CHAPTER I

A PARABLE OF PROGRESS — 'THE CRESTEIA'
Zeus has led us on to know,
the Helmsman lays it down as law
that we must suffer, suffer into truth
(Ag. 11. 77-79)

I

The factors which formed the myth were in the
oblivion and what remained in the memory were the deeds of
the gods and heroes that framed the bases of religion.
Rational man began to question the unreasonable acts of gods
and it became the poets' job of work to interpret the myth
and "justify the ways of gods to men" in order to prevent
it from wearing out. The deeds were taken for granted by the
successive generations; what remained was the question why it
happened so. The once personified and deified factors are
now given human motives to make them also appear rational.
The Oresteia by Aeschylus is regarded as the first dramatized
and humanized version of the myth. Strictly following the
rising and falling structural pattern of the myth that has
gone deep into the minds of his audience he creates a parable

* The translation of the work followed is the latest, by
For convenience the names of
the plays are used in short forms in the foot notes, like
Ag for Agamemnon, L.B. for The Libation Bearers and Eum
for The Eumenides.
of progress from darkness to light.

When Aeschylus writes for an audience to whom the ritual murder is unintelligible, he takes it for a curse in the form of blood-for-blood-feud prevailing in the House of Atreus, originated as a result of Atreus' dreadful act of sacrificing his brother's children and serving them as food and Thyestes' curse in return. As we see the House of Atreus that represents the whole humanity through the eyes of Cassandra, it is

"the house that hates god,
an echoing womb of guilt, kinsmen
torturing kinsmen, served heads,
slaughterhouse of heroes, soil streaming blood-,”

but the poet imagines that there was a good time for the house and bewails the ill fate that has befallen, through the watchman:

I cry for the hard times come to the house,
no longer run like the great place of old, 1

What may be the reason for this pitiable and dreadful state?

Only the reckless act
can breed impiety, multiplying crime on crime,
while the house kept straight and just
is blessed with radiant children.

1. Ag 11 1087-1091, 11 21-22.
But ancient Violence longs to breed,
new Violence comes —. ²

The ancient and original sin is attributed to Atreus' murder
of the children:

"I trust to them, to the babies
wailing, skewered on the sword,
their flesh charred, the father gorging on their
parts —,"

and murder of any sort is irreparable, as is said by the
chorus:

a man's life — blood
is dark and mortal.
Once it wets the earth
what song can sing it back? ³

Aeschylus has no doubt that a crime will be punished:

Some say
that heaven would never stoop to punish men
who trample the lovely grace of things
untouchable. How wrong they are!
A curse burns bright on crime —
full-blown, the father's crimes will blossom,
burst into the son's. ⁴

², Ag 11 751-56.
³, Ag 11 1095-97, 11 1017-20.
⁴, Ag 11 374-80.
The situation for the hero to react is set, in these few strokes and we know that there is little choice for him that he inherits a tragic situation where existence itself is tragedy, like that of Christ.

Even if we accept the possibility that the dramatist was unaware of the religious, social and political background of the myth, he deliberately forgets the adultery committed by Thyestes with Aerope and the feud that existed between the brothers even before; but the effect is the same. The sin or destruction of the order, whatever it is, sprang out of men, not from gods; whether it was first done by Atreus or was it a custom followed by Atreus does not make much difference. The first step of humanization is done in giving a susceptible cause for the present situation. We can say these three things, then, about Aeschylus' dramatic form; he is interested in the spread of disorder from an initial wrong act which he sets in the context of the relevant past, and whose consequences he then traces to their conclusion; "he has a way of organizing his structure that seems like music and he writes about serious issues in such a way that a particular event is about more than one issue at the same time."5

The second modification should be considered a serious error or misunderstanding from the part of the poet.

"Aeschylus believed men to be free in making some decisions and at the same time he recognized the limitations imposed upon men by their "moira" or portion, in terms both of identity and circumstance." Freedom to decide and awareness in man of his part in relation to the whole comes only when he is conscious of what he is doing. In the analysis of the myth we have seen that till the time of Orestes men followed an unconscious natural order by which every king was to be killed at the end of a stipulated period and even if there existed no feud between Atreus and Thyestes or between Agamemnon and Aegisthus, they would have been killed.

