

THE ATTRIBUTION OF AESCHYLUS, *CHOEPHOROI* 691–9

οἱ ᾗ γώ, κατ' ἄκρας †ἐνπᾶς† ὥς πορθούμεθα.
ὦ δυσπάλαιστε τῶνδε δωμάτων Ἀρά,
ὥς πόλλ' ἐπωπᾶς κάκποδὼν εὖ κείμενα·
τόξοις πρόσωθεν εὐσκόποις χειρουμένη
φίλων ἀποψιλοῖς με τὴν παναθλίαν. 695
καὶ νῦν Ὀρέστης, ἣν γὰρ εὐβούλως ἔχων
ἔξω κομίζων ὀλεθρίου πηλοῦ πόδα
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νῦν δ' ἥπερ ἐν δόμοισι βακχείας κακῆς
ἱατρὸς ἐλπίς ἦν, προδοῦσαν ἐγγραψε.

These lines are the first reaction to the false news of the death of Orestes. Their attribution has been much discussed.¹ What prompts my intervention is the recent development, on this important problem, of a confident unanimity which seems to me certainly mistaken. I have been unable to find a single translator, editor, or commentator in recent years who gives the lines to Electra. The case for Electra was best made by Headlam–Thomson in 1938, and a few extra points were added very hesitantly by Winnington-Ingram in 1946.² From the wealth of detailed argument in Headlam–Thomson, which has been ignored rather than refuted, I will mention and briefly develop just two points, before going on to add some of my own.

Firstly, verse 695, in which the speaker claims to be entirely wretched and entirely without φίλοι, contrasts with verse 717, in which Clytaemnestra boasts that she does not lack φίλοι. If the queen also speaks 691–9, the contradiction can be reconciled only by one of two bizarre hypotheses. Either she begins hypocritically and then suddenly abandons hypocrisy, or she begins with honest despair but suddenly pulls herself together, forgets her sorrows, and remembers Aegisthus. I know of nothing in tragedy remotely comparable to these dramatically pointless and inexplicable sudden shifts. In fact Clytaemnestra at 717 is contrasting her position with Electra's (see below). It is significant that those who give 691–9 to Clytaemnestra cannot agree, and often cannot decide, whether she speaks them sincerely or not. Garvie, for example, in his recent commentary, decides that Aeschylus 'leaves the question open'. He mentions in support of this view S. *El.* 766–71: but there Clytaemnestra movingly *expresses her emotional dilemma*, which is precisely what does *not* occur at any stage in the Aeschylus (note especially 695 *παναθλίαν*).

Secondly, ἐν δόμοισι βακχείας κακῆς³ ἱατρὸς ἐλπίς (698–9) is entirely apt to be spoken by Electra (cf. e.g. 135–44, 193, 236, 394–6, 430, 494); and the words ἱατρὸς (cf. 471–4, 953–9, 965–8) and ἐλπίς (cf. 194, 236, 776) are entirely apt for Orestes' *revenge*. I do not see how the phrase can refer to anything other than the termination

¹ They were first attributed to Clytaemnestra by Portus, to Electra by Turnebus (the MS. has only a paragraphus). I reproduce Page's OCT text, even though I disagree with it in some details irrelevant to this paper.

² W. G. Headlam and G. Thomson, *Aeschylus, The Oresteia* (Cambridge, 1938; second edition, Prague, 1966). R. P. Winnington-Ingram in *CR* 60 (1946), 58ff., reprinted with revisions in *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge, 1983). Typical of modern confidence is Taplin's brusque 'Electra does not, of course, say 691ff.' (*The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* [Oxford, 1977], p. 340).

³ καλῆς M; κακῆς (Portus) is generally accepted.

by Orestes of Clytaemnestra's and Aegisthus' present domination of the household. But how could Clytaemnestra claim, even hypocritically, to be made 'entirely wretched' by the removal of the only threat to her position and her life?⁴ H. J. Rose in his Commentary claims that 'she had vague hopes of a reconciliation' with Orestes. But his only evidence of this is 908, which on inspection turns out to be spoken by Clytaemnestra when faced with an Orestes bent on killing her! In his recent Commentary A. Bowen notes that Clytaemnestra 'must mean the hope that Orestes would return to sort the house out and break the curse of madness. But she can hardly have hoped such a thing herself, as it would require her own death.' Quite so. Why then does she say it? 'She is quoting public opinion and concealing her own, for the messenger's benefit.' But why, if concealment is her aim, does she mention the βακχεία κακή and the ἱατρὸς ἐλπίς at all? To the news of Orestes' death in Sophocles it is Electra who reacts first, with (genuine) despair. Clytaemnestra then rebukes her, and simply asks the stranger for more details. It is only much later, after hearing the long account of the gruesome *manner* of her son's death, that Clytaemnestra expresses her (mixed) feelings, which she then quickly resolves in favour of satisfaction. The situation is similar in Aeschylus, except that Electra is pretending and there are no gruesome details to shock Clytaemnestra into a twinge of regret.

