

AESCHYLUS' *ORESTEIA* AND ARCHILOCHUS

In a recent article in this journal¹ M. L. West made the plausible suggestion that some features of the parodos of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, including the famous simile of the vultures deprived of their young, display the influence of Archilochus' celebrated epode in which Lycambes was admonished with the tale of the fox and the eagle.² I think a passage in the *Choephoroe* confirms his view.

One of the *Oresteia*'s most characteristic traits is the manner in which themes and images recur during the trilogy. The simile of the vultures at Ag. 48 ff. and the omen of the eagle and the hare at 112 ff. are conspicuously placed and vividly drawn, and we are not surprised to find a resumption of this imagery in the *Choephoroe*, when the eagle's nestlings, Electra and Orestes, are reunited and plan their revenge (*Cho.* 246–51, 255–9). Here we find the image reversed: the young have lost their parents, not the parent-birds their young as at Ag. 48 ff. I quote from *Cho* 243:

Ηλ. . . .	πιστὸς δ' ἀδελφὸς ἦσθ' ἐμοὶ σέβας φέρων · μόνον Κράτος τε καὶ Δίκη σὺν τῷ τρίτῳ πάντων μεγίστῳ Ζηνὶ συγγενιτό μοι.	245
Ορ.	Ζεῦ Ζεῦ, θεωρὸς τῶνδε πραγμάτων γενοῦ, ἰδοῦ δὲ γένναν εὖνῳ αἰετοῦ πατρὸς θανόντος ἐν πλεκταῖσι καὶ σπειράμασιν δεινῆς ἐχίδνης · τοὺς δ' ἀπωρφανισμένους νῆστις πιέζει λιμός · οὐ γὰρ ἐντελεῖς θήραν πατρῴαν προσφέρειν σκηνήμασιν. οὕτω δὲ κάμε τήνδε τ', Ἠλέκτραν λέγω, ἰδεῖν πάρεστί σοι, πατροστερὴ γόνον . . .	
255 ff. . . .	καίτοι θυτήρος καὶ σε τιμώντος μέγα πατρὸς νεοσσούς τοῦσδ' ἀποφθείρας πόθεν ἔξεις ὁμοίας χειρὸς εὐθουινον γέρας; οὐτ' αἰετοῦ γένεθλ' ἀποφθείρας πάλιν πέμπειν ἔχοις ἂν σήματ' εὐπιθὴ βροτοῖς, οὐτ' ἀρχικός σοι πᾶς ὄδ' ἀνανθείς πυθμῆν βωμοῖς ἀρήξει βουθύτοις ἐν ἡμασιν . . .	

On this passage Headlam³ wrote: 'I strongly suspect that the line (sc. 245)

¹ 'The Parodos of the *Agamemnon*', *CQ* N.S. 29 (1979), 1–6.

² Archilochus, fr. 88–95 Diels = fr. 172–81 West.

³ *ap.* G. Thomson, *The Oresteia of Aeschylus* (Cambridge, 1938), p. 180. In the second edition (Amsterdam and Prague, 1966) Thomson rejects Headlam's idea, but admits that *πρηγμάτων* is unexplained. Dawe's conjecture *πηγμάτων* can be refuted on grounds of sense, since Electra has said that her brother has been faithful to her—all that is needed is for Force, Justice, and Zeus himself to join their side. If *πηγμάτων*

is taken as referring to the bonds of loyalty between brother and sister, Orestes is praying about a matter that does not worry her, and neglects to pray about what does, namely the success of the conspiracy that they must now achieve. If on the other hand *τῶνδε πηγμάτων* refers to compacts or agreements made between them on how to conduct the *coup*, we must face the problem that no such compacts have previously been mentioned, as Thomson remarks (*ad loc.*). Thus Headlam may be right, and the cautious will follow Page's *πραγμάτων*. However Headlam (*loc. cit.*) hints at

(like many others) was taken by Aeschylus from Archilochus; that fr. 94 (= fr. 177 West), of which we possess the first four lines, continued thus:

