complemented by a further quotation, from a modern introduction to anthropology:

Social relationships . . . are . . . the ways in which people behave when other people are the objects of that behaviour. The social relationship between husband and wife, for example, in a particular society means the ways in which husbands ordinarily behave to their wives, and wives to their

<sup>64</sup> See J. J. Peradotto, *AJP* lxxxv (1964) 378–93; T. N. Gantz, *JHS* xcvi (1977) 28–38.

<sup>65</sup> Note that the motif of *giving birth* is Aeschylus' own touch to the tradition about Clytaemnestra's dream: contrast Stesichorus, *PMG* 219 Page.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley/London 1971), Index s.v. 'Dikē'; Dover on *Ar. Nub.* 1292; H. Fränkel, *Wege und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens*<sup>2</sup> (Munich 1960) 162–73.

<sup>67</sup> For δίκαιος and similar words applied to Athens, see 805, 912, 994.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Vickers (n. 1) 420.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. F. Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1949) 215. Pericles praises Athenian democracy for its fear of written and unwritten laws (*Thuc.* ii 37.3): so too Aeschylus requires fear of the Arcopagus and the Erinyes.

<sup>70</sup> For a suggestive statement of this point, see Aristotle, *EN* 1159a25–1160a30; cf. *Cic. Fin.* v 65–6.

<sup>71</sup> A qualification: Sophoclean drama is certainly concentrated on the lonely individual, but by the same token it concerns his estrangement from his fellow-men or his precarious place among them.

husbands, in that society. At this preliminary level, there are always two things to be ascertained about any social relationship; whom it is between (e.g. husband and wife, father and son, ruler and subject) and what it is about (e.g. the disposition of property, the exercise of authority, the need to show respect). The dual quality of social relationships is often expressed in the distinction between statuses, what people are; and roles, what as occupants of certain statuses they do. The two aspects have sometimes been combined . . . in the portmanteau concept 'status-role'.

J. Beattie, *Other cultures* (London 1964) 35–6

Now *τιμή* is both a 'position' and a 'function' in a society; it is also the 'honour' which a person receives in virtue of them. So the word refers both to a 'status-role' and its acknowledgement, the feeling or behaviour which guarantees it and is evoked by it. And society is no more nor less than a 'system of relationships' (*ibid.* 221). Therefore when *τιμή* is at stake, so is society itself.

In order to see how an ancient mind might picture such a 'system of relationships', we could do worse than turn to an ancient anthropologist, St Augustine, who in the passage which follows is reporting, after Varro, the ethical tenets of the later Academy (*De civ. Dei* xix 3):<sup>72</sup>

hanc vitam beatam etiam socialem perhibent esse, quae amicorum bona propter se ipsa diligit sicut sua eisque propter ipsos hoc velit quod sibi; sive in domo sint, sicut coniunx et liberi et quicumque domestici, sive in loco ubi domus est eius, sicuti est urbs, ut sunt hi qui cives vocantur, sive in orbe toto, ut sunt gentes quas ei societas humana coniungit, sive in ipso mundo qui censetur nomine caeli et terrae, sicut esse dicunt deos quos volunt amicos esse homini sapienti.

'They say that happiness is sociable, in that the happy man delights in the blessings of those he loves for their own sake as if they were his, and desires for those persons, for *their* own sake, what he desires for himself—whether they are in his home (like his wife and children and any other members of his household) or in the place where his home is, a city for example (like those who are called his fellow-citizens) or in the whole world (like the nations of men, with whom he is joined in the common bond of humanity) or in the universe itself which goes by the name of "heaven and earth" (like the gods, in their view, who they claim are friends to the wise man).'

Two ideas underlie this doctrine. First, the individual cannot be fully good or happy unless his society (in the large sense of the term that the passage suggests) is good and happy. Second, all relationships are continuous with one another; and a man cannot exist as a human or moral being outside that growing series of attachments. These notions were formulated at least two centuries after Aeschylus' death, but they are implicitly—and powerfully—present in the *Oresteia*; and they help to understand its artistic unity. For if family relationships and relationships with the rest of 'society' are continuous, it is clear that a concern with the city, the human community, is the natural counterpart of what is more often emphasized in Aeschylus, a concern with the family and with the gods. And as we consider *τιμή*, we shall have to consider it in all these contexts equally.

