The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

FROMA I. ZEITLIN

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

The single most compelling feature of the artistry of the *Oresteia* is its elaborate network of image and metaphor. Far from providing only the rich dyes and subtle embroideries of a royal robe, the imagery is often the medium through which the dramatic action finds its expression.[1] As the image becomes symbol it is woven into the very fabric of the drama, and it is this interweaving of plot and symbol which often reveals the pattern of thought in this difficult and densely textured trilogy. Light and dark, net-yoke-entanglement, justice and law, disease and remedy, the ravening lion, the serpent—these are some of the central images which come immediately to mind or which other critics have brought to our attention.[2]

Apart from the resolution in the *Eumenides*, the plot itself is a straightforward tale of hatred, revenge, and murder within a royal family. Yet to apprehend the fundamental changes Aeschylus introduces into the old epic tale, we must take the imagery for our point of departure.

It is our purpose here to treat one aspect of this imagery which has not been fully examined hitherto, to trace it through the trilogy, to show that this imagery forms a consistent and important motif, especially in the *Agamemnon*, and to demonstrate how this

[1] "The issues, the themes, the motives that make for conflict, for drama, find their most complete expression not in the characters' declarations of fact but in their statements in symbol, symbol which in syntax, in the circumstances of language, becomes image. Imagery in the Aeschylean plays does not then simply illuminate or even illustrate drama. In its recall of past events, in its anticipation of future events, in its definition—not description—of present conflicts it actually creates drama. In this sense, imagery is dramatic imagery." Barbara L. Hughes, "Dramatic Imagery in Aeschylus" (unpublished dissertation, Bryn Mawr 1955) iv.

[2] Richmond Lattimore, *Aeschylus, Oresteia* (Chicago 1953) Introduction, 15–18; John H. Finley, *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1955) 248–49; Robert F. Goheen, "Aspects of Dramatic Symbolism in the *Agamemnon*," *AJP* 76 (1955) 113–37; Bernard M. W. Knox, "The Lion in the House," *CP* 47 (1952) 17–25. This is only a partial list of material that treats various aspects of imagery and symbol in the *Oresteia*.

motif is significant, either by its presence or absence, in expressing some of the most important ideas in the trilogy. This motif might be called the sacrifice corrupted. By this is meant that violent deeds of bloodshed are portrayed not as murder but as murder in sacramental dress, that is, ritual slaughter. The imagery expressive of this motif is found primarily in the *Agamemnon*, in which every murder committed is described in this special way, but it reappears briefly and compellingly in the other two dramas. Not only, as Whallon indicates,[3] are the members of the family the sacramental victims, one after another, but those characters outside the circle of kinship as well.[4]

The Evidence of the Text

The sacrificial theme is established in all its rich complexity at the very beginning of the *Agamemnon* in the *parodos*.

The first allusion is small and subtle. The chorus, after the simile of the eagles robbed of their young, draws a parallel between the Erinys sent to avenge them and the two sons of Atreus sent on a punitive mission against Paris to Troy. It then describes the painful struggle of men in war and the deaths suffered by Greeks and Trojans alike (*A.* 63–68):

πολλὰ παλαίσματα καὶ γυιοβαρῆ,
γόνατος κονίαισιν ἐρειδομένου
διακναιομένης τ' ἐν προτελείοις
κάμακος, θήσων Δαναοῖσιν

[3] William Whallon, "Why is Artemis Angry?" *AJP* 82 (1961) 78–88.

[4] In studies of Aeschylus' poetic technique, sacrificial imagery is largely neglected. Jean Dumortier, *Les Images dans la Poésie d'Eschyle* (Paris 1935) includes references to sacrifice in his chapter "La Vie Religieuse," 217–32. In one instance he says "Le sacrifice lui-même sera le symbole d'une immolation sanglante d'un caractère mystérieux et sacré," (218) but he draws no general conclusions. F. R. Earp, *The Style of Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1948) finds only two references in the trilogy to sacrificial imagery and metaphor. Eduard Fraenkel, *Aeschylus' Agamemnon* (Oxford 1950) views parody of ritual only as a dramatic device "to enhance a gruesome effect," 3.653, but there is no consideration of the cumulative effect of these allusions as a matter of any thematic significance.

Anne Lebeck in her "Image and Idea in *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus" (unpublished dissertation, Columbia 1963), which first became available after this paper was written, does recognize the thematic use of sacrificial imagery and sketches out briefly some important examples of it in the first play.

Τρωσί θ' ὁμοίως. ἔστι δ' ὅπη νῦν
ἔστι· τελεῖται δ' ἐς τὸ πεπρωμένον.[5]

Proteleia is a ritual word signifying preliminary sacrifices of any kind, but especially those performed before the marriage ceremony.[6] A favorable and auspicious term of sacrifice, then, is used in an image of men slain in the battles preliminary to the final destruction of Troy and ultimate punishment of Paris, preliminary also to the punishment of Agamemnon, the major dramatic event of the play, which will also be imaged in the language of sacrifice. This coming death of Agamemnon is darkly riddled in *τελεῖται δ'ἐς τὸ πεπρωμένον*. *Teleitai*, that word of many meanings, primarily connotes fulfillment or end. However, in its punning word play with *proteleia*, it assumes the color of its kindred definition, the performance of a holy rite.[7]

The unpropitious use of the *proteleia* and the ambiguous *teleitai* becomes still more ominous by its direct association with the observation of the chorus on the failure of sacrifice to soothe intractable wrath (*A.* 69–71):

οὔθ' ὑποκαίων οὔτ' ἐπιλείβων
οὔτε δακρύων ἀπύρων ἱερῶν
ὀργὰς ἀτενεῖς παραθέλξει.

This last statement provides an ironic contrast to the images of soothing remedies they will shortly use to describe Clytemnestra's present joyous sacrifices of thanksgiving, offerings they hope will heal their anxiety and sense of foreboding (*A.* 87–103).

Distracted for the moment by the queen's rites and the uncertainties of the present, the chorus returns again to its reminiscences of the world of the past and recalls another sacrifice, which is the second act of violence described, the feasting of the eagles

[5] Textual references to the *Agamemnon* (unless otherwise noted), the *Choephoroi*, and the *Eumenides* will be cited from the Oxford Classical Text (Oxford 1955, 2nd ed.), ed. Gilbert Murray.

[6] See Fraenkel (above, note 4) 2.40–41. Also Knox (above, note 2) 21.

[7] Anne Lebeck (above, note 4) analyzes the use of *telos* and related words in the chapter "Telos of Marriage and Telos of Death" and states the case quite fairly (page 103): "In the case of *telos* the number of possible meanings is multiplied several times, thus making it more difficult to determine the thematic importance of the word. This much is certain. The meaning of *telos* which is significant for the trilogy as a whole, that against which every secondary meaning plays, is a religious one. It is difficult to be more precise."

upon the hare. As a portent, the act itself is a symbol, susceptible of broad interpretation (which will be discussed below). We note here only that the initial verb of feasting, *boskomenoi* (*A.* 119) and the characterization of the perpetrators as *lagodaitas* (*A.* 124) give way to the typical verb of sacrifice, *thyō: πτανοῖσιν κυσὶ πατρὸς . . . θυομένοισι* (*A.* 136–37). Calchas sees the destruction of the hare quite clearly as a sacrifice to which another sacrifice, that of Iphigenia, will be a counterpart, and he prays to Apollo to prevent the fulfillment of the omen in that unlawful offering (*A.* 151):

. . . θυσίαν ἑτέραν, ἄνομόν τιν', ἄδαιτον.

Iphigenia is the next victim in the play and the grim note on which the long *parodos* ends. Her death, of course, is not a metaphorical sacrifice for she is actually offered up upon the altar by her father. Agamemnon expresses clearly the nature of the deed he is about to perform (*A.* 207–11):

. . . εἰ
τέκνον δαΐξω, δόμων ἄγαλμα,
μιαίνων παρθενοσφάγοισιν
ῥείθροις πατρῴους χέρας πέλας βω-
μοῦ.

But he does dare to be the *thytēr thygatros* (*A.* 224–25), to sacrifice his daughter as *proteleia naōn* (*A.* 227). In this context, *proteleia* is used with greater effect than before. Iphigenia was literally the preliminary sacrifice before the departure of the fleet, but we are reminded too that she was a nubile young girl (*partheno-sphagoisin*, *A.* 209; *partheniou haimatos*, *A.* 215; *ataurōtos*, *A.* 245) and that, according to the tradition, she was lured to Aulis with the promise of marriage to Achilles. Instead of offering *proteleia*, she herself became the *proteleia*.

The memory of Iphigenia's sacrifice pervades the play, but is only directly mentioned again after Agamemnon's ritual death (*A.* 1415–18, 1432–33), for it is the prime motive Clytemnestra claims as justification for her husband's murder.

The fourth specific deed of bloodshed appears in the parable of the lion cub (*A.* 730–31 [Fraenkel]), where it

μηλοφόνοισιν ⟨ἐν⟩ ἄταις
δαῖτ' ἀκέλευστος ἔτευξεν.

The crime committed here is the bloody slaughter of the sheep by the fawning pet who had been brought to the house *en biotou proteleiois* (*A.* 720). Tenderly nurtured by its benefactors, it now has turned savage beast.[8] The cub is characterized as *hiereus tis Atas* (*A.* 735). The *hiereus* is not simply a priest but the priest who presides at sacrifices, technically a *sphageus*.[9] This epithet becomes still more significant in the light of the poetic evidence given of the multiple identities of the lion cub,[10] but we shall return to this point later.

As the drama nears its fearful climax, after Agamemnon's regal entry into the house, the talk of sacrifice begins again and Clytemnestra is the spokesman. Her first appearance upon the stage was in the silent act of sacrifice (*A.* 87–103). In subsequent appearances, this act is stressed again (*A.* 262, 587, 594–97). Now she is about to perform another sacrifice—but this one is to take place indoors—and she invites Cassandra to take part, first in the preliminary ceremony (*A.* 1035–38):

> εἴσω κομίζου καὶ σύ, Κασσάνδραν λέγω.
> ἐπεί σ' ἔθηκε Ζεὺς ἀμηνίτως δόμοις
> κοινωνὸν εἶναι χερνίβων, πολλῶν μέτα
> δούλων σταθεῖσαν κτησίου βωμοῦ πέλας.

An innocent enough request; the household slave participates in household rites. But the preliminary ceremony alluded to in *chernibes*, the lustral water used for purification before sacrifice, is an ironic hint of the bath which will precede the murder.

Unable to overcome Cassandra's reluctance, Clytemnestra grows impatient; she cannot wait any longer (*A.* 1055–57):

> οὔτοι θυραίᾳ τῇδ' ἐμοὶ σχολὴ πάρα
> τρίβειν· τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἑστίας μεσομφάλου
> ἕστηκεν ἤδη μῆλα πρὸς σφαγὰς πάρος.

[8] *Proteleia* here has still another connotation. It is used as a poetic equivalent of the early years of life preliminary to the maturity that brings with it reversion to savagery and assumption of the role, *hiereus Atas*. In its direct parallel with Helen, it is a direct allusion to her union with Paris, that *kēdos* which is both a marriage and a source of woe. Cf. above, note 7; see also Knox (above, note 2) 17. The main points to be emphasized are the intrusion of this propitious ritual word in sinister contexts and the verbal echo which links them together in theme.

[9] See Fraenkel (above, note 4) 2.341.

[10] See Knox (above, note 2).

Both victim and spectator stand by the altar (*statheisan, hestēken*) or are they the same? It is no coincidence that both these statements are addressed to Cassandra who will be a spectator of the victim Agamemnon's death and herself serve as victim too.[11]

Neither of these implications escapes the sharp notice of Cassandra and, through the extended range of her vision, we are permitted to see the crimes of the house, those projected into the future as well as those recalled from the past, brought suddenly into focus as related components of a consistent pattern of murder. That she regards these crimes in terms of ritual is evident from her description of the house to which she has been brought (*A.* 1090–92 [Fraenkel]):

> μισόθεον μὲν οὖν, πολλὰ συνίστορα
> αὐτοφόνα κακὰ καρατόμα
> ἀνδροσφαγεῖον καὶ πεδορραντήριον.

These last two words are highly allusive. *Androsphageion* is translated as a slaughter place for men, *pedorrhantērion* as a floor dripping with blood. Fraenkel comments that the "awful word *pedorrhantērion* must have evoked in the mind of the audience the name of a sacral vessel, the *perirrhantērion*, an instrument of ritual purification, whereas here the most monstrous defilement is meant."[12] Similarly the term *androsphageion* includes not only the concept of *sphagē*, a term used in sacrifice, but also recalls the *sphageion*, a ritual vessel for catching the blood of the sacrifice.

Note that both of these words refer back to Clytemnestra's language; the *pedorrhantērion* evokes the *chernibes* of her first remarks, and the *androsphageion* is a truer evaluation of the *mēla pros sphagas*.

Four lines later Cassandra alludes to the slaughter of Thyestes' children (*A.* 1096–97):

> κλαιόμενα τάδε βρέφη σφαγὰς
> ὀπτάς τε σάρκας πρὸς πατρὸς βεβρωμένας.

