

GENDER IN THE ORESTEIA: IMAGERY AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MALE  
POWER

by

JENNIFER ANNE STANULL

(Under the Direction of Charles Platter)

ABSTRACT

Gender is a major issue in the *Oresteia*. The trial in the *Eumenides* can be seen as a battle of genders, with Apollo representing the male and the *Erinyes* representing the female. Apollo defeats the *Erinyes* through successfully mobilizing gendered rhetoric while the *Erinyes* are concerned only with pollution. This focus on pollution is ineffective because the *Erinyes* themselves are polluted. The *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* prepare for this gender conflict through imagery which supports male power and diminishes the role of the female. Concepts of gender are expressed through images of animal single parents, lions, the roles of mother and wife, and the *Erinyes*.

INDEX WORDS: Oresteia, Aeschylus, Narration (Rhetoric), Greek Drama, Women and Literature-- Greece, Greek Literature—History and Criticism, Gender Identity in Literature

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## INTRODUCTION

My reading of the *Oresteia* is shaped by the question “why is Orestes acquitted?” While the cycle of violence continued by Orestes’ matricide indicates a need for the change in justice, whether the trial is a legitimate method of creating such a change remains questionable. The *Erinyes* seem justified in their dissatisfaction with the outcome because Apollo’s arguments do not appear to be substantially more convincing than theirs, especially the arguments about pollution. The *Erinyes* say that Orestes is polluted, while Apollo asserts that Orestes has been purified and that the *Erinyes* are polluted, but there is no clear method for determining whose view of pollution is correct. However, Apollo’s argument that mothers have no genetic connection to their children leaves questions of pollution behind and presents an analysis of the issues through gender. Yet this argument has been treated with much critical scorn for the implausibility of its genetics and therefore its inability to convince. A desire to understand this argument and how it could be effective was the starting point for my exploration of gender in the *Oresteia*. In attempting to rehabilitate Apollo’s argument, I was forced to open my reading of not only the *Eumenides* but the trilogy as a whole to focus on issues of gender and masculine power. The *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* describe a system of masculine power, which emphasizes the role of the father to the complete exclusion of the mother and thus fits with the concepts of Apollo’s argument and requires the acquittal of Orestes. In my first chapter, I look at the components of this masculine power structure in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*, focusing on single-parent animal imagery, lion imagery, and Clytemnestra as wife and mother. As a counterpart to the exploration of concepts of gender in support of Apollo, I also found it

important to look at the nature of the *Erinyes*. While the *Erinyes*' position is clear in the *Eumenides*, their nature is not consistent throughout the trilogy. In my second chapter, I analyze passages in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* which mention the *Erinyes*, and suggest that the *Erinyes* can be a pro-masculine force. In my final chapter, I look at how both issues of masculine power and the nature of the *Erinyes* interact in the *Eumenides*, suggesting that the nature of the *Erinyes* and their arguments, both of which are focused on pollution, are self-defeating and that Apollo succeeds through his use of the gender concepts which have been explored in the previous two plays of the trilogy. In looking at such issues of gender, my reading has been informed, in particular, by the work of Goldhill, Zeitlin, and Foley. Goldhill's close reading has informed my approach to the text while his attention to gender has helped hone my focus. Zeitlin's "The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*" has greatly informed my approach to imagery and its importance, while her "The Dynamics of Misogyny" has provided vital insight on gender. Foley's *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* has been particularly helpful in my analysis of Clytemnestra.

## CHAPTER 1

### GENDER IMAGERY IN THE *AGAMEMNON* AND THE *CHOEPHORI*

#### I. Introduction

In the *Oresteia*, masculine power is threatened by Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon and then decisively reestablished with Orestes' acquittal. Gender and the roles of women and men are an issue throughout the trilogy. The *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* explore gender issues through imagery, especially animal imagery. This imagery has a rhetorical slant; it can support masculine power either by presenting a positive depiction of Agamemnon or by critiquing those who threaten masculine power, such as Clytemnestra and Helen.

The imagery of the first two plays supports masculine power by reconfiguring human relationships. The family is redefined on the basis of gender; the father is elevated to the status of sole parent while the mother is completely removed from the family, allowing for what would be familial violence.<sup>1</sup> Because the family has been reduced to only father and children and the mother has been made into an enemy, the taboo against matricide is avoided. The image of the animal single-parent, which occurs in both the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*, implies that the father is the only head of the family, placing the mother outside of the family. This reevaluation of the family is explored in section one "Animal Single-Parent Imagery." This redefinition of the family also occurs in depictions of Clytemnestra where she is shown as something other than a mother or wife. Clytemnestra's crimes are so great that she cannot be defined with human terms. She is separated from the family by being removed or replaced in the roles of mother and wife.

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<sup>1</sup> Fowler disagrees: "Members of a house, naturally committed to one another, are . . . forced to turn against one another- and so against themselves- by the compelling force of revenge. B. Hughes Fowler, "Aeschylus' Imagery," *ClMed* 28 (1967): 54.

Clytemnestra's connection to these roles is explored in section three "Clytemnestra as Wife and Mother?"

While the imagery of animal single parents and of Clytemnestra focuses on reshaping the nuclear family of father, mother, and children, the lion imagery of the *Agamemnon* focuses on the relationship of husband and wife. The lion imagery exposes the lack of conformity to gender roles by Helen, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus and connects this lack of conformity to adultery. Helen and Clytemnestra are depicted as unwomanly- more like Homeric heroes than proper wives. Aegisthus is unmanly- he does not fit the image of a Homeric hero and is cowardly. The lion imagery connects adultery to xenia, putting the adulterers under the power of Zeus, minimizing the threat to masculine power. The connection to xenia comes from an emphasis on hospitality in the lion images. The lion imagery exposes Helen, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus as non-conformists in terms of traditional gender roles and violators of xenia. This lion imagery is explored in section two "Lion Imagery."

Zeus plays an important but subtle role in the gender politics of the *Oresteia*. Zeus both supports Agamemnon as king and father and, as Zeus Xenios, rebukes the actions of Clytemnestra and Helen.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Zeus is the ultimate power in the *Oresteia*; he determines what is just and can bend all other divinities, including the *Erinyes*, to his will.<sup>3</sup> The description of Paris at Ag. 396-402 is an example of Zeus' expansive power and how it undergirds issues of gender:

λιτᾶν δ' ἀκούει μὲν οὔτις θεῶν:  
τὸν δ' ἐπίστροφον τῶν  
φῶτ' ἄδικον καθαιρεῖ.  
οἷος καὶ Πάρις ἐλθὼν

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<sup>2</sup> Fontenrose sees a very close connection between Zeus and Agamemnon: "Zeus is a divine Agamemnon." Joseph Fontenrose, "Gods and Men in the *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 102 (1971): 107.

<sup>3</sup> Fowler comments on Zeus' justice: "The will of Zeus, which is not immediate Revenge but eventual Justice, is the force that, temporarily subdued, will prevail." Fowler, "Aeschylus' Imagery": 59.

ἐς δόμον τὸν Ἀτρεϊδᾶν  
ἥσχυνε ξενίαν τράπε-  
ζαν κλοπαῖσι γυναικός. (Ag. 396-402)

None of the gods hears his prayer: he destroys the unjust man doing such things. Such was Paris who having come into the home of the Atreidae dishonored the guest table with the theft of a woman.<sup>4</sup>

None of the gods will save Paris because he committed what is specifically described as a xenia violation. This description is a microcosm of the moral universe of the *Oresteia*; Zeus ultimately dictates morality and his concerns (kingship, xenia) become the concerns of all the gods. Here, all the gods shun Paris who has wronged Zeus, giving an example of the divine concord which establishes male power.<sup>5</sup> Zeus is a “transcendent responsible force” in the *Oresteia* and as such his connection to concepts of gender is influential.<sup>6</sup> Zeus’ influence can be seen in the animal single-parent images of the eagle children (*Ch.* 246-51) where he is called on to support Agamemnon and Orestes and of the vulture parents (*Ag.* 48-54) where he sends Agamemnon and Menelaus against Troy. Zeus’ indirect involvement through xenia is found in the image of the lion cub (*Ag.* 728-36). The violence of the cub against the household which took it in as a guest violates xenia. Zeus’ power shapes the depiction of gender because he is the dominant moral force of the *Oresteia*.

### III. Animal Single-Parent Imagery

The image of the single parent most clearly shows the reconfiguring of the human family. The purpose of these images is to assert that the father is the only parent, removing the mother from the family. The family is reconfigured from a mother, a father, and the children to one male parent and children. The role of the mother is completely removed and the father, in place of the

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<sup>4</sup> All translations are my own.

<sup>5</sup> Goldhill connects the divine rejection of Paris to “the desire for control of narrative events to come.” Knowing how the gods judge allows the reader to understand the outcome of the trilogy. Simon Goldhill, *Language, sexuality, narrative: the Oresteia*: 41.

<sup>6</sup> Goldhill, *Language, sexuality, narrative: the Oresteia*: 61.

mother, takes on a nurturing role and cares deeply about the welfare of the children. This reconfiguration creates a new model of the family which reduces the genetic and familial connection between Clytemnestra and her children and legitimizes their antagonism towards her. Orestes' revenge for his father against his mother is justified by the model of the family presented through single-parent images: the familial bond was strong between Orestes and Agamemnon, but nonexistent between Orestes and Clytemnestra.<sup>7</sup> These ideas of mothers, fathers, and children are vital to an understanding of Apollo's argument about the mother's role in the creation of children in the *Eumenides*; the animal single-parent images implicitly address issues of parentage and family as they are dealt with by Apollo. There are two of these images in the Oresteia: the vulture simile in the *Agamemnon* (Ag. 48-54) and the image of the children of the eagle father in the *Choephoroi* (Ch. 246-51).

The best example of animal single-parent imagery is given by Orestes in the *Choephoroi*. This single-parent image focuses on Agamemnon's family; Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Orestes, and Electra have clear animal counterparts. Agamemnon is the eagle single parent of his chicks Orestes and Electra:

Zeῦ Zeῦ, θεωρὸς τῶνδε πραγμάτων γενοῦ:  
 ἰδοῦ δὲ γένναν εὖνιν αἰετοῦ πατρός,  
 θανόντος ἐν πλεκταῖσι καὶ σπειράμασιν  
 δεινῆς ἐχίδνης. τοὺς δ' ἄπωρφανισμένους  
 νῆστις πῖζει λιμός: οὐ γὰρ ἐντελεῖς  
 θήραν πατρώαν προσφέρειν σκηνήμασιν.(Ch. 246-51)<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This construction of the family is not based on real experience, as Orestes and Agamemnon would have little time to form a connection due to Agamemnon's absence. Despite this absence, Orestes still rejects Clytemnestra in favor of his father.

<sup>8</sup> Garvie comments on πατρώαν "The epithet is chosen to suggest the patrimony of Orestes and Electra." A. F. Garvie *Aeschylus Choephoroi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 1.250-1. Fowler also sees a focus on inheritance. Fowler, "Aeschylus' Imagery": 56. This idea of patrimony is important to Orestes' call on Zeus. I suggest that this image is also indicative of the ties between family members; Agamemnon needs to be held up as father to diminish Clytemnestra as mother.

Zeus, Zeus, be the watcher of these deeds: look upon the young lacking the eagle father, who died in the woven coils of the terrible snake<sup>9</sup>. Hunger strikes those who are orphaned: for they are not grown to carry the fatherly prey to the nest.

The eagle family is only Agamemnon, Orestes, and Electra. Clytemnestra is an entirely different species. Garvie sees the snake as an especially pertinent image for Clytemnestra's relationship to her husband and children; the viper was thought to attack its mate and be attacked by its children.<sup>10</sup> However, what is depicted here is not intra-species animal violence; Clytemnestra the snake attacks a family of another species. This exclusion from the animal family does not lessen Clytemnestra's guilt, but instead defines her behavior as that of a hostile outsider. The image suggests that Clytemnestra acts as an enemy, not as a family member, and should not be protected by the bonds of family. Clytemnestra has forfeited her role as wife eagle through her violence against Agamemnon. Clytemnestra's place in the family and the need for a mother is completely removed through this animal image. The father eagle alone was the caregiver so in his absence the chicks go hungry. The family suffers from the loss of the father, not from the lack of the mother.<sup>11</sup> Agamemnon is vital to the welfare of his children and is a nurturing, caring parent.<sup>12</sup> The image of the eagle children depicts Agamemnon as the only parent and Clytemnestra as an unrelated enemy.

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<sup>9</sup> Fontenrose sees the *Echidna* as a mythical creature, equivalent to an *Erinys*. This would separate Clytemnestra even farther from her family. Fontenrose, "Gods and Men in the Oresteia": 98.

<sup>10</sup> Garvie, *Ch.*, l.247-9. Heath sees a competition with snake metaphors between Clytemnestra and Orestes in the *Choephoroi*. Orestes wins this competition when he defeats the serpents Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Thus the establishment of this image is closely tied to the search for vengeance and justice; Clytemnestra the snake can be destroyed. John Heath, "Disentangling the Beast: Humans and Other Animals in Aeschylus' Oresteia," *JHS* 119 (1990): 31.

<sup>11</sup> Foley also sees the transfer of the nurturing parent from the mother to the father in the confrontation between Orestes and Clytemnestra. Helen P. Foley *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 232. Garvie connects this hunger to Orestes' and Electra's need to recover their property. Garvie, *Ch.*, l.252-3.

<sup>12</sup> Of course, Agamemnon's actual involvement in parenting would be miniscule; the image's rhetorical importance is not decreased by its lack of depiction of reality.



Orestes attempts to establish a mutual dependence between Zeus and Agamemnon later in the same passage. Orestes claims that Zeus's power over mortals depends on whether he saves Agamemnon's children and explains why Zeus should save him and Electra:

καὶ τοῦ θυτῆρος καὶ σε τιμῶντος μέγα<sup>13</sup>  
νεοσσὺς τοῦσδ' ἀποφθείρας πόθεν  
ἔξεις ὁμοίας χειρὸς εὐθοινον γέρας;  
οὔτ' αἰετοῦ γένεθλ' ἀποφθείρας, πάλιν  
πέμπειν ἔχοις ἂν σήματ' εὐπιθῇ βροτοῖς: (*Ch.* 255-59)

Having destroyed the children of the reverent, sacrificing father, from where will you have a magnificent offering from a similar hand? If you destroy the race of the eagle, you may not send trusted signs to mortals.

Zeus is personally responsible for the fate of the children because he is the god associated with kingship; Orestes suggests that if Zeus allows the degradation of the kingly role to continue by allowing Clytemnestra's rule to continue, his own power will be at stake.<sup>14</sup> Zeus must maintain the children or he will reduce the honors given to him as a god.<sup>15</sup>

Zeus' power may be under threat not only on a mortal level, but also on a divine level. Orestes' mention of the race of the eagle and his suggestion that Zeus could lose honors implies that Zeus's role as king and father of the gods could also be threatened. The connection between the roles of Agamemnon and Zeus and the connection between Zeus and the eagle help form the threat to Zeus' divine power. Goldhill reads αἰετοῦ γένεθλ' as the bird of Zeus.<sup>16</sup> If this

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<sup>13</sup> Heath connects this description of Agamemnon as sacrificing with the sacrifice of Iphigenia. This is certainly the most notable sacrifice Agamemnon has made, but it was not made to Zeus. However, if the sacrifice of Iphigenia is included, this would imply that this sacrifice was acceptable to Zeus (see Garvie, *Ch.*: 1.255). Does this justify the sacrifice of Iphigenia and anticipate another similar sacrifice, that of Clytemnestra? Heath, "Disentangling the Beast":31.

<sup>14</sup> The connection between Zeus and the Atreidae is strong; Goldhill states that the use of the eagle "refers back to the omen of the eagles and the hare at Aga. 110ff. . . (linking the Atreidae and Zeus)." Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: the Oresteia*: 134.

<sup>15</sup> Zeitlin sees this mention of sacrifice as a restoration of the relationship between Zeus and the house of Atreus; this sacrifice is no longer corrupted. This reading supports Orestes' claim through this sacrifice that Zeus has a need for mortals. Froma Zeitlin, "The Motif of Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 96 (1965): 505.

<sup>16</sup> Goldhill, *Language*, 135. Conacher notes a connection to the "regal imagery" of vulture simile and the eagle portent of the Agamemnon (Ag. 49ff, 114-38), which would suggest the bird is a symbol of Zeus rather than Zeus himself. However, Conacher's emphasis on kingship and both images' emphasis on family (the vultures have lost

connection can be tightened to Zeus as the eagle, such as in the myth of Ganymede, rather than the eagles as Zeus' messengers, the mention of the αἰετοῦ γένεθλ' suggests that Zeus' family, not only Agamemnon's, is threatened. The relationship between Zeus and his children and Agamemnon and his children are arguably similar; the children support and increase the power of their father. Although Zeus is the all-powerful king and father god, his power is increased if he can use his children to carry out his will. The importance of Apollo and Athena, as well as the interest in Hermes, in the trilogy is part of a divine patrilineal power structure. The conflation between the divine and the human lines of descent increases the threat to Zeus; if he does not maintain the line of Agamemnon, his own power through his descendants could be at stake. If Zeus' children can also be seen as the αἰετοῦ γένεθλ', Orestes warns Zeus he could lose control over gods as well as humans.

The destruction of the race of the eagle could also attack Zeus' credibility. Garvie describes the outcome of destroying the race of the eagle: "If [Zeus] betrays the offspring of the bird that is especially sacred to him, no one will believe his word again."<sup>17</sup> This would be catastrophic to the divine justice system which is established in the first two plays through imagery and invocation and in the third through civil institutions. The concept of justice is based upon Zeus; he must answer those who are wronged but also ultimately defines what is just. If Zeus cannot bring justice to mortals, the power behind Agamemnon and Orestes crumbles. If Zeus does not maintain his connection to mortals through the eagle and thus to the system of justice based on his power, the resolution brought about in the *Eumenides* will not be possible.

The eagle children passage, as an animal single-parent image, illustrates the connections between Agamemnon's family. Agamemnon is the single-parent, the eagle father. Agamemnon

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their children, the eagles devour the pregnant hare) suggest that Zeus's role as king and father should be considered. D. J. Conacher, *Aeschylus' Oresteia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 107.

<sup>17</sup> Garvie, *Ch.*: 1.259.

provided all the necessary care for the nestlings, Orestes and Electra, who starve in his absence. Because Agamemnon fulfills all the parental duties, there is no need for an eagle mother. Thus, Clytemnestra, as the snake, is not a mother but an enemy. She has lost her place in the family through her violence against Agamemnon and is excluded from the family by her depiction as another species. This depiction of the family suggests Orestes' innocence; Agamemnon deserves revenge and Clytemnestra is not protected by the bonds of family. This animal single-parent image shows a family comprised only of father, Agamemnon, and children, Orestes and Electra. Clytemnestra is not a part of the eagle family but instead a predator of another species.

The eagle children passage also establishes a connection between Agamemnon and Zeus. Agamemnon faithfully sacrificed to Zeus, and if Zeus allows his line to die out, he will cease to receive sacrifice from Agamemnon's family and lose his ability to communicate to mortals. Zeus' connection to Agamemnon is therefore an intrinsic part of Zeus' connection to all mortals and his own family. This connection draws on Zeus' roles as god of kings, a source of justice, and a divine father. Orestes argues based on this relationship that Zeus must support his revenge or risk losing his power. The eagle children passage also attempts to legitimize Orestes' murder of Clytemnestra by asserting that violence against Clytemnestra is not violence against a mother and Zeus must aid Orestes to return to power through such violence. If the relationships Orestes depicts are true, his actions against Clytemnestra are just and divinely mandated. Orestes argues that Zeus's power rests on maintaining the correct relationship with Agamemnon and his descendants.

The simile of the parent vultures who have lost their young in the *Agamemnon* can also be seen as an animal single-parent image, among other things. The similarity of this image to that of the *Choephoroi* is clear: both involve birds, the loss of part of the family, and refer to

Agamemnon. However, the extreme polyvalence of this vulture image makes single-parent nature of the image less obvious. Because of this polyvalence, it is useful to consider the eagle children image as a paradigm. The eagle children image presented an image of single-fatherhood which illustrated the necessity of the father to the family and the father's connection to divine justice from Zeus. The strong statements made by Orestes in the eagle children passage serve as a tool to explore and organize the complexity of the vulture simile. Within this framework, the vulture simile is the first example of single-parents and represents the first step in the re-gendering of parenting needed to make Apollo's arguments in the *Eumenides* convincing.

The vulture simile presents another image of male single-parentage: Agamemnon and Menelaus are male parent vultures who have lost their young. With regard to only Agamemnon, the parent-child relationship is most appropriate: the simile shows Agamemnon's connection to his children, just as the eagle children passage. However, the simile complicates Agamemnon's role as parent by alluding to Iphigenia. Whether Agamemnon is culpable for the sacrifice of Iphigenia determines the effect of the vulture simile; does this image of male parentage support or vilify Agamemnon? With regard to Menelaus, the parent-child relationship is less appropriate: Menelaus has lost his wife, not his children. This representation of Menelaus provides strong support for the Trojan War. The chorus uses the vulture image to show the different ways that Menelaus and Agamemnon are single parents caring for their young:

Μενέλαος ἄναξ ἡδ' Ἀγαμέμνων,  
...  
μέγαν ἐκ θυμοῦ κλάζοντες Ἄρη  
τρόπον αἰγυπιῶν, οἷτ' ἐκπατίοις  
ἄλγεσι παίδων ὕπατοι λεχέων  
στροφονοῦνται  
πτερύγων ἐρετμοῖσιν ἐρεσσόμενοι,  
δεμνιοτήρη  
πόνον ὀρταλίων ὀλέσαντες: (Ag. 42, 48-54)

Lord Menelaus and Agamemnon, shouting a great war cry from their spirits like vultures, who wheel high above their nests, sped along by the rowing of their wings, with excessive pain, having lost the at home toil over their chicks.<sup>18</sup>

Agamemnon and Menelaus become the male parents of nestlings. They are depicted as concerned parents, mourning their lost young, whom they worked hard for. Parallel with the eagle children passage, this passage focuses on the nurturing, parental role held by Agamemnon and Menelaus but also equates the role of general with that of parent. The male is the only one needed on the battlefield and in the home. Certainly, this is not a “single” parent image because there are two parents, but there is a single gender for the parents. Agamemnon and Menelaus, as vultures, are male parents, sufficient for their children without a mother.<sup>19</sup>

Although this reading of the animal single-parent imagery suggests that such a depiction reinforces male power, making Agamemnon the father and then Iphigenia the lost chicks complicates this pro-male reading. Because Agamemnon and Iphigenia fit best into the father/child relationship structure, however, the reference to Iphigenia is unavoidable. The inclusion of Iphigenia can suggest that Agamemnon is culpable for the sacrifice of his daughter and therefore can fulfill neither the role of general nor father. Such culpability rests on determining both the chorus’ and Agamemnon’s perspectives on the sacrifice of Iphigenia and

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<sup>18</sup> Fraenkel notes that παῖδων makes a connection to human rather than animal parents. Eduard Fraenkel, *Aeschylus Agamemnon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 1. 50.

<sup>19</sup> Goldhill asserts that Agamemnon and Menelaus should be seen as one household. This would completely erase the place of the mother. Goldhill, *Language*, 15. Heath challenges this concept of male parentage: “The care and painful effort in raising children is not a central element in the life of Agamemnon or Menelaus.” In the single-parent reading of the image, veracity is not the goal. Certainly, both the families of Agamemnon and Menelaus are two parent, two gender families and women took the burden of raising children. This imagery distorts the actual family for rhetorical purposes; seeing the father as the only parent increases his power over the household and his connection to his children. The Atreidae both have problematic wives; emphasizing their power within the family helps deal with the issue of adulterous and possibly murderous wives. The wife/mother is not a threat to the paternal power; she is excluded from the family. Heath, “Disentangling the Beast,” 19. Heath suggests that the care for the vulture babies makes Clytemnestra a more suitable vulture; as discussed with the eagle children passage and in the upcoming section “Clytemnestra as Wife and Mother”, Clytemnestra does not take part in the care and raising of her children, Orestes and Electra. Neither Clytemnestra or Agamemnon realistically fits the image of the nurturing animal parent. Heath, “Disentangling the Beast,” 20.

the Trojan War. Reading Iphigenia as the vulture chicks can undermine the pro-Agamemnon reading suggested by connecting this single-parent image to that of the *Choephoroi*.

Moreover, reading the vulture simile as representing Agamemnon mourning the loss of Iphigenia critiques Agamemnon's lack of fatherly feeling and choice of the army over his daughter. Such a reading offers an implicit critique by depicting Agamemnon as he should have responded, rather than how he does respond. Agamemnon does not mourn the loss of Iphigenia as the vultures mourn their chicks and thus does not act correctly as a father. The critical aspect of this reading depends on two assumptions: 1. The sacrifice of Iphigenia was a wholly negative act. 2. Agamemnon is morally responsible for the sacrifice. Neither of these conditions can be assumed. To determine the extent to which these conditions are true, it is necessary to examine Agamemnon's perspective on the sacrifice (Ag. 205-217) and the chorus' perspective on the sacrifice and the Trojan War.

