

# Dream as Image and Action in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

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"In dreams begin responsibilities." –Yeats

DREAMS CONSTITUTE a central point in the *Oresteia's* elaborate structure of image and metaphor. The language of dreams is introduced early, its significance built up gradually over the course of the trilogy. The relationship in each instance between image, idea, symbol, and context is unique and merits its own examination. But we may state in general terms that the imagistic pattern of dreams is characterized throughout by a progression from the metaphoric to the actual. Dreams begin as language, become a motivating force in the plot, and end as an actor on the stage. Through the metaphor of dreams Aeschylus casts light on past, present, and future to show the meaning and high purpose in the darkness of the house's crimes. Specifically, we here posit that the poet uses dream as an epistemological tool to pry off the covering of the cosmos and probe its underlying moral logic. Characters and audience are led together through a process of partial and progressive knowing, whose endpoint is alluded to via foreshadowing and suspense.

Anne Lebeck has written that "movement from enigma to clarity underlies the form of the *Oresteia*," and that this movement is at the same time a reduction, as "the multiplicity of meanings possible gives way to a statement with one signification."<sup>1</sup> Lebeck never specifically addresses dreams, focusing

<sup>1</sup> A. Lebeck, *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure* (Washington 1971) 31.

instead on the elaborate ambivalence of nets, treading, and pouring in the language of the trilogy. As with the imagistic patterns that Lebeck does discuss, the significance of dreams may be seen to unfold in successive stages over the course of the *Oresteia*, keeping time with the action of the drama in its movement from anxious uncertainty through tragic fulfillment to final redemption.<sup>2</sup>

The three sections of this paper address the role of dreams in the trilogy, and attempt to demonstrate that the evolution of the dream motif by degrees parallels and drives forward Aeschylus' development of plot and theme.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The imagery in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* has been a major focus of scholarly attention since the early 1950's. Particularly influential for my methodology have been R. Lattimore, *Aeschylus: Oresteia* (Chicago 1953); R. F. Goheen, "Aspects of Dramatic Symbolism: Three Studies in the *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 76 (1955) 113–137; J. J. Peradotto, "Some Patterns of Nature Imagery in the *Oresteia*," *AJP* 85 (1964) 378–393; F. I. Zeitlin, "The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *TAPA* 96 (1965) 463–508. These works have established the importance of metaphorical language as a significant element of Aeschylus' literary style and dramatic technique. Metaphor and meaning are indissoluble: as Zeitlin has written (463), in Aeschylean tragedy the imagery "is often the medium through which the dramatic action finds its expression."

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus: Choephoroi* (Oxford 1986) ad 22–83; J. D. Mikalson, *Honor thy Gods: Popular Religion in Greek Tragedy* (Chapel Hill 1991) 102; E. Petrounias, *Funktion und Thematik der Bilder bei Aischylos* (Göttingen 1976) 276–279. A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus: Persae* (Oxford 2009) 101, points out that Atossa's dream concretizes imagery in a similar way: the image of yoking, introduced as metaphor in the language of the Chorus, takes on physical presence in the form of the two women whom Xerxes tries to yoke to his chariot. I have also drawn on W. S. Messer, *The Dream in Homer and Greek Tragedy* (New York 1918); A. H. M. Kessels, *Studies on the Dream in Greek Literature* (Utrecht 1978); E. Bächli, *Die künstlerische Funktion von Orakelsprüchen, Weissagungen, Träumen u.s.w. in der griechischen Tragödie* (Winterthur 1954); G. S. Rousseau, "Dream and Vision in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *Arion* 2 (1963) 101–136; J. C. Kamerbeek, "Prophecy and Tragedy," *Mnemosyne* 18 (1965) 29–40; G. Devereux, *Dreams in Greek Tragedy: an Ethno-psychoanalytical Study* (Oxford 1976); and E. Lévy, "Le théâtre et le rêve: le rêve dans le théâtre d'Eschyle," *Théâtre et spectacles dans l'antiquité* (Leiden 1981) 141–168, for

I. *Agamemnon*: A Dream Seen by Day

As the overture to a piece of music introduces themes which will later be developed in greater detail, the Watchman's speech sets up a series of tones that will resonate throughout the *Agamemnon*. The language is significantly strange, unsettling by program. The Watchman describes his restless bed, which is not "watched over by dreams" (*ὀνείροις οὐκ ἐπισκοπούμενην*, 13): in the dark night of uncertainty that precedes Agamemnon's return, benign dreams do not keep their natural place. The Watchman's speech creates a strong sense of incongruity by inverting traditional epic depictions of dreams and sleep. The "guardian" dream has been replaced by fear which stands by in its stead (*φόβος*, 14). Sleep itself, traditionally "sweet," has become for the Watchman a disease for which he must seek a "cure" in humming or singing (*ὕπνου τόδ' ἀντίμολπον ἐντέμνων ἄκος*, 17).<sup>4</sup> This perversion of the role of sleep and of dreams establishes on the level of imagery and tone what the Watchman also states openly: all is not well within the silent palace.

The Parodos, which takes place as night gives way to day,

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analysis of dreams as literary symbols. More recently, two sequential articles by Sarah Mace enumerate the literal and figurative allusions to sleep and waking in the *Oresteia*, tracing a thematic link between nocturnal activity of all kinds and the working out of retaliatory justice: S. Mace, "Why the *Oresteia*'s Sleeping Dead Won't Lie, Part I: *Agamemnon*," *CJ* 98 (2002) 35–56, and "Part II: *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides*," *CJ* 100 (2004) 39–60. As for the cultural context, W. V. Harris, *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2009), surveys the breadth of Greek and Latin literature and analyzes the successive interpretations which ancient minds placed on dreaming, in light of contemporary scientific methods and anthropological evidence.

<sup>4</sup> In Homer *ὕπνος* is most often accompanied by a positive epithet (*ἀμβρόσιος Il.* 1.19; *ἀπήμων Il.* 14.164; *γλυκὺς Od.* 7.289, 10.31; *γλυκερός Il.* 10.4, 24.3, *Od.* 5.472; *ἡδύς Od.* 1.364, 19.604; *λιαρὸς Il.* 14.164; *μαλακός Il.* 10.2, 24.6778; *μελιηδής Od.* 19.551; *μελίφρων Il.* 2.34; *νήδυμος Il.* 2.2, 10.91, 10.187, 16.454, 23.63, *Od.* 4.793), and is only rarely described in negative terms (*σχέτλιος Od.* 10.69, *χάλκεος Il.* 11.241).

contains the initial statement of many of the major imagistic patterns that govern the *Oresteia*. After thirty lines describing the departure of the Greek army, the Chorus introduce themselves and explain their continued presence in Argos. The stanza concludes with a description of advanced age, which makes its way on triple feet: “it wanders, a dream appearing by day” (*ὄναρ ἡμερόφαντον ἀλαίνει*, 82). The striking and lovely formulation, “a dream seen by day,” is difficult to pin down to any single interpretation. The preceding lines have drawn a triple comparison between old age, withered leaves, and dreams—the implication seems to be that all three are weak, insubstantial, and ineffectual versions of a more robust natural phenomenon. Indirect or vague motion provides a common thread as well: old men wander aimlessly, as dead leaves are blown by the wind and drift slowly to the ground. And as the proper domain of dreams is the night, there may be a further implication that a daytime dream is particularly indistinct and unreliable, doubly dreamlike.<sup>5</sup>

The ensuing dialogue between the Chorus and Clytemnestra (264–280) sharpens the contrast between the factual, clear knowledge that comes with the day, and the knowledge that issues from the night, riddling yet potentially more profound. Questioning Clytemnestra’s assertion that Troy has fallen, the Chorus immediately connect the notion of divine deceit with dreams, perhaps on the epic model of false dream messengers sent from Olympus.<sup>6</sup> Clytemnestra retorts that she would not accept the report of a “drowsing mind” (*δόξαν ... βριζούσης φρενός*, 275). The use of *δόξα* with words denoting dreaming and sleep emphasizes the illusory and untrustworthy nature of the sleeping state.<sup>7</sup> In their next ode, the Chorus too speak of

<sup>5</sup> Lévy, in *Théâtre et spectacles* 145. For the unreliability of daytime dreams cf. Apul. *Met.* 4.27.

