

A REFLECTION ON HOMERIC DAWN IN THE PARODOS OF AESCHYLUS, *AGAMEMNON*

Aeschylus' account of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia in the *Agamemnon* has elicited an extraordinarily wide range of interpretations – a critical response which, in its very productivity, may signal a central aspect of the description itself. While more recent explications have been profitably informed by research in cult and ritual, there remains, I would like to suggest, an important literary possibility which merits consideration, particularly in a text where so much has been shaped from a close and profound engagement with the Homeric tradition.

The description of the sacrifice (*Ag.* 228–47) is forcefully carried by enjambement from one stanza into another by the sheer weight, as it were, of the force that crushingly silences, βίαι χαλινῶν τ' ἀναύδωι μένει (238). In the midst of much that is dark and difficult to construe, the composition yields a sudden effusion of colour, a striking trail of saffron. The sense of concealment, of a figure enveloped or enshrouded, which has been suggested by the phrase πέπλοισι περιπετῇ (233), opens on to an image of unfolding, the falling spread of a robe caught in its flow towards the ground, κρόκου βαφὰς δ' ἐς πέδον χέουσα (239).¹

When the Chorus abruptly break off from their attempt to tell of the unspeakable, the audience is left with an account fraught with suggestions of significance not yet fully developed. There remains something insistent but elusive in the intense description in language of an image (πρέπουσά θ' ὡς ἐν γραφαῖς, 242) which is never made entirely visible in this constitutively verbal evocation of the visual. The words withhold any final discernment of the image they create and offer to the imagination for visualization. At the same time, the suggestive significance of those words leaves a residual sense of something having been seen without being seen. In this area of the undefined, certain highlighted features in the text prompt questions as to their significance and call for a response which would be more than one of either simply seeing or naming. As Lebeck, for example, asks, 'Why is Iphigeneia's flowing robe described with such emphasis in the parodos not once but twice?'² In response to such questions, one might argue that there is every possibility, especially within this particular tragedy, where poetic details trail behind them an intimately known Homeric tradition, that the image suffused with saffron in the suspended flow of the robe may have prompted in an ancient Greek audience an important association from within the epic tradition.

¹ It is assumed here that Iphigeneia's robe is indeed at least the *literal* referent in both phrases, an interpretation to which the argument for traditional associations in the language will, it is hoped, lend support. For the robe see e.g. A. Lebeck, 'The Robe of Iphigeneia in *Agamemnon*', *GRBS* 5 (1964), 35–41, and *The 'Oresteia': A Study in Language and Structure* (Washington, DC, 1971), pp. 80–6. While a review of the numerous publications on this subject is beyond the scope of this paper, one especially important point, frequently overlooked in a number of interpretations and reconstructions, should be noted: the aspect of the verb χέουσα. χέουσα is not an aorist but a present and thus, significantly, does not mark a *completed action*, as has been pointed out by H. Lloyd-Jones, 'The Robes of Iphigeneia', *CR* n.s. 2 (1952), 132–5, p. 135.

The text cited throughout this study is D. Page's 1972 OCT edn. Unattributed translations are from Lloyd-Jones's *Oresteia* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1970). E. Fraenkel's edition of the *Agamemnon* (Oxford, 1950) is abbreviated throughout as Fraenkel.

² 'The Robe of Iphigeneia in *Agamemnon*', pp. 38–9.

The longest extant choral ode in Greek tragedy is halted at a point where its curtailed picture of a past is sharply juxtaposed with the present upon which it bears. After the extended, sweeping narrative sequences recounting distant events, the Chorus are held in a brooding gloom on the borders of night and day. The gradual transition from darkness to light, which constitutes the prolonged opening movement of the play from the initial pre-dawn watch, is quietly resumed only to be stalled and suspended. Reflection upon the sacrifice of Iphigeneia colours the dejected conclusion to the ode, where the language speaks of both a metaphorical and a literal dawn, presaging the impending break of day while resisting any advance in time, which would betoken only further cause for lament: 'The future you may learn when it comes. Let it be greeted in advance – but that is equal to being lamented in advance. For it will come clear with the rays of dawn [*τορὸν γὰρ ἤξει σύνορθρον αὐγαῖς*]' (250–4, tr. Fraenkel and Lloyd-Jones).

