enjoyed by Aeschylus between his own time and the nineteenth century; in the violence with which the very people who most insist on the excellence of all genuine Greek tragedy declaim against any passage which they have persuaded themselves is an interpolation, we can recognise a reaction that is only human. It has been easier to patronise the *Suppliants* as a monument of primitive drama rather than to understand it; yet the qualities which it exhibits, whether they deserve praise or not, are those that are typical of Aeschylean tragedy. The force and passion of the opening anapaests make them almost the finest beginning to any play of Aeschylus; the lyrics, though damaged by corruption, are of superb quality; the scene with the herald, though the most corrupt of all, is dramatic to a high degree; and above all the supplication scene is hardly much inferior to the great kommos of the *Choephori*. What has told most against the play in modern estimation is the stilted character of much of the trimeter part. That is a feature of any play of Aeschylus, but most of all of this one. Those who dislike it have a perfect right to; but some will find it less displeasing once they have got used to the undoubted fact that Aeschylus wrote in a convention even more remote from modern naturalism than either of the other great tragedians, and in character for its own sake he took no interest whatsoever.

6

THE GUILT OF AGAMEMNON[1]

HUGH LLOYD-JONES

In recent years the general view of the theology and morality of Aeschylus which we still find expressed in the most popular handbooks of Greek tragedy has come under fire;[2] fire which its defenders have so far been unwilling or unable to return. That Aeschylus was a bold religious innovator propounding advanced doctrines can no longer be assumed without argument; neither can one take for granted that his outlook on morality in general and on justice in particular was as advanced as it was once usual to maintain. Aeschylean justice, it is now beginning to be realized, had more in common with the ancient Hebrew justice that demanded eye for eye and tooth for tooth than with the exalted conceptions attributed to the poet by modern theorists. But whatever view we take of Aeschylus' notion of justice, we are not likely to dispute the paramount importance of justice in his work, and especially in the *Oresteia*. If I begin, then, with the assumption that the *Oresteia* is concerned with justice, human and divine, I shall be on safe ground.

The first and greatest of its three plays shows how the leader of the Greek expedition against Troy, the chosen instrument of Zeus' chastisement of the Trojans, comes to a miserable end. The train of events that leads to this conclusion has been set in motion long before the play begins, when the Greek fleet is assembled at Aulis on its way to Troy. The goddess Artemis becomes incensed with Agamemnon, and sends unfavourable winds that prevent the fleet from sailing. Either the great expedition, ordered by Zeus, must be abandoned, or the king must sacrifice his own daughter to appease the goddess. He consents to the sacrifice. This action earns him the bitter enmity of his wife, who at home in Argos plans his murder. She has at hand an instrument ready to her purpose. Agamemnon's father, Atreus, has long ago massacred the children of his brother, and has served him at a banquet with their flesh. One survivor has escaped, and he is now a grown man waiting for his revenge.

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The constant preoccupation of the poet with guilt and retribution creates a strong impression in the hearer's mind that the exact assessment of Agamemnon's guilt must be important for the understanding of the play. And yet there is no agreement among scholars as to the nature of that guilt. Agamemnon has been sent against Troy by Zeus himself; and yet Zeus allows him to perish miserably. Why? Is it for having consented to his daughter's sacrifice? If so, how far is his punishment the work of Zeus, and how far is it the consequence of the wrath of Artemis? The motive for that wrath is itself a subject of acute controversy. Or is Agamemnon punished for his remorseless extirpation of the Trojans, and the destruction of their city together with its temples and its altars? What part is played in his destruction by the curse brought down upon his family by the monstrous action of his father, Atreus? Or is he punished for his own pride and arrogance? Most modern scholars, with the notable exception of Eduard Fraenkel, have seen him, if not as an arrogant and cruel despot, at least as something not far removed from one. Or can it be that several, or all of, these factors contribute somehow to his ruin? If so, how far can we hope to assign to each its proper degree of importance in working to this end?

All these questions are controversial. The most learned of Aeschylean scholars, to whom every serious student of the play must acknowledge a large debt, has even warned us that 'it would be absurd to attempt an exact calculation as to the degree of efficacy in each of the different elements that work together towards Agamemnon's fatal end'.[3] It is indeed important to guard against attacking the complicated task of unravelling these twisted strands with any excessive confidence that we shall reach a clear-cut answer. Yet it is agreed that the trilogy is concerned with justice, guilt, and retribution; and that seems to me to justify a fresh attempt to discover how the poet meant us to suppose these notions are exemplified in his work. Whether the results which are arrived at are absurd will be for the reader to judge.

The Chorus in its opening anapaests (60 f.) strongly asserts that the cause of the Atreidae against the Trojans is a just cause. They have been sent against Troy by Zeus, the guardian of the law of host and guest: Zeus, who has been outraged by Paris' crime against the sacred laws of hospitality. At the beginning of the first stasimon (367 f.), the point is further reinforced. The Chorus has just been told that Troy has fallen. 'They can speak of a stroke from Zeus', they begin; 'this, at least, one can make out.' Later in the play the same truth is strongly insisted on both by the Herald and by the King himself. And yet it is by the will of Zeus, as the loyal elders themselves finally acknowledge, that Agamemnon comes to his miserable end.

The reasons begin to emerge in the parodos, in that great choral ode which describes what has happened ten years earlier, when the Greek fleet lay encamped at Aulis on its way to Troy. The portent of the eagles that tore and devoured a pregnant hare has taught Calchas, the prophet of the Greek army, that Troy is destined to fall to the expedition; it has taught him also that Artemis is incensed against its leaders, the Atreidae. In the whole play nothing is more controversial than the reasons for Artemis' anger, but in an investigation of the guilt of Agamemnon the problem of her motive is not one that we can avoid.

