

THE "GOLDEN LAMB" ODE IN EURIPIDES' *ELECTRA*

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AT LINE 693 of Euripides' *Electra* Orestes leaves to kill Aegisthus. Electra charges the chorus to report the outcome of Orestes' efforts and then returns to her house, leaving the chorus alone on stage. A choral ode is clearly called for here, to fill the interval between Orestes' departure and the messenger's account of his success. And so, while Aegisthus is being slain, the chorus sings the play's second stasimon (699–746), whose main subject is the golden lamb which Atreus' wife stole from her husband and gave to Thyestes. The purpose of this paper is to show how the ode is related both to the *Electra* as a whole and to its immediate context, the slaying of Aegisthus.

Our ancient sources give two principal versions of the origin of the golden lamb.¹ According to the first version, Atreus had promised to sacrifice the finest of his flock to Artemis, but when the golden lamb appeared he neglected his vow and kept the lamb for himself. Atreus' neglect of his vow is the reason for Artemis' antagonism toward Agamemnon in the next generation, an antagonism which leads to the death of Iphigenia, and to Clytemnestra's revenge for Iphigenia's death, the murder of Agamemnon. According to the second version of the myth, Hermes was angered at Pelops' mistreatment of his son Myrtilus and so placed the golden lamb among Atreus' flocks as a sort of "apple of discord," to incite enmity among Pelops' sons and among their descendants. In both principal versions of the myth, then, the golden lamb is the symbol of an "original sin" whose effect extends through the generations, determining or influencing actions and bringing woes to the descendants of Pelops and Atreus.

Euripides, however, uses neither standard version of the myth but chooses instead a version otherwise unattested,² that Pan procured the lamb for Atreus. By substituting Pan as the lamb's source, Euripides in effect distracts the audience from the versions of the myth in which Artemis and Hermes figure, and from the implications of "original sin" and family curse in those versions. Unlike the standard versions, the Pan version does not bring with it any associations from outside the play, and this absence

1. For the ancient sources see L. Preller-C. Robert, *Griechische Mythologie*⁴, 2.1:294–97; J. G. Frazer, *Apollodorus: "The Library,"* vol. 2 (London, 1921), pp. 164–67. Besides the two standard versions of the myth discussed in the text above, there are also Euripides' version found in our ode, that Pan supplied the lamb (see also n. 2), and the version given by Accius (209 ff. Ribbeck³), that Jupiter sent the lamb as a *regni stabilimen* to Atreus.

2. This absence of testimony outside our play is surprising in view of the large number of ancient authors who mention the myth, and it suggests that Euripides may have invented this version himself to avoid the inconvenient implications of the standard versions.

of associations requires the audience to view the lamb and its history exclusively in terms of the action and images of the play itself.

The lamb is, first of all, the token of Argive sovereignty: whoever possesses the lamb is entitled to rule Argos. Thus the chorus tells of the herald's announcement (708–711):

'Αγοράν ἀγοράν, Μυκη-
ναῖοι, στείχετε μακαρίων
δόξομενοι τυράννων
φάσματα † δέσματα.

Although the text is corrupt,³ its general sense is clear: the Mycenaeans were summoned to an assembly at which they would ratify Atreus' kingship, after he had demonstrated his right to rule by displaying the lamb (τυράννων φάσματα [710–11] where τυράννων is proleptic). Similarly in the antistrophe at 722–25 the chorus tells how Thyestes announced to the assembly that he possessed the lamb. The parallel between Thyestes' announcement and the earlier announcement of the herald (708–711) clearly implies that Thyestes' possession of the lamb was enough to procure the kingship for him.

In the second strophe the chorus sings of a series of celestial changes caused by Zeus. According to the myth, Zeus sent Hermes to Atreus and told him to make an agreement with Thyestes that, if the sun should reverse its course, Atreus would rule. The agreement was made; Zeus caused the sun to go backwards; and Atreus assumed the kingship of Argos.⁴ These celestial reversals are thus another means by which Atreus' right to rule was manifested, and they are parallel to the golden lamb of the first strophe.

