

Author's Note

The Greek texts quoted in this work are taken from the following editions: Denniston and Page's edition of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Dale's edition of Aeschylus' *Eumeneis*, West's edition of Hesiod's *Theogony*, *Works and Days*, Murray and Page's edition of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as well as Lloyd-Jones and Wilson's edition of Sophocles' *Ajax*. For bibliographic information, see **Works Cited**. All of the images referenced in the body of the text from Prag's *The Oresteia: Iconographic and Narrative Tradition* may be found in Appendix A; those cited in LIMC may be found in Appendix B.

Aeschylus' Erinyes: Tragedy's Muses

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Wilson and Taplin argue that Aeschylus' use of the language of music in the trilogy reflects the social and political conflicts within the story. The authors cite a dictum of Ptolemy, a fifth-century musical theorist: "The notes of music are never disturbed without disturbance of

Chapter One

Introduction

The over-arching theme of Aeschylus' trilogy, the *Oresteia*, is the emergence of law from vengeance, but does the author also address the nature of tragedy through an innovative treatment of song and the Erinyes? Peter Wilson and Oliver Taplin thought so: "The *Eumenides* supplies a kind of 'aetiology' of tragedy -- that is, of itself."¹ Beginning with Wilson and Taplin's intriguing idea, this paper will explore the evolving nature, function, and representation of the Erinyes before, during, and after the *Oresteia* was first performed, in order to determine how Aeschylus granted them a clearly defined identity, transforming these goddesses from the fearful shadows of epic into tragedy's Muses.

Wilson and Taplin argue that Aeschylus' use of the language of *mousike* in the trilogy reflects the social and political conflicts within the story. The authors cite a dictum of Damon, a fifth-century musical theorist: "The modes of music are never disturbed without disturbance of

¹ Peter Wilson and Oliver Taplin "The 'Aetiology' of Tragedy in the *Oresteia*," PCPS Vol. 39 (1993) pgs. 169-180. pg. 169.

the most fundamental political and social *nomoi*."¹ By analyzing particular instances of musical language throughout the trilogy, most notably the Watchman's prologue, Cassandra's exchange with the *choros* of Argive elders, and the Erinyes' Binding Song, Wilson and Taplin discover the extent to which Aeschylus incorporated Damon's thinking into his own work. For example, the playwright establishes the atmosphere of *anomia* in the opening *Agamemnon* when the Watchman laments:

ὅταν δ' αἰεῖδεν ἢ μινύρεσθαι δοκῶ,
 ὕπνου τὸδ' ἀντίμολπον ἐντέμνων ἄκος,
 κλαίω τὸτ' οἴκου τοῦδε συμφορὰν στένων
 οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ' ἄριστα διαπονουμένον. (Ag. 16-19)

[W]henever I think to sing or to hum, dispensing this remedy from music against sleep, then I weep in lament for this house's misfortune; it is not managed for the best as it was before.³

This first instance of song in the trilogy is "proffered as a potential cure, but in effecting its cure it brings tears, lamentation."⁴ The very word the Watchman uses for song offers an explanation for this – for the adjective *antimolpon* is, in Wilson and Taplin's estimation:

¹ Plato, *Republic* 4.424c as translated and quoted in *ibid.* pg. 169.

³ Aeschylus, *Oresteia* trans. Christopher Collard (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) pg. 3.

⁴ Wilson and Taplin pg. 170.

[A] strangely compressed and paradoxical compound, suggesting conflicting roles for *molpe*, caught between conflict and cure, under the different values of *anti-*: song is a cure against sleep; or the Watchman's cure for sleep is *antimolpon*, something 'against song', hostile to it – or a *substitute* for [it] [*italics in original*].⁵

In this way, "disruptions or distortions in the social order find their counterpart in the musical order."⁶ By focusing upon Aeschylus' use of song and musical language we can discover (i) the manner in which he linked the corrupted music motif with the Erinyes, and, (ii) why the *anomia* in Argos prevents them from being expressed in a traditionally harmonious manner.