Now the ominous *androsphageion* is echoed in *sphagas*.[13]

[11] See Knox (above, note 2) 22, who points out that the *mēla* recall the *mēla* of the lion's feast.

[12] Fraenkel (above, note 4) 3.496.

[13] *Sphagē* (and *sphazō*) are properly used of slaughter for sacrifice. In Homer the word *sphazō* is used only of cattle, both for feasting and for sacrifice proper. These terms are also used of human sacrifice which is referred to as a *sphagion*, e.g. Eur.

At the end of the play Aegisthus also speaks of *sphagē* (*A.* 1599) in his description of the fate of these same children (*A.* 1590–1602). But this allusion to *sphagē* is reinforced in a slightly different way. The κρεοῦργον ἦμαρ on which the murder took place is a festive occasion or holy day when meat, ordinarily a rarity in Greek daily diet, would be available from sacrifices made to the gods.[14] The correlation between κρεοῦργον ἦμαρ and δαῖτα παιδείων κρεῶν ironically shows that on this day cattle were not offered up (as *Cho.* 261: βουθύτοις ἐν ἤμασιν) but children (cf. Eur. *Hel.* 1474, Soph. *Tr.* 609). The feast of Thyestes upon his children is not only a hideous travesty of the feast of reconciliation in honor of

Ion 277–78, *Hec.* 109, 119, *Or.* 815, 842. (See J. E. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* [3rd ed., Cambridge 1922; repr. New York 1955] 55–69 and R. K. Yerkes, *Sacrifice in Greek and Roman Religions and Early Judaism* [New York 1952] for a discussion of sacrificial terms.) Subsequently *sphagē* and *sphazō* lost their exclusively sacrificial connotation and their meaning was extended to include any slaughter, especially throat cutting (the method ordinarily used in killing victims for sacrifice), although the cognate words *sphagion*, *sphagiazō*, *sphageion*, *sphagiazomai*, *sphagiasmos*, and *prosphagma* generally retained their purely sacrificial use.

It is our contention that, for the most part, Aeschylus employs *sphagē* and *sphazō* to convey the sense of sacrificial slaughter. In the extant plays these words occur a total of 14 times, once in the *Prometheus*, once in the *Persae*, once in the *Septem*, and eleven times in the *Oresteia*.

A cursory analysis reveals seven instances of definite sacrificial use (*Sept.* 43, *Per.* 816, *A.* 209, 1057, 1433, *Eu.* 305, 450), two references to Thyestes' children (*A.* 1096, 1599) served up as part of a sacrificial feast (see below, note 15), and one allusion in a peculiar passage teeming with ritual language (*A.* 1389) which will be examined more fully below.

The other four instances are more ambiguous and hence more difficult to pinpoint precisely. (1) Clytemnestra's ghost describing her own murder in *Eu.* 102 probably does not intend a wholly neutral meaning in view of her role in the *Agamemnon* and the context here of her other sacrifices to the Erinyes (*Eu.* 106–9). (2) In the *Prometheus* the reference is to the Danaids' crime (*Pr.* 863); but observe that divine sanction is offered for the deed (*Pr.* 859). (3) Orestes' use of *sphazō* just before he slays his mother (*Cho.* 904) resembles the *Prometheus* passage in that divine sanction is also provided, and in the strongest terms (*Cho.* 900–2), but see below, note 42, for a fuller analysis. (4) The last instance (*Eu.* 187) seems, at first glance, to connote simply "throat cutting" included in a list of barbarous penalties. A closer scrutiny reveals ironic similarities between the *dikai* executed in this Oriental torture chamber and those of the house of Atreus (cf. *A.* 1091 and Fraenkel's note [3.494]; *Cho.* 1047; *Cho.* 934; *Cho.* 204, 236, 502; *A.* 1594; *A.* 1118, 1616), reinforced by Apollo's metaphorical characterization of this scene as a *heortē* or festival of the Erinyes (*Eu.* 191) and especially by his allusion to the ravening lion and its associations (see Knox [above, note 2] 24).

These words, then, by themselves are not necessarily indicative of ritual, but the instances of their definite sacrificial use and the abundance of other unequivocal terms which we shall meet support the more literal meaning suggested.

[14] See Fraenkel (above, note 4) 3.747.

the suppliant received again into the family, but, in view of the sacral nature of the banquet among the Greeks as a communal meal shared by gods and men, is a parody of sacrifice as well.[15]

Cassandra views her own impending death as a sacrificial offering. The first indication of this attitude is subtly stated (*A.* 1166–69, 72):[16]

> ἰώ, πόνοι πόνοι πόλεος
> ὀλομένας τὸ πᾶν.
> ἰὼ πρόπυργοι θυσίαι πατρὸς
> πολυκανεῖς βοτῶν ποιονόμων . . .
> ἐγὼ δὲ θερμόνους τάχ' ἐν πέδῳ βαλῶ.

In this highly compressed statement she laments both the fate of Troy and her own doom. The sacrifices offered before the walls of Troy[17] did not save Troy (*A.* 1169–71), nor will those sacrifices

[15] For the banquet as sacrificial feast see e.g. C. Kerenyi, *Religion of the Greeks and Romans* (New York 1962) 177–92 and Martin P. Nilsson, *Greek Folk Religion* (New York 1940; repr. 1961) 74–75.

[16] The allusions will become clearer and more coherent. She states this plainly only a few lines further on (*A.* 1178–83).

[17] Scholars disagree as to the meaning of *propyrgoi*. Some say it means sacrifice offered up in behalf of the city, but the general view now tends to favor the interpretation "before the walls." See Fraenkel (above, note 4) 3.532. Either, of course, is possible here. We prefer the latter rendition because the passage then becomes an echo or perhaps even a clarification of *A.* 127–30.

In that passage πάντα δὲ πύργων κτήνη πρόσθε δημιοπλήθεα is explained as the flocks that graze outside the city walls, i.e., the city's wealth, which in ten years of war is depleted. See Fraenkel (above, note 4) 2.77–79. But cf. H. J. Rose, *A Commentary on the Surviving Plays of Aeschylus* (Amsterdam 1958) 2.14 for an entirely different explanation—the flocks are divided up as spoils of war (*moira* is taken as division, not fate)—and Denniston-Page, *Aeschylus' Agamemnon* (Oxford 1957) 80, who prefer another reading altogether and render *ktēnē* as possessions, not flocks.

It is possible, however, that the *ktēnē prosthe pyrgōn* might not be simply cattle killed for food by the exigencies of a protracted war, but rather the multitude of cattle sacrificed before the city's walls, readily explained as ritual designed to protect the efficacy of the magic circle that is the wall, as in *A.* 1166–67. The invalidation of this magic is alluded to when Agamemnon refers to the wooden horse launching itself with a leap (*A.* 826), and to the ravening lion who bounds over the wall (*A.* 827). The horse in actuality was brought into the city by the Trojans in a more conventional way. (See W. F. J. Knight, *Vergil's Troy* (Oxford 1932) 112–34 for a discussion of the wall's magic significance and the tradition of the horse leaping over the wall to gain entry.)

Calchas immediately follows the description of the cattle with a plea that the gods will have no change of heart in their intention to destroy Troy (*A.* 131). How better can the gods' purpose be swayed if not by sacrifice? In each case there are flocks (*ktēnē* and *botōn poionomōn*) in large numbers (*dēmioplēthea* and *polykaneis*), and both are before the walls (*prosthe pyrgōn* and *propyrgoi*). Furthermore, Clytemnestra, who envisions the destruction of Troy, sees the Greeks starving but finding food in Troy

save Cassandra now. In the phrase *en pedō balō* her fall is shown as parallel to the fall of Troy, but on the other hand, the references to *thysiai* are paralleled by her fall as a sacrificial victim.[18] Neither the Trojan sacrifices nor her sacrificial death will avert the coming evil. Moreover, *en pedō balō* recalls the *pedorrhantērion* and even further, it curiously recalls the language of Iphigenia's sacrifice (*A.* 239–40):

κρόκου βαφὰς δ' ἐς πέδον χέουσα
ἔβαλλ' ἕκαστον θυτήρων . . . .

Our interpretation is borne out by the next prophecy of her death (*A.* 1277–78):

βωμοῦ πατρῴου δ' ἀντ' ἐπίξηνον μένει
θερμῷ κοπείσης φοίνιον προσφάγματι.

Thermōi is perhaps some hint of the obscure *thermonous* and the *bōmou patrōiou* echoes the *thysiai patros*. The father's altar, however, is a still richer allusion, referring to another death at a father's altar (Iphigenia) and perhaps even to the tradition that Neoptolemus slew Priam on his own altar.[19] But *prosphagma* is the most important word for it is another technical ritual term of a preliminary sacrifice.[20]

The chorus marvels at Cassandra's courage in accepting the

(*A.* 330–31). Most important of all, however, is the fulfillment of Calchas' prophecy by the words of Cassandra, who says clearly these cattle were killed for sacrifice rather than food.

[18] It should be mentioned here that line 1172 is a difficult one which no two commentators explain in the same way. Both Fraenkel (above, note 4) 3.534–36 and Denniston-Page (above, note 17) 177 find partial or total corruption, while V. W. Verrall, *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus* (2nd ed., London 1904) 224–25 and Rose (above, note 17) 2.83 work diligently to justify the text. In any case, the general sense seems to indicate some reference to Cassandra's approaching death. This is clear from the chorus' response in *A.* 1173–77.

[19] Martin P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion* (2nd ed., Oxford 1952; repr. New York 1963) 125.

[20] Fraenkel (above, note 4) 3.594–95 discusses the possibility that *prosphagma* might be used in its strictest sense as the offering made to a dead man (i.e., Agamemnon shall have his funeral with Cassandra's death providing the *prosphagma*) but thinks the term is probably used more loosely to indicate a preliminary sacrifice, since Cassandra is well aware that Agamemnon's death is the central issue and her murder is only of secondary importance (*A.* 1260–61, 1325–26). We concur in the latter view. In this passage Cassandra is the preliminary offering or appetizer, while Clytemnestra views her in the imagery of a feast as the afterthought, the side dish or dessert, *paropsōnēma* (*A.* 1447).

certain death she foretells for herself and they speak in the terms of her vision (*A.* 1296–98):

> . . . εἰ δ' ἐτητύμως
> μόρον τὸν αὑτῆς οἶσθα, πῶς θεηλάτου
> βοὸς δίκην πρὸς βωμὸν εὐτόλμως πατεῖς;

In her prophetic outcry Cassandra also makes allusion to Agamemnon's death by sacrifice (*A.* 1117–18):[21]

> . . . στάσις δ' ἀκόρετος γένει
> κατολολυξάτω θύματος λευσίμου.

The pointed references to the net (*diktyon*, *A.* 1115; *arkys*, *A.* 1116) following upon the antistrophe that foretells the king's murder (*A.* 1107–11) make it clear that the *thyma* is to be Agamemnon.

Thymata is the word mentioned by the chorus at the very end of this scene when Cassandra cries out that the house reeks of blood and death. The chorus, thinking she is complaining of some real odor, innocently tries to calm her (*A.* 1310):

> . . . τόδ' ὄζει θυμάτων ἐφεστίων.

This is a powerful ironic stroke that finally underscores Cassandra's hints and premonitions and repeats in effect Clytemnestra's sinister statement before Cassandra begins her prophecy (*A.* 1056–57).

If Cassandra makes only one definite reference in the language of ritual to Agamemnon's approaching doom, Clytemnestra, in addition to her earlier hints, leaves no doubt that she considers Agamemnon's death in identical terms.[22]

At the horrifying climax of the play, the most horrifying parody of ritual is advanced. Clytemnestra stands triumphant over the body of her husband and describes how she slew him (*A.* 1384–87):

[21] The chorus, as so often in this scene with Cassandra, seems to understand her prophecies, but not on the conscious level. The *thyma leusimon* reminds them of another sacrifice which was an atrocity, that of Iphigenia. The *krokobaphēs stagōn* (*A.* 1121–22), so strangely used here, is but a whisper of her whose garments were *krokou baphas* (*A.* 239). But the chorus cannot make the leap to final recognition of the connection.

[22] Fraenkel (above, note 4) 3.573 states, "Apart from one blasphemous utterance of the queen herself (1386 ff.) Clytemnestra's bloody deed is never compared with an act of sacrifice." This assertion appears to be refuted by the text itself. We have already seen that Cassandra refers to Agamemnon's death as a *thyma leusimon* and have noted the implications of Clytemnestra's preliminary hints of sacrifice. Other textual evidence will be adduced in the examination of the rest of the play.

παίω δέ νιν δίς. κἀν δυοῖν οἰμωγμάτοιν
μεθῆκεν, αὐτοῦ κῶλα. καὶ πεπτωκότι
τρίτην ἐπενδίδωμι, τοῦ κατὰ χθονὸς
Ἅιδου, νεκρῶν σωτῆρος εὐκταίαν χάριν.