According to the chorus, Agamemnon does not mourn Iphigenia in Ag. 205-217. Instead, he is resolute when choosing the war over his family. Whether this choice can be critiqued as a failure of Agamemnon as a father depends on his culpability for the sacrifice. Agamemnon logically decides that sacrificing his daughter is the better of two bad courses of action:

ἄναξ δ' ὁ πρέσβυς τότε εἶπε φωνῶν:  
'βαρεῖα μὲν κῆρ τὸ μὴ πιθέσθαι,  
βαρεῖα δ', εἰ τέκνον δαΐ-  
ξω, δόμων ἄγαλμα,  
μιαίνων παρθενοσφάγοισιν  
ρείθροισ πατρώους χέρας  
πέλας βωμοῦ: τί τῶνδ' ἄνευ κακῶν,  
πῶς λιπόνανυς γένωμαι  
ξυμμαχίας ἀμαρτῶν;  
παυσανέμου γὰρ θυσίας  
παρθενίου θ' αἵματος ὀρ-  
γᾶ περιόργως ἐπιθυ-  
μεῖν θέμις. εὖ γὰρ εἴη.' (Ag. 205-217)

The most important leader then said speaking: It is a terrible punishment to not obey,  
But also terrible, if I kill my child, the beauty of my house, staining my fatherly hands  
with streams of virgin blood near the altar; what is without evils, how can I desert the  
fleet harming my allies? For stopping it is correct for her to wrathfully desire sacrifices of  
virgin blood. May it be well.

Here Agamemnon is aware of his obligations as a father. He weighs the demands of fatherhood  
with the demands of war leader, but ultimately it is the unnamed Artemis who tips the scales.

That it is not right for Agamemnon to kill Iphigenia, while Artemis has a right to demand such a  
sacrifice is the real paradox Agamemnon must deal with.<sup>20</sup> His decision has an oddly pious feel;  
by doing wrong, Agamemnon is doing the will of the gods.<sup>21</sup> Goldhill notes “Certainly, here it is  
disobedience to Zeus that is described in negative terms, while the sacrifice is expressed  
positively.”<sup>22</sup> Fraenkel also notes that obligations to Zeus trump other obligations: “The nature  
of Zeus’ almighty power is exemplified in Agamemnon’s resolution to take upon himself the

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<sup>20</sup> Lloyd-Jones “It is no use trying to water down the final word θέμις.” He, however, still holds Agamemnon responsible. Lloyd-Jones, “Zeus,” 191.

<sup>21</sup> There are many arguments against this position. Zeitlin argues that Atreidae are corrupted by their involvement in the war; because they become agents of vengeance, they deserve Artemis’ anger. Zeitlin, “Sacrifice,” 482. Lloyd-Jones attributes Agamemnon’s choice to a loss of judgment: “Zeus has taken away Agamemnon’s judgement, but that does not absolve Agamemnon from the guilt his error will incur.” Lloyd-Jones, “Zeus,” 192. Winnington-Ingram sees a more personal motive: “Ambition led him to sacrifice Iphigeneia.” Winnington-Ingram, “Vote,” 113. Goheen sees Agamemnon as wholly culpable: “He has put himself in the wrong directly with the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Thereby he propagated a chain reaction of violence in his own house.” Goheen, “Aspects,” 129. Fowler credits Agamemnon’s motives to a degree but still holds him responsible: “the persuasion or delusion that made him continue out of one motive, originally good, upon a wrong course of action” is the forces that convince Agamemnon to value the army over his daughter. Fowler, “Aeschylus’ Imagery”: 29. See also Zeitlin, “Sacrifice,” 493; Sommerstein, “Tangled,” 167. Heath’s analysis focuses on the human rather than the divine level, but provides a contradictory reading of animal imagery. Heath, 29 suggests that Iphigenia is “denied her place in the community” when she described with animalistic language. In my reading, animal imagery separates the referent from humanity to allow violence against them; if Iphigenia is turned into an animal through language, she can be sacrificed. Heath thinks Iphigenia inhabits both the bestial and human realms, and this partial animalization should cause discomfort over her sacrifice. Fowler provides another explanation for Iphigenia which does not implicate Agamemnon: the sacrifice is the result of the curse on the house of Atreus. In previous generations, the slaughter of children is preceded by an act of adultery. Fowler points out that “the troubles of in the house of Atreus began with a seduction: Thyestes’ of his brother Atreus’ wife.” Fowler, “Aeschylus’ Imagery”: 23. The cause of familial violence is also cyclical: in the next generation, Paris seduces Helen. Seeing the adultery and slaughter as a pattern innate in the curse decreases human agency but reduces the blame on Agamemnon. This decrease in agency is part of Fowler’s reading of the Agamemnon; he believes that “all its characters are caught up in a chain of catastrophe, in a succession of sin and destruction” Fowler, “Aeschylus’ Imagery” 25. Although this reading is also concerned with the opposition of the female and the male, this focus on chaos and the curse removes the human agency which allows blame to be placed on Clytemnestra and makes Agamemnon’s righteousness necessary to support.

<sup>22</sup> Goldhill, *Language, sexuality, narrative: the Oresteia*: 29.

sacrifice of his daughter.”<sup>23</sup> Although Agamemnon’s lack of mourning for Iphigenia raises questions about his parenting ability, ultimately his obligations to Zeus are more important than his obligations to his daughter and parenting ability is, in this case, inconsequential compared to martial ability. Thus, criticizing Agamemnon as a father is inappropriate because Agamemnon is required to act as a commander, not a father.

Although Agamemnon sees the sacrifice of Iphigenia as demanded by the gods, the chorus may not agree with him. However, the chorus’ view is difficult to determine; they present anti-war statements and pity Iphigenia (Ag. 228-246), but they also describe the Trojan War as mandated by Zeus (Ag. 60-62). The chorus had questioned Agamemnon’s decision to go to war:

σὺ δέ μοι τότε μὲν στέλλον στρατιὰν  
Ἑλένης ἔνεκ’, οὐ γάρ σ’ ἐπικεύσω,  
κάρτ’ ἀπομούσως ἦσθα γεγραμμένος,  
οὐδ’ εὖ πραπίδων οἶακα νέμων (Ag. 799-802)

When you were readying the army on account of Helen, I will not deceive you,  
for me you were painted entirely evilly not guiding well the rudder of the mind.

However, this specific period of questioning is in the past.<sup>24</sup> This objection to Helen must be weighed against the chorus’ assertion that Zeus, particularly Zeus Xenios, mandated the war. Helen’s and Paris’ transgression is the reason Zeus Xenios is involved; in this passage the chorus seems to focus on the human sphere and find Helen an unsuitable exchange for the loss of life, which could include Iphigenia’s. However, the Trojan War is dealt with in a divine context earlier in the play:

οὕτω δ’ Ἀτρέως παῖδας ὁ κρείσσων  
ἐπ’ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πέμπει ξένιος  
Ζεὺς πολυάνορος ἀμφὶ γυναικὸς

<sup>23</sup> Fraenkel, Ag., l. 205. Fontenrose also agrees that Agamemnon acted justly: “To Zeus he was not guilty because he acted as king and commander with sovereign right, doing what he had to do.” Fontenrose, “Gods and Men in the Oresteia”: 83.

<sup>24</sup> Lloyd-Jones sees the chorus as more critical. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, “Zeus in Aeschylus,” *JHS* 76 (1956): 193. Fontenrose agrees that the chorus has finished critiquing Agamemnon. Fontenrose, “Gods and Men in the Oresteia”: 76.



πολλὰ παλαίσματα καὶ γυιοβαρῇ  
γόνατος κονίαισιν ἐρειδομένου  
διακναιομένης τ' ἐν προτελείοις  
κάμακος θήσων Δαναοῖσι  
Τρωσί θ' ὁμοίως. (Ag. 60-67)

Thus the stronger one, Zeus Xenios sends the sons of Atreus against Alexander, for the sake of a many-husbanded woman making many battles and weighting the leaning knees into the dust in the offering of the scraped spear for both Danaans and Trojans.

In this passage, the chorus still sees Helen as the cause of the fighting, but ultimately sees Zeus supporting the conflict. The chorus notes the loss of life that will occur, but does not hold the Atreidae responsible for the war. Thus the chorus reacts to the war on two levels; when considering only human causation, they hold Agamemnon responsible for the war, but when the chorus considers divine causation as well, they remove this blame from Agamemnon. Because of this conflict in causation, if the gods demand that Iphigenia must be sacrificed, Agamemnon is less culpable according the chorus and therefore it is possible to read the vulture passage in a way that does not hold him responsible.

The vulture simile can be read as questioning Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia, but also represents Menelaus as the vulture parents and Helen as the lost chicks.<sup>25</sup> The "at home toil" of the vultures emphasizes that Helen has been removed from her proper place in Sparta and the war must be fought to return her. Helen's departure has upset the home just as the loss of children would upset the vulture nest. This vulture passage warns of the disturbance if all the family relationships are not maintained.

The need to return Helen is reinforced by the invocation of the three gods in Ag. 55-59 and Zeus' role in Ag. 60-67. Menelaus the vulture shows the problematic effect of breaking up

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<sup>25</sup> Heath also connects the vultures to Helen, but finds Clytemnestra a more convincing referent. Heath, "Disentangling the Beast," 18. Goldhill comments that "the results of her action are for society disruptive"- the vultures show the social disruption on the family level. Goldhill, *Language*, 14. Zeitlin also notes the connection. Zeitlin, "Sacrifice," 482.

the family, while the involvement of the gods legitimizes the resulting war. The connection of these gods to the Atreidae clarifies the morality of the Trojan War; the Atreidae were wronged and acted under divine guidance.

The uncertainty of which god hears the cry of the vultures in *Ag.* 55-59 illustrates the breadth of divine support for Agamemnon and Menelaus.

ὔπατος δ' αἰὼν ἢ τις Ἀπόλλων  
ἢ Πάν ἢ Ζεὺς οἰωνόθροον  
γόνον ὄξυβόαν τῶνδε μετοίκων  
ὑστερόποινον  
πέμπει παραβᾶσιν Ἑρινύν. (*Ag.* 55-59)

Some uppermost god, either Apollo, Pan, or Zeus perceiving the shrill, birdy wail of the foreigners sends an *Erinys* avenging the transgression.

That the cry could be answered by Apollo, Pan, or Zeus implies that any of these gods would be sympathetic to Atreidae. Further, the mention of Zeus Xenios in *Ag.* 60-67 makes the support for answering Menelaus' grief with war explicit. If the vultures are agents of Zeus Xenios, they should mourn the loss of Helen, the reason Zeus sends them against Paris.<sup>26</sup> Zeus is a protector of the family unit, concerned with the rights of the husband against the outsider.<sup>27</sup> Menelaus' cry is answered in a way which confirms his place in the vulture simile and lends divine support to the Trojan War.

As vultures, Menelaus and Helen provide an image of the family broken by adultery. The need to correct this break is enforced by the invocations to the gods following the vulture simile. Therefore, Menelaus' loss is divinely confirmed as a proper reason for war. Agamemnon as a vulture presents a less clear justification for war. The possibility of Iphigenia as the dead chick

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<sup>26</sup> Alan H. Sommerstein, "The Tangled Ways of Zeus," in *The Tangled Ways of Zeus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2010), 165.

<sup>27</sup> Goldhill "Zeus the god of social relationships." Goldhill, *Language, sexuality, narrative: the Oresteia*: 14. Fraenkel notes the importance of the family: "The kind of adultery which violates at the same time the sanctity of the home and the mutual bond between host and guest has been reckoned since earliest times a particularly heinous wrong." Fraenkel, *Ag.*, l. 60f.

brings Agamemnon's choices into question, although Agamemnon may not be entirely culpable for her sacrifice. The vulture simile is also the first example of animal single-parent imagery; seeing Menelaus and Agamemnon as male parents presents an idea of fatherhood which is part of the reshaping of the family necessary to free Orestes from the charge of murder. This reshaping is continued by the eagle children passage in the *Choephoroi*. The eagle children passage depicts Agamemnon as a single parent to separate Clytemnestra from the family, which allows violence against her. Orestes calls for Zeus' support in the eagle children passage, using sacrifice and Agamemnon's association to win Zeus' favor. Both animal single-parent images suggest that the male is the only parent and his place in the family is divinely supported.

### III. Lion Imagery

Lion imagery represents the transgressions of Helen, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus as a perversion of gender norms. The lion cub in *Ag.* 728-36 represents Helen and Clytemnestra as violent, unfeminine women as well as violators of *xenia*. The depiction of Clytemnestra as a lion at *Ag.* 1258-60 illustrates the unnatural power dynamic in her relationship with Aegisthus. The lion passage at *Ag.* 1223-6 shows how Aegisthus does not fit the traditional role of the brave, heroic man. The lion imagery roots the other transgressions of Helen, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus, such as adultery or violating *xenia*, in their lack of conformity to normative gender roles.

The lion cub at *Ag.* 728-36, most clearly represents Helen, but can also represent Clytemnestra. The chorus speaks of the destruction caused by Helen's marriage immediately preceding the lion cub passage, suggesting that they are using the lion cub as a simile- Helen is

taken into the house, like the cub, through marriage and causes the destruction of the Trojan War.<sup>28</sup> Helen is described as a violent lion by the chorus:

χρονισθεῖς δ' ἀπέδειξεν ἦ-  
θος τὸ πρὸς τοκέων: χάριν  
γὰρ τροφεῦσιν ἀμείβων  
μηλοφόνοισιν ἐν ἄταις  
δαῖτ' ἀκέλευστος ἔτευξεν:  
αἵματι δ' οἶκος ἐφύρθη,  
ἄμαχον ἄλγος οἰκέταις  
μέγα σίνος πολυκτόνον.  
ἐκ θεοῦ δ' ἱερεὺς τις ἄ-  
τας δόμοις προσεθρέφθη. (Ag. 728-36)

Having matured, it returned the accustomed thing to the parents; giving thanks to the adoptive parents unbidden it made feasts in sheep-slaying ruin: the house was dyed with blood, an unbearable grief and a murderous pain for the household. Some priest of ruin was raised by the god against the house.

My reading of the lion cub image has two important facets: gender and xenia. Connecting Helen and Clytemnestra to the lion cub makes them masculine and heroic because of the similarity of this lion image to the heroic lion similes of the *Iliad*. Comparing the lion cub as representative of Helen or Clytemnestra to Agamemnon's lion simile in the *Iliad* shows the heroic and masculine nature of the lion cub, and thus of Helen and Clytemnestra. Xenia and hospitality are an issue because the lion is a guest in the household and because the lion is a metaphor for the destruction of Troy, which is carried out by Zeus. The lion cub thus captures the unfeminine violent nature and the transgressions of xenia common to both Helen and Clytemnestra.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Knox asserts "The context suggests that the lion is Helen. . . The parallel is exact and significant." Knox, "The Lion in the House," 17.

<sup>29</sup> Zeitlin makes a similar connection between Aegisthus and Paris when she states: "In his erotic susceptibilities, he is not unlike his barbarian counterpart Paris, who also commits adultery with a daughter of Tyndareus." Froma Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Myth Making in the *Oresteia*," in *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 92.

The lion cub defeminizes Helen by associating her with the heroic lion.<sup>30</sup> Because of Agamemnon's importance to the *Oresteia*, the lion simile from the *Iliad* makes the most interesting comparison to Helen the lion cub. Agamemnon is described as a lion during battle:

ὥς δὲ λέων ἐλάφοιο ταχείης νήπια τέκνα  
ῥηϊδίως συνέαξε λαβὼν κρατεροῖσιν ὁδοῦσιν  
ἐλθὼν εἰς εὐνήν, ἀπαλὸν τέ σφ' ἦτορ ἀπηύρα: 11.113-115

As the lion easily breaks the infant children of the swift deer, seizing with strong teeth, coming into the bed, he takes their tender heart.

Both lions prey on those weaker than them, preserving the natural order. Both similes are images of war, although the gender of the warrior differs. The image of the lion cub can be seen as a reworking of the Homeric paradigm to lay blame on Helen. In this sense, the lion cub shifts the focus from the men fighting the war to the woman who caused it. The application of the Homeric, heroic lion to Helen explains how she caused the war; she is an unnatural woman who brings violence to the house. Although the household of the lion is more clearly Paris', the violence in the house can also refer back to Helen's destruction of Menelaus' household, the result of her adultery with Paris.<sup>31</sup> Helen, as the lion, exemplifies the gender abnormality that caused the Trojan War.

Besides becoming a perversion of the Homeric hero, Helen the lion breaks the rules of *xenia*. The violence extends from the stable to the family household, breaking the compact that was made when the lion was taken into the house. Because the lion's destruction affects the

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<sup>30</sup> Making normative, gendering statements about lion imagery is supported by Dennison, Page, and Fraenkel's reactions to the description of Aegisthus as a lion. Dennison and Page, *Ag.*, l. 1224, Fraenkel, *Ag.*, l. 1224. See also the discussion of the Aegisthus lion later in this section. Knox asserts that the raising of the lion has specific Iliadic parallels, but does not continue them into the attack of the lion. Knox, "Lion," 17

<sup>31</sup> Adultery was also depicted with death in the household in the vulture simile.

entire household, the destruction of the lion is a violation of xenia.<sup>32</sup> The lion commits violence against those who have offered it hospitality (or at least their property).

The involvement Zeus Xenios in the destruction Troy makes the connection of the lion cub to xenia stronger.<sup>33</sup> Zeus' involvement in the destruction of Troy provides an apt comparison to Helen as the lion cub and helps focus on issues of Helen's culpability for the destruction of Troy and violation of xenia.

Ἰλίου δὲ κῆδος ὀρθ-  
ώνυμον τελεσσίφρων  
μῆνις ἤλασεν, τραπέζας ἀτί-  
μωσιν ὑστέρῳ χρόνῳ  
καὶ ξυνεστίου Διὸς  
πρασσομένα τὸ νυμφότι-  
μον μέλος ἐκφάτως τίνοντας,  
ὑμέναιον, (Ag. 701-706)

Rage, working its will, sent a wife, rightly called a grief to Troy, at a later time, avenging the dishonoring of the table and of Zeus of the shared hearth against the outspoken singers of the bridal song.

The marriage of Helen and Paris brought Zeus' wrath down upon Troy. In this passage, the attack on Troy comes as vengeance from Zeus, through Helen.<sup>34</sup> In the lion cub passage the attack comes directly from Helen. In this respect, the images are parallel. However, they differ in who violated xenia. In Ag. 701-706 the Trojans are culpable and deserve the punishment of Zeus; their violation of xenia is the explicit reason for their destruction. In the lion cub passage, the household is not condemned for taking the lion in the house, the lion attacks "unbidden." The

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<sup>32</sup> Denniston and Page, *Ag.*, l. 727ff. Fraenkel, *Ag.*, l. 372. Denniston and Page suggest that not only sheep are the victims of the lion, while Fraenkel suggests that in the move to the house we are leaving the lion simile.

<sup>33</sup> Macleod gives a very broad definition of xenia: "Paris offends against a social institution, xenia, and the god who guarantees it. He is thus attacking society as a whole, not merely Menelaus or even Menelaus' city." The lion breaks social compacts in a similar way. Colin Macleod, "Politics in the *Oresteia*," in *Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 40.

<sup>34</sup> Lloyd-Jones on the contrary, sees Helen as a demonic force, unallied with a specific divinity. Lloyd-Jones, "Zeus," 194. This would still connect her to Clytemnestra; Lanahan sees both as demonic "Like her sister Helen, she is the demonic instrument of divine retribution on the sons of Atreus." William F. Lanahan, "Levels of Symbolism in the Red Carpet Scene of *Agamemnon*" *Classical Bulletin* 51 (1974): 26.

two passages present differing accounts of Helen's actions. Although Troy deserved vengeance from Zeus,<sup>35</sup> the vengeance was carried out incorrectly through the attack of the lion.<sup>36</sup> Helen is both an agent of Zeus, but also a violator of Zeus' laws. This paradox stems from Helen's corrupted nature; because Helen, in addition to Paris, has committed adultery, ignoring the bonds of marriage, she cannot simply be a tool of Zeus' vengeance. Making Helen an agent of Zeus decreases her agency and her threat to the husband's control of the wife. However, her adultery must also be depicted as fundamentally wrong and un-feminine. The need to show both the power of Zeus and the evil of Helen results in varied depictions of her role and culpability in regard to the Trojan War.

Clytemnestra can also be seen as the lion; the same issues of marriage and *xenia* which applied to Helen can also be applied to her.<sup>37</sup> Clytemnestra can be criticized in the same way as Helen, for she has also committed adultery and violated *xenia*. Clytemnestra also is depicted with varying amounts of agency; she is held culpable so Orestes can carry out his revenge, but her threat to marriage and the power of the husband is also diminished. As with Helen, Zeus' invocation before the lion simile both diminishes Clytemnestra's agency by suggesting that she is an agent of Zeus and focuses on her violation of *xenia*. Clytemnestra, like Helen, is an agent of Zeus and thus the destabilizing force of her murder of Agamemnon is limited. However, Clytemnestra has also violated *xenia*. *Xenia* demands that Clytemnestra welcome a stranger into her house and show them hospitality. That Clytemnestra cannot show hospitality to her own

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<sup>35</sup> Knox asserts "Troy which took in Helen has got what it deserved." Knox, "Lion," 18.

<sup>36</sup> Zeitlin sees the lion as a priest of corrupted sacrifice. Zeitlin, "Sacrifice," 467.

<sup>37</sup> Knox connects the lion cub passage with the descriptions of Clytemnestra, Agamemnon and Aegisthus as lions based on the animals, eventually concluding that this lion also represents Agamemnon. This association maintains the kingship associations of the lion, but fails to deal with the "irony" of Aegisthus as a lion and the importance of the original female referent, Helen. Knox, "Lion," 19. Lloyd-Jones makes a closer connection, stating "pervasive . . . is the parallel between the fate of Helen and the fate of Clytemnestra." Lloyd-Jones, "Zeus," 192. The association of Helen and Clytemnestra begins early on the Agamemnon; see R. P. Winnington-Ingram, "Clytemnestra and the Vote of Athena," *JHS* 68 (1948): 130. Helen can serve as a template to understand the murder of Agamemnon; see Foley, *Female Acts*, 215.

husband and uses the bath, a part of correct hospitality, to kill Agamemnon emphasizes the degree of her transgression of *xenia*.<sup>38</sup> Her adultery can also be seen in the context of *xenia*. Goldhill sees “parallelism between the destructiveness of the wrong female desire of Clytemnestra and of Helen,” which connects the two sisters by their acts of adultery.<sup>39</sup> The adultery of Helen is clearly within the context of *xenia* (Paris violates his *xenia* relationship with Menelaus (Ag. 60-2), the Trojans are condemned for accepting Helen (Ag. 700-706), Helen as the lion cub violates the *xenia* shown to her by the Trojans). Through her connection with Helen and association with the lion cub which violates *xenia*, Clytemnestra’s adultery becomes associated with the violation of *xenia*. Like Helen, Clytemnestra has committed adultery, which has been followed by violence.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Clytemnestra, as the lion cub, both is brought under power of Zeus and convicted of a *xenia* violation.

Clytemnestra can also be linked to the lion cub through the similarity of her imagery of violence to that of the lion cub. The destruction made by the lion cub is similar to that made by Clytemnestra: *φόνον δόμοι πνέουσιν αἵματοσταγῆ*, “the homes breathe slaughter reeking of blood” (Ag. 1309) Here Cassandra describes the house stained with blood, just as the blood spilled by the lion stains the same house. The result of Clytemnestra’s slaughter and the lion’s are the same. While the lion has metaphorically stained Troy with blood, Clytemnestra has actually stained her home with blood. The connection through violent imagery reinforces the similarity of Clytemnestra’s and the lion cubs’ wrong doing. In addition, Clytemnestra appears as a lion elsewhere in the Agamemnon at 1258-60. This later association of Clytemnestra with a

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<sup>38</sup> Macleod notes the ritual nature: “the bath which marks the homecoming of the master of the house.” Colin Macleod, “Clothing in the *Oresteia*,” in *Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 42. Notably, this is not a ritual carried out for a stranger, but is still a hospitality ritual.

<sup>39</sup> Goldhill, *Language, sexuality, narrative: the Oresteia*: 92.

<sup>40</sup> Foley finds this to be a “traditional poetic cliché. . .which finds the root of all ills in women and their adultery.” Foley, *Female Acts*, 215-6. If adultery is the ultimate cause of the violence within the lion cub simile, adultery then causes the violation of *xenia*.



lion suggests that the earlier image of the cub, because of the animal used in the simile, is also appropriate for Clytemnestra. Thus, Clytemnestra should also be seen as the lion cub.

Clytemnestra is also depicted as a lion in Ag. 1258-60. This lion image is also concerned with the issues of female violence and adultery, strengthening the connection between Clytemnestra and Helen. Clytemnestra is shown to prefer an unequal, adulterous relationship over her marriage and to commit violence against a member of her household. Cassandra describes Clytemnestra as a lion:

αὕτη δίπους λέαινα συγκοιμωμένη  
λύκῳ, λέοντος εὐγενοῦς ἀπουσία,  
κτενεῖ με τὴν τάλαιναν: . . . (Ag. 1258-60)

She the double footed lion lies with the wolf, in the absence of the well-born lion, she will kill me, a wretch:

The intra-species relationship signifies the adultery. Agamemnon is also a lion: λέοντος εὐγενοῦς ἀπουσία, but Clytemnestra chooses to mingle with a wolf. The wolf-lion relationship illustrates the reversed, unequal power dynamic in Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' relationship, within which Clytemnestra is clearly the more dominant member.<sup>41</sup> Although Agamemnon and Clytemnestra should be a couple because they are the same species, Clytemnestra chooses a relationship outside of her species in which she is dominant. The intra-species relationship shows the unnaturalness of a woman-dominated couple. This lion image depicts Clytemnestra as unnatural in choosing an adulterous relationship where she is in charge.

