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THE DYNAMICS OF MISOGYNY: MYTH AND MYTHMAKING IN THE ORESTEIA*

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THE *Oresteia* occupies a privileged position in any examination of the Greek mind and spirit and stands as one of those monumental works of art which transcend their aesthetic values, for it gives voice and form to the social and political ideology of the period at the same time as it actively shapes the collective fantasies of its audience with its own authoritative vision. By taking as his subject a dynastic myth known to us from the very beginning of Greek literature and transforming it into a wide-ranging myth of origins, Aeschylus draws upon his mythopoetic powers in the service of world-building. The last play leads us back to a reenactment of the cosmic struggle between Olympian and chthonic forces, and the trilogy ends with two social but divinely sanctioned acts of creation: the first human court to judge cases of homicide and the new religious cult of the Eumenides. The *Oresteia*'s program is to trace the evolution of civilization by placing the *polis* at the center of its vision and endowing it with the creative power to coordinate human, natural, and divine forces.

For Aeschylus, civilization is the ultimate product of conflict between opposing forces, achieved not through a *coincidentia oppositorum* but through a hierarchization of values. The solution, therefore, places Olympian over chthonic on the divine level, Greek over barbarian on the cultural level, and male above female on the social level. But the male-female conflict subsumes the other two, for while it maintains its own emotive function in the dramatization of human concerns, it provides too the central metaphor which "sexualizes" the other issues and attracts them into its magnetic field. This schematization 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. Moreover, the basic issue in the trilogy is the establishment in the face of female resistance of the binding nature of patriarchal marriage where wife's subordination and patrilineal succession are reaffirmed. In the course of the drama, in fact, every permutation of the feminine is exhibited before us: goddess, queen, wife, mother, daughter, sister, bride, virgin,

adulteress, nurse, witch, Fury, priestess. Every issue, every action stems from the female so that she serves as the catalyst of events even as she is the main object of inquiry.[1]

Viewed as a gynecocentric document, the *Oresteia* then holds an equally privileged position in any exploration of the Greek image of the female, the definition of her social role and status, her functions and meanings. If Aeschylus is concerned with world-building, the cornerstone of his architecture is the control of woman, the social and cultural prerequisite for the construction of civilization. The *Oresteia* stands squarely within the misogynistic tradition which pervades Greek thought, a bias which both projects a combative dialogue in male-female interactions and which relates the mastery of the female to higher social goals.

But in the breadth of its scope and in the complexity of its treatment, the *Oresteia* moves out beyond the other exemplars. The diachronic sweep of the trilogic form creates a broad field in space and time for amplifying patterns and themes, while mythopoetic stratagems lend prestigious authority to dramatic enactment. The *Oresteia* expands the paradigm by incorporating other myths and mythic elements into a comprehensive frame of reference and transforms it by an imaginative synthesis which culminates in the creation of a definitive new myth. The trilogy looks both ways. It stands as the fullest realization of an attitude which from its first literary expression in the *Odyssey* is already associated with Clytemnestra (*Od.* 24.199-202).[2] But by integrating the issue into a coherent system of new values, by formulating it in new abstract terms, and by shifting to a new mode of argumentation, it provides the decisive model for the future legitimation of this attitude in Western thought. It is the purpose of this paper to examine the *Oresteia* as mythopoesis and to reveal the strategies by which it achieves its aims.

I. THE MYTH OF MATRIARCHY

The progression of events in the *Oresteia* is straightforward. Woman rises up against male authority in a patriarchal society. By slaying her husband and by choosing her own sexual partner, she shatters the social norms and brings social functioning to a standstill. Portrayed as monstrous androgyne, she demands and usurps male power and prerogatives. Son then slays mother in open alliance with

the cause of father and husband, and mother's Erinyes, in turn, pursue him in retribution.

The dynamics of the process, however, are noteworthy. Clytemnestra, the female principle, in the first play is a shrewd intelligent rebel against the masculine regime, but by the last play, through her representatives, the Erinyes, female is now allied with the archaic, primitive, and regressive, while male in the person of the young god, Apollo, champions conjugality, society, and progress, and his interests are ratified by the androgynous goddess, Athena, who sides with the male and confirms his primacy. Through gradual and subtle transformations, social evolution is posed as a movement from female dominance to male dominance, or, as it is often figuratively phrased, from "matriarchy" to "patriarchy."[3]

For Bachofen, as for many who followed him, this evolution represented a true historical development, and it was no accident that for verification of his general theories of the origins of society he drew heavily on ancient classical sources, including the *Oresteia*, and gave his different phases names drawn from Greek mythology.[4] For the Greek mythic imagination is rich in projections of female autonomy and Greek religion is amply populated with powerful female deities who seem to antedate their male counterparts in the pantheon. The great Greek culture heroes, Heracles and Theseus, are aggressively misogynistic and each counts among his founding acts of civilization the confrontation and defeat of those woman warriors, the Amazons (Slater 1968: 393). Iconographically, the Amazonomachy figures on the same level of significance as those two other great victories over the giants and the centaurs. The female, the earth-born elements, and the hybrid beast share the same associative sphere.

But matriarchy in the literal meaning of the term is not provable as a historical reality whatever the differences in social structure may have been between the inhabitants of the Aegean basin and the invading Indo-Europeans.[5] Far more compelling is Bamberger's theory of the myth of matriarchy as myth, not "a memory of history, but a social charter," which "may be part of social history in providing justification for a present and perhaps permanent reality by giving an invented 'historical' explanation of how this reality was created" (Bamberger 1974: 267).

From a cross-cultural perspective, the *Oresteia* can be characterized as an intricate and fascinating variant of a widely distributed

myth of matriarchy, the so-called Rule of Women, whose details differ but whose general scenario conforms to a consistent pattern. Such myths are normally found in "societies where there also exists a set of cultural rules and procedures for determining sexual dimorphism in social and cultural tasks." Women once had power, but they abused it through "trickery and unbridled sexuality," thus fostering "chaos and misrule." The men, therefore, rebelled. They assumed control and took steps to institutionalize the subordination of women. The point of the myth is not the recording of some historical or prehistorical state of affairs, but rather that women are not fit to rule, only to be ruled (Bamberger 1974: 276, 280).

While the simpler myth of matriarchy reads as a definitive masculine triumph which establishes the pattern for all time, the variations, repetitions, and frequency of the pattern in Greek myths attest to the continuing renewability of the battle between the sexes in many areas and circumstances. The conflictual nature of the encounter is consonant with the generally agonistic outlook of the Greek world, while the consistency of the portrayal of the woman reflects perhaps the deep-seated conviction that the female is basically unruly. The vigorous denial of power to the female overtly asserts her inferiority while at the same time expresses anxiety towards her persistent but normally dormant power which may always erupt into open violence. But the eruption of that force is not perceived as a purely unpredictable menace; rather it follows a discernible linear pattern that proceeds in conformity to its own particular "logic," its own dynamics, which arises directly out of this fundamental ambivalence towards women.

The central role played in mythology by male-female encounters attests to the significance and complexity of the problem even as the proliferation of versions indicates perhaps the impossibility of finding a satisfactory conclusion. In turning to Aeschylus to outline the version of this "logic" of misogyny operative in his drama – the dramatic sequence of events and the hidden assumptions that regulate this sequence – it is noteworthy that the poet must in effect invent his own solution.

The conjugal relationship is the focus of the struggle. Already assumed as the pre-existing norm, it is not accepted in its current form by the female as an absolute imperative. In the *Oresteia*, wife and mother, Clytemnestra, repudiates it from inside the society, al-

though it may be rejected from the outside, as the Danaids, militant young virgins, do in another trilogy. The ultimate goal of both trilogies is the female's full acceptance of the marital bond as necessary, natural, and just. In each case, the prior rejection of marriage leads to the massacre of the male, the corollary of which is the threat of extinction to human society as a whole. Clytemnestra slays her husband. Danaids slay their bridegrooms on their wedding night. The polarizing imagination of Greek mythic thought not only establishes a strong dichotomy between male and female, it also posits predictable behavioral responses at either end of the spectrum where female self-assertion on her own behalf is expressed only at the cost of annihilating the Other. We might perhaps speak of an "Amazon" complex which envisions that woman's refusal of her required subordinate role must, by an inevitable sequence, lead to its opposite: total domination, gynecocracy, whose extreme form projects the enslavement or murder of men. That same polarizing imagination can only conceive of two hierarchic alternatives: Rule by Men or Rule by Women. (Cf. Eurip. *Or.* 933-37).

