THE SERPENT AND THE SPARROWS: HOMER AND THE PARODOS OF AESCHYLUS' *AGAMEMNON*

The Homeric influence on two prominent avian images in the parodos of the *Agamemnon*—the vulture simile (49–50) and the omen of the eagles and the pregnant hare (109–10)—has long been noted.[1] In 1979 West suggested that the animal imagery also derived in part from Archilochus' fable of the fox and the eagle (frr. 172–81 West),[2] and his discussion was quickly welcomed and supplemented by Janko's reading of the eagle and snake imagery used by Orestes at *Cho.* 246–7.[3] Capping this *triennium mirabile* of critical interest in Aeschylus' birds of prey, Davies argued that the convincing resemblances between the fable and the Aeschylean passages in West's thesis—the anthropomorphism implied in παίδων (*Ag.* 50) and δεῖπνον (*Ag.* 137) and the concern of Zeus for aggrieved animals (*Ag.* 55–6)—derive more generally from the nature of fable rather than from any one particular tale.[4] Thus we have, according to Davies, an example of Aeschylus 'exploring the resources and familiar modes of expression of a popular and well-known genre' and transforming it into 'the purest and sublimest type of poetry'.[5]

My aim here is not to reject outright the West–Davies theory of the influence of fable on the two passages but to suggest that this background served merely to facilitate the transference of the more likely source—the sparrow and snake omen at Aulis—into the *Oresteia*. Aeschylus avoids any direct allusion to this famous portent found in both the *Iliad* (2.299–332) and the *Cypria* (as summarized in Proclus' *Chrestomathy*). Instead, the poet weaves the main features of the omen throughout the first 200 lines of the *Agamemnon*.[6] The West–Davies model correctly examines

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[1] See discussion below; the text is that of Page's *OCT* with some orthographical changes.

[2] M. L. West, 'The parodos of the *Agamemnon*', *CQ* 29 (1979), 1–6.

[3] R. Janko, 'Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Archilochus', *CQ* 30 (1980), 291–3.

[4] M. Davies, 'Aeschylus and the fable', *Hermes* 109 (1981), 248–51.

[5] Ibid., 251.

[6] J. J. Peradotto, 'The omen of the eagles and the ΗΘΟΣ of Agamemnon', *Phoenix* 23 (1969), 237–63 at 243, notes the Aeschylean conflation of the two gatherings at Aulis—the snake/sparrow omen and the sacrifice of Iphigenia (not mentioned by Homer)—in the eagle/hare omen, but does not consider the role of the vulture simile. T. G. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* (Berkeley, 1982), 125–7, sees the vulture and eagle episodes as a pair, where a 'syntactic' and an 'asyntactic' simile combine forces, but he does not consider the Homeric antecedents. Other readers, ancient and modern, have heard echoes of the Homeric passage in the death of the hares; cf. A. Sideras, *Aeschylus Homericus* (Göttingen, 1971), 221 and F. R. Adrados, 'El Tema del Aquila, de la Epica Acadia a Esquilo', *Emerita* 32 (1964), 267–82 at 270–2. Both this article and his 'El Tema del Leon en el *Agamenon* de Esquilo (717–49)', *Emerita* 33 (1965), 1–5, examine how Aeschylus may have adapted fable as filtered through Homer and archaic poetry. One ancient commentator thought he saw—no doubt wrongly—a direct allusion to this omen in Calchas' prophecy. A gloss on *Agamemnon* 145, apparently explaining a slightly dangling τούτων in v. 144, adds στρουθῶν (or τῶν στρουθῶν) to δεξιὰ μὲν κατάμομφα δὲ φάσματα; see Fraenkel ad loc. and the twenty-two page discussion in J. Bollack and P. Judet de La Combe, *L' Agamemnon d' Eschyle: le texte et ses interprétations* (Lille, 1981–), ad loc. One passage in the *Agamemnon* may suggest that Aeschylus had the first half of the second book of the *Iliad* on his mind. When commenting on the deceptive nature of friendship (832–3), Agamemnon cites Odysseus as the single man who, though initially unwilling to go to war, once 'yoked' was a trace-horse dedicated to Agamemnon (841–2). What would inspire this statement? Of all the efforts by which Odysseus could be said to

both bird passages from the parodos under the same microscope. But the chorus' description of the sacrifice of Iphigenia—the centrepiece of the parodos and one of the events conjured up by both the simile and omen[7]—should be included as a third passage in this analysis as well. By taking the rather straightforward omen at Aulis from Homer that reveals the length and outcome of the siege, and recasting the animal imagery through a simile, omen, and human sacrifice, Aeschylus typically—and uncomfortably—conflates human with beast as well as past with present, victim with agent, and image with event, a confusion that is central to the meaning of the *Oresteia*. An examination of the dramatist's adaptation of a traditional episode, then, is not primarily a venture into source-hunting but provides a window into the connections between style and meaning crucial for understanding any Aeschylean work.[8]

Before trying to demonstrate the central role of the omen of the sparrow and snake for Aeschylus' parodos, it must be conceded that the tragic imagery owes much in general to Homeric poetry. For the initial image, where the war cries of the Atreidae (μεγάλ' ἐκ θυμοῦ κλάζοντες Ἄρη, *Ag.* 48)[9] at the theft of Helen are compared to the screaming of vultures who have lost their young, commentators note especially the parallels with similes at *Il.* 16.428–30 and *Od.* 16.216–19. In the latter passage, the wailing (κλαῖον) of Odysseus and Telemachus upon reunion is compared to that of birds, including vultures (αἰγυπιοί), whose unfledged chicks (τέκνα) have been taken by country workers. The simile in *Il.* 16 compares the cries (ὡς οἱ κεκλήγοντες) of Sarpedon and Patroclus to the loud screeches (μεγάλα κλάζοντε) of vultures (αἰγυπιοί) attacking each other.[10] To these should be added *Il.* 11.113–14, where

aid Agamemnon's cause in particular (see Thomson ad loc.), by far the most appropriate for this context would be the Ithacan's successful efforts to stop the Greeks from sailing home (*Il.* 2.188–9). And it is in pursuing this objective that Odysseus reminds the Greeks of the omen at Aulis and Calchas' interpretation. Perhaps this will partially answer R. P. Winnington-Ingram's question as to why Odysseus is introduced by Agamemnon at all; 'Notes on the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus', *BICS* 21 (1974), 3–19 at 15, n. 11. Of course, the larger dramatic point of Agamemnon's misunderstanding the chorus' warning is to reveal once again his self-absorption and weakness.