Here, the corrupted ritual is given a different emphasis. Agamemnon's blood is a libation, and with the three strokes she gave him, each one drenching her in blood, she makes precise allusion to the customary rite of pouring three libations after the feast—one to the Olympians, one to the Chthonians, and one to Zeus the Savior. The inversion is twofold in implication. Not only is the libation Agamemnon's blood rather than wine, but Zeus the Savior, the *agathos daimōn* who crowns the feast with blessings, is distorted here into Zeus of Hades, the Savior (keeper) of the dead.[23]

Apart from the intrinsic horror of this blasphemy, the ceremony of the three libations vividly evokes Iphigenia's presence at her father's table where, as head of the house, he mixed the libations and she, the daughter, sang the paean (*A.* 244–47):

πατρὸς κατ' ἀνδρῶνας εὐτραπέζους
ἔμελψεν, ἁγνᾷ δ' ἀταύρωτος αὐδᾷ πατρὸς
φίλου τριτόσπονδον εὔποτμον
παιῶνα φίλως ἐτίμα.

The contrast between the libations of that idyllic picture and those of this bloody scene is continued in lines 1395–96 (Fraenkel):

εἰ δ' ἦν πρεπόντως ὥστ' ἐπισπένδειν νεκρῷ
τάδ' ἄν δικαίως ἦν, ὑπερδίκως μὲν οὖν,

where, to Clytemnestra's way of thinking, the usual sorrowful libations to the dead would be suitably and justly altered to joyous ceremony.[24] No longer is his blood the libation itself; Agamemnon is now the corpse over which the improper libations are rightly poured. In life he prepared a mixing bowl of evils, filling it brimful of curses; now in death his turn has come to drain the potion.

[23] The entire question of Zeus the Savior in the *Oresteia* is a fascinating problem with many facets that have never been explored in any detail. It is beyond the scope of this paper to pursue all its ramifications. We remark here only on its significance as travesty of ritual.

[24] See Fraenkel (above, note 4) 3.658–69.

In this same scene Clytemnestra makes reference to *sphagē* in κἀκφυσιῶν ὀξεῖαν αἵματος σφαγήν (*A.* 1389), but the phrase αἵματος σφαγήν has posed serious difficulties for interpretation.[25] A literal rendition, "gasping out the (swift) slaughter of his blood," makes poor sense. The usual translation taking *sphagēn* as "wound" reads "the blood from his wound," but this solution requires some rather vigorous syntactical gymnastics. Perhaps this phrase would be less obscure if we say "gasping forth the sacrificial offering of his blood."[26] We have already been told his blood is a sacred libation and this expression is a further confirmation. (The pertinence of this wording will be supported in our analysis of *A.* 1431–33.)

The chorus grasps Clytemnestra's meaning and the dark expression of Cassandra is clarified at last, for in expressing their revulsion at the murderous deed, they say to the queen (*A.* 1409): τόδ' ἐπέθου θύος, δημοθρόους τ' ἀράς, "you have taken upon yourself this sacrifice and the roaring curses of the people."[27] But if the chorus accepts her terminology, they will not let her shield her crime behind the pretense of sacrifice. The penalties for homicide—curses and exile—will be hers just the same. The curses of the people point up too the curse of blood guilt upon the house, the curses Iphigenia is not permitted to make (*A.* 236–37), the krater overflowing with curses mixed by Agamemnon (*A.* 1397–98), the curse Thyestes delivers (*A.* 1601), and even the curses of the people for the loss of their men in war (*A.* 457). The ironical juxtaposition of sacrifice and curses provides a powerful value judgment of the proceedings. This is further evidenced in the *thyma leusimon* of which Cassandra speaks (*A.* 1118) transferred to

[25] See Fraenkel (above, note 4) 3.654–55 for a discussion of the many explanations offered for this difficult phrase. He himself rejects the word *sphagēn* as corrupt.

[26] The word *sphagē* itself in context often demands a departure from the simple meaning of slaughter. It has the collateral sense of wound, as has been suggested for this passage and for Soph. *Tr.* 573, Eur. *El.* 1228; or throat, the place where the victim is struck, e.g. in Eur. *Or.* 291. But in Soph. *Tr.* 756, as well as in *A.* 1096, 1599 (see Verrall [above, note 18] 184), slaughter implies sacrifice. (Cf. above, note 13.) The concept of slaughter, then, is not transferred from the deed to the wound or the place of the wound, but rather to the purpose or nature of the deed, not an impossible connection.

[27] See Rose (above, note 17) 2.101 and Denniston-Page (above, note 17) 200, who both offer this very adequate explanation. Fraenkel finds this phrase extremely obscure, perhaps because he does not see references to sacrifice as a continuing refrain.

leusimoi arai by the chorus in their castigation of Aegisthus (*A.* 1616).

Clytemnestra immediately pounces upon these two key words, sacrificial victim and curse, and uses them to expose her motive for killing Agamemnon (*A.* 1412–20). Was it not Agamemnon instead who deserved exile and curses for sacrificing his child ὡσπερεὶ βοτοῦ μόρον (*A.* 1415)?

The chorus, aghast at the death of its king and at Clytemnestra's arrogant defiance, supposes she was driven mad by the bloody deed and warns her that retribution awaits her in the inexorable workings of the *lex talionis*. She brushes aside their admonition as irrelevant to her own circumstances, and grows still more grandiose in her self-justification in this passage which provides the vital clue for the comprehension of Clytemnestra's continual use of sacrificial language (*A.* 1431–33):

> καὶ τήνδ' ἀκούεις ὁρκίων ἐμῶν θέμιν.
> μὰ τὴν τέλειον τῆς ἐμῆς παιδὸς Δίκην
> Ἄτην Ἐρινύν θ', αἷσι τόνδ' ἔσφαξ' ἐγώ.

It is thought that Clytemnestra swears her oath and then corroborates it in the typical fashion with a sacrifice, i.e. Agamemnon.[28] If this interpretation were correct, then the queen would refer to Agamemnon in general terms as a sacrifice, but the specific type of offering to which she alludes would vary from passage to passage, depending on her fancy. Earlier his blood provided the libations to Zeus the Savior; here his corpse is the special sacrifice over which an oath is sworn. But it is our contention that Clytemnestra, who has revealed the careful preparations she has made for the execution of her act, does not make random allusions to different offerings. We propose rather to show that the queen is consistent in viewing her act as a particular type of sacrifice at the root of which lies the very idea she intends to emphasize. But in order to grasp her intention, there is need for a re-evaluation of the three lines in question, 1431–33.

It is our opinion that this passage has been misunderstood (even aside from the confusion as to the nature of the sacrifice). Let us look at its context. The chorus originally thought Agamemnon's murder was a political assassination (*A.* 1346–71). They then

[28] See Fraenkel (above, note 4) 3.675, who says that Clytemnestra swears her oath here and now, and that Agamemnon is the sacrifice offered to validate the oath.

discover that Clytemnestra is the author of the deed and they prophesy curses and exile for her (*A.* 1407–11). She tells them curses and exile ought to have been Agamemnon's portion because he slew his daughter. The chorus then realizes that the curse of blood guilt is operative in her act of vengeance. Exile is not to be her punishment, as they recall the old *lex talionis*. She has shed blood; her blood must be shed. They also predict that in consequence of her act she will be deprived of her friends and supporters. Our explanation of Clytemnestra's reply is that she answers their statement in two parts. First, she replies to the argument of the *lex talionis*. She brushes aside the relevance of this law to herself, viewing her act as one of justice, not of crime—quite different from Agamemnon's deed which was perpetrated to charm the winds for his own self-interest (*A.* 1418)—and she says (*A.* 1431):

καὶ τήνδ' ἀκούεις ὁρκίων ἐμῶν θέμιν.

The usual translation of this verse is "hear now the solemnity (or solemn power) of my oath."[29] This is admittedly a hard won solution to a puzzling line. The finite verb in place of the imperative is highly irregular. *Themis*, ordinarily "righteousness" or "justice," requires alteration to "solemnity" or "power."[30] And finally "oath" must be read for "oaths"—not a problem significant in itself, but what *is* significant is the necessity of straining sense and syntax for half the words (and these are the important words) which comprise this short sentence.

However, if this line is translated quite literally, we read, "Yes, you understand (or have heard) the righteousness of my oaths." In other words, the chorus has spoken of the law of retribution for the first time in a formal manner. It is precisely this law of retribution which motivated her to kill Agamemnon and she tells the chorus that by their formulation of it they understand the righteousness or justice of her oaths.[31]

[29] See Fraenkel's rendition (above, note 4) 1.179. Cf. Rose (above, note 17) 2.103, "my steadfast oath, my pledge which shall not be broken."

[30] But see Denniston-Page (above, note 17) 201–2, who translate *Themis* here as "propriety" or "justness of my oath." They argue that Clytemnestra feels she has to justify her use of this demonic triad as her *Eidgötter*.

[31] On this point it is of interest to note that Headlam-Thomson, *Oresteia of Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1938) 2.141 reject the form *akoueis* as corrupt: "You hear, you have heard now—it is after the law has been recited that the orator says '*akoueis ton nomon*' and the same is invariably the case with *klyeis*." This argument only adds support to our

What then are these oaths, if not simply Clytemnestra's assertion that she will not be afraid so long as Aegisthus is by her side? These are oaths she swore in the past to kill Agamemnon. His murder was no unpremeditated act, as she has stated quite plainly (*A.* 1377–78):

> ἐμοὶ δ' ἀγὼν ὅδ' οὐκ ἀφρόνιστος πάλαι·
> νείκης παλαιᾶς ἦλθε, σὺν χρόνῳ γε μήν.

We may conjecture, then, that she swore these oaths during the ten long years the battle raged at Troy. Orestes (*Cho.* 976–79) tells us she and Aegisthus swore to kill Agamemnon. (Orestes himself had also made oaths preliminary to his undertaking [*Cho.* 901], probably a typical ritual incumbent upon the avenger to solemnize his task.)

To whom did she swear these oaths? To the *Dikē*, justice, the *Atē*, ruin, and the *Erinys*, vengeance of her child. The ghost of Clytemnestra in the *Eumenides* (*Eu.* 106–9) refers to offerings she made to the Erinyes. The dead make no offerings. She must have made them when she was alive, probably to these very spirits when she swore her oaths to them and prayed for success in her execution of vengeance.[32] It is this *Dikē* she invokes to lead her

case. In speaking of *tymma tymmati teisai* (*A.* 1430) and of its echoes in *Cho.* 309–10:

> ἀντὶ μὲν ἐχθρᾶς γλώσσης ἐχθρὰ
> γλῶσσα τελείσθω . . .

and in *Cho.* 312–13:

> ἀντὶ δὲ πληγῆς φονίας φονίαν
> πληγὴν τινέτω . . .

Fraenkel (above, note 4) 3.674 points out that these repetitions of words are doublets of archaic legal language. In response to the chorus' legal terminology, Clytemnestra replies with an expression reminiscent of the law courts. The audience would understand her phraseology and the substitution of *themis*, the unwritten law, for *nomos*, the law. The chorus' formulation of this law was meant to be relevant to Clytemnestra's crime and to the punishment which would be meted out to her. By her expression she shows them they have heard or know the law—but as it is relevant to Agamemnon. The subtlety of the dramatist on this point is masterful. The queen rephrases this law in her next mention of Iphigenia (*A.* 1527–29):

> ἄξια δράσας, ἄξια πάσχων,
> μηδὲν ἐν Ἅιδου μεγαλαυχείτω,
> ξιφοδηλήτῳ
> θανάτῳ τείσας ἅπερ ἔρξεν.

[32] Logic forbids the identification of these offerings, χοάς τ' ἀοίνους, νηφάλια μειλίγματα, with those made to Agamemnon in the *Choephoroi*: χοὰς φερούσας νερτέροις μειλίγματα (*Cho.* 15). If hair splitting is in order, it might be added that Clytemnestra sends the offerings in the *Choephoroi* but does not offer them herself. Also in the *Eumenides* she refers to many offerings, while the libations to Agamemnon were a single extraordinary occurrence.

husband to his unhoped for home (*A.* 911) as he prepares to walk upon the purple carpets.

Why does Clytemnestra now refer to the deities of these oaths? She refers to them in order to explain the nature of her oaths and to assert her claims of just retribution in terms of supernatural agents of vengeance. She had dismissed the chorus' law of retribution as operative for her and has used it to formulate her own justification. But now she swears that she will not be afraid in any case because she does have friends, i.e. Aegisthus, and she invokes these divinities to corroborate the strength of her utterance. Her mention of Aegisthus is the second part of her statement in answer to the chorus' prediction of her isolation.

These deities have been characterized as *teleoi*,[33] those who bring issues to fulfillment. They have brought Clytemnestra's purpose to fulfillment in the slaying of Agamemnon. Their power has proved efficacious in the past by the accomplishment of his death as vengeance for the death of Iphigenia. Thus they are appropriate spirits upon whom an oath is sworn now in repudiation of any fear of retribution. *Teleios Erinys* makes us think how deceitful was her earlier invocation to *Zeus Teleios* (*A.* 973):

Ζεῦ Ζεῦ τέλειε, τὰς ἐμὰς εὐχὰς τέλει.

It is the *teleios Erinys* to whom she really addresses her prayers, but she dared not say it then, just as she dared not specify the *Dikē* of her child who will conduct Agamemnon to a home he never expected (*A.* 911).

In corroboration of our interpretation of Clytemnestra's oaths, we note that the chorus eventually acknowledges her appeal to the death of Iphigenia and its connection with the law of retribution (*A.* 1560–62):

ὄνειδος ἥκει τόδ' ἀντ' ὀνείδους
δύσμαχα δ' ἐστὶ κρῖναι.
φέρει φέροντ', ἐκτίνει δ' ὁ καίνων.