'In time', says Calchas (126 ff.), 'this expedition captures Priam's city; and all the plentiful herds of the people before the walls shall Fate violently ravage. Only may no envious grudge from the gods strike beforehand and cast into darkness the great bit for Troy's mouth that is the host encamped. For in pity Artemis bears a grudge against the winged hounds of her father that slaughter the poor trembling hare with all her young before the birth; and she loathes the feast of the eagles. . . . The Fair One, kindly as she is towards the helpless offspring of ravening lions and pleasant to the suckling young of all creatures that roam the wild, demands fulfilment of what these things portend; favourable is the portent, yet fraught with blame. And I invoke the blessèd Healer, that she prepare not against the Danaoi lengthy delays in port caused by adverse winds that hold fast the ships, striving to bring about another sacrifice, one without song or banquet, a worker of quarrels born in the house and fearless of the husband. For there abides a terrible, ever re-arising, treacherous keeper of the house, unforgetting Wrath, child-avenging.'

The ancient epic called the *Cypria* accounted for the wrath of Artemis by means of a story not mentioned by Aeschylus. According to Proclus' summary of the plot of this lost work (O.C.T. of Homer, v. 104), Agamemnon had shot a stag, and in his triumph boasted that as an archer he surpassed even Artemis. A similar story is told by Sophocles in his *Electra* (563 f.). That story is not mentioned here; but can we rule out the possibility that it was, none the less, the reason for the wrath of Artemis that Aeschylus had in mind? If that is so, it follows that he has set down Artemis' anger to an obscure and arbitrary grievance, a grievance so trivial that it is not worth mentioning in the play at all. It would certainly be unsafe to deny *a priori* that this could be the case; but the conclusion is such a strange one that it seems hardly reasonable to adopt it without further examination of the evidence. Does the portent give us any clue to the reason for the goddess's anger?

Calchas says that she is angry because she loathes the feast of the eagles; and the eagles, he says, stand for the Atreidae. Here, say some

scholars, we have the explanation of her anger: she hates the eagles, and the eagles stand for the Atreidae; therefore she conceives a hatred for the Atreidae. This interpretation seems to me to rest on an intolerable confusion between the world of the portent and the world of the reality it happens in order to symbolize. The eagles and the hare belong to the world of the portent; that portent symbolizes an event which is to happen in the real world. The eagles stand for the Atreidae; so it is natural to infer that the hare must stand for some other figure or figures belonging to the real world. We can hardly avoid supposing that it stands for the Trojans and their city. So when Calchas says (137) Artemis abhors the eagles' feast, he must mean that Artemis abhors the coming destruction of Troy, which the Atreidae are destined to accomplish.

I believe that this conclusion is confirmed by the words of Calchas' explanation of the portent. But the point is not to be grasped immediately, for like most Greek prophets Calchas casts his interpretation in riddling language. 'In time', he begins (126 f.), 'this expedition captures Priam's city; and all the plentiful herds of the people before the walls shall fate violently ravage.' This is strange language. We should have expected that the tearing of the pregnant hare would stand for the annihilation of the Trojans, not only men, women and children, but even the unborn; we can scarcely help remembering the speech of Agamemnon to Menelaus in the sixth book of the *Iliad* (57 f.), in which he declares that not even the unborn children of the Trojans shall escape his vengeance. Yet when it comes to the explanation of the portent, we are told that the Achaeans will destroy the Trojan . . . cattle!

That seems incredible; and I have suggested that the explanation lies in the habit Greek prophets had of referring to people by the names of animals.[4] If so, 'the abundant herds of the people' will mean 'the abundant herds *that are* the people'. This is confirmed by the presence of the words 'before the walls'; for the Trojan cattle did not perish before the walls, but the Trojan men did perish 'in front of the city'.

If it is correct, the close correspondence of the portent with the future reality must be taken as established. The eagles stand for the Atreidae; the hare and its young stand for Troy and its inhabitants. What reason does Calchas give for the pity felt by Artemis for the hare? He says that Artemis is the patroness of the young of all wild animals; and according to many modern interpreters this fact in itself is enough to explain her anger against the Atreidae. But this is out of the question. Just as both eagles and hare correspond to figures of the real world, so must the motive assigned to the goddess for championing the hare represent a motive for championing what the hare represents in the world of reality. We have seen that in the real world the hare represents the Trojans. Has

Artemis a special motive for championing the Trojans that may correspond in the world of reality to the motive assigned her in the world of the portent for championing the hare?

She has, in fact, an excellent motive; for in the *Iliad* and in the whole poetical tradition Artemis together with her brother Apollo appears as a loyal partisan of Troy against the invaders. This supplies a motive for her hostility to the Atreidae that is fully sufficient to explain her action. The last scholar to put forward a view at all similar to this weakened his case by regarding the sacrifice of Iphigeneia as 'an atonement payable in advance for the destruction of Troy'.[5] This language is too legalistic: it is a mistake to talk of 'sin' and 'atonement' in this connexion. In Aeschylus, as in Homer, the lesser gods have a position in no way comparable with that of Zeus; they may range themselves on either side in the Trojan conflict, but Zeus for the first time holds the balance and will in the end decide the issue. Artemis' blow against Agamemnon is one move in the struggle; it is the attempt of a pro-Trojan goddess to strike at the invaders before the invasion: Artemis must be seen not as a judge punishing a sin, but as a powerful enemy striking at an enemy. Zeus will not prevent Artemis from bringing about the sacrifice; and Calchas hints that this may have consequences beyond itself. Why may it have these consequences? 'There abides', he says (152 ff.), 'a terrible, ever re-arising, treacherous keeper of the house, unforgetting wrath, child-avenging.' That is usually taken as an allusion to Clytemnestra; indeed, some scholars have thought that it identifies the Wrath with her. But if I am right in translating *palinortos* by 'ever re-arising', the reference cannot be limited to her. There is a possibility (see Denniston-Page, ad loc.) that the word may mean 'arising in the future'; and in view of that I do not press the point. But it is worth noticing that if *palinortos* here could bear its natural meaning, the reference would be to a child-avenging wrath that is 'ever again arising'. And that could only be the ancient wrath of the House of Atreus.