<sup>6</sup> The most famous examples being the baneful dream sent to Agamemnon by Zeus at *Il.* 2.5–41 and Penelope’s description of the gates of horn and ivory at *Od.* 19.560–567.

<sup>7</sup> Examples are collected by Lévy, in *Théâtre et spectacles* 151–155. Garvie,

δόξα in connection with dreams, echoing and expanding Clytemnestra's language.<sup>8</sup>

After Clytemnestra has disappeared into the palace, the Chorus begin an ode offering thanks for Agamemnon's victory over Troy. At the same time, they remain conscious of the king's disastrous choice at Aulis, just narrated in the *parodos*—their words vibrate between hope and premonitory fear. In the second strophe-antistrophe pair the lyrics of the Chorus take on a visionary clarity (402–436). The strophe begins with a description of Menelaus grieving for Helen, and the antistrophe ends with the people of Argos grieving for the dead they lost at Troy. Bridging the transition from private to public sorrow is the image of the dream (ὄνειρόφαντοι ... δόξαι, 420–421). These mournful semblances bring only vain joy (422), and vanish with waking: “for whenever someone seems to see (δοκῶν ὄρα, 423) delights, straightaway the vision (ὄψις, 425), slipping through his arms, is gone, following on wings the paths of sleep.”<sup>9</sup> The repeated emphasis on δόξα underscores the vanity and illusion of Menelaus' love in contrast to the real anguish of the Argives. Menelaus' desire for “the one beyond the sea” (πόθῳ δ' ὑπερποντίας, 414) prepares the way for the sorrows at the hearth in every house (κατ' οἴκου ἐφ' ἑστίας, 427). Even

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*Aeschylus: Persae* 115, notes the prominence of words for “sight” and “seeing” in Atossa's dream in the *Persae*: “where we ‘have’ a dream, the Greeks talked about ‘seeing’ a dream, experiencing it as an objective reality which was there to be seen.” Over the course of the fifth century δοκεῖν increasingly replaces ἰδεῖν in descriptions of dreams, which Garvie suggests may indicate “a movement towards a more subjective view of the experience.”

<sup>8</sup> In the dreams of Menelaus, the absent Helen appears as δόξα, a vain image (420–426); the palace seers lament that a phantom will seem to rule in the house (φάσμα δόξει δόμων ἀνάσσειν, 415).

<sup>9</sup> D. Steiner, “Eyeless in Argos: A Reading of *Agamemnon* 416–19,” *JHS* 115 (1995) 175–182, at 178, comments on the “fleeting evanescence” of Helen in the ode: “In place of the living Helen who flits overseas, her visionary double now glides through Menelaus' hands. The scene previously played out at the city gates repeats itself in the intimacy of the home where the deserted husband sleeps dreaming of his wife.”

the shapely statues which serve as reminders of Helen's beauty (*εὐμόρφων*, 416), reappear in the description of the handsome young men who died at Troy (*εὐμορφοι*, 454).<sup>10</sup>

Clytemnestra reverses and perverts the image of a husband dreaming of his wife in her speech to Agamemnon upon his homecoming (855–913). In her dreams, as reported, she saw Agamemnon enduring many terrible things, more things than would have been possible in the short time of her sleep (889–894). Here we must face the problem, acknowledged by all commentators, in distinguishing between the hypothetical dream as experienced and the dream as reported. F. R. Earp declares that most of Clytemnestra's speech consists of "down-right lies,"<sup>11</sup> and A. F. Garvie dismisses these "fabricated" dreams as another instance of Clytemnestra's hypocrisy.<sup>12</sup> Certainly the reporting of the nighttime vision remains at something of a distance from the presumed dream, and is used to very deliberate ends. Clytemnestra draws on dreams as one prop in her masterful performance of a pious wife, as she also draws on the malignant rumors that terrified the city, Orestes' absence, and her own attempts at suicide. In her speech she readily turns any phenomenon of possible emotional power to her own fatal purpose.<sup>13</sup>

And yet, if her reported dream were purely a fabrication and a lie, she might have taken greater care not to let the wish show through at all. In her very imposture her words reveal her, in

<sup>10</sup> These are the only two instances of *εὐμορφος* in the play; the word appears again at *Cho.* 490.

<sup>11</sup> F. R. Earp, "Studies in Character: *Agamemnon*," *G&R* 19 (1950) 54–57.

<sup>12</sup> Garvie, *Aeschylus: Choephoroi* 54.

<sup>13</sup> A. Betensky, "Aeschylus' *Oresteia*: The Power of Clytemnestra," *Ramus* 6 (1977) 11–25, argues that Clytemnestra's uncanny influence derives from her powerful use of metaphor. L. McClure, "Clytemnestra's Binding Spell (*Ag.* 958–974)," *CJ* 92 (1997) 123–140, sees in Clytemnestra's manipulation of language a magical and incantatory power, although she perhaps overdraws the parallel between the speech of Clytemnestra and the song of the Furies.

dark intimations, to the Chorus, as Aeschylus reveals her to us. In Clytemnestra's purposeful rhetoric, words themselves are not false, but falsely applied. To borrow a phrase from W. G. Thalmann, her language is "crammed with truth," ambiguous and multi-faceted.<sup>14</sup> Although she means to deceive, she is not untruthful. It is not in the words themselves, but in the connection between her intentions and her words, between what she means and what she says, that Clytemnestra lies. She may indeed have wept through night-long vigils—but not for the reasons she leads Agamemnon to suppose. And she may have dreamed of Agamemnon, as the rumors affirmed, "pierced more full of holes than any net"—but these dreams express her wish rather than her fear.<sup>15</sup> Clytemnestra's opportunistic misuse of her dreams, and her cavalier attitude towards their content, mark her as distinctly impious.<sup>16</sup> Dreams offer clues about the future, if treated with the proper awe and reverence; Clytemnestra's dreams foretell the future and at the same time misshape it, as the many wounds she describes become the many wounds she inflicts with her own death-dealing hand.

The ominous double-entendres of Clytemnestra's speech are not wholly lost on the Chorus. In a sense, they hear her reported dream as prophetic; and their interpretation bears out the truth. After Agamemnon has entered the house on the carpet of crimson tapestries, never to emerge again, the Chorus sing of a terrible foreboding that they cannot escape (975–983). They do not have the courage to scorn their unclear terror, as they might an uninterpretable dream (*οὐδ' ἀποπτύσαι δίκαν δυσκρίτων ὄνειράτων*, 980–981).<sup>17</sup> Throughout the short ode

<sup>14</sup> W. G. Thalmann, "Speech and Silence in the *Oresteia* 2," *Phoenix* 39 (1985) 221–237, at 226.

<sup>15</sup> *Ag.* 868, *τέτρηται δικτύου πλέον*.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Zeitlin, *TAPA* 96 (1965) 504, on the "dire dislocation" of the house of Atreus from the Olympian gods.