It is upon such a threshold that one of the most powerful figures in all Greek tragedy makes her entrance into language. Her first words in the play that she is to dominate announce the emergence of the day on which she is to accomplish her long-meditated designs. Her language is charged with the now stated significance of an image which has faded but whose traces persist. Against the background of her child's enforced silence and slaughter, a past poised in suspended time on the edge of night and day, Clytemnestra forcefully articulates a relation and a poetic association which had been suggestively limned in the depiction of the sacrifice. What has been a gradually emerging significance now breaks forth explicitly in words:

*εὐάγγελος μὲν, ὥσπερ ἡ παροιμία,
ἔως γένοιτο μητρὸς εὐφρόνης πάρα.* (264–5)
Happy tidings, as the proverb has it,
may the dawn bring as she comes from night her mother.

Clytemnestra dramatically announces the break of day, invokes the emergent light of dawn, and in doing so recasts much of what has already been spoken. The significant relation which she articulates is reiterated in her further gesture to the spreading light, specifically said to have been engendered by the night:

τῆς νῦν τεκούσης φῶς τόδ' εὐφρόνης λέγω. (279)
Since the night, I say, that has just now given birth to the light of this
morning.

(Tr. Fraenkel)

The mother's opening words are intricately related to the immediately preceding words of the Chorus;³ that close initial intertwining, however, raises the possibility of relations which reach still further and far deeper. Indeed, her words strike significant points of partial silence but unstilled resonance in the description of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia.

In Clytemnestra's depiction of dawn the bond between mother and child is closely forged. The pronounced maternal imagery introduces a marked shift in perspective after the protesting insistence on *patēr* in the preceding account of the sacrifice (231, 244, 245, cf. 228). Within the structure of the relations created in the passage from

³ In Clytemnestra's opening lines (264–6) words which echo the Chorus (261–3) include: *εὐάγγελος*, *εὐφρόνης*, *πεύσῃ*, *ἐλπίδος*, *κλύειν*. *τορῶς* (269) may recall *τορὸν* (254), while *γένοιτο* (264) may echo *ἐπεὶ γένοιτ'* (252).

night to day, the mother is (in Clytemnestra's case, most appropriately) identified with the night, while the dawn is conceived as child or daughter, a relation which gives force to, and derives force from, an association which was already at work in the description of Clytemnestra's daughter Iphigeneia in the scene of sacrifice.

Before exploring the precise nature of that association within the description, and as a way of leading into it, we might note that Clytemnestra opens her speech with a proverb. Her first statement announces the new day in terms of an age-old formulation drawn from what is proverbial, a society's shared repository of customary belief, knowledge and values. In part, this opening with a proverb introduces from the outset a significant characteristic of Clytemnestra's discourse throughout the play: no one is more skilled in the exploitation of conventional wisdom, the articulation of the commonplaces of socially sanctioned roles, particularly that of the 'good' or faithful wife, than the adulteress and intending husband-slayer who knows how to greet the important day: 'For what light is sweeter for a wife to behold than this, when, as the god has preserved her husband safe from the field, she opens the gates for him?' (601–4, tr. Fraenkel). It is, however, of more general significance that Clytemnestra's first words are a citation, repeating not only the immediately preceding words of the Chorus, but also a formulation from the distant past. From the very outset the new day is presented as that great 'drama of recommencement'⁴ which is the dawn; at the same time, the dawn is, within the pattern of citation, emphatically construed as a repetition of the past – a point of significance not only for the action (given its implications of vengeance for the sacrifice of the child), but also in terms of the literary tradition.

An important constitutive feature of proverbial lore as a society's shared cultural perspective is underlined by *our* not knowing the precise nature of the proverb referred to in the Greek text. We can infer, as has been suggested, that it was something similar to 'like mother like child in beauty' (Fraenkel on 264). Certainly the proverb seems to have proposed a reflection, some image of resemblance between the antithetical (night and day), in a saying which played upon the verbal similarity of the term for night (*eu-phronē*) and a dawn designated as *eu-angelos*. The shared element is that which is central to the trilogy and the ultimate object of its sustained searching: *to eu*. In the word *euangelos* a mother announces the dawn and refers to its silent tidings, a point which may remind us that the mother speaks where the child was bound to silence.