The portrait of Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon* specifically links her independence of thought and action with a desire to rule (Winnington-Ingram 1948: 130-47), an emphasis which transforms a personal vendetta into a gynecocratic issue, which presents the first motive as synchronic not diachronic with the other. Husband is also king, an economy which conflates the two social statuses and erases political and domestic distinctions, and permits the merger of personal revenge and political ambition. Clytemnestra begins, in fact, as woman in charge, for, as the chorus remarks, she is entitled to rule in the absence of the husband-king (*Ag.* 258-60; cf. 84), but her intentions are to make that regency permanent and she assumes the stance of political *tyrannos*, an impression that is explicitly confirmed by both the choruses in the first two plays (Grossmann 1970: 218-26). She does not rule alone, however, in a full gynecocracy, but the principle is maintained by the delineation of her lover and later coregent Aegisthus. He is the male who has already succumbed to female domination. He occupies the female interior space (*oikouros, Ag.* 1225, 1626), renounces masculine heroic pursuits of war and glory (*Ag.* 1625). He is only an adjunct to, not an initiator of the plot against Agamemnon (*Ag.* 1633-37; 1643-45). In his erotic susceptibilities, he is not unlike his barbarian counterpart Paris who also commits adultery with a

daughter of Tyndareus. The subordinate male, the strengthless lion (*Ag.* 1224-25) is the only possible partner for the dominant female, and the chorus contemptuously marks this reversal of roles by calling him "woman" (*Ag.* 1625; cf. *Cho.* 304), (Vernant 1969: 107-11). And when he does assert himself by baring his own motives and flexing his new-found power, he himself conforms to the stereotypical male model of *tyrannos*.

Note too that Agamemnon must also be assimilated to the pattern before his murder at the hands of a woman. The prelude to his death is his defeat in the verbal exchange between himself and Clytemnestra, a debate which is specifically posed as a power struggle between male and female in which male eventually yields (*Ag.* 940-43). The cause of that dispute, the walking on the tapestries, is itself concerned with a clash in values, and Agamemnon's objections are based on his correct perception of the gesture as one appropriate only to women and barbarians. But he has already announced his sexual appetites by bringing back Cassandra as his concubine from Troy, while his yielding to Clytemnestra's temptation marks his secret affinity with the Trojan king Priam and with barbarian values of luxury and gratification of desires (*Ag.* 918-21; 935-39). This antithetical barbarian world is portrayed in the Greek imagination as the world of effeminacy and of sensual delights even as it is the world where, logically enough, female domination is perceived as a cultural reality and where the myths of matriarchy are most often located.

Clytemnestra fully understands this cultural dichotomy and reveals it in an oblique and subtle way. After Agamemnon has yielded to her persuasion and has entered the palace, she urges Cassandra now to come into the house and to accept her fate of slavery, and she supports her argument by allusion to a mythological precedent: even the son of Alcmene, when sold into servitude, endured his life of bondage (*Ag.* 1040-41). Heracles is identified not by name but only through his maternal genealogy, and his enslavement, of course, was to the Lydian queen Omphale who is everywhere in the tradition associated with the Rule of Women. In fact, one of the prominent features of the relationship between Heracles and Omphale is the terms of his enslavement at her hands which required him to take on the role of female, to wear women's dress, and to do women's work, as well as to serve as the male sexual object to satisfy the needs of the queen.[6]

If Omphale is an archetypal exemplar of the Rule of Women, two other paradigms point even more directly to the same mythological construct. In the *Choephoroi*, the series of monstrous women recited by the chorus culminates in a reference to the famous myth of the Lemnian women, so famous that their deed need not be recorded, but only the judgment passed upon it as proverbial for the epitome of evil (*Cho.* 631-36). The crimes of single women come first, Althaea (mother), Scylla (daughter), and Clytemnestra (wife). The Lemnian allusion completes the misogynistic progression by moving from one to all, from individual transgression to a collective menace that wipes out an entire race. Moreover, by redoubling the example of husband murder which immediately precedes, it places Clytemnestra's offense (which itself has passed into paradigm) within the larger frame of the Rule of Women where female aims to annihilate male.

If the Lemnian women serve a programmatic function in the *Choephoroi* as a justification for the murder of Clytemnestra, the Amazons assume that role in the third play where Aeschylus shifts the aetiological explanation for the name of the Areopagos from Ares' trial on that site to the battle between Theseus' Athens and the Amazons, worshippers of Ares. There the Amazons, the open rivals of men, had built their own city, had asserted their will in rival architectural and ritual structures (*Eu.* 685-90). If in the *Choephoroi*, the mythological emphasis falls both on the murderous aspect of the female in domestic relations and on her successful vanquishing of the male with its predictable results, the other exemplar shows the Rule of Women as a political issue and celebrates its decisive defeat at the hands of Theseus, champion of male interests. Clytemnestra is no longer the point of reference as Apollo points out since she did not confront the male in open combat (*Eu.* 625-28), and she is the threat from within the system not from without. The Amazonomachy in this context rather serves to demarcate the major substantive issue of Orestes' trial as a battle between the sexes. Moreover, the prior victory over the Amazons serves not only to foreshadow the outcome of the trial, but, by association, to invest the new defeat with the same symbolic significance and prestige as the earlier one. In the synchronic perspective, past, then, is paradigm, but if we shift to a diachronic view, the substitution of tribunal for warfare, of law for violence, indicates an evolutionary development and offers a new paradigm for the pacification of hostilities.

These three gynecocratic allusions, each allotted to a different play of the trilogy, and together forming a series of increasing elaboration and emphasis, mark out different aspects of the general pattern of the Rule of Women. The reference to Omphale implies role reversal and sexual bondage, that of the Lemnian women focuses on the potential outcome of the struggle as the destruction of male by female, and that of the Amazons points to the conclusion of the myth of matriarchy – the drawing of battle lines and the ultimate triumph of male over female.

In the Aeschylean version of the myth, the woman does not initiate the hostilities. She is spurred to retaliation by a prior outrage inflicted upon her by a male.[7] Clytemnestra, enraged by the treatment of her daughter as a sacrificial animal, plots revenge and is reinforced in her resolve to kill her husband by Agamemnon's intention to introduce his concubine into the domestic space of the legitimate wife.[8] The Danaids are fleeing their suitors who view marriage as acquisition, rape, and enslavement.

But the female response invariably exceeds the provocation offered by the male and creates a still more violent disequilibrium that brings society to a standstill. The havoc caused by the female in the first play of the *Oresteia* requires two further sequels to alleviate it, and the shock waves ripple out first to the city of Argos and then to the universe at large. In the *rhetorical* progression of the drama the crimes of the males of the house, Thyestes, Atreus, and Agamemnon, first fade into lesser significance and finally are mentioned no more.

In the *Choephoroi*, the uncanny power of the monumental androgynous figure of the *Agamemnon* has receded (Vickers 1973: 382-88, 393-94). Clytemnestra rules with Aegisthus over Argos, but she is now back in the interior of the house, not visible in the world of men and politics. She sends libations to the tomb of Agamemnon, but her action creates a ritual impasse since the wife who owes this duty to her husband is also his murderer (*Cho.* 84-100). This impasse is emblematic of the dysfunction of the social order under her regime, and she herself poses the problem which must be resolved if the social order is to be repaired and restored. The impasse is also manifested in the social status of the legitimate children: Electra, unwed, arrested in maidenhood, bound to the paternal hearth (Vernant 1969: 110-12), and Orestes, an exile, as yet unable to cross the boundary to

adulthood, a status contingent upon his assumption of his father's name and space. The house is shrouded in darkness, literal and metaphorical, the blood is frozen in the earth (*Cho.* 51-53, 66-67), and the children have a past but no future. That past, in fact, must be recalled and recreated in the long *kommos*, even as the free flowing of pent up libations, tears, and verbal laments is the first symbolic step towards liberation from the suffocating spiritual and social deadlock of the current regime.

The only solution envisioned by the myth is the retaliatory defeat of this self-willed female principle whose potency is still a living and malignant force. And the myth proposes only one candidate for the task; the rules of blood vendetta exclude any other. Son must slay mother; father must be avenged, but in so doing, son's alliance with paternal power and interests must simultaneously be seen as repudiation of the mother. Mother must therefore be presented as hostile to both father and to son. In Clytemnestra's dream of the serpent at the breast and in his encounter with his mother, Orestes represents both himself and his father; he acts on behalf of his father but also on behalf of himself (Green 1969: 68-69, n. 14). For Orestes interprets his exile from the palace as rejection by the mother (*Cho.* 912), and mother's hostility to her children is confirmed by her treatment of Electra (*Cho.* 189-91; 418-19; 444-46), by her call for a man-slaying axe at the moment of recognition (*Cho.* 889-90), and, above all, by the nurse who exposes Clytemnestra's hypocritical grief at the report of her son's death and who herself lays claim to responsibility for the nurture he received as a child (*Cho.* 737-65).