In the *Eumenides* *τιμή* (the word and its cognates recur again and again) is particularly associated with the Erinyes. Their functions or privileges as divine avengers of wrongdoing are, as they see it, in question; and these are confirmed at the end by their receiving a cult and a home in Athens. Thereby a mutual relationship of honour is set up between them and the Athenians (e.g. 917 and 993, 1029, 1038).<sup>73</sup> In the earlier part of the play the goddesses' *τιμή* is bound up with Clytaemnestra's—indeed, they *are* the curses of the aggrieved parent (417): the ghost of the murdered mother sees herself 'dishonoured' among the dead (95 ἀπητιμασμένη), and the only

<sup>72</sup> For similar passages and a discussion of their sources, see S. G. Pembroke in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. A. A. Long (London 1971) 121–6. Also relevant to Aeschylus and his period, and foreshadowed in them, is the Stoic idea of the world as a city in which gods and men live together under a natural law: see, e.g., A. J. Festugière, *La révélation d' Hermès Trismégiste* II (Paris 1949) 272–8.

<sup>73</sup> This is visually represented by the procession in the last scene and by the scarlet over-garments put on them there, which are now used, as the red robes should have been in the *Agamemnon* (921–2; 946–7), to honour the gods: see further *Maia* xxvii (1975) 201–3. Red robes are also proper to the cult of the nether gods: cf. Headlam on *Eum.* 1028–30 (pp. 316–17); Plut. *Aristid.* 21.



remedy is vengeance. (So also in *Cho.* 483–5 and 255–61 Orestes had warned both Agamemnon and Zeus that they would be dishonoured if Clytaemnestra was not punished, because they would receive no offerings from the royal house.) Against the claims of Clytaemnestra and the Furies are set the claims of Orestes as a suppliant: the two are most directly contrasted at *Eum.* 230–4,

*Χο.* ἐγὼ δ', ἄγει γὰρ αἷμα μητρῶον, δίκας  
μέτειμι τόνδε φῶτα κάκκυνηγέσω.  
*Απ.* ἐγὼ δ' ἀρήξω τὸν ἰκέτην τε ῥύσομαι.  
δεινὴ γὰρ ἐν βροτοῖσι κὰν θεοῖς πέλει  
τοῦ προστροπαίου μῆνις, εἰ προδῶ σφ' ἑκῶν.

*Chorus:* 'I will pursue my vengeance, led by his mother's blood, and hunt the man down'.

*Apollo:* 'And I will help and rescue the suppliant. The wrath of a suppliant is terrible among men and gods, when he is gratuitously abandoned'.

The contrast is stressed by the ambiguity of the word *προστρόπαιος*, which may denote either, as here, the suppliant for purification or the spirit of a murdered man (e.g. *Cho.* 287) that demands revenge.<sup>74</sup> It could be said, in fact, of Orestes in this play that his role is simply to be a suppliant. It is this which gives him, through the purification it seeks and finds, a foothold among men, a claim to trial and so, after his acquittal, restoration to his kingdom. It is also his suppliant condition which distinguishes him from the other murderers of the trilogy (Dodds 61). He, when the deed is done, looks for purification; 'where Clytaemnestra carried a bloody sword, Orestes carries a *θαλλός* and a wreath' (*ibid.*)—though he too carries a sword (for he too is a murderer), as is clear from the priestess' description of him (*Eum.* 42–3). He behaves *σωφρόνως* (*Eum.* 44), in that spirit of enlightened fear which the Furies praise, the Areopagus embodies and the Athenians are to live by (*Eum.* 1000).

The characters in the *Eumenides*, then, are what they are in virtue of their definition as social beings. Orestes is so unobtrusive, even colourless, because he is a suppliant, and as such must efface himself in seeking help;<sup>75</sup> and the moment he is restored to his own identity and his own community is the end of his tragedy. The Erinyes are so ferocious because they are defending their status in the world, which is to embody and enforce the law of blood for blood among kindred; and their tragedy likewise ends when they are incorporated in a city with the honours that are their due.