In the light of this reading, then, Agamemnon is not the sacrifice

[33] Strictly speaking both *teleion* and *tēs emēs paidos* modify *Dikēn* but no difficulty prevents the application of these terms *apo koinou* to *Atēn* and *Erinyn* as well. These three spirits are closely allied in concept and outlook and are all recipients of Clytemnestra's sacrifice. The structure of the grouping, i.e. asyndeton and the enclitic connective, allows the closest possible association of the three. Cf. Rose (above, note 17) 2.103.

upon which Clytemnestra validates her oath. Rather she has invoked these deities and *defines* them as the gods to whom she earlier sacrificed her husband in accomplishment of vengeance and in fulfillment of her oaths to them. What then is the nature of this sacrifice and why has she made it?

Coincidentally, the sacrifice offered at the time an oath is sworn is properly a *sphagion*—but Clytemnestra has in mind another *sphagion*, the victim whose blood is offered as expiation of blood guilt. Orestes tells us of the latter rite (*Eu.* 448–52; cf. also *Eu.* 282–83):

> ἄφθογγον εἶναι τὸν παλαμναῖον νόμος,
> ἔστ' ἂν πρὸς ἀνδρὸς αἵματος καθαρσίου
> σφαγαὶ καθαιμάξωσι νεοθήλου βοτοῦ.
> πάλαι πρὸς ἄλλοις ταῦτ' ἀφιερώμεθα
> οἴκοισι, καὶ βοτοῖσι καὶ ῥυτοῖς πόροις.

Purification is achieved when the blood of a sacrificial victim is poured over the man polluted with blood guilt and then is washed off with clear water. The meaning of this ritual has been explained. The ghost of the murdered man demands blood to slake its thirst for vengeance. "The sacrificial victim is a surrogate for the polluted suppliant, the blood is put upon him so that he may be identified with the victim, the ghost is deceived and placated."[34] This ritual is an advance over the primitive and savage notion that purgation from the stain of blood is obtained only by the offering of the blood of the murderer. It is evident, however, that it is this original type of blood offering that Clytemnestra has made. She has slaughtered Agamemnon and given his blood quite specifically to the Erinys, the ghost of vengeance of her child, the Erinys to whom she swore vengeance.

In the light of this explanation, Clytemnestra's emphasis on the blood that pours from Agamemnon's wound is more readily understood. So too is the phrase *haimatos sphagēn* (*A.* 1389) as we have rendered it, "the sacrificial offering of his blood." But the horror exhibited by the chorus at her violent expression shows clearly how far removed was this barbaric sacrifice from the later modified ritual of purification, even though the driving force of blood guilt itself remains a compelling concept. It must also be

[34] Harrison (above, note 13) 61. See also her entire discussion of placation of ghosts, 55–76.

remembered that her revival of this monstrous custom is heightened in horror by the intrusion of the travesty of the propitious three libations.

The chorus is still more repelled by Clytemnestra's admission of love for Aegisthus and jealousy of Cassandra. They now see the queen as Helen's twin, both sisters, both adulteresses, both destroyers of men.[35] Some *daimōn* must be responsible for their evil. Only an external force could exert such power and tenacity. Clytemnestra seizes this idea and transfers it from the two sisters to the *daimōn* of the house, that *daimōn* who has been thrice glutted with blood (*A.* 1476). No longer is she bereaved mother and jealous wife. She is the very spirit of vengeance of the house of Atreus (*A.* 1501–4):

τοῦδ' ὁ παλαιὸς δρομὺς ἀλάστωρ
'Ατρέως χαλεποῦ θοινατῆρος
τόνδ' ἀπέτεισεν
τέλεον νεαροῖς ἐπιθύσας.

The first crime and the last are united, not only by the same idea, but by the same image. Cassandra's insight has passed on to Clytemnestra and become her own. We have seen the implications of Clytemnestra's address to *Zeus teleios*. Now we understand Clytemnestra's hint in *andros teleiou* (*A.* 972), not just the man in power, but also the perfect victim, and the adult who is to expiate the deaths of children with his own death.[36]

To summarize the evidence, there are seven slayings described in the *Agamemnon* and all are expressed in sacrificial terms: the death of the men at Troy, the feast of the eagles upon the hare, the actual sacrifice of Iphigenia, the slaughter of the sheep by the lion cub, the butchery of Thyestes' children, and the slayings of Agamemnon and Cassandra. Cassandra views herself as a sacrifice, and, insofar as the eagle-hare omen and the parable of the lion cub in their immediate context refer to Troy and the destruction of its inhabitants, we must draw Troy as well as

[35] It is interesting to note how far this similarity extends—even to their choice of lovers. Paris in the *Iliad* and Aegisthus here are both referred to contemptuously as cowards and stay-at-homes.

[36] Verrall (above, note 18) 120 comments on *teleiou*: "a grim word. As applied to the husband or master of the house, it means governing. . . . But it is also a ritual term, applied to the perfect victim, fit for the sacrifice." On the meaning of *telein*, to accomplish a ritual act, see above, note 7.

Cassandra into the circle of the sacramental victims of the house.[37]

Before leaving the *Agamemnon* to examine the other two plays, it is perhaps worth noting in some detail the especial significance of sacrificial images used in the descriptions of the omen of the eagle feast and the parable of the lion cub. For these, as we will presently demonstrate, are highly expressive symbols, with wide application to the human characters in the trilogy. Both are predacious creatures feeding upon innocent prey, the eagles upon the hare, the lion upon the sheep.

The expansion of the parable of the lion cub in terms of its significance far beyond that of Helen and Troy has been brilliantly treated by Bernard Knox.[38] He demonstrates convincingly that the parable of the cub is also relevant to Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, and Aegisthus, and even to Orestes. If the lion symbol has met with definitive treatment, the portent of the eagles is still a battleground of divergent opinions, especially in terms of its application to the wrath of Artemis and the subsequent sacrifice of Iphigenia. We shall attempt to deal with the identity of the eagles and hare only insofar as it is pertinent to our theme.

To treat the question of these eagles, it is necessary to begin with the simile of the eagles who are robbed of their young (*A.* 49–59), for in both cases we are told that they represent the two Atreidae.[39] The concept of the ravished turned ravisher (or vice versa) is perfectly intelligible in the *Agamemnon*: φέρει

[37] Whallon (above, note 3) speaks of the curse of ritual teknophagy whose origins in the house lie as far back as Tantalus and also characterizes the sacramental victims as members of the family. But the sacramental victims are not only children (e.g. *A.* 1504, where the sacrifice of an adult is clearly juxtaposed to that of children, and cf. 326), and not only members of the family (Cassandra and the Trojans). To support his argument Whallon adduces an external knowledge of the myths of Pelops and Tantalus, although the text of Aeschylus (who begins the curse only with Atreus) provides no internal evidence as confirmation. On the other hand, by confining examination of this sacrificial language mainly to the passage of the eagles, Whallon takes no advantage of the more complex pattern developed throughout the text.

[38] Knox (above, note 2). He traces the circumstances of the parable of the lion cub throughout the plays—references to other lion images, the babyhood of the cub, its longing for the breast, the *proteleia*, its nurses, the time that elapses before it turns savage, etc. He finds similarity of language and idea in descriptions of other characters.

[39] In this simile the birds are properly vultures. But see D'Arcy Thompson, *Glossary of Greek Birds* (Oxford 1895) pp. 3 and 16, who points out that there is often confusion between eagles and vultures. See also Whallon (above, note 3) 81, note 10.

φέροντ', ἐκτίνει δ' ὁ καίνων (*A.* 1562). In the one case, the eagles lose their young; in the other, the eagles destroy an animal who has her young contained within her. Troy and its people are surely recognizable in the image of the pregnant hare, but, were it not perhaps for the later parable of the lion cub personifying Helen as a young creature still unweaned, we might be more reluctant to equate her loss with the loss of the eagles' nestlings. And yet, as the image of the lion cub transcends Helen and becomes the generalized image of the slayer in the house, so does the image of the eagles transcend its immediate context as the sons of Atreus. The lion cub, then, bears some resemblance to the predacious eagles, but as the eagles are presented initially as victims, the interpretation of their symbolic value becomes more complex.

Furthermore, there is a middle stage in their transformation from victim to villain. The eagles who are robbed cry out for vengeance but they themselves do not accomplish it, for Zeus sends an Erinys to perform this very function. But this Erinys, in the next breath, becomes again the sons of Atreus and hence the eagles.[40] Thus, before the bereaved eagles make the transition to birds of prey, they first become an Erinys, an avenger. By their rapacious acts they then incur guilt and are themselves pursued by vengeance, here in the shape of Artemis. What is the significance of this interim stage? Justified vengeance for a wrong committed leads to corruption of the avenger. The Atreidae are justified in their anger at the loss of Helen, but they are not as justified in the sacking of a city to recover one woman, when it was against Paris they were sent, and still less are they justified in sacrificing Iphigenia.

This interpretation of the threefold development extends to other characters also. Clytemnestra is the eagle robbed of her young. She has some justification for killing Agamemnon but not insofar as her motives include jealousy and adulterous love, and, of course, Cassandra is an innocent victim relative to Clytemnestra's role of avenger. As Clytemnestra assumes the role of predator, she loses the first quality of bereaved parent altogether. In the *Choephoroi* she does not allude to the loss of

[40] This relationship can be stated algebraically. Assume that eagles are A, and Atreidae are B, and Erinyes are C. We are first told A equals B and then that B equals C. Therefore, A equals C or eagles are Erinyes.

Iphigenia, nor does she mourn the supposed loss of Orestes. (It is the nurse, instead, who mourns—*καὶ πολλὰ καὶ μοχθήρ' ἀνωφέλητ' ἐμοὶ τλάσῃ* [*Cho.* 752–53]. Cf. the eagles—*πόνον ὀρταλίχων ὁλέσαντες* [*A.* 54].) In the *Eumenides* she incites the Erinyes who track down the deer, the *ptōx*, and *lagōs* for their feast. They are her *enkotoi kynes* as the eagles of the feast are *ptanoi kynes*.

The grieving eagles remind us of another man who is grieving for his children, Thyestes. To avenge his father, Aegisthus becomes the Erinys, quite literally *hysteropoinon* (*A.* 58). He, the son, inflicts vengeance upon the guilty man's son. (The words *paides Atreōs* remind us forcefully of this inherited guilt.) But he too turns from Erinys to predator in the slaying of Agamemnon, and, as tyrant, hated by the citizens, he feasts upon the riches of Argos.

Yet in Orestes the pattern changes. Apollo sends Orestes as an Erinys not *algesi paidōn* (*A.* 50) but as an orphan child robbed of his eagle father, who begs Zeus to send *hysteropoinon Atan* (*Cho.* 383). Instead of evolution to the predatory eagle, he becomes instead the hare.[41]

The ambiguity and complexity of these eagle symbols reflect the complexity of those same problems with which the play is concerned. They do not have the beautiful simplicity exhibited by the parable of the lion cub. The lion cub, however, represents only the murderous impulse, while the eagles represent a triple progression from victim to avenger to that murderous impulse which is always inherent in the nature of the eagle.

If the symbols of the lion cub and the eagles are applicable to all those in the play who have committed crimes of bloodshed, the image of sacrifice used in both their feasts (see above, pp. 465–67) may be said to point up the similarity of the crimes and the similarity in the nature of the victims and avengers. Perhaps the images of sacrifice in these two instances would be sufficient evidence on which to rest our case, but the many additional references we have analyzed elevate the stature of this imagery to a strong motif in the *Agamemnon*. But what of its use in the other two plays of the trilogy?

[41] The innocence of the hare is relative to the cruelty of the eagle. Troy has harbored Helen and is surfeited with wealth but it meets with overwhelming disaster. Agamemnon is profoundly guilty in many respects, but he is viewed as an innocent beast caught in the hunter's snare. Similarly, Orestes *is* guilty of bloodshed, but he retains the imagery of the hare.

The *Choephoroi* is the drama in which we would expect to find the slaying of the monstrous Clytemnestra and her paramour in terms of ritual sacrifice. Orestes is the only one directly guided by the hand of a god to accomplish his mission. Yet oddly enough these images are almost nonexistent in the play. In speaking of Aegisthus' imminent murder Orestes says (*Cho.* 577–78):

> φόνου δ' Ἐρινὺς οὐχ ὑπεσπανισμένη
> ἄκρατον αἷμα πίεται τρίτην πόσιν.

The theme is similar to Clytemnestra's libations of blood (*A.* 1385–87), both in the matter of the third libation to Zeus the Savior and the concept of a blood offering demanded by the Erinys. But the travesty is not as pronounced and some of the horror of his utterance is blunted. First, it is said of Aegisthus, at least, and not of his mother. Second, it is said before Orestes even meets Aegisthus. Its context is in the detailed speech in which Orestes describes the plot he has concocted with Apollo's assistance. He leads us along every step of the way, almost like a schoolboy recounting his lessons. The tone of this statement which comes at the moment when he pictures Aegisthus dead leans more to bravado than to effrontery. Clytemnestra, after all, makes her statement splattered with blood and standing over her victims. Third, Clytemnestra's statement places the distorted Zeus the Savior as the recipient of the libation and it is only through another passage that we understand the connection of the Erinys. Orestes, at any rate, properly gives the libation as appeasement to the Erinys while Zeus the Savior is not mentioned by name. In view of the earlier use of the third potion, we assume the relation here to the good god of the propitious libation. Finally, the implications here of the third libation are less the distortion of Zeus the Savior to Erinys than the sense of finality which the last draught signifies.

