

## ESSAY

### THE FURIES' HOMECOMING

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THE *ORESTEIA* CULMINATES NOT, as one might expect, in the resolution of the problems of Agamemnon's heir in Argos, but in the establishment of a *chorus* of Furies in a new home in Athens. It is this shift of attention from mortal individuals to a chorus of divinities that I will try to elucidate here by showing how the whole trilogy builds toward that culmination in Athens.

Two sacred and related institutions—animal sacrifice, the shared feast of mortals and gods, and hospitality, the relation of host and guest—permeate the trilogy, both as actual occurrences and as figures of speech, and achieve climactic expression in the final scene of *Eumenides* in which the Furies become the beneficiaries of Athenian hospitality in two forms—a cult, which includes an invitation to participate in a recurrent sacrificial feast in their honor, and a permanent home in a cave under the hill of Ares. In an operatic finale they sing a song of blessing for the city, and now, robed in red instead of black,<sup>1</sup> proceed to their new abode with a ceremonial escort of torch-bearing, singing Athenians. We need to consider what these two institutions, sacrificial feast and hospitality, meant in Aeschylus' society in order to understand the meaning of this pageant and its relation to the rest of the trilogy.

Participants in the sacrificial feast receive portions of the sacrificed animal appropriate to their station—for the gods the smoke from the bones and fat burned on the altar, for mortals cuts of meat according to their rank. Sacrifice thus, by confirming every participant's proper place, consolidates community and social order. Disruption in the community is mirrored in

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1. For details of the finale, see pp. 51–52, 54 and 57–59 below, as well as P. E. Easterling, "Tragedy and Ritual," *Metis* 3 (1988): 87–109; A. H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus: "Eumenides"* (Cambridge, 1989), 260–86; E. A. M. Visser, "The Erinyes: Their Character and Function in Classical Greek Literature and Thought" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1980), 149; and J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, "Hunting and Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, trans. J. Lloyd (New York, 1988), 141–59.

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disruption in the ritual of slaughter and feasting, which in turn results in further disruption.<sup>2</sup>

In two pivotal articles Froma Zeitlin has shown that the antecedents and the actual events of the trilogy involve a series of such sacrificial feasts, all disrupted by the fact that the sacrificed victim is a human being rather than a domestic animal.<sup>3</sup> Thyestes' children, slaughtered and fed to their father, begin the chain of violations. Iphigeneia is offered up to Artemis "like a goat" (Ag. 232). Agamemnon is slaughtered like a sacrificial ox (e.g., Ag. 1126, 1384–87, 1432–33), and Cassandra after him. Clytemnestra is sacrificed to the shade of Agamemnon by Orestes. The Furies view Orestes as their consecrated victim (*Eum.* 304), though they fail to achieve their goal of devouring him alive. Feasting as well as slaughter figures in each case, literally or figuratively. Thyestes' children are literally consumed by their father. Clytemnestra describes Cassandra's death as a relish to her enjoyment of vengeance (*paropsonema*, Ag. 1446–47). The chorus point out that Iphigeneia, the sacrificial animal, is *not* feasted on (*adaiton*, Ag. 150)—a disruption of normal sacrificial procedure that is a sign of the communal disruption caused by kindred murder. In *Eumenides* the Furies relish the smell of human blood like hungry hunting dogs (253). They refer to Orestes as food (*boske* 226, *boskema* 302), "consecrate to me and fattened for my feast" (304). Their threat to feed on him *live* (265–68, 305), "not cut down first at the altar" (305–6), is an even more extreme violation of normal ritual.

The communal disruption of which ritual disruption is a symptom is felt to be a kind of pollution, *miasma*. Miasma literally *infects* communities where the laws on which their survival depends have been violated. These are the so-called unwritten laws ordained by the Fates, the Moirai, ancient gods, having the same mother as the Furies (*Eum.* 962), daughters of night (*Eum.* 322, 416, 745, 844).<sup>4</sup>

These laws enjoin reverence for the gods, for kindred, for strangers, for suppliants, for oaths. Gods as well as mortals are subject to the Moirai and their laws. Zeus holds sway over gods and mortals only as long as he observes and enforces these laws. Pollution is the rage of and for victims of violations of these most sacred and fundamental ties—the rage of defied or disregarded gods, of abused or murdered blood relatives, of hosts and

2. For feast and sacrifice as affirmation of community and social order see W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. J. Raffan (Cambridge, 1985), 54–59, 254–60. On the disastrous consequences for the community of violations of fundamental social and religious procedure, see R. Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1983), passim, esp. 2–10. F. Zeitlin's pioneering articles, "The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 96 (1965): 463–508, and "Postscript to Sacrificial Imagery in the *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 97 (1966): 645–53, are the obligatory point of departure for all subsequent interpretations of disruptions of sacrificial ritual in the *Oresteia*. See too Vidal-Naquet, "Hunting and Sacrifice" (n. 1 above), 141–59, building on Zeitlin. That hunting imagery is used for "corrupted" sacrifice throughout the trilogy until feast and sacrifice are finally linked to homecoming is my contribution.

