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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

AESCHYLUS' ORESTEIA AND T.S. ELIOT'S THE FAMILY REUNION: INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONS

BY TERESA CUNNINGHAM

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
SPRING 1990

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Aeschylus' Oresteia and T.S. Eliot's The Family Reunion: Intertextual Relations* submitted by Teresa Cunningham in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Supervisor

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the relationship between T.S. Eliot's The Family Reunion and Aeschylus' Oresteia. In Chapter One, Eliot's indebtedness to the Oresteia in his The Family Reunion is established. In Chapters Two through Five, themes to be found in both plays are examined and compared. In Chapter Two, the presence of Time in both plays is considered. In Chapter Three, the themes of light and darkness as they occur in both plays are examined. In Chapter Four, the theme of medicine is considered. In Chapter Five, the attention that each dramatist has given to the difference he sees between appearances and reality is analyzed. In each chapter, new possibilities for interpretation of The Family Reunion that are afforded by comparison with the Oresteia are presented. In Chapter Six, these possibilities for interpretation are synthesized into a new interpretation of The Family Reunion, which is compared with existing interpretations of The Family Reunion which do not take into consideration the influence of the Oresteia.

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I would like to thank Professor Mozejko and Professor Robberecht for their contributions and comments. I would especially like to thank Professor Lynn-George whose commitment and support, even in the face of split infinitives, enabled me to complete this thesis. I would also like to thank my father for solving my computing difficulties and for developing my interest in literature from the beginning.

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INTRODUCTION

In his writings, whether prose or poetry, T.S. Eliot proves himself to be very much aware of the significance of past literary traditions for modern literature. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent[1]", Eliot describes his perception of the value of a literary work as follows:

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete significance alone. His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism... The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new... work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.[2]

This statement expresses Eliot's concern with the omnipresence of past traditions in modern writing, including his own.

While critics tend to examine the literary influences which have provided inspiration for Eliot in his other works, particularly in his poetry, the presence of the ancient tradition in Eliot's The Family Reunion has not been dealt sufficient consideration. In his essay, "Poetry and Drama[3]" Eliot admits to having borrowed extensively from the Oresteia: "I should have stuck closer

1 T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" in Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975).

2 Ibid., pp. 38-9.

3 T.S. Eliot, "Poetry and Drama", in Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975).

to Aeschylus or else taken a great deal more liberty with his myth."[4] Despite statements such as these on the part of its author, the criticism which The Family Reunion has received is marked by a failure to recognize the significance of the presence of the ancient tradition in the play.

For example, Helen Gardner, in her work The Art of T.S. Eliot[5] says of The Family Reunion:

> What Greek influence there is in this play is to be looked for in the link between the plot and the Orestes myth, and seems to me to be quite superficial. Paradoxically, Mr. Eliot's Greek play, Murder in the Cathedral, is far more Greek in spirit and form than this play in which Christian terminology and explicitly Christian reference are deliberately avoided, and which at first sight demands comparison with the Oresteia to which it so often refers.[6]

Rather than examine any similarities to the Oresteia contained within The Family Reunion herself, Gardner instead cites Maude Bodkin's earlier The Quest for Salvation in an Ancient and a Modern Play[7] as a "thoroughly developed treatment"[8] of the relationship between the Oresteia and The Family Reunion.

In this work, Bodkin undertakes a comparative study of The Family Reu-

[4] Ibid., p.143.

[5] Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S. Eliot (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1950.

[6] Ibid., p.140.

[7] Maude Bodkin, The Quest for Salvation in an Ancient and Modern Play, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941).

[8] Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S. Eliot, (New York: E.P. Dutton 1950) p. 140.

union and the third play of the Oresteia, the Eumenides. However, as the Eumenides is the only play of Aeschylus' trilogy to which she gives her consideration, and Eliot makes use of the entire Oresteia in his play, she therefore omits two-thirds of the ancient drama from her study. In addition, her study considers only the theme of salvation, as her title suggests, and while she includes an examination of some of the similarities in plot structure between these plays, she does not explore any other points of comparison between them. In addition, this study only makes use of an English translation of the Eumenides, whereas Eliot himself examined the original Greek, and was aware of the variety of interpretations that the denseness of Aeschylus' use of language permits. Certainly Eliot incorporates some of the ambiguities created by Aeschylus' use of language into his own play.

Unlike these critics, George Steiner, in The Death of Tragedy,[9] places greater emphasis on the presence of the classical play within The Family Reunion, although it is not within the scope of that work to analyze these similarities in detail. He notes Eliot's use of the Oresteia as follows:

> In The Family Reunion, Eliot makes wary use of the Oresteia. He keeps posed in our minds the near presence of the Aeschylean tragedy. This presence glows and darkens behind the frail structure of the modern work. For a time the dual focus is effective. We do seem to hear above the nerve-tight cadence of genteel speech the overtones of ancient disaster.[10]

[9] George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961).

[10] Ibid., p.328.

These "echoes" of the ancient play which Steiner perceives to be present in The Family Reunion are in part due to the similarity in plot between the ancient and the modern play -- a son returns to his home and his return results in the death of his mother. This course of events, however, is insufficient in itself to create the "overtones of ancient disaster" to which Steiner refers. The presence of the dread goddesses, the Eumenides, within the drama is an obvious point of reference with the Oresteia, yet it is at this point in the drama that Steiner and, indeed, Eliot himself consider the play to become unsatisfactory.[11] In other words, it is when the Eumenides make their appearance, that the interplay of modern and ancient dramatic techniques disintegrates. There are also references to be found within the drama which refer directly to the Oresteia, for example, references are made to hot baths and to the city of Argos. These allusions to the ancient play, however, are too sparse and undeveloped to create the illusion which Steiner depicts in The Death of Tragedy.

Perhaps Eliot's most extensive use of the ancient drama, and one which could sustain the "overtones of ancient disaster" to which Steiner refers, is thematic in nature. In the Oresteia, Aeschylus incorporates many motifs which may be viewed as reflecting the level of moral awareness on the part of the characters of the drama. For example, the themes of time, medicine, light and darkness, and the nature of appearances, may all be perceived to be inverted or "corrupted" in the Agamemnon, but have their natural "redeeming"

[11] Ibid., p.329.

properties restored to them in the Eumenides. Eliot, however, while employing them in his play in a similar way, omits the resolution of these themes at the end of The Family Reunion. The consideration of this borrowing of ancient themes, and the manner in which it has been done, may result in a darker and more ironic interpretation of The Family Reunion than it has hitherto received.

It will be within the scope of this study then, to examine closely any thematic similarities between the Oresteia and The Family Reunion. The use of the themes of time, light, medicine and the reality behind appearances, will be given particularly close attention. Finally, possibilities of interpretation that arise from consideration of these themes borrowed from the ancient play will be examined and compared with those of critics who have not examined the Oresteia in any detail.

While special consideration is given to the Greek text of the Oresteia in this study, English translation of the Greek is provided for those readers without Greek. The source of these translations is that of Hugh Lloyd-Jones, except where otherwise noted.

TIME

In the Oresteia, Aeschylus reveals a fascination with the role of time in human affairs and its corresponding role in the plan of Zeus. Aeschylus' perception of time suggests the influence of the philosophy of Heraclitus, as it can be discerned from the surviving fragments of that philosopher. T.S. Eliot incorporates many of Aeschylus' perceptions of time into The Family Reunion, and like Aeschylus, he incorporates Heraclitean philosophy into his treatment of the Orestes myth. For Aeschylus, time brings all things to pass, and reveals even the most hidden of crimes. In addition, past actions always remain in the present, and have a bearing on the future. The result of this view is a cyclic perspective of time. Eliot, too, sees the past and the future as integral parts of the present, and he, too, presents a cyclic perspective of time in his play; however, from his perspective the cycle of time is inescapable, with the result that permanence becomes almost impossible. In Aeschylus' Oresteia, it becomes possible to establish a legal system for all time.

The single surviving fragment of the pre-Socratic philosopher, Anaximander, suggests a view of nature which entails the conflict of opposites and the role of time within these oppositions:

> ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσίς ἐστι τοῖς οὖσι, καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὸ χρεών, διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν, ποιητικωτέροις οὕτως ὀνόμασιν αὐτὰ λέγων.[1]

[1] Charles Kahn, Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) p.35.

> (Out of those things (namely, the opposing powers) from which their generation comes, into these again does the destruction of things take place, in accordance with what is right and necessary; for they make amends and pay the penalty to one another for their aggression according to the ordinance of Time.[2]

Charles Kahn, in his edition of the fragments of Heraclitus, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus,[3] notes the debt the philosopher owes to Anaximander.

> Here the pattern of physical change and transformation, the birth of what is new and the death of what is old, is seen as a conflict regulated by an ordinance of time, where the contestants appear in turn as victor and vanquished... This Milesian notion of cosmic order as one of opposition, reciprocity and inevitable justice, is faithfully taken over by Heraclitus with all its poetic resonance and association with older mythical ideas.[4]

Aeschylus, a younger contemporary of Heraclitus, incorporates Heraclitean philosophy into his plays, employing the same cryptic use of language as the philosopher. In the Oresteia, one sees a cycle of violence, in which opposites, (male and female, young and old, those associated with light, and those with darkness), conflict in a series of murders, with justice as the inevitable outcome.

The Watchman's speech introduces several temporal themes central to the Oresteia:

2 Charles Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p.18.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 18

θεοὺς μὲν αἰτῶ τῶνδ' ἀπαλλαγὴν πόνων,
φρουρᾶς ἐτείας μῆκος, ἣν κοιμώμενος
στέγαις Ἀτρειδῶν ἀγκαθεν, κυνὸς δίκην,
ἄστρων κάτοιδα νυκτέρων ὁμήγυριν,
καὶ τοὺς φέροντας χειμα καὶ θέρος βροτοῖς
λαμπροὺς δυνάστας, ἐμπρέποντας αἰθέρι
ἀστέρας, ὅταν φθίνωσιν ἀντολαῖς τε τῶν.
καὶ νῦν φυλάσσω λαμπάδος τὸ σύμβολον,
αὐγὴν πυρὸς φέρουσαν ἐκ Τροίας φάτιν
ἀ 'σιμόν τε βάξιν: ὧδε γὰρ κρατεῖ
γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ...
κλαίω τότ' οἴκου τοῦδε συμφορὰν στένων
οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ' ἄριστα διαπονουμένου.
νῦν δ' εὐτυχὴς γένοιτ' ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων,
εὐαγγέλου φανέντος ὁρφναίου πυρός. (Ag: 1-20)

(The gods I beg for deliverance from these toils, From my watch a year long, through which, sleeping upon the house of the Atreidae, like a dog, I have learned to know the assembly of the stars of night and those who bring winter and summer to mortals, the bright potentates, shining in the sky, the stars, when they set and at their rising. and now I am watching for the signal of the torch, the gleam of fire bringing news from Troy and the tidings of capture: for such is the rule of a woman's man-counseling, ever hopeful, heart... then I weep, lamenting the misfortune of this house, not now, as in time past, excellently kept in order. But now may there come a happy deliverence from toil, as the fire that brings good news shines through the darkness.)

The first statement of the play is a request to the gods that they bring a release from suffering and from his year-long vigil: the Watchman is seeking an "end" to his waiting. These are two themes which recur throughout the play. Perhaps the central question of the play is whether release from the suffering brought about by the curse on the House of Atreus can be abated

in terms of existing methods of justice. In addition, the theme of waiting is also central to the trilogy. The Watchman waits for the return of Agamemnon, as does Clytemnestra for different reasons, and the chorus of Argive elders wait for the future to unfold in the Agamemnon; Orestes, Electra, and the chorus of serving women await revenge in the Choephoroi, the chorus of the Furies in the Eumenides wait for justice to take place while Orestes awaits acquittal. In all these plays, an end to the cycle of violence is sought.

The Watchman remarks on the procession of the stars at night, "bright potentates" (λαμπρούς δυνάστας) who bring winter and summer to mortals. In this passage, the lordly stars are viewed as eternal and unchanging, while mortals are perceived as transient beings who directly experience the passage of time through the change of the seasons. The Watchman also indicates that it is night, suggesting that the beacon's flame will bring the light of day to night. The fact that it is night adds an element of foreboding to the process of waiting.

Time not only reveals all things but brings all things to pass. For Aeschylus, the hidden crime will be made manifest in the future. In the following passage, the chorus of the Agamemnon compare Helen of Troy to a lion cub, the point of the comparison being that time reveals that which is hidden.

πολέα δ' ἔσχ' ἐν ἀγκάλαις,
νεοτρόφου τέκνου δίκαν,
φαιδροπὸς ποτὶ χειρα σαί-
νων τε γαστρὸς ανάγκαις.

χρονισθεὶς δ' απἐδειξειν η-
θος τὸ πρὸς τοκέων...

(And often he took it in his arms like a new-born child bright-eyed, and fawning on the hand as its belly's needs compelled it. But in time it showed the temper it had from its parents...)

(Ag: 723-8) Here, the hidden, destructive nature of the lion makes itself manifest over time.

Jacqueline de Romilly, in her work, Time in Greek Tragedy[5] suggests that Aeschylus "trusted time"[6] and she cites a fragment of Athenaeus which suggests that Aeschyus "dedicated his work to time."[7] For Aeschylus, time brings about justice and teaches a lesson, in the form of divine punishment. de Romilly argues that it is necessary, if one believes in divine justice, for time to play a role in the dispensation of justice as justice may often be "surprisingly late"[8]. In fact, divine justice may be dispensed only in later generations, as if part of some incomprehensible plan. An example of this view of justice may be found in lines 58-9 of the Agamemnon. In this passage, the chorus relate how Zeus will send the ὑστεροποινον Ἐρινυν (late-avenging Fury) to the transgressor of the vultures' nest. The term ὑστεροποινον stresses the temporal aspect of divine retribution in the Oresteia.

5 Jacqueline de Romilly, Time in Greek Tragedy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968).

6 Ibid., p.59.

7 Ibid., p.59.

8 Ibid., p.60.

For Aeschylus, the past is an inescapable dimension. Once an action has been committed, it is irrevocable; past crimes cannot be forgotten because they will be atoned for in the future, according to the plan of Zeus. The chorus of the Choephoroi say of the criminal:

δρὰσαντα παθεῖν,
τριγέρων μῦθος τάδε φονει.(Ch: 313-5)

("Let the doer suffer": so goes a saying three times ancient.)

In addition, the irrevocability of death is stressed repeatedly in the play, a feature of death which necessitates the irreparable nature of the crime of murder. In the Eumenides, Apollo remarks upon the fact that even Zeus is incapable of remedying the death of a mortal:.

ἀνδρὸς
δ' επειδὰν αιμ' ανὰσπασηι χὸνις
απαξ θανόντος, ουτις ἐστ' ἀνάστασις.
τούτον ἐπωδὰς οὐκ ἐποίησεν πατὴρ
ὑμός"...(Eu: 647-50)

(But once a man is dead, and the earth has sucked up his blood, there is no way to raise him up. For against this my father has furnished no spell.)

While death is irrevocable for mortals, the avenging spirit of the dead may remain. Agamemnon's spirit is invoked in the Choephoroi, and "the dream" of Clytemnestra invokes the Furies to justice in the Eumenides. The chorus of serving women tells Orestes:

τέκνον, φρόνημα τοῦ θανόντος οὐ δαμα-
ζει πυρος μαλερα γναθος
φαίνει δ' ὕστερον ὀργάς:
ὀτοτύζεται δ' ὁ θνήισκων,
ἀναφαίνεται δ' ὁ βλάπτων."

(My son, the dead man's mind is not subdued by the fire's ravening jaw; but late in time he shows his anger. The dead is lamented, and the punisher is revealed.)

(Ch: 324-28) Not only is it stressed that the spirit of the murdered man is vengeful, but that this vengeance will take place aided by time. Clearly, crimes committed in the past live very much in the present in the drama of House of Atreus by her vision of the spectres of the Aeschylus. For example, Cassandra is able to discern the history of the murdered children and the Furies who inhabit the house.

Throughout the Oresteia, however, various characters are unwittingly caught up in the cycle of murder and imagine that by their act of vengeance, they will end the curse upon the House of Atreus. The herald imagines that the past deaths at Troy can be forgotten and that the future should only be considered in the light of Agamemnon's victory:

τί ταῦτα πενθεῖν δεῖ; παροίχεται πόνος;
παροίχεται δέ; τοῖσι μὲν τεθνηκόσιν
τὸ μήποτ' αὖθις μηδ' ἀναστῆναι μέλειν;
ἡμῖν δὲ τοῖς λοιποῖσιν Ἀργείων στρατοῦ
νικᾷ τὸ κέρδος, πῆμα δ' οὐκ ἀντιρρέπει;
τί τοὺς ἀναλωθέντας ἐν ψήφῳ λέγειν,
τὸν ζῶντα δ' ἀλγεῖν χρὴ τύχης παλιγκότου;
καὶ πολλὰ χαίρειν συμφοραῖς καταξιῶ...(Ag: 567-74)

> Why should I lament for this? Our toil is past, past so that the dead, for their partcare not even to rise again. Why must I tell the tale of those who perished, and why must the living groan again over malignant fortune? I hold that what has happened warrants us even to feel great joy. And for us who are left from the Argive army gain prevails, and sorrow does not counterveil it...)

The Herald has not considered the guilt Agamemnon has incurred upon himself, through both the murder of his daughter and the excessive revenge he has taken on Troy, to the extent that he has destroyed even the temples of the gods. Again, the spirits of the dead men at Troy may be vengeful, as well as the gods themselves.

Clytemnestra imagines that the murder of her husband will end the curse upon the house:

> ...ἐγὼ δ' οὖν
> ἐθέλω δαίμονι τῷ Πλεισθενιδᾶν
> ὅρκους θεμένη τάδε μὲν στέργειν
> δύστλητά περ ὀνθ', ὃ δὲ λοιπόν, ἰόντ'
> ἐκ τῶνδε δόμων ἄλλην γενεὰν
> τρίβειν θανάτοις αὐθένταισιν;
> κτεάνων δε μέρος βαιὸν ἐχούσῃ
> πᾶν ἀπόχρη μοι μανίας μελάθρων
> ἀλληλοφόνους ἀφελούσῃ. (Ag: 1568-76)

> (But I for my part am willing to swear a covenant with the demon of the Pleisthenids so that I bear all this, hard though it is to endure; and he may go for the future from this house and wear away some other family through deaths at the hands of kindred. Even if my share of possessions is small, I shall be content with all things if I have rid our halls of the frenzies in which we shed

each other's blood.)

Clytemnestra fails to realize, however, that with the murder of Agamemnon, rather than ridding the house of a vengeful spirit, she will instead introduce a new and vengeful spirit to the house, and one that will certainly not leave until she herself has been slain. Similarly, the chorus of the Choephoroi believe that Orestes' murder of his mother will end the curse:

> τάχα δὲ παντελὴς χρόνος ἀμείψεται
> πρόθυρα δωμάτων, ὅταν ἀφ' ἑστίας
> μύσος ἄπαν ἐλαθῇι
> καθαρμοισιν ἀτᾶν ἐλατηρίοις...(Ch: 965-8)

(And soon shall all-accomplishing time pass the portals of the palace, when from its hearth all pollution shall be driven by means of cleansing which expels destruction.)

While time will indeed bring the murder to fulfillment because of Clytemnestra's past guilt, Orestes' crime of matricide cannot remain in the past, but will remain with him. The chorus of Argive elders have already remarked on the inevitability of Paris' punishment in the Agamemnon in these terms:

> ἐστι δ' ὅπῃ νῦν
> εστι τελεῖται δ' ἐς τὸ πεπρωμένον·
> οὐθ' ὑποκαίων οὐτ' ἀπολείβων
> ἀπύρων ἱερῶν ὀργὰς ἀτενεῖς παραθέλξει. (Ag: 67-71)

(The matter stands where it now stands; and it shall be accomplished to its destined end. Not by the persuasion of burnt offerings nor of libations, of sacrifices that know no fire shall he cajole aside unflinching wrath.)

Clearly, the means the chorus of the Choephoroi hopes to employ in order to purify both Orestes and the hearth of the house will be largely inadequate.

