

SHORTER NOTES

DISROBING IN THE *ORESTEIA*

In *Eum.* 1028–9 the Furies mark their transformation into Eumenides by donning red robes over their black costumes (*Cho.* 1049, *Eum.* 352, 370) in imitation of the robes worn in the Panathenaea by metics (Phot. s.v. *σκάφας* = Men. fr. 166 Koerte; cf. *Eum.* 1011).¹ Greek epic was sensitive to the symbolic value of clothing² and Aeschylus had experimented in the *Persians* with the greater scope that drama offered for clothing-symbolism.³ Scholars have detected a wealth of associations in the Furies' robing-scene:⁴ this culmination of the trilogy echoes the red carpet upon which Agamemnon walks to his death in the first play, which is actually referred to as 'garments' (*εἴματα* *Ag.* 921, 960, 963),⁵ and the net in which Agamemnon is caught (*Ag.* 1126, 1382, 1580, *Cho.* 1000, *Eum.* 635), which is brought on stage in the middle play (*Cho.* 973–1006).⁶ Another series of stage-actions of equal importance in preparing for the robing of the Furies has not been so well explained.

At *Ag.* 239, the chorus, describing the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, says that the girl shed to (or toward) the ground her dyes of saffron (i.e. her saffron-dyed robes).⁷ These robes, like those of the Furies, have their counterpart in cult: the Bears in the cult of Artemis at Brauron, which was said to have been founded by Iphigeneia (Eur. *IT* 1462–7, Paus. 3.16.7), wore saffron robes and shed them at some point during their service to the goddess (Ar. *Lys.* 644–5).⁸

All of the other characters murdered in the *Oresteia*, except for Aegisthus, remove

¹ See W. Headlam, *JHS* 26 (1906), 268–77.

² See J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 3–4, 18, 21, 28–9 and E. Block, *TAPA* 115 (1985), 1–11.

³ In *Pers.*, the queen dreams that Xerxes tears his clothing (line 199); he actually tears his clothing after Salamis (468–70, 1030) and enters at 909 still wearing his torn clothing (cf. 832–6). When he complains in 1017 of his ruined *στολή*, we take him to be referring both to his army and to his robes. See O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 121–7 on *Pers.* 1017 and W. G. Thalmann, *AJP* 101 (1980), 260–82.

Ar. *Ran.* 842 and 1063 portrays Aeschylus as being contemptuous of Euripides' realism in the treatment of clothing.

⁴ See Headlam, *JHS* 26 (1906), 266–77, G. Thompson, *Oresteia*² ii (Prague, 1966), pp. 221–3, H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Eumenides of Aeschylus* (London, 1970), pp. 72–3, A. Lebeck, *The Oresteia: a Study in Language and Structure* (Washington, D.C., 1971), p. 15, C. W. MacLeod, *Maia* 27 (1975), 201–3 = *Collected Essays* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 41–3, Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, pp. 412–13, and T. A. Tarkow, *Maia* 32 (1980), 153–65.

⁵ See R. F. Goheen, *AJP* 76 (1955), 115–26.

⁶ See E. Vermeule, *AJA* 70 (1966), 4.

⁷ See U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Griechische Tragödie* ii (Berlin, 1900), p. 59, W. Kranz, *Hermes* 54 (1919), 310, U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Griechische Verskunst* (Berlin, 1921), p. 182 n. 1, E. Fraenkel, *Aeschylus*, Agamemnon ii (Oxford, 1950), p. 138 on 239, P. Maas, *CQ* 45 (1951), 94 = *Kleine Schriften* (Munich, 1973), p. 42, who offers *ABV* 97.27 as an illustration, H. Lloyd-Jones, *CR* n.s. 2 (1952), 132–5, J. D. Denniston and D. Page, *Aeschylus*, Agamemnon (Oxford, 1957), pp. 90–1 on 239, E. Grassi, *Atene e Roma* 6 (1961), 138–42, A. Lebeck, *GRBS* 5 (1964), 35–41, J. T. Hooker, *Agon* 2 (1968), 59–65, J. Bollack, *L'Agamemnon d'Eschyle* = *Cahiers de Philologie* 7 i.2 (Lille, 1981), pp. 300–3 on 239.

⁸ Reading *καὶ χέουσα* (Stinton's emendation). See C. Sourvinou, *CQ* 21 (1971), 339–42, T. C. W. Stinton, *CQ* 25 (1975), 11–12, P. Perlman, *GRBS* 24 (1983), 115–20, H. Lloyd-Jones, *JHS* 103 (1983), 91–8, and J. Henderson, *Aristophanes*, *Lysistrata* (Oxford, 1987), p. 156 on 645. Vases found at Brauron depict the Bears, some clad, some naked; see L. Ghali-Kahil, *AK* 8 (1965), 20–33, *AK* 20 (1977), 86–98, and *Hesperia* 50 (1981), 253–68.