3. Zeitlin, "Corrupted Sacrifice" and "Sacrificial Imagery" (n. 2 above).

4. In Hesiod the Furies are not included with the Moirai among the children of Night (*Theog.* 217), but are said to have sprung from the blood of the emasculated Uranus (*Theog.* 183–85). On the implications of this departure from Hesiod's version, see F. Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus* (Ithaca, 1949), 178–86. Compare to Sommerstein, "*Eumenides*" (n. 1 above), 8–9.

guests and accepters of oaths betrayed.<sup>5</sup> The Furies are neither anarchic, primitive spirits of violence nor servants of Zeus, but Zeus' unseen collaborators as guardians and enforcers of those laws that are an essential part of the cosmic order that the father of gods and men administers.

Many critics, including myself in earlier versions of this essay, have represented the Furies as servants of Zeus who at his behest enforce the unwritten laws from the beginning of the trilogy.<sup>6</sup> But this takes the language of *Agamemnon* too literally. Nowhere in the play or the trilogy is Zeus said to control the Furies. He sends against Troy not the Furies themselves, but their embodiments, Agamemnon and Menelaus (Ag. 40–62, 104–21).<sup>7</sup> His instruments in the enforcement of the unwritten laws of the Moirai are not the Furies but the human victims of violations. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are punished by Orestes acting at Zeus' behest, conveyed by Zeus' son Apollo (*Cho.* 269–97, 900–902, *Eum.* 614–21). The Furies and Zeus act in parallel as enforcers of the unwritten laws. In *Agamemnon* and *Choe-phoroe* the Furies are the invisible energizers of the human implementers of the principle that the doer must suffer.

Where violation results in pollution, Zeus himself sends, as in the opening chorus of *Agamemnon* (cited above), human surrogates of the Furies, the avenging Atreidai, to reaffirm the law. Curbing the transgressor will prevent the fearful rage that the violation has unleashed from spreading like an unchecked epidemic and destroying the community.<sup>8</sup> We encounter this fury-rage in Clytemnestra's chilling declarations, in Electra's and Orestes' frenzied invocation of Agamemnon's spirit, in Apollo's description (cited above) of what awaits Orestes if he does *not* avenge his father, and finally, *personified* in the Furies themselves, when Orestes *does* avenge his father and is acquitted in Athens. This rage is both a necessary corrective to outrage and a potential source of further outrage. It is the cause of the tone of foreboding in the opening chorus of *Agamemnon*, in which they refer to "a fearful, repeatedly-breaking-out, house-keeping, crafty, remembering, child-avenging [which also can mean exacting-vengeance-by-children] *wrath*" (154–55, my literal translation). This unforgetting, house-keeping (*oikonomos*) rage, originating in the murder of the children of Thyestes, breaks out, like an infectious disease, in each succeeding generation of the house of Atreus. We should be able to recognize from our own experience

5. E.g., R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1980), 208–9; C. Meier, *The Political Art of Greek Tragedy*, trans. A. Webber (Baltimore, 1993), 112.

6. For more on the unwritten laws, see Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus* (n. 4 above), 198–99; cf. Hes. *Op.* 327–34. For miasma and violation of unwritten laws, see Parker, *Miasma* (n. 2 above), passim, esp. 144–206. The Furies' function in both history and iconography is conveniently summarized by Sommerstein, "*Eumenides*," 6–7. For more on the iconography, see A. J. N. W. Prag, *The Oresteia: Iconographic and Narrative Tradition* (Chicago, 1985), p. 201, index, s.v. "Furies;" and H. Sarian, "Erinyes," *LIMC* 3 (1986).

7. For the Furies as servants of the Moirai, not Zeus, see Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus*, 189. On the Moirai, see also R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge, 1983), 154–74. For Zeus and the Furies, see A. L. Brown, "The Erinyes in the *Oresteia*," *JHS* 103 (1983): 13–34, at 27. Solmsen (186–89, 197) tends to emphasize the Furies' bonds with the Moirai, independent of Zeus.