<sup>17</sup> The word *ἀποπτύσαι*, "spit upon," expresses a strong ritual rejection. Hesiod speaks of the gods "spitting back prayers" (*ἀποπτύσουσι δέ τ' ἀράς*, *Op.* 726). At *Eum.* 303 the Chorus accuse Orestes of "spitting away" their

the Chorus waver between the conviction that their feelings are true and the hope that they may be false, rather as in the first stasimon. Until the consequences of the death of Iphigeneia and the destruction of Troy become clear, the Chorus consign their apprehension to the darkness, where it mutters, “distressed and hopeless” (1030–1034).

The connection between dream, vision, and madness is explored most directly through the figure of Cassandra. As a prophetess possessed by Apollo, she has been blessed and cursed with a second sight that enables her literally to see both past and future along with the present. This multi-temporal awareness is one hallmark of a prophet: Cassandra sees, experiences, and emotionally responds to the gruesome events that she prophesies in real time on the stage.<sup>18</sup> Cassandra’s intensity, her insistence, and the directness with which she expresses her knowledge make her terrifying as well as pitiable. Her charged visions force themselves upon the Chorus, frightening and revolting them. She brings into the open every past event that the Chorus would rather forget, every portent for the future that they would rather ignore. As Bernard Knox has written, by blending “cause, effect, and result” Cassandra’s visions suspend dramatic time: “in Cassandra’s possessed song the past, present, and future of Clytemnestra’s action and Agamemnon’s suffering are fused in a timeless unity which is shattered only when Agamemnon in the real world of time and space (which is also the false world of mask and stage) screams aloud in mortal agony.”<sup>19</sup>

The terrifying, timeless state of visionary prophecy has much

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words (*ἀποπτύεις λόγους*), and at *Eum.* 68 Apollo refers to the Erinyes as *κατάπτυστοι κόραι* (cf. also *Eum.* 191).

<sup>18</sup> In the *Iliad* Calchas is described as “far the best of the bird-interpreters, who knew those things that are, those that will be, and those that were before” (1.69–70).

<sup>19</sup> B. Knox, “Aeschylus and the Third Actor,” *AJP* 93 (1972) 104–124, at 114.



in common with the world of dream.<sup>20</sup> In one of Cassandra's intense hallucinations, the slaughtered sons of Thyestes sit in the palace, "resembling the shapes of dreams" (*ὄνειρων προσφereiς μορφώμασιν*, 1218). Cassandra's torrent of speech and song dissolves the boundaries between metaphor and real experience in its unchecked flow. Through the hyper-compressed language of the doomed prophetess, Aeschylus establishes an explicit continuum between intimation, vision, dream, and the actuality of the spirit world.

When Clytemnestra appears on the *ekkyklema*, like an avenging Erinys standing over the two corpses, the Chorus is plunged into the horror they have been trying to escape since the beginning of the play. The visions of Cassandra have been realized, and the only escape the Chorus can wish for is a death-like state of permanent sleep (*ἀτέλευτον ὕπνον*, 1451).<sup>21</sup> Agamemnon "lies" (*κεῖσαι*, 1492 = 1516) trapped in Clytemnestra's impious spiderweb, breathing out his life on the "un-free resting place" (*κοίταν τάνδ' ἀνελεύθερον*, 1494 = 1518).<sup>22</sup> Only the permanent, undisturbed sleep that the Chorus envision has the power to bring them beyond the reach of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, who in their plotting "walk the earth with unsleeping hands" (*πέδον πατοῦντες οὐ καθεύδουσιν χερί*, 1357).

In the final scene, the imperfect, dreamlike forebodings that have haunted the Chorus throughout the play issue into a

<sup>20</sup> Philosophers noted the connection between madness, prophecy, and dreams. Plato derives the term *μαντική* from *μανική* (or *μανία*) at *Phaedrus* 224C, and Cicero has Quintus declare that the human soul divines naturally "when it is so unrestrained and free that it has absolutely no association with the body, as happens in the case of frenzy and of dreams" (*Div.* 1. 113, transl. Falconer).

<sup>21</sup> Mace, *CJ* 98 (2002) 37, has traced a metaphorical association between sleep and the helplessness of victims, especially prominent in this final exchange between Clytemnestra and the Chorus.

<sup>22</sup> The noun *κοίτη* (from *κεῖμαι*) means broadly any place where one lies down, and can refer at once to the usual bed or bier on which a corpse is laid out and to the bath in which Agamemnon may be displayed.

nightmarish reality. The elders of Argos struggle to discern the conflicting forces that shape the destinies of men: the will of Clytemnestra, the will of Zeus, their own wishes and fears. To their limited mortal vision the coherent sequence of action, event, and consequence remains shrouded in darkness. Through the recurrent use of the dream metaphor, Aeschylus refers the events of the drama to another level, a transcendent dimension that simultaneously resists realistic perception and invites a truer vision. Meaning and purpose, horrifyingly absent from mere event, are implicit in the discourse of dream. This connection between dream and action is made explicit in the next play; in fact, it drives the movement of the *Choephoroi*.

## II. *Choephoroi*: Dream as Destiny

In the *Agamemnon*, dream weaves one thread in the complex web of imagery; in the *Choephoroi*, the role of dream extends into the realm of action. The relation between Clytemnestra's dream, reported in the Parodos, and the climax of the play is both polyvalent and direct. At the level of plot, the premonitory aspect of the dream foreshadows its fulfillment, even as it actively draws Orestes towards his destiny. At the level of thematics, the dream enriches the field of meaning of what might otherwise be simply a brutal revenge killing. At the level of imagery, the dream, with its harshly clashing visions of serpent and breast, pulls together human and bestial realms. It draws to a single point the conflict between the violent and the vulnerable, fang and flesh, which issues forth in metaphors and actualizations from Cassandra's wild lyrics in the *Agamemnon* to the serpent-haired hellhounds of the dead Clytemnestra in the *Eumenides*.

Clytemnestra's dream is delivered to us by stages, in dark hints: when it is brought fully to light, it meets its own interpretation in the scene of Orestes' revenge. The premonitory dream and the climactic scene are twinned, each deriving its full meaning from the other. The dream and its own realization, like two opposed mirrors, reflect each other into greater depth. For, as Clytemnestra and Orestes both recognize, their confrontation is the literal fulfillment of the dream. At the same

time, the dream expresses the emotional and symbolic truth of their conflict: for a human to murder his mother is a horror virtually unimaginable—it must include, therefore, a monstrous metamorphosis.

Indeed, the guiding trope of the *Choephoroi* is opposition, as it is of the trilogy as a whole: husband and wife, Chorus and Clytemnestra, mother and son, snake and breast, blood and milk, finally the gods of the old and the new way, until, at the end, the sequence of oppositions must be transcended. The irreconcilable clash of opposites is expressed in physical conflict, in stichomythic rejoinders, and in the violent yoking together of images, nowhere more so than in Clytemnestra's dream.

From its first mention in the Parodos, the dream, like an arrow, points to its foreordained target. As yet unreported, it sets in motion the ritual act with which the play begins. But even before the dream and its content are announced by the Chorus, even before Orestes speaks the Prologue, the audience are ushered into a world of uncanny darkness. The opening invocation to Hermes defines the way in which the nether powers will set about their plans for vengeance. For dreams are particularly associated with Hermes; as A. F. Garvie has suggested, Hermes as *ψυχοπομπός* “is responsible for all the extracorporeal adventures of the soul.”<sup>23</sup> The god's influence over sleep links him with dreams as well.<sup>24</sup> Already in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes he is described as *ἡγήτορ' ὀνείρων* (14).<sup>25</sup> At the beginning of the play, then, Orestes appeals to the chthonic powers in general and to Hermes in particular because he is uniquely qualified as a mediator between heaven, earth, and Hades, both as *ψυχοπομπός* and as *ἡγήτορ' ὀνείρων*. And Orestes' prayers are answered in advance; for the nether gods

<sup>23</sup> A. F. Garvie, “The Opening of the *Choephoroi*,” *BICS* 17 (1970) 79–91, at 86.

