

‘The future you will know when it happens’:

**A study of the parodos of Aeschylus’
*Agamemnon***

Daniel Hill

**Submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy
in the Discipline of Classics in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Adelaide**

April 2012

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Thesis Declaration

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Thesis Abstract

The hypothesis of this thesis is that, through an examination of the parodos of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (40-257), we may determine how divine and human causes are seen by the dramatist to combine so as to bring about Agamemnon's death at the hands of his wife Clytemnestra. It is no exaggeration to assert that the parodos must be interpreted correctly for the proper understanding of *Agamemnon* and, indeed, the *Oresteia* as a whole. However, since the parodos is a complex lyrical ode, there is much that is necessarily ambiguous and that frustrates simple explanation. Structurally, the thesis will examine four particular concerns addressed in the parodos. First, the theme of the Sack of Troy, foreshadowed in the parodos, is a recurring one in *Agamemnon* and it raises the issue of what part sacrilege plays in Agamemnon's downfall. Secondly, the omen of the eagles and hare and the demand by Artemis for the sacrifice of Iphigenia illustrate how the gods establish a dilemma which mortals must respond to. Thirdly, Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice Iphigenia then raises the still much disputed question of the relation between individual freedom of choice and divine determination (is Agamemnon merely a victim of Fate, or an ancestral curse?). The final concern is the role of Zeus, who, while not a character, is experienced as a force throughout the play and is intimately involved in the tragic scenarios. I am convinced that we need to get away from a conception of Aeschylus as seeking to provide a theology/theodicy for Zeus, and instead evaluate Zeus in relation to the tragedy's dramatic requirements. The so-called 'Hymn to Zeus' (160-83), usually regarded merely as a pious flourish, provides an apt case study for doing so. Analysis of the pressing concerns of the parodos enables us to understand not only Agamemnon's tragedy but also the wider meaning of the *Oresteia*. Moreover, it is hoped that a study of the parodos of *Agamemnon* will further our insight into what constitutes Aeschylean tragedy.

Acknowledgments

This thesis was written under the principal supervision of Dr Eoghan Moloney, to whom I extend my deepest gratitude for all his time, effort, and encouragement. I would like to acknowledge in particular the assistance of the Head of the Classics discipline Prof. Han Baltussen, as well as A/Prof. Peter Davis, for their advice on the structure and style of the thesis. Thanks also to all staff and postgraduates of the discipline. I have also been fortunate to be able to draw on Mr David Hester's broad knowledge of Greek drama.

Abbreviations

AJP: American Journal of Philology

CA: Classical Antiquity

CP: Classical Philology

CQ: Classical Quarterly

CR: Classical Review

G&R: Greece and Rome

HSCP: Harvard Studies in Classical Philology

JHS: Journal of Hellenic Studies

LSJ: Liddel-Scott-Jones Greek-English lexicon

OLD: Oxford Latin Dictionary

TAPA: Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association

*TrGF: Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta: vol.iii, Aeschylus ed. S.L. Radt (Gottin-
gen,1985).*

Introduction

1. The Problem

Agamemnon, the first play of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy, begins with the watchman's prologue delivered at the sight of the chain of beacon fires which signals the fall of Troy. It is delivered in a tone of cautious optimism, both in expectation of King Agamemnon's impending return, and also in full awareness that all has not been well in Argos, where Queen Clytemnestra holds power with her lover, Aegisthus. The chorus then files on stage to deliver the parodos (entrance song) to *Agamemnon* (40-257), which is the longest of extant Greek choral odes. It is delivered by a chorus of Argive elders who were too old and decrepit to participate in the Trojan expedition, and provides the background to the play: the events of that expedition.

The prevailing atmosphere of the parodos is one of foreboding and trepidation: for Agamemnon, the state of Argos, and the people of that state. It is also an intricate lyrical ode which sets out the chain of circumstances that causes us to expect Agamemnon's imminent destruction and creates the heavy atmosphere that pervades the rest of *Agamemnon*. What is significant is the chorus' choice not to concentrate on the glamour and triumph of the campaign, but instead on the hardships and losses. The fighting of Greeks and Trojan troops is called the προτέλεια, 'pre-nuptial rites' (65), to the perverse union of Paris and Helen of Troy. Most striking, the chorus recounts the sinister events at Aulis, where an angry Artemis waylaid the Greek host. A portent of twin eagles devouring a pregnant hare is interpreted by the seer, Calchas, to mean that the Greek force will only sail on and raze Troy if a sacrifice is offered to appease the offended goddess. Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia is identified as the appropriate sacrificial victim. This then leads to Agamemnon's agonized decision over whether to follow through with the sacrifice or to abandon the expedition. He chooses to sacrifice his daughter, and Troy falls in time – but to what end? Oppressed by anxiety and an uncertain future, the chorus directs a hymn to Zeus (160-83) in an effort to make sense of all that has happened in light of its understanding of traditional morality and religious beliefs. In this hymn we find what look like conventional pieces of piety, πάθει μάθος, 'learning by suffering' and 'the grace (χάρις) that comes violently'.

While the issues raised in the parodos have been much debated, it is true to say that often they have been considered as problems of intrinsic interest without thought for how the parodos as a whole contributes to the dramatic action of *Agamemnon*. For example, note how the authors of the most recent commentary on the play have recognized in the parodos how ‘...its utterances can be seen as a form of dramatic action in their own right, in that they are ill-omened for Agamemnon...’¹ Agamemnon’s actions and their consequences are the subject of the parodos. As I will argue in this thesis, the anger of Artemis and the hymn to Zeus are ultimately only explicable in their relevance to the dramatic action of *Agamemnon* overall. We are all familiar with how, in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, Aeschylus is made to maintain for his art a distinct educatory purpose, claiming that, whereas the young have teachers, adults have the poets. Although *Frogs* parodies the great tragedian, it surely reflects part of the reality of how poets and poetry were esteemed in the Greek world.² But a play has to work as drama. Therefore, Aeschylus’ primary concern as a dramatist was to ensure that his production was dramatically effective.

2. Thesis Aims

It is my aim in this thesis to demonstrate how Aeschylus handles the parodos in order to provide the audience with the requisite information for understanding the chain of causes and events, both human and divine, leading to Agamemnon’s death. For the most part my study takes the form of a review of the scholarship on the problems raised in the parodos of *Agamemnon*. In practice, this will require an examination of the main problems of these verses: the omen of the eagles and hare, and Artemis’ anger; the Aulis episode; and the hymn to Zeus. I will also begin with a discussion of the representation of the Trojan expedition in the play, from the conviction that the play’s characterization of Agamemnon depends a great deal upon his behaviour during the expedition as depicted by Homer and as handled, a touch ironically, by Aeschylus.

¹ Raeburn/Thomas (2011) 72.

² Ar. *Ran.* 1054-5: τοῖς μὲν γὰρ παιδαρίοισιν | ἐστὶ διδάσκαλος ὅστις φράζει, τοῖσιν δ’ ἡβῶσι ποιηταί. Henderson (2002) 9 notes that in the latter half of the fifth century BC there was in Athens increased study of language, form and style, leading to the refinement of poetry. Further, that, ‘...the increasing circulation and study of books had begun to create a more sophisticated awareness of poetry as literature, and of criticism as a formal approach to it.’

Of course, in the study of Aeschylus there will always endure problems of no sure solution, ambiguities forever beyond us, and parts of the text hopelessly corrupt. But as our understanding of the text, dramaturgy, and Greek values and religious beliefs, among other things, deepens, so we can expect to refine and improve our understanding of this great and complex dramatist. The number of studies and the various critical approaches demonstrate also that we must reflect on how we are to undertake the task of criticism. For instance, there has been a marked shift from hoping to define some sort of Aeschylean theology and, having done so, to assign the poet a place in the history of the development of Greek religious thought. A worthy contribution of performance criticism has been to highlight the necessity of treating the Greek tragic texts as pieces created to be performed. This sort of criticism, when at its best, does not deprecate the importance of establishing the best text possible. This is not only because for most of us the experience of Greek tragedy comes predominantly from reading the plays, but also because the direction required for staging a Greek tragedy is to be drawn from the text.³ Therefore, while this thesis is largely concerned with problems arising from a choral ode, it seeks to interpret these problems squarely in relation to the dramatic concerns of *Agamemnon* as a performed piece.

3. Thesis Summary

This thesis comprises four chapters, each focusing on a specific cause or factor in the chain leading to Agamemnon's downfall. The first chapter, 'The Sack of Troy in the parodos', examines how the theme of the sack of Troy, the Iliouperisis (first mentioned in the parodos), assists in the characterization of Agamemnon and the dramatic action. The theme reveals three things. First, the suffering of the Greeks, for which the necessity and Agamemnon's part are scrutinized in successive choral odes; secondly, the destructive force of Helen, whose reputation and worth cast doubt on the legitimacy of the expedition; finally, I show how Paris can be seen as a precursor to Agamemnon: as a paradigm to show the process whereby a person is brought to destruction.

³ See especially Taplin (1977) 'Introduction' and (2003)17: '...all the action necessary for a viable and comprehensive production of a Greek tragedy is, as a matter of fact, included in the words.'

Chapter two looks at the place in the parodos for the rehearsal of the omen of the eagles of Zeus which, appearing to the Greek expedition detained by adverse winds at Aulis, devour a pregnant hare, and Artemis' anger in response. So enraged is she by the death of the hare that she demands a second sacrifice, in order for the adverse winds to abate. What does the omen symbolize? If we can answer this, then perhaps we can determine against whom Artemis' anger is directed. Since Agamemnon is the protagonist, it would appear most likely that she is angry with him. But, if this is so, we must determine what was his offence. Here the problem is that there is nothing in the text prior to the omen which affords a clue. It may be that Artemis is offended by some future misdeed, such as the razing of Troy or Iphigenia's sacrifice. Indeed, there is some question as to whether Artemis demands the fulfilment of the omen in the form of Iphigenia's sacrifice, or merely approves it (should we read ἀίνει or ἀΐται?) In any event, these lines of the parodos are immensely important since they establish the need for Agamemnon to decide whether or not to sacrifice his daughter, a decision which has fatal consequences for the hero. Ultimately, as I will try to show in this chapter, the omen and Artemis' response are explicable only in light of the dramatic needs of the tragedy.

The omen and Artemis' anger lead directly to the Aulis episode, the subject of chapter three. If the anger of the goddess is to be appeased and, hence, the Greek expedition to Troy is to continue, Agamemnon must sacrifice his daughter. This chapter analyses how the chorus relates Agamemnon's decision-making process and how, the decision made, he attempts to justify it. Agamemnon's apology for his decision is disturbing because of the language he uses. Particularly difficult is how to make sense of his statement that 'it is right (θέμις) to desire' (217). Two things are unclear here. First, how can Agamemnon assert that the killing of his own daughter is morally palatable? Secondly, even if this is what he is saying, for whom is he claiming that the desire for the sacrifice is θέμις? A further difficulty in Agamemnon's apology is his fear over losing the Greek alliance. I will contend that Agamemnon fears for his own prestige which (as he sees it) will be irreparably tarnished if he deserts the expedition. In order to determine how the parodos sets out the process by which Agamemnon is brought to destruction it is necessary to reach an understanding of the part dual causation plays. The Aulis episode is a famous example of the interconnection between divine motivation and

personal responsibility. But how and to what degree the two have bearing on human actions is a source of ongoing debate.

The thesis concludes with a chapter on Zeus in *Agamemnon* – more specifically a study of the Hymn to Zeus – which the chorus delivers in the middle of its retelling of the Aulis episode. My main argument in this chapter is that the hymn is an organic part of both the parodos and the play, and not merely a meditation on the nature of Zeus. It contains profound observations on Zeus, but we need to understand the hymn principally in terms of its contribution to the dramatic action.

I will argue that this sense can be elicited from the hymn if we favour *που* enclitic over *ποῦ* interrogative. Aeschylus presents Zeus as the supreme force experienced by his characters. I will trace the belief expressed in *Agamemnon* (especially by the chorus) that all happens in accordance with Zeus' will and that Zeus' concern for *δίκη* will finally be upheld. And once we have understood that, we can reconcile Agamemnon's fate with Zeus' concern for *δίκη*.

4. Literature Review

The scholarship on Aeschylus is immense and it has taken many directions over last sixty years or so. In practice I have restricted myself to works dating from 1950 and mostly those in English. The date is not entirely arbitrary, since it marks the year in which Fraenkel's magisterial three volume text and commentary of *Agamemnon* was published. The great advantage of his edition is that he has synthesized much of the Aeschylean scholarship up to his day, which is beneficial for the student who wishes to have some familiarity with the great German critics like Hermann and Wilamowitz. I have also consulted with advantage a few earlier commentaries, such as those of Paley, Verrall, Sidgwick, Headlam, and Lawson.⁴ Also, I have had the good fortune to see the most recent commentary on the play, that of Raeburn and Thomas.⁵

Fraenkel was followed by the slimmer commentary of Denys Page, who completed and revised the work begun by Denniston.⁶ The publication of Denniston/Page was delayed so that Page could take into consideration the views expressed by Fraenkel. As a result, the positions on fate and free will and the role of

⁴ Paley (1870), Verrall (1889), Sidgwick (1905), Headlam (1910), and Lawson (1932).

⁵ Raeburn/Thomas (2011).

⁶ Denniston/Page (1957).

necessity in the Aulis episode which these two commentaries take have provided the starting point for debate on these issues in Aeschylean scholarship ever since. For instance, Denniston/Page's position that ἀνάγκη means that Agamemnon has no real choice in whether or not to slay Iphigenia has proved particularly contentious. This view was challenged in works such as those by Peradotto and Dodds, who insists that, by saying Agamemnon 'put on the yokestrap of necessity', the chorus does not intend for us to absolve the king from responsibility for the killing.⁷

Aeschylean studies have been greatly enriched by the scholarship of Hugh Lloyd-Jones. Most notably, he has shaped the debate on the nature of Zeus as Aeschylus presents it. His article 'Zeus in Aeschylus' signals a change in direction from the scholarly position of the day with regard to Aeschylus's portrait of Zeus. He concludes that Aeschylus is not the great religious innovator or original theologian, as was so often thought.⁸ The gods do not send suffering to purify or ennoble mortals. In the much debated concept of πάθει μάθος ('wisdom through suffering'), notably in the Hymn to Zeus (160-83), Lloyd-Jones cannot see what the victims of this law (Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus) actually learn, besides the fact that it is vain to defy Zeus' law. And, as he remarks, this is hardly an advanced ethical observation or some original 'Aeschylean Zeus-religion'. Rather, Aeschylus' theology remains that of Hesiod, and thus primitive, a position that many would not accept, and which Lloyd-Jones elaborates on. Thus he concludes that, '...Aeschylus' conception of Zeus contains nothing that is new, nothing that is sophisticated, and nothing that is profound.'⁹

The debate surrounding the nature of the religious beliefs espoused in Aeschylus' plays has come a long way from a belief, such as that of Owen, that choral song was principally a religious act.¹⁰ Cohen disagrees fundamentally with Lloyd-Jones' claim that, 'In Aeschylus Zeus never punishes the guiltless'.¹¹ Instead of seeing anything benevolent in the idea that Zeus ensures that all turns out in accordance with his will, Cohen concludes by this that Zeus' justice is arbitrary. Consequently he has little time for Zeus' justice as evinced in *Agamemnon*, which he summarizes as 'compulsion, the bit, the yoke, and the bridle, applied indis-

⁷ Peradotto (1969) and Dodds (1973).

⁸ As evident in Murray (1940).

⁹ See Lloyd-Jones (1956) 62-4 in particular.

¹⁰ Owen (1952) 65.

¹¹ Cohen (1986); Lloyd-Jones (1971) 90.

criminally to guilty and innocent alike.¹² Recently, Parker has cast light on the seemingly contradictory nature of Zeus in Aeschylus, and he reminds us that the opinions expressed by characters (and that includes the chorus) about the gods cannot be taken necessarily as the belief of Aeschylus.

The issue of theology has been central in another vexed question: the argument over the authenticity of *Prometheus Bound*. West is one of a number who have found fault with the poor theology, even suspect irreligion, of that tragedy, which they mark as another strike against Aeschylean authorship.¹³ But surely one reason for such discrepancies in the representation of Zeus is the malleability of the mythological corpus, which the Greek poets exploited to suit the needs of their productions. This should serve to remind us that in the study of Greek tragedy the divine must be interpreted by dramatic context.¹⁴

Lloyd-Jones develops his thesis regarding the simple theology of Aeschylus in *The Justice of Zeus* and concludes that, 'From Hesiod Aeschylus takes over a doctrine of Zeus and Dike fully sketched in that author, but visible in the *Iliad* and clearly present in the *Odyssey*...' Lloyd-Jones also develops the positions on Agamemnon's guilt of Denniston/Page and Dodds that we have to understand Agamemnon's dilemma as both being forced upon him and the source of his guilt.¹⁵ Thus, Lloyd-Jones' contribution is not least to clarify our understanding of dual causation: the relationship between divine and human motivation in characters' decisions and actions. Further, Lloyd-Jones' position that Zeus compels characters to commit crimes in order to punish them in turn is challenged by Ga-

¹² Cohen (1986) 133.

¹³ Parker (2009), and West (1990b) 54 & 63, where he concludes: 'The theology of the *Prometheus* is no theology at all.' Lloyd-Jones (2003) is a forceful critique of West's arguments.

¹⁴ As Griffith (1977) 251-3 maintains. Griffith, who concludes that Aesch. *PV* was written by an Alexandrian ('a playwright of ideas first, of the stage second') explains the loss of Zeus's teleological associations (such as those we see in the *Oresteia*: he is the moral, domestic and political necessity that works its way through the *Oresteia* towards harmonization): 'When Zeus becomes a character in the drama, even though he does not appear before our eyes, the anthropomorphic and less dignified aspects of his personality are naturally exaggerated, as they are in those parts of Homer in which the domestic life of the Olympians is presented.' Famous examples of this are: *Il.* 1.536-70, where we are presented with the perennial quarrelling of Zeus and Hera, which contrasts strongly with the bad blood that has just arisen between Achilles and Agamemnon. Then, at *Il.* 14.153-353, there is the episode of the beguiling of Zeus, which is pure comic diversion.

¹⁵ For the simple theology of Aeschylus, see Lloyd-Jones (1971) 86. Lloyd-Jones (1962) 191: 'We are faced with an apparently glaring contradiction. We must agree with Page that Agamemnon has no choice but to sacrifice his daughter; the expedition had to sail. Yet Dodds (1973) is equally right in insisting that his action was, and is meant to be regarded as, a crime. The text is explicit on this point. Can it be that both are right? Can Zeus have forced Agamemnon to choose between two crimes, either of which was certain to result in his destruction? My answer to this question would be, Yes.'

garin, amongst others.¹⁶ The debate over what exactly constitutes the 'Aeschylean theology' is no longer pressing, and scholars have departed from trying to determine whether his corpus reflects the traditional morality and beliefs found in Homer and Hesiod, or if it marks a clear stage in the development of Greek religion. A change in the direction of criticism is signalled by Rosenmeyer, who sensibly encourages us to realize that Aeschylus' interest is for humanity, not primarily for the running of the universe, and that to become distracted by the question of theology in the drama is counterproductive.¹⁷

Lesky has proved a very influential article in the debate over dual motivation in the works of Aeschylus. He is the first to call attention to the fact that the sacrifice of Iphigenia is both a horrible necessity imposed upon Agamemnon and at the same time his own, passionately desired deed. Lesky was soon followed by two scholars who have shaped the thought behind this thesis. Peradotto is particularly helpful in understanding causation in the Aulis episode. I accept as a guiding principle his assessment that, 'The gods are responsible for the necessary chain of cause and effect; man is responsible for its inception or application.'¹⁸ Edwards advocates that in order to understand Aeschylus properly we should relax the demands of strict logic and conduct a more searching analysis of the parodos. He argues that, although the dramatist may not have everything worked out clearly as we might like, yet we must allow that Aeschylus' thinking is consistent and his views discernible in the plays.

Aside from much activity on the ideas found in Aeschylus, there has been an increased focus on characterization. This has shifted from the enthusiasm for character studies popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (in the mould of Bradley's studies of the characters of Shakespeare), which assumed that characters could be compartmentalized into types, and certainly this is how Aeschylus' Agamemnon has been viewed. Fraenkel shows himself to be of this tradition when he notoriously ascribes Agamemnon's reason for yielding to Clytemnestra to

¹⁶ Gagarin (1976) 62-3: 'The theory may have a certain attraction, for it provides the "logical" system of causality that is needed if we are to invest Aeschylus with a systematic concept of justice; but there is no support for it in the text.'

¹⁷ Rosenmeyer (1982) 274: 'But this argument [ie. on theology], like the polemic against which it is directed, runs the risk of short changing what matters most: the power and freshness of the poetic vision, and the sense of fullness and energy which it communicates.'

¹⁸ Lesky (1966) and Peradotto (1969) 253.

his status as a gentleman.¹⁹ Since Fraenkel there has been a move to the position that Aeschylus was not concerned with characterization in its own right, rather with the drawing of a character's actions and words to contribute to the dramatic demands of the play.

Aside from summarizing the views on characterization in Aeschylus, Easterling highlights some of the pitfalls for interpretation that arise when we discount psychological considerations in favour of interpreting the supernatural purely along lines of dramatic effectiveness. For instance, she maintains that it is not enough to say that a character 'is in the grip of Ate'; rather, we must ask ourselves what human intelligibility the odd behaviour has. Few now would disagree with her assessment of the dramatist that, 'He may not have been interested in the exploration of personality for its own sake, but he was profoundly interested in his characters, whom he saw as *paradeigmata* of the human condition.' In the interpretation of the plays, Aeschylean characters need above all to be taken seriously as characters in their own right whose doings reflect 'a lifelike complexity'.²⁰

The real value of Easterling's studies is to remind us (as Edwards also does) that, while we must treat Greek tragedy as a dramatic production, at the same time we must acknowledge that there are discernible ideas as well as a consistency to the dramatists' thoughts which goes beyond a desire for their productions to evince dramatic effectiveness as an end in itself. In short, Easterling agrees with the prevailing view of scholarship of her time that it is wrong to ask what kind of a person Agamemnon is; but she emphasizes that we should do this without failing to see him as a real person. Her work reflects the concerns evident in influential studies on characterization in Sophocles and Euripides, such as those by Knox, Winnington-Ingram, and Segal.²¹ My thesis is motivated by the conviction that a character like Agamemnon, while performing a crucial dramatic function, must be explained as a complex character, and not as a simple type.

Relevant to characterization is the group of studies devoted to the psychology on display in drama. One could begin with Buxton, a study of persuasive behaviour in tragedy. Then there is Sullivan, which provides insights into the psychological

¹⁹ Fraenkel (1950) II 441-2. Rosenmeyer (1982) 223 also labels Agamemnon a 'type'.

²⁰ Easterling (1973); quote from Dover (1987b) 158.

²¹ On Sophoclean characterization see Knox (1964), Easterling (1977), Winnington-Ingram (1980), and Segal (1981). Scodel (2005) 240-5 provides a valuable summary of characterization in Sophocles. See Gregory (2005) 260-5 for a summary of characterization in Euripides.

terminology employed in Aeschylus. Finally, there are studies, such as that of Budelmann/Easterling, which are beginning to apply the findings of cognitive science in an effort to see what value it has in the interpretation of tragedy. Such studies assist in the understanding of a character's cognitive process, especially in the cases of Agamemnon's dilemma and the carpet scene.²²

A significant stage in the study of Greek tragedy is marked by Taplin, who presents a compelling case for the need to admit considerations of stagecraft to the interpretation of tragedy. Developing Fraenkel's assertion that for Greek tragedy there is 'something like a grammar of dramatic technique', he holds that, 'all the action *necessary* for a viable and comprehensive production of a Greek tragedy is, as a matter of fact, included in the words.' There are qualifications to this statement, but his is a study that highlights the necessity for attempting to reconstruct, at least in our mind's eye, the stage action if we are to do justice to the tragedies in our interpretation of them.²³ Taplin's emphasis (previously too often of secondary importance to philological questions, or disregarded entirely) is on Aeschylus' dramatic purposes which, once understood, enrich the study of the play. Taplin's contribution is to underscore the need to match our criticism first and foremost to the dramatic requirements of the tragedy.

Like Easterling, Taplin offers some sound principles for interpretation in the firm belief that dramatic effectiveness is not a virtue in itself since it must be attached to meaning: 'A performed work should wear its meaning in view; it cannot afford to be inexplicitly cryptic, or to hide its burden in inconspicuous corners.' This is a principle that should be borne in mind by the critic of tragedy as much as by the producer. And, though the lyrical passages may be more intricate and harder to comprehend, it is the critical principles those like Taplin and Sommerstein (that we should not expect anything in Greek tragedy to have gone over the head of the (Athenian) man in the street) by which I strive to make sense of the parodos of

²² Buxton (1982), Sullivan (1997), and Budelmann/Easterling (2010).

²³ Taplin (1977) 17. For Taplin's aims and scope see his Introduction, sec. 1.

Agamemnon.²⁴ Taplin has demonstrated convincingly that stagecraft criticism and literary criticism must exist side by side in the study of Greek tragedy.²⁵

To move on to studies of Aeschylus' language. These begin with Stanford, who draws attention to Aeschylus' peculiar use of ambiguity in language to reflect how emotion causes incoherence and obscurity in speech.²⁶ As Goldhill observes, 'Lack of security and misplaced certainty in and about language form an essential dynamic of the texts of tragedy.'²⁷ Perhaps the best demonstration of the validity of this statement is provided by the manipulation of language to great dramatic effect in the parodos of *Agamemnon*. Lebeck offers a valuable, much cited, and engaging study. She has a good deal to say on structure, the nuances and intricacies of Aeschylean language, his complex, layered and recurring imagery, and on the nature of Zeus and δίκη. Lebeck contends that much of the ambiguity we come across in Aeschylus is deliberate and designed. This is a reaction to 'traditional classical scholarship' which has preferred to judge the dramatist at fault rather than to see some purpose to his style.²⁸

However, Lebeck is not immune to an occasional sweeping statement, such as when she outlines her methodology: 'The following approach is here pursued: when argument arises over meaning, the statement that claims to be exclusively right is categorically wrong.'²⁹ But to decry a particular interpretation as 'categorically wrong' is as equally misguided as excoriating one that claims to be exclusively right. This is so because such confidence is unfounded, since there are multiple ways in which our criticism of Aeschylus can go awry. For example, something in the text that strikes us as ambiguous may only be so, not through

²⁴ Taplin (1977) 18; Sommerstein (2010) 254. Cf. Easterling (1973) 15: 'I lay so much stress on believing in the characters and their actions because although great dramatists are often ambiguous they are not puzzling. To be puzzling is to run the risk of distracting or boring the audience; and every great dramatist knows that they must be gripped.' Griffith (1977) 252 expresses very much this same view.

²⁵ As observed by Goldhill (1997) 339, who goes on to say: 'Many critics who have followed Taplin's lead into stagecraft have not followed this recognition, and where at its best stagecraft criticism can explore conventions and possibilities of staging to illumine the nature of theatrical representation and its production of meaning, at its worst stagecraft criticism has descended into critics saying how they would direct plays, or the mere listing of entrances and exits.' Other notable studies of stagecraft include Bain (1977) and Halleran (1985).

²⁶ Stanford (1942) 136: 'This use of confused and obscure (or vague) constructions to represent, as well as describe, confused and uncertain things is characteristically Aeschylean and markedly unclassical.'

²⁷ Goldhill (1986) 3.

²⁸ See Lebeck (1971) 3: 'Yet that ambiguity characteristic of Aeschylus is not easy to achieve; it comes about neither by accident nor inability, but by design.'

²⁹ Lebeck (1971) 3.

Aeschylus' design, but due to our limited understanding. Thus it would seem that the interpretation of Aeschylus is a collective endeavour, requiring a considered judgment of the arguments and scholarship that have gone before without hastiness to dismiss summarily any particular argument.³⁰

A major trend in Aeschylean studies has dealt with his complex and circular imagery. The subject is not the major concern of my thesis, but it has given rise to certain influential and important studies. Those of immediate relevance to my work include Zeitlin's article on the theme of corrupted sacrifice throughout the trilogy, and the study of Roth, who, in tracing the theme of corrupted $\xi\nu\nu\iota\alpha$, presents us with a broader and richer understanding of recurring references to Paris and Helen in *Agamemnon*.³¹

Of a different bent in Aeschylean studies is Goldhill's *Language, sexuality, narrative: the Oresteia*, which marks a departure from 'the accumulated weight of Aeschylean scholarship'. In a thorough reading of the *Oresteia*, Goldhill aims to challenge the rigidity of the boundaries between textual and literary criticism, in order to determine 'how the text means'. His concern is with the multivalency of Aeschylus' language, and it builds upon the work of others, like Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, on ambiguity and levels of meaning in tragic language.³² Goldhill applies the literary critical theories of thinkers like Derrida and Barthes to elucidate the poet's language and narrative structure. Although an important work, Goldhill's study has also met with severe criticisms, not least for its opaque and dense style, which it must be admitted does detract from Goldhill's thesis.³³ Nonetheless, he conveys a number of valuable insights into Aeschylus' handling of language as well as the laudable conviction that (contrary what has often been thought) Aeschylus is indeed a sophisticated and accomplished artist.