Cassandra makes the initial, essential connection between disordered music and the Erinyes:

τὴν γὰρ στέγην τήνδ' οὔ ποτ' ἐκλείπει χορὸς
 ξύμφθογγος οὐκ εὐφωνος· οὐ γὰρ εὖ λέγει.
 καὶ μὴν πεπωκώς γ', ὡς θρασύνεσθαι πλέον,
 βρότειον αἶμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει,
 δῦσπεμπτὸς ἔξω, συγγόνων Ἐρινύων.
 ὕμνοῦσι δ' ὕμνον δώμασιν προσήμεναι
 πρῶταρχον ἄτην· (Ag. 1186-1192)

From this room a *choros* never departs -- it sings in unison, but makes no pleasant sound, for its words are not pleasant. Yes, and it has drunk -- and so grows bolder -- human blood; and it remains, a *komos* in this house, hard to send away, of Erinyes of the race. And they sing their

⁵ *ibid.*, pg. 171.

⁶ *ibid.*, pg. 169.

song, besetting the halls, sing of the madness that began it all.⁷

The prophetess sees the gruesome spectacle and recognizes the roots of the *anomia* plaguing Argos: the curse inherited from Pelops. Although the *choros* at first hesitate to connect Cassandra's vision to their ruling family's sordid history, they nevertheless intuitively comprehend that destructive disorder is linked with the Erinyes. The invocation of the Erinyes also gives both the characters and the audience an understanding of the nature of the disorder. Thus, when Cassandra speaks of Agamemnon's murder, she envisions insatiable *stasis* raising the *ololyge* over the coming sacrifice of her captor the king:⁸

ἔῃ, παπαῖ παπαῖ, τί τόδε φαίνεται;
ἢ δίκτυόν τί γ' Ἴδου;
ἀλλ' ἄρκυς ἢ ξύνευνος, ἢ ξυναιτία
φόνου. στάσις δ' ἀκόρετος γένει
κατολολυξάτω θύματος λευσίμου. (Ag. 1114-1118)

Oh horror! No! What is this which appears? Is it some catch-net of Death? No, the trap-net sharing his bed, sharing guilt for his blood; now let insatiable discord for the family cry its triumph for the sacrifice which incurs stoning.⁹

The *choros* reply:

ποῖαν Ἐρινὺν τήνδε δώμασιν κέλη

⁷ *ibid.*, pg. 172.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Collard. pg. 31.

*ἐπορθιάζειν; (Ag. 1119-11120)

What Erinys do you bid raise her cry over the house?¹⁰

By linking Agamemnon's impending doom with the Erinyes via the metaphorical language of *mousike*, the *choros* adds a symbolic dimension to these goddesses, although they lack corporeal form.¹¹ When they at length become physical characters in the *Eumenides*, they perform the Binding Song, in which they explicitly identify themselves as a *choros* within the play itself:

ἄγε δὴ καὶ χορὸν ἄψωμεν, ἐπεὶ
 μούσαν στυγεράν
 ἀποφαίνεσθαι δεδόκηκεν,
 *λέξαι τε λάχη τὰ κατ' ἀνθρώπους
 ὡς ἐπινωμά στάσις ἀμά. (*Eum.* 307-311)

Come let us link in dancing too since we have a mind to display our hateful music and to say how our party manages its allotted roles among men.¹²

Wilson and Taplin consider this scene "the theatrical culmination of the *Oresteia's* 'corrupted music'."¹³ The Erinyes are no longer undefined phantasms, but goddesses in human form, possessing the power of speech, and, most importantly, a clear, immediate sense of purpose:

¹⁰ Wilson and Taplin p. 172.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Collard pg. 94.

¹³ Wilson and Taplin p. 174.

ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ τεθυμένῳ
 τόδε μέλος, παρακοπά,
 παραφορὰ φρενοδαλῆς,
 ὕμνος ἔξ Ἐρινύων,
 δέσμιος φρενῶν, ἀφόρ-
 μικτος, αὐονὰ βροτοῖς. (*Eum.* 328-333)

Over the one who is made our sacrifice
 this is our song: derangement, distraction, ruination of
 the mind in a hymn from the Furies
 which binds the mind, no lyre's music,
 withering mortal men dry.¹⁴

Thus, Aeschylus has transformed these elusive
 mythological characters into self-reflexive agents
 distinctively aware of their role. Taplin and Wilson note
 that this scene is "a remarkable case of the tragic *choros*
 performing as a *choros* within the world of the drama and
 probably the least submerged, the closest to an explicitly
 self-referential example to be found in extant tragedy".¹⁵
 They are no longer simply evocative of or associated with
 the horrors of the tragic curse, *they themselves embody it*.
 Moreover, they conceive themselves precisely as a tragic
choros. The punishment they exact is expressly
 foreshadowed in a lugubrious song. As Clytemnestra's
 avengers, they represent the logical and emotional
 counterpoint to Apollo's defense of Orestes at his trial.
 Further, at the moment when they sing the Binding Song,

¹⁴ Collard pg. 94.