Besides characterizing Clytemnestra's relationship with Aegisthus as unnatural, the depiction of Clytemnestra as a lion links adultery and household violence. Adultery perverts the entire household, resulting in violence against its members. Certainly, this violence is enacted

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<sup>41</sup>Winnington-Ingram explains the dynamic "This woman-man was chosen by the man-woman to be her mate." Winnington-Ingram, "Vote," 133. Zeitlin discusses this power dynamic in reference to Ag. 1224-25: "The subordinate male . . . is the only possible partner for the dominant female." Zeitlin, "Misogyny," 92.

against a member of another adulterous relationship; however, it is Clytemnestra who reacts violently. The violence of Clytemnestra is tied to her unnatural relationship with Aegisthus; the absence of the well-born lion, Agamemnon, is a key factor in both the adultery and the violence against Cassandra. The lion image of Clytemnestra at Ag. 1258-60 connects household violence and adultery.

The description of Aegisthus as a weak lion points to his failures in the role of heroic warrior. Aegisthus the lion is the opposite of the Helen and Clytemnestra lions; whereas Helen and Clytemnestra became a perversion of the Homeric hero, Aegisthus is shown as weak and unmanly.<sup>42</sup> Cassandra describes Aegisthus:

ἐκ τῶνδε ποινὰς φημὶ βουλεύειν τινὰ  
λέοντ' ἄναλκιν ἐν λέχει στρωφώμενον  
οἰκουρόν, οἴμοι, τῷ μολόντι δεσπότη  
ἐμῷ (Ag. 1223-6)

From this I say the weak lion turning in the bed plans punishment, alas, watching for my master coming.

Denniston and Page find the weak lion confusing, preferring to assume textual corruption, especially in comparison with the description of the Agamemnon as a lion at Ag. 1259.<sup>43</sup>

Fraenkel also asserts that “it would be for a Greek, one might say, an offence against the laws of nature to call a lion-- of all creatures-- ἄναλκις” and makes the same connection with Ag. 1259.<sup>44</sup>

Yet an offence against nature is precisely what this image is trying to depict. The offensive nature of Aegisthus the lion is only clarified by the connection with Agamemnon the lion.

Agamemnon is a lion in the Homeric, heroic fashion, as the simile from the *Iliad* shows. This paradigm of the heroic lion should be considered when thinking of Aegisthus the lion to illustrate

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<sup>42</sup> This lion image anticipates the depiction of Aegisthus as a wolf in Ag. 1258-60 as both images represent Aegisthus as weak.

<sup>43</sup> Denniston and Page, Ag., l. 1224. Heath finds this image perfectly sensible, concentrating on the sexual and adulterous connotations of λέχει. Heath, “Disentangling the Beast,” 23.

<sup>44</sup> Fraenkel, Ag., l. 1224.

the degree to which Aegisthus does not fit this paradigm and is instead cowardly. The use of the lion image in different ways for Agamemnon and Aegisthus is no less surprising than the fact that it is used to depict Helen and Clytemnestra. If the lion can only be used to depict manly bravery, how is it used for both Clytemnestra and Helen? In fact, however, the traditional lion image, of the Homeric hero, is purposely contradicted by its use for Aegisthus, Clytemnestra, and Helen. The traditional lion image is used as a paradigm to critique their adultery and abnormal gender roles. This lion image communicates exactly what the chorus protests when they ask Aegisthus:<sup>45</sup>

γύναι, σὺ τοὺς ἦκοντας ἐκ μάχης μένων  
οἰκουρὸς εὐνήν ἀνδρὸς αἰσχύνων ἅμα  
ἀνδρὶ στρατηγῷ τόνδ' ἐβούλευσας μόρον; (Ag. 1625-7)

Woman, while others went to war, you stayed at home defiling the bed of the master,  
did you plan this fate for the commander?

Heath summarizes the mental stumbling block created by the connection of these images: “We are conditioned by Homeric usage to accept [the lion] as a natural depiction of martial prowess . . . and . . . [a woman] as an insult.”<sup>46</sup> Instead of being off fighting the war, Aegisthus is at home where the women belong. While Helen and Clytemnestra were unusually strong lions, Aegisthus is an unusually weak lion. He is not the dominant partner in the relationship, or even the household; there is another master. In this lion image, Aegisthus is shown as not a proper man and the problems of adultery are explored. There may be hints of xenia issues in this image as

<sup>45</sup> Heath also notes verbal and thematic connections between these passages, but does not focus on gender. Heath, “Disentangling the Beast”: 24. Zeitlin notes the cowardly similarity between the adulterous partners of Helen and Clytemnestra. Zeitlin, “Sacrifice,” 480 n. 35. Foley holds Aegisthus responsible for “[letting] a woman kill a returning general and pollute the country and its gods.” Foley, *Female Acts*, 206.

<sup>46</sup> Heath, “Disentangling the Beast”: 24. Zeitlin explains the discomfort caused by this portrayal of Aegisthus through the fear of gynecocracy; Clytemnestra’s sole rule is buffered by her Aegisthus through the fear of the rule of women; Clytemnestra’s sole rule is buffered by her connection to Aegisthus, but this is not enough to pacify the chorus. The chorus expects Aegisthus to take on the role of the warrior and be a real lion, like Agamemnon, but he instead has betrayed the gendered role they have made for him, just as in the lion simile. Aegisthus in no way fits the image of the typical, heroic male like Agamemnon, and the animal descriptions work to highlight his atypical gender role. Zeitlin, “Misogyny,” 91-2.

well; why is this lion in the house if the master is gone? The depiction of Aegisthus as a lion illustrates his lack of masculine qualities. The use of the lion brings up the paradigm of the Homeric hero lion, which is contradicted by Aegisthus who does not fight in the war and is dominated by Clytemnestra.

The lion imagery of the *Agamemnon* creates a gender paradigm through which Helen, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus are criticized implicitly.<sup>47</sup> The lion imagery depicts all three as unnatural in terms of their gender. Helen and Clytemnestra take on masculine characteristics, while Aegisthus is feminized. The Homeric simile of warrior as lion serves as a rubric for traditional gender which is perverted by each character. In the lion imagery, perversion of gender results in violence and other transgressions such as adultery or violation of xenia.

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<sup>47</sup> There is another lion image that deals with gender in the *Agamemnon*. The description of Artemis in the chorus' recounting of the prophecy of Calchas links lions to intrafamilial intergender conflict:

οἴκῳ γὰρ ἐπί-  
φθονος Ἄρτεμις ἀγνὰ  
πτανοῖσιν κυσὶ πατρὸς  
αὐτότοκον πρὸ λόχου μογερὰν πτάκα θυομένοισιν  
στυγεῖ δὲ δείπνον αἰετῶν.<sup>7</sup>  
αἴλινον αἴλινον εἰπέ, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.  
τόσον περ εὐφρων, καλὰ,  
δρόσοισι ἀέπτοις μαλερῶν λεόντων  
πάντων τ' ἀγρονόμων φιλομάστοις  
θηρῶν ὀβρικάλοισι τερπνά, (Ag. 136-42)

Holy Artemis, angry at the winged dogs of her father killing the wretched rabbit with its young before it gave birth, with pity hates the feast of the eagles. Sing the dirge, let there be victory. But being so friendly, good, pleasant, to the un-weaned young of raging lions and to the young loving the breast of all field-dwelling wild beasts.

Artemis's support of lions is mentioned directly after her conflict with her father Zeus. This is also an image of interspecies opposition; Zeus' eagles are contrasted with Artemis' lions, focusing the opposition between the descriptions of the Atreidae as birds and their wives as lions. Zeitlin sees this as an image of the cycle of vengeance; the male gods are opposed to the female gods, the father to the daughter. Zeitlin, "Sacrifice," 492. This passage complicates the nature of Helen and Clytemnestra as lions; are they fully agents of Zeus or are they allied against him and those he supports, Agamemnon and Menelaus? This Artemis passage also maintains the status of animal imagery as images of familial, gendered conflict.

#### IV. Clytemnestra as Wife and Mother?

How Clytemnestra does or does not fulfill the roles of wife and mother is important to determining both Orestes' and Clytemnestra's guilt. Clytemnestra is criticized for not being a wife and mother, although her failure in these roles breaks her connection to Orestes and suggests that he does not really commit matricide. Foley sees Clytemnestra struggling against the roles of mother and wife: "Clytemnestra resists being judged simply as a female or domestic agent, but ultimately fails in her attempt."<sup>48</sup> This struggle is unsuccessful because the imagery continually references the roles of wife and mother, establishing these roles as the only criteria through which Clytemnestra can be judged. Clytemnestra is judged not through being shown as a bad wife and mother. Instead, through imagery, Clytemnestra becomes something that is explicitly different from a wife or mother. If Clytemnestra can be metaphorically removed from the roles of wife and mother, she is no longer part of her family and Orestes can murder her without the taint of matricide. Clytemnestra is removed from the roles of mother and wife in her dream of nursing a snake (*Ch.* 529-33), the nurse's speech (*Ch.* 749-50), comments by Orestes and Electra (*Ch.* 190-1, 1005-6), passages which compare her to an animal (*Ag.* 1228-33, *Ch.* 991-6), her speech to the herald (*Ag.* 601-612), and her speech over Agamemnon's body (*Ag.* 1435-1443). In the dream and in the animal comparisons, Clytemnestra is metaphorically represented something other than mother or wife, whereas the other passages deal with Clytemnestra's actual behavior. On a metaphorical and literal level, both plays ask "Is Clytemnestra a wife and mother?" rather than "Is Clytemnestra a bad wife and mother?"

Clytemnestra's dream of nursing the snake shows some awareness of her lack of mothering skills, which can remove her from the maternal role. Clytemnestra cannot care for her child, the snake. Rose suggests "Clytemnestra became dispensable to the family after Orestes'

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<sup>48</sup>Foley, *Female Acts*, 201.

birth.”<sup>49</sup> In the snake dream, Clytemnestra is not only dispensable, but useless. The dream can be applied to Clytemnestra’s real, human family; Goldhill states about the giving birth that it undergoes “shifting between its use as a metaphor, a symbol, and its use to express the ‘literal’ relation between parents and children.”<sup>50</sup> Thus Clytemnestra’s failure to care for the snake reflects her failure with Orestes and Electra. Clytemnestra attempts to take care of her snake child but is attacked:

Χορός :ἐν σπαργάνοισι παιδὸς ὀρμίσαι δίκην.  
 Ὀρέστης :τίνοϛ βορᾶς χρῆζοντα, νεογενὲς δάκος;  
 Χορός: αὐτὴ προσέσχε μάζον ἐν τῷ νείρατι.  
 Ὀρέστης: καὶ πῶς ἄτρωτον οὐθαυ ἦν ὑπὸ στύγους;  
 Χορός: ὥστ’ ἐν γάλακτι θρόμβον αἵματος σπάσαι. (Ch. 529-33)

Chorus: It was in swaddling clothes like a child.  
 Orestes: What kind of food did the new born beast want?  
 Chorus: She offered it her breast in the dream.  
 Orestes: And how was the teat unwounded by the hateful thing?  
 Chorus: It drew a lump of blood in the milk

In the dream, Clytemnestra attempts to carry out the maternal role, but is unsuccessful and is harmed by her child. Thus, Clytemnestra, through her rejection of the maternal role to Orestes and Electra, makes her own children hostile to her. Orestes takes this reading of the snake dream when he uses the dream to justify killing Clytemnestra:

δεῖ τοί νιν, ὡς ἔθρεψεν ἑκπαγλον τέρας,  
 θανεῖν βιαίως: ἐκδρακοντωθεὶς δ’ ἐγὼ  
 κτείνω νιν, ὡς τοῦ νειρον ἐννέπει τόδε. (Ch. 548-50)

It is necessary for her to die violently because she nourished the violent sign; I having become a snake will kill her, as this dream said.

<sup>49</sup> Amy R. Rose, “The Significance of the Nurse’s Speech in Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*,” *Classical Bulletin* 54 (1982): 50.

<sup>50</sup> Goldhill, *Language, sexuality, narrative: the Oresteia*: 155.

Orestes sees Clytemnestra causing her own destruction.<sup>51</sup> Besides holding Clytemnestra responsible, Orestes also erases any possible bond between human mother and human child by turning into a snake.<sup>52</sup> In Orestes' interpretation, the snake dream shows Clytemnestra creating her murderer through her rejection of the role of mother. The snake dream shows Clytemnestra's failure as a parent; she does not know how to take care of her child. Orestes reads the snake dream as referring to him; this justifies killing Clytemnestra because she has not actually been a mother to Orestes.

Although the snake dream can be read as suggesting that violence against Clytemnestra is justified because she did not fulfill the maternal role, the dream can also be read to suggest the opposite. Another possible reading of the snake dream is that Clytemnestra is acting as a mother but the problem lies with her snake child, Orestes. Orestes does use the way Clytemnestra cares for the snake to determine that he is the snake in the portent; Clytemnestra is identified through acting as a mother. If the focus is on Clytemnestra's action rather than its effect and the snake's reaction, Clytemnestra is taking on the role of mother and does nothing to cause the snake's attack.

This reading is less appropriate because the depiction of Clytemnestra as a non-mother fits better with other depictions of Clytemnestra and the dream is, as a whole, negative. Seeing the snake dream as a positive representation of Clytemnestra's mothering skills is less convincing when other depictions of her as a non-mother, particularly in Cilissa's speech, are considered. The fact that the dream terrifies Clytemnestra (*Ch.* 535-9) suggests that we should not see this as a positive depiction of Clytemnestra as mother; the dream as a whole is negative.

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<sup>51</sup> Betenksy "The poetic logic is that the mother of such a monster must be a monster herself." Aya Betenksy, "Aeschylus' *Oresteia*: The Power of Clytemnestra," *Ramus* 7 (1978): 21. Shaw's 258 definition of monster is appropriate: "something which belongs to a recognizable group but which somehow violates the norms of that group."

<sup>52</sup> Whallon "The bond between them is loosened by the denial that an image connecting them is valid." William Whallon, "The Serpent at the Breast," *TAPA* 89 (1958): 274.

The reading of the dream as a depiction of Clytemnestra the good mother harmed by the evil snake baby Orestes does not present a convincing depiction of Orestes. In this reading, Orestes is vilified by the other associations of the snake. The snake is often used to represent Clytemnestra, as in the eagle children passage (*Ch.* 246-51). In that passage, Clytemnestra as a snake was depicted as an enemy to her husband and children, separated by species from her family. If this snake image is read in the same way, it is Orestes who is unnatural and made into an enemy, not Clytemnestra.<sup>53</sup> This position is rebutted by Whallon and Rose. Whallon sees the negative nature of serpent imagery ultimately focused on Clytemnestra, concluding “the serpent loses its reference to Orestes but becomes Clytemnestra alone.” Rose uses Cilissa’s speech to assert that Orestes the violent baby snake has no basis in reality: “Orestes was not a bloodsucking snake but a harmless and defenseless baby.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, the snake image depicts mother and child in a way which implicates Clytemnestra rather than Orestes. Orestes’ violence against his mother is not depicted as unnatural and Clytemnestra is not depicted as a good mother; rather Clytemnestra is depicted as a non-mother, who is shown to bring violence upon herself. The snake dream is therefore correctly interpreted by Orestes; Clytemnestra has created an enemy through her lack of mothering.

The nurse Cilissa shows how Clytemnestra was not a mother to Orestes in comparison to her own efforts in caring for Orestes.<sup>55</sup> As Clytemnestra rejoices over Orestes’ reported death,

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<sup>53</sup> Garvie connects the snake dream to the lion cub of the *Agamemnon*. If so, Orestes will be implicated for his crimes and connected to Clytemnestra and Helen. The similarities between their violence are difficult to avoid. If Helen is ultimately the agent of Zeus, Orestes could be saved from condemnation. Garvie, *Ch.*: l. 251 Garvie also notes that the *Erinyes* also drink blood. This is an extremely problematic connection. The *Erinyes*’ form of vengeance must be replaced with the court system; this connection would implicate Orestes’ actions as an incorrect form of vengeance. Garvie, *Ch.*: l. 252-3.

<sup>54</sup> Whallon, “Serpent,” 272. Rose, “Nurse,” 50.

<sup>55</sup> Goldhill argues that the nurse preforms “an explicitly interpretative reading” and the true character of Clytemnestra cannot be found in her speech. While this essentially devalues my reading of her speech, Goldhill and I differ on the purpose of the nurse’s accusation; the development of the case for Orestes rests on “resist[ing] . . . a move through language to (the motivation of) character.” Clytemnestra cannot be seen as a complex human being,



Cilissa thinks of her connection to Orestes: φίλον δ' Ὀρέστην, τῆς ἐμῆς ψυχῆς τριβήν, /ὄν ἐξέθρεψα μητρόθεν δεδεγμένη “Dear Orestes, the toil of my life,/ I raised him having received him from his mother” (*Ch.* 749-50).<sup>56</sup> Cilissa took the mothering role from Clytemnestra.<sup>57</sup> Cilissa forged an emotional attachment to Orestes while Clytemnestra did not; Cilissa contrasts the joy of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus with her own dedication to Orestes. Cilissa, not Clytemnestra, raised and was emotionally attached to Orestes.

Not only did Cilissa replace Clytemnestra as the mother, it is implied that this replacement was beneficial to Agamemnon as well as Orestes. Cilissa states that this benefitted Agamemnon: ἐγὼ διπλᾷ δὲ τάσδε χειρωναξίας /ἔχουσ' Ὀρέστην ἐξεδεξάμην πατρί “I received Orestes from his father, having this double job” (*Ch.* 761-62). Cilissa has the skills required to raise Orestes and so takes him from his father. Cilissa's two accounts of receiving Orestes from his parents imply that being taken from his mother was a benefit to both Agamemnon and Orestes, which implies that Clytemnestra's current lack of maternal feeling was life-long.<sup>58</sup> Cilissa denies Clytemnestra the role of mother; Cilissa was the true mother because she cared emotionally and physically for Orestes. Cilissa provides especially strong testimony that Clytemnestra was not a mother and is therefore separated from the family; not only is

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she must be at least excluded from human categories if she is not also turned into an animal or monster. Goldhill, *Language, sexuality, narrative: the Oresteia*: 167.

<sup>56</sup> Garvie contrasts this with the snake dream; he sees Cilissa described as a good parent and Clytemnestra as a bad parent. Garvie, *Ch.*: l. 750

<sup>57</sup> Zeitlin sees the testimony of Cilissa as the paramount evidence in Orestes' attempt to create a situation where “son's alliance with paternal power and interests must simultaneously be seen as a repudiation of the mother.” Zeitlin, “Misogyny,” 95. Winnington-Ingram sees Cilissa as the true mother, not Clytemnestra. Winnington-Ingram, “Vote,” 139. Goheen “[the nurse serves] to withdraw from Clytemnestra . . . much of her status as mother.” Robert F. Goheen, “Aspects of Dramatic Symbolism: Three Studies in the *Oresteia*,” *AJP* 76 (1955): 132.

<sup>58</sup> Garvie translates the dative πατρί as the dative of advantage. Garvie, *Ch.*: l. 752.

Clytemnestra marginalized but she is replaced.<sup>59</sup> Clytemnestra is not just a bad mother; Cilissa shows that Clytemnestra did not act as mother to her children.

Orestes and Electra also refuse to accept Clytemnestra as their mother or as a wife to their father. Electra states that Clytemnestra does not deserve the name of mother: ἐμὴ δὲ μήτηρ, οὐδαμῶς ἐπώνυμον /φρόνημα παισὶ δύσθεον πεπαμένη. “My mother, never of that name, having a godless mind against her children” (*Ch.* 190-1).<sup>60</sup> Electra refuses to call Clytemnestra mother; Orestes challenges Clytemnestra as wife. Orestes, “expressing rhetorically his feelings about his mother,” swears off marriage if his wife is like Clytemnestra: τοιάδ’ ἐμοὶ ξύνουκος ἐν δόμοισι μὴ / γένοιτ’· ὀλοίμην πρόσθεν ἐκ θεῶν ἅπαις “Let me not cohabit with such a one: let me rather die childless” (*Ch.* 1005-1006).<sup>61</sup> A wife such as Clytemnestra cannot even be tolerated for the sake of producing children, it is better to have no family at all rather than marry. Orestes contrasts being a married to a Clytemnestra and having no wife at all and chooses no wife. Orestes and Electra attack Clytemnestra as wife and mother. Orestes has the greatest need to show that Clytemnestra is not a mother or a member of his family, so his statements could be biased. However, Cilissa’s testimony that Clytemnestra was not a mother provides evidence from a less biased source. This reconfiguring of the family to exclude Clytemnestra is, until Apollo’s speech in the *Eumenides*, conceptual rather than biological. Thus, Orestes and Electra reject the idea of Clytemnestra as wife and mother, implying that she is not part of the family.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Cilissa’s replacement of Clytemnestra affects Clytemnestra’s ability to prevent her murder; Whallon believes Cilissa’s speech disproves Clytemnestra’s attempt to gain pity through her breast (*Ch.* 896-8). Whallon, “Serpent,” 274.

<sup>60</sup> Garvie explains the problem with calling Clytemnestra a mother: “The name . . . belies Clytemnestra’s nature: she is the unnatural mother.” Garvie, *Ch.*: 1. 190-1.

<sup>61</sup> Garvie, *Ch.*: 1.1005-6.

<sup>62</sup> Clytemnestra is concerned with her role as mother of Iphigenia “the only child who matters” Betensky, “Power,” 17. This mother role does not save her from the redefinition of the family, which includes Agamemnon, Orestes, and Electra, but not Clytemnestra; “If Clytemnestra was never a ‘real’ mother to Orestes, then she could not have been one to Iphigeneia either. . . her claims in the previous play are completely undermined.” Betensky, “Power,” 21. Zeitlin holds a similar view: “By denying her two remaining children, she has denied her role of mother.” Zeitlin, “Sacrifice,” 491.

Clytemnestra is depicted as non-human because of her rejection of the roles of wife and mother in *Ag.* 1228-33 and *Ch.* 991-6. Both these passages seek to redefine Clytemnestra as an animal or a monster explicitly because of her violence against Agamemnon. These passages critique Clytemnestra not by portraying her as a bad wife or a bad mother but as a creature outside of the human sphere. This separation from human categories is rhetorically important; the *Erinyes* cannot claim Orestes as their rightful prey if he has not truly committed matricide. The depiction of Clytemnestra as animal or monster does not, however, free her from the constraints of family; the images emphasize her violation of family bonds. Orestes and Cassandra seek to define Clytemnestra as something other than a wife or mother.

In *Ag.* 1228-33, Cassandra also depicts Clytemnestra as non-human on account of her murder of Agamemnon. Clytemnestra can no longer be called a wife, a human, or even a female. Cassandra tries to find the appropriate beast or monster to represent Clytemnestra:<sup>63</sup>

οὐκ οἶδεν οἷα γλῶσσα μισητῆς κυνὸς  
 λείξασα κάκτεινασα φαιδρὸν οὔς, δίκην  
 Ἰτης λαθραίου, τεύξεται κακῇ τύχῃ.  
 τοιάδε τόλμα: θῆλυς ἄρσενος φονεὺς  
 ἔστιν. τί νιν καλοῦσα δυσφιλὲς δάκος  
 τύχοιμ' ἄν; ἀμφίσβαιναν, ἥ Σκύλλαν τινὰ (*Ag.* 1228-33)

He did not know the kind of word for the hateful dog, fawning and killing the one with the shining mind, like a secret ruin, she comes with an evil fate. Such daring: the female is the slayer of the male. What should I call her, this hated beast? A serpent or some Scylla?

Cassandra is at a loss because Clytemnestra, in her view, has gone beyond humanity and almost beyond gender.<sup>64</sup> Clytemnestra's inversion of gender roles is explicitly noted; her violence

<sup>63</sup> Foley sees Cassandra taking on the role of wife as she makes this comparison; Clytemnestra's place as wife has been supplanted by a better candidate, just as Cilissa replaced Clytemnestra as mother. Foley, *Female Acts*, 93.

<sup>64</sup> Betenksy's position on Clytemnestra's move away from the feminine is an interesting counterpoint: "The death of Iphigenia can be understood . . . as a destruction of Clytemnestra's own fertility after the absence of Agamemnon had already made her cease having a feminine identity." Betenksy, "Power," 15-16. See also Goheen, "Aspects," 133. Foley sees Clytemnestra described as a hater of her philoi; this hatred is represented by making her animal. Foley, *Female Acts*, 221.

against her spouse is deemed unnatural. This violence is also the reason she is depicted as an animal and a monster. Cassandra does not know what to call Clytemnestra because Clytemnestra has violated the norms of gender and of wifely behavior and thus can no longer be defined with human terms. By using animals, Cassandra implies that Clytemnestra is not a wife.

Orestes seeks to limit Clytemnestra's role as wife and mother by suggesting that she is instead a snake in *Ch.* 991-6:

ἥτις δ' ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ τοῦτ' ἐμήσατο στύγος,  
ἐξ οὗ τέκνων ἤνεγχε' ὑπὸ ζώνην βάρος,  
φίλον τέως, νῦν δ' ἐχθρόν, ὥς φαίνει, κακόν,  
τί σοι δοκεῖ; μύραινά γ' εἴτ' ἐχιδν' ἔφυσεν  
θιγοῦσ' ἄν ἄλλον οὐ δεδηγμένον  
τόλμης ἕκατι κακδίκου φρονήματος. (*Ch.* 991-6)

What is she who bore such hate against her husband, by whom she bore the weight of children under her girdle, dear to you, now, as it seems, a hated enemy, what does she seem to be? She is a sea-eel, a snake which touching poisons, the other not being bitten, daring according to her unlawful mind.