Aeschylus' assumption that man had consciousness has far-reaching consequences. If man has consciousness, there will naturally be a feeling of right and wrong and with that a moral order, the breach of which certainly a wrong that calls for punishment. Though there existed no order, no right and no wrong, the dramatist seems to have thought that there was an order and the disbalancing of it caused the murder of the doer. But the periodical kingship and the murder of the king at the end of it continued and the poet supposed even the act of retribution was sin that brought about his death. "All executioners plead that they act for just retribution, but the chain of murder has got out of hand and is perpetuating itself, until it seems no longer to come from personal

purpose but has grown into a Curse, a Thing."

The third step of humanization is the transformation of the blood that once fructified the land into blood that cries for revenge. Blood cries for blood; the injured man cries for justice; the prayer of the forgotten dead lives and works. That is Dike, the inevitable law. And "the Furies, being personification of that prayer and that cry, are not cold Judges distributing well-weighed dooms, they are an incarnated passion for avenging the sufferer and smiting the wicked." The retributor is given some personal interest along with the urge to avenge so that his act also becomes a sin. Now the ritual murder becomes a blood-for-blood-feud, in the house of Atreus, originated and continuing in the form of a curse.

The punisher punished is an important theme developed by Aeschylus, to explain the recurring murder in the House of Atreus. Each one claims that he is a minister of justice when he kills the wrongdoer, but gives cause for another revenge in that and revenge becomes a perpetual chain-reaction. "Aeschylus, through Cassandra and her visions, makes of this building a visible symbol of the agony of humanity, as it waits for light, healing, finality and release from toils, for

a Dike that will be bearable." Only through suffering man attains these and that is the core of the play as said by the chorus:

Justice turns the balance scales,
sees that we suffer
and we suffer and we learn.10

These changes can be viewed as a positive approach by the poet to unravel the mysterious relation of the actor with the action and to satisfy the demand of motivation in drama. Aeschylus presumes that "one who acts must suffer" and sometimes the nemesis is shared by the family or community; it is a belief shared by many.11 "To one who faces the facts without flinching, there can be no doubt the sins of the fathers are indeed visited on the children; that the sins of ancestors descend to their descendants; that the sins of past societies are agonies of our own."12 There is no doubt in short, that the sins of the guilty are visited on the innocent. The curse hangs above the head of Agamemnon to determine the course of his life and to affect his decisions.

The total destruction of Troy is an explicit example for the visitation of nemesis on the innocent members of the

10. Ag. II. 250-52.
11. Ag. 1. 1592.
Helen is seductively beautiful, but what Paris did is a sin to be punished and wrong to be avenged, and she herself turns into a Fury to punish the Trojans who welcomes her and her captor:

Veering wild in Mid-flight
She whirled her wedding onto a stabbing end,
Slashed the sons of Priam - hearthmate, friend to death,
sped by Zeus who speeds the guest
a bride of tears, a Fury. 14

Trojans are late to understand that "she came to Troy with a dowry, death" and when they realize there remains no way out of the hell that threaten them. 15

Menelaus and lord Agamemnon,
two kings with the power of Zeus,
the twin throne, twin sceptre,
Atreus' sturdy yoke of sons
launched Greece in a thousand ships,

the heart within them screamed for all-out war
Like vultures robbed of their young.¹⁶

Paris deserves punishment, but when the whole world is made to suffer in a war 'all for a woman manned by many' who will retribute for the innocent blood that wets the ground? Artemis the architect of vengeance cannot allow this crime to go unavenged.¹⁷

So when the Greek army is all prepared to go she lets loose the cross-winds and obstructs the voyage. All the Greeks waiting for the favourable winds in front of the palace could see two eagles preying on the prow of a ship; they

plunged their claws in a hare, a mother
bursting with unborn young - the babies spilling,
quick spurts of blood - cut off the race just dashing into life!¹⁸

Calchas the loyal seer declares after probing the situation:

I see
pure Artemis bristle in pity -
yes the flying hounds of the Father
slaughter for armies .... their own victim... a woman

¹⁶. Ag. 1. 168
¹⁷. Ag. 1. 405
¹⁸. Ag. 11. 122-24.
trembling young, all born to die — she loathes the eagle's feast.¹⁹

On the surface we find no relation between the preying eagles and the expedition, but they should be understood one and the same from Artemis' interference with adverse winds. "The eagles are the Atreidae, the ministers of justice; the hare can be nothing but Troy; and the young within the hare can be nothing but the innocent population of Troy, now threatened with destruction by the expedition of Zeus Xenois and his eaglekings."²⁰ Therefore she sends cross winds to prevent his outrage unless Agamemnon will pay the price demanded by Artemis; and certainly it is a price which a man of courage and sense would refuse to pay.

