INTRODUCTION:

THE MYTH OF ORESTES AS AN ARCHETYPAL TRAGIC PATTERN
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When we examine some of the greatest works of literature we recognize a structural analogy despite the vastness of the space and time that separated the master craftsmen. This happens especially when writers of some consequence fall back on the traditions and conventions of literature with a view to becoming conspicuously modern. Many such clusters are discernible in literature, that derive the vital force necessary for their existence from sources that are common to each. Those works based on the mythical figures like Prometheus, Orestes, Oedipus, Orpheus, Antigone and Job or on incidents like the Fall of man or the Trojan war are but a few instances. My concern is the group of plays that appears to have shared some property of the myth of Orestes, chiefly those with the same structural pattern.

The varied notes the poets sound on the archetypal pattern of the myth of Orestes, leave us gaping at its magnitude and profundity. The frequency with which it appears on the tragic stage like a ritual compels us to study the myth to see why it is so popular among the tragedians and to know whether it has all the potential which the succeeding playwrights have exploited. We begin our quest from the very beginning, that is, from the question why poets return over and over again to the already exploited structural patterns.
that appear to be over wrung. We next delve into the special significance of the myth of Orestes leading to the factors that created it, straying occasionally into its anthropological, psychological, sociological, political, ethical, metaphysical and religious ramifications. After the analysis of the myth we turn to individual playwrights who utilized the myth and evaluate them using the myth as a point of departure.

In studying the plays the central question is how far the myth is ritualized or how much of it is preserved in the literary work and how much of drama is contributed to it by the authors, keeping in mind, of course, that drama itself is a rite. The main concern is always the structure of the play or the action in it and less attention is paid to the language or imagery, excepting those symbols and images that appear crucial to the play. Since the action of the play is the plot-character interaction, the motives that drive the chief characters of each play also are analysed. The theme that has been dealt with in each of these plays and the statement made thereby, will be studied along with the effectiveness with which it is conveyed. The question, how far do they escape being merely repetitious while using the traditional material and make themselves acceptable and compelling to the modern audience also come under our scrutiny.

I

A work of art that is worthy to be called so is the one which comprehends the entire tradition and effects its
own modification on it. Since men and women remain the same and their problems perennial there are things that have been told time and again, but need to be reiterated. As long as the mysteries of the universe continue, literature which is serious will have to encounter and explore it time after time, for no rendering of it will be final. Unless a writer wants to be merely repetitive or ineffective he cannot afford to disregard the spoken word that has become tradition. Paradoxically it is not by discarding the hitherto uttered word, but by accepting it, that one finds one's own meaning, for the highest values of life do not change. That is why T.S. Eliot opines that, "if we approach a poet without prejudice, we shall find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."¹ If a writer is concerned with such matters of some significance like love, war, tyranny, sin, courage or fate, he has to recognize what have been recurringly said about it, as he has nothing new to deal with and what he writes goes down into its genre. "No poet, no artist of any sort has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists."²


² Ibid.
Archetypal and analogic criticism, the only kinds that assume a larger context of literature as a whole provide us with the structural principles that equip us in the study of the genres and conventions of literature. The genres and conventions take us far back into a world of myths and folk tales, expressions of the collective experience of the racial unconscious. The structural principles of literature are as closely related to mythology and comparative religion as those of painting are to geometry. The rising and falling actions that come from the myth are the only two structures of literature according to Northrop Frye:

The absorption of the natural cycle into mythology provides myth with two of these structures; the rising movement that we find in myths of spring or the dawn, or marriage and resurrection, and falling movement in the myths of death, metamorphosis, or sacrifice.³

With the help of these structural principles he equates the literary forms of comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony and satire to the myths of spring, summer, autumn and winter respectively.⁴


Narratology appears to me the greatest boon given to literature by myth, because at the base of every culture we find a mythology and a myth was the first story narrated in any given race of human beings. Epics sprang out of the story elements of the myths combining and preserving them perpetually, giving way in due time to drama. Since it is unanimously agreed that drama originated from the ritual performance of the myths we need not dwell too much on it. It is common knowledge that these two literary forms preceded lyrics and prose fiction. It should be worthwhile to examine the myths if they supply literature with forms, techniques and even themes.

There have been many mistaken notions about myth and instead of considering it as the greater truth or the greater history, people tend to mean by it something fictitious, imaginary or invented. Myths are serious stories that reflect a society's spiritual foundations. They are symbols of human experience that each culture values and preserves because they embody the world view or important beliefs of the culture.

True myth may be defined as the reduction to narrative shorthand of ritual mime performed on public festivals, and in many cases recorded pictorially
on temple walls, vases, seals, bowls, mirrors, chests, shields, tapestries and the like.*

They may explain origins, natural phenomena, and death; they may describe the nature and function of divinities; or they may provide models of virtuous and heroic behaviour by relating the adventures of heroes. Elements of folklore as well as legends may be included in myths. "They impart a feeling of awe for whatever is mysterious and marvelous in life, depicting a universe in which human beings take their place in a much larger scheme;" 6

The origin of myth can be explained as man's attempt to unriddle the mysteries of the universe, at a time when he could not think, but thoughts occurred to him. In the development of man, anthropologists and psychologists say, there was a stage of unconsciousness, when he obeyed the rhythm of nature, acting on instincts prompted by the basic emotions which he shared and even now shares with animals.

The place of myth at the very root of thought, when thought is still an outline plan of action, explain why all races without exception have

possessed a mythology because without myth, action becomes impossible. But like the sun's light or air we breathe, myth reveals itself only indirectly, and each individual must make a personal effort to discover its presence at the basis of his own thinking. 7

If each one of us considers the matter carefully and honestly, one will be forced to recognize that myth is far from foreign to our daily thought, and what is more, that it is far from opposed in essence to scientific thought. It is the object of the myth as of science to explain the world to make its phenomena intelligible. In the primitive times we were living in a world of meanings, the mythical interpretation of the world, not in the real world that we inherited. Now science, the new myth, has taken the role of the ancient myth, but we continue to live in a world interpreted for us by science.

This is easy to understand when we consider the fact that mathematics which mothered all modern sciences still remains on a conceptual plain. Like science too, its propose is to supply means to influencing the universe, making sure of the spiritual and material possession of it.

Given a universe full of uncertainties and mysteries, the myth intervenes to introduce the human element:

clouds in the sky, sunlight, storms at sea, all extra-human factors such as these lose much of their power to terrify as soon as they are given the sensibility, intensions and motivation that every individual experiences daily.\textsuperscript{8}

This explains why myth is believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing to influence the world and human destinies by each of the race that still believes in myth.

These stories live not by idle interest, not as fictitious or even as true narratives; but are to the natives a statement of primeval, greater and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as how to perform them.\textsuperscript{9}

As a matter of fact the myth most often relates an ancient memorable act attributed as the case may be, to a god, hero or even ordinary mortal but always destined to have never ending consequences. In whatever form it may be represented, it instructs man, not only in his relation with his own kind,

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., p. 9.

but also in his relation with gods and with nature. "In terms of narrative, myth is the imitation of actions near or at the conceivable limits of desire." The fact that myth operates at the top level of human desire does not mean that it necessarily presents its world as attained or attainable by human beings. In terms of meaning or "dianoia" myth is the same world looked at as an area or field of activity, bearing in mind our principle that the meaning or pattern of poetry is a structure of imagery with "conceptual implications."

An examination of the historicity of myth is instrumental to our study. Mythologists don't question the veracity of myth, because like religious faith it is a great source of energy and therefore useful, though they do not dare to place it in history. To them myths are simply stories that are immemorially old, or a kind of objective correlative, that has rendered the unconscious visible. But how did they get into the unconscious and how the truth that perpetually evades consciousness got itself fixed and made visible? My answer is that myth is an account of true events covered with the accretion of legends that have multiplied over time. The older a tradition is, the more the "mythodes" encumbers it and renders it less worthy of belief.