Orestes sees Clytemnestra as dehumanized because she rejected her family. Clytemnestra should have been connected to her husband through her children. Because she rejects this connection, she is compared to a poisonous snake. Clytemnestra's rejection of Agamemnon is explicit, but, in Orestes' view, she also rejects her children: she destroys their father but also fails to properly bond with them, which would have produced a connection to her as mother. Orestes tries, through redefinition of Clytemnestra as an animal, to denigrate Clytemnestra not only for her rejection of the role of wife, but also the role of mother.<sup>65</sup>

For Orestes, the separation of Clytemnestra from the roles of wife and mother justifies his act of murder. The reimagining of Clytemnestra as a poisonous snake both emphasizes her rejection of her husband and children and allows Orestes to respond with violence. Garvie sees another rhetorical purpose of making Clytemnestra a non-mother: "Orestes reverses the charge

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<sup>65</sup> See also *Ch.* 130-6, 190-1, 421-2.

brought by Clytemnestra against Agamemnon who sacrificed Iphigenia.”<sup>66</sup> This reversal seeks to focus Clytemnestra’s role as mother on her living children; Iphigenia must be excluded from the family.<sup>67</sup> Clytemnestra’s justification for the murder of Agamemnon as in revenge for Iphigenia is removed. Instead, Clytemnestra is denigrated for her violence against her husband, and violence against Clytemnestra is justified through the image of Clytemnestra as a poisonous snake. Clytemnestra’s rejection of these roles is so extreme that she can no longer be seen as human. Violence against Clytemnestra is justified through turning her from a member of the family into an animal.

In her speech to the herald, Clytemnestra uses the guise of a proper wife to cover her murderous intentions, thus showing the degree to which she is not a wife: <sup>68</sup>

τί γὰρ  
 γυναικὶ τούτου φέγγος ἥδιον δρακεῖν,  
 ἀπὸ στρατείας ἀνδρὶ σώσαντος θεοῦ  
 πύλας ἀνοῖξαι;—ταῦτ’ ἀπάγγελον πόσει:  
 ἦκειν ὅπως τάχιστ’ ἐράσμιον πόλει:  
 γυναῖκα πιστὴν δ’ ἐν δόμοις εὖροι μολῶν  
 οἴαν περ οὖν ἔλειπε, δωμάτων κύνα  
 ἐσθλὴν ἐκείνῳ, πολεμίαν τοῖς δύσφροσιν,  
 καὶ ἄλλ’ ὁμοίαν πάντα, σημαντήριον  
 οὐδὲν διαφθείρας ἐν μήκει χρόνου.  
 οὐδ’ οἶδα τέρψιν οὐδ’ ἐπίνογον φάτιν  
 ἄλλου πρὸς ἀνδρὸς μᾶλλον ἢ χαλκοῦ βαφάς. (Ag. 601-612)

For what sight is more pleasant for a wife than this, opening the gates for her husband, who has been saved by the god from battle; announce this to my husband: to come most

<sup>66</sup> Garvie, *Ch.*: l. 922

<sup>67</sup> Goheen explains the emotions behind this difference between children “Instead of fresh love to replace that lost with Iphigenia, that feeling has been replaced . . . with indifference and dislike.” Goheen, “Aspects,” 134. Foley suggests that Iphigenia is not as an important part of the household as Clytemnestra attempts to make her: “Clytemnestra implicitly remakes inheritance law by integrating her daughter into the direct lineage of the royal house.” Foley, *Female Acts*, 217.

<sup>68</sup> Fraenkel focuses on the optative εὔροι as key to figuring out what Clytemnestra means; is she deceptive or honest? Fraenkel concludes that Clytemnestra is trying to state that she is faithful. Fraenkel, *Ag.*, l. 606. Betensky concludes Clytemnestra is faithful, in a way: “She is not lying. The fidelity is to the house, not to him.” However, later Betensky admits “her role in [the house of Atreus] is limited.” Betensky, “Power,” 15,19. Goldhill sees the use of πόσει as an evasion; Clytemnestra is hiding “her ἀνὴρ, Aegisthus.” Goldhill, *Language, sexuality, narrative: the Oresteia*: 55.

quickly to his beloved to the city: having come home let him find his faithful wife in the house, just as he left her, a good watchdog of the home for him, war-like towards his enemies, and all other appropriate things, whose seal has not been destroyed in the length of time. I do not know delight nor shameful reputation because of another man more than I know how to dip bronze.

Clytemnestra is believed by the herald because she describes what her behavior should be.<sup>69</sup>

Because none of the things she claims are true as will be implied by the chorus, Clytemnestra shows she is not fulfilling the role of wife. Clytemnestra is not excited for Agamemnon to return, except so that she can kill him.<sup>70</sup> She has not been faithful and is even, metaphorically, lying about dipping bronze; Fowler points out that “She is about to dip her sword, dye it in blood.”<sup>71</sup> Clytemnestra shows all the ways in which she could be a proper wife but is not, thus actively rejecting the role of wife.

Clytemnestra openly rejects the role of wife in Ag. 1435-1443. Clytemnestra argues that Agamemnon and Cassandra and Aegisthus and herself are the better couples. By arguing for the validity of her relationship with Aegisthus, Clytemnestra is explicitly rejecting the role of Agamemnon’s wife. By attempting to legitimize these extra-marital relationships, Clytemnestra shows her opposition to the traditional model of the family:

οὐ μοι φόβου μέλαθρον ἐλπὶς ἐμπατεῖ,  
ἔως ἂν αἴθῃ πῦρ ἐφ’ ἐστίας ἐμῆς  
Αἴγισθος, ὥς τὸ πρόσθεν εὖ φρονῶν ἐμοί.  
οὗτος γὰρ ἡμῖν ἀσπίς οὐ σμικρὰ θράσους.  
κεῖται γυναικὸς τῆσδε λυμαντήριος,  
Χρυσήιδων μείλιγμα τῶν ὑπ’ Ἰλίου·  
ἢ τ’ αἰχμάλωτος ἦδε καὶ τερασκόπος

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<sup>69</sup> Betensky find Clytemnestra not entirely believable: “The statement is suspicious here to her audience but passes because it fits normal expectations.” Betensky, “Power,” 15. Winnington-Ingram notes the paradigmatic nature of the description: “she maintains the role of the conventional wife, the home-keeper, the watch-dog.” Winnington-Ingram, “Vote,” 132.

<sup>70</sup> Fowler believes that Clytemnestra would, at some time, have been excited for Agamemnon to return, arguing that “thwarted passion for Agamemnon” is one of Clytemnestra’s motives for murder. Fowler “Aeschylus’ Imagery”: 24. Although Clytemnestra makes statements about the difficulty of being separated from her husband (Ag. 859-62, Ch. 920), this problem would be rectified by not killing him when he finally returns home. Betensky’s explanations is more sensible: “Now she longs for him in order to kill him.” Betensky, “Power,” 15.

<sup>71</sup> Fowler, “Aeschylus’ Imagery”: 34.

καὶ κοινόλεκτρος τοῦδε, θεσφατηλόγος  
πιστὴ ξύνευνος, ναυτίλων δὲ σελμάτων  
ἰσοτριβῆς, ἄτιμα δ' οὐκ ἐπραξάτην. (Ag. 1434-1443)

My hope does not walk in a house of fear as long as Aegisthus kindles a fire upon my hearth, as he was well-disposed toward me. For he is a shield for us, not of small strength. The destroyer of this woman lies dead, the balm for the golden-looking ones at Troy: She was taken by the spear, a prophet, she shared his bed, a trusted prophetic mistress, pressing the benches of ships, their reward is not undeserved.

Clytemnestra belongs with Aegisthus, Cassandra with Agamemnon.<sup>72</sup> Clytemnestra attempts to break down her original family and substitute Aegisthus; Agamemnon has lost his place as the head of the household.<sup>73</sup> Agamemnon is no longer lord or husband; he is placed with Cassandra and is described as the destroyer their relationship. Thus Clytemnestra focuses the blame for the break of her and Agamemnon's relationship on Agamemnon.<sup>74</sup> Zeitlin sees placing him with Cassandra as a method of weakening Agamemnon; Agamemnon (like Aegisthus?) is feminized through his connection to Cassandra and the "barbarian world . . . of effeminacy and sensual delights".<sup>75</sup> Agamemnon is no longer Greek and no longer a proper partner for Clytemnestra- she has broken up the family using cultural values. Clytemnestra uses Cassandra to blame Agamemnon for the breaking of her marriage and to take focus of her relationship with Aegisthus. In Ag. 1435-1443, Clytemnestra openly promotes extramarital relationships, rejecting the role of wife of Agamemnon, and attempts to place the blame for the move from marriage to adultery on Agamemnon.

In Ag. 601-612 and Ag. 1435-1443, Clytemnestra depicts herself as fulfilling the roles of wife and mother. In Ag. 601-612, Clytemnestra plays the role of faithful wife, which implicates her unfaithfulness and shows her rejection of the role of wife. In Ag. 1435-1443, Clytemnestra

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<sup>72</sup> Foley thinks Clytemnestra senses an attack and "clearly means to imply that Cassandra has threatened to double or replace her." Foley, *Female Acts*, 92.

<sup>73</sup> Fraenkel, *Ag.*, l. 1435.

<sup>74</sup> Foley notes that Clytemnestra attempts to hold Agamemnon for adultery which, as a man, he would not usually be responsible. Foley, *Female Acts*, 215.

<sup>75</sup> Zeitlin "Misogyny," 92.

openly rejects the role of wife by promoting the relationships between Aegisthus and herself and Agamemnon and Cassandra as the more appropriate pairings, but also tries to blame Agamemnon for the destruction of their relationship. Clytemnestra rejects the role of wife, separating herself from the family in the same way as her opponents.

In the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* Clytemnestra is suggested to be something other than a wife and mother. This presentation involves comparing Clytemnestra to an explicit or implicit example of these roles and showing how she does not fulfill them. In the snake dream, Clytemnestra does not properly perform the role of mother for the snake and thus brings violence upon herself. Cilissa asserts that she, not Clytemnestra was a mother to Orestes because she took care of Orestes as a baby and still cares for him emotionally as an adult. Orestes and Electra respectively assert that Clytemnestra was neither wife nor mother. Cassandra and Orestes both find that Clytemnestra is better described with animals, removing her from the human roles of wife and mother. Clytemnestra herself presents a false image of a faithful wife, through which she can be judged to not be a wife, and explicitly rejects the role of wife in favor of adulterous relationships. Defining Clytemnestra as neither wife nor mother serves to separate her from her family and from humanity, allowing Orestes to answer her violence with violence.

## V. Conclusion

The imagery of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* presents a view of the family and of gender which supports male power. The female is denigrated, especially Clytemnestra as a wife and mother, while the imagery of the animal single-parent presents a restructuring of the family so that the male is the only parent and the mother is excluded from the family. The father is depicted as a nurturing, caring parent who is vital for the survival of his children. This structure is most clearly seen in the eagle children passage of the *Choephoroi*; Agamemnon is the eagle



father and his chicks, Orestes and Electra, cannot survive without him. Clytemnestra is a snake, an outsider and enemy. The image of the vulture parents in the *Agamemnon* has the same structure but at the same time questions the validity of the remaking of the family. Agamemnon and Menelaus are male parent vultures. Again, there is no place for the mother in this animal depiction of the family. However, the vulture image highlights Agamemnon's failures as a father; the dead vulture chicks most obviously refer to Iphigenia and bring up questions of accountability for not only her sacrifice but also for the Trojan War. Agamemnon's place as an agent of Zeus provides a counterpart to the reference to Iphigenia. In reference to Agamemnon, the vulture simile questions his role as a parent. The vulture simile also represents Menelaus as the parent vultures and Helen as the vulture chicks. This change in referents changes the valence of the image; it supports Menelaus' role as a husband and justifies the Trojan War. Both single-parent images remake the family by excluding the mother. The eagle children passage presents a family composed only of Agamemnon, Orestes, and Electra where Clytemnestra is an enemy. The vulture parent passage presents a family structure where the father is the only parent, but can question or support this structure depending on whether the focus is on Agamemnon or Menelaus.

The lion imagery of the *Agamemnon* connects issues of gender to adultery and transgressions of xenia. For the lion imagery, the heroic lion similes of the *Iliad* provide a normative paradigm of gender which illustrates how the lion imagery of the *Agamemnon* depicts a corruption of gender roles. Helen and Clytemnestra are depicted as overly strong women, breaking out of the role of wife, while Aegisthus becomes a cowardly lion, dominated by Clytemnestra. Helen and Clytemnestra are connected through the lion imagery; both can be seen as the destructive lion cub. The lion imagery depicts the unnaturalness of their adultery and

violence; they are not real women but animals. The lion imagery of the *Agamemnon* points to the unnaturalness of Helen, Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus in regards to gender and adultery.

The imagery of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* depicts Clytemnestra not as a bad mother or wife but as something explicitly different from a wife and mother. Clytemnestra is removed from the family through this imagery, which allows Orestes to murder her without the taint of matricide. Clytemnestra is removed from the role of wife and mother in the snake dream in the *Choephoroi*, which depicts her as unable to fulfill the role of mother and nurture her child. Clytemnestra is also depicted as a non-mother and non-wife in imagery which discusses the problem of defining her as a human and chooses to instead define her as an animal or monster. Clytemnestra also considers the roles of wife and mother herself and depicts herself in ways that remove her from these roles for her own purposes. Clytemnestra takes on the guise of a faithful wife to carry out the murder of Agamemnon and openly rejects the role of wife after the murder. Clytemnestra takes the expectations for wife and mother and uses them to carry out and justify her murder of Agamemnon. Both those opposed to Clytemnestra and Clytemnestra herself consider her in terms of the roles of wife and mother, showing how she does not fit into the proscribed roles. This separates Clytemnestra particularly from Orestes, allowing him to take vengeance against her.

The imagery of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* presents a specific conception of the family to denigrate those who fall outside the family's proscribed roles. This imagery excludes adulterers and mothers, depicting them as unnatural and not as a member of the family. Animals are used to symbolize both these broken relationships and to present what is left of the family as a whole.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE *ERINYES* IN THE *AGAMEMNON* AND THE *CHOEPHORI*

In the *Eumenides*, the trial decides issues of gender as well as Orestes' guilt because the opposition of Apollo and the *Erinyes* is also the opposition of the male and the female. As Zeitlin eloquently explains: "This schematization [i.e. the male-female] is especially marked in the confrontation between Apollo and the *Erinyes* in the *Eumenides*, where juridical and theological concerns are fully identified with male-female dichotomies."<sup>1</sup> Thus "the male" becomes defined by a specific set of beliefs and values, exemplified by Apollo and "the female" becomes defined by the *Erinyes*<sup>2</sup>. Because the *Erinyes* become equivalent with the female in the *Eumenides*, it is useful to explore how the *Erinyes* are portrayed before the trial and their identification with a specific set of values. Although the *Erinyes* are only physically present on stage in the final play, they appear in both the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* in imagery and finally in their unseen attack which maddens Orestes. Because the *Erinyes* become Orestes' opponents in the *Eumenides*, their use in the first two plays cannot be accidental. However, the first two plays do not simply give a glimpse of the *Erinyes* which will be embodied in the *Eumenides*, rather they present conflicting accounts which both contradict and correspond to the *Erinyes* of the final play.

Therefore, I will analyze the references to the *Erinyes* in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*, and try to answer the question "What are the *Erinyes*?" There are various parts of

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<sup>1</sup> Zeitlin "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*" in *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 87.

<sup>2</sup> The *Erinyes* are also emphatically opposed to the male and similar to Clytemnestra per Zeitlin: "For the devouring voracity of the Furies. . . represents both oral aggression against the child they should nourish and sexual predation against the male to whom they should submit." Zeitlin, "Misogyny," 97.

this question: What gods, if any, do the *Erinyes* work for? Who is avenged by the *Erinyes*? What sort of violations do the *Erinyes* avenge? To gauge the variety of *Erinyes* present in the first two plays, it is helpful to use the *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides* as a comparison. Thus the three previous questions can also be phrased: Are the *Erinyes* unallied with and opposed to the other gods? Do the *Erinyes* support Clytemnestra? Do the *Erinyes* avenge familial violence (violence between those related by blood and therefore not spousal violence)?<sup>3</sup> To organize my discussion, I have divided the passages in which the *Erinyes* appear into three thematic categories: the *Erinyes* and War, the *Erinyes* and the death of Agamemnon, and the *Erinyes* and Clytemnestra. In the *Erinyes* in War, I discuss passages in which the *Erinyes* are involved in the Trojan War. These *Erinyes* are markedly different from those in the *Eumenides* due to their association with male gods and non-familial violence. In the *Erinyes* and the death of Agamemnon, I discuss *Erinyes* which serve either as an anticipation of or a reaction to the death of Agamemnon. In the *Erinyes* and Clytemnestra, I analyze the *Erinyes* that are connected to Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon and are used to support Orestes' murder of Clytemnestra. These *Erinyes* are particularly rhetorical in character and are used to justify murder.

The differing portrayals of the *Erinyes* suggest that the conflict of genders can be resolved; the *Erinyes* do not have to be a force diametrically opposed to the male but rather can be incorporated into the male power system as agents of Zeus and Agamemnon. The *Erinyes* can support Agamemnon instead of Clytemnestra, Zeus and the other gods instead of being outcasts. The various natures of the *Erinyes* in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* provide an answer to the gender conflict.

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<sup>3</sup> Zeitlin describes the *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides*: "By the last play, through her representatives the *Erinyes*, the female principle is now allied with the archaic, primitive, and regressive, while the male, in the person of the young god Apollo, champions conjugality, society, and progress." Zeitlin, "Misogyny," 89.

## I. The *Erinyes* and War

In the *Agamemnon*, the *Erinyes* are often participants in the Trojan War. This association changes the gender of the association of the *Erinyes* by placing them in the domain of both human men as well as male gods. When they are involved in war, the *Erinyes* are no longer focused just on familial violence and are not always agents of vengeance. Instead, the *Erinyes* are used to signify just retaliation, especially that of Zeus.

Early in the *Agamemnon*, an *Erinyes* appears as an agent of the male gods. The *Erinyes* avenges the loss of the children of the vultures, which are a metaphor for Agamemnon and Menelaus who avenge Paris' xenia-violating adultery with Helen. This *Erinyes* is then allied with the male powers instead of the female and avenges both metaphorical familial violence and the actual violation of xenia, which is outside the concern of the *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides*. Thus, the first appearance of the *Erinyes* differs greatly from its counterparts in the *Eumenides*. The chorus describes the sending of the *Erinyes*:

Μενέλαος ἄναξ ἡδ' Ἀγαμέμνων,  
...  
μέγαν ἐκ θυμοῦ κλάζοντες Ἄρη  
τρόπον αἰγυπιῶν, οἷτ' ἐκπατίοις  
ἄλγεσι παίδων ὕπατοι λεχέων  
στροφοδινοῦνται  
περύγων ἐρετμοῖσιν ἐρεσσόμενοι,  
δεμνιοτήρη  
πόνον ὀρταλίχων ὀλέσαντες·  
ὕπατος δ' αἰὼν ἢ τις Ἀπόλλων  
ἢ Πᾶν ἢ Ζεὺς οἰωνόθροον  
γόνον ὀξυβόαν τῶνδε μετοίκων  
ὑστερόποινον  
πέμπει παραβᾶσιν Ἑρινύν.  
οὕτω δ' Ἀτρέως παῖδας ὁ κρείσσων  
ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πέμπει ξένιος  
Ζεὺς πολυάνορος ἀμφὶ γυναικὸς  
πολλὰ παλαίσματα καὶ γυιοβαρῇ

γόνατος κονίαισιν ἐρειδομένου  
διακναιομένης τ' ἐν προτελείοις  
κάμακος θήσων Δαναοῖσι  
Τρωσί θ' ὁμοίως. (Ag. 42, 48-67)

Lord Menelaus and Agamemnon. . . shouting a great war cry from their spirits like vultures, who wheel high above their nests, sped along by the rowing of their wings, with excessive pain, having lost the at home toil over their chicks. Some uppermost god, either Apollo, Pan, or Zeus perceiving the shrill, birdy wail of the foreigners (vultures) sends an *Erinys* avenging the transgression. Thus the stronger one, Zeus Xenios sends the sons of Atreus against Alexander, for the sake of a many-husbanded woman making many battles and weighting of the leaning knees into the dust in the offering of the scraped spear for both Danaans and Trojans.

The connection between the vultures, the *Erinys*, and Agamemnon and Menelaus is complex. Lebeck argues that Agamemnon and Menelaus are compared to the *Erinys*, but Goldhill asserts that in sending the *Erinys*, “Zeus now sends not eagles but avengers of the eagles.”<sup>4</sup> When we consider the *Erinys* only within the vulture simile, the source of the *Erinys* is a male god that could be Zeus. The *Erinys* is sent for the loss of children, presumably through violence. This *Erinys* then is concerned with the same issues as the *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides*, but is sent from an unexpected source: the gods which are the enemies of the *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides*. If we consider this *Erinys* to represent the Atreidae, as Lebeck suggests, the *Erinys* takes on new properties. The *Erinys* as the Atreidae is clearly sent from Zeus and also is concerned with adultery and the husband-wife relationship through the nature of Paris’ violation of *xenia*. This *Erinys* protects the rights of the husband, not the wife. The *Erinys* of Ag. 59-67 is allied with the male gods and is concerned with familial violence but also possibly adultery and *xenia*. Here, the

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<sup>4</sup>Anne Lebeck, *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 8. Simon Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The Oresteia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 14. Gagarin sees the conflict over Helen as a “sexual conflict” which would then give the *Erinys* a gendered nature. Michael Gagarin, *Aeschylean Drama* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976), 88-89.

*Erinyes* is a just response to a transgression which is committed by Paris and judged by the male gods.

Not only the *Erinyes*, but also their mother, Night, can be allied with Zeus. Zeus and Night work together to overthrow Troy:

ὦ Ζεῦ βασιλεῦ καὶ νύξ φίλῃα  
μεγάλων κόσμων κτεάτειρα,  
ἦτ' ἐπὶ Τροίᾳς πύργοις ἔβαλες  
στεγανὸν δίκτυον, ὥς μήτε μέγαν  
μήτ' οὖν νεαρῶν τιν' ὑπερτελέσαι  
μέγα δουλείας  
γάγαμον, ἄτης παναλώτου.  
Δία τοι ξένιον μέγαν αἰδοῦμαι  
τὸν τάδε πράξαντ' ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ  
τείνοντα πάλαι τόξον, (Ag. 355-64)

O king Zeus and dear night, ruler of great beauty, who has thrown on the gates of Troy a water-tight net, so that neither young nor old can escape the great net of slavery, of all-catching ruin. I am in awe of the great Zeus Xenios who enacted this against Paris, stretching back the bow.

Although Night and Zeus will become opposing forces during the trial, the former as the mother of the *Erinyes* and the latter as the power behind Apollo, during the Trojan War they are working together. Their function is to punish the Trojans and Paris, who have acted against Zeus. The pairing increases the sense that justice has been done because Zeus does not need to act alone against the transgressors. Thus, the mother of the *Erinyes* aids Zeus in the Trojan war and thereby in establishing his justice.

The connection of Zeus and Night has implications for the position of the *Erinyes* in relation to Zeus. Lebeck sees this pairing as only a foreshadowing: “Thus there is implicit here that harmonious union established at the end of the trilogy when Zeus and Night’s daughters, the

*Erinyes*, are once more reconciled.”<sup>5</sup> Because the chronology of Zeus and Night’s team effort is clearly placed before the trial and the time of the *Agamemnon*, I assert that the reconciliation has, in some sense already occurred. The partnership of both Night and Zeus and the *Erinyes* and Zeus during the Trojan War implies that the *Erinyes* are not naturally opposed to Zeus and that the reconciliation restores the *Erinyes* to their normal place as agents of Zeus. The pairing of Zeus and Night suggests that from birth the *Erinyes* are allied with Zeus and therefore are more appropriately agents of his justice rather than opponents.

Another *Erinyes* is an agent of Zeus in the Trojan War, again the agent of a male god and concerned with bloodshed outside of the family. Helen in her marriage to Paris is both an agent of Zeus Xenios and an *Erinyes*:

παρακλίνασ’ ἐπέκρανε  
 δὲ γάμου πικρὰς τελευτάς,  
 δύσεδρος καὶ δυσόμιλος  
 συμένα Πριαμίδαισιν,  
 πομπᾷ Διὸς ξενίου,  
 νυμφόκλαυτος Ἐρινύς. (Ag. 744-49)

Turning aside she made a bitter end to the marriage, coming to the sons of Priam bringing evil and hard to live with, sent by Zeus Xenios, an *Erinyes* bringing woe to brides.

Helen, as an agent of Zeus Xenios, is metaphorically an *Erinyes*.<sup>6</sup> This *Erinyes* supports the masculine power system, both divine and human, by avenging transgressions that involve adultery, bringing vengeance for Menelaus and other wronged husbands. The connection of the *Erinyes*, Helen, and Zeus Xenios makes the *Erinyes* a tool of vengeance of Agamemnon, not

<sup>5</sup> Lebeck, *O.*, 64.

<sup>6</sup> Conacher agrees with this connection. Although he renders “*Erinyes*” as “a curse,” Conacher also identifies Helen with the *Erinyes*, making her “the occasion, through her marriage with Paris, of Zeus’ wrath, and as the instrument for its accomplishment. Conacher, *O.*, 28. Goldhill, however, hesitates to make Helen the *Erinyes* and concludes this image represents “a confusion of motivation, of suspected divine causalities, a doubt as to the beginning of the pattern of cause and effect, crime and punishment.” Goldhill, *Language*, 64. I would rather see a reconfiguring of “divine causalities”; the *Erinyes* is purposely depicted not as an opponent of Zeus but as his agent. Fraenkel also hesitates to fully connect Helen to the *Erinyes*, seeing Helen as “a daemonic being”, “superhuman.” Fraenkel, *Ag.*, l. 749. The *Erinyes* are too important to the trilogy to merely signify a more than human nature, thus Helen should be considered as an *Erinyes* rather than any daemonic being.