[7] The exact correspondence of the allusions in the vulture and eagle images has proven elusive; there is no room here to enter the fray. I discuss the possible analogies briefly below, but for the purposes of this paper perhaps it will be sufficient to suggest that it is this very slippery ambivalence or multivalence that lies at the heart of Aeschylus' animal imagery until the last 300 verses of the *Eumenides*; for a more complete exposition of the connections between bestial images and the themes of the trilogy, see my 'Disentangling the beast: humans and other animals in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*', *JHS* (forthcoming 1999).

[8] Davies (n. 4), 251, n. 5, observes that the use of a fable is part of Aeschylus' animal imagery, but he does not suggest (nor does West [n. 2] or Janko [n. 3]) *how* the poet's use of fable might fit into the larger issues of the trilogy.

[9] West (n. 2), 1, n.1, asserts that there is no reason to accept Page's emendation of μέγαν to μεγάλ' merely on the basis of the similar Homeric phrasing.

[10] On bird imagery in the similes of Homer, see C. Moulton, *Similes in the Homeric Poems* (Göttingen, 1977), 135–9. *Scutum* 405–6 develops the simile. Birds also shriek in flight: the Greeks shout (κεκλήγοντες, *Il.* 17.759) while fleeing from Hector and Aeneas as a cloud of birds cries (κεκλήγοντες, *Il.* 17.756) when it spots a falcon. Two omens also contain screaming birds: an eagle screeches when bitten by a snake (*Il.* 12.207; see discussion below) and a heron sent by Athena at night is heard by the Greeks (*Il.* 10.276). It should be noted that some scholars consider these αἰγυπιοί to be eagles, not vultures, equivalent in some fashion to the αἰετοί in the eagle/hare omen; see, for example, F. I. Zeitlin 'The motif of the corrupted sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*', *TAPA* 96 (1965), 481; Thomson, 1, 21; J. H. Finley, Jr, *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge, MA, 1955), 9–10, and Lattimore's translation. In fact the two were often confused in antiquity—they were considered by many to refer to the same bird; see the passages cited by D. W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (London, 1936) in articles under both names: 'The Vultures were, and

Agamemnon is compared to a lion who crushes the offspring of a hind as she stands helplessly nearby, soon fleeing for her own life. Here we find the same kind of anthropomorphism we will see in the *Agamemnon*, both with the use of νήπια τέκνα for the fawns (the expression is used only once elsewhere in Homer of animals—in the Aulis omen) and also with the slightly more common metaphorical extension of εὐνή to mean 'lair' (so used five times in Homer; cf. Aeschylus' choice of λέχος for nest, discussed below). Also of interest in this connection is the simile at *Il*. 18.316–23, where Achilles' groans of lament (γόοιο; cf. *Ag*. 57, γόον) for the dead Patroclus are compared to those of a lioness whose whelps have been stolen. The language of Homer, then, may have found new life in the vulture simile of the *Agamemnon*.

There is no Homeric parallel quite so close to Aeschylus' omen of the eagle and the hare, but several passages are suggestive. Most of Homer's bird omens involve eagles, but none includes a hare. Portentous eagles attack snakes (*Il*. 12.200–1), geese (*Od*. 15.160–1, 19.538–9), doves (*Od*. 20.242–3; cf. 15.525–6 for a hawk as the predator), and a fawn (*Il*. 8.247–8). The appearance of an eagle in answer to a prayer also serves as a providential sign (*Il*. 13.821–2, 24.314–15). Eagles (and vultures, for that matter) also swoop down upon geese, cranes, swans, and 'smaller birds' in Homeric similes (*Il*. 15.690–1, 17.460; *Od*. 22.302; in *Od*. 2.146–7 they attack each other). The darting of characters is frequently compared to the motion of birds of prey (*Il*. 13.531; 21.252–3; *Od*. 24.538). Two Homeric similes in particular may have influenced Aeschylus' omen. At *Il*. 17.674–5, Menelaus' glance is compared to that of a sharp-eyed eagle who can spot from afar a swift-footed hare (πτώξ) hiding in a bush. And Hector's desperate attack on Achilles is likened to the swoop of a high-flying eagle upon a lamb or hare (πτῶκα λαγωόν, *Il*. 22.308–10; cf. *Il*. 10.360–1, where Diomedes and Odysseus pursue Dolon like two hounds after a doe or screaming hare). But unlike the eagles in Aeschylus, Homeric birds never ingest their prey, and the maternal aspects of the victim are not featured.[11]

The simile and omen in Aeschylus, then, seem to derive from Homeric motifs—the

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are, frequently confused under the name ἀετός', and he suggests that this passage is one of the con- fused references (p. 5). Interestingly, vultures had a reputation in antiquity for inordinate affection for their young—and the young of other species; see J. R. T. Pollard, 'Birds in Aeschylus', *G&R* 17 (1948), 116–17, and E. Petrounias, *Funktion und Thematik der Bilder bei Aischylos* (Göttingen, 1976), 130 with n. 496.

[11] There is one partial exception at *Iliad* 12.200–1. As the Trojan troops of Hector and Polydamas prepare to storm the wall and burn the Achaean ships, they spot an eagle carrying a snake. The snake bites its abductor and falls among the soldiers. Polydamas quickly interprets this 'portent sent from Zeus': the Trojans will retreat, leaving behind many of their own dead, just as the eagle let the snake fall before it could reach its nest to feed its offspring. Polydamas' interpretation is correct, of course, and its rejection by Hector—'one bird omen is best, to fight for one's country'—offers insight into Hector's character, present attitude, and ultimate folly. But it is Polydamas, not the poet, who adds the domestic touches to the actual event to support his interpretation. He supplies the motives of the eagle from his own imagination—to take food home (φίλα οἰκί' ἱκέσθαι, 221) for the children (τεκέεσσιν, 222). The Greek οἰκία is used twice elsewhere in Homer of animals' homes (*Il*. 12.168, 16.261), both of wasps (and bees) who defend their children (τέκνων, *Il*. 12.168; τέκεσσι, 16.265). τέκος is used twice elsewhere of animal young—of the fawn dropped by an eagle (*Il*. 8.248) and in the comparison of Ajax' protection of Patroclus' body to that of a lioness for its τέκεσσιν (17.133). These are all passages filled with pathos and emotion. Thus Homer shows us Polydamas putting his own domestic spin on the omen, revealing his warranted concerns for his city and family. For eagle omens in the *Iliad*, see R. W. Bushnell, 'Reading "Winged Words": Homeric bird signs, similes, and epiphanies', *Helios* 9 (1982), 1–13, and E. K. Ahnhalt, 'Barrier and transcendence: the door and the eagle in *Iliad* 24.314–21', *CQ* 45 (1995), 280–95.