While it may seem 'natural' to 'regard morning or sun or day as the child of the preceding night' (Fraenkel, ad loc.), this perspective nevertheless remains an important cultural construction of the natural phenomenon which is daybreak.⁵ The Greek text does not simply place its audience in an unmediated relation with the dawn, but conceives, articulates and visualizes that event within the structure of its

⁴ G. Poulet's phrase in *Études sur le temps humain* (Paris, 1952–68).

⁵ Commentators cite, for this relation, Hesiod, *Theogony* 124, Νυκτὸς δ' αὐτ' Αἰθήρ τε καὶ Ἡμέρη ἐξεγένοντο. One might note that within the *Theogony*, Dawn (Eos) is distinguished from Day (Hēmera) and has a different parent, Theia (371–4). In the *Agamemnon* it is specifically 'Eos' (in the Attic form *ἔως* for *ῥώς*, 265) who is now the daughter of the night. This possible change in the relations established in Hesiod's *Theogony* would be matched by another: Aeschylus similarly makes the Furies daughters of mother Night (cf. e.g. *Eum.* 321–2, 791–2 = 821–2); for this latter difference see F. Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus* (Ithaca, NY, 1949), pp. 178–81, and, in general, C. Ramnoux, *La Nuit et les enfants de la nuit dans la tradition grecque* (Paris, 1959). Unlike Eos *krokopeplos*, the Furies are dark-robed (*Eum.* 353; cf. *Cho.* 1049, *Eum.* 370). From Hesiod, Night as mother also has the potential to produce *kaka*, including Death and Strife (*Theog.* 211–32).

own cultural code. As recent research has illustrated, we are, in the passages relating to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, concerned with the conventions of a culture that is in many respects other than our own, such that we have to work to recognize certain connotations suggested by that 'long education of the eye and ear'⁶ which makes up a culture's shared perceptions. To move finally from the proverbial to the literary, this means considering the display of colour within the 'iconography' of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia as drawn in a potentially significant way from the Greek literary tradition.

The striking detail in the image of Iphigeneia, so suggestive of some symbolic significance that it has elicited a very wide range of responses, recalls in colour and garment the Homeric rendering of that singularly poetic event, the break of day. In the epic, a constant source of Aeschylus' 'many-coloured and richly storied' language,⁷ saffron has one significant association. *κροκόπεπλος*, 'saffron-robed', is the epithet of *Ἡώς*, the personified dawn.

Ἡὼς μὲν κροκόπεπλος ἐκίδνατο πᾶσαν ἐπ' αἶαν. (Iliad 8.1)

*Ἡὼς μὲν κροκόπεπλος ἀπ' Ὠκεανοῖο ῥόων
ὄρνυθ', ἢν ἄθανάτοισι φῶς φέροι ἡδὲ βροτοῖσιν.* (Il. 19.1–2)

**Ἡμὸς δ' ἑωσφόρος εἴσι φῶς ἑρέων ἐπὶ γαίαν,
ὄν τε μέτα κροκόπεπλος ὑπεῖρ ἅλα κίδναται Ἡὼς* (Il. 23.226–7)

Ἡὼς δὲ κροκόπεπλος ἐκίδνατο πᾶσαν ἐπ' αἶαν (Il. 24.695)

This possible Homeric association does not appear to have been noticed, even by studies devoted specifically to the relation of Aeschylus' poetry to Homeric language.⁸ There are, however, a number of very important implications in this association of Iphigeneia with *Eos erigeneia* which contribute significantly to our interpretation of the play.