¹⁵ Wilson and Taplin pg. 174.

they are the cause of Orestes' flight, the reason for his current dilemma.

Given that the Erinyes are closely linked with the suffering which tragic situations bring about, how shall we understand their ultimate willingness to be persuaded to abandon their anger by Athena's offer of cultic honors? They quite literally change their tune, asking Athena what song she would wish them to sing for the land:

τί οὖν μ' ἄνωγας τῆδ' ἐφθυμῆσαι χθονί; (*Eum.* 902)

What then do you bid me invoke for this land?¹⁶

Athena replies:

ὅποια νίκης μὴ κακῆς ἐπίσκοπα,
καὶ ταῦτα γῆθεν ἔκ τε ποντίας δρόσου
ἐξ οὐρανοῦ τε· κἀνέμων ἀήματα
εὐηλίως πνέοντ' ἐπιστείχειν χθόνα·
καρπὸν τε γαίᾳ καὶ βοτῶν ἐπίρρυτον
ἄστοϊσιν εὐθενούντ' ἄ μὴ κάμνειν χρόνῳ,
καὶ τῶν βροτείῳ σπερμάτων σωτηρίαῦ.
τῶν εὐσεβούντων δ' ἐκφορωτέρα πέλοις.
στέργω γάρ, ἀνδρὸς φιτυποίμενος δίκην,
τὸ τῶν δικαίων τῶνδ' ἀπένθητον γένος.
τοιαῦτα σοῦσι. (*Eum.* 903-913)

Such things as attend victory not badly won, and for these to come from the earth, and from the waters of the sea, and from the heaven; for the winds to come to the land blowing their breath amid happy sunshine; for an abundant, thriving yield for citizens from soil and beasts not to fail with time; and for safety for its human seed. May you bring more to birth who are reverent ...¹⁷

¹⁶ Collard pg. 109.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

This song is a blessing upon all aspects of Athenian life, and so the Erinyes, formerly associated with *anomia*, now work to uphold the *nomoi* as articulated by Athena. This change is highlighted by the quality of their song itself, which is in direct contrast to the corrupted *mousike* that the Watchman lamented at the beginning of the first play, thereby confirming that Athena has re-established order by inviting the Erinyes, a fearful *choros* of goddesses, into the City. On this point, Wilson and Taplin conclude "on a non-explicit and figurative level of self-reference [...] the incorporation of the Erinyes can be seen to represent the *incorporation of tragedy itself within the city of Athens* [*italics in original*]." ¹⁸ Athena's characterization of the Erinyes' future function in her city also suggests this line of reasoning, for "she says that they will provide some in the city with 'a life dimmed by tears', while to others they will give [...] 'songs, or themes for song'": ¹⁹

τοῖς μὲν ἀοιδάς, τοῖς δ' αὖ δακρύων
βίον ἀμβλωπὸν παρέχουσαι. (*Eum.* 954-955)

¹⁸ Wilson and Taplin pg. 175.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

To discover why Aeschylus uses the word *aoida*, instead of a more natural antithesis to tears, Wilson and Taplin take these lines together with Athena's description of the *choros*:

ἐκ τῶν φοβερῶν τῶνδε προσώπων
μέγα κέρδος ὄρω τοῖσδε πολίταις· (Eum. 990-991)

From these terrifying [faces] I see great profit for these citizens.²⁰

Taking the reference to song together with the word *prosopa*, which came to refer to 'masks' in addition to 'faces,' suggested to Wilson and Taplin "a subliminal layer of significant self-reference."²¹ They add:

In a subtle and powerful (meta)theatrical register, Athena's words evoke the incorporation of tragic *choroi* into the life of the future city.²²

Finally, Wilson and Taplin offer a sampling of subsequent literary and artistic evidence, particularly a passage from Aristophanes' *Wealth* (422ff.) dating from 388 B. C. and the 'Cleveland Medeia' circa 400 B. C.²³ These works strongly suggest that "the Erinyes seem to have

²⁰ Wilson and Taplin pg. 175.