Rather than listing the other points already made in favour of Electra as the speaker, I will now add some new ones.

The metaphor of maenadism or Bacchic frenzy is frequent in tragedy. The main point of comparison is generally frenzy, but also often some other characteristic of (mythical) maenadic behaviour (hunting, physical aggression, kin-killing, uncontrollability, wandering away from the house, snakes, etc.). By way of illustration, I will confine myself to the three other cases in Aeschylus.⁵ At *Eum.* 500 the Furies are called maenads: the chorus of Furies is an uncontrollable band of women with snakes,⁶ huntresses (*Eum.* 131–2, 147, etc.) who inspire frenzy (e.g. *Eum.* 300–1). At *A. Sept.* 498 a warrior βακχᾶι: he is inspired (by Ares, ἐνθεὸς Ἄρει) to a frenzy of aggression; and the metaphor was suggested also by the snakes woven round his shield (495–6) and by his war-cry (see below). Finally, at *Su.* 564 Io is called a θυιάς Ἥρας: Hera has put her in a frenzy (μαίνομένη) in which she wanders far from home.

Clytaemnestra, it is claimed,⁷ means by βακχεία κακή the revelry of the Erinyes in the house. Despite the difficulty, already mentioned, of seeing how she can desire the termination of the current phase of this 'wicked Bacchic revelry', the image may seem to suit the Furies. Cassandra called them a κῶμος at *Ag.* 1189, and at *Eum.* 500 they are called μαινάδες. But in fact the Bacchic image is less apt than it seems. In almost every tragic instance it describes a human being (or bird: *Ion.* 1204). One exception is *Eum.* 500, but (like the other, *HF* 899) it proves the rule, for at this point the Erinyes are visible, a choral band of aggressive females with snakes, and they have just performed a frenzied song and dance (307–96). At *Cho.* 698, on the other hand, there has so far in the trilogy been no suggestion that the Erinyes have any of the characteristics, such as frenzy, which elsewhere attract the Bacchic/maenadic metaphor. As for Cassandra's vision, the Erinyes there are compared

⁴ Compare the moderate (hypocritical) words of Aegisthus at 839–43.

⁵ cf. also *S. Ant.* 136; *E. Alexandros* 7.2, *El.* 1032, *Hek.* 121, 676, 686, 1076–8, *Hel.* 543–4, *HF* 899, 966, 1085, 1119, 1142, *Hipp.* 550, *Ion.* 1204, *Or.* 339, 411, 835, 1492, *Phoen.* 1489, *Tro.* 169ff., 307, 342, 349, 367, 408, 415, 500.

⁶ *Cho.* 1050. A. J. N. W. Prag, *The Oresteia* (1985), p. 48, compares, in fifth-cent. vase painting, the Furies with maenads in respect of their snakes.

⁷ e.g. by Garvie on 698–9; cf. *Ag.* 1567ff.

not with *Βακχεία* but with the quite distinct sympotic *κῶμος*. And anyway, with her special vision Cassandra can, like the audience of the *Eumenides*, actually see the Erinyes. *Βακχεία κακή* implies a concrete perception of someone acting as if in a Bacchic frenzy. Clytaemnestra has had this perception neither of the Furies nor of anything else. But Electra has had it of her mother.

Earlier in the play Electra condemned the excessive, wanton luxuriance of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, and Clytaemnestra's lack of *σωφροσύνη*.⁸ They are guilty of wasting or destroying the house;⁹ and Clytaemnestra has mistreated her own family: not just Agamemnon but Electra and Orestes too.¹⁰ Just as Agamemnon's killing of his daughter was *τὸ παντότολμον* and *παρακοπά*, so Clytaemnestra in killing her husband is *παντότολμος* (*Ag.* 1237, *Cho.* 430, 597) and raving mad.¹¹ Particularly interesting is *Ag.* 1235–7, in which Cassandra, having wondered whether to call Clytaemnestra an amphisbaena or a Skylla, continues

θύουσαν Ἄιδου μητέρ' ἄσπονδόν τ' Ἄρη¹²
 φίλοις πνέουσιν; ὥς δ' ἐπωλολύξατο
 ἢ παντότολμος, ὥσπερ ἐν μάχῃς τροπή.