For the moderns myth will be the narration of a great event, and it is this that gives rise to its legendary aspect. The event is epically magnified rather than is altered by adventitious elements, for the puffed up popular soul enlarges great national exploits. Legend has its origin in the popular genius, which makes up stories to tell what is really true. That which is most true is precisely the marvellous, for that is where the emotion of the national soul is revealed. Rightly or wrongly, ancients and moderns believe in the historicity of the Trojan War, but for opposite reasons. We believe because of its marvellous aspects; they believed in spite of it. For the Greeks, the Trojan War had existed because a war has nothing of the marvellous about it; if one takes the marvellous out of Homer this war remains. For the moderns, the Trojan War is true because of the fabulous elements with which Homer surrounds it. Only an authentic event that moved the national soul gives birth to epic and legend. "Myths (...) have a true basis, and if the historicity of the wars of Troy and Thebes recognized by all, is not demonstrable, it is because no event can be proved." 11

Myth is truthful, but figuratively so. It is not historical truth mixed with lies; it is a high philosophical truth that is entirely true, on the condition that instead

of taking it literally, one sees in it an allegory. Because 
the emotion involved cannot in any way be a lesser truth than 
the event. Truth being volatile in nature cannot be preserved 
without something of a preservative nature. "Ancient salt is 
good packing" said W.B. Yeats which is not only true of 
modern truth but also of ancient truth. Thus, for the philo­
sopher myth is an allegory of philosophical truths and for the 
historians it is a slight deformation of historical truths. 
In short, we can say that myth will transmit either some useful 
teaching, or a philosophical or theological doctrine hidden 
under the veil of allegory, or the memory of events of the 
past times.

Who is the inventor of mythology anyway? No one 
ever knew the name of the author of mythology. Myth belongs 
to the same realm as vocabulary, figures of speech and to 
some extent poetry. Far from taking its authority from the 
poets' genius, poetry, despite the poets' existence is a sort 
of authorless speech. Myth and poetry draw their authority 
from themselves. Here we cannot miss out Paul Veyne's very 
recent comment on these dream palaces of culture:

These successive dream palaces, all of which have 
passed for truth, have the most varied styles of 
truth. The imagination that constitutes these styles 
has no order to its ideas; it follows the accidents
of historic casualty. This imagination not only moves from one plane to another but changes its very criteria. Far from being an indication that speaks for itself, truth is the most variable of measures. It is not a transhistorical invariant but a work of the constitutive imagination.\textsuperscript{12}

By constitutive imagination he does not designate a faculty of individual psychology but refer to the fact that each epoch thinks and acts within arbitrary and inert frame works. They have the spontaneity of natural productions and are probably neither true nor false. They arise from the same organizing capacity as the works of nature, that their profound impulse is not turned toward the true but toward amplitude. A tree is neither true nor false. They have atleast one value, all too rarely mentioned, which we bring up only when we do not know quite what the interest of something is: they are interesting. For they are complicated.

Like everything human, like language and laws, myths become spent and lose their efficacy. There comes a time when myths play a lesser part in the lives of individuals. But myths do not die; they are transformed. In the transformation, which is probably a sort of conservative mechanism, myth begets myth and thus variants of the same myth as well as various myths in the same structure are observable. Likewise

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 117.
myths show a dual nature by being at the same time amazingly multiform, picturesque, and colourful, and, to no less a degree, remarkably uniform and recurrent. Formalism intervenes to tell us that there exists but one tale and the movements central to it are "struggle" leading to "victory" in the first move and "difficult task" to "solution" in the second. Claude Levi-Strauss opines that these structural similarities among myths come from the transformations which show a tendency in myth to conserve itself:

These transformations — from one variant to another of the same myth, from one myth to another, from one society to another for the same myth or for different myths — bear sometimes on the framework, sometimes on the code, sometimes on the message of the myth, but without ceasing to exist as such. Thus these transformations respect a sort of principle of conservation of mythical material, by which any myth could always come from another myth.  

Once being detached from collective consciousness, which they occupy no longer, they acquire an objective reality which allows them to be reviewed and exposed to criticism. Again a myth may be told and retold; it may be modified or elaborated or different patterns may be discovered in it. But

its life is always the poetic life of a story, not the "homiletic life" of some illustrated truism. It is precisely here and why the poet steps in to interpret the myth and trigger a perpetual process of humanization.

II

In every age poets who are thinkers (remembering that poets think in metaphors and images, not in propositions) and are deeply concerned with the origin or destiny or desires of mankind — with anything that belongs to the larger outlines of what literature can express — can hardly find a literary theme that does not coincide with a myth.¹⁴

Contrary to the popular notion that myth provided themes only for the ancients and that too in accordance with the convention, poets of all ages keep returning to the myths for their themes and plots, knowingly or unknowingly. "The notion that writers should create their own plots ad hoc and ex nihilo is relatively modern and possibly wrong,"¹⁵ Shakespeare, although his sources were much more eclectic than those of the Greeks, would not have thought of inventing the stories he dramatized any more than Sophocles. By the advent of archetypal criticism it became possible to study the tendency among the


poets to take plots from the myths, which have often been remarked by the critics as "archaic" or even "atavistic."

A myth is like a well balanced mathematical equation "a + b = c," where "c" will always be the sum total of whatever values "a" and "b" assume. When the poet recreates one of the acts attributed to the myth, he will be resounding some of the unending consequences as well as adding one or more motifs and sometimes giving new dimensions to the myth. If a literary work is of some worth, whether it is a synthesis of two or more myths or the refashioning of one, it will be the poet's own rendering of the truth. It should be instrumental rather than apocalyptic and the treatment of myth should be a means rather than an end.

The reason for poet's attraction for myth and the reason why he makes certain structural changes are probably the same. Ancient poetry accepted reality not directly but through the agency of myth, because myth was and is an embodiment of reality. Myths, unlike direct reality the nature of which is rather elusive, display a remarkable integrity. That which perpetually eludes consciousness is fixed and made visible in the myths. Because of this integrity again, any structural change in the body of the myth must be careful and deliberate. Ancient poetry chose myth as its subject - matter for a fresh expression of reality and causing
a few structural changes for the same reason. The success of poetry depends upon the degree of freedom it took with the facts of the myth, which ideally should neither be more nor should it be less.

Analogous to the sensory associations that bring a lived experience into awareness, certain images, symbols and themes taken from the myths, when used by a poet bring back into our conscious mind the collective experience of the race which lie buried deep in our collective unconscious. That which stirs our mind in response to the effective presentation of an ancient theme can be called an archetypal pattern.

When a great poet uses the stories that have taken shape in the fantasy of the community, it is not his individual sensibility alone that objectifies. Responding with usual sensitiveness to the words and images which already express the emotional experience of the community, the poet arranges these so as to utilize to the full their evokative power. Thus he attains for himself vision and possession of the experience engendered between his own soul and the life around him, and communicates the experience, at once individual and collective, to others, so far as they can respond adequately to the words and images he uses.16

If we wish to contemplate the emotional patterns hidden in our individual lives, we may study them in the mirror of our spontaneous actions, so far as we can recall them or in dreams and in the flow of waking fantasy. But if we would contemplate the archetypal patterns that we have in common with the men of the past generations, we do well to study them in the experience communicated by the great poetry that has continued to stir emotional response from age to age. For this we must continually endeavour to render in terms of feeling rather than intellect those underlying patterns of profound disturbances that seek expression through poetry.

Certain ancient and recurring structural patterns of poetry may be described as organizations of emotional tendencies, determined partly through the distinctive experience of the race of community within whose history the pattern has arisen. Tragic poetry being a contribution of the Greeks the patterns of it are certainly to be looked for in their mythology. Even a cursory survey of the myth of Orestes will manifest that it satisfies all the structural intricacies and necessary patterns of tragedies and expounds why it was converted into one of the earliest series of tragedies.