Clytemnestra. In doing so, the concern of the *Erinys* is radically different from that of Clytemnestra's *Erinyes* in the *Eumenides*. This *Erinys* avenges adultery, which is seen as a violation of *xenia*, rather than familial violence. This difference from the *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides* suggests that the *Erinyes* can be part of Zeus' system of justice, rather than opposed to it. The *Erinys* instead causes familial violence; Paris' marriage to Helen brings her as an *Erinys* to destroy his family. This metaphor depicts the *Erinys* as an agent of Zeus and as concerned with adultery rather than familial murder. Helen as the *Erinys* is a just punishment for the wrongs of Paris and the Trojans.

The idea of war as a punishment meted out by the *Erinyes* also associates the *Erinyes* with Ares. The messenger uses the *Erinyes* and Ares to characterize the horrors of war. The *Erinyes* are here a masculine force concerned with the violence of war instead of familial violence. The news of the casualties of war is compared to a *paian* of the *Erinyes*:

ὅταν δ' ἀπευκτὰ πῆματ' ἄγγελος πόλει  
στυγνῶ προσώπῳ πτωσίμου στρατοῦ φέρῃ,  
πόλει μὲν ἔλκος ἐν τὸ δῆμιον τυχεῖν,  
πολλοὺς δὲ πολλῶν ἐξαγισθέντας δόμων  
ἄνδρας διπλῇ μάστιγι, τὴν Ἄρης φιλεῖ,  
δίλογχον ἄτην, φοινίαν ξυνωρίδα:  
τοιῶνδε μέντοι πημάτων σεσαγμένον  
πρέπει λέγειν παιᾶνα τόνδ' Ἑρινύων. (Ag. 638-45)

When a messenger brings the awful pain of the fallen army to the city with a hated face, that there is one public wound for the city, many men from many homes have been driven out with a double whip, Ares loves this, the two-fold folly, the bloody team of horses: however, the messenger appears to speak of a gathering-together of pains, this *paian* of the *Erinyes*.

The news of casualties is both a joy to Ares and a *paian* of the *Erinyes*. Ares enjoys the destruction, but for the people this news is connected to the *Erinyes*. Defeat in war is the result of

the *Erinyes*; the messenger sings a *paian* to them in celebration of their destructive powers.<sup>7</sup> In this passage, the *Erinyes* appear as agents of death somewhat analogous to Ares. The *Erinyes* are not concerned with familial violence but rather the violence of war. There is no mention of the *Erinyes* as agents of vengeance; they simply cause pain through destruction of the army. If the *Erinyes* must be agents of vengeance, it appears that the city has suffered defeat because of some act which angered the *Erinyes*. The *Erinyes* are not obviously agents of justice. The *Erinyes*, along with Ares, seem to delight in the pain of the people, which suggests that they are not simply objective punishers of the unjust. This passage complicates the nature of the *Erinyes*; they are not simply agents of Zeus who brought a deserved punishment to Troy, but also are associated with Ares and a delight in human suffering. Therefore, *Erinyes* are not unambiguous signifiers of the justice of an act.

## II. The *Erinyes* and the Death of Agamemnon

As the *Erinyes* were often used as a sign of the justice of the Trojan War, they are also used to suggest the justice of retributive violence. The *Erinyes* are associated with both the murder of Agamemnon and its effects; while many passages suggest that the death of Agamemnon was in part caused by the *Erinyes*, Orestes' speech in the *Choephoroi* asserts that Agamemnon's death produced *Erinyes*. Not all the *Erinyes* associated with Agamemnon's death are part of an explicit justification of murder; instead, the use of the *Erinyes* suggests that there are divine forces that respond to human actions with vengeance. However, the passages raise questions about the connections between divine and human actions (Did the *Erinyes* murder Agamemnon or did Clytemnestra?) and the connection between vengeance and justice (Can

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<sup>7</sup> A "*paian* of the *Erinyes*" is for Fraenkel a "blasphemous paradox." Eduard Fraenkel, *Aeschylus Agamemnon* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1962), l. 645.

Orestes commit matricide as vengeance for his father? Is Clytemnestra a force of vengeance against a sinful Agamemnon?).

In Ag. 457-74, the chorus mentions the *Erinyes* as they conclude speaking about the evils of the Trojan War, using the *Erinyes* as a punishment for unnamed wrong-doers. The context suggests that the wrong-doers could be the Atreidae. Here, the *Erinyes* are associated with reversal of fortune, death, and transgression:

βαρεῖα δ' ἄστων φάτις ξὺν κότῳ:  
δημοκράντου δ' ἄρ᾽ τίνει χρέος.  
μένει δ' ἀκοῦσαί τί μου  
μέριμνα νυκτηρέφες.  
τῶν πολυκτόνων γὰρ οὐκ  
ἄσκοποι θεοί. κελαι-  
ναὶ δ' Ἐρινύες χρόνῳ  
τυχηρὸν ὄντ' ἄνευ δίκας  
παλιντυχεῖ τριβᾷ βίου  
τιθεῖσ' ἀμαυρόν, ἐν δ' αἰ-  
στοῖς τελέθοντος οὔτις ἄλ-  
κά: τὸ δ' ὑπερκόπως κλύειν  
εὖ βαρύ: βάλλεται γὰρ ὅς-  
σοις Διόθεν κεραυνός.  
κρίνω δ' ἄφθονον ὄλβον:  
μήτ' εἶην πτολιπόρθης  
μήτ' οὔν αὐτὸς ἀλοὺς ὑπ' ἄλ-  
λων βίον κατίδοιμι. (Ag. 457-74)

The voice of the city is heavy with ill-will: it is the equivalent of a publicly ordained curse. Some care of the night remains to hear me, for they are not the aimless gods of the murderers. The black *Erinyes* enfeeble him who has been fortunate against justice, reversing his fortune and corroding his life and when he comes into the land of the unseen, he has no protection. And to be excessively praised is dangerous: The thunderbolt is thrown from the eyes of Zeus. I choose happiness without envy: let there not be sacking of cities, let me, conquered by others, not look down upon life.<sup>8</sup>

The *Erinyes* bring a reversal of fortune, death, to one who was fortunate but also has committed hubris. Although the assumed outcome of an attack of the *Erinyes* would be death, the result is

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<sup>8</sup>Conacher sees a transition from the justice of Zeus to the justice of the people in Ag. 456-7. D. J. Conacher, *Aeschylus' Oresteia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 23. Translation is from Alan H. Sommerstein, *Oresteia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) with adaptations.

often collateral damage such as war rather than the death of a single person (as in Ag. 59-67, Ag. 744-49, Ag. 1184-93). Here the vengeance reflects back on the wrong-doer; the arrival of the *Erinyes* is explained only with what translates literally as “it is heavy to hear well those overstepping their bounds.”<sup>9</sup> Thus the *Erinyes* attack someone who has committed hubris, which would be a personal wrong rather than something done to someone else and one that is reflected directly back on the wrong doer.<sup>10</sup> In Ag. 463-9, the *Erinyes* attack a single wrong-doer who has overstepped his bounds, suggesting that the crime they are concerned with is hubris. The actions of the *Erinyes* in this passage are clearly within the realm of justice- the *Erinyes* explicitly on the correct side of justice by not supporting murderers (Ag. 461-2), attack those who are on the wrong side of justice (Ag. 463-5) and act together with Zeus (Ag. 469-70).

Although the attack of the *Erinyes* is described as the result of a personal rather than communal violation, the context of the passage clarifies the hubris described and its effect on others. Within the context of the anti-Trojan war sentiments expressed by the chorus, the hubris is that of Agamemnon and Menelaus waging war, which affects the entire community. The anger of the people indicates that the people are avenged by the *Erinyes*. The *Erinyes*, bringing death after the Trojan War to punish those who waged it, serve as a counterpart to Ares, who brings death during the Trojan War, reducing the soldiers to ashes in urns (Ag. 438-444). The *Erinyes* are the divine force that can take lives after the war is over; Agamemnon and Menelaus were lucky in that they survived the Trojan War, but their luck will change when the *Erinyes* come to

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<sup>9</sup> Sommerstein gives “And to be excessively praised is dangerous.” Sommerstein, *Oresteia* (Harvard University Press), l. 468-9.

<sup>10</sup> Wheelwright connects the *Erinyes* to hubris, commenting “The arrogant [i.e. hubristic] man errs by overstepping, yes, but in terms of another metaphorical figure he upsets the natural balance of things, which must then be restored. . . . The *Erinyes*, too, are operative in this connection- only secondarily as ‘Furies,’ primarily as restorers of the order of nature.” Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 178.

kill them. The *Erinyes* are a response to the anger of the people about the Trojan War and they bring death to those who committed hubris in waging the war, Agamemnon and Menelaus.

If the attack of the *Erinyes* is directed against Agamemnon, is Clytemnestra part of this attack? There is nothing in the chorus' description of the *Erinyes* which overtly refers to Clytemnestra. Because of the chorus' antagonistic relationship with Clytemnestra and the fact the murder has not yet occurred, the chorus is not predicting that Clytemnestra is the answer to their anger. However, the fact that the *Erinyes* kill, punishing hubris makes Clytemnestra's involvement appropriate. It is Clytemnestra, not supernatural forces, who will bring an end to Agamemnon's life. Hubris is closely connected to Agamemnon's death; Clytemnestra tricks Agamemnon into committing an act of hubris by walking on the carpets, before she kills him.<sup>11</sup> Thus, although the *Erinyes* are overtly only forces against Agamemnon, they have a function similar to Clytemnestra.

The chorus again connects an *Erinys* to the death of Agamemnon at Ag. 988-1000. Although the murder has still not occurred, the reference to Agamemnon's death is clearer. The chorus characterizes the feeling of foreboding that strikes them after Clytemnestra and Agamemnon enter the house as a "dirge of the *Erinys*", connecting the *Erinys* to death from the sea and the death of Agamemnon:

πεύθομαι δ' ἀπ' ὀμμάτων  
νόστον, αὐτόμαρτυς ὢν:  
τὸν δ' ἄνευ λύρας ὅμως ὑμνωδεῖ  
θρῆνον Ἑρινύος αὐτοδίδακτος ἔσωθεν  
θυμός, οὐ τὸ πᾶν ἔχων  
ἐλπίδος φίλον θράσος.  
σπλάγχνα δ' οὔτοι ματᾶ-  
ζει πρὸς ἐνδίκους φρεσὶν

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<sup>11</sup> Fisher considers walking on the carpets and other images of "trampling on" or "kicking" beautiful and valuable 'objects' a violation of *χαρις*. N. R. E. Fisher, *Hybris* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1992), 272. Taplin terms the violation of walking on the carpets "hybristic" as well as "religious." Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 311.

τελεσφόροις δίναις κυκώμενον κέαρ.  
εὔχομαι δ' ἐξ ἐμᾶς  
ἐλπίδος ψύθη πεσεῖν  
ἐς τὸ μὴ τελεσφόρον. (Ag. 988-1000)

I know the return by my eyes, being my own herald<sup>12</sup>: my self-taught spirit from within likewise sings without a lyre the dirge of the *Erinyes*, having none of my own courage for hope. Thus the heart boils the inward parts with a just mind, stirred with end-bringing whirlpools. I pray without hope that the lie fall into nonfulfillment.

The dirge of the *Erinyes* is directly connected the νόστος of Agamemnon (Ag. 989).

Agamemnon's return home causes the chorus not joy but fear and uncertainty. The chorus seems to be afraid that Agamemnon has not really returned home safe, as they are focused on the danger that could have prevented his return; they must assure themselves that he has indeed returned (πεύθομαι δ' ἀπ' ὁμμάτων νόστον) and escaped the dangers of the sea. The sea is used by the chorus later as a general image of destruction: καὶ πότμος εὐθυπορῶν / ἀνδρὸς ἔπαισεν ἄφαντον ἔρμα. "The straight fate of man has hit the invisible reef." (Ag. 1005-6). The chorus connects the *Erinyes* to death from the sea.

Why does the chorus sing a dirge of the *Erinyes* out of fear of the sea? Although Agamemnon will not die because of shipwreck, his death can be connected to the sea. The simple explanation is that the bath, like the sea also has water. However, the connection with the sea is richer when we consider that Clytemnestra has also just spoken about the sea:

ἔστιν θάλασσα, τίς δέ νιν κατασβέσει;  
τρέφουσα πολλῆς πορφύρας ἰσάργυρον  
κηκίδα παγκαίνιστον, εἰμάτων βαφάς. (Ag. 958-60)

There is the sea, who can quench it? It nourishes an ever renewed gushing of much murex dye, worth its weight in silver, a stain for clothes.

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<sup>12</sup> This passage, with its focus on homecoming and heralding, seems to pick up from the reference to the Erinyes made by the herald who spoke a *paian* of the *Erinyes* (Ag. 638-45). Now the chorus are themselves a herald and the song has changed from a *paian* to a dirge. The herald's *Erinyes* brought death and so do those of the chorus: they sing a funerary song and make reference to the destructive power of the sea (τελεσφόροις δίναις). Thus, the chorus continues the herald's usage of the *Erinyes*.

Clytemnestra refers to the sea as the source of the dye of the carpets which Agamemnon has just walked on. Thus, the chorus' anxiety over the sea which they express using the *Erinys* is connected to Agamemnon's death. The reference to the *Erinys* here therefore expresses the chorus' foreboding of Agamemnon's death, which in a way does come from the sea. The chorus's feeling of foreboding incompletely reflects what will happen; they have a sense that Agamemnon will die, but incorrectly attribute his death to the forces of nature. However, the chorus does connect an *Erinys* to Agamemnon's death, suggesting that Clytemnestra will be a force of vengeance.

In Ag. 1114-24, the chorus asks about an *Erinys* in response to Cassandra's wild outburst foretelling the murder of Agamemnon. The chorus uses an *Erinys* to characterize what they see as Cassandra's vague evocation of destruction. Again, however, Agamemnon's murder is described as an act of vengeance. What kind of *Erinys* this is depends on what the chorus knows and is trying to clarify from Cassandra's cries; although the specific nature of the *Erinys* cannot be determined, the chorus' need to ask "What kind of *Erinys* is this?" shows that there can be more than one kind of *Erinys*. The chorus reacts to Cassandra's outcry:

Κασάνδρα  
ἐ ἔ, παπαῖ παπαῖ, τί τόδε φαίνεται;  
ἦ δίκτυόν τί γ' Ἄιδου;  
ἀλλ' ἄρκυς ἢ ξύνευνος, ἢ ξυναιτία  
φόνου. στάσις δ' ἀκόρετος γένει  
κατολολυξάτω θύματος λευσίμου.  
Χορός  
ποῖαν Ἑρινὺν τήνδε δώμασιν κέλη  
ἐπορθιάζειν; οὐ με φαιδρύνει λόγος.  
ἐπὶ δὲ καρδίαν ἔδραμε κροκοβαφῆς  
σταγών, ἅτε καιρία πτώσιμος  
ξυνανύτει βίου δύντος ἀνγαῖς:  
ταχεῖα δ' ἅτα πέλει. (Ag. 1114-24)

Cassandra: EEEE! AIII!!!! What is this? What net of Hades? But the consort, the hunter's net, sharing the blame for slaughter. Let the insatiate spirit of strife raise a cry of

triumph over the family for this sacrifice which merits stoning!

Chorus: What sort of *Erinys* do you urge to be set against the house? Your speech does not make it clear to me. Sallow drops ran into the heart, the same which, just as when men fall in battle, arrive there with the last setting rays of their life: there is swift bewilderment.<sup>13</sup>

The chorus mentions the *Erinys* as a way to clarify what Cassandra means. All the chorus can know is that Cassandra is predicting that some violence will occur in the house. They do not know that Cassandra is telling them that Clytemnestra will murder Agamemnon or even if Cassandra is referring to murder. Despite the fact that Cassandra has described the murder of Agamemnon twice before this passage (Ag. 1100-4, 1107-11), the chorus has responded by expressing confusion (Ag. 1105-6, 1112-3). After Cassandra's third description of the murder, the chorus may realize that Cassandra is speaking about murder. This knowledge could be expressed with their cryptic reference to death: ἄτε καιρία πτώσιμος; ξυνανύτει βίου δύντος αὐγαῖς. However, at the end, the chorus still expresses confusion: ταχεῖα δ' ἅτα πέλει. Therefore, the chorus asks about an *Erinys* in response to what they may know is murder, but they are unaware of the specifics of the act. Because the chorus is unclear about who has murdered whom in Cassandra's prophecy, I must disagree with Fraenkel who asserts "It is not likely that the Chorus is enquiring about the nature of the *Erinys*. . . The correct function of ποῖος [is] 'What do you mean by talking about this *Erinys*.'" <sup>14</sup> The chorus should, by now, be aware that some violence is predicted. They have also been alerted to a former event which could call up an *Erinys*, the feast of Thyestes (Ag. 1096-7). Although the chorus states their refusal to listen when Cassandra alludes to the feast, they notably do not say that they do not understand.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Translation taken from Sommerstein, *Oresteia* (Harvard University Press), l. 1114-24 with adaptations.

<sup>14</sup> Fraenkel, *Ag.*, l. 1119. The chorus has referenced the *Erinys* four times at this point in the play in various contexts, so it seems strange that they would object to Cassandra's usage of the *Erinys*.

<sup>15</sup> The chorus has made no reference to the curse of Atreus at this point, so we cannot be sure they understand. However, when Cassandra makes another reference to the feast of Thyestes, the chorus understands quickly (Ag. 1242-5). Whether they understand the reference to the feast of Thyestes, the chorus should have some awareness that Cassandra is describing violence.



Because the chorus is aware of two situations, the past feast of Thyestes and the current unspecified violent act, for which the *Erinys* is appropriate, the chorus is not asking Cassandra why she is talking about an *Erinys*, but what kind of *Erinys* she refers to. This question is important to understanding the mutable nature of the *Erinys*. If the chorus can ask this question, the nature of the *Erinys* is not fixed. Thus this passage implies that the concerns of the *Erinys* (adultery, familial murder) and their controllers (Agamemnon and Zeus, Clytemnestra) are not absolute in the *Agamemnon* and the entire trilogy.

Although the chorus has to ask about the nature of the *Erinys*, it is useful to consider the answer to this question, outside of the perspective of the chorus. However, the nature of this *Erinys* is still unclear; the *Erinys* could be an agent of vengeance for Clytemnestra, against Clytemnestra, or for the curse of Atreus. Fraenkel notes that the *Erinys* is somewhat defined because *στάσις* is analogous to *Ἐρινὺς*.<sup>16</sup> The source of the *στάσις* is, however, uncertain. If the *Erinys* is another way of envisioning Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra is represented by the *Erinys*. However, the *Erinys* could also be a result of the murder of Agamemnon, called up by the shedding of Agamemnon's blood against Clytemnestra. The *Erinys* could even also be a result of both the curse of Atreus and Clytemnestra. Cassandra mentions the feast of Thyestes directly before beginning speaking about the murder of Agamemnon (Ag. 1096-7). If the two events should be connected, Clytemnestra and the *Erinys* are both made part of the curse. Connecting the feast of Thyestes and the murder of Agamemnon is supported by Cassandra's use of the word "new" when she begins to speak about the murder:

τί τόδε νέον ἄχος μέγα  
μέγ' ἐν δόμοισι τοῖσδε μήδεται κακὸν  
ἄφερτον φίλοισιν, δυσίατον; (Ag. 1101-3).

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<sup>16</sup> Fraenkel, Ag., l. 1117, 1119.

What is this new pain so greatly brought about in the house, an unbearable evil against the family, hard to heal?

Cassandra connects the feast and the murder, seeing the murder as the next pain in the house of Atreus. Due to this connection, the *Erinys* can represent Clytemnestra as part of the curse of the house of Atreus. The *Erinys* is then a force directed against Agamemnon which avenges familial violence, particularly against children. Because the nature of the *Erinys* is uncertain, it can represent three different forces of vengeance: Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, or the curse working through Clytemnestra.

The chorus uses the word *Erinys* to describe what they understand from Cassandra's prophecy of Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon. Because the chorus is confused by the prophecy, they are indeed asking "What kind of *Erinys* is this?" This question shows that there can be different kinds of *Erinys*. In the *Agamemnon*, the *Erinys* is not tied to one concern or to being an agent of one person. Indeed, this *Erinys* can be an agent of Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, or the curse of Atreus, but the connection of the *Erinys* to the death of Agamemnon suggests that it is an act of vengeance.

Aegisthus ties together the *Erinyes*, the other gods, the curse of Atreus, and Agamemnon's death. Aegisthus sees the *Erinyes* as co-responsible with himself for the death of Agamemnon, which is the result of the curse of Atreus and approved by the gods. Thus, Aegisthus uses the *Erinys* to lend divine support to his act. Aegisthus celebrates Agamemnon's death:

φαῖν' ἂν ἤδη νῦν βροτῶν τιμώρους  
θεοὺς ἄνωθεν γῆς ἐποπτεύειν ἄχῃ,  
ιδὼν ὑφαντοῖς ἐν πέπλοις, Ἑρινύων  
τὸν ἄνδρα τόνδε κείμενον φίλως ἐμοί,  
χερὸς πατρώας ἐκτίνοντα μηχανάς.  
Ἄτρεὺς γὰρ ἄρχων τῆσδε γῆς, τούτου πατήρ,  
πατέρα Θυέστην τὸν ἐμόν, ὥς τορῶς φράσαι,

αὐτοῦ δ' ἀδελφόν, ἀμφίλεκτος ὢν κράτει,  
 ἡνδρηλάτησεν ἐκ πόλεώς τε καὶ δόμων.  
 καὶ προστρόπαιος ἐστίας μολὼν πάλιν  
 τλήμων Θυέστης μοῖραν ἡῦρετ' ἀσφαλῆ,  
 τὸ μὴ θανὼν πατρῷον αἰμάξαι πέδον,  
 αὐτός: ξένια δὲ τοῦδε δύσθεος πατήρ  
 Ἄτρεϋς, προθύμως μᾶλλον ἢ φίλως, πατρὶ  
 τῶμῳ, κρεουργὸν ἥμαρ εὐθύμως ἄγειν  
 δοκῶν, παρέσχε δαῖτα παιδείων κρεῶν. (Ag. 1578-1594)

Now it seems that the gods honored by mortals watch from on high the pains of the earth, seeing this man lying in the woven peplos of the *Erinyes* is a delight to me, who has paid for the paternal tricks himself. For Atreus the ruler of this land, Agamemnon's father, being powerful both ways, banished his brother, my father Thyestes, from his city and home. And coming again to the hearth as a suppliant, suffering Thyestes himself found an immovable fate, to not sully the fatherly land, dying. Father Atreus, hated by the gods for his hospitality towards him, with courage more than was good, to my father, seeming to make a day of good deeds with good intentions, served a feast of children's flesh.

Agamemnon lies dead in a *peplos* of the *Erinyes*; therefore the robe which bound Agamemnon in the bath is somehow connected to the *Erinyes*. By involving the *Erinyes* in the murder, Aegisthus tries to show that he was justified by the rules of retributive justice.<sup>17</sup> Aegisthus believes he deserved vengeance on Agamemnon for the crimes of his father Atreus; thus Aegisthus is also positioning the *Erinyes* as agents of the curse of Atreus. In addition, the crime of Atreus is described explicitly as a violation of *xenia*; Atreus misused the hospitality of the feast against Thyestes.<sup>18</sup> The *Erinyes* are thus an answer not to the murder of the children as much as the perversion of hospitality; Aegisthus believes that Atreus is hated by the gods for violation of *xenia*, not for murder. Aegisthus involves the *Erinyes* in the murder of Agamemnon, which makes them agents of the curse of Atreus as well as avengers of violations of *xenia*. The *Erinyes* also work with the other gods. Aegisthus believes the gods judged Atreus for his violation of *xenia* and watch his triumph over Agamemnon. The awareness of the gods implies that they

<sup>17</sup> Fraenkel notes that Aegisthus claims Agamemnon's death was carried out in concordance with the *Erinyes*. Fraenkel, *Ag.*, l. 1580.

<sup>18</sup> B. Hughes Fowler, "Aeschylus' Imagery," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 28 (1967): 27.

approve of the actions of Aegisthus and the *Erinyes* and have seen that Aegisthus deserved vengeance. Thus, the *Erinyes* do not work alone or in opposition to the other gods but are part of divine justice.<sup>19</sup> Aegisthus presents *Erinyes* who cause the death of Agamemnon, working with the other gods and as agents of the curse of Atreus to avenge violations of *xenia*. Thus, Aegisthus uses the *Erinyes* to support his vision of justice, in which he has defeated Agamemnon and avenged his father with the support of not only the *Erinyes* but also the other gods. Therefore, the *Erinyes* are rhetorically important in justifying acts of vengeance.