³⁰ For this reason we should bear in mind the cautionary words of Fraenkel (1950) I ix, who states of Aeschylean studies that, 'Every possible effort should be made to understand a difficult passage; but when a careful examination of the language and the style has produced no indication of a corruption and yet the sense remains obscure, then there may be a case, not for putting a dagger against the passage, but for admitting the limits of our comprehension.' See also the comments of Lloyd-Jones (1972), a review of Lebeck (1971).

³¹ Zeitlin (1965) and Roth (1993).

³² Goldhill (1984) 1. Vernant & Vidal-Naquet (1990) 42: 'In the language of the tragic writers there is a multiplicity of different levels more or less distant from one another. This allows the same word to belong to a number of different semantic fields depending on whether it is part of religious, legal, political, or common vocabulary or of a particular sector of one of these. This imparts a singular depth to the text and makes it possible for it to be read on a number of levels at the same time.'

³³ See the reviews of Heath (1985) and McCall (1986), who sees Goldhill (1984) ultimately as a failure.

Finally, an important area of research has been into choral identity in Greek tragedy. This is something I have had to take into consideration, since the *parodos* is a passage of choral lyric. Rosenmeyer argues that the chorus is a character in its own right. Further, that it reflects the standards and beliefs of the community and the audience, and is the voice of *gnomai*, but that we need to be wary of identifying it as the dramatist's spokesman. He even sees Aeschylus as the first and only creator of 'unified choral plays', with the choral passages being of the plot's fibre and essence.³⁴ However, Rehm is opposed to the idea of the chorus as the ideal spectator, the common man, or the city. Rather, he argues, it should be seen in dramatic terms as responding to the moods and needs of the plot, and thus as a thing distinctly apart from the characters. Fletcher agrees that the chorus has privileged insight into the play and would hold that the chorus is sometimes a character in its own right and then sometimes it speaks on the poet's behalf. Foley contends that though the Aeschylean chorus, like all Greek tragic choruses, espouses the traditional beliefs and wisdom of the (Athenian) culture of which it is part, yet its point of difference is that its fate is intimately bound up with that of the protagonists to a degree not found in Sophocles and Euripides.³⁵ This is the reason, as I will argue in the final chapter, for the chorus' concern in *Agamemnon* for the wellbeing of, not only its king, but the state of Argos and itself.

5. Note on primary sources

I have followed the Greek text of Alan Sommerstein's new (2008) Loeb edition of the *Oresteia*. Alternative readings proposed by other scholars (such as those found in Page's OCT and West's Teubner) will be discussed where relevant. Stand alone numbers in brackets refer to line numbers in the Loeb *Agamemnon*. All Greek is cited from standard editions: usually the Oxford or Loeb text. Classical authors and works are cited in accordance with standard abbreviations given in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (3rd ed. 1996)

³⁴ For his standpoint on the chorus in Aeschylus see Rosenmeyer (1982) 145-6, 150, 161-3.

³⁵ Rehm (1992), Fletcher (1999), and Foley (2003).

Chapter 1

The Theme of the Sack of Troy

The events surrounding the Trojan War, and in particular the sack of Troy (Iliou-persis), cannot fail to strike even the most casual reader of *Agamemnon* as the source of powerful imagery. A more probing examination soon reveals that this theme is intricately woven into the text in a manner that requires explanation. The theme of the Trojan War is first encountered in the parodos and it remains vital throughout the first 1000 lines leading up to the carpet scene. However, even then we are not allowed to forget the war, and the Cassandra scene (1178-1330) serves as yet another link to the Ilioupersis theme.¹

The aim of this chapter is to trace and explain that theme in relation to Agamemnon's fall. Three elements from the Trojan War are highlighted in *Agamemnon*: the sufferings involved for the soldiers, the destructive force of Helen, and the comparison of Agamemnon to Paris. In this chapter I will look at each of these in turn. The theme of the Ilioupersis was a popular one in Classical Greek art and literature, in which it became an established paradigm for sacrilege and excess. The sense that Agamemnon deserves to suffer has to be established early in the play, and with the limited stage presence of the protagonist, Aeschylus must characterize Agamemnon and establish his 'guilt'. My contention is that the events surrounding the Trojan War, all initially outlined in the parodos, are developed and treated by Aeschylus in such a way as to provide a paradigm by which Agamemnon's tragedy may be illustrated. Finally, I will cite parallels from Aeschylus' earliest play *Persians*, another tragedy on the dangers of excess and sacrilege, on the grounds that it can shed much light on the theme of the sack of Troy in *Agamemnon*.

Of immediate concern in the parodos is the sack of Troy. The relay of beacon fires triggers within the chorus a feeling of anxiety and trepidation over what might happen next. These elders, too old to participate in the expedition themselves, know the circumstances surrounding the war against Troy, and its costs. The expedition which Menelaus and Agamemnon embarked upon ten years before in or-

¹ Cf. the observation of Anderson (1997) 109: 'The Ilioupersis rests uneasily on the horizon, an ambiguous spectre whose immense influence is felt and acknowledged, but whose shape and contours cannot be fully discerned.' On Cassandra in *Agamemnon* see especially Macleod (1982c).

der to avenge Paris' abduction of Helen was instigated at the behest of Zeus ξένιος (60-2): appropriately so since Paris has abused Menelaus' hospitality, and he, like Agamemnon is a Zeus-appointed king (43). The Atreidae are envisaged as plaintiffs prosecuting a case, and on this score their action can be seen as just. They undertake the expedition in their own interest, which accords with the will of Zeus, who is concerned for the upholding of δίκη. Yet, as Conacher reminds us, they are 'sent' in the broader sense that the expedition is instigated in accordance with Zeus' overall scheme of things.² Although Zeus sends the expedition, a human decision still has to be taken (just as at Aulis) to embark on it. There is double motivation at work here: for Zeus' part, to see justice done and for the Atreidae to recover their stolen 'child', Helen. But as becomes quickly apparent, the chorus is concerned that the sufferings this protracted expedition brings may in fact vitiate the claim of the Greeks.

In addressing the theme of the sack of Troy in *Agamemnon* what we are principally considering is to what extent this event is connected with Agamemnon's tragedy. For one thing, we are meant to envisage Agamemnon primarily as the great conqueror of Troy, Τροίας πολίπορθης (782), as the chorus hails him upon his return home. The Greek cause may be just and sanctioned by Zeus, but from the chorus' first descriptions of the Trojan expedition we are aware of great uneasiness concerning it. After all, Aeschylus evinces elsewhere an understanding that an unjust war, undertaken for the sake of conquest and aggrandizement, may still be divinely decreed. In *Persians*, Destiny 'prevailed by divine decree (θεόθεν)' and imposed on the Persians the fate of carrying out wars. Zeus does not employ the morally upright alone to carry out his designs (*Pers.* 102-7)³

² Conacher (1987) 86 explains the double motivation for the Trojan expedition in an effort to correct the deterministic interpretations (ie. that the expedition was entirely orchestrated by Zeus) previously presented in, most influentially, Denniston/Page (1957): 'Clearly they [the Atreidae] have their own reasons for waging this "war for a woman's sake", as the Chorus' references to criticisms (including their own) of the Atreidae on this very point indicate (see vv 456ff, 799ff). That the war is definitely part of Zeus' scheme of things as well, cannot, of course, be doubted in view of the Chorus' frequent allusions to the retribution exacted by Zeus ξένιος upon Paris and the Trojans...'

³Cf. Sommerstein (2010) 261: 'To be an agent of the will of Zeus is not a guarantee of moral rectitude or divine favour.'

1. *Agamemnon* and the suffering of war

The description of the sufferings undergone by both sides, Greek and Trojan alike, as προτέλεια (65) is sinister – perverse, even, in the context of a war fought because of the violation of a marriage. προτέλεια are properly the sacrifices preliminary to marriage. It stands out as uncomfortably here as does the herald's mention of singing a paean to the Erinyes (645).⁴ This startling use of the word can be understood in several ways. Not only does it emphasize Paris' violation of Menelaus and Helen's marriage, it is also an apt description of the pending destruction of Troy, for which the slaughter and suffering of the many men before the city's walls form a sacrifice. Further, προτέλεια can be taken as referring to the preliminaries to the return of Helen to Menelaus.⁵ Later in the parodos it will be applied to the sacrifice of Iphigenia (227). Accordingly, right at the beginning of the tragedy the chorus raises the question of how much innocent suffering even a just cause may entail. In the Aulis episode, it asks how far that innocent suffering should be condoned. Later, in the first stasimon, there is an attempt to articulate the full horror of the Greek suffering on the voyage home from Troy, a journey which spares only Agamemnon. The great expedition which could have been the source of so much prestige is largely remembered by the chorus in Argos for the sorrows within people's homes: τὰ μὲν κατ' οἴκους ἐφ' ἑστίας ἄχνη (427). There is the powerful image of ὁ χρυσαμοιβὸς Ἄρης σωμάτων (438), and the grimmer one of the repatriation of urns containing the ashes of the fallen Greek soldiers (440-44). Aeschylus depicts a community affected by widespread bereavement in order to show how the war undertaken on behalf of an insulted husband has deleterious effects for an entire πόλις. Homer is attuned to this reality but Aeschylus exploits it for the purposes of his tragedy.⁶

In his speech, the herald provides detail of the storm sent by the gods to wreck the returning Greek fleet in retribution for the rape of Cassandra in Athena's tem-

⁴ Which Fraenkel (1950) II calls 'a blasphemous paradox'.

⁵ Sommerstein (2008a) 10 n 15. Goldhill (1984) 15 observes of προτέλεια: 'Here it is used ironically of the shattered spear as a first sacrifice before the completed rite (death/destruction of Troy) and also points out the corruption of the adulterous alliance, which in transgressing the rules of society lacked precisely προτέλεια. The corrupt exchange affects both sides, Δαναοῖσιν Τρωσὶ θ' ὁμοίως.' Lebeck (1971) 10 understands the preliminary sacrifices to be the deaths of men. Zeitlin (1965) 465-7 also explores the connotations of προτέλεια.

⁶ An instance of Homer's awareness of the effect of war on a community is at *Od.* 1. 354-5, where Telemachus reproves Penelope and reminds her that many Greeks, not just them alone, have lost dear ones at Troy.

ple. The devastation which is wreaked on the fleet is widespread. The herald describes vividly how, at sunrise, ὀρώμεν ἀνθοῦν πέλαγος Αἰγαῖον νεκροῖς | ἀνδρῶν Ἀχαιῶν ναυτικοῖς τ' ἔρειπίοις (659-60). The imagery here is strikingly similar to that which Aeschylus employs in *Persians*, in particular in the description of the destruction of the Persian fleet at Salamis.⁷ We can draw several parallels between the Persians of *Persians* and the Greeks of *Agamemnon*, including the descriptions of their wrecked fleets. The fate of the Persian host is also seen through the reactions of those left behind: the Persian women are at home grieving for their loved ones, 'mourning amidst their finery' (ἀβροπενθεῖς) (*Pers.* 62-4, 135-8, 537-45). As in *Agamemnon* so here the war that was instigated by one man (Xerxes) has terrible ramifications for the community as a whole.

In the heroic world, war was a source of glory and prestige. But it had a human cost and in Homer we are shown the blood and gore, and the terrible realities of warfare, without acknowledgment of which the *Iliad* would not be so humane. Loss of human life in itself was not necessarily a disincentive to undertake a military campaign. The *Oresteia* was produced in 458BC in a period of 'almost feverish Athenian activity'.⁸ The city was committed to war with Corinth, Aegina and had dispatched, together with her allies, a 200 strong fleet bound for Cyprus and then on to Egypt to fight the Persians. This expeditionary force was the largest sent from Greece to fight on non-Greek soil since the Trojan War.⁹ In 459 or 458 the casualties of one *phyle*, Erechtheis, totalled 177 dead. Indeed, Athenian casualties throughout the 450s would remain high. This situation has been cited to support the view that this people accepted sufferings and losses as a concomitant of the glory gained.¹⁰ This was an Athens still triumphant from the great Hellenic victory over Persia, in particular its own overwhelming victory at Salamis. Moreover, towards the end of the *Oresteia*, Athena invokes as a blessing on her city war in foreign lands (θυραῖος ἔστω πόλεμος) for anyone who has δεινὸς εὐκλείας ἔρωσ (*Eum.* 864-5). War presented an opportunity for Athens to gain glory and prosperity, and we would surely not be wrong to say that this reflected the prevailing mood

⁷ *Pers.* 419-20, where it is said that θάλασσα δ' οὐκέτ' ἦν ἰδεῖν because ναυαγίων πλήθουσα καὶ φόνω βροτῶν.

⁸ Ehrenberg (1973) 216.

⁹ See Ehrenberg (1973) 214-15 for casualty figures. Also Sommerstein (2010) 284.

¹⁰ So argues, eg., Leahy (1974) 8. He does, however, make a case, 9, for what he believes to be Aeschylus' effort to deglamourize the Trojan War in contradistinction to the prevailing mood in the arts of his day.

in Athens at the time of the trilogy's production.¹¹ However, the Persian Wars, in which Athens had lost many men and endured the burning of the Acropolis, had been a fight for Athens' very survival. Glory accrued to Athens for repulsing what is in *Persians* an unjust invasion. But *Agamemnon* depicts a Greek force that is in danger of transgression in its role as victors. Here we find no attempt to glamorize the Trojan expedition.

Although it cannot be proved that Aeschylus espouses in his works any specific cause or betrays his own political partiality, we should expect the tragedians to reflect the issues of concern to society in the themes they chose to address.¹² Aeschylus was himself a veteran of Marathon and had firsthand experience of war's horrors – he was a part of what Ehrenberg labels 'The War Generation'. The realistic, stark, representation of the Trojan War that we find in *Agamemnon* is appropriate to a poet who had been through such things; but equally important, it is appropriate to tragedy. In both *Persians* and *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus is alert to the human experience of war, and he is as much interested in its effect on those at home as he is in those who fight: in the victors as well as the conquered. Moreover, such a representation questions the justification for, as well as the nature of, this war. The chorus sees the justice of Zeus at work in the Trojan War. But it is not a simple formula whereby Paris and Troy are in the wrong, the Atreidae and Greeks in the right.¹³ Rather, Aeschylus explores how the human *casus belli* both correspond and clash with divine justice.

For a start, the grumblings of the people and the fears of the chorus remind us that the Argive people hold their leaders responsible for their grievous losses.¹⁴ And even as Xerxes' defeat and humiliation are presented in *Persians* as directly following on from his ill-starred campaign, so it is reasonable to conjecture that Agamemnon's downfall can in part be expected as a consequence of his prosecution of the Trojan expedition. The Atreidae have on their hands the blood of many

¹¹ So Sommerstein (1989) 253 argues that δεινός εὐκλείας ἔρωσ is '...an astonishing phrase, implying a frank, unashamed, almost cheerful militarism which Athens can hardly ever have known *except* in the opening phase of the First Peloponnesian War.'

¹² Sommerstein (2010) 284 says of Athens: 'In the spring of 458 she was at a crossroads of her history, from which she might go on to greatness or to ruin.'

¹³ See in particular Hammond (1972) 95: 'In this war, as in many wars, both sides are in the wrong: Troy in accepting and defending Paris and Helen, and Greece in going to war for the sake of a woman who knew many lovers.'

¹⁴ Cf. Leahy (1974) 21, who argues that, by presenting the stark reality of the war, Aeschylus 'summons up the strongest possible emotional reaction against Agamemnon for what he has caused his people to suffer.'

Greeks (430). The chorus tells Agamemnon in person that it questioned his sense and motives in going to war over Helen, and, in so doing, strongly implies that he is responsible for the deaths of many men (800-04). Assuredly, someone will pay for this, for the gods are not unmindful of such πολυκτόνοι (461-62).

The privations and afflictions endured by the Greeks must be set against the concern for potential sacrilege or behaviour that will occasion divine resentment. Calchas has already alerted Agamemnon to this when in the parodos he is reported as warning him not to provide grounds for divine resentment (ἄγχα θεόθεν) to overshadow the Greek host (131-4). Otherwise, Agamemnon will compromise the legitimacy of his role as Zeus's στόμιον μέγα ('great scourge', 133), as the agent of his justice. Clytemnestra herself points out the need for the Greeks to exercise restraint as sackers of Troy (338-47). She states that they must treat the Trojan gods and city with respect in order to avert harm from themselves, so that (and this with irony) οὐ τᾶν ἐλόντες αὐθις ἀνθαλοῖεν ἄν (340). The irony here is twofold. First, we can reasonably assume that the Athenian audience would have been aware of the two famous acts of sacrilege (not included in the play), the slaying of Priam and Cassandra's rape, from their widespread depiction in the art of the time.¹⁵ Secondly, the suggestion that the captors could in turn be taken captive anticipates Clytemnestra's own designs for her husband. For her, sacrilege has already been committed, and any further evil deed will strengthen the justification for her actions.

Even as in *Agamemnon* there is fear for what may happen as a result of the Greeks' behaviour at Troy, so in *Persians* suffering will unfailingly befall the retreating Persian army in requital for their outrageous behaviour (ὑβρις φρονιμάτων). They have desecrated Greece's holy places and the images of the gods. The suffering engendered by these outrages will last a long time, even to the third generation.¹⁶ *Ag.* 330-3 relates how the Greeks ransacked the captured city for food, and we know that they are punished for their sacrilege on the return trip.

¹⁵ Sommerstein (2008b) 41 n 75 states these were commonly known. The frequency of the depiction of the sack of Troy on Athenian vases began to increase from the 490s BC, with the two most commonly depicted scenes being the rape of Cassandra in the temple of Athena and the slaughter of Priam. In painting too, it was popular, as its inclusion on the Parthenon (432BC) and on the Stoa Poikile (460-50BC) would indicate. For the theme of the Ilioupersis in Greek art and literature see Anderson (1997) and Ferrari (2000).

¹⁶ *Pers.* 808-18.

If we add *Ag. 527* ('and the abodes and altars of the gods have disappeared') then the desecration carried out by the Greeks is brought to the fore. Provided that we accept *Ag. 527* as an original line in the play, we have a positive statement on the herald's part that the Greeks did exceed their role as conquerors. Agamemnon is hailed as having dug up Troy with the mattock of Zeus δικηφόρος, and in so doing destroying the seed of the whole country (525-28). Not all editors, however, have felt comfortable with this line, and would prefer to dismiss it as a later interpolation. Sommerstein's argument, that *Ag. 527* interrupts the metaphor of the mattock and that even without this line the audience is already aware of the Greek crimes, is convincing. Certainly, the metaphor reads better without the line.¹⁷ The line is a shocking statement and makes for an indecorous boast on the herald's part, which is a further mark against acceptance. To say that Agamemnon has worked over the ground where Troy once stood (ie. that he has razed the city) is surely to acknowledge *tout court* the demolition of the sacred sites. Whether we accept or discard *Ag. 527* the herald's message that Troy has been utterly destroyed is hard to mistake; and certainly no one can fail to suspect that the Greek force has behaved in a way liable to incur divine resentment.

2. Helen of Troy

Although the Atreidae may be divinely dispatched and have some justification in seeking redress for Paris' violation of their hospitality, yet the direct object of their suit presents '...a far less irreproachable motive. "For a woman's sake" would be bad enough... πολυάνορος...makes it much worse.'¹⁸ This brings us to the second disquieting element of the Ilioupersis theme, Helen of Troy. In the parodos the Atreidae are the birds of prey who are crazed with grief over the robbery of their young, who is logically supposed to be Helen (49-50).¹⁹ The haunting image of Helen, only derisively named in the parodos, becomes fully developed in the first

¹⁷ *Ag. 527*: βωμοὶ δ' ἄιστοι καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματα. Sommerstein (2008a) 61 n112. Denniston/Page defend *Ag. 527* on the dubious basis that *Ag. 338-47* need an answering statement. Anderson (1997) 120 prefers to keep the line, since 'this is precisely the image which Aeschylus has prepared us to expect.'

¹⁸ Fraenkel (1950) II 146.

¹⁹ Although, of course, this is not to say it is the only way of understanding the metaphor. Knox (1952) 18: '[These lines] cannot fail to suggest to the audience Clytemnestra robbed of her daughter Iphigenia, for the image is more appropriate to her situation than it is to theirs [ie. the Atreidae's].'

and second stasima (681-781). First, the image of Menelaus the husband deserted by the beautiful wife he loves dearly sets in relief the bereavement of the Argive families (400-32). The mention of the bridal bed left with the *στίβοι φιλόνορες* (411) is a poignant reminder of the woman of many men, although here the adjective evokes the image of a loving wife whose impress still visible in the bed evokes the rawness of the loss.²⁰ It has been observed of these lines that, ‘Menelaus’ grief at the loss of Helen is paralleled and rendered insignificant by the grief of Argos for its young men.’²¹ But this is too severe an observation. Despite Helen’s moral flaws of his wife, Aeschylus is at pains to emphasize the love, and so the keen loss, felt by Menelaus. This is the effect created by the image of Menelaus who sits alone but does not revile Helen for deserting him. The palace is haunted by her phantom. Although surrounded by many statues of beautiful women (even of Helen herself), yet in the absence of Helen’s eyes Menelaus has no *Ἀφροδίτα*, no desire or joy.²²

The reacquisition of Helen motivates the *προδικοί* (the Atreidae) to wage war on Troy. But in *Agamemnon* this motive – most scathingly expressed as *ἄλλοτρίας διὰ γυναικος* (448) – is the source of deep resentment and anger (450-1, 456-7). The suggestion that the angry speech of the people is equivalent to a publicly decreed curse (*δημοκράντου ἄρατος*, 457), and that the Erinyes will track down the unjust *πολυκτόνοι* even into the afterlife (461-8), strongly suggests that in return for the blood spilt in the recovery of Helen the agents of *δίκη* will themselves be punished.²³ The all-consuming destructive force that Helen becomes is described in the second stasimon. The implications of the unorthodox usage of *προτέλεια* in the *parodos* now become apparent, as we see what sort of marriage it is for which the fighting has provided preliminary sacrifices. Indeed, there is a play on the double meaning of *κῆδος* (700), as both ‘marriage bond’ and ‘mourning’, which is

²⁰ So Sommerstein (2008a) 48 n 89.

²¹ Lebeck (1971) 44. Cf. Conacher (1987) 22, who sees ‘this passage of striking and mournful beauty’ as thematically positioned to shift the focus away from Helen and the Trojans to the bereavement of the Greeks at home.

²² *Ag.* 416-19 has proved problematic. The question is whose eyes are absent? While most scholars favour the statues’ eyes as the referent, I prefer to understand Helen’s eyes as absent, meaning that there is no *Ἀφροδίτα* (pleasure, desire) without the presence of the beloved. For discussions of this problem see especially Fraenkel (1950) II 218-20; Buxton (1982) 112-13; West (1990b) 186; Steiner (1995); and Sommerstein (2008b) 49 n 91.

²³ A point well made by Sailor and Culpepper Stroup (1999) 160: ‘The Chorus anticipates that the same forces (Zeus and Darkness) that helped Agamemnon achieve victory may punish him, inasmuch as he achieved it with the blood of the Argive youth.’

exactly what Helen's abduction by Paris has brought to Troy. The chorus emphasizes that Troy is punished by Zeus of the hearth for being complicit in Paris' violation of the rules of hospitality (700-16). In a pun on the verb ἐλεῖν ('to destroy, capture'), Helen is said to have brought destruction to ships, men, and cities (688-90). Although in the context of the stanza that follows this means the utter destruction of Troy, the reference to ships surely implies that she ultimately has a hand in the destruction of the Greek fleet after the fall of Troy.

In the famous lion cub parable (717-36) – too complex to be examined here in anything like completeness²⁴ – Helen's destructive potential is memorably reinforced. She is the lion cub raised by an adoptive family (the Trojans) only to turn on it and wreak havoc. In the end, the προτέλεια are the preliminaries to the 'bitter marriage' between herself and Paris to which she puts an end (744-5). And this is the final point about Helen to bear in mind: she is both the catalyst for the Trojan expedition and also the Erinys which Zeus is said to send against the 'transgressors' Paris and the Trojans in punishment for the breach of the Menelaus' ξενία (hospitality) (59). She is complicit in Paris' crime – the chorus has no doubts as to her θάρσος ἐκούσιον ('willing wantonness', 803). Further, there is the assertion that πειθώ ('persuasion') had a hand in Helen's abduction (385). Buxton has shown that Helen was associated in art with the evil power of πειθώ.²⁵ Thus, the suggestion is that Helen did not simply fall victim to Paris; instead, she herself bears responsibility for the whole affair.²⁶ Within the space of three lyrical odes Aeschylus introduces and develops a Helen who is at once a victim, bewitching and treacherous, as well as a symbol for the violation of marriage and ξενία. She is a woman of many men both because of her infidelity and because she sends many to their deaths. Finally, she is an instrument of Zeus' justice, because for her sake the Atreidae embark on the great expedition that leads to Agamemnon's death.

²⁴ Knox (1952) remains the best study of the lion cub parable. He traces its full implications and shows, 18, that, 'It is a complex knot of suggestions which evoke simultaneously all the principal human figures of the *Oresteia*.'

²⁵ Buxton (1982) 45-6; 105.

²⁶ Conacher (1987) 28 explains lucidly Helen's representation in these odes: 'Helen, who is herself outside the moral sequence concerned, acts first as a catalyst for Paris' crime; once this role is completed, she becomes, like the lion-cub, the force by which her new 'protectors' are destroyed.'

3. Paris and Agamemnon

Discussion of Helen cannot pass without consideration of Paris, the third focus of the theme of the Ilioupersis. I would argue that in many respects Paris is represented in *Agamemnon* as a forerunner to the protagonist; his path to destruction is set out as a paradigm of how men who err are brought to total ruin. This is the final element of the Ilioupersis theme in its relevance to how Aeschylus establishes in the parodos the tragic scenario of *Agamemnon*. Denniston/Page see Paris very much as a product of Troy, whose crime is not a cause but an effect of the sinful society in which he lives. Certainly, Troy is represented in the play as a victim of its wealth and prosperity, and lacking in proper respect for δίκη. Such are the colours in which it is painted in the first stasimon, and so Denniston/Page would take as a reference to Troy *Ag.* 386-95, where the chorus sings of how πειθῶ infiltrates and ruins a community and against its power every remedy is in vain. 'Morally, Troy can be seen as the unjust city that earns destruction.'²⁷ But we risk making Paris' fate seem determined if we envisage him merely as a product of some morally bankrupt city. Might we not just as validly say that Paris' abduction of Helen is the cause of Troy's downfall? True, Paris is the offspring of a prideful house that has excessive wealth, μείζον ἢ δικαίως (376-8). This arouses divine envy, and wealth in itself will not prove a defence once the altar of Justice has been kicked over (381-4). On the other hand, Paris is singled out as the one who has acted unjustly, who in violating the hospitality of the Atreidae inflicts suffering upon his city (395-402). The point cannot be stressed enough that in Aeschylus the relationship between the actions of an individual and that of the community are inextricably bound together and it is impossible to distinguish them. Troy has payed the price; it is συντελής (532) along with Paris. Further, that price has been steep: διπλᾶ δ' ἔτεισαν Πριαμίδαι θάμάρτια (537) as Athenian law dictated for theft.²⁸

Paris begins by committing an offence against Menelaus' οἶκος and hospitality, and so against Zeus ξένιος himself; as a result he brings destruction upon his own

²⁷ Sommerstein (2010) 204. Denniston/Page (1957) 104: 'It is perfectly clear that Aeschylus takes the sin of Paris to be not a cause but an effect: it is not, strictly speaking, 'his fault', it is the fault of the society which produced him. He is not the black sheep of an honest flock: what is happening is that the sins of his fathers are being visited on his head, he is the symbol and scapegoat of their corruption, the finished model of their craftsmanship.'

²⁸ As observed by Sommerstein (2008b) 63 n 115, paying twofold is very much an understatement for the fate of Troy and the sons of Priam. See also Fraenkel (1950) II 170 and Raeburn/Thomas (2011) 126 for unaggravated theft in Athenian law; see also Macleod (1982b) 134.

πόλις and οἶκος, as well as himself. He offends against the gods, his parents and strangers: individuals towards whom, in a πόλις community, honour was prescribed.²⁹ And this is how Paris' fate serves as a warning for what will befall Agamemnon.³⁰ The former commits an unjust act and so brings punishment upon himself and his people, while the latter, though legitimately motivated (to seek redress for violated hospitality), yet commits wrongful acts which cause suffering for his family and πόλις, and so will himself be punished in turn. This association between individual and πόλις is of central importance in Aeschylean tragedy. The *Oresteia* concludes with the Erinyes' prayer that neither civil strife (στάσις) nor retaliatory murder threaten to ruin the πόλις.³¹ It is a mark of how deeply rooted in the Greek psyche was the bond between individual and community that Aeschylus even pictures the Persian Empire quite incongruously as a πόλις which suffers similarly because of an individual. When the ghost of Darius denounces Xerxes' misguided invasion of Greece he remarks of his own reign, ἀλλ' οὐ κακὸν τοσόνδε προσέβαλον πόλει (*Pers.* 781). Whatever his own faults as Great king, Darius never did anything which undermined the very core of Persian society. It is the severest reproach he can make against one who is supposed to guard the welfare of the state.