But in the *Agamemnon* the queen's primary motive was maternal vengeance for her child, Iphigenia; her second one was the sexual alliance she contracted with Aegisthus in her husband's absence. There the two traits of mother love and conjugal chastity diverge, are, in fact, antithetical to each other. Here in the *Choephoroi* adulterous wife is now fully equated with hostile mother. The faithless wife who betrayed her husband and has taken his usurper into her bed has now betrayed her other children to gratify her own sexuality (*Cho.* 915-17; cf. 599-601).[9] The confrontation between Clytemnestra and Orestes is remarkable for the queen's mingled appeal of maternity and sexual seductiveness; the breast she bares to him (*Cho.* 894-98) has both erotic and nurturant significance. The gesture that momentarily stops him in his tracks is the source of her power over him, the source

of all female power. It is the emblem of the basic dilemma posed by the female – the indispensable role of women in fertility for the continuity of the group by reason of her mysterious sexuality and the potential disruption of that group by its free exercise.

It is significant that the maternal role should be exemplified in the first place by the mother-daughter dyad, for that is a relationship from which the male is excluded, a closed circle in which his interference can only be construed as an invasion as the myth of Kore and Demeter demonstrates so well. It is essential too that the mother-daughter bond be attenuated as it is in the second play, where Electra is her mother's antagonist and her father's ally, essential too that the mother-child bond in the *Choephoroi* include both male and female offspring, although the emphasis now falls on mother and son.

The dramatic sequence of events in the trilogy suggests a linear chain of cause and effect. If the female overvalues the mother-child bond, her own unique relationship, she will, in turn, undervalue the marriage bond, which will, in turn, lead to or be accompanied by an assertion of sexual independence (free replacement of one sexual partner by another), and will be manifested politically by a desire to rule. The next step, paradoxically, will be her undervaluation, even rejection, of the mother-child bond, as in the case of Electra and Orestes. Child, in response, will undervalue and reject mother.

Orestes' victory over Clytemnestra does not, however, as in the more typical myth of matriarchy, result in the defeat of the female and in the curtailment of her power. Far from it. The murder of the mother evokes a renewed and redoubled power, exemplified now in a proliferation of negative female imagoes of supernatural origin. The chorus in the *Choephoroi* had resorted to another mythological paradigm to exhort Orestes to action: he is to be another Perseus who will slay the Gorgon (*Cho.* 835-37), the archetypal myth on another level of masculine triumph over female.[10] But the projected model is not fully applicable, first, because Orestes himself is given ophidian attributes, and secondly, because the serpent dead is deadlier still. The chorus' exulting allusion after the deed to Orestes' liberation of Argos by lopping off the heads of two serpents (*Cho.* 1046-47) is instead an ironic cue for Orestes' first glimpse of the serpentine Furies. In this play, the Erinyes by their appearance terrorize him into frenzy and flight. In the next, they would annihilate him by absorption into themselves in an exact and retaliatory inversion of the symbolism of Clytemnestra's dream.

This final stage in the developmental progression, in fact, links together the perversion of both relationships – mother-child and female-male. For the devouring voracity of the Furies, the incarnations of Clytemnestra, who would pursue and suck the blood from their living victim, represents both oral aggression against the child they should nourish and sexual predation against the male to whom they should submit.[11] Clytemnestra has banished both legitimate males from the house and blood guilt infects the earth. In the case of the Erinyes, as transformations of Clytemnestra, the result of hypersexuality is sterility and death. The virginal Erinyes are barren and sterile and create sterility in all of nature.

In the primitive portrayal of the Furies there is a regression to the deepest fantasies of buried masculine terrors. They are *paides apaides*, children who are no children because they are old and also because they are children who have no children. They are shunned and rejected by men and gods with whom they have no intercourse (*Eu.* 1033; 68-73). Daughters of Night, they inhabit the depths of the earth. Repulsive in physical appearance, they drip and ooze from every orifice; even their breath, their words, their thoughts drop poison (*Eu.* 478-79). Their virginity is negative virginity as Clytemnestra's sexuality is negative sexuality, and in each case the fertility of the land is threatened (cf. *Ag.* 1390-92).

The pacification of the Erinyes becomes the ideological effort to solve the dilemma of the inextricable connection between female fertility and female sexuality, between female beneficence and female malevolence, for the equation of the female with sterility and death creates a new impasse that spells an end not only to society but obviously to life itself. The solution moves to repair the female archetype which has been polarized at its extreme negative limit in response to its rejection and denigration. The solution also establishes marriage as the institution that controls sexuality and ensures fertility even as it serves to assert the inherent subordination of female to male. For female dominance is expressed paradigmatically by the mother-child relationship – concretely in the *Oresteia* by Iphigenia's death as the motive for the female's attack upon the male and generically by the natural dependency of the male child upon the adult female. Patriarchal marriage is paradigmatic of male dominance in-

cluding the primacy of the father-son bond in patrilineal succession and the primacy of the male in political power.

II. SEPARATION FROM THE MOTHER AND THE GENERAL PATTERN OF PUBERTY RITES

In speaking of the myth of matriarchy and the general function of myth and ritual as educational tools in pre-literate or traditional societies, Bamberger draws a parallel between the myth of matriarchy and puberty initiation rites which aim at detaching the boy from his natal household and his maternal associations and retraining him for his social and political roles. She points out that "this regrouping of adolescent boys with adult males is prefigured in some societies in myths foretelling the demise of female power and in the concomitant rise of male privilege. The myth of the Rule of Women in its many variants may be regarded as a replay of these crucial transitional stages in the life cycle of the individual male" (Bamberger 1974: 277). There is, in fact, a close correlation between myth and ritual since in the myth men often seize the sovereignty from the women by stealing their sources of power, the sacred objects (e.g., masks and sacred trumpets), and making them their own exclusive possession, while one of the important events in the rituals of initiation involves the revelation of these same sacred objects to the boys and the explication of their meaning. But in these cases myth is prior to ritual; an event of the past supports and justifies the ritual and its message.

What we find instead in the *Oresteia* is the sophisticated interweaving and transposition of traditional motifs from both the myth of matriarchy and the ritual initiation scenario. Orestes, specifically characterized as on the threshold of maturity in the *Choephoroi* (6), lives out the myth in terms that bear a remarkable resemblance to generalized and widely diffused initiatory patterns, but his own special situation now determines and directs the final outcome of the myth. Rather than following out a well-trodden path to adulthood as countless others would have done before him as we would expect of an actual cult experience, he must make his own way through an unprecedented set of procedures created expressly for him, and he himself must act as the catalyst that brings a secular non-cultic institution into being. Likewise, the myth of matriarchy reaches its predictable conclusion

but through a series of stratagems that combines the old and the new.

Orestes in the second play is the anomalous male, the logical counterpart of the anomalous female, Clytemnestra. Male activity is normally directed outward away from the hearth for external validation of prowess, but the domain which Orestes must enter is feminine space. If Vidal-Naquet's suggestion as to his ephebic status is correct, as I think it is, the inversion is still more precise. The boy, prior to his entry into adulthood, must separate himself from the attachments of home and childhood to serve out his military term on the wild frontiers, where he is situated temporarily in a savage state, in a liminal space as befits his liminal position.[12] But Orestes, the exile banished in childhood by his mother, *returns* at puberty to his home, that space made savage and undomesticated by his mother's action in order to undertake the most savage act of all.[13]

In fact, in order to effect that separation he must commit a crime, the crime of matricide, and far from releasing him from his mother and her influence, the Erinyes now sing a binding song over him to draw him into their domain and keep him there. Orestes' true initiatory experience begins only after his *second* expulsion from the palace in Argos and is terminated when, reincorporated into society in the third stage of the *rite de passage*, he returns to Argos now as lawful ruler and successor to his father. The overt mission of the *Eumenides* is to effect the salvation of Orestes. And that salvation is contingent upon his successful separation from his mother, in other words, upon completion of the enterprise undertaken by Orestes himself in the second play. The task now ascends to a higher level, to the level of both gods and city, even as the myth of matriarchy can only reach its prosperous conclusion in this new setting through a similar upward revision of its traditional terms. That is, the *Eumenides* must now once and for all establish and justify in abstract, theoretical, and mythopoetic terms the principles upon which the predictable sequence of the myth of matriarchy is based.

This shift to a more inclusive level of discourse is necessitated by the terms of the main preoccupation of the trilogy which reaches its fullest articulation in this third and final play. The primary issue in the *Oresteia* is, of course, justice. In its proper execution under all circumstances, matricide, the extreme transgression and the insoluble case, serves only as the means, the irresistible catalyst. Kuhns shrewdly observes that "Orestes cannot know that he is directed to act on

behalf of a further purpose; he does not know that the crime is committed in order that it may be judged." (Kuhns 1962: 35).