loss of young animals and the attack of animals, especially eagles—but not from any single passage.[12] But one famous Homeric and Cyclic episode—the omen of the snake and the sparrows at Aulis—may well have supplied a blueprint for Aeschylus' oblique treatment of the events in Greece just before the armada sailed for Troy. This episode alone in Homer combines the attack of an animal on another with the loss of the young and the mother herself, all in the context of Zeus-sent victory so central to the *Oresteia*. The chorus in the parodos of the *Agamemnon* is obsessed with the past, in particular the events that took place ten years before: the divinely ordained mission of the Atreidae (embedded in the vulture simile), the horrific omen, and the subsequent sacrifice of Iphigenia. If Aeschylus' imagination turned to Homer for inspiration—and no one doubts the essential truth of his 'tidbits from Homer's feasts'—the omen at Aulis was virtually all that he had to work with.[13] By comparing Homer's version of the pre-Trojan events with the three Aeschylean passages—the vulture simile (48–59), the eagle/hare omen (109–57), and the sacrifice of Iphigenia (184–247)—we shall see just why and how the dramatist has incorporated the traditional account into his strikingly different narrative.

The omen of the sparrows and snake in the second book of the *Iliad* is recounted by Odysseus as part of his speech to steady the homesick troops. He recalls that their ships were gathered at Aulis (ἐς Αὐλίδα νῆες Ἀχαιῶν / ἠγερέθοντο, 2.303–4), the only direct Homeric reference to the pre-Iliadic events at Aulis. Aeschylus seems to set his omen at Aulis as well, noting that the king of birds appeared to the kings of the ships (οἰωνῶν βασιλεὺς βασιλεῦσι νεῶν, 114–15). Iphigenia, of course, is sacrificed at Aulis (παλιρρόχθοις ἐν Αὐλίδος τόποις, 190–1), the only time Aulis is mentioned by name in the trilogy. The context of the opening vulture simile also subtly evokes the gathering at Aulis, as the chorus begins by noting that this is the tenth year since the sons of Atreus launched the 'thousand-ship expedition of the Greeks from this land' (στόλον Ἀργείων χιλιοναύτην / τῆσδ' ἀπὸ χώρας, 45–6). Aulis, then, shapes the dramatic landscape of all three Aeschylean passages.[14]

[12] This survey does not exhaust all the possible Homeric parallels. Other passages, not directly related to animals, have been suggested as influences on the hare and eagle omen; see, for example, Davies' comments (n. 4), 248, n.1, on H. R. Dawson's discussion of Agamemnon's 'grim boast' at *Il.* 6.57ff. in *CR* 41 (1927), 214ff.

[13] We sometimes forget how striking that episode is, and was, particularly the ending. Ancient commentators rejected the transformation into stone (G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary* vol. I [Cambridge, 1985], on 2.318–19, agrees; see his arguments there). The transformation seems un-Homeric, certainly un-Iliadic. Niobe's metamorphosis into stone was also athetized; the petrifaction of the Phaeacians' ship is clearly motivated in the epic and seems more in keeping with the folk tale narrative of the *Odyssey*. For the dramatist's debt to Homer, I have found especially helpful W. B. Stanford, *Aeschylus in his Style* (Dublin, 1942), 15–27, the scattered comments of J. Dumortier, *Les Images dans la Poésie d'Eschyle* (Paris, 1975), and Petrounias (n. 10). A. Sideras's study (n. 6) remains the standard work, but his analysis of the vulture simile is limited to noting the 'strong Homeric coloring' (p. 247). H. R. Dawson, 'On *Agamemnon* 108–120', *CR* 41 (1927), 213–14 put the issue nicely: 'But repeatedly Aeschylus finds in the simple Homeric narrative a suggestion which, transformed by his reflection and imagination, is given again to us in a beautiful development, original in every sense possible to nearly all literature, art, discovery and invention. Literature cannot be understood except in its relations.' Aeschylus would have known other versions of the snake/sparrow omen, but Homer's would certainly have been foremost on his mind. The version in the *Cypria* seems to have been very close to Homer's; see Proclus' summary, Apollod. *Epit.* 3.5, and M. Davies, *The Epic Cycle* (Bristol, 1989), 43–4. For Aeschylean manipulation of the mythological tradition, see also A. J. N. W. Prag, *The Oresteia: Iconographic and Narrative Tradition* (Warminster, 1985) and J. R. March, *The Creative Poet* (*BICS* Suppl. 49, 1987), 81–118.

[14] The emphasis in the *Oresteia* on the *maritime* leadership of Agamemnon (cf. *Ag.* 184–5,

It is easy to overlook the context of the portent as told by Odysseus. The Greeks were in the midst of a sacrifice, offering hecatombs on the holy altars (ἱερούς κατά βωμούς, 305). Odysseus later informs us that the omen interrupted the sacrifice (δεινά πέλωρα θεῶν εἰσῆλθ᾽ ἑκατόμβας, 321). Aeschylus too, as commentators do not fail to point out, refers to both the eagle/hare omen and the slaughter of Iphigenia as sacrifices.[15] In fact, the chorus links the two events by using specifically religious terminology. Calchas reports that Artemis is angered at the eagles' 'sacrificing the hare' (πτάκα θυομένοισιν, 136), and he later worries that the goddess's wrath could force *another* impious and inedible sacrifice (θυσίαν ἑτέραν ἄνομόν τιν᾽ ἄδαιτον, 150).[16] Iphigenia's death becomes the ultimate in perverted sacrifices (214–15, 224–7, 240–1), when she is slaughtered like a goat on the sacrificial altar (210–11, 232). And dramatically, the vulture simile also is delivered in the midst of sacrificing. Whether Clytemnestra enters at verse 83 or later, the chorus makes it clear that the queen has been lighting the sacrificial fires for quite a while.[17] The altars are already ablaze with offerings (βωμοὶ δώροισι φλέγονται, 91) as the flame shoots into the sky (οὐρανομήκης / λαμπὰς ἀνίσχει (92–3).

Homer's omen thus sets the place (Aulis) and context (sacrifice) of all three passages in the parodos. The salient elements of the first part of the portent, which we will find scattered among the separate passages of the *Agamemnon*, are the following.