In the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* too the characters can only arouse the intense emotions they do because they are set in a society which their deeds or sufferings affect. This should have emerged to a considerable degree already in this paper; so in order not to overburden the reader I limit the discussion to, first, the main appearances of the word *τιμή* and its cognates, and then the central misdeed of the trilogy, the murder of Agamemnon.

First, *Ag.* 699–706:

Ἰλίῳ δὲ κῆδος ὀρ-  
θώνυμον τελεσσίφρων  
Μῆνις ἤλασεν τραπέζας ἀτί-  
μωσιν ὑστέρῳ χρόνῳ  
καὶ ζυνεστίου Διὸς  
πρασσομένα τὸ νυμφότι-  
μον μέλος ἐκφάτως τίοντας.

'Wrath that fulfils its purpose brought to Troy a marriage rightly named "woe" [pun on *κῆδος*] exacting in the passage of time requital for a dishonour done to hospitality and Zeus, guardian of those who share the hearth, from the people who loudly sang in honour of the bride . . .'

<sup>74</sup> See further Moulinier (n. 42) 267–70.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. J. Gould, *JHS* xciii (1973) 94–5. His whole paper is an already classic treatment of supplication; also

admirable is the chapter of Vickers, (n. 1) 438–94, on the subject as material for tragedy.

Paris offends against a social institution, *ξενία* (as he does against another one, marriage), and the god who guarantees it. He is thus attacking society as a whole, not merely Menelaus or even Menelaus' city. Compare *Cho.* 429–45:

Ηλ. ἰὼ ἰὼ δαῖα  
 πάντολμε μάτερ, δαΐαις ἐν ἐκφοραῖς  
 ἄνευ πολιτᾶν ἄνακτ',  
 ἄνευ δὲ πενθημάτων  
 ἔτλας ἀνοίμωκτον ἄνδρα θάψαι.  
 Ορ. τὸ πᾶν ἀτίμως ἔλεξας, οἴμοι,  
 πατρὸς δ' ἀτίμωσιν ἄρα τείσει . . .  
 Χο. ἐμασχαλίσθη δέ γ', ὡς τόδ' εἰδῆς·  
 ἔπρασσε δ' ἄπερ νιν ὦδε θάπτει,  
 μόρον κτίσαι μωμένα  
 ἄφερτον αἰῶνι σῶ.  
 κλύεις πατρώους δύας ἀτίμους.  
 Ηλ. λέγεις πατρῶον μόρον. ἐγὼ δ' ἀπεστάτου  
 ἄτιμος, οὐδὲν ἀξία<sup>76</sup> . . .

*Electra*: 'Ah, mother of hatred, you stopped at nothing, you dared, in a funeral of hatred, to bury the king without his citizens, your husband without a lament, unbewailed'.

*Orestes*: 'In utter dishonour! She will pay, then, for the dishonouring of my father . . .'

*Chorus*: 'And he was mutilated too. . . . She did it, she who buried him thus, eager to give him a death unbearable to you and your life. I tell you of the sufferings, the dishonour of your father'.

*Electra*: 'That was how my father died. And I stood apart, dishonoured unworthily . . .'

There is here a dishonouring of Electra thrust aside by the usurpers, as there is of the city and the house,<sup>77</sup> but still more a dishonouring of the dead man. Agamemnon is buried, but he receives no lament and is even mutilated. Here, as when Clytaemnestra's ghost appears, it is the *τιμή* of the dead that is at stake, for they too are part of society by virtue of their honours and influence among the living.<sup>78</sup> This same theme, the lack of a lament over Agamemnon, plays a large part at the end of the *Agamemnon* (1489–96 = 1513–20; 1541–50) and the beginning of the *Choephoroi*: it culminates and ends in the lament at last achieved by Electra, Orestes and the chorus. So again in *Ag.* 1443–6 Clytaemnestra boasts:<sup>79</sup>

ἄτιμα δ' οὐκ ἐπραξάτην·  
 ὁ μὲν γὰρ οὕτως, ἡ δὲ τοι κύκνου δίκην  
 τὸν ὕστατον μέλψασα θανάσιμον γόον  
 κείται φιλήτωρ τοῦδε . . .

'They have not lacked their privileges. There he lies, and she, having sung like a dying swan their lament, lies there too, his lover . . .'

