

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

A NOTE ON *EUMENIDES* 292–97

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

But, whether she is in the Libyan country, near the stream of Triton, the ford where she was born, at rest or in motion, aiding friends, or whether she oversees the Phlegraean plain, like a brave general, may she come.

With these words, Orestes invokes Athena's aid against the pursuing Erinyes, as he arrives in Athens. Attempts to explain the meaning of these lines have been primarily concerned with finding in them some allusion to contemporary political events or, conversely, denying that they have any significance beyond the merely generic ritual invocation that is their ostensible motivation. I would suggest that this passage has both a contemporary political reference and a ritual significance; but in addition, it also has a thematic significance for the play as a whole, since Triton, as Athena's birthplace, represents the conflict between the sexes whose resolution depends upon the nature of her birth, while the Phlegraean plain, the scene of the Gigantomachy (Pind. *Nem.* 1.67–68), represents Athena's role in the struggle between older and younger gods, which is the other great conflict in the play.

Among many others who have commented on these lines, E. R. Dodds contends that the reference to Libya is an allusion to the current naval expedition to Egypt in support of Inarus (Thuc. 1.104.1).¹ However, Dodds' suggestion cannot account for the second half of the invocation, which refers to the Phlegraean plain. The invocation's symmetry of form (εἴτε . . . εἴτε)² seems to demand a symmetry of meaning in whatever allusion to contemporary events the passage is making, and Dodds admits that he cannot prove that there are any "goings-on" in Potidaea with which Athena might be dealing at the time of the play. C. W. MacLeod, on the other hand, considers whatever political reference these lines may contain to be secondary and argues against Dodds that the passage is primarily a ritual invocation of the goddess. Since Triton and Phlegra represent the most southerly and northerly sites with which Athena is associated, MacLeod argues, these lines implicitly praise her by

1. E. R. Dodds, "Morals and Politics in the *Oresteia*," *PCPS* 186 (1960): 20–21.

2. On the use of εἴτε . . . εἴτε (or *sive* . . . *sive*) as a common prayer formula, cf. E. Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Leipzig, 1913), pp. 144–47, G. Appel, *De Romanorum Precationibus* (Giessen, 1909), pp. 75–80, and J. G. Griffiths, *Apuleius of Madauros: The Isis-Book ("Metamorphoses," Book XI)* (Leiden, 1975), pp. 119–21.

attributing to her a very wide sphere of influence.³ This is all very well. But there is more to the choice of the two places than geographical distance. Our understanding of the passage will be significantly enhanced if we can look beyond the elements of ritual invocation and the reference to contemporary politics to see the broader thematic significance that maintains a symmetry of meaning that the form of the invocation demands.

The *Eumenides* (and indeed the entire *Oresteia*) contains two primary conflicts, one between the sexes and another between the generations, both of which are resolved by the end of the play. The sexual conflict is resolved at the decisive moment of the *Eumenides* by the acquittal of Orestes (752–53). This acquittal is the result of Apollo's insistence that the father alone is the parent of the child, for which he cites Athena's own birth from Zeus as evidence (663–66), and of Athena's endorsement of this argument as her reason for voting to acquit Orestes (735–38).⁴ Thus, the allusion to Triton as the birthplace of Athena (the text is careful to emphasize that the place is associated with her birth, γενεθλίου πόρου, 293) foreshadows the significance that the special nature of Athena's birth will have in the resolution of the sexual conflict. This reading is reinforced by the presence of masculine nouns, adjectives, and participles in 296–98, which Sommerstein has suggested also foreshadow Athena's role as a "partisan of the male" at Orestes' trial.⁵

Likewise, the reference to Phlegra, site of the Gigantomachy, is an allusion to the other great conflict in the play, the generational conflict. Much iconographic evidence⁶ as well as Euripides' *Ion* (206–11) identifies Athena as a participant in this battle, and the comparison of Athena to a ταγούχος in 296 reinforces the idea that Phlegra is the site of a battle. In the *Eumenides*, Orestes invokes Athena as he seeks refuge from the Erinyes, who have been complaining specifically about the younger generation of gods trampling the rights of the elder generation (150–53, 162–67, 171–72) and insisting on their own right to punish kindred bloodshed, in this case, the murder of the parent by the child (210). Now, the Erinyes and the Giants are quite directly associated as members of the same pre-Olympian generation in Hesiod (*Th.* 185), where the Giants are said to be born at the same time as the Erinyes, when the blood of castrated Uranos lands on Gaea. Admittedly, in the *Eumenides*, the Erinyes themselves are the daughters of Night (321–22), but that does not nullify the association of the Giants with the same elder generations of deities. Apollodorus (*Bibl.* 1.6.1–2) specifically states that the Gigantomachy is an intergenerational conflict in which the Giants attacked the Olympians to avenge the defeat of the Titans.