<sup>24</sup> G. Krüger, “Hermes und Hypnos,” *Neue Jahrbücher für antike und deutsche Bildung* 87 (1863) 289–301.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. also Ap. Rhod. 4.1732; Heliod. 3.5; Pollux 6.100; Plut. *Mor.* 714C; Philostr. *Her.* 10.8.

have already sent Clytemnestra a nightmare, guided to her by Hermes and his snake-wreathed *caduceus*.

As the Parodos begins, the Chorus set forth the events that have led to these singular rites. The first mention of Clytemnestra's dream is oblique and incomplete, colored by the Chorus' own impressions. In the midst of their lamentations they speak of the dream that disturbed the sleeping palace (32–37):<sup>26</sup>

τορὸς γὰρ ὀρθόθριξ δόμων  
ὄνειρόμαντις ἐξ ὕπνου κότον πνέων  
ἀωρόνυκτον ἀμβόαμα  
μυχόθεν ἔλακε περὶ φόβῳ,  
γυναικείοισιν ἐν  
δώμασιν βαρὺς πίτνων·

A clear prophetic dream, breathing out wrath in sleep,  
which made the house's hair stand on end,  
raised a loud cry of terror at dead of night  
in the innermost part of the house,  
making a heavy attack  
on the women's quarters.<sup>27</sup>

Clytemnestra's dream is described at second hand, through the emotions it elicits. The Chorus then tell of the palace seers who interpret the dream, still without explicit reference to the specific nature of the vision—the poet is clearly holding the actual dream from us, to augment suspense (38–41):

κριταί <τε> τῶνδ' ὄνειράτων  
θεόθεν ἔλακον ὑπέγγυοι  
μέμφεσθαι τοὺς γὰρ νέρθεν περιθύμως

<sup>26</sup> These lines do not correspond metrically to the strophe, and the entire passage bears traces of corruption. I follow most editors in deleting *Φοῖβος*, which appears in **M** between *τορὸς γὰρ* and *ὀρθόθριξ* in line 32. Apollo has nothing to do with the interpretation of dreams in the palace of Argos, or with the cries of Clytemnestra. Garvie, *Aeschylus: Choephoroi* 57, may be correct in suggesting that the use of *μυχόθεν* and *ἔλακε*, words used regularly of oracles, misled a scribe to identify the *ὄνειρόμαντις* with Apollo.

<sup>27</sup> All translations are from the Loeb edition of A. H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus II Oresteia* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2008).

τοῖς κτανούσιν τ' ἔγκοτεῖν.

And the interpreters of this dream  
proclaimed, under a divine guarantee,  
that those beneath the earth were furiously aggrieved  
and wrathful against the killers.

The palace seers take the dream in its entirety as a sign, and treat its existence, as well as its content, as significant.<sup>28</sup> Their response is described in the same terms as the dream itself, emphasized by the repetition of ἔλακε and ἔλακον (35, 38). The first interpreter of the dream is Clytemnestra's fear; the second is the opinion of the experts, who confirm her initial reaction and advise her course of action. Clytemnestra, who scorned the empty promises of dreams at *Ag.* 274, has now had a warning dream sent to her from the nether world, stirring terror and compelling belief. She does not doubt that the vision is powerful and portentous, and summarily dispatches her slaves and daughter to offer libations to the angry dead.

The dream of Clytemnestra is thus introduced in the opening lines of the play, although not explained in full until after the *kommos* at 514 ff. The dream exists for different characters in succession: first for Clytemnestra, before the action of the play begins, then for the Chorus and Electra, and finally for Orestes and the audience as it is reported onstage. An appropriate tone is prepared at the outset by Orestes' invocations to Hermes and to the chthonic powers, by the setting of the action at Agamemnon's tomb, and by the funereal garb of Electra and the Chorus. In the *Parodos* great emphasis is placed upon Clytemnestra's fearful reaction to her dream, and on its clear fore-

<sup>28</sup> The plural τοὺς γὰρ νέρθεν in 40 is "deliberately vague" (Garvie, *Aeschylus: Choephoroi* 58), and may refer to Agamemnon himself or to the lower powers in general, or more probably to both. Fresh from the *Agamemnon*, we may perhaps think of Cassandra as well. The prophetess is never mentioned by name in the *Choephoroi*, and no more is said about her—but certainly her dying words, predicting the coming of Orestes and his revenge (*Ag.* 1317–1320), add to the sense of the inevitability of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus' downfall.

boding of ill. Positioned immediately after Orestes' prayer to chthonic Hermes, the reporting of the dream comes as fulfillment in advance of that prayer.

While dream is not explicitly invoked in the *kommos*, the language of the scene forges a triple bond between Clytemnestra, Orestes, and the figure of the snake, preparing for the symbolism of the still-unreported dream. Following the Parodos comes the scene of recognition between brother and sister. United by their common cause, Orestes and Electra invoke Zeus as aider and abettor of their plans for vengeance. Orestes' language in this scene fatefully matches the symbolism of the dream which he has not yet heard, and anticipates the sinister reversal of roles as son becomes murderer. Orestes calls on Zeus for aid (247–249):

ἴδοῦ δὲ γένναν εὐνὴν αἰετοῦ πατρός  
θανόντος ἐν πλεκταῖσι καὶ σπειράμασιν  
δεινῆς ἐχίδνης.

Behold the orphan brood of the eagle father,  
of him who died in the twisting coils of the fearsome viper.

The image of the eagle and his helpless chicks recalls the extended simile in the Parodos of the *Agamemnon* (*Ag.* 48–59). A new element has been added in the form of the viper (ἐχίδνης), whose deadly power Aeschylus emphasizes by the enjambment and mid-line sense pause in 249. Clytemnestra takes the part of the murderous reptile; the coils of the snake enwrap the eagle just as the net-like robe of Clytemnestra captures and strangles Agamemnon in the earlier play.<sup>29</sup> Here for the first time Clytemnestra is explicitly equated with a serpent, an identification which becomes stronger as the drama unfolds.<sup>30</sup> This initial

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Ag.* 1115, 1125–1129, and 1381–1383.

<sup>30</sup> The scholarship on snake imagery in the *Oresteia* is vast. See especially D. J. Conacher, *Aeschylus' Oresteia: A Literary Commentary* (Toronto/London 1987) 114–115, 122–124; S. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: the Oresteia* (Cambridge 1984) 159–194; Lebeck, *Oresteia* 13–15; N. Loraux, “*Matrem nudam*: Quelques versions grecques,” *L'écrit du temps* 11 (1986) 90–102, esp.

instance harks back to Cassandra's ravings in the *Agamemnon*: the prophetess, searching for a fanged demon whose evil is comparable with that of Clytemnestra, settles on the ἀμφίσβαινα, a double-headed snake (1233).

The serpent image significantly recurs later in the *Choephoroi*, when the Chorus urge Orestes to take revenge by summoning up the courage of Perseus, slayer of the serpent-haired Gorgon (831–837). After the double murders of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus they congratulate him for having cut off the heads of two serpents: δυοῖν δρακόντων εὐπετῶς τεμῶν κάρα (1047). And in his speech over the two corpses Orestes himself speaks of his mother as “moray-eel or a viper” (μύραινά γ’ εἶτ’ ἔχιδν’ ἔφνυ, 994), so poisonous that a man would rot by her mere touch without having been bitten.