This is another of the queen's blasphemous sarcasms. The *τιμή* the two have received is not a proper lament at all, it is only Cassandra's prophetic wailing (*cf.* 1313–14).

To consider now the murder of Agamemnon. Here the most valuable starting-point is the arguments of Apollo and Athena in the trial scene of the *Eumenides*. Of these Solmsen remarks (n. 69) 193, that they 'are merely an attempt to appraise in rational, or even doctrinal, terms those

<sup>76</sup> On the force of this phrase, note A. W. H. Adkins, *CQ* xvi (1966) 91: Electra is 'unworthy' both as innocent and as a noblewoman. *Cf.* Isoc. xvi 48.

<sup>77</sup> The word *ἄτιμος* is applied to the house in *Cho.* 408; and the notion that it and the city are enslaved and degraded by the usurpers pervades the whole play: see, e.g., 302–4, 942–5, 961–4, 973–4. In the last passage

Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra are evil *μέτοικοι* (in contrast to the Erinyes at the end of *Eum.*).

<sup>78</sup> *Cf.* Dover (n. 19) 243–6.

<sup>79</sup> Denniston-Page rightly interpret *ἄτιμα* here as 'without honour, without privileges'; but I differ over what honour or privilege is concerned.

features of the situation which long before the trial scene have influenced our responses to the plot'. In other words, though the arguments which secure Orestes' acquittal are one-sided,<sup>80</sup> they are, to the spectator who has seen the whole trilogy, not arbitrary sophistries. The essence of the matter is this: Agamemnon is the man, the husband, the lord of the house, the victorious general, the king; he is treacherously killed by a woman, his wife, the false guardian of the house in his absence (*οἰκουρός*), who then becomes, with her consort, a tyrant. The king's death is pitiful and fearful because it represents the inversion or destruction of so many social values. The same applies, though on a smaller scale, to the death of Clytaemnestra. She is, though her husband's murderer and a usurper, still the mother killed by her son; this is what the Erinyes are asserting and has been thrust upon us above all in the scene where she bares her breast to Orestes (*Cho.* 896–934), or in the account of her dream where the serpent she bore sucks her blood, even as her son is to kill her (*Cho.* 526–50). And it should by now be clear how all the events and all the people involved in them have such a social significance. The exception which proves the rule is Cassandra. The essence of her tragedy is that she is caught up as a gratuitous and innocent victim first in the destruction of Troy and then in the death of Agamemnon and the doom of his house; she falls a prey not so much to the justice of the gods as, like Io in the *Prometheus Vincetus*, to the arrogance of her divine lover. At the same time, isolated and misunderstood, she knows and reveals, as no other does, what is to come. And it is only from this isolation that she can cry (*Ag.* 1327–30):

ὡς βρότεια πράγματ'· εὐτυχοῦντα μὲν  
 σκιᾷ τις ἂν πρέψειεν, εἰ δὲ δυστυχῆ,  
 βολαῖς ὑγρώσσων σπόγγος ὤλεσεν γραφῆν.  
 καὶ ταῦτ' ἐκείνων μᾶλλον οἰκτίρω πολύ.

'Oh the life of man! When there is prosperity, it can be likened to a shadow; but when there is misfortune, the dash of a wet sponge wipes out the picture. And this I pity far more than that.'

She alone tastes unmixed sorrow, without pride or guilt.<sup>81</sup>

But let us consider one by one the elements of Agamemnon's tragedy as it is recalled in the trial scene.

(i) Agamemnon as man and husband killed by the woman and his wife (the two pairs of notions are hard to keep apart because of the ambiguity of *ἀνήρ* and *γυνή*).<sup>82</sup> This theme figures in Apollo's speech (627; 657–66); and the predilection for the male is the main feature of Athena's (734–40). We have already seen the importance of marriage in the trilogy; and that Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra are man and wife is naturally part of the horror of his death. So *Ag.* 1116: 'The net is his wife, who is responsible for the murder' (*ἀλλ' ἄρκυς ἡ ξύνευνος, ἡ ξυναιτία / φόνου*); *Ag.* 1543: 'Will you dare to lament your husband when you killed him?' (*ἦ σὺ τὸδ' ἔρξαι τλήση, κτεῖνας' / ἄνδρα τὸν αὐτῆς ἀποκωκῦσαι*). So also the theme of man and woman in *Ag.* 1231: 'The female is murderer of the male' (*θῆλυς ἄρσενος φονεὺς*), with the subsequent comparisons to female monsters. And the notion of the woman's unnatural and criminal supremacy dominates a whole ode in the *Choephoroi* (585–651).<sup>83</sup> The pervasiveness of this theme is what above all makes Clytaemnestra seem an almost super-human—or better, anti-human—character; and it is represented on the stage when she dominates her husband on