"The lawless bloodshed of which Agamemnon will be guilty if he kills his daughter is exactly parallel to the lawless bloodshed, of which he will be guilty if he goes on with his war 'for a wanton woman.'"²¹ He is nearly committed to this war which will destroy countless innocent lives; very well: if he must do this, let him first destroy an innocent of his own — and take the consequences. Let him brand himself as a man of blood; let it be manifest what he has been doing. Thus Agamemnon is placed at the cross-roads; he can neither desert the fleets and fail the alliance nor sacrifice his own

¹⁹ Ag. 11. 134-38.
²⁰ H. D. F. Kitto, op. cit., p. 3
²¹ Ibid., pp. 4-5.
daughter without the consequence of dire punishment. In this and in his final decision to kill his daughter we can see the curse working, unseen yet seen. But Aeschylus' poetic technique is such that everything can be explained in its cause-effect relationship even without the help of the curse.

He who does such a thing as this, to wage a war and to kill his daughter in order to do it, shall be destroyed in return, through the wrath that his own action will create.\textsuperscript{22}

Agamemnon is like any other man who grows head-strong in his own act and Iphigenia's sacrifice is only the first in a series of crimes for him to incur the wrath of the gods and men:

\textit{Once he slipped his neck in the strap of Fate, his spirit veered black, impure, unholy, once he turned he stopped at nothing.}\textsuperscript{23}

Leaving the grieving mother and the weaker section of the people he sails for Troy with all the young blood of Greece and after sometime urns and urns with the ashes of the dead young begin to come:

They knew the men they sent, but now in place of men

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 5
ashes and urns come back
to every hearth. 24

What is war for the people remaining at home but "the great
gold-broker of corpses" that holds the balance of the battle
on his spear.

All for another's woman', so they mutter
in secret and the rancour steals
towards our staunch defenders, Atreus' sons. 25

The people begin to hate and curse their beloved king
Agamemnon:

"The people's voice is heavy with hatred,
now the curses of the people must be paid,"
says the chorus and they are sure that,

"God takes aim
at the ones who murder many." 26

After ten years of war, after killing soldiers of both the
sides for so long

"he dug Troy down, he worked her soil down
the shrines of her gods and the high altræ, gone!
and the seed of her wide earth he ground to bits." 27

25. Ag. 11. 444-46.
26. Ag. 11. 451-52 and 11. 455-56.
27. Ag. 11. 517-19.
Now we know him to be a sin-laden king, the destroyer of filial bonds, the innocents, the order in the society, the seeds and the shrines of gods. The Trojans welcomed Helen and her captor and so were guilty; but their punishment—the total destruction of their city, their temples and their men; the enslavement and defiling of their women and children was out of all proportion to any harm they had done to Greece. "Neither Troy nor Greece deserved what the idea of Helen made Agamemnon do them." Naturally, now it is the turn of the minister of justice, Agamemnon, to be killed.

Taking advantage of Agamemnon's absence and the dissatisfaction of the people over their ruler, Aegisthus comes out of exile, wins over 'the single-minded queen' who is nursing the wound inflicted by her husband, and they wait for Agamemnon to come after his victory, from Troy. Unlike the myth, the complete responsibility of the murder is given over to Clytaemnestra in the play and she is made a "Memory womb of Fury child-avenging Fury." She takes the role of the minister of justice to serve out punishment to Agamemnon, for the murder of Iphigenia. "The punishment of Paris and Troy has been carried out through the Erinys which took form of Helen herself; and the punishment of Agamemnon will be carried out by an Erinys which takes the form of Clytaemnestra."
Clytaemnestra is a despicable adulteress who has taken the enemy of her husband to lover in his absence and plots for his murder:

She is the lioness,
She rears on her hind legs, she beds with the wolf when her lion king goes ranging.  

