AESCHYLUS, HOMER, AND THE SERPENT AT THE BREAST

K. O'NEILL

CLYTEMNESTRA'S DREAM OF GIVING BIRTH TO A SERPENT and her bare-breasted confrontation with her son have long been at the center of various literary and psycho-analytical interpretations of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.[1] It is generally accepted that Clytemnestra's bare-breasted supplication of Orestes alludes to Hecuba's similar supplication of Hector in the *Iliad*.[2] The abundance of snake imagery applied to Clytemnestra and Orestes in the *Choephori* has usually been attributed to the influence of Stesichorus, whose *Oresteia* contains a striking serpent image of its own.[3] In this paper, I will re-examine the relationship of Clytemnestra's supplication to the Homeric model, and argue that significant material found in the same context in both works has been passed over by modern scholarship. Building on the allusion to Hecuba's supplication, I will argue that the Aeschylean image of the serpent at the breast has an antecedent in this Homeric passage, creating an important intertextual relationship. Finally, I will show how this intertextual relationship illuminates the inter-personal dynamics of the climactic scenes of the *Choephori*.

Reading has been described as an act of comparison, seeking a text's resemblance to, and difference from, other texts.[4] The term intertextuality describes how a text depends on other texts for meaning, and describes the discursive space that a text occupies in relation to other texts. The expansiveness of intertextuality makes it almost impossible to discuss with regard to specific texts without violating the terms of its definition.[5] It is all-embracing in that a text is read in relation to all other texts. Yet, as soon as a reader compares a text with a single other text, the expansiveness of intertextuality is called into

An earlier version of this article was presented at the Israeli Society for the Promotion of Classical Studies Annual Meeting in Haifa, 1995. All translations are my own. My warmest appreciation goes to Pietro Pucci of Cornell University for his insightful comments and suggestions on this paper. I am also grateful to the Editor and anonymous referees of *Phoenix* for their helpful criticisms.

[1] See Garner 1990: 39–40; Conacher 1987: 114–115, 122–124; Bowen 1986: *ad loc.*; Garvie 1986: *ad loc.* and xxxvi–xxxvii; Loraux 1986: 90–102; Goldhill 1984: 159–194; Stanford 1983: 161; Zeitlin 1980: 56; Whallon 1958 and 1980: 132; Devereux 1976: 181–218; Lebeck 1971: 13–15.

[2] See Garner 1990: 39–40; Loraux 1986: 99–100; Whallon 1980: 135–136; Murray 1940: 160–161; Devereux 1976: 203–210. See also *ad loc.* Garvie 1986; Bowen 1986; Sidgwick 1884; Verrall 1893; Tucker 1901. Tucker also suggests that Stesichorus must have had such a scene in his *Oresteia*, but the surviving fragments can neither confirm nor refute this suggestion.

[3] See Garvie 1986: xix–xxi and Garvie 1970: 83–84; Sidgwick 1884: x–xi; Conacher 1987: 114; Smyth 1900: 266–267; Devereux 1976: 172–176, 189–190.

[4] See Culler 1981: 38, 102–104; Todorov 1977: 241–246.

[5] Culler (1981: 105–108) shows how even Kristeva, who coined the term intertextuality, puts her theory into question when she tries to work with it.

PHOENIX, VOL. 52 (1998) 3–4.

question. Thus, the nature and extent of an intertextual relationship is intrinsically hard to define, and each reader or audience can set its own limits to that relationship.[6] In this paper I treat intertextuality as a refinement of allusion, noting that intertextuality weakens the idea of authorial intentionality and of referentiality.[7] Thus, in this paper, intertextuality has a modest and, I hope, practical scope.[8]

In his examination of allusions to Homer, Garner begins by analyzing a fragment of Mimnermus.[9] He argues that an easily recognizable allusion to the *Iliad* "triggers" the reader's recognition of a second, less obvious, allusion by encouraging the reader to look for further references to that work.[10] In this paper, I make a similar argument for the *Choephori* about an easily recognizable allusion to the *Iliad* triggering the recognition of an allusion to a second passage in the *Iliad*. As a reader, I acknowledge that I am establishing my own limits to these allusions, and that, as a result, other readers may set different limits, and therefore reject the extension of allusion which I am proposing here. Nonetheless, I contend that this specific expansion of allusion is encouraged by the general allusiveness of the Aeschylean text. Moreover, I argue that, in this case, the recognition of the second passage is made possible by the combination of a mother's bare-breasted supplication and a snake simile in both texts.

The archetypal bare-breasted supplication occurs in the *Iliad* as Hector waits to face Achilles in front of the city gates. In fear for their son, Priam and Hecuba beg Hector to come inside the walls. It is in this context that Hecuba tears open her robe and makes her appeal:

> "Εκτορ, τέκνον ἐμόν, τάδε τ' αἴδεο καί μ' ἐλέησον
> αὐτήν, εἴ ποτέ τοι λαθικηδέα μαζὸν ἐπέσχον·
> τῶν μνῆσαι, φίλε τέκνον, ἄμυνε δὲ δήιον ἄνδρα
> τείχεος ἐντὸς ἐών, μηδὲ πρόμος ἵστασο τούτῳ· 22.82–85
>
> Hector, my child, feel shame before these (breasts), and pity me
> If ever I held my care-banishing breast to you
> Be mindful of this, my dear child, and ward off the hostile man

[6] See Pucci 1987: 240–242 for a discussion of the reader's role in setting limits to the extents of allusion. See also Adkins 1985: 148–149, where he acknowledges the difficulty in determining "the purposive use of Homeric allusion" in *Theognidea* 237–254W, but argues that it is probable, due to the common use of Homeric allusion in the culture, and because "only a very stupid or ignorant Greek could have missed the wealth of Homeric phraseology in this poem."