μητέρα is corrupt. It cannot mean the mother of Hades, but the meaning 'hellish mother' is irrelevant to the context, in which the queen has killed her husband not her offspring. Fraenkel nevertheless retains it, largely on the grounds that the *τε* after *ἄσπονδον* requires that what precedes denotes a family relationship: a hellish *mother* attacks her *φίλοι*. This will not do. And he also fails to see another objection to *μητέρα*. When *Ἄιδου* means 'hellish', the noun it qualifies is always independently associated with Hades or with death (song, wreaths, etc.). This is another decisive blow to *μητέρα* here. We should read *μαινάδ'* (Weil), which (a) meets Fraenkel's point about the connection with what follows: maenads kills their kin;¹³ (b) is paralleled at *E. Hec.* 1077 *Βάκχαις Ἄιδου* (of the women tearing apart Polymestor's children), *HF* 1119 *Ἄιδου Βάκχος* (of Herakles killing his children);¹⁴ (c) suits *θύουσιν*: the only other occurrences of this root in Aeschylus are both contained in maenadic metaphors (*Sept.* 498 *θυιάς ὤς*, *Su.* 564 *θυιάς Ἥρας*); (d) suits the image of war and the war-cry: one of the male activities imagined as practised by maenads is warfare, and indeed the war-cry.¹⁵ And so the maenadic image is applied by Sophocles to war (*Ant.* 136) and by Aeschylus to war and the war-cry (*Sept.* 497–8 *ἐπηλάλαξεν*); (e) is supported by a Campanian vase-painting¹⁶ of a woman killing a warrior with an axe. The woman has ivy leaves on her dress, suggestive of Dionysos.

⁸ 136–7 *ὑπερκόπως... χλίουσιν μέγα*, 140... *σωφρονεστέραν...* (cf. the paradox at *E. Ba.* 940 *ὅταν παρὰ λόγον σῶφρονας βάκχας ἴδῃς*).

⁹ 137 (with Garvie ad loc.), 943–5, 974.

¹⁰ 135, 419. That C. is pleased by O.'s (supposed) death is made quite clear by 738–9 (why else would Aesch. make the nurse say that?).

¹¹ *Ag.* 1235, 1428, 1576, and perhaps 1409. Cf. *Cho.* 524, 535, 547.

¹² Ἄρη is a generally accepted conjecture for the MSS. *ἀρὰν* (defended by Zeitlin in *TAPA* 97 [1966], 645–53).

¹³ The women of Thebes, the women of Argos, the Minyads, Procne. The idea is implicit in *E. Or.* 339 *ματέρος αἷμα σᾶς, ὃ σ' ἀναβακχεύει* (cf. 411, 833–5) and perhaps even in Hecuba's *βακχεῖος νόμος* over the corpse of her son (*E. Hec.* 686).

¹⁴ In their killing maenads may seem inspired not by Dionysos but by Hades, two deities who, Herakleitos tells us (B15), are one and the same. For maenads as dedicated to death see Seaford in *CQ* 31 (1981), 261.

¹⁵ *E. Ba.* 733ff., 1098, 1147; war-cry: 1133; Bacchyl. 11.56; Seaford in *JHS* 108 (1988), 134.

¹⁶ Calyx-crater, Leningrad St. 812; discussed and illustrated by A. Kossatz-Deissmann, *Dramen des Aischylos auf Westgriechischen Vasen* (Mainz, 1978), p. 91 and plate 13.

She has been identified as Clytaemnestra, partly because Clytaemnestra certainly appears in maenadic costume on another Southern Italian vase-painting (see below). The influence, albeit sometimes indirect, of Aeschylus on the vase painting of Magna Graecia is beyond doubt.¹⁷ This does not of course mean that Clytaemnestra appeared in maenadic costume in the original production of the *Agamemnon*. Rather, the idea of her as a maenad may have been suggested to a later producer, or vase-painter, by *Ag.* 1235. And even if the painting were entirely independent of Aeschylus, it would still exemplify the ease of the association between Clytaemnestra and maenadism.

All this constitutes a strong case for reading *μαινάδα*. But even if Fraenkel is right to suppose that ‘now the name “destroying mother” is fastened upon her as having slaughtered the father of her children and in so doing entered upon war to the death against these children and, above all, her son’, a mother’s war against her son is maenadic (e.g. *E. Ba.* 1147). Clytaemnestra’s *βακχεία κακή* continues to the time of her death. As the paramour of Aegisthus she continues to enjoy the anomaly resulting from her killing of her husband. Maenads are imagined as enjoying illicit coupling,¹⁸ and, like Clytaemnestra (*Ag.* 11 etc.), behave like men. When Clytaemnestra realises that Orestes has returned, her first thought is to kill him with a ‘man-slaying axe’ (*Cho.* 889–90). An Apulian vase-painting¹⁹ of the late fourth century B.C. shows Orestes killing Aegisthus, who is sitting in theatrical costume on a throne (cf. *Cho.* 572–6). Clytaemnestra, dressed in the *nebris* of a maenad, is attacking her son with an axe. Another woman (presumably Electra), also with a *nebris*, is joining in the fray. It has been argued that the inspiration of this painting is Aeschylean and that the Dionysiac element derives from a new production or from the vase-painter’s imagination. To this we may now add that the Dionysiac element is already there in Aeschylus.