²¹ *ibid.*, pg. 176.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.* pg. 176 n. 42.

become, after the *Oresteia*, something of a symbol of tragedy, an emblem of tragic horrors."²⁴

Before Wilson and Taplin's 1993 article, other scholars had argued, albeit briefly and somewhat impressionistically, that Aeschylus' Erinyes possessed a self-reflexive, meta-theatrical character. The earliest of these is R. P. Winnington-Ingram, who observed that, since Athena is the goddess of wisdom, representing harmony in all its forms -- including tragedy -- she recognized that the Erinyes must be honored, and reconciled them due to her civilized, and civilizing manner: "Athena shows the way to deal with [the Erinyes], which is...to reason, persuade and reconcile, to make them Eumenides..."²⁵

Elizabeth Belfiore approaches Aeschylus' Erinyes as Gorgon-figures, informed by Pindar's *Pythian* 12. There he relates how Athena invented the *aulos* "in imitation of the crying of the Gorgon Euraylos":²⁶

[S]he crafted the many-voiced song of the *aulos*, so that she might imitate with instruments the loud-sounding wail approaching her from the ravenous jaws of Euryale. The goddess invented it. But having invented it for mortal men to have,

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ R. P. Winnington-Ingram, Studies in Aeschylus (Cambridge UP, 1983) pg. 172.

²⁶ Elizabeth Belfiore, Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion. (Princeton: UP, 1992) pg. 14.

she called it the many headed tune,
 the fair famed wooer to the contests that arouse the
 people,
 a tune that crowds through the thin bronze and the reeds
 that grow beside the city, fair in dances, of the Graces²⁷

Belfiore holds that Athena's actions in this poem parallel her wearing the gorgoneion on her *aigis*, for there "[her] divine craft allows her to use the terrifying and destructive Gorgon's head for beneficent, apotropaic purposes."²⁸ She contends that Aeschylus' Erinyes (whom the Pythia likens to Gorgons²⁹) also parallel the Gorgon's dual symbolic aspects, as "terrible monster and [...] beneficent, apotropaic gorgoneion."³⁰ Further, since Pindar had linked the gorgoneion with poetry in *Pythian 12*, Belfiore believes:

Aeschylus uses the image of the Gorgon-Erinyes just as Pindar uses that of the Gorgon-gorgoneion: as a symbol of something that can be perceived as either destructive and evil or good and necessary to an orderly society. Moreover, like Pindar, Aeschylus implicitly connects this image with poetry. His play suggests that the transformation in the audience of maddening terror caused by wrongdoing into beneficial reverence is to be connected with the power of art to change our perceptions. Aeschylus does this in the second half of the *Eumenides* by leading us, implicitly, to reflect on tragedy itself.³¹

²⁷ Pindar, *Pythian 12* (19-27) as translated in Belfiore pg. 15.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *Eum.* 48-51 as cited in *ibid.*, pg. 21.

³⁰ *ibid.*, pg. 19.

³¹ *ibid.*, pg. 26.

While Belfiore's analysis of Aeschylus' Erinyes explains the mythological basis for such characters, she stops short of specifying how their mythological identity translates into literary significance.

Ruth Padel's approach to the symbolic value of the Erinyes is more impressionistic, even oracular. She does not specifically address their self-referential quality or the metaphors Aeschylus associates with them, but contrasts the Erinyes' mythological characteristics with the nature of tragedy itself: "Tragedy's vision of inner experience assumes a mass of multiple external forces, which concretely assault self's concretely conceived interior. Erinyes sum them all up. Erinyes was tragedy's ideal *daemon*."³² Suggestive as this is, Padel does not explore the Erinyes' nature beyond an impressionistic survey of their character as it relates to their mythological function as avengers of wrongdoing. Her conclusion is less of an analysis rooted in the text than a free association between the Erinyes and tragedy, much like Winnington-Ingram's.

³² Ruth Padel, In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self (Princeton UP, 1992) pg. 172.