Similar language is used to link the two prodigies in our ode. The lamb is thrice described as golden or gold-fleeced (705, 719, 725), while the second antistrophe speaks of the χρυσωπὸν ἔδραν of the sun (740). Similarly the gleam of the sun's fire (729, 732) corresponds to the gleam of the fire that celebrated the possession of the lamb (714); and the adjective φαεινός (726), used to describe the stars whose courses were changed, recalls the word φάσματα (711), used to describe the golden lamb. These links serve to unify the ode as a whole by reinforcing the parallelism between the golden lamb and the celestial changes. As we shall shortly see, these same motifs also link our ode to other elements in the play and help to clarify the ode's place in the play as a whole.

The chorus, it is true, consciously sings only of Thyestes, the golden lamb, and so forth; but, if there are correspondences between what the chorus says and elements elsewhere in the play, it is reasonable to assume that the audience would recognize these correspondences even if the chorus is unaware of them. An interpretation based on such similarities, however, cannot be limited to a few specific details. It must include all the major

3. The textual difficulties are discussed by J. D. Denniston (ed.), *Euripides: "Electra"* (Oxford, 1939), ad loc.

4. For sources for the myth see Preller–Robert, *Mythologie*, 2.1:294–97; Frazer, *Apollodorus*, 2:164–67.

elements of the ode, namely, the golden lamb, the betrayal of Atreus by his wife, the rule of Thyestes, the celestial changes, and the implied restoration of Atreus. Any interpretation should also explain why the ode occurs when it does in the play, while Aegisthus is being slain.

As Froma Zeitlin has recognized,⁵ there is an obvious parallel between Thyestes as he is described in the ode and his son Aegisthus as he is seen elsewhere in the play. Both Thyestes and Aegisthus seduce the legitimate king's wife; both use this seduction to their own advantage to replace the rightful ruler; and both are in turn ousted from their throne. If this parallel between Thyestes and Aegisthus is to be complete, however, we must also find what corresponds in Aegisthus' case to both the golden lamb and the celestial changes—after all, these are the principal elements in the ode.

We may first consider the lamb. Within the ode the lamb is described as golden (705, 719, 725); and the sovereignty which it betokens is celebrated with music (716–19), dance (711), and religious ritual (713–15) involving the whole city of Argos (714–15). These different elements are all tightly interwoven. Thus the religious ritual in honor of the χρυσέαν ἄρνα (705) takes place at θυμέλαι . . . χρυσήλατοι (713). The music in Argos is played on the flute (716), recalling Pan (who delivered the lamb) playing the flute (702). The Argives are summoned Ἀγορὰν ἀγορὰν to view the lamb (708; cf. 723), that is, to a gathering of all the citizens; and the fire of the religious ritual burns throughout their city (714–15). Elsewhere in the play these same motifs of gold, of dance, and of a religious ritual involving the whole Argive community appear together in the parodos, when the chorus invites Electra to join the festival of Hera (167 ff.).⁶ Hera is the principal goddess of Argos, and the festival in her honor in Argos (like the Panathenaea at Athens) would be a national event involving the community as a whole. This point is reflected in the parodos when the chorus says that the Argives (i.e., the community as a whole) have announced the forthcoming festival and that all the young women will participate (172–74). The Argive girls will honor Hera with a choral dance (cf. 178–80) but Electra will not be with them—or more precisely, she will not be their leader (οὐδ' ἰστᾶσα χοροῦς, 178).⁷ The king's daughter would naturally lead the girls' dance in honor of the national goddess, but Electra's father Agamemnon is dead and Aegisthus is now king instead. Electra's absence from the chorus which she should by right be leading is a sign of her own alienation from the corporate union of Argive citizens, but it is also a reminder that sovereignty in that city has passed from Agamemnon to Aegisthus.

This theme of lost royalty is also reflected in Electra's description of her poor clothing, so unbecoming the daughter of the king who captured Troy (184–89). The mention of Troy reminds us of the Trojan spoils, the fruits of Agamemnon's victory (cf. 4–7), now appropriated by the new and illegiti-

5. "The Argive Festival of Hera and Euripides' *Electra*," *TAPA* 101 (1970): 654.