8. For a discussion of the Furies' hiding within mortals who are both their victims and their agents, see R. Padel, *In and Out of Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self* (Princeton, 1992), 80–81. For Fury surrogates, see C. Chiasson, "Lecythia and the Justice of Zeus in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *Phoenix* 42 (1988): 1–21, at 7, though he too seems to take this as evidence of interaction with Zeus.

of victimized people that the Furies, who personify this rage, represent a universal psychological reality, not an outmoded "primitive" superstition. This fury endangers not only individual members of the house of Atreus but the whole Argive community over which Atreus' descendants rule. Before and after the murder of Agamemnon the chorus brood not just about Agamemnon's fate but about the danger to the state, about the lurking anger of the Argives over the loss of relatives before Troy (Ag. 429–60). This anger helps activate the coup d'état and Aegisthus' usurpation of power. Proliferating throughout Argos from generation to generation it corrupts every one of the sacrificial feasts around which the trilogy is structured.

Except in the case of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, which facilitates a departure, each of these sacrificial "feasts" is occasioned by a homecoming. Thyestes, coming home from exile as a suppliant, is invited by his brother Atreus to a feast of reconciliation. Agamemnon becomes the sacrificial ox in Clytemnestra's celebration of *his* homecoming. Orestes comes home from exile and sacrifices Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, and the chorus raise the victory cry in preparation for a would-be celebration of his triumphant return to assume the kingship (Ag. 935–71). Beginning with the watchman's frustrated longing to join in the dances that will celebrate his master's victorious homecoming (Ag. 26–30), the action of the trilogy is a series of attempts to perform a sacrificial rite that will celebrate a homecoming and mark the end of rage and violence in Argos. Until the finale of *Eumenides* all are abortive. In *Agamemnon* the chorus salute Agamemnon as victor and find themselves mourning his death. After Clytemnestra slaughters her victims in the name of justice Aegisthus grandly proclaims the triumph of justice and the end of pollution (Ag. 1577–1611), but the play ends in confrontation portending new outrage. In *Choephoroe* the chorus proclaim the victory of justice and the departure of the Furies (935–71), but their cry of joy only signals the outbreak of new wrath as the Furies drive Orestes from the home to which he has just returned.

In *Eumenides* the sacrifice of Orestes is averted. In a traditional denouement, Orestes is delivered from the status of hunted animal (*Eum.* 754–60) and restored to the human community. At last he *can* go home. The Furies have left Argos, and the legitimate kingship has been restored. But these events are not celebrated on stage. The celebration that takes place *onstage* in the finale is for the installation of the Furies in a new home. All the elements of the traditional victory feast are present—Athena's proclamation of a victory (*Eum.* 974–75, 1009), and, in the closing stanzas, the chorus' victory cry (*Eum.* 1043 and 1047) and their announcement of the animal sacrifices (*Eum.* 1006, 1037) and of the libations of wine (*Eum.* 1044) that are the prelude to feasting.<sup>9</sup>

This onstage celebration occurs after Athena and her Athenians take the daring and untraditional step of solving the problem of the presence of raging

9. For more on the victory feast, the announcement of animal sacrifices, and the fact that the sacrificial victim is onstage, see the discussion of *Eum.* 1006 in Easterling, "Tragedy and Ritual" (n. 1 above), 7–24. See also Sommerstein, "*Eumenides*," 276, on *Eum.* 1021–47 and Vidal-Naquet, "Hunting and Sacrifice," 141–59.

Furies not by getting rid of them but by offering them a home and a cult. The Furies, whose presence is normally a sign of pollution, take up permanent residence in Athens *without pollution*, acquiring a new status as honored guests instead of outsiders to be driven off. In this final scene, the emphasis shifts (it has indeed been gradually shifting throughout this last play) from the problems of Argos and the house of Atreus to the Furies' role in the cosmos and Athens' role in clarifying it. *This* is the homecoming feast and sacrifice, rather than that of Orestes, towards which the action of the whole trilogy has been building from the watchman's speech on.