The chorus in the closing lines of the play (*Cho.* 1065–74) bring this idea into clearer focus:

> ὅδε τοι μελάθροις τοῖς βασιλείοις
> τρίτος αὖ χειμὼν
> πνεύσας γονίας ἐτελέσθη.
> παιδοβόροι μὲν πρῶτον ὑπῆρξαν
> μόχθοι τάλανες [τε Θυέστου]·

δεύτερον ἀνδρὸς βασίλεια πάθη,
λουτροδάϊκτος δ' ὤλετ' Ἀχαιῶν
πολέμαρχος ἀνήρ·
νῦν δ' αὖ τρίτος ἦλθέ ποθεν σωτήρ—
ἢ μόρον εἴπω;

Although the metaphor in this passage is not libation but rather storm of blood, Orestes' characterization as the third savior seems to imply a variation of the recurrent theme of the third offering. The emphasis is somewhat different; he who enacted this last deed of bloodshed is the savior rather than the god to whom the libation is due, for it is hoped that Orestes, by his third act, will end the cycle of recurrent murder, and by that accomplishment will be the savior of the house—or will he be its doom? It is a sobering reflection after the drunken orgy of bloodshed. Now they do not know where it will end.[42]

If we find the sacrificial motif significantly reduced in the *Choephoroi*, it is very much revived again in the *Eumenides*, where it is used exclusively by the Erinyes. They view Orestes as a sacrifice, first as a *pelanos* (*Eu.* 264–66):

ἀλλ' ἀντιδοῦναι δεῖ σ' ἀπὸ ζῶντος ῥοφεῖν
ἐρυθρὸν ἐκ μελέων πέλανον· ἀπὸ δὲ σοῦ
βοσκὰν φεροίμαν πώματος δυσπότου.

then as a fatted animal (*Eu.* 304–5):

ἐμοὶ τραφείς τε καὶ καθιερωμένος;
καὶ ζῶν με δαίσεις οὐδὲ πρὸς βωμῷ σφαγείς.

They accuse Apollo of seeking to save Orestes and so deprive them of their victim (*Eu.* 325–27):

τόνδ' ἀφαιρούμενος
πτῶκα, ματρῷον ἄγ-
νισμα κύριον φόνου.

[42] There is one more instance in this play which might be interpreted as sacrificial language. When Orestes finally confronts his mother he finds his courage failing him. He hesitates, asks Pylades whether he should not feel shame to kill his mother. Pylades reminds him of Apollo's oracles and his own sworn oaths, and advises him to make any man his enemy rather than the gods (*Cho.* 900–2). The full weight of the god's authority descends upon him and he strengthens his resolve. Imbued with Apollo's influence, he determines to kill her (*Cho.* 904): ἕπου, πρὸς αὐτὸν τόνδε σε σφάξαι θέλω, and he uses the verb *sphaxai* which is properly applied to sacrifice. But in the absence of any other supporting ritual language, this word here has almost lapsed into its secondary and more neutral meaning of slaughter—but not quite.

Finally, the refrain of the magic binding song begins with the words *ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ τεθυμένῳ* (*Eu.* 328, 341).

It is true that the Erinyes demand the human blood of the murderer for expiation of bloodshed. But they overstep even their bounds. They do not want to see Orestes sacrificed at any altar (*Eu.* 304–5). They want to suck the blood from his living marrow (*Eu.* 264–65) even though he has been purified of blood guilt with the appropriate ceremonies and sacrifices, and technically is innocent. Surely they are the *kynes* glutting themselves on an unholy feast of the hare. They resemble the predatory eagles of the *Agamemnon*, but in horrid demonic shape. The spirit of Clytemnestra is, in one sense, the Erinyes,[43] but she rouses these demons from their deep metaphoric sleep of buried primitive savagery and lashes them into uncontrollable fury and passion for vengeance. We look upon them and see clearly the face of vengeance as it must become (*Eu.* 253): *ὀσμὴ βροτείων αἱμάτων με προσγελᾷ*. As Clytemnestra's agents they reflect the old order which is the guide to action in the *Agamemnon* and the old spirit of vengeance which pervades it.

In summary of the textual evidence, the use of ritual language to describe murder assumes a pattern of definite outlines. It begins slowly in the *Agamemnon*, builds up to a more insistent refrain as the climax of the drama, the death of Agamemnon, approaches, and is highly articulated in the scenes following the murder. It abruptly fades out in the *Choephoroi* with one cogent reminder, but comes to its fullest and most horrible expression in the *Eumenides*.

On one level, vengeance as sacrifice is highly consistent with the most primitive concept, the demand of the victim's ghost for the murderer's blood. This concept, in fact, is the rationale behind the potency of the curse of blood guilt. But it is of utmost importance to remember that although the curse of blood guilt is recalled as operative in an irresistible law of vengeance and retaliatory murder, it is still far removed from the sacrificial offering of the blood of the murderer. Moreover, even retaliatory murder is a revival of an older law. At the time at which Aeschylus places the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*, the modified

[43] Harrison (above, note 13) 233.

ceremony of the surrogate victim is the accepted ritual means for purification of blood guilt. (It is the modern study of the nature of this modified ritual which points to its oldest origins, the offering of human blood.[44]) The chorus in the *Agamemnon* is beset with anxiety of imminent evil. They know past transgressions must be punished but they are not aware that the old law which required the murderer's life as sacrifice for his victim must still be served. Cassandra tells them, but they do not comprehend her completely. Only after Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon and announces her reason are their nameless fears

[44] Some clarification of this stratification of ideas is perhaps necessary. There are four stages in the evolution of requital for blood guilt. The first, the deeply buried notion, is the demand of the victim's ghost for the blood of the murderer as an offering. The second stage is the feud of blood guilt itself. George Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens* (2nd ed., London 1946) 33–35 discusses the treatment of homicide in a tribal society. If a man of one tribe kills a man from another tribe, the victim's clansmen must exact penalty from the offender's clan by application for compensation. If the compensation is granted, the affair is at an end. If not, they will kill the offender or another member of his clan. If the latter happens, it becomes incumbent upon the other clan to adopt the same procedure. And so on. This procedure obviously could not be used for homicide within the clan itself. Thus the penalty for this type of offense was expulsion from the community or excommunication. The third stage provides the means of readopting the offender into society by purification. Originally, another community to which the murderer had fled as suppliant would employ these rites. Then the man's own community might provide the means for purification. The fourth stage is the impartial judgment of the court of law.

Aeschylus, it seems, has shown the evolution of requital of blood guilt from phase one (Clytemnestra, Aegisthus, Orestes) to a combination of phases two and three (excommunication of the murderer and purification rites, i.e. Orestes) to the ultimate solution of phase four. Phase one represents a regression, phases two and three are the standard, and the great change comes to pass in the founding of the court of law in the last play. To put it slightly differently, the Erinyes represent the old blood guilt, Apollo the middle ground of excommunication-purification, and Athena the triumph of the law court. (See also Nilsson [above, note 19] 195 on the absence of this primitive blood feud from Homer.)

But the reader is reminded that the law court of Aeschylus and of Athens continued the policy of excommunication and purification rites. To state the case succinctly, "The Athenians were singularly conservative in their treatment of homicide. The principles and rules of Draco's code were still venerated in the age of Aristotle, after three centuries of profound change. The law abolished the blood-feud and blood-money, and discriminated degrees of guilt, but never, as at Rome, came to rank the taking of human life with other offences against the community. Plato's *Laws* proves the vitality of the old religious conception of bloodshed, that the murderer was polluted and spread pollution, that the angry spirit of the victim called on his kindred for vengeance. The part of the State at Athens was to control and regulate the methods of this vengeance, and to prescribe the conditions on which the offender would receive the forgiveness of the avengers and be purified of the stain of blood." (Leonard Whibley, *A Companion to Greek Studies* [Cambridge 1905] 479). See also J. W. Jones, *Law and Legal Theory of the Greeks* (Oxford 1956) 251–69.

now recognized, as apprehension of a return to this old *lex talionis*.

On another level, this ancient form of sacrifice takes place in the *Agamemnon* within the milieu of apparently normal sacrifices, joyous feasts, and propitious offerings. We are told in the *Eumenides* of the usual fireless sacrifices made to the Erinyes (*Eu.* 107–9); yet, when roused by Clytemnestra, they demand another kind of sacrifice, a cannibal feast.

Finally, even if this sacrifice is comprehensible in terms of vengeance for murder, we must not forget that sacrifice is applied also to vengeance for crimes other than manslaughter.

Apart from the contribution this imagery makes to the horror and savagery of the violence in the *Oresteia*, its significance is embedded in the very matrix of the dramatic and poetic structure of Aeschylus' artistic achievement. The explanation of this significance, therefore, requires integration with other aspects of Aeschylus' poetic method, which, in turn, will illuminate the powerful ideas which support the trilogy.

Image-Idea-Symbol Patterns and Character Development

In an examination of Aeschylus' poetic technique, it has been noted that many of the central ideas are realized as images. These, in turn, move from a metaphorical expression to a concrete embodiment, whether a material object or a dramatic action. These concretizations, then, serve as tangible symbols for the idea and the image.[45]

The most obvious example would be the imagery of the net that represents entanglement and is realized in the device of the robe.[46] We would draw attention to other organic groupings. All the legal terminology, the expressions of the law court throughout the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*, lead up to concretization in the actual trial at the court of the Areopagus. The disease imagery as expressive of moral sickness finds its one specific realization in the threats of Apollo to inflict actual physical disease upon Orestes if he does not avenge his father,

[45] Lattimore (above, note 2) 15 points out this relationship between symbol, idea, and image, but cites only the example of the net and the robe. See Lebeck (above, note 4) for further development of these relationships.

[46] Barbara Hughes (above, note 1) 92–113 deals with the device of the robe in detail.

and is expanded in the threats of the Erinyes to bring pestilence on all mankind if they are cheated of their victim. The abundance of storm and wind imagery recalls the two storms that do take place, the winds at Aulis, and the storm which destroys Agamemnon's fleet on the voyage home. The numerous images of prophecy and divination have as focal reference points the seer Calchas and, of course, Cassandra. The frequent allusions to ruin or vengeance in terms of Erinys are metaphorical expressions destined to find their real counterpart in the last play. The strong chiaroscuro of light and dark throughout the trilogy is evident at the opening of the *Agamemnon* with the beacon fire in the night, returns in the *Choephoroi* when Clytemnestra has the lanterns lit in the house to dispel her terrible nightmares, and ends the *Eumenides* in the torches of the triumphal procession.

The relationship in each case between image, idea, and symbol is unique and merits its own examination. But using the same generalized formula, the references to slaughter in terms of ritual imagery have their one true realization in the sacrifice of Iphigenia. This sacrifice that is unlawful, *anomos* (*A.* 151) and *prōtopēmōn* (*A.* 223), the primary cause of woe, will form the prototype of the other murders, those preceding it and those following it. The sacrifice of Iphigenia becomes the symbol which the other murders resemble as unlawful deeds. Even more, perhaps, Iphigenia's sacrifice is also the vital causative agent in the later development of the plot.

Aeschylus, therefore, unifies the murders by revealing their relationship to the sacrifice of Iphigenia as effects of the same cause—the curse on the house—and he further unifies them as all partaking of the peculiar horror and lawlessness of her death. It is curious to note that the actual moment of Iphigenia's sacrifice is never described. The chorus tells us in heartbreaking detail of the preparations for her immolation, but at the instant the knife is poised above the throat, a great ox sits upon their tongue (*A.* 248): τὰ δ' ἔνθεν οὔτ' εἶδον οὔτ' ἐννέπω. They need say no more. The sacrificial descriptions of the other murders plainly tell us how Iphigenia must have met her end. The device of this imagery, then, illuminates the common nature of the murders.

In the *Choephoroi*, however, there is only one mention of Iphigenia's death as a sacrificial victim, stated in oblique terms. Electra says (*Cho.* 242): καὶ τῆς τυθείσης νηλεῶς ὁμοσπόρου.