6. I am indebted here to Zeitlin's excellent analysis of the parodos, "The Argive Festival," pp. 645–69.

7. Cf. the note of Denniston, "*Electra*," ad loc.

mate royalty while Electra, the true king's daughter, languishes in poverty. Fine clothing is linked with gold jewelry when Electra says that she does not delight in gold necklaces (176-77), and the chorus offers to lend her clothes and gold ornaments for the festival (191-93). Again, when Electra contrasts her own poverty with the wealth of Clytaemestra, she does so in terms of her own poor clothing (307-8) and of the robes pinned with gold worn by Clytaemestra's slaves, part of the booty Agamemnon brought from Troy (314-18).⁸ Significantly, this last statement of Electra is immediately followed by mention of the murder of Agamemnon (318-19) and the illegitimate rule of Aegisthus (319-22). The Trojan booty, Agamemnon's murder, and Aegisthus' replacing Agamemnon as king are also linked together in the same sequence in the opening lines of the play (4-12).

In these early scenes, then, gold (and the Trojan spoils), choral dance, and religious ritual involving all of Argos are associated with the Argive kingship in the sense that Electra should be able to enjoy these things but cannot, because the kingship has been stolen from her father and taken by Aegisthus. The same group of motifs appears in our ode, when the golden lamb as a token of kingship is linked with choral dance and with religious ritual involving the whole of Argos. In terms of our parallel, the ode shows us Thyestes (= Aegisthus) enjoying the golden glories of Atreus (= Agamemnon), while the parodos shows us Electra mourning their loss.

What of the celestial changes described in the second strophe? In order to interpret these changes properly, we must distinguish the version of the myth found in the ode, which associates the changes with Thyestes' theft of the lamb (cf. *τότε δὴ τότε*, 726), from the other version of the myth, which makes of the changes a sign of divine horror at the later Thyestean banquet.⁹ In the latter version the changes serve to express a moral judgment on the actions of Atreus, as the reversal of the natural order of heavenly events becomes a symbol for both the savage enormity of the banquet and the extreme supernatural reaction to that enormity. But we shall seriously misread the ode if we see, in the celestial changes which it describes, a similar disturbance of nature in order to express supernatural displeasure at Thyestes' theft of the lamb. Rather the ancient sources for this version of the myth all agree that the celestial changes were, as we have said, a means whereby Atreus could trick Thyestes and regain his throne. While Zeus's motive in providing the means was to obtain *δίκη* (cf. p. 195), the celestial changes were not themselves an immediate statement of heavenly disapproval of Thyestes' theft of the lamb and of the Argive kingship, but only a divinely produced event which enabled Atreus to oust Thyestes and recover the kingship for himself.

In terms of the equation of Thyestes and Aegisthus, the event which

8. This passage is drawn from the message which Electra would send to Orestes (303-331). One of the dramatic functions of the message is to repeat and emphasize in iambic form points presented lyrically in the preceding parodos: Electra's removal from the royal palace (306), her exclusion from religious ceremonies and choral dance (306), and her poor clothes (307-8) contrasted with the rich spoils of Agamemnon now possessed by Clytaemestra.

9. For the sources for this version of the myth, see Frazer, *A pollodoros*, 2: 166.

corresponds to the celestial changes is the return of Orestes; for, as a consequence of Orestes' return, Aegisthus will be ousted from the kingship and the Atreid line will be restored.¹⁰ In the standard version of the myth, the sun's course is reversed so that it rises in the west and sets in the east (728–32). Euripides adds two further details: that Zeus also changed the course of the stars (726–27); and that northern regions, formerly dry, became moist, while the previously moist regions of Africa became dry (733–36). As we shall see, Orestes is also the "new dawn" come to dispel the darkness of Aegisthus' reign. The correspondence between Orestes as rising sun and the sun's reversing its course is not a perfect one, but the imperfection is less noticeable in the present context, which juxtaposes changes in the stars (= night) and sun (= day), than it would be if only the reversed course of the sun were mentioned. Moreover, we shall find—as with the golden lamb—not a narrow one-for-one correspondence, but a more complex set of associations of Orestes' return with all three motifs: sun, stars, and moisture.