Inextricably linked as they are to feast and sacrifice, all the outrages of the *Oresteia* are also involved with relations of host and guest—the sacred bond of hospitality. *Xenos* (stranger) can designate an alien, a potentially evil or dangerous person. But it can also mean both host and guest. *Xenia*, the institution of hospitality, is the unwritten law that unites these.<sup>10</sup> Thyestes is Atreus' guest, his *xenos*. Paris' abduction of Helen while he is Menelaus' guest is a violation of *xenia*. Zeus Xenios ("Zeus of Strangers") presides over the whole action of the trilogy and sends the sons of Atreus like avenging Furies in pursuit of Paris (Ag. 60–61, 361, 748). Orestes and Pylades present themselves as *xenoi* (strangers/guests) asking for hospitality, and Clytemnestra as hostess fulsomely welcomes them. In Delphi and Athens Orestes is a suppliant, a special category of guest.<sup>11</sup> His status as guest/suppliant, which the Furies are on the verge of violating, as Apollo makes clear (*Eum.* 90–93), is sacrosanct. The outcome of the trial hinges on two arguments made by Apollo (p. 56), most importantly that the mother is not related to the child by blood but by the sacred bond of *xenia*: she is *trophos* (nurse) and *xene* (hostess) who provides nurture to a *xenos* (guest, *Eum.* 658–61). Secondly, he argues that the marriage bond, which also joins two *xenoi*, is equally sacred (*Eum.* 313–18 and 625–39). The Furies claim that Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon is less sacrilegious than Orestes' matricide, since it violates no blood bond (*Eum.* 605), but Apollo argues that, like Orestes, she violates not a blood bond but a bond between *xenoi*, or rather two such sacred bonds—that between husband and wife (*gunaikos*, 627) and that between king and subject. The institutions of hospitality, suppliance, marriage, kingship, which link people not related by blood, are throughout the trilogy given near equal weight with blood kinship.<sup>12</sup> Their violation, like the violation of the blood bond, also results in an outbreak of polluting rage that disrupts social order. In the outcome, the preservation of *all* these laws, including the blood bond, will be affirmed as the function of the Furies and the court.

Foreigners, outsiders, also have crucial roles *outside* the context of hospitality. As outsiders, victims and advocates of vengeance, Cassandra in *Agamemnon* and the chorus and the nurse of *Choephoroe* prefigure the ul-

10. E. Belfiore, "Xenia in Sophocles' *Philoctetes*," *CJ* 89 (1994): 113–29, esp. 117, for both formal and informal *xenia* relationships. For *xenia* as an aspect of ritualized friendship, see G. Herman, *Ritualised Friendship in the Greek City State* (Cambridge, 1987), 118–28.

11. For suppliancy as *xenia*, see J. Gould, "Hiketeia," *JHS* 93 (1973): 74–103, at 79, 99–100; Belfiore, "Xenia" (n. 10 above), 115; and Herman, *Ritualised Friendship* (n. 10 above), 54–58.

12. That Apollo's ruling is not a quibble but crucial, see Visser, "Erinyes" (n. 1 above), 205.

intimate outsiders, the Furies themselves, and function as their surrogates. All three are foreigners and slaves, urge retribution, and exhibit other Fury attributes and functions.<sup>13</sup> Cassandra is a newly captured prisoner of war reduced to slavery, dragged from a violated hearth. Like the Furies, she sniffs out blood like a keen-scented dog (Ag. 1092–93, 1184–85, 1309). Before she enters the polluted palace she disavows Apollo (Ag. 1248) by stripping off his insignia (Ag. 1264–72) and then invokes the avenger Orestes (Ag. 1279–85, 1316–20). Apollo, the god of purifications, has no place in the world of the Furies to which Cassandra is now dedicated.

Like Cassandra, the chorus of *Choephorae* are prisoners of war reduced to slave status, victims from outraged homes (*Cho.* 75–77), which makes it easy for them to side with Electra and Orestes. They are longtime intimate domestic servants (*Cho.* 84) to whom Electra turns for advice because of their greater age (*Cho.* 171). They share with the Furies their advanced age, their black robes (*Cho.* 10), the distraught gestures of their entrance (*Cho.* 22–23), their role as keepers of Agamemnon's house (*Cho.* 84; cf. Ag. 154–55), and most of all their role as inciters and implementers of vengeance. They urge Electra to pray for Orestes' return and for matricide (*Cho.* 115–23). As the Furies literally lash to madness those on whom the burden of executing vengeance is laid (*Cho.* 283–96), the chorus figuratively lash Electra and Orestes into *fury* and keep their minds on vengeance (*Cho.* 306–478, 512–13). On the level of action they help to implement vengeance by participating in Orestes' plot (*Cho.* 581–84) and intervening directly with the crucial instruction to the nurse to tell Aegisthus that Clytemnestra bids him return to the palace without his bodyguard. Finally they pray for Orestes' success and raise the victory cry after the matricide.