Clytemnestra's dream, still incompletely revealed, haunts the great *kommos* with its appeal to the full panoply of underworld powers. With the exception of Hermes, messenger between two worlds, the powers that preside over dreams in the *Choephoroi* are all chthonic. For Earth, mother of all things, is mother also of dreams. Aeschylus reminds us in the opening line of the *Eumenides* that Earth is πρωτόμαντις (1), the first of prophets and origin of the power of the Pythia.<sup>31</sup> So too, later in the *Choephoroi*, after Orestes has heard the dream in full, he prays to Earth and to his father's tomb for fulfillment (540).

Once the linkage between Orestes, Clytemnestra, and the snake has been established through the language of the *kommos*, we are allowed to hear at last the content of Clytemnestra's

99–100; for a psychoanalytical approach see G. Devereux, *Dreams in Greek Tragedy: An Ethno-psychoanalytical Study* (Oxford 1976) 181–218.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the connection between dreams and the deep Earth is a commonplace of Greek thought. In the *Odyssey* the slain suitors go down to Hades via the land of dreams (δῆμον ὀνειρώων, 24.12). Euripides in the *Hecuba* makes reference to Earth as the mother of μελανοπτερύγων ὀνειρώων (70–71), and the Chorus in *Iphigeneia in Tauris* likewise speak of Χθών in connection with dreams and the Pythian oracle (1259–1267). Cf. also Aristophanes' *Frogs* 1331 ff., where in the poetic ἀγών Aeschylus speaks of dream as a child of black Night (ὦ νυκτὸς κελαινοφαῆς ὄρφνα).

dream, leading immediately to its interpretation. After the ritual at the tomb has been duly performed, Orestes turns to the Chorus to enquire how and why Clytemnestra resolved to send these libations. The slave-women reply that her nightmare prompted her to order these apotropaic rites (523–525):

οἶδ', ὦ τέκνον, παρῆ γάρ· ἔκ τ' ὄνειράτων  
καὶ νυκτιπλάγκτων δειμάτων πεπαλμένη  
χοῶς ἔπεμψε τάσδε δύσθεος γυνή.

I do know, my child, because I was there.  
That godless woman sent these drink-offerings  
because she was shaken by dreams and wandering terrors  
of the night.

Orestes, filled with the spirit of vengeance by the *kommos*, readily seizes upon the dream as relevant to his own plans. In the stichomythic section that follows, his questions, pointed and insistent, draw out the explanation of the dream (526–533). Finally he asks what end the story reached, and the Chorus respond with the details already revealed in the Parodos (535–539):

ἦ δ' ἐξ ὕπνου κέκλαγγεν ἐπτοημένη,  
πολλοὶ δ' ἀνήθοντ' ἐκτυφλωθέντες σκότῳ  
λαμπτήρες ἐν δόμοισι δεσποίνης χάριν.  
πέμπει δ' ἔπειτα τάσδε κηδείους χοῶς,  
ἄκος τομαῖον ἐλπίσασα πημάτων.

She cried out in terror in her sleep,  
and many house-lights which had been extinguished into  
blind darkness  
blazed up again for the sake of our mistress.  
Then she sent these drink-offerings of mourning,  
hoping for a decisive cure for her troubles.

The drink offerings which Clytemnestra sends are intended as a “sharp cutting” (i.e. “decisive cure,” *ἄκος τομαῖον*, 539) for her troubles. The surgical remedy she has in mind fulfills itself in the form of Orestes, both toothed serpent and sword-wielding son.

Immediately upon hearing it, Orestes declares that the dream was not empty, and names himself its interpreter, as well



its central sign.<sup>32</sup> He proposes to explain the dream in such a way that all the parts “are glued together” (*συγκόλλως ἔχειν*, 542), and thereby achieves semantic mastery over it. If the serpent was born from the same place as he, was wrapped like him in swaddling clothes, and nursed at the same breast, whose milk it mixed with blood, then it is clear that Clytemnestra is to die by violence (540–550). As Deborah Roberts explains it, in this scene Orestes takes on a “threefold prophetic role”: he is at once the fulfillment of a series of portents, an interpreter of portents, and himself a portent that must be interpreted.<sup>33</sup>

Orestes’ interpretation of the dream, like Clytemnestra’s fearful reaction to it, determines the way in which the action will play out.<sup>34</sup> Orestes is the snake because he himself has gone through the same sequence of birth and nurture, point for point, as the Chorus describe; and Clytemnestra is destined to die by violence because the serpent suckles blood from the breast she offers it. Orestes resolves the terms of the dream specifically by recognizing the relationship between mother and child, and by identifying himself with the serpent. Behind

<sup>32</sup> κρίνω δέ τοί νιν ὥστε συγκόλλως ἔχειν (542). According to Kessels, *Studies* 28 ff. with n.14, 35, 175, and 188, the reference to the κριταί of Clytemnestra’s dream in the Parodos (38) and this self-styling of Orestes are the earliest attested cases in which κρίνω means to “interpret” an allegorical or symbolic dream. Earlier the verb, always in the middle in Homer, refers to the separation of true and false dreams.

<sup>33</sup> D. H. Roberts, “Orestes as Fulfillment, *Teraskopos*, and *Teras* in the *Oresteia*,” *AJP* 106 (1985) 283–297, at 291.

<sup>34</sup> Orestes thus emerges as the first successful dream-interpreter in the trilogy. The Chorus of the *Agamemnon* are impotent not only in their failure to understand their own prophetic visions, but, more significantly, in their inability to effect the outcome even of what they do understand. The professional κριταί of the *Choephoroi* advise Clytemnestra to avert the evil omen of her nightmare with apotropaic offerings, but, for obvious reasons, their feed advice cannot include any genuine acknowledgement of Clytemnestra’s guilt, nor any attempt to address her past crimes. Cf. Devereux, *Dreams* 203: “Orestes interprets the dream, out loud, in a particular way, so as to *make* it come true in *that* particular way.” See further J. J. Peradotto, “Cledonomanicy in the *Oresteia*,” *AJP* 90 (1969) 1–21.

his acceptance of an identity with the deadly reptile lies an unstated identification with his mother, who has repeatedly been likened to a viper. Orestes has taken upon himself the character which belonged to Clytemnestra, and will act as she did; he is the ἔκπαγλον τέρας (548). He will kill the loathsome serpent, after having “turned snake” himself (ἐκδρακοντωθείς, 549): a perilous strategy, since he will be left as the vessel of pollution. Orestes is torn between the opposing claims of father and mother, being “at once the nestling of the eagle, Agamemnon, and the offspring of the viper, Clytemnestra.”<sup>35</sup>

The first half of the *Choephoroi* is wound up as description and preparation; the second half unspools as action. Orestes’ incompatible identities as son and killer are juxtaposed in his confrontation with his mother. He must fulfill his part in the drama of revenge—but, of course, seen in moral perspective, his act only deepens his own conflict. And in religious perspective, although his deed is divinely ordained, the pollution which now adheres to him is inevitable and extreme.

When Clytemnestra hears the panicked cries of the palace servants, she immediately understands that they portend a threat to her life. Master of any situation, she quick-wittedly calls for her “man-slaughtering axe” (887–891). But when Orestes appears and announces that Aegisthus is dead, Clytemnestra switches tactics. Rather than opposing her son with force, she appeals to αἰδώς and to the bond between mother and son. Confronted with the serpent, Clytemnestra presents her breast.<sup>36</sup> We do not know, of course, how the action would

<sup>35</sup> J. J. Peradotto, “The Omen of the Eagles and the ΗΘΟΣ of Agamemnon,” *Phoenix* 23 (1969) 237–263, at 259.