"It is certain that Tragedy and Comedy both began in improvisations; the former originated with the authors of Dithyramb, the latter with those of the phallic songs which
still survive as institutions in many cities", says our venerable master Aristotle who turns out to be the best and most primitive authority. Even for Aristotle the origins of it was lost in prehistoric mists and the only certainty was that its matrix or womb was religious ritual. It is a fact that ancient drama was connected with religion, was part of some god's worship, and as such could be presented only at the time of his festivals. This patron deity was uniformly Dionysus the god of wine, for both dithyramb and phallic song had a meaning and function similar to certain rites of Dionysus and in the course of time was brought into connection with his worship. The religious character of these festivals and of the dramatic exhibitions connected with them must have been a very real thing to the Greeks, and everyone in attendance might have fully realized that he was present at no secular proceeding. It follows that the subject-matter of Greek drama was drawn from their mythology as uniformly as the text of modern sermon is drawn from the Bible. The introduction of illusion into ritual was evolved to counterbalance the decline in power of magic and wonder over man's mind as we have seen earlier. It is just that tragedy which is a living ritual, either sacred or profane, whose object always is to involve a


living audience in its performance, should turn for patterns to the myth of Orestes which abounds with rituals.

The ritual enacted in tragedy is the sacrifice of a King or hero who dies for his people, by whom he is offered as an outstanding specimen of the whole in the belief that this is a sufficient concession to satisfy the gods. As a later development from the real sacrifice, the tragic hero is not really killed or eaten, but the corresponding thing in art still takes place, a vision of death which draws the survivors into a new unity. Probably the reason for this is in the fact that tragedy originated from the ritual to do away with the evil that has befallen the society or to buy freedom from suffering for the community as a whole on the principle of compensation. Again, though we cannot say this sacrificial element, tragedy inherited from the myth of Orestes alone, it is very clearly present in the killing of the King which is repeated in it.

The question of motivation is very strong in drama unlike myth in which an action merely takes place. It is probably because myth was formulated before man's acquirement of consciousness which provided him with the faculty to rationalize. Now man suffers from the problem of meaning, the

problem of justifying, explaining and affirming himself. The meaninglessness of suffering, not suffering itself has been the thorn in the flesh of man, ever since he started to think. The original objective behind the ritual having been forgotten with the furtherance of the culture, tragedy which is a mimesis of that sacrifice was compelled to attribute reasons for the fall of hero in it.

Two reductive formulas have often been used to explain the tragic action. The first is that it is a clear token of the abasement of the highest in the community to a still higher power, thus exhibiting the omnipotence of a supernatural and external agency. It is a kind of fatalism that establishes the supremacy of an impersonal power and the limitation of human effort. Maud Bodkin expresses almost the same idea in the *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*.

The archetypal pattern corresponding to tragedy may be said to be a certain organization of the tendencies of self-assertion and submission. The self which is asserted is magnified by the same collective force to which finally submission is made; and from the tension of the two impulses and their reaction upon each other, under the conditions of poetic exaltation, the distinctive tragic attitude and emotions appear to arise.20

20, Maud Bodkin, loc. cit. p. 23
Though a staggering majority of tragedies illustrate this theory, the theory of fatalism and free will does not appear to be convincing. Secondly, the irrational behaviour of the gods is not a sufficient explanation as far as the action of a drama is concerned.

What the playwrights have done to make the suffering more reasonable has caused the other theory, that is, fate or divine power intervenes only after the tragic process is set going. According to this theory, composed by Aristotle, the act which sets the tragic process going must be primarily a violation of moral law, whether human or divine.21 Tragedy begins with a primary "act of shame or horror" which is objectively real and absolutely binding. The suffering precipitated by this sin or wrongdoing is not merely arbitrary but objectively necessary, and thus necessary because expiatory. The guilt is not always of a personal nature; even if it is personal its effect should be collective like the sin of Oedipus. It could be collective as well or even a sense of guilt come into existence because of a difficult situation, from the conviction that suffering is derived only out of sin, which seems to be a law of morality. The transgressions of the community are transferred symbolically to the sacrificial King, who goes to his death loaded with both

excellence and sin, with the shame of the community as well
as its pride. Thus the sacrifice becomes both expiatory and
propitiatory. Gaining the knowledge that suffering is inevi-
table, the hero falls but affirming the greatness of the human
spirit and the worthwhileness of human life, restoring and
reaffirming the universal moral order which was violated.
Though later tragedians tend to depict the suffering of charac-
ters who are apparently innocent, defying the norms and
coming closer to life, if tragedy is to serve its purpose, it
should be morally intelligible.

In the house of Atreus a tragic condition prevails
that people belonging to three generations are led to violate
the moral law by ruthless killing, thus initiating the tragic
process. When each murder becomes a punishment to the sinner
who in sinning worked as an instrument of Zeus in exhibiting
his omnipotence, the myth of Orestes becomes an attestation
to both these theories and demonstrate that these theories
are rather complementary than contradictory in explaining the
tragic condition and the tragic process.

The introduction of the theme of sin and expiation
brings certain derivative concepts of the hero who expiates
for the community. In all periods the tragic hero is strongly
individual, an extremist, generally superior to the average
man and yet representative of mankind. The hero's role is
fundamentally though not exclusively a guilty one, so that we are easily able to attribute his downfall to his wrongful behaviour. Though superior to the average man, the hero is "not eminently good and just," and his downfall is caused by a tragic flaw — a sufficient fault or error. Anyhow, the hero is destroyed not because of his own fault but through fate or external evil. And the hero's tragic action is guilty from one point of view and innocent from another. The myth of Orestes serves as an archetypal pattern to these notions too.

The freedom of choice is a major concern in the play because the centre of the action is the tragic choice made by the hero. Tragedy can be viewed as a symbolic reply to a mechanistic or fatalistic reading of life, for it presents human actions as evolving — and not always predictably — from within the being of the changing but enduring participants. Hence the processes and consequences of purpose are most steadily examined in it. Suffering is viewed as a consequence of error and drama without suffering is inconceivable. In many cases tragedy represents the life of man in the environment of catastrophe. The hero is compelled to commit an action by a world that does not permit inaction and suffering is meted out to him as an inevitable consequence of what he did. This tragic form is at once an expression of evolving

purpose and compulsion. In tragedy as in life, the boundaries of freedom and compulsion are difficult, perhaps impossible to assign. What the theory of tragedy requires is the recognition that freedom as well as compulsion underlies the dramatic action. To put it in other terms, tragedy requires the presence of a hero whose metaphysical being can act as a creative cause of critical decisions.

Even the employment of the term "fate" to imply the "inevitability" that compels a character to commit a wrongful deed is mutually inconsistent and ambiguous. Sometimes it is an external influence, mysterious and irrational or at least incomprehensible to human reason, a vague circum-ambience to which even the gods are subject. So conceived, fate can have little meaning in relation to character and action and is therefore of slight value. On some other occasions fate is really a convenient verbalization of our conviction that all phenomena have causes and that these causes assume certain rationally comprehensible patterns. But at the same time fate may also signify an internal compulsion. To make it brief, we can say that the tragic hero does not completely control his destiny, yet he is responsible for his own actions. "In one sense Oedipus suffers forces he can neither control nor understand, the puppet of fate; yet at the same time he wills and intelligently intends his own move."23 It remains

so, inspite of all attempts made by man for freedom of action and to own up the responsibility. This theme essential for tragedy is manifold in the myth of Orestes, in the plights of everyone of its characters.

Normally the structure of a tragedy is either a falling action or a rising action, turning point, and fall. It is the absorption and identification of the cyclical pattern of the natural phenomena exemplified daily in the movement of the sun, monthly in the phases of the moon, and yearly in the changing seasons that we see in this structure.