According to the Argive elders, the future cannot be known until it happens. Clytemnestra's dream in the Choephoroi, however, indicates that there are means of divining the future, although not perhaps the time of the future within the plan of Zeus. The divinely inspired Cassandra is able to discover the future through visions which encompass both the past and the present. However, she is unable to communicate her knowledge to the chorus, or to anyone for that matter. The characters of the Oresteia know the future so far as they know when they shall have their moment of vengeance. For example, Clytemnestra, once she hears of Agamemnon's return, knows when she will take her revenge, and she makes her preparations in anticipation of that event. In the Choephoroi, despite her prophetic dream, Clytemnestra does not know when the moment of her death will take place, certainly she does not know that it will occur that night. Beyond the knowledge of their immediate plans, the characters of the Oresteia are unable to know the future.

Clytemnestra demonstrates an acute awareness of time in the Agamemnon. She appears almost to "manipulate time," transcending space and time in both the "beacon speech" and also when she imaginatively depicts the destruction of Troy. In addition, she speeds to make her preparations, denying

Agamemnon the chance to "learn in time" who has been faithful to him and who has not. Clytemnestra also remarks on the changes that occur in time to mortals, for example, the fading of modesty. She speaks ironically throughout the play, yet this irony is double-edged: she speaks with intentional irony when referring to Agamemnon's future, but with unintentional irony when her words signify her own future, beyond the death of Agamemnon. For example, she describes Agamemnon's return in these terms:

ῥίζης γὰρ οὔσης φυλλὰς ἵκετ' ἐς δόμους,
σκιὰν ὑπερτείνασα σειρίου κυνός·
καὶ σοῦ μολόντος δωματῖτιν ἑστίαν,
θάλπος μὲν ἐν χειμῶνι σημαίνει μολόν,
ὅταν δὲ τεύχῃ Ζεὺς ἀπ' ὀμφακος πικρᾶς
οἶνον, τότ' ἤδη ψῦχος ἐν δόμοις πέλει,
ἀνδρὸς τελείου δῶμ' ἐπιστρωφωμένου;
Ζεῦ Ζεῦ τέλειε, τὰς ἐμὰς εὐχὰς τέλει;
μέλοι δέ τοί σοι τῶνπερ ἂν μέλλῃς τελεῖν.(Ag: 966-72)

> For while the root survives, the leaves return to the house, stretching their shade over against the dogstar; and with your return to the hearth of the palace, you signal warmth in winter by your coming. And when Zeus makes from the unripe grape wine, then at once is there coolness in the house, while a man of power walks about the palace. Zeus, Zeus with power to accomplish, accomplish my prayer.

This passage suggests the passing of the seasons and mortality -- to the mind of the audience, Agamemnon's mortality specifically. However, Clytemnestra's use of nature imagery in this instance also suggests her own mortality. For Orestes, her son and slayer, may be thought of as the root, which preserves the tree, or the House of Atreus.[9]

9 John Peradotto, "Some Patterns of Nature Imagery in the Oresteia," AJP, 85 (1964) 378-93, p.381.

The question of the Oresteia becomes how to reconcile the suffering incurred in the past with future well-being -- in other words, how may the curse be revoked? Heraclitus commented on the inadequacy of the ancient definition of justice as retribution:

> They are purified in vain with blood, those polluted with blood, as if someone who stepped in mud would try to wash himself with mud. Anyone who noticed him doing this would think he was mad. [10]

Clearly, this mode of justice will mean the utter destruction of the House of Atreus as it does for the House of Laius in Aeschylus' play, Septem Contra Thebas[11]. Justice as a legal process is, to Aeschylus' mind, the answer. However, to arrive at a system of justice which will enable the curse on the house of Atreus to be lifted, a balance between ancient views of justice as retribution, and modern views of justice as legal process, must be achieved.

This concern is echoed by the conflict between generations which moves throughout the play and culminates in the trial scene in the Eumenides. The Furies are representative of the past, the age-old wisdom of justice as retribution. Their office was established in the past and for all time:

10 Charles Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p.81.

11 Aeschylus, Septem Quae Supersunt Tragoediae, ed. Gilbert Murray, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955).

τοῦτο γὰρ λάχος διανταία
Μοιρ' ἐπέκλωσεν
ἐμπέδως ἔχειν.
θνατων τοισιν αὐτουργίαι
ξυμπέσωσιν μάταιοι,
τοῖς ὁμαρτεῖν, ὅφρ' ἂν
γᾶν ὑπελθεῃ· θανων δ'
οὐκ ἄγαν ἐλευθερος.(Eu:
334-6)

(For this is the office that Fate with her piercing stroke has ordained that I should hold fast: that after mortals to whom has come wanton murder of their own, I should follow, until they descend below the earth: and after death no wide liberty is theirs.)

Orestes and Apollo, on the other hand, represent the younger powers. In addition, Apollo already has a reputation for undermining the authority of the older gods. The Furies recall that Apollo previously flouted the authority of the Fates:

σύ τοι παλαιὰς διανομὰς καταφθίσας
οἴνωι παρηπάφησας ἀρχαίας θεάς.(Eu: 727-8)

(It was you who violated the ancient dispensations and with wine beguiled primeval goddesses.)

Athene, in her role as mediatrix must ensure that she does not undermine the authority of the Furies who are concerned that matricide will become the order of the day should their office become invalid. Furthermore, they intend to destroy her city in the event that the murderer, Orestes, goes free. On the other hand, if justice is accomplished in the ancient fashion, the House of Atreus will be utterly destroyed. The fact that Orestes is acquitted by a

(roughly) equal vote and the honor Athene accords to the Furies, indicates that in order to achieve a complete reconciliation between the two opposing forces, as opposed to a series of temporary vengeances, she must accord respect to both old and young gods alike.

Eliot introduces The Family Reunion with a speech which incorporates the theme of Time, and recalls the Watchman's speech in the Agamemnon.

> Not yet! I will ring for you. It is still quite light./ I have nothing to do but watch the days draw out./ Now that I sit in the house from October to June,/ And the swallow comes too soon and the spring will be over/ And the cuckoo will be gone before I am out again./ O Sun, that was once so warm O Light that was taken for granted/ When I was young and strong, and sun and light unsought for/ And the night unfeared and the day expected/ And clocks could be trusted, tomorrow assured/ And time would not stop in the dark! Put on the lights. But leave the curtains undrawn./ Make up the fire. Will the spring never come? I am cold. (FR: p.11)

It is Amy, the mother-figure of the drama, however, who has been awaiting her son's return for eight years, who speaks. Her first words are, "Not yet!", two words central to the play as the characters feel themselves overcome by the passage of Time and the change it elicits in them. Amy does not want the curtains drawn because there is still light left in the day; it is not yet evening. She follows this command with her comment that all she does is watch the days draw out, and that the seasons pass far too quickly. Unlike the Watchman, she fears sleep, being afraid of death, whereas he is afraid that if he sleep, he will miss the beacon's signal, unaware that it too, signals death. Amy recalls that in her youth the passage of time did not mean as much to her; she did not fear age nor the approach of death. Both

Amy and the Watchman recall the past with fondness, and the present and future with apprehension. Amy then has a fire drawn for warmth, and she wonders when spring will come. Spring, however, she reflects, will probably come and go far too quickly. Amy's speech lacks the fixed, unchanging, aspect of the Watchman's speech, provided by the reference to the stars. This lack of correspondence suggests that Amy sees nothing permanent and unchanging in existence, although she strives to attain stasis before the time of the play, and continues to attempt to achieve it during the course of the evening.

Agatha responds to Amy's opening with, "Wishwood was always a cold place Amy. (FR: p.11)" In this passage, Agatha announces that she at least sees some permanence. She also reveals the name of the house, a name which suggests another shared theme with the Oresteia.

Throughout the Oresteia, the wish is often expressed that the future may hold what the characters desire. The "wood" in "Wishwood" is a homonym for "would," the subjunctive employed in wishes for the future. As Carol Smith suggests in T.S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice,[12] "The name of her (Amy's) domain, Wishwood, indicates the illusion of her desires, and the events of the play indicate the impossibility of her plan."[13]

[12] Carol Smith, T.S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice: From Sweeney Agonistes to The Elder Statesman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

[13] Ibid., p.136.

As in the Oresteia, the opening speech introduces the theme of waiting. Amy is waiting for spring, and she has been waiting for eight years for her son to return. Agatha later describes both herself and Mary as "watchers and waiters," to which Mary replies: "Waiting, waiting, always waiting. I think this house means to keep us waiting (FR: p.50)." Here, Mary imagines herself to be part of some grander design that determines that she should wait. Certainly, this is the classical role for women, as the examples of Clytemnestra and Penelope illustrate. The chorus of the play awaits an end to the curse, as do those of the Agamemnon and the Choephoroi, however, the circular nature of Time in the play entails that an end is necessarily another beginning, and so this proves impossible. The cry of "Not yet!", recurs in the play, as each time a character believes himself to have achieved an end, this end proves to be merely another beginning to the cycle.

Eliot, like Aeschylus, may be seen to dedicate a great quantity of his work to time. In addition, Eliot was greatly influenced by Heraclitus, although Eliot was, of course, only able to study the fragments which remain of Heraclitus' text. Eliot's work of poetry, Four Quartets,[14] is primarily concerned with Time, and was published around the same time as The Family Reunion was first presented. It features two epigraphs, both fragments of

Heraclitus. In The Family Reunion itself, there are clear references made to the Heraclitean perspective of time. For Eliot, however, justice does not appear as the inevitable end of the conflict of opposing forces brought about by the family curse. Instead, a cyclic pattern of opposition is achieved. The establishment of this pattern results in a view of time and history in which "Accident is design/ And design is accident/ In a cloud of unknowing./(FR: p.110)

In Four Quartets, Eliot demonstrates a fascination with the possibility that the past and the future may both be present in the present:

> Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future/ And time future contained in time past./ If all time is eternally present/ All time is unredeemable. (FQ: p.13)

The perspective of time to be observed in The Family Reunion, is a circular one. As in the Oresteia, past curses breed with the generations; and the future fulfills past curses. As in the Oresteia, there is a wish for this cycle of curses to be ended. Throughout the play, Agatha voices the hope that the chain of curses and the "knot of confusion" wrought by family unhappiness will end: "May the knot that was tied/ become unknotted... (FR: p.70)". The curse, unlike that of the Oresteia, is too much embedded in both the past (and the future) to be unravelled.

Both Harry and Agatha demonstrate an awareness of the power and eternal presence of both the past and future. Harry replies to Dr. Warburton, who has just told him to forget his past and to concentrate instead on

Amy's future: "How can we be concerned with the past/ and not with the future? or with the future/ And not with the past? (FR: p.75)". Harry is aware of the power of the past and past guilt to shape the future, and realizes the dependence of these temporal aspects upon one another.

Amy attempts to ignore the past, and imagines that it can be forgotten so that Harry may take his rightful place as the master of Wishwood. In this attempt, she resembles those characters of the Oresteia who hope to leave past events in the past.

> Harry is to take command at Wishwood/ And I hope we can contrive his future happiness./ Do not discuss his absence. Please behave only/ As if nothing had happened in the last eight years.(FR: p.21)

Here Amy imagines that she can shape Harry's future if they can only treat the past eight years and the events which took place in them as non-existent. Considering the length of time involved, and the fact that it becomes apparent that her son was responsible for the death of his wife in that time, Amy's hope takes on ludicrous proportions. Agatha had previously discussed Harry's homecoming in terms of the impossibility of constructing the future without the past: "I mean painful, because everything is irrevocable./ Because the past is irremediable,/ Because the future can only be built/ Upon the real past.(FR: p.17)" In these terms, Amy would certainly be "contriving Harry's future" were it possible to abandon the events of the past, for this would be to abandon "the real past."

Amy did attempt to change the "real past" so that the future would correspond with her ideal. Amy, as she remarks to Agatha, "forces sons on an unwilling father," in order to mold the future by her design. Furthermore, Amy did not keep so much as a photograph of Harry's father, nor permit any mention of him, and in this way attempted to silence the past by denying its presence. In addition, Amy attempted to create a happy childhood for both Harry and Mary, a childhood from which she wished to contrive a happy future of the two at Wishwood as man and wife. Despite Amy's efforts, as Harry and Mary remark, Amy's attempts at creating happiness for them as children merely took away their genuine happiness:

> Harry: Why were we not happy?
> Mary: Well, it all seemed to be imposed upon us:/ Even the nice things were laid out ready,/ And the treats were always so carefully prepared;/ there was never any time to invent our own enjoyments./ But perhaps it was all designed for you, not for us. (FR:p.53)

Their only memory of genuine happiness is of a naturally hollow tree; the next summer, Amy had it torn down and replaced with a summer house "to please the children." This summer house was an imposition of an adult ideal of childhood happiness on what in fact was their actual source of happiness. In this way, Amy attempted to contrive a happy childhood for Harry, of the sort she felt appropriate to the future master of Wishwood.

Harry has returned to his point of departure in order to begin anew and to forget his past. He has, however, only gathered new memories:

> It seems I shall get rid of nothing./ Of none of the shadows that I wanted to escape:/ And at the same time, other memories./ Earlier, forgotten, begin to return/ Out of my childhood. (FR: p. 52)

In fact, Harry seeks out more of the past on his return, guided by the Eumenides, both discovering a resemblance between himself and his father, and uncovering the initial curse on himself and on Wishwood:

> Here I have been finding/ A misery long forgotten, and a new torture./ The shadow of something behind our meagre childhood./ Some origin of wretchedness. Is that what they would show me?/ And now I want you to tell me about my father. (FR: p.100)

Harry feels that he has been brought back to Wishwood to understand his hereditary guilt.

Once Harry eloped with his wife, Amy forbade any changes to be made to Wishwood. This behavior is in marked contrast with that of Clytemnestra, who deliberately brought about many changes to the House of Atreus in Agamemnon's absence, including sending away her son. Amy determined that Wishwood was to remain exactly as it was when Harry left it in preparation for her son's return. Her plan succeeds to the extent that she herself appears not to have aged in ten years, yet, according to Dr. Warburton, her health has fallen into decline. In any event, Amy's attempts to prevent change meet with failure; the rock garden has gone to rack and ruin, the housekeeper has become senile, and Harry's pony has had to be killed. Amy's ban on change is incapable of preventing the onset of death and decay. The

furniture may be exactly as it was when Harry left; nothing, however, can prevent the effects of time on living things.

Harry views this attempt to prevent change on his mother's part as impossible. Harry remarks to Mary that the apparent changelessness of Wishwood -- Amy's attempt to deny the passage of time -- "makes the changes which have occurred more manifest." He informs his relatives upon his arrival: "Changed? nothing changed? how can you say that nothing is changed? You all look so withered and young (FR: p.26)." Agatha remarks that when Harry returns to Wishwood, he will run into himself as a boy, suggesting that Harry is a different person than he was when he left. Furthermore, as Harry tells the Eumenides, he was a different person when he "killed" his wife.

> I tell you, it is not me you are looking at,/ Not me your confidential/ looks/ Incriminate, but that other person, if person/ You thought I was: let your necrophily/ Feed upon that carcase. They will not go.(FR: p.62)

Clearly, while Harry feels that he has changed since his wife's death, to the extent that he considers himself to be an entirely different person, the Eumenides still possess the values they possessed in the Oresteia -- a conviction that murder remains present and is a crime for which there must be atonement.

The view of time shared by the characters of the play holds further implications. Agatha remarks: "We do not pass twice through the same door/

Or return to the door through which we did not pass..." (FR: p.109) -- a sentiment recalling Heraclitus, Aeschylus' contemporary. According to Heraclitus, nature is in a state of flux, a condition which he illustrates with the metaphor of a river:

> One cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers: it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs.[14]

In addition, the chorus of The Family Reunion comment, "We do not like to look out of the same window, and see quite a different landscape/ We do not like to climb a stair, and find it takes us/ down/." (FR: p.132), a statement which not only recalls the preceding fragment of Heraclitus, but also that which Eliot employed as an epigraph for "Burnt Norton": "The way up and down is one and the same(FQ: p.10)." Not only do these statements recall Heraclitus, but they also suggest the fact that the chorus finds both the state of constant flux and the cyclical perspective of time to be found in the play disturbing. The chorus remark on the way in which the cyclic perspective of time has made a mockery of attempts to order history into a diachronic perspective.

> And the past is about to happen, and the future was/ long since settled./ And the wings of the future darken the past, the beak/ and claws have desecrated/ History.(FR: p.69)

14 Charles Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p.53.

In this passage, the bird imagery is suggestive of the phoenix, the mythical bird with an eternally circular lifespan. Throughout the play, anomalies of the past and present occur. For example, it was "too late" in the past for Mary to apply for a fellowship and leave Wishwood. In the future, it becomes the "right" time to do these things.

This view of nature as being in constant flux with the passage of time, results in the fact that it becomes impossible to recapture or redeem the past:

> I was not there, you were not there, only our phantasms/ And what did not happen is as true as what did/ happen/ O my dear, and you walked through the little door/ And I ran to meet you in the rose-garden.(FR:p.108)

This passage recalls the first verse of "Burnt Norton", in which Eliot may be perceived to be commenting on the elusive nature of the past:

> Footfalls echo in the memory/ Down the passage which we did not take/ Towards the door we never opened/ Into the rose-garden. My words echo/ Thus, in your mind,/ but to what purpose/ Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves/ I do not know.(FQ: p.13)

Here, the past is inhabited by echoes. When one attempts to recapture the past, one does not achieve the rose-garden of the past, but rather, the dust on dead rose-petals which the passage of time has wrought. In The Family Reunion, the phantoms of the past are as elusive as the echoes of the past in "Burnt Norton." Memories, like echoes and phantoms, are only images of

the past; one can never truly recapture the past and re-enter the rose-garden. Harry, upon discovering the relationship that took place between his father and Agatha in the past, claims that he has "been wounded in a war of phantoms." Here, he notes that this past has shaped his future. However, it is also clear that the past is present in the form of spectres -- it is not tangible. Again, Amy describes Harry's father as "a discontented ghost." These references to the past as inhabited by spectres suggests the fact that while Harry may learn something of his father, he will not be able to grasp the "real past," but rather a pale reflection of it.

The passage of the seasons, which suggests the unchanging nature of the stars in contrast with the inexorable process of change and age that takes place in mortals to whom they bring the seasons in the Watchman's speech in the Agamemnon, suggests the irrevocability of change in The Family Reunion, as well as the cyclic nature of time. The Family Reunion takes place in early spring, the winter has not yet ended, and the family awaits the arrival of spring, or at least the return of warmth. There is, however, the concern that spring will pass far too quickly, that it will soon be winter again. Later in the play, Agatha recalls a long vacation she had which ended with the arrival of autumn "which came too soon," but also "not soon enough:"

> Agatha: I came once for a long vacation. I remember/ A summer day of unusual heat/ For this cold country.
> Harry: And then?
> Agatha: There are hours when there seems to be no past or

future,/ only a present moment of pointed light...(FR: p.102)

The summer day appeared to Agatha as a moment fixed eternally in the present. It, too, came to an end, despite her wish and that of Harry's father. Harry, too, hopes for a delay. He cries out as he senses the arrival of the Eumenides, "Not yet! Not yet!", for he has only then been able to grasp part of his past, and therefore the meaning of his guilty existence. They appear immediately, however, to take him off to uncertain territory. Harry has only achieved an end which proves to be yet another beginning.

The spring which is awaited in the play takes on sinister overtones. Traditionally, spring is a time of rebirth and growth, but Mary depicts this birth in terms of death imagery, inverting the image:

> The cold spring now is the time/ For the ache in the moving root/ The agony in the dark/ The slow flow throbbing the trunk/ The pain of the breaking bud.(FR: p.59)

This passage not only suggests the pain of birth but the agony of the human condition, as trees and leaves are symbolic of mankind, as can be seen in Clytemnestra's speech as she describes the return of Agamemnon to his house. Mary inverts this image of birth still further, to the extent that birth becomes merely the beginning of the process of death. "I believe the moment of birth/ Is when we have knowledge of death/ I believe the season of birth/ Is the season of sacrifice...(FR: p.60)." Clearly, Eliot had much the same thing in mind when he wrote "The Wasteland": "April is the cruellest

month, breeding/ Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/ Memory and desire, stirring/ Dull roots with spring rain."[15] In this poem, the speaker regrets the passing of winter, and the comfort of death and sleep, with which he associates winter. Certainly, Mary's view that birth is merely the beginning of death recalls this sentiment. This cyclic perspective of the beginning as the end recalls a fragment of Heraclitus: "The beginning and the end are shared in the circumference of a circle."[16] In light of the circular nature of time, it is significant that Amy's birthday becomes her day of death. Reinforcing this theme is the fact that Amy repeats lines from her first speech in her last words. In the opening lines of the play, Amy voices her fear "that the clock will stop in the dark", a fear which comes to fruition as indicated by her final words: "The clock has stopped in the dark! (FR: p.131)"

In addition, the family curse is described in terms of birth as it progresss from generation to generation:

> A curse comes to being/ As a child is formed./ In both, the incredible/ Becomes the actual/ Without our intention/ Knowing what is intended./ A curse is like a child, formed. In a moment of unconsciousness...(FR: p.110)

In The Family Reunion, curses appear to "breed" as they do in the Oresteia. Clytemnestra has given birth to her own slayer, Orestes, who fulfills the wi-

15 T.S. Eliot, Selected Poetry (London: Faber & Faber, 1954) p.51.

16 Charles Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 75.

ashes of his father, as Amy has given birth to Harry, who causes her death, however indirectly. Harry in fact completes the slaying of his mother which his father had contemplated before he was born. Harry, therefore, may be perceived to have become an extension of his father.