But it is the stature of this character rather than her moral values that is stressed throughout *Agamemnon*; the role of Aegisthus is carefully played down. In her we can see some tinges of the matriarch when the watchman grumbles. 'That woman - she manoeuvres like a man' or when the chorus says,

growing strong in the house
with no fear of the husband
here she waits.  

When she contemptuously triumphs over the chorus in ll 580-91 of *Agamemnon*, we are convinced that she is equal to her task of vengeance.

"In fact, she is an agent in a divine drama, as well as in her own; an instrument of the gods, just as Agamemnon is."  

He is being used to punish Paris, and she will be used to punish Agamemnon; and she will triumph over him as completely as she triumphs over the chorus here. This

31. Ag, ll. 1272-4.
32. Ag, 1. 13 and ll. 151-53.
present triumph gives us her measure. Above all it is the will of gods that is working in this world of humans. It is Zeus who sends the sons of Atreus to punish Troy; it is Artemis who insists that Agamemnon should be punished in return; it is the fire-god Hephaestus who brings the message of Troy's fall for Clytemnestra to prepare for the murder. Zeus wants to teach man the truth of justice, when he exceeds the limits and destroys the order. Though they are absent in the first two plays their presence is made felt and in the *Eumenides* Athene and Apollo personally appear. Gods bring Agamemnon safely home and Agamemnon alone to take his deserved punishment, for if Menelaus and his fleet are there, they may hinder the proceedings:

> Stoms swept the Greeks,
> and not without the anger of gods! \(^{34}\)

When Agamemnon comes, he brings along Cassandra the Priestess and the soothsayer of Apollo and that is the last straw to Clytemnestra's patience; by making her, his concubine he has already offended Apollo. By waging the war for ten years and after that facing the sea-storm he is completely worn-out and tired, similar to the weak and mild sun in the evening.

Now comes the willing submission of Man to his tragic end. The only scene where both Agamemnon and his punisher

\(^{34}\) Ag. 646-47.
meet reaches a dramatic climax, when Clytaemnestra persuades him to tread a purple carpet, an honour appropriate to gods, and bring down the punishment on him and he hesitates. It is almost as if she was challenging Agamemnon to see the truth, if he can. "It leads to the most unexpected of climaxes: what was a metaphor, when it was applied to Paris, comes to life in startling fashion for his fellow-sinner Agamemnon, as Clytaemnestra invites the 'sacker of Ilium' to tread under foot the beauty of holy things!' First he protests against it saying, "Never cross my path with robes and draw the lightning," but after a prolonged argument he submits. We have to guess that Agamemnon was not totally unaware of the coming end, from his prayer immediately after touching the ground of Argos:

Victory, you have sped my way before, how speed me to the last.  

The elements of ritual sacrifice in the murder of Agamemnon are not entirely absent from the play. As the king treads the blood-red carpet Clytaemnestra prays,

"Zeus, Zeus, Master of all fulfilment, now fulfil our prayers - speed our rites to their fulfilment once for all!"

36. Ag. 1, 914.  
37. Ag. 11, 840-41.
and later she invites Cassandra in the same tone:

Already
the victims crowd the hearth, the Navel stone,
to bless this day of joy I never hoped to see!—
our victims waiting for the fire and the knife,
and you,
if you want to taste our mystic rites, come now. 38

After the murder of Agamemnon when she faces the chorus also
she stresses the ritual elements related with the fructifying
ceremony:

When he's down I add the third, last blow,
to the Zeus who saves the dead beneath the ground
I send that third blow home in homage like a prayer.

So he goes down, and the life is bursting out of him —
great sprays of blood, and the murderous shower
wounds me, dyes me black and I, I revel
like the Earth when the spring rains come down,
the blessed gifts of god, and the new green spear
splits the sheath and rips to birth in glory: 39

The net in which Agamemnon was caught before being
stabbed by Clytaemnistra is at the same time a thing with
physical existence and a symbol with several layers of mean-

38. Ag. 11. 975 and 11. 1054-59
39. Ag. 11. 1407-1415.
"The spider web in which Agamemnon was trapped is one more variation of entanglement, spun by another creature who murders in marriage. Entanglement may come by outright force or by seduction and surprise. Clytaemnestra lures Agamemnon into it by flattery, persuasion, by her sex." It is rather a symbol of entanglement of the primitive form of justice, the natural order and the taboos in which the whole humanity was trapped and which ultimately drives Orestes mad in the end of Choephoroi. The importance given to this symbol can be understood from the frequency with which Aeschylus uses it in the trilogy. It appears as web, snare, trap, coil, noose or net eleven times in the Agamemnon, eight times in the Choephoroi and five times in The Eumenides.