[7] See Pucci 1987: 29, no. 30.

[8] For another interpretation of intertextuality which rejects all-embracing expansiveness, see Pasco 1994: 4–6.

[9] Garner (1990: 1–8) formulates an intelligent distillation of the work of other scholars on allusion, and applies it convincingly to the relationship between Mimnermus fr. 2 and *Iliad* 6.146–149 and 9.411–415. See also Dawson 1966: 42–47; Griffith 1975: 73–78.

[10] See also Adkins 1985: *passim*, but especially 202–204, making a comparable suggestion with regard to Archilochus and other Greek elegists.

Keeping yourself within the wall, and do not station yourself out
in front against that man.

This mother's love for her son is unquestionable. Her motive is her desire to save his life. By exposing her breasts, Hecuba reminds her son of his filial debt to her. Nevertheless, despite Hecuba's verbal arguments and dramatic maternal display, Hector is not persuaded, and remains outside the walls.

In the *Choephori*, a mother once again makes a dramatic appeal to her son in an effort to save a life. This time, however, the life is her own, and her relationship with her son is neither loving nor dutiful. Clytemnestra is faced with her estranged son who has just slain her lover and is now planning to take her life. Unable to escape, she makes a desperate attempt to gain an emotional advantage over Orestes and to dissuade him from his murderous intent by recalling the love of mother and infant.[11]

Κλ. ἐπίσχες, ὦ παῖ, τόνδε δ' αἴδεσαι, τέκνον,
μαστόν, πρὸς ᾧ σὺ πολλὰ δὴ βρίζων ἅμα
οὔλοισιν ἐξήμελξας εὐτραφὲς γάλα. 896–898

Cl. Hold it, son, feel shame, my child,
Before this breast, from which often dozing
You sucked out nourishing milk with your gums.

Exposing her breasts, Clytemnestra paints a tender picture of the drowsy baby Orestes sucking her life-giving milk.[12] The two scenes are remarkably similar, but the motivation of each woman is very different. Hecuba fears for her son, while Clytemnestra fears for herself.

Aeschylus' general debt to Homer has long been acknowledged.[13] Here, beyond the obvious dramatic similarities of the two appeals, linguistic echoes establish a strong link between the Homeric and Aeschylean passages. That combination of dramatic and linguistic similarities has led many scholars to observe Aeschylus' debt to the Homeric scene.[14] Lloyd-Jones (1970: *ad loc.*), however, links this

[11] Clytemnestra's verbal manipulation of her husband in the *Agamemnon* makes her sincerity suspect here. See DeForest 1993: 130; Goldhill 1992: 37–45; Winnington-Ingram 1983: 106–108; Kitto 1961: 84. On the other hand, Garvie (1986: *ad loc.*) states that "there is no good reason to doubt the sincerity of Clytaemestra's maternal feelings," and see also his comments on 691–696.

[12] As Goheen (1955: 135) points out, the nurse has just undercut many of Clytemnestra's potential claims of maternal worth, but not in the presence of Orestes. The horror of his decision is not palliated. See also Whallon 1980: 136–137; Devereux 1976: 203–204; Rousseau 1963: 124; Winnington-Ingram 1983: 116–118, but also 124.

[13] For an ancient impression, see Ath. 8.347e: τεμάχη ... τῶν Ὁμήρου μεγάλων δείπνων. For more recent assessments, see Sideras 1971: passim; Garson 1985: 1–5; Lamberton and Keaney 1992: ix; Goldhill 1992: 46–53; 1984: 183–195. Garner (1990: 21–48, especially 31–32) argues that, as the *Oresteia*'s subject-matter, time-frame, and characters are so intimately connected with the Trojan War, the trilogy "most naturally" promises allusion to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

[14] See above, n. 2.

scene with the "well-known story" that Helen convinced Menelaus to spare her life by baring her breasts.[15] The extant traces of the Helen story do not exhibit any of the linguistic similarities we have observed in the Hecuba story, but a couple of passages are worthy of attention.[16] There is some evidence that the story of Helen's bare-breasted supplication may go back to the *Ilias Parva* and *Ibycus*, so both these stories may resonate in the Aeschylean story.[17] Certainly, an expansive interpretation of intertextuality would demand that we include Helen's story in this reading. In any case, no matter what other text may have an intertextual relationship with this passage, we must acknowledge a reminiscence of Hecuba's appeal to Hector in Clytemnestra's supplication of Orestes. One of the immediate effects of the Homeric parallel is to juxtapose Clytemnestra with the good mother, Hecuba, and Orestes with the dutiful son, Hector.[18] It remains to be seen how well the Greek mother and son match the virtues of their Trojan counterparts.