When Electra enters, her first words are: ὦ νύξ μέλαινα, χρυσεῶν ἄστρον τροφέ (54). These words set the time of the present action, the dark of night; but the night is immediately associated with Electra's present condition of exile from the royal palace (into the outer darkness, as it were) by Aegisthus and Clytaemestra (54–63). As a token of her present condition, Electra carries a jug with which she will fetch water, not because she has to, but ὡς ὕβριν δείξωμεν Αἰγίσθου θεοῖς (55–58). The visual effect of the water jug should not be underestimated. Electra enters bearing the jug on her head (cf. 55–56) and refuses to put it down at the request of the farmer (64–76); she exits with the jug (81; cf. 77–78), returns with it at her second entrance (112; cf. 108), and sings and dances the first half of her kommos song with it still on her head (112–39; cf. 140). The ever-present jug continually reminds us of the element of water. In the second half of the kommos, water occurs again as Electra, like a swan beside a river (152), laments her father λουτρά πανύσταθ' ὑδρανάμενον χροί (157). Agamemnon was murdered in water, as Electra reminds us (157–58), and Electra's present condition is a result of that murder. It is fitting then that Electra uses water, the water she fetches in the jug, to symbolize her estrangement from the royal house and the loss of royal prerogative which she suffered when Aegisthus replaced her father as king. In her songs Electra returns, too, to the motif of night, telling of her nocturnal lamentations for Agamemnon's death (γόους νυχίους, 141) and for her own wretched state as the ex-princess of Argos (δάκρυσιν νυχεύω, 181–82). In these early laments of Electra, then, we find an interrelated set of ideas: night and stars, lamentation, water, the murder of Agamemnon, and the loss of royal prerogatives.

10. Admittedly the restoration is short lived, and Orestes is forced into exile because of his act of matricide; but we learn of his permanent exile only at the play's end (1273–74; cf. 1312–13). At the present moment in the play there is nothing to indicate that Euripides will not follow the version of the myth found, e.g., in *Orest.* 1648–65 which foresees Orestes ruling in Argos once he is purified in Athens. Moreover, if the ode is principally about Thyestes (= Aegisthus) taking and then losing the throne, as I believe it is, then the length of Orestes' restoration is irrelevant, since his exile results from Clytaemestra's death, not from Aegisthus'.

Electra's night, however, is rapidly coming to an end. The farmer leaves at 81 so that he may begin his field work *ἄμ' ἡμέρα* (78), and immediately after he leaves Orestes enters with Pylades (82). Orestes' arrival coincides with the dawn (*Ἔως γὰρ λευκὸν ὄμμ' ἀναίρεται*, 102; cf. in the ode *λευκὸν τε πρόσωπον ἁοῦς*, 730–31). Interestingly, this dawn precedes the nocturnal lamentations of Electra's kommos and the parodos. On a realistic level, we should imagine the hour as the first glimmer of dawn, still easily mistaken for night, especially by someone with the negative outlook of Electra. On a symbolic level, the new day may be dawning for others, but Electra will remain in the night of her own dismal state until she is sure that Aegisthus is dead (cf. 866–69). The chorus is more easily cheered. Word that Orestes may come warms their hearts with joy (401–2; cf. the expressions of heat associated with the sun in the ode, 732 and 739–40); and, when Orestes' identity is finally revealed, they burst into song (585–87):

ἔμολες ἔμολες, ὦ, χρόνιος ἡμέρα,
κατέλαμψας, ἔδειξας ἐμφανῇ
πόλει πυρσόν . . .

The long-awaited Orestes (*ὦ χρόνῳ φανείς*, 578) is the *ἐμφανῇ πυρσόν* (586–87; cf. *φλογὶ θεοπύρῳ*, 732) which this long-awaited day has brought. The image of the torch (*πυρσός*) occurs again, when Orestes leaves to slay Aegisthus, and Electra instructs the chorus to report the results of the struggle: *ὑμεῖς δέ μοι, γυναῖκες, εὖ πυρσέετε* . . . (694), literally, "light well the torch for me."¹¹ Finally, when the messenger completes his account of Aegisthus' death, Electra at last expresses her sense of liberation in the same image of gleaming day replacing night (866–69). And, as day replaces night, a choral dance of joy replaces Electra's solo dance of lamentation (cf. 856–65); for Agamemnon's murderer has been slain (869) and the rightful rulers have regained the throne (876–78).¹²