The murder of Agamemnon is a matter of much critical speculation and several views have come into existence of which the most acceptable, it seems, is that of N.G.L. Hammond who says that in Clytaemnestra's murder of Agamemnon three forces are at work. The first is Clytaemnestra's eagerness, inspired by personal hatred, to kill Agamemnon. The second is the will of Zeus, which punishes the moral crimes of Agamemnon, in accordance with the laws of Justice. The third is the call of

40. Richmond Lattimore, loc.cit. pp.78-79.

blood, personified in the Avenger, Black Ares and later the ἔρινης. At one point in the play these three powers coincide in the killing of Agamemnon.42

After the murder she pauses as the Justice who meted out the punishment for the various crimes that Agamemnon and his father committed. She tells the chorus,

"I brooded on his trial, this ancient blood feud year by year. At last my hour came,"

and she has no doubt that what she has done is an act of retribution:

Here is Agamemnon, my husband made a corpse by this right hand — a master piece of Justice.43

Aegisthus also calls himself 'the weaver of Justice' and considers the death of Agamemnon as the fulfilment of his life:

Now I could die gladly, even I — now I see that monster in the nets of Justice.44

Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus think that their act is final and they have brought about peace and order as she says:

You and I have power now.

We will set the house in order once for all.45

42. N.G.L. Hammond, loc. cit., p. 94.
43. Ag ii. 1396-97 and 1429-30.
44. Ag ii. 1635 and 1642-43.
45. Ag ii. 1707-8.
But what they did was 'destiny' and their justice "Act for act, wound for wound" as Clytemnestra recognizes earlier.\textsuperscript{46} Their act cannot be final, not only because their justice is blood-for-blood and had personal interest in the murder, but also because they killed the innocent Cassandra. Before being slaughtered she predicted that

\begin{quote}
"There will come another to avenge us,
born to kill his mother, born
his father's champion,"
\end{quote}

and she says their blood will stop crying for revenge only,

\begin{quote}
"When the queen, woman for woman, dies for me,
and a man falls for the man who married grief!"\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

Thus the first play in the trilogy comes to an end with a ray of hope in black-despair.

\textbf{II}

The \textit{Libation Bearers} begins with the rites of spring performed when the god is struggling for rebirth, where memory and desire, dread and expectation mix. No sooner, the play commences, than we find Orestes with his friend Pylades praying to Hermes, lord of the dead, and then he proceeds to

\textsuperscript{46} Ag. \textit{ii.} 1692 and 1555.
\textsuperscript{47} Ag. \textit{ii.} 1302-04 and 1340-41.
lay two locks of hair, one for his dead father and one for Inachos, a local stream that gave him manhood. Soon there comes a procession of libation bearers led by Electra and Orestes goes behind the tomb. Electra and her friends continue with the rites that Orestes began and pray for the arrival of the avenger. Significantly at the end of the prayer Electra feels "pangs of labour" and Orestes comes out from behind the tomb and assures them that he is the fruit of their prayer:

Pray for the future. Tell the gods they've brought Your prayers to birth, and pray that we succeed.\footnote{48, L.B. 11, 212-13.}

The location of the dead king's grave, the rites and his timely appearance suggest that Orestes is the re-incarnation of the dead king as the avenger of his death, a motif carried on from the myth. Moreover, later in the play the Chorus speaks about the mutilation of Agamemnon, which makes a closer analogy between the vegetation god and the dead king possible.\footnote{49, L.B. 11, 428-32.}

What follows is a process of identification after which Electra showers all the love on Orestes:

You light to my eyes, four loves in one! I have to call you father, it is fate! and I turn to you the love I gave my mother -
I despise her, she deserves it, yes, and the love I gave my sister, sacrificed on the cruel sword, I turn to you. You were my faith my brother - You alone restore my self - respect. 50

These lines and her later prayer to her father "Help me kill her lover, then go free" proves beyond doubt that Aeschylus was aware of the motif of 'Electra complex' in the myth and that he has expressed that in the play.