<sup>36</sup> W. Whallon, “The Serpent at the Breast,” *TAPA* 89 (1958) 271–275, at 274, argues that this passage is a “brilliant deceit,” as the speech of the Nurse (750–757) has demonstrated that Clytemnestra never nursed Orestes herself. This is to deprive Clytemnestra’s gesture of its primal symbolism. The Nurse is brought onstage as someone who loves Orestes for himself, not as a potential avenger, and the unadulterated sincerity of her reaction to the news of his death throws into sharper relief Clytemnestra’s mixture of

have been played by a masked, male actor, but the visual element must have been highly charged, even shocking. Clytemnestra's primal act carries us back into the world of her dream. She implores Orestes to revere the breast where he suckled as a child, where he drew milk not with the fangs of a snake but with an infant's toothless gums (898). Confirming the Chorus' prediction at 826–830, she manipulates Orestes' emotions by addressing him as *παῖ* and *τέκνον* (896–898).

The thought of *αἰδώς* makes Orestes hesitate: the meaning includes filial piety and respect, modesty, and shame. At this critical juncture, Pylades, the third actor, speaks for the first time. He reminds Orestes that an Olympian power commands this murder: the oracle of Apollo. Thus the dream and the oracle climactically come together to drive the action of the *Choephoroi* towards its closure. The dream, emanating like an unholy vapor from the tomb of Agamemnon, and the oracle, sent from the Olympian god through his earthly priestess, doubly motivate Orestes' revenge. As snake, he is now the weapon of the gods.

Orestes, his will steeled by the admonition of Pylades, does not retreat before his mother. When Clytemnestra sees that her appeals have won her no mercy, she turns instead to warnings of the revenge that will pursue Orestes if he becomes a matricide. She states the crime, clearly and deliberately, in order to intensify its horror (922–923):

ΚΛ. κτενεῖν ἔοικας, ὦ τέκνον, τὴν μητέρα.

ΟΡ. σύ τοι σεαυτήν, οὐκ ἐγώ, κατακτενεῖς.

Cl. You seem, my child, to be on the point of killing your mother.

Or. It is not I that will kill you: *you* will have killed yourself.

Orestes' reply again draws on the logic of Clytemnestra's dream. Clytemnestra bore and nourished the serpent that wounded her; she is mother both to the terrible murder that necessitates her death in recompense, and to Orestes, the means of that death.

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hypocrisy and grief earlier in the scene.

Clytemnestra's last words acknowledge the fulfillment of her dream. She knew already that her dream portended evil, but only at this moment of crisis does she understand its full significance. The image has become incarnate, and her fear stands as the guarantor of its veracity (928–929):<sup>37</sup>

ΚΛ. οἶ γώ, τεκοῦσα τόνδ' ὄφιν ἐθρεψάμην.  
ἦ κάρτα μάντις οὐξ ὄνειράτων φόβος.

Cl. Ah me, this is the snake I bore and nourished!  
The dream that terrified me was truly prophetic indeed!

In the *Choephoroi*, the force of character alone is not sufficient to drive the plot to its inevitable conclusion. Rather, in the central play of the trilogy the thread of the plot is pulled tight between the two fixed points of the dream and the confrontation. The entelechy of the serpent-breast vision—glimpsed, long suspended, and then made manifest—serves, in this sense, as the thematic impetus of the drama and its central action.

### III. *Eumenides*: Drawing Back the Veil

Throughout the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*, the realms of beast, human, and spirit have existed in parallel: metaphor, not action, connects them. So, for instance, we have seen that the snake in Clytemnestra's dream is at once (1) a loathsome and ill-omened reptile, (2) her son Orestes, and (3) the agent of divine retribution for her crimes. In the first scenes of the *Eumenides* what was previously expressed through metaphor and extraordinary vision becomes dramatic reality. It is as though the material veil of the universe has been drawn aside, so that we may see the divine beings already involved in the action of

<sup>37</sup> There is room for doubt about the assigning of 929 to Clytemnestra. **M** and most editors give the line to Orestes, on the argument that he, as the victorious party, concludes the stichomythia with a weighty two lines. Yet both Page and Garvie argue that it is more likely, and more effective, that Clytemnestra herself should dwell upon the meaning of her dream at this final juncture. She is given two lines because they are the last she speaks in the play; and Orestes' brusque reply is not out of keeping with his tone throughout the exchange. See further Garvie, *Aeschylus: Choephoroi* 301–302.

the trilogy.<sup>38</sup> Expressed as imagery in the *Agamemnon* and as action in the *Choephoroi*, in the *Eumenides* figures from the world of dream walk the stage as actors in the drama.

In the ἀγών of the *Eumenides* opposed supernatural forces battle for control: on the one side stand the creatures of nightmare, the χθόνιοι, represented by the ghost of Clytemnestra and her fearsome agents; on the other side stand Apollo and the gods of Olympus, the οὐράνιοι, champions of the clarity of δίκη.<sup>39</sup> In order for the audience to participate emotionally and viscerally in this struggle, in support of Apollo's civilizing programme, they must first be drawn into Orestes' awful visions. To this end, Aeschylus allows the realm of nightmare, with its unmediated experience of guilt and terror, fully to penetrate the human world on the stage. Only after being horrified by the filthy, bloodthirsty Erinyes, and by the shrieking ghost of Clytemnestra who urges them on in pursuit of Orestes, can the audience endorse the solemn procession which ends the trilogy and establishes the rule of law in Athens.

At the end of the *Choephoroi* the Erinyes exist in a liminal space between subjective and objective reality. The terrifying beings are clearly visible to Orestes, but not to the Chorus or the audience.<sup>40</sup> Aeschylus underscores the paradoxical nature

<sup>38</sup> Other metaphors for the effect of the concluding drama have been suggested, for instance that the scene shifts from the external world to the tortured inner consciousness of Orestes (cf. Whallon, *TAPA* 89 [1958] 273).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. H. Lloyd-Jones, "Erinyes, Semnai Theai, Eumenides," in E. M. Craik (ed.), *Owls to Athens* (Oxford 1990) 203–211, at 204: "Aeschylus exploits the polarity between *ouranioi* and *chthonioi*, as he exploits that between the gods of the older generation and the gods who rule Olympus."

<sup>40</sup> As they were visible to Cassandra at *Ag.* 1186–1193, but not to the Chorus or the audience. The idea of a god manifesting himself to only one member of a group is familiar from Homer (e.g. *Il.* 1.198, *Od.* 16.160 ff.), and certainly does not imply that the manifestation has no objective reality. W. Whallon, *Problem and Spectacle: Studies in the Oresteia* (Heidelberg 1980) 91, has proposed that the Furies are in fact seen, in addition to the slave women of the Chorus, in the last scene of the *Choephoroi*; the question has been thoroughly discussed by A. L. Brown, "The Erinyes in the *Oresteia*: Real

of the Furies' appearance by playing on the word *δοκεῖν*. Orestes' extra-metrical cries (*ᾄ ᾄ*, 1048) urge the slave women to look, to see what he sees, but in vain. The Chorus leader tells him to hold firm, not to fear these fancies (*δόξαι*, 1051); for her the Furies are merely symptoms of Orestes' fearful imagination. Yet for Orestes the Erinyes have a horrifying reality: picking up on the Chorus leader's language, Orestes replies that these beings are not fancies (*δόξαι*, 1053); they are plainly (*σαφῶς*, 1054) the wrathful hounds of his mother. The Chorus cannot understand, because they cannot see what he sees: *ἡμεῖς μὲν οὐχ ὁράτε τάσδ', ἐγὼ δ' ὁρῶ* (1061).