1227; *Cho.* 723; *Eum.* 637) is unusual. The centrality of Aulis, where the ships are held at bay until Iphigenia's sacrifice, is certainly one of the reasons. A. H. Sommerstein has recently argued that the omen in fact takes place in front of the palace at Argos, not at Aulis at all; 'Aesch. *Ag.* 104–59 (the omen of Aulis or the omen of Argos?)', *Museum Criticum* 30–1 (1995–6), 87–94. His strongest evidence is the fact that the eagles appeared ἴκταρ μελάθρων (116)—what is a palace doing at Aulis? Frankel (ad loc.) notes that μέλαθρα can refer to the temporary lodging of the Atreidae, as in Euripides' *IA* 440, 612, 678, 685, 820, 854. Sommerstein counters with two objections. (i) In Euripides the μέλαθρα refer to the *skene*, whereas the setting for *Agamemnon* is, of course, the house of Agamemnon; this argument must remain inconclusive, however—there is no obvious reason that the chorus, old men whose memories are travelling all over the Aegean, must be referring to the stage. (ii) More generally, the original audience would not have known of the link between the omen and the sacrifice until verse 134, and so all previous images in the parodos, including the omen, could not have conjured up anything to do with Aulis. Thus the most natural interpretation of μέλαθρα would be to the only house so far referred to, that of the Atreidae at Argos.

I cannot do justice to Sommerstein's careful argument here—I hope to address it more fully elsewhere. Let me only suggest that I believe that Aeschylus provides numerous opportunities before verse 134 for an audience famiar with the Trojan myth and the Homeric omen to be reminded of Aulis. By verse 116 we have already been taken to Troy (especially at 60–7) through the words of the chorus, and we have been carefully reminded of the departure of the ships (στόλον Ἀργείων χιλιοναύτην, 45). The omen appears to the 'kings of ships' (οἰωνῶν βασιλεὺς βασιλεῦσι νεῶν), surely a reference made much more meaningful if the ships are those off Aulis rather than Argos. The fact that Calchas is on hand to interpret the omen also suggests Aulis—the prophet's native city is variously presented in the tradition, but he is best known for his work at Aulis and Troy. At any rate, Sommerstein is surely right that those of us who retain the location in Aulis must not translate μέλαθρα here as 'palace' but rather 'tents'. It ultimately makes no real difference for my argument. As Sommerstein acknowledges, "[i]t is, of course, clear that the Aeschylean omen is designated to put its audience in mind of the Homeric one' (93). We agree that Aeschylus is adapting the Homeric model for his own thematic purposes.

[15] See especially Zeitlin's important article (n. 10) with *TAPA* 97 (1966), 645–53. Homer's Aulis omen is the first 'corrupted' sacrifice in extant Greek literature.

[16] For this necessary implication of ἑτέραν, see Fraenkel ad loc..

[17] See E. H. Pool, 'Clytemnestra's first entrance in Aeschylus' *Agamamenon*. Analysis of a controversy', *Mnemosyne* 36 (1983), 71–116, for a complete survey of options and their supporting arguments. She argues for Clytemnestra's appearance at 83–103. If we are to imagine the queen actually doing something during this time, it would be tending to the sacrifices.

The snake at Aulis crawls up a tree to the topmost branch in order to devour eight cowering sparrow chicks and their mother (2.310–16). Odysseus emphasizes the pathetic helplessness of the young birds and especially the grief of the mother, who is powerless to save her children. The νεοσσοί (311) of the sparrow are referred to as τέκνα three times within five lines, with each appearance having its own emotive description: νήπια τέκνα, 311; μήτηρ . . . ἥ τέκε τέκνα, 313; φίλα τέκνα, 315. Homer uses τέκνα for the offspring of both humans and animals, so his repetition of this word, as opposed to νεοσσοί (311), which is only used of non-human young, keeps the emotional level high.[18] The phrase νήπια τέκνα in its various manifestations (only once elsewhere of animals; see above) is always found combined with a mention of wives, referring to those who are to be protected, seized, or left behind in battle. The war puts entire families in jeopardy, just as here an entire lineage is wiped out. Even more evocative in the Aulis omen is the use of φίλα τέκνα, which in its nine other manifestations in Homer is used affectionately in address by an elder to a junior (e.g. Hecuba to Hector, Nestor to Telemachus, Eurycleia to Penelope). This is the only time the phrase is used of someone not actually being addressed in the conversation, and nowhere else is the expression found of animals. Odysseus presents himself as *feeling* for the mother sparrow and her children.

The poor nestlings sit on the topmost branch (312), where, no doubt, the mother had thought they would be safe from just this kind of assault. They cower (ὑποπεπτηῶτες, 312) under leaves, twittering piteously (τετριγῶτας, 314). Odysseus describes the mother as the ninth sparrow 'who bore them', a strictly unnecessary but emotionally poignant verse ending. She flies around (ἀμφιποτᾶτο, 315) grieving for her children (ὀδυρομένη, 315). Finally, the snake grabs her wing and wraps his deadly coils around her as she fills the surroundings with her screams (ἀμφιαχυιᾶν, 316). No image in Homer describes the horrible loss of animal young combined with the destruction of the parent in such graphic and sympathetic fashion.

The parallels with the vulture simile are readily apparent: here too are parent birds who have lost their young. The chorus asks us to empathize with the pain (ἄλγεσι) of the vultures at their loss by anthropomorphizing the offspring (παίδων, 50). This type of humanizing may belong to fable, but its appearance is striking in this dramatic context. The immediate point is to make the parental loss palpable, as in Homer's triple repetition of τέκνα, and especially to blend the animal simile with the human context. The simile takes on manifold analogies at this point—if the vultures are the Atreidae, then the lost children must be Helen. But Helen is not their child, so we naturally (*pace* Fraenkel) think as well of Iphigenia and even Orestes, the 'lost' children of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. The plural παῖδες also forces us to consider the fate of Thyestes and his children, the original crime that lies behind the tragedy of the house of Atreus.[19] But it may be more important for the understanding of the trilogy

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[18] νεοσσός is used only one other time by Homer, when Achilles compares himself to a bird who brings food to her young (νεοσσοῖσι), ultimately to her own detriment (*Il.* 9.323–4). For τέκνα by itself of animal young, see *Il.* 11.113 (deer), 12.170 (wasps), and horses (19.400), all in contexts evoking pathos. νεοσσοί will be important in the trilogy (*Ag.* 825; *Cho.* 256); see Janko (n. 3). Electra repeats the image by referring to herself and Orestes as νεοσσούς sitting by the tomb (*Cho.* 501). E. Belfiore traces the death of the hare back to the destruction of Troy by the Trojan horse (ἵππου νεοσσός, *Ag.* 825) through the imagery of inverted parent–child relationships; 'The eagles' feast and the Trojan Horse: corrupted fertility in the *Agamemnon*', *Maia* 35 (1983), 3–12.