Homosporos is a neutral word and only the feminine participle indicates that a female relative, i.e., a sister, has been cruelly sacrificed. Name, place, time, reason, and agent are all absent. We have already shown how sparse are the instances of sacrifice imagery in the *Choephoroi*. Perhaps with the removal of the motive of Iphigenia's death, the sacrifice imagery has lost its close organic relationship with its real counterpart. The one depends upon the other for coherence in the poetic frame. Yet the unifying sacrificial imagery in the *Agamemnon* characterizes not only the nature of the deed, but also shows the nature of the doer as performer of sacrifice. This is the explanation that lies behind the shift of emphasis in the *Choephoroi*. Yet to understand the shift of the image and its focal reference, we must raise the question of the disappearance of Iphigenia from the second play.[47]

Were there no mention at all of Iphigenia's sacrifice in the *Choephoroi*, we might conclude that Aeschylus had reverted to the earlier Homeric tradition which ignores the tale of Iphigenia. But there is one faint allusion to it. We can readily comprehend why Electra, her father's defender, would not probe the details of Agamemnon's crime, and, for that matter, why neither Orestes nor the chorus would bring up this sore point. But why does Clytemnestra never refer to her, especially where it would be most appropriate—in her plea to Orestes? The omission is all the more striking when one considers the vital role of Iphigenia's death in the development of the *Agamemnon* and Clytemnestra's emphasis upon this as her motive. The two plays are not separate entities but are integral components of a carefully wrought trilogy. Why is Aeschylus not consistent? Is this an inherent fault in his dramatic treatment? Agamemnon is not the arrogant conqueror of the first play, but now a great and benevolent hero. Perhaps Aeschylus could not handle the difficulties which Clytemnestra's accusation would inevitably provoke. But both Sophocles and Euripides in their *Electra* tragedies wrestle with the problem and find an answer adequate

[47] Iphigenia is not recalled in the *Eumenides*, although there are strong sacrificial allusions. But Iphigenia is not really relevant to the problems in the *Eumenides* because Clytemnestra's innocence or guilt in killing her husband is of no interest to the Furies. They are only interested in those who shed kindred blood and are not punished (Iphigenia's death was properly avenged through the *alastōr*, Clytemnestra). Yet the strong images of the sacrifice recall the atmosphere of the *Agamemnon* where Iphigenia's sacrifice is a running motif.

for their purposes.[48] Commentators have either largely ignored or overlooked this apparent discrepancy in Aeschylus, probably on the assumption that the *Choephoroi*'s attitude is shaped by those who are partisans of Agamemnon. Kitto raises the question but does not answer it with reference to Clytemnestra.[49]

The solution, we feel, must lie in the character of Clytemnestra. The *Choephoroi* implies a second stage in the progression of the trilogy, both temporally and spiritually. We have mentioned the key image of the eagles robbed of their young, turning avenger and finally corrupted into predator. We have shown that this image is relevant to Clytemnestra as she is first the bereaved parent, then the avenger, and finally, at the end of the *Agamemnon*, shows herself jealous wife and adulteress. These last two motives for the slaying of Agamemnon have gained the ascendancy in the *Choephoroi*. With the passage of time and the intensification of the liaison between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, the original, the justifiable motive, has withdrawn into a dim memory. Yet if it were still a real memory, Clytemnestra, clever woman that she is, might raise the ghost of Iphigenia to suit the occasion. But the *Choephoroi* demonstrates a further corruption of Clytemnestra's character. In the *Agamemnon*, although she destroyed the bond of marriage by the murder of her husband out of love for another man and resentment at her husband's disloyalty, she destroyed these bonds primarily as a self-righteous mother. But here, by denying her two remaining children, she has denied her role of mother.

Electra bitterly complains of her mother's treatment (*Cho.* 444–50). Clytemnestra's secret joy at the news of Orestes' death does not escape the sensitive perception of the old nurse (*Cho.* 737–40). The nurse's speech with its simple love for the nursling, the homely details of the care she lavished upon the baby, and the profound grief at his supposed death, shows clearly what true mother love is (*Cho.* 734–65). Clytemnestra felt this love once in her grief for Iphigenia (*A.* 1412–20). Now when she understands the meaning of the riddle, the dead are killing the living, her reaction is to call for a manslaying ax (*Cho.* 887–91). For her own preservation and for vengeance in return for her lover's death, she is even prepared to kill her son (*Cho.* 891): ἐνταῦθα

[48] Soph. *El.* 575–84; Eur. *El.* 1051–53, 1060–99.

[49] H. D. F. Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama* (London 1956; repr. 1960) 43, 57.

γὰρ δὴ τοῦδ' ἀφικόμην κακοῦ. This is the final stage where the Clytemnestra of the *Agamemnon*, fiercely protective of her child Iphigenia, rejects her child Orestes. Whallon comes to this very conclusion through the study of the snake imagery and shows the disruption of the bond between the mother and her child.[50] But he does not explore the progression of Clytemnestra from loving mother of the *Agamemnon* to the Clytemnestra who repudiates her maternal function.

Electra states the case quite plainly (*Cho.* 190–91):

> ἐμὴ δὲ μήτηρ, οὐδαμῶς ἐπώνυμον
> φρόνημα παισὶ δύσθεον πεπαμένη.

Mother in name proves to be a grotesque caricature of motherhood. The loss of maternal feelings towards Orestes and Electra works retroactively, we might say, in her attitude towards Iphigenia. An appeal, then, to the death of Iphigenia as her motive in Agamemnon's slaying is no longer valid in the *Choephoroi*, and thus the anticipated reference to the sacrifice of Iphigenia does not appear. Clytemnestra has, in effect, buried the ghost.

But as the key to the obliteration of Iphigenia's death is found in the development of Clytemnestra's character away from the attitude in the *Agamemnon* to a denial of motherhood, the key to the absence of sacrificial imagery in the *Choephoroi* is to be found in the disparity between Orestes' character and those of the slayers in the *Agamemnon*. The implications of sacrificial imagery in the *Agamemnon* will further illuminate Clytemnestra's character and also will illuminate the character and attitude of those other murderers in the play who share her attitude. It will also make it clear why Orestes is not to view his acts entirely as ritual slaughter. We turn then to a discussion of character in the *Agamemnon*.

The *Agamemnon* has been aptly described as a drama that exhibits the "vitality and violence of error,"[51] error that is manifested in many different ways. The first aspect of this error we will examine is the error of deception.

[50] William Whallon, "The Serpent at the Breast," *TAPA* 89 (1958) 271–75. He shows that the serpent imagery becomes "a multivalent representation of love replaced by cruelty in the relationship of mother and child." See also Goheen (above, note 2), who shows the shift in Clytemnestra's role of mother through the images of fecundity which become hateful.

[51] Finley (above, note 2) 248.

We might call this play the great drama of deception, both outward and inward. Clytemnestra practices the vital deception of the robe in slaying Agamemnon. Cassandra freely admits that she has deceived Apollo (*A.* 1208) in violating her promise of marriage, and as punishment she is to be regarded as a false or deceiving prophet. Atreus deceives Thyestes, pretending to make a feast day in honor of the reconciliation with the exiled brother (*A.* 1593). Implicit in the tale of Iphigenia's sacrifice is the deception of the promised wedding with Achilles which brought her to Aulis, of which there is a faint allusion in *proteleia naōn* (*A.* 227). The wooden horse, the classic deceit, is mentioned specifically by Agamemnon and turns into the familiar symbol of the ravening lion (*A.* 824–28). Of all the men who were with him at Troy, the king has words of praise only for Odysseus (*A.* 841), the master deceiver and traditionally the inventor of the wooden horse and the deviser of the marriage ruse to lure Iphigenia to Aulis. Aerope, Clytemnestra, and Helen all deceive their husbands. The lion cub in the parable deceives its masters as to its true nature (*A.* 727–34) and Helen deceives Troy into thinking her an object of beauty, when she is an Erinys bringing tears to brides (*A.* 749). Her marriage to Paris is a *kēdos*, a kinship of wedlock, but will prove to be another *kēdos*, a bitter woe (*A.* 699). Agamemnon expresses this theme when he speaks of deceitful friends and denounces their hypocrisy (*A.* 838–40).

If the external events share this common pattern of deception, it is also reflected in the inward development of the characters. They not only deceive others, but are deceived themselves, especially as to the motives for their action and the nature of their deeds. Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus are to be *dikēphoroi*—dispensers of justice—but in the process this form of justice becomes tainted and overpowered by motives of self-aggrandizement. Aside from their original motives of determination to exact penalty for the loss of their loved ones, Agamemnon is enticed by the glory of victory in battle and the illusions of wealth, Clytemnestra is overcome with passion for another man, and Aegisthus is attracted to the power of the throne.

As the motives change, the justice exacted proves to be not an act of justice but a crime. In the course of execution of this corrupted justice, the crime becomes not one but many. Thus, as the house of Atreus in producing corrupted avengers

perpetuates the same pattern of unlawful acts, in a further reduction of scale, each avenger, once embarked upon his career of action, commits himself to continued acts of similar outlines (*A.* 758–60):

> . . . τὸ δυσσεβὲς γὰρ ἔργον
> μετὰ μὲν πλείονα τίκτει,
> σφετέρᾳ δ' εἰκότα γέννᾳ.

Both the sacrifice of Iphigenia and the destruction of Troy are closely related to the mutilation of the pregnant hare. To further his ambition Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter; with the unlawfulness of this first act, his initial mission—vengeance against Paris—becomes the equally unlawful destruction at Troy, including the losses sustained by his own army. Clytemnestra kills not only Agamemnon but Cassandra too, and, as we have shown in our discussion of the *Choephoroi*, she continues the process of corruption in her rejection of her children and in her willingness to kill Orestes. Aegisthus, when censured by the chorus for his part in the slaying of Agamemnon, is prepared to wreak a new vengeance upon the citizens who oppose him.

The pregnant hare is indeed an appropriate symbol. The eagles do not feast on her alone but on her unborn progeny as well. While a creature teeming with young is the very personification of a pitiful victim, in another sense the pregnant hare who contains her young within her is a promise of proliferation of victims who resemble her. Literally the unborn babies are destroyed simultaneously with the mother; figuratively they are embryonic representations of future destruction. The eagles' feast upon a pregnant hare is also a shorthand symbol for a repeated pattern of predation inherent in the very nature of the predator. To punish his predations a new avenger will come, will himself be corrupted in motive and intent, and will commit acts of predation which will require a new avenger. The appetite of the eagles is insatiable; the progeny of the hare is infinite.

If we have sought to examine the extent of this significant shift from righteous avenger to murderer, it is to show how deceptive is the appellation of avenger for those who flaunt it. They do not recognize that they are no longer entitled to that name, nor do they then recognize the new vengeance which must inevitably follow. And they do not recognize those qualities in themselves which are conducive to predatory action.

Against the development of action undertaken in folly, delusion, pride, and arrogance, the chorus sings of the enticements of evil persuasion, the satiety of wealth, the sins of arrogance and the consequences which must inevitably follow—the doer must suffer. But these general pronouncements fall on deaf ears.

Agamemnon is the perfect example of utter imperviousness to the implications of his acts. A conquering hero, distended with pride, glutted with spoils of war, he vaunts his performance in the war and gloats over the ruin of Troy without a thought of those men who are now a handful of ashes and the lovely things that were trampled into the dust. He is Clytemnestra's perfect victim, easily deceived by her cunning, because his deceptive image of himself renders him unable to contemplate a contradictory view.

Clytemnestra, secure in the great wealth of her house, arrogantly proclaims the justice of her act as fulfillment of the law of retribution but is unable to perceive the avenger who one day will come to her. In limitless pride she sees herself as the very spirit of vengeance, and therefore beyond the limits of human avengers and human laws.

Aegisthus, the weakest character, dazzled by the new power of his position, asserts in loudest and crudest voice the glory of the day of vengeance. He mocks the chorus' appeal to Orestes' return from exile. Yet ironically, although his hopes were fulfilled upon *his* return from exile, he cannot fathom a parallel fulfillment of Orestes' hopes.

It is characteristic of the wrongdoers in the *Agamemnon* that they think the law of retribution fails to apply to them because their acts were acts of true justice. Perhaps the true *dikēphoros*, agent of the gods, may view his act as sacrifice because sacrifice implies a well motivated and propitious act, deserving a return not of punishment, but of praise. But the prideful predators recognize neither their faults nor the faulty claims of their justice. Thus, consonant with their arrogant and misguided views, murder is not murder but sacrifice. Self-deception as to the nature of their acts and as to their own natures is revealed in their glorification of their corrupted justice as sacrifice.

The *Choephoroi* is also a play of deception. The plot to kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is a deception planned by Orestes and Apollo to match the deception Clytemnestra practiced on

Agamemnon. But Orestes is not as guilty of self-deception. He is an unwilling avenger, agent of Apollo, terrorized by the god into accepting his part. Hesitation and vacillation are characteristic of his behavior, as confidence and determination characterize that of the slayers in the *Agamemnon*. The lengthy *kommos* (*Cho.* 306–478) is designed to play upon Orestes' deepest emotions, to rouse him to a fury whose momentum will suffice to enable him to do the deed. The chorus is never quite sure that he will succeed and offer constant exhortations to action. And the chorus is right. At the last moment the *aidōs* of matricide overwhelms him, and only Pylades' reminder of the strength of Apollo's will drives him over the edge.