We have seen that Clytemnestra's treacherous deeds have caused the development of complex psychological atmosphere in the house. The daughter takes her father as a love-object and by refusing to give her in marriage, Clytemnestra has intensified that love as well as Electra's hatred towards her. When Orestes comes back she takes him for a son, she wished for from her father as is evident from her suffering of pangs of labour just before his arrival. Deliverance from all these moral and psychological entanglements is to come from the family as the chorus says:

But there is a cure in the home and not outside it, no. 51

51. L.B. 458-59.
Orestes is an avenger with a difference that he has no other way open before him other than to act, whereas Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra could elude the action if they wanted. In short, Orestes is denied the freedom of self-determination. Apollo has commanded him to avenge his father or suffer pains of guilt as political as exile, as physical as plague, and as psychological as madness and the Furies. Yet he hesitates and needs a push either from Electra or Pylades.

Secondly, Orestes knows that action is suffering and he does not hope that his act will be final; neither does he hope that he can rule the country after murdering Clytaemnestra, unlike her. The grievous duty of bringing down the triumphant wrong doer fell upon him as the law prevailed was blood-for-blood and it meant that the avenger must live for it alone, in hardship and constant danger, sacrificing all pleasure in life till he had saved the honour of the dead. His only prayer to the gods is "just let me take her life and die!"52

At the most immediate level Orestes appears before us as the son divided by the fatal discord of the parents; it is a fate he shares with Oedipus, and like Oedipus, if to a lesser degree, his history seems to embody the principle

52, L.B. 1.427.
of psychic determinism for both are enmeshed by events in the past over which they have no control and for which they bear no wilful responsibility.\textsuperscript{53} However, we can find a reversal of the Oedipus complex and the love of mother is replaced by murderous hatred.

The ambivalent feelings of the son towards the mother is reactivated by the basic situation of the father's disappearance and the mother's guilty responsibility for it. The ambivalence is inherent in the relationship of the mother and son, since in the first months of life she represents to him the whole of the external world, both good and bad. "His attitude to her is formed both by love and dependence, and by contrary feelings of envy and frustrated greed, all such feelings, when projected into her, making her simultaneously a good and bad object."\textsuperscript{54} The father's success as a competitor compounds this envy with jealousy and forms the destructive component in the love of the adult son for his mother.

It is demanded of Orestes that he kill his mother as an act of retributive justice; but in terms of psychological reality the impulse to the act, which alone makes its performance possible, springs less from the external authority or moral principle or divine command than from the most deeply


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p. 149.
buried primitive impulses from the past, the rage and resentment of spoiled love. \(^{55}\) When the son finds, his own desire to kill the father and marry the mother have been successfully enacted by another, the reversal of Oedipus complex takes place. The worthlessness of Aegisthus as a substitute for him and his own identification with the father prompt him to kill the supplanter. Here, the avenging of the father, the unconscious desire to kill the father and the proving of his own worth combine in the need to kill Aegisthus.

Orestes asks why the chorus of libation bearers were sent by Clytaemnestra and they inform him about her dream in which a snake bore by her, kills her by drawing clots of blood from the nipple along with the milk. He accepts the viperous role of love-in-hate and submits to the dream:

The sexual associations of the dream look back to Clytaemnestra's usurpation of the male role in the _Agamemnon_ and prefigure this rankling sexual jealousy against his father's womanish cousin and supplanter, Aegisthus; father and son share the same resentment against the woman's sexual betrayal of them. Early pre-Oedipal fantasies are here blended with later Oedipal material. The husband and father had been killed and castrated by the wife; how he

\(^{55}\) Ibid., pp. 149-50.
comes to life again in the son, an enemy armed both with his own infantile envy and the destroyed penis of father. 56

Apollo has asked Orestes to avenge Agamemnon by cunning to get even with the murderers of his father who killed him by cunning. This may be taken as an explanation by Aeschylus for Orestes' murder of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus without the help of an army. Orestes knocks at the door of the house and gives the false news of his death, whereupon Clytaemnestra receives them with pretended sorrow and sends the old nurse Cilissa as a messenger to Aegisthus.