[19] At least as far as the text of the *Oresteia* is concerned, the problems begin with Atreus and Thyestes. West (n. 2), 1–2 points out that the only use of παῖδες for animal young before

to accept this blurring of images, with animals substituting simultaneously for different characters, than to identify any primary level of correspondence. In this slippery world, animals and humans are dangerously intermixed.

Similar anthropomorphism is found in the the second half of verse 50. Just as the Homeric mother sparrow flew around the nest on top of the tree, so Aeschylus' birds spin around ($\sigma\tau\rho\sigma\phi\sigma\delta\iota\nu\sigma\hat{\upsilon}\tau\alpha\iota$, 51) 'very high above their nest/beds' ($\ddot{\upsilon}\pi\alpha\tau\sigma\iota\ \lambda\epsilon\chi\acute{\epsilon}\omega\nu$, 50).[20] $\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\chi\sigma\varsigma$ for 'nest' is again borrowed from the human context—Aeschylus is the first extant author to use it of animal 'beds'.[21] No familiarity with fable is necessary to feel the connotations: the word, so often used in Homer of the marriage bed, is used twice elsewhere in the *Agamemnon*, once of Helen's marriage bed (411), once of Clytemnestra's (1224). Whereas in the *Iliad* the birds—though sympathetically depicted—remain merely birds, in Aeschylus they share in the human world and are thematically linked to the image of corrupted beds and fruitless parenting.

The mother's emphatic role in bearing and raising her chicks in Homer (313) is echoed in the vultures' wasted effort in raising their young ($\delta\epsilon\mu\nu\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\eta$ / $\pi\acute{\sigma}\nu\sigma\nu$ $\acute{\sigma}\rho\tau\alpha\lambda\acute{\iota}\chi\omega\nu\ \acute{\sigma}\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\alpha\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$, 53–4). As the mother sparrow had cried and lamented in vain, so the vultures cry ($\mu\epsilon\gamma\acute{\alpha}\lambda'\dots\kappa\lambda\acute{\alpha}\zeta\sigma\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$, 48)[22] and raise a sharp lament ($\sigma\mathaccent"705E\omega\nu\acute{\sigma}\theta\rho\sigma\sigma\nu$ / $\gamma\acute{\sigma}\sigma\nu\ \acute{\sigma}\xi\upsilon\beta\acute{\sigma}\alpha\nu$, 56–7) to no avail. Again, the differences in the applications of these images are revealing. In the *Iliad*, the death of the birds stands separately from the human action. It represents merely what will happen at Troy—there is no conflation of the sparrows or snake and the humans.[23] In Aeschylus, however, there is no easy demarcation. The Atreidae scream like vultures whose cries are heard by the gods who send an avenging Fury; thus Zeus sends the Atreidae to punish Troy. As has often been noted, the comparison built into the simile shifts more than in most Homeric similes.[24] More significantly, the human and bestial converge in the conflation of victim and agent: the Atreidae are victims like the vu‹ltures who get vengeance from the gods like

Aeschylus is in Archilochus, but he does not suggest why Aeschylus may be alluding to that particular poem; cf. the general criticisms of Davies (n. 4) *passim*.

[20] This translation of the phrase seems to have been generally accepted, although the Greek is unparalleled; see Fraenkel's note ad loc.

[21] At *Sept.* 291–3, the chorus says it fears the enemy surrounding its walls as a dove fears for its $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\nu\omega\nu\dots\lambda\epsilon\chi\alpha\acute{\iota}\omega\nu$ when snakes are present. For a Homeric pun involving $\xi\acute{\upsilon}\lambda\sigma\chi\sigma\varsigma$ for lion's den at *Od.* 4.333–4, see M. W. Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary* vol. V (Cambridge, 1991), 33.

[22] Actually, the vultures shout only by analogy, as the Atreidae cry war like vultures ($\tau\rho\acute{\sigma}\pi\sigma\nu$ $\alpha\acute{\iota}\gamma\upsilon\pi\iota\hat{\omega}\nu$, 49).

[23] Homer's similes are by no means simple, often changing directions in mid-course to match the shifting action, and can involve slight mixing of the animal and human worlds. At *Odyssey* 22.468–70, for example, the twelve hanging maids are compared to thrushes or doves that fall into a snare as they hurry towards their resting place ($\alpha\hat{\upsilon}\lambda\iota\nu$), but instead a hateful bed ($\kappa\hat{\sigma}\hat{\iota}\tau\sigma\varsigma$) welcomes them. The word for bed here is used in ten other places in Homer, always of a comfortable place for human sleep, occasionally for sleep itself. This ironic transference of $\kappa\sigma\hat{\iota}\tau\sigma\varsigma$ to the animal world serves to tighten the analogy between the doves and the women, since the latter have abused their place of sleep, as Telemachus notes just a few lines before ($\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\ \tau\epsilon$ $\mu\nu\eta\sigma\tau\hat{\eta}\rho\sigma\iota\nu\ \mathaccent"705E\iota\alpha\nu\sigma\nu$, 464). Similarly, $\alpha\hat{\upsilon}\lambda\iota\nu$ has appropriate meanings in both the human world (a place to set down tents, *Il.* 9.232, its only other appearance in Homer) and animal kingdom (a place for cows to sleep, *H. Merc.* 71; *H. Ven.* 168). The verb used to describe the maids' final kicks ($\mathaccent"705E\eta\sigma\pi\alpha\iota\rho\sigma\nu$) applies to the death throes of animals (fish, fawns, lambs, bulls, snakes) more often than to humans; see Sideras (n. 6), 79. Still, the reader has no trouble isolating the different elements of the comparison. For the close identification of Achilles with a lion at *Il.* 20.164–73, see K. C. King, *Achilles: Paradigms of the War Hero from Homer to the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1987), 17–24. For an excellent summary of Homeric similes and their sophisticated connection with the narrative, see Edwards (n. 21), 27–34.

[24] See the discussion by Fraenkel on 59.

the god-sent vengeance the Atreidae bring against Troy. The vultures form a kind of bizarre prism through which the sons of Atreus are redirected from victim to agent.

Homer's omen at Aulis provides the impetus for Aeschylus' vulture simile—no doubt combined with recollections of a few Homeric similes as well—but the tragedian complicates the animal imagery. This new vision of parental loss at the very beginning of the *Oresteia* is already difficult to decipher, as the animal simile blends mysteriously with the human world to which it refers.