In *Ch.* 269-296, Orestes recounts Apollo's warning and gives the most explicit description of the *Erinyes* in the first two plays. These *Erinyes* will come from Agamemnon if Orestes does not avenge him, causing sickness and pollution. In their effects, these *Erinyes* are similar to those of the *Eumenides*, who threaten to send blight upon Attica. Like Aegisthus, however, Orestes uses the *Erinyes* to justify murder. Thus while these *Erinyes* resemble the nature of the *Erinyes* in the *Eumenides*, they serve the opposite rhetorical purpose of justifying matricide rather than condemning it. Orestes describes why he must avenge his father by killing Clytemnestra and Aegisthus:

οὔτοι προδώσει Λοξίου μεγασθενῆς  
 χρησμὸς κελεύων τόνδε κίνδυνον περᾶν,  
 κάξορθιάζων πολλὰ καὶ δυσχειμέρους  
 ἄτας ὑφ' ἧπαρ θερμὸν ἐξαυδόμενος,  
 εἰ μὴ μέτειμι τοῦ πατρὸς τοὺς αἰτίους:  
 τρόπον τὸν αὐτὸν ἀνταποκτεῖναι λέγων,  
 ἀποχρημάτοισι ζημίαις ταυρούμενον:  
 αὐτὸν δ' ἔφασκε τῇ φίλῃ ψυχῇ τάδε  
 τεῖσειν μ' ἔχοντα πολλὰ δυστερπῇ κακά.  
 τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐκ γῆς δυσφρόνων μηνίματα  
 βροτοῖς πιφαύσκων εἶπε, τὰς δ' αἰνῶν νόσους,  
 σαρκῶν ἐπαμβατῆρας ἀγρίαις γνάθοις  
 λειχῆνας ἐξέσθοντας ἀρχαίαν φύσιν:  
 λευκὰς δὲ κόρσας τῇδ' ἐπαντέλλειν νόσῳ:  
 ἄλλας τ' ἐφώνει προσβολὰς Ἐρινύων

<sup>19</sup> Fowler p. 27 sees the *Erinyes* as representative of vengeance which is *dike*, but not yet justice.

ἐκ τῶν πατρώων αἱμάτων τελουμένας:  
 τὸ γὰρ σκοτεινὸν τῶν ἐνεργέων βέλος  
 ἐκ προστροπαίων ἐν γένει πεπτωκότων,  
 καὶ λύσσα καὶ μάταιος ἐκ νυκτῶν φόβος  
 ὀρῶντα λαμπρὸν ἐν σκότῳ νωμῶντ' ὀφρὺν  
 κινεῖ, τaráσσει, καὶ διώκεσθαι πόλεως  
 χαλκηλάτῳ πλάστιγγι λυμανθὲν δέμας.  
 καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις οὔτε κρατῆρος μέρος  
 εἶναι μετασχεῖν, οὐ φιλοσπόνδου λιβός,  
 βωμῶν τ' ἀπείργειν οὐχ ὀρωμένην πατρὸς  
 μῆνιν: δέχεσθαι δ' οὔτε συλλύειν τινά.  
 πάντων δ' ἄτιμον κᾶφιλον θνήσκειν χρόνῳ  
 κακῶς ταριχευθέντα παμφθάρτῳ μόρῳ. (Ch. 269-296)

The strong oracle of Apollo, ordering me to drive right through this danger, will not betray me, crying aloud and speaking aloud wintery curses into my hot heart and many other things, if I do not seek those responsible for my father's death "in the same manner" – meaning, kill them in revenge. It said that I having many ill-pleasing evils should pay back these things for my own soul. It sadly spoke, making clear the causes of wrath against mortals from the earth, saying the sicknesses, the assailants of the flesh with savage jaws, the plagues letting out their ancient nature: to make the temples leprous with sickness: It spoke of the other attacks of the *Erinyes* revenging fatherly blood: the shady bolt of the netherworld falling on the race because of those who are polluted, together with madness and empty night-time terrors, derange him, harry him, and chase him from his city, physically humiliated by a metal collar. And the portion of the *krater* cannot be shared with these, nor a drop of the libations, the unseeing rage of the father bars them from the altars: nor can anyone accept them or host them. In time, they will die dishonored and unloved by all, evilly preserved for an awful fate.<sup>20</sup>

Orestes needs to kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus or face the attacks of his father's *Erinyes*. The attacks of the *Erinyes* have many consequences; Orestes will be affected physically and socially and his family will be affected as well. The *Erinyes* will cause both physical afflictions (Ch. 278-82) as well as giving Orestes a terrible death (Ch. 295-6). The attacks of the *Erinyes* will mean that Orestes is polluted and will not be able to have social contact or participate in religious ritual (Ch. 289-94). The *Erinyes* will render life unlivable for Orestes, unless he avenges his father. The *Erinyes* will also create what may be another ancestral curse, attacking "the race" and not Orestes alone (Ch. 285-6). Not only will Orestes be killed by the *Erinyes*, but also his family.

<sup>20</sup> Translation adapted from Sommerstein, *Oresteia* (Harvard University Press).

The *Erinyes* will attack Orestes unless he avenges his father, causing sickness, marking Orestes as polluted and thus unable to participate in society socially or religiously, and bringing death to “the race” which could be the beginning of another ancestral curse.<sup>21</sup>

Apollo takes great care to detail the horrors that will come from Orestes’ paternal *Erinyes*, but by the end of the *Choephoroi* he is attacked by the *Erinyes* of his mother. Does the appearance of the *Erinyes* of Clytemnestra call into question Apollo’s prophetic ability and this description of the *Erinyes*?<sup>22</sup> Conacher does not comment on any issues with the paternal *Erinyes*, but instead believes that this mention of the *Erinyes* aids Orestes’s case: “the full list of horrors included in Orestes’ quotation of the oracle is clearly designed to indicate the weight of supernatural compulsion on the prince and so exonerate him, in advance, from the unnatural deed of matricide.”<sup>23</sup> For Conacher, the actual nature of the *Erinyes* is unimportant; it is the severity of the punishment which will exonerate Orestes. Roberts argues against questioning Apollo’s warning, noting that Apollo has not said anything incorrect. Maternal *Erinyes* are not an issue because the warning “omits any reference to the results of obedience.”<sup>24</sup> Additionally, Orestes is not guaranteed to immediately go free of blame but must be exonerated in the trial.<sup>25</sup> Roberts believes that Apollo’s oracular powers are not refuted because the oracle does not say that Orestes will not be attacked by maternal *Erinyes* nor does it say that Orestes will be immediately free from blame. Goldhill, however, sees an important irony in the warning about paternal *Erinyes*: “The double bind finds ironic expression here in this fear of the *Erinyes*: it is his

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<sup>21</sup> Garvie, *Ch.*, l. 284.

<sup>22</sup> Certainly, Apollo cannot be proved wrong about the existence of paternal *Erinyes*; there is no occasion for them to appear since Agamemnon is avenged. Garvie points out that paternal *Erinyes* have a precedent in Hesiod, where the *Erinyes* are born from the blood of Uranus. Garvie, *Ch.*, l. 284.

<sup>23</sup> Conacher, *O.*, 107

<sup>24</sup> Deborah H. Roberts, *Apollo and his Oracle in the Oresteia* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 40.

<sup>25</sup> Roberts *Apollo*, 39.

mother's (not father's) blood which will set the Erinyes in motion.”<sup>26</sup> Goldhill still sees Orestes as compelled to murder his mother, but also sees Orestes' fears as incorrect. In conclusion, although Apollo cannot be faulted for giving an incorrect oracle, it is impossible not to notice the difference between the *Erinyes* Apollo describes and those which actually pursue Orestes.

The irony of paternal rather than maternal *Erinyes* is heightened by the similarity of the *Erinyes* described by Apollo to those of the *Eumenides*. The paternal *Erinyes* share the ability to inflict sickness and to cause infertility with the maternal *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides*. The maternal *Erinyes* also cause sickness, which can affect crops as well as humans:

ἐγὼ δ' ἄτιμος ἅ τάλαινα βαρύκοτος  
 ἐν γὰρ τᾷδε, φεῦ,  
 ἰὸν ἰὸν ἀντιπενθῇ  
 μεθεῖσα καρδίας, σταλαγμὸν χθονὶ  
 ἄφορον: ἐκ δὲ τοῦ  
 λειχὴν ἄφυλλος, ἄτεκνος,  
 ἰὼ δίκαια, πέδον ἐπισύμενος  
 βροτοφθόρους κηλίδας ἐν χώρᾳ βαλεῖ.

I, dishonored, wretched, heavy in wrath, in the earth, alas, send poison causing grief in turn from my heart, a barren drop for the earth: because of this drop a leafless, barren blight justly will strike the field bringing man-killing defilements into the land.

The λειχὴν has both agricultural and human elements; it causes barrenness in both plants (ἄφυλλος) and in humans (ἄτεκνος). The effect on humans is emphasized again; the blight is “man-killing” (βροτοφθόρους). The blight of the maternal *Erinyes* is similar to two different effects of the paternal *Erinyes*: the disease and the attack on the race. The disease of the paternal *Erinyes* is also a λειχὴν, although it only affects humans (*Ch.* 282). The attack on the race can be construed to have the same effect on fertility as the λειχὴν of the maternal *Erinyes*. The σκοτεινὸν τῶν ἐνεργέτων βέλος from the paternal *Erinyes* (*Ch.* 285) will bring death to Orestes' family just as the λειχὴν of the maternal *Erinyes* will end the Attic race. Thus the attacks of the

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<sup>26</sup> Goldhill, *Language*, 136.

paternal and maternal *Erinyes* both are described as a λειχήν and cause death to an entire race. Therefore, Apollo ironically seems to describe the *Erinyes* that will attack Orestes, except for their source.

### III. The *Erinyes* and Clytemnestra

The use of the *Erinyes* to condemn or justify actions is most evident in passages which deal with Clytemnestra. There is a clear conflict in how the *Erinyes* are presented; Clytemnestra invokes the *Erinyes* to justify her murder of Agamemnon, while others use the *Erinyes* to condemn Clytemnestra for her adultery and murder and to justify the murder of Clytemnestra. The *Erinyes* are a key part of the justification of vengeance for both Clytemnestra and those opposed to her.

Cassandra invokes the *Erinyes* in a way which condemns Clytemnestra's adultery. Cassandra uses the *Erinyes* to describe the curse infecting the house, making the adultery of Thyestes the source of the curse. The *Erinyes* are the curse personified:

καὶ μαρτυρεῖτε συνδρόμῳ ἵχνος κακῶν  
ρίνηλατούσῃ τῶν πάλαι πεπραγμένων.  
τὴν γὰρ στέγην τήνδ' οὐποτ' ἐκλείπει χορὸς  
ξύμφορος οὐκ εὐφωτος: οὐ γὰρ εὖ λέγει.  
καὶ μὴν πεπωκὼς γ', ὥς θρασύνεσθαι πλέον,  
βρότειον αἶμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει,  
δύσπεμπος ἔξω, συγγόνων Ἑρινύων.  
ὕμνοισι δ' ὕμνον δώμασιν προσήμεναι  
πρώταρχον ἄτην: ἐν μέρει δ' ἀπέπτυσαν  
εὐνὰς ἀδελφοῦ τῷ πατοῦντι δυσμενεῖς. (Ag. 1184-93)

And witness together the track of evils by tracking the deeds of long ago. For never does the chorus, sounded together, not sweet-voiced leave out this hate: for it is not good to say. But indeed drunkenly, so to be full of courage, the revel of the *Erinyes*, servants of the house, keeps the mortal blood in the houses, hard to banish outside. They sing a hymn, placing primal folly in the house: in measure they spit on the beds of the brother, hateful in their dance.



The curse is musical; the *Erinyes* enact the curse by singing. Thus, the curse becomes associated with ritual; Lebeck notes that this passage describes the *komos* following a feast.<sup>27</sup> This would be entirely appropriate for the source of the curse if Cassandra saw the cause of this *Erinyes* infestation as the feast of Thyestes, but instead the source is Thyestes' adultery. Lebeck sees Atreus as partially involved: "The *Erinyes*, drunk on the blood spilled by Atreus, chant the guilt of Thyestes which called forth such vengeance."<sup>28</sup> Thus the blood is from Atreus, but the guilt the *Erinyes* are concerned with is Thyestes'. Cassandra explicitly makes the concern of the *Erinyes* adultery rather than familial murder. The *Erinyes* as avengers of adultery affect the next generation as well; Conacher believes that "Aegisthus. . . [inherits] the hatred of the *Erinyes* along with the adulterous and treasonous character of his father."<sup>29</sup> Therefore the curse of the *Erinyes* is directed against the line of Thyestes, not that of Atreus, and stems from adultery. Cassandra uses the *Erinyes* to represent the curse of Thyestes, which manifests itself in the adultery of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Cassandra has presented her own interpretation of the curse through the *Erinyes*, using them as a call for vengeance.

Although the *Erinyes* has been an agent of her enemies, Clytemnestra also claims the *Erinyes* as a supporter of her murder of Agamemnon. Clytemnestra uses an *Erinyes* to justify her murder of Agamemnon:

καὶ τήνδ' ἀκούεις ὀρκίων ἐμῶν θέμιν:  
 μὰ τὴν τέλειον τῆς ἐμῆς παιδὸς Δίκην,  
 Ἄτην Ἐρινύν θ', αἵσι τόνδ' ἔσφαξ' ἐγώ, (Ag. 1431-3)

And you hear the swearing of my oath: by the finishing justice of my child, Folly and the *Erinyes*, I slaughtered him with curses.

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<sup>27</sup> Lebeck, *O.*, 56.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Conacher, *O.*, 45.

An *Erinys* like those of the *Eumenides* is perfectly appropriate for Clytemnestra to swear by; such an *Erinys* is allied with female forces, supports retributive justice, and is concerned with familial violence.<sup>30</sup> The eventual appearance of the *Erinyes* confirms Clytemnestra's oath. However, the previous references to *Erinyes* in support of Agamemnon complicate the oath; because we cannot be sure what the *Erinyes* are, we cannot be sure that Clytemnestra has made a proper oath.<sup>31</sup> Clytemnestra views the *Erinys* as a supporter of her murder of Agamemnon, but the previous references to the *Erinyes* suggest that they could instead be opposing forces. Clytemnestra, in her oath, calls on an *Erinys* similar to those who will appear in the *Eumenides*. Beyond the actual nature of the *Erinys*, Clytemnestra views the *Erinys* as a rhetorical tool to justify her actions.

Electra and the chorus call on both Zeus and an *Erinys*, linking the *Erinys* to masculine powers, to help them kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Electra evokes Zeus, while the chorus calls on the *Erinys*:

Ἡλέκτρα  
καὶ πότ' ἂν ἀμφιθαλῆς  
Ζεὺς ἐπὶ χεῖρα βάλοι,  
φεῦ φεῦ, κάρανα δαΐζας;  
πιστὰ γένοιτο χώρα.  
δίκαν δ' ἐξ ἀδίκων ἀπαιτῶ.  
κλῦτε δὲ Γᾶ χθονίων τε τιμαί.  
Χορός  
ἀλλὰ νόμος μὲν φονίας σταγόνας  
χυμένας ἐς πέδον ἄλλο προσαιτεῖν  
αἶμα. βοᾷ γὰρ λοιγὸς Ἑρινὺν  
παρὰ τῶν πρότερον φθιμένων ἄτην  
ἐτέραν ἐπάγουσαν ἐπ' ἄτη. (*Ch.* 394-404)

<sup>30</sup> Fraenkel notes "Naturally Clytemnestra swears her very special oath by three 'Sondergötter' suited to her particular situation." Fraenkel, *Ag.*, l. 1432 f. This *Erinys* can even be an agent of Zeus, like previous *Erinyes*; Conacher notes the influence of Zeus: "the use of τέλειος with δίκη already suggests that the Justice of Zeus . . . is at least a coadjutor in the murder." Conacher, *O.*, 50. The involvement of Zeus suggests that Zeus and Clytemnestra are not opposing forces- is Zeus then no longer a supporter of Agamemnon?

<sup>31</sup> Goldhill thinks Clytemnestra undermines the sanctity of her oath when she "adds Ἄτην and Ἑρινὺν to Δίκην, both of which we have seen to be unclear, shifting causal agents." Goldhill, *Language*, 91.

Electra: And when will Zeus, blooming on both sides, strike with his hand, alas alas, breaking the head? Let the trusted things come to the land. I demand justice from the unjust. Hear me Earth and honored chthonic ones.

Chorus: But the law also asks for more blood in exchange for the bloody drops pouring into the earth. Havoc calls an *Erinyes* bringing more destruction upon destruction for those who perished before.

Electra calls on Zeus and chthonic powers, which could include an *Erinyes*. The chorus then completes the connection by speaking of the *Erinyes*. Therefore, Electra and the chorus want Zeus and the *Erinyes* to work together to defeat Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Because of the emphasis on the chthonic, the *Erinyes* should not be seen as becoming Olympian through connection with Zeus. Electra and the chorus see the destruction of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus as supported by both chthonic and Olympian powers and as justice. This type of reciprocal justice is associated with the *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides*, but is the kind that must be done away with.<sup>32</sup> Although the *Erinyes* is called on to support Electra and the chorus, its support may not allow the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus with impunity. However, the chorus and Electra believe that they deserve divine help to defeat Clytemnestra.

Orestes envisions an *Erinyes* feasting on the blood of Aegisthus, using the *Erinyes* to justify the violence. The blood does not spur the *Erinyes* to vengeance, but is instead a reward of vengeance:

εἰ δ' οὖν ἀμείψω βαλὼν ἐρκείων πυλῶν  
κάκεϊνον ἐν θρόνοισιν εὐρήσω πατρός,  
ἢ καὶ μολὼν ἔπειτά μοι κατὰ στόμα  
ἄρεϊ, σάφ' ἴσθι, καὶ κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς βαλεῖ,  
πρὶν αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν 'ποδαπὸς ὁ ξένος;' νεκρὸν  
θήσω, ποδώκει περιβαλὼν χαλκεύματι.  
φόνου δ' Ἑρινὺς οὐχ ὑπεσπανισμένη  
ἄκρατον αἷμα πίεται τρίτην πόσιν. (Ch. 572-8)

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<sup>32</sup> Many commentators find this presentation of the *Erinyes* representative of a problematic form of justice. Lebeck notes the endless violence and connects this passage to the appearance of the *Erinyes* in the *Eu*. Lebeck, *O.*, 101. Garagin notes that the *Erinyes* represent "bloodshed, for which . . . there is no remedy" Garagin, *Aeschylean Drama*, 74. Goldhill sees the mention of the *Erinyes* as an "ironic forewarning." Goldhill, *Language*, 145.

If, therefore, I cross the threshold of the front gates and find him sitting in the throne of my father, or then coming to me he faces me, let it be clear, and striking him with my eyes, before he can say “Where are you from, stranger?” I will kill him, striking him with swift bronze. The *Erinys* not filled with slaughter will drink a triple cup of unmixed blood.

By associating the *Erinys* with the murder of Aegisthus, Orestes claims that his act is one of vengeance. This vengeance can either be for Agamemnon in a political sense, if Aegisthus is seen as a usurper of the throne, for adultery with Clytemnestra, or for the murder of Agamemnon. Although it is clear in the *Agamemnon* that Clytemnestra was the sole perpetrator of the murder, the pair is held jointly responsible in the *Choephoroi*. Only if Orestes holds Aegisthus responsible for the murder of Agamemnon is the *Erinys* a representation of reciprocal violence. Otherwise, Orestes answers a non-violent act with violence under the guise of the vengeance of the *Erinys*. The previous connections of the *Erinyes* and *xenia* make Orestes’ justification of killing Aegisthus as he is being offered hospitality tenuous. Orestes may see the vengeance of the *Erinys* overcoming the prohibitions of *xenia*. The *Erinys* hungry for slaughter and drinking blood ties vengeance to food, which can be a part of hospitality. Orestes believes he will feed an *Erinys* which demands justice from Aegisthus. However, the *Erinys* may not be an adequate justification for his act. Thus, Orestes deploys the *Erinys* not because it is an appropriate context for their narrowly defined vengeance, but as a general justification of his act of vengeance.

In *Ch.* 639-51, the chorus connects the justice of Zeus to the *Erinys*. Directly after contemplating the importance of honoring Zeus, the chorus speaks about the vengeance of an *Erinys*:

τὸ δ’ ἄγχι πλευμόνων ξίφος  
διανταίαν ὀξυπευκὲς οὐτᾶ  
διαὶ Δίκας. τὸ μὴ θέμις γὰρ οὖν  
λὰξ πέδοι πατούμενον, τὸ πᾶν Διὸς

σέβας παρεκβάντος οὐ θεμιστῶς.  
Δίκας δ' ἐρείδεται πυθμὴν:  
προχαλκεύει δ' Αἴσα φασγανουργός:  
τέκνον δ' ἐπείσφerei δόμοισιν  
αἱμάτων παλαιτέρων τίνειν μύσος  
χρόνῳ κλυτὰ βυσσόφρων Ἑρινύς. (Ch. 639-51)

The sharp-pointed sword extends through the lungs with a wound by justice. It is not right to walk with the heel on the ground, deviating not rightly from the honor of Zeus. The sword props justice at its foundation.<sup>33</sup> The lot-dispensing sword maker forges the sword beforehand: The glorious, deep-thinking *Erinys* brings the child to pay for the defilement of ancient blood in time.

The sword ties together Zeus and the *Erinys*. The wound dealt by the sword is just. The next statement also concerns justice and explains why the wound needed to be given; the wounded one did not correctly honor Zeus. The next sentence connects justice, the sword, and the *Erinys*. The sword is an instrument of vengeance, just as the *Erinys* is. The act of violence carried out with the sword is supported by the *Erinys* and they together avenge a wrong which is both against Zeus and involves ancient blood. Thus the *Erinys* is an agent of Zeus and Zeus's justice involves blood guilt. Goldhill believes that this passage refers to Orestes; if so, Orestes' murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is an act that punishes Clytemnestra and Aegisthus for not honoring Zeus and is supported by an *Erinys*.<sup>34</sup> Thus Orestes works with the *Erinys*, not against it. This passage therefore connects the *Erinys* to both Orestes and Zeus, justifying Orestes' actions by claiming he is supported by two different divine forces.

At the end of the *Choephoroi*, Orestes and the chorus discuss the nature of the *Erinyes* which have just appeared to Orestes. Orestes recognizes that the *Erinyes* are from Clytemnestra but the chorus believes that the *Erinyes* are the product of a mental disturbance which can be cleansed by Apollo:

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<sup>33</sup> Translation of this sentence is Burnett's. Anne Pippin Burnett, *Revenge in Attic and Later Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 64.

<sup>34</sup> Goldhill, *Language*, 162-163.

Ὀρέστης  
οὐκ εἰσὶ δόξαι τῶνδε πημάτων ἐμοί:  
σαφῶς γὰρ αἶδε μητρὸς ἔγκοτοι κύνες.  
Χορός  
ποταίνιον γὰρ αἶμά σοι χεροῖν ἔτι:  
ἐκ τῶνδ' εἰς τοὶ ταραγμὸς ἐς φρένας πίτνει.  
Ὀρέστης  
ἄναξ Ἄπολλον, αἶδε πληθύνουσι δὴ,  
κάξ ὀμμάτων στάζουσιν αἶμα δυσφιλές.  
Χορός  
εἷς σοὶ καθαρμός: Λοξίας δὲ προσθιγῶν  
ἐλεύθερόν σε τῶνδε πημάτων κτίσει.  
Ὀρέστης  
ὕμεις μὲν οὐχ ὁρᾶτε τάσδ', ἐγὼ δ' ὁρῶ:  
ἐλαύνομαι δὲ κοῦκέτ' ἂν μείναιμ' ἐγὼ.  
Χορός  
ἀλλ' εὐτυχοίης, καὶ σ' ἐποπτεύων πρόφρων  
θεὸς φυλάσσοι καιρίοισι συμφοραῖς. (Ch. 1053-64)

Orestes: These are not phantoms of my pains: these clearly are the malignant hounds of my mother.

Chorus: Still there is fresh blood on your hands: this is why madness falls into your mind.

Orestes: Lord Apollo, they multiply, and they drip hateful blood from their eyes.

Chorus: There is one cleanser for you: Loxias by touching you he will make you free from these pains.

Orestes: You do not see them: I see them: I am driven out and I cannot remain.

Chorus: But you did well, and the god, seeing ahead, watching guards you from appropriate misery.

Does this appearance of the *Erinyes* outweigh everything that has been said about them before?

Roberts believes that Apollo's ability to help Orestes is undermined by the appearance of the

*Erinyes*.<sup>35</sup> Apollo's warning, which Orestes recites at Ch. 269-296, seems to have misled

Orestes; instead of being hounded by the *Erinyes* of his father, he is attacked by the *Erinyes* of

his mother. However, although Apollo's warning would seem to be contradicted by this

appearance of the *Erinyes*, there is no reason for the *Erinyes* of Agamemnon to appear because

Orestes has avenged him. Thus Apollo's warning seems disingenuous due to the appearance of

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<sup>35</sup> Roberts, *Apollo*, 67.

the *Erinyes* of Clytemnestra, but is not disproven.<sup>36</sup> Apollo's oracular powers are not disproved by the appearance of these *Erinyes*, but that does not guarantee he will be able to help Orestes. The chorus certainly believes that Apollo will be able to help Orestes, but they also misunderstand the nature of the *Erinyes*. Is the chorus wrong in trusting in Apollo, as Roberts insinuates? The chorus, although they see the *Erinyes* as madness rather than as physically present, are not wrong that Apollo will be able to cleanse Orestes. Although the *Erinyes* will question the possibility of this cleansing in the *Eumenides*, Orestes claims that he has been cleansed by Apollo and his freedom from pollution and guilt is confirmed in the trial. Thus, the appearance of the *Erinyes* of Clytemnestra is a surprise which previous references to the *Erinyes* have not prepared us for. However, the physical presence of the *Erinyes* does not negate the chorus' belief that Apollo can cleanse Orestes, nor does it negate previous statements made about the *Erinyes*, especially Apollo's warning to Orestes.