The nurse, like the chorus a foreign female slave and longtime domestic servant, sides with the victimized child, Orestes, against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. As the bearer of the lying message to Aegisthus she, like the Atreidai, Clytemnestra, and Orestes, is an implementer of vengeance. As I hope will become apparent, in her role as cherisher of the infant Orestes she also anticipates the benign aspect of the Furies that is manifested in the finale. Along with Cassandra and the chorus of female slaves, the nurse prefigures both aspects of the ultimate outsiders, the Furies. In an ironic way, Orestes and Electra too qualify as outsiders of this kind since they are strangers and victims in their own home, as well as ultimately inflictors of retribution.

The Furies are emphatically marked out as strangers, at first in a purely negative sense, cosmic outcasts, unknown to Olympians and mortals. The Delphic priestess doesn't know who or what they are (*Eum.* 46–59). Apollo, expelling them from his temple, reviles them as "spat upon by the gods" because of their cannibalistic feasts and grisly associations (*Eum.* 179–97). According to him, "neither gods, nor mortals, nor beasts associate with them . . . they inhabit the darkness of Tartarus beneath the earth, objects of

13. For a discussion of how the chorus of the *Choephorae* prefigure the Furies, see M. McCall, "The Chorus of Aeschylus," in *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*, ed. M. Griffith and D. J. Mastronarde (Atlanta, 1990), 17–30; and T. G. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* (Berkeley, 1982), 168–73.

hatred to mortals and Olympian gods" (*Eum.* 67–73, my literal translation). Children of Night, they belong to darkness. They claim that no god comes to their cannibalistic feasts, that their black robes mark them as *excluded from the white-robed sacrificial feasts* of gods and mortals (*Eum.* 349–52). But when they accept Athena's offer of a home and a cult in Athens, this outcast status is ended. The establishment of a cult signifies their integration into the sacrificial community of gods and mortals. Henceforth they will dwell not in the darkness of Tartarus but in a cave under the hill of Ares. Instead of their cannibalistic feasts in outer darkness they will share the sacrificial feasts of gods and mortals, which form the central motif of the trilogy. As already pointed out, the finale celebrates their "homecoming" to Athens with animal, not human, sacrifice and libations of wine, not blood.

As she begins her farewell to the Furies, Athena calls them *metoikoi* (*Eum.* 1011, literally, "settlers"; Lattimore translates "guests of the state"). They acknowledge this status when they refer to "my *metoikia*" ("settlement," *Eum.* 101; Lattimore, "guestship"). *Metoikoi*, a special group of resident aliens in Athens, enjoyed certain privileges of citizenship, including that of participation in the Panathenaea, the procession and sacrificial feast in honor of Athena that was celebrated with great pomp every four years. On this ceremonial occasion the red robes of the metics (*metoikoi*) distinguished them from the native Athenians.<sup>14</sup> When the Furies exchange their black robes for red, as Athena's last speech implies they do (*Eum.* 1127–28, though the text here is slightly confused), this act explicitly affirms their status as divine *metoikoi*, outsiders originally without civic status, who have become insiders by being integrated into the sacrificial community of gods and mortals.

Orestes undergoes a comparable but not identical change of status. He takes refuge in Delphi as a polluted outcast. Apollo rids him of pollution but until the court confirms this, he remains essentially stateless, unable to return home and claim his birthright. On being acquitted he says to Athena, "it was you who *restored me to my home* [*su toi katoikisas me*, *Eum.* 767] and among the Hellenes they shall say '*The man is alive again* and lives in his ancestral wealth'" (*Eum.* 754–58, my literalization of Lattimore). Orestes however is restored to his *old* home whereas the Furies find a *new* home.

What happens at the center of the trilogy just before the murders throws more light on both these homecomings.

Two juxtaposed scenes of *Choephoroe*, framed by two powerful choral songs, focus intensely on major aspects of the trilogy. In the first of these scenes Pylades and Orestes present themselves to Clytemnestra with the false message of Orestes' death; in the second the nurse, on her way to fetch Aegisthus, grieves at that news. These two scenes form the center of this play and of the trilogy in several ways. Numerically, they are preceded and

14. For the red robes of metics, see W. Headlam, "The Last Scene of the *Eumenides*," *JHS* 26 (1906): 268–77, at 272–74; G. Thomson, ed., *The "Oresteia" of Aeschylus*, new rev. and enl. ed. (Amsterdam, 1966), 2: 231–33 on *Eum.* lines 1027–31; Sommerstein, "*Eumenides*," 281, on *Eum.* 1028; and Visser, "Erinyes," 149.