One study of colour in ancient art translates the word *κροκόπεπλος* – aptly in view of the connection here – 'with a trailing robe the color of a crocus'.⁹ Since recent suggestions have tended to abandon the possibilities of the image of a robe, it might be helpful to recall here something of the literary importance of the peplos. In her study of dress in Homer, H. L. Lorimer notes that *κροκόπεπλος* is one of several recurring compound adjectives formed from *peplos*, a feature of the Homeric language which she takes to indicate that the word *peplos* is 'the oldest term in the epic tradition' for the principal garment of female clothing.¹⁰ This range of traditional epithets includes *τανύπεπλος*, 'with long, flowing robe', the sense of which seems to be similar to that of *ἐλκεσίπεπλος*, 'trailing the *πέπλος*, with long flowing *πέπλος*'. Such epithets contribute to our visualization of the pictorial image which may be

⁶ The phrase is from William James, *Principles of Psychology* (New York, 1890), v. 2, p. 78, where it is argued that 'every perception is an acquired perception'.

⁷ Joyce's phrase in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: 'The phrase and the day and the scene harmonized in a chord. Words. Was it their colours? He allowed them to glow and fade, hue after hue: sunrise gold, the russet... through the prism of a language many-coloured and richly storied.'

⁸ Cf. e.g. A. Sideras, *Aeschylus Homericus: Untersuchungen zu den Homerismen der aischyleischen Sprache* (Göttingen, 1971). Sideras, p. 205, cites Il. 5.734–5 as the Homeric model for Ag. 239.

⁹ F. E. Wallace, *Color in Homer and in Ancient Art: Preliminary Studies* (Northampton, Mass., 1927), p. 51.

¹⁰ H. L. Lorimer, *Homer and the Monuments* (London, 1950), ch. 6 (336–405), pp. 377, 389. It might be noted that tragedy tends to generalize the traditional epic term *peplos* by often using it in the plural (hence *πέπλοις περιπετῇ*, 233) (see Lorimer, p. 389).

being suggested in Aeschylus' depiction of the sacrifice. *εύπεπλος*, 'with beautiful *peplos*, beautifully robed', registers an appreciation of the resplendent quality of such robes, which is also marked in Homer by comparisons of these garments with the brilliant, shining light of the sun or a star.¹¹ Such comparisons reflect the association of dawn with a robe, distinguished in the epic by its colour saffron.¹²

In part, the saffron robe of Eos reaffirms and elaborates a personification of the dawn which, it has been suggested, may be of Indo-European origin.¹³ E. Irwin's argument, however, that the epithet 'saffron-robed' does not suggest the colours of dawn, but rather serves to mark the status of Dawn as 'primarily a goddess for Homer [and] not a natural phenomenon', seems to overstate the element of personification at the expense of what has long been appreciated as a vivid and memorable poetic perception of the splendour of daybreak.¹⁴ The imaginative epic epithets for dawn have not only been a source of imitation throughout the literary tradition; they also attracted the attention of the earliest commentators. For the Homeric scholia and Eustathius, *κροκόπεπλος* evoked a slightly sombre moment at the first burgeoning of the light of dawn in the midst of darkness before the transformation into *ρόδοδάκτυλος*, 'rose-fingered' dawn. The sun is anticipated by a relay of heralding colours.¹⁵

Aeschylus characteristically reworks the Homeric language he adopts. At the point of return to the robes of Iphigeneia (*peploisi*) within the description of her sacrifice, a point of restatement and a resumption of the traditional language and imagery, Aeschylus produces a bold innovation: *κρόκου βαφὰς δ' ἐς πέδον χέουσα* (239). The phrase *κρόκου βαφὰς* is allusive, the poet relying upon recognition of the tradition he is recalling and modifying, as the colour of the Homeric diction is woven into the design of his own trilogy with its particular focus upon fabrics, robes, and dyeing. Here Aeschylus achieves a striking intensity of colour, in what is to become a prominent motif in the trilogy, by emphasizing the very *process of colouring* through

¹¹ Penelope's weaving, for example, is described as *ἡελίω ἐναλίγκιον ἢ σελήνῃ*, *Od.* 24.148; at *Od.* 19.234 Odysseus' robe is *λαμπρὸς δ' ἦν ἡέλιος ὥς*. Cf. *Il.* 6.293–5, *Od.* 15.105–8.

