

Greeks brought her to Aulis (*Cypria* apud Procl. *Chrestomathy* page 104 Allen, Eur. *IT* 25, *IA* 100, 835–6, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.22), for she dies a virgin (*Ag.* 209, 215, 229) and her saffron-dyed garment suggests her sexual desirability (cf. *Ar. Nub.* 51, *Lys.* 44–51, 219–20, *Eccl.* 879). In Agamemnon's case it is his power, for he regards even the boots that he removes as servile (*Ag.* 945). In Clytaemnestra's case it is her mannish nature (cf. *Ag.* 11), for now she reveals herself as a woman.

The ending of the trilogy contrasts with what has gone before. Like the murder-victims, the Eumenides surrender their primary character-trait, their fury, and enter a new status below the earth (*Eum.* 916, 1023, 1036–8); for them also this act involves a change of clothing (*Eum.* 1028–9). However, while the murder-victims enter the earth in death, killed by the blood-feud, the Eumenides enter the earth to offer Athens their aid in establishing a legislated and life-giving system of justice.

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### VITA AESCHYLI 9: MISCARRIAGES IN THE THEATRE OF DIONYSOS

Anonymous, *Vita Aeschyli* 9 (= *TGF* 3 T Al.30–32 Radt) preserves the following startling report concerning Aeschylus:

Some say that at the performance of the *Eumenides*, by bringing on the chorus one by one, as he did, he terrified the audience so that children swooned and fetuses were aborted.

Expectedly the passage is dismissed as sheer fancy. A. E. Haigh called it 'a foolish invention'.<sup>1</sup> A. W. Pickard-Cambridge agreed.<sup>2</sup> Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff wrote: 'The fables about the *ekplexis* because of the *Eumenides* only inform us of the effect the play had on later readers'.<sup>3</sup> Mary R. Lefkowitz explained the tradition as an irresponsible biographer's elaboration of hints in the play itself.<sup>4</sup> In thirty years of lecturing on the *Oresteia* I have always dismissed the anecdote as rubbish.

A remarkable and well attested parallel has recently come to my attention.<sup>5</sup> On November 26th 1776 in Hamburg the German première of Shakespeare's *Othello* took place. An account of the performance, published in 1794 and based on eye-witness reports, observes:<sup>6</sup>

By November 26th, eight weeks after the première of *Hamlet*, *Othello the Moor of Venice*, a tragedy in five acts after Shakespeare, was announced with new costumes and sets. The house was packed. The name of Shakespeare and the cast which was announced...promised the happily expectant crowd a second *Hamlet*-evening. It turned out otherwise. This time the

<sup>1</sup> A. E. Haigh, *The Attic Theatre*<sup>3</sup>, edited by A. W. Pickard-Cambridge (Oxford, 1907), p. 327.

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (Oxford, 1953), p. 268: 'a story...invented'.

<sup>3</sup> Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Aischylos Interpretationen* (Berlin, 1914), p. 249 (translation is my own).

<sup>4</sup> Mary R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (Baltimore, 1981), pp. 71–2. Her conclusion is in part anticipated by Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 372 n. 2, 438 n. 2.

<sup>5</sup> I first learned of it from Professor Dr Werner Habicht (Würzburg), the Shakespearian scholar.

<sup>6</sup> Johann Friedrich Schütze, Kgl. dänische Kanzleisekretär, *Hamburgische Theater-Geschichte* (Hamburg, 1794), 208–9, cited by Jocz Savits, *Shakespeare und die Bühne des Dramas: Erfahrungen und Betrachtungen* (Bonn, 1917), p. 31. The translation is my own.

director, who until then had been so careful, overestimated his audience. The daemonic passion of the African, the satanic malice of his ensign, the cruel slaughter of the innocent Desdemona, all exceeded by far what the nerves of the men of Hamburg and even more those of the women of 1776 Hamburg could bear. The closer the performance approached the catastrophe, the more uneasy the audience grew. 'Swoons followed upon swoons,' reports an eyewitness. 'The doors of the boxes opened and closed. People left or when necessary were carried out; and (according to trustworthy reports) the premature miscarriages of various prominent Hamburg women were the result of seeing and hearing the overly tragic play.'

When the play was next performed on December 4th, it was called 'Othello with Changes'. There were not only deletions and rewritings of crass expressions and scenes but most important a happy ending was added. 'Both Othello and Desdemona remained alive; and Hamburg's coming generations were preserved from theatrical accouchements.'

The eighteenth-century parallel does not assure the historicity of the Aeschylean anecdote. It does prove that the historicity of the anecdote cannot be dismissed on the grounds of intrinsic absurdity. A modern European audience reacted just this way to a frightening stage presentation.

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<sup>7</sup> That Secretary Schütze would have read Anonymus, *Vita Aeschyli* and invented history to agree with it is what the late Sir Denys Page would have called 'the remotely conceivable alternative'.

#### CONINGTON'S FIRST EMENDATION

Aesch. *Eum.* 483

φόνων δικαστὰς ὀρκίων αἰδουμένους  
θεσμόν.

Page's apparatus: 483 αἰδου- Prien: αἰρου- codd.

C. Prien, *Rh. Mus.* 6 (1848), 192f.: '...so habe ich vor Jahren schon vermuthet [but not published, apparently] ὀρκίων γ' αἰδουμένους mit Vergleichung der Stellen V. 650 [= 680] ὀρκον αἰδεσθε und 680 [= 710] αἰδουμένους τὸν ὀρκον, ohne sie für evident ausgeben zu wollen.'

W. Linwood, *Aeschyli Eumenides* (Oxford, 1844), Corrigenda et Addenda p. 200: 'αἰδουμένους pro αἰρουμένους conjicit juvenis ingeniosus: nec male fortasse.'

*Dictionary of National Biography* iv (1908), 938f. CONINGTON, JOHN (1825–1869), classical scholar, born 10 Aug. 1825... On 30 June 1843 Conington matriculated at University College, Oxford... He went into residence in October 1843, and in the Lent term of the following year carried off the Hertford and Ireland university scholarships... It is curious that his judgment... drew him in the direction of Cambridge... To Oxford, however, he went, and read with the eminent scholar Linwood, who had the same passion for Greek plays as his pupil...

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#### THE FINAL LINES OF SOPHOCLES, *KING OEDIPUS* (1524–30)

ὦ πάτρας Θήβης ἔνοικοι, λεύσσειτ', Οἰδίπους ὄδε,  
ὃς τὰ κλεῖν' αἰνίγματ' ἤδει καὶ κράτιστος ἦν ἀνὴρ, 1525  
οὐ τίς οὐ ζήλω πολιτῶν ταῖς τύχαις \*ἐπέβλεπεν,  
εἰς ὅσον κλύδωνα δεινῆς συμφορᾶς ἐλήλυθεν.  
ὥστε θνητὸν ὄντ' ἐκείνην τὴν τελευταίαν ἰδεῖν  
ἡμέραν ἐπισκοποῦντα μηδέν' ὀλβίζειν, πρὶν ἂν  
τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάσῃ μηδέν' ἀλγεινὸν παθῶν. 1530