But by posing the son's action in separating himself from his mother as a crime, the issue of justice and the issue of the female are inextricably blended, for in the offering first of justification for matricide and then in its exoneration, mother is also judged. And she is judged on two levels: first, the woman is judged as wife. The crime of Clytemnestra (mariticide) is measured against Orestes' (matricide) and found to be more opprobrious: "For it is not the same thing that a noble man die, a man honored with god-given sovereignty, and at the hands of a woman at that." (*Eu.* 625-27). Secondly, the Erinyes themselves, the first judges of Orestes, are also judged. Mother has been turned into vindictive and archetypal female. In Aeschylus' new genealogy for the Erinyes they are now daughters of Night, i.e. totally identified with the negative female principle. And they champion a justice which is judged blind, archaic, barbaric, and regressive, a justice which is to be superseded by the new institution of the law court in which they will in the future play a supporting not a starring role.

The problem of the female is posed in a new set of terms and the victory that is won is predicated on a social transformation of a higher degree. The *Eumenides* therefore is everywhere concerned with change and transformation on every level both for the son figure Orestes and for the mother. For the archaic mind, as Eliade points out, it is a characteristic belief that "a state cannot be changed without first being annihilated" and then recreated from the beginning. "Life cannot be repaired. It can only be recreated by a return to sources." (Eliade 1958: xiii; 1963: 30).

The first word of the last play of the trilogy is *"prōton,"* "first," as Burke puts it, "the final oracular beginning" (1952; 1966: 133). The *Eumenides* is a drama preoccupied with beginnings, with origins. Its *mythos* is itself a myth of origins, of aetiologies, on both the secular and cultic levels, and it supports and redeems itself by reference to the ultimate beginnings. Again to quote Eliade (1963: 21):

> Every mythical account of the origin of anything presupposes and continues the cosmogony. From the structural point of view, origin myths can be homologized with the cosmogonic myth. The creation of the World being *the* pre-

> eminent instance of creation, the cosmogony becomes the exemplary model for 'creation' of every kind. This does not mean that the origin myth imitates or copies the cosmogonic model.... But every new appearance – an animal, a plant, an institution – implies the existence of a World.... Every origin myth narrates and justifies a 'new situation' – new in the sense that it did not exist *from the beginning of the World.* Origin myths continue and complete the cosmogonic myth; they tell how the world was changed, made richer or poorer.... This is why some origin myths begin by outlining a cosmogony.

And this is precisely how the *Eumenides* begins.

The opening scene, as many critics have noted is both paradigmatic and anticipatory of the ending of the play. The Delphic succession myth (a parallel to the evolution of power in Hesiod's *Theogony*) provides a direct mythological model for the transference of power from female to male.[14] Although it would not have been inappropriate in view of the prevalence of serpent imagery in the trilogy to cite the traditional Delphic version of Apollo's acquisition of the shrine by dragon combat with the Pytho, Aeschylus has substituted an orderly and peaceful version of the succession myth in order to foreshadow the peaceful and harmonious ending of the trilogy. "For a thing to be well done, it must be done as it was *the first time.*" (Eliade 1958: xiii). Here is true mythopoesis and a reversal of terms: a new civic world is in the process of creation and requires therefore as its model an alternate cosmogony, a new myth of origins.

By the terms of the revised myth, Aeschylus provides a paradigm of positive matriarchy that acknowledges the principle but relegates it to a primordial past that has been superseded. But by his other act of mythopoesis, he presents the Erinyes as daughters of Night, representatives of a negative matriarchy that must be overcome. In the Hesiodic attribution of their origin to the blood of Uranus' severed genitals, they were also associated with vengeance and retribution. In their new genealogy as parthenogenetic offspring of Night, the principle of vengeance itself is posed as wholly female and female in its blackest and most negative manifestation (Ramnoux 1959: 138-39). The new genealogy anchors them to a stage antecedent to the Uranian creativity of bisexual reproduction and the generation of regular non-monstrous forms.

"In this juxtaposition of two matriarchal representations, the Erinyes are invested with the symbolism of the dragon-combat mythology that was displaced from Delphic myth. The Erinyes' desire to suck Orestes' blood, to engulf him, paralyze him, and draw him down into the darkness of Hades, is consonant with the general pattern of the archetype. Earlier I remarked on the failure of the Gorgon-Perseus paradigm for Orestes in the *Choephoroi*, but that failure resides not in the misnaming of the monstrous serpent female, only in Orestes' inability to play Perseus. Here the transpersonalization of the female dragon (*Eu.* 128), the archetypal encounter recurs, but will be transformed. For neither can Apollo reenact his previous victory over the Pytho, nor will Orestes himself play out the part of the typical hero and slay the dragon. Nor will the dragon truly be slain, but tamed; the act of domestication will be presented in collective, social, non-heroic terms, and violence will yield to open persuasion, *Peitho*.[15] Yet with the gods as agents, the struggle is also presented as mythic conflict between chthonic and Uranian forces, between regress and progress, that resonates with the emotive power of theogony, gigantomachy (*Eu.* 295-96), and dragon combat. The defeat of the Erinyes is already prefigured in the prologue by their temporary pacified sleep at the shrine (*Eu.* 47, 68) and by their subsequent expulsion from it by Apollo (*Eu.* 179).

In the perspective of the myth of matriarchy, the Erinyes and their characterization conform more closely to the general pattern. For they are now a collective of females rather than a single figure, and their quarrel with Apollo turns precisely on the issue of usurpation of prior female power and privilege. But it is the conflation of the myth of matriarchy and the myth of dragon combat that invests the *Oresteia* with its most persuasive rhetorical weapon. For the Erinyes on stage not only serve as concrete embodiments of the metaphorical allusions to themselves in the earlier plays, but as true primordial dragon figures, they also make visible the metaphors of female monstrosity which have been associated with Clytemnestra from the beginning. In the *Agamemnon*, Cassandra delineates her as Scylla, amphisbaena, and mother of Hades (*Ag.* 1233-36), allusions which proliferate in the second play with references to *echidna* (*Cho.* 249), *muraina* (994) and Gorgon (835). The two strands meet in the ode on monstrous women in which the mythological women who slay men are linked from the first strophe with monstrous eruptions in nature on sea, on land, and in air, in which

the human Scylla, daughter of Minos, recalls her homonymous monstrous counterpart of Cassandra's accusation (*Cho.* 612-22).[16]

It is this rhetoric, in fact, which already in the first play, provides the yeast which transforms the shrewd political rebel into an archaic *daimon* that menaces the world with a renewed cosmogonic threat of total disorder and which marks the male-female conflict not as a feminine revolution but as a struggle between the new (male) and the old (female). Female is allied with the forces and values of the past not only on the mythological level, but, as the combat shifts from that of husband and wife to one of mother and son, it operates also on the personal human level. In the generational code, mother is anterior in time to son. In the juridical code, the ancient principle of the blood vendetta becomes fully identified with mother, for it was her championship of the priority of blood ties which led her first to slay the male to avenge her daughter's death and now both to pursue the slayer, the kinsman who shed kindred blood, and to refuse her son the normal passage into adulthood.

If the recitation of Delphic genealogy is a myth of beginnings, the second part of the prologue, Orestes at the shrine itself, presents another modality of beginnings directly consequent upon the first one. Orestes is seated at the *omphalos*, the navel of the world, holding suppliant emblems of white wool and covered with the purifying blood of a pig. As matricide, his condition symbolically represents his status of moral ambiguity, guilty and not guilty, polluted and purified (Jones 1962: 105-06). As neophyte, his ambiguity is emblematic of puberty rites everywhere. In a state of liminality, betwixt and between, he is separated from the world and not yet reincorporated into it. In the process of transition and change, he must go back again to beginnings, this time marked in the biological domain by the imagery of parturition. In fact, "neophytes are [commonly] likened to or treated as embryos, newborn infants, or sucklings by symbolic means which vary from culture to culture."[17] All initiations employ some nexus of death and rebirth symbolism as a mark of a transition to a new state, but the imagery in puberty rites has special relevance, since the essential aim of the rite is to dramatize the biological life cycle by indicating the death of childhood and the rebirth into adulthood, a symbolism supported by the applicability, for instance, of the cutting of hair both to rites of puberty and to rites of mourning (*Cho.* 6-7).

Delcourt, in her *Oreste et Alcméon*, inquires, why the blood of

a pig in rites of purification? And she suggests that its value lies neither in its sacrificial nor its lustratory functions, but in its close association with female genitalia. The pig, as artistic representations make clear, was held over the head of the subject who sits "like a new-born under the bloody organ which gave him birth. The blood of the piglet was only symbolically purificatory. The guilty was supposed reborn, and reborn innocent, from the mystic *choiriskos*," and Varro informs us that the same treatment was applied both to homicides and to those who had been mad and were now sane (*De re rust.* 2.4.16).[18] "Just as pollution is disease and disease is death, so purification is a renewal of life" (Thomson 1946: 93).