Emboldened by this allusion to the *Iliad*, we can henceforth be more alert to any other references to Homer. In that context, it is now time to consider another major element of Aeschylus' *Choephori*: the serpent imagery. As soon as the Chorus describes Clytemnestra's dreadful dream to Orestes (523–534) and Orestes interprets his role in the dream (543–550), the serpent and the breast are connected as crucial symbols in this play. Yet, the serpent has been a significant element in the imagery of the trilogy before that point. The family involvement with snake imagery is first suggested in the *Agamemnon* (1233) when Cassandra in the midst of prophetic raving dubs Clytemnestra an ἀμφίσβαινα, a double-headed snake, and a Scylla, the monster with dogs' heads protruding from her loins.[19] At this point, the snake is just one of the creatures associated with Clytemnestra, but it seems that Cassandra has peeked beyond her death into the next play of the trilogy. As Anne Lebeck observes, the early occurrences of an image in Aeschylus are elliptical and enigmatic. Initial glimpses of the image

[15] Devereux (1976: 207) and Loraux (1986: 100, and nos. 29 and 30) link the Aeschylean scene to both this story and the Hecuba passage. Euripides also makes a passing reference to an unsuccessful bare-breasted supplication by Jocasta to her warring sons at *Phoen.* 1567–69, but we know little else about this story.

[16] See Ar. *Lys.* 155–156; Eur. *Andr.* 627–631.

[17] See Stevens 1971: *ad loc.*, but see also Henderson 1987: *ad loc.*, reading the Aristophanic passage as a deliberate reference to the *Andromache*. He notes that there was a long tradition concerning Menelaus' immediate loss of resolve at the sight of Helen, but that the detail about her breasts first appears in Euripides. Henderson's caution seems warranted because, even in the *Andromache* and *Lysistrata*, it is not clear that Helen deliberately exposes her breasts, but only that Menelaus sees them. This point is significant because there are references to diaphanous clothing at Ar. *Lys.* 48 and 151 (Henderson, *ad loc.*).

[18] See Whallon 1980: 139.

[19] It is possible that the reference to Scylla, coupled with the reference to a dog/bitch in the preceding lines (1228), foreshadows the dog imagery applied to Clytemnestra's vicarious hunt of Orestes through her Furies: see *Cho.* 924, 1054, *Eum.* 129–132, 147–148, 230–231, 246–253, 323–327, and Whallon 1980: 140.

form a riddle whose solution is slowly made apparent in the course of the play or, in this case, the trilogy.[20]

In the *Choephori*, references to snakes are both more common and more prominent. We first see such a reference when Orestes makes an impassioned prayer to Zeus, the father of the gods, and therefore a presumably sympathetic audience for a son seeking vengeance for his own father. In an extended metaphor (246–261), Orestes describes himself and Electra as chicks orphaned when their eagle father was killed by a snake (Clytemnestra). In the natural world, the eagle preys upon the snake—it is the superior species. Here the natural order has been subverted as Clytemnestra and her "man-scheming heart" (*Agamemnon* 11) have bested Agamemnon—the snake has slain the eagle.[21] The image of Orestes and Electra as little birds has already been established before this image.[22] Moreover, both Orestes and Electra use the term νεοσσός, the Homeric word for fledgling, to describe themselves in the first half of the play (256, 501). Thus, in the early part of the *Choephori*, Clytemnestra is cast as a completely different species from the other members of her family.[23] Interestingly, in his appeal to Zeus, Orestes refers to the θήρα πατρώια (251), which would quite fittingly be the serpent which turned the tables on the eagle. At this point, then, the young eagles, Orestes and Electra, embark on the hunt of the snake, Clytemnestra.[24] The emphasis on the different, hostile species, which the eagle and serpent represent, temporarily allows the audience to downplay the importance of the blood-ties between Orestes, Electra, and Clytemnestra. Thus Orestes' and Electra's hunt of their mother seems less immoral.[25]

The unforgettable image of the serpent at the breast is revealed when Orestes asks the Chorus why Clytemnestra has sent libations for Agamemnon's tomb. They describe the terrifying dream of the queen:[26]

> Χο. τεκεῖν δράκοντ' ἔδοξεν, ὡς αὐτὴ λέγει.
> Ορ. καὶ ποῖ τελευτᾷ καὶ καρανοῦται λόγος;
> Χο. ἐν σπαργάνοισι παιδὸς ὁρμίσαι δίκην.

[20] Lebeck 1971: 2. See also Zeitlin 1965; Wheelwright 1968: 212–213; Garner 1990: 28–29.

[21] Thomson (1966: *ad loc.*) cites some ancient evidence for the scheming nature of the snake and for the traditional enmity of the snake and eagle: Arist. *H.A.* 1.1.488b, 9.1.609a; Hom. *Il.* 12.200–209; Aesch. *Sept.* 503.

[22] Lebeck (1971: 13–14, and no. 15) comments on the use of avian terminology with regard to Electra and Orestes: ὁμόπτερος (174) and ἀναπτερόω (228).

[23] I am indebted to one of the journal's anonymous readers who observes that this metaphor plays nicely with the Hesiodic claim that the female is a different γένος from the male (*Th.* 590–591).

[24] Goldhill (1992: 88) notes that Orestes uses a tracking metaphor to cast himself as the hunter of his mother. See also Vidal-Naquet 1988: 154–156, and especially no. 125. See also Zeitlin 1965: 483.

[25] Note that Electra may initially suspect Orestes to be a snake when she asks him if he is *coiling* a trap for her (πλέκεις, 220; cf. πλεκταῖσι, 248). Given her family history, caution does seem appropriate.

[26] In 531, I prefer Sidgwick 1884 and Verrall 1893, accepting the Homeric μαζόν, as recorded by the manuscript tradition, instead of the Attic μαστόν, preferred by Garvie 1990 and Bowen 1986.