¹² The *Odyssey* achieves a gentle effect in terms of these relations when dawn (*Ἡὼς ἐυθρονος*) awakens the young girl Nausikaa, who is described as *εὐπεπλος* (*Od.* 6.48–9).

¹³ See M. L. West, in his edition of Hesiod, *Works and Days* (Oxford, 1978), p. 383, for Eos as 'one of the very few identifiable Indo-European deities in the Greek pantheon'; cf. D. D. Boedeker, *Aphrodite's Entry into Greek Epic* (Leiden, 1974), p. 72; on Eos in general, see also *LIMC*, s.v. (v. 3, pt. 1, esp. pp. 748–9) and C. Mugler, *Dictionnaire historique de la terminologie optique des grecs* (Paris, 1964), s.v. *ἑως*, *ἡώς*.

¹⁴ The quotation is from E. Irwin, 'The Crocus and the Rose: A Study of the Interrelationship between the Natural and the Divine World in Early Greek Poetry', in D. E. Gerber (ed.), *Greek Poetry and Philosophy* (Chico, Calif., 1984), 147–68, p. 158. M. Leumann, on the other hand, regards the Homeric epithets for dawn as 'konkret-anschaulich' in their reference to the natural phenomenon of daybreak, reflecting 'die alte Naturanschauung' (*Homerische Wörter* (Basel, 1950), p. 18 n. 9).

¹⁵ See *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem*, ed. H. Erbse (Berlin, 1969–88), on *Il.* 8.1 (v. 2, p. 297) and on *Il.* 1.477 (v. 1, p. 134). The same explanation is repeated and elaborated by Eustathius, *Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes, ad fidem codicis Laurentiani editi*, ed. M. van der Valk (Leiden, 1971–87), 693.46–56 (v. 2, pp. 509–10). Cf. also Eustathius, *Commentarii ad Homeri Odysseam, ad fidem exempli Romani editi* (Leipzig, 1825; repr. Hildesheim, 1960), 1429 (v. 1, p. 76). Also interesting in this relation also is Eustathius' comment on the term *ἡριγένεια*: *Ἡὼς: δύναιται μὲν οὖν Ἡριγένεια ῥηθῆναι καὶ ἡ τὸν ὄρθρον γεννώσα. μάλιστα δέ, παθητικὸς ὁ τῆς λέξεως ταύτης σχηματισμός, ὡς ἡ Ἰφιγένεια δηλοῖ καὶ ἡ Τριτογένεια. αἱ γεννηθεῖσαι δηλαδὴ ἡ μὲν, ἀπὸ ἰσχυροῦ καὶ βασιλικοῦ γένους* (1430). On *Eos erigeneia* in Homer see also N. Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in Homer's 'Odyssey'* (Berkeley, 1975), p. 92; cf. A. E. Kober, *The Use of Color Terms in the Greek Poets* (Geneva, NY, 1932), p. 60, and Wallace (n. 9 above).

the phrase *κρόκου βαφάς*.¹⁶ In dissolving and recomposing the epic language, transforming the traditional *κροκόπεπλος* into *κρόκου βαφάς*,¹⁷ Aeschylus significantly accentuates the fluidity of the flowing fabric at the point where the temporal sequence of narrative enters the suspended realm of image and painting (*πρέπουσά θ' ὡς ἐν γραφαῖς*, 242). While dyeing is essentially the fixing of colour in fluidity, Aeschylus reverses the process, reintroduces a flow of fabric and colour into the fixity of his arrested image, held like a painting; the spatial composition suddenly acquires a temporal design in the suggested traditional association with the dawn. The tinge of transience spreads gradually across the silent and otherwise static space of the image. In this suspended world of infinite duration, where all falls into stillness and still falls, the lasting effect is one of an endless flow.