Sun and stars also appear on the shield of Achilles described in the first stasimon (432–86). We may agree with M. J. O'Brien¹³ that, in general terms, the first stasimon presents a series of images which we are to associate with Orestes, whose first meeting with Electra occurs in the scene which precedes the stasimon and whose real identity will be revealed in the scene which follows. Orestes is the hunter pursuing Aegisthus and therefore is like the decoration of the armor: Perseus slaying the Gorgon (459–62; cf. 855–57), the Sphinx with her prey (471–72), Bellerophon pursuing the Chimaera (473–75). In a similar fashion Orestes may also be associated with the sun and stars which decorate the shield (464–69) and which are here called

11. The metaphor in *πυρσέετε* is strained, and as a result the exact sense of *πυρσέετε κραυγὴν ἀγῶνος τοῦδε* (694–95) is obscured. On the whole it seems more likely that Electra means "light a beacon in respect to [i.e., announce] the cry of the contest" (which the chorus does, 747–50; note especially *βοῆς* [747] referring to the sound from the battle). However, N. Wecklein (ed.), *Euripidis "Elektra"* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1906), ad loc., and Denniston, "*Elektra*," ad loc., make the shout the chorus': "raise a shout as a beacon."

12. See G. V. Sumner, "Euripides *Elektra* 876–8," *Mnemosyne* 12 (1959): 135–36.

13. "Orestes and the Gorgon: Euripides' *Elektra*," *AJP* 85 (1964): 16 ff. O'Brien, however, does not comment on the significance of the sun and stars on the shield.

τροπαῖοι (469) in that they cause the rout of Hector (= Aegisthus).¹⁴ Later Zeus himself is invoked as Τροπαῖ' (671), when Orestes prays for his own victory over Aegisthus (671, 675); and, to complete the pattern, Zeus in our ode sends the change of sun and stars, the sign which causes Thyestes (= Aegisthus) to lose the throne.

Thus we find in the play two closely related sets of celestial images which overlap in the person of Orestes. On the one hand, Orestes is the new dawn come to replace the dark night of Aegisthus' reign. On the other hand, he is like the sun and stars on Achilles' shield putting the enemy to rout and like the sun and stars in our ode causing the false king to lose his throne. In their different ways, then, both sets of images represent change,¹⁵ specifically the expulsion of Aegisthus.

In summary, our ode is internally structured along a parallel between the tale of the golden lamb in the first strophe and the tale of the celestial changes in the second. More importantly, there are also parallels between the events of the generation of Atreus and Thyestes as they are related in our ode and the events of the present generation, including events within the play itself. Because of this relation between past and present, Euripides is able to use his chorus' description of past events as a means of commenting on the parallel events of the present, specifically on Orestes' return and the ouster (and death) of Aegisthus.

But what is Euripides saying about these events? We have already noted that the celestial changes of the second strophe were brought about by Zeus. In terms of the parallels which we have considered, Orestes' return (= celestial changes) should also be brought about by Zeus. According to the myth Zeus caused the celestial changes . . . δυστυχία βροτείω θνατᾶς ἔνεκεν δίκας (741-42), i.e., "because of mortal misfortune, for the sake of mortal justice."¹⁶ In other words, Zeus brought about the celestial changes because of the misfortune suffered by one mortal (Atreus), in order to obtain justice from the mortal (Thyestes) who caused that misfortune. Again, in terms of the parallel, this would mean that Zeus brought about Orestes' return in order to exact δίκη from Aegisthus (= Thyestes) for the δυστυχία which he had caused Agamemnon (= Atreus). Such an interpretation of these verses is borne out by the use of the same terms elsewhere in the play. Thus δυστυχία is the condition of the murdered Agamemnon (cf. 301), in contrast to his

14. The adjective τροπαῖοι (469) specifically modifies only ἄστρον χοροί (467), but κύκλος ἀελίοιο (465) and ἄστρον χοροί are so closely linked by enclitic τ' (467) that the adjective's sense is easily extended to the sun (just as grammatically only κύκλος ἀελίοιο is the subject of the verb κατέλαμπε [464], but the sense of the verb extends to ἄστρον χοροί as well).