Ορ. τίνος βορᾶς χρῄζοντα, νεογενὲς δάκος;
Χο. αὐτὴ προσέσχε μαζὸν ἐν τὠνείρατι.
Ορ. καὶ πῶς ἄτρωτον οὔθαρ ἦν ὑπὸ στύγους;
Χο. ὥστ' ἐν γάλακτι θρόμβον αἵματος σπάσαι.
Ορ. οὗτοι μάταιον ἀνδρὸς ὄψανον πέλει. 527–534

Ch. She seemed to give birth to a serpent as she tells it.
Or. And where does the story end and come to a close?
Ch. She secured it in swaddling clothes like a child.
Or. What food did it crave, this newborn monster?
Ch. In her dream she herself offered her breast.
Or. And how was her teat not wounded by this abomination?
Ch. Actually, it drew out a clot of blood in the milk.
Or. This is no empty dream; it is a vision of a man!

Orestes' insistent, pointed questions draw out the story, almost as if he knows the answers before he poses the questions. The Chorus then explains that the queen's horror and fear of the dream's portent prompted her to send them to pour libations on Agamemnon's tomb. Orestes jumps on the link that his mother has established between her nightmare vision and the death of her husband. In contrast to his mother, he prays that this dream may be portentous, and offers an interpretation, which his mother must at least subconsciously dread. Orestes explicitly identifies himself with the δράκων of his mother's dream (527), and he accepts that he must become a snake, ἐκδρακοντωθείς (549), if he is to kill his mother.[27] This is quite a change from his earlier claim to be the fledgling son of the eagle, Agamemnon. Now, he is akin to his snake mother, Clytemnestra, who killed his father. Ironically, this image portrays Orestes as the unnatural child of a normal, i.e., human, mother, in that he is a snake biting the breast (μαζόν) of a typical mother, caring for her child.[28] On the other hand, in her nightmare, Clytemnestra denies her snaky nature while acknowledging to herself that the son from her womb is a serpent.[29] Thus, the snake image also functions to relate Clytemnestra's transgression against the laws of kindred blood to Orestes' own murder of a family member. Nevertheless, the Chorus welcomes Orestes' interpretation of the dream and expresses the hope that it will play out thus.

[27] Lebeck (1971: 130) observes that just as Orestes' act of vengeance is the offspring of his mother's vengeful deed, so, too, as a serpent, he is his mother's son. See also Winnington-Ingram 1983: 135.

[28] Note that Orestes' language appears to dehumanize his mother when he substitutes the word οὔθαρ (532) for the Chorus's μαζόν. Bowen (1986: *ad loc.*) observes that οὔθαρ is more usually used of animals than people in Greek. See also Devereux 1976: 189 and n. 21. See also Vidal-Naquet 1988: 155–156 and n. 121. In his interpretation of the dream, however, Orestes reverts to the term μαστόν (545).

[29] If the snake image indicates a character flaw which enables you to kill a family-member, then, of course, it could equally well be applied to Agamemnon who sacrificed his daughter to free the Greek fleet from plague-ridden delay. Aeschylus' choice not to apply the snake image to Agamemnon, therefore, becomes all the more significant.

Subsequently, the Chorus encourages Orestes to have the courage of Perseus, which implicitly casts Clytemnestra as the snake-haired Medusa (*Cho.* 831–837).[30] The myth of Perseus details how, after the slaying of Medusa, the hero was pursued by other Gorgons. Thus, the pursuit of Orestes by the Gorgon-like Furies is prefigured by this allusion to the Perseus story.[31] Moreover, despite the Chorus's acceptance of Orestes' self-identification with the snake in his mother's dream, they still perceive Clytemnestra to be the real snake who threatens her family.

The next passage, which confirms the prophetic nature of Clytemnestra's dream of the serpent at the breast, lies within the climactic scene of the play, during Orestes' confrontation with his mother. We have seen above the dramatic moment in which Clytemnestra bares her breasts in an effort to forestall her murderous son. The effectiveness of Clytemnestra's Iliadic gesture is demonstrated by Orestes' hesitation. Despite his rage at Clytemnestra's expression of love for the dead Aegisthus (893), Orestes is suddenly at a loss when confronted by his mother's breasts. This is the first time, and the only time in the murder-scene, that Orestes applies the term "mother" to Clytemnestra:[32]

Ορ. Πυλάδη, τί δράσω: μητέρ' αἰδεσθῶ κτανεῖν; 899

Or. Pylades, what should I do? Should I be ashamed to kill my mother?

The echo (αἰδεσθῶ) of Clytemnestra's words (αἴδεσαι) reveals that her appeal to αἰδώς strikes a chord.[33] These circumstances prompt the only words that Pylades speaks: he urges Orestes to do Apollo's bidding and kill her. With her breasts exposed, as she faces her newly resolute son, Clytemnestra then gives voice to the fear she has been denying: Orestes is the snake in her dream. She knows that this identification means death for her. When Orestes has driven his mother into the house, the Chorus suddenly expresses pity "*even* for these two," Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (931).[34] The Chorus's momentary sense of compassion may well be due to the more human, feminine persona that Clytemnestra displays in her last moments: a loving woman and a once-happy mother.[35]

Any sympathy for Clytemnestra is short-lived. Orestes soon reminds the Chorus of his mother's serpentine nature by associating her with a μύραινα or an

[30] See Loraux 1986: 90–92, 96–98, 101.

[31] See *ad loc.* Garvie 1986 and Bowen 1986. The Furies are explicitly compared to Gorgons at *Cho.* 1048 and *Eum.* 48.

[32] See Garvie 1986: *ad loc.* and Lebeck 1971: 116.