In Homer, *Ἡὼς δὲ κροκόπεπλος ἐκίδνατο πᾶσαν ἐπ' αἶαν*: dawn 'is spread, dispersed or scattered'. The verb *κίδνημι* is a poetic form for *σκεδάννυμι*, used, for example, of dispersing or scattering mist. The epic language already carries a hint of the inherently evanescent event which is the dawn, first light cast by an unseen sun, colour scattered across the sky and over the earth. Dawn is spread, disperses, is dispersed. Its dispersal is both its effulgence and its fading, an intense transience displayed across the sky, a luminous process of eventual loss, reaching in its gradual extension its deferred extinction, this 'the diffusion of daybreak'.¹⁸ Something of this suggestion of loss seems to have been explored in Sappho, fr. 104a (L-P), where evening displaces dawn, 'the bringer of light' (*φῶως φέρουσα*), to 'bring back', restore all that dawn disperses – all except the child to its mother:

"Εσπερε, πάντα φέρων ὅσα φαίνολις ἐσκέδα' Αὔωας,
†φέρεις ὄν, φέρεις αἶγα, φέρεις ἅπυτ' μᾶτερι παῖδα.¹⁹

The mother's irrevocable loss of her child pierces through Clytemnestra's opening words. Birth (*τῆς νῦν τεκούσης*, 279) is belied by death in a dawn which is not here a break from the past, but rather bears the burden of past grief. Even as Clytemnestra announces it, the dawn is lost on this sunless day of vengeance given over to the unseen, dark-robed daughters of the Night, the Erinyes. If, at the point of parting of day and night, Clytemnestra appropriates the day in the maternal image of parturition, it is an appropriation of the day by or for the night. Her great beacon speech that follows is not only an incandescent account of immense advances in space. It is also, more subtly, an extended return in time to the darkness of the vast night; her account takes the audience from the early sunlight of the new day to what is, in its course through the night, 'like some sun', *ὥς τις ἥλιος* (288), then 'like the shining moon', *δίκην φαιδράς σελήνης* (297–8). Similarly, Clytemnestra's second

¹⁶ For the close association of *βαφή* and colour in later work, see Aristotle's *Περὶ χρωμάτων* (*On Colours*), where it is maintained that the earth is naturally white, but seems coloured because it is dyed (791a1.4–6: *καὶ ἡ γῆ δ' ἐστὶ φύσει λευκή, παρὰ δὲ τὴν βαφὴν πολύχρους φαίνεται*). Throughout the treatise, colour in the natural world is explained in terms of the analogy with artificial dyeing.

¹⁷ Hence LSJ, s.v. *βαφή*, 'the saffron-dyed robe' (for the plural *βαφάς*, comparable to *πέπλοιαι*, 233, see n. 10 above). On the motif of dyeing cf. e.g. *Ag.* 960, *εἰμάτων βαφάς*, 1121, *κροκοβαφής*; *Cho.* 1013, *πολλὰς βαφάς ... τοῦ ποικίλματος*; *Eum.* 1028, *φοινικόβαπτος*; and see W. Ferrari, 'La parodos dell' *Agamemnone*', *Ann. d. R. Sc. Norm. Sup. di Pisa: Lett., St. e Fil.*, ser. 2, 7 (1938), 355–99, p. 393, and O. Hiltbrunner, *Wiederholungs- und Motivtechnik bei Aischylos* (Bern, 1950), pp. 62–3.

¹⁸ Joyce's phrase in *Ulysses*.

¹⁹ See e.g. M. Treu, *Sappho* (Munich, 1968), p. 225, and J. S. Clay, 'Sappho's Hesperus and Hesiod's Dawn', *Philologus* 124 (1980), 302–5; cf. J. A. Davison, *From Archilochus to Pindar* (London, 1968), p. 246 n. 1, and E. Fraenkel, 'Vesper adest', *JRS* 45 (1955), 1–8.

powerful speech traces the movements of the Achaeans at night (*νυκτίπλαγκτος*, 330) through the site of destruction which is Troy, as they take possession of the city, but not, as they presume (*ἀφύλακτον εὐδήσουσι πάσαν εὐφρόνην*, 337), of the night.