Orestes then is ritually reborn at the *omphalos* of Delphi, the female symbol at the center of a place whose name means womb. But this symbol has been appropriated by the male hegemony of the shrine which Apollo himself received as a *birthday* gift (*Eu.* 7). The implication of the scene is of rebirth from the male, a necessary condition both for Orestes' redemption from guilt and for his passage into adulthood as son of his father. Cross-cultural ethnographical data confirms that one of the most consistent themes of puberty rites is, in fact, the notion that the first birth from the female is superseded by a second birth, this time from the male. The initiate is born again into the social world of the fathers and is thereby definitively separated from the world of his childhood and his maternal dependence.[19]

What is remarkable in the compressed symbolism of rebirth in this opening tableau is its double reference, for if Orestes' ambiguous presentation is attributable first to his liminal status as neophyte, it is also attributable to the nexus of guilt and innocence which proclaims him still attached to his mother (i.e., guilty) or separated from her (i.e., innocent). He can hardly negotiate the first set of terms until he has resolved the second. And this second issue which is, in fact, the primary focus of the trilogy, will be determined by the new Apollonic argument in the new juridical sphere that his mother is no kin to him, that he, in fact, is born from the father and only from the father.

The Apollonic argument then, is a restatement in another mode of discourse, of what has already been represented here at Delphi. Orestes himself is drawn into the Apollonic milieu and is assimilated, if obliquely, to the pattern of Apollo's own development which brought the god from Delos to Delphi, from mother to father.[20] But Orestes' position still lacks the conclusive ratification of society and its gods.

It is only a beginning, and one that must move him from Delphi to Athens, from isolation to community. And the process that will define him will be linked to the process by which society will define itself. In this double task which the drama poses for itself as a simultaneous reciprocal development, the action veers away from the sphere of myth and ritual even as it continues the impulse in a new and different way.

Orestes' experience continues to conform to the constellation of symbols and events that cluster about the pubertal initiation scenario. For in addition to the liminal situation of ambiguity and the recurrent imagery of birth, death, and rebirth, other typical features include: (1) ordeal, wakefulness, suffering, silence, isolation, wandering, and terror produced by encounter with the monstrous, (2) close connection with the deities of the group, (3) the presence of a male authority figure as guide, who dispenses the "arcane wisdom" or "gnosis" pertaining to social and political realities couched in mythic and symbolic form, especially theogonic and cosmogonic material, as well as "instruction in ethical and social obligations, in law and kinship," and (4) the passive submission and obedience to that authority (Turner 1967: *passim*). The main event of initiation rites is, of course, the revelation of the hallowed traditions and the secret lore of the group upon which that tradition is based. Here in the *Eumenides* the revelation combines both old and new to formulate the future tradition, the foundation of which is the judgment by law and the definitive hierarchical disposition of male and female statuses.

In the *Eumenides,* the power of the mother is first drastically undercut and even denied by Apollo, who, as representative of male interests, logically champions the cause of marriage, but that denial is then mitigated by a limited restoration of that power through the intervention of Athena and the transformation of Erinyes to Eumenides. But Apollo must come first, to be superseded but not fully denied.

In the short view, Apollo's argument can be regarded as a sophisticated legal maneuver designed to get his client off on a technicality, or, in a more ameliorative reading, to break the impasse caused by the disparity between the Erinyes' absolutist and rigid formulation of the issue (guilty or not guilty) and the Apollonian defense of extenuating circumstances. In the wider view, the Apollonian argument is the hub of the drama, mother right vs. father right, old justice vs. new justice.

On the one hand, his method of argumentation is fully consonant

with the archaic mode of thought which can only express change in status and attitude through total annihilation or negation of the previous position. He had already demonstrated the superiority of male over female on the sociological level by proclaiming that husband-king-male is more important than wife-queen-female (*Eu.* 625-26) and by pressing the cause of conjugality over blood kinship (*Eu.* 213-18). Now he moves back to the beginning to assert the primacy of the male through appeal to the primacy of the father. This he can only do, first, by the denial of the mother's role in procreation on the biological level, and then by resort on the mythological level to the denial of the mother altogether. The mother is only necessary conditionally in the case of a uterine association; where that association is lacking, mother need not exist at all. The denial of *matriarchy* is achieved by the denial of *mater*. The tables are completely turned.

On the other hand, this archaic mode of argument is presented in the service of a new synthesis in a new environment. To break the binding force of the symbiotic link between mother and child (best expressed imagistically in the circularity of serpent symbolism), Apollo needs a new forum, namely, the law court, the city's device which admits the use of logical argument and debate even as it establishes the right of non-kin to decide disputes among kin.

In this context of a founding act, the content of the argument is concerned with beginning again, expressed biologically as embryology, mythologically as theogony. The rebirth of Orestes into innocence and the birth of the law court and civic justice are confirmed by resort to the archetypal paradigm of beginnings. But the argument itself is a new kind of argument. In proposing that the father, the one who mounts, is the only true parent of the child, while the mother is merely the stranger host to the embryo, the passive vessel during its gestation, the argument draws upon the new scientific theories of the day. But even as the argument looks forward in its advancement of new intellectual trends, it looks backward in relying for proof of this contention on the mythic concept of Athena's birth from the head of Zeus.

The mythic argument is not just an exercise in logical absurdity which poses the anomaly as paradigm. It is a sound strategy (not only for the reasons outlined above on the nature of archaic argument) within the rules of mythic thought. Athena's birth is of founding significance in the creation of the world. In the terms of Hesiod's theogonic myth of succession, Zeus, by this act, puts an end to any

threat to his sovereignty, by incorporating the principle of intelligence through the swallowing of Metis and 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 whose filial relationship proclaims her dependence on the male. The mythic form his act of creation assumes completes the trend of the *Theogony* which began with Earth's natural parthenogenetic capability and ends with the male's imitation of her. The seal is set on the finality of the transition from female dominance to male dominance by overt male usurpation of her procreative function, the basic source of her mystery and power. That usurpation is consummated in the total reversal from female as begetter of male to male as begetter of female.[21] But in the course of this transition, male generative creativity is displaced from phallos to head, or rather, put somewhat different, phallos and head are associated together.

This connection is precisely the basis that also underlines the "scientific" argument. For already in some of the pre-Socratic philosophers as well as later in Plato and Aristotle, seminal fluid is associated with spinal and cerebral fluids; the hypothesis is that semen is transmitted from the brain and the spinal column through the genitals to the womb. There is more. The major component of semen is *pneuma,* a foamlike airy substance which contains the seed of the divine. Originating in the brain, semen is responsible for endowing the offspring with the essential human capacity for reason, for *logos*. Seed of generation, of intellectual ability, and of the divine element in the human species, semen confirms the innate superiority of male over female. For Aristotle, "the male provides the form and the principle of the movement; the female provides the body, in other words, the material;... the male provides that which fashions the material into shape.... Thus the physical part, the body, comes from the female and the soul from the male since the soul is the essence of a particular body" (*De gen. an.* 1.20.729a, 738b).[22]

Here in the *Oresteia, logos* and *mythos* usually posed in two different modes, make an alliance and interact to support each other. This alliance is, in fact, a microcosmic reflection of the larger alliance between male and female, new and old, secular and sacred, on which the trilogy relies for its conclusion. Through the myth of Athena's birth, theogony is recapitulated now in the new embryology, championed by the new generation of gods in the interests of a new justice. If

theogony supports embryology, it itself is reaffirmed through the authority of the other. Through this union of *mythos* and *logos*, a new mythos is engendered, one that mounts a final successful assault on the power of the female and brings a new ending to the myth of matriarchy. Bamberger points out that "from [her] cursory study... women frequently are subjected to harsh outside controls because of their putative immorality.... And so it seems from myth that less tangible forces than biology [her unique ability and her important contribution to group survival normally celebrated in female puberty ritual but overlooked in myth] were brought to bear on the subversion of the female sex role.... The case against her was made out to be a moral one, divorced from the biology that might have given her sex priority under other circumstances."[23] Here in the *Oresteia* the attack is a double one – against the adulterous wife *and* the reproductive function of the female.

As Hillman remarks, since "embryology is a *logos* of beginnings, it will be influenced by creation mythemes," and "because theories of generation reflect the differences and union of opposites, these theories will be influenced by *coniunctio* fantasies. Perhaps still more fundamental are the fantasies which afflict the male in regard to the female when the male is observer and female the datum." And he goes on to point out that "we encounter a long and incredible history of theoretical misadventures and observational errors in male science regarding the physiology of reproduction. These fantastic theories and fantastic observations are not misapprehensions, the usual and necessary mistakes on the road of scientific progress; they are recurrent deprecations of the feminine phrased in the unimpeachable, objective language of the science of the period. The mythic factor recurs disguised in the sophisticated new evidence of the age."[24] Apollo is the first to initiate this trend. "The Apollonic fantasy of reproduction and female inferiority recurs faithfully in the Western scientific tradition" (Hillman 1972: 225).