No scholar specifically analyzed the Erinyes' literary function until Wilson and Taplin addressed the self-referential nature of the Erinyes in the *Oresteia*. Unfortunately, by framing their study of the trilogy as a discussion of the theory of self-referentiality, they effectively disconnect their analysis from the text it is meant to illuminate and give opponents of the theory a reason to dismiss their work. Jasper Griffin, for example, observed in connection with their article: "This looks to [me] like an idea of our own time, a brilliant *tour de force* of post modern interpretation, very unlikely indeed to have entered the minds of many of the citizens who sat and watched the *Oresteia* in 458 B.C."³³ This criticism, however, amounts to a complaint that Wilson and Taplin's *method of analysis* would not have occurred to the original audience. Although Griffin's criticism has a point, he does not shed any light on how Athenians in fact perceived the Erinyes in 458 B.C., or how Aeschylus presented them in his tragic trilogy. The evolution of Aeschylus' compositions, as well as literary and artistic evidence, illustrates that the playwright developed an association between the Erinyes and

³³ Jasper Griffin, "Review Article: Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond," M. S. Silk. *JHS* Vol. 118 (1998), pg. 193.

tragedy which was adopted by contemporary visual artists and ultimately accepted into the popular culture.

In this thesis, I propose to examine how Aeschylus created a character-identity for the Erinyes in the *Oresteia*, one which is inextricably tied to the destructive conflicts created by the Pelopid curse, and therefore, by extension, to tragedy itself. Aeschylus' Erinyes link themselves with both a "hateful Muse" and "maenads," which, in turn, associates them with both music -- the fundamental element of tragedy's formal structure -- and figures who represent the irrational, a current which runs through all tragic tales. These characters are therefore not simply evocative of tragedy, they are indeed its Muses -- their song is fearfully discordant. By grounding the discussion of these issues in the surviving cultural evidence and viewing the symbolic value of Aeschylus' Erinyes as a product of organic cultural evolution as opposed to modern literary criticism, I shall demonstrate that the points of Wilson and Taplin (as well as their predecessors) are not nearly as far removed from the original context of the *Oresteia* as one might at first suppose.

Chapter Two

Pre-Aeschylean Presentations of the Erinyes

To understand Aeschylus' Erinyes in context, we need to understand the artistic and literary images that he and his original audience inherited. The earliest surviving evidence presents these divinities as amorphous, inchoate figures commonly identified with the preservation of *dike* within the social order by avenging broken oaths and murder victims. This chapter explores pre-Aeschylean presentations of the Erinyes, the better to show the nature and extent of Aeschylus' innovations (to be discussed in Chapter Three).

1. The Erinyes in Poetry and Philosophy Before Aeschylus

The first references to the Erinyes in Greek literature occur in the poems of Hesiod and Homer.¹ According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, they were born as a result of the emasculation of Ouranos at the hands of his youngest son, Kronos, the first internecine outrage committed in the

¹ Alan H. Sommerstein, introduction and commentary, Eumenides, by Aeschylus Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) pg. 7.

universe. The drops of divine blood from Ouranos' severed member produced these mighty and fearful goddesses:

φίλου δ' ἀπὸ μήδεα πατρὸς
 ἔσσυμένως ἤμησε, πάλιν δ' ἔρριψε φέρεσθαι
 ἔξοπίσω· τὰ μὲν οὐ τι ἐτώσια ἔκφυγε χειρός·
 ὄσσαι γὰρ ραθάμιγγες ἀπέσσυθεν αἱματόεσσαι,
 πάσας δέξατο Γαῖα· περιπλομένων δ' ἐνιαυτῶν
 γείνατ' Ἐρινῦς τε κρατερὰς μεγάλους τε Γίγαντας,
 τεύχεσι λαμπομένους, δολίχ' ἔγχεα χερσὶν ἔχοντας,
 Νύμφας θ' ἄς Μελίαις καλέουσ' ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαίαν. (*Thg.* 180-187)

His son reached out from the ambush with his left hand; with his right he took the huge sickle with its long row of sharp teeth and quickly cut off his father's genitals, and flung them behind him to fly where they might. They were not released from his hand to no effect, for all the drops of blood that flew off were received by Earth, and as the years went round she bore the powerful Erinyes and the great Giants in gleaming armour with long spears in their hands, and the nymphs whom they call Meliai on the boundless earth.²

Later, when the Erinyes embody a parent's curse, they are ascribed a particular function.³ Hesiod further elaborates in the *Works and Days*, where he identifies the Erinyes as guardians of oaths:

πέμπτας δ' ἐξαλέασθαι, ἐπεὶ χαλεπαί τε καὶ αἰναί·
 ἐν πέμπτη γὰρ φασιν Ἐρινύας ἀμφιπολεύειν
 Ὀρκὸν γεινόμενον, τὸν Ἔρις τέκε πῆμ' ἐπιόρκους. (*Op.* 802-804)

But avoid the 5ths, for they are difficult and dire: it was on the 5th, they say, that the Erinyes attended Oath at his birth, whom Strife bore as a bane for perjurers.⁴

² Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days* trans. M. L. West (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) lns. 180-187.