<sup>80</sup> Athena's words in 734–40 correspond to the will of Zeus (797–9), but they are not meant to be a solution: what Orestes did remains a fearful crime, and not for nothing are there as many votes for condemnation as for acquittal (*cf.* 795–6). Aeschylus expects from his audience enough political wisdom to see that law and judgement are no less necessary because some legal decisions are open to dispute.

<sup>81</sup> On the contrast between Cassandra and the other characters (especially Agamemnon), see K. Reinhardt,

*Aeschylus als Regisseur und Theologe* (Bern 1949) 90–105; C. W. Macleod, *Maia* xxvii (1975) 202–3; *CQ* xxxii (1982) 231–2.

<sup>82</sup> On this theme, see R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *JHS* lxviii (1948) 130–47, a pioneering article; also Vickers (n. 1) 381, 400–2, 414–16, who corrects an aberration of Winnington-Ingram's on p. 432, n. 33.

<sup>83</sup> On this ode, see the valuable analysis by T. C. W. Stinton, *CQ* xxix (1979) 252–62.

his return. So when Apollo and Athena say that the man is the only begetter of the child, that is the statement, in physical terms, of a principle thought necessary for moral and social order (the fusion of the categories 'is' and 'ought' is of the essence in the notion of *δίκη*); and Aeschylus' poetry has made it immediate to the spectator through his portrayal of Clytaemnestra and the reactions of chorus and characters to her deed. Apollo has not told the whole story, for Agamemnon himself sins against marriage by bringing a concubine into the house and by killing the daughter he shares with his wife; but neither is the god's argument a mere sophistry.

(ii) Agamemnon as lord of the house, and Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus as its false guardians.<sup>84</sup> This theme figures in Athena's speech (740). So in *Ag.* 1224–5 Aegisthus is the 'cowardly lion, enjoying the freedom of his bed, keeping the house—alas!—for its lord' (*λέοντ' ἀναλκιν ἐν λέχει στρωφώμενον / οἰκουρόν, οἴμοι, τῷ μολόντι δεσπότη*); or in *Cho.* 52–3: 'Darkness covers the house at the death of its lord' (*δνόφοι καλύπτουσι δόμους / δεσποτῶν θανάτοις*). More broadly, this theme is present in Clytaemnestra's welcome when Agamemnon returns, seemingly to take his place in the house as its master, but in reality to die (esp. *Ag.* 966 ff.); it is most vividly represented when her sudden appearance blocks his entry into his own palace,<sup>85</sup> or when she boasts of her 'good housekeeping' (606–16). And in the *Choephoroi* the death of Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra is the liberation of the house from its wrongful occupiers (e.g. 942–5, 962–4).

(iii) Agamemnon as victorious general. This theme appears in Apollo's speech (631–2, 637). 'He fared well for the most part' (*ἤμποληκότα / τὰ πλείστ' ἄμεινον*) is a bold rhetorical obfuscation designed to blot out memories of the sacrifice of Iphigenia or the guilty triumph at Troy; none the less, we have already been responding to Agamemnon's death as that of the great general. So *Ag.* 1227–8: 'The ruler of the ships, the sacker of Troy, does not know' (*νεῶν δ' ἄπαρχος Ἰλίου τ' ἀναστάτης / οὐκ οἶδεν . . .*); *Cho.* 1071–2: 'The war-lord of the Greeks was struck down in his bath' (*λουτροδάικτος δ' ὤλετ' Ἀχαιῶν / πολέμαρχος ἀνήρ*). On a larger scale this theme has been present in the confrontation of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra. For Clytaemnestra fulsomely urges Agamemnon not to place 'the foot that sacked Troy' (907 *τὸν σὸν πόδ', ὠναξ, Ἰλίου πορθήτορα*) on the bare ground, but in reality—as is underscored by the language (940–3, 956)—she wins a 'victory' over Agamemnon by persuading him to walk on the precious robes; and so we have the ironic spectacle of the conqueror conquered, which also foreshadows his coming death.