There are many different *Erinyes* in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*. Although the *Erinyes* will appear on stage in the *Eumenides*, the *Erinyes* of the first two plays do not always resemble the *Erinyes* of the final play. Both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus see the *Erinyes* as their co-agents in the murder of Agamemnon, but the *Erinyes* are also described as agents of vengeance for Agamemnon. The *Erinyes* of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* are concerned with not only with familial murder, but also spousal murder and xenia. The variety of *Erinyes* suggests that the *Erinyes* do not have to be as they appear in the *Eumenides*, but they can have a different nature. The varying nature of the *Erinyes* is also due to their status as a rhetorical tool to justify actions of vengeance. The defeat and the transformation of the *Erinyes* is necessary to restore a nature where they support the justice of the Zeus and provide justice for a broader range

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<sup>36</sup> Garvie "Orestes thought of the πῆματα that awaited him if he failed to avenge his father. Now he is to suffer them through obedience to Apollo's oracle." Garvie, *Ch.*, l. 1053.

of issues. The *Erinyes* of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* suggest an alternative to the *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides*' separate system of justice.



## CHAPTER 3

### GENDER ON TRIAL: THE *EUMENIDES*

In the *Eumenides*, the rhetoric of gender explored in the previous two plays is confirmed by the verdict of the trial. Apollo argues for the male single parent as biological fact and the importance of the marital bond, making concepts of gender a deciding factor in the trial. The *Erinyes*, however, do not deal with the opposition of the male and female, but instead are concerned primarily with pollution. Apollo's rhetorical success comes from his use of gender in his argumentation; he can sway Athena with his assertion of masculine power and the *Erinyes* cannot counter his argument because they do not address such issues. To explore the rhetoric of the trial, I will look at the nature of the *Erinyes* and connect this nature to their focus on pollution. The *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides* are different from all the previous *Erinyes* because they are separated from the other gods. This separation is defined in terms of the difference between chthonic and Olympian ritual and the bloody nature of the *Erinyes*. These two components suggest that the *Erinyes* cannot take part in the society or rituals of the other gods because they are polluted.<sup>1</sup> The nature of the *Erinyes*, then, both influences their argument and also allows their assertions of Orestes' pollution to be discounted. Apollo answers the *Erinyes*' claims of

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<sup>1</sup> Burkert explains the difference between purity and pollution: "The conception of specifically cultic purity is defined by considering certain more or less grace dislocations of normal as *miasma*. Disturbances of this kind are sexual intercourse, birth, death, and especially murder. *Hagnos* in the exemplary sense therefore applies to whoever shuns contact with blood and death, especially the virgin." The *Erinyes* are associated with murder, are constantly in contact with blood, and live in the underworld with the dead, all which deny them ritual purity and label them as polluted. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) 78. In addition, Parker states "the pollution [of the murderer] is the blood of his victim clinging to his hands." The transfer of pollution to others comes through contact; the *Erinyes* come in contact with the murderer when they pursue him. The bloody imagery of the *Erinyes* then depicts them not as avengers, but murderers themselves. Robert Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 106.

Orestes' pollution with claims of the *Erinyes*' pollution.<sup>2</sup> With the issue of pollution seemingly in deadlock, Apollo succeeds by bringing in the new issues of gender: the male as the only parent and the importance of marriage. The former argument is especially convincing to Athena, who is Apollo's example, and thus secures Orestes' acquittal. I will first look at the nature of *Erinyes* as polluted and separated from the other gods, and connect these factors to the *Erinyes*' argument, which I will establish as concerned with pollution but indifferent to gender. Then I will look at Apollo's answers to the *Erinyes* to establish what I have described as the rhetorical deadlock. Finally, I will look at the success of Apollo's arguments on gender based both on their connection to the rhetoric of gender in the previous two plays and his arguments' effect on Athena.

The *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides* are unique in their separation from the other gods, which is due to the *Erinyes*' disgusting nature. The separation can be both physical- the *Erinyes* live under the earth, far from the Olympian gods- and connected to ritual – the *Erinyes* are worshipped differently from the Olympians and also unfit to enter the temple of Apollo.<sup>3</sup> Both forms of separation are necessitated by the disgusting nature of the *Erinyes*, which I will argue is related to blood pollution. The *Erinyes* are polluted in two ways; they are by nature bloody and connected to human violence and their separation from the gods is the same which Orestes would suffer if he were polluted. To explore the polluted nature of the *Erinyes*, I will first analyze the passages in which the *Erinyes* are both described as disgusting and banned from the

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<sup>2</sup> Lebeck notes that the *Erinyes* suffer the same torments promised to Orestes if he did not avenge his father. Clearly, there is an intentional parallel between the *Erinyes* and Orestes. Anne Lebeck, *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 140-1.

<sup>3</sup> Worship of the *Erinyes* is a creation of Aeschylus; Brown asserts that "there is very little evidence for the worship of the *Erinyes*, as we know them from literature, at any time or place. . . to the mind of a fifth-century Athenian, *Eumenides* and *Semnai Theai* would have been creatures of local cult and popular belief, while *Erinyes* would have been mainly, if not exclusively, creatures of myth and literature." A. L. Brown, "Eumenides in Greek Tragedy," *The Classical Quarterly* 34 no. 2 (1984), 265.

presence of the Olympian gods. Second, I will further establish their separation by looking at passages which explore the difference in worship of the *Erinyes* and the Olympians.

The *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides* are markedly different from the *Erinyes* of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* because they do not interact with the other gods.<sup>4</sup> The *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides* cannot be divided into masculine and feminine forces as they were in the previous two plays because that division was based on their association with other gods. The association of the *Erinyes* with the male gods, particularly Zeus, made them into a masculine force. Therefore, the *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides*, which associate with no other gods, cannot be a masculine force in this way. In addition, even the *Erinyes* of the previous plays which were a feminine, pro- Clytemnestra force, are associated with other gods. Clytemnestra invoked an *Erinyes* with *Dike* and *Ate* (*Ag.* 1431-3) and Aegisthus, although attempting to take credit for Clytemnestra's actions, saw the *Erinyes* working with the other gods to defeat Agamemnon (*Ag.* 1578-1594). The *Erinyes* of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*, therefore, are always connected to other deities. The *Erinyes* of the *Eumenides*, however, are completely separate. This separation prepares us for the reconciliation of the Olympian gods which occurs when the *Erinyes* are turned into *Eumenides*. The description of the separation in terms of ritual pollution undermines the *Erinyes*' assertion of Orestes' pollution, leading to their defeat and transformation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1949), 186-7.

<sup>5</sup> Solmsen sees the transformation of the *Erinyes* as coming from their ability to "rise above [the] motives" of "blood lust and blood thirst." Rather, the *Erinyes* cannot escape their own nature or overcome the obstacles that prevent them from associating with the Olympians without their defeat. Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus*, 199.

In their first description by the Pythia, the *Erinyes* are both disgusting and separated from the gods. Both their disgusting physical nature and their separation are the result of pollution.

The Pythia describes *Erinyes* which cannot be approached nor can approach others:<sup>6</sup>

ρέγκουσι δ' οὐ πλατοῖσι φυσιάμασιν:  
ἐκ δ' ὀμμάτων λείβουσι δυσφιλῇ λίβα:  
καὶ κόσμος οὔτε πρὸς θεῶν ἀγάλματα  
φέρειν δίκαιος οὔτ' ἐς ἀνθρώπων στέγας. (Eu. 55-6)

They're pumping out snores that one doesn't dare come near, and dripping a loathsome drip from their eyes: and their apparel is fitting to be worn neither near the statues of the gods nor into the houses of men.<sup>7</sup>

The physical nature of the *Erinyes* keeps others away from them, while their apparel prevents them from coming near the statues of the gods and entering into human society. The *Erinyes*, then, should not come into the temple of Apollo. The physical description of the *Erinyes* is not specifically connected to either their separation or miasma, but it can refer to the bloody aspect of the *Erinyes*. The snores certainly only make the *Erinyes* repugnant in a somewhat questionable manner (it is unclear how a snore is unapproachable, although Sommerstein suggests “This may be taken as referring to the frightening sound, or the smell of their breath, or both.”)<sup>8</sup>, but the drip from the eyes most likely is blood.<sup>9</sup> Since this possible reference to blood is sandwiched between other reasons why there can be no contact with the *Erinyes*, it is sensible to

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<sup>6</sup> Goldhill sees the *Erinyes* in entirely different terms, but does remark on both gender and their relation to Orestes. Goldhill notes “Entrance to the temples of the gods and the houses of men is again stated as a criterion of recognition, acceptance- banishment from which Orestes feared. . . The *Erinyes*’ lack of one parent, the father, their non-participation in sexual exchange, mark their separation from human society. Thus, the *Erinyes* represent one outcome of Orestes’ conviction and must be separated because they do not fulfill the correct female roles of paternal daughter and wife. William Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The Oresteia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 211.

<sup>7</sup> Translations are from Alan Sommerstein, *Aeschylus vol. II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) with some additions of my own.

<sup>8</sup> Alan Sommerstein, *Aeschylus vol. II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), l. 55 n.

<sup>9</sup> This does require a combination of passages. The *Erinyes* are commonly described as dripping, but the fluid is not always described. However, in *Eu.* 365-6, the *Erinyes* drip blood, but not from their eyes. However, the *Erinyes* of *Ch.* 1058 do drip blood from their eyes. Garvie discusses the appropriateness of this image. A.F. Garvie, *Choephori* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), l. 1058.

include their bloody nature among the aspects which keep them separate. This bloody nature is not incompatible with seeing the robes of the *Erinyes* as funerary<sup>10</sup>; the blood and the black robes both can be a result of the *Erinyes*'s connection with murder. Thus, the *Erinyes*, as described by the Pythia, must be separated from the worship of the gods because they are contaminated by blood. This contamination can be extrapolated from the physical description of the *Erinyes*.

Apollo explicitly connects the “defilement” of the *Erinyes* to their prohibition from his temple. The cause of this defilement can be found in Apollo's connection of the *Erinyes* to blood and to murderous acts which would cause miasma. Apollo casts out the *Erinyes* and describes their objectionable nature:

ἔξω, κελεύω, τῶνδε δωμάτων τάχος  
χωρεῖτ', ἀπαλλάσσεσθε μαντικῶν μυχῶν,  
μὴ καὶ λαβοῦσα πτηνὸν ἀργηστήν ὄφιν,  
χρυσηλάτου θώμιγος ἐξορμώμενον,  
ἀνῆς ὑπ' ἄλγους μέλαν' ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ἀφρόν,  
ἐμοῦσα θρόμβους οὓς ἀφείλκυσας φόνου.  
οὗτοι δόμοισι τοῖσδε χρίμπεσθαι πρέπει:  
ἀλλ' οὗ καρανιστῆρες ὀφθαλμωρύχοι  
δίκαι σφαγαί τε σπέρματός τ' ἀποφθορᾶ  
παίδων κακοῦται χλοῦνις, ἡδ' ἀκρωνία,  
λευσμὸς τε, καὶ μύζουσιν οἰκτισμὸν πολὺν  
ὑπὸ ῥάχιν παγέντες. ἄρ' ἀκούετε  
οἷας ἐορτῆς ἔστ' ἀπόπτυστοι θεοῖς  
στέργηθρ' ἔχουσαι; πᾶς δ' ὑφηγεῖται τρόπος  
μορφῆς. λέοντος ἄντρον αἵματορρόφου  
οἰκεῖν τοιαύτας εἰκός, οὐ χρηστηρίοις  
ἐν τοῖσδε πλησίοισι τρίβεσθαι μύσος.  
χωρεῖτ' ἄνευ βοτῆρος αἰπολούμεναι.  
ποίμνης τοιαύτης δ' οὐτις εὐφιλῆς θεῶν. (*Eu.* 179-97)

Out, I tell you, get out of this house at once! Get away from my inner prophetic sanctum, in case you find yourself on the receiving end of a winged flashing snake speeding from

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<sup>10</sup> Sommerstein notes that the funerary nature of such clothing would make it inappropriate as well as inauspicious to wear in a temple. Alan Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1. 55.

my golden bowstring, and vomit out in agony black foam taken from human bodies, bringing up the clots of blood that you have sucked. They are not able to approach this home: you belong where there are head-chopping, eye-gouging judgments and slaughters, where eunuchs are punished by the destruction of their children's seed, where there is mutilation of extremities and stoning, and where men moan with long and piteous cries after being impaled under the spine. Do you hear what kind of festivity, detestable to the gods, you have a fondness for? It is proper for these creatures to inhabit the den of the blood-drinking lion, but not proper for them to spread defilement in this oracle. Let these goats tended without a herdsman withdraw.<sup>11</sup> None of the gods is friendly towards this flock.

Like the Pythia, Apollo believes the *Erinyes* do not belong in his temple. Apollo, however, in explaining why he bans them, speaks not of their clothing but of defilement.<sup>12</sup> This defilement (μύσος) is undefined but its nature can be drawn from Apollo's other comments about the *Erinyes*. The *Erinyes* are physically bloody, belong in bloody homes, and are connected to violent punishment. The *Erinyes* have sucked human blood from their victims; the *Erinyes* have taken on the agent of miasma from those inflicted with miasma and thus can be considered a literal embodiment of pollution. Blood is part not only of the physical nature of the *Erinyes* but also of their environment; Apollo suggests the den of the lion, which drinks blood just as the *Erinyes* do, as a more proper place than his temple, which must be kept clean of blood. The epithet "blood-drinking" emphasizes the difference between the temple and the den is blood. By placing the *Erinyes* with the lion, Apollo makes them a lower level of divinity, which belongs

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<sup>11</sup> Goldhill argues that the shepherdlessness of the *Erinyes* denotes their lack of participation in the male power structure; "*poimen*, for example, is used regularly in Homer, particularly of Agamemnon to express the relation of a king to his people or the lord of the *oikos* to his family. To be without this figure is precisely the state into which Clytemnestra thrust the *oikos* of Atreus, and the *Erinyes*, following the mother's curse, are a chorus without a figure of authority, without a paternal figure." Thus the *Erinyes* represent the lack of an Agamemnon, the figure Apollo will argue is the most important in the family. Their victory would be a denial of the importance of fathers, husbands, and kings. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 219.

<sup>12</sup> Sommerstein finds Apollo unreasonable, commenting "Over against his arrogant contempt, the *Erinyes*' manner is made to seem reasonable, even if the substance of what they say does not." Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (Cambridge University Press), l. 179-234. Certainly, Apollo's manner is rude, but I contend the substance of what *he* says makes sense. Apollo is not the only one to say that the *Erinyes* do not belong in his temple and their nature suggests the ban is sensible as well. Zeitlin sees Apollo as successful, if only metaphorically, noting that "the defeat of the *Erinyes* is already prefigured. . . by their subsequent expulsion from [the shrine] by Apollo." Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny," 103.

more with beasts than the Olympian gods. Besides belonging in the den of lion, Apollo also states that the *Erinyes* delight in violent punishment. Although the punishments are not described as bloody, their violence is extreme and would incur pollution. Describing the punishments as a *ἐοπτῆς* suggests not only the consumption of blood but also the other profane feast, the feast of Thyestes. The *Erinyes* enjoyment, dietary or not, of the violence repels the other gods. Thus, the connection of the *Erinyes* to blood and violence mandates not only their exile from the temple but also from the society of the Olympian gods.

The bloody nature of the *Erinyes* is an explicit reason for their separation from the Olympians. The *Erinyes* describe why they no longer associate with the other gods in their binding song<sup>13</sup>: Ζεὺς δ' αἰμοस्ताγὲς ἀξιόμισον ἔθνος τόδε λέσχαζ' ἄς ἀπηξιώσατο. (*Eu.* 365-6) “Zeus cast out this nation, dripping blood and worthy of hate, from his company.” The *Erinyes* do not regard their separation as unjustified, for they describe themselves as worthy of hate.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Apollo and his servant the Pythia are not trying to advance a particularly Apollonian perspective when they speak of the *Erinyes*. The *Erinyes* describe themselves as dripping blood as well, explicitly linking their bloodiness and their rejection by the gods. While the dripping blood is a notable physical attribute, it also connects the *Erinyes* to the crimes they punish and therefore miasma. The *Erinyes* describe themselves as both cast out and bloody; because this blood can be connected to miasma-causing crimes and blood pollution bans one from contact

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<sup>13</sup> Solmsen sees the binding song as another reason for the separation “The Furies also practice a kind of magic incantation which it is difficult to believe that Aeschylus could ever associate with the Olympians.” While Aeschylus’ religious beliefs should not be a primary reason for differentiating the chthonic *Erinyes* from the Olympians, the song’s content and use against Orestes does mark the *Erinyes* as different. Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus*, 191. Goldhill sees the song as concerned with the nature of the *Erinyes* and their relation to others but also as having active force, “an incantation . . . to control events.” Thus the separation of the *Erinyes* is an important part of their view of the world. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 228.

<sup>14</sup> Solmsen suggests that the *Erinyes* “glory and revel in their consciousness of being outcasts from official good society.” Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus*, 190. Sommerstein adds that this is a happy separation for both sides “The Olympians too, they say, have hitherto been equally happy to leave the *Erinyes* and their activities severely alone.” Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (University of Cambridge Press), l. 365-7.

with the Olympians and their shrines (as suggested by the previous two passages), the bloodiness can be seen as the cause of the exile.

Not only must the *Erinyes* stay away from the rituals of the Olympians, but the rituals for the *Erinyes* are markedly different and separate from those of the Olympians. Although this difference is not connected to miasma, it is another way in which ritual separates the *Erinyes* and the Olympians. Clytemnestra describes her offerings to the *Erinyes*, marking their differences from offerings given to the Olympians<sup>15</sup>:

ἦ πολλὰ μὲν δὴ τῶν ἐμῶν ἐλείξατε,  
χοάς τ' αἰίνους, νηφάλια μείλιγματα,  
καὶ νυκτίσεμνα δεῖπν' ἐπ' ἐσχάρᾳ πυρὸς  
ἔθουον, ὥραν οὐδενὸς κοινὴν θεῶν. (*Eu.* 106-109)

And you licked up many of my sacrifices, wine-less offerings, sober placations, and feasts offered at night sacrificed upon the fire of the hearth, at an hour shared by none of the gods.

Both the content of the offerings and the time at which they are given make these offerings different from offerings to Olympian gods. These “feasts” for the *Erinyes* should be compared with the feasts described by Apollo; the gods who celebrate violence and feed on human blood are celebrated separately.<sup>16</sup> Although Clytemnestra’s rituals for the *Erinyes* are not explicitly connected to blood or violence, they highlight the difference between the Olympians and the *Erinyes*, which is elsewhere connected to negative aspects of the *Erinyes*. Also, Clytemnestra notes how the feasts for the *Erinyes* are unusual. The “unusual feast” is a negatively charged

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<sup>15</sup> Brown surmises that such offerings could not be part of actual cult practice for “if their nature is such as literary sources describe, they perhaps cannot expect regular worship . . . the typical *Erinyes* of tragedy can only do harm, so their aid cannot be invoked for any respectable purpose; Clytemnestra’s offerings to them only strengthen the point, for we are not invited to admire her piety.” Despite the offerings’ literary status, they describe a difference between the *Erinyes* and the Olympians and the reasons why the *Erinyes* would not receive actual worship also serve to explain why such a separation occurs. This separation does not have to be absolute; the prior two plays have presented *Erinyes* for whom such a separation does not exist.

<sup>16</sup> The separateness of these rituals is emphasized by Sommerstein’s observation on ἐλείξατε “a verb more suited to beasts than gods.” Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (University of Cambridge Press), l. 106.



concept considering the blood-drinking nature of the *Erinyes* and mythic appropriateness of the feast of Thyestes; the stress placed on the ritual diet of the *Erinyes* emphasizes their bloody nature and associates them with others connected to the house of Atreus who dine on blood. This separateness of the *Erinyes* is an important new part of the nature of the *Erinyes* and its connection to ritual establishes the rules of ritual as important for understanding the *Erinyes* as outcasts from the divine community.

The *Erinyes* embrace and support their separation from the other gods, describing the difference as one of ritual.<sup>17</sup> The *Erinyes* define themselves by the separation:

γίγνομέναισι λάχῃ τάδ' ἐφ' ἅμιν ἐκράνθη:  
 ἀθανάτων δ' ἀπέχειν χέρας, οὐδέ τις ἐστί  
 συνδαίτωρ μετάκοινος:  
 παλλεύκων δὲ πέπλων ἀπόμοιρος ἄκληρος ἐτύχθην (*Eu.* 349-52)

These lots were ordained for us: and the hands of the immortals cannot touch them, no one shares our feasts or our home: our clan has no share in all-white garments.

The difference in homes, feasts, and apparel are all found in other depictions of the *Erinyes*.<sup>18</sup> The question of dress is now reversed; instead of black garments preventing their entering the temple, the *Erinyes* openly reject the white garments associated with the Olympians. The white garments, if they indicate purity<sup>19</sup>, are inappropriate for the *Erinyes* for a variety of reasons: the association of the *Erinyes* with death makes funerary apparel more suitable, but also the *Erinyes*

<sup>17</sup> Solmsen sees this not as a ritual difference, but as an expression of different forms of justice; the *Erinyes* “represent an idea of vengeance and blood atonement with which Zeus and his children would be unwilling to identify themselves.” As this blood atonement causes miasma, this abstraction still hints at pollution. Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus*, 197.

<sup>18</sup> Sommerstein notes the severity of the separation of the feasts of the *Erinyes*, commenting “The separation between Olympians and *Erinyes* is so complete that there is not even a third party which feasts with both.” Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (University of Cambridge Press), l. 350-1.

<sup>19</sup> Irwin contends that “white clothing may symbolize the goodness and purity of the wearer.” Irwin notes that white wool is associated with the suppliant in *Eu.* 45, but her comments on Eur. fr. 472 16-19, which is about the Cretan priests of Zeus, are also of interest: “There is particular stress in this fragment on ritual purity, and it seems reasonable to assume that wearing white was part of this purity.” Eleanor Irwin, *Colour Terms in Greek Poetry* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1974). I have argued that the nature of the *Erinyes* and their place among humans and gods is also concerned with ritual purity, besides that the ritual purity of Orestes is a major concern of the *Eumenides*, so such symbolism would not be out of place here.

are described as dripping blood and defiling, both of which can be connected to miasma.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in this passage, the *Erinyes* not only reject the Olympian gods but also affirm their own dirty, polluted nature.

Depictions of the nature of the *Erinyes* are focused on their ritual and physical separation from the Olympians, particularly from Apollo's temple, their physical bloodiness, and their association with violent crime. These three factors hint that the *Erinyes* are polluted. These factors are also found in the discussion of Orestes' pollution. The similarities between the nature of the *Erinyes* and the pollution of Orestes suggest that the *Erinyes* are indeed polluted and that the separation of the *Erinyes* from the Olympians, a novel part of their nature in the *Eumenides*, is emphasized to make their similarity to Orestes apparent.

Orestes drips blood just as the *Erinyes* do. The *Erinyes* can hunt him by this trail of blood: τετραυματισμένον γὰρ ὡς κύων νεβρὸν/ πρὸς αἷμα καὶ σταλαγμὸν ἐκματεύομεν. (*Eu.* 246-7) "Like a hound on the trail of a wounded fawn, we are tracking him down by the drip of blood." Orestes is made into a beast by the blood pollution the *Erinyes* claim to track, just as Apollo animalized the *Erinyes* by casting them out into the den of the lion. The *Erinyes* are notably also animals here; in their view, both they and Orestes are removed from the human/Olympian realm by their connection to blood. Orestes is similar to the *Erinyes* in that he also drips blood and is described as an animal.

The *Erinyes* claim that Apollo's sanctuary is polluted by blood carried by Orestes.<sup>21</sup> This claim stands against Apollo's claim that it is the *Erinyes* who have brought pollution to the sanctuary.<sup>22</sup> The *Erinyes* claim:

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<sup>20</sup> Sommerstein describes the garments as only funerary and not as related to miasma. For him the garments indicate that the *Erinyes* "have nothing to do with any kind of rejoicing." Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (University of Cambridge Press), l. 352. Certainly, their joylessness is an important part of the nature of the *Erinyes*, but I suggest that their black clothing and rejection of white clothing can also be linked to their polluted nature. As I noted while discussing the Pythia's observations, the *Erinyes*' connection to bloody violence makes them joyless and funerary.

τοιαῦτα δρῶσιν οἱ νεώτεροι θεοί,  
κρατοῦντες τὸ πᾶν δίκας πλέον  
φονολιβῆ θρόνον  
περὶ πόδα, περὶ κάρα.—  
πάρεστι γὰρ ὀμφαλὸν προσδρακεῖν αἱμάτων  
βλοσυρὸν ἄρόμενον ἄγος ἔχειν. (Eu. 162-7)

Such are the actions of the younger gods, who are exercising total power, beyond what justice allows. I can see that the prophetic throne is dripping with gore from head to foot, and that the navel of the earth has acquired for its own a horrible blood pollution.

Besides focusing on pollution, the *Erinyes* are also concerned with their honored place as elder gods and their use of this opposition shows their concern lies with a question of age rather than a question of gender. The *Erinyes*' view of the world is based on the oppositions of polluted/not-polluted, old gods/new gods, chthonic ritual/ Olympian ritual, not on the opposition of male/female. Here they see their position threatened as elders, not as females.

The *Erinyes* focus on pollution in their cross examination of Apollo: κᾶπειθ' ὑπέστης αἵματος δέκτωρ νέου. "And then you offered to receive [him stained with] new blood." (Eu. 205) This statement follows up on the *Erinyes*' assertion that Orestes has polluted the sanctuary and makes entering the sanctuary as a polluted or purified individual a key part of the trial. This question of entering the sanctuary applies to the *Erinyes* as well; both the Pythia and Apollo note that the *Erinyes* are unsuited to enter the sanctuary while the descriptions of the differences in chthonic and Olympian ritual suggest that the *Erinyes* do not belong with the Olympians or the worship of the Olympians.<sup>23</sup> Thus the possible pollution of Orestes is mirrored in the nature of the *Erinyes* and their ban from the temple of Apollo. This parallelism of pollution helps to create

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<sup>21</sup> Zeitlin limits the pollution nature of the image of Orestes, bloodied, at the omphalos by suggesting that the blood is from a purification right and represents his rebirth through purification. Orestes is not, therefore, stained by death, but is instead stained by birth. Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny," 104.