In response to this reinstatement of a pervasive night, the Chorus address an ode of celebration to Zeus and *Nux philia* (355), ‘possessor of great glories’ (356).²⁰ Late in the same ode a very different aspect of night is intimated when the Chorus voice a persistent sense of anxiety, their apprehension of something that is *νυκτηρεφής* (460, ‘found only here’, as Fraenkel observes); they elaborate this sense of foreboding with mention of the *κελαιναὶ Ἐρινύες* (461–2) and a destructive power from which there is no protection or defence, *οὔτις ἀλκά* (467–8). The *harpax νυκτηρεφής* recalls the Homeric epithet for the home, the *δῶμα* that is *ὑπερεφές*, roofed as a protective shelter from the outer world.²¹ In place of the security and stability usually associated with the home, it is anxiety that tends to abide (*μένει*) within this play, in a world where the basic means of protection, such as clothing and coverings, roofed space and robes, become implements of destruction. The ‘covering’ net of night may itself be a potential form of shelter, but, like the vault of night, the ‘roof’ of the outer world, it exposes and traps, covers and encloses, shrouds rather than shelters.²² This inversion invades the home itself, the focus of a play in which that protected and protective structure by which the family seeks to secure itself is negated, so that what is ‘roofed’ is at best a concealed darkness, in which the hearth provides less a source of light in the night than a site for unseen sacrifice (1055–7).

Within the great play of darkness and light that structures the *Oresteia*, there are a multitude of sensitive reflections on the possibilities of this founding metaphor and source of images – subtle modulations and inflections of the poetic tradition which call for detailed appreciation.²³ Further analysis of this array of poetic imagery and close textual imbrication is beyond the scope of this paper, but one final general point

²⁰ *Nux philia* is almost an allusion to the term for night, *eu-phronē*; cf. the collocation at 805–6, *οὐδ’ ἀφίλως εὐφρων*.

²¹ For *ὑπερεφής* with *δῶμα* see *Il.* 5.213, 19.333, *Od.* 4.15, 4.46, 7.85, 7.225, 10.111, 13.4–5, 15.424, 15.241, 15.432, 19.526; one might compare *οἶκον ὑψόροφον*, *Od.* 5.42, 5.115, 7.77; cf. *ἐρέ(φω)*, ‘cover with a roof’ (LSJ).

²² Cf. *Ag.* 355–61; for the sense of *στεγανόν* (358, a ‘covering’ net), see Fraenkel, v. 2, pp. 188–9: ‘The adjective... carries the notion, roughly, of a horizontal roof-life or lid-like covering.’ Fraenkel’s cites Thuc. 3.21.4 for the sense ‘at night, for a shelter against rain’.

²³ Here one might mention one transposition, where the saffron, that first of several great strokes of colour in the trilogy, is unexpectedly reworked. Later in the play, within a context which includes a number of disparate echoes of the Iphigenia scene (cf. e.g. *ἐν πέπλοις*, 1126) the rays of dawn and the saffron of daybreak are dispersed in the late reflection of evening, the departing light of mortal life, as some of the suggestive implications of the scene of sacrifice, a dawn compounded with death, are forcefully intensified: *ἐπὶ δὲ καρδίαν ἔδραμε κροκοβαφῆς | σταγῶν, ἅτε καὶ δορὶ πτωσίμποις | ξυνανύτει βίου δύντος αὐγαῖς*, ‘And to my heart runs a drop of saffron dye, | the drop that for men who fall by the spear | accompanies the rays of life’s sun as it sets’ (1121–3; cf. 254, *σύνορθρον αὐγαῖς*, in the Chorus’s anticipation of daybreak at the outset of the play). One might compare such a transposition with Sappho’s reworking of the traditional epithets for dawn: ‘But now she is pre-eminent among ladies of Lydia, like the rosy-fingered moon after sunset *ὥς ποτ’ ἀελίῳ δύντος ἀ βροδοδάκτυλος μήνη*’, | Surpassing all the stars; its light extends...’, etc. (Sappho, fr. 96 (L-P)). The later passage in the *Agamemnon* confirms the previously implicit association of dye with blood, which is not to say that *κρόκου βαφῆς* at 239 should be understood to mean ‘blood’; as A. F. Garvie succinctly comments on the phrase in his edition of the *Choephoroi* (Oxford, 1986), it ‘denotes Iphigenia’s robe but connotes blood’ (p. 332). Cf. B. Vickers’s comment in *Towards Greek Tragedy: Drama, Myth, Society* (London, 1973), ‘her robes hang downwards as a proleptic analogy with the flow of her blood, a movement which is familiar from many vase paintings’ (p. 428 n. 13).