[33] Goldhill (1984: 179–180) argues that an appeal to αἰδώς is an appeal to be recognized as a φίλος rather than an ἐχθρός. See also Loraux 1986: 97–101. For such a claim to be rejected, Clytemnestra must be seen to be an enemy of Orestes' family rather than a member of it.

[34] See *ad loc.* Bowen 1986 and Garvie 1986.

[35] The credibility of this display is open to question. Clytemnestra's ability to love is revealed by her expression of grief for Aegisthus tactlessly uttered in front of Orestes (893–895). Whether or not her maternal feelings are genuine, however, is a much more vexed question (above, nn. 11 and 12).

ἔχιδνα (994). Then, at the end of the *Choephori*, the Chorus commends Orestes for killing the two snakes, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (δυοῖν δρακόντοιν), once again dehumanizing Orestes' mother, and perhaps, by implication re-affirming the humanity of Orestes (1044–47).[36] Certainly, when Orestes then expresses terror at the apparition of his mother's Furies with their snaky hair, he seems to have lost any sense of self-identification with snakes.[37] It seems that only one member of the family at a time can be represented by snakes. Finally, in the *Eumenides,* when the ghost of Clytemnestra rouses the Furies to the chase, Clytemnestra is once again associated with a serpent, δρακαίνη (128), either in her own right, or through the Furies as her intermediaries.[38] As Orestes vacillates between his maternal and paternal heritage, he is alternately a snake or the prey of a snake. In her dream vision, and when she bares her breasts in supplication, Clytemnestra is briefly associated with a human mother. That association, however, is short-lived. Her role as predatory serpent plotting against her family is a constant in the *Oresteia.*

Previous attention to the serpent imagery in the *Oresteia*, and to the image of the serpent at the breast, in particular, has focused on a fragment from the *Oresteia* of Stesichorus, describing a dream of Clytemnestra:[39]

> τᾶι δὲ δράκων ἐδόκησε μολεῖν κάρα βεβροτωμένος ἄκρον,
> ἐκ δ' ἄρα τοῦ βασιλεὺς Πλεισθενίδας ἐφάνη.
>
> A serpent with the top of its head stained with gore seemed to her to approach,
> And out of it the Pleisthenid king appeared.

As it is not clear whether the Pleisthenid king is the snake or the offspring of the snake, it is a matter of debate whether the Pleisthenid king is Agamemnon or Orestes. Clearly, however, in Stesichorus' account of the dream, the snake represents Agamemnon.[40] It is a striking feature of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, therefore, that Agamemnon is never described as a snake. On the contrary, the hostility between the king and Clytemnestra is represented, as we noted above, by casting them respectively as rival species: the eagle and the snake. As I will now show, Aeschylus' representation of Orestes as a serpent is indebted not only to Stesichorus, but perhaps even more to a Homeric simile intimately connected with Hecuba's bare-breasted supplication of Hector.

[36] See also Vidal-Naquet 1988: 155–156.

[37] As noted above (n. 19), the Furies are also represented as blood-drinking dogs in the *Choephori* and *Eumenides*. See also Vidal-Naquet 1988: 157. They may recall the corpse-eating dogs which Hecuba and Priam, in particular, dreaded (*Il.* 22.66–76, 88–89). See also the final dialogue of Hector and Achilles (*Il.* 22.335–354), and the grieving words of Andromache (*Il.* 22.508–510). See also *Il.* 23.21–23 and 182–187; 24.209–211, 406–413.

[38] See *ad loc.* Podlecki 1989, Davies 1885, Sommerstein 1989, Lattimore 1953. See also Whallon 1980: 140. As many of the same images are applied to Clytemnestra and her Furies, it is easy to blur the distinction between the woman and the avenging monsters who are so closely identified with her.

[39] Page 1962: fr. 42.

[40] For commentary on the serpent in Stesichorus, see above, n. 3.

We established above that there were strong similarities between Clytemnestra's appeal to Orestes and Hecuba's appeal to Hector. Another obvious point in common is that both mothers fail to dissuade their sons from the course of action they have chosen. Orestes leads his mother into the house to kill her, and Hector turns his attention to the approach of Achilles. As soon as Hecuba ends her speech to Hector, a powerful image is applied to the resolute hero:

> ἀλλ' ὅ γε μίμν' Ἀχιλῆα πελώριον ἆσσον ἰόντα.
> ὡς δὲ δράκων ἐπὶ χειῇ ὀρέστερος ἄνδρα μένῃσι,
> βεβρωκὼς κακὰ φάρμακ', ἔδυ δέ τέ μιν χόλος αἰνός,
> σμερδαλέον δὲ δέδορκεν ἑλισσόμενος περὶ χειῇ·
> ὣς Ἕκτωρ ἄσβεστον ἔχων μένος οὐχ ὑπεχώρει.
>
> Hom. *Il.* 22.92–96

> But he awaits mighty Achilles drawing ever nearer.
> Just as a mountain serpent waits for a man by its hole,
> And, gorged with evil poisons, dreadful anger fills him,
> And he casts terrible glances coiling around his hole,
> So Hector keeping his passion unquenched brooked no retreat.