The omen of the eagle and hare—probably invented by Aeschylus[25]—also emphasizes the mother and her loss as found in the sparrow/snake omen in Homer. The hare is first described as a λαγίναν ἐρικύμονα φέρματι γένναν (119), literally the 'offspring of hare very pregnant with fruit of the womb'. The oracular ambiguity works well (*pace* Denniston–Page) by emphasizing the generational aspects of the hare—she is part of a lineage, a daughter of a hare, now ready to give birth herself. As in Homer, an entire family is being wiped out, a heritage devoured (βοσκομένω, 119; cf. κατήσθιε, *Il.* 2.314) by Zeus-sent predators. There is no other omen or simile in Homer that similarly emphasizes the destruction of an entire race (it is no doubt a coincidence that no sparrows are found in the rest of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*). But Aeschylus again breaks down any simple interpretation of the omen by presenting us with a mother-to-be.[26] When Calchas later refers to the omen, his expression is loaded with double-meaning. As has been frequently remarked, the phrase αὐτότοκον πρὸ λόχου μογερὰν πτάκα θυομένοισιν (136) can be translated 'slaying a trembling hare and its young before their birth', but also 'sacrificing a trembling, cowering woman, his own child, on behalf of the army'.[27] The first reading again emphasizes the destruction of a helpless mother and her young. The second reading, however, leads us, as so much else in the parodos, to the sacrifice of Iphigenia.

Iphigenia becomes the timorous animal of the pattern, playing the role of the lost offspring (τέκνον, 208) as a hare here in Calchas' prophecy. In this perverted sacrifice, all is turned upside down. The cries of the dying chicks to their parent for help are now transformed into the prayers and calls of a daughter that fall on the deaf ears of her murderous father (λιτὰς δὲ καὶ κληδόνας πατρῴους / παρ' οὐδὲν ... ἔθεντο, 228–30). The child's cries are not silenced by death from without but by a bit (χαλινῶν) applied by her own parent (235–6). The last sound we hear is the sweet singing of unwed Iphigenia at her 'dear' father's table (πατρὸς / φίλου τριτόσπονδον εὔποτμον,

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[25] See Fraenkel II, 96–9.

[26] This aspect of perverted child–parent relationships or corrupted fertility is another central theme of the trilogy; see especially Belfiore (n. 18). Belfiore notes that the hare is depersonalized—she is not presented with emotions, no children separate and cowering as in the omen at Aulis (4–5). But in fact the snake/sparrow omen is spread out through three different passages—and the *vultures* are depicted reacting emotionally, and Agamemnon's lack of parental emotion is the focus of the chorus' criticism (see below).

[27] W. B. Stanford, *Ambiguity in Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1939), 143–4, citing Lawson's 1932 edition of the *Agamemnon*. It is perhaps worth noting that the word for hare here is different from that in the two previous references. πτάξ derives from a basic meaning of 'cowering' or 'trembling' (in place of λαγίναν, 119; cf. λαγοδαίτας, 124). Homer in fact uses the two roots together in a simile, where Hector's futile charge against Achilles is compared to an eagle's swoop upon a lamb or πτῶκα λαγωόν (*Il.* 22.310; cf. *Il.* 17.676, discussed above, and *Il.* 22.191–2, for the comparison of Hector, fleeing Achilles, to a fawn cowering [καταπτήξας] under a thicket). The word πτώς was originally an adjective, eventually becoming the name of the animal that best fulfilled its description. Perhaps the image of the hare was suggested to Aeschylus partly by the description of the cowering sparrows in the omen at Aulis (ὑποπεπτηῶτες, 312) as well as the Homeric hare similes. Orestes is referred to both as 'cowering' (καταπτακών, 252) and as a hare (πτῶκα, 326) in the *Eumenides*.

245–6), her former voice echoing horribly in the silence of her now-gagged voice. As so often in the tradition, Agamemnon is asked to play a role for which he is uniquely unqualified. The grief-stricken parental wails associated with the loss of children—the sparrow's scream (ἀμφιαχυῖαν), the vultures' cries (κλάζοντες)—are completely missing. Agamemnon becomes instead the rapacious snake, the robber of the nest, a slaughtering, Zeus-sent eagle who has turned on his own offspring.[28] The silence of parent and child are replaced by the shouting of Calchas. The screaming of the Atreidae/vultures (κλαζόντες) can be found, ultimately, only in the bellowed warnings of the Greek prophet: Κάλχας . . . ἀπέκλαγξεν (156; cf. μάντις ἔκλαγξεν, 201). He speaks out when others cannot or will not.[29]

Yet for all his volume, Calchas in the *Agamemnon* does not speak as clearly as he does in the Homeric episode. Odysseus reports that after the snake and sparrows are turned to stone, the prophet immediately revealed the meaning (αὐτίκ' ἔπειτα θεοπροπέων ἀγόρευε, 322) of the great portent (τέρας μέγα, 324): in the tenth year (τῷ δεκάτῳ [ἔτει], 329) the Greeks will capture the city. In the parodos the omen at Aulis is reported by witnesses ten years (δέκατον . . . ἔτος τόδ' ἐπεί . . ., 40) after the event. And Calchas here also quickly sees the relevance of the portent and informs the assembled troops (εἶπε τεράζων, 125; τεράζων, West [n. 2], 2, n. 4): 'in time' (χρόνῳ, 126) they will take the city. His lack of specificity is typical, but also relevant to the opening of the play—the chorus has no reason to believe that the war of Troy will soon be over. But the seer goes on, notoriously so, plunging into deeper and murkier oracular waters. The chorus summarizes Calchas' reading of the omen: in the two 'hare-devouring' eagles are to be seen the Atreidae (122–5). Although Calchas does not tell us specifically that the hare and its unborn young are Troy, this is clearly implied. Calchas relates his famous account of the anger of Artemis at the eagles, her hatred of their feast (δεῖπνον, 137)—by now it should be clear that there is no need to invoke the fable to explain this anthropomorphic twist—and his own hopes of avoiding a second sacrifice.[30]

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[28] On serpent imagery in the *Oresteia*, see Petrounias (n. 10), 129–90; Dumortier (n. 13), 88–100; W. Whallon, 'The serpent at the breast', *TAPA* 89 (1958), 271–5; and the relevant sections scattered through B. Fowler, 'Aeschylus' imagery', *C&M* 28 (1969), 23–74 and A. Lebeck, *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure* (Washington, 1971).