Here at its inception *mythos* still plays a determining role and the *logos* of scientific argument is still rudimentary; copulation is equated with gestation in a false analogy. But for *mythos* and for *logos* the true model is social relations, and woman's new reduced biological function is a sophisticated translation of her social function, ratified by god and science. It is the patent absurdity of Apollo's argument that offends our own fully developed scientific sensibilities,[25]

not the principle itself of biology (false or true) as a justification of ideology. The issue of whether anatomy is destiny is still very much alive.

The very terms of Apollo's argument bring together phallos and head in still another way, for the ending of the trilogy is also concerned with a shift in modes of action and behavior, as it charts a progression from obscurity to clarity. Representation of symbolic signs perceived as female activity gives way to the male *logos*. Repetition and incantation yield to dialectic. Even more, "this turning away from the mother to the father," as Freud observed, "signifies a victory of intellectuality over the senses... since maternity is proved by the evidence of the senses while paternity is a hypothesis based on inferences and premises."[26] A whole series of antitheses form about the polarization of male and female roles which can be tabulated as follows (although not all of them are treated in this essay):

Male	Female
Apollo	Erinyes
Olympian	Chthonic
Unbinding (will; salvation)	Bind ("Fate"; binding song)
Marriage (non-kin)	Kinship
Father	Mother
Law (court)	Ritual (altar)
Intention	Act
Odd (three; trilogy)	Even (two, tie, *lex talionis*)
Center	Limit (frontier, interior)
Greek	Barbarian
City	House
CULTURE	NATURE
Future (young)	Past (old)
Order	Chaos
Rule	Unruly (misrule) ←
Above	Below
Head-Phallos	Belly-Womb
Active	Passive
Creativity	Fertility
Reason	Unreason (sexuality; passion) ←
Light	Dark
Life	Death
Clarity (plain speaking)	Obscurity (riddle)

Intellect (paternity, inference)	Senses (maternity, representation)
Positive	Negative

If the birth of Athena is necessary for Apollo's synthesis and Orestes' reincorporation into community, her pedigree and status are necessary for reaching any workable solution to the problem of the female who resists the encroachment on her prerogatives. Androgynous compromise, Athena is the benevolent answer to her opposite and doublet, Clytemnestra. Female born of male, she can ally herself with male interests and still display positive nurturant behavior. As deified female, child of Zeus, she can initiate authoritative religious and social change. But as female herself, she can serve too as model of the female. But not alone. For Athena and the Erinyes whom she has placated are not separate entities but complements, each of them virgins, each now charged with the fostering of the group, and together representing the reconciliation of the positive and negative elements of the female archetype on the transpersonal level. Both agree that female will be subordinate to male within the family in patriarchal marriage and that the family itself will be subordinate to the city. Both in turn shower the city with blessings of prosperity and fertility. Each is content with daughter status, for the father-daughter relationship is the purest paradigm of female dependence, while the oxymoron of virginal maternity promises fertility without its dangerous corollary of sexuality. Mother is denied but not denied.

Orestes had denied his mother by the act of matricide and sought a new birth at the male-centered *omphalos* of Delphi. That new birth was just a beginning that sent him further to another altar, Athena's altar, upon which he sat, embraced her image, and held on tight. She provided him with the salvation he had sought. The positive maternal figure, in fact, restored him to his father and freed him to claim his social and political identity based on a new embryology and a traditional theogony. Like Athena, he now belongs wholly to his father.

In the double movement of this last play, Aeschylus modifies and diminishes the role of Delphic Apollo as the sole arbiter of the Orestean dilemma in favor of a larger more inclusive transaction[27] that includes the allotment of prerogatives to the Erinyes – their old negative ones of vengeance, which are now defined and limited for the city's interest, and their new positive ones of benison and fosterage. The Hesiodic theogonic model is still operative, for Athena is both

porte-parole of Zeus and the living incarnation of the *nature* of his sovereignty and how he secured it. Her allotting of specific roles and functions is therefore a direct continuance of her father's work which was not to create the world but to organize and classify its components (Hes. *Theog.* 885) and to make accommodations between generations. If the *Oresteia* can be viewed, as I suggested at the beginning, as a gynecocentric document, as an inquiry into the nature and limits of feminine power, this last act completes the transference of the *political* power (along the lines of the myth of matriarchy), which Clytemnestra had brazenly claimed in the first play, to the *ritual* power of the female exemplified by the role assigned to the Erinyes in Athens.

From the anthropological perspective, the solution is perfectly consistent with the observable principle of patrilineality in which the male "transmits membership in the corporate descent group," while the female transmits "mystic potentialities, powers, or attributes" through the uterine tie.[28] From this same outlook, the complementarity of positive and negative femininity is readily understandable. As Harris observes, "the double association of women as mothers with life and nurturance on the one hand and with death and destructiveness on the other is certainly widespread and may be well nigh universal.... The mother-child nexus and other ties through women always and everywhere appear both bad and good precisely because they are at the opposite end of the scale from the authority of society" (1973: 157, 158). For Harris, this double association is confined to the two poles of Erinyes-Eumenides, while I would include Athena, the other and chief custodian of Athens, as the main representative of the positive side, the one who persuades the Erinyes to modify their malevolence. But Harris' perspective enables us to understand the choice of Athena to effect the pacification of the Erinyes, for if we follow the anthropological orientation, Athena is the truly positive female figure precisely because she has neither a uterine tie of her own nor does she herself create one. Free from any but symbolic maternal associations, she thus foreswears any matriarchal projects. In this sense, the *Oresteia* also judges and justifies Athena.

Oddly enough, the androgynous woman in power does not disappear but is reasserted and reaffirmed in her divine counterpart. The displacement of the issue upwards in this last play avoids the specifically human dilemma of the female in her dual role of mother (power) and wife (deference). It also effectively removes the psy-

chological issue from the human dilemma of a son who has killed his own mother by defining it as a social and cosmic problem and quite literally putting it in the laps of the gods. Only they can free him (as far as it is intellectually possible) from the irrefutable and often anguished fact of human existence that man is from woman born.

In the end, this new Aeschylean myth, like all myths, as Lévi-Strauss says, "perhaps explains nothing and does no more than displace the difficulty, but by displacing it, it appears at least to mitigate any logical scandal" (1964: 13). But Lévi-Strauss is interested in defining the objective functions of myth and myth-making in a society, not in confronting the potentially dysfunctional properties of myth for legitimating social and political ideology whose mythic basis is neither recognized nor acknowledged. Psychic impulses compel the creation of the myth, but once objectified and projected outward, the myth reinforces, legitimates, and even influences the formation of those impulses by the authoritative power of that projection, especially when it is embedded in a magisterial work of art. There is a continuing reciprocity between the external and internal, between individual psyche and collective ideology, which gives myth its dynamic life far beyond the static intellectual dimension. By uncovering the apparent "logic" that informs the myth, we can both acknowledge the indispensable role of myth and myth-making for human cognition and at the same time lay bare the operations by which it organizes and manipulates reality.

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Notes

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[1] The infidelity of Helen was the cause of a vengeance that brought disastrous results; it was a goddess Artemis who blocked the fleet at Aulis and demanded a virgin as the price of the expedition. It was the hatred left by the memory of this daughter sacrificed to paternal ambition and the jealousy aroused by the concubine in the service of his royal pleasure which excited the hatred of a mother and wife. Electra arms Orestes and his persecuting divinities were female, guardians of mother right. Finally, it was a woman, the daughter of Zeus to whom the judgment fell (Green 1969: 59).

[2] "An overwhelming misogyny accompanies the appearance of Clytemnestra everywhere. Agamemnon only names her in the *Iliad* in order to reject her. In the *Nekyia* (11.400), he hardly mentions Aegisthus and he burdens all women in general with the example of Clytemnestra; Odysseus should be careful of making too many concessions to his own wife! In the second *Nekyia* (24.201), he finds some comfort in the certainty that the transgression of Clytemnestra will weigh on the reputation of all, even the most irreproachable.... It is not possible and not useful to distinguish the different layers of interpolation here. The sentiment which inspired the first poet satisfied those who later enriched the diatribe thanks to two favorite themes of popular misogyny, that which never accuses a woman of anything without immediately extending the grievance of all the others, and which concludes in recommending to husbands to keep watch over their authority" (Delcourt 1959: 84 [tr. mine]).

[3] E.g., R. Y. Hathorn, *Tragedy, Myth and Mystery* (Bloomington and London 1962) 51, R. Lattimore, *Aeschylus: Oresteia* (Chicago 1953) 30. In more general terms, Thomson (1966) 45-46, Neumann (1954) 168.