As Hector's attention turns from his family to the arch-enemy of his city, he is no longer presented as a nursing baby, but as a snake waiting to strike.[41] Here, it is Hector who is a δράκων (*Cho.* 527). It is Hector who puts aside any thoughts of his debt to his mother, and plots the destruction of his foe, ἐκδρακοντωθείς (*Cho.* 549) no less than Orestes. The juxtaposition in both texts of a mother's bare-breasted appeal to her son, and the likening of that obdurate son to a snake poised to strike can hardly be coincidental. It is my contention that Aeschylus has taken this simile from the *Iliad*, along with Hecuba's dramatic bare-breasted supplication, and combined the two to create the imagery of the serpent at the breast, which lies at the heart of the *Oresteia*'s extended snake imagery.[42] Already on the alert for further Iliadic references following the allusion to Hecuba's bare-breasted supplication, the reader can now make the connection with the very next Iliadic scene: the obdurate snake-man.

What is the impact of this observation? The double allusion to the Iliadic passage creates an intertextual relationship, bringing the Aeschylean characters into more pointed comparison and contrast with the Homeric characters. The reader is induced to see Clytemnestra and Orestes against the backdrop provided by Hecuba, Achilles, and Hector. Of course, the initial connection is between

[41] It is appropriate for the connection that I am drawing that Hector is likened to a mountain snake, ὀρέστερος, as the hero of the *Choephori* is a mountain man, Ὀρέστης.

[42] Garner (1990: 179) notes that Books 6 and 22 of the *Iliad* are imitated and alluded to by Greek poets more frequently than any other books of the *Iliad*. He suggests that this may indicate that these books were the "most popular and likely to be recognized as the vehicle of allusion." Such popularity can only increase the likelihood both that Aeschylus is deliberately alluding to the Homeric snake simile, and that his audience would have recognized and digested the significance of that allusion. For the likelihood that the audience would recognize a reused Homeric simile in a passage of extended allusion, see further, Garner 1990: 6, 61, and 105, and Goldhill 1992: 46–47.

Clytemnestra and Hecuba. Whether or not this link with Hecuba humanizes Clytemnestra and elicits compassion by associating her with a good mother who suffered much, Orestes is confronted with the inescapable truth that Clytemnestra is his mother.[43] He hesitates now as he wonders if this killing will be as much matricide as vengeance for his father. Furthermore, the pairing of the two passages also establishes a link between Orestes and Hector. The audience now has a noble model for Orestes' obduracy in the face of this maternal exhibitionism. There is a heroic precedent for his snakiness. As Hector refuses to flee from the enemy who threatens death to his father, so Orestes will not spare the one who has already killed his father. As Hector takes on the guise of a venomous serpent ready to strike in defense of his home and family, Orestes can justify his matricide as a tyrannicide, designed to avenge his father. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that Hector, unlike Orestes, enjoys normal relationships with his family. His violence is directed outwards against threats external to his family and city. Here, Hector turns a deaf ear to his parents' pleas, but the nobility of his character and the normalcy of his relationship with his father and mother is never in any doubt. In Orestes' case, the situation is tragically altered. While it is true that avenging the death of a family member is perfectly honorable, when that vengeance must turn against a parent, the heroism of the deed is seriously compromised.

Froma Zeitlin demonstrated how the motif of corrupted sacrifice is used throughout the *Oresteia* to illustrate disharmony within the family, within the state, and between mortals and immortals.[44] The image of the serpent at the breast also illustrates the corruption and dysfunction of the family.[45] I contend that the extent of the corruption and dysfunction is thrown into higher relief by a deliberate comparison with an ideal family, familiar to any classical audience. As Garner (1990: 40) observes, Orestes is no Hector. Clytemnestra is certainly no Hecuba. But the combination of the bare-breasted supplication with the snake image allows us to see traces of another Homeric character in Clytemnestra: Achilles.[46] If Orestes the serpent is cast as Hector the serpent, then the foe he is about to strike must recall for us Achilles, the foe whom Hector awaits. In the *Iliad*, Achilles slays Hector, and Pyrrhus, Achilles' son, will eventually butcher Priam. The connection of Orestes to Hector, coupled with the linking of Clytemnestra to Achilles, allows us to see Orestes' matricide as an act of self-preservation. The combination of the two Homeric ideas also allows us to see the duality of Clytemnestra in her son's eyes. She is both the mother who nursed

[43] Rousseau (1963: 124) believes that Clytemnestra never nursed her son, and therefore argues, "no pity is intended to be felt for the viper who lies to her son in the moment of death." Whallon (1980: 135–137 and n. 16) suggests that her appeal sounds hollow due to what he calls plagiarism from the *Iliad*, but is less convinced that Clytemnestra is lying. Whallon also summarizes various scholars' opinions on whether or not Clytemnestra nursed Orestes. See also Golden 1962: 84.

[44] Zeitlin 1965; 1966: 645–653. See also Whallon 1980: 132.

[45] See Whallon 1980: 271.

[46] Achilles may be something of a favorite foil for characters in Aeschylus. Garner (1990: 41–46) demonstrates that another play, *Prometheus Vinctus*, contains elaborate thematic and linguistic parallels between Prometheus and Achilles.

and cared for him, and she is the one who slaughtered his father, and now poses a threat to him. Despite Orestes' attempts to distance himself from Clytemnestra, at a crucial moment, he accepts her as a maternal figure. Under our gaze, the combination of Homeric ideas then permits Orestes to make a smooth transition from hesitation before the "evidence" of his debt to his mother to deadly resolve before an enemy of his family. The parallel with an Iliadic hero-serpent gives credibility to the redefinition of Orestes' mother as his foe. Moreover, while there are obvious family ties between Hector and Hecuba, Achilles can in no way be construed as a family figure for Hector. Thus, through the association of Clytemnestra with Achilles, the stage is set for the denial of Clytemnestra's family ties to Orestes.[47] In the *Eumenides*, the crux of the trial is whether or not mother and son have kindred blood (604–674). Apollo's assertion that the mother is not a parent is foreshadowed by Clytemnestra's second Iliadic counterpart, Achilles.