As the sun every year and every morning begins weak and lovely, then grows strong and fierce, then excessive and intolerable, and then by reason of that excess is doomed to die, so runs the story with the trees, beasts and men, with kings and heroes and cities.24

The myth of Orestes which is rich with the ritual of this rise and fall provides the archetypal structural pattern to those plays that attempt to imitate this celestial pattern.

Another dramatic element from the myth is the theme of revenge. We have seen the first movement of tragedy as the disturbing of a natural order, by the tragic hero, that

sooner or later must be reaffirmed. Retributive justice is what demanded in the second movement by drama for such violation of an order divine or human. The agent or instrument of nemesis may be human vengeance, ghostly vengeance, divine vengeance, divine justice, accident, fate or the logic of events, but the essential thing is that nemesis happens, and happens impersonally, unaffected by the moral quality of human motivation involved. Very often the wronged person or one near to him functions as the instrument of retribution in revenge tragedies, thus escalating the tragic tension to the highest point. In many plays the detection of the transgressor contributes a third and dramatically interesting movement. Northrop Frye analyses the theme of revenge in the following way:

The hero provokes enmity, or inherits a situation of enmity, and the return of the avenger constitutes the catastrophe. The revenge - tragedy is a simple tragic structure and like most simple structures can be a very powerful one, often retained as a central theme even in the most complex tragedies. Here the original act provoking the revenge sets up an antithetical or counterbalancing movement, and the completion of the movement resolves the tragedy. This happens so often that we may almost characterize the total mythos of tragedy as binary, in contrast to the three-part
The disillusionment of the tragic hero is yet another important theme that we find in tragedies. Tragedy studies cause and effect in a personal world that the writer makes us feel man's accountability is not so much to natural law as to his own consciousness. The tragic error may reap whirlwind, or issue in the storm on the heath, but the disturbance symbolizes the inner disorder following the error. If the hero never guesses the meaning of his fate, if he never knows "what hit him," the tragedy is incomplete. Usually the hero who is stripped of his hybris is reconciled with himself. "In many tragedies he begins as a semi-divine figure, at least in his own eyes, and then an inexorable dialectic sets to work which separates the divine pretence from the human actuality." After the victory at Troy Agamemnon considers himself to be an equal to the gods when he steps on the purple carpet spread before him by Clytaemnestra, but is soon led to know that he is a mere mortal. Orestes' jubilation after the murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, likewise comes to an abrupt ending, when the snake-haired and bat-winged Furies appear, to have his blood.

26. Ibid., 217.
Another thematic concern in tragedy, a social one in contrast to the metaphysical problems we have dealt with, is the protagonist's breaking up with the family or society. In ancient tragedy the chorus, however, faithful, usually represents the society from which the hero is gradually isolated. It is true that the hero cannot exist apart from a society, but he cannot make his mark, cannot sign his name, if wholly subdued to the group. "The unified will of a nation, a people, or a community can win inspiring victories or meet a terrible defeat, but when tragedy had once passed beyond its ritualistic origins, the achievements and failures of developed persons — metaphysical entities — were the inescapable subject of the tragic artist."27 These persons, indeed, are apt to be those who violate social ritual. In other words, though tragedy arose out of social ritual, the tragic masterpiece is in effect a revolt against ritualistic thinking. If not in Orestes and his killing of his mother where else do we find the archetype for this theme of revolt against the social norms?

We should presume that the foundling plot, very popular with the dramatists with its surprise meeting, irony of situation and recognition, also comes from the myth of Orestes. Orestes whose name means 'mountaineer' was left on a mountain wrapped in a robe 'embroidered with wild beasts,' and was cared for by the shepherds. He was eventually recognized by Electra when the robe woven by her was shown.

In tragedy, we find a typical character, the suppliant, often female, who presents a picture of unmitigated helplessness and destitution. "Such a figure is pathetic, and pathos, though it seems a gentler and more relaxed mood than tragedy, is even more terrifying." Its basis is the exclusion of an individual from a group, inducing in us the greatest fear that we possess. In the figure of the suppliant, pity and terror are brought to the highest possible pitch and intensity, and the awful consequences of rejecting the suppliant for all concerned is a central theme of the Greek tragedy. In Electra we have the archetype of suppliant figures who are often women threatened with death or rape.

A soothsayer or prophet who foresees the inevitable end, or more of it than the hero does is a typical character in tragedy. Finally there is the archetype of a plain dealer who may be simply the faithful friend of the hero who lends support or guidance at critical moments, like Pylades. "The familiar figures of Cassandra and Tiresias combine this role with that of the soothsayer. Such figures when they occur in a tragedy without a chorus, are often called chorus characters, as they illustrate one of the essential functions of the tragic chorus."

29. Ibid.
In addition to these archetypal elements of all tragedy, the myth of Orestes provided the core-structure for many great tragedies to come. The structure is that of a father being supplanted and the son avenging the death of his father by murdering both his mother and her lover. This in the myth refers to a total development and change that occurred in the history of humanity in the religious, political, sociological, moral and psychological spheres. The inter-relation of these aspects and the labyrinthine form in which we have inherited the myth, makes the analysis of it hazardous.

III

"In the beginning Eurynome, the Goddess of All Things, rose naked from Chaos, but found nothing substantial for her feet to rest upon, and therefore divided the sea from the sky, dancing lonely upon its waves," according to the Pelasgian myth, whereas the Olympian myth says, that "At the beginning of all things Mother Earth emerged from Chaos and bore her son Uranus as she slept." An all pervading Mother Goddess who was the first to be, and the one who mothered or created all, can be discerned as a salient feature of all ancient religions. The Great Goddess was conceived to be immortal, changeless and omnipotent. In the extant religious faiths the mother figure

is still prevalent though in a subdued stature as the mother of a particular incarnation or incarnations of God or even as a wife to some god, thus assuming the posture of a universal mother. The presence of a Mother Goddess at the base of every religious faith, every mythology reflects the human observation that only a female procreates:

In (the) archaic religious system there were neither gods nor priests, but only a universal goddess and her priestesses, woman being the dominant sex and man her frightened victim. Fatherhood was not yet honoured, conception being attributed to the wind, the eating of beans, or the accidental swallowing of an insect.31

The Virgin Birth of Christ in the Hebrew myth and Kunti bearing children to the sun-god, wind-god and water-god in the Indian myth probably exhibit the same human observation. Anyhow, men feared, adored, and obeyed the matriarch. She took lovers, but for pleasure, not to provide her children with a father. The hearth which she tended in a cave or hut became the earliest social centre and motherhood continued to be their prime mystery for quite some time.

Once the relevance of coition to child-bearing has been officially admitted, winds or rivers were no longer given the credit for impregnating women, and man's religious status gradually improved. Consequently, Uranus is given a part with

31. Ibid., p. 28.
Mother Earth in further creations. "Gazing down fondly at her from the mountains, he showered fertile rain upon her secret clefts, and she bore grass, flowers, and trees, with the beasts and birds proper to each." Uranus fathered the Cyclopes and Titans also on Mother Earth.

The primitives must have thought that if drops of semen can impregnate, drops of men's blood also can fructify as expressed in the castration myth of Uranus. Even drops of perspiration were considered capable of fructifying the womb as evinced in the Indian myth of Hanuman who gave birth to a child called Hamsadwaja through drops of perspiration when a female fish swallowed them. This happened after the great fire of Lanka when Hanuman sweated profusely. Uranus offended his wife-mother by throwing his rebellious sons, the Cyclopes, into Tartarus, 'a gloomy place in the underworld.' As a revenge she persuaded the Titans to attack their father, and Cronus, their leader, cut off Uranus' genitals and threw them off with the sickle into the sea. "But drops of blood flowing from the wound fell upon Mother Earth and she bore the Three Erinyes, furies, who avenge crimes of parricide and perjury — by name Alecto, Tisiphone and Megaira." The nymphs of the ash-tree, called Meliae, also sprang from the spilt blood.