needs to be considered. It is perhaps important that in making a suggestion as to the significance of certain details in the account of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, one returns finally to acknowledge and attempt to define a central quality of the scene which will not be completely exhausted by any single suggestion, but is rather to be recognized as a particularly significant source of meaning. In his general discussion of 'poetic design' and the place of the image in Aeschylean drama, T. G. Rosenmeyer raises the question of the possibility of a significant relation between the choral ode and Clytemnestra's first words:

At the end of the first ode of *Agamemnon* the recollection of Iphigeneia's sacrifice is fresh and troubling. Very soon afterwards, Clytemnestra has her first words. We expect her utterance to be, to some degree, in response to that recollection and to the choral comments, no matter whether she has been on the stage to hear them or not. Images voiced affect behavior and action; this is one of the crucial ways in which drama differs from other genres. But it is also one extremely hard to trace and demonstrate.²⁴

Rosenmeyer senses – and it is a perception that helps to locate a fundamental feature of the text – that the words in the play gesture towards some specific significance which calls for formulation while eluding the critic's efforts.

On the threshold of that 'transition into visibility' which in general distinguishes tragedy as a literary form,²⁵ Aeschylus presents, in narrative and words alone, the unseen picture of an unrepresentable event: the sacrifice of a child. The image is created within that tension. From the enforced silence of an Iphigeneia who remains unnamed and *anaudos*, the account appeals for its impact to the visual element of what remains an occluded scene. The scene of sacrifice is constructed less by direct description than by evocation, before it breaks off irrevocably. It is the powerful suggestiveness, the allusive force of words that summon troubling and unformulated associations, which produces such a compelling sense of immanence, of something that is very much there yet hard to define. In the midst of the account – and in its very construction – there seem to be intimations of an unseen dawn. We are 'presented' with something that is negated in its emergence, evoked in its silence, as it gradually gathers broken and intermittent fragments into a resplendent unfolding, standing out while withheld from view, before it fades, leaving a wake of suggestiveness, from which each interpretation attempts to reconstruct its own partial glimpse of the unseen.

The image of Iphigeneia is, in all its striking colour, the tragic product of a negated art – *πρέπουσά θ' ὡς ἐν γραφαῖς, προσεννέπειν θέλουσα*: unseen, she stands out in her desire but inability to speak, voiceless 'like a painting'. The depiction of the event is very much the confrontation of negated art with a negated object. And it leaves its audience with the tension that has structured it throughout. The account breaks off suddenly at line 248, harshly interrupting, and in so doing highlighting, the text's endeavour to find articulate forms for the unsayable. The Chorus speak out to the very limits of the unspeakable, both succeeding and failing to provide a voice for the *anaudon*, not only that 'at which or in which there is no speech', but also 'something for which (for describing which) there is no speech, no means of expression'.²⁶ In

²⁴ T. G. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* (Berkeley, 1982), p. 121. Cf. D. J. Conacher, *Aeschylus' 'Oresteia': A Literary Commentary* (Toronto, 1987), who describes the words as 'cryptic' (p. 62 n. 30).

²⁵ H.-G. Gadamer's phrase in 'Philosophy and Poetry', in R. Bernasconi (ed.), *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, tr. N. Walker (Cambridge, 1986), 131–9, p. 136; cf. J.-P. Vernant, 'Entretien', *Magazine littéraire*, June 1986, p. 96; 'En effet, la tragédie marque un changement considérable sur le plan des formes littéraires. Il n'y a plus un poète qui chante ses histoires, mais un spectacle...'.
²⁶ See Fraenkel, v. 2, p. 137.

narrating the sacrifice, presenting the unrepresentable in terms reminiscent of an unseen dawn, the Chorus attempt to meet the urgent need to find words for what imposes silence even while it demands speech.²⁷

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