followed by roughly equal numbers of lines. Dramatically, the trap is set when Orestes and Pylades gain entrance to the palace and Aegisthus is induced by a false message carried by the nurse to return without his body-guard. There is now no escape for Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Thematically, they set the stage for Apollo's argument that a mother is a hostess and a nurse, not a blood relative, as mother and son have their first on-stage encounter, in the roles of hostess and guest. Aeschylus underlines this by using *xenos* and its compounds thirteen times in this sixty-six-line scene. The nurse shows herself to be more truly a mother than the woman who gave Orestes birth, not only by her unfeigned grief but by virtue of the fact that it is she who has performed the role as Apollo will describe it (*Cho.* 658–61) in the passage already mentioned: "The mother is not parent [*tokeus*] of that which is called her child, but only nurse [*tropheus*] of the new-planted seed that grows. The parent is he who mounts. A stranger [*xene*] she preserves [*esosen*] the young plant for a stranger [*xenōi*, i.e., the father] if no god harm it." The mother is the protector and the nurturer.<sup>15</sup> It is the nurse, the alien stranger, not Clytemnestra, who "saved" the child for maturity by performing those homely services of nurture and diaper-changing, which she describes so graphically. By juxtaposing Clytemnestra and the nurse receiving the news of Orestes' death Aeschylus anticipates on an emotional level Apollo's argument that in killing Clytemnestra Orestes is violating not a blood bond but a bond of *xenia*. But the nurse not only receives the child from the father and "saves" it by providing nurture, she is also directly involved in the implementation of retribution. The cherishing maternal figure who turns to violence to avenge the memory of Orestes and Agamemnon anticipates, as I have already suggested, both the violence of the Furies and the benign aspect that manifests itself at the end of *Eumenides*.<sup>16</sup>

Finally the two choral odes that frame these two scenes bring into the foreground the lurking fear that has haunted the action so far and will become increasingly prominent in the second half of the trilogy. This fear is generalized in the first of these odes, which ends a list of monstrous and terrifying deeds by singling out "the child" (*teknon*, Orestes), whom the *Fury* (*Erinys*) brings home to perform one more terrifying, if necessary, deed (*Cho.* 649–51).<sup>17</sup> This fear is made specific in the second choral ode, a prayer for Orestes' success after the nurse goes for Aegisthus. After invoking the gods of the house the chorus admonish Orestes, at the dreadful moment when he faces his mother sword in hand and she appeals to him as "child" (*teknon* 827–37), to *summon up the heart of Perseus*. The reference to Perseus clarifies the nature of Orestes' ordeal. Perseus confronted and conquered the Gorgon whose terrifying face turned people to stone. Either by averting his head or by looking at her image reflected in his shield, he avoided the stony paralysis of fear. Like Orestes he achieved this feat with

15. For an opposing view, see Sommerstein's commentary on lines 658–61 in "*Eumenides*," 209.

16. See Padel, *In and Out* (n. 8 above), 104–6, on the Nurse's double function as parallel to other chthonic deities, including the Furies.

17. This ode (*Cho.* 585–656) has a broader reference than is usually recognized. See A. F. Garvie, ed. "*Choephoroi*" (Oxford, 1986), 201–25.



the help of Athena and Hermes.<sup>18</sup> Clytemnestra, who has been repeatedly compared to a Fury, is here assimilated to the Gorgon by the chorus. A little later the Furies are also assimilated to Gorgons, by Orestes as he is going mad after the murder (*Cho.* 1048) and by the Delphic priestess when she stumbles on them in Apollo's shrine (*Eum.* 48).

Both before and after the murder Orestes' problem is fear of the Gorgon-like Furies. The murder scene of *Choephoroe* parallels the situation evoked by the preceding choral ode. Facing his mother sword in hand as she calls him "child," Orestes is almost turned to stone. Pylades' reminder of Apollo's oracle begins the process of preventing this paralysis (*Cho.* 900–902). In the line-for-line exchange with Clytemnestra that follows, in which she continues to call him "child" (*pai*, 896, *teknon*, 910, 922), Orestes *consciously* confronts his mother with what she has done, exposing each of her self-justifications. He maintains his self-control by *shedding light* on the nature of her actions. Contrast the mood of gloating anger in which Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon.

This is the beginning of coping with the immobilizing fear of the Gorgon face by *bringing it into the light*. But Orestes' temporary madness shows that the process is not yet complete. Apollo, as he consigns Orestes to the protection of Perseus' two helpers, Hermes and Athena, warns against fear in dealing with the Furies (*Eum.* 88): "Remember, do not let fear [*phobos*] overcome your judgment [*phrenas*]" (my translation). It is only after purification at Delphi that the Furies can no longer make Orestes lose control. Their "binding" song that is designed to drive him mad fails to do so. At the trial he is coherent and self-possessed.