The repetition of the key word *δόξαι* draws a parallel between the visions that pursue Orestes and the more commonly experienced visions of dreams. We have already heard that nightmare is one way in which the Furies work upon their victims (*Cho.* 288): whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad. Even before committing matricide, Orestes was threatened with the kind of nightmare that revealed the anger of the dead against his mother; and now he will in fact be driven from the city maddened and in fear. As Edmond Lévy has discussed, *δοκεῖν* and *δόξα* are frequently found in connection with descriptions of dreams in Greek tragedy and elsewhere, and their use often emphasizes the subjective character of the dream vision.<sup>41</sup> Dream visions (*δόξαι*) appear only to the person who dreams them; but at the same time they seem more real and more overwhelming than diurnal sights.

Furthermore, dreams may permit direct access from the spirit world to human consciousness in a way that is familiar to all—visions are given to few, dreams to everyone. We may recall Cassandra's description of the slaughtered children who stand before the palace of Atreus, clear to her sight like the

Life, the Supernatural and the Stage," *JHS* 103 (1983) 13–34, and is succinctly summarized by Garvie, *Aeschylus: Choephoroi* ad 973–1076.

<sup>41</sup> Lévy, in *Théâtre et spectacles* 151–152. In Aeschylus, *δοκεῖν* occurs in connection with dreams at *Pers.* 181–183, 188, *Ag.* 423, and *Cho.* 527; and *δόξα* at *Ag.* 275, 421.

visions of dreams (*ὄνειρων προσφερῆς μορφώμασιν*, *Ag.* 1216). Like Orestes, Cassandra again and again draws attention to what she “sees,” and urges the Chorus to “look,” even though they are unable to share her visions or understand her distress.<sup>42</sup> She alludes to dreams because they are the bridge of common use between worlds. The Greek audience will have been able to make the step across in both cases from the idea of madness and illusion, to that of second sight and the perception of a higher reality.

The Erinyes are both cause and symptom of Orestes’ madness. As in a dream, an undesired window has opened between his mind and the usually unseen workings of the supernatural world. The staging emphasizes Orestes’ isolation: the Chorus and the audience, outside of his crime, cannot participate in his visions. Torn between the desire to see what he sees and fear of the terrible spectacle he describes, they stare and see nothing. The experience of supernatural vision is introduced in the final scene of the *Choephoroi*, suspended, and then, in a dramatic enjambment, continued and made more powerful at the beginning of the next play.<sup>43</sup>

Thus the bursting in of previously unseen forces at the beginning of the *Eumenides* comes at the end of a gradual process of build-up and preparation. In the *Agamemnon*, the prophetess Cassandra sees where divine decisions and human crimes interpenetrate. Cassandra sees the Furies. The old men of Argos, too, have some poetic and imagistic sense of the larger forces at work in Troy’s downfall, and later in Agamemnon’s death. The lyric invocation to the dead king in the *Choephoroi* keys the audience to expect some response from the nether world; and at the end of the play we witness Orestes maddened by monstrous beings that only he can see.

<sup>42</sup> Cassandra speaks of vision at *Ag.* 1114, 1125, 1179, 1217.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1977) 361: “In a sense Orestes’ final exit is the first move of the *Eumenides*. Orestes flees pursued by the Erinyes, and the pursuit crosses over between the two plays.”

Even so, the visual representation of otherworldly beings comes as a shock. After Orestes' departure at the end of the *Choephoroi*, the audience may expect that the spirit world will remain, as it has been, separate from the action onstage, glimpsed by the characters through the narrow portals of dream, madness, and hallucination, and available to the audience only as language.

If the last scene of the *Choephoroi* raised in the audience a doubt about the objective existence of the Erinyes, that doubt will be abruptly overwhelmed in the final play. The opening scenes of the *Eumenides* propel the audience into the supernatural world. Aeschylus nevertheless contrives to keep us in suspense, so that the revelation of the Erinyes delivers the maximum possible impact. The first character of the play is human, albeit with a privileged connection to the divine. The Pythia, as the official mouthpiece of the Delphic oracle, stands with one foot in each realm. In contrast to the scene of Orestes' madness that concluded the *Choephoroi*, the Pythia begins her speech on a note of ordered calm. She prays to the gods of Delphi, announces that the oracle is open for consultation, and with dignity proceeds to enter the temple.

A moment later the priestess emerges again, overcome by terror. She crawls on hands and knees like a frightened child (37–38). Shaken, she describes at some length the scene of grisly horror that drove her out again: inside the temple sits a man with bloody hands, a suppliant at the navel-stone, surrounded by a company of indescribable, filthy female beings (40–59). The two portions of the Pythia's speech take place under radically different assumptions about the dramatic world onstage: in Taplin's words, "the first half shows a pious routine which is the outcome of a peaceful Delphic tradition; the second vividly conveys the abhorrent and incomprehensible disruption which the Erinyes have brought into this orderly Delphic world."<sup>44</sup> In the brief space of time that the stage stood

<sup>44</sup> Taplin, *Stagecraft* 362–363.



empty, bestial and spirit forces have violently entered into the perception of the characters onstage, and of the audience.

But the Erinyes are not alone for long: Clytemnestra, whom we last saw fighting for her life, appears as a gruesome embodiment of death. Her ghost<sup>45</sup> calls upon the sleeping Erinyes, enjoining them to look upon her wounds (*ὄρα δὲ πληγὰς τάσδε καρδίᾳ σέθεν*, 103). Eyes closed in sleep, each Erinyes must see “in her heart” (*καρδίᾳ*). The implication seems to be that in sleep the heart has the ability to perceive truth, even against the will of its owner. In the last line of her speech Clytemnestra boldly identifies herself: *ὄναρ γὰρ ὑμᾶς νῦν Κλυταιμῆστρα καλῶ* (116). Until this point there has been no explicit statement that what we are witnessing is a dream, and without this line the scene could perhaps be read in a number of different ways. For little in Clytemnestra’s appearance is typical of actual dreams. As Brown has written, in this embodiment of a dream on the stage Aeschylus “follow[s] the logic of the dramatic presentation rather than that of an abstract conception.”<sup>46</sup> Clytemnestra appears to all the Erinyes at once, not because a real dream would do so, but because a single, externally visible visitant could. She reproaches them for sleeping, which seems natural in a standing, wakeful figure addressing many prone ones.

Most remarkably, the Furies over the course of the scene are revealed to be dreaming about something else entirely, namely their pursuit of Orestes (130–132). As Brown writes, “formally the inconsistency is absolute, for the Furies can dream either that they are pursuing Orestes or that they are being reproved for not doing so, but hardly both at once.”<sup>47</sup> Clytemnestra’s perversely clear-sighted, paradoxical relationship with dream-

<sup>45</sup> In calling Clytemnestra a ghost, I perhaps beg the question of the relationship between ghost, vision, and dream. Clytemnestra identifies herself as a dream, yet, for the audience, who are awake and not possessed of visionary powers, she is necessarily understood as the ghost of the dead queen.

<sup>46</sup> Brown, *JHS* 103 (1983) 30.

<sup>47</sup> Brown, *JHS* 103 (1983) 31.

ing over the course of the trilogy is now taken up on another plane. She is neither fully within nor fully outside of the Erinyes' dream; she inhabits an undefined space with access to both realms. Yet the logical contradiction would not have troubled the audience, so fully do both Clytemnestra and the Erinyes embody their roles as wakeful spirit and passive sleepers. In the final analysis, the words and actions of Clytemnestra as a dream figure reflect her own purposes and the purposes of the dramatist, rather than any typical features of actual dreams.<sup>48</sup>

In the actor playing Clytemnestra, dream has acquired a visible, physical existence on the stage. Nevertheless, the dream remains intimately bound up with the sleeping Furies, and must again obey dramatic logic by disappearing before they are fully awake. The voice of the ghost pulls the Furies from their dream and sets them in movement. Clytemnestra's harangue serves as an ironic commentary on the self-deluding content of the Furies' dream, their pursuit of Orestes. As they are gradually roused to actual pursuit, her voice fades away, or rather her injunction blends into the Erinyes' own efforts (140–142):

ἔγειρ', ἔγειρε καὶ σὺ τήνδ', ἐγὼ δὲ σέ.  
 εὐδεις; ἀνίστω, κάπολακτίσασ' ὕπνον,  
 ἰδώμεθ' εἰ τι τοῦδε φροιμίου ματᾶ.