In The Family Reunion, as in the Oresteia, the conflict between the past and the future and the fear of change may be seen as resulting in a conflict between generations. Charles, a representative of the traditional values, says of the younger generation:

> It's the cocktail-drinking does the harm:/ There's nothing on earth so bad for the young./ All that a civilized person needs/ Is a glass of dry sherry or two before dinner./ The modern young people don't know what they're drinking.(FR: p.13)

Here, Charles imagines his generation to be civilized, and embraces older traditions, while "modern young people" clearly ignore these traditions and are therefore "uncivilized." The representatives of the older generation in The Family Reunion are all members of the aristocracy who can trace their ancestry back for generations. They are therefore concerned by the fact that "people with money from goodness knows where" are undermining traditions. As traditions are undermined, the aristocracy will be displaced, and this upheaval is a source of concern for them. In order to achieve an understanding of the principles that govern the new generation, Gerald asks Mary to explain them. Mary however, is caught in a conflict between generations. She is without family and therefore under Amy's thumb, yet she is also part of

Harry's generation, the "younger generation," and so she claims to be part of no generation:

> Really Cousin Gerald, if you want information/ About the younger generation, you must ask someone/ else./ I'm afraid that I don't deserve the compliment:/ I don't belong to any generation.(FR: pp.14-5)

At the end of the play, Mary decides to apply for a fellowship and joins Harry and Agatha -- both representatives of the younger generation in the play -- in leaving Wishwood, thereby abandoning Amy and traditional values. In The Family Reunion, traditional and modern values are not reconciled as they are in the Eumenides, rather, the division becomes more pronounced, as members of the younger generation make plans to leave Wishwood and the older generation.

The consequences of old age which are manifest in the Oresteia are also apparent in The Family Reunion. The chorus of Argive Elders comment on old age in the Agamemnon in this way:

> ὁ τε γὰρ νεαρὸς μυελὸς στέρνων
> ἐντὸς ἀνάσσων
> ἰσόπρεσβυς, Ἄρης δ' οὐκ ἐνὶ χώρᾳ;
> τὸ θ' ὑπέργηρων φυλλάδος ἤδη
> καταχαρφομένης τρίποδας μὲν ὁδοὺς
> στείχει, παιδὸς δ' οὐδὲν ἀρείων
> ὄναρ ἡμερόφαντον ἀλαίνει.(Ag: 76-82)

> (For the fresh stuff of life that within the breast holds sway is like an old man's, and the war-god is not at his post; and great age with the leaf already withering on three feet walks, and with strength no greater than a child's like a dream seen by day wanders.)

In this passage, the concept of the beginning and the end arriving at the same point is apparent, for old age has brought for the elders a second childhood. In The Family Reunion, Violet says of the housekeeper whom Amy has kept on: "Mrs. Packell is too old to know what she is doing./(FR: p.27)," a remark which indicates that old age has brought to the housekeeper the mind of a child. Harry's comment that his family all look so "withered and young," again recalls this statement. Amy declares, "I do not know very much:/ And as I get older, I am coming to think/ How little I have ever known./(FR: p.126)." Remarks such as these suggest that while old age may be perceived as a return to youth in The Family Reunion, as it is in the Oresteia, this return may be considered more mental than physical, as opposed to the Greek tragedy in which the body is shown to deteriorate, as the mind grows in wisdom.[17] The Argive elders grow old and feeble in body only, while Amy does not appear to have aged in ten years. For Aeschylus, the old men of the chorus have obtained some wisdom over the years. For Eliot, the old either forget everything they ever knew, or discover what they know to be meaningless.

At the end of the play, the chorus remarks that "there are immutable laws in Argos and England of music," which transcend time. Despite this statement, the chorus do not find any permanence or immutable laws on which they may depend, and so they remain in the dark, as opposed to the end of

[17] Jacqueline de Romilly, Time in Greek Tragedy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968) p.146.

the Eumenides, in which conflicting forces are reconciled and a code of justice is established "for all time." Mary strikes out on her own, rejecting the future Amy sought for her, thereby adding her death blow to Harry's. While Agatha suggests that Harry's departure will expiate the curse, it only serves to perpetuate it. Harry's departure has only brought his father's wishes to fulfillment. The Family Reunion ends with the darkness of the Choephoroi, rather than the light of the Eumenides. Significantly, Downing has a "presentiment" that Harry will not require him much longer. This belief suggests that the cycle may include yet another death in the family. The last choral ode of The Family Reunion expresses wishing and unknowing:

> ...And what is being done to us? And what are we doing? To each and all of these questions/ There is no conceivable answer./ We have suffered far more than a personal loss -- we have lost our way in the dark. (FR: p.130)"

The characters of both the Oresteia and The Family Reunion are awaiting an end. However, only in the Oresteia is this end achieved, due to Aeschylus' belief that once justice is achieved, as it must be in the course of time, then the cycle of vengeance may be ended. Eliot's perception that an end is always the beginning of something new, entails that an end can never be achieved. For Eliot, change is an inexorable process; despite the attempts of the characters of The Family Reunion to prevent it, Change accompanies Time. The only permanence on which one may depend in this play, is that of the lasting nature of guilt. For both authors, the past is intrinsically linked with the

future and both the past and the future exist in the present. In both plays, traditional values and therefore values tied to the past must be reconciled with modern values; only in the Oresteia is this reconciliation achieved, and a new code of justice established that will last for all time. In The Family Reunion, this reconciliation is not achieved, with the result that the cycle of curses continues.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

"The benevolence or hostility of nature in the Oresteia may be seen to depend upon the moral decisions of man[1]." John Peradotto remarks in his article, "Some Patterns of Nature Imagery in the Oresteia." He continues,

> In the Agamemnon man is surrounded by a hostile world, blossoming with ugliness, evil, and pain under a shower of blood where flowers are blighted and leaves withered, a world of dreadful darkness and terrible light.[2]

Indeed, light, which is generally a "positive" force to the Classical mind, takes on sinister properties in the Agamemnon. Darkness, however, is also a fearsome quality in this play and even more so in the Choephoroi; in the latter play, light is sought to release the House of Atreus from the darkness into which it has sunk through the series of kindred murders committed in it. Not until the Eumenides, however, are both light and darkness reconciled and transformed into truly "positive" qualities. Light resumes its naturally "positive" character, while night is no longer merely euphemistically εὐφρονη[3] (kindly).

1 John Peradotto, "Some Patterns of Nature Imagery in the Oresteia," AJP, 85 (1964) 278-93, p.378.

2 Ibid., pp.378-9.

3 Ibid., p.389.

In The Family Reunion, T.S. Eliot adapts this classical conflict between the forces of light and darkness. Like Aeschylus, Eliot employs light imagery to reflect the "family curse", which in turn is the result of the moral decisions made by members of the family. The Family Reunion, unlike the Oresteia, does not end with a reconciliation between light and darkness. The Family Reunion contains elements of the final harmonizing torchlit procession of the Eumenides, but these are parodic, rather than purely imitative. The conclusion of The Family Reunion employs the corruption of light imagery to be found in the Agamemnon, as well as the enveloping darkness to be found in the Choephoroi. The forces of light and darkness do not achieve final reconciliation in The Family Reunion; rather, darkness overcomes light entirely.

The passage of time in the Agamemnon is that of night to day, or darkness to light. However, in terms of the moral decisions made in the play, and the light imagery that is employed, the existing darkness which covers the House of Atreus through the murder of its children is in turn only made darker. This procession from night to day, despite the fact that on a moral plane, darkness has only grown darker, is indicative of the corruption of the image of light which is prevalent in the play.

The play begins with the Watchman awaiting the arrival of the beacon's light which he hopes will signal not only the fall of Troy, but the restoration of the house to its past glory.

νῦν δ' εὐτυχὴς γένοιτ' ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων,
εναγγέλου φανέντος ορφναίου πυρός.(Ag: 20-1)

(But now may there be deliverance from toil, as the fire that brings good news shines through the darkness!)

Already there is the suggestion that the house is covered in darkness, morally as well as physically. The Watchman has already remarked that the house is no longer "excellently managed" as it was in the past, and he equates the light of the flare with redemption for the house, and blackness with the distress from which he hopes the house will be delivered. Ironically, one of the possibilities of translation for the term ὀρφναίου which is used to describe the beacon's light suggests that the light provided by the beacon will be "dark and murky."[4] Once the light of the beacon appears, the Watchman hails it, declaring,

ὦ χαῖρε λαμπτὴρ νυκτὸς ἡμερήσιον
φάος πιφαύσκων καὶ χορῶν κατάστασιν
πολλῶν ἐν Ἄργει τῆσδε συμφορᾶς χάριν.
ἰοὺ ἰού:
Ἀγαμέμνονος γυναικὶ σημαίνω τορῶς
εὐνῆς ἐπαντείλασαν ὡς τάχος δόμοις
ὁλολυγμὸν εὐφημοῦντα τῇδε λαμπάδι
ἐπορθιάζειν... (Ag: 21-9)

(Hail, lamp that shows by night the light of day, and ordains the setting-up of many dances in Argos for the sake of this event! Hurrah, hurrah! To Agamemnon's wife I give clear signal, that she may rise from her bed in all speed and raise a jubilant cry of thanksgiving at this torch...)

4 ed. J.D. Denniston and D. Page, Aeschylus, Agamemnon (Oxford; Oxford University Press 1957) p.68.

The irony of this passage increases as the play progresses. Not only does the beacon's fire signify to Clytemnestra that the time for the violent death of Agamemnon is approaching -- an action on her part which will plunge the house into deeper gloom -- but the χοροί (choruses) that the Watchman imagines the beacon to summon do not consist entirely of the Argive elders. Rather, the beacon's fire also summons the Furies whom Cassandra later perceives to be a χορός (chorus) associated with the House of Atreus:

> τὴν γὰρ στέγην τήνδ' οὔποτ' ἐκλείπει χορός
> ξύμφθογγος οὐκ εὐφωνος· οὐ γὰρ εὖ λέγει·
> καὶ μὴν πεπωκώς γ' ὡς θρασύνεσθαι πλέον,
> βρότειον αἷμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει,
> δυσπεμπτος ἔξω, συγγόνων Ἐρινύων.(Ag: 1186-90)

> For this house is never left by a choir that sings in unison, yet with no pleasant sounds; for not pleasant are its words. Yes, and it has drunk -- so that it grows all the bolder -- of human blood, and stays in the house, a band of revelers not easily sent away, composed of the Erinyes bred in the family.

In addition, the Agamemnon is followed by the Choephoroi and the Eumenides, and therefore, the choruses summoned may also be viewed as including the mourning serving women and the avenging Furies.[5]

The chorus of elders is made uneasy by the beacon, which causes the chorus to recount the events of ten years previously, all of which clearly indicate the guilt of Agamemnon. Rather than speculate idly, the chorus chooses to put its faith in the light of the sun.

5 John Peradotto, "Some Patterns of Nature Imagery in the Oresteia," AJP, 85 (1964) 379-93, p.389.

Δίκα δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦ-
-σιν μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει· τὸ μέλλον δ'
γένοιτ' ἂν χλυοις· πρὸ χαιρέτω·
ἴσον δὲ τῷι προστένειν·
τορὸν γὰρ ἥξει σὺνορθρον αἰγαῖς...(Ag: 250-4)

(And Justice sways the balance, bringing to some learning by suffering. The future you may learn when it comes. Rejoice in it before it comes! But all is one if we lament before; for it will come clear with the rays of dawn.)

However, the knowledge that the arrival of daylight and justice provides for the chorus is the fulfillment of its worst fears: the light of the sun will shine on Agamemnon's corpse.

Clytemnestra greets the chorus awaiting the dawn with:

εὐάγγελος μέν, ὥσπερ ἡ παροιμία,
ἕως γένοιτο μητρὸς εὐφρόνης πάρα...(Ag: 264-5)

(Happy tidings, as the proverb has it, may the dawn bring as she comes from night her mother.)

Here, Clytemnestra, who is associated with the light throughout the trilogy, is speaking ironically. Unlike the chorus, which "remains in the dark", Clytemnestra realizes that the "kindly night" will give birth to Agamemnon's sacrifice in requital for the sacrifice of her daughter. When the chorus depicts the sacrifice of Iphigegenia, they describe her in association with a saffron-colored garment of an ambiguous nature.[6] Whatever this garment may be, the color saffron is a color associated with the dawn, and therefore, Iphige-

6 ed J.D. Denniston and D. Page, Aeschylus, Agamemnon, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957) pp.90-1.

neia may also be viewed as being associated with dawn.[7] In this way, Clytemnestra may be perceived as Mother-night who has given birth to the dawn-child; certainly, the events of the following day will be of her own creation.

The chorus is made uneasy not only by the light of the beacon, but also by the sacrifices which Clytemnestra supervises once she has received the message of the beacon. The chorus say of these sacrificial fires,

> πάντων δὲ θεῶν τῶν ἀστυνόμων,
> ὑπάτων, χθονίων, τῶν τε θυραίων
> τῶν τ' ἀγοραίων,
> βωμοὶ δώροισι φλέγονται·
> ἄλλη δ' ἄλλοθεν οὐρανομήκης
> λαμπὰς ἀνίσχει,
> φαρμασσομένη χρίματος ἀγνοῦ
> μαλακαῖς ἀδόλοισι παρηγορίαις...(Ag: 88-95)

(The altars of all the gods that guide the city, gods on high and gods below the earth, gods of the doors and of the market-place, blaze with offerings; and from this side and that as high as heaven torches send up their light, charmed by the hallowed unguent's soft guileless coaxing...)

The term οὐρανομήκης (as high as heaven) becomes indicative of the extent of Clytemnestra's daring. Once the day's events have unfolded, it is clear that these sacrifices are representative of her "sacrifice" of Agamemnon, and are in fact employed to bring about his death, as sacrifices, creatures associated

[7] This Homeric association is suggested by Michael Lynn-George in a forthcoming article, "Daybreak's Designs: The Image of Iphigeneia in Agamemnon."

Clytemnestra has not ignored the Chthonic deities, the Furies, in her with both darkness and death. In addition, the term παρηγοριαις (coaxing or persuasion) suggests the death of Agamemnon, which is achieved by Clytemnestra's powers of persuasion. These words, therefore, cast a sinister emphasis on the sacrificial fires. The flames of the sacrifices come to signify the destruction of Agamemnon, "medicined" by Clytemnestra's persuasion.

Upon his arrival, the Herald describes Agamemnon and his homecoming as "bearing light in gloom.[8]" This statement recalls the properties of the sinister beacon in the Watchman's speech. Again, light is associated with the homecoming of Agamemnon, and his subsequent death. In addition, light appears to abandon its traditional and natural role in the Herald's speech. For example, fire denies its nature and allies itself with water, its traditional enemy, in order to destroy the Argive fleet on its homecoming journey.

> "ξυνώμοσαν γάρ, ὄντες ἐχθιστοι τὸ πρίν,
> πῦρ καὶ θάλασσα, καὶ τὰ πίστ' ἐδειξάτην
> φθείροντε τὸν δύστηνον Αργείον στρατόν... (Ag: 650-2)

(For a covenant was sworn by those former enemies, fire and sea, and they gave earnest of their friendship by destroying the unhappy host of the Argives...)

The next day, the light of the sun reveals the destruction wrought by the storm to the Argives:

8 Aeschylus, Aeschylus I: Oresteia, trans. Richmond Lattimore, The Complete Greek Tragedies, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953) p.50.

ἐπεὶ δ' ἀνῆλθε λαμπρὸν ἡλίου φάος,
ὁρῶμεν ἀνθοῦν πέλαγος Αἰγαῖον νεκροῖς
ἀνδρῶν Ἀχαιῶν ναυτικοῖς τ' ἐρειπίοις...(Ag: 658-60)

(And when the sun's bright light arose, we saw the Aegean sea flower with the corpses of Achaean men and with the wrecks of ships.)

This is a statement which inverts natural imagery. Not only does the sun reveal horrors, but the term ἀνθοῦν (flower) suggests that the sun's light is nourishing death rather than life. The Herald also suggests that only the sun knows the location of Menelaus, a statement which suggests that the image of the sun may yet possess life-giving connotations. The audience of the Oresteia, already familiar with the legend through Homer, must be aware that Menelaus is alive. However, it is also clear that Menelaus, who is indeed in sunlight, is too far away to prevent the death of Agamemnon.

εἰ δ' οὖν τις ἀκτὶς ἡλίου νιν ἱστορεῖ
καὶ ζῶντα μάλιστα καὶ βλέποντα, μηχαναῖς Διός
οὐπω θέλοντος ἐξαναλῶσαι γένος,
ἐλπίς τις αὐτὸν πρὸς δόμους ἥξειν πάλιν (Ag: 676-9).

(Well, if some ray of the sun finds him out still flourishing in life, by the contrivance of a Zeus who does not yet wish to exterminate his house, there is some hope that he may come back home.)

Despite the fact that this statement indicates the powerlessness of Menelaus, it equates light with life, and therefore with ἐλπίς (hope).

Before the arrival of Agamemnon, the chorus express their fears, again employing the image of light.

Δίκα δὲ λάμπει μὲν ἐν
δυσκάπνοις δώμασιν,
τὸν δ' ἐναίσιμον τίει βίον·
τὰ χρυσόπαστα δ' ἐδεθλα σὺν
πίνῳ χερῶν παλιντρόποις
ὄμμασι λιποῦσ' ὅσια προσέβα
τοὖ, δύναμιν οὐ σέβουσα πλού-
του παράσημον αἴνῳ·
πᾶν δ' ἐπὶ τέρμα νωμᾷ (Ag: 773-81).

(Justice shines beneath smoky rafters and honors the righteous life; but the gold-bespangled halls where there are hands unclean she quits with eyes averted and goes to what is holy, having no respect for the power of wealth made counterfeit with praise. And she guides all things to their appointed end.)

The House of Atreus is a wealthy one, as Clytemnestra stresses to Agamemnon and Cassandra when she attempts to persuade both of them to enter. However, as the chorus have already stressed, members of the family have committed grave atrocities in the house. The "light of Dike" is clearly missing from the house of Atreus, and therefore, Agamemnon's homecoming is not secure.

Cassandra, attempting to make her prophecies plain to the chorus declares:

καὶ μὴν ὁ χρησμός οὐκετ' ἐκ καλυμμάτων
ἔσται δεδορκὼς νεογάμου νύμφης δίκην·
λαμπρὸς δ' ἔοικεν ἡλίου πρὸς ἀντολὰς
πνέων ἐφήξειν, ὥστε κύματος δίκην
κλύζειν πρὸς αὐγὰς τοῦδε πήματος πολὺ μεῖζον... (Ag: 1178-82)

(Now shall my oracle be no longer one that looks forth from a veil, like a newly wedded bride, but as a bright, clear wind it shall rush toward the sunrise, so that like a wave there shall surge toward the light a woe far greater than this...)

Cassandra hopes to make her prophecies clear and bright, rather than veiled and murky. However, her prophecies, though bright, will be of destruction, and therefore, the image of light attaches "negative" connotations to itself. In addition, the chorus is unable to understand her prophecies even after her vow to make herself understood: Cassandra is unable to bring the light of clarity to her veiled words.

Before Cassandra enters the house, she calls upon the sun as a witness:

> ...ἡλίῳ δ' ἐπεύχομαι
> πρὸς ὕστατον φῶς τοῖς ἐμοῖς τιμαόροις
> ἐχθροῖς φονεῦσι τοῖς ἐμοῖς τίνειν ὁμοῦ
> δούλης θανούσης, εὐμαροῦς χειρώματος. (Ag:1323-6)

(I pray to the sun's last light that to my avengers my enemies may pay for my murder also, for the death of a slave, an easy overthrow.)