After the narrative of Calchas' prophecy, the Chorus enters upon the famous invocation that is often called the 'hymn to Zeus' (160 ff.). Why does the Chorus choose this moment for the invocation? The question is not one which every editor of the play has tried to answer; but the choral lyrics of Aeschylus are not normally irrelevant to the dramatic situation, and there is no reason why this one should form an exception to the rule. What is the situation at this point? Zeus has sent the Atreidae against Troy; but Artemis has confronted them with the intolerable choice between abandoning the expedition Zeus has ordered or consenting to Iphigeneia's killing. Where might Agamemnon have looked for help? And where might the elders of Argos appeal in the face of the

anxiety that even now, ten years later, still torments them in consequence of what happened at Aulis? Only Zeus could have helped him, and them, to cast from their minds 'the burden of futile worry' (165). Zeus' power is over all, and he teaches men, by means of bitter experience, to obey his stern law of reciprocal justice. Artemis has faced Agamemnon with a terrible alternative. Zeus has sent him against Troy; surely he can hope for aid from Zeus.

Yet the Chorus does not appear at all confident that such aid will be forthcoming. 'Why not?', the audience may wonder. The Chorus gives no indication of the reason for its fears; at this point, the audience can only ponder on the riddling final words of the prophecy of Calchas. But, in the light of a full knowledge of the play, the reader may well wonder, 'Will aid from Zeus be forthcoming for the son of Atreus?'

From the invocation the Chrous returns abruptly to the scene at Aulis, and Agamemnon's grim dilemma. Should he have given up his expedition and gone home? Many scholars have been of this opinion. But in his brilliant introduction to the play D. L. Page has argued that Agamemnon has no choice. Zeus, he has pointed out, has ordered the expedition; it is his will that Troy shall fall. Hear the words attributed to Agamemnon (214 f.): 'That they should desire with passion exceeding passion a sacrifice to still the winds, a sacrifice of maiden's blood, is right in the sight of heaven'. It is no use trying to water down the final word *themis*, whose emphatic position no less than its solemn association lends it great weight in this place. Yet we must notice that Agamemnon's action is described by the Chorus in words that leave no doubt that it is considered a crime (218 f.): 'And when he had taken upon him the bridle of compulsion, and the wind of his purpose had veered and blew impious, impure, unholy, from that moment he reversed his mind to a course of utter recklessness. For men are made bold by evil-counselling shameless infatuation, the beginning of woe. So he brought himself to sacrifice his daughter, in aid of a war to avenge a woman's loss and as advance payment for his ships.'

We are faced with an apparently glaring contradiction. We must agree with Page that Agamemnon has no choice but to sacrifice his daughter; the expedition had to sail. Yet E. R. Dodds[6] is equally right in insisting that his action was, and is meant to be regarded as, a crime. The text is explicit on this point. Can it be that both are right? Can Zeus have forced Agamemnon to choose between two crimes, either of which was certain to result in his destruction? My answer to this question would be, Yes.

The words just now quoted which describe how Agamemnon made his decision imply that he is mentally deranged (222). These words

recall the famous passage in the nineteenth book of the *Iliad* in which Agamemnon tries to account for his reckless behaviour in provoking Achilles. 'I was not responsible', he exclaims, 'but Zeus and my portion and the Erinys that walks in darkness, who while I spoke put cruel Ate in my mind' (86–88). Infatuation, *parakopē*, in the *Agamemnon* is hardly distinct from Ate in the *Iliad*; and Ate is commonly an instrument of Zeus.

Zeus is indeed determined that the fleet must sail; Agamemnon has indeed no choice. But how has Zeus chosen to enforce his will? Not by charging Calchas or some other accredited mouthpice to inform the king of his decision; but by sending Ate to take away his judgement so that he cannot do otherwise. Does it follow that Agamemnon is not held responsible for his action? Certainly not. In Homer Agamemnon excuses his behaviour by pointing to the action of Ate on his mind; but it does not occur to him to deny his responsibility, or to shuffle out of paying the enormous compensation which he has promised to Achilles. It is the same in Aeschylus. Zeus has taken away Agamemnon's judgement; but that does not absolve Agamemnon from the guilt his error will incur. Nothing could better illustrate the saying of Aeschylus' Niobe that Zeus makes a fault in men, when he is determined utterly to destroy a house (fr. 277, Loeb edition, pp. 15-16).

But what leads Zeus to determine to destroy a house? A famous chorus of the *Agamemnon* (750 f.) gives a definite answer to this question; and it stands in such a context that we can hardly doubt that the belief which it expresses is meant to be regarded as a true one. Prosperity in itself, the Chorus insists, is not sufficient to arouse the anger of the gods; only crime brings down punishment on a man or on his descendants after him. Despite the Chorus's claim of originality, this doctrine is not, of course, peculiar to Aeschylus; Page (loc. cit., p. 136) has reminded us that it is found in two places in the fragments of Solon, a writer not unfamiliar to Aeschylus' audience. It is likely to represent Aeschylus' own belief. If so, it is unlikely that Zeus' decision to destroy Agamemnon is without a motive.