The trial is the final stage of confrontation for Orestes but not for the Furies. Apollo's discrimination, already described, between the father's relation to the child by the bond of blood and the mother's relation, as nurse or stranger/hostess, by the bond of hospitality, is not a quibble but a fundamental clarification both of Orestes' situation and of the Furies' future role in Athens. In a surprising inversion Aeschylus represents the female role as that of culture, *xenia*. The nurse describes her maternal activities not in terms of nature but as exercising the *crafts* (*cheironaxias*, *Cho.* 761) of laundress, fuller, and nurse in order to help an infant "like a beast" (*boton*, *Cho.* 753) grow into a human being. The *father* has the role of nature. In Apollo's words, "the parent is he who mounts" (*Eum.* 660). The male engenders like an animal; the female nurtures with her skills.<sup>19</sup>

18. The assimilation of the Gorgon and the Fury by way of the comparison of Orestes to Perseus is the culminating duality of the trilogy. See B. C. Dietrich, *Death, Fate, and the Gods: The Development of a Religious Idea in Greek Popular Belief and in Homer* (London, 1965), 143–44; Belfiore, "Xenia," 120; and J.-P. Vernant, "Feminine Figures of Death in Greece," in id., *Mortals and Immortals*, ed. F. Zeitlin (Princeton, 1991), 95–110.

19. The lack of a blood tie is usually interpreted as a denigration of the female, e.g., Winnington-Ingram, *Studies in Aeschylus* (n. 7 above), 154–74; and F. Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," in *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature* (Chicago, 1996), 87–119, at 106–9. Sommerstein in his commentary on *Eum.* 660 ("*Eumenides*," 209) remarks on the animality of *throiskon*, but still sees the passage as a denigration of the female. Padel, *In and Out*, 107, argues that Aeschylus makes the female passive, but she overlooks the active female cultural role. See also Meier, *Political Art* (n. 5 above), 35–36.

Apollo's ruling that the mother has the role of *culture* is part of the trilogy's insistence on the importance of *cultural* laws (*xenia*, marriage, etc.), in addition to laws of blood, and also on the Furies' obligation to enforce them.

The trial, with its fine discriminations that provide the basis for Orestes' acquittal, illustrates the court's future function. Apollo frees Orestes to act by enabling him to face Clytemnestra and *shed light* on her actions and his own by subjecting them to conscious scrutiny; in the same way, the court frees the Athenians to make rational decisions about fearful deeds like Orestes' by *bringing them into the light* and subjecting them to the same kind of scrutiny.<sup>20</sup> Institutionalizing this process provides a permanent way to check the proliferation of polluting rage and violence that such deeds engender. The court is a device for coping with the monstrous and the fearful, equivalent to the device that Athena gave Perseus. In addition, Apollo's presentation of the female contribution to culture, reinforced by the image of the nurse as practitioner of the civilizing arts of nurture, prepares for the Furies' role as nurturers of all aspects of culture in their new home in Athens.

It is in the last scene of *Eumenides* that the process of bringing hidden fearful things into the light of consciousness culminates in the emergence of the Furies from their native darkness to be recognized for what they are—not simply malign punishers too terrifying to associate with, but simultaneously powerfully creative forces to be welcomed into the sacrificial community of gods and mortals. In the course of the trilogy the Furies advance from being outcasts, inhabitants of outer darkness, working unseen by gods and mortals, to being legitimized members of the cosmic community, part of the *consciousness* of mortals and gods. Their presentation in the three plays is emblematic of this process. In *Agamemnon* they are visible only to Cassandra, shadowy forces, figures of speech, invisibly energizing moral agents of retribution. In *Choephores* they are implicit in the chorus, in the nurse, and in Orestes as he proves himself the fulfillment of Clytemnestra's dream. They determine the action but are still invisible, except to Orestes at the very end. In *Eumenides* they are fully visible as a principal actor. Their status in reality is reversed as they, *who were part of Clytemnestra's dream and Cassandra's and Orestes' visions*, now *dream* of Clytemnestra and Orestes. The dream has become the dreamer.<sup>21</sup> Through the court, of which the Furies will be the guarantors, Athena and the Athenians *recognize* the Furies and their function, make them part of consciousness, bring them into the light.

At each stage of this progression they have been not Zeus' subordinates in the enforcement of the decrees of Moira but autonomous divinities acting first invisibly in concert with him and then in visible opposition to his disposition of Orestes' case on the grounds that it violates the role assigned to them by Moira. In assenting to Athena's clarification they do not submit as subordinates but voluntarily choose as autonomous divinities to join the

20. On the shift from the curse to the court, see M. Detienne, *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, trans. J. Lloyd (New York, 1996), 104–5.