From this passage, it is clear that the light of the sun will shine upon the bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in the future. However, it is also clear from this prophecy that the sun's light will shine first upon the corpses of Agamemnon and Cassandra.

Aegisthus, vaunting over the body of Agamemnon, hails the ἡμέρας δικηφόρου (Ag: 1577), unaware that he too will be similarly displayed on another "justice-bearing day" in the Choephoroi. In addition, Aegisthus employs the term εὐφρων (kindly) to describe this day.

However, εὐφρων suggests the euphemism for night, εὐφρόνη (the kindly time), and therefore, Aegisthus may be viewed as hailing the arrival of night rather

than day.[9] Justice is to be equated with light as lines 773-81 of the Agamemnon suggest, yet Aegisthus has unwittingly associated the day with night and therefore, with darkness.

The final hope of the chorus of the Agamemnon is expressed in terms of light: Ὀρέστης ἆρά που βλέπει φάος... (Ag: 1646). (Does Orestes somewhere see the light...) Despite the onset of moral darkness in the House of Atreus the reference to φάος (day-light) in this passage suggests that light retains some of its life-giving connotations: certainly it provides the chorus with some hope that this darkness may be lifted in the future.

In the Oresteia, Aeschylus can be observed to be weighing the comparative merits and disadvantages of the various arts of his day. References are made in the Oresteia to sculpture, music, and escpecially to painting. Aeschylus attempts to convey the powers of the visual arts through his poetry, most conspicuously in the "beacon speech" of Clytemnestra, and in Cassandra's final speech. In the "beacon speech" Clytemnestra is able to provide a very detailed picture of the passage of the beacon's light, as in a painting, yet she is also able to provide this picture with motion, and the ability to traverse a great distance, a quality painting cannot convey.

Cassandra depicts the fleeting existence of man in terms which suggest his mortality, and also suggest a weakness in the nature of painting which is not present in the nature of literature.

[9] John Peradotto, "Some Patterns of Nature Imagery in the Oresteia," AJP, 85 (1964) 378-93, p.390.

ἰὼ βρότειο[illegible]πάγματ' εὐτυχοῦντα μὲν
σκι[illegible]ᾷ τις [illegible]ρειεν ἂν δὲ δυστυχῆ.
βολαῖς [illegible] ν σπόγγος ὤλεσεν γραφήν·
καὶ ταῦτ' ἐκείνων μᾶλλον οἰκτίρω πολύ (Ag:1327-30)

(Alas for the affairs of men! When they are fortunate, one may liken them to a shadow: and of they are unfortunate a wet sponge with one dash blots out the picture. And I pity this far more than that.)

This depiction of the tenuous nature of man's existence and his accomplishments is a view which differs from that presented in the Eumenides, in which god and man establish together a law court to last for all time. In contrast, the actions of some of the characters of the Agamemnon may be viewed as δυσσεβής (ungodly) as the chorus view Agamemnon's choice to sacrifice his daughter in line 220. The violent actions of the characters of the Agamemnon incite revenge, and therefore embroil those who have committed these acts of revenge within a cycle of vengeance, in which any triumph must be fleeting.

In the Agamemnon, the image of light is associated with supernatural vengeance, and is therefore also associated with mortality. In the Choephoroi, this image of darkness persists, while light becomes symbolic of hope; light is associated with life, rather than with loss of life.

The action of the Choephoroi progresses from day towards nightfall. Despite the fact that this action takes place during the day, the Choephoroi is dominated by images of darkness. The first line of this play is an invocation to Ἑρμῆ χθόνιε (Hermes of the earth) (Ch: 1), an invocation that stres-

ses Hermes' relationship with the underworld and its deities,[10] a place which is referred to as one of unutterable blackness and the total absence of the sun's light.

The House of Atreus is described by the chorus in these terms:

> ἀνήλιοι βροτοστυγεῖς
> δνόφοι καλύπτουσι δόμους
> δεσποτᾶν θανάτοισι (Ch: 51-3).

(Sunless, hateful to mankind is the darkness that shrouds the house through the death of its master.)

The hope of the chorus of serving women is that Orestes, whom they perceive as the "light of the house," will rid the House of Atreus of its darkness. Certainly Orestes has been charged by Apollo, on whom Cassandra bestows the epithet Λυκίαν (Lykian) suggestive of light,[11] to commit matricide.

Clytemnestra demonstrates an almost supernatural power over light in the Agamemnon: she creates fires which leap "as high as the heavens", and she also envisions the path of the beacon's light from Troy to Argos. In addition, she is associated with night and darkness. It is during the night, after all, that she has made her sacrifice to the Furies, as is revealed in the the Eumenides. However, Clytemnestra's dominance over the powers of light

10 ed. A.F. Garvie, Aeschylus, Choephoroi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) p.48.

11 Liddell and Scott, Greek English Lexicon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) s.v.

and darkness proves short-lived. In the Agamemnon, she boasts that as long as Aegisthus tends her hearth she has nothing to fear. In the Choephoroi, the security of the image of the hearth is nullified by Agamemnon's angry spirit.

ἡ δ' ἐξ ὕπνου κέκλαγγεν ἐπτοημένη.
πολλοὶ δ ἀνήφθοντ' ἐκτυφλωθέντες σκότωι
λαμπτῆρες ἐν δόμοισι δεσποίνης χάριν (Ch: 535-7).

(And in her sleep she screamed in terror. And many lamps that darkness had made blind were kindled in the palace for the mistress' sake.)

Because of her guilt, Clytemnestra has torches lit for very different reasons in the Choephoroi than she did in the Agamemnon. Clytemnestra now lights torches literally against the darkness of night, and metaphorically against the darkness into which the House of Atreus has fallen following the murder of Agamemnon.

These torches prove ineffectual against the darkness, possibly because light may be viewed as a punitive force in the Choephoroi, as is darkness. The chorus says of a murderer:

ἀναφαίνεται δ' ὁ βλάπτων,
πατέρων δὲ καὶ τεκόντων
γόος ἐνδίκος ματεύει
ποινὰν ἀμφιλαφῶς ταραχθείς (Ch: 328-31)

(The punisher is revealed, and the lament due to fathers and begetters hunts down the guilty one, when raised full loud and strong.)

Clearly, light does not symbolize only life in this passage, but the inevitability of divine retribution.

In addition, Orestes calls upon Helios to witness the justice of the revenge he has taken upon his mother and her lover.

ἐκτείνατ' αὐτὸ καὶ κύκλωι παράσταδὸν
στέγαστρον ἀνδρὸς δείξαθ', ὡς ἴδηι πατήρ,
οὐχ οὑμός, ἀλλ' ὁ πάντ' ἐποπτεύων τάδε
Ἥλιος, ἀναγνα μητρὸς ἔργα τῆς ἐμῆς,
ὡς ἄν παρῆι μοι μάρτυς ἐν δίκηι ποτὲ
ὡς τόνδ' ἐγὼ μετῆλθον ἐνδίκως φόνον
τὸν μητρός...

(Spread it out! Stand by in a circle, and display her covering for her husband, that the father may behold -- not my father, but he who looks upon this whole world, the Sun! -- may behold my mother's unholy work, so that he may bear me witness on the day of judgment when it comes that it was with justice that I pursued this killing that of my mother...)

(Ch: 984-9) However, at the time Orestes makes this declaration, it would appear that night has already fallen and the sun is no longer in the sky. This sequence of events allows for the possibility that, with the murder of his mother, Orestes may not have rid the house of its darkness, but rather may have increased it. Indeed, at the end of the Choephoroi, Orestes is pursued by the daughters of night who have naturally allied themselves with Clytemnestra.

In the Eumenides, the forces of light and darkness become personified. Apollo and Orestes are both associated with light and youth, in contrast to Clytemnestra and the Furies, who are both associated with darkness, night, and age.

At the beginning of the Eumenides, the Furies drink the "black blood of mortals[12]," wear black robes, and live in the darkest part of the underworld:

> ...ἄτιμ' ἀτίετα διόμεναι λάχη
> θεῶν διχοστατοῦντ' ἀνηλίῳ λάμπα.
> δυοδοπαίπαλα δερκομένοισι
> καὶ δυσομμάτοις ὁμῶς...
> ἔπι δέ μοι
> μένει γέρας παλαίον, οὐδ' ἀτιμίας κυρῶ,
> καίπερ ὑπὸ χθόνα τάξιν ἔχουσα
> καὶ δυσήλιον κνέφας (Eu: 385-96).

(...unhonored and unesteemed is the office we pursue, apart from the gods in the sunless slime: it makes rough the path of the seeing and of the blind alike... Still for me remains my ancient privilege, nor do I lack honor, though it is beneath the ground that I have my station, inhabiting the sunless gloom.)

Clearly, the Furies believe that they have no place in daylight. The Furies view the function of their existence in terms of darkness:

> πίπτων δ' οὐκ οἶδεν τόδ' ὑπ' ἄφρονι λύμα;
> τόνδ' ἐπὶ κνέφας ἀνδρὶ μύσους πεπόταται,
> καὶ δνοφερὰν τιν' ἄχλὺν κατὰ δώματος
> αὐδᾶται πολύστονος φάτις (Eu: 377-80).

[12] Aeschylus, Aeschylus I: Oresteia, trans. Richmond Lattimore, The Complete Greek Tragedies, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953) p.141

(And as he falls he knows it not, by reason of the blight that drives him mad; such is the darkness of pollution that hovers over a man; and a murky mist spreads over his house, as is proclaimed by rumor, bringing many a sigh.)

The darkness of which the Furies speak is suggestive of the state of the House of Atreus at this point in the drama, as Orestes still bears the guilt of matricide.

Orestes, however, is acquitted by the "luminous evidence of Zeus," [13] a statement which suggests that the House of Atreus has now escaped its darkness. In order to persuade the Furies to be well-disposed towards her city, Athene suggests to them the possibility of a transformation in their stature in terms of light imagery. No longer will the Furies be entirely excluded from the light of day. She tells them:

κοίμα κελαινοῦ κύματος πικρὸν μένος,
ὡς σεμνότιμος καὶ ξυνοικήτωρ ἐμοί (Eu: 832-3)

(Lull to repose the bitter force of your black wave of anger, since you shall be honored and revered and dwell with me!)

In return, she promises:

13 Ibid., p.163.

ἐγὼ γὰρ ὑμῖν πανδίκως ὑπίσχομαι
ἕδρας τε καὶ κευθμῶνας ἐνδίκου χθονὸς
λιπαροθρόνοισιν ἡμένας ἐπ' ἐσχάραις
ἕξειν, ὑπ' ἀστῶν τῶνδε τιμαλφουμένας(Eu: 804-7)

(For in all justice I promise you shall have a seat and a cavern in this righteous land, sitting on gleaming thrones hard by your altars, honored by these my citizens.)

Not only will the fulfillment of this promise transform the Furies and their office, but it will also restore the image of the hearth, which was corrupted in the Agamemnon and the Choephoroi, to its traditional image of security. When the Furies take up their new offices, their black robes are exchanged for purple, a color which had previously been an agent of Agamemnon's death, but is now worn appropriately by goddesses worthy of this splendor, and so loses its sinister connotations. In addition, these purple robes are brighter than the traditional black robes of the Furies, and are therefore suggestive of the new harmony between night and day.

The torchlit procession which marks the end of the play suggests the reconciliation of the forces of light and darkness. These torches are not lit for the purpose of destruction, as they are in Agamemnon, nor are they lit to ward off the darkness as they are in the Choephoroi; rather, they are lit in order to symbolize the unity between the powers of light and darkness.

Just as the mother-figure of the Choephoroi, Clytemnestra, fears the dark, so too, does Amy, the mother-figure of The Family Reunion. For Amy, light signifies youth and life, while darkness signifies old age and death -- a

perspective that is also to be found in the Oresteia. Amy insists that the curtains remain open to catch the last light of day, and she orders Denman to put on the lights. She laments the passing of her youth, a time

> When I was young and strong, and sun and light unsought for/ And the night unfeared and the day expected/ And clocks could be trusted, tomorrow assured/ And time would not stop in the dark. (FR: p.11)

When Amy voices her fear that the clock will stop in the dark, it is clear that she equates night with death and mortality.

Upon his arrival at Wishwood, Harry views light negatively, primarily because it reveals to him the ugliness of life as he perceives it. When he observes his family through the window, he is disgusted by their appearance in the light: the light reveals them to him and he is horrified by what he sees:

> How can you sit in a blaze of light for all the world to look at?/ If you knew how you looked when I saw you through the window!/ Do you like to be stared at by eyes through a window? (FR: p.24)

Mary too, views light as something to be feared, a view which reflects her own perception of existence. Mary has been afraid of life; in the past she turned down a fellowship and chose instead to live at Wishwood according to Amy's plans. Like Amy, Mary equates darkness with death, and light with life. Unlike Amy, however, Mary, as she says to Harry before dinner, prefers the comfort of darkness and death:

> The cold spring now is the time/ For the ache in the moving root/ The agony in the dark/ The slow flow throbbing the trunk/ The pain of the breaking bud./ These are the ones that suffer least:/ The aconite under the snow/ And the snowdrop crying or a moment in the wood. (FR: p.59)

Characteristically, Mary depicts birth in terms of suffering and sorrow. Darkness is equated with agony in this passage, only because growth is occurring; for growth to occur, the light of the sun must be touching the plant. Mary imagines these plants emerging from their dormancy to be suffering, and considers those plants that are to be buried under the snow in darkness, the Aconite and the Snowdrop, to be fortunate. Ironically, Aconite is a poisonous plant which, according to Ovid in his Metamorphoses, [14] sprang from the foam of Cerberus' jaws. This plant, therefore, is life which is created by a creature associated with death and the underworld. The Snowdrop's entire lifespan takes place in early spring; therefore, Mary has once again equated life with death.

Not only are darkness and death preferable to Mary, but light and life are qualities to be feared:

> Pain is the opposite of joy/ But joy is a kind of pain/ I believe the season of birth/ is the season of sacrifice/ For the tree and the beast, and the fish/ Thrashing itself upstream/ And what of the terrified spirit/ Compelled to be reborn/ To rise toward the violent sun...(FR: p.60)

Here, Mary depicts life as a painful and even an unnatural process, illustrated by her depiction of the life-cycle of fish. For Mary, birth is merely

14 Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. Mary Innes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Limited, 1955) p.166.

15 OCD s.v.

the beginning of death. Life, from Mary's perspective, is terrifying, and therefore, the sun, traditionally the source of both light and life, becomes the source of all suffering.

Despite his own reaction to the revelations of light and Mary's depiction of light, Harry strives to attain light. Harry imagines his past at Wishwood in terms of light and music. This past took place before Harry brought the guilt of his wife's death upon himself and came to imagine light as revealing only horror. He tells Mary, who has enabled him to understand something of his past:

> You bring me news of a door that opens at the end of a corridor,/ Sunlight and singing; when I had felt sure that every corridor only led to another,/ Or to a blank wall; that I kept moving/ Only so as not to stay still. Singing and light. (FR: pp.60-1)

At this moment, Harry imagines that Wishwood will be the end of his journey, and the beginning of a new life. He therefore equates Wishwood with light. However, this realization is immediately followed by the appearance of the Eumenides, traditionally creatures of darkness, who apparently disapprove of his intended course of action.

> They are roused again, the sleepless hunters/ That will not let me sleep. At the moment before sleep/ I always see their claws distended/ Quietly, as if they had never stirred./ It was only a moment, it was only one moment/ That I stood in sunlight, and thought I might stay there. (FR: p.61)

Harry, who imagined that he might start a new life as the master of Wishwood is snatched from the light to return to the nightmare of his guilt-ridden existence. Similarly, the chorus of the Choephoroi hope that once Orestes has slain his mother, the House of Atreus will be freed from darkness and Orestes be permitted to live there. Instead, the black-robed Furies appear before Orestes and he is forced to flee to Athens. Orestes, however, is under the guidance of Λυκίαν (Lykian) Apollo, while Harry will have only the Eumenides as guides, and he is ignorant of his destination.

As Clytemnestra is disturbed by nightmares arising from her guilt, so too is the conscience-stricken Harry. While Clytemnestra's nightmares are said to be caused by the vengeful Agamemnon and take place in her sleep, Harry's are produced by his own sense of guilt, and he perceives the whole of his existence to be a nightmare. Harry tells the chorus, "You have gone through life in sleep/ never woken to the nightmare. I tell you, life would be unendurable/ If you were wide awake..." FR: p.28). For Harry, neither being asleep nor awake is desirable. Life for Harry is a nightmare, yet the form of existence which his relatives have adopted is not desirable to him either. Harry considers his family to be spiritually and intellectually comatose; in fact, for the duration of the play his brother John is literally in a coma, a state which Harry feels will make little difference to his brother's usual mode of existence.

The Family Reunion is dominated by the image of darkness, as is the Choephoroi. In the past, Harry's wife was killed on a moonless night, and his departure from Wishwood at the end of the play, which proves to be the death of his mother, also takes place on a night in which visibility is limited. Not only is Wishwood covered by darkness, but it is covered by a fog throughout the play. Wishwood, therefore, physically resembles the metaphorical state of the House of Atreus, which the chorus of the Choephroi perceive as being shrouded in a murky darkness owing to the stain of blood. Orestes is the flame they hope will save the house; in The Family Reunion, Harry is looked upon by his mother as the savior of Wishwood. In the Eumenides, the Furies describe the plight of the murderer, who, surrounded by the mist created by his crime, stumbles and falls. In The Family Reunion, fog literally causes John's accident, and will certainly be present for Harry's departure.

Harry's wife is depicted by Amy in terms suggestive of the view of man's mortality presented in the Agamemnon. "A restless shivering painted shadow/ in life, she is less than a shadow in death"(FR: p.21). This description recalls the plight of mankind as Cassandra envisions it. This similarity suggests that in The Family Reunion, man and his accomplishments are the shadowy fleeting entities that they are in the Agamemnon. Unlike the Oresteia, The Family Reunion does not end with the harmony of the Eumenides, wherein torches are lit not against the darkness but as a symbol of unity with it. In The

Family Reunion, flames are extinguished, rather than lit, and the stage becomes shrouded in darkness. Light, therefore, does not lose the negative connotations that are attached to it throughout the play. The candles on the cake, which represent every year of Amy's life, are to be extinguished in a clockwise motion, according to the stage directions, which suggests that the passage of time leads to death, and the increased brightness of added candles will gradually be extinguished once death has occurred. In addition, this equation of the passage of time with increasing darkness suggests that the future, beyond Amy's death, will be a bleak one.

In their last speech, the chorus of The Family Reunion gloomily await the morning and the information they must reveal to both John and Arthur, rather than awaiting the revelations of the day with hope. The fate of the House of Atreus would have been similar, had Orestes not won his case, and the Furies not been reconciled by the persuasion of Athene. In the following passage, the chorus of the Choephoroi examine the possible outcomes of Orestes' vengeance:

> νῦν γὰρ μέλλουσι μιανθεῖσαι
> πειραὶ κατ' ἀνάνων ἀνδροδαίκτων
> ἢ πάνυ θήσειν Ἀγαμεμνονίων
> οἴκων ὄλεθρον διὰ παντός,
> ἢ πῦρ καὶ φῶς ἐπ' ἐλευθερίαι
> δαίων ἀρχάς τε πολισσονόμους
> ἕξει πατέρων μέγαν ὄλβον. (Ch: 859-65)

(For now blood shall stain the edges of the blades that slaughter men; these will either bring disaster complete on Agamemnon's house, or else, kindling a torch to win freedom and power to rule the city Orestes shall possess the great wealth of his fathers.

While the latter possibility is not realized until the Eumenides, nevertheless, the House of Atreus is returned to light. The Family Reunion, however, ends with the gloom of the Choephoroi and its yet to be atoned-for matricide. The chorus of The Family Reunion laments:

> To each and all of these questions/ there is no conceivable answer./ We have suffered far more than a personal loss -- / We have lost our way in the dark. (FR: p.133)

Clearly, the chorus has not progressed beyond its development at the point when Agatha takes on her mantic powers. "A curse is like a child, formed/ To grow to maturity: Accident is design/ And design is accident/ In a cloud of unknowing" (FR: p. 110). In The Family Reunion, the chorus fumbles blindly in a "cloud of unknowing," its members unable to control their destinies as design and accident are interchangeable.