There is another, powerful, link drawn between Paris and Agamemnon in the bird of prey simile in the parodos (49-54). Scholars have often called attention to the fact that in this simile the stolen child, while most obviously connoting Helen, also prefigures the loss of Iphigenia. 'Hence the simile reflects the paradox of right and wrong that runs throughout the trilogy. Paris is guilty of stealing Helen; Agamemnon is no less guilty.'³² The question of Agamemnon's responsibility for the sacrifice of his daughter as a prerequisite for continuing the Trojan expedition is examined in the third chapter of this thesis. But the point must be emphasized here that the nature of the transgressions which the two perpetrate is identical.³³ Both Agamemnon and Paris, as is implied in the parodos, commit crimes against

²⁹ See Ehrenberg (1973) 210.

³⁰ Roth (1993) demonstrates how the Paris theme serves not only as a backdrop to Agamemnon's downfall, but also adumbrates the repeated transgressions of ξενία and its consequences throughout the *Oresteia*. Cf. Peradotto (1969) 253: '...what is the overriding preoccupation of the chorus in this ode as throughout the play if not the *inevitable consequences* of unjust acts, both Paris' and Agamemnon's?'

³¹ *Eum.* 976-87.

³² Lebeck (1971) 8.

³³ As does Roth (1993).

the οἶκος and ξενία. And the same Zeus ξένιος (61) who sends the Atreidae against Paris will act against Agamemnon.

Finally, Agamemnon and Paris are both victims of *πειθώ* manifested in a woman; both fall victims to the feminine charm of two sisters.³⁴ The Trojan War features one final time in the lead up to Agamemnon's death, in the famous carpet scene, that mighty exhibition of the power of persuasive speech. As part of her effort to coerce her triumphant husband to walk on the strewn cloths Clytemnestra poses the question, τί δ' ἄν δοκεῖ σοι Πρίαμος, εἰ τὰδ' ἦνυσεν; (935). To this Agamemnon replies that he thinks Priam would have trodden on them. Agamemnon's striking (yet feeble) response indicates two things. First, that, to Agamemnon's thinking, treading on finery might be the sort of thing Priam could have been expected to do, in view of the wealth and prosperity of Troy. Secondly, Priam might conceivably have done so because he was a barbarian and the product of a society which (as the play has indicated) displays no regard for justice. But such arrogant behaviour is likely to arouse envy and be regarded as tyrannical; and to Greek sensibilities it can never be condoned. Agamemnon is concerned about what the people may say (938), yet Clytemnestra, in a powerful, fatal quip, reminds him that in order to have an enviable position (ἐπίζηλος πέλει) one must expect envy (φθόνος, 939). It is a comment calculated to play on her husband's pride.³⁵ Thus, the great sacker of Troy is undone. The captor is captured and brought low, just as Priam was and just as Clytemnestra had expressed concern that the victorious Greek force might be. Walking the crimson path will be Agamemnon's final act of sacrilege and will complete Clytemnestra's revenge. It also completes the theme of the *Iliouperis* as it applies to Agamemnon.

The theme of the *Iliouperis* is undoubtedly of major significance in *Agamemnon*, especially in the lead up to Agamemnon's death. Aeschylus concentrates studiously on war's deleterious nature rather than its glory, and explores how the aims of one man first coincide and then clash with the divine will. As Buxton writes in an attempt to make sense of the carpet scene, 'It is as if all the parallels between Troy

³⁴ On this see Rosenmeyer (1982) 236, who says with regard to the carpet scene: 'The feminine charm must not be forgotten. Clytemnestra is, after all, the sister of Helen. The charm becomes a weapon as she persuades Agamemnon to step upon the crimson stuffs. It is a charm that kills, a fatal handmaiden of corrupted Eros.' Cf. Conacher (1987) 24.

³⁵ See Denniston/Page (1957) 153 for a detailed discussion of this exchange.

and Argos with which Agamemnon has hitherto confronted us have exerted such pressure that the king is forced to conform to the pattern. But that is mere mysticism...³⁶ He is correct to say this, since we should be on our guard against any temptation to try to explain the problems of this play neatly by recourse to determination without taking into account individual freedom of choice. Instead, we should see the *Ilioupersis* theme as a means of elucidating Agamemnon's fall. Agamemnon seeks reparation for violated $\xi\nu\nu\acute{\iota}\alpha$, in the course of which he becomes guilty of sacrilege and so, disastrously, puts himself at odds with the divine.

The purpose of the theme of the sack of Troy in *Agamemnon* is to impress upon us the fact that Agamemnon's death is merited (or at least explicable) and in accordance with divine will.³⁷ It is through the choral lyrics, with all their sinister suggestions as to the actions of the Greek host, that the audience and readers acquire an impression of the character of Agamemnon long before he has appeared on stage. Even as our doubts and concerns are raised in the *parodos*, our understanding of the danger Agamemnon will become enriched by one specific outrage which the chorus relates in more detail: the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis. It is the puzzling account of the omen of the eagles and hare and Artemis' anger – which set the scene for that outrage – to which I now turn.

³⁶ Buxton (1982) 106.

³⁷ Leahy (1974) 20: 'An audience may have grasped only imperfectly the theological background of the play – which depends heavily upon the long choral odes – and yet realize that the fate of Agamemnon is in some sense bound up with the process of divine justice provided that, before Agamemnon comes to die, they feel that he has merited death. And conversely, if the audience has been allowed to retain an Odyssean notion of him as a noble king wickedly murdered by an adulterous pair none of the play will make the required sense.'

Chapter 2

The omen of the eagles and hare and Artemis' anger

In *Agamemnon*, the tragic situation is created when a human comes into conflict with Zeus's purpose or transgresses the bounds of δίκη. In the parodos we are struck not only by a sense of foreboding surrounding Agamemnon's role in the Trojan expedition, as well as a sense of the immanence and authority of Zeus, we are also informed of the great ethical dilemma that faces Agamemnon, which is established by another deity. In this chapter I wish to examine the very contentious issue of the purpose of Artemis in the parodos of *Agamemnon*. Her part in the play is brief; in fact, she does not appear as a character, but is only mentioned once in the play, during the retelling of the omen of the eagles and hare (107-59), which sets up the dilemma of the Aulis episode.

My contention is that the omen of the eagles and hare along with Artemis' subsequent reaction are primarily to be understood in light of the dramatic needs of *Agamemnon* and the trilogy as a whole. Although this may appear to be an obvious statement there is a tendency among scholars to labour over the logical explanation of the portent and why Artemis may be angry, and in so doing to run the risk of overlooking its dramaturgical function. I will give an account of the omen, followed by an outline of Artemis' representation in early Greek literature and traditional religious observance, before addressing the place and purpose of the omen in the tragedy. However we interpret these verses, ultimately we must acknowledge a direct causal link between them and Agamemnon's dilemma; otherwise the anger over the portent is largely meaningless.¹ 'At the origin of the action of the *Oresteia* is an enigma wrapped in a riddle; and at the centre of the enigma is the attitude of the gods towards humanity.'² The omen of the eagles and hare together with the Aulis episode is the enigma that sets in motion the action of the *Oresteia*. This chapter will propose a way of reading this enigma in order to gain insight into both the tragic action of the play and the gods' intimate connection to it.

¹ Cf. Lawrence (1976) 106: 'To argue that there is no significant causal sequence from the portent through Artemis' wrath to Agamemnon's decision is to leave the dilemma facing Agamemnon causally unexplained.'

² Buxton (2007) 185.

1. The omen

In the early part of the parodos of *Agamemnon* the chorus sings of a portent that had appeared to the Greek expedition at Aulis. Two eagles, the 'king of birds', appear to the 'kings of ships' and proceed to devour a pregnant hare along with her unborn young. The seer Calchas interprets this omen as referring to the coming capture and sack of Troy (126), but with the injunction not to do anything that might let divine resentment obscure the στόμιον μέγας ('great scourge') of Troy, and the warning that 'Holy' Artemis resents the 'winged hounds of her father' and loathes their feast (134-8). In retribution for this feast, so Calchas states, Artemis threatens adverse winds that will detain the fleet in her desire (σπευδομένα) for another sacrifice. Calchas concludes with mention of the μνάμων Μῆνις τεκνόποινος (155) that awaits to arise again. There are two critical questions which the omen raises. First, why and towards whom (Zeus, the Atreidae, the eagles) is Artemis angry? Secondly, what is Aeschylus' intention by having her demand the sacrifice of Iphigenia? Artemis' function in *Agamemnon* and the source of her anger are not idle questions, for this omen together with the dilemma at Aulis set the problem of the entire trilogy.

These lines pose great problems for interpreters. Fraenkel identifies the essence of the problem: namely that at no point in the ode are we told why Artemis is angry with the Atreidae. An explanation for Aeschylus' failure to supply a full account of the story is that it was sufficiently well-known to his Athenian audience.³ The version he is referring to is found in the *Cypria*. One of the most famous examples of the sinister side to the deity, this story tells how Artemis was enraged after Agamemnon shot a deer and boasted that not even the goddess was as great a hunter as himself. In her rage Artemis sends adverse winds to Aulis, detaining the Greek fleet. Calchas then tells the leaders that they must sacrifice Iphigenia in order to appease Artemis. In the end the goddess rescues the girl and substitutes a deer in her place.⁴ Similarly, in Stesichorus' account, Iphigenia is spared. It appears that there were two versions of the story. In Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*, despite its fragmentary nature, it is said that the Greeks 'slew' (σφάξαν) Agamemnon's daughter 'Iphimede'. However, Pausanias informs us that

³ Fraenkel (1950) II 97.

⁴ *Cypr.* 8 [West (2003)] Gantz (1993) 582 gives a detailed summary of the *Cypria* version.

in the *Catalogue* Iphigenia does not die, but by Artemis' will becomes Hecate. In Euripides' *Electra*, Clytemnestra says that Agamemnon slew the girl. As Solmsen remarks, it seems likely that Aeschylus knew both versions.⁵ However, there is an alternate version which locates the sacrifice at Brauron, not Aulis, where Agamemnon is said to have substituted a bear for Iphigenia. Alternatively, Artemis is said to have substituted a deer for the girl, which is the version followed by Euripides in *IT*.⁶ Notably, Homer is unaware of, or simply disregards, the version where Iphigenia is killed, since in the *Iliad* she (as Iphianassa) is alive together with her sisters.

That there should be no mention of this version in *Agamemnon* is explained as unwillingness on the poet's part to implicate the tragic hero in a 'comparatively minor offence' which brings upon himself the goddess' wrath and so detracts from the moral dilemma at Aulis, the crux of Agamemnon's tragedy. This part of Fraenkel's answer, that the ode stresses the dilemma around the sacrifice of Iphigenia is convincing. However, need we be so certain that the dramatist wants us to think of the *Cypria* story?⁷ Aeschylus' reticence on any past offence is to be explained most probably as the dramatist's studied effort to blur events in order to make it more difficult to explain the reason behind divine punishment of Agamemnon.⁸ Further, it has been noted that, had Aeschylus followed the normal version in which a deer, bear, or phantom are substituted, he could have exploited the tragic possibilities which would result from having Clytemnestra believe mistakenly that her daughter had been sacrificed. But Aeschylus does not, and we must see Agamemnon as the sacrificer of his daughter in this play. This is what the chorus must mean by its reluctance to describe the Aulis episode in its entirety, and its ominous comment that, τέχναί δὲ Κάλχαντος οὐκ ἄκραντοι (249).⁹

⁵ Hes. *Cat.fr.* 19.17 [Most (2007)]; Paus. 1.43.1; Eur. *El.* 1020-3; Solmsen (1981) 351.

⁶ For the bear substitute see Price (2005) 90. Euripides follows the traditional story, in which Iphigenia is sacrificed, in his *El.* and *IA* – if we accept that the conclusion of that play was part of the revised version (on which see Kovacs (2002), especially his introduction to the play and 333 n 26; see Kovacs (2003) for a fuller discussion of the possible revised ending to the play.

⁷ Fraenkel (1950) II 99: 'By a bold stroke the poet fought his way out of the difficulty: he followed the traditional story in maintaining the wrath of Artemis and her appeasement through the sacrifice of Iphigenia but eliminated the act of Agamemnon which had incensed the goddess.' So too Lloyd-Jones (1962) 189, believes that the *Cypria* adequately accounts for the wrath of Artemis.

⁸ As Goward (2005) 55 argues: 'There seems no reason for Aeschylus to have omitted an account of his [Agamemnon's] traditional offence other than to weaken the causal link between crime and punishment, and thus make his [Agamemnon's] death, viewed as a divine punishment, less readily explicable.'

⁹ On this line see Dover (1973) 62, who gives the implications of the chorus' words: Iphigenia is killed, the bad weather stops, Troy falls: '...Calchas uttered obscure but undoubtedly menacing

2. The traditional Greek view of Artemis

It is beneficial for the purposes of my study to trace briefly the religious tradition surrounding Artemis. However, in doing so we must always be mindful of the difference between the depiction of the divine in art and literature from that in public religious practice, as well as the fact that this was a malleable tradition open to the reinterpretation of poets and other artists.¹⁰ The representation of Artemis prior to Aeschylus can be reconstructed from what is found in Homer, Hesiod, the lost epics like the *Cypria*, and in what the lyric poets wrote. Artemis' salient characteristics are, first, her function as the protectress of the young and of childbirth; secondly, her role as a huntress; and thirdly, her concern as a virgin goddess for the virginity of young girls.

An enigmatic and contradictory goddess – a virgin who loves the hunt – Artemis is 'the goddess of wild things, of wild creatures and places, of the undomesticated feminine, the adolescent girl as adult.'¹¹ She is also the goddess of the moon, having the ability to control tides and weather conditions. Childbirth was an especially dangerous time for a woman, with death a very real possibility for the mother. Greek women would pray to Artemis to alleviate labour pains and to see them through the associated risks.¹² She is a nurturer of children and wild animals, a preserver of virginity, and a patroness of the reproductive life of both human and animal communities. On the other hand, like her brother Apollo, she is not a deity to be taken lightly; the efforts at placating her through votive offerings and sacrifice testify to the Greek fear and respect for her as a temperamental and powerful goddess.

The paradoxical nature of the goddess is seen best in her attitude towards hunting and hunters. Artemis herself loves the hunt and is a prolific huntress. This bond with wild animals connects her with the old deity, 'Mistress of Wild Ani-

words (151-5) about consequences of the sacrifice, and we cannot but fear that they will be fulfilled.' See also Sommerstein (2010) 138, where he sums up: 'In Aeschylus, Agamemnon truly is guilty of his daughter's murder.' On the other hand, Griffith (2002) 241-6 makes a good but to my mind not a decisive case that in the satyr play which completed the tetralogy, *Proteus*, the eponymous hero may reveal to Menelaus that Iphigenia had not been sacrificed after all, but a phantom in her place. In which event Agamemnon would still be guilty of *meaning* to kill his daughter and of actually killing a helpless victim who turned out to be a phantom.

¹⁰ On the fluidity and malleability of the tradition surrounding the gods, see Mikalson (2005) 35-7.

¹¹ Hansen (2005) 117-18.

¹² Cole (1998) 304.

mals'.¹³ She is often referred to as roaming the hills and woods, a graceful and noble feminine figure, with whom Homer famously compares the beautiful Nausicaa (*Od.* 6.102-8). In Greek religious practice sacrificial offerings were made to her, the she-goat being her preferred victim. Artemis also shows concern primarily for wild, undomesticated animals. Hunting is tolerated only in so far as it provides food for humans and only if carried out with the proper rituals.¹⁴ There is a suggestion in Xenophon that, in entrusting the youngest hares to the goddess, hunters were conscious of preserving the stock of game (*Cyn.* 5.15). In Greek mythology it is only when hunters overstep and boast of their prowess that Artemis is provoked to anger. Thus, when Orion threatens to slay all animals on earth, Artemis sends a scorpion to kill him. (One version, originating with Callimachus, has Orion attempt to court or rape the goddess).¹⁵

Another story which was immensely popular in classical times is of how the goddess sends a huge boar to ravage the territory of Oeneus, the Calydonian king, as punishment for overlooking her while offering sacrifice to all the gods. He fails to appease her by offering goats and oxen in sacrifice, and so follows the famous hunt involving Atalanta and Meleager.¹⁶ The story of Actaeon, who is transformed into a deer and then torn apart by his own hounds after he has seen the goddess naked, dates from Hellenistic times.¹⁷ But an earlier version mentioned by Diodorus Siculus has Actaeon slaying a deer sacred to Artemis and boasting of his hunting prowess (*Diod. Sic.* 4.81.4). Interestingly, Diodorus believes that Actaeon's intention is to marry the goddess, to which end he brings votive offerings of slain animals into her sanctuary, thereby doubly offending Artemis by violating the sanctity of the place and by attempting to violate her chastity. In all versions of the story the consequence for Actaeon is fatal. Artemis' unpredictability, her need for appeasement, and complex character are typical of the Greek gods in general. In many ways she is just as enigmatic as her brother Apollo. On the one hand, he is a god of intelligence, prophecy, and music; on the other, he is so often overcome by lust for mortal women (as in the case of Cassandra) and is not above descending to appalling acts of cruelty (as evident from the flaying of Marsyas).

¹³ Suggested by the Homeric πόντια θηρῶν, applied to Artemis at *Il.* 21. 470. See also Hard (2008) 187, and Kirk (1990) 59.

¹⁴ Hughes (1990) 193-203.

¹⁵ Hard (2008) 563.

¹⁶ Found in, *in al.*, Hyg. *Fab.* 129, 172-5.

¹⁷ And is most familiar from Ovid's retelling at *Met.* 3. 138-252

One of Artemis' significant characteristics is her virginity. Like Athena, Artemis is distinguished by her unwillingness to consort with gods or men. The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite tells how that goddess is unable to tame Artemis the huntress 'with distaff of gold' (χρυσηλάκατον, *Hymn. Hom. Ven.* 5.16-17). 'For goddesses, virginity guaranteed independence,' and the opportunity to concentrate on interests which were not the domain of mortal women.¹⁸ There is a great deal of freedom in Artemis' activities, and a distance from Olympus, which sets her apart and makes her the only goddess who 'cannot effectively be subordinated to Zeus.'¹⁹ Virginity as a condition was extended by the goddess to the attendants of her sanctuaries. At most of her shrines the priestesses served until marriage, or at least until the onset of puberty.²⁰ Sexual abstinence as well as relative isolation from the rest of society was required of the priest and priestess of Artemis Hymnia at Orchomenos in Arcadia. Such stipulations regarding the personal purity of a Greek deity's attendants were severe and 'unique in Greece'.²¹ Any breach of her requirements would arouse divine ire, as is clearly demonstrated by the story of Callisto – who fell pregnant after being raped by Zeus while in the goddess' service and (according to some versions of the story) was transformed into a bear as punishment.²²

In both stipulating chastity and watching over childbirth, Artemis stands out as a goddess deeply concerned for female sexuality. And these roles, in the wider context of Greek society, are complementary. A female's progress from girlhood through puberty to child-bearing adulthood was important for the continuation of society and was accompanied by many dangers. Artemis, who did not experience the process of maturation and its physiological changes, was seen by the Greeks as an ideal protectress. Accordingly, 'She had to be a permanent *parthenos* because she could protect girls, brides, and adult women from the dangers of reproduction only if she herself were immune to its disabilities.'²³ However, there was a realization and concern amongst the Greeks for the goddess' sinister side. It was essential to placate Artemis, in order to ensure that once girls had lost their virgin-

¹⁸ Lefkowitz (2007) 120.

¹⁹ Harris and Platzner (2004) 198.

²⁰ Dillon (2002) 75.

²¹ Nilsson (1964) 84.

²² See Cole (1998) 30; also Hard (2008) 191 & 540-1.

²³ Cole (1998) 32. Cf. Dillon (2002) 235: 'Artemis is in a very real sense without gender, her biological potential is eternally unfulfilled, and she is invoked precisely to engender the virgins, to take them from their virgin status as asexual beings through to motherhood.'

ity and become mothers she would not take revenge on them.²⁴ Consequently, young girls would prepare for childbirth through rituals such as dressing as she-bears and dancing for the goddess at the Brauronia (the *arkteia*), an event held all over Greece.²⁵ Through the goddess' role as a nurturer, these girls who danced before her were ensuring their own reproductive potential, which was ultimately of vital importance for the survival and growth of their community.²⁶

As the patron deity of childbirth, the Greeks knew Artemis to deal sudden and mysterious death to women. This trait is evident in Homer, who 'places a particular emphasis on her function as an agent of death'. 'Holy' Artemis ἰοχραῖρα ('she who showers down arrows') is, like Apollo, an archer who kills with ἀγανοῖσι βέλεσσιν. These 'kindly, painless' shafts betoken a swift death.²⁷ Odysseus, for example, enquires of his mother in the Underworld whether this was the nature of her own death (*Od.* 11.173). One famous episode in which Artemis wreaks havoc is the story of Niobe, recounted (one of several times in Classical literature) by Hector to Priam at *Il.* 24.602-17. Offended by Niobe's boast that she has more children than the goddess, Leto dispatches Artemis and Apollo to slay all twelve of Niobe's children.

However there are many cases where Artemis' anger and motivation for killing goes unexplained. For instance, Homer tells us that Laodameia was killed by Artemis, but we remain unsure as to the exact cause for the anger which motivated the killing (*Il.* 6.205). But surely these tales from mythology reflect the reality that many causes of female illness and death remained mysterious to the Greeks and could be ascribed most credibly to the workings of a capricious goddess. And it was not uncommon, at least from the classical period onwards, for Artemis to be identified with her cousin grim Hecate. Association with the queen of ghosts and the restless dead suggests Artemis' fatal side; but it also indicates her independence, for Hesiod tells us that Zeus does her no wrong nor interferes with her activities at all. There is a further connection; since Hecate aids women in childbirth and

²⁴ Dillon (2002) 235.

²⁵ Eg., the chorus of women at *Ar. Lys.* 641-6 mentions how they took part in the Brauronia as girls. The origins of this festival lie in a myth about a young girl who had teased and provoked a bear, which then killed her; in turn the girl's brothers slew the bear. On this see Dillon (2002) 221. See also Hughes (1990) 195-6 and Mikalson (2005) 62-3.

²⁶ See Cole (1998) 33 & 40.

²⁷ See Hard (2008) 188, who provides a catalogue of her more famous victims. See also Macleod (1982a) 153.

cares for the young, she, like Artemis, is labelled *κουροτρόφος* by Hesiod (*Theog.*423-4, 451-2).²⁸

3. Reasons for Artemis' anger

Having built up a picture of the traditional understanding of the nature of Artemis, let us now return to the omen of the eagles and hare and the first point of contention, the reason for Artemis' anger. Scholars have suggested several explanations. Some would maintain that we should understand her anger literally; that is, she is angry with the eagles themselves. It may also be the case that Artemis' anger is directed towards Zeus, since the eagles who wreak destruction are his own birds. On the other hand, Artemis may be angry with Agamemnon, Zeus' agent. If some act of his is the cause, what is it? Some past slight the hero made against the goddess? The impending destruction of Troy? Or perhaps it is the sacrifice of Iphigenia which he is about to perform?

Denniston/Page, who take a literal approach, assert that we can only take the text on face value: Artemis is angry and demands a second sacrifice because two eagles sent by Zeus to encourage Agamemnon have devoured the pregnant hare. They disagree with Fraenkel in that they do not hold that the elimination of details is any kind of solution. And following Fraenkel's own dictum that it is an 'established' and 'guiding' principal of Aeschylean interpretation not to take into account any detail of a tradition which the poet has not mentioned, Denniston/Page can find no motive for Artemis' anger in any of Agamemnon's acts as found in the text.²⁹ We know from elsewhere in *Agamemnon* that Aeschylus is selective with details. For instance, at *Ag.* 650-2, in relating the details of the storm that befell the Greek fleet *en route* from Troy, the herald makes no mention of the traditional cause of the storm, Athena's wrath at the Greeks' violation of her temple and their rape of Cassandra.³⁰ In light of Athena's role as her father's representative later in the trilogy, it is understandable why Aeschylus downplays this aspect. According

²⁸ See also Hard (2008) 187 and 193-4.

²⁹ See Denniston/Page (1957) xxv. For the axiom in Aeschylean interpretation see Fraenkel (1950) II 97.

³⁰ The traditional cause is mentioned at *Od.* 3. 135 & 5. 108-11, where it is specifically said that the Greeks sinned (*ἀλίτωντο*) against Athena. Of course, this is not to say that the Greek audience would have been unaware of the real cause of the storm; but it is noteworthy that Aeschylus refrains from naming the goddess, and surely he does so in the interests of the play.

to this interpretation, then, we must accept Artemis and the omen as illogical and a means for preparing the ground for the scene at Aulis.

However, there is another factor which may explain the paucity of details. Konishi rightly reminds us that what is being rehearsed in the ode is, to be sure, the *oratio recta* of Calchas (and later that of Agamemnon), but it is his speech as *re-told* by the chorus of Elders. The chorus, Konishi maintains, believes that the Greek cause against Troy is essentially just. Zeus sanctioned the expedition and Artemis demanded the sacrifice of Iphigenia; Agamemnon had no choice but to obey. In the interests of defending its king the chorus is wary of revealing too much, so that Clytemnestra (who, as far as Konishi is concerned, is on stage during this ode) cannot lay the ultimate responsibility for Iphigenia's death upon him.³¹ To my mind, neither a stance where the chorus suppresses the prior offence of the *Cypria* in order to accentuate the crime at Aulis, nor one where it studiously covers up for Agamemnon provides an adequate explanation for the omen. Within eighty lines we are to be informed of the full brutality and horror of the sacrifice; whatever prior knowledge the Athenian audience may have had about Agamemnon's slight against the goddess surely pales during those few lines. And nothing the chorus says is going to be effective in deflecting Clytemnestra's anger from her husband. We are faced with the prospect, then, of accounting for Artemis and her anger as a dramaturgical device, and that what Aeschylus implies by her inclusion is to set the scene for Agamemnon's dilemma.

What Aeschylus does emphasize in the parodos is that Artemis, 'the Fair one', is 'kindly-disposed' to the young of wild beasts, even lions (140). She cares not only for the newborn, but for the unborn as well, so she would find the fate of the unborn hares particularly incensing.³² In light of this it seems plausible that Artemis' quarrel is with Zeus, because the eagles who devoured the hare are his. West, too, holds that logically Artemis ought to be angry with the eagles, not the Atreidae, but that this inconsistency can be resolved once we remember that her oppo-

³¹ Konishi (1990) 47. I do not agree with him, however, that the parodos is a manifest defence of Agamemnon. Nor do I agree with him, or Denniston/Page (1957) 75, that Clytemnestra is present for the duration of this ode. On this question see Taplin (1977) 280-5. He points out that the chorus' apostrophe to Clytemnestra during *Ag.* 83-103 cannot be used, as Denniston/Page attempt, as the basis for the argument that the queen is on stage during the parodos, because, 'It is well known that in Greek tragedy the chorus can in their lyrics apostrophize characters who are off-stage.'

³² Fraenkel (1950) II 84: δρόσοις ἀέπτοις (141) means the 'helpless offspring', ie. specifically the unborn.

sition to Agamemnon is 'an immutable feature of the story'. This, he argues, is the reason for her anger that Aeschylus has provided, so we must accept it, however illogical it may appear.³³

Perhaps there is much to be said for not seeking too far for an explanation for the anger. The parodos is not a sustained narrative where events follow in a linear, or even logical, order. Thus, Conacher reaches the conclusion to take Artemis' anger poetically and illogically: because she is the protectress of the young of animals she finds the eagles' feast abhorrent. This would make Artemis quite a temperamental, unpredictable and vicious deity, if she were really to demand recompense in the form of human sacrifice from an apparently innocent party (the eagles belong to Zeus, not the sons of Atreus).³⁴ However, the charge of capriciousness and willfulness may be levelled at the Greek gods, especially the gods of the *Iliad*, who seek every opportunity to assist their *protégés* and at times are unstinting in their hatred (think of Hera's hatred of Troy in the *Iliad*). And, since Artemis is the protectress of the young and certain animals, it is not strictly correct to claim that it is illogical for her to become enraged over the brutal killing of an animal.

The pertinent question is with whom is Artemis angry? The choice is between Zeus and the Atreidae: between the sender of the omen and the instrument of the Olympian king. The chief difficulty in arguing that Artemis is primarily angry with the winged hounds is that they were, after all, only acting on Zeus' command. He, it would seem, is responsible for the omen and therefore the expedition, as it is explicitly stated that this portent sets the Atreidae on their way (111). Therefore, as Sommerstein rightly observes, she cannot be angry with them without being angry with the father Zeus.³⁵

On the other hand, Artemis must bear some grudge against Agamemnon if she is prepared to detain the fleet at Aulis. The possibility is, therefore, that Artemis

³³ West (1979) 4. Tracing the possible development of the eagles and hare omen from Archilochus and the *Cypria* to Aeschylus, he finds that in Archilochus alone of Greek poets is there found a representation of Zeus as protector of wronged animals. Davies (1981) 250, challenges this assumption, noting that the notion of Zeus as a god to whom animals may appeal or pray was 'common' in Greek literature. Lawrence (1976) 97 & 109, concludes that the text seems 'decidedly' in favour of Artemis being offended by the eagles' feast alone.

³⁴ See especially Dover (1973) 62. He considers it very unlikely that, despite the temperamental instability and the arbitrariness of the gods, '...we are meant to believe that because a certain event in the animal world was distasteful to Artemis she therefore vented her anger on the humans whose enterprise, through no fault of theirs, was symbolised by that event.'