It is interesting to notice that Cilissa is introduced as a character having more speaking part than both Aegisthus and Pylades when the number of characters were yet only three in Greek tragedy. Aeschylus could have sent a servant or a messenger as it was the convention. The presentation of the Old Nurse, bewailing the death of Orestes and telling the audience how she loved and nursed him, must be understood as an attempt to present a surrogate mother for Orestes and to reduce Clytaemnestra's claim as mother, just before her murder. 57

56. Ibid., p. 158.
After the murder of Aegisthus the mother and son come face to face without the protective barrier that his father or the surrogate father once provided. Orestes wavers and he would have left Clytaemnestra un killed, but for the timely intervention of Pylades. In killing the mother, the son simultaneously responds to the dead father's call for revenge and seeks to gratify his own buried impulses that seize upon and exploit the opportunity provided by the mother's responsibility for the father's death. "At another level, the killing may even seem to resolve an unbearable conflict, for by removing the object of so much concentrated love and hatred it releases the son from the Oedipal tension."

In the scene of the murder, when Orestes coarsely enjoins his mother with the lover in death, sexual jealousy is very prominent. He repeats Electra's words earlier in the play that Aegisthus had been the price she obtained for selling her children. He steams out his dissatisfaction that she preferred Aegisthus both to his father and himself:

I want to butcher you—right across his body!
In life you thought he dwarfed my father — die!
go down with him forever!
You love this man,
the man you should have loved you hated.

58. Patrick Roberts, op. cit., p. 150.
59. L.B. 11, 891—94.
Again after the murder keeping the dead bodies one upon the other he says to chorus: "Great lovers still, as you may read their fate." 60

The chorus that prayed to Orestes to come,

"and wash old works of blood
in fresh-drawn blood of Justice"

continue to believe that "the pure god came down and healed our ancient wounds" and they praise the heaven's just command.61 But, exhibiting the net in which Clytaemnestra caught Agamemnon, he says that the act was done by Apollo and he was only an agent:

Here unfurl it
so the Father - no, not mine but the One who watches overall, the Sun can behold my mother's godless work. So he may come, my witness when the day of judgement comes, that I pursued this bloody death with justice

Mother's death.62

Orestes never considers himself as Justice; What he says is that his act is just and it was ordered by the Seer of Delphi.

60. L.B. 1. 967.
61. L.B. 11. 795-96 and 1. 947
Orestes who identified himself with his father first, now identifies himself with the mother: "I must escape this blood; it is my own." The pressure of matricide and that of breaking a taboo becomes heavy on him and he begins to see the personified pangs of conscience, the Furies. The Furies are yet internal as we can see from the words of Orestes just before rushing out:

You can't see them
I can, they drive me on! I must move on —

John Jones equates the mother's blood on his hands and the Furies: Orestes sees the Furies because his mother's blood is fresh on his hands, and when he has been cleansed by Apollo he will cease to see them. The Furies are subjective manifestation in the sense that they appear only to Orestes, but they have objective status in that their visible presence is grounded in the material human blood on his hands: "they cannot be called figments of his imagination any more than the blood can be so called." In the transformation of the myth into drama Aeschylus has avoided the children of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra and so we should assume that there will be no avenger for them.

63. L.B. 1. 1036.
64. L.B. Il. 1060-61.
But what Orestes did was an act in the line of the blood for blood, wound for wound justice and as a result he goes mad. What will be the fate of Orestes? What will be the fate of the House of Atreus?

The Libation Bearers ends with these questions:

First the children eaten, the cause of all our pain, the curse:
And next the kingly man's ordeal, the bath where the proud commander, lord of Achaea's armies lost his life.
And now a third has come, but who?
A third like Saiming Zeus?
Or should we call him death?
Where will it end? —
Where will it sink to sleep and rest, this murderous hate, this Fury?

III

We have seen that the uncontrollable, unconscious law of nature had been converted into a blood-for-blood justice, where each punisher assumes the role of Justice, by Aeschylus. In the Eumenides when the Erinyes are objectified we are seeing the personification of this curse under whose yoke the House of Atreus suffered for three generations.