(iv) Agamemnon as king. In Apollo's words he is 'honoured by a Zeus-given sceptre' (626 *διοσδότοις σκήπτροισι τιμαλφούμενον*). So also in *Ag.* 1451–2: 'Our most kindly lord and guardian has been killed' (*δαμέντος / φύλακος εὐμενεστάτου*); *Cho.* 431–3: 'You buried the king without his citizens' (*ἄνευ πολιτῶν ἄνακτα . . . ἔτλας . . . θάψαι*); *Cho.* 479: 'Father, you who died in a way unfit for a king' (*πάτερ, τρόποισιν οὐ τυραννικοῖς θανῶν*). Agamemnon's kingship is his most obvious relationship with the community; and the chorus in the *Agamemnon* are naturally conscious of him above all—at times angrily—as their ruler, and their feelings guide and stimulate the audience's. The theme is further stressed by typically Aeschylean inversions. We already saw how Helen and Clytaemnestra are conceived to wield a common rule, by a hideous analogy with the joint kingship of the Atridae (*Ag.* 1470); and how when the queen and her lover come to power, they are usurpers from whom Orestes liberates the city.

I have separated these themes for convenience's sake, when in their contexts they combine, and in so doing, gain intensity; and they have only been selectively illustrated. But they are so pervasive in the trilogy, its words and its action, that no further quotation should be necessary.

<sup>84</sup> In general on the wife's role as *οἰκουρός* see T. E. V. Pearce, *Eranos* lxxii (1974) 16–33. In *Ag.* 1225 *οἰκουρόν* (cf. 809) must have—with the bitter irony revealed by *οἴμοι*—its full sense of 'guardian of the house', since it goes with *τῷ μολόντι δεσπότη*. (The following line is rightly deleted by Fraenkel.) So also at

1626, where a large part of the horror is that he who watches over the house in its lord's absence also defiles his bed. The sense 'stay-at-home' is also felt in so far as Aegisthus is contrasted with the fighter and general Agamemnon.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Taplin (n. 14) 306–8.

All that needs repeating is that any response to Aeschylus' characters and their destinies is a response to a society, a society upturned, as in the body of the trilogy, or renewed, as at the end of the *Eumenides*.

## IV

I have adopted in dealing with the *Oresteia* a position which might well be attacked as unhistorical. But it was not my intention to deny what a historian might wish to insist on, that Aeschylus was part of his own, a historical, society and that he must have been affected by it and had some views about it. As I hope was clear, I believe it is possible by an examination of the text to suggest something about Aeschylus' political views; for he clearly accepts the Areopagus as Ephialtes reconstituted it and the Argive alliance. More generally, there are important touches in the *Oresteia* which are the work of the citizen of a democracy. For example, for Aeschylus, unlike Hesiod or Homer, *δίκη* is guaranteed not by a just ruler but by a court and a cult; nor is there any sign of a monarch in his mythical Athens. And Aeschylus' concept of the Areopagus corresponds quite closely to things that the orators say about law and its function in society. But the same Aeschylus who idealizes a democratic Athens also vividly presents through his choruses and characters the sentiments of loyal subjects of a monarchy; and the *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* would be meaningless if we did not accept in imagination the social framework they presuppose.<sup>86</sup> The *Oresteia*, because it spans and penetrates so many conditions of man tends towards universality; and its conclusion is the picture of much more than a good democracy. The poet's own city here approaches the condition of an ideal city; but the ideal embraces society—and that means also nature and the gods—as a whole. Likewise, the message of the play to its audience is not a narrowly topical one. The tragedian is influenced by his time and circumstances; but they are an influence on the work, not the meaning of it. And it is only through an examination of that meaning that both the lasting greatness of the poet and his position in his own time and city can be illumined.

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<sup>86</sup> For some places where the *Oresteia* presupposes non-Attic (Homeric) customs, see Fraenkel on *Ag.* 245, 1109, 1382, 1595.