15. It would be more accurate, perhaps, to say exchange: day for night, Atreus for Thyestes, Orestes for Aegisthus. The theme of exchange occurs in a far more melancholic context, when the chorus sings of old evils replaced by new ones (1146 ff.) as Clytaemestra is being killed.

16. Denniston, "Electra," ad loc., translates "for man's (i.e. Thyestes') misfortune, . . . for the chastening of mortals," but this use of the dative to express purpose is improbable (see H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, rev. by G. M. Messing [Cambridge, Mass., 1956], §§ 1473, 1519). Wecklein, "Electra," ad loc., sees δυστυχία βροτείω, correctly I believe, as a dative of cause (for the dative of cause see Smyth, § 1517). Wecklein's translation, however, "ob menschlicher Verblendung," i.e., on account of Thyestes' error, either requires an unparalleled use of δυστυχία or exonerates Thyestes to a degree contradicted by θνατᾶς δίκας in the following verse.

εὐτυχία at Troy (cf. 8–9); and it is the condition inherited by his children, the poor mismatched Electra (49, 301, 1005; cf. *δυσδαίμονος*, 199) and the exiled Orestes (398, 403, 690, 889). On the other hand, Aegisthus fears *δίκη* for the murder of Agamemnon (cf. 40–42);¹⁷ Electra wishes *δίκη* from Aegisthus for her own misfortunes (cf. 266–69); and Orestes obtains *δίκη* in slaying Aegisthus (584, 676, 771, 953, 955, 958).

Such then are the implications of the myth: that Orestes' return has been contrived by Zeus to achieve justice by ousting Aegisthus from the throne which legitimately belongs to the Atreids. The chorus, however, refuses to believe the myth that Zeus intervened in human affairs, causing the celestial changes in order to achieve justice (737–41). As we noted earlier, the chorus consciously speaks only of the myth of Thyestes; but, because of the parallel between past and present, when the chorus comments on the myth, it also unconsciously comments on the events of the play. Thus, the chorus, by denying that the celestial changes were sent by Zeus to secure justice, unwittingly also denies the parallel, that the return of Orestes and the slaying of Aegisthus are likewise Zeus's means of achieving justice. Some critics see not merely the chorus, but Euripides himself through his chorus, denying the myth and so denying that there is any supernatural dimension to the present events. According to these critics, Euripides is saying that Apollo's directions to Orestes are, like the celestial changes, nothing more than a pleasant tale, and that we are to judge the actions of Orestes (and Electra) in purely human terms. There is, however, nothing outside of the ode to support this interpretation of Euripides' intention. Rather, the evidence of the play consistently implies that there is a supernatural dimension to Orestes' actions. Before accepting the "atheist" solution, then, we should first consider if a "theist" interpretation of the ode is possible.

By denying the myth, the chorus implicitly denies the supernatural dimension of present events; but the chorus is not necessarily infallible—not all tragic choruses are. I would suggest that we reverse the parallel and argue from the present to the mythic past; for, if it can be shown that there is indeed a supernatural dimension to present events, then, because of the parallel, the chorus must be in error and the celestial changes must also have been the will of Zeus.

The chorus, it may be noted, nowhere denies the role of the gods in the present events. Indeed it has already twice expressed the view that the gods do intervene in human affairs and that they are capable of bringing victory over Aegisthus (193–97, 590–94). This "theist" view is shared by the other characters. Electra, in her opening speech, says that she carries the water jug to show Aegisthus' *ὑβρις* to the gods (58), presumably with the expectation or hope that they will punish him for it; and in her kommos she prays to Zeus for Orestes' return, to free her from her woes and to punish her enemies (135–39). Similarly, when Orestes first enters, he says that he has come *ἐκ θεοῦ μυστηρίων* to punish his father's murderers (87–89), and later

17. Similarly Aegisthus' rule is unjust (cf. 584, 878, and Sumner, "*Electra* 876–8," pp. 135–36), as was his adultery with Clytaemestra (cf. 920) which enabled him to gain the throne and its wealth (cf. 943).