Orestes is aware of the repulsive nature of his task. He wishes just to do the thing and then die himself (*Cho.* 438): ἔπειτ' ἐγὼ νοσφίσας ὀλοίμαν. The characters in the *Agamemnon* perform their task with zest and exultation, an attitude, in truth, which is appropriate to the spirit of joy which attends a sacrifice to the gods. Agamemnon bids his attendants drag the fainting Iphigenia to the altar παντὶ θυμῷ (*A.* 233). Atreus προθύμως μᾶλλον ἢ φίλως (*A.* 1591) pretends to inaugurate the special feast, and Clytemnestra crows over the body of Agamemnon (*A.* 1394): χαίροιτ' ἄν, εἰ χαίροιτ', ἐγὼ δ' ἐπεύχομαι. Cassandra is brief and to the point in describing Clytemnestra's attitude (*A.* 1118): κατολολυξάτω θύματος λευσίμου. This *ololygmos*, cry of joy to the gods (whether used of sacrifice proper or of any triumph where thanks are due to the gods) over an awful deed, is not missing from the *Choephoroi*. The chorus in the *kommos* prays for the opportunity to raise up the *ololygmos* (*Cho.* 386–89):

> ἐφυμνῆσαι γένοιτό μοι πυκά-
> ενθ' ὀλολυγμὸν ἀνδρὸς
> θεινομένου, γυναικὸς τ'
> ὀλλυμένας·

and when the opportunity does come, their wish is granted (*Cho.* 942–45):

> ἐπολολύξατ' ὦ δεσποσύνων δόμων
> ἀναφυγᾷ κακῶν καὶ κτεάνων τριβᾶς
> ὑπὸ δυοῖν μιαστόροιν
> δυσοίμου τύχας.

But only the chorus, which does not differentiate between

dikēphoros and *dikastēs* (*Cho.* 120–21), utters this cry, not Orestes. No exultation for him. The price of his victory is pollution (*Cho.* 1016–17):

> ἀλγῶ μὲν ἔργα καὶ πάθος γένος τε πᾶν,
> ἄζηλα νίκης τῆσδ' ἔχων μιάσματα.

The restoration of his patrimony as a secondary motive may be evidence that he is not the perfect dispenser of justice,[52] but in the *Choephoroi* he realistically envisions himself less a king upon his hereditary throne than an exile and outlaw from his home (*Cho.* 1042): ἐγὼ δ' ἀλήτης τῆσδε γῆς ἀπόξενος.[53]

As the events in the *Eumenides* will show, the true dealer of justice must be impersonal; but Orestes provides the middle ground. He has moved away from the passions and close relationships which gave Clytemnestra her impetus in the *Agamemnon* to a more abstract figuration. An exile from home for so many years that he is unrecognized by his sister and his mother, bound not by the actual dynamics of a family relationship but rather by the obligations that are inherent in it, and impelled to his action by the external influence of Apollo, he marks a step in the right direction. In fairness, however, to Orestes' character as portrayed by Aeschylus, it must be said that, relatively free though he may be of base and deceptive motives, he might have also become corrupted by his role of avenger. But it is precisely because Orestes resists any real change in his original role as avenger and because he recognizes that murder, even though justifiable vengeance, is an ugly pollution and not a joyous sacrifice, that some conclusion to the recurrent bloodshed in the house may be anticipated.

It takes, then, an Orestes to strip away the grandiloquent view of vengeful slaughter as sacrifice, just as he strips away the layers of poetic imagery surrounding the robe and shows it for what it is—a shabby device that an ordinary robber might use to ensnare strangers, a tool of his trade (*Cho.* 1001–4).

It must be remembered, however, that Orestes is not perfect, that he is capable of hatred and resentment against his mother,

[52] Finley (above, note 2) 266.

[53] This is a grim echo of Cassandra's prophecy of the coming avenger (*A.* 1282): φυγὰς δ' ἀλήτης τῆσδε γῆς ἀπόξενος. Then he was an exile destined to return home. Now he is to be an exile once more, φεύγων τόδ' αἷμα κοινόν (*Cho.* 1038).

and that he does commit murder. The one lapse into the old pattern of ritual imagery which we have cited above may be viewed as evidence that this concept is a great temptation for the avenger, and thus only a disinterested judge is the ultimate solution. But Orestes, who resists for the most part this temptation of calling himself a sacrificer for vengeance, marks a stage in development that must be passed before the ultimate solution is attained.

To summarize our point, the characters in the *Agamemnon* do not recognize their shift in motives nor the consequences inherent in this shift. They are deceived into thinking they have remained the true *dikēphoroi*, when in truth they are savage predators. Thus they dress their crimes in sacrificial imagery and cannot or will not accept the responsibility of calling murder by its rightful name. The sacrificial imagery, then, is a manifestation of this self-deception. Orestes, who uses this imagery only once, has remained truer to the spirit of his task of vengeance, but is aware that vengeance which demands human blood is repugnant.

There is one vital difference, however, between the illusion that a robe is a net and the illusion that murder is sacrifice. This differentiation is the third issue which gives the sacrificial imagery its greatest force. It will prove, in effect, to embrace the other two points we have made, that of Iphigenia's sacrifice as a poetic focus and that of murder deceptively viewed as sacrifice. We turn now to the religious significance of this imagery.

Corruption and the Restoration of Purity

The embroidered robe as a net and device of murder is a brilliant and imaginative poetic image. Sacrifice that is no sacrifice is essentially sacrilegious blasphemy. Manslaughter viewed as sacrifice is an atavistic regression to primitive bestiality, but it is also an impious profanation of ritual communication with the gods. The slayers may be deceived as to the true nature of their action, but the fact that their deception takes this particular form reveals something further about the error to which deception has led. The sacrifice corrupted helps to define one specific aspect of the corruption of personality and action which is deeply rooted in the house of Atreus, namely the distortion of relationship between gods and men which results in impiety. But to treat

this one theme of impiety it is necessary to understand the atmosphere of corruption and disharmony which is the *Agamemnon's* environment.

When we spoke about deception, we singled it out as one expression of error, the error which suffuses the actions and characters of the play. This error, *in toto*, is the corruption of basic human values, the reversal of primal human relationships, family unity split by disharmony, love turned to hate, devotion to treachery. Iphigenia singing with love at her father's banquet and the joys a returning husband and lord bestows upon his household refer us back to the norms of standard behavior which have been upset in this topsy-turvy world of the *Agamemnon*.

The paean of the Furies (*A.* 645), the distortion of marriage (*proteleia*, *A.* 227) and the *kēdos* with its double meaning of marriage and woe (*A.* 699), the *kōmos* the Furies sing in the house (*A.* 1189), the propitious word *amphithalēs* (*A.* 1144) used to describe evil—all are further evidence which points to a serious corruption of ritual in domestic life. Add to these the distortion of the market place where Ares is the gold merchant, a dealer in men not in metal (*A.* 437–44), and distortions of agriculture such as the mattock of Zeus which uproots Troy (*A.* 526) and the spurting blood of Agamemnon compared to a healthful and fruitful shower (*A.* 1390–92).

On the broader scene, the images and ideas of ill winds and storms, to some extent, also reflect the corruption or loss of harmony in nature.[54] We speak here not of storm as a metaphor of passion and violence nor of a tempest-tossed vessel foundering in a sea of woes. The destructive power of raging winds did not escape the imagination of the Greeks who sailed the seas, and Aeschylus' use of these images to express turbulence of spirit and violence of emotion is not at all unusual. But winds are conceived of as chthonic spirits, divided according to their nature into beneficent and evil demons who could be placated with suitable invocation and sacrifice.[55] Whatever explanation we accept for Artemis' behavior towards Agamemnon, she manifests her displeasure in the ill winds which detain the fleet at Aulis. Those

[54] See J. J. Peradotto, "Some Patterns of Nature Imagery in the *Oresteia*," *AJP* 85 (1964) 378–93, which appeared subsequent to the writing of this paper. He deals with language expressive of storms and good weather (383–88), but with an emphasis slightly different from ours.

[55] See Harrison (above, note 13) 67 and 176–83.

winds were placated with the sacrifice of Iphigenia; but other winds continued to blow, literally, of course, in the storm which destroyed the fleet on its homeward voyage. Metaphorically, we see the change in wind expressive of Agamemnon's consent to sacrifice his daughter (*A.* 187, 219), the gusts of wealth blowing from the smoking ruin that was Troy (*A.* 819–20), the winds of pride that blow beyond the bounds of justice (*A.* 375), Cassandra's rejection of the wind of grace Apollo breathes (*A.* 1206), the house that blows the stench of bloody murder (*A.* 1309), and the truceless warfare with which Clytemnestra, that hellish mother, blasts her kin (*A.* 1235–36). All attest to a disharmony in nature parallel to the disharmony of human affairs. Helen sails to Troy with *Ζεφύρου γίγαντος αὔρᾳ* (*A.* 692), a wind from Hell,[56] although she herself deceptively appears as a mood of windless calm, *φρόνημα μὲν νηνέμου γαλάνας* (*A.* 740).

Conversely, in the *Choephoroi*, the play that moves to repair the disharmony, the chorus hopes for a change of wind which will signify the end of evil (*Cho.* 775) and invokes the assistance of Hermes who can grant success with favoring wind (*Cho.* 812–14). If he indeed should grant success, they will sing the song of deliverance which women sing when the wind sits fair (*Cho.* 821). But when Orestes is beset by the Erinyes, they wonder whether the wind was indeed favorable (*Cho.* 1066–67).

In the *Eumenides*, the Erinyes breathe forth noisome blasts (*Eu.* 53) and blow winds of fury and rage (*Eu.* 840, 873),[57] but Athena bids the Erinyes to invoke the blessing of favorable winds (*Eu.* 905–6):

> . . . *κἀνέμων ἀήματα*
> *εὐηλίως πνέοντ' ἐπιστείχειν χθόνα.*

As Eumenides, they themselves add their own prayer (*Eu.* 938): *δενδροπήμων δὲ μὴ πνέοι βλάβα.*[58] Favorable winds bring health, wealth, and prosperity, all indications of a harmonious state. The barring of noxious blasts and the blessing of sunlit winds is one sign of the restoration of harmony in nature.

[56] Rose (above, note 17) 2.53.

[57] The Erinyes are probably closely connected in idea with the Harpies, who are a form of wind demon (cf. above, note 55), because the priestess of Apollo sees a resemblance between the two (*Eu.* 50–51).

[58] Thomson (above, note 44) 294 rightly draws attention to the blessings of the good winds and recalls the *eudanemoi*, the spirits who hush the winds, worshipped on the slopes of the Acropolis.

It is interesting to note here that Dumortier raises the question whether the word *cheimōn* (as cited in *Cho.* 1066) has a medical significance as it relates to Hippocrates' use of *cheimōn* in his treatise, *Peri physiōn* (14), to describe the onset of a specific disease, epilepsy, while *galanê* refers to the medical state following the seizure.[59] In that case, the use of *cheimōn* may be a metaphorical equivalent of disease. Whether we accept this hypothesis or not is unimportant. We need not go so far to find images of disease in the trilogy. But if the winds that bring ruinous storms can also be representative of some disorder of wild nature,[60] then the images of disease may be said to reflect even more closely some disorder in the human condition.

The imagery of disease is highly developed in the trilogy.[61] We find many medical terms used in a metaphorical sense. For example, *helkos* or "ulcer" for the destruction that engulfs a city (*A.* 640), *ichōr* or "pus that seeps from a wound" as equivalent to bloodshed (*A.* 1479–80), woe that brings memory of pain oozes like an old hurt that continues to throb (*A.* 179), political dissension as *pēma nosou* which requires remedies (*A.* 848–50), the death of Agamemnon as an incurable bane, *dysiaton kakon* (*A.* 1102–3). In the *Choephoroi*, disease assails the one guilty of bloodshed (*Cho.* 69) and it will assail quite literally, according to Apollo, the one who does not avenge bloodshed (*Cho.* 279, 282, 296).

Disease of the body may be a metaphor or externalizing expression of sickness of spirit and disease may be regarded as a loss of *isonomia*, the harmony in the forces of life (*A.* 1001–4), but even more significantly, in ancient religious ideology, physical disease is the closest neighbor of ritual pollution. "Uncleanness

[59] Dumortier (above, note 4) 210.

[60] Actually, the winds are connected with disease as causative agents. It was thought that climates afflicted with certain types of winds would be likely to produce various diseases (Hippocrates, *Peri Aerōn, Hydatōn, Topōn* 2–5). It is also interesting to note that one must guard against certain times of the year, the risings of the stars, especially of the Dog Star (also of Arcturus), and also of the setting of the Pleiades. For it is especially at these times that diseases come to a crisis (11.11–14). Troy was destroyed at the time of the setting of the Pleiades (*A.* 826)—although others take this to signify the time of night rather than the time of year—and Clytemnestra speaks of the heat of the time of the Dog Star in her hyperbolic welcome of Agamemnon (*A.* 967). See also Peradotto (above, note 54) 384, note 8.

[61] Instances of disease imagery have been discussed by Jean Dumortier, *Le Vocabulaire Médical d'Eschyle et les Écrits Hippocratiques* (Paris n.d.) and by Barbara Hughes (above, note 1). The former deals with the explanation of medical terms and the latter deals with disease viewed in a medical rather than a ritual way.

was conceived of as infection, a material substance, which could be washed away with water or the blood of sacrificial victims, or else burned away with fire or smoked out with sulphur."[62] The pollution of bloodshed is even regarded as infecting the earth itself (*Cho.* 68–69). Conversely, sickness was viewed as uncleanness and required the same means for its cure, as shown by the great cleansing of the Greek camp after the plague in the first book of the *Iliad.* *Nosos* is a form of *miasma* and *miasma* is *nosos.* The god is the healer of both pollution and disease, and ritual sacrifices will provide the proper remedy (along with normal medicines), the *apallagē ponōn* anxiously sought from the first line of the *Agamemnon* but not achieved until the end of the *Eumenides.*

To effect the cure of the evils that plague the house the characters may see sacrifice as the remedy, but sacrificial murder proves not to be the proper means. Even normal ritual will not effect the cure, as the chorus says immediately after the simile of the eagles robbed of their young and the death of the soldiers in the *proteleia* of war (*A.* 67–71):

> . . . ἔστι δ' ὅπη νῦν
> ἔστι· τελεῖται δ' ἐς τὸ πεπρωμένον·
> οὔθ' ὑποκαίων οὔτ' ἐπιλείβων
> οὔτε δακρύων ἀπύρων ἱερῶν
> ὀργὰς ἀτενεῖς παραθέλξει.