In the Oresteia, Aeschylus has light, as an aspect of nature, reflect the moral development in the play. Accordingly, the image of light, as it is presented in the Agamemnon, signifies evil and death, rather than life. In the Choephoroi, the House of Atreus is depicted as being covered by a spiritual darkness from which only Orestes, the "light of the house," and Dīke, which is equated with light, may deliver it. In the Eumenides, the forces of light and darkness are embroiled in a court battle which results in a final harmony, in which images of light and darkness are both made favorable. T.S. Eliot inverts the image of light from its positive role to a negative one in order to

reflect moral development on the part of the characters, as does Aeschylus in the Agamemnon and the Choephoroi. In addition, he depicts Wishwood as being covered by fog and darkness, as the House of Atreus is metaphorically shrouded in the Choephoroi. However, Eliot does not reconcile the forces of light and darkness at the end of his play. Instead, the stage is enveloped by darkness, and therefore darkness and death may be seen to defeat utterly light and life. Eliot's Orestes, Harry, must continue his journey in the dark and mist of his curse.

MEDICINE

The theme of medicine may be observed in both the Oresteia and in The Family Reunion. In the Oresteia, Aeschylus equates morality with physical health. Criminal activity is depicted in terms of disease, and therefore remedies for disease such as surgery and medication become metaphors for justice and punishment. Morally upright behavior is depicted in terms of health. Eliot adapts the image of disease as moral corruption in The Family Reunion. In Eliot's play, however, physical health is literally, rather than purely metaphorically, equated with moral awareness.

In the Oresteia, disease may be perceived as a metaphor for the state of sin into which the House of Atreus has fallen. The Watchman introduces this theme by referring to song as a "remedy of incision"[1] against sleep, in order to ease his vigil. Later, he prays for a release from πόνων, presumably for both himself and the House of Atreus, a release which he imagines will be achieved by the light of the beacon. In the following passage, the chorus of the Choephoroi describes the state of the house in terms of disease:

ὦ πόνος ἐγγενής,
καὶ παράμουσος ἄτας
ἁιματόεσσα πλαγά,
ἰὼ δύστον' ἄφερτα κήδη.

[1] ed. J.D. Denniston and D. Page, Aeschylus. Agamemnon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957) p.68.

ἰὼὶ δυσκατάπαυστον ἄλγος.
δώμασιν ἔμμοτον
τῶνδ' ἄκος οὐκ ἀπ' ἄλλων
ἔκτοθεν ἀλλ' ἀπ' αὐτῶν
σὺ δμὰν ἔριν αἱματηράν...(Ch: 406-74)

(Ah. sorrow inbred in the race, and bloody stroke of ruin discordant! Ah. woes lamentable, unbearable! Ah. pain not to be quelled! The house has a remedy for this, a remedy of suppuration: not from others, without, but from its own children must it come, by means of cruel, bloody strife.

Here, the crimes committed by members of the house are presented as a disease which transmits itself down through the generations, and one which can only be healed "from within." The term ἔμμοτον refers to "plugs of lint for dressing festering wounds, or, more precisely, for keeping them open until they suppurate and can heal from within."[2] Moreover, with the exception of this passage, this term is found only in medical writers.[3] Aeschylus, therefore, has borrowed a very specific expression from medical terminology to express the way in which a cure may be applied to the House of Atreus. Ironically, this cure may merely prolong the disease, rather than cure it completely. The ἄτη (folly) referred to by the chorus is ambiguous: it may refer to either Clytemnestra or Orestes,[4] which suggests that their actions may

[2] ed. A.F. Garvie, Aeschylus. Choephoroi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) p.172.

[3] Ibid., p.172.

[4] Ibid., p.172.

hold equal penalties. Since the cure must come from within the house, it will require the shedding of kindred blood, and therefore, with the murder of his mother, Orestes will incur upon himself the same guilt and corruption that Clytemnestra has incurred upon herself through the murder of Agamemnon. Vengeance, therefore, may be viewed as a purely "symptomatic" remedy for the sickness of the House of Atreus.

Throughout the Oresteia, the view that crime is an incurable malady is stressed. For example, the chorus of the Agamemnon speaks of the inexorable fate of Paris, a man whom they believe to have scorned the altar of Justice:

> βιᾶται δ' ἁ τάλαινα Πειθὼ
> προβούλου παῖς ἄφερτος Ἄτας
> ἄκος δὲ πᾶν μάταιον· οὐκ ἐκρύφθη,
> πρέπει δέ, φῶς αἰνολαμπές σίνος... (Ag:385-9)

(He is overborne by relentless Persuasion, child irresistible of forecounseling Destruction. And every remedy is vain: not hidden, but conspicuous, a lurid-shining light is the plague.)

In this passage, the chorus of the Agamemnon suggests that the only ἄκος (cure) for offences committed against the altar of justice is total destruction. External cures such as rites of purification will prove inadequate to nullify the guilt of the transgressor.

This view of the nature of crime as incurable is due to the aware-

ness on the part of Aeschylus that all actions are irrevocable. Once an action has been completed, it remains unretractibly in the past, and its consequences remain eternally present. Therefore, a man who has committed a criminal act shall be punished in his own lifetime or the penalty of his sin may be transmitted to future generations -- nevertheless the penalty will be paid. The chorus of the Choephoroi suggests that a criminal action remains as irrevocable as the loss of virginity:

> δι' αἵματ' ἐκποθέν θ' ὑπὸ χθονὸς τροφοῦ
> τίτας φόνος πέπηγεν οὐ διαρρύδαν·
> διαλγὴς ἄτα διαφέρει τὸν αἴτιον
> παναρκέτας νόσου βρύειν.
> θιγόντι δ' οὔτι νυμφικῶν ἑδωλίων
> ἄκος, πόροι τε πάντες ἐκ μιᾶς ὁδοῦ
> διαίνοντες τὸν χερομυσῆ φόνον καθαί-
> ροντες ἴθυσαν μάταν. (Ch: 66-75)

(Because of blood drained by the fostering earth the vengeful gore stands clotted, and will not dissolve away. Calamity, inflicting grievous pain, keeps the guilty man forever infeted with an all-destroying sickness. For him that has violated a bridal bower there is no remedy; and though all streams flow in one channel to cleanse the blood from a polluted hand, they speed their course in vain.)

The crime of murder, of which members of the House of Atreus are guilty, is perhaps the most serious of all crimes, as its results cannot be altered, not even by the gods. As Apollo remarks in the Eumenides, not even Zeus may restore a man's life once it has been taken. Furthermore, once

blood has been shed, it requires the blood of the murderer to be shed in requital, as Agamemnon's spirit demands the death of Clytemnestra and Clytemnestra's spirit demands the death of her son. Through the spilling of kindred blood, infection is spread from one member of the House of Atreus to another.

Medicine may be considered to possess a dual nature in the Agamemnon. Medicinal draughts may possess restorative properties, or they may be poisonous and lethal. For example, the Argive Elders employ the verb φαρμάσσω (medicate) to describe the effects of unguent on the flames of Clytemnestra's sacrificial fires.

> ... βωμοὶ δώροισι φλέγονται·
> ἄλλη δ' ἄλλοθεν οὐρανομήκης
> λαμπὰς ἀνίσχει
> φαρμασσομένη χρίματος ἀγνοῦ
> μαλαχαῖς ἀδόλοισι παραγορίαις...(Ag: 92-5)

(... the altars blaze with offerings: and from this side and that as high as the heaven torches send up their light, charmed by the unguent's soft guileless coaxing...)

This verb suggests both the capacity of the unguent to heal and the capacity to "bewitch ... or to poison"[5] Clytemnestra's sacrifices, therefore,

5 Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon, (Oxford: Oxford University Press) s.v.

possess supernatural and menacing qualities. In addition, it is the persuasion of the unguent that "medicines" the flames of the sacrifices in honor of Agamemnon, and it is persuasion that will prove the destruction of the man who scorned the altar of Justice. The chorus expresses the hope in lines 97-103 of the Agamemnon that Clytemnestra may consent to be the "healer" of their fears. However, as the term φαρμασσομένη (medicating) is employed to describe the sacrifices she has revealed, there remains the possibility that she may employ her powers in a destructive rather than a healing capacity.

The remedy, which Calchas claims will alleviate the winds which hold the Argive fleet in Aulis, reinforces this idea that medicine is capable of providing both life or death. The prophet speaks of a "bitter remedy" to free the ships, one which will eventually prove to be the death of Agamemnon, as well as that of his daughter:

> ...ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ πικροῦ
> χείματος ἄλλο μῆχαρ
> βριθύτερον πρόμοισιν
> μάντις ἔκλαγξεν προφέρων
> Ἄρτεμιν, ὥστε χθόνα βά-
> κτροις ἐπικρούσαντας Ἀτρεί-
> δας δάκρυ μὴ κατασχεῖν...(Ag: 198-204)

(And when another remedy against the cruel storm more grievous for the chiefs, was shrieked out by the prophet, putting forward Artemis as cause, so that the Atreidae beat the ground with their staves and could not hold back a tear.)

he remedy Calchas suggests is both "additional to the disease and worse than it."[6] Clearly, this remedy is a sinister one. While it serves to free the ships, the guilt which it will bring upon Agamemnon will prove worse than the setback provided by the weather. With the death of Iphigeneia, kindred blood has once again been spilled in the House of Atreus and the infection of guilt increased.

Throughout the Oresteia, a complete cure, rather than a temporary remedy which merely prolongs the disease, is sought for the House of Atreus. Agamemnon, upon his return, imagines himself in the rôle of physician: by means of burning and amputation he believes that he will cure any sin and corruption in Argos:

> ὅτῳ δὲ καὶ δεῖ φαρμάκων παιωνίων,
> ἤτοι κέαντες ἢ τεμόντες εὐφρόνως
> πειρασόμεσθα πῆμ' ἀποστρέψαι νόσου. (Ag: 848-50)

(But as for that which has need of healing remedies, either by burning or by the kindly knife we shall try to turn back the pain of the disease.)

Agamemnon, however, does not realize that he himself is stained with corruption, and that Clytemnestra will be assuming the rôle of surgeon. Agamemnon employs the term φαρμάκων (medicine) to suggest healing. Ironically, Kassandra later employs his term to describe Clytemnestra's intended murder

6 ed. Denniston and Page, Aeschylus, Agamemnon, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957) p.87

of herself and Agamemnon. In this context, φάρμακον takes on supernatural and deadly connotations:

> ...ὡς δὲ φάρμακον
> τεύχουσα κἀμοῦ μισθὸν ἐνθήσει κότῳ
> ἐπεύχεται, θήγουσα φωτὶ φάσγανον,
> ἐμῆς ἀγωγῆς ἀντιτείσεσθαι φόνον.

(...and as though brewing a potion she will put in the cup a wage for me also.)

(Ag: 1260-63) Here Clytemnestra will employ the same means to destroy her guilty husband, φάρμακοι and a blade, that he thought to employ against the guilty in Argos. While Agamemnon employs the term φάρμακον to refer to healing, if not the patient, then the city, Clytemnestra's use of φάρμακοι serves entirely destructive purposes.[7]

Aegisthus also perceives himself as occupying the rôle of surgeon. He threatens the Argive elders with starvation, which he claims to be both a

> δεσμὸς δὲ καὶ τὸ γῆρας αἵ τε νήστιδες
> δύαι διδάσκειν ἐξοχώταται φρενῶν
> ἰατρομάνταις.(Ag: 1621-3)

(Bonds and whips and the pangs of hunger are excellent prophet-doctors for the wits.)

[7] Jean Dumortier, Le vocabulaire medicale d' Eschyle et les écrits Hippocratiques (Paris: Societe d'edition "Les Belles Lettres," 1975) pp.58-9.

In this way, Aegisthus assumes Agamemnon's characteristics. The fact that both the king and the usurper imagine themselves in the rôle of surgeon suggests the way in which infection is passed from one member of the family to another. Once Agamemnon has been slain, Aegisthus adopts the perspective of his guilty cousin. In addition, this similarity between the two men reinforces the symmetry between Aegisthus' death in the Choephoroi and that of Agamemnon.

Orestes is considered by the chorus of the Choephoroi to be the one who may, by avenging his father's death, end the cycle of violence and therefore provide the cure to the House of Atreus "from within." Yet once the son has slain his mother, her blood stains his hands and he too bears the stamp of corruption which the Furies sense. Not only is Orestes contaminated by his mother's blood, but he is pursued by the Furies who, according to the oracle of Apollo inflict sickness on their victims:

> ...τὰς δ' αἰνῶν νόσους,
> σαρκῶν ἐπαμβατῆρας ἀγρίαις γνάθοις,
> λειχῆνας ἐξέσθοντας ἀρχαίαν φύσιν,
> λεύκας δὲ κόρσαις τῆιδ' ἐπαντέλλειν νόσωι...(Ch: 279-82)

(...leprous ulcers that mount upon the flesh with cruel fangs, eating away its primal nature: An a white down sprouting forth upon this infection.)

Clearly, the murder of Clytemnestra has not removed the stain of corruption

from the House of Atreus.

The rôle of Apollo in the play is consistent with his association with medicine, as may be inferred by the use of his title as the god of healing. Apollo may be perceived to reflect the dual nature of medicine: he possesses the ability to save lives or to destroy them. In the Agamemnon, Calchas attempts to invoke the god's healing properties:

> ἰήιον δὲ καλέω Παιᾶνα,
> μή τινας ἀντιπνόους Δαναοῖς χρονίας ἐχενῆδας ἀπλοίας
> τευξῃ, σπευδομένα θυσίαν ἑτέραν ἄνομόν τιν' ἄδαιτον,
> νεικέων τέκτονα σύμφυτον, οὐ δεισήνορα...(Ag: 146-53)

(I call upon the blessed healer, that Artemis may not bring to pass delay through adverse winds, long lasting, holding fast the ships, working to bring about another sacrifice, one without song or feast, an architect of quarrels grown up with the family, with no fear of the husband.)

Despite the plea of the prophet for Apollo to invoke his healing powers, only the "bitter remedy" is provided. The Herald too, invokes Apollo as the god of healing without effect.

> ἅλις παρὰ Σκάμανδρον ἦσθ' ἀνάρσιος·
> νῦν δ αὖτε σωτὴρ ἴσθι καὶ παιώνιος,
> ἄναξ Ἄπολλον... (Ag: 511-3)

(The enmity you showed us by Scamander's banks was enough; but now be once more our preserver and healer, lord Apollo.)

In fact, Cassandra later informs the chorus that the god of healing will be absent in the Agamemnon: ἀλλ' οὔτι παιὼν τῷδ' ἐπιστατεῖ λόγῳ (Ag: 1249). (But no healer stands by while this word is uttered.) Cassandra, unlike the Herald, is aware that Apollo will behave only in his capacity as ἄπολλον (destroyer) the destructive side of his dual nature. Not until the Choephoroi, in which killing is carried out with more justice, does Apollo begin to facilitate the healing of the House of Atreus. In the Agamemnon, justice is entirely absent from the house. As justice is the remedy for crime, it is natural that the god of healing should be absent since there are no tools with which he may operate in the play. In the Choephoroi, Apollo believes Orestes to have justice on his side while the guilt of Klytemnestra infects the house. Accordingly, he directs his oracles towards the release of the house from its malady. The god continues to operate in his capacity as destroyer, however, for he demands the death of Clytemnestra, and this death could conceivably bring about the death of Orestes. In the Eumenides, in which the nature of justice is redefined, the god makes a physical appearance and acts directly to save Orestes.

The Furies, who are represented in the play as foul and diseased creatures, dripping poison, may be viewed as representative of the irrevocable nature of criminal actions and the inevitability of retribution. Their physical

appearance reflects the moral state of the criminal. These goddesses pursue the murderer much as disease persists in a human being. Once Orestes is liberated from their pursuit, the Furies prepare to transfer their venom to the city of Athens. It is their intention to infest the land with disease and make it barren. However, in the way that Justice is transformed so that it possesses both a healing capacity as well as a destructive capacity, so too are the Furies, who represent a retributive form of justice, transformed. In their new rôle, the Furies, or Eumenides, will see to it that no sickness shall fall upon Athens, and will work to promote the health of the land. With the acquittal of Orestes and the transformation of the Furies, a cure is finally provided for the characters of the play.

In The Family Reunion, Eliot attributes to medicine many of the qualities given it in the Oresteia. For example, Gerald suggests before Harry's arrival that the family should overlook his nephew's unsuitable marriage: "Make him feel that what has happened doesn't matter. He's taken his medicine, I've no doubt"(FR: p.18). The cliché, "to take one's medicine," assumes ironic overtones when the image of medicine as it is employed in the Oresteia is taken into consideration. Once Harry's guilt has been made manifest to the audience, this reference to medicine is suggestive of the view that medicine is both a means of healing and a means of inflicting destruc-

tion. The "medicine" Harry has taken is very much like the "bitter remedy" that is presented to Agamemnon in Aulis. Like Agamemnon, Harry has rid himself of one of the greatest obstacles of his life while at sea, and like Agamemnon, Harry has incurred guilt upon himself, or "taken a bitter medicine," through his action.

Once Harry announces that he is responsible for his wife's death, members of his family react naively, unaware of the magnitude of his guilt. Harry's version of his wife's death is not consistent with that of the newspapers, and it is the newspapers on which Harry's relatives rely for information. The members of the chorus, who believe everything they read in the papers, and who perceive themselves to be well-versed in scientific matters because of their dependence on the media, consider Harry's guilt to be a physical illness, rather than a metaphysical one. Ivy says of Harry's mental condition:

> I have heard of such cases before -- that people in his condition/ Often betray the most immoderate resentment/ At such a suggestion. They can be very cunning/ -- Their malady makes them so. They do not want to be cured/ And they know what you are thinking. (FR: p.33)

The family accordingly brings in a doctor to remedy what it perceives to be Harry's "malady," unaware that the words of the doctor will be largely inadequate to alter Harry's condition. The family cannot conceive of the guilt attached to Harry both through the death of his wife, and through the work-

ings of the family curse, both subjects not to be found in newspapers.

Harry, however, is aware that it is within the capacity of Doctor Warburton to cure only physical maladies, rather than spiritual ones. Harry remarks that if the Eumenides were not external entities, the doctor would probably be able to provide him with a cure:

> I have a private puzzle. Were they simply outside./ I might escape somewhere, perhaps. Were they simply inside/ I could cheat them perhaps with the aid of Dr. Warburton/ -- or any other doctor, who would be another Warburton./ if you decided to set another doctor on me. But this is too real for your words to alter. (FR: p.93)

In the Family Reunion, the Eumenides represent the irrevocable nature of actions, in particular, the irrevocable nature of murder, as they do in the Oresteia. As the Eumenides are external entities and may be seen by other characters, as well as by himself, their appearance is clearly not a symptom of Harry's madness, and no drug will rid him of their presence. But as the Eumenides are in part manifestations of his guilt, there is no way for him to escape their presence physically. In this way, Harry finds himself in the same situation as Orestes at the beginning of the Eumenides: there are no physical means by which the infection of his guilt may be removed.

In his conversation with Doctor Warburton, Harry dwells upon the relationship between the nature of murder and cancer:

> Not at all extraordinary./ It is really harder to believe in murder/ than it is to believe in cancer. Cancer is here:/ The lump, the dull pain, the occasional sickness:/ Murder a reversal of sleep and waking./ Murder was there. Your ordinary murderer/ Regards himself as an innocent victim./ To himself he is still what he used to be/ Or what he would be. He cannot realize that everything is irrevocable./ The past unredeemable. But cancer, now./ That is something real. (FR: p.67)

To Harry, while cancer is clearly real and cannot be denied, the act of murder, while equally irrevocable and incurable, does not appear to be tangible, primarily because actions committed in the past do not appear to exist in the present. Harry, at this point in the drama, has difficulty reconciling himself with the eternal presence of the past in his life. While he may wish to forget his past and continue his life as if nothing has happened in the last seven years, the cancerous guilt which he has incurred upon himself will remain eternally present, as the presence of the Eumenides suggests.