The conflict among the men and with women while freeing themselves from matriarchy is seen in further myths on
A struggle for power was soon to originate and as a result the Cyclopes were once again confined to Tauraros by Cronus who ruled in Elis, taking his sister Rhea to wife. But Cronus' dethronement by one of his sons was prophesied by his dying father and Mother Earth. To elude this predicament, 'every year' he 'swallowed' the children whom Rhea bore him and finally she was enraged. She bore Zeus, her third son, at the dead of night on Mount Lycaenum in Arcadia, where no creature casts a shadow and, having bathed him in the River Neda gave him to Mother Earth. He was carried to Lectos in Crete, by her, and hidden in the cave of Dicte on the Aegian Hill. Feeding on honey supplied in ample quantity by the Ash-nymph Adrasteia and her sister Io, and by the Goat-nymph Amatheia, Zeus grew fast. He survived an attempt by Cronus to eradicate him, by metamorphosis, even as a child. Gaining manhood, Zeus returned to have vengeance on Cronus. In a long drawn out war which lasted for ten years like the Trojan War he defeated and banished his father with the help of the Cyclopes. Thus Zeus became the omnipotent patriarchal god in the third generation of the gods.

The improved religious status of man, caused by the awareness of his role in child-bearing, was to cast its shadow on the social life also. As a result of this the tribal Nymph, it seems, chose an annual lover from her entourage of

34. Ibid., p. 39
young men, a king to be sacrificed when the year ended. Man was made a symbol of fertility, rather than the object of her erotic pleasure. "His sprinkled blood served to fructify trees, crops, and flocks, and his flesh was torn and eaten raw by the Quen's fellow-nymphs-priestesses wearing the masks of bitches, mares or cows." The blood-ritual of the people of Karamundi in Australia for rain-making, described by Mircea Eliade, shows that this belief in the fertilizing capacity of blood was not specific to Greece alone, but a universal feature probably obliterated with the advancement of humanity. In the ritual, man's blood mixed with gypsum, and his own hair, is placed between two pieces of bark and put under the surface of water in some river or lagoon.

The annual murder of the king was a result of his being associated with the sun-god. "Man in fact created gods in his own likeness and being himself mortal he naturally supposed his creatures to be in the same predicament." By association the potency of the man-god also declined when the power of the sun began to weaken in the summer. For them the danger caused by this was a formidable one because if the course of nature is dependent on the man-god's life, what catastrophes may not be expected from the gradual enfeeblement of his powers and their

35. Ibid., p. 14
final extinction in death? To the primitives embarrassed at the diminishing potency of their god, there appeared only one way of averting these dangers. "The man-god must be killed as soon as he shews symptoms that his powers are beginning to fail, and his soul must be transferred to a vigorous successor before it has been seriously impaired by the threatened decay."

Another young man, his twin or supposed twin (a convenient ancient Irish term used by Robert Graves is "tanist") then became the Queen's lover, who was duly sacrificed at the winter solstice, just before the new king was chosen, when once again the days began to lengthen. As a corollary to this, there was the conviction that the king must not be allowed to become ill or senile, lest there should be terrible calamities as consequences. They believed that with the diminishing vigour of the King the cattle should sicken and fail to bear their increase, the crops should rot in the fields, and man, stricken with disease, should die in ever increasing numbers. To prevent these calamities the King was put to death whenever he showed signs of ill health or failing strength. Frazer says that even an incapacity to satisfy the sexual passions of his wife was taken to be a fatal symptom of decay which she promptly reported to the chiefs. Anyhow the Kings were never allowed to die a natural death.

As man was associated with the sun, the moon was worshipped as a woman, whose menstrual cycle is normally twenty-eight days, and that is also the true period of the

38. Ibid., pp. 224-25
39. Ibid., p. 225.
moon's revolutions, in terms of the sun. "Time was first
reckoned by lunations and every important ceremony took place
at a certain phase of the moon; the solstices and equinoxes
not being exactly determined but approximated to the nearest
new or full moon." Thus number seven acquired peculiar
sanctity, because the king died at the seventh full moon after
the shortest day.

From the lover of two lovers chosen annually by the
tribal nymph, Kingship developed though women remained sovereign
in religious matters. Even after the sun became the symbol of
male fertility through the identification of King's life with
seasonal course, it remained under the moon's tutelage; as
the king remained under the queen's tutelage, in theory at
least, long after the matriarchal phase had been outgrown.

Even after careful astronomical observations, when the
solar year proved to have 364 days with a few hours leftover,
it was easy for them to divide it into thirteen lunar months
that coincided with the moon-cycles. "The sun passed through
thirteen monthly stages beginning at the winter solstice when
the days lengthen again after their autumnal decline." Thus the thirteenth month became the death-month of the sacred
king and that probably provided the evil reputation for
thirteen among the superstitious.

40. Robert Graves, op. cit., p. 15
41. Ibid., p. 16.
The ritual murder of the King continued even after a male military aristocracy was reconciled with the female theocracy. In *The New Golden Bough* we get evidence that this annual Kingship was not confined to the Greeks only, but was found among the Babylonians and in Hawaii as well.\(^\text{42}\)

In the myth of Orestes the murder of Agamemnon, Cassandra and her children must have taken place on the thirteenth day of the thirteenth month, for "Clytemnestra decreed the thirteenth day a monthly festival, celebrating it with dancing and offerings of sheep to her guardian deities."\(^\text{43}\) From the story that Agamemnon's fleet ran into winter storms while returning from Troy we can derive the conclusion that he died in January which coincided with the thirteenth month of the Greeks named "Gamelion."\(^\text{44}\)

The ritual death varied greatly in circumstance and style. He might be 'torn into pieces' by wild women, 'transfixed' with a sting-ray spear, 'flung over a cliff,' burned to death on a pyre, 'drowned' in a pool, or killed in a pre-arranged 'chariot crash.' The story of the death of Agamemnon has survived in a very much stylized and dramatic form. Agamemnon dies in a peculiar manner: with a net thrown

\(^{42}\) James George Frazer, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-37.

\(^{43}\) Robert Graves, *op. cit.*, p. 416

\(^{44}\) Ibid.
over his head, with one foot still on the bath, but the other on the floor, and in the bath-house annexe. That is to say, at the time of murder he was neither clothed nor unclothed, neither in water nor on dry land, neither in his palace nor outside. This recalls the murder of Hiranyakasipu by Narasimha, one of the avatars, in the Indian myth. The story of Hiranyakasipu also must have been originally an astronomical myth. Both Hiranyakasipu and his brother Hiranyaksha are the two aspects of the sun-god, one dominating the first half of the year and the other the second half. Both tried to change the orbital movement of the earth and therefore were killed by the omnipotent god in the form of a man-lion and the wild boar. Robert Graves asserts that in spite of the difference in the style of Agamemnon's death, "this is the familiar myth of the sacred king who dies at midsummer, the goddess who betrays him, the tanist who succeeds him, the son who avenges him."45

In the analogy with the sun, or the annual vegetation gods, the Greeks must have believed in the resurrection of the man god and the offering of a lock of hair or libations were probably devices to embrace the soul than to pacify it. Certainly the idea that the soul of a dying person may be transmitted to his successor is perfectly familiar to primitive

45. Ibid., p. 418.
peoples. It had been already said that the object of the ritual murder itself was to transmigrate the soul of the incarnate deity at the time of death into another incarnation. Various devices used by the ancient people and their comparatively primitive successors to capture the dead man's soul, while dying or afterwards, and transferring it to the successor can be found in Frazer:

On the seventh day after the death of the king of Gingiro the sorcerors bring to his successor, wrapt in a piece of silk, a worm which they say comes from the nose of the dead king; and they make the new king kill the worm by squeezing its head between his teeth. The ceremony seems to be intended to convey the spirit of the deceased monarch to his successor.46

Another important ritual cited there seems to be more relevant to us. Among the Masai of East Africa, when an important chief has been dead and buried for a year, his eldest son or the successor removes the skull of the deceased, while at the same time offers a sacrifice and a libation with goat's blood, milk and honey. In this way, the prayer at the tomb of Agamemnon by Orestes and Electra can be viewed as rites to re-activating and absorbing the dead man's soul and thus enabling the resurrection which was denied along with the ceremonies of burial.