ὦ Ζεῦ, πάτερ Ζεῦ, σὸν μὲν οὐρανοῦ κράτος,
 σὺ δ' ἔργ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώπων ὁραῖς
 λεωργὰ καὶ θεμιστά, σοὶ δὲ θηρίων
 ὕβρις τε καὶ δίκη μέλει.
 <καὶ νῦν θεωρὸς τῶνδε πρηγμάτων γένευ.>

and that the Ionic *πρηγμάτων* in our MS (at 245) here is due to a scribe remembering this original'. Headlam's restoration is very bold, but one can see good reasons behind his intuition of borrowing from Archilochus. Verbally, there is the anaphora of *Ζεῦ* and the proximity of *κράτος* and *δίκη* to note; in theme the parallels are more extensive. First, this passage is closer to Archilochus than the simile of the vultures, as an eagle is involved and not vultures, and one is mentioned and not more. Secondly, there is greater emphasis here on the fate of the nestlings than there was in the simile, which focused on the anguish of the bereaved parents. Thirdly, Archilochus' fable and this passage share the motif of sacrifice. In the fable, the conflagration of the eagle's nest and the fledglings it held occurred when the eagle snatched a piece of burning flesh from an altar and carried it back to the eyrie. Here the motif is integrated differently: father eagle should not be treated ungratefully by Zeus in return for all the sacrifices he has offered in the past and which his family, if saved, will offer in the future (255 ff.). Death by fire appears just below instead, when the chorus express their wish to see the usurpers burn to death in molten pitch (267 f.). Lastly, there is the crucial point that here, just as in Archilochus and the parodos of *Ag.*, Zeus concerns himself with the wrongs of animals, an idea that West⁴ notes is not found elsewhere in early poetry. Concomitant with divine interest in avian affairs is the use of terminology really appropriate only to men, as West showed in the case of Archilochus 179:

προῦθηκε παισὶ δεῖπνον αἰηνὲς φέρων.

Here both *παισὶ* and *δεῖπνον* are human terms; their extension to avian domestic scenes is a distinctive feature of Archilochus' fable and Aeschylus' parodos, where the *νεοσσοί* are called *παῖδες* (*Ag.* 50).⁵ It is most striking that something similar is found in our passage—247 *αἰετοῦ πατρός*.

another possibility which deserves review in the light of West's theory, that the text of Aeschylus' own MS had this reading. He compares *Persae* 763 Ἀσίδος μηλοτρόφου with Archilochus, fr. 227 West ὁ δ' Ἀσίδος καρτερὸς μηλοτρόφου, and notes that just below at *Persae* 784 a line with two Ionic forms might be connected with him. In transmitted νέος ἐὼν νέα φρονεῖ it is not difficult to emend ἐὼν and the scansion of νέα away, but there is some evidence to suggest that avoidable dialect forms could be retained in literary borrowing: cf. B. Forssman, *Glotta* 44 (1966), 5–14, on Pindar *Pyth.* 3.68 ff., and the Attic formula in Hesiod, *Th.* 19, 371 λαμπράν τε σελήνην

(Edwards, *The Language of Hesiod*, pp. 102 f.).

⁴ Art. cit., p. 1.

⁵ West, pp. 2 f. Note also the parallel between *Cho.* 250 f., the nestlings οὐ γὰρ ἐντελεῖς / θήραν . . . προσφέρειν, and the same fable as told by Aesop (*fab.* 1(1) Hausrath): the eaglets were subjected to destruction because they were πτήνες ἀτελεῖς, where West prints <ἀ>πτήνες and deletes ἀτελεῖς as a gloss (*Iambi et Elegi Graeci* I, p. 65). Certainly the adjective does not appear in any surviving fragment of Archilochus; but is not Aeschylus' usage some defence for it here?

Surely there is enough here to show that West's view that the parodos of the *Agamemnon* is influenced by Archilochus' epode is not far from the mark, at least as far as the fact of borrowing is concerned.⁶ Again in the *Choephoroe* we may observe how skilfully Aeschylus weaves his model into the pattern of the whole to produce a fine extended image without altering the usual texture of his verse.

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⁶ Whether the theological consequences West extracts from his discovery of Aeschylus' source in the parodos are correct, I am not enough of a theologian to judge, although

it reads well. This note is not intended to cast any light on the matter beyond confirming that Aeschylus did know and exploit Archilochus' epode.