Harry, as he realizes the difficulty the chorus has grasping the nature of his guilt, suggests that it is not he himself who is ill, but the world around him:

> It goes a good deal deeper/ Than what people call their conscience: it is just the cancer/ That eats away the self. I knew how you would take it./ First of all, you isolate the single event/ As something so dreadful that it couldn't have happened/ Because you could not bear it. So you must believe/ That I suffer from delusions. It is not my conscience./ Not my mind, that is diseased, but the world I have to live in. (FR: p. 31)

At this point in the drama, Harry is unaware of the workings of

the family curse, and how it has been passed down to him by his father. He senses, however, that there is a sickness in the world in which he lives. As has already been noted, the Furies depict the state of the transgressor in terms of disease in the Eumenides (Eu: 377-79). The criminal is said to be surrounded by an infection, owing to his guilt, which obscures the light and causes him to fall. The same may be said of Harry who perceives the world around him as diseased, once he has assumed the responsibility for his wife's death. Harry, like Orestes at the end of the Choephoroi, is surrounded by the infection of his family's guilt and by that of his own guilt.

While the Oresteia marks a progression from sickness to health, as Apollo progresses from "destroyer" to "healer," The Family Reunion contains no such resolution, but rather the play ends with the death of one of its central figures. Healing is not achieved at the end of The Family Reunion, despite the presence of the Eumenides in the drama whom Harry considers to have become "bright angels." Instead, Harry indirectly slays his mother, and will presumably draw more guilt upon himself through this action.

In the Oresteia, Aeschylus employs the theme of medicine as an index of the state of moral development in the play. While Justice is absent from the House of Atreus, the house is characterized by illness and disease. Throughout the play, a cure is sought for the sickness that infests the

house, but healing may only be achieved by means of Justice, which is absent. Once Justice has been accomplished, and the House of Atreus freed from its guilt, the play abounds with metaphors of growth and new life. In addition, medicine may be seen to possess a "dual nature," which is also reflected by the rôle of Apollo in the play. Medicine may either heal or destroy, and these ends are both within the capacity of Apollo, the god of healing. In The Family Reunion, physical health may also be shown to reflect the state of of moral development in the play. Harry perceives the crime of murder to be akin to cancer, and he becomes aware of the sickness of the world around him. The chorus attempts to contrive a cure for what they consider to be his malady, yet the general practitioner they solicit proves ineffectual in matters that require spiritual healing. In The Family Reunion, a cure is not achieved; rather, the play ends with death and the mere hope that there may yet be atonement for the curse.

SEEMING AND BEING

Both Aeschylus and T.S. Eliot are concerned with the difference between reality and appearance in their works. In the Oresteia, Aeschylus explores the means by which it is possible to distinguish the real from that which merely appears to be real. This concern on the part of Aeschylus is reflected in the use of language in the Oresteia. Eliot too, may be seen to examine the adequacy of language to express the real in his play. Both authors speculate on the rôle of god and the supernatural in human affairs, and the ability of language to express this rôle.

In this matter of distinguishing appearance from reality, Aeschylus again reveals himself to have been influenced by his older contemporary, Heraclitus. Many of the surviving fragments attributed to Heraclitus suggest that the philosopher dealt extensively with this problem in his work, as fragments XIV-XVI illustrate:

> Whatever comes from sight, hearing, learning from experience, this I prefer. Eyes are surer witnesses than ears. Eyes and ears are poor witnesses for men if their souls do not understand the language.[1]

These comments could well apply to the Agamemnon, as its characters struggle to make sense of events, yet are frequently unable to process the information they receive. Clytemnestra adopts a congenial appearance and

[1] Charles Kahn, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 35.

speaks with deliberate irony, so that the chorus is unable to grasp her true intent. Cassandra, by the nature of her curse, cannot make her oracles understood. The Watchman and the chorus avoid both speaking and hearing ill-omened words, fearing that by voicing their fears, they will inadvertently bring them to pass. The Watchman employs "ritual" terminology in his speech.[2] He claims to speak only to those who understand: to those who do not, he will remain silent. He is deliberately vague, yet his language is unwittingly ironic, because of his ignorance of future events.

The Watchman speaks of Clytemnestra as a woman possessing an ἀνδρόβουλον κέαρ (manly-purposed heart[3]). He associates masculine characteristics with a female character, an association which Aeschylus presumably intended to jar the audience. Clearly, Clytemnestra is overstepping the bounds of her rôle as the wife of Agamemnon. This equation of Klytemnestra with masculine rôles, later serves to reveal to the audience some of the irony of her speech as she refers to her husband in lines 604-12 of the Agamemnon.

The Watchman heralds the arrival of the beacon's light to the queen in terms which refer to sacrificial ritual. He suggests that Clytemnestra should

2 ed. J.D. Denniston and Dennis Page, Aeschylus, Agamemnon, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957) p.70

3 Ibid., p. 68

raise an ὀλολυγμός (a loud cry) over the beacon and the fall of Troy it heralds. Since the ὀλολυγμός is a ritual cry uttered by women at the moment a victim is sacrificed,[4] the Watchman has unconsciously associated the homecoming of Agamemnon with a sacrifice. In his speech, the Watchman intimates to his audience that he is uneasy concerning the fate of the House of Atreus, but he never states these fears outright, presumably for fear that should his suspicions be voiced, they will come about. Rather, he suggests, ...οἶκος δ' αὐτός, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι, σαφέστατ' ἂν λέξειεν. (But the house itself, if it could take voice, could tell the tale most clearly... -- my translation) (Ag: 37-8). When Cassandra stands before the house, she is able to read both the ancient crimes which have been perpetrated within it and those about to take place. The house, while incapable of speech, is capable of a form of communication of which the Watchman is unaware. The house has retained the stain of the crimes committed within it, enabling the seer to "read its history." The Watchman, despite his guarded speech, has spoken with unintentional irony.

Clytemnestra, as she informs the chorus after the murder of her husband, has spoken deliberately ironically throughout the play in order to

4 Walter Burkert, Homo Necans, trans. Peter Bing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) p.54.

achieve Agamemnon's death:

> πολλῶν πάροιθεν καιρίως εἰρημένων
> τ' ἀναντί εἰπεῖν οὐκ ἐπαισχυνθήσομαι
> πῶς γὰρ τις ἐχθροῖς ἐχθρὰ πορσύνων, φίλοις
> δοκοῦσιν εἶναι, πημονῆς ἀρκιώτατ' ἂν
> φάρξειεν ὕψος κρεῖσσον ἐκπηδήματος;
> ἐμοὶ δ' ἀγὼν ὅδ' οὐκ ἀφρόντιστος πάλαι
> νείκης παλαιᾶς ἦλθε σὺν χρόνῳ γε μήν...(Ag: 1372-8)

(Before I said much to suit the time, but I shall feel no shame to say the opposite. For if one has in hand acts of enmity against enemies who seem to be friends, how else can one fence up the nets of harm to a height beyond overleaping? For me this contest, sprung from an ancient quarrel, has a matter for thought long since; but in time it has come.)

Clytemnestra has employed the same means to sacrifice her husband as he employed to sacrifice their daughter: she has made herself appear to have friendly intentions, lulling her victim into a sense of false security. Klytemnestra "sets the nets" about her husband beyond overleaping by her use of language, as he set the nets "beyond overleaping" around Troy (Ag: 358-9) with an army.

Clytemnestra instructs the herald to a report a message to her husband in which she declares her loyalty. Ironically, before she dispatches the herald, she orders him to end his description of the events at Troy as she would rather hear them first hand from Agamemnon. Clytemnestra clearly realizes the possibilities of misrepresentation through "second-hand" communications:

ταῦτ' ἀπάγγειλον πόσει·
ἥκειν ὅπως τάχιστ' ἐράσμιον πόλει·
γυναῖκα πιστὴν δ' ἐν δόμοις εὑροι μολὼν
οἵανπερ οἶν ἔλειπε, δωμάτων κύνα
εσθλὴν ἐκείνῳ, πολεμίαν τοῖς δύσφροσιν,
καὶ τἄλλ' ὁμοίαν πάντα, σημαντήριον
οὐδὲν διαφθείρασαν ἐν μήκει χρόνου·
οὐδ' οἶδα τέρψιν οὐδ' ἐπίψογον φάτιν
ἄλλου πρὸς ἀνδρὸς μᾶλλον ἢ χαλκοῦ βαφάς. (Ag: 604-12)

(Take this message to my husband! May he come as soon as possible, the city's darling, and may he find his wife faithful in his house, just as he left her, the watchdog of the palace, loyal to him, an enemy to his ill-wishers, one alike in all things; in the length of time she has destroyed no seal set there by him. I know no more of delight -- nor censorious rumor -- coming from another man, than I know how bronze is dipped.)

Agamemnon is persuaded to return home quickly, by the use of reported speech, and does not permit himself the time to discover first hand who has been faithful to him and who has not, as does, for example, his ally, Odysseus. Clytemnestra's reference to herself as the "watchdog" of the house recalls the homecoming of Odysseus, in which his dog both recognizes him and proves faithful. Clytemnestra's speech, therefore, reinforces the difference between the two returning heroes. The fact that Clytemnestra employs the optative of εὑρίσκω (to find), εὑροι (may he find) rather than the future, εὑρήσει (he shall find) suggests that the statements to follow are unreal: they exist only as wishes for the future. While Agamemnon may hope to find his wife as faithful to him as on the day he left, there is no guarantee

of this, as Clytemnestra's failure to use the indicative mood indicates. Klytemnestra carefully avoids claiming that Agamemnon will find these things which she has listed upon his arrival. There remains, however, some truth to her statements. These truths depend largely upon her knowledge of the manly art of tempering bronze, with which she assures her faithfulness. The art of tempering bronze belongs to warcraft, and has no part in the management of domestic affairs which is the traditional woman's rôle, to the mind of the returning army. The Watchman, however, has already declared that she has an ἀνδρόβουλον κέαρ (manly-purposed heart), which suggests that a knowledge of bronze is something she may well possess. Certainly when Clytemnestra slays Agamemnon, she demonstrates a knowledge of the use of bronze. In addition, Clytemnestra assumes a masculine role which would be more appropriate to Aegisthus, as the chorus later remark at lines 1643-5 of the Agamemnon.

In her triumph speech, Clytemnestra remarks that she has been planning her husband's death for a great deal of time. In addition, the term she has employed to refer to tempering bronze is χαλκοῦ βαφὰς, (tempering or dipping of bronze[5]) which recalls the χρόκου βαφὰς (saffron dipped) which the chorus have incorporated into their depiction of the death of Iphigeneia.

5 ed. J.D. Denniston and D. Page, Aeschylus, Agamemnon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957) p.126.

Clytemnestra, therefore, is not speaking far from the truth when she addresses the Herald. She will be as faithful to her husband on his return as on the day he killed her child. Lines 613-14 of the Agamemnon indicate that Aeschylus intends the audience to be aware of the irony of Clytemnestra's words.

τοιόσδ' ὁ κόμπος, τῆς ἀληθείας γέμων,
οὐκ αἰσχρὸς ὡς γυναικὶ γενναίᾳ λακεῖν.

(Such is the vaunt, being full of the truth, that it is not shameful for a noble woman to proclaim. -- my translation)

Whether the Herald or Clytemnestra utters these words, it is clear that there is a discrepancy between truth and the appearance of truth in her words. While Clytemnestra's statements are loaded with truth, this truth is ironic. Her words are merely "becoming" -- they are not sincere and do not accurately reflect reality. Clytemnestra is able to speak ironically at this point in the play, because she is in a position to know more than anyone else. For example, the Herald believes himself to possess knowledge: τοσαῦτ' ἀκούσας ἴσθι τἀληθῆ κλυών (Ag: 680). (Know that in hearing so much you have heard the truth!) The Herald, however, is in fact ignorant of how matters stand in the House of Atreus, which, in retrospect makes Clytemnestra's speech all the more ironic. While the chorus harbor unvoiced suspicions, only

Clytemnestra knows what she intends to accomplish.

Continuing this pattern of deceit, Orestes achieves the death of his mother by claiming to be somebody else. In addition, Clytemnestra is placed in a situation in which she must guess a riddle -- as the characters of the Agamemnon are placed in a situation in which they must decipher Klytemnestra's riddling speech.

> Οιχ: τὸν ζῶντα καίνειν τοὺς τεθνηκότας λέγω.
> Κλ: ὀἰ γώ, ξυνῆκα τοὔπος ἐξ αἰνιγμάτων·
> δόλοις ὀλοὐμεθ' ὥσπερ οὖν ἐκτείναμεν.
> δοίη τις ἀνδροκμῆτα πέλεκυν ὡς τάχος. (Ch: 886-9)

(Slave: A living man, I say, is slain by the dead.
Clytemnestra: Ah, Woe!
I understand your words, despite the riddle! By guile shall we perish, just as we slew by guile! In all speed give me a man-slaying axe.)

Clytemnestra correctly answers the riddle, unlike the chorus of the Agamemnon, but not quickly enough to save her life. Her manly heart proves ineffective against her avenging son, who has the favor of the gods on his side. Clytemnestra is slain by Orestes because her son has returned in the way his father ought to have -- with stealth. In addition, Orestes denies his mother the time necessary to exert her persuasion. Orestes uses Klytemnestra's treacherous means against her. Orestes has knowledge of the future, and he too lies in order to accomplish it.

In the Agamemnon, Cassandra stands before the House of Atreus and

"reads" its history. Through her mantic powers, she is able to divine information beyond even Clytemnestra's powers, for Kassandra is able to divine the identity of her own avenger. Clytemnestra does not and cannot know anything of the future beyond the death of her husband. Cassandra's prophecies, however, prove unintelligible to the chorus, who might have been in a position to prevent the murder of Agamemnon. The deaths of Agamemnon and Cassandra, however, are firmly and irrevocably fixed in the future according to the plan of Zeus: a knowledge of future events cannot prevent them from taking place in the world of the Oresteia.

Cassandra rejects Klytemnestra's persuasion, and refuses to make a sign to indicate her understanding of Clytemnestra's orders. Unlike Agamemnon, Cassandra immediately recognizes the evil of the house and the intentions of its mistress, through her prophetic insight, which Agamemnon lacks. Kassandra's prophecies, conveyed in metaphorical language, prove beyond the capacity of the chorus to understand.

> καὶ μὴν ὁ χρησμὸς οὐκέτ' ἐκ καλυμμάτων
> ἑστὰι δεδορκὼς νεογάμου νύμφης δίκην·
> λαμπρὸς δ' ἔοικεν ἡλίου πρὸς ἀντολὰς
> πνέων ἐφήξειν, ὥστε κύματος δίκην
> κλύζειν πρὸς αὐγὰς τοῖδε πήματος πολὺ
> μεῖζον· φρενώσω δ' οὐκέτ' ἐξ
> αἰνιγμάτων... (Ag: 1178-83)

(Now shall my oracle no longer one that looks forth from a veil, like a

newly wedded bride, but as a bright, clear wind it shall rush toward the sunrise, so that like a wave there shall surge toward the light a woe far greater than this; no more in riddles shall I instruct you.)

Here, Cassandra claims that she will speak plainly, yet her announcement is comprised of extremely dense similes. Rather than speaking more plainly, Cassandra continues to speak in oracular and metaphorical language.

The semblance of the truth which Clytemnestra has projected to aid her treachery clouds her true motives. An atmosphere of doubt and unknowing, therefore, has been created for the other characters of the play. The chorus comments on the disparity between appearance and genuine nature suggesting that the true nature of any given thing will be revealed with time.

χρονισθεὶς δ' ἀπέδειξεν ἦ-
θος τὸ πρὸς τοκέων· χάριν
γὰρ τροφεῦσιν ἀμείβων
μηλόφονοισι (σὺν) ἄταις
δαΐτ' ἀκέλευστος ἔτευξεν·
αἵματι δ' οἶκος ἐφύρθη...(Ag: 727-32)

(But in time it showed the temper it had from its parents; for returning kindness to those that reared it with horrid slaughter of their cattle it made a beast unbidden and the house was befouled with blood...)

In this passage, the Argive elders are speaking of Helen, but their analogy is true of her sister, Clytemnestra, as well. Certainly if Helen is a lion, then

members of her family must be also. The "lion in the blood-strain"[6] appears over time, much as Clytemnestra has plotted her husband's murder over time and caused the house to "reek with blood"[7] once more. Clytemnestra, like Agamemnon, is also referred to as a lion by Kassandra.

The son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, Orestes, also reveals family traits, ἤθοι, over time.[8] He has been raised in another city, yet he reveals traits upon his return which he shares with both his parents. He is the avenger of his father, yet he employs his mother's techniques to accomplish his vengeance. He is both the son of the eagle, Agamemnon, and the son of the viper, Clytemnestra, but it is in the persona of the viper that he slays his mother.

Agamemnon seeks the truth behind treacherous appearances, but his judgment is clouded by his wife's use of language, despite his statement that he can readily distinguish the real from that which merely appears to be real:

6 Aeschylus, Aeschylus I: Oresteia, trans. Richmond Lattimore, The Complete Greek Tragedies, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953) p.57.

7 Ibid., p. 57.

8 John Peradotto, "The Omen of the Eagles and the ΗΘΟΣ of Agamemnon," Phoenix, 23 (1969) 237-63, p.251-2.

εἰδὼς λέγοιμ' ἄν. εὖ γὰρ ἐξεπίσταμαι
ὁμιλίας κάτοπτρον, εἴδωλον σκιᾶς,
δοκοῦντας εἶναι κάρτα πρευμενεῖς ἐμοί·
μόνος δ' Ὀδυσσεὺς ὅσπερ οὐχ ἑκὼν ἔπλει,
ζευχθεὶς ἑτοῖμος ἦν ἐμοὶ σειραφόρος·
εἴτ' οὖν θανόντος εἴτε καὶ ζῶντος πέρι
λέγω.(Ag: 838-43)

(I can speak from knowledge (or I can speak having seen) -- well I know the mirror of society, the image of a shadow, those who seem most kindly towards me. But only Odysseus, who sailed against his will, once yoked proved a ready trace-horse for me: whether he is alive or dead, I say this of him. -- my modification of Lloyd-Jones' translation)

Here, Agamemnon claims to be able to discriminate between true friends and treacherous ones. He supports his claim that he knows true friends from false ones by suggesting that "he has seen" and has therefore gained knowledge from experience. He uses εἰδὼς (having seen) the perfect participle of ειδω, "to see" , which also has the sense of "to know". Therefore, Agamemnon's knowledge stems from what he has seen. A further ambiguity is caused by his reference to ὁμιλίας κάτοπτρον, which, as Denniston and Page suggest, could mean that "the image seen in the mirror is a true reflection of the real thing ... nevertheless only a reflection, as opposed to the reality."[9] They suggest that:

> ὁμιλιας κάτοπτρον here might imply that the king in society sees nothing but flatterers aping himself; εἴδωλον σκιᾶς, the reflection of a shadow,

[9] ed. J.D. Denniston and D. Page, Aeschylus: Agamemnon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957) pp. 142-3.

> then follows well for the flatterers are shadows of the king, and what he sees in society's mirror is merely the reflection of those shadows...[10]

Agamemnon's language remains ambiguous despite this interpretation, for σκιᾶς may also refer to a "shade" or the "spirit of a dead man,"[11] term which would be ironic if referring to Agamemnon in this context, as he is soon to become a shade. If Denniston and Page are correct, Agamemnon's flatterers could also be viewed as the reflection of a shade. Agamemnon employs unwitting irony in contrast to the deliberate irony of Clytemnestra's speech.

While Agamemnon claims that he is aware of the difference between a pleasant appearance and sinister intentions, he does not employ this ability for his homecoming. His wife is unduly pleasant, to the point that he remarks upon it, yet he suspects nothing of her underlying motivations. Agamemnon's method of attaining knowledge requires time: he views the actions of men and on the basis of this observation, passes judgment. Clytemnestra does not allow Agamemnon the time to decide the matter of her loyalty. The reference to Odysseus again reinforces the contrast between these men: Odysseus takes time to discern who has been loyal to him in his absence,

10 Ibid., p. 143

11 Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) s.v.

while Agamemnon, imagining that he possesses a profound insight into human nature, does not take this time, and is promptly struck down.