Zeus has faced Agamemnon with an impossible alternative. Also, he has taken away his judgement, so that he takes a fatal course; not that the other choice would not have been equally fatal. Why has he done this? Why, in using Agamemnon to punish Troy, has he chosen a course which must lead inevitably to the ruin of Agamemnon? Do we know of any guilt previously attaching to the King himself? No. But do we know of any guilt attaching to his ancestors? More than half the play has elapsed before we hear anything of such guilt. But let me continue with the commentary on the play's successive scenes that I have begun, resuming from the scene that follows the parodos.

Running right through the play we find a deliberate parallel between the fate of the house of Priam and the fate of the house of Atreus; equally pervasive, only less important, is the parallel between the fate of Helen and the fate of Clytemnestra. Again and again we find this sequence repeated; first, pious moralizings as the working of Zeus' law is traced in the just punishment of Troy; next, gradually increasing realization, both by the audience and by the Chorus, that what is true of Troy may prove true also of Troy's conquerors; lastly, agonized apprehension. This is the pattern of scene after scene and chorus after chorus. It was the pattern of the Chorus's initial anapaests together with the parodos; it is the pattern of the scene between Clytemnestra and the Chorus that follows.

In the first of her two great speeches in that scene (281 ff.), Clytemnestra describes the rapid journey from Troy to Argos of 'the light lineally descended from the fire of Ida' (311). Some people see nothing in the Beacon Speech but an irrelevant, if magnificent, geographical excursus. No one could be more reluctant than I to attribute to ancient authors anything like what is generally meant by the modern term 'symbolism'. But I cannot doubt that in Clytemnestra's mind the fire from Ida stands for the avenging fire of Zeus; nor that the Beacon Speech is highly relevant to the parallel between the fates of the Priamidae and that of the Atreidae which I have just mentioned. In the second of her speeches in this scene (320 f.) Clytemnestra paints for the Chorus a vivid picture of what she imagines to be happening in the captured city. If the conquerors show piety, she says, towards the gods of the conquered land and towards their shrines, then they may escape being conquered in their turn. But if they commit sacrilege, they may provoke revenge; and even if they avoid sacrilege, they may arouse the vengeance of the spirits of the dead. Clytemnestra's pretended fears are obviously her secret hopes. This speech looks forward to the later scene in which the Chorus gradually extracts from the innocently optimistic Herald the news of the storm that has scattered the returning ships. This disaster was directly provoked by the sacrilege Clytemnestra had anticipated, and its occurrence greatly facilitated the accomplishment of her plan; for it was owing to the storm that Agamemnon returned in a single ship and without his brother. The adventures of Menelaus after the storm formed the subject of the satyr-play that accompanied the trilogy, the *Proteus*; this, too, may help to explain the importance assigned by the poet to the brothers' separation.

The first stasimon begins on a note of triumph and ends on one of disaster. From the theme of the just punishment of Troy, the Chorus passes to that of Helen and the lives sacrificed for her sake, and ends on a note of anxious foreboding (459 f.) 'My anxious thought waits to hear something yet shrouded in darkness. For the gods are not unwatchful of the killers of many; and in time the black Erinyes consign to darkness him who is fortunate without justice, reversing his fortune and ruining his life; and he has no protection once he is among the vanished. To be praised exceedingly is dangerous. . . . My choice is the prosperity that comes without envy. May I not be a sacker of cities, nor yet be made captive by others and see my life waste away.' It is remarkable that Agamemnon's own loyal councillors can seem to imply that he is 'fortunate without justice'. If he has killed many, is it not because he is the minister of Zeus' vengeance? If he has made war and sacrificed his daughter for the sake of Helen, has it not been at Zeus' order?

The scene of the Herald repeats the now familiar sequence of hope and triumph followed by the slow realization that all is not well; it ends with the Chorus forcing the Herald, much against his will, to describe the disaster of the storm. Then the second stasimon takes up once more the theme of Helen, and illustrates her nature by the fable of the lion cub. It shows Helen to be in a sense a daemonic being, one sent into the world for the express purpose of causing havoc and destruction. We are meant to remember that Clytemnestra is her sister; later in the play, the Chorus itself will observe the similarity of their careers (1468 f.). From the theme of Helen, the Chorus goes on to speak of guilt and divine justice (750 f.). Prosperity does not of itself provoke the anger of the gods; evil deeds alone bring down divine justice either on their doer or on his descendants after him.

Immediately after this famous passage the King enters the stage; we can hardly doubt that the words the Chorus has lately uttered somehow apply to his case. The elders welcome him. In the past they have criticized his conduct in making war to recover Helen; but now that his plan has been successfully accomplished, they are glad to greet him with enthusiasm and to warn him against secret enemies. Perhaps the presentation of the King himself may furnish some clue to the problem of his guilt. But the character assigned him by the poet has been, and is, the subject of acute controversy. 'It is a common view', wrote Fraenkel in 1942,[7] '. . . that king Agamemnon is either the villain of the piece or, at any rate, a reckless, overbearing and impious tyrant.' His own view is very different. For him Agamemnon is 'in everything . . . a great gentleman, possessed of moderation and self-control';[8] he is 'every inch a king'; 'his every word and gesture is expressive of a powerful sincerity'.[9] Page takes a view of Agamemnon's character not widely removed from that against which Fraenkel has so energetically protested. 'His first address does not endear him,' he writes, 'he is ready with pious phrases,

he greets success with gratitude, but without surprise. . . . He neither mentions his wife nor expresses pleasure in his home-coming . . .' (loc. cit., pp. xxxiii f.). When he gives in to Clytemnestra and fatally consents to make a triumphal entry into the palace, treading underfoot the purple tapestries normally reserved as offerings to the gods, that happens, according to Page, 'simply because he is at the mercy of his own vanity and arrogance, instantly ready to do this scandalous act the moment his personal fears of divine retribution and human censure are, by whatever sophistry, allayed' (loc. cit., p. 151).