[29] Half of all the extant uses of κλάζω in Aeschylus are found in the parodos of the *Agamem-non*. The central theme of the trilogy may be contained in the chorus' hopeful cry in the 'Hymn to Zeus': Ζῆνα δέ τις προφρόνως ἐπινίκια κλάζων / τεύξεται φρενῶν τὸ πᾶν (174–5). The verb seems tied to portentous moments in the *Oresteia*—Clytemnestra jumps up from her prophetic dream of the suckling snake with a great shout: ἐξ ὕπνου κέκλαγγεν ἐπτοημένη (*Cho.* 535).

[30] Reviews of the standard interpretations of the meaning of the omen can be found in S. E. Lawrence, 'Artemis in the *Agamemnon*', *AJP* 97 (1976), 97–110 and D. J. Conacher, *Aeschylus' Oresteia: A Literary Commentary* (Toronto, 1987), 76–83. For bibliography, see B. H. Fowler, 'The creatures and the blood', *ICS* 16 (1991), 85–100 at 87, n.11. Conacher disapproves of Lebeck's understanding of the omen because she sees in it *both* the sack of Troy *and* the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Similarly, H. Lloyd-Jones, 'Artemis and Iphigenia', *JHS* 103 (1983), 87–88 disagrees with the Page–Conington interpretation that Artemis is angry with the eagles themselves and not what they symbolize, because this 'confuses' the world of the portent with reality. As is clear by now, I think it is exactly this confusion that is significant. K. Clinton, 'Artemis and the sacrifice of Iphigenia in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*', in P. Pucci (ed.), *Language and the Tragic Hero* (Atlanta, 1988), 11 answers Lloyd-Jones, but only by separating Artemis' reaction to the event (unsymbolic) from the other characters' response to the symbolism. The ambiguities here are directly linked with the double-meaning mentioned above of the expression αὐτότοκον πρὸ λόχου μογερὰν πτάκα θυομένοισιν (136). Artemis bears a grudge against the eagles' destruction of the hare, but also at the Atreidae's sacrifice of Iphigenia, a butchery the goddess herself will demand (cf. *Ag.* 201–2).

What exactly all this means has been the subject of endless scrutiny and fortunately is not an issue here. Aeschylus has transformed Calchas' interpretation as well, muddying the comparatively clear waters of the Iliadic model. In Homer's version, the omen has a simple, temporal meaning: each of the animals represents a year at Troy. Although the counting may be a bit odd (see Kirk's note ad loc.), success will come at the end of that period. The pitiable deaths of the sparrows might have been connected to the deaths of those at Troy during the past nine years if Homer had desired to do so. Odysseus alludes to the Achaean dead, referring to the gathered troops as those οὓς μὴ κῆρες ἔβαν θανάτοιο φέρουσαι (302), but neither the prophet nor the speaker tries to make a connection between the animals of the omen and the Greeks who witness the portent. The human and bestial worlds are kept distinct: a god-sent portent from the animal kingdom simply reveals what awaits the warriors. There is no hint that the Greeks or Trojans share in the animal world. In Aeschylus, the prophecy becomes mysterious, multivalent, and ominous, the human and animal worlds flowing together in complex and nearly inextricable patterns.

We should not expect to find every Homeric detail in each passage, but it is surprising how many do appear—and, to risk entering dangerous methodological waters, it is sometimes worth noting what does *not* show up. It is interesting, for example, to examine the role of Zeus in our passages. Odysseus reminds the Greeks that the great portent that appeared (ἐφάνη, 308), a red-backed serpent, was sent by Zeus himself (αὐτὸς 'Ολύμπιος, 309; cf. 324). Similarly in the *Agamemnon* a portent appears (φανέντες, 116) in the shape of coloured animals (115) sent by Zeus (πτανοῖσιν κυσὶ πατρός [of Artemis], 135). The vultures in the simile stand in for the Atreidae, who in turn are sent by Zeus against Alexander (ὁ κρείσσων / ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πέμπει ξένιος / Ζεύς, 60–2). If we were a suspicious audience, our familiarity with the pattern might lead us to expect that Zeus played a central role in the sacrifice of Iphigenia as well. But it is the *absence* of the supreme Olympian in this context that has evoked much scholarly enquiry into the nature of justice and the divine in the *Oresteia*. Artemis orders the sacrifice, but her motivation—and its connection with Zeus' will—is notoriously obscure. What role does Zeus, who the chorus at least believe has ordered Agamemnon and Menelaus to exact vengeance by going to Troy, have in the butchery of Iphigenia and the subsequent acts of retribution?[31] Aeschylus is intentionally elusive on the issue, and the interesting thematic questions derive from the lack of clarification until the end of the trilogy.

An examination of Aeschylus' treatment of his source gets to the crucial links between imagery, style, and theme. The dramatist takes a well-known and fairly uncomplicated event and weaves it through three separate but closely related episodes at the beginning of his trilogy. The effect is to conflate image and event, human and bestial, past and present (and future as well), an ambiguity that, as many critics have noted, slowly gives way to clarity by the end of the three plays. How the animal imagery evolves throughout the *Oresteia* cannot be fully explored here, but the impact of the intentional breakdown in demarcations is felt in these first few hundred lines of the first play. The Atreidae are like animals (vultures) who are like humans; they are sailors who are like birds who are like sailors (πτερύγων ἐρετμοῖσιν ἐρεσσόμενοι, 52). We are compelled to wonder which animals represent which humans, and what exactly to make of the parallels between beast and man. The missing young—are they Helen,

[31] The bibliography on this issue is immense, but an important examination of the chorus' (mis)understanding of the relative responsibility of Zeus and Agamemnon is T. Gantz, 'The Chorus of Aischylos' *Agamemnon*', *HSCP* 87 (1983), 65–86.

Iphigenia, or Aegisthus' brothers? Are the vultures then simply the Atreidae, or can they be Clytemnestra or Thyestes as well? The simile elicits unexpressed analogies. The Atreidae quickly become eagles, enjoying a human feast (δεῖπνον; cf. the δαίς in λαγοδαίτας) of a mother hare and her unborn offspring.[32] What, or whom, do *they* represent? Iphigenia's death, of course, presents the messiest and most significant conflation of human and animal of all. In the *Agamemnon*, the animal similes, metaphors, and images are woven into the fabric of the play; they cannot be removed from their human context without tearing apart the poetic coherence of the work. The animal images are, finally, embodiments themselves of the overarching theme of entanglement that dominates the trilogy, enveloping the reader/spectator in a web of meanings.