he stresses the validity of Apollo's oracle which prophesied his return (399–400). When the old man recognizes Orestes, his first words are *ὦ πότνι', εὔχου, θύγατερ Ἥλέκτρα, θεοῖς* (563); for Orestes, now returned, is a *θησαυρόν, δν φαίνει θεός* (565). And, when Orestes contemplates the task of slaying Aegisthus he is confident (583–84):

*πέποιθα δ'· ἡ χρὴ μὴκέθ' ἡγείσθαι θεούς,
εἰ τᾶδικ' ἔσται τῆς δίκης ὑπέρτερα.*

Aegisthus, Orestes says, will have a bitter sharer of his feast *ἦν θεός θέλῃ* (638). Orestes, Electra, and the old man, in a brief but impressive prayer, together invoke Zeus, Hera, and Earth for success in slaying Aegisthus (671–79). Aegisthus is then slain, and to his first words of Aegisthus' death the messenger adds the now familiar refrain, *ἀλλὰ θεοῖσιν εὔχεσθαι χρεών* (764). At first Electra doubts the news (765), but, once she is convinced, her first response is, *ὦ θεοί, Δίκη τε πάνθ' ὀρώσ', ἡλθές ποτε* (771). And Orestes' first words when he enters after slaying Aegisthus are (890–92):

*θεοὺς μὲν ἡγοῦ πρώτων, Ἥλέκτρα, τύχης
ἀρχηγέτας τῆσδ', εἴτα καὶ ἐπαίνεσον
τὸν τῶν θεῶν τε τῆς τύχης θ' ὑπηρέτην.*

Consistently, then, throughout the play, not only does Euripides have his characters recognize the role of the gods in the return of Orestes and the slaying of Aegisthus, but he also emphasizes the supernatural dimension of these events by referring to it at prominent points in the speeches of his characters. Indeed, before our ode the only "atheist" statement denying the role of the gods occurs in the parodos, when Electra, responding to the chorus' pressures to attend the festival of Hera (190–97), answers that no god heeds her cries or the death of her father (198–200). Electra is pushed into this response by the badgering of the chorus, which cannot understand her reasons for not attending the festival; and her loss of faith is temporary. Yet even here Euripides contrives to refute Electra's atheist statement; for, at the very moment when she denies that the gods heed her prayers, Orestes, for whose return she had prayed to Zeus (135 ff.), is already present on the stage prepared to punish the murderers of his father (cf. 89). When Electra says that the gods do not care, the audience does not respond by agreeing with her. Rather they feel sympathy for her, because she is so distracted by her suffering that she cannot recognize what the audience knows, that Orestes has already returned.

Something similar occurs in the ode as well; for, in terms of the parallels which we have examined, the events of the play correspond to the theist myth and not to the denial of the myth by the chorus. Specifically, Orestes' return and the ouster of Aegisthus correspond to the celestial changes described in the myth. Now Orestes has in fact returned, and at the very moment when the chorus sings the ode, he is in the process of slaying Aegisthus. Through the parallel between present and past, the reality of Orestes' present action attests to the reality of the celestial changes in the past. Thus the chorus' denial of the "theist" myth is refuted, as was Electra's

earlier denial of the gods' willingness to intervene, by events occurring at the very moment of denial.

If the events of the play attest the validity of the myth, then conversely the purpose for divine intervention in the myth (*δυστυχία βροτείῳ θνατᾶς ἔνεκεν δίκας*, 741–42) will also be the purpose for divine intervention in the events of the play. We have already seen how similar language is used to describe Atreus' *δυστυχία* and the *δίκη* extracted from Thyestes on the one hand and the parallel *δυστυχία* of Agamemnon and his children and the *δίκη* extracted from Aegisthus on the other. This *δίκη* is more than a mortal concern. The gods and *δίκη* (in terms of the punishment of Aegisthus) are linked at key points in the play, by Orestes when he reveals himself to Electra (583–84); in the prayer of Orestes, Electra, and the old man (675–76); and by Electra when she welcomes the news of Aegisthus' death (771). And in our ode, too, we are reminded of Zeus's desire for *δίκη* at the very moment that *δίκη* is obtained through the death of Aegisthus.