Let us investigate the reasons for this singular disagreement. Fraenkel seems to me to have established that his calling the gods 'jointly responsible' for his victory does not immediately convict the King of hybris; such language was for a Greek perfectly consistent with a properly respectful attitude.[10] But it cannot be denied that in his opening speech Agamemnon looks back upon his ruthless extirpation of his enemies with a fierce satisfaction. 'The blasts of destruction still have life; and the embers as they die with the dead city waft upwards the rich incense of its wealth' (819-20). 'There is no sentimental lamentation in this fine sentence,' writes Fraenkel (p. 378), 'but a true note of profound sympathy.' A few lines later Agamemnon says, 'The ravening lion leaped over the wall, and lapped his fill of the blood of kings' (827-8). I find no sympathy, profound or otherwise, in that sentence or in anything that Agamemnon says about the Trojans; and I find it difficult to deny that the complaisance with which he views the extermination of his enemies must bode ill for him. Clytemnestra has, we know, been hoping that the Greeks will commit some act of sacrilege and provoke the anger of the gods; and the Herald has told us, in a line most unconvincingly obelized by Fraenkel (527), that the altars and shrines of the gods are to be seen no more. Agamemnon now boasts of the city's total destruction; are we to suppose that he has somehow managed it in such a way as to leave the shrines intact?[11] It is true that in his vengeance Agamemnon has acted as the minister of Zeus. But is it no less true that it is dangerous to be a sacker of cities, and that the destruction of the Trojan temples must provoke divine resentment.

We must agree with Page that the grimness and harshness of Agamemnon make an unfavourable impression; but we cannot deny that there is much in the situation that makes this understandable. It is hardly reasonable to reproach him with his coldness to his wife; it seems clear that rumours of what is going on at home have found their way to him. Nor is his behaviour at any point undignified; here we must contrast him with Aegisthus, whom the poet has portrayed in a most unsympathetic fashion. Both recent editors have remarked on the meanness of

his conduct and the vulgarity of his language: what purpose had the poet in depicting him in such a way if not that of showing his enemy in a comparatively sympathetic light? Further, we must note the trust and affection of the humble Watchman who speaks the prologue; he looks forward to clasping in his own his master's well-loved hands. Notice, too, the attitude of the Chorus. They acknowledge to the King himself that they have criticized his conduct in the past. But they are glad to welcome him back from Troy with a friendly greeting; and their sincerity is proved by their lamentations at the miserable end of him whom they call their 'kindly guardian' (1452). Fraenkel and Page are both right; we have here a character of light and shade. This conclusion is confirmed by a comparison of Aeschylus' Agamemnon with that of Homer; the two are remarkably alike. Homer's Agamemnon is not, on the whole, an agreeable character. He is proud and irascible, to such an extent that he becomes involved in quarrels with his allies that have disastrous consequences. He is utterly determined to exterminate the enemy, declaring to Menelaus that even the unborn children in the womb shall perish (6. 57 f.). He is ready to proclaim in open council that he prefers the captive concubine Chryseis to his wife Clytemnestra (1.113 ff.). But these defects cannot blind the reader to his magnificent heroic qualities. He is a good fighter, at his best in a difficult situation; his management of affairs is, as Apollo says in the *Eumenides* (631-2), on the whole successful. Like many hot-tempered men he is capable of behaving with dignity and nobility, as his reconciliation with Achilles plainly shows.

Let us now examine the crucial scene in which Clytemnestra induces her husband to tread upon the purple tapestries (932 ff.). Why does Agamemnon end by succumbing to his wife's persuasion? Fraenkel (loc. cit., p. 441) argues that he yields partly out of chivalry towards a lady, partly because after long years of struggle he is weary and his nerve finally gives way. This is not convincing. Chivalry of such a kind seems to be a medieval and a modern rather than an ancient concept; and the psychological explanation that the King sees through his wife but is too weary to oppose her has a decidedly modern ring. It is a far cry from Aeschylus' Agamemnon to Mann's Aschenbach; nor is such a notion firmly grounded in the text. Must we then believe with Page that Agamemnon secretly longs to make a triumphal entry, and eagerly grasps at the sophistical excuses offered by the Queen? Or should we rather accept a third explanation lately offered us by Hermann Gundert,[12] who has argued that Agamemnon surrenders because he has been outwitted, and that he has been outwitted because Zeus has taken away his wits?

With these three theories in mind let us turn to the text. 'In a moment

of fear', says Clytemnestra, 'might you not have vowed to the gods that you would do this?' This is no argument; an offering made to discharge a vow would have been in honour of the gods, but what Clytemnestra is proposing would be in honour of the King himself. Agamemnon knows this, and might have said it; what he does say is that, on the advice of an accredited exegete, he would have done so. 'What do you think Priam would have done?', the Queen asks. This again is a sophism; Priam was not only a barbarian, but a man under a curse. This too Agamemnon knows and might have said; instead he is content with the dry answer, 'Yes, *he* certainly would have done it.' 'Have no scruple, then,' says Clytemnestra, 'for the reproach of men.' Agamemnon could have answered that the reproach of men did not worry him, but that what he dreaded was the anger of the gods. Instead, he lamely replies, 'Yes, but public opinion is a great power.' Considered in terms of what we know of Aeschylean morality, this answer surely indicates a moral blindness. 'But the man who arouses no jealousy is not enviable', says the Queen. Agamemnon knows that to incur *phthonos* ('envy') is dangerous; yet he can counter only with the feeble complaint that a woman ought not to desire contention. 'But for the fortunate', his wife answers, 'it is becoming to yield the victory.' 'Do you think victory in this contest so important?' 'Be persuaded; if you give in to me, you are the winner.' The King has no answer to this; and after removing his boots in a futile gesture of appeasement, he enters the palace.

Agamamnon's answers to the last two questions give a definite indication that he has provoked divine *phthonos*: the more closely we consider them, the harder it becomes to accept Fraenkel's explanation of Agamemnon's conduct. Must we agree with Page that he gives in 'simply because he is at the mercy of his own vanity and arrogance'? Here we are troubled by the empirical fact that during a performance of the play we find ourselves at this point regarding Agamemnon not with contempt, but with compassion. Note in particular the lines that immediately precede the stichomythia (926 f.). The king has replied to his wife's long and effusive speech of welcome with a curt and almost brutal refusal to accept her praise. But the conclusion of his speech, summing up his attitude, makes him, almost for the first time, sympathetic. 'Apart from foot-wipers and embroideries sounds the voice of fame; and good sense is the god's greatest gift. Men should call him happy who has ended his life in the prosperity that we desire. And if in all things I can act thus, I lack not confidence.' These do not seem the accents of hypocrisy. Yet in the scene that follows, Clytemnestra twists her husband round her little finger; he is as helpless as Thrasymachus before Socrates against her devastating dialectic.

How can we account for Agamemnon's rapid collapse? Page's view that under temptation he reveals his secret moral weakness is not a wholly convincing explanation of the change in him. Here we must carefully consider the explanation offered by Gundert, that Zeus and his portion and the Erinys have put Ate into his mind, to use the words put into Agamemnon's mouth in the nineteenth book of the *Iliad* (quoted on p. 63). A parallel which seems to me to lend strong support to Gundert's view is furnished by that scene in the *Seven Against Thebes* in which the Messenger describes to Eteocles the seven champions who are arrayed against the seven gates. Against the first six Eteocles dispatches champions from his own command. At the seventh gate stands Eteocles' own brother Polyneices. Like Agamemnon Eteocles is a harsh and grim character who is yet not unsympathetically portrayed. He knows that if he fights his brother he will not survive; he knows that pollution of the most hideous sort is caused by the shedding of a brother's blood; and yet he cannot bring himself to do as the Chorus wishes and send another in his place. The reason for this is clearly indicated in the text, as Friedrich Solmsen has shown in an important article;[13] Eteocles is in the power of the Erinys. In Agamemnon's case the evidence of the text is less positive; but I have little doubt that Gundert is right in thinking that the reason for his behaviour is the same.

Not that Gundert's explanation seems to me entirely sufficient; in a curious way I believe that he and Page are both partly right. Gundert goes too far in arguing that Agamemnon reveals no *hybris*, but mere stupidity; for when Zeus takes away a man's wits, he sends upon him a moral blindness. Zeus' action in sending Ate upon Agamemnon causes Agamemnon to commit a crime; so far Page is right; but in so far as the crime is the result of Zeus' action, Gundert has supplied an element of the truth which Page's explanation has ignored. It is clear that we have come upon an anomaly similar to that which so much perplexed us in the matter of Agamemnon's fatal decision at Aulis. There Page argued that Agamemnon could not be held responsible; Dodds argued that his action was a crime, and was called a crime by the Chorus; both views, I have argued, contain an element of truth. Here too it is the same. In one sense Agamemnon is guilty; Page has shown that he utters words that are bound to bring down on him divine envy, and we know that he will presently pay the penalty. Yet in a certain sense Agamemnon is innocent; he acts as he does because Zeus has taken away his wits. But why has Zeus done so? For the same reason as at Aulis; because of the curse. As Agamemnon succumbs, vanquished by the irresistible persuasion of Helen's sister, the destined instrument of his destruction, we look upon him not with scorn, but with compassion. Guilty as he is, he

is not, like Aegisthus, mean and contemptible; destined as he is to ruin, at once guilty and innocent, he is a truly tragic figure.

The King disappears into the palace; the Chorus sings the third stasimon, full of ominous foreboding; and we are already waiting for Agamemnon's death-cry. But we are kept waiting till the end of the Cassandra scene. That scene occupies nearly 300 lines, not much less than one-fifth of the entire play. The power and beauty of that scene are so overwhelming that it is easy to forget to inquire what is its function in the unfolding of the plot. What is that function? Cassandra makes a desperate effort to get across to the uncomprehending Chorus a warning of Agamemnon's mortal danger which it is inevitably bound not to grasp. This provides a wonderful opportunity for the working up of an uncanny atmosphere and for the gradual building up of suspense. But this is not all. Since the narrative of the prophecy of Calchas, the audience has felt that there is some dark factor in the situation which has only been hinted at; something which if known would do more to explain the sinister forebodings of the Chorus than any vague talk of murmurs in the city against the princes. What that something is is instantly known to the foreigner Cassandra, whom Clytemnestra has supposed may be ignorant of Greek. No sooner does she begin to move in the direction of the door than she sees in a vision (1096) the murdered children of Thyestes. Soon after she exclaims that even now a mighty evil is being plotted in the house (1102); and she describes in confused and agitated utterance a vision of the approaching murder. During the first part of the scene Cassandra speaks in lyrics; that part concludes with her calling to mind the fate of her own family and nation, and recalling once more to the audience the parallel, so often suggested during the first four great odes, between the fate of the Priamidae and the fate of the Atreidae. Then by a last great effort she collects herself, and in trimeters instead of lyrics, in speech instead of song, she openly declares to the Chorus (1178 f.) that the house of Atreus is beset by the Erinyes; that it is haunted by the spirits of the murdered children; that she and Agamemnon are presently to die an awful death; and that they will not go unavenged. And just before her final exit, she returns once more (1287 f.) to the fate of Troy and the not dissimilar fate of its conquerors.

We cannot regard the Cassandra scene as a mere episode, one whose presence may be amply justified by its effect but which is not essential to the development of the plot. Cassandra supplies us, first obscurely and later at the climax explicitly, with the vital piece of information that gives the missing clue for which we have so long been seeking. One main contribution of the scene to the unfolding of the plot is Cassandra's

futile warning; but a more important one is her bringing into the open, for the first time in the play, the origin and nature of the curse.

There follows the scene in which Clytemnestra, standing over the dead bodies of the murdered pair, boldly confronts the Chorus and exults in her revenge. Returning to the theme so often played on in the early lyrics of the play, the Chorus cries out against Helen; now her deadly work has achieved its final triumph. 'O mad Helen,' they exclaim (1455 f.), 'you who alone destroyed those many, all those many lives beneath Troy, now have you crowned yourself with the last, the perfect garland, not to be forgotten, by means of the blood not washed away.' Clytemnestra forbids the Chorus to blame Helen. Next the old men address the daemon of the house (1468 f.): 'Daemon, you who fall upon the house and the two Tantalids, and exercise through women an evil sway. . . .' 'Now you have set right your utterance', the queen replies, 'by calling on the daemon of this race, thrice glutted.' 'Great is the daemon of whom you speak,' says the Chorus, 'evil is his wrath, insatiate of baneful fortune. Woe, woe, through the will of Zeus, the cause of all, the doer of all. For what is fulfilled for men without Zeus? Which of these things is not god-ordained?'

These words of the Chorus are not spoken idly. We can now trace, from the primal *Atē* of Thyestes, the grand design of Zeus. The action of the Theban trilogy, almost the only other of which we have a reasonable knowledge, is determined from the start by the curse upon Laius; so, I feel certain, is the action of the *Oresteia* by the curse upon Atreus. From his birth Agamemnon's fate, like that of Oedipus or Eteocles, has been determined; he is the son of the accursed Atreus. Zeus uses him as the instrument of his vengeance upon Troy; but he uses him in such a fashion that his own destruction must inevitably follow. At the outset of the expedition, Artemis, a partisan of Agamemnon's enemies, demands of him blood for blood. Agamemnon cannot refuse, for it is Zeus' will that the fleet sail; and Zeus sends Ate to take away his judgement and force him to consent. The King bows to the goddess's demand: and his consent brings down upon him the vengeance of his wife, who shares her sister's uncanny and daemonic nature serving like her as an instrument of Zeus' destructive purpose. Even his righteous revenge upon the Trojans involves Agamemnon in yet further guilt. In one sense, it is a triumph of divine justice; in another, an atrocious crime; the instrument of Zeus' punishment of Troy must himself be punished. But such guilt as the King contracts from the sacrifice of his daughter and from the annihilation of Troy with its people and its temples is only a consequence of the original guilt inherited from Atreus; the curse comes first, and determines everything that follows. Zeus brings about the ruin

of Priam; Zeus brings about the ruin of Agamemnon. The Chorus of the *Agamemnon*, like Sophocles' women of Trachis,[14] can justly echo Homer's words at the beginning of the *Iliad* and say that all that has happened has been in accordance with the will of Zeus.

7

IMAGERY AND ACTION IN THE *ORESTEIA*

ANN LEBECK

Several major systems of imagery in the *Oresteia* have a specific purpose: they turn the events of the drama into a concrete illustration of the principle *pathein ton erxanta* ('the doer suffers'). The gnome itself is not stated until the end of *Agamemnon*: yet the idea of like for like is communicated on the level of imagery from the beginning of the play. Further, a variety of expressions which suggest the proverb prepare for the statement of the gnome itself. The majority of these involve repetition of *paschō* (suffer), *draō* (act), and *prattō* (do) or verbal parallelism of some kind. They recur with increasing frequency in the final half of *Agamemnon*.[1]

Introduced at the close of the first drama, the gnome and its equivalent 'blood for blood' are central to the action of *Choephori*. However, as the trilogy progresses the proverb takes on other overtones. A divine decree in *Agamemnon* (1563-64), in *Choephori* it is shown to be untenable, a vicious unending circle of injustice.[2] Orestes' last words to Clytemnestra sum up the situation with an irony born of understanding: 'You slew whom you ought not have slain, now in requital suffer what you ought not suffer' (930).

In *Eumenides*, along with Erinyes, the gnome undergoes a final metamorphosis: from doing ill and suffering harm to doing good and faring well. From the lament of the Furies in the parodos to the words of Athena at the close:

> *Chor.* Ho, ho! Out upon it! We have suffered, dear ones –
> much have I suffered, and all in vain! –
> we have suffered a grievous blow, alas, a hurt unbearable.
> (143-145)
> Such are the actions of the younger gods. . . . (163)

Excerpted from *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 59–73. Abridged, with some Greek, French and German passages replaced by English translation.

9. Cf. *Ag.* 385–98.
10. Cf. 198–9, 468, 537–8, 834–6, 846–8, 1017, 1030, 1060.
11. Not even 'all at one stroke, they pitifully gasped upon the shore.' (976–7): the picture is in harmony with the general design; these men are victims cast up the Sea.

The translation of *The Persians* by A. J. Podlecki (Prentice-Hall, 1970) has been used for the following lines: 249–52; 345–6; 352–4; 412–13; 433–4; 472–3; 515–16; 577–8; 807–8, 976–7. Used by permission of Professor Podlecki.

H. Lloyd-Jones: The Suppliants of Aeschylus (pp. 42–56)

1. *P. Oxy.* 2256, fr. 3 (Part XX, p. 30).
2. *Eumenides* (Göttingen, 1833), 123; cf. *Griechische Literaturgeschichte*, 2^3, 88; cf. Boeckh, *Tragoediae Graecae principum rel.* (1808), 54.
3. See G. Mueller, *De Aeschyli Supplicum tempore atque indole* (Diss. Halle, 1908), 67 f.
4. Notably G. Mueller in the dissertation just quoted. Although Mueller reached a wrong conclusion, his work has great merits; his refutation of the historical arguments for a late date is particularly good.
5. By W. G. Forrest, *Class. Quart.* n.s. 10 (1960), 240, l. 3. My disagreement with Mr Forrest over the *Suppliants* does not mean that I fail to appreciate his ingenious and learned article.
6. A. Andrewes, *Probouleusis* (Oxford, 1954), 7.
7. *Il.* 22. 99 f.
8. 6. 83.
9. Aristotle, *Pol.* 1303 a 6; Plutarch, *De Mul. Virt.* 245 F. See the discussion by Forrest, loc. cit. 221 f.
10. See Forrest, loc. cit. 239, who quotes E. Cavaignac, *Rev. Phil.* 45 (1921), 102–6.
11. Authority is no substitute for argument, nor will the isolated treatment of details suffice. It is not enough to show that a particular expression is unusual; it is necessary to show that the expression in question could not have been used by Aeschylus.
12. F. R. Earp, *The Style of Aeschylus* (Cambridge, 1948). Studied in his way, according to this author, the tragedians become three old friends whose little ways we know (p. 5).
13. *Class. Quart.* 30 (1936), 116 f.
14. *Tragodoumenon Libri Tres* (Cracow, 1925), 133 f.; cf. E. B. Ceadel, *Class. Quart.* 35 (1941), 66 f.
15. See G. Mueller, loc. cit. 52 f.
16. See G. Mueller, loc. cit. 46 f.
17. At 490; the speech must be given to Danaus (cf. 500, 504).
18. *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*, 87 f.; *Theatre of Dionysus in Athens*, 31 f.; *Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 241 f.
19. *Aischylos: Interpretationen* (1914), 4.
20. See Maas, *Griechische Metrik*, ch. 76 (on pp. 53–4 of my English translation); cf. *Hermes* 64 (1929), 461 f. = *Kl. Schr.* iv. 479.
21. Maas, loc. cit.; Kranz, *Stasimon* (1933), 272.
22. In his introduction to Denniston and Page, *Aeschylus, Agamemnon* (Oxford, 1957), xxx.

23. *Hermes* 64, loc. cit.
24. See *Greek Metre*, ch. 76.
25. *Griechische Tragoedien*, 1^4, 221.
26. W. B. Stanford, *Aeschylus in his Style* (Dublin, 1942), 112.
27. I have developed these reflections somewhat further in a review of John Jones's remarkable book *Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London, 1962) in *The Review of English Studies* 15, no. 58 (1964), 221 f. Cf. also *Gnomon* 34 (1962), 740; *Class. Quart.* n.s. 12 (1962), 187.
28. *Die Struktur des Eingangs in der Attischen Tragödie* (*Tübinger Beiträge* 10, 1930), 1; *Gnomon* 10 (1934), 413; also in the preface to the reprint of Droysen's translation of Aeschylus in Kröners Taschenausgabe (152).

H. Lloyd-Jones: The Guilt of Agamemnon (pp. 57–72)

1. This paper formed the first of my J. H. Gray Lectures given at Cambridge in 1961; it has also been given at other places. I am grateful to those who have helped to improve it, and particularly to Professor E. R. Dodds and Mr G. E. M. de Ste Croix.
2. See D. L. Page's preface to *Aeschylus, Agamemnon*, ed. J. D. Denniston and D. L. Page (Oxford, 1957); and my article 'Zeus in Aeschylus', *Journ. Hell. Stud.* lxxvi (1956), 55 f.
3. Eduard Fraenkel, *Aeschylus, Agamemnon* (Oxford, 1950), iii, 625.
4. *Rheinisches Museum* ciii (1960), 76 f.
5. B. Daube, *Zu den Rechtsproblemen in Aischylos' Agamemnon* (Zürich, 1939), 147 f.
6. 'Morals and Politics in the Oresteia', *Proc. Cambr. Phil. Soc.* 186, n.s. 6 (1960), 19 f.; on this point see pp. 27–8.
7. *Proc. Brit. Acad.* xxviii, 22.
8. *Aeschylus, Agamemnon*, ii, 441.
9. *Der Agamemnon des Aeschylus* (Zürich and Stuttgart, 1957), 23.
10. *Aeschylus, Agamemnon*, ii. 371 f.; cf. *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, loc. cit. 22–3.
11. See Denniston and Page, op. cit. 120.
12. In *Theōria* (*Festschrift für W. H. Schuchhardt*) (Baden-Baden, 1960), 69 f.
13. *Trans. Amer. Philol. Ass.* lxviii (1937), 197 f.
14. *Agam.* 1485–6; Sophocles, *Trach.* 1278.

Ann Lebeck: Imagery and Action in the Oresteia (pp. 73–83)

1. Lines 532–3, 1286–8, 1318–19, 1429–30, 1527, 1562–4 (first formulation as a proverb), 1658.

Throughout her essay, Professor Lebeck refers to Eduard Fraenkel's 3-volume edition of the *Agamemnon* (Oxford 1950), abbreviated as 'Faenkel'.

2. Lines 122–3, 309–14, 400–4, 556–8, 803–5, 888, 930, 1007–17.
3. On the relation of feast and sacrifice which increases the similarity between the two, see ch. 2, n. 15.
4. However, at the close of *Eumenides*, motifs of ritual and sacrifice regain their customary propitious significance. See Froma I. Zeitlin, 'The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*', *Trans. Amer. Philol. Ass.* 96 (1965): 498–508.

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