³⁵ Sommerstein (1980) 166 and (2010) 258.

hates the Atreidae because she hates the eagles which symbolize them.³⁶ But this is to confuse the distinction between portent and cause, since a portent is only a sign of what is to come, and not a cause.³⁷ If the omen symbolizes an event yet to occur, then the goddess' anger would appear to be over some future wrongdoing on Agamemnon's part. Therefore, to claim that Artemis' anger is directed towards the symbol (the eagles) does appear simplistic, and it would seem necessary to seek a stronger motive behind her anger.³⁸ Is it the case that she is angry with Zeus, and, since she cannot attack the Father of the gods directly, tries to strike at him through his ministers the Atreidae? A god may threaten another god with harm, but may also get at that god indirectly. In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, for example, Aphrodite offends Artemis by causing the death of her devotee Hippolytus.³⁹ If such is the case at Aulis, then Artemis is being quite ruthless. She presents her victim Agamemnon with an impossible choice, for '...whatever he chooses will be bad for him – and also bad for Zeus.' His own prestige and the success of the expedition are at stake, and Zeus' honour stands to suffer if his chosen king and agent is brought low.⁴⁰

Be that as it may, Artemis acts on her own initiative, and there is no evidence that Zeus either approves or disapproves of her actions. The only plausible suggestion that Artemis is seeking Zeus' approbation for her actions is to take Zeus as the unexpressed object of *Ag.* 144: 'she demands *that Zeus* fulfil the portent'. But this seems unnecessary and a detraction from Artemis' function in the parodos, as will be examined below.⁴¹ This leads to another argument against the theory that the goddess directs her anger at the Olympian. As we saw with regard to the representation of the Trojan expedition in *Agamemnon*, in Greek society one legal claim (δίκη) could be challenged by another, with both at the same time having legitimate claims to being δίκη ('true / just') in itself. Likewise, both deities at Aulis

³⁶ See Lawrence (1976) 101, who, following Fraenkel (1950) II 97, calls such an interpretation 'almost too naive to require formal refutation.'

³⁷ See Gantz (1982) 11: 'But the portent simply predicts for the Atreidai what they may be certain will happen *if* they go to Troy; it does not, if it is like most omens, create any obligation among those to whom it appears.' [his italics]. See also Goward (2005) 55.

³⁸ Exceptions are Denniston/Page (1957) xxv, and Conacher (1987) 81. They base their arguments (with slight differences) on the illogicality of the passage, and in the belief that the anger serves the sole purpose of actuating the events at Aulis. On the confusion between portent and the reality it symbolizes, see Lloyd-Jones (1961) 189.

³⁹ See Sommerstein (1980) 166-7. And in Euripides' play, Aphrodite acts more obliquely, never being portrayed as *demanding* the protagonist's death.

⁴⁰ Sommerstein (1980) 167-8.

⁴¹ A point made by Fontenrose (1971) 79.

have agendas or claims that are at odds. But that does not mean that one is necessarily ethically stronger or more just than the other. That is not in question, nor does it require resolution in this tragedy.

If neither Zeus nor his eagles are the cause of Artemis' anger, there are two further possibilities. First, the deity may be angry over the impending destruction of Troy. This is a view that has held widespread acceptance among scholars, and it is true to say that throughout *Agamemnon*, especially up to Agamemnon's murder, the theme of the sack of Troy continues to resurface. Calchas is reported as divining the destruction of Troy and the subsequent sack of the city (126-30). If the two eagles represent the Atreidae, then the hare's unborn offspring could quite plausibly symbolize the Trojans.⁴² As we have seen, the destruction of Troy is a concern of this play, and Peradotto cites Agamemnon's desire in the *Iliad* for every Trojan to perish, including the unborn in the womb (*Il.* 6.57-60).⁴³ At *Ag.* 126-29 we are informed of how the Greeks will take Troy, and how fate will ravage the herds before the city walls. The herds, we may safely assume, are the Trojans themselves.⁴⁴ Agamemnon's viciousness, therefore, in both the *Iliad* and in the parodos is brought to the fore. The imagery is violent, and it is hard not to agree that, 'Eating the hare together with its unborn young, Aischylos' eagles represent the fulfilment of Agamemnon's threat.'⁴⁵ By this violence (not the symbolic violence of the omen) Artemis is offended. And in many ways Artemis is depicted as a Homeric deity, though transferred to the tragic sphere, whose stance and demands, however illogical or unfair, must be faced and responded to by the mortals of the drama. This is the chief local deity at Aulis,⁴⁶ prone to vindictiveness; the loyal helpmate of the Trojans, who demands sacrifice of helpless animal victims in reparation for trivial offences and who understands the cruelty which Agamemnon will

⁴² See Lloyd-Jones (1961) 189: The eagles stand for the Atreidae, the hare must represent some figure from the world of reality, so 'We can hardly avoid supposing that it stands for the Trojans and their city.'

⁴³ See Peradotto (1969) 248. In favour of the hare and its unborn as a symbol of Troy and the Trojans are, Fraenkel (1950) II 96; Lloyd-Jones (1962) 189; Neitzel (1979) 19.

⁴⁴ See Lloyd-Jones (1961) 189 and references there. He mentions that Greek prophets tended to refer to people by the names of animals.

⁴⁵ Anderson (1997) 110.

⁴⁶ Furley (1986) 119. There has arisen some debate over where exactly the omen is supposed to have occurred. The omen must surely appear at Aulis, though it is not specifically mentioned. Sommerstein (2008b) 15 n 28, takes *μελάθρων* (116) to refer to the palace at Argos. However, Heath (2001) had previously argued against this. Amongst his arguments the most compelling is that the Athenian audience would most naturally have thought of Aulis in connection with the events just prior to the Greeks' departure for Troy, especially with regard to a bird omen.

indulge in; perhaps the idea of an innocent human sacrifice appeals to her as an appropriate revenge. Is it thus the case that the sacrifice of Iphigenia will provide a prerequisite to the fall of Troy? Add to this the opportunity for getting at Zeus for sending this expedition as the instrument of his vengeance on Troy, and we can see a plausible motive take shape.

Yet this explanation is not entirely satisfactory, not least because it bases the cause of Artemis' anger on an event that is yet to happen. The portent is, according to the chorus, expressly interpreted by Calchas as a sign that Troy would ultimately be destroyed (122-30). But it is not so clear whether we can connect Artemis' pity and anger directed at the winged hounds of her father directly with the fall of Troy. Moreover, speculation on whether or not the expedition would have proceeded, and Troy have fallen, without the portent, risks detracting from the central thread of the *parodos*.⁴⁷ The chief conclusion from my examination of the theme of the *Ilioupersis* was that Aeschylus' principal purpose by including it is to create the backdrop for the tragedy. Artemis may be angry over Troy's fate, but at Aulis that is still in the future. I see no reason to locate the cause of Artemis' anger exclusively in the destruction of Troy.⁴⁸ Further, I find it less than satisfactory to understand Iphigenia's sacrifice to be in atonement for Troy's destruction – as Artemis' method of providing Agamemnon with a taste of what it is like to indulge in mass bloodshed.⁴⁹ Agamemnon's tragedy is intertwined with his actions at Troy, but this is only one piece of the overall picture.

There is final interpretation of the hare and her young. If the eagles represent the Atreidae, then the children may represent Helen or, by extension, Iphigenia and Orestes. With regard to Agamemnon's children, this is not the only place in the trilogy where they are presented as helpless young; Electra and Orestes refer to themselves as νεοσσούς ('nestlings') while standing before Agamemnon's tomb (*Cho.* 256, 501). Likewise, the mention of θυσίαν ἑτέραν in connection with the

⁴⁷ See Winnington-Ingram (1983) 99. Incidentally, he believes the bloodshed at Troy would have happened in any case.

⁴⁸ Consequently, I find an answer like Helm's (2004) 41 unsatisfactory: 'It must, then, have been the Trojan expedition itself together with the impending fall of Troy that infuriated Artemis; she did not feel that the death and suffering of innocents that was bound to be involved in the war was justified...'

⁴⁹ As does Peradotto (1969) see in particular 249. Helm (2004) 42: 'Before Agamemnon gets involved in such mass destruction of innocents, Artemis wants him to be aware of the seriousness of what he is doing, and forces him to destroy the life of one dear to him as a sign before he even begins.' See too Lloyd-Jones (1961) 190, who reminds us that such talk of atonement or sin is too legalistic.

Atreidae not only suggests a future wrong but is also redolent of that earlier dire feast, the *cena Thyestae*.⁵⁰ Furley presents a brilliant argument for locating the source of Artemis' wrath in this curse. There is a danger that she will delay the fleet at Aulis and ask the terrible sacrifice from Agamemnon, '...because a μνάμων μῆνις τεκνόποινος remains unrequited to plague the Atreidae.' The omen signals to Calchas that the threat of the curse still lingers, ready to strike again (παλίνορτος).⁵¹ These words are most commonly taken to refer to Clytemnestra and her vengeance which will confront Agamemnon as a direct result of sacrificing Iphigenia.

Alternatively, we can view this part of Calchas' divination as a description of the present state of affairs for the house of Atreus, not simply of the consequence of the decision at Aulis (since a seer can see present, past, and future events). Following Furley, we can say that Artemis becomes an intimate associate in the cycle of bloodshed and retributive killing. She is not merely the device for setting the dilemma, she is also motivated by the need to perpetuate the cycle of revenge and the familial guilt; the slaying of Iphigenia is the next point in that cycle, the means by which the guilt may be transferred to Agamemnon. The wrath that is παλίνορτος, often translated as 'arising *in the future*', is present even here and now, as it has long been, and it will rear its head again; '...what remains is also active and activated'.⁵² this is the 'ever re-arising' ancient wrath of the House of Atreus.⁵³ The merit of Furley's argument is that our attention is fixed where it should be in *Agamemnon*, squarely on the events at Aulis and the implications these will have for Agamemnon's 'guilt' and subsequent downfall, not principally on the destruction of Troy.

⁵⁰ Heath (1999) 401. Lebeck (1971) 33, is also of the opinion that the imagery of mourning for lost young has a threefold significance: the theft of Helen, the murder of Iphigenia and the fate of Thyestes' children. See also 34-5 for her discussion of the connotations of θυσίαν ἔτέραν. Cf. Conacher (1987) 10: 'The poet is concerned first of all to provide a portent in which we can see, in a flash of the mind's eye, without rational analysis, the sack of Troy, the sacrifice of Iphigenia, and the awful feasting on Thyestes' young.'

⁵¹ Furley (1986) 112.

⁵² Goldhill (2004) 75.

⁵³ On the cycle see Furley (1986) 113: 'It was a guilt totally in accord with Greek thinking before the sophistic enlightenment, whereby the cycle of bloodshed, blood-guilt, and further retaliatory bloodshed passes relentlessly down the line of a man's descendants...' For the traditional understanding of παλίνορτος see the commentaries of Fraenkel (1950) and Denniston/Page (1957). Goldhill (2004) 75 points out that the force of παλίν '...implies precisely the logic of reversal and repetition ('back again') central to revenge', and cites Fagles' translation, 'back and back in the future'. See also Lloyd-Jones (1961) 190 for his discussion of the family 'curse'. It should be noted that παλίνορτος is found only here in extant Greek literature.

4. The result of Artemis' anger

If we are to make sense of the omen and Artemis' anger, we need to pay close attention to the reported speech of the seer Calchas. The omen which he is divining is not all bad; it is both auspicious and inauspicious (145), a mix of 'fateful things' together with 'great goods' (156).⁵⁴ It is comparable to the Homeric portent in which a snake sent by Zeus slithers out from the altar on which the Greeks are offering sacrifice and proceeds to devour the eight helpless sparrow chicks along with their despairing mother (*Il.* 2.309-18). A frightening omen, but Calchas interprets it as auspicious: a sign that in nine years' time the Greeks will take Troy. So too in the parodos, Calchas, who '...does not speak as clearly as he does in the Homeric episode',⁵⁵ divines that the expedition will be a success and that Troy will fall 'in time' (126). The sinister addition at this point is his injunction not to let ἄγα θεόθεν overshadow the expedition and thus jeopardize it. Dover contends that the Athenian audience would have had no difficulty in understanding the 'mantic reasoning' of Calchas. This is an ominous event, and one which Artemis finds distasteful because the hare is an animal most closely associated with her cult; therefore, Calchas infers, if any deity will stand in the way it will be Artemis. Not that this meant the audience would have speculated on her reasons for acting in this way, for in any case it was realized that divine motives are frequently indiscernible.⁵⁶

At this point it is important not to forget the harsh and cruel aspect to Artemis. In particular, Lloyd-Jones has done a valuable service in drawing attention to it. On this point some critics have been baffled, for they cannot reconcile Artemis' kindly nature with her demand for the sacrifice. This has led to debate over the reading ἀίτεῖ at *Ag.* 144. It is the reading of the MSS, accepted in, amongst others, Murray's OCT, West's Teubner text, and Sommerstein's Loeb edition. ἀίτεῖ should be retained, for it emphasizes that Artemis herself *demand*s fulfilment of

⁵⁴ Fraenkel (1950) II 95 remarks on the careful use of μόριμα, so that the nature of the evil remains ambiguous.

⁵⁵ Heath (1999) 404.

⁵⁶ Dover (1973) 62. Cf. Heath (1999) 405, on the notorious obscurity of Artemis' motivation and Zeus' will. He sees Aeschylus as being deliberately elusive on these. On the place of hares in the cult of Artemis see Furley (1986) 121.

the portent. However, this is a little too confronting for certain tastes. In particular, Fraenkel is uneasy about it and mounts a case against the reading on the basis of the grammatical difficulties of αἰτεῖν followed by an infinitive. He prefers the gentler αἰνεῖ: the goddess *grants* or *consents* to (however much against her nature), rather than blatantly demands, the fulfilment of the portent.⁵⁷

But any attempt to soften the goddess' nature is misleading or unnecessary at best. Furley argues that the goddess had a propensity for meting out dreadful punishment for trivial incidents. And I have already mentioned the story of how the Athenians shot a bear which had wandered into Artemis' sanctuary in Brauron, for which Artemis inflicted them with plague, which the Delphic oracle proclaimed could only be allayed by annual sacrifice of an Athenian girl to the goddess.⁵⁸ Whallon goes further in highlighting the barbarous nature of Artemis. According to him, the names in the *Oresteia* are profoundly significant. Artemis' own name reflects her split personality; she can be just as much ἄρταμος ('butcher') as ἀρτεμής ('safe and sound'). And by demanding the sacrifice of Iphigenia she is certainly a butcher.⁵⁹ Thus, for Artemis to demand the fulfilment of the omen, rather than merely grant that it be fulfilled, seems more appropriate to her nature. She is angered by the outrage of the eagles' feast and can only be mollified by the counterpart (ξύμβολα) of another feast.⁶⁰ She is demanding a feast to satisfy as a completion of the portent, which is what ξύμβολα κρᾶναι properly means.⁶¹ Without question, the second feast will be terrible. Although its full horror only be-

⁵⁷ Fraenkel (1950) II 86: 'αἰτεῖν with the infinitive, but with no accusative to show from whom something is requested or demanded, seems never to occur at all; at best the construction would be most unusual.' Conacher (1987) 82 agrees that αἰνεῖ is 'probably the most acceptable solution'. However, I agree with the opinion of Furley (1986) 118: 'I suspect that Fraenkel's objections to αἰτεῖ originate less from the grammatical difficulties he finds than from the sentiment it implies to Artemis...' Rose (1958) 15 takes αἰτεῖ as αἰτεῖ (2nd per. med. pass.), which means Artemis is asked to bring about fulfilment of the portent. Although plausible, this is another solution founded on the disbelief that the goddess could feel anything other than repugnance at the thought of human sacrifice. There is a third option, adopted in the editions of Headlam (1910), Sidgwick (1905) and Smyth (1926), to read αἰνεῖ (imperative). In this case, Calchas is himself exhorting his king to fulfil the portent.

⁵⁸ See Lloyd-Jones (1983) esp. 99-101. For Brauron see Furley (1986) 118-20 and Peradotto (1969) 244.

⁵⁹ Whallon (1961) 79.

⁶⁰ Verrall (1889) 16, illuminates the exact meaning of this word here: 'any two things which *tally* are ξύμβολα to each other; here the event is to tally with the sign, in which case, it is suggested, the goddess should be satisfied...' Cf. Degener (2001) 72, who says that ξύμβολα are not merely 'symbols'; 'Rather, they must be understood in their archaic sense as opposing halves guaranteeing a contractual relationship.'

⁶¹ Which is how Judet de la Combe (2001) 779-80 explains it: 'Le sacrifice, qui consiste à consacrer un jeune vivant à la déesse, compense ainsi le repas sanglant des aigles.'

comes apparent later in the parodos, yet in Calchas' words we already have a clear indication. It will be ἄνομόν (either 'without music' or 'without law') and ἄδαιτον ('without feasting') and will bring strife to the household (150-51).

Finally, the effort to make sense of Artemis' function in the parodos is complicated by the debate over the force of the particle *περ* at Ag.140. Scholars are divided over whether to interpret it as intensive, so as to make the line read, 'So very kindly disposed is the Fair one [that she demands sacrifice]'; or as concessive, 'Although kindly disposed...'⁶² I favour the former interpretation, mostly because I think Aeschylus wishes to emphasize that the ξύμβολα is the kind of thing Artemis would demand in this situation, particularly in her role as protectress of animals. This is a deity who demands a heavy price, whatever the scale of the offence against her. Her reaction, then, is to be expected; one might almost say it is natural for her to ask for a second sacrifice. At any rate, it cannot be dismissed as an illogical demand.⁶³

5. The dramaturgical purpose of the omen and Artemis' anger

If we are to make sense of the omen and of the place of the anger of Artemis, this can only be done in relation to the climax of the parodos, the dilemma at Aulis. The goddess establishes Agamemnon's dilemma by desiring a second sacrifice. Perhaps that is all there is to it: Artemis is a device, a means to the end of Agamemnon's downfall. This is consistent with Conacher's solution that we should take Artemis' anger at face value. Gods in Greek tragedy do not have to act rationally, and it is perfectly acceptable for them to intervene and clinch the issue when the play requires a speedy resolution or the hero needs encouragement. To suggest that Artemis is a device is also consistent with Furley's conclusion that the events at Aulis focus our attention on Agamemnon's guilt and the basis for his downfall.

⁶² Among those who take *περ* here to be emphatic are Denniston/Page (1957), Degener (2001), Sommerstein (2008a), and Raeburn/Thomas (2011). Conacher (1987) 82, makes the most persuasive case for the latter view. Denniston (1954) 382 seems to understand *περ* at 140 as adding emphasis.

⁶³ Egan (2007) 195, makes the point that, owing to her kind disposition towards the young of animals, Artemis cannot be expected to have acted any differently: '...the incident by itself is enough to trigger Artemis' predictable demand for a compensatory sacrifice.' This is enough in itself, he argues, without seeking a deeper explanation for her anger in what the omen may portend for Troy or the Atreidae.

This, then, brings us to view the goddess not as a developed character in the play but as an instrument of Zeus and Fate. She reacts in the manner expected of her as goddess and protectress, but still in accordance with Zeus' plan.⁶⁴ However, we need also to draw a critical distinction between a character that functions as an instrument of Zeus and Fate, and a character that performs a dramatic function necessary to the progression of the tragedy. Agamemnon is an example of a character who, while having his own motivation for his actions (such as conducting the Trojan expedition), at the same time is carrying out the purpose of Zeus. In Artemis' case, while ultimately part of Zeus' plan, she performs first and foremost a vital dramaturgical function: she is a part of the dual causation behind Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter.

Peradotto contends that Artemis creates the situation to which Agamemnon must respond, and that she need not be understood to be callously demanding sacrifice. 'All the text tells us' is that Artemis caused the adverse winds. Calchas can only implore Apollo to prevent his sister from delaying the fleet and consequently necessitating the second sacrifice (148-51).⁶⁵ σπευδομένα can mean 'precipitating' as well as the more emotive 'desiring', which in reference to the second sacrifice is an important nuance: Calchas is worried that this will be the direct result of the goddess' anger, whether or not she actually is bloodthirstily *eager* for the feast.⁶⁶ In turn, Calchas proposes the sacrifice as a remedy (μῆχαρ, 199) for the storms, which Agamemnon accepts without demurring. All Aeschylus says by way of summing up the seer's explanation for the cause is the phrase προφέρων Ἄρτεμιν (201-02). Only now, at last, are we aware of who is behind the storms and whose wrath is detaining the Greeks at Aulis. The facts and the dilemma, in so far as they can be discerned, are laid before Agamemnon for him to make the terrible choice. Artemis is the one who has instigated this.

Aeschylus has handled the goddess skilfully, and this is the last we hear of her. 'Artemis compels Agamemnon to nothing.'⁶⁷ Her motive, previously indiscernible, now becomes unimportant as the chorus moves on to the horror of the Aulis epi-

⁶⁴ Bergson (1982) 144-5, holds that Artemis is a mere tool of Zeus ('lediglich ein Werkzeug des Zeus') serving to actualize his and Fate's grand plan. See also Lawrence (1976) 109.

⁶⁵ ἱήιον δὴ καλέω Παιῶνα, | μὴ τινὰς ἀντιπνόους Δαναοῖς χρονίας ἐχενῆδας ἀπλοίας | τεύξῃ, σπευδομένα θυσίαν ἑτέραν, ἄνομόν τιν', ἄδαιτον... That Calchas entreats Apollo is perfectly understandable, for, as Fraenkel (1950) II 87 points out, Calchas is a dependant of this god, from whom he received the prophetic gift. See *Il.* 1. 72.

⁶⁶ See LSJ entries for σπεύδω, especially 2 & 5.

⁶⁷ Peradotto (1969) 249-50.

sode. The goddess is certainly harsh and the choice she presents the mortal with is bitter, but that is what makes for tragedy. To see this we do not need to envisage Artemis as the counterpart of the Erinyes and part of an 'inimical cosmos' which sends Agamemnon to his doom.⁶⁸ Artemis is an enigmatic figure in the play, whose motivation is difficult to ascertain, and who only appears briefly to perform one, vital, function. Also, and most important, such a function then places the emphasis on human decision-making in the tragedy.

Artemis is a deity motivated by caprice and predilection like any Greek god. Like Hera, she can be destructively jealous; like Apollo, she can be cruel. But she is also a mysterious and enigmatic goddess. The Greeks knew this and their forms of devotion reflected it. But so too did Aeschylus, fully aware that the gods, though they may manifest themselves and be comprehensible to some extent, are ultimately unknowable and unfathomable. It is this which vivifies tragic action. Thus, it is misguided to search too deeply for an explanation behind Artemis' wrath, for the tragedian does not supply anything beyond a hint, and it is not necessary to suppose that he expects us to select one from tradition.

What is imperative in interpreting *Agamemnon* is to recognize that the goddess sets up the dilemma of the sacrifice. Whether she does so out of her famed concern for the young, from pique due to a past outrage on Agamemnon's part, or irrationally, it is not necessary to know. But in the interests of the play Artemis must fulfil this role, and in that sense she is a dramaturgical device. That also is how the omen is to be taken. Together they establish the situation to which Agamemnon will respond with tragic consequences. Nevertheless, given the richness of Aeschylus' lyrics and imagery, so long as we have grasped the primary meaning of the portent it is possible to read into it further levels of meaning. And while the omen may imply Troy's impending annihilation, it can stand as a powerful symbol of an earlier crime committed against Thyestes, a present crime (Iphigenia's murder), and even points to the future (παλίνωρτος): the violent death awaiting Agamemnon and Orestes' retributive killing of Clytemnestra. For this reason it can truly be said of the portent and its interpretation that, 'Past, present and future are

⁶⁸ See Whallon (1961) 83. Lebeck (1971) 22, also sees Artemis as a counterpart to the Erinyes; both have a dual aspect: Artemis from tenderness to harshness, the Erinyes vice-versa.

all shown simultaneously in their dreadful interrelation.⁶⁹ After all, in a trilogy rich in recurring imagery and filled with sinister reflections and references to past and future wrongdoing, should we not expect this?

⁶⁹ Kamerbeek (1965) 33. Cf. Goward (2005) 57, who says more generally of *Agamemnon*, 'Causal relationships are extremely complex and 'ends' turn out to be 'beginnings' or, unexpectedly, the outcome of things long past. Everything points two ways, both to the past and to the future.'

Chapter 3

ἔτλα θυτὴρ γενέσθαι θυγατρός: the Aulis Episode

From the omen of the eagles and hare, and the subsequent anger of Artemis which places Agamemnon in the bind of a dilemma to which he must respond, we move directly to the culminating event of the parodos, Agamemnon's agonized decision to sacrifice Iphigenia (205-27). The execution of this decision must be regarded as the main cause of Agamemnon's tragedy, for it is the justification given by Clytemnestra for killing her husband (1412-21). Indeed, later in the play there are obvious hints that it was for deeds of blood that the great king suffered, not least of which is the chorus' suggestion that Agamemnon is paying for προτέρων αἶμα (1338); and the most significant act of bloodshed is the ritual killing of Iphigenia.¹ This is the moral dilemma upon which Aeschylus positions Agamemnon's tragedy: 'Aeschylus has placed his character in the ultimate tragic situation, faced with a choice which must bring disaster whichever path he chooses.'² Out of this episode Euripides was to produce an entire tragedy, *Iphigenia at Aulis*; but in *Agamemnon* its brief treatment is still an occasion of great pathos and immense importance for the unfolding of the drama. However, Agamemnon's decision to comply with the omen of the eagles and hare by proceeding with the sacrifice has presented several problems for scholars.³

The first concern is the king's agonized decision over whether or not to follow through with the sacrifice. Next, there is Agamemnon's seemingly incongruous application of the term θέμις to the desire for the sacrifice, in an attempt to justify the sacrifice. This leads to the question of whether or not Agamemnon could legitimately have abandoned the expedition to Troy. Finally, this episode raises the question of the relationship between divine motivation and individual responsibility (dual causation), when Agamemnon is said to put on the yokestrap of necessity (ἀνάγκη).

¹ See Raeburn/Thomas (2011) 210, who take the line to refer chiefly to Iphigenia. However, Deniston/Page (1957) 192 argue that the phrase refers to the three principal stages in the development of the story: the children of Thyestes, Agamemnon, and Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Given the prominence afforded Iphigenia's sacrifice, I suggest Aeschylus intends for us to take the phrase as, first and foremost, a reference to her killing.

² Edwards (1977) 24. This is the sort of dilemma that moved Lesky (1966) 80 to state grandly that, 'It was Aeschylus who discovered the problem of the uncertainty inherent in every human action.'

³ As Vickers (1973) 352 says appropriately of the dilemma, 'The critic attempting to evaluate it fairly is likely to end up as internally riven as Agamemnon himself.'

The problems inherent in the Aulis episode have exercised the minds of many critics, and it is instructive to review the scholarship surrounding them, not only in order to determine our own reading of this part of the parodos, but also to recognize its implications for the entire understanding of the play and trilogy. Of the multiple interpretations which have been proffered, most contribute something to a richer perspective on what is Aeschylus' purpose by including the Aulis episode. Yet all too often the scholarship has become waylaid by a fixation with philological intricacies and as a result has failed to grasp the dramaturgical importance of this section of the parodos. Thirty years ago Gantz stated that, 'In recent years Aeschylean scholarship has been much preoccupied with the freedom of a number of his characters to choose for themselves the course of action which brings disaster upon them.'⁴ It is fair to say that the interconnection between divine motivation and individual responsibility in *Agamemnon* is still much debated, especially in its most prominent instance, the Aulis episode. That will be the focus of this chapter. I will argue that Aeschylus intends for his audience to understand that the sacrifice is very much Agamemnon's own, considered, decision, and that he bears full responsibility for it.

1. The Dilemma

In a seminal article, Zeitlin traces the motif of sacrifice in the *Oresteia*. One of her observations is that all murders in *Agamemnon* are depicted as ritual slaughter.⁵ The first murder we encounter is in fact a sacrifice, that of Iphigenia, in order to ensure the prosecution of the Trojan expedition. As Zeitlin points out, Iphigenia herself becomes the προτέλεια ναῶν (227). Iphigenia is one more, the first, of the Greeks to be slain as a preliminary offering for the perverse union of Helen and Paris. But more than this, the foreboding surrounding the sacrifice offered by the father indicates that the chorus expects and fears disastrous consequences for Agamemnon. The sacrifice of Iphigenia serves also as the προτέλεια to Agamemnon's own downfall, for Clytemnestra states that she killed Agamemnon in revenge for Iphigenia's death (1412-21, 1524-9 - where she mentions Iphigenia by

⁴ Gantz (1982) 1.

⁵ Zeitlin (1965) 464.

name - and 1555-9). But it is only towards the end of the play that we become aware of the full ramifications of Agamemnon's decision at Aulis.

Agamemnon's initial response to the Calchas' interpretation of the omen of the eagles and hare, as given by the chorus, is telling. He sheds tears and beats his staff on the ground (204). The first words he utters are

βαρεῖα μὲν κῆρ τὸ μὴ πιθέσθαι,
βαρεῖα δ' εἰ τέκνον δαΐξω, δόμων ἄγαλμα,
μιαίνων παρθενοσφάγοισιν
ρεΐθροις πατρώους χέρας πέλας βω-
μοῦ·
(206-11)

The antithetical βαρεῖα μὲν... βαρεῖα δ'... phrase the dilemma as Agamemnon himself sees it.⁶ It is a grievous thing not to obey, but grievous also to sacrifice the girl. Agamemnon is emphatic; disobedience means κῆρ ('fate' or 'death').⁷ Disobedience is a grievous thing, but it is not specified *whom* Agamemnon risks disobeying. The best way to understand it is as referring to both Calchas and Artemis, with the awareness that ultimately the command to sacrifice stems from Zeus.⁸ Offended, Artemis demands the sacrifice as propitiation before the fleet may continue on to Troy, or so runs Calchas' interpretation of the omen. However, the chorus states that the expedition was formed according to the will of Zeus (60-2). Thus, Agamemnon is faced with the gravity of the failure to carry out the sacrifice. The Greek host will eventually fall apart if it cannot depart from Aulis; Agamemnon will fail as Zeus' instrument of retributive justice; finally, Agamemnon's prestige will suffer a devastating blow if he, the Zeus-appointed king, fails to raze Troy.