³ *Thg.* 472 as cited in Sommerstein pg. 9.

⁴ *Theogony and Works and Days* lns. 802-804.

Since oaths formalize and sanctify critically important social obligations, this detail sheds more light upon the Erinyes' essential function as avenging spirits.

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* present the Erinyes in terms of the offices Hesiod assigned to them, as seen through human eyes. Wronged parents invoke them in their curses, as Phoenix's father Amyntor does when he learns that his son had availed himself of his father's young concubine:⁵

τη πιθόμην καὶ ἔρεξα· πατήρ δ' ἔμὸς αὐτίκ' οἴσθεις
πολλὰ κατηράτο, στυγεράς δ' ἐπέκεκλετ' Ἐρινῦς,
"μή ποτε γούνασιν οἷσιν ἐφέσσεσθαι φίλον υἷον (Il. 9.454-456)

I was persuaded and did it; and my father when he heard of it straightaway called down his curses, and invoked against me the dreaded furies, that I might never have any son born of my seed to dandle on my knees.⁶

The Erinyes also righteously avenge mothers, as we learn from the story of Epicaste in the *Odyssey*. After she commits suicide, Odysseus notes that she leaves her Erinyes to Oedipodes, a ghastly inheritance:⁷

τῶ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα τε μητρὸς
Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσιν. (Od.11.279-80)

⁵ Timothy Gantz, Early Greek Myth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1993) pg. 13; see also *Il.* 21.412.

⁶ Homer, The Iliad of Homer trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1951) 9.453-455.

⁷ Gantz pg. 13; see also *Od.* 2.135ff.

[but left to him who survived her] all the sorrows that are brought to pass by a mother's furies.⁸

They are also called upon to avenge the death of a family member as when, in Book 9 of the *Iliad*, they hear Althaea curse her son Meleager after he accidentally kills his uncle(s):⁹

κικλήσκουσ' Αΐδην καὶ ἔπαινήν Περσεφόνειαν
 πρόχνη καθεζομένη, δεύοντο δὲ δάκρυσι κόλποι,
 παιδί δόμεν θάνατον· τῆς δ' ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινὺς
 ἔκλυεν ἔξ Ἐρέβεσφιν ἀμείλιχον ἦτορ ἔχουσα. (*Il.* 9.569–572)

[S]he called on Hades and on honoured Persephone, [...] to give death to her son; and Erinys, the mist-walking, she of the heart without pity, heard her out of the dark places.¹⁰

In each of these Homeric instances, the Erinyes are closely associated with a parent's curse – thus reflecting their birth from the severed member of an outraged father, as depicted in the *Theogony*. Even in the divine realm, the Erinyes enforce the proper hierarchical relation amongst family members.¹¹ For example, Iris

⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey of Homer* trans. Richmond Lattimore (New York: Harper, 1965) 11.279–280.

⁹ Gantz pg. 13.

¹⁰ *The Iliad of Homer* 9.569, 571–572.

¹¹ Mark Griffith, "Brilliant Dynasts: Power and Politics in the Oresteia," *ClAnt* (1995) pgs. 70–71.

invokes the Erinyes when she cautions Poseidon not to
direct harsh words at Zeus:¹²

τὸν δ' ἠμείβετ' ἔπειτα ποδὴνεμος ὠκέα Ἴρις·
οὕτω γάρ δῃ τοι γαιήοχε κυανοχαίτα
τόνδε φέρω Διὶ μῦθον ἀπηνέα τε κρατερόν τε,
ἦ τι μεταστρέψεις; στρεπταὶ μὲν τε φρένες ἔσθλων.
οἴσθ' ὡς πρεσβυτέροισιν Ἐρινύες αἰὲν ἔπονται. (Il. 15.200-204)