The textual parallels between Clytemnestra and Achilles, and between Orestes and Hector, go beyond facing or acting like a determined serpent. Another important image in the *Oresteia* may have been culled from *Iliad* 22. After slaying his mother, Orestes is pursued by her Furies. Various hunting images and terms are then applied to their pursuit.[48] Clytemnestra had warned Orestes to fear her wrathful hounds (*Cho.* 924), and Orestes identifies his mother's furies as hounds before the end of the play (1054). Thus, it is not surprising that several of the hunting images in the *Eumenides* cast the Furies as hounds, and a couple of these images explicitly portray Orestes as a fawn.[49] In one case, the image of Clytemnestra's Furies pursuing Orestes like dogs after a cowering fawn (246–253) is strongly reminiscent of a similar image in Achilles' pursuit of Hector (*Il.* 22.188–193).[50] Aside from κύων and νεβρόν, the Homeric and Aeschylean passages seem linked by καταπτήξας and καταπτακών, respectively. The linguistic echoes in this image common to both texts can only strengthen my argument that there is an important intertextual relationship between the *Oresteia* and *Iliad* 22.[51] Once again, identification with hostile species and heroes at war characterize the interaction of this mother and son, Clytemnestra and Orestes. For, Hector and Orestes are here linked by a fawn, and their respective pursuers, Achilles and Clytemnestra (through her Furies), are linked by the hound. The bare-breasted supplication scene establishes a link between Hector and Orestes, and between Hecuba and Clytemnestra. Next, the serpent image

[47] The association with Perseus and Medusa, which Loraux (1986), Bowen (1986: *ad loc.*), and Garvie (1986: *ad loc.*) each explore, also denies family ties between Clytemnestra and Orestes. See above, nn. 30 and 31.

[48] See Vidal-Naquet 1988: *passim*; Lebeck 1971: 15–16, 63–68.

[49] *Eum.* 111–113, 131–132, 230–231, 246–253. See Sommerstein 1989: *ad loc.* and Podlecki 1989: *ad loc.* See also above, nn. 20 and 38.

[50] Podlecki 1989, on line 111, cites the Iliadic simile, but limits himself to observing that "the fawn was a favourite prey, no doubt in real as in fictional hunts." Note that all the Trojans are likened to fawns following their flight from Achilles in the opening line of *Iliad* 22.

[51] See also above, nn. 3 and 15.

changes Clytemnestra's Homeric foil from Hecuba to Achilles. The image of the hound and the fawn then extends the association of Orestes with Hector, and confirms Clytemnestra's new link with Achilles.

There are various ways, as I have shown, in which the association of Clytemnestra and Orestes with Achilles and Hector enriches the Aeschylean text, but the intertextual relationships of all the Homeric and Aeschylean characters is complicated by the presence of Agamemnon in both texts. In the passages I have examined, Clytemnestra is associated with Achilles solely through her interaction with Orestes, but the link is interesting with regard to another interaction, too. For, the *Iliad* describes the wrath of Achilles against Agamemnon. As leader of the Greek forces, Agamemnon expects loyalty from Achilles despite taking Briseis from him, an act that publicly humiliated him. In the first play of the *Oresteia*, Agamemnon also expects loyalty from Clytemnestra despite taking Iphigeneia from her and humiliating her by sleeping with Chryseis and Cassandra. Thus, Achilles is an appropriate foil for Clytemnestra as a hero hostile to Agamemnon. It may seem strange, however, to associate a woman, even a queen, with Greece's greatest warrior-hero, but Clytemnestra is no ordinary woman. She is like a man in her counsel, mind, speech, and action.[52]

The intertextual relationship between the *Oresteia* and *Iliad* 22 is established through the imagery and *dramatis personae* common to both texts. The act of comparing the two texts highlights a variety of similarities and differences which allows us to gain a richer understanding of Orestes, Clytemnestra, and the relationship between them. Clytemnestra tries to escape her doom by claiming the rights of a good mother, thereby trying to force Orestes into the role of a dutiful son. Unfortunately for Clytemnestra, recognition of the Homeric model for her bare-breasted supplication condemns her to failure, as Hecuba fails to persuade Hector. Furthermore, as Orestes has already embraced the image of the serpent in his mother's nightmare, his association with Hector makes him not only a dutiful son but also a deadly warrior. The Homeric simile, which likens Hector to a snake as he awaits the onslaught of Achilles, foreshadows Orestes' eventual resolve for violence. The audience can sympathize with Orestes' filial guilt as they compare him with Hector resisting Hecuba's pleas. They can then comprehend his suddenly renewed, grim determination as they compare him to Hector poised to strike at his foe, Achilles. Moreover, as Orestes the snake strikes at his mother, and Hector the snake faces Achilles, this intertextual relationship between Aeschylus and Homer offers both positive and negative parallels for Clytemnestra. She is both maternal figure and deadly enemy for Orestes. The debt of the *Choephori* to these lines from *Iliad* 22 enables us to acknowledge Orestes' twin perspectives on Clytemnestra, and finally allows us to accept his dismissal of her maternal role and his new focus on her hostile aspect.

[52] *Ag.* 10–11, 351–353, 940. Winnington-Ingram (1983: 101–131) argues that Clytemnestra acts the male to both Agamemnon and the womanly Aegisthus. See also Goldhill 1992: 37–39.