Nor is sacrifice a remedy for the preservation of Troy (*A.* 1168). But the choral passage quoted above almost immediately precedes the appearance of Clytemnestra making sacrifices, the only semblance of real ritual in the entire *Agamemnon* (*A.* 87–96):

> πειθοῖ περίπεμπτα θυοσκεῖς;
> πάντων δὲ θεῶν τῶν ἀστυνόμων,
> ὑπάτων, χθονίων
> τῶν τε θυραίων τῶν τ' ἀγοραίων,
> βωμοὶ δώροισι φλέγονται·
> ἄλλη δ' ἄλλοθεν οὐρανομήκης
> λαμπὰς ἀνίσχει,
> φαρμασσομένη χρίματος ἀγνοῦ
> μαλακαῖς ἀδόλοισι παρηγορίαις,
> πελανῷ μυχόθεν βασιλείῳ.

[62] Nilsson (above, note 19) 85.

We note the medicinal references in *pharmassomenē* and *parēgoriais*. As the flame is treated with the soothing balm of unguents, the chorus would like to forget its despondency and be lulled by the hope that rises from the fire of Clytemnestra's sacrifice. Clytemnestra is to be *paiōn merimnēs* (*A.* 99), the healer of their anxiety. This anxiety, of course, is the hope of Agamemnon's triumph at Troy and his safe return home, but these words are too closely juxtaposed to the chorus' earlier doubts as to the healing powers of sacrifice to be convincing.

Does the chorus believe this ritual is sincere? At the time they probably do, but future events will indicate that this act cannot have been an ordinary thanksgiving sacrifice. The good wife would perform this sacrifice in gratitude to the gods for her husband's safety. But if Clytemnestra is grateful at all, she is grateful he survived the war so that she might not be deprived of the pleasure of killing him herself. She speaks of another sacrifice she is preparing in the house after Agamemnon returns home (*A.* 1035–38, 1056–57), but its ominous intent does not escape us or Cassandra. Her first sacrifice is suspect as to its true meaning and the second, if performed at all, is only a prelude to her sacrifice of Agamemnon.

Other acts of impiety are evident in the play as well. We know that Agamemnon has committed the impiety of destroying the altars in Troy, *βωμοὶ δ' αἵστοι καὶ θεῶν ἱδρύματα* (*A.* 527), an unpropitious sign, made still more sinister by allusion to Clytemnestra's warning on this very subject (*A.* 336–44) and by the chorus' generalization of the fate which awaits the man who kicks away the altar of justice (*A.* 383–84). The folly of Persuasion draws that man to his act and there is no remedy (*A.* 387), for none of the gods will listen to his prayers (*A.* 397). Agamemnon's supreme act of impiety is contained in his treading on the purple carpet, the *athiktōn charis*. Even he knows this is an honor reserved for the gods (*A.* 922), but Clytemnestra persuades him and later argues that such an act could be a sign of reverence to the gods (*A.* 963–65).

It is important to note that only the chorus and the herald address the gods in direct invocation, while the major characters lack a close personal relationship with the gods. Except for one invocation by Clytemnestra of Zeus discussed earlier (*A.* 973; see above, p. 478), she, Aegisthus, and Agamemnon all refer to

the gods in vague terms. Her first sacrifices of thanksgiving are addressed to all the deities of the city (*A.* 88–90), while Agamemnon invokes no specific deity (*A.* 810–16, 829, 851–53) in a speech that abounds in pious platitudes and perfunctory reference to the gods,[63] and Aegisthus speaks only of avenging gods, *brotōn timaorous theous* (*A.* 1578–79).

The prideful impiety towards the gods, the absence of close communion with the deities by name, and the paucity of ordinary ritual, as well as the grotesque parody of ritual in sacrificial imagery, all mark some dire dislocation of the house of Atreus from the Olympian gods.

Cassandra is the great symbol of this disruption.[64] She is Apollo's prophet but he is her destroyer—first destroyer of the efficacy of her prophetic gift as punishment for her deceit, and now destroyer of her life, for he has brought her to Argos to be slain (*A.* 1275): καὶ νῦν ὁ μάντις μάντιν ἐκπράξας ἐμέ. The very act of stripping off Apollo's insignia is a physical representation of this disrupted relationship and defiantly she bids him ἴτ' ἐς φθόρον (*A.* 1267). This one close connection between immortal and mortal, imperfect though it was, has lost all hope of reconciliation and is destroyed. Apollo, the god of healing, will not heal the breach.

Thus there is no cure, neither for disease, that natural corruption, nor for pollution, that supernatural corruption. The infection in the *Agamemnon* cannot be healed with medicines or with ritual. There is no *iatromantis*, no *sōtēr*, no *paiōn*, no *akos*. This disruption of the relation between man and god is vividly expressed in all the impious acts of the play. But its most emphatic expression is found in the horror of corruption of sacrifice.

There is no actual healing in the *Choephoroi* either. Disease runs rampant and the cure is still far off in the future (*Cho.* 71, 472). Clytemnestra again pretends to a normal ritual in the funeral libations, but they are only sent by her to assuage her nightmares: ἄκος τομαῖον ἐλπίσασα πημάτων (*Cho.* 539). We now learn she has committed other impieties at some time between the close of the *Agamemnon* and the opening of the *Choephoroi* in her

[63] Ironically "Agamemnon himself is unconscious of sin; he feels himself rather a favorite of the gods and a most deserving one." Gilbert Murray, *Aeschylus, the Creator of Tragedy* (Oxford 1940; repr. 1962) 193.

[64] Finley (above, note 2) 262.

refusal to grant the regular funeral obsequies for Agamemnon and in the mutilation of his corpse (*Cho.* 430–33, 439–42).

Apollo is still no healer; instead he shows his opposite self, the potential inflicter of disease (*Cho.* 278–85). Orestes is looked upon as *iatros elpis* (*Cho.* 699) when Clytemnestra pretends sorrow at the news of his death. Yet the corrupted relationship between man and god is beginning to heal. Apollo may not be a benevolent god in this play but Orestes is under his protection and acts under his guidance. The very name of the play, *Choephoroi*, marks the return to normal ritual. In fact, proper ritual occupies a large portion of the drama. Electra hesitates before she utters the prayers to accompany her libations—should she be false and say they are gifts from a loving wife or should she utter curses or should she pour them in silence and then throw away the vessel as one does who purifies a polluted house (*Cho.* 88–89)? The chorus sets her on the right path and she makes the proper prayer to the gods (*Cho.* 124–51). The long *kommos* is the ritual threnody due to Agamemnon at his funeral but offered now along with the necessary libations. The mourners frequently call upon the gods by name. Finally, the lock of hair Orestes dedicates is ritually appropriate both as a sign of mourning and as a sign of his adulthood.

Orestes begs Zeus to save the house of Atreus so the god will not lose the rich gifts of their sacrifices (*Cho.* 255–57, 260–61) and promises funeral feasts to Agamemnon if he will come to their assistance (*Cho.* 483–85). Conditioned by the travesty of ritual in the *Agamemnon*, we expect irony in these statements, but we realize that Orestes is perfectly sincere.[65] Sacrifices have been restored to their proper function.

After his crime Orestes continues his adherence to accepted ritual. He takes up the scepter of the suppliant and sets out to receive purification. Ordinary purification will prove to be insufficient, since Clytemnestra's avenging spirits insist upon a return to the old blood sacrifice. But the initial steps have been taken towards the final healing of the house. The ghastly

[65] The audience might well expect irony, for Agamemnon's virtue as a *thytēr* to Zeus is extolled here by his son, while we recall his role of *thytēr thygatros* (*A.* 224–25) in the first play. Similarly, the *ennomoi daites* promised here to Agamemnon by his children are the exact opposite of that other sacrifice the king performed, *thysian heteran, anomon, adaiton* (*A.* 151).

sacrificial imagery has yielded to proper ritual and communion with the gods.

The *Eumenides* continues the progress of healing the rift between gods and men. Apollo, whom we know in the *Agamemnon* only through the tortured utterances of his prophet and in the *Choephoroi* only by hearsay, appears in person. His prophetess in the *Eumenides* speaks confidently of him as *iatromantis* (*Eu.* 62).[66] Although he will be less doctor and more advocate in this final drama, he plays an important part in the final cure. Athena makes her appearance in full majesty. Even the scene has changed from the palace of Agamemnon and the site of his tomb to the sacred shrine of Apollo and to the court over which the goddess presides. Orestes himself clings to the altar of Apollo and embraces the wooden image of Athena, the oldest embodiment of her godhead. Thus even physical contact is restored.

The *Agamemnon* was a play of conflicting claims of partial justice. The *Choephoroi* was a drama essentially free from any conflict, for it presented only one acceptable view of justice. The *Eumenides* returns to the conflict between two proponents of justice, but this conflict moves to the divine level and to the formality of a court of law with a goddess as impartial judge. In its claims and counterclaims it returns to the tensions of the *Agamemnon*. The Furies, spurred on by Clytemnestra's ghost, as forceful in spirit as she was in the flesh, advocate a return to the attitude of the *Agamemnon*. This return is most effectively shown through the images of sacrifice, powerful poetic allusions to the first play. The Erinyes—hateful monsters, loathed by the gods, thirsting for human blood—transport us back to that first play. Suddenly, in retrospect, all the references to metaphorical Erinyes in that play make us realize the strength of error that turned human beings into Furies. If, as supernatural beings, they transgress the limits of the sacrifices to which they are entitled, one should not wonder that a mortal who assumes the role of Erinys will cross the boundary that separates avenger from bloodthirsty predator.

The horror evoked by the vivid description of the Erinyes makes it clear that the cure of the malady of the house of Atreus cannot

[66] "In driving away disease the prediction of the future is everywhere an essential part of the ceremony. The doctor-magician is, therefore, in many cases a seer at the same time." Nilsson (above, note 19) 131.

be brought about by the verdict of acquittal for Orestes. The Erinyes themselves must be reconciled so that they change their dress, their habits, their functions, and their names. Only then is there hope that the dreadful pattern of the *Agamemnon* will not repeat itself. The cure for them lies in the healing powers—the *meiligma* and *thelktērion*—of Athena's persuasion (*Eu.* 885–86). In their new role as Eumenides they can then speak knowingly of the final cure for mankind—it is to be through a restoration of the harmony of family and state (*Eu.* 984–87; cf. *Eu.* 534–36):

> χάρματα δ' ἀντιδιδοῖεν
> κοινοφιλεῖ διανοίᾳ,
> καὶ στυγεῖν μιᾷ φρενί
> πολλῶν γὰρ τόδ' ἐν βροτοῖς ἄκος.

No longer hated by the gods, they take their place among the gods. No longer eager to feast on human blood, they accept the offerings due to the gods, *semna sphagia* (*Eu.* 1006–7; cf. 835, 1037).

For the first time in the trilogy the *ololygmos* is restored to its proper function as the citizens lead the Eumenides to their new sanctuary (*Eu.* 1043, 1047): ὀλολύξατε νῦν ἐπὶ μολπαῖς. The *spondai* (*Eu.* 1044) are no longer the blasphemy of blood poured out in three libations, nor even the libations poured over Agamemnon's tomb accompanied by prayers for vengeance. Now they represent the truce achieved between the citizens and the new resident gods, the Eumenides (or Semnae). Even the epithet "the third Savior" returns at last to its rightful owner, Olympian Zeus (*Eu.* 759–61).

In conclusion, the motif of sacrifice corrupted is a valid and powerful theme in the *Oresteia* and plays an important role in the development of the trilogy. It is seen to form a coherent pattern along the lines of other patterns of imagery which Aeschylus employs. It is the measure of the error and inverted relationships of the *Agamemnon* in that it demonstrates the woeful self-deception and corruption of the avenger who has shattered all the normal patterns of human life in his quest for vengeance. Along with other references to impiety, it attests to the further corruption in character towards godlessness. Relative to imagery of disease, it exhibits the symptoms of another infection, corruption and pollution of the relations between man and god, the result of

impiety. Its near absence in the *Choephoroi* and the ascendancy there of normal ritual points the way to a change in attitude on the part of the avenger and shows a progession on the path to healing and purification. Its return in the *Eumenides* is a yardstick against which the tentative gains can be measured and a grim reminder of the implications of the past. The final abandonment of corrupted sacrifice in favor of healthful ritual is effected when the spirits of vengeance become a force for good. The harmony of family and state is re-established. The end of the *Eumenides* draws all the dominant motifs together in the triumph of good persuasion, true justice, love, light, healing, and propitious sacrifice.