In presenting the second option, to proceed with the sacrifice, the unnaturalness and perversity of the proposed sacrifice are brought to the fore, since there appears to be little to mitigate the crime.⁹ And by expanding on the act of sacrifice (207-10), the chorus is expressing how wrong it thinks this option is. But this is not to say that Agamemnon is unaware of the horror of his choice (a point to keep in

⁶ Noted by Raeburn/Thomas (2011) 90-1.

⁷ κῆρ is explained by Rose (1958) 20 as '...a power always more or less malignant, generally death-bringing'. This is the only occurrence of the word in the entire trilogy.

⁸ As does Edwards (1977) 24.

⁹ Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1983) 82: '...so vivid and so revolting is the description, so discordant the clash between words of sacrifice and words of family relationship. It is revolting to us; to Greeks, accustomed to the sight of a sacrificial victim, held above the altar, of the blood streaming down when its throat was cut, it must have been more revolting still.' Cf. Fraenkel (1950) II 122: 'Nowhere does the speaker attempt to make the crime appear in a milder light.'

mind when determining his level of personal responsibility), as is evident when he asks rhetorically, ...τί τῶνδ' ἄνευ κακῶν; (211). Fraenkel rightly labels the question 'A fundamental motif of the trilogy.'¹⁰ He then cites Electra's rhetorical question in *Choephoroe*. Confronted with a similar moral dilemma (Agamemnon's children and the chorus are contemplating revenge on Clytemenestra), Electra asks, τί τῶνδ' εὔ, τί δ' ἄτερ κακῶν; (*Cho.* 339). As is so often the case in the *Oresteia*, the problem is couched in terms of a conflict between two competing and (*prima facie*, at least) credible positions; a state of affairs neatly summarized by Orestes: Ἄρης Ἄρε ξυμβαλεῖ, Δίκᾱ Δίκᾱ (*Cho.* 461). The question is which does Agamemnon think is the most grievous path? That Agamemnon gives first thought to disobedience (τό μὴ πιθέσθαι: substantive use of the infinitive), and then refers to the sacrifice in the indicative (δαίξω), demonstrates that he believes that the sacrifice is the course he must adopt.¹¹

Another clue suggesting that Agamemnon will decide to proceed with the sacrifice is given a little earlier in the chorus' lyrics. There is a touch of irony, commented upon by Fraenkel, but without receiving much attention anywhere else, when, almost as an aside, Agamemnon is said not to blame Calchas: μάντιν οὔτινα ψέγων (186). The irony lies in the fact that this is not how the Homeric Agamemnon reacts towards his seer. At the start of the *Iliad* he accuses Calchas of always prophesying evil to him. Could the Homeric comment be a veiled reference to one evil in particular, the seer's *suggestion* to sacrifice Iphigenia? Alternatively, and more effectively, we could see this as a loaded and ironic reminiscence of the opening of the *Iliad* designed to establish the character of the Aeschylean Agamemnon.¹² Aeschylus' hero will not, unlike the Agamemnon of Homer, chal-

¹⁰ Fraenkel (1950) II 122.

¹¹ Cf. Nussbaum (1986) 35: Agamemnon's phrasing of the choices 'shows us his sense that the *better* choice in the situation is the sacrifice'. The phrasing is imitated in Eur. *IA* 1257-8, where Agamemnon adds that he must do the deed: δεινῶς δ' ἔχει μοι τοῦτο τολμησαι, γύναι, | δεινῶς δὲ καὶ μή· ταῦτά γὰρ πράξαι μέ δεῖ. Note that in Euripides' play Agamemnon reverses the order of the options available to him.

¹² Sommerstein (2010) 137 suggests the irony. Cf. Goldhill (1990) 125. The lines are *Il.* 1. 106-8: μάντι κακῶν, οὐ πῶ ποτέ το κρήγυον εἶπας· | αἰεὶ τοι τὰ κάκ' ἐστὶ φίλα φρεσὶ μαντεύεσθαι, | ἔσθλόν δ' οὔτε τι πῶ εἶπας ἔπος οὔτε τέλεσας. Fraenkel (1950) II 115: at *Ag.* 186, 'Agamemnon does not behave as others in corresponding circumstances usually behave towards the seer concerned.' See also West (1979) 5, where he proposes that Agamemnon greeted the prophet with the same response in the *Cypria* as he does in *Agamemnon*. See Goldhill (1990) 109 for the possible relationship between the Homeric and Aeschylean Agamemnon: 'When Agamemnon's name is mentioned in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, it comes always with a collection of associations in particular from Homer, but also from other poetic traditions.' See also Winnington-Ingram (1983) 94-5, who

lenge the authority of the seer. Instead, he acquiesces resignedly, as though at this point he knows, or has decided, that to obey the portent is his only viable option.¹³

The carpet scene provides more than a hint that this image of a slightly weak, and certainly more restrained, hero is how Aeschylus wants to present his Agamemnon. In response to Clytemnestra's exhortation to tread the fine cloths, he replies affirmatively, εἴπερ τις εἰδώς γ' εὖ τόδ' ἐξεῖπεν τέλος (934). Yes, he would, if someone like Calchas should deem that action appropriate.¹⁴ At Aulis, Calchas is at hand to propose the μῆχαρ necessary for the continuation of the expedition. It is due to the king's weakness of character, as much as anything, which leads him to adopt the remedy. Aeschylus' Agamemnon lacks moral fibre and the courage of his convictions, and is not cast in as much detail as he is in Homer. That does not, therefore, make him merely a type-character, '...the non-character for achieving important dramatic effects.'¹⁵ On the contrary, the Aeschylean Agamemnon is made in the image of the Homeric figure; he is proud, conscious of his own κλέος, and intransigent; yet Aeschylus' slightly ironic handling of Agamemnon in the Aulis episode casts him as a more tragic figure.

Certainly, Agamemnon realizes that either choice entails evils of different sorts. It is a little harsh to maintain that Agamemnon has a 'blinker focus' on only the κακά of disobedience.¹⁶ The ramifications of either choice are far from appealing to him, and he is in an agony of doubt over his decision. This is not to say that Agamemnon has not at this point made up his mind, since it appears that he has every intention of sacrificing Iphigenia for the precise reason that the looming κῆρ of the alternative path is too much for the great king to bear (the simple verbal phrase suggests that it will bring evil to more people than the killing of a single girl will). The elaborate detail of 207-11 can then be explained as Agamemnon's (and the chorus') recognition that to kill an innocent girl is undeniably cruel, horrific, and

suggests the possibility that Aeschylus is harnessing the poetic tradition of Agamemnon's reply to Calchas (in the *Iliad* and the *Cypria*) to imbue his Agamemnon with irony.

¹³ See the comments of Parker (1986) 260 on the relationship between seers and kings in high literature. The seer speaks the mind of Zeus, but cannot enforce his view, and thence issues tragic potential of their relationship: 'The seer knows, but the ruler decides.'

¹⁴ Relatively few interpreters have pointed out the insight into Agamemnon's character afforded by this line when considered together with his behaviour at Aulis towards the seer. But see Easterling (1973) 13, 18, Winnington-Ingram (1983) 95, and Sommerstein (2008b) 108 n 196.

¹⁵ Rosenmeyer (1982) 223, where he says also of Agamemnon that, 'It is that he is merely a type, an almost impersonal entity, inspired by the legend and its elaboration in various epics...'

¹⁶ As Willink (2004) 51 maintains.

a great evil; but it may be the preferable path. Thus the moral dilemma is established.

2. Agamemnon's apology

Once Agamemnon has resolved to perform the sacrifice he must find grounds to justify it, whether that decision has been made freely or imposed upon him. Again, just as the Homeric Agamemnon makes the notorious apology for his quarrel with Achilles (*Il.* 19.78-113), so here he makes an attempt at self justification. After the dramatic display of grief and distress at the horrible prospect of sacrificing his daughter, Agamemnon says something curious. He justifies his decision to proceed with the sacrifice on the grounds that it is *θέμις*. This is astonishing, because, taken at face value, it seems impossible. Our problem here is that it is unclear for *whom* Agamemnon is saying it is *θέμις* 'to desire passionately the blood of a maiden'.¹⁷ Is it a generalizing statement, or an effort at self-justification; is Agamemnon suggesting divine sanction for the deed, or is he ascribing the desire to the Greek expeditionary force? There is no general consensus as to whom the word actually refers, and a quick glance at any selection of translations make apparent the options facilitated by the ambiguity of the line. In this section of the chapter I will examine the uses of *θέμις* in the trilogy, before moving on to detail and assess the various solutions proffered by scholars. It is a critical question, coming at a decisive moment in *Agamemnon*. Agamemnon is represented as making an apology for the sacrifice on the basis of such an ethically loaded term. It appears that Aeschylus meant this appeal to *θέμις* to be particularly striking, since it highlights both the frailty and the confusion of the defence which the hero mounts for himself, and so makes his guilt the more patent.

The first thing to establish is what *θέμις* means and how Aeschylus employs it in the *Oresteia*. Fundamentally, *θέμις* means what is right, proper, acceptable, and lawful – both morally and socially. It is 'a word loaded with authority and traditional right'.¹⁸ Themis, according to Hesiod, is a wife (in other versions, daughter) of Zeus and mother of the Horae (of whom *Δίκη* is one). Further, '...Themis stands

¹⁷ Ag. 215-17: παρθενίου θ' αἵματος ὄρ-
γαῖα περιόργω σφ' ἐπιθυ-
μείν θέμις.

¹⁸ Conacher (1987) 60.

for everything that is and has always been right, proper, and common practice (ἡ θέμις ἐστίν).¹⁹ At *Eum.* 2, Themis is listed by the Pythia as the second prophetess at Delphi, which is the only reference to the goddess in the trilogy. In *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus mentions how his mother is known by the twin names Themis and Gaia (Earth) (*PV* 209-10). Such a maternity and oracular succession lends justification and authority. For the Pythia to say that the oracular responses have come from Themis and Earth (from whose recesses the Greeks believed that oracular responses originated) is to guarantee their validity.²⁰

In general, to call something θέμις is to say that it is right or proper to do or to say.²¹ The chorus in *Agamemnon* requests of Clytemnestra that it be told as much as is possible and proper (θέμις) regarding the sudden appearance of the beacon lights (98). This is how θέμις is often used in Homer; for instance, Diomedes states that it is θέμις ('accepted practice') for him to take issue with Agamemnon in the assembly of the Greeks over whether or not they should abandon the Trojan expedition (*Il.* 9.33).²² Its final occurrence in *Agamemnon* is illuminating. At *Ag.* 1431 Clytemnestra sets about defending herself before the chorus, with regard to the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra, by telling them to listen to the 'righteousness (θέμις) of her oaths',²³ sworn by Δίκη, Iphigenia, Ἄτη, and Erinys. Like her husband at Aulis, the murderess appeals to divine and moral sanction for her deed. We can see the close relationship between the great concept of the trilogy, δίκη, and θέμις elsewhere, such as when the female chorus of *Choephoroe* sings how the sword of vengeance pierces one because Δίκη is 'wrongfully (τὸ μὴ θέμις) trampled on the ground underfoot' (*Cho.* 639-45).²⁴ This is what happens when someone slights completely (τὸ πᾶν) the reverence (σέβας) for Zeus in a way that is not right (οὐ θεμιστῶς). Again, this connection between δίκη and θέμις is reiter-

¹⁹ See Hes. *Theog.* 901-2 and Solmsen (1949) 35.

²⁰ See West (1985) for a brief but informative discussion of these points.

²¹ It corresponds to the Latin *fas est*. See LSJ under θέμις (1); also Fraenkel (1950) II 126-7.

²² Similarly at *Il.* 2.73, Agamemnon states that it is θέμις first to test the men with words over whether or not to return home in the ships.

²³ So Sommerstein (2008b), 175, translates it. On this line see also Zeitlin (1965) 476: 'It is precisely the 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.'

²⁴ τὸδ' ἄγχι πλευμόνων ξίφος
διανταίαν ὄξυπευκὲς οὐτᾶ
διὰ Δίκας – τὸ μὴ θέμις –
λὰξ πέδον πατουμένας,
τὸ πᾶν Διὸς σέβας παρεκ-
βάντος οὐ θεμιστῶς.

ated in Athena's speech, after she comes upon the Erinyes surrounding Orestes: 'To speak evilly of your neighbour when there is no fault to find is far from what is right (δικαίων) and θέμις keeps far from it.' (*Eum.* 414) What is θέμις is intimately bound to justice, and justice in the *Oresteia* is the preserve of Zeus.

Furthermore, the principal characters in the trilogy – Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Orestes – believe their actions to be just and proper, and they are concerned with securing divine approbation for their several causes. Clytemnestra believes wholeheartedly that she has the gods, Δίκη, and every justification supporting her actions. However, there is an important difference between Athena's words in *Eumenides* and those of Agamemnon at Aulis.²⁵ Athena, the representative of her father Zeus in the final play, is concerned with justice and righteousness; she acknowledges that the trial of a man for murder is a weighty matter, so much so that οὐδὲ μὴν ἐμοὶ θέμις to determine it. The function or right to pass judgment has not been given to the goddess. It is not right for her to pass judgment, therefore she refrains (*Eum.* 471).²⁶ But Agamemnon does not refrain from the dreadful sacrifice, but attempts to justify it as θέμις. Both goddess and king are confronted with life and death decisions, and both appeal to what is right and proper. One calms the Furies and maintains Zeus' concern for justice, while the other unleashes suffering and revenge. At Athens Athena puts a stop to the retributive killings which Agamemnon had initiated at Aulis. *Eumenides* culminates in the harmonizing of what is pleasing to Zeus, that which is θέμις. But the events described in the parodos of *Agamemnon* reflect a disharmony in the order of the universe. So the question of how, or why, or to whom Iphigenia's sacrifice could possibly be θέμις is to which I turn now.

Ag. 214-17 presents great textual and critical difficulties. Sommerstein's text reads,

παυσανέμου γὰρ θυσίας
παρθενίου θ' αἵματος ὀρ-
γᾶ περιόργω σφ' ἐπιθυ-
μῆν θέμις.

²⁵ *Eum.* 470-72: τὸ πρᾶγμα μείζον, εἴ τις οἶεται τόδε
βροτὸς διαιρεῖν· οὐδὲ μὴν ἐμοὶ θέμις
φόνου δικάζειν ὄξυμηνίτους δίκας,

²⁶ See Sommerstein (1989) 166 for an insightful discussion into Athena's decision. He observes that Athena is saying that it is wrong for her to judge this case in particular, not for her to judge homicide cases in general.

This has previously found the acceptance of Sidgwick, Rose, Page, and Verrall. Fraenkel favours ὀργᾶ περιόργως ('in passion most passionately'), as do Paley and Headlam, as well as Murray in his OCT.²⁷ The action is clear; both the cessation of the winds and the virgin's blood are described as being passionately desired. What is not so clear is *whose* desire this is. Most scholars – for example Verrall, Sidgwick, Denniston/Page, West, and Willink – understand the Greek allies to be cherishing such a desire, and translations such as Vellacott's and Sommerstein's imply the ξυμμαχία, yet remain ambiguous.

If, as in the editions of Smyth and Fraenkel, σφε is omitted from the text, it becomes a generalized statement ('right for one...'). In this instance θέμις is an impersonal statement, equivalent to *fas est*: 'It is right and lawful that one desire...' The absence of a definite subject may be intentional, for then it can refer to both Agamemnon and his fellow Greeks. It reinforces that the sacrifice is necessary and divinely ordained. That this is Artemis' desire (as the Triclinian gloss suggests) is dismissed out of hand by Fraenkel.²⁸ As an impersonal statement the phrase has a gnomic ring, which, while its form would not be out of place in Aeschylus, its sentiment does appear so at first sight. Fraenkel is alert to this and sees the use of strong words like ἐπιθυμῆν (which occurs only here in Aeschylus' extant works) as aptly suited to the situation, because they highlight the 'unnatural character' of the sacrifice.²⁹ The fact that Agamemnon chooses to use this phrasing rather than 'a term from the sphere of merely human obligations and merely human laws' stresses that the king is stretching the legitimacy of the desire, and that there is a clear contradiction. It would seem unquestionable, therefore, that, 'He knows that the task he has in hand may be necessary, but cannot possibly be θέμις.'³⁰

But this is not the only instance in *Agamemnon* where a statement over the propriety of a certain action is seemingly contradictory. As was previously mentioned, the herald states that when someone brings news of destruction and the cruelty of

²⁷ Following the main MS tradition, Fraenkel (1950) II 124 likes the 'excellence of the expression'.

²⁸ Fraenkel (1950) II 126.

²⁹ Fraenkel (1950) II 126: 'That a virgin's blood should become the object of anyone's ἐπιθυμία is most unnatural; the phrase is therefore very appropriate in this context, in which the unnatural character of the sacrifice is emphasized again and again.'

³⁰ Fraenkel (1950) II 99. Hammond (1972) 97 goes further: 'These words are almost blasphemous. They show that passion for war and fear of public opinion are turning Agamemnon into a hypocrite.' Cf. Peradotto (1969) 254: 'For Agamemnon to call the sacrificial murder θέμις...does not make it so, and must be considered at best hyperbole, at worst rationalization.'

wars, then ‘it is fitting (πρέπει, 645) to sing a paean to the Erinyes.’ Fraenkel labels this a ‘blasphemous paradox’, since a paean is properly a song of joy.³¹ θέμις, Fraenkel implies, is a more lofty term, one which suggests divine approbation. If it is blasphemy, impiety, or even simply poor taste for the herald to claim such a thing, then how much more so for Agamemnon to claim that his murderous sacrifice is proper in the eyes of anyone? Aeschylus implies that the sacrifice at Aulis is ‘the fountain-head of Agamemnon’s fate’, which is why he does not dwell on the cause of Artemis’ wrath, but moves on to the means of placating that wrath, and thus Agamemnon’s dilemma. That he can do so (and how) are due to the nature of the parodos. Being ‘a retrospective song’, Aeschylus is afforded the freedom ‘to select and emphasize a few significant points, and moreover by the cryptic character appropriate to the words of a seer.’³² He had to select apposite words for dramatic effect as well, words which sound odd and impious, to reinforce not only how reprehensible the sacrifice is but also how strained a justification Agamemnon offers.³³ And this use of θέμις is striking.

Striking, moreover, if we regard θέμις as applied to the gods’ desire. In his translation, Lloyd-Jones renders it, ‘is right in the eyes of heaven’ to desire such a sacrifice.³⁴ Winnington-Ingram makes an admirable case for Artemis as the unexpressed subject of these lines. He agrees with Fraenkel that ἐπιθυμῆν is a strong word, which should be preserved with ὀργᾶ περιόργως in order to create ‘an expression of fantastic strength’.³⁵ As to the meaning of ὀργή in this context, it must be something between the weaker ‘temperament / mood’ and strong ‘anger’. At any rate, if we wish to take it as ‘anger’, we must concede that ‘this was not the emotion felt by Agamemnon or by the allies in connection with the sacrifice.’ Further, how passionately could Agamemnon have desired Iphigenia’s blood immediately after what he has said at 207-11, and after weeping? Besides, with regard to the allies, such language strikes as ‘grossly inflated’. Winnington-Ingram’s conclusion is to take ὀργή as ‘anger’ and to apply it to Artemis, the one figure who we know for certain is angry. Given that Artemis required sacrifices from hunters, the

³¹ Fraenkel (1950) II 320.

³² Fraenkel (1950) II 99.

³³ Cf. Willink (2004), 53: ‘It is indeed odd to say “it is θέμις to desire...”. But Agamemnon’s language is *intended* to sound not merely odd, but “impious”’.

³⁴ Lloyd-Jones (1979) translation of 214-17 as a whole: ‘for a sacrifice to still the winds and for a maiden’s blood/ with passion exceeding passion/ is right in the eyes of heaven. May all be for the best!’

³⁵ Winnington-Ingram (1983) 85 n 16.

eagle omen and the need for sacrifice match this side of her nature. In sum, though such a reading of *Ag.* 217 does not excuse Agamemnon, it does emphasize that the compulsion, will, and desire of the gods are major factors in the tragic scenario. This is sound. After all, Agamemnon's first words express a deep concern not to disobey the divine command which Calchas has prognosticated from the omen of the eagles and hare. *θέμις* is still problematic; however, surely there is a stronger case for terming a goddess' motive for anger 'right / proper' than there is a mortal's.

Despite the strong arguments for the legitimacy of a divine desire for the sacrifice, we should consider whether, in fact, Agamemnon is appealing to a human desire. Seaford outlines the differences in the nature of sacrifice. He finds that tragic killing within the family is always described as a perverted sacrifice.³⁶ There is no escaping the brutality and perversity of Iphigenia's sacrifice, so he takes *θέμις* to refer to Agamemnon's *own* desire.³⁷ Thus, 'It seems that the sacrifice is here envisaged as desirable in itself, not as a means to an end.' Like Fraenkel, he regards the omission of any prior offence on Agamemnon's part as preliminary to focusing attention on Aulis. Building on Lloyd-Jones' views on Artemis and Iphigenia, Seaford draws attention to the 'familiar Greek idea' of sacrificing a maiden as a preliminary to war, to arouse necessary aggression, which is created and sustained by killing an insider of the group.³⁸ He believes that Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia willingly, and that Aeschylus, unlike Euripides, does not elicit the pathos of the scene.

On this basis, Agamemnon means precisely what he says: he has a right (*θέμις*) to desire strongly (*ὀργᾶ περιόργω*) the sacrifice. It is, Seaford holds, Agamemnon's personal desire, and not that of the Greek army.³⁹ Athena can demur on trying a homicide case herself because it would be wrong and unnatural for her to do so; yet Agamemnon makes no attempt to plead similarly on his own behalf. Per-

³⁶ Seaford (1989) 87-88.

³⁷ So did Wilamowitz, as noted by Fraenkel (1950) II 126, who gives his translation: 'und zu dem Blute der Jungfrau...treibt es mich unwiderstehlich'.

³⁸ Seaford (1989) 91-3, where he remarks on Greek sacrifice: the 'ordered violence of sacrifice' functions when the victim is both an insider (a *domesticated* animal) and an outsider (an animal, *not* a human). But the natural order is perverted in this case; lines are blurred, and a man who will become the hunter of his own species may also become the sacrificer of his own child.

³⁹ Seaford (1989) 92. 'It seems that the sacrifice is here envisaged as desirable in itself, not as a means to an end.' In this he is preceded by Gantz (1982) 13: 'I suggest that what Aischylos shows us in this play is what he shows us in the *Persai*, a man who chooses freely a disastrous deed because he desires its consequences.'

haps this is to be explained by Agamemnon's characteristic stubborn determination and sheer bloody-mindedness, familiar both to the original Athenian audience and to us from Homer.⁴⁰ Agamemnon's words have also been interpreted as those of a man who is trying to convince himself that it is natural for him to have a desire for the sacrifice.⁴¹ This is quite plausible, but Agamemnon's final wish, εὐ γὰρ εἶη (217), should be regarded as the remark of a man who is steeling himself for the deed before him, rather than as 'a peculiar optimism'.⁴² It is the expression of a man uncertain of the future and aware of the gravity of his situation. He will act and then await the consequences.

What is apparent in Seaford, as in Fraenkel and Lloyd-Jones, is that to whomsoever we assign the 'right' of desiring the sacrifice, it is a perverted sacrifice. It cannot be justified as θέμις, at least not as we understand that concept. Yet, if we constantly bear in mind that logicity and a sequential narrative are not required in Greek choral lyric, we will find it easier to see that this question is largely one of the drama, not of ethics. As such, a good deal of Seaford's argument is persuasive. But I do think he does Aeschylus a disservice by not allowing for the pathos of Agamemnon's decision. Ultimately, that is perhaps more understandable when one takes the view that this is squarely Agamemnon's ἐπιθυμία at work. These lines are deeply tragic, and the tragedy of the dilemma is intensified by the fact that Agamemnon has a choice. By maintaining that Agamemnon's doubts are removed prior to the sacrifice by virtue of a psychological change (discussed in more detail below), Seaford appears to be suggesting that the king's freedom to make a choice is curtailed or, worse, eliminated.

At this juncture, we should look more closely at the text of verses 215-17, specifically the phrase ὀργᾶ περιόργω σφ' ἐπιθυμῆιν ('that they should desire with intense passion'), upon which the true understanding of θέμις is predicated. Winnington-Ingram belongs to the tradition of scholars who favour this reading over

⁴⁰ Sommerstein (2010) 261 points out that, being a win-at-all-costs man, Agamemnon makes just the sort of choice we should expect.

⁴¹ Nussbaum (1986) 35-36, where she states: 'if it is right to obey the god, it is right to *want* to obey him, to have an appetite (*epithumein*) for the crime, even to yearn for it with exceedingly impassioned passion.'

⁴² Nussbaum (1986) 34. Fraenkel (1950) II 126 explains Agamemnon's final words sufficiently: it 'may sound hopeful, but there is no real hope in it.' Quoting Hermann, he rightly equates it with *sic fiat*, this is Agamemnon's 'thy will be done' moment.

the MS ὀργᾶ περιόργως, which he believes is not ‘tolerable Aeschylean Greek’.⁴³ The emendation leads to the ‘tenably correct’ view that the pronoun refers to the allies, ‘...in which case Agamemnon is showing himself under social pressure’.⁴⁴ A forceful argument against such emendation, one which places the ἐπιθυμία within Agamemnon, is advanced by Willink. He admits that περιόργω σφ’ ‘is indeed seductive at first sight’.⁴⁵ However, he does not think the arguments for it are entirely convincing, and instead prefers Fraenkel’s defence of the original reading.⁴⁶ Willink suspects the pronoun on the grounds that, ‘It is not easy to understand σφε as “them, the allies” from ξυμμαχίας in 213...’⁴⁷ Instead, he is inclined to agree with Fraenkel that the subject of ἐπιθυμῆν remain unexpressed. In this case Agamemnon is saying that it is for the commanders (by whom he means specifically himself and Menelaus) to desire passionately the sacrifice.

The difficulty of these lines has occasioned alternative conjectures. One such is put forth by West.⁴⁸ Even without accepting σφε in the text, he interprets the desire as the army’s (understood from 213), ruling out Agamemnon, Artemis, and (overlooked by most critics) Calchas. With regard to the seer, I agree with West that, once he has finished his pronouncement at 202, the attention turns to Agamemnon’s own tortuous choice. West holds that it is the army’s desire for deliverance from the afflictions they have just described that exerts pressure upon Agamemnon, which is understandable from what has been revealed earlier in the parodos. The ‘burning question’, as he rightly identifies, is not the legitimacy of the army’s feelings, but whether or not it is permissible for Agamemnon to follow through with the sacrifice.

West’s basis for thinking so is the consideration that, ‘The concept of θέμις is normally applied to the sphere of action, not that of thought or emotion.’ The case

⁴³ Among whom are numbered Lawson (1932), Denniston/Page (1957) and Sommerstein (2008b); Rose (1958) inclines towards it.

⁴⁴ Winnington-Ingram (1983), 85. The difficulty in interpreting these lines is such that Goldhill (1984), 29, suggests that ‘The ambiguity of the referent for σφε is unsolvable and the emendation certainly offers no solution to the difficulty of reading this passage.’

⁴⁵ Willink (2004), 53.

⁴⁶ That is, on grounds of Fraenkel (1950) II 124-5: the ‘excellence of the expression ὀργῆ περιόργως’, which is ‘a peculiar...form of intensification, effected by placing next to an adjective an adverb formed from the same stem...’ Fraenkel and Willink follow the reading favoured by Paley (1870), Verrall (1889), Headlam (1910), and Smyth (1926).

⁴⁷ Willink (2004) 53.

⁴⁸ West (1990b) 178-80. His Teubner edition (1990a) reads:

...ὀργᾶι
περιόργως· < ἀπὸ δ’ > αὐδαί
Θέμις.

for his radical conjecture is based on dislike for the sense of the received text as he understands it. To say that Themis ‘forbids’ (ἀπὸ δ’ αὐδᾶι) the sacrifice is a bold move and it gives to the passage the sense West is after (that Agamemnon is still in doubt over his decision).⁴⁹ But I agree with Willink that an argument against the sacrifice is incongruous as the climax (I should say as any part at all) of Agamemnon’s deliberation.⁵⁰ There is no doubt that Agamemnon is fully cognisant of the perversity of the sacrifice; however, if we accept with West that the desire is harboured by the Greek host, then the tension lies in ascribing the appellation of θέμις specifically to their desire. Agamemnon is concerned primarily with the success of the expedition, and it is this final consideration which decides the matter in his mind. By saying that it is right for the allies to have the desire, at once Agamemnon both gives some justification for the sacrifice and distributes the blame for it. This is more effective than saying flatly, ‘Themis forbids it’. West conjectures a verb of prohibition for the additional reason that he dismisses ἐπιθυμεῖν as a marginal gloss of ὀργᾶ περιόργως transcribed into the text.⁵¹ But such radical alterations seem unjustified on lines of both better sense and a better text. ἐπιθυμεῖν is a perfectly apposite word (*pace* Rose, who finds it ‘rather prosaic’).⁵² When it is pronounced that such desire is θέμις, the moral confusion and the impiety of Agamemnon’s thought process become manifest, which, as Fraenkel and Willink persuasively argue, is what is required at this point in the play.