Although Orestes relinquishes his role as a serpent after slaying his mother and Aegisthus, he never regains his eagle image. His association with Hector begins with his mother's Iliadic supplication, develops as he becomes a snake, and persists as he flees like a fawn pursued by hounds. He regains access to the community of men at the end of the *Eumenides* when he receives religious purification and is acquitted of murder charges. It seems, however, that, although he avenges his father and sloughs his serpent skin, in the aftermath of striking down his mother, he can no longer preen himself as an eagle of the house of Atreides.

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS
COLBY COLLEGE
4160 MAYFLOWER HILL
WATERVILLE, MAINE 04901–8841
U.S.A.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adkins, A. W. H. 1985. *Poetic Craft in the Early Greek Elegists.* Chicago.
Bowen, A. ed. 1986. *Aeschylus:* Choephori. Bristol.
Conacher, D. J. 1987. *Aeschylus'* Oresteia. Toronto.
Culler, J. 1981. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction.* Ithaca.
Davies, J. J. ed. 1885. *The* Eumenides *of Aeschylus.* Dublin.
Dawson, C. M. 1966. "Σπουδογέλοιον: Random Thoughts on Occasional Poems," *YCIS* 19: 37–76.
DeForest, M. 1993. "Clytemnestra's Breast and the Evil Eye," in M. DeForest (ed.), *Woman's Power, Man's Game: Essays on Classical Antiquity in Honor of Joy K. King.* Wauconda, Ill. 129–148.
Devereux, G. 1976. *Dreams in Greek Tragedy.* Berkeley.
Garner, R. 1990. *From Homer to Tragedy.* New York.
Garson, R. W. 1985. "Aspects of Aeschylus' Homeric Usages," *Phoenix* 39: 1–5.
Garvie, A. F. 1970. "The Opening of the *Choephori*," *BICS* 17: 79–91.
—— ed. 1986. *Aeschylus:* Choephori. Oxford.
Goheen, R. F. 1955. "Aspects of Dramatic Symbolism: Three Studies in the *Oresteia*," *AJP* 76: 113–137.
Golden, L. 1962. *In Praise of Prometheus: Humanism and Rationalism in Aeschylean Thought.* Chapel Hill.
Goldhill, S. 1984. *Language, Sexuality, Narrative:* The Oresteia. Cambridge.
—— 1992. *Aeschylus:* The Oresteia. Cambridge.
Griffith, M. 1975. "Man and the Leaves: A Study of Mimnernus fr. 2," *CSCA* 8: 73–88.
Henderson, J. ed. 1987. *Aristophanes:* Lysistrata. Oxford.
Kitto, H. D. F. 1961. *Greek Tragedy.* London.
Lamberton, R. and J. J. Keaney (eds.). 1992. *Homer's Ancient Readers.* Princeton.
Lattimore, R. tr. 1953. *Aeschylus* 1: Oresteia. Chicago.
Lebeck, A. 1971. The Oresteia: *A Study in Language and Structure.* Washington, D.C.
Lloyd-Jones, H. tr. 1970. *Aeschylus:* The Libation Bearers. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.

Loraux, N. 1986. "*Matrem nudam*: Quelques versions grecques," *L'Écrit du Temps* 11: 90–102.
Murray, G. 1940. *Aeschylus*. Oxford.
Page, D. L. ed. 1962. *Poetae Melici Graeci*. Oxford.
Pasco, A. H. 1994. *Allusion: A Literary Graft*. Toronto.
Podlecki, A. J. ed. 1989. *Aeschylus:* Eumenides. Warminster.
Pucci, P. 1987. *Odysseus Polutropos: Intertextual Readings in the* Odyssey *and the* Iliad. Ithaca and London.
Rousseau, G. S. 1963. "Dream and Vision in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *Arion* 2: 101–136.
Sideras, A. 1971. *Aeschylus Homericus*. Göttingen.
Sidgwick, A. ed. 1884. *Choephoroi*. Oxford.
Smyth, H. W. ed. 1900. *Greek Melic Poets*. London.
Sommerstein, A. H. ed. 1989. *Aeschylus:* Eumenides. Cambridge.
Stanford, W. B. 1983. *Greek Tragedy and the Emotions*. London.
Stevens, P. T. ed. 1971. *Euripides:* Andromache. Oxford.
Thomson, G. ed. 1966. *The* Oresteia *of Aeschylus*. Amsterdam.
Todorov, T. 1977. *The Poetics of Prose*. Tr. R. Howard. Oxford.
Tucker, T. G. ed. 1901. *Aeschylus:* Choephori. Cambridge.
Verrall, A. W. ed. 1893. *Aeschylus:* Choephori. London and New York.
Vidal-Naquet, P. 1988. "Hunting and Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," in J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet (eds.), *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*. New York. 141–159. (Originally published in *Parola del Passato* 129 [1969] 401–425.)
Whallon, W. 1958. "The Serpent at the Breast," *TAPA* 89: 271–275.
—— 1980. *Problem and Spectacle*. Heidelberg.
Wheelwright, P. 1968. *The Burning Fountain*. Bloomington.
Winnington-Ingram, R. P. 1983. *Studies in Aeschylus*. Cambridge.
Zeitlin, F. I. 1965. "The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 96: 463–508.
—— 1966. "Postscript to Sacrificial Imagery in the *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 97: 645–653.
—— 1980. "Closet of Masks: Role-Playing and Myth-Making in the *Orestes* of Euripides," *Ramus* 9: 51–77.