a piece of clothing on stage before entering the scene-building to their deaths.⁹ Before walking on the carpet, Agamemnon bids a slave remove his boots (*Ag.* 944–5). (He will have disrobed fully within the palace since, unlike Homer [cf. *Od.* 11.411], Aeschylus has him murdered in his bath [*Ag.* 1109, 1129, 1540, *Cho.* 491, 1071, *Eum.* 633].) At *Ag.* 1269–70 Cassandra casts to the ground and tramples upon her staff, garland and robe, the professional garb she wore as prophetess (*Ag.* 1264–8; cf. *Eur. Tro.* 451–4). At *Cho.* 896–8, Clytaemnestra parts her robes to reveal to Orestes her breast (cf. *Eur. El.* 1206–7, *Or.* 527, 841, and Euphorion, fr. 92 Powell, *Coll. Alex.*).¹⁰ This unexpected action places her in the role of mother¹¹ (cf. Hecuba at *Il.* 22.79–83, *Eur. Phoen.* 1568) in which she has been replaced previously by Cilissa (cf. *Cho.* 734–65). It also has erotic implications, shown by the parallel with Helen's baring her breast before the enraged Menelaus (*Ilias Parva* fr. 17 Allen, Stesichorus 201 *PMG*, Ibyc. 296 *PMG*, *Eur. Andr.* 629–30 and *Ar. Lys.* 155–6). The action arouses such emotion in Orestes that he falters momentarily in his resolve, and Pylades must make his only speech (*Cho.* 900–2) in order to encourage him.

These disrobings have two effects. First, they recall the common metaphor whereby the dead are stripped naked (cf. *Il.* 22.508–11, Hdt. 5.92.2) and clad in a tunic of earth.¹² By this metaphor, the dying person undergoes a ritual change of clothing like any other initiate, including the metics in the Panathenaea, the Bears at Brauron, and the *mystae* at Eleusis (cf. *Ar. Plut.* 845 with Schol. = Melanthis *FGH Hist* 326 F 4).¹³ Clytaemnestra uses this metaphor when she says that if Agamemnon had really died every time he was said to have done so, he would be wearing a 'three-fold cloak of earth' (*Ag.* 872).

Second, the disrobing of each character in the *Oresteia* graphically illustrates the loss of his or her primary trait. Most explicit is Cassandra's loss of prophecy. In Iphigeneia's case it is her loss of the marriageability on the pretext of which the

⁹ The *Oresteia*'s pattern of characters disrobing before death seems to have influenced the other dramatists (e.g. *Soph. Trach.* 924–6, 1076–80, *Eur. Hec.* 555–60, *Andr.* 832–3). With similar meaning, one can also dress for death (*Eur. Supp.* 1054). Pentheus both dons and removes special clothing before his death (*Eur. Bacch.* 925–44 and 1115–17).

¹⁰ O. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1978), p. 61, and J. M. Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice* (Westport, 1980), p. 191 deny that the scene was staged on the grounds that Clytaemnestra was played by a male actor, but a masked theatre where all female characters (howsoever clad) are played by males will not balk at problems of verisimilitude, and a similar scene in *Eur. Andr.* 832–3 was explicitly staged. Moreover, the frequent allusions to the *Oresteia* in *Eur. Or.* (e.g. 238 = *Cho.* 1026; 256 = *Cho.* 1048–50 and *Eum.* 48–59; 262 = *Eum.* 64; 553–8 = *Eum.* 657–73; 1225–45 = *Cho.* 479–509; 1395 = *Ag.* 121, 139 and 159; 1402 = *Cho.* 938; 1477 = *Ag.* 1651; 1667 = *Cho.* 559 and *Eum.* 615) suggest that *Eur. Or.* 527 and 841, which describe Clytaemnestra baring her breast, refer specifically to the Aeschylean treatment of the myth. It is therefore better to suppose that when Clytaemnestra points to her breast (τόνδε *Cho.* 896), she reveals it. This is the view of T. G. Tucker, *The Choephoroi of Aeschylus* (Cambridge, 1901), p. 199 on 895, A. H. Sommerstein, *BICS* 27 (1980), 74 n. 32, and, apparently, A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus, Choephoroi* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 292–3 on 896–8.

¹¹ *Cho.* 899 is the first and only time in the murder-scene that Orestes uses the word μήτηρ of Clytaemnestra.

¹² Cf. *Il.* 3.56–7, Alc. fr. 129.17–18 Voigt, Theog. 428, Simon. fr. 6.3–4 West, Pind. *Nem.* 11.16, *Eur. Hel.* 851–4, *Tro.* 1148, Xen. *Cyr.* 6.4.6, Theoc. *Epigr.* 9.4, Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.691, *Anth. Pal.* 7.238, 242, 255, 446, 480, 551, and Kaibel *Ep. Gr.* 243.34.

Resurrection in the Christian view also involves a change of clothing (cf. 1 Corinthians 15.53).

¹³ See N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford, 1974), p. 164 on 42. *Arist. Eth. Nic.* 3.1 says that Aeschylus had been initiated at Eleusis. I would like to thank Professor Gloria D'Ambrosio-Griffith and an anonymous referee for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this note.

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'.¹ A. W. Pickard-Cambridge agreed.² 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'.³ Mary R. Lefkowitz explained the tradition as an irresponsible biographer's elaboration of hints in the play itself.⁴ 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.⁵ 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:⁶

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

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

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

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

⁴ 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.

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

⁶ 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.