46. James George Frazer, op. cit. p. 248.
"The extra day of the sidereal year, gained from the solar year by the earth's revolutions around the sun's orbit, was intercalated between the thirteenth and the first month, and became the most important day of the 365, the occasion on which the successor to the murdered King was selected. The procedure of selection was not less hazardous for the sacred King than the predicament he faced at the end of his one year long reign. Normally the winner of a race, a wrestling match, or an archery contest was chosen by the tribal Nymph as the sacred King, but 'vanquishing the king' in battle and forcefully marrying the princess also must have been devices to assure succession to kingship, as we have seen in the myths of Uranus, Cronus and Zeus. Agamemnon's marriage with Clytaemnestra by murdering her husband Tantalus, in that case, refers to the foreigner's marriage with the heiress to become the king, by murdering the reigning king.

It was such a contest that contributed to bring about the lethal curse on the house of Atreus, as per one version of the myth. Oenomaus insisted that each suitor of Hippodamia, his daughter, must compete with him in a chariot-race, a failure in which would cost him his life. Pelops bribed Oenomaus' chariot driver Myrtilus wherein he replaced the linch-pins on the axle of his master's chariot with those made of wax. For the treachery Myrtilus was rewarded with a curse

47. Robert Graves, op. cit., p. 16.
from Oenomaus, who died in chariot crash, that he would perish at the hands of Pelops. Instead of fulfilling his offer of the first night with Hippodamia to Myrtilus, Pelops flung him over a cliff into the sea. According to this version the curse laid on Pelops and all his house by the sinking charioteer Myrtilus caused all the misfortunes for his progeny.

When the frequent murder of young men after a short term reign of one year proved irksome and threatened the races with extinction, it was decided to prolong the term of the King. Though there might have been several stages in the extension of the term of a King eight years seems to be a generally accepted duration for a King. The reason is probably to be found in those astronomical considerations which determined the early Greek calendar. The difficulty of reconciling the lunar with solar time was one of the standing puzzles which taxed the ingenuity of men who were emerging from barbarism. Frazer gives the reason for the octennial Kingship in the following words:

An octennial cycle is the shortest period at the end of which sun and moon really mark time together after overlapping, so to say, through out the whole of the interval. Thus for example, it is only once in every eight years that the full moon coincides with the longest or shortest day. 48

Since the crops were to be fructified every year a surrogate boy-king was sacrificed every year and his blood was used for the sprinkle ceremony. It should be conceived that at least in some places the king abdicated annually for a short time in favour of the substitute who filled the place more or less as a nominal sovereign. After this rule which lasted from one to seven days the surrogate was flayed to death and his blood was used to fructify the land.

"When the King first succeeded in getting the life of another accepted as a sacrifice instead of his own, he would have to show that the death of that other would serve the purpose quite as well as his own would have done."49 Thus initially his own children or boys from his own race were selected to die for the king. This explains why Cronus is pictured as swallowing his own children, Atreus' murder of Thyestes' children which brought down the curse on the brood also must be seen as the sacrifice of child surrogates in place of the reigning King.

Occasionally mothers might have taken offense as Rhea did, and got their children exchanged with their servants', or sent them abroad, or even abandoned them on the hills. This can be understood as the origin of the foundling myth and can be taken as a reason why Orestes was left on the mountain.

49. Ibid., p. 242.
either by Clytemnestra or by Electra. Thyestes and Zeus himself were abandoned infants who came back to their respective rightful places after coming of age.

The famous myth of Oedipus in which a son is abandoned on the hills, saved by a shepherd and brought up by the King of another country is clearly a variation of the myth of Orestes. According to this myth, a Corinthian shepherd found the abandoned child, named him Oedipus because his feet were deformed by nail-wound, and took him to Corinth, where King Polybus was reigning at the time. Gaining youthhood he returns to Thebes without knowing that it is his homeland, on the way vanquishing the reigning King Laius, who also happens to be his father. Answering a riddle asked by Sphinx, the failure in which would amount to instant death, he gains the queen and the crown. Unhappily he married his own mother bringing misfortune on him and on Thebes. This myth, looked from a purely sociological angle, is only a patriarchal version of the Orestes myth. It warns against the possibility of an abandoned son coming back as a foreigner and marrying the queen-mother by winning the competition and murdering the king-father.

"Now the sacred king either reigned for the entire period of a Great year, with a tanist as his lieutenant; or the two reigned alternate years; or the Queen let them divide
the queendom into halves and reign concurrently.\(^{50}\) In annual Kingship, the King reigned until the summer solstice, when the sun reached its most northerly point and stood still; then the tanist killed him and took his place, while the sun daily retreated southward towards the winter solstice. Though the duration was extended to a Great Year the sacred king and tanist must have had to change places, which generated mutual hatred, sharpened by sexual jealousy, because the tanist possessed his rival's wife for half the year. This can be interpreted as the cause for the quarrel of Atreus and Thyestes over Aerope.

Atreus and Thyestes must have been the combined rulers who quarrelled incessantly for the golden lamb, the possession of which would ensure Kingship. Robert Graves points out that by the time Atreus and Thyestes quarrelled over succession, the Argives were already habitual stargazers and it was agreed that the best astronomer should be elected king:

In the ensuing contest, Thyestes pointed out that the sun always rose in the Ram at the Spring Festival—hence the story of the golden lamb—but the seer Atreus did better; he proved that the sun and the earth travel in different directions, and that

what appear to be sun sets are in fact, setting of the earth.\textsuperscript{51}

Thus Atreus won the contest whereupon Argives made him their King.

A further lengthening of the King's reign was into nineteen years, the "excuse being that a closer approximation of solar and lunar time had now been found" after 325 lunations.\textsuperscript{52} Agamemnon ruled for a few years and fathered three or four children on Clytaemnestra, before going for the Trojan war which lasted for a decade and so his murder was after the reign of a Greater Year consisting of nineteen solar years.

The throne remained matrilineal and the sacred King and his tanist were therefore always chosen from outside the royal female house. The reason given for the selection of outsiders including foreigners was that the Kingship should not be confined to one family, but may be shared in turn by several; and it prevented the extinction of the race. This continued "until some daring King at last decided to commit incest with the heiress who ranked as his daughter, and thus gain a new title to the throne when his reign needed renewal."\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., pp. 411-12.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 19.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
From this angle we are able to get another view of the rape of Pelopia by Thyestes, that it was the King's attempt to prolong his reign beyond the customary limit by marriage with his step-daughter, the heiress.

In the matrilineal inheritance, an axiom taken over from the pre-Hellenic religion, the king was always to be a foreigner, who ruled by virtue of his marriage to an heiress and the royal princes learned to regard their mother as the main support of the Kingdom. They were brought up on myths of the earlier religion, according to which the sacred King had always been betrayed by his goddess-wife, killed by his tanist, and avenged by his son. "They knew that the son never punished his adulterous mother, who acted with the full authority of the goddess whom she served." 54

With the lengthening of the reign of sacred Kings and the acceptance of substitutes in their stead, a serious question should have arisen. Why should the king be ever slain? A plausible explanation was contrived to meet this, by the primitive genius. The king was supposed to be sin-laden or he was charged with sin and that was advertised as the reason for his loss of potency, of course, in analogy with the sun. In the myth of Oedipus we see that the land of Thebes suffered from blight, from pestilence, and from sterility both of women and cattle under the reign of Oedipus,

54. Ibid., p. 424.
who had unwittingly slain his father and wedded his mother. Here the relation between sin and decay is clearly established. A remnant of the ritual murder of the sin-laden king which prevailed in Babylonia is to be seen in Frazer:

A prisoner condemned to death was dressed in the King's robe, seated on the king's throne, allowed to issue whatever commands he pleased, to eat, drink and enjoy himself, and to lie with the king's concubines. But at the end of the five days he was stripped of his royal robes, scourged, and hanged or impaled. 55

The accusation of the king with sin also sufficed to dissuade the son from avenging the death of his father.