On balance most scholars ascribe θέμις to the desire of the Greek allies at Aulis. Perhaps this is the interpretation that emphasizes the fullness of Agamemnon’s tragedy. Denniston/Page are adamant that it is the Greek chiefs who are demanding the sacrifice.⁵³ This position is partly supported by the fact that the ξυμμαχία has just been mentioned at 213. Thus, the mention of the alliance is more vivid in the audience’s mind than any mention of a god (Artemis was last named at 202), and it does not demand mental strain (despite Willink’s reservations) to construe from the context that it is the implied subject. It then makes sense to retain in the text the plural personal pronoun σφε and to take it as referring more naturally to the

⁴⁹ Raeburn/Thomas (2011) 91 tentatively prefer West's conjecture.

⁵⁰ Willink (2004) 52.

⁵¹ Quite remarkably so in the view of Willink (2004) 52, who presents a compelling argument against the likelihood of such a scribal error.

⁵² Rose (1958), 20.

⁵³ Denniston/Page (1957) 86-7: ‘...it is said to be not merely reasonable but actually *right and proper* that the confederate chiefs should demand the sacrifice of Iphigeneia.’

alliance.⁵⁴ However, there is something to be said for permitting the ambiguity to remain, since it could well be the case that this is precisely what Aeschylus wanted. For if Agamemnon were to state that it is $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\mu\iota\varsigma$ for the alliance to make the demand, then he would be implying that for him it is not; therefore he leaves the situation purposely ambiguous.⁵⁵

That said, one great attraction of accepting the allies as subject is that, without mitigating the impiety of the suggestion that the sacrifice is proper and right, it enforces that the dilemma is acted out, profoundly, on a human level. Conacher warns us against jumping to the conclusion that the use of the word $\theta\acute{\epsilon}\mu\iota\varsigma$ in this context automatically implies supernatural justification. As we have seen, this is not always the case elsewhere in the *Oresteia*. Moreover, it is imperative for us to remember that *Ag.* 215-17 is the reported speech of Agamemnon. This is Agamemnon's attempt at self-justification. Other instances from Greek tragedy can be cited where a royal child has to be sacrificed for the sake of a greater good, such as in Euripides' *Erechtheus* and *Phoenissae*; although it must be remembered that in these plays the sacrifices are voluntary, which is certainly not the case in *Agamemnon*.⁵⁶

And, at first glance, Agamemnon would seem to have some reasonable grounds for his decision. Certainly, Agamemnon feels the weight of social and political pressures; and, indeed, the sacrifice has been interpreted as a reaffirmation of Agamemnon's bond to the rest of the Greeks.⁵⁷ One sacrifice for the sake of an entire expedition, for the lives of the soldiers and to avert divine anger, is not an easy decision free from consequences; but it is the sort of decision that, however terrible, a general has to face. It cannot be morally or socially right for the army to have such a craving, yet it is natural in that it is expedient, and so understandable.

⁵⁴ In translations there is often a tendency not to commit to a specific subject; the translator prefers to reflect the ambiguity of the Greek. Vellacott's 1956 translation gives 'Their chafing rage demands it – they are right', where it is not clear whether he means gods or the army. He does, however, clarify the point in (1984) 60 that the Greek chiefs are meant. Sommerstein (2008a) also chooses to retain the ambiguous subject.

⁵⁵ See Reeves (1960), 169-70. He points out that, 'Agamemnon nowhere states that what it is right for his allies to ask is therefore right for him to give.'

⁵⁶ Conacher (1987) 60. Reported speech: Vellacott (1984) 59. For *Erechtheus* see Eur. fr. 360 (Collard & Cropp). At Eur. *Phoen.* 930-52, Teiresias instructs Creon to sacrifice his son, Menoecus, in order to gain Ares as an ally of Thebes.

⁵⁷ See Wohl (1998) 69-70: '...the decisions to sacrifice his daughter, then, would seem to be a reaffirmation of Agamemnon's allegiance to his allies [*summakhoi*], a reconfirmation of the homosocial bonds of aristocratic, male society, and the sacrifice itself the enabling factor for the war'. However, I think Wohl goes too far in his interpretation of the scene, seeing it as an incestuous act and an instance of gang rape.

Iphigenia becomes, according to Goldhill, the votive offering 'of the expedition, of the state, of the *ξυμμαχία*'.⁵⁸ Perhaps it is only along these lines that we can hope to make sense of the justification forwarded for the sacrifice. And it is a fitting dilemma upon which to hang the trilogy. The moral confusion of saying it is *θέμις* for the Greeks to desire the sacrifice underscores this. For this reason, emendations which, like West's, seek to remove the confusion and make better sense of what we understand to fit the concept of *θέμις* prove unsatisfactory.

There is another factor to be taken into consideration in attributing to the Greek allies the desire for the girl's sacrifice. Interpreters' willingness to ascribe the desire to the alliance may have been influenced by the attitude of Agamemnon in Eur. *IA*, who fears that the Greeks will kill him, Clytemnestra, and Iphigenia, and even their daughters left behind at Argos, if he makes void Artemis' oracle by not sacrificing the girl.⁵⁹ This has led to the supposition that the same fear is present in Aeschylus' play. Agamemnon goes ahead with the sacrifice because he knows that the assembled host will sacrifice his daughter should he fail to do so.⁶⁰ However, the difficulty is that nowhere in the text of *Agamemnon* is this fear articulated. And this argument runs into the hurdle that Iphigenia is not yet present at Aulis and must be summoned by Agamemnon (as in the tradition followed by Euripides).⁶¹ Agamemnon summons her only after he has made the decision to obey the portent.

To conclude, then, it would seem most likely that we are to understand that the *ξυμμαχία* harbours the desire for Iphigenia's sacrifice, although I admit it is far from certain. It is imperative to stress once more that it is Agamemnon who is saying that the *desire* for Iphigenia's sacrifice is what is right and natural, not the sacrifice itself. He attempts to apportion blame, to share the burden of the decision, and to represent his hand as forced by the pressure imposed by the rest of the Greeks. Perhaps, in the end, we do not need to explain the morality and legitimacy of Agamemnon's apology in order to understand why it is included. For one thing, the harsh reality of a situation, rather than any justification for it, is what

⁵⁸ Goldhill (1984), 29. Iphigenia is the *δόμων ἄγαλμα*. Goldhill explains that *ἄγαλμα* 'is a word used particularly in the *Odyssey* of votive gifts of the gods...' This is akin to Seaford (1989)'s sacrifice of a maiden as a preliminary to warfare.

⁵⁹ See his words at Eur. *IA* 1268-9.

⁶⁰ So Denniston/Page (1957) xxiv-vi, 87, who hold it 'certain' that Agamemnon's desertion would not save Iphigenia's life, because, they imply, the chieftains would proceed with the sacrifice.

⁶¹ A point made by Sommerstein (2010) 261. Eur. *IA* is consistent with *Cypr.8*, where Iphigenia is summoned to Aulis by her father under pretence of marrying Achilles.

most interests Aeschlyus. If we believe that the decision at Aulis is key to comprehending the play, as the focal point in Agamemnon's tragedy, then, as with Artemis' anger, we need to see it principally in terms of its dramatic effectiveness. The power of this episode in *Agamemnon* lies in the tension of the situation, one in which the suggestion that the desire for a perverse sacrifice can be θέμις is designed to accentuate the sense of foreboding surrounding the decision and the sacrifice. What is prominent in the text, though, is Agamemnon's belief that to recoil from the sacrifice is to become a deserter of the expedition, and the weight of this claim is perhaps the most troubling aspect of the Aulis episode. Troubling because the reader's view of the degree of Agamemnon's guilt will be largely formed by the conclusion one reaches on whether or not the king could have abandoned the expedition. It is to this problem that I wish now to turn my attention.

3. Agamemnon's fear of desertion

Prior to his attempt to justify the desire for the sacrifice, Agamemnon poses the rhetorical question as to how he can become a deserter of the fleet and so lose his alliance: πῶς λιπόνους γένωμαι | ξυμμαχίας ἀμαρτών; (212-13). Fraenkel replies emphatically that it is impossible for Agamemnon to become a deserter because this is the moment where, by calling the first choice by its true name (failure to sacrifice equals becoming a deserter of the expedition), Agamemnon makes up his mind to slay his daughter (and so puts on the 'yokestrap of necessity' (218)). Lesky holds that as soon as Agamemnon utters πῶς λιπόνους γένωμαι (212), envisioning potential shame and disgrace, 'the scales are no longer even'; there is no longer free choice; on the contrary, he *has* to sacrifice Iphigenia.⁶² Such language risks exaggeration, but it does at least express the enormous pressure felt by the king. What I intend to do in this section is, first, to determine the meaning of λιπόνους, and, next, show how the fear of 'failing in the alliance' is Agamemnon's principal concern, which has a profound influence upon his decision.

λιπόνους is supposedly an Athenian legal term, and there is reference to the λιπόνουτιού γραφή, an indictment against one who deserted his ship or post at

⁶² See Fraenkel (1950) II 122 and Lesky (1966) 81.

sea.⁶³ Sidgwick, Lloyd-Jones, Winnington-Ingram, Conacher, Willink, and Sommerstein agree with Fraenkel in taking the adjective as active ('deserter of the fleet'). On the other hand, Paley (following Hermann), Headlam, Lawson and Rose take it as passive ('deserted by the fleet'). The former interpretation seems best. Similar words, such as λιπονάυτης ('leaving the sailors') and λιποστρατία ('deserting the army'), suggest strongly that λιπόνους connotes desertion, whether passive or active.⁶⁴

Ξυμμαχίας ἀμαρτών (213) then presents a further difficulty. Fraenkel concludes that the poet is probably taking advantage of a rare use of ἀμαρτάνειν and the genitive in an effort to bring out the moral failure of such an action. Denniston/Page develop this sense of 'failing in duty to allies' to 'losing my league', and Sommerstein accepts both interpretations as possible. He does, however, make the valid point that nowhere in the *Iliad* or *Agamemnon* is there a suggestion that Agamemnon is under any obligation to anyone except perhaps Menelaus, who is dear to him.⁶⁵ Lloyd-Jones translates it as 'losing my allies' (the regular usage of the verb) while Conacher sees in it the idea of betrayal. Winnington-Ingram maintains that it is 'most naturally' taken to mean the complete loss of the allies and the failure of the expedition.⁶⁶ Another possibility is to take the primary sense of ἀμαρτάνειν and the genitive ('missing the mark'), which is paralleled at 175: τεύξεται φρενῶν ('will hit the mark in respect of thinking').⁶⁷ Willink also explains ξυμμαχία as both the relationship between Agamemnon and the Greeks as a whole, and the relationship between the 'coequal and like-minded royal brothers' Agamemnon and Menelaus. There is a case to be made for understanding ξυμμαχία as a reference to the bond between the royal brothers, especially since they are closely associated on a few occasions in the play, first as the πρῶδικοι of the parodos. But this subtlety is not necessary here; instead, we should see Agamemnon's concern for losing the entire alliance.

⁶³ Poll. 8.42 (however, Pollux is writing in the second century AD). See Raeburn/Thomas (2011) 91 and the LSJ entry for λιπονουτίου.

⁶⁴ The LSJ attributes to λιπόνους both a passive and an active sense. λιπονάυτης occurs at Theoc. 13.73; λιποστρατία at Herod. 5.27 and Thuc. 6.76. Lawson (1932) 116 cites the example of λιπόθριξ, 'bald'.

⁶⁵ Fraenkel (1950) II 123; Denniston/Page (1957) 87; Sommerstein (2008b) 25n47 and (2010) 261; *Il.* 4.169-70.

⁶⁶ Winnington-Ingram (1983) 83-4.

⁶⁷ Willink (2004) 52.

But well may we ask how just a claim this is. Critics are clearly divided on this point. Denniston/Page contend that it is ‘unthinkable’ for the king to desert, to become a λιπόνους, ‘a common criminal’, and risk incurring the wrath of Zeus, whose vice-gerent on earth Agamemnon is. Moreover, (as noted above) they argue that even if Agamemnon refrained from sacrificing, the Greek allies would have slain Iphigenia anyway.⁶⁸ The second part of this view is unwarranted, since nowhere in the text are we led to consider this a possibility. Nor should we be misled by Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis*, where the two Atreidae are afraid to abandon the expedition because they fear for their own lives.⁶⁹ And surely the dilemma is simplified (and the drama compromised) if we suppose that Iphigenia’s sacrifice was inevitable. Granted the result would be the same whether Agamemnon or the Greek host slay Iphigenia. Nevertheless, as Conacher correctly observes, it makes all the difference to the king’s personal guilt and pollution, if he is the one to perform the sacrifice or not.⁷⁰ Therefore, we should not disregard the allies as a motivating factor behind Agamemnon’s choice. As commander and king he is afraid of the consequences for the expedition and himself, should he fail to act upon the omen, but there is nothing in the play to support the assumption that the allies would carry out the sacrifice should Agamemnon recoil from it.

Sommerstein holds that, ‘Agamemnon puts the alternative in the worst possible light.’ He argues that a commander could disband an expedition with all propriety, ‘...when its aims clearly cannot be fulfilled except at ruinous material or moral cost.’ Further, he argues that, ‘The Argives think of it as an Argive expedition undertaken on the joint initiative of the kings of Argos; they have invited others to share in the risks and rewards and can, if they choose, withdraw the invitation.’⁷¹ Thus, Sommerstein sees Agamemnon as well within his rights to abandon the expedition if its only chance of success is the price of his daughter. This accords with the view that military service was not compulsory for the heroic chieftain, who

⁶⁸ Denniston/Page (1957) xxiv-vi. Lesky (1966) 81 agrees that it would be ‘unthinkable’ for Agamemnon to stop the campaign, to become, as Agamemnon says of himself, a λιπόνους Cf. Paley (1870) 348, who maintains that the allies would have left Agamemnon if their ‘religious fanaticism’ had not been indulged.

⁶⁹ See Winnington-Ingram (1983) 84 for a counter argument to Denniston/Page (1957) and a warning not to be led astray in interpretation by Eur. *IA*. While he agrees that the interpretation of the passage would (wrongly) be simplified by dismissing the allies as a motivating factor, he is right to pull up Denniston/Page (1957) for insisting that the allies would have proceeded with the sacrifice.

⁷⁰ Conacher (1987) 87. In this he develops the argument put forward by Peradotto (1969) 254.

⁷¹ See Sommerstein (2008b) 24 n 46 and (2010) 260.

acted ‘as his θυμός bade him’.⁷² Certainly, Agamemnon is distressed by the prospect of the dissolution of his expedition. Whether he believes he will be the deserter or the deserted, he realizes that the expedition’s failure will be the inevitable consequence of his decision not to sacrifice. For a Greek like Agamemnon, the ἀνάξ ἀνδρῶν, to abandon a military expedition would surely entail disgrace and damage to his prestige and pride (and, *pace* Sommerstein, it is not ‘logically impossible’ to desert an expedition one has initiated oneself, especially if one is bound to that expedition by oaths).⁷³ It is all the more disgraceful and unpalatable if Agamemnon believes that the expedition has been commissioned by Zeus.⁷⁴

Sommerstein may maintain otherwise, but he does observe that Agamemnon *fears* the possible damage to his prestige and his ἡγεμονία.⁷⁵ That is the point; Agamemnon’s perception, rather than the actual consequences (which we cannot know), is what is important. The considerations which influence Agamemnon are purely human and all the while he believes that he is making a choice, though ignorant that he is Zeus’ agent.⁷⁶ It is quite true that, if it were an offence against Zeus to abandon the expedition, then it is ‘very remarkable’ that Agamemnon makes no appeal to this factor. And, Sommerstein adds, the chorus would certainly not have spoken disparagingly of the Trojan War (as it does in the parodos and especially the first stasimon) if it had thought that Agamemnon was making war at Zeus’ behest. Sommerstein reaches the conclusion that Agamemnon is indeed acting as Zeus’ instrument to punish Troy and its people, not because of

⁷² Griffith (1991) 174.

⁷³ As Sommerstein (2010) 261 claims. If I organize an expedition, binding myself and others to it by oaths, is it not as ethically and socially reprehensible for me to break that oath by abandoning the expedition as it is for the other members? As Raeburn/Thomas (2011) 91 comment on Agamemnon’s predicament: ‘Agamemnon cannot afford to “lose his alliance”. Alliances were sealed with sacred oaths of cooperation which he would have to break, and he could thereby expect to lose all his aristocratic prestige.’ Admittedly, *Agamemnon* contains no details as to what sort of oaths (if any) the Greek chiefs took between themselves before commencing the Trojan expedition. Taplin (1990) 68-9 points out similar uncertainty over the nature of the oaths taken in the *Iliad*. In that text, oaths of loyalty are mentioned on three occasions. Significantly, Odysseus says (*Il.* 2. 286-8) that, in wanting to return home, the Achaeans will not fulfil the promises (ὑπόσχεσθαι) they made. Nestor rebukes the Greeks at *Il.* 2. 339-41 on the grounds that to abandon the campaign would contradict their oaths (ὄρκια), solemn pledges in wine (σπονδαί ἄκρητοι), and the giving of right hands (δεξιαί). As Taplin points out, we do not know for sure whether or not these oaths were sworn in loyalty to Agamemnon. And while this is true, it is surely not misguided to assume that in Aeschylus’ play, since Agamemnon does demonstrate a sense of obligation to the expedition, he and the Greeks have sworn oaths.

⁷⁴ Nussbaum (1986) 34 is of the opinion that, since he is fighting in a just cause (that of Zeus), to desert would involve Agamemnon in gross impiety.

⁷⁵ Sommerstein (2010) 261.

⁷⁶ So argues Dodds (1973) 57.

some divine command, but because it is his own desire in the search for glory and personal gain.⁷⁷ However, the fact remains that the chorus believes that Zeus ξένιος sent the Atreidae against Paris (60-2). That war may entail πολλά παλαίσματα καὶ γυιοβαρῆ (63) and much blood, but this does not preclude the possibility that its motivation had justification (as I argued in the first chapter). The hospitality of the Atreidae was violated, and under the aegis of Zeus ξένιος the brothers seek recompense.⁷⁸ Thus it would seem that, to Agamemnon's thinking, he cannot and must not jeopardize the expedition over which he is king and supreme commander.

4. The Complex of Causation

The final problem of the Aulis episode to be considered is that of dual causation. Is Agamemnon really making a free choice or is he compelled by an external force to sacrifice Iphigenia? How we explain this problem is central to how we understand the function of the parodos as the prelude to Agamemnon's downfall. It is clear from the play that, while Agamemnon is sent by Zeus, he also initiates the Trojan expedition of his own volition, which suggests that there is double motivation at work. Some critics would explain Agamemnon's choice by appealing to his descent from Atreus.⁷⁹ But, as we have seen, the familial curse is not dwelt upon in *Agamemnon*, and any contention whereby Agamemnon's choice is seen as predetermined by the ancestral curse does less than justice to Aeschylus' skill as a dramatist. On the other hand, it will not do to dismiss out of hand the familial guilt, since it is mentioned in the play. The best way to understand it in the context of the play is perhaps to follow Nussbaum's lead. The guilt is at work, but it is manifested in the act of Zeus imposing upon Agamemnon a choice between two courses, neither of which is guilt-free.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Sommerstein (2010) 261. Cf. Gill (1990) 23, who argues that, although Agamemnon does bow to overwhelming pressure, yet his words are suggestive of someone who is carrying out a deliberate action which he owns as his.

⁷⁸ Cf. Fraenkel (1950) II 39: '[Zeus] is offended by the adultery committed beneath the husband's roof. The kind of adultery which violates at the same time the sanctity of the home and the mutual bond between host and guest has been reckoned since earliest times a particularly heinous wrong.'

⁷⁹ On which see Stinton (1975) 245.

⁸⁰ Nussbaum (1986) 34: 'There is a background guilt at work in the situation: the guilt of Atreus, which is visited by Zeus upon his offspring. But this fact does not prevent us from asking precisely *how* the familial guilt attaches itself to Agamemnon. And when we do so we must answer that Zeus has attached this guilt to him by placing him, a previously guiltless man, in a situation in which

Zeus sets the dilemma, for all must work out according to his purpose. But to what degree is Agamemnon responsible? The question of personal responsibility in Homer and Greek tragedy has been variously treated. There are two terms used by the chorus that are of particular importance for this question: ἀνάγκη and παρακοπή. The chorus tells us that, once Agamemnon ἀνάγκας ἔδου λέπιδνον (218), he then stopped at nothing. Most scholars would no longer defend the position that ἀνάγκη, which has the primary meaning of ‘force, constraint, and necessity’, means here that Agamemnon is acting under constraint and that ‘it is absolutely inconsistent with the idea that Agamemnon has any freedom of choice’.⁸¹ Such a brusque dismissal of individual responsibility is unsatisfactory, and most, if not all, scholars have since departed from a standpoint that would have the protagonist’s fate so rigidly determined. Opinions on the degree of responsibility that we attach to a character may vary; but few would disagree with the assertion that in Greek tragedy, ‘The involvement of divine hands does not relieve human ones of their responsibility.’⁸²

A second way to understand ἀνάγκη is in reference to the consequences of the choice. In making his decision, Agamemnon puts on the yokestrap of necessity, that is, once the decision has been made, the consequences follow ineluctably. To understand these lines thus is to place a premium on human responsibility. The cause of the dilemma may have been established by the gods, and the consequences of the choice are divinely ordained, yet what we witness in the parodos is still a process of human decision making.⁸³

there is open to him no guilt-free course. Such situations may be repellent to practical logic; they are also familiar from the experience of life.’

⁸¹ Denniston/Page (1957) 88; see also xxiii: ‘As Aeschylus actually tells the story, Agamemnon is *compelled, for no fault of his own*, to sacrifice his daughter.’ [Italics theirs] They add that ἀνάγκη is the last word a Greek would have used to describe a voluntary decision.

⁸² Sommerstein (2010) 263. See Dodds (1951), ‘Agamemnon’s Apology’, for the seminal discussion of the Homeric understanding of double motivation; Lesky (1966) is the significant study to elucidate the functioning of double motivation in Aeschylus, and should be read in conjunction with Lloyd-Jones (1962). Both agree in highlighting the potential for tragedy when someone has to act out of necessity, and thus incur guilt, which must be atoned for. Lloyd-Jones places slightly more emphasis on the role of hereditary guilt, and so sees Agamemnon as, in one sense, already partly guilty. Hammond (1972) dismisses the importance of the ancestral curse in Agamemnon’s fate. Peradotto (1969) represents a further advance in how we should understand dual causation, 253: ‘The gods are responsible for the necessary chain of cause and effect; man is responsible for its inception or application.’ Winnington-Ingram (1983) ch. 5 also discusses causation.

⁸³ Peradotto (1969) is the first to outline the process at work in the Aulis episode. Raeburn/Thomas (2011) xxxviii expound the meaning most clearly: ‘In 218, ἀνάγκας ἔδου λέπιδνον suggests that Agamemnon actively, after consideration, chooses to submit to the obligations imposed externally by an [sic.] network of alliances, which he perceives to be overriding: he “bows to the inevitable”.’

This explanation of ἀνάγκη is convincing. However, a third solution has been proffered. If we hold that Agamemnon is most concerned for the desire of the ξυμμαχία, then might not the phrase 'put on the yokestrap of necessity' signal that the supreme commander is bowing to the wishes of his men and so it is this which compels him to make his decision.⁸⁴ At any rate, both of these solutions attach a degree of responsibility to Agamemnon. That he is personally responsible would seem to be supported by the chorus' observation that 'he dared (ἔτλα) to become the sacrificer of his daughter' (224-5). The statement makes the crime all the more shocking, for it indicates that the father finally resigns himself to the course which in the last few lines he has hinted as preferable, and has tried to justify. 'He put up with it; he did not struggle against it.'⁸⁵ Moreover, the striking verb ἔτλα, compounded by the detailed description of the rough preparation of the girl for sacrifice (228-47), drives home the unmistakable impression that Agamemnon bears guilt for this act, and is not merely a victim of divine malice.

Nevertheless, does not the presence of παρακοπᾶ (223) in this episode mitigate somewhat Agamemnon's guilt and place responsibility back on the malice of the divine? παρακοπᾶ ('infatuation, frenzy, delirium') is often equated with ἄτη, which in Homer is sent by Zeus. παρακοπᾶ can be aptly defined as, '...an external force which shakes its victims from their senses. It makes them susceptible to shameful and rash ideas, which when acted upon lead to woe.'⁸⁶ Denniston/Page, since they argue that Agamemnon is acting entirely from divine motivation, see this altering of the king's normal state of mind as necessary in order for him to execute the deed.⁸⁷ According to this argument the derangement comes upon the victim prior to him acting, and so would seem to mitigate his personal responsibility. However, we do well to bear in mind that in the *parodos* of *Agamemnon* the 'psychological' process is being related by the chorus, which is itself in a state of con-

⁸⁴ Raeburn/Thomas (2011) 91 see the ἀνάγκη, the overriding constraint, as Agamemnon's obligation to his allies. See also xxxviii: 'In each case the word [ἀνάγκη] applies to a force beyond the control of an individual, but it is never necessary to understand it as predestination.'

⁸⁵ Nussbaum (1986) 36. Cf. Vickers (1973) 353 with regard to this line: 'Agamemnon was not passive.'

⁸⁶ Raeburn/Thomas (2011) xxxviii. Cf. Dodds (1951) 5, who calls attention to the fact that in Homer there are a number of passages where 'unwise and unaccountable behaviour is attributed to *ate*,' but *ate* in Homer is not itself a personal agent (5). 'Always, or practically always, *ate* is a state of mind – a temporary clouding or bewildering of the normal consciousness.' A temporary and partial insanity ascribed, 'not to physiological or psychological causes, but to an external "daemonic" agency.'

⁸⁷ Denniston/Page (1957) 88. Cf. Dawe (1968) 100: 'The gods consign men to destruction not with the thunderbolt, but by interfering with the correct functioning of the mind and its judgement.'

sternation regarding all that has happened.⁸⁸ Thus, these lines give the *chorus*' view that Agamemnon could not and should not have made the choice he did, had he not been under the influence of some παρακοπή.

That Agamemnon is suffering mental derangement seems certain to the chorus. It attributes his behaviour to the force of παρακοπή, for how else could a father indulge in such a perverse deed? But whether the derangement afflicts him before or after his choice is made, it does not excuse him. The παρακοπή emboldens Agamemnon and blows (πνέων) his mind to an 'impious disposition' (219-22). Willink is right to point out that the 'clearly enunciated options' mean precisely that Agamemnon does have a choice, even if the chorus sees him as afflicted by παρακοπή. Lloyd-Jones, who champions double motivation, contends that the presence of divinely sent ἄτη does not absolve a mortal of responsibility for his actions. He cites the Homeric examples of Agamemnon and Achilles, both of whom admit that Zeus has afflicted them with ἄτη (and, in Agamemnon's belief, then used deceit, ἀπάτη, to delude himself). But this does not mean that they are excused from their wrongdoing (in Agamemnon's case, his obstinacy in wanting the best gifts for himself, which leads to the alienation of Achilles; in Achilles' case, his anger).⁸⁹

We see this force of delusion at work elsewhere in Aeschylus. In *Persians*, Xerxes' hybriatic attempt to subjugate Greece is attributed to the derangement of his wits by a divine power. And he is never excused for his audacity and impiety; instead, he is upbraided by the ghost of his father Darius for the ruin he has

⁸⁸ Goldhill (1990) 124: 'The *parodos* is not simply a story of Agamemnon, but a story of a chorus's narrating of a story of Agamemnon.'

⁸⁹ *Il.* 9. 17-22; 19. 86-90, 270-6. See Lloyd Jones (1971) 14 and especially 23: 'Ate, sent by Zeus, takes away the *phrenes* of the person concerned; as a result his *thymos* is rendered uncontrollable, his heart swells with *cholos* and the knowledge of how to make a right decision which he possesses is rendered ineffective. The gods put a fierce *thymos* in his chest but at the same time he himself puts it there. Like Agamemnon, Achilles blames Zeus, but he does not deny his own responsibility.' Cf. Hammond (1972) 96-7, who says of the hold of παρακοπή that it is '...an explanation, not an exoneration, since Greeks in general did not regard pleas of "mental deficiency" or "derangement" as exonerating.' Taplin (1990) 76 and (1992) 206-7 takes a slightly different view of Agamemnon in the *Iliad*, in line with his reading of the poem that it makes manifest that the king has been in the wrong all along, both ethically and owing to the disastrous consequences of his behaviour. The element of ἄτη does not contradict personal responsibility, but Taplin sees Agamemnon's apology at *Il.* 19. 86-90, in which he tries to attribute partial responsibility to the gods, as special pleading. For, at the beginning of *Od.* 1, Zeus rejects the way mortals blame their troubles on the gods. Raeburn/Thomas (2011) 92 also understand the mention of derangement at 222-3 to be an additional level of motivation in the episode, not an exoneration. Dawe (1968) 100 argues (attractively for my own argument) that there is 'no doubt' that the Greeks regarded ἄτη and ἀπάτη as etymologically related concepts.

brought upon the Persians. It has been pointed out that it is only after Xerxes decides to undertake the expedition against Greece that ἄτη takes away his wits (*Pers.* 724-5): a similar process to that which we see in the parodos of *Agamemnon*.⁹⁰ Likewise, in their rehearsal of the Aulis episode, the chorus is not pleading insanity for Agamemnon as though that exonerated him. Agamemnon must have been deranged by some supernatural power, it appears to be saying, to dare to sacrifice his daughter. At the same time, the deed is Agamemnon's own, and this is why the chorus fears for what the future may hold, not only for its king, but for its own wellbeing and that of the state of Argos as a whole.

However, I do not think we should try to determine whether the παρακοπή / ἄτη precedes the human decision or vice versa, since in a choral lyric like the parodos the narrative of events is not presented in a strict linear progression. In order to explain double motivation in the Aulis episode, we are forced to say that both a divine cause (Zeus establishes the dilemma through Artemis) and individual responsibility (Agamemnon makes a choice) are present. Nussbaum calls Agamemnon a 'willing victim', and in the wind metaphor of *Ag.* 219 sees the expression of 'an unnatural cooperation of internal with external forces.'⁹¹ This is perhaps as good a way as any to describe what the chorus wishes to convey in the Aulis episode; it is undoubtedly a fine description of the relationship between ἀνάγκη, παρακοπή / ἄτη, and individual responsibility. Agamemnon is placed in a dilemma in which he must choose between two courses, both of which entail harm: either to sacrifice Iphigenia, and so ensure the wellbeing of his men and (a more than incidental consideration) the upkeep of his reputation and prestige; or to abandon the expedition entirely and so risk impiety, become an oath breaker, and damage his prestige.

On the basis of these considerations, the place of ἀνάγκη in the Aulis episode becomes clearer. Agamemnon must choose, but his choice is not predetermined. It is true to say that Agamemnon is forced to a degree, in that (if we accept that he believes the desire of the Greek forces to be θέμις) he feels that he must, as supreme commander, give in to the pressure of his responsibility and commitment to the Greeks. Any amount of pleading that he is pressured into his decision does

⁹⁰ Gantz (1982)11. See 8-9 for his discussion of guilt and motivation in *Persians*.

⁹¹ Nussbaum (1986) 35. Winnington-Ingram (1983) 95-6 argues that the later uses of συμπνεῖν and συμφύσαν, in Plato and Demosthenes, are applied to those who are active partners. Thus, the force of συμπνεῖν here means that 'Agamemnon is not simply blown upon, but joins in the blowing.'

not disguise the fact that Agamemnon must bear responsibility for the consequences of the decision. παρακοπὰ is at work, but as an explanation, not exoneration. Whatever Agamemnon's attempts to justify his decision, the chorus' account dwells on its king's decision-making process and the fact that he does choose to kill Iphigenia. Then it recounts in detail the beginning of the sacrifice. By so doing, the chorus shows that it cannot consider the sacrifice as right or without severe consequences for Agamemnon.⁹² On the basis of the Aulis episode above all we are aware that Agamemnon will suffer for his deed, however guilty or however much a victim of inimical forces he may be.

Amidst my discussion of παρακοπὰ, one important word I have so far overlooked is πρωτοπήμων (223), the adjective used to qualify παρακοπὰ. Agamemnon's decision is ultimately the cause of his death at Clytemnestra's hands, and this is why the Aulis episode is of central importance to the play. In this respect, Fraenkel's observation rings as true: 'From the point of view of Aeschylus it was all-important that nothing but Agamemnon's deliberate decision should appear as the primary cause of his sufferings, πρωτοπήμων.'⁹³ The Aulis episode presents an individual who makes a considered and rational choice in full awareness. The gods establish the situation, but in no way does that absolve Agamemnon of responsibility for his actions. We must remember that in Greek thinking the act itself, not the intent, is what counts.⁹⁴

From the Aulis episode we gain three important insights into the nature of Agamemnon's tragedy. First, Agamemnon believes that the sacrifice, however repellent and morally defiling, is his only viable option. Next, Agamemnon engages in special pleading, very much as he does in the *Iliad*, in an effort to exculpate himself. I have suggested how Aeschylus may have relied on the poetic tradition and his audience's preconception of the character of Agamemnon in order to represent the protagonist with irony, and not as a mere type. (My suggestion need not be the final word; there is scope for exploring this in a further study.) By attributing to the alliance the desire for the sacrifice, Agamemnon is looking to apportion blame

⁹² Cf. Parker (2009) 132. He does not regard the chorus here to be considering the Aulis episode after the manner of a modern moral philosopher, who posits that a single act can be both blame-worthy and necessary; rather: 'They simply reject Agamemnon's desperate defence of his foul deed.'

⁹³ Fraenkel (1950) II 99.

⁹⁴ So Dodds (1951) 3.

and to present himself as yielding to an intolerable external pressure. Be that as it may, the desire is also Agamemnon's, because he cannot stand to lose prestige and status. Finally, however much an agent of Zeus, Agamemnon is still a free and responsible individual who, when placed in a terrible ethical dilemma, does dare to become his daughter's killer after making a deliberate choice.⁹⁵ For otherwise Clytemnestra loses her prime motive for killing him: revenge for their daughter.⁹⁶

If, as has been my intention in this chapter, I have advanced the point of view that the burden of responsibility lies squarely with Agamemnon, I hope it will not, therefore, be assumed that I ascribe only an incidental part in the tragedy to the actions of the gods. Aeschylus never dismisses the importance, the all-pervasiveness, of the divine in human life. Indeed, the choral lyrics demonstrate that the gods, especially Zeus, are a pressing concern, and how much that happens in life can only be explained by reference to Zeus' purpose. In the next chapter I will examine the place of Zeus in *Agamemnon*, principally with regard to his contribution to the dramatic effectiveness of the tragedy. Similarly, in the narrative of the Aulis episode Aeschylus crafts the choral lyrics with primary consideration for dramaturgy. As *Agamemnon* moves along towards the fatal encounter between husband and wife, what remains rooted in the minds of audience and readers alike is neither the soundness of Agamemnon's apology for the sacrifice, nor the complex of causation at work (however significant these points are in themselves), but the terrible reality that it is the great hero himself who ἔτλα θυτῆρ γενέσθαι θυγατρός.

⁹⁵ Cf. Sommerstein (2010) 138: 'Aeschylus emphasizes overwhelmingly the father's personal role in the act, and presents it as the consequence of a decision taken by him alone...'

⁹⁶ A point made by Vickers (1973) 353.

Chapter 4

Zeus in the Balance: the Hymn to Zeus

To complete this study of how the parodos establishes Agamemnon's tragedy, I intend to analyse the so-called 'Hymn to Zeus' in the parodos of *Agamemnon* in order to determine what it tells us about the role of Zeus in the tragedy and, by extension, the *Oresteia* as a whole. In keeping with my conviction that the choral lyrics are not merely pious reflections on the part of the poet, I will propose how the hymn is related to the action of the tragedy; how, that is, it is not only of religious significance, but is also dramatically effective. No one would deny that *Agamemnon*, like the rest of the *Oresteia*, is infused with a sense of the numinous (and, in the case of *Prometheus Bound*, is peopled by a cast of divine and semi-divine characters); nor can it be denied that Zeus is the pervasive concern of Aeschylus' characters and especially his choruses.

Nonetheless, there has been no entirely satisfactory explanation of the role of the divine in *Agamemnon*, a play that presents a tragic scenario which results from the responses of human characters to problems set by gods. We must avoid the temptation to dogmatize on what we think were the poet's beliefs, or to reconstruct some sort of Aeschylean theology. Such exercises are fraught with difficulty, for the simple fact that we are dealing with a poet and a dramatist, not a theologian. On the other hand, it will not do to dismiss Zeus neatly as a dramaturgical device and think we are done with the matter. The inescapable fact is that in the *Oresteia* Zeus' presence is always felt, and his might and authority, his omniscience and omnipresence, cannot pass unnoticed. This chapter will focus on the hymn to Zeus in the parodos, with which the chorus interrupts its narration of the Aulis episode (160-83). In particular, I will analyse how it casts light on what the chorus believes can be expected from the events at Aulis, especially for Agamemnon. In this vein, it is hoped that this chapter will also clarify how Zeus and Agamemnon, the two great figures sung of in the parodos, are to be understood in relation to one another. Finally, I hope to reinforce how essential it is when reading *Agamemnon* to consider how the figure, or presence, that is Zeus is significant to the requirements of the play as drama.

Agamemnon is a thoroughly religious work, for the simplest reason that it is filled with the actions and the presence of the gods and various daemons.¹ It is in terms of religious ideas that Aeschylus frames and interprets his stories. Indeed, the Aeschylean conception of the all-encompassing authority of divine powers is exemplified by his unique representation of the Athens of *Eumenides* as neither a monarchy nor a democracy, but a theocracy under Athena.² For him, causation and the events and experiences of all aspects of life are best explained in relation to the will of the gods. The Greeks knew the gods as forces in their lives. Zeus, because he was king of the gods, was the supreme force. And it is as a force that Zeus is often represented in *Agamemnon*.³ This is a key point. Zeus may be anthropomorphized; he is called 'Father', and he and Hera are exemplified as the defenders of the sanctity of marriage (*Eum.* 213-14); however, there is never any sense that he is a kindly father in heaven who takes interest in his children on earth. The chorus may say, Δία τοι ξένιον μέγαν αἰδοῦμαι (362), but there is little here in the way of affection.⁴ It is rather the case that Aeschylus expresses his conception of Zeus metaphorically, the most ready means for humans to express the ineffable nature of their gods. Zeus is many things, and the characters of the trilogy apply to him the epithets appropriate to a particular situation. But there remains much uncertainty over Zeus. No character attempts to describe him in his fullness, but then should we be surprised? He remains the mystery which the characters and choruses of the plays seek to unravel gradually and with immense difficulty.⁵ All we really need to understand of Zeus is that his will must and will be done, as the choruses in all three plays express repeatedly. This is a cause for both fear and hope.

In *Agamemnon* there is much about Zeus that is uncertain. What we do know are the attributes given to him that are constantly reinforced: Zeus shows concern

¹ Cf. Goward (2005) 70: '*Agamemnon* must be taken as a serious religious drama.'

² See Winnington-Ingram (1983) 1: 'Aeschylus was a dramatist of ideas – of religious ideas. His ideas may have been old or new, clear or confused, crude or profound, but it was in terms of religious ideas that he interpreted the story of the house of Argos...' On Athens in *Eumenides* see West (2006).

³ Golden (1961) 163.

⁴ This is true even on the occasions when the chorus reaches soaring levels of reflection: at *Supp.* 524-26, Zeus is hailed as 'King of Kings. Most blest of the blest, most perfect of the perfect.', and during the ode of *Supp.* 86-103, the chorus, according to Parker (2009) 135, reaches 'a remarkable intensity of devotion to Zeus.'

⁵ Cf. Winnington-Ingram (1983) 183: 'For Aeschylus Zeus is not a datum, but a mystery to be investigated; not a solution to problems, but himself a problem to be solved.'

for the stranger (748), for justice and for the home (704, 1036); he is 'the fulfiller' (582). Elsewhere in the *Oresteia* he is also referred to as 'the saviour' (*Eum.* 760) as well as 'the father of Olympian gods' (*Cho.* 783). Other deities state that they are acting on his behalf; Apollo affirms that all of his own oracular prophecies are in accordance with the will of Zeus (*Eum.*618). Other gods too are powerful and have prominent roles in Aeschylean drama, such as Apollo and Athena in *Eumenides*, but Zeus stands out as the supreme god of the universe. Indeed, whenever the divine is spoken of in Aeschylus it is mainly in relation to Zeus. Essentially, this will be my contention, that while we may admit the veracity of Page's statement that no 'coherent theology' can be deduced from the surviving works of Aeschylus, the dramatist does make manifest Zeus' omnipotence and reflects the view that everything in the world works in accordance with his plan and purpose.⁶

2

The uncertainty over Zeus, the presence of fear and hope, are plain to see in the Hymn to Zeus (160-83). It is with the hymn that I wish to concern myself for in this chapter, since it is notable as a synthesis of the essential points about Zeus which are discernible in *Agamemnon* and, indeed, in the entire trilogy. In its essence the hymn is an expression of uncertainty and an admission that the ways of Zeus are inscrutable.⁷ It is reverential and pious, and the *Oresteia*'s most powerful expression of faith in the greatest, yet ultimately unknowable, force which these Argive elders reverence and fear. Significantly, the hymn is sung at the start of the trilogy, thereby setting the tone for what is to follow. It is also highly significant that it is placed amidst the tragic events at Aulis. The uncertainty that the chorus expresses by ὅστις ποτ' ἐστίν reflects its attempt to search out the real nature and character of Zeus.⁸ Such a formula of address is common in Greek literature. The chorus takes pains to address the god correctly and reverently because, 'For the worshipper it is important to address the god by his correct name; otherwise he

⁶ Denniston/Page (1957), xv. Cf. the comments on the possibility of an Aeschylean theology in Lloyd-Jones (1971) 87. For the divine mainly conceived of as Zeus see Grube (1970) 47.

⁷ Cf. Lloyd-Jones (1971) 85: 'We have long known that to make sure one does not offend a deity or fail to attract his attention by using the wrong name when we invoke him is an age-old religious practice, from which formulas of this kind originate. In this context the use of this invocation has the further effect of laying stress upon the inscrutability of the all-powerful divinity whose aid is being implored, and thus striking a note of proper humility.' See also Golden (1961) 164.

⁸ See Fraenkel (1950) II 100. Cf. Lebeck (1971) 23: 'The conventional religious formula becomes a question on the very nature of the godhead it was designed to praise.'

may not hear or may not listen.⁹ The hymn is a call, not to comprehend Zeus, but to recognize that there is nothing else like him and that nothing will be done in contravention to his will. And it is one of the principle reasons for the claim that Aeschylus is a profound theologian. Lesky sees it as a clear expression of Aeschylus' conception of the supreme god, commenting that, 'There are few passages in which we catch so clearly the poet's own voice.'¹⁰ The position of the hymn may appear out of place at first, given the terrible events that encompass it. However, this need not be so if we understand it as an organic part of the narrative of the parodos, directly related to the events at Aulis – events indirectly or directly brought about by Zeus – and if we interpret it correctly. It has truly been called, 'a cornerstone not only of this play but of the whole trilogy'.¹¹

I intend to argue in agreement with scholars such as Fraenkel, Smith, and Sommerstein, that the parodos should be read as a whole like any other Greek choral ode and that this hymn should not be regarded as some pious afterthought which Aeschylus added without consideration for the play's overall structure.¹² Analysis of the metre reveals that the hymn is an organic part of the parodos and not a self-contained unit of song. Also, I will contend that we can avoid the risk of reading this hymn as some sort of Aeschylean credo by reviving a largely neglected textual variant. By continuing to call these stanzas a hymn, scholars have perpetuated the misconception that this is Aeschylus' confession of faith. In this regard the hymn is something like the famous carpet scene, where the traditional name stubbornly persists and so risks impairing interpretation.¹³

3

The first problem in interpretation is how to take the verb προσεικάζσαι. The traditional understanding of it is 'to compare'. Thus *Ag.* 163-5 can be rendered: 'I have

⁹ Lloyd-Jones (1979) 24. So we find at *E. Her.* 1263: Ζεὺς δ', ὅστις ὁ Ζεὺς and *S. OT* 903-4: ὦ κρατύνων, εἴπερ ὄρθ' ἀκούεις, | Ζεῦ, πάντ' ἀνάσσων. Similarly at *Od.* 5.445 Odysseus, out of ignorance, but also careful to invoke correctly, calls on the river god, Κλυθι, ἄναξ, ὅτις ἐσσί.

¹⁰ Lesky (1966) 258.

¹¹ Fraenkel (1950) II 114.

¹² On the timing of the hymn cf. Denniston/Page (1957) 83: This transition to Zeus seems abrupt 'only so long as we fail to remember that it was he who was responsible for the gathering at Aulis.' One critic I agree with on this point is Smith (1980) 1: '...in the "Hymn to Zeus", interpreters have been inclined to regard it as only loosely related to its context, and so it has been interpreted as a self-contained religious essay, and the difficulties raised by its compressed and allusive style have been approached in the same spirit.'

¹³ As noted by Goldhill (1984) 25. For analysis of the metre of the hymn see most recently Sommerstein (2010) 147-9.

nothing to compare, though I weigh everything in the balance except Zeus'.¹⁴ Smith is not entirely happy with this interpretation of the verb and so defines it more acutely as, 'to identify a present but unidentified, or unclassified, X with a known Y in order to be ready to respond appropriately to it and also with the knowledge that it needs – and normally has – both an X and a Y to complete its meaning.'¹⁵ A further difficulty arises over whether to take πλὴν Διός with 165 or 163. The question really is whether to take it as the object of ἐπισταθμώμενος or προσεικάσαι. The former seems most natural, in which case the meaning is that everything is being weighed in the balance, with the exception of Zeus. As such, it shows the confusion of the chorus at this point, which has had no experience ever before of what has just taken place at Aulis. All experiential knowledge is found wanting, and so the only recourse is to seek an explanation in the ways of Zeus. Conversely, Zeus can be taken as the object of προσεικάσαι, in which case the chorus is saying that only Zeus can be compared with himself.¹⁶

The next consideration is the true meaning of τὸ μάταν φροντίδος ἄχθος, 'The vain burden of anxiety' (165), that should be discarded. μάταν is used nineteen times in Aeschylus, 'always of actions which do not achieve their presumably intended results *and which should not have been expected to achieve them either.*' The adjective indicates that an action is irrational or senseless in the way it is when it rests on no sense or reasoning at all.¹⁷ In the context of the parodos, it seems that the chorus is referring to mental disturbance at traumatic and seemingly inexplicable occurrences, such as the sacrifice of Iphigenia.¹⁸ But is it seeking deliverance from this burden through Zeus? Some scholars raise objections to what they regard as a decidedly Christian idea (and therefore alien to Greek thought), to seek solace from the supreme-being. However, it has been argued

¹⁴ So Sommerstein (2008b), but so too others like Denniston/Page (1957) 84. See entry for προσεικάσαι (2) in LSJ, which gives its meaning as 'liken, compare' and translates οὐκ ἔχω προσεικάσαι as 'I am not able to guess by comparison'. Fraenkel (1950) II 101 prefers 'liken' to 'compare' on the grounds that to ask 'whom does so-and-so resemble?' came more naturally to the Greeks than to us.

¹⁵ Smith (1980) 11-12.

¹⁶ As does Smyth (1926): 'as I weigh all things in the balance, I have nothing to compare save "Zeus"'; Lloyd-Jones (1979): 'I can compare with him, measuring all things against him, none but Zeus'.

¹⁷ Smith (1980) 16 [his italics].

¹⁸ Cf. Fraenkel (1950) II 103: '...τὸ μάταν ἄχθος is the burden of the folly which induces men to believe that Zeus is not the almighty ruler, who directs all that is done among mankind.'

that there are examples of characters doing exactly this.¹⁹ Yet if we accept the interpretation whereby everything is weighed except Zeus, do we need to see the chorus as taking comfort in Zeus?

There is in Aeschylean studies a tendency to view the poet as an optimist in regard to the gods, a view strengthened by the belief that he is a pious dramatist. Scholars can write even now how the gods ‘...are identified as the underlying cause for everything that happens; they inspire fear, but are also the only hope that things might get better.’ This has certainly been maintained in interpretations of the hymn. However, this view has not passed unchallenged, and we should consider whether the picture of the gods, and especially Zeus, painted in Aeschylus is not a bleaker one than is usually supposed.²⁰

But first, let us consider the possibility that the chorus is seeking solace in Zeus. We have only to examine other descriptions of Zeus to see where this view might stem from. It is acknowledged on several occasions in the Aeschylean corpus that Zeus is omnipotent. In *Eumenides*, for instance, Apollo proclaims how Zeus arranges everything by his desire ‘without panting in the least’ (*Eum.*650-1). This is the effortless omnipotence of Zeus.²¹ Another famous choral lyric (often compared and contrasted with the hymn) is located in *Suppliants*, in which, it has been pointed out, Zeus behaves more like a saviour than a seducer with respect to Io.²² For readers of *Prometheus Bound*, in which Zeus is portrayed unabashedly as Io’s amatory predator, this will strike as odd.²³ But there is not necessarily anything contradictory in the separate representations; the desire (ἴμερος) of Zeus is, after all, not easy to find out. Both passages, as has been observed, portray a Zeus who controls all without effort and remains motionless, a deity with strong similarities to the Zeus found in Homer and Xenophanes.²⁴ ‘Thus the effortless Zeus of *Supplikes* can be seen as the Homeric Zeus, piously interpreted as is appropriate

¹⁹ Smith (1980) 5 suspects that this is a Christian idea leeching into scholarly interpretation of the hymn. Parker (2009) 137 n 31 is the most recent to challenge this assumption.

²⁰ Optimistic quote: Goward (2005) 70. Cf. Sommerstein (2010) 251: ‘Ancient Greeks also wanted to believe that the gods were good.’ The main proponent of the pessimistic view is Pope (1974).

²¹ τὰ δ’ ἄλλα πάντ’ ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω | στρέφων τίθησιν οὐδὲν ἀσθμαίνων μένει. See further Sommerstein (1989) 204-5.

²² Parker (2009) 134. The exaltation of Zeus in *Suppliants* is discussed by Smith (1980) 36-40.

²³ See especially *PV* 560-608.

²⁴ *Supp.* 87, 92, 100. Parker (2009) 135 and Sommerstein (2010) 271.

in a hymn of praise, no less than as an early form of the god of the philosophers...'²⁵

As the hymn indicates, the ways of Zeus are obscure: they are κατιδεῖν ἄφραστοι (*Supp.* 95). In a fragment from Aeschylus' *Heliades*, Zeus is hailed as 'earth, heaven, the all, and whatever may be beyond that' (Aesch. *TrGF* iii F 70).²⁶ Although the context for this affirmation is unknown, it seems to be a statement of pantheism, not an acknowledgment of a personal god. Nevertheless, what the choruses of Argive elders and Danaids, as well as the deliverer of the lines in *Heliades*, are doing is to register their awe and dread at the workings of the supreme deity. They recognize the forces at work in their universe, and Zeus is the symbol for that 'matrix of forces', just as he and the gods collectively comprise 'a device for talking about the power that causes the universe to be the way it is.'²⁷

However, despite my general agreement with the idea that Aeschylus makes use of Zeus largely as a dramaturgical device and views him as a force, not a character, in his tragedies, I do think some qualification of this belief is warranted. The gods may be the means of explaining the workings of the universe; but it is also important not to forget that in the *Oresteia*, as in Homer, they interact personally with the characters. For example, Cassandra has a very personal encounter with Apollo, as she rejects his advances to her own injury. Most prominently, Orestes, who has the support of Apollo and later Athena, certainly comes to know the gods in a personal way, just as Odysseus and Telemachus do in the *Odyssey*. The gods afford their personal protection: Orestes believes firmly and states (although whether it is in fact the case is another matter) that Apollo is a μάντις ἀψευδῆς τὸ πρὶν on whom he can rely (*Cho.* 559).

It can be countered, of course, that with the hymn to Zeus we are in the bleak and opaque beginnings of the trilogy: the atmosphere of dread and anxious expectation signalled by the watchman's speech as he maintains his sleepless vigil. This is the atmosphere which abides throughout the trilogy, and even after the trial which acquits Orestes it is not entirely dispelled. The fate of Orestes – of the en-

²⁵ Parker (2009) 135-6. His view supports Lloyd-Jones' thesis of a non-evolving Zeus, (1971) 86: 'From Hesiod Aeschylus takes over a doctrine of Zeus and Dike fully sketched in that author, but visible in the *Iliad* and clearly present in the *Odyssey*.'

²⁶ Ζεὺς ἔστιν αἰθῆρ, Ζεὺς δὲ γῆ, Ζεὺς δ' οὐρανός, | Ζεὺς τοι τὰ πάντα χῶ τι τῶνδ' ὑπέρτερον.

²⁷ On the matrix of forces see Rosenmeyer (1982) 277, where he also says that Zeus is never a dramatic character, rather 'a poetic way of talking about the context of human action.' For the divine as a device see Sommerstein (2010) 271-2.

tire house of Atreus – hangs perilously in the balance until Athena’s casting vote; and the ghost of Clytemnestra and the unseen spirit of Agamemnon are oppressive and noticeable presences during much of the trilogy. Amidst the bleakness and uncertainty it is the gods, and in particular Zeus, ‘the Causer of all things’ (1485), to whom the characters have their only true recourse for making sense of events. This is what we sense elsewhere in Aeschylus, such as in the fragment from *Heliades* mentioned above and in *Suppliants*. At these occasional moments of reflection it seems that for the Aeschylean characters the gods are something more than impersonal forces. In that respect there is comfort of a sort stemming from the knowledge that there is somehow a reason behind events.

But this is not something we should overstate. Significantly, the first word of *Agamemnon* is Θεοῦς: the watchman calls upon the gods for release from his πόννοι. *Eumenides* concludes with the procession that chants how Zeus ‘the all-seeing’ and Destiny (*Moirā*) have saved the day. In between there is a succession of invocations to the gods on the part of all the main characters. These include Clytemnestra’s ominous petition to ‘Zeus the fulfiller’ (974) and, most memorable perhaps, Cassandra’s intermittent invocations of Apollo, with the linguistic play on Ἀπολλον and ἀπόλλων ἐμός (1072-87). What we see in such instances (and I include the hymn) is an indication that the characters’ experiences of the divine lie chiefly in experiencing the forces sent by Zeus, or in the desires and whims of the gods. There are absolutes that the gods stand for and uphold: δίκη being the principle one in the *Oresteia*.

We see the paramount importance of justice in all dealings of gods and men also in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. Zeus’ concern is with justice, as Hesiod so fervently believes (*Op.* 225-37).²⁸ This same idea can be found in Homer, particularly in the *Odyssey*.²⁹ This is to be explained by the fact that Aeschylus saw, as the Greeks

²⁸ See also Hes. *Op.* 134-39 and 174-201, where the poet describes how the current generation will be destroyed by Zeus for its unrighteous living in which it disregards proper respect for parents and strangers, and indulges in violence and oath-breaking.

²⁹ *Od.* 19.109-14 and see Stanford (1958) 319. Lloyd-Jones (1971) 86: ‘From Hesiod Aeschylus takes over a doctrine of Zeus and Dike fully sketched in that author, but visible in the *Iliad* and clearly present in the *Odyssey*’. Allan (2006) 2: ‘It remains a standard view of the Homeric epic that the gods of the *Iliad*, in contrast to those of the *Odyssey*, are little interested in human morality.’ He agrees with Lloyd-Jones (1971) in general, and his article poses a challenge to conventional view which distinguishes the divine in each epic as frivolous (*Iliad*), and concerned for justice (*Odyssey*). The ‘standard view’ is evident in, eg., Edwards (1987) 130: ‘In the *Odyssey*, however, the gods are much more concerned with morality, and they wander in disguise over the earth, watching men’s conduct...A man’s sufferings are partly the result of his misdeeds, not simply the will of the gods.’ He observes that only in one place in the *Iliad* (and in a simile) Zeus is said to be angered by the

did, that the events of the universe, both practical (the success of the harvest) and ethical (one's dealings with a neighbour) are intimately connected. And in the *Oresteia* we see this same correlation between a regard for δίκη and the prosperity and well-being of the city or family. It is exemplified by the Paris theme in the first half of *Agamemnon*, being most vividly expressed in the lion cub simile (717-49).

30

So it is true to say that 'The poets talk not of the righteousness of the gods, but of their power, and of their insistence that we be righteous.'³¹ And there is undoubtedly a belief that Zeus will assist those whose cause is just, because he is the father of Δίκη. That is why Orestes cries out to Zeus for support when he finds himself oppressed by the burden of having to avenge his father (*Cho.*246-63).³² He does so because he believes that he is doing Zeus' bidding. But there is also the grim reality weighing heavily upon Orestes that not to obey Apollo's command (and, by extension, the will of Zeus) to pursue the murderers will incur all manner of disasters and suffering, and will entail the forfeiture of his own life (*Cho.* 269-305). It is another blunt reminder that, in the end, the purpose and the will of Zeus will be upheld. This is precisely what the chorus grapples with as it sings not only the hymn, but also the other odes of *Agamemnon*: 'What is accomplished for mortals without Zeus? What of these things is not divinely ordained?' (1487-8).

4

To return to the hymn: this burden for the chorus is the inability to comprehend a traumatic event by the light of mortal (or at least the chorus') understanding of the working of the universe. The chorus proceeds to sing of how Zeus τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοῦς ὁδῶσαντα (which can be translated as 'who sets mortals on the road to understanding', 176-7).³³ This is the second problem of the hymn, to explain the meaning of the φρονεῖν that Zeus enables people to reach. The verb means 'to think, be minded' and 'to be wise, have understanding'. Fraenkel believes that it comes closest in meaning to σωφρονεῖν, and quotes with approval Headlam's

wrongdoing of men and to punish them with natural disasters (*Il.*16.384-93). Similar standpoints include Mueller (1984) 146: 'The reader who...looks in the *Iliad* for theodicy will be disappointed. The gods are not just in any ordinary sense of the word.'

³⁰ See Macleod (1982b) 138 on this correlation: 'For δίκη is manifested or upturned in a city and in a world; it is not the lonely righteousness of an individual.'