21. For a discussion of Clytemnestra as an *eidolon*, a product of the Furies' mind, see G. Devereux, *Dreams in Greek Tragedy: An Ethno-Psycho-Analytical Study* (Oxford, 1976), 150–64.

sacrificial community of gods and mortals as fully visible members. It is a change not of identity but of status—a new *relationship*, with fruitful possibilities for all creatures, human and divine, subject to the decrees of Moira. The Furies' initial resistance to the verdict of the trial on the grounds that it violates the role assigned to them by Moira threatens to put Zeus and Moira at odds. The threat of instability in the cosmos—a potential cosmic crisis—is precipitated by the verdict and resolved by Athena's clarification of the Furies' cosmic role. Their acceptance of their new status is an acknowledgment that Zeus and Moira are once more working in concert, as the end of the final chorus affirms (*Eum.* 1045–46).

This progression from darkness to light, from exclusion to inclusion, is paralleled by a shift in tone. In the first two plays and the beginning of *Eumenides* the Furies are grisly, bloodthirsty monsters. In their first exchanges with Athena a more courteous and affirmative side begins to appear. The song they sing just before the trial dwells not on their desire for blood but on their function as enforcers of the unwritten laws and on the crucial importance of *fear* in maintaining social order (*Eum.* 517–19). Athena in establishing the court reaffirms this *positive* aspect of fear as the basis of the court, the cornerstone of the city's well-being (*Eum.* 696–706). The Furies agree to become guardians of the court and accept a cult and a home in Athens because she finally persuades them that the court neither supersedes nor bypasses them but affirms the utility of fear and reaffirms and extends their function. Their benign side reaches its fullest expression in the song of blessing in which they reveal themselves as *nurturers* and fosterers of every form of physical and spiritual growth—childless, aged, alien females who perform the all-important cultural task of nurture at all levels—of land and crops and people, and of the spirit in the form of the laws and all other forms of human creativity. *After* this song Athena *reaffirms* the importance of fear with a reference to the terrible Fury faces that stampeded the Delphic priestess and Orestes into panic: "From these *fearful* [*phoberon*] *faces* I see great gain for these citizens" (*Eum.* 990–95, my translation). These spirits of blessing still have the terrible Gorgon face.<sup>22</sup> Like Orestes they have changed their status but not their fundamental identity. This is followed by the joyful initiation of the sacrificial celebration. The chorus exchange their black robes for red and the Athenians escort them to their new home with torches and song.

The blessing of Athens is the direct consequence of her ability to contemplate and give sanctuary first to Orestes and then to the Curses personified in the form of the goddesses who, as they tell Athena, are called Curses in their home under the earth (*Eum.* 417). The whole trilogy is designed to

22. On both the unity and the duality of the Furies, see recently, E. Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion* (Princeton, 1992), 9, 22; also Chiasson, "Lecythia" (n. 8 above), 18. On miasma vs. honor and revenge as social good, see Visser, "Erinyes," esp. 205–6. Burkert (*Greek Religion* [n. 2 above], 200–201) reaches a view of the two-sided Fury by a different, very interesting route. Rosenmeyer (*Aeschylus* [n. 13 above], 174–75) argues that the two sides of the Furies are mutually exclusive. For an argument that the Furies' nature is unchanged at the end of the play, see Vidal-Naquet, "Hunting and Sacrifice," 164–65.

show that the power of blessing is rooted in the power of the curse. The Furies are *both* Eumenides, kindly ones, tender nurses, and Erinyes, Furies, spirits of wrath and retribution. They haunt the trilogy in both forms.<sup>23</sup>

The Argives, with the help of Athens, rid the ruling house and the city of the bloody Fury revel. The Athenians, according to Aeschylus, recognize the Furies' function with the offer of a cult and a permanent home. Instead of banishing them to their ancestral darkness they bring them into the light of consciousness<sup>24</sup> to join the feasts of gods and mortals and receive their share of honor. Like Orestes and Perseus, with the help of Athena they find the resources to confront the face of fear and are rewarded with the discovery of its protective nurturing power.

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23. On the power of the Furies both to curse and to bless, see Padel, *In and Out*, 104.

24. See Padel, *In and Out*, 191–92, on the meaning of the final scene. See also Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles* (n. 5 above), 156–58; Brown, "The Erinyes" (n. 7 above), 28; and Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus*, 203–5.