Cenomaus, Atreus and Thyestes like their gods Uranus and Cronus must have been sin-laden god-kings who were sacrificed with the three purposes of removing the evil king, bringing back fertility to the land and providing a new husband to the Queen. There is every possibility that the Indian myth of avataras to remove evil-asura-kings is another version of the murder of the sin-laden king. Similarly the Crucifixion and death of Christ shedding his blood that brings a new eternal life and salvation to men can be seen as a Hebrew version of this myth.

In the existing social system mother remained to be the main support of the kingdom and matricide was an unthinkable crime, while, if the wife or her lover killed the husband it was only a ritual murder. That is why the murder of Clytaemnestra by Orestes, the first matricide, presents him with so many social and psychological problems whereas the murder of Aegisthus is immediately forgotten.

Politically the murder of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus implies the final triumph of the Hellenic invaders such as the Acheans, Dorians, Aeolians, and Ionians over the pre-Hellenic Greeks. The invading Hellenes were by the far civilized and had outgrown the matriarchal influence in the religious, social and political aspects of life. They came south in the second millenium B.C. and brought with them the great Indo-European sky-god Dyaus, or Zeus. "Olympianism had been formed as a religion of compromise between the pre-hellenic matriarchal principle and the Hellenic patriarchal principle," says Robert Graves. Orestes put an end to matriarchy and assured patriarchy by his daring act, though as a compromise he married Hermione, a member of the matriarchal royal family, in the third generation of the House of Atreus that symbolizes the third phase of development of humanity as Zeus did in the third phase of religious development.

Probably Orestes' murder of Clytaemnestra is the metaphorical expression of his putting an end to matriarchy. 

Still there is a version of the myth that says that he only committed her for trial by the judges, who condemned her to death, and that his one fault, if it may be called a fault, was that he did not intercede on her behalf. Had he killed Clytaemnestra, Homer would certainly have mentioned the fact, and refrained from calling him "god-like;" he records only that Orestes killed Aegisthus, whose funeral feast he celebrated jointly with that of his accursed mother:

Orestes, returning from Athens, that murderous man
The crafty Aegisthus, his father's slayer,
o'verthrew
And thereafter made to the Argives a funeral feast
For his mother accursed and the crav'n Aegisthus himself. 57

If this interpretation is acceptable it can be compared with the murder of Renukadevi by her son Parasurama at the instance of his father Jamadagni, in the Indian myth. In this version Renukadevi is immediately given life by Jamadagni which again points out that the woman was not killed, but deprived of her matriarchal powers by the patriarch.

How Orestes roamed from place to place, after the matricide, pursued by Furies of his murdered mother and how no one would take him in, or sit at meat with him, reflects

faithfully the real Greek dread of such as were still haunted by an angry ghost: for they certainly believed in ghosts.

The ancient Greeks believed that the soul of a man who had just been killed was worth his slayer and troubled him; wherefore it was needful even for the involuntary homicide to depart from his country for a year until the anger of the dead man had cooled down; nor might the slayer return until sacrifice had been offered and ceremonies of purification performed. 58

This may be the reason behind Orestes' wandering through different countries, till he was acquitted by a human jury, rather than being haunted by "serpent-haired, dog-headed, bat-winged Erinyes" as we see in the myth.

Erinyes must have been personified pangs of conscience, that are capable of tormenting a person who has rashly or inadvertently broken a taboo. Robert Graves says that pangs of conscience are capable of killing a man even today in Pagan Melanesia, if he has broken a taboo. "He will either go mad and leap from a coconut palm, or wrap his head in a cloak, like Orestes and refuse to eat or drink until he dies of starvation." 59

If at all Erinyes haunted him, they must have been the priestesses of the matriarchal goddess, who used to receive sacrifices and libations from Clytemnestra, and who would lose such privileges, once a patriarchal succession is established. "During the King's sacrifice, designed to fructify the corn fields and orchards, her priestesses will have worn menacing Gorgon masks to frighten away profane visitors," and those masks must be behind the fearsome forms in the myth of Erinyes. Their function being avenging the matricide, as we see in the myth of Oedipus and that of Orestes himself, contrary to the function given to them in the myth of the origin of Erinyes makes this explanation plausible.

Orestes' going to Apollo's shrine at Delphi must be understood as an attempt to seek the help of certain Northern Hellenes who were already in possession of that area. When Apollo and his force failed to pacify the wrathful Erinyes he went to Athens where Athene the goddess of Libyans was worshipped. They probably did not follow the matriarchal lineage and thus she was all for her father. Though at his first arrival none wished to receive him, as being hated by gods, gradually some were emboldened to invite him into their houses, where he sat at a "separate table" and drank from a "separate

60. Ibid., p. 38.
61. Ibid., p. 80.
62. Ibid., p. 45.
wine cup." Gradually the noblest citizens were sworn-in to establish the Areopagus and try his case, that drove the last nail on the coffin of matriarchy by acquitting him.

The murder of Clytaemnestra marks not only the death of matriarchy, but also the end of myth-making itself for the Greeks. "Patrilineal descent, succession and inheritance, discourage further myth making; historical legend then begins and fades into the light of common history." Thus the myth of Orestes with its numerous ramifications is not the recording of an incident, but the encoding of the evolutionary process of humanity from the very beginning to the dawn of modern thought.

IV

The act of Orestes can be taken as the first assertion of rational thought over instincts and the imitation of the natural process, which paved the way to modern civilization. Primitive man was much more governed by his instincts than are his "rational" modern descendants, who have learned to "control" themselves. "In the civilizing process, we have increasingly divided our consciousness from the deeper instinctive strata of human psyche, and even ultimately from the somatic basis of the psychic phenomenon."

63. Ibid., p. 20.

Man had no self-control and even after gaining so much of command over oneself man loses his temperament when he is emotionally upset; things were more so in the past. "It is even conceivable that the early origins of man's capacity to reflect come from the painful consequences of violent emotional clashes."  

This were generally done first and it was only a long time afterward that somebody asked why they were done. That is why the question of motive is insignificant in myth, which records the life of men when he had not gained consciousness, but becomes essential in tragedy that dramatizes them long after.

Just as the human body represents a whole museum of organs, each with a long evolutionary history behind it, so we should expect to find that the mind is organized in a similar way. It is rather foolish to think that our mind is functioning according to what we have learned and experienced after birth. Carl Jung holds that the "immensely old psyche forms the basis of our mind, just as much as the structure of our body is based on the general anatomical pattern of the mammal."  

The myth of Orestes also reveals the process of individuation, the gradual gaining of personal consciousness. "Man

65. Ibid., p. 65.
66. Ibid., p. 57.
has developed consciousness slowly and laboriously, in a
process that took untold ages to reach the civilized state.\textsuperscript{67}
The murder of Clytaemnestra is the final severing of one's
relations with the unconscious and the freeing of one's own
self from it. He is no more ready to follow the pattern of
the unconscious life that preceded him.

Once man begins to think and act instead of obeying
the instincts he has to take the responsibility of what he
does. When an act is deliberately done the question whether
it is good or bad, whether it is useful for the society or
not, whether it is after the best interests of the individual
or against it, comes. Precisely an act becomes sin or morally
wrong only when it is done as a result of deliberate reflection.
In other words, it is absurd to ask whether an act is right
or wrong as long as it was done instinctively, though in the
new concept of society, in the state of gained consciousness,
we are forced to arrest the compulsion of the nature to act
and cry out helplessly that "the other is hell." Orestes
suffers from pangs of conscience whereas Agamemnon, Clytaemn-
estra, Aegisthus and their predecessors who followed the
natural instincts never faced such troubles.