One final example of Aeschylus' rewriting of the Homeric omen will bring out the dramatist's thematic treatment of the epic Aulis episode. The Iliadic Calchas refers to the sparrow/snake omen sent by Zeus as 'late in arriving, late in fulfilment' (ὄψιμον, ὀψιτέλεστον), whose fame will never die (325). Neither adjective appears anywhere else in Homer, but their meanings are clear enough—it is only now, as they are prepared to go to war, that the Greeks learn it will take a decade of struggle to capture Troy. Odysseus can afford to recall these words because he can now remind the exhausted troops that the tenth year is at hand (τὰ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται, 330). There is no other point to the adjectives beyond the temporal reference. Aeschylus, however, appropriates the idea of 'late in fulfilment' for his own central thematic concerns. A god hears the vultures' shrill lament (οἰωνόθροον / γόον ὀξυβόαν, 56–7) and sends a 'late-avenging' Fury against the transgressors (ὑστερόποινον / ... παραβᾶσιν Ἐρινύν, 58–9). As Fraenkel notes, these 'weighty compounds' (this one fills the entire verse) are central to the major themes of the *Oresteia*.[33] The note in Denniston–Page's commentary (on 58) is instructive, and will take us back to the role of fable in these images. The editors repeat the LSJ definition of 'late-avenging' but are unhappy with it: 'That would suit the punishment of Paris, delayed ten years, but not the matter to which it is applied—requital for the vultures. Probably "avenging after the act . . .".'

First, 'avenging after the act' is misleadingly bland—when does vengeance take place *before* the act? The *Oresteia* reveals that vengeance comes inevitably but slowly—Clytemnestra, Orestes, and the Furies must wait impatiently to strike, and the development of a broader sense of justice takes place on a cosmic timescale, over several generations of human life. More revealingly, Denniston–Page insist that the meaning of ὑστερόποινον must come from its first point of reference, the vultures, where a meaning of 'late-avenging' is judged to be inappropriate. But there seems to be nothing particularly objectionable about 'late-avenging' even in this context, since there is no telling how long the vultures would have to wait for payback. More importantly, there is no reason to insist that the adjective must apply primarily to the birds.

What is clearly happening here is the familiar feature Silk refers to as intrusion, where the elements of one part of the simile are thrust into the other.[34] We have

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[32] The word δαίς is used of animal meals at *Il.* 24.43, δεῖπνον at *Il.* 2.383, Hes. *Op.* 209, and Archil. 179 West, as well as at Aesch. *Supp.* 801; see H. Pelliccia, *Mind, Body, and Speech in Homer and Pindar* (Göttingen, 1995), 79, n.130.

[33] Fraenkel on line 58. He compares *Cho.* 382–3, where Zeus sends (or is asked to send) ὑστερόποινον ἄταν.

[34] M. S. Silk, *Interaction in Poetic Imagery* (Cambridge, 1974), 10–72 at 138–47. O. Smith, 'Some observations on the structure of imagery in Aeschylus', *C&M* 26 (1965), 10–72 at 52–65, calls it fusion when parts of a simile coalesce and the poet does not distinguish strictly between the 'illustrans' and the 'illustrandum', terms invented by H. Friis Johansen, *General Reflection in*

witnessed this process throughout the simile—birds with children, beds, and oars (the word directly before ὑστερόποινον in fact calls the vultures μετοίκων, 57). The vultures are never merely birds, but always part human, pulling the Atreidae (and other analogous characters like Iphigenia, Helen, etc.) into their bestial world. The 'late-avenging' may apply to the vultures—we will never know—but it certainly applies to the Atreidae's punishment of Paris, the subject of the next lines (60ff.). And the Fury is clearly tied into the larger, slow-acting themes of the drama that swirl around Agamemnon's story, not that of the birds. The critics who find in this passage a reference to a Zeus who cares about the fate of animals—and thus an allusion to fable—need not be so literal. What Zeus Xenios (61–2) really cares about is punishing the Trojans. Elements of the human context in this case have flowed back onto the vultures. Moreover, the chorus specifically states that Zeus is interested in the case of Paris and Helen; the Argive elders are rather confused about which god might hear the lamention of the vultures—Pan maybe? Apollo? Zeus? If anything, the passage assures us that the animal world *may* be of concern to the gods, but Zeus himself has his eye on human morality.

The transference of human attributes to animals, as well as Zeus' concern for animals, may have been made easier for the poet and his audience by their familiarity with fable. But if so, Aeschylus has taken fable, where animals with human speech, virtues, and vices act out short morality plays for the benefit of mankind, and sub-stituted a nightmarish dramatic reality where humans are bestial and beasts human. The sparrow and snake omen from the *Iliad* provides a model for important motifs and topics throughout the parodos, supplying a crucial image to link the seemingly bewildering logic of the old men in this long and difficult passage.[35] It is this pre-polis state of humanity that must be resolved for civilization to flourish. The polis is needed, as Aristotle will spell out more systematically, to suppress the bestial and bring out the human, and even, as we see later in the case of the Furies, to separate the gods from both. That is why the animal imagery dissipates by the end of the *Eumenides*,[36] with gods, humans, and animals back in their respective places, though with the threat of collapse ever present. That, in essence, is the pragmatism of Greek political science—to force men to live as men, between gods and beasts, in the middle (τὸ μέσον, *Eum.* 529; cf. 696–7) between the idle rich and idle poor, and we see the exploration of this ideal most dramatically in the *Oresteia*.[37]

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Tragic Rhesis (Copenhagen, 1959). Rosenmeyer (n. 6), 121–5, calls it a transference from the 'vehicle' to the 'tenor'. Long ago W. Headlam put it simply, 'no one has his [Aeschylus'] habitual practice of pursuing a similitude, of carrying a figure through' ('Metaphor, with a note on transference of epithets', *CR* 16 [1902], 436).

[35] In fact, one Aeschylean scholar recently suggested that this conflation of simile and omen with actual events—as well as their 'confusion' of Pan with Hermes—is a product of the Argive elders' incipient senility: 'The chorus are tending to wander in mind; we sense that they truly think like old men' (W. Whallon, 'The Herm at *Ag.* 55–56: stocks and stones of the *Oresteia*', *Hermes* 121 [1993], 496–9). This would be more convincing if it could be tied into the larger thematic issues of the trilogy.

[36] Rosenmeyer (n. 6), 141, Petrounias (n. 10), 178.

[37] I would like to thank the editor, referees, Nora Chapman, Mark Edwards, and Helen Moritz for many helpful suggestions.