Cassandra's claim, despite her failure to make the chorus understand her, is indicative of a need for clarity on the part of the characters of the Agamemnon as Clytemnestra, through her deceit, has created an atmosphere of confusion. Throughout the play, this need for clarity is reflected by a need to define terms. Frequently, Aeschylus examines the etymology of words and names as if the name of an object may reveal its nature in some way. The chorus of the Agamemnon in their initial ode, ponder upon the name of Zeus:

> Ζεὺς ὅστις ποτ' ἐστιν, εἰ τόδ' αὐ-
> τῷ φίλον κεκλημένῳ,
> τοῦτο νιν προσεννέπω·
> οὐκ ἔχω προσεικάσαι
> πάντ' ἐπισταθμώμενος
> πλὴν Διός, εἰ τὸ μάταν ἀπὸ φροντίδος ἄχθος
> χρὴ βαλεῖν ἐτητύμως·
> οὐδ' ὅστις πάροιθεν ἦν μέγας,
> παμμάχῳ θράσει βρύων,
> οὐδὲ λέξεται πρὶν ὤν. (Ag: 160-70)

(Whoever Zeus may be, if this name is pleasing to him, by this name I address him. I can compare with him, measuring all things against him, none but Zeus, if from my mind the vain burden may be cast in sincerity. Not even he who in time past was great, abounding in boldness irresistible, he shall not even be counted, since he was of the past.)

Here, the members of the chorus are in doubt as to the nature of Zeus. This confusion may reflect the doubt and ignorance which Clytemnestra's illusions,

and the chain of violence already begun in the House of Atreus, have wrought in them. The chorus know little of Zeus other than that he defeated his father, whom they will not name since he is perceived as inferior to Zeus once conquered by him. The chorus believe that Zeus has a plan and that all events unfold according to it, yet they do not understand the nature or the workings of this plan. Because of their ignorance of the nature of Zeus, they are uncertain as to the accuracy of the title, "Zeus," as they know nothing of its origins. Pondering his name to gain insight into his nature, therefore proves fruitless. In the Choephoroi and the Eumenides, both the rôle of Zeus in human affairs and his nature are clarified. Not only do the gods appear on stage to save the House of Atreus, but their lineage is strictly traced by the Pythia. The increased rôle of the gods in human affairs reflects the deepened sense of moral awareness on the part of the characters of the Oresteia at this point. For example, Orestes kills his mother because justice demands it, but he does not do it readily, as his father slew Iphigeneia, or as his mother slew both Agamemnon and Cassandra.

The chorus analyze the effects of Helen and ironically suggest that her name is entirely appropriate:

τίς ποτ' ὠνόμαζεν ὧδ'
ἐς τὸ πᾶν ἐτητύμως·
μή τις θύτιν οὐχ ὁρῶμεν προνοί-

αισι τοῦ πεπρωμένου
γλῶσσαν ἐν τύχᾳ νέμων:
τὰν δορίγαμβρον ἀμφινει-
κῆ Ψ' Ἑλέναν: ἐπεὶ πρεπόντως
ἑλένας, ἑλανδρος, ἑλεπτολις...(Ag: 681-9)

(Who can have named her with such utter truth? Was it perhaps some unseen one who in foreknowledge of what was fated guided his tongue rightly? Her, the bride of the spear, the object of contention, Helen? For in a manner fitting to her name destroyer of ships, destroyer of men, destroyer of cities...)

Helen's name, according to the Argive elders, signifies her true nature, the nature which brought destruction to those who took her in, as did the marauding lion-cub. Here, the chorus again suggest that the name of an object, perhaps divinely inspired in accordance with destiny, may serve as an indicator of the true nature of an object.

Cassandra, standing before the statue of Apollo, suggests that the name of the god is indicative of his rôle in her destiny.

Ὦπολλον, Ὦπολλον.
ἀγυιᾶτ' ἀπόλλων ἐμός·
ἀπώλεσας γὰρ οὐ μόλις τὸ δεύτερον.(Ag: 1080-2)

(Apollo, Apollo! You of the roadside, my destroyer. For you have a second time easily destroyed me.)

Kassandra is punning on the similarity of "Apollo," and ἀπολλυμι, "to destroy." She suggests that the god has behaved consistently with his name in

regard to her destiny. In addition, she refers to his identity as the god of healing, and suggests that he will not be acting in this capacity in this play. So, too, did Calchas at Agamemnon 146-52, before the expedition set sail for Tro from Aulis and again Apollo did not act in this capacity.

Throughout the Oresteia, characters strive to find a working definition of justice. If justice is purely reciprocal, as it has been in the past, then the cycle of violence that has begun in the House of Atreus cannot end without the destruction of the house and all its members. Clearly, a new definition of justice is necessary, but one that still incorporates traditional definitions of justice, as represented by the Furies. For example, Electra ponders the way in which she should formulate her prayer for vengeance:

Ἠλ. τί φῶ; δίδασκ' ἄπειρον ἐξηγουμένη.
Χο. ἐλθεῖν τιν' αὐτοῖς δαίμον' ἢ βροτῶν τινα.
Ἠλ. πότερα δικαστὴν ἢ δικηφόρον λέγεις;
Χο. ἁπλωστὶ φράζουσ', ὅστις ἀνταποκτενεῖ. (Ch: 118-22)

(El: What shall I say? Prescribe the form, instruct my inexperience!
Ch: Pray that there may come to them some god or mortal...
El: Do you mean a judge or one who does justice?
Ch: Express it plainly -- one who shall take life for life!)

Here, the chorus advocate the ancient law of reciprocal punishment, while Electra suggests the possibility of justice as legal process. Furthermore, Electra suggests that reciprocal murder may carry the same penalty

as the original murder in the eyes of the gods:

> ἀλλὰ νόμος μὲν φονίας σταγόνας
> χυμένας ἐς πέδον ἄλλο προσαιτεῖν
> αἷμα· βοαῖ γὰρ λοιγὸς Ἐρινύν
> παρὰ τῶν πρότερον ῥῳμένων ἄτην
> ἑτέραν ἐπάγουσαν ἐπ' ἄτῃ. (Ch: 400-4)

(But it is the law that drops of blood spilt on the ground demand further bloodshed: for murder calls the Erinys, who from those who perished before brings one ruin in another's wake.)

The chorus state the traditional definition of justice: Clytemnestra must be struck down accordingly. However, the wording also suggests that Orestes, too, must be punished should he strike down his mother. For by this reasoning, her blood will also demand an avenger.

Once the definition of justice has been transformed in the Eumenides, it becomes necessary to modify the rôle of the Furies, the representatives of the traditional mode of distributing justice. Their rôle will now employ some life-giving aspects, such as blessing marriages, rather than merely life-destroying aspects, in accordance with the new definition of justice as legal process. Justice may still require the death of the transgressor but this will not necessarily be the case. The criminal may be spared should a jury find that he acted with justice. Accordingly, the "Erinyes" are now referred to as "Eumenides," a name which is no longer euphemistic but denotes their new

rôle in society.

The need to discover and define laws or truths which will endure for all time is the result of an awareness that man is merely a "creature of a day." His fleeting life, therefore, requires some form of permanence to be meaningful. The chorus of the Agamemnon describe man in his old age as ὄναρ ἡμερόφαντον ἀλαίνει (a dream, appearing by day, that wanders -- my translation) (Ag: 81), while Cassandra likens the fleeting nature of existence to painting.

> ἰὼ βρότεια πράγματ'· εὐτυχοῦντα μὲν
> σκιᾷ τις ἂν πρέψειεν· εἰ δὲ δυστυχῇ,
> βολαῖς ὑγρώσσων σπόγγος ὤλεσαν γραφήν·
> καὶ ταῦτ' ἐκείνων μᾶλλον οἰκτίρω πολύ.(Ag: 1327-30)

> (Alas for the affairs of men! When they are fortunate, one may liken them to a shadow; and if they are unfortunate a wet sponge with one dash blots out the picture. And I pity this far more than that.)

In this passage, Cassandra remarks on the fragile nature of man's existence, by employing terminology more commonly associated with painting. This metaphor not only suggests man's transient nature, but also suggests ways in which man may attempt to create some form of permanence for his existence. This possibility is somewhat ill-fated as Cassandra suggests, for a painting, which is designed to give both artist and subject immortality, may be wiped away by the stroke of a sponge. Aeschylus, however, may be ironically contrasting the value of painting with that of poetry. To his mind,

poetry does not suffer the ravages of physical decay which is exacted by time on the visual arts. To his mind, a poem cannot be physically destroyed so long as it exists in the minds of men. While Cassandra envisions the destruction of painting, Aeschylus immortalizes her lament in his poetry.

The visual arts also prove to be a source of knowledge, as well as remembrance in the Oresteia. For example, the Pythia is able to compare the Furies to a painting she has seen:

> εἶδον ποτ' ἤδη Φινέως γεγραμμένας
> δεῖπνον φερούσας ἀπτεροι γε μὴν ἰδεῖν
> αὗται, μέλαιναι δ', ἐς τὸ πᾶν βδελύκτροποι
> ῥέγχουσι δ' οὐ πλατοῖσι φυσιάμασιν.(Eu: 50-2)

(I have seen before now pictures of those that carried off the feast of Phineus: but these appear wingless, black, altogether hateful in their ways.)

While the Pythia perceives only a resemblance, this resemblance enables her to understand some of the nature of the Furies. In addition, the fabrics which were woven to destroy Agamemnon provide proof of the guilt of Klytemnestra, as they are stained by his blood. Orestes displays them as proof before the sun. The stains which mar the fabric become the evidence of Klytemnestra's crime.

Omens or portents may also provide knowledge and reveal the future in the Oresteia. The omen of the birds clearly represents Agamemnon and Me-

nelaus, and reveals the guilt which Agamemnon will bring upon himself through his destruction of Troy and his daughter. The chorus tell of:

> ὅπως Ἀχαιῶν δίθρονον κράτος, Ἑλλάδος ἥβας
> ξύμφρ[illegible]α ταγάν,
> πέμπει ξὺν δορὶ καὶ χερὶ πράκτορι
> θοὐριος ὄρνις Τευχρίδ' ἐπ' αἶαν,
> οἰωνῶν Βασιλεὺς Βασιλεῦσι νε-
> ῶν, ὁ κελαινὸς ὁ τ' ἐξόπιν ἀργᾶς...(Ag: 131-7)

> (...how the tw[illegible]ed command of the Achaeans, of the youth of Hellas the concor[illegible]leadership, was sped with avenging spear and arm by the warlike bird of omen to the Teucrian land, the king of birds appearing to the king of ships, the black eagle and behind it the white one...)

Artemis demands the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter in requital for the eagle's slaughter of the hare-mother. If Agamemnon wishes to wreak total devastation on Troy, then he must first wreak similar destruction upon his own family and therefore incur guilt upon himself. The omen is a metaphor for the total destruction of Troy, and it is this crime on the part of Agamemnon to which Artemis takes offence. The denseness of the language of the text suggests that the portent itself is the cause of her anger, rather than a representation of the original source of that anger. Apollo, Artemis' brother, also involves himself in the fate of the House of Atreus. His oracle orders Orestes' act of matricide in the Choephoroi, while in the Eumenides, the god himself intervenes directly to alter Orestes' destin[illegible]. In both cases,

these divine communications prove somewhat beyond the grasp of those for whom they are intended. Agamemnon imagines that it is right and just to sacrifice his daughter -- Calchas does not suggest otherwise. Orestes imagines that he may slay his mother with justice, yet the appearance of the Furies proves this belief to be false. Not until the Eumenides, in which the gods make their appearance on stage, is the divine will made clear.

Not only do words from divine sources have power in the Oresteia, but words spoken by mere mortals may be viewed as bringing events to pass. Despite the fact that in lines 636-7 of the Agamemnon he has attempted to refrain from speaking "ill-omened" words, the Herald remarks naively at 671-2.

> καὶ νῦν ἐκείνων εἴ τις ἐστὶν ἐμπνέων,
> λέγουσιν ἡμᾶς ὡς ὀλωλότας. τί μήν;

> (And now, if any of them yet breathes, they speak of us as dead, of course...)

To the audience already familiar with the fate of Agamemnon, this statement is clearly ironic. Not only will Agamemnon be spoken of as a dead man in the near future, but quite correctly.

When Cassandra finally states clearly the fate of Agamemnon, the chorus balks at her prophecy:

Κα: Ἀγαμέμνονος σὲ φημ' ἐποψέσθαι μόρον.
Χο: εὔφημον, ὦ τάλαινα, κοίμησον στόμα.
Κα: ἀλλ' οὐτι παιὼν τῷδ' ἐπιστατεῖ λόγῳ.
Χο: οὐκ, εἴπερ ἔσται γ' ἀλλὰ μὴ γένοιτό πως.(Ag: 1246-9)

(Ka: I say that you shall look upon Agamemnon's end.
Ch: Unhappy one, lull your voice to utter no ill-omened word!
Ka: But no healer stands by while this word is uttered.
Ch: No, if indeed it must be so: but may it not happen!)

Here, the chorus fears Cassandra's unambiguous use of language: at last she has directly stated the fate of Agamemnon and they are concerned that the utterance of these words will somehow bring the event to pass. The chorus orders Cassandra to avoid words of ill-omen, and attempts to counteract what she has said by employing the optative mood. While she has directly stated the future, the chorus perceive her statement to be only one of many possibilities. Yet throughout the play, it is clear that the chorus fears for Agamemnon. The chorus has recounted his deeds from before he set out for Troy until his return from that city, and by its analysis of divine justice, he must be found guilty, despite the fact that the chorus never puts this fear into words. Before the actual moment of Agamemnon's death, the Argive elders voice their fear for Agamemnon, not actually stating as specifically as Cassandra that Agamemnon will die on that very day, but stating their awareness that Agamemnon has brought guilt upon himself and must pay for it.

καὶ τῷδε πόλιν μὲν ἑλεῖν ἔδοσαν
μάκαρες Πριάμου,
θεοτίμητος δ' οἰκαδ' ἱκάνει·
νῦν δ' εἰ προτέρων αἷμ' ἀποτείσῃ
καὶ τοῖσι θανοῦσι θάνων ἄλλων
ποινὰς θανάτων ἐπικράνῃ,
τις κἀν εὔξαιτο βροτῶν ἀσινεῖ
δαίμονι φῦναι τὰδ' ἀκοίων...(Ag: 1335-42)

(To this man the blessed ones granted That he should take Priam's city, and honored by the gods he returns home. But now if he is to atone for the blood of some who are of the past and by dying for the dead is to ordain a penalty that consists in other deaths, who, who among mortals may boast himself born with a fortune beyond reach of harm.)

The fact that as soon as the chorus names its fear, Agamemnon is struck down cannot be attributed to mere coincidence.

The chorus of Argive elders, despite their ignorance of the exact nature of Zeus, are convinced that events occur according to his plan. Throughout the play, they attempt to interpret events in accordance with this will, including the justification of Agamemnon's devastation of Troy. As Peradotto remarks,

> After the event, the chorus sees the destruction of Troy as retribution fulfilled for a crime hateful to Zeus Xenios, and can, therefore, speak of the war as the stroke... or the work... of Zeus, and of the Atreidae as his avenging instruments.[12]

The chorus is convinced that the punishment of Paris unfolded according to

[12] John Peradotto: "The Omen of the Eagles and the ἦθος of Agamemnon", Phoenix, 23 (1969), 237-63, pp. 251-2.

this plan of Zeus. While the exact nature of Zeus remains an enigma to the chorus, the accomplishments of his will are made manifest over time:

Διὸς πλαγὰν ἐ'χουσιν εἰπεῖν.
πάρεστιν τοῦτό γ' ἐξιχνεῦσαι·
ἔπραξεν ὡς ἔκρανεν. οὐκ ἔφα τις
θεοὺς βροτῶν ἀξιοῦσθαι μέλειν
ὅσοις ἀθίκτων χάρις
πατοῖτ'· ὁ δ' οὐκ εὐσεβής·
πέφανται δ' ἐγγόνοις
[ἀτολμήτων ἀρη]
πνεόντων μεῖζον ἢ δικαίως.
φλεόντων δωμάτων ὑπέρφευ.
ὑπὲρ τὸ βέλτιστον· ἔστω δ' ἀπή-
μαντον, ὥστ' ἀπαρκεῖν
εὖ πραπίδων λαχόντι.
οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἔπαλξις
πλούτου πρὸς Κόρον ἀνδρὶ
λακτίσαντι μέγαν Δίκας
βωμὸν εἰς ἀφάνειαν. (Ag: 367-86)

(They may speak of a stroke from Zeus: that at least can be traced out. He has accomplished it as he ordained. Men have said that the gods did not deign to attend to mortals by whom the grace of things inviolable was trampled; but such men are impious. And the penalty for daring what may not be dared has been revealed to the descendants of those whose pride is greater than is right, when their house abounds with wealth in excess, beyond what is best. May it be granted me to have good sense, so that the gods are content to leave me free from harm! For there is no defense for a man who in the surfeit of his wealth has kicked the great altar of Justice out of sight.)

Yet the chorus' condemnation of Paris' behavior also suggests the guilt of Agamemnon. The chorus suggest that Paris, whose house enjoyed a wealth "beyond what is just" trampled the altar of justice to nothingness. Agamem-

non, too, belongs to a wealthy house from which justice is absent, and he, as the herald reveals, has literally destroyed altars at Troy. In addition, it is the persuasion of Clytemnestra that will prove his downfall. Clearly, the death of Agamemnon must also be part of the plan of Zeus, if the chorus has divined some fraction of its nature.

Since the death of Agamemnon is part of this plan, so too are the death of Clytemnestra and the acquittal of Orestes. Not only does Athene act on her father's authority -- she reminds the Furies that the key to her father's thunderbolt lies in her possession (Eu: 826-28) -- but it is Zeus who has provided evidence for Orestes' acquittal:

> ἐξῆλθ' ἀληθῶς, οὐκ ἀτιμίᾳ σέθεν·
> ἀλλ' ἐκ Διὸς γὰρ λαμπρὰ μαρτύρια παρῆν,
> αὐτὸς θ' ὁ χρήσας αὐτὸς ἦν ὁ μαρτυρῶν...(Eu: 796-8)

(...but in equal votes the trial resulted in all truth, bringing you no dishonor. Why, clear testimony from Zeus was there, and he who had given the oracle himself bore witness...)

Orestes too, attributes his freedom to both Pallas Athene and Apollo, and to the "all ordaining god, the Savior."[13] σωτήρ being an epithet of Zeus. With the Eumenides, Zeus is no longer the offended "Zeus Xenios," but the saving

13 Aeschylus, Aeschylus I: Oresteia, trans. Richmond Lattimore, The Complete Greek Tragedies, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955) p.162.

"Zeus Sōter."

From the outset of The Family Reunion, it is made clear that events will not unfold the way in which the characters may wish. Amy remarks:

> I am/ Only certain of Arthur and John./ Arthur in London, John in Leicestershire:/ They should both be here in good time for dinner./ Harry telephoned to me from Marseilles, / He would come by air to Paris, and so to London./ And hoped to arrive in the course of the evening. (FR: p.16)

Amy states that the punctual arrivals of Arthur and John are the only events of which she may be certain. Ironically, it is Harry, rather than his "predictable" brothers, who arrives before dinner, and who, as it later develops, will arrive at all. Clearly, if the punctual arrival of Arthur and John is Amy's only certainty, as she declares it to be, then there is nothing on which she may depend in the course of the drama.

This speech on the part of Amy contains parodic elements of Clytemnestra's beacon speech: she imagines the journey of Harry over space and time, however she lacks the imagination and the accuracy of Clytemnestra's vision as she visualizes the passage of the beacon between Troy and Argos. Amy, like Clytemnestra, creates illusions. Whereas Clytemnestra's distortions of the truth are meant for others, rather than herself, Amy believes in the fantastic world she has created. She imagines that by allowing nothing to be

touched at Wishwood, the house and all its members will remain just as when Harry left, in readiness for him should he return to take over as the master. Amy, however, has been unable to prevent the onslaught of decay and death. While time may appear to have stopped at Wishwood, it has, in fact, brought changes, even if these are not immediately apparent.

Not only is the appearance of "changelessness" that Amy has created artificial, but the future she attempts to contrive for Harry is also an illusion based entirely on her own fantasies. Agatha remarks upon the impossibility of Amy's plans. For Agatha, the future can only be built upon the "real" past. Furthermore, she perceives the futility of Amy's attempts to stop the progression of time:

> Agatha: He will find a new Wishwood. Adaptation is hard.
> Amy: Nothing is changed, Agatha, at Wishwood. Everything is kept as it was when he left it./ Except the old pony, and the mongrel setter/ Which I had to have destroyed. Nothing has been changed. I have seen to that. (FR: pp. 17-18)

Members of the chorus comment upon the artificial nature of Amy's plans by likening themselves to actors -- in the wrong play.