Then in turn swift wind-footed Iris answered him:
'Am I then to carry, o dark-haired, earth-encircler,
this word, which is strong and steep, back to Zeus from
you? Or will you change a little? The hearts of the great
can be changed. You know the Furies, how they forever side
with the elder.'¹³

Beyond upholding *dike* within the family, the Erinyes
preserve it in society-at-large by punishing oath-breakers,
as when Agamemnon calls upon them to witness his solemn
oath that Achilles' *geras* Briseis remained pure while in
his huts:

ἴστω νῦν Ζεὺς πρῶτα θεῶν ὕπατος καὶ ἄριστος
Γῆ τε καὶ Ἥλιος καὶ Ἐρινύες, αἱ θ' ὑπὸ γαίαν
ἄνθρώπους τίνυνται, ὅτις κ' ἐπίορκον ὁμόσση,
μὴ μὲν ἐγὼ κούρη Βρισηίδι χεῖρ' ἐπένεικα,
οὔτ' εὐνῆς πρόφασιν κεχρημένος οὔτε τευ ἄλλου.
ἀλλ' ἔμεν' ἀπροτίμαστος ἐνὶ κλισίῃσιν ἐμῆσιν. (Il. 19.259-263)

Let Zeus first be my witness, highest of the gods and
greatest, and Earth, and Helios the Sun, and Furies, who
underground avenge dead men, when any man has sworn a
falsehood, that I have never laid a hand on the girl

¹² Further, at *Od.* 17.475-476 it is hoped the Erinyes will
avenge the rights of beggars, as they are under divine
protection, cf. *Od.* 6.207-208, 14.57-58.

¹³ The Iliad of Homer 15.200-204.

Briseis on pretext to go to bed with her, or for any other reason, but she remained, not singled out, in my shelter.¹⁴

The role of the Erinyes as preservers of *dike* emerges when they silence the miraculous speech of Achilles' horse Xanthius when he prophesies his master's death.¹⁵ In this instance, the Erinyes intervene to halt a dislocation in the world-order.

On two occasions, however, the Erinyes are proactive: The first occurs in Book 19 of the *Iliad*, when Agamemnon holds them partly responsible for inflicting *ate* upon him:

ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ αἴτιός εἰμι,
ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα καὶ ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινύς,
οἳ τέ μοι εἰν ἀγορῇ φρεσὶν ἔμβαλον ἄγριον ἄτην,
ἧματι τῷ ὅτ' Ἀχιλλῆος γέρας αὐτὸς ἀπήρῳ. (*Il.* 19.86ff)

I am not responsible, but Zeus is, and Destiny, and Erinyes the mist-walking who in assembly caught my heart in the savage delusion on that day I myself stripped from him the prize of Achilles.¹⁶

The second occurs in the *Odyssey*, when they blind the seer Melampus after he takes the cattle of King Phylacos in order to provide his brother with the dowry which Neleus demanded:

εἵνεκα Νηλῆος κούρης ἄτης τε βαρείης,
τήν οἱ ἐπὶ φρεσὶ θῆκε θεὰ δασπλήτις Ἐρινύς. (*Od.* 15.233-4)

¹⁴ The Iliad of Homer 19.258-263.

¹⁵ *Il.* 19.418.

¹⁶ The Iliad of Homer 19.86-89.

[F]or the sake of Neleus' daughter, and the bitter infatuation which the goddess Erinyes, wrecker of houses, inflicted upon him.¹⁷

In both instances, the Erinyes caused *ate* (destructive blindness). But, as we have already established, the Erinyes act to preserve order.¹⁸ There seems to exist at least an apparent conflict in the role of the Erinyes, for they seem at once to uphold order and to destroy it. Sommerstein addresses this point, but does not resolve it: "The only link between this and the Erinyes' other functions seems to be the idea that they are essentially maleficent."¹⁹ While this is undoubtedly true, it leaves us with an unexplained and unsatisfying paradox: The Erinyes maintain *dike* as well as wreak havoc in human affairs.

In order to resolve this seeming contradiction, we need to explore and understand the nature of the Erinyes' role in association with the concept of *ate*. In The Greeks and the Irrational, Dodds notes that in the Homeric poems *ate* is nearly always "a state of mind – a temporary clouding or bewildering of the normal consciousness," which he likens to our notion of temporary insanity. He adds: "[L]ike all insