

‘The future you will know when it happens’:

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

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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.

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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 ξενία, 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).