> Why do we feel embarassed, impatient, fretful, ill at ease, assembled like amateur actors who have not been assigned their parts? like amateur actors in a dream when the curtain rises to find themselves dressed for a different play, or having rehearsed the wrong parts,/ Waiting for the rustling in the stalls, the titter in the dress circle, the laughter and catcalls in the gallery.(FR: p. 22)

Like the chorus of the Agamemnon, the chorus of The Family Reunion is apprehensive, aware that appearance and reality have become disparate qualities. The uneasiness of the chorus of The Family Reunion, which arises from the fact that its members fear themselves to be in the wrong play, suggests that all courses of action, and therefore all possibilities of reality, are equally artificial. Anything they do becomes merely acting out a rôle in a drama. Here the chorus projects an even more negative view of man's existence than Kassandra has done in the Agamemnon: the chorus compares life to an artform as she does, but for these characters, life is in fact only a drama: drama does not lend immortality to the lives of the members of the chorus. In the Oresteia, there is the hope that art will lend some permanence to man's otherwise transitory existence: in The Family Reunion, the fact that life is art means that the existence of the family is devoid of reality.

Mary suggests the possibility to Harry that all realities are of equal value. "You bring your own landscape ... no more real than any other... (FR: p.56)." In addition, she suggests, "Even if as you say, Wishwood is a cheat, your family a delusion -- then it's all a delusion (FR: p.58)." Here, Mary presents to Harry the possibility that Wishwood may be the place for him to cease his journeying. Harry accepts her reasoning, but once he imagines his pilgrimage has ended at its starting point, the Eumenides appear. From Har-

ry's interpretation of their manifestation, it would seem that Amy's plans for Harry at Wishwood are not permissable. Harry must expiate his curse and that of his family with continued wandering.

The essential characters of both Amy and Agatha have not changed despite the passage of time. "I know one thing, Amy: That you have never changed. And perhaps I have not. I thought that I had, until this evening (FR: p.117)." Not only do the personalities of the characters remain unchanged, but, because of the absolute value of actions, once an action has been committed, it exists eternally in the past, present, and future, as in the Oresteia. For example, Harry imagines himself to be a different person than he was on the night of his wife's death. The Eumenides, however, dispute this belief. They indicate by their presence that the stigma of crime remains with the criminal, despite changes in his personality and his own inability to believe in his crime. Harry is in a state similar to that in which Orestes finds himself at the beginning of the Eumenides. Orestes has performed rituals of purification, yet these rites have not cleansed the metaphysical stain of matricide from him which the Furies sense. Harry believes himself to be a changed man, from the time of his wife's death, yet the stain of her death and the family curse remain with him.

Upon his arrival at Wishwood, Harry is aware that the future Amy in-

tends for him is unsuitable for him. He is also very aware of the differences between his perspective and those of his relatives, so much so, that he perceives communication to be impossible between them. For this reason, irony dominates conversations between Harry and his family. While Harry's relatives imagine that they know more of him and of life than he thinks they do, their conversation in fact belies their argument. For example, Harry finds that his part in the death of his wife is an action which he is unable to communicate by means of language, as it does not fit into the ordinary scheme of reality to which his relations are accustomed. "This is what matters. But it is unspeakable./ untranslatable. I talk in general terms./ Because the particular has no language (FR: p.30)." Harry considers language to be inadequate for communication because with it, he is only able to describe events rather than communicate their significance:

> But how can I explain it to you? You will understand it less after I have explained it./ All that I could hope to make you understand is only events: not what has happened./ And people to whom nothing has happened cannot understand the importance of events. (FR: p.128)

Despite their plea for explanation and protests that they are more capable of understanding Harry's past than he believes them to be, Harry's relatives promptly misunderstand him. They protest that they have great experience with life, unaware of the magnitude of what Harry has done.

Harry's conversation with Doctor Warburton is an example of misunderstanding used as a means of creating irony. It also suggests the consequences of δυσφημία (ill-omened language), to be found in the Oresteia. Doctor Warburton finally succeeds in informing Harry of his reasons for fearing for Amy's life, on the basis that this information will "make an endless difference to the future:"

> She has only lived for our return to Wishwood./ for you to take command at Wishwood./ And for that reason, it is most essential/ That nothing should disturb or excite her.(FR: p.78)

Clearly, Amy's life depends on Harry assuming his rôle in her plans: should he reject this role, her death will result. Consciously, or unconsciously, Harry provides Amy with the disturbance that will end her life, the fear that Doctor Warburton has put into words. Doctor Warburton's statement may in fact "make an endless difference to the future" as the curse that Harry will bring upon himself from his mother's death will remain eternally present.

Harry's conversation with Doctor Warburton also furnishes Harry with the desire to find out more about the father whom he has never seen. The doctor grudgingly admits that there is indeed a strong physical resemblance between Harry and his father. Clearly, Amy's attempt to remove all aspects of his father from Harry's life cannot alter the ties of blood, which have de-

veloped into physical resemblance over time. Later, Agatha reveals to Harry his father's attempts to murder Amy: once Harry has learned this aspect of his father's nature, his next action is to accomplish those things which, as he has been informed by Doctor Warburton, will result in his mother's death. In addition, Harry has enacted his mother's will by allowing the death of his wife to take place, which suggests that he has ties with her as well. Harry is as much a victim of the ἦθος (character) of his family as Orestes, but his separation from his family has instead resulted in the fulfillment of this ἦθος. Harry, however, is already guilty of murder at this point in the drama, and his guilt only imposes more guilt upon him.

When Harry attempts to communicate with his mother, the result is increased misunderstanding and irony. He informs Amy that he must leave Wishwood and he is able to provide only a very ambiguous explanation for his departure. Amy imagines that her son will become a missionary -- a misunderstanding which provides both comic relief and an example of the impossibility of communication between family members. The chorus with unconscious irony delivers well-meant and misinformed advice on the life of a missionary to Harry, who has no intention whatsoever of becoming one.

Harry, Agatha, Mary and Downing all rely upon a "sixth sense" to gain knowledge, in particular, knowledge of the future. These characters do not

rely purely on language or appearances to gain knowledge. Mary knows "instinctively" that if Wishwood is all a cheat then everything is:

> I am not a wise person./ And in the ordinary sense I don't know you very well./ Although I remember you better than you think./ And what is the real you. I haven't much experience./ But I see something now which doesn't come from tutors./ Or from books or from thinking or from observation:/ Something which I didn't know I knew. (FR: p.58)

Agatha, as she stands in the embrasure which the Eumenides have recently occupied, enters into a trance and becomes their mouthpiece. While she is occupied by the mantic frenzy, Agatha suggests to Harry that he "is a curse that must be fulfilled." Once her prophetic moment has passed, she interprets the message of the Eumenides to mean that Harry must go on a long journey. Agatha abandons her normal means of communication and becomes the voice of the gods and therefore speaks in a poetic, oracular language of a prophet, like Cassandra. The Eumenides are silent figures in The Family Reunion; they require human beings as mouth-pieces to communicate their will. While Downing perceives their intent, Harry, although sensitive to the presence of the Eumenides, is unable to divine what they intend for him. Downing, however, has seen the Eumenides even before Harry. He has also kept Harry's car in readiness at Wishwood, sensing that the Eumenides will not allow Harry to remain there. More ominously, Downing also

> ...has a kind of feeling that his Lordship won't need me/ Very long now. I can't give you any reasons./ But to show you what I mean, though you'd hardly credit it./ I've always said, whatever happened to his Lordship/ Was just a preparation for something else./ I've no gift of language, but I'm sure of what I mean. (FR: p.129)

Downing's knowledge is not derived from language or events, nor does he speak in the poetic runes of Agatha. He does, however, interpret the divine will more accurately than his more eloquent Lordship. Since Downing is more sensitive to the requirements of the Eumenides, this premonition on his part suggests that expiation of the family curse may require Harry's death.

In the Family Reunion, the presence of divine forces is evident. These powers, however, cannot communicate directly with the recipients of their will, but require prophetic media, like Agatha and Downing, for communication. This need is suggestive of the Agamemnon and the Choephoroi, in which characters act on human interpretations of the will of the gods, as Agamemnon obeys Artemis at the suggestion of Calchas, with dire results. In the Eumenides, the gods are present and speak for themselves, in order to free the House of Atreus from the difficulties its members have brought upon it due to a failure to comprehend the plan of Zeus. In The Family Reunion the Eumenides are present, as they are in the Eumenides of Aeschylus, but they remain mute, and must rely solely on human interpretation for communication. There may have been a more politic approach for Harry to adopt in his

dealings with Amy, one that might have prevented her death, but this option is not suggested to Harry by Agatha's interpretation. Harry, like Agamemnon, obeys the words of an interpreter without question, and this blind faith in human interpretation leads to death.

The chorus believes that all knowledge may be attained from newspapers. They argue that Harry could not have killed his wife because that is not how the papers recorded it. Charles informs Harry,

> You mustn't indulge such dangerous fancies./ It's only doing harm to your mother and yourself./ Of course we know what really happened, we read it in/ the papers --/ no need to revert to it. (FR: p.31)

The chorus' trust in the newspaper as a source of knowledge is proven to be misplaced, not only by the fact that the newspapers reported Harry's wife's death inaccurately, but also by the fact that the chorus failed to notice what the paper has already reported concerning Arthur's accident. Despite the fact that the newspaper has been in Charles' possession for the duration of the play, the relations do not read it until Arthur phones and tells them personally. Later, Arthur attempts to conceal events from his mother by means of a telegram, or written communication. The chorus however, has read the paper at last, and realizes that this is an attempt on his part to keep the truth concerning events rrom his mother, and does not deliver the message.

Reported communication proves to be an untrustworthy means of attaining knowledge.

The chorus of The Family Reunion finds itself in a state of confusion at the end of the play. The relations remarks.

> We understand the ordinary business of living. We know how to work the machine. We can usually avoid accidents./ We are insured against fire./ Against larceny and illness./ Against defective plumbing./ But not against the act of God.(FR: pp.132-3)

The chorus has been shaken by the death of Amy and Harry's revelation that he is a murderer. The newspapers and other sources of knowledge have proved inadequate in light of the violence of events and the intervention of divine agencies. The chorus, due to its faith in conventional means of interpreting events cannot resort to the means of interpreting events that Harry, Mary and Agatha use to fathom divine intervention. Modern instruments of communication such as newspapers and the telephone are not adequate to explain acts of god. Yet the oracular means of divining the will of God prove inadequate or at least very open to interpretation. While the divine actually manifests itself in the drawing room, it cannot communicate its purpose directly. In The Family Reunion, communication between human beings and divine is impossible, and therefore this avenue to knowledge of the divine p[illegible]so impossible.

In the Oresteia, it becomes necessary for the characters to distinguish the difference between reality and appearance, a difference which has become distorted by various characters for their own purposes. Some characters use language with deliberate irony, while those who have less knowledge of the future speak with unintentional irony. In the Oresteia, language becomes a means both to cloud the truth and to reveal it. In The Family Reunion, characters must also distinguish between what is real and what appears to be real. As the characters fail to understand this difference, the language they employ becomes increasingly ironic, but unintentionally so. For the characters of The Family Reunion, the possibility of direct communication does not exist; language proves inadequate for communication between characters, while direct communication with the powers that guide existence proves impossible.

CONCLUSION

Many critics have either ignored Eliot's ironic adaptation of classical themes in The Family Reunion or, if they have made note of them, see only very few points of comparison.[1] In fact, Eliot makes use of the themes of medicine, time, light and darkness, and the nature of appearances in his play. However, Eliot's transposition of these classical concerns to a modern context results in the creation of irony. This irony is achieved in part through the fact that while Eliot's play superficially resembles Aeschylus' Eumenides, through the presence of the goddesses, it lacks the resolution of Aeschylean themes which takes place in the last play of Aeschylus' trilogy. Instead, Eliot's use of these themes is similar to Aeschylus' employment of them in the Agamemnon and the Choephoroi. The Monchensey family may be viewed as remaining trapped in a circular pattern of curses: the house is literally shadowed in darkness at the end of the drama, no cure is found for the "disease" from which Harry suffers, the divine presences in the play are incapable of communicating their will. Rather than rejoicing that unalterable laws that will last an eternity have been established, as do the songs of the Eumenides at the end of the Oresteia, members of the chorus of the Family Reunion regret that they "have lost their way in the dark." The consideration of this ironic treatment results in a darker interpretation of the play than that which

[1] David. E. Jones, The Plays of T.S. Eliot (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960) p.90.

it has traditionally received.

Certainly there was doubt in Eliot's mind as to whether Harry's "salvation" outweighs the death of his mother in significance. The author in fact suggests that his play leaves his audience with a "divided frame of mind, not knowing whether to consider the play the tragedy of the mother or the salvation of the son."[2] Gardner certainly considers the salvation of the son to be of central importance, dismissing the death of Amy as a fairly inconsequential event:

> The true meaning of the drama of the play is not, however, in Amy's death, which is merely a consequence, but in Harry's conversion: and that, like Thomas' sanctity, we have to take for granted. It cannot be expressed in dramatic terms... We can use psychological terms and say that Harry's departure is an act by which he expresses the end of his mother-fixation, or we can use religious terms and say that Harry's departure expresses his discovery that his obligation is not to his mother but to God...[3]

There is room for doubt as to whether Harry is in fact saved in the play. Causing the death of one's mother is not a normal way of ending a mother-fixation, if indeed Harry suffers from such. Certainly he imagines himself to be following the path to expiation, yet as the Eumenides are voiceless, it is never made entirely clear what their true intentions are. This inability on the

[2] T.S. Eliot, "Poetry and Drama", in Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975) p.143.

[3] Helen Gardner, The Art of T.S. Eliot (New York: E.F. Dutton 1950) p.155.

part of divine agents to communicate directly in the play is significant. Despite the fact that the Eumenides are referred to as "bright angels" by Harry (FR: p.115), this view is only an interpretation on the part of a mortal of unfathomable events. There is no apparent physical change in the Eumenides, nor do they voice their intentions as they do in Aeschylus' drama.

While some critics perceive Harry's departure as a journey on the path to sainthood,[4] the attainment of sainthood does not necessitate abandoning one's mother without concrete explanation when one has already been informed that such an action will likely result in her death. Harry's inability to act in this matter is akin to his reaction to his wife's death -- a total lack of response. Eliot notes this inability on the part of his hero, and the guilt it brings upon him in this way:

> In what other simple way can one person imagine that he has killed another, except by pushing? Suppose that the desire for her death was strong in his mind, out of touch with reality in her company. He is standing on the deck, perhaps a few feet away, and she is leaning over the rail. She has sometimes talked of suicide. The whole scene of pushing her over -- or giving her just a little tip -- passes through his mind. She is trying to play one of her comedies with him -- to arouse any emotion in him is better than to feel that he is not noticing her -- and she overdoes it, and just at that moment, plump, in she goes. Harry thinks

[4] John D. Margolis, T.S. Eliot's Intellectual Development 1922-39 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972) p.217.
cf. Helen Gardner The Art of T.S. Eliot (New York: E.F. Dutton & Co. Inc., p.155.
cf. also Carol Smith, T.S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice: From Sweeney Agonistes to The Elder Statesman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) p.117.

> he has pushed her; and certainly, he has not called for help, or behaved in any normal way, to say nothing of jumping in after her.[5]

Harry's inability to respond to his wife's needs both in life and in death has proven as deadly as if he had in fact pushed her. In this way, the guilt of his wife's death is attached to him, and the question of whether he pushed her or not becomes immaterial; he is still responsible for her death.

Amy's death, too, may be viewed as a result of Harry's inability to act, and in this way, his decision to follow the Eumenides may in fact be a mere repetition of the death of his wife. In addition, the death of Amy suggests that Harry has in fact brought his father's curse to pass. In the Oresteia, the return of the son parallels the return of the father, yet he avoids the traps in which his father was snared, and slays his mother. In The Family Reunion, Harry completes his father's unfulfilled wish -- as does Orestes in the Choephoroi -- and causes the death of Amy. Certainly, the way in which Eliot employs classical themes tends to reinforce this interpretation. Eliot employs classical images in the way Aeschylus makes use of them in the Agamemnon and in the Choephoroi. In these ancient plays, members of the House of Atreus remain embroiled in the workings of a circular curse, and it therefore seems quite possible that the Monchensey family will remain entangled in their curse once Amy has died and Harry has departed from Wishwood.

[5] E. Martin Browne, The Writing of T.S. Eliot's Plays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) pp.107-8.

In fact, Eliot later commented on the dual nature of the tragedy of the play as follows:

> The two situations are not reconciled. I find a confirmation of this in the fact that my sympathies now have come to be all with the mother, who seems to me, except for the chauffeur, the only complete human being in the play, and my hero now strikes me as an insufferable prig.[6]

Clearly, the hero's actions, and his abandonment of his mother, to Eliot's mind do not suggest a "positive" end to the play. Rather, it is quite possible that Harry has only "brought to fruition" yet another cycle of the family curse.

Eliot's inclusion of the Eumenides in The Family Reunion is perhaps a feature of the play which contributes most to the ambiguity of the ending. For the Eumenides are accompanied by their significance not only in the classical literary tradition, but within the context of Western literature. Just as the modern author cannot disassociate himself and his work from the classical tradition,[7] neither can the figures he has borrowed from ancient drama be disassociated from their traditional significance. In the Oresteia, the Furies are the agents of divine punishment, and it is their function to punish the perpetrators of particularly heinous crimes, in particular, the murder of

6 T.S. Eliot, Poetry and Drama, in Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975) pp.143-44.

7 T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", in Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975) p.44.

family members. (This function of the Furies had not changed even in the time of the later classical writer Plutarch.)[8] Even in their transformed role in the Eumenides, these goddesses do not rehabilitate criminals or enable them to expiate their crimes: rather, they destroy those who are proven guilty in a court of law, and leave unharmed those who are found innocent. Certainly this feature of their nature would make them less than ideal as guides for Harry's redemption. In the Christian tradition, most notably in Dante's The Divine Comedy,[9] a work to which Eliot devoted much attention, the Furies again have a function which suggests that they would be unlikely representatives of a God interested in Harry's redemption, and indeed, election. In the Inferno, the Furies are the guardians the gates of the city of Dis, and as such, represent "the fruitless remorse that does not lead to penitence"[10] In The Dictionary of Symbols[11], A.D. deVries indicates that the Furies symbolize "remorse, or guilt turned upon itself to the destruction of

[8] C.J. Gianakaris, Plutarch, in Twayne's World Authors Series, ed. Sylvia E. Bowman (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1970) p.118.

[9] Dante, The Divine Comedy I: Hell, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1949).

[10] Ibid., p. 127.

[11] A.D. deVries Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery (Amsterdam: North Holland Press, 1974)

the guilty."[12] Eliot's use of the Furies as Harry's guides on the path to redemption then, can only allow for an ironic interpretation of Harry's departure in order to expiate the family curse, particularly when his mother dies immediately afterwards. Traditionally, the Furies symbolize self-destructive remorse, and this attribute suggests that they would be highly inappropriate spiritual guides for Harry's "election." Certainly, they have led him to commit an action which may inspire a great deal of remorse and self-condemnation.

In the period of writing the play, immediately before the outbreak of the Second World War, Eliot had grown convinced that society was no longer based on Christian values. Rather, he considered the society of his time to be rapidly disintegrating, and Christianity to have been replaced by Fascism as its foundation.

> It was Eliot's belief that if Christianity disappeared our civilization would disappear with it, and in his letters to friends during this period he gave the impression that this process was already far advanced. By the beginning of 1939, he saw only the unpleasant alternatives of uninterrupted decay or some form of authoritarian political leadership which might arrest it artificially, and exactly a year later he described the fatal weaknesses of Western democracy, and how the progress of industrialization was creating an apathetic citizenry -- the kind of people who could only be aroused by despots like Hitler.[13]

12 Ibid., p.168.

13 Peter Ackroyd, T.S. Eliot (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984) p.249

This view of his society may account for the curious silence of God and his instruments in Eliot's play, a silence which does not exist in the Oresteia. Rather, the gods make their appearance in the Eumenides in order to make clear their requirements and to liberate the House of Atreus from its curse. The Oresteia is a play written by a poet whose country had recently won a major war and who was convinced that his society was based on divine and unalterable foundations of justice.[14] As Eliot did not share this conviction, the silence of the gods in his parallel drama is significant. Perhaps the gods are unable to speak, or mortals incapable of listening. Certainly, one cannot assume, as some critics do, that Harry is on his way to sainthood and redemption.

[14] Hugh Lloyd-Jones, The Justice of Zeus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) pp.88-9.

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