Wake her—you wake her, as I do you!  
 are you sleeping? Get up, shake off sleep,  
 and let's see whether that dream-prophecy was wide of the mark  
 at all.

Once the Chorus is fully awake, singing and dancing their plans of revenge, Clytemnestra need no longer be visibly present in their midst—the wrathful spirit has entered into her agents.

The dialogue between the ghost of Clytemnestra and the sleeping Erinyes marks a transition from the imagined world of spirit and dream to the enacted world of the stage. Dream has

<sup>48</sup> See Kessels, *Studies* 155–162, and Harris, *Dreams and Experience* 23–90.

throughout the trilogy provided a way to see what is otherwise invisible: the realm of the supernatural, where humans mingle with gods, monsters, and the dead. Here, through the medium of poetic drama, Aeschylus allows the audience to see in open display what otherwise they might only glimpse in disconnected fragments through the altered states of madness, dream, or hallucination. As Frontisi-Ducroux writes of this scene, “it is a dream space, bloodied with sufferings and hatreds, which affords an intermediate level between the invisible Beyond, home of those beings and the dead queen’s ghost, and the reality of the stage where they will materialize before the spectators.”<sup>49</sup>

The metaphor of dream, introduced in the *Agamemnon* and explored in the *Choephoroi*, thus contributes to an understanding of the purpose, nature, and significance of the shift in dramatic convention between the end of the *Choephoroi* and the beginning of the *Eumenides*. The action of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* is overseen and in some sense directed by the gods, but no supernatural being walks the stage as an actor. Within the first two hundred lines of the *Eumenides* the audience has seen in quick succession the Chorus of Gorgon-faced Erinyes, the god Apollo, and the ghostly dream figure of Clytemnestra.

The action of the trilogy moves at two levels, natural and supernatural. Aeschylus brings the near level into focus in the first two plays, and the far level in the third; or, rather, in the *Eumenides* he brings both together. This is a bold synthesis, a view of the whole of what is, on a par with the unifying visions of the philosophers.<sup>50</sup> In the final analysis, however, Aeschylus’

<sup>49</sup> F. Frontisi-Ducroux, “The Invention of the Erinyes,” in C. Kraus et al. (eds.), *Visualizing the Tragic: Drama, Myth, and Ritual in Greek Art and Literature. Essays in Honour of Froma Zeitlin* (Oxford 2007) 165–176, at 173.

<sup>50</sup> R. Seaford, “Aeschylus and the Unity of Opposites,” *JHS* 123 (2003) 141–163, has made claims for Aeschylus’ affinities with Presocratic thought. In a more general sense, Aeschylus writes of all phenomena, whether animal, human, or divine, as fundamentally interconnected and interdependent.

representation of the supernatural redirects focus onto the world of human beings. By putting gods and monsters on stage, Aeschylus explores the relationship between internal and external motivation in the human search for retribution and justice.<sup>51</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

Over the course of the *Oresteia*, dreams move from the realm of metaphor and imagery to the realm of action and, ultimately, to that of actor. In the *Agamemnon* dream images function as polyvalent symbols, transcending any immediate context. Familiar features of dream-consciousness provide a metaphor for both the uncertainty and the emotional power of the tragic situation. Thus dreams become a symbol of riddling complexity and hidden meaning, of all that is insecure, unstable, and indistinct. Additionally, the Chorus of the *Agamemnon* sing of the wisdom that comes to man in dreams, which may be a source of genuine truth, but of a truth transformed and disguised, requiring interpretation. Dreams in the language of the prophetess Cassandra convey hyper-clear, intense visual impressions, which overwhelm with their insistency. Cassandra's mantic visions, compared both to dreams and to madness, allow her privileged access into the workings of the spirit realm.

In the *Choephoroi* dreams move beyond metaphor to become a driving force of the plot. As the play opens Clytemnestra, who was so scornful of dreams at *Ag.* 274, and who used dreams to disguise her motives at *Ag.* 891, has now had an undeniable warning dream sent to her by the powers below. The dream's primal, opposed symbols of breast and serpent elevate the conflict between mother and son to a higher plane of metaphor and meaning. In the climactic scene of the play, Orestes and Clytemnestra enact the dream on the stage, as Clytemnestra

<sup>51</sup> P. E. Easterling, "Gods on Stage in Greek Tragedy," in J. Dalfen et al. (eds.), *Religio Graeco-Romana, Festschrift für Walter Pötscher (Gräzzer Beitr. Suppl. 5 [1993])* 77–86.

bare her breast to the sword of her avenging son. The dream's fulfillment and the resolution of its imagery mark the hand of *δίκη* at work in human affairs.

The interpenetration of bestial, human, and divine realms, condensed into the symbols of Clytemnestra's dream, is made manifest in dramatic action at the beginning of the *Eumenides*. The final scene of the *Choephoroi* cues the audience to the felt presence of the supernatural, while at the same time reinforcing the expectation that chthonic and Olympian deities are visible only to those in the extraordinary states of dreaming, hallucinatory prophecy, or madness. The terms of the argument are the same as between Cassandra and the Chorus in the *Agamemnon*, but now they are opposed as starkly as possible: those "illusions" (*δόξαι*) versus "they are not illusions to me!" One play ends, and then the song is immediately taken up in a new key. In a dramatic tour de force, Aeschylus sets the audience in the midst of this world of heightened—indeed full—awareness, bodying forth the ancient Erinyes, daughters of Night, along with the resplendent Olympians Apollo and Athena. And the wraith of Clytemnestra, no illusion, dares to scold and direct the false-dreaming gods: herself a dream, she stands and speaks on the stage.

Throughout the trilogy dreams are deployed to disclose the closely connected workings of a tragic fate inherent in the *γένος*; now a new role is forecast for dreams. The *Agamemnon* begins with a single man, fearful and powerless, on guard duty (*φρουρά*, 2), watching for the return of a doomed hero. Having come full circle, the *Eumenides* ends with the goddess Athena establishing a guardian council (*φρούρημα*, 706), divine and human both, to watch over the sleeping citizens of the land. The closing procession of the *Eumenides* grants to dreams the significance of benevolent and solemn guardians—one way in which the just and sleepless gods, all-seeing, guide us through our darkling life. As Anne Lebeck has described, the trilogy's resolution, and the transformation of the Erinyes into Semnai Theai, is reflected on another level in the resolution and transformation of imagery. Images "hitherto adverse, possessed of ominous quality, are turned into their auspicious equiva-

lents.”<sup>52</sup> Formally enacting the establishment of the Areopagus, Athena declares that the court will watch over the land, wakeful on behalf of those who sleep (704–706):

κερδῶν ἄθικτον τοῦτο βουλευτήριον,  
αἰδοῖον, ὀξύθυμον, εὐδόντων ὑπερ  
ἐγρηγορὸς φρούρημα γῆς καθίσταμαι.

This council, untouched by thought of gain,  
reverent, quick to anger, a wakeful sentinel for the land  
to protect those who sleep, I hereby establish.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Lebeck, *Oresteia* 131.

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