Although (mythical) maenads may disrupt their households²⁰ by illicit sex and kin-killing, they generally do so away from the house itself, in the wild. But the *βακχεία κακή* of Clytaemnestra is shockingly anomalous even as maenadism, for it occurs *within* the house (*ἐν δόμοις*). Indeed, Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus are *δωμάτων πορθήτορες* (974; cf. *E. Ba.* 751–7).

Why are the lines now universally given to Clytaemnestra? In his recent Commentary Garvie refutes all but one of the arguments that have been used to give the lines to Clytaemnestra (the all too sudden change in Electra, the three-actor rule, the need for Clytaemnestra to react), and there is no need to deal with them here. But the one argument that remains Garvie calls ‘decisive’: ‘Electra was dismissed indoors at 554 and 579, and it is clear that she has no further dramatic part to play... No one addresses her in the present scene and she has nothing to do. What matters now is the relationship between mother and son.’ Let us see whether this point is strong enough to overturn our entire argument. At 554 Orestes says that Electra is to go inside. He then makes a plea for secrecy, so that the usurpers may be killed by guile. This plea, Garvie argues, is directed to Electra (‘or perhaps Electra and the chorus together’). Orestes then describes at length the plan of action, which he ends by saying to Electra (579–80)

*νῦν οὖν σὺ μὲν φύλασσε τὰν οἶκον καλῶς,
ὅπως ἂν ἀρτίκολλα συμβαίῃ τάδε.*

¹⁷ See e.g. Kossatz-Deissmann, op. cit. (n. 16).

¹⁸ A. fr. 382; and in general Seaford, art. cit. (n. 15), 125–8.

¹⁹ Oinochoe, Bari 1014; discussed and illustrated by Kossatz-Deissmann, op. cit. (n. 16), p. 99 and plate 18.

²⁰ Seaford, art. cit. (n. 15), 124–8.

This is taken to be a way of explaining why Electra does not reappear. 'She has played her part and so she is dispensed with,' writes Taplin,²¹ who also notes, however, that 'this uncompromising abandonment of a named character is remarkable' and unique in Aeschylus. In fact, the emphatic instructions given to Electra may equally suggest that she has *not* entirely played her part yet. She must of course be sent inside, for it would not do for her to be found outside with the strangers.²² But that is not the only motive. Electra can assist the plot best from within. And indeed she does play a role which as well as helping the plan adds powerful, visually expressed irony to the scene. Having emerged with her mother (cf. 135 ἀντίδουλος), she is ordered to take the strangers inside and to ensure that they obtain δώμασιν τὰ πρόσφορα (712–14). To the order the queen adds the sentence αἰνῶ δὲ πράσσειν ὡς ὑπευθύνῳ τάδε (715), which would, it has been pointed out, be a curious threat to address to a *mere* slave. That it is in fact spoken to her daughter is indicated also by what the queen says next:

ἡμεῖς δὲ ταῦτα τοῖς κρατοῦσι δωμάτων
κοινώσομέν τε κοῦ σπανίζοντες φίλων
βουλευσόμεσθα τῇσδε συμφορᾷς πέρι.

In contrast to the friendlessness bewailed by the ἀντίδουλος Electra in verse 698, she, the queen, has φίλοι who rule the house. The ironies here are that ὑπεύθυνος seems to implicate Electra in the strangers' obtaining δώμασιν τὰ πρόσφορα (i.e. their victory),²³ and that it will after all be Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, not Electra, who lack φίλοι. Garvie, it will be remembered, argues that 'no one addresses Electra in the present scene and she has nothing to do'. Well, what wonderful drama it was for Clytaemnestra coldly to contrast the power of her φίλοι with the despairing isolation of Electra, while addressing her directly only in the imperious command which allowed her to conduct her saviours into the house!²⁴

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²¹ *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford, 1977), p. 340.

²² Even the farmer objects at E. *El.* 341–4. In Soph. *El.* is with her mother when the strangers arrive.

²³ This prefigures her much fuller participation in Soph. and Eur.

²⁴ I would like to thank Alex Garvie for his helpful comments on this paper without implying that he is persuaded by it, and my student Tony Moretta for suggesting that I publish it.