[4] Bachofen (1861; 1967) insisted on the primacy of matriarchy, or more correctly, *Mutterrecht* (the law of women) in the early stages of cultural development. He designated his two main phases of this period as Aphroditic (hetairic) and Demetrian (matrimonial) with an aberrational stage of Amazonism. *Mutterrecht* represented the telluric, the material, and the feminine which gives way gradually in the development of civilization to the higher Uranian, spiritual, and masculine values. See also Delcourt (1959) 78-79.

[5] By matriarchy is meant the actual political and economic supremacy of women in a given culture, not matriliny or matrifocality. See the remarks of Delcourt (1959) 15, 77; also G. Thomson, *Studies in Ancient Greek Society* (New York 1965) who collects a vast amount of interesting material but whose conclusions are not generally accepted. See further S. Pembroke, "The Last of the Matriarchs: a Study in the Inscriptions of Lycia," *Journal of Econ. and Soc. Hist. of the Orient* 8.3 (1965) 217-47; "Women in Charge. The Function of Alternatives in Early Greek Tradition and the Ancient Idea of Matriarchy," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 30 (1967) 1-35, "Locres et Tarente: Le rôle des femmes dans la fondation de deux colonies grecques," *Annales ESC* 25 (1970) 1240-70; Vidal-

Naquet (1970); and especially the discussion of M. Arthur, Review Essay, "Classics," *Signs* 2 (1976) 383-87.

[6] For ancient testimony on Omphale see Apoll. *Bibl.* 2.6.3; 7.8; Diod. Sic. 4.31; Ov. *Her.* 9.55 ff.; Soph. *Tr.* 247 ff.; Luc. *Dial. of Gods* 13.2; Plut. *Qu. Gr.* 45; Schol. to *Od.* 21.22; Hyg. *Fab.* 32. See also Bachofen (1967) 142, 216-27 (who makes interesting connections with Tanaquil, Dido, Cleopatra and others). The importance of Omphale's name is obvious; cf. Slater (1968) 379, Fontenrose (1959) 108-10.

[7] Clearchos proposes this principle in speaking of the Lycian "matriarchy" initiated by Omphale: Cl. ap. Ath. *Deip.* 5153-5156c, Wehrli, *Klearchos*[2] (Basel/Stuttgart 1969) fr. 43a. Cf. Hes. *Theog.* on Gaia's response to Uranos (154-72). See also the discussion in Bachofen (1967) 104-05, 141-42, whose views are consonant with his idealization of pre-Hellenic womanhood. See also M. Shaw, "The Female Intruder: Women in Fifth-Century Drama," *CP* 70 (1975) 255-66, who proposes a similar scenario for Greek drama, but who does not see the massive threat to society caused by female intrusion nor the implications of the male-female hierarchy.

[8] The same principle holds true for Deianeira in Soph. *Tr.* and Medea in Euripides' play despite the vast differences in characterization.

[9] The ode on monstrous women makes universal the force of *eros* which is *thelykrates, eros* that masters the female, but it refers also to the female who, under the influence of *eros*, will master men (sons, fathers, husbands). See also Winnington-Ingram (1948) 138, n. 76.

[10] For the psychological import of dragon combat with a maternal figure, see Neumann (1954) 152-69. For him Orestes' victory over the mother and the psychological "matriarchate" of female domination "has gone a stage further.... Here, the identification with the father is so complete that the maternal principle can be killed even when it appears, not in the symbolic form of the dragon, but as the real mother – and killed precisely because this principle has sinned against the father principle" (168). But at the end of the *Choephoroi,* this liberation has not been achieved.

[11] Green (1969) 74, Slater (1968) 189-90. The alimentary and sexual appetites of the female are already important features of the Prometheus-Pandora myth in Hesiod. See the excellent structural analysis of J. -P. Vernant, "Le mythe prométhéen chez Hesiode" in *Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1974) 177-94.

[12] Van Gennep (1909; 1960) was the first to identify and formulate the three main stages in *rites de passage:* separation, liminality (or *marge*), incorporation (or aggregation). Victor Turner has brilliantly elaborated the socio-cultural functions of liminality (1967, 1969, 1974).

[13] Vidal-Naquet (1969; 1973), (1968), (1974). The *ephebeia* seems to have been in origin the equivalent of male puberty initiations attached to the tribal phratry and modified later to make boys into hoplite citizens. Our evidence is late, scanty, and transmitted by a secular source (Arist. *Ath. Pol*). The Spartan *krypteia* (to which the *ephebeia* bears certain marked resemblances) and the Cretan *agelai* conform even more closely to

traditional tribal initiations. Vidal-Naquet (1974: 157) declares that in the historical period "what was true of the Athenian ephebe on the level of myth is true of the Spartan *krypteia* on the level of practice." [tr. mine]. See also the remarks of Eliade (1958) 108-09. Vidal-Naquet in "Le 'Philoctète' de Sophocle et l'éphébie" in J. -P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne* (Paris 1973) 159-84 argues for the ephebic status of Neoptolemus in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* and Jeanmaire (1939) for the initiatory motifs in the myth of Theseus (227-375). With the exception of Vidal-Naquet's interest in some of Orestes' ephebic traits (hunt, ruse), Orestes' connection with puberty rites has gone unmarked by classicists, as far as I know, despite the opening statement of *Cho.* 5 which emphasizes his age and status (although Brelich [1969: 242-44] recognizes some distinctive initiatory features in Euripides' *IT*). But Meyer Fortes, the noted anthropologist, alluding to another variant in the Orestean myth, easily recognizes the frame of reference. "What is significant for us in the Orestes story is that he murdered a kinswoman, that this kinswoman was his mother, and that his expiation was to mutilate himself by biting off a finger.... The parallels that leap to mind, for an anthropologist today, are other apparently irrational mutilations of the body carried out in the context of an overt or suppressed conflict between successive generations. We think...of the very widespread association of circumcision and other forms of mutilation with the initiation of youths and maidens into adulthood" (*Oedipus and Job in Western African Religion* [Cambridge 1959] 9-10).

Thomson (1966) 46-47 and M. Tierney, "The Mysteries and the *Oresteia*," *JHS* 57 (1937) 11-21, find an initiatory pattern in the trilogy but refer it respectively to the Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries. But these recurrent mystical allusions do not form the primary pattern. In this regard, we might note the connection between the Eleusinian Mysteries and the ephebes who played an important public role in the preliminaries. But their participation might have been due to their status as civic representatives (since they were separated from their families) or to their own initiatory status in another sphere. What can be said is that the general cluster of details of which I am speaking and will discuss further below was familiar to the Greek world through the scenario of the Eleusinian Mysteries, and for ethnology, mystery initiations everywhere are secondary elaborations of tribal initiations. For the argument that the Eleusinian Mysteries were indeed derived from Athenian tribal initiations, see D. Sabbatucci, *Saggio sul misticismo greco* (Rome 1965) 153, n. 30 and 177 ff.

[14] On the *Theogony* see N. O. Brown, *Hesiod's Theogony* (Indianapolis and New York 1953) 17. On the paradigmatic function of the prologue in the *Eumenides*, see, e.g., F. Solmsen, *Hesiod and Aeschylus* (Ithaca, N. Y. 1949) 21, 23, 64, 157-66; D. Clay, "Aeschylus' *Trigeron Mythos*," *Hermes* 97 (1969) 1-9; J. H. Finley, *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge, Mass. 1955) 277; and Ramnoux (1959) 139-43.

[15] For a thorough study of the recurrent details of the combat myth, see Fontenrose (1959).

[16] See Zeitlin (1966) 645-53, especially 653. After the completion of this study, I was given access to an unpublished dissertation (1976) by N. S. Rabinowitz, *From Force to Persuasion: Dragon Battle Imagery in Aeschylus' Oresteia*, which interprets (and sometimes overinterprets) the motif of dragon combat in exhaustive detail.

[17] Turner (1967) 96. "The symbolism attached to and surrounding the liminal *persona* is complex and bizarre. Much of it is modeled on human biological processes.... They give an outward and visible form to an inward and conceptual process. The structural 'invisibility' of liminal *personae* has a twofold character. They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified. Insofar as they are no longer classified, the symbols that represent them are, in many societies, drawn from the biology of death, decomposition, catabolism, and other physical processes that have a negative tinge.... The other aspect that they are not yet classified, is often expressed in symbols modeled on processes of gestation and parturition."

[18] Delcourt (1959) 97. "All the words which in Greek and Latin designate the piglet also designate the feminine organ, *porculus* as well as *choiros* and its diminutives, *choiriskos, choiridion,* all equivalents of *kteis*. Baudo on the back of a pig holds a loom comb, the *kteis*. *Orthagoriskos* and *orthagoras,* other names for piglet, signify to *aidoion* [the pudenda] (*Ann. Inst. Arch.* 15, pl. E, p. 80; sch. Aristph. *Eccl.* 915; cf. e.g., *Vesp.* 1364). The womb is called *delphys*; the suckling pig is called *delphax* which is probably the same word as *vulva*. The Latins call *porca* the projecting part of a ploughed furrow, and the tracer of the furrow, in the list of the twelve gods of the *Sacrum Cereale,* is called *Imporcitor.*" [tr. mine].