Although Apollodorus is not necessarily evidence for fifth-century perceptions of the Gigantomachy, there is iconographic evidence that suggests that the Gigantomachy could be confused with the Titanomachy in the fifth century; and a tradition going back at least to the time of Hesiod identifies the Titanomachy as an

3. C. W. MacLeod, "Politics and the *Oresteia*," *JHS* 102 (1982): 124–25.

4. F. Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the *Oresteia*," in *Women in the Ancient World*, ed. J. Peradotto and J. P. Sullivan (Albany, 1984), pp. 167–72. Also, M. Gagarin, *Aeschylean Drama* (Berkeley, 1976), p. 103.

5. A. H. Sommerstein, "Notes on the *Oresteia*," *BICS* 27 (1980): 72. Also, S. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The "Oresteia"* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 227.

6. F. Vian, *Répertoire des Gigantomachies Figurées dans L'Art Grec et Romain* (Paris, 1951), pp. 48–68. Also *LIMC*, s.v. Athena, cat. nos. 381–401.

intergenerational conflict. It was once thought that there were no iconographic representations of the Titanomachy, but this was challenged by J. Dörig's reexamination of some representations of the Gigantomachy. Dörig argues that originally iconographic representations of the Gigantomachy and the Titanomachy were sharply distinguished, but that the two battles began to be confused in the fifth century.⁷ There is literary evidence that fourth- and fifth-century Athenians could fail to distinguish certain artistic representations of these battles. In two different plays, Euripides refers to the battle represented on the Panathenaic πέπλος as a Titanomachy (*Hec.* 468–73, *IT* 224), but Plato refers to it as a Gigantomachy (*Resp.* 378C).⁸ Furthermore, Plato appears to interpret the πέπλος Gigantomachy specifically as an intergenerational struggle in the *Euthyphro* (6B). Shortly after Euthyphro has attempted to justify his prosecution of his father by appealing to the conflict between Zeus and Kronos, Socrates expresses his distaste for such corrupting depictions of intergenerational strife and cites the πέπλος Gigantomachy as a particularly prominent example. So Plato, an authority much closer to Aeschylus' time than Apollodorus, could also interpret the Gigantomachy as an intergenerational struggle. Thus, Aeschylus' reference to the Gigantomachy and to Athena's role in it is surely a foreshadowing of her generational allegiance as Orestes invokes her help against the Erinyes, who complain of the transgressions of younger gods on the divine plane and claim the right to punish transgressions against generational order in the human realm.

I believe that this interpretation of the invocation of Athena shows that it has a meaning for the play as a whole which goes beyond that of ritual invocation of the goddess to foreshadow the two major conflicts in the play. This interpretation retains the symmetry of signification that the form of the invocation (εἴτε . . . εἴτε) surely insists upon, a symmetry that a direct reference to political events could not maintain.⁹

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7. J. Dörig and O. Gigon, *Der Kampf der Götter und Titanen* (Olton and Lausanne, 1961), p. 15.

8. I owe this observation about Euripides' and Plato's interpretations of the πέπλος to T. H. Carpenter, *Dionysian Imagery in Archaic Greek Art* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 60–61.

9. The author wishes to thank E. Cook, B. Goff, T. Hubbard, D. Martinez, M. Gagarin, H. Fredricksmeyer, and the two anonymous referees for useful suggestions on improving this note.

MACROCOLLUM

In a recent issue of this journal, I argued that the frequency of joins in a roll of papyrus was important in the determination of a roll's quality.¹ The higher grades had wider sheets, hence fewer joins and fewer disruptions to the writing surface. Thus it is that Pliny in his account of the grades of papyrus (*HN* 13.74–78) gives details of sheet width but says nothing of the roll height. Here I rely on this argument

1. "Pliny the Elder and Standardized Roll Heights in the Manufacture of Papyrus," *CP* 88 (1993): 46–50.