The chorus concludes by addressing some words to the absent Clytaemestra. Had she remembered the myth, they sing, she would not have slain her husband (743–46). For Clytaemestra too, we are reminded, has her parallel in the myth, in the person of Aerope, Atreus' unfaithful wife. After he was restored to the throne, Atreus slew Aerope for her treason; and, the parallel implies, Clytaemestra will be slain by the restored Orestes. Like the slaying of Aegisthus, the slaying of Clytaemestra is a matter of both *δίκη* and divine will. Thus, for example, Electra speaks ironically of Clytaemestra's death as a sacrifice to the gods and as satisfaction (*δίκη*) which Clytaemestra will pay to Electra for the death of Agamemnon (1141–46).¹⁸ As the chorus awaits Clytaemestra's death, it sings of the *δίκη* coming to her for the adulterous murder of Agamemnon (1155); and, when it hears her death cry, it sings *νέμει τοι δίκαν θεός, ὅταν τύχη* (1169). There are expressions of pity for Clytaemestra (1168, 1170) and for Orestes and Electra who have had to slay their own mother (1172–76), but there is never any suggestion that Clytaemestra did not in justice deserve to die.

In conclusion, then, the ode tells how Thyestes stole the golden lamb and the throne of Argos from Atreus, and how Atreus was restored by Zeus, who caused sun and stars to reverse their path. This myth is remarkably parallel to the events of the play: the murder of Agamemnon, the illegitimate rule of Aegisthus, the return of Orestes, and Aegisthus' death. The parallel between myth and reality is emphasized by patterns of images which link the golden lamb with Argive kingship and the celestial phenomena with Orestes. The parallel extends beyond the events to their causes. Zeus intervened in the myth to restore Atreus, and the characters of the play recognize that there is a similar supernatural dimension to the return of Orestes and the death of Aegisthus. Zeus's intervention secured *δίκη* in the myth as Aegisthus' death does in the play. The ode is principally concerned with the punishment of Aegisthus, but the brief address to Clytae-

18. The particular importance of *δίκη* in the relations between Electra and Clytaemestra is underlined by the repeated use of *δίκη* and similar words in the scene between the two women (1017, 1030, 1050, 1051, 1087, 1094, 1096).

mestra at its end prepares the way for the extension of the themes of *δίκη* and divine will to the death of Clytaemestra in the latter part of the play.

Euripides achieves all these effects in a roundabout way, through a myth which the chorus denies but which events vindicate. But the playwright also warns us of what he is about to do, when he has the chorus introduce the myth as a *κληδών ἐν πολιαῖσι . . . φήμαις* (700–701). The chorus means simply that the myth is a "tale among old legends." The words *κληδών* and *φήμη*, however, are both also used to describe a particular sort of divine sign or portent. Specifically, the *κληδών* or *φήμη* is a statement which is applicable to circumstances of which the listener is aware but the speaker is not. The Greeks saw in this coincidence proof that the statement was divinely inspired and valid in the circumstances recognized by the listener but unimagined by the speaker.¹⁹ In our ode the chorus thinks only of mythic history, the tale of Thyestes, and denies the divine intervention of the myth. The chorus' account of the myth, however, is a *κληδών* in the fullest sense of the word, because the audience will recognize the applicability of this myth of divine justice—and not the chorus' denial of the myth—to the tale of Aegisthus, who is being slain at this very moment. The chorus confirms the validity of the myth with another *κληδών* of its own. In the ode the chorus had described *τέρατα*, divine signs sent by Zeus, the golden lamb and the celestial changes. As the women finish their song they hear a cry which, we recognize, comes from the slaying of Aegisthus. The chorus likens the cry to *βροντὴ Διός* (748); and by so doing they confirm, without realizing it, the applicability of the myth to present events. For thunder (to which the sound of the slaying of Aegisthus is compared) is perhaps the most typical *τέρας* sent by Zeus.

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19. "... die sog. *κληδόνες* oder *φήμαι*, Worte oder Laute, die zur guten Stunde gesprochen oder vernommen werden, absichtslos und anscheinend nichtssagend, aber doch bedeutend durch irgend ein auffälliges Zusammentreffen und ein plötzlich sich aufdrängende Beziehung" (P. Stengel, *Die griechischen Kultusaltertümer*³ [Munich, 1920], p. 55). See also A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1879), pp. 154–60.