Delcourt (97-98) also points to analogous rites of palingenesis. Men believed dead were not reintegrated into the community until after a simulated rebirth (washing, swaddling, nursing) on account of which they were called *Deuteropotmoi* or *Hysteropotmoi.* There was a Roman rite which obliged those thought dead in a foreign land to reenter their houses through the chimney in the roof, not through the door (Plut. *Qu. Rom.* 5).

The most famous and detailed account of a man's return home after a long absence when it was not known whether he was dead or alive is, of course, the *Odyssey.* Several scholars have pointed to the general patterning of themes of death and rebirth, notably C. P. Segal, "Transition and Ritual in Odysseus' Return," *PP* 116 (1967) 321-42, who treats the recurrent motifs of sleep, the bath/purification, and threshold. In this context, I would emphasize the way in which Odysseus' reentry into the palace (Bk. 19) recapitulates the stages of the life cycle in a scene which E. Auerbach in his well-known study (*Mimesis* [Princeton 1953]) treated merely as a digression. To reclaim his adult status on Ithaca, Odysseus must begin again from birth and reconstitute his early history: (1) Eurykleia, his nurse, who "took him in her own hands when his mother first bore him"

(19.355), washes his feet and through the recognition of his scar recalls (2) his naming on the knees of his maternal grandfather when an infant (19.399-409) and (3) his killing of the boar at the age of puberty, which included the well-known initiatory feature of a mutilation of the body (i.e., the scar) (19.410-65).

[19] "One of the most important purposes of the puberty rites is to loosen the tie between boys and their mothers and to bind the novices to the society of men. This part of primitive education... is accomplished by drastic means. The strongest tie binding the child to the mother is, of course, the fact that she gave birth to him and his dependence resulting from that. To break it, the male child is supposed to die, to be killed and to be born by man again, by his father or a father-representative. This new or newborn being begins a fresh existence as an adult and as a member of his tribe.... It is essential to recognize this most significant feature of the initiation and its purpose of breaking the tie between boys and their mothers by pretending that the initiated are born again by men. This rebirth is significant in undoing birth from the mother"(Reik 1960: 123-24; cf. Eliade 1958: 7-10). Often the women are, in fact, duped into thinking their sons have died. Often they are required to mourn for their sons who have been taken away from them by ritually aggressive means and pretend not to recognize them when they return. (*Note that Orestes reports himself dead and that Clytemnestra does not recognize him*). In extreme cases, "the initiate is allowed to insult and even manhandle his mother in token of his emancipation from her tutelage" (Hottentot), or he "walks over his mother's body, deliberately stepping on her belly, and this gesture confirms his definitive separation from her (Papua)" (Eliade 1958: 30).

On rebirth from the male or attested to by male sponsors, see also Bettelheim (1954) 113-21, and generally, see Turner's account of Ndembu circumcision ritual (1962) and Eliade (1958) 27, on the importance of blood symbolism. Vidal-Naquet's (1974) remark is eminently relevant here. "The Athenian city is constituted on the exclusion of women, even as it is constituted, in other respects, on the exclusion of strangers and slaves. The only civic role of women consists in giving birth to citizens..." (154). However, the importance of autochthony (substitution of Earth as mother) in Athenian political ideology should not be overlooked.

[20] Delcourt (1959) 103, remarks that "the Greeks unanimously saw in Apollo the natural defender of the avenging son.... It is the image of the young god assisting the young man, his double.... Apollo of Delphi is a symbol, that of Delos tenderly associated with images of birth, has a totally different value. Delphi ignores Leto and represents the maternal power in its most terrible aspects [Pytho]." [Tr. mine.]

[21] See Reik (1960) 128-31 on the creation of Eve and his remarks on the analogous but different myth of the birth of Athena. It might be pointed out that the struggle of the male to control or usurp the female reproductive function is a repetitive motif in Greek myth. Zeus himself gives birth to Dionysus, the "twice born," from his thigh. In the preceding episodes in

the *Theogony*, Uranos attempts to control creation or begrudges female productivity by refusing to allow his children to be born, and, more importantly, himself creates alone from the blood and semen of his severed genitals. The latter is particularly relevant since Aphrodite, a female, and specifically, the principle of bisexual reproduction, is born from the essence of the male. Cronos swallows his children in imitation of pregnancy, but is forced to disgorge them, while Zeus goes one step further and swallows the mother and successfully gives birth to the daughter. As Vernant (1969: 106) remarks, "ce rêve d'une hérédité purement paternelle n'a jamais cessé de hanter l'imagination grecque," and see his discussion, 106-07.

[22] See the discussion of Kuhns (1962) 45-49, the remarks of Delcourt (1959) 85, n. 1, Vickers (1973) 414-15, 636-43, and A. Peretti, "La teoria della generazione patrilinea in Eschilo," *PP* 49 (1956) 241-62 on the theory of patrilineal generation in Aeschylus.

Kuhns cites the observations of R. B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought*[2] (Cambridge 1954) 108-09, on the likely connection of *engkephalos* and semen in the *Iliad* as evidence of an earlier Greek belief in the primacy of the male role in procreation, but such a belief does not deny the female's role, nor does it promulgate a scientific doctrine.

[23] Bamberger (1974) 279. Embryological speculation is not, of course, limited to the Western tradition. (For some examples, see, e.g., Barnes [1973] 65, E. Leach, *Rethinking Anthropology* [London 1966] 13-14, and Vickers [1973] 637-39 with bibliography.) Nor are beliefs pertaining to procreation necessarily linked to kinship systems (i.e., matriliny, patriliny). The denial of maternity, however, is unusual, as it is for other Greek embryological speculations which follow a less drastic course. See E. Lesky, *Die Zeugungs- und Vererbungslehren der Antike und ihr Nachwirken* (Wiesbaden 1951).

[24] Hillman (1972) 224-25. "The Apollonic view of the feminine appears to be inherent in the same structure of consciousness as the methods by which the fantasies are supposedly proven." For instance, von Leeuwenhoek, who invented the microscope, insisted he saw *homunculi* in the spermatozoa he viewed, and Leonardo, the father of modern embryology, drew, on the basis of data from anatomical dissections, *two* urethral passages, one for the seminal fluid and a second one for the *pneuma* or *aura seminalis* (222). See also Barnes (1973) 61-87.

[25] Hence the tendency by modern critics to discount the argument as "rhetorical," "meaningless," "frigid," "absurd," "tongue-in-cheek," "unproved speculation," and "parody," (see citations in Kuhns [1962] 45-46 and Vickers [1973] 414, 435, n. 47).

[26] Sigmund Freud (1958) 145. It seems fair to point out that Freud's view of the female as a mutilated male lies squarely within the Aristotelian doctrine of the woman as a deformity in nature. Moreover, his debt to Bachofen seems evident in the following passage from *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York 1930; 1961): "Women soon come into opposition

to civilization and display their retarding and restraining influence – those very women who, in the beginning laid the foundations of civilization by the claims of their love. Women represent the interests of family and of sexual life. The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable." Since a man does not have unlimited quantities of psychical energy at his disposal, he has to accomplish his tasks by making an expedient distribution of his libido. What he employs for cultural aims he to a great extent withdraws from women and sexual life. His constant association with men, and his dependence on his relations with them, even estrange him from his duties as a husband and father. Thus the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it."

[27] It is generally agreed that the connection of Orestes with the founding of the Areopagus is Aeschylus' own invention. Delcourt (1959: 27-30, 103-13) also insists that he is the originator of the link between Delphi and Orestes, although others posit another and earlier "Delphic" version against which Aeschylus is reacting.

[28] Harris (1973) 157. Ortner's remarks are even more precise. "The psychic mode associated with women seems to stand at both the bottom and the top of the scale of human modes of relating. The tendency in that mode is to get involved more directly with people and individuals and not as representatives of one social category or another; this mode can be seen as either 'ignoring' (and thus subverting) or 'transcending' (and thus achieving a higher synthesis of) those social categories, depending upon the cultural view for any given purpose. Thus we can account easily for both the subversive feminine symbols (witches, evil eye, menstrual pollution, castrating mothers) and the feminine symbols of transcendence (mother goddesses, merciful dispensers of salvation, female symbols of justice, and the strong presence of feminine symbolism in the realms of art, religion, ritual, and law). Feminine symbolism, far more often than masculine symbolism, manifests this propensity toward polarized ambiguity – sometimes utterly exalted, sometimes utterly debased, rarely within the normal range of human possibilities." "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, edd., *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford 1974) 85-86.

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