66, L.B. II. 1067-1077.
To escape from the grip of it, man should be able to accept justice implemented by an external agency, instead of taking the law on his own hand. Now man has suffered into that truth as Orestes says, "I have suffered into truth" and seeks the help of Apollo and Athena. 67

The natural law must have existed in the minds of men even before the birth of gods since the Erinyes are considered as the elder ones. They were the products of the unconscious and ignorance; hence they are called the daughters of night by themselves:

We are the everlasting children of Night.

Deep in the hells of Earth they call us Curses. 68

Till the murder of Clytemnestra Zeus and the other younger gods worked in conjunction with the Erinyes. Now there comes a rift between Zeus and the daughters of darkness, as he wants to establish a new order; of course Zeus is never seen in the play but Apollo who speaks nothing but the will of Zeus and Athena who is all of her father truly represent him. As men have sought for his help it is easy for him to give them wisdom; but the Erinyes fear that if Orestes is acquitted justice itself will disappear from the face of earth. The Eumenides is the reconciliation of these two factors.

68. Eum. I, 426-29.
Apollo is speaking the language of force from the beginning. Driving the Furies out of his shrine, he shouts:

Out I tell you, out of the halls — fast! — set the Prophet's chamber free!

Or take

the flash and stab of this, this flying viper

whipped from the golden cord that strings my bowl.

Later vindicating Orestes in the court of Athena he warns:

Not once

from the Prophet's thrones have I declared

a word that bears on man, woman or city

that Zeus did not command, the Olympian Father.

This is his justice — omnipotent, I warn you.

Bend to the will of Zeus. No oath can match

the power of the Father.

Again when the voting is going on he bursts out:

— among the gods, young and old

you go disgraced. I will triumph over you.

The Furies in their turn are not at all concerned with the motives which qualify Orestes' action in terms of

69. Eum. 11, 176-79.
70. Eum. 11, 623-28.
71. Eum. 11, 736-37.
morality and what they say is "you'll give me blood for blood, you must!" The Erinyes cannot conceive of any justification for Orestes. That one of his motives was to vindicate authority and order in his house and city means nothing to the Erinyes of Clytaemnestra, and indeed the stability of the social fabric has not been the concern of any of the Erinyes we have met: "the first one plunged Greece into mourning for the sake of Dike, and the incessant crimes of vengeance in the house of Atreus have brought it down in ruin. The Erinyes are daughters of night, instinctive and blind." Insisting on the fact against the idea, they ignore the justifications of Orestes; for them the blood on his hands means far more than the reasons why the blood is there.

The conflict between the Erinyes and Apollo is of great significance and consequences both for men and gods. It is a fight for domination of younger against elder generation; of male against female; of civilization against primitivism; of intellect and enlightenment against ignorance; of consciousness against the unconscious. Only Athena, whose nature reconciles the female with the male, bearing a deeper wisdom can solve the stalemate.

Athena listens to both the sides patiently and as a result the crisis that Agamemnon faced when the gods sent

72. Eum. 1. 262.
adverse winds and the crisis that Orestes faced when Apollo commanded him to murder his mother is passed over to her:

A crisis either way.

Embrace the one? expel the other? It defeats me. 74

She gives the judgement of the case to a jury of men,

"But since the matter comes to rest on us,

I will appoint the judges of man slaughter,

swear them in, and found a tribunal here

for all time to come,"

but keeps the final verdit for herself. 75 When the jury of man is found qually divided Athena favours Orestes and acquits him.

The infuriated Furies threaten Athens with destruction refusing to yield to the power and wisdom, but Athena knows that they are not to be fought out of existence; using persuasion which once led Agamemnon to his death, she wins over them for the good purpose of the progress of humanity. The Furies themselves look for nothing less than moral annihilation as the result of the defeat. But something of which they never have dreamed - of which, probably, no Greek in the theatre had dreamed - is in store for them; neither victory nor defeat, but recognition by the power to which they have been forced to bow, assimilation to that religion

74. Eum. 11. 495-96.
75. Eum. 11. 497-500.
from which they have kept themselves so jealously sundered. "They are still to be mighty powers of earth, yet their function is to be cursing no more, but blessing only." They accept the proposal put forward by Athena and transform themselves from the mechanical Law of Retribution which operates blindly, into a law which thinks and feels and seeks real justice.

What Aeschylus finds in the myth is the gradual achievement of true Justice or the possibility of it. Thus, the myth of Orestes for him is a grand parable of progress.