³¹ Lloyd-Jones (1956) 66.

³² As Bowen (1986) 63 notes, the prayer is as much a bid for the audience's sympathy with Orestes' plight as it is a bid for Zeus's help.

³³ So Sommerstein (2008b). Lloyd-Jones (1979) renders: 'who put men on the way to wisdom'.

comment, 'σωφρονεῖν is synonymous with γνῶναι σεαυτόν, to *know your place* in relation to the Gods and your fellow-men.³⁴ This is understanding in its fullest sense: rational thought, the exercising of one's full adult faculties. Indeed, as Sullivan puts it, the suggestion is that understanding, φρένες, can only be acquired by siding with Zeus.³⁵ Pope sees an extended meaning here which I think he is right to observe. The lines mean in effect, 'Zeus who has put men on the way of being men', that is, 'who has given us consciousness'.³⁶ Zeus, according to the Greeks, did not create men; but it is very much incumbent on men to come to comprehend the overarching importance of Zeus' power and decrees in their lives, and to respect them. Herein lies the fullness of human wisdom. This surely is what the chorus meant when it sang just prior to this how 'he who gladly utters songs of victory to Zeus τεύξεται φρενῶν τὸ πᾶν (hits directly on understanding)' (174-5).

Closely connected with this is the vexed 'doctrine' of πάθει μάθος, which the chorus says that Zeus has established as a law (178). We are right to be wary of taking this as the expression of some arcane mysticism that suffering has a purificatory effect which leads to perfection.³⁷ Yet it is not easy to determine what it does mean. The learning in question must be connected with σωφρονεῖν, which the chorus says comes even unwillingly (καὶ παρ' ἄκοντα, 180). If we consider the other occurrences of σωφρονεῖν in *Agamemnon*, and indeed in the rest of the *Oresteia*, the intimation is that this good sense only comes about through instruction or force. There are two kinds of learning by suffering which can be identified in the play, that of learning too late by suffering oneself, and learning by witnessing what others suffer.³⁸ Thus, Clytemnestra warns the chorus that she will resist any attempt to oust her; she will accept defeat, but if she should prevail, if 'a god should decide it the other way', then the chorus will learn (though late) after being taught (διδαχθεῖς) σωφρονεῖν ('to be sensible') (1425).

A little later Aegisthus tells the Argive elders that 'to be taught' is difficult for their age when they have been ordered to exercise discretion / prudence (σωφρονεῖν εἰρημένον, 1620), and then proceeds to threaten them with starvation and impris-

³⁴ Fraenkel (1950) II 105.

³⁵ Sullivan (1997) 19.

³⁶ See Pope (1974) 109-10, where he goes even further (where it is not necessary for my argument to follow): 'φρονεῖν βροτοῦς implies not only that we have consciousness but that we have something which, without being too philosophical about it, we may call free will.' See also Goldhill (1984) 27.

³⁷ A suggestion which is dismissed by Denniston/Page (1957) 86 and Lloyd-Jones (1979) 26.

³⁸ Identified by Sommerstein (2010) 195.

onment as means of teaching the mind (διδάσκειν...φρενῶν, 1622).³⁹ This, then, is a kind of learning through suffering. However, it is noteworthy that these later uses of σωφρονεῖν in *Agamemnon* are in the context of threats (pronounced by the most odious of the trilogy's characters) and a far cry from the choral song of praise. Moreover, there is nothing particularly elevated in this kind of learning. In the chorus' case it remains stubbornly incapable of understanding anything that is happening around it. Besides, no character in *Agamemnon* shows any sign of having learned from suffering; indeed, one is hard pressed to provide evidence that the one is the cause of the other.⁴⁰ The first play passes as proof that if one fails to comprehend (and so consequently defies) the purpose of Zeus then one will learn it unwillingly and painfully.

The doctrine recurs throughout the trilogy, but our interest is in how it is applied in the hymn by this group of bewildered Argive elders. There are two other interpretations of πάθει μάθος. For instance, μάθος can mean 'custom', in which case the line could be 'Zeus has established it as a rule that custom comes through experience' (experience makes it a custom), but this really amounts to the same thing. Denniston/Page equate the doctrine with that expressed later, δράσαντι παθεῖν, that the doer suffers (*Cho.* 313). *Agamemnon*, they point out, certainly learns that he cannot escape the punishment of Zeus.⁴¹ But this concept seems rather more in keeping with Clytemnestra's assessment of her husband's death, that he reaped what he sowed: ἄξια δράσας, ἄξια πάσχων (1527). Again, it seems less than satisfactory to interpret that the chorus understands the phrase to mean that object lessons can be drawn from what happens to a particular individual.

We would do better to take πάθει μάθος as a confident belief on the chorus' part that in particular human experiences the plan and hand of Zeus can be more generally discerned, though not always immediately. Once this has been discerned,

³⁹ At *Eum.* 520-1 the chorus of Erinyes sing how ξυμφέρει / σωφρονεῖν ὑπὸ στένει. Here it is set against the idea that fear itself will stay a man from some calamity. See Sommerstein (1989) 176.

⁴⁰ As Smith (1980) 23 remarks, 'Surely the striking thing about wisdom and suffering in the *Oresteia* is their separation.' On the absence of characters who demonstrably learn, see Sommerstein (2010) 196: 'In *Agamemnon*...everyone marches confidently, or at least hopefully, along the same path as those who have gone before, shutting their eyes to the implications of what their predecessors have suffered, and inevitably meeting the same fate themselves.' On the dangers of failure to comprehend Zeus's designs, cf. Lloyd-Jones (1979) 26: 'The wise man, it is implied, understands that it is foolish to defy the will of Zeus; the foolish man, who fails to understand when he is warned, will learn only when disaster teaches him.'

⁴¹ Denniston/Page (1957) 86.

learning consists in reverence for the superior power of Zeus and fear for his punishment as a result of any transgression against that power.⁴² Agamemnon is himself surely motivated by this belief and fear when he reproves his wife for pressing him to walk on the path of strewn crimson cloths. Such is the honour due to gods, not mortals. ‘Good sense is the greatest of god’s gifts’ (927-28), he tells her.⁴³ A man can only act confidently and safeguard his prosperity if he adheres to such a principle as due reverence for the divine (928-30). This is true rational thought. It is fatal for Agamemnon that τὸ μὴ κακῶς φρονεῖν abandons him at the crucial moment.

This resonates with what the chorus states in the hymn, that this kind of good sense (τὸν φρονεῖν) is in fact a favour, a χάρις (182), described as βίαιος, which the chorus sees as coming in some way (πou) from the gods.⁴⁴ If we consider the eighteen occurrences of χάρις in *Agamemnon*, we can see that the word connotes a gift or favour, and is also used to describe the charm of statues (484), or a thank offering. Often, too, it has a sinister overtone, as when death is described as a favour (550). ‘The basic idea is obligation; a favour requires an answering act.’ And the obligation may be between man and man, or man and god.⁴⁵ This sense of a favour that requires an act in return is evident when the herald concludes his speech by saying that χάρις will be payed (τιμήσεται) to Zeus for having brought about the sack of Troy and the return of Agamemnon (581-2). A prominent use of the term appears near the end of the trilogy, where the placated Erinyes declare as their χάρις a prayer that destructive winds and plague may not afflict Athens, and that the people may have fertile soil (*Eum.* 939). The use of χάρις closest to that found at *Ag.* 182 is where the chorus states that a reward that will not be unhonoured (χάρις οὐκ ἄτιμος) has been earned by the Argives for their sufferings (354). Thus we see a direct link drawn between a favour (the Greeks undertaking

⁴² In line with his argument for the continuity of Greek religious views, Lloyd-Jones (1971) 88 presents an argument that Zeus determines the course of events in Aeschylus just as he does in the *Iliad*. Likewise, Zeus’ purposes are inscrutable to men, who can trace the workings of justice only in the light of experience (what he understands by πάθει μάθος). This, he argues, is the principle found in Hesiod and Homer, and so in Aeschylus too. Cf. Macleod (1982b) 136: ‘To know the gods’ power induces justice inspired by a conscious fear, not blindness – and then terror of punishment for the misdeeds that blindness prompted.’

⁴³ καὶ τὸ μὴ κακῶς φρονεῖν | θεοῦ μέγιστον δῶρον. To ‘think well’ is to think rationally. At Soph. *OT* 859, Oedipus says to Jocasta, καλῶς νομίζεις, in response to her reasoned argument that Oedipus could not have been the one who killed Laius.

⁴⁴ *Ag.* 182-3: δαιμόνων δέ που χάρις βίαιος
σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων.

⁴⁵ Bowen (1986) 37.

the Trojan expedition on behalf of Zeus and undergoing all its dangers and privations), and its reward (the expectation of the safe return of the army). And the chorus sees this as a divine favour, for it proceeds to address Zeus βασιλεύς in another lyrical outburst of praise (355-66).

5

There are also textual discrepancies in these lines which, I would argue, have great bearing on the meaning of these lines and on the tone of the hymn. The adjective βίαιος, which is printed in Page's OCT and the new Loeb, is in fact an emendation made by Turnebus in the sixteenth century and frequently published thereafter. In the earliest (Medicean) manuscript it stands as the adverb βιάίως, which is retained in Fraenkel's edition, Murray's OCT, and West's Teubner. As an adverb it describes the violence or force of the gods who 'sit on august benches' (183). Fraenkel identifies the impact of this reading, which 'indicates the supremacy of the heavenly powers, and especially of the highest god, exercising itself with unbridled force.'⁴⁶ Now in the first antistrophe there is an example of this unbridled force. 'The one who was formerly great, swelling with proud confidence he could fight any foe' must mean Uranus, Zeus' grandfather who was overthrown by his son, Cronus, ('he who was born later', 171), whom in turn Zeus overthrew and so gained supreme power for himself.⁴⁷ Zeus' ascent to irresistible power would seem to be a paradigm for πάθει μάθος. Indeed, it is precisely the nature of Zeus' rule which must be understood. Therefore, the chorus implies, we must expect this lesson, whereby one comes to realize how the universe is run, to be learnt, whether one likes it or not. However painful it may be, the process will eventually come to be seen as a favour of the gods.

Traditionally, Ag. 182-3 has been taken as a positive conclusion on the chorus' part – an affirmation that somehow this forced (βίαιος) attainment of good sense through suffering is the gods' gift. This support from the gods is violent in nature: the βία required of the agents of Zeus manifest in the Trojan War and the brutal slaying of Iphigenia.⁴⁸ Sommerstein draws a parallel between this 'splendid oxy-

⁴⁶ Fraenkel (1950) II 111.

⁴⁷ Ag. 167-72: οὐθ' ὅστις πάροιθεν ἦν μέγας,
παμμάχῳ θράσει βρύων,
οὐδὲ λείξεται πρὶν ὦν·
ὅς τ' ἔπειτ' ἔφθ, τριακ-
τῆρος οἴχεται τυχῶν·

⁴⁸ On the connection see Smith (1980) 29.

moron' and the one found in *Suppliants*, where the touch with which Zeus impregnated Io is described as εὐμενῆ βίαν ('kindly force', *Supp.* 1062-7).⁴⁹ The parallel is enlightening, yet the phrase in *Suppliants* is more readily understood, since Zeus turns out to be Io's protector despite (or because of) the forced pregnancy.

There is an alternative way to read *Ag.* 182-3; one which, as Pope has cogently argued, our earliest manuscript of the play facilitates, and which it is perhaps surprising more scholars have not accepted.⁵⁰ The Medicean manuscript prints, not a positive statement, but a question. It gives two other readings: the interrogative ποῦ (instead of που enclitic) and the adverb βιάίως. The text stands thus,

δαιμόνων δέ ποῦ χάρις βιάίως
σέλμα σεμνὸν ἡμένων;

This is basically what West prints in his Teubner text (with the exception of a comma after χάρις). Pope deprecates που enclitic on the basis that it contravenes Homeric, Hesiodic, and Aeschylean usage, where it occurs with the verb expressed, and also fifth century BC poetic usage. He takes βιάίως to mean 'unnaturally' or 'by force', and cites in support the phrase from *Eumenides* which affirms how the man who acts lawlessly against justice will 'in time be forced (βιάίως) to lower sail' (*Eum.* 555). The passage may be translated thus, 'Where is the favour from the gods who sit unnaturally (or with might) on the august steersman's bench?' It alters interpretation of the hymn dramatically, since, appropriately, it stresses that the hymn is a pessimistic meditation rather than simply an optimistic affirmation of the ways of Zeus. What is more, doubt is very much in keeping with the tone of the hymn.

We do not have to seek too far to account for scholarly opposition to the reading in the Medicean manuscript. Pope proffers an explanation: 'It is the prejudice most simply and directly expressed by Groeneboom in his commentary that Aeschylus never doubts the goodness of the gods.'⁵¹ The criticism is valid. I would prefer to say, first, that in *Agamemnon* it is Zeus' concern for justice, rather than goodness, which is never doubted; next, that Aeschylus' characters certainly question the actions of the gods, for they have doubts to which they give voice. In the case of the chorus of Argive elders, who are riddled with anxiety, perplexity, and

⁴⁹ Sommerstein (2010) 122. 'Splendid oxymoron' is the phrase of Rose (1958) 18.

⁵⁰ Wecklein's 1885 edition is the only instance prior to him

⁵¹ Pope (1974) 107.

doubt, this is patently true. After noticing the lit beacons, the chorus calls upon Clytemnestra to explain the situation and so to alleviate its concern (85-7; 98-99). For the chorus, hope is the one thing that can come to ward off the worries and the grief that gnaw at its soul (101-3).⁵² And we have just heard the chorus, in relating Calchas' interpretation of the omen of the eagles and hare, conclude all three strophes with the loud, hopeful, yet hardly confident petition τό δ' εὖ νικάτω.⁵³

In *Choephoroe*, Electra is awake to the cruelty of her situation; she must honour her father's shade with proper rites, but how is she to act towards her mother? She expresses her distress in the question, 'What of this is good, what free from evil?' (*Cho.* 337) Although she does not doubt Zeus' justice will be done, to await it is anguish for her: καὶ πότ' ἄν ἀμφιθαλῆς | Ζεὺς ἐπὶ χεῖρα βάλοι, | φεῦ φεῦ, κάρανα δαίξας; (*Cho.* 394-6). Moreover, a distinct trait of Orestes is his pained indecision over the societal and ethical rights and wrongs of killing his mother in revenge for his father Agamemnon. At the crucial moment filial piety almost stays his hand, but the solitary lines uttered by Pylades, 'What then of Loxias' oracles delivered at Pytho, and of the sanctity of sworn pledges?' (*Cho.* 900-1) serve to reprove and remind him that the will of the gods must be accomplished, and that he is the agent of Zeus' justice.⁵⁴

Likewise here in the parodos of *Agamemnon*, by reviving the original reading we have the *Oresteia's* first moment of dark doubt and pessimism. It is fitting at the outset of the *Oresteia* that the chorus should express doubt and concern for the future after becoming aware of what has happened at Aulis and Troy. The doubts characters express will be allayed and meaning will be forthcoming. But the tenor of the hymn shows that we are very far from such clarity. Thus, a tone of pessimism is what is required here, and I cannot countenance any suggestion that it makes nonsense of all that the chorus has sung about beforehand. Pope sees the chorus' question as a denial that there is any comfort to be expected from the gods, which he believes is appropriate to the starkness of tragedy.⁵⁵ I agree with

⁵² ἀγανὴ φανθεῖσ' | ἐλπὶς ἀμύνει φροντίδ' ἄπληστον | καὶ θυμοβόρον φρενὶ λύπην.

⁵³ This is certainly the chorus' interjection, not Calchas' reported speech.

⁵⁴ ποῦ δαὶ τὸ λοιπὸν Λοξίου μαντεύματα | τὰ πυθόχρηστα, πιστὰ τ' εὐορκώματα; On this scene Knox (1972) remains the best study.

⁵⁵ Pope (1974) 111. Conacher (1976) 331-2 objects to any pessimistic tone at this point of the hymn. He is also alert to the impact of what the chorus is saying here, 328: 'The decision as to whether we read ποῦ enclitic or ποῦ interrogative...in this sentence is clearly of crucial importance in assessing the mood of the Chorus in this part of the parodos, and may (some would argue) affect the view which we are directed to take of the gods in the coming trilogy.' It should be noted that

him that the starkness is in keeping with the mood of *Agamemnon* and is an essential aspect of tragedy. However, despite these occasional moments of doubt experienced by the chorus, Orestes, and Electra, the Argive elders know what they tell Clytemnestra to be true, that ἄντιτον ἔτι σε χρῆ...| τύμμα τύμματι τείσαι (1429-30). The blow of Zeus is the one thing certain.

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Suddenly (καὶ τόθ', 184), the hymn breaks off, and in this, the second antistrophe of the hymn, the chorus returns to its narrative of the Aulis episode. This antistrophe serves to connect the hymn directly with the Aulis episode.⁵⁶ The connection having been made, the rhythm changes. This is the final point to be grasped from the hymn that, ultimately, Zeus is connected with the death of Iphigenia.⁵⁷ It is something the chorus has known and dreaded all along. Whether he is μεταίτιος or παναίτιος (as the Erinyes accuse Apollo of being with regard to Clytemnestra's murder (*Eum.* 199-200)) they do not make bold to suggest; but involved he certainly is. The chorus delivers the hymn in the expectation that Agamemnon, the perpetrator of the sacrifice, will pay for it in some manner. But by inserting the hymn into the middle of the Aulis narrative, the chorus also betrays its belief that Zeus is behind these events, and is in this way attempting to place Iphigenia's sacrifice 'against an acceptable moral background'.⁵⁸ Thus, the chorus is suggesting that there must be a reason for all that has happened. At such moments, 'Zeus cannot be kept entirely distinct from Right, even though certain dramatic situations appear to make room for a friction between the two.'⁵⁹ However, what we can say in light of the hymn is that the chorus is confident that Zeus and δίκη are indivisible.

What, then, can we conclude about Zeus' function in *Agamemnon* as evinced by the hymn? I have said that he appears as a force, and this view can be clarified by

Conacher finds himself at odds with some of the arguments of Pope (1974) and reflects that, 'Perhaps all that we may conclude... is that no absolutely compelling case can be made, simply from the text of this sentence (182-183) in isolation, against reading πρου as enclitic...'

⁵⁶ Demonstrated best by Fraenkel (1950) II 113, who shows the force of the connective particle καὶ τόθ' to signal that what happened to Agamemnon is a παράδειγμα to illustrate Zeus's sovereign power and how the gods lead men through suffering to wisdom. For analysis of the metre see Sommerstein (2010) 148.

⁵⁷ Sommerstein (2010) 148: 'The lyric structure establishes Zeus' responsibility for the atrocity of Aulis even though in the actual narrative he is never referred to.'

⁵⁸ Smith (1980) 1.

⁵⁹ Rosenmeyer (1982) 352.

interpreting Zeus as ‘a poetic way of talking about the context of human action.’⁶⁰ In *Agamemnon* in general, and in the hymn to Zeus in particular, we witness a reflective dramatist’s struggle to come to terms with the forces in the universe and what the result is when mortals come into conflict with them. As a dramatist, Aeschylus constructs sublime lyrical reflections which constitute a magnificent blend of reverence, dread, and awe directed toward the Olympian who cannot be fully comprehended. Nowhere else in the entire *Oresteia* is the omnipotence and omniscience of Zeus so powerfully praised in a tone of awe and fear as it is in the hymn. Together with the Aulis episode, the hymn provides the first and most powerful example of how the characters respond to Zeus and how they are bound by the limitations he sets.

To read Aeschylus is to be aware that, as in Homer and Hesiod, underlying all that is affirmed about Zeus is the unfailing belief that he is the supremely powerful god of justice. The hymn to Zeus accords with this belief. Neatly put, δίκη and Zeus’ will are one and the same; it is the friction between δίκη, which Zeus demands be upheld at all cost, and the actions and desires of characters that is of interest to the tragedian.

Zeus is at the core of the *Oresteia* and he lends it that grandeur which none can fail to admire and which Aristophanes parodied in his *Frogs*. Moreover, no one would deny that Aeschylus handles Zeus with a sense of awe and does reflect on his nature, principally in the choral lyrics. *Agamemnon* is a serious religious drama in the sense that mankind’s place in relation to Zeus is under scrutiny. It is reasonable to conclude, for instance, that in *Eumenides* – the conclusion of the trilogy, which culminates in the establishment at Athens of the new court of the Areopagus (which acquits Orestes) – we witness the harmonization of the divine and human legal processes: the triumph of the administration of justice amongst a community (Athens) in a system that is orderly.⁶¹ But this conclusion is good only so long as we realize that it is part of a broader picture. Justice (Δίκη) which is the daughter (κόρη) of Zeus and the expression of his will, has been done.⁶² Athena confirms this when she proclaims, ἀλλ’ ἐκράτησε Ζεὺς ἀγοραῖος (*Eum.* 973). With the hymn to Zeus in *Agamemnon*, a pessimistic meditation set amidst horrific

⁶⁰ Rosenmeyer (1982) 277.

⁶¹ For this sort of interpretation see Podlecki (1989) 50.

⁶² At *Cho.* 949 Justice is called the daughter of Zeus.

events, we become aware that it is the divinely distributed χάρις of rational and sobre reflection alone which can clarify Zeus' part in the dire events related in the parodos; although the process leading to enlightenment may be hard to endure.

Zeus may not be a 'good' god in the way we think of the expression; however, amidst all the uncertainty surrounding him, there is a firm confidence that Zeus' justice will come to pass. It is the hope that the Argive elders express amidst their fear in the refrain 'Cry sorrow, sorrow, but may good prevail!' (121, 138, 159). This same hope is present, ironic and sinister, when Clytemnestra evokes Zeus τέλειος, 'the fulfiller', to bring her wishes to fulfilment, confident as she is in the justice of Zeus (974).⁶³ Διὸς δ' ἔτελείετο βουλή: so Homer proclaims in the fifth line of the *Iliad*; and so it is too in the *Oresteia*. Even as it is Zeus' will that Troy should fall, so it is his will that Agamemnon, having acted in an unrighteous manner by slaying his own child, should be murdered. 'What is accomplished for mortals without Zeus? What of these things is not divinely ordained?' asks the chorus, faced with the murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra and the rise to power of the adulterous killers Aegisthus and Clytemnestra (1487-8). There is one constant amidst the turmoil, the deception and the disharmony, 'Justice, fulfilling the will of Zeus. This is the only certainty in the midst of endless conflicts and perplexities. The whole trilogy circles round this centre.'⁶⁴

In the final analysis, the hymn to Zeus stands out not simply as a lofty pious refrain on the part of a group of elders. More tellingly, it is one of the *Oresteia*'s significant instances of momentary fear and doubt that result when a character or, in this case, the chorus is confronted by a seemingly insoluble dilemma (such as Agamemnon's decision at Aulis) posed by the gods, yet left to mortals to solve, and to do so at their own peril. This is its contribution to the effectiveness of the drama of *Agamemnon*. As a dramatist, Aeschylus' interest is predominately in constructing a dramatically effective play, not (or at least not principally) in untangling the workings of the universe.⁶⁵ Consequently, only so much theology is included as assists the dramatic needs of the play; enough, that is, to enable the

⁶³ Sommerstein (2008b) 115 n 207: 'This formulation implies that Clytemnestra is certain that Zeus desires the death of Agamemnon.'

⁶⁴ Fraenkel (1950) II 147.

⁶⁵ Rosenmeyer (1982) 274. Cf. Denniston/Page (1957) xv: 'Aeschylus is first and foremost a great poet and a most powerful dramatist: the faculty of acute or profound thought is not among his gifts.' An unjust statement, even if I do maintain that the poet is no theologian. The *Oresteia* is nothing if not one of the most profound and complex artistic creations of all time.

audience to reconcile Agamemnon's transgressions (his 'guilt') with Zeus' concern for justice. Standing in the ominous shadow cast by the events related in the parodos, what must be learnt (and herein lies the meaning of τὸν φρονεῖν) is that, somehow Zeus' purpose will finally prevail, even if forcefully (βίαιως), and his plan (βουλή) will be fulfilled. The achievement of Aeschylus lies in his ability to present the stark reality of a universe ruled by a god such as this, and then to show how his characters confront that reality; for out of this is fashioned the stuff of tragedy.

Conclusion

From this discussion of several problems of the parodos, what consensus can be reached on how to read this choral lyric? I have argued that it must be understood in so far as it assists the drama of *Agamemnon*. As the play progresses several key concepts are stressed: the Trojan expedition, corrupt sacrifice, and Zeus. Despite its intricacy of imagery and syntax, the parodos is crafted in such a way that an audience can grasp these few, though crucial points. They must be grasped at this early stage of the tragedy, for they inform the understanding of the rest of *Agamemnon* and the *Oresteia* as a whole. On the other hand, though the play's the thing, yet it would be naive to fail to grasp that there is deeper meaning in these 200 lines, as there must be in all great poetry. The parodos makes sense dramaturgically, and there is also a coherency to the ideas it expresses.

In his treatment of the Trojan expedition, Aeschylus makes no attempt to glamorize or sanitize it. Rather, by showing the loss and waste, he suggests that there will be repercussions, for the gods are not unmindful of those who are πολυκτόνοι. Agamemnon, as the leader of that expedition, is responsible for its actions and transgressions. The whole saga of the expedition suggests how the aims of an individual, even an agent of Zeus, can come into conflict with the divine purpose, which leads in turn to that individual's punishment. The purpose of the theme is to provide an explanation for Agamemnon's fate. If his death is not warranted, at least it is explicable, so far as the chorus can determine, since anyone who kicks at the altar of δίκη will ultimately pay the penalty for that transgression. Further, the references to the misconduct of Paris in successive choral odes provide a paradigm of sorts whereby the chorus and the audience can understand how the process from transgression to retributive justice unfolds.

I have considered the place of Artemis' anger in *Agamemnon*, in the knowledge that this has been a stumbling block to criticism of the play. Although there are several possible explanations for her anger and for the meaning of the portent, it would seem that it is precisely the enigmatic and capricious nature of the goddess that appealed to Aeschylus as a means of establishing Agamemnon's dilemma. The tragedian is able to exploit Artemis' nature and seemingly irrational anger as a dramaturgical device by which the chorus' narrative can continue seamlessly to the Aulis episode. If we accept the goddess' nature, and that her response to the

portent is the sort of thing that she could be expected to do (as Aeschylus himself seems to have had no trouble in doing), then it is easy to interpret this part of the parodos as vital for the overall dramatic effectiveness of the play.

Artemis (ultimately acting in accordance with the purpose of Zeus) brings Agamemnon to his fateful decision at Aulis. His decision to sacrifice Iphigenia is a considered, rational choice. Dual causation is on display; but, while we may sympathize with the agony of the decision, at no point in the parodos or in the rest of *Agamemnon* can we excuse the hero, or claim that his choice was determined by an external power. It is out of despair and perplexity that the chorus ascribes such a terrible decision and act to the working of παρακοπή, of some supernatural delusion sent to derange its king's mind. Moreover, even though Agamemnon believes that the decision to sacrifice is his only viable option, it is still very much Agamemnon's own decision. For this reason his apology rings hollow. To claim that the desire for the sacrifice is that of the ξυμμαχία is special pleading. While it is true that he feels overwhelming pressure, yet Agamemnon is motivated primarily by fear of the loss of personal prestige.

Despite the fact that I have argued for a large degree of individual responsibility in the Aulis episode, this is not to depreciate the role of the gods in Aeschylean tragedy. The reason for the final chapter on Zeus is to illustrate how Agamemnon's fate is all worked out in accordance with the purpose of the Olympian. Accordingly, it is legitimate to speak of *Agamemnon* as a serious religious drama, because its concern is for mankind's place before Zeus. Zeus is the abiding presence, the directing force in the universe. Agamemnon's fate is commensurate with the chorus' understanding of how Zeus' justice will invariably be upheld. This is the sum of the 'simple' theology presented by Aeschylus. The hymn to Zeus is a lyrical meditation on this view of Zeus, but it is more than that. I have demonstrated how it is the *Oresteia's* first expression of deep and bleak doubt. The hymn is the chorus' momentary wavering which upsets, though does not destroy, its conviction that all the events it has recounted are to be explained by reference to Zeus. Finally, τὸν φρονεῖν consists, so far as the chorus is concerned, in coming to understand that this is the nature of the universe; the rest of *Agamemnon* realizes the truth of this conviction, most momentously in the carpet scene. And it is consistently applied throughout the trilogy, to the point where, at the end of the

Eumenides, we are left in no doubt that Zeus' concern for the maintenance of δίκη has prevailed.

Two figures dominate the chorus' thoughts in the parodos: Agamemnon and Zeus. A complex of causes, ultimately explicable only by reference to Zeus, brings about Agamemnon's fate. The parodos, which is intelligible only in relation to the rest of *Agamemnon*, delineates the causes leading to Agamemnon's fall and infuses the play with an atmosphere of fear for the king's wellbeing. It concludes on the ominous note that Δίκη 'looms' (ἐπιρρέπει, 250) to teach those who suffer: those who will act out the tragic scenarios that follow. It is only through the action of the play, in particular in the episodes and stasima leading up to Agamemnon's murder (but also throughout the course of the *Oresteia* as a whole) that τὸ μέλλον δ' ἔπει γένοιτ' | ἄν κλύοις (251-2) – that we come to see how this process, whereby transgression is followed invariably by justice's response, works in practice.

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