Agamemnon and the other heroes who preceded him were
following the natural instincts and so the will of gods, when

\textsuperscript{67.} Ibid., p. 6.
they killed and supplanted the sin-laden sacred-kings. When their turn to be removed came they also were considered sin-laden. The playwrights who dramatized these myths, long after they were formed, went so far as to say, that even the removal of the predecessor was a sin; thus, in their view, a blood-for-blood feud ran in the house of Atreus as a result of Thyestes' curse on it. Tragedy itself began to be conceived as the treatment of sin and expiation or defilement and purgation.

When the individual who commits sin is not aware of the sin the sin becomes a part of an impersonal process of sin-punishment — expiation. The curse is an active part of this process. A curse is a verbal structure which is meant to shock the sinner into an awareness of the sin committed. The process of retaliation, on the other hand, is a blind and mechanical process with a view to establishing an order of crude justice. As against this Orestes commits a personal sin with an awareness and is prepared to face personal suffering externalized by the Furies and awaits a form of perfect justice which is divine. This presented the critics with the serious problem of compromising with the strange and incomprehensible behaviour of gods; that is, to say, driving a man to an act and punishing him for the same action.

It is when the natural process is refused, when the will of gods and thus gods themselves are rejected, that man faces the dire necessity of justifying himself to himself as well as to the society. Orestes the first major iconoclast
erumbles down under the enormous weight of the responsibility of his own action and goes mad seeing the gorgon mask of the outworn system staring at him.

The above situation is faced with the formation of a panel of jury that is external both to Orestes and to those who cry for his blood and so objective and disinterested. They judge the moral validity of the action with regard to the person and also to the society, taking into consideration the motives behind the action. Not withstanding the metaphysical problem concerning the responsibility of man in his action, he is given an opportunity to explain himself and his motives, by the implementation of a jury and its laws.

The pangs of conscience are not to be done away with, but are to be reconciled with and used for the betterment of the society. The will of gods, once dark and ferocious, now transformed into the "kind ones," can now onwards understand the poor creature called man and his plight in this world. They are for the welfare of the society, preventing all acts against the best interests of the people, resulting in prosperity and a good social life. Thus the unconscious natural order gives way to the conscious moral order.

What were the motives that led Orestes into killing his mother and his father's supplanter? On the superficial
level it is the avenging of the murder of his father and claiming his rightful throne from the usurper. The whole prosecution is focussed on the question whether father or mother is carrying out the principal role in the reproduction effecting more obligation from the child; for the jury is weighing the call of duty to avenge the death of the father, with the crime of matricide on the other side of the balance. But, it seems, that there were deeper motives in the act of Orestes, that escape the perception of the areopagus. They are to be looked for in the psychological undercurrents of Orestes and also of Electra who persuaded him to it.

Freud enlightens us by illuminating the intricate trails of child psychology, that may help us understanding the myth better:

The son when quite a little child already begins to develop a peculiar tenderness towards his mother, whom he looks upon as his own property, regarding his father in the light of a rival who disputes this sole possession of his; similarly the little daughter sees in her mother someone who disturbs her tender relation to her father and occupies a place which she feels she herself could very well fill. 68

These instincts lie buried deep in the minds of children occasionally expressed but never seriously regarded by the parents and never fulfilled by the children. Again this complex may be more or less strongly developed, or it may even become inverted, but it is a regular and very important factor in the mental life of the child. Normally we are only more in danger of understanding its influence and that of the developments that may follow from it.

The natural instinct feeds upon affection and preferences shown by the mother to the boy and by the father to the girl because of the difference in sex and especially when the married life has become sore. The parents themselves frequently stimulate the children to react with what is known as "Oedipus complex." According to Freud the reason for this is the fact that "parents are often guided in their preferences by the difference in sex of either children, so that the father favours the daughter and the mother the son." This is intensified where conjugal love has grown cold and the child may be taken as a substitute for the love object which has ceased to attract.

There is no reason why Clytemnestra should love Agamemnon, she being forcibly married by the murderer of her first husband Tantalus and left alone when he went for the decadelong Trojan war; the hatred-in-love reaches its peak when Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia before going to the

69. Ibid., p. 175
war. She must have naturally showered her love and affection on Orestes at least during the first few years, before falling prey to the conspiracy of Aegisthus, and thus stimulated the complex in him. Agamemnon in the same way stimulated love towards him in Electra or when Orestes was given preferences by her mother, the dejected daughter must have turned for it towards her father.

A boy may take his sister as love object in place of his "faithless mother," where there are several brothers to win the favour of a little sister hostile rivalry, of great importance in after life, shows itself already in the nursery. Similarly a little girl takes an older brother as a substitute for the father who no longer treats her with the same tenderness as in her earliest years; or she takes a little sister as a substitute for the child that she "vainly wished for" from her father. When Agamemnon went for the war, Electra most probably took Orestes as her love-object and this resulted in a tug-of-war for his love between the mother and the daughter that created the profound embitterment and estrangement between them.

Another shift in these complex relations happens when Orestes is forced into the second place and finally parted from Clytemnestra due to her relationship with Aegisthus, and all his love flows towards Electra.
Forced into the second place by the birth of another child and for the first time almost entirely parted from the mother, the child finds it very hard to forgive her for this exclusion of him; feelings which in adults we should describe as profound embitterment are aroused in him, and often become the groundwork of a lasting estrangement.

As a result of this estrangement and as an amendment for his antagonistic feelings towards his father in the infantile days an inversion of the Oedipus complex is possible. The only way of reconciliation with his already dead father is to avenge his murder; this would also enable him to fulfil the unconscious desire to kill his "mother's husband."

Even if the inversion of the Oedipus complex has not taken place, the murder of Clytaemnæstra becomes essential as a part of freeing himself from the parents to lead a normal social life which he can never do if she is alive, for from the time of puberty every human individual must devote himself to that great task. Only after this detachment is accomplished can he cease to be a child and so become a member of the social community. For a son, the task consists in releasing his libidinal desires from his mother, in order to employ them in the quest of an external love object in reality. The death of his father and his supplanter have removed whatever

70. Ibid., pp. 280-81.
obstruction there was in fulfilling his libidinal desires towards his mother. Now the love-hatred relationship becomes so acute that the murder of the mother becomes necessary for he is incapable of liberating himself by his own. Though violence or murder can be interpreted as a substitute for sexual act and thus the consummation of the hidden desires, it would be better to see it as the symbolic representation of the severance of his bonds with her, from the mythical point of view.

The dream of Clytaemnestra warns her nothing other than her murder by her own son, and so we should presume that she was aware of this predicament. Snake is a generally accepted male symbol in psychology as well as in mythology. "Many of the beasts which are used as genital symbols in mythology and folk-lore play the same part in dreams: e.g., fishes, snails, cats, mice (on account of the pubic hair), and above all those most important symbols of the male organ - snakes." 71

So at last she bares her breast for the snake to sting and draw blood from where he had sucked milk, when her paramour is killed all the ways close down before her. Though Orestes hesitates for a moment he responds to the call of intellect and bids goodbye to the childhood days to become a responsible member of the society; then only he can direct his love to an external object and marry Hermione.

Mother Earth still weds a new sun-god every day, a new spring-god and his slayer the winter-god every year; female insects among bees, spiders and scorpions continue to kill their males after mating and mate with their sons in the next season; but human beings have travelled far from it. The myth of Orestes is the myth of man's eating the forbidden fruit, his exodus from the bliss of ignorance to the agony of knowledge. It is the myth of man-made tools gaining control over the earth, the myth of stealing fire from heaven, the myth of change and development. Every performance of a tragedy that imitates the myth of Orestes is a ritual of man's growth, of becoming an individual from being an infant, of creating his rhythm after breaking away from the rhythmical nature.