<sup>22</sup> Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (University of Cambridge Press), l. 164-8.

<sup>23</sup> Sommerstein summarizes the *Erinyes*' argument as "You have no right to complain that we are polluting your sanctuary, when you allowed and indeed instructed Orestes to come into it in a polluted state." Notably, he does not have the *Erinyes* argue that they are not polluted. Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (University of Cambridge Press), l. 206.

rhetorical deadlock; accusations of pollution are met with counter accusations of pollution.

Neither side admits that their accusations of pollution have been effectively refuted.

As descriptions of the *Erinyes* focused on their lack of participation in Olympian ritual, the *Erinyes* question Orestes' ability to join in communal ritual:

ποίοισι βωμοῖς χρώμενος τοῖς δημίοις;  
ποία δὲ χέρνιψ φρατέρων προσδέξεται; (*Eu.* 655-6)

What sort of altars in the deme will he use? What sort of water of brotherhoods will accept him?

The *Erinyes* suggest with these questions that Orestes will be banned from religious life because of his pollution.<sup>24</sup> They themselves could not participate in the same rituals, as the focus on their inability to join in Olympian ritual has made clear. Thus, by questioning Orestes' ritual involvement the *Erinyes* raise questions about their own ability to have contact with the Olympians through ritual, which suggests that the *Erinyes* themselves are polluted.

Orestes' pollution and whether he has been purified when he enters the sanctuary are not only a concern of the *Erinyes*. In addressing Athena, Orestes needs to clarify that he is not polluted:

ἄνασσ' Ἀθάνᾳ, Λοξίου κελεύμασιν  
ἦκω, δέχου δὲ πρευμαενῶς ἀλάστορα,<sup>25</sup>  
οὐ προστρόπαιον οὐδ' ἀφοίβαντον χέρα,  
ἀλλ' ἀμβλὺς ἤδη προστετριμμένος τε πρὸς  
ἄλλοισιν οἴκοις καὶ πορεύμασιν βροτῶν. (*Eu.* 235-239)

Lady Athena, I come by the order of Loxias, receive this avenger gently, who is neither

<sup>24</sup> Sommerstein connects this question to Apollo's threats that Orestes would be unable to participate in religious life if he did not avenge his father. Orestes would have been prevented by his father's *Erinyes*. Thus, the *Erinyes*, paternal or maternal, are concerned with the sanctity of religious rite and the prevention of the polluted from participating in it. Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (University of Cambridge Press), l. 655-6.

<sup>25</sup> Sommerstein notes that this is an epithet of Zeus. Such an epithet is extremely appropriate for Orestes, through whose acquittal the power of Zeus to protect masculine power is reasserted. Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (University of Cambridge Press), l. 236.

a suppliant or one with unclean hands, but is blunt and already rubbed away the pollution at other houses and byways of mortals .

Orestes is able to acknowledge the questions about pollution raised by the *Erinyes*. If Orestes can be received in the presence of Athena and in the sanctuary of Apollo, he has a higher status than the *Erinyes* themselves, who themselves shun the Olympians and are banned from contact with the Olympians by Apollo. Orestes and Apollo are able to answer, if not refute, the *Erinyes*' questions of pollution.<sup>26</sup> The fact that the *Erinyes* hold a similar outcast status to Orestes further undermines their rhetorical strategy of focusing on pollution.

While the issue of pollution is balanced, with the *Erinyes*' arguments concerning Orestes counteracted by their own polluted nature and the claims of Apollo, the issues of gender opposition are taken up only by Apollo. While much of the description of the *Erinyes* deals with ritual and blood, Apollo does describe the *Erinyes* in terms of their gender (*Eu.* 67-73). Apollo also chides the *Erinyes* for not recognizing the gender issues at play, calling out their lack of attention to marriage (*Eu.* 213-24) and the differences between male and female (*Eu.* 625-8). The *Erinyes*, however, make very few statements which involve gender. According to the *Erinyes*, they carry out non-gendered advocacy against parental violence; although they represent Clytemnestra, the *Erinyes* consider themselves protectors of not only mothers but fathers (*Eu.* 514-16). If a gender theory can be drawn from the *Erinyes*' short statements on the subject, it is that they refuse to value fathers more than mothers, as Apollo does. Thus, the *Erinyes*, in dealing so briefly with the questions of gender raised by Apollo, do not present a strong opposition to such ideas. Consequently, Apollo is successful in arguing his view of gender unopposed, using ideas of gender and the family already presented in the first two plays of the trilogy. The key

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<sup>26</sup> Orestes' evidence of his lack of pollution is convincing; Sommerstein notes that "These human contacts are themselves evidence that Orestes is no longer unclean and will not pollute Athena's temple." Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (University of Cambridge Press), l. 239.

question of the trial is not who is polluted, but who understands the rhetoric of gender that is closely tied to the justice of Zeus. I will give examples of the *Erinyes*' non-gendered approach, analyze Apollo's use of gendered rhetoric, and finally look at how Apollo's rhetoric is successful with Athena.

The *Erinyes*, unlike Apollo, make both genders equally important. The *Erinyes* state that their defeat will negatively affect both mothers and fathers:<sup>27</sup>

ταῦτά τις τάχ' ἄν πατήρ  
ἢ τεκοῦσα νεοπαθῆς  
οἶκτον οἰκτίσαιτ', ἐπει-  
δὴ πίτνει δόμος δίκας. (*Eu.* 514-6)

Some father perhaps or some mother who has just become a victim may well lament this lament, since the house of Justice will have fallen.

Thus, the *Erinyes* do not see their support of Clytemnestra in this case as definitively marking them as supporters of only mothers. The *Erinyes* instead see their job as protecting the interests of either parent in a situation similar to Clytemnestra's.

In addition to implicitly stating their support of both genders, the *Erinyes* question Apollo's preference for the father. The *Erinyes* note the bias in Apollo's argument: πατρὸς προτιμᾷ Ζεὺς μόνον τῷ σῷ λόγῳ: "On your account, Zeus sets a higher account on the death of a father" (*Eu.* 640) . Considering the *Erinyes*' earlier support of both parents, here the *Erinyes* are questioning the male power system which was invoked in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*.<sup>28</sup> The *Erinyes* see themselves not arguing for feminine superiority, but for an equal treatment of both genders. The *Erinyes*' failure to contradict the pro-male, anti-female rhetoric leads to their

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<sup>27</sup> Goldhill notes that the language emphasizes the role of the mother, in opposition to Apollo's emphasis of the father. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 241.

<sup>28</sup> Goldhill sees the *Erinyes* questioning Apollo's authority and the treatment of his word as truth. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 250.

downfall. Although the *Erinyes* implicitly suggest that the genders should be treated the same, they do not overtly deal with gender and therefore cannot refute Apollo's arguments.

While the *Erinyes* do not take up the opposition of the male and the female, Apollo deals directly with such a view of gender. Apollo makes femaleness an important part of the nature of the *Erinyes*:

καὶ νῦν ἀλούσας τάσδε τὰς μάργους ὀρᾷς:  
ὕπνῳ πεσοῦσαι δ' αἰ κατάπτυστοι κόραι,  
γραῖαι παλαιαὶ παῖδες, αἷς οὐ μείγνυται  
θεῶν τις οὐδ' ἄνθρωπος οὐδὲ θήρ ποτε.  
κακῶν δ' ἑκατὶ κἀγένοντ', ἐπεὶ κακὸν  
σκότον νέμονται Τάρταρόν θ' ὑπὸ χθονός,  
μισήματ' ἀνδρῶν καὶ θεῶν Ὀλυμπίων. (*Eu.* 67-73)

Even now you see these mad women taken captive: fallen in sleep, these abominable old maidens, these aged virgins, with whom no god ever holds any intercourse, nor man nor beast either- They were born from evils, and thus live in the evil darkness under the earth in Tartarus, hated by men and the Olympian gods.

In this passage, the separation of the *Erinyes* is not based on their disgusting dirty or bloody nature or their ritual differences, but is concerned with their gender. Apollo includes humans as well as Olympians in this separation.<sup>29</sup> However, Apollo makes the separation between the *Erinyes* and men, not both men and women, focusing on the sexual sense of μείγνυμι. Apollo assumes there should be mixing of male and female, but the disgusting femaleness of the *Erinyes* prevents this. The *Erinyes* should have mixed and relinquished the roles of virgin and maiden, but their continuation in this state stands as a profanation of the female.<sup>30</sup> The *Erinyes*, like Clytemnestra, fail to properly fulfill the standard female roles.

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<sup>29</sup> The inclusion of humans in the separation is also found in the Pythia's description of the Eumenides (*Eu.* 55-6).

<sup>30</sup> Goldhill approaches the femininity of the *Erinyes* not as a profanation, but simply as an issue of definition. The *Erinyes* cannot be defined by typical female life stages "for sexual activity (particularly as formalized in marriage) is often the diving-point between [statutes]." Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 212. However, the idea of a "profane" femininity is advanced by the connection of the *Erinyes* to darkness: here the dark underworld, in other

Apollo takes the “profane” femininity of the *Erinyes* and their separateness from the other gods, and turns these qualities against them. Apollo berates the *Erinyes* for not being supporters of marriage<sup>31</sup>:

ἦ κάρτ' ἄτιμα καὶ παρ' οὐδὲν εἰργάσω  
Ἥρας τελείας καὶ Διὸς πιστώματα.  
Κύπρις δ' ἄτιμος τῷδ' ἀπέρριπται λόγῳ,  
ὅθεν βροτοῖσι γίγνεται τὰ φίλτατα.  
εὐνὴ γὰρ ἀνδρὶ καὶ γυναικὶ μόρσιμος  
ὄρκου 'στὶ μείζων τῇ δίκῃ φρουρουμένη.  
εἰ τοῖσιν οὖν κτείνουσιν ἀλλήλους χαλᾶς  
τὸ μὴ τίνεσθαι μηδ' ἐποπτεύειν κότῳ,  
οὗ φημι 'Ορέστην σ' ἐνδίκῳ ἀνδρῆλατεῖν.  
τὰ μὲν γὰρ οἶδα κάρτα σ' ἐνθυμουμένην,  
τὰ δ' ἐμφανῶς πράσσουσιν ἡσυχαιτέραν. (*Eu.* 213-224)

Truly you have held in utter contempt the pledges of Hera goddess of marriage, and of Zeus, and treated them as being of no account; and Cypris too is cast aside in dishonor by this argument, she from whom come the closest, dearest ties that mortals have. The bed of a man and a woman, when hallowed by destiny, is something mightier than an oath, and Justice stands sentinel over it. If, then, you go easy on those who kill each other by not punishing and not casting a wrathful eye on them, I say you have no right to harry Orestes from his home. One kind of action I perceive that you take very much to heart, while about the other kind you are blatantly acting more gently.

Certainly, the previous passage has illustrated why the *Erinyes* might disregard these gods; the *Erinyes* have no part in marriage or sex, being “aged virgins.”<sup>32</sup> The markedly separate status of

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passages dark clothes. Irwin notes that women are often described as white (λευκός) in tragedy, especially goddesses, and this color “indicated not merely beauty in women, but another quality that was thought to be characteristic of them- their helplessness and need of protection.” Certainly, very few of the women in the *Oresteia* exhibit this trait, but Apollo here berates the *Erinyes* for their non-characteristic femininity, which also extends to their color association. Eleanor Irwin, *Colour Terms in Greek Poetry* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1974) 166-21.

<sup>31</sup> The *Erinyes*’ ignoring of marriage is especially harmful considering Zeitlin’s assertion that “the basic issue of the trilogy is the establishment, in the face of female resistance, of the binding nature of patriarchal marriage.” The *Erinyes* are not helpful members of the female resistance because they will not focus on marriage and the difference between male and female. This ignorance may be a result of the *Erinyes*’ very nature, as Goldhill explains “The *Erinyes*’ . . . non-participation in sexual exchange, [marks] their separation from human society.” However, Apollo succeeds in establishing the importance of marriage to the degree that even those intrinsically opposed to it (both the *Erinyes* and Athena) are required to support it. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 211.



the *Erinyes* would also suggest that the *Erinyes* should not be concerned with the same things as the Olympians.<sup>33</sup> However, Apollo suggests that violations of marriage should be punished by the *Erinyes* and that their lack of concern for it invalidates their claim for justice. Apollo makes the *Erinyes* and justice incompatible because of their rejection of the opposition of male and female.<sup>34</sup>

Apollo explicitly attacks the *Erinyes*' non-preferential view of gender. While the *Erinyes* see father and mother as of equal value, Apollo argues for the greater importance of the father<sup>35</sup>:

οὐ γάρ τι ταῦτ' ἄνδρα γενναῖον θανεῖν  
 διοσδότοις σκήπτροισι τιμαλφούμενον,  
 καὶ ταῦτα πρὸς γυναικός, οὔ τι θουρίοις  
 τόξοις ἐκηβόλοισιν, ὥστ' Ἀμαζόνος, (*Eu.* 625-8)

Yes, because it is simply not the same thing- the death of a noble man, honoured with a royal scepter granted him by Zeus, and that too at the hands of a woman, and then not by the far-shooting martial bow of say, an Amazon,

Here, Zeus' power marks the man as important; Apollo therefore suggests that the *Erinyes*' equality of genders goes against the power of Zeus. Apollo also devalues the female by

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<sup>32</sup> However, the *Erinyes* should be wary of marriage being valued over the parent-child relationship; Sommerstein notes that "Apollo denies the claim of Clytemnestra and the *Erinyes* that the closest *philia* is that between mother and child. Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (Cambridge University Press), l. 216. However, Goldhill points out that marriage creates the relationships the *Erinyes* are concerned with: "Marriage and its sexuality are the necessary precursors to the coming into being of precisely the ties the *Erinyes* have emphasized: without marriage, no family, no blood-ties." Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 222.

<sup>33</sup> Sommerstein notes the *Erinyes* should at least respect the *timai* of the Olympians. Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (Cambridge University Press), l. 213-33.

<sup>34</sup> Solmsen takes a less rhetorical reading. See Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus*, 191.

<sup>35</sup> The preference for the male can also be read as a conflict between genders; Zeitlin notes that "The Amazonomachy in this context rather serves to demarcate the major substantive issue of Orestes' trial as a battle of the sexes. Moreover, the prior victory over the Amazons not only foreshadows the outcome of the trial but also, by association, invests the new defeat with the same symbolic significance and prestige as the earlier one." Zeitlin's view of the trial as an Amazonomachy is interesting, as the *Erinyes* do not willingly take up the role of fighters for the female, but approach the trial through issues of pollution and the rights of parents of both genders. Thus, I suggest that only Apollo sees the trial in this light, and thus the *Erinyes* are easily defeated. Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny," 93-4.

suggesting that to die at the hands of a woman degrades a man.<sup>36</sup> Apollo suggests that a proper balance must be maintained between the genders, not through equality but through the elevation of the male. Apollo rejects a view of gender where men and women are equal.

Apollo overturns the *Erinyes*' views of parental equality and solidifies concepts of male parentage explored in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* by arguing that biologically the male is the only parent:

οὐκ ἔστι μήτηρ ἢ κεκλημένου τέκνου  
τοκεύς, τροφὸς δὲ κύματος νεοσπόρου.  
τίκτει δ' ὁ θρώσκων, ἢ δ' ἄπερ ξένῳ ξένη  
ἔσωσεν ἔρνος, οἷσι μὴ βλάβῃ θεός.  
τεκμήριον δὲ τοῦδ' ἐσοὶ δείξω λόγου.  
πατὴρ μὲν ἂν γένοιτ' ἄνευ μητρός· πέλας  
μάρτυς πάρεστι παῖς Ὀλυμπίου Διός,  
οὐδ' ἐν σκότοισι νηδύος τεθραμμένη,  
ἀλλ' οἷον ἔρνος οὔτις ἂν τέκοι θεός. (*Eu.* 658-66)

The so-called “mother” is not a parent of the child, only the nurse of the newly-begotten embryo. The parent is he who mounts; the female keeps the offspring safe, like a stranger on behalf of a stranger, for those in whose case this not prevented by god. I shall give you powerful proof of this statement. A father can procreate without a mother: a witness to this is close by us, the daughter of Olympian Zeus, who was not even nurtured in the darkness of a womb, but is such an offspring as no female divinity could ever bring forth.

This argument is the summation of the parental imagery of the previous two plays. This concept of parentage has been explored through the single-parent imagery, in which the father was the sole parent of an animal family and the mother was either absent or a different species.<sup>37</sup> Now biology removes the need for metaphor to mediate between the animal and the human. The suggestion of the father as the only parent is now fact. This argument is also answers the

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<sup>36</sup> Solmsen notes that this has been established earlier in the trilogy. Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus*, 192. See also Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (Cambridge University Press), l. 627-8. Zeitlin notes that the *Oresteia*, as part of the misogynistic tradition, “relates the mastery of the female to higher social goals.” Clytemnestra’s murder of Agamemnon has denied this mastery and upsets the concept of masculine power. Zeitlin, *The Dynamics of Misogyny*, 88. See also Zeitlin, *Dynamics of Misogyny*, 89.

<sup>37</sup> See “Animal Single-Parent Imagery” pp. 5-18.

treatment of Clytemnestra as mother; Clytemnestra is not a mother and we have previously learned she was not even a nurse. Thus Apollo takes the ideas of the family presented in the previous two plays and reframes them with science rather than imagery, again asserting the importance of the father and minimizing the mother.<sup>38</sup>

Apollo's argument about parentage sways Athena, who turns out to be the most important voter in the trial. Athena, being the offspring of a male single-parent, can confirm Orestes' position as the same. Athena states that her innate nature requires her to support Orestes:

ἐμὸν τόδ' ἔργον, λοισθίαν κρῖναι δίκην.  
ψῆφον δ' Ὀρέστη τήνδ' ἐγὼ προσθήσομαι.  
μήτηρ γὰρ οὔτις ἐστὶν ἢ μ' ἐγείνατο,  
τὸ δ' ἄρσεν αἰνῶ πάντα, πλὴν γάμου τυχεῖν,  
ἅπαντι θυμῷ, κάρτα δ' εἰμὶ τοῦ πατρός.  
οὔτω γυναικὸς οὐ προτιμήσω μόνον  
ἄνδρα κτανούσης δωμάτων ἐπίσκοπον. (*Eu.* 734-40)

This is now my task, to be the last to judge in this case; and I shall cast this ballot for Orestes. There is no mother who gave birth to me, and I commend the male in all respects (except for joining in marriage) with all my heart: in the fullest sense I am my father's

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<sup>38</sup> Apollo's argument has caused much scholarly discomfort. I believe the best way to deal with this argument is to see it as a continuation of earlier rhetoric and imagery in which the father is the only or superior parent. Solmsen provides a summary of the academic debate, although his assertion that "nothing . . . can prove that for [Aeschylus] they were not perfectly serious and valid thoughts" goes too far in entering the realm of personal belief. Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus*, 192 n. Forty years later, Sommerstein continues the struggle against Apollo's argument. Although Sommerstein admits that there is some parity between philosophical theories of reproduction and Apollo's biology, he outlines the limited acceptance Apollo's biological argument would garner with the audience. While producing biological confusion in the audience would certainly limit Apollo's effectiveness, Aeschylus is not producing a scientific drama. Cohesiveness between the science of the play and the science of the audience is less important than the cohesiveness of the trilogy. While the biological aspect is certainly new, the concepts of the family it presents are not. Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (Cambridge University Press), l. 657-66. Zeitlin, however, finds the argument instrumental in the defeat of matriarchy required to restore patriarchy and to further Orestes' move to manhood through separation from his mother. Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny," 107-8. Roberts sees this argument in the context of Apollo's role as oracle and instigator of the matricide. Roberts explains: "Apollo's arguments thus work against the Erinyes in two ways: they show that the oracle commanded nothing sacrilegious, and they show that the Erinyes have no particular right to pursue Orestes. . . it is a variant of the traditional revelation that an oracle does not mean quite what it had been taken to mean." Deborah H. Roberts, *Apollo and His Oracle in the Oresteia* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 53. Goldhill legitimizes Apollo's argument by connecting it to the discussion of issues of parentage in the *Choephoroi*. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 252. Lebeck has no problem with the argument, and notes that although it is "sophistic. . . this does not mean, however, that the argument is not thematically 'right.'" Lebeck, *The Oresteia*, 135.

child. Therefore I shall not set a higher value on the death of a woman, when she had killed her husband, the guardian of her house.

Athena is easily co-opted into Apollo's version of biology but is even convinced of his version of marriage.<sup>39</sup> Although Athena notes her opposition to wedlock, she ends up supporting the marriage ties which hold Clytemnestra at fault.<sup>40</sup> Although the *Erinyes* are perhaps innately unable to be convinced by Apollo's arguments on gender, Apollo does successfully appeal to Athena. Thus the *Erinyes* are defeated through their inability to deal with the gendered rhetoric which is so convincing to Athena.

In conclusion, the *Eumenides* introduces yet another type of *Erinyes* as a weak rhetorical foil to Apollo, who continues the gendered rhetoric of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*. The

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<sup>39</sup>Sommerstein disagrees that Athena can be easily convinced by Apollo's "highly dubious argument." I fail to see how this could be, as she is the example he uses. If the argument has less to do with the actual method of human reproduction and more with a male-centered conception of the family, there is no reason to disregard the argument because it could only be true of divine and not of human children. Again, the single-parent animal imagery has suggested that the father is the only parent. The imagery of Clytemnestra has tried to deny her a place as mother and wife, removing her from the family. Thus, the family structure promoted in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* is the same as the one suggested by Apollo and exemplified by Athena and Zeus. Even if Athena is only convinced because this is "the view taken by Zeus," Zeus has been linked to the single-parent family previously in the trilogy. Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (Cambridge University Press), l. 736-40. Zeitlin, although not concerned with Athena's personal take on the argument, sees the use of Athena as vital to the trial's re-establishment of masculine power. Zeitlin explains the significance of Athena: "Zeus' act puts an end to any threat to his sovereignty by incorporating the principle of intelligence through his swallowing of Metis and by making that principle manifest in the world through the birth of a child whose sex indicates that she will be no political threat to her father and even more, whose filial relationship proclaims her eternal dependence on the male." Thus, male birth establishes paternal authority, both of Zeus, whose justice undergirds the trial, and of Agamemnon, for whom Orestes has acted to restore masculine power to Argos. In addition, Zeitlin, in opposition to Sommerstein, views Athena's partisanship with Zeus here as not just the response of "Daddy says so," but as a vital part of both her nature and of the structure of power she votes to support. Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny," 108. Goldhill believes that Athena truly belongs to neither party, but this results in Orestes' acquittal for "Athena represents the vote which allows the acquittal of Orestes- that is, the escape from the pattern of reciprocal revenge which has been depicted in terms of an opposition of the sexes, precisely because she stands between and against the opposition." Thus, Goldhill suggests that Athena supports, to some degree, the rhetoric presented by Apollo, but in the end she creates resolution by transcending such divisive rhetoric. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 259.

<sup>40</sup> Sommerstein again disagrees, stating that "the rejection of *gamos* suggests prima facie antipathy to, rather than partisanship of, the male. However, considering the trial is concerned, in part, with spousal murder, Athena's avoidance of marriage could be an asset. Although Apollo argues for the importance of marriage, he notably does so from the perspective of marriage as the *timai* of Zeus, Hera, and Aphrodite. Given the dearth of positive models of marriage and abundance of destructive wives (Clytemnestra and Helen) and the attempts to metaphorically remove Clytemnestra from the role of wife, rejection of marriage can be in support of the male. Sommerstein, *Eumenides* (Cambridge University Press), l. 737. Zeitlin, however, does not see Athena as opposed to the male. Apollo is supported by "the androgynous goddess Athena, who sides with the male and confirms his primacy. Zeitlin, *The Dynamics of Misogyny*, 89.

*Erinyes* of the *Eumenides* are separate from the Olympian gods and different from their previous depictions in the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*. This difference is so important because it is ultimately tied to pollution. The physical bloodiness of the *Erinyes* and their association with violent crimes necessitate the separation of the *Erinyes* from the temples of the Olympians and the gods themselves. The *Erinyes*' polluted, outcast status is parallel to that which they claim for Orestes. The *Erinyes*, in celebrating their outcast status, suggest that they are more polluted than Orestes is, which weakens their argument. With charges of pollution leveled by both Apollo and the *Erinyes*, Apollo triumphs rhetorically because he (re-)introduces a new point of contention: gender. Because the *Erinyes* lack an understanding of marriage and lack a response to Apollo's promotion of the male, they are defeated.

The trial ends successfully for Apollo and Orestes, but this success must be qualified. Although Apollo's gendered rhetoric goes unchallenged by the *Erinyes* and gains the vital vote of Athena, Orestes wins by a very narrow margin. The most convincing aspect of the gendered rhetoric which is used by Apollo in the *Eumenides* and presented by the imagery of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* is its maintenance of the status quo. The "victory" of Apollo and Orestes owes much to resistance to change and to accepting and understanding those who do not conform to traditional gender roles, such as Clytemnestra and the *Erinyes*. The very existence of these oppositional figures shows the inability of such conceptions of gender to accurately represent reality; this difference between reality and status quo creates the discomfort caused by Apollo's biological argument against mothers and the disjunction between the gendered imagery and whom it represents. The *Oresteia* ends with an attempt to bring together rhetoric and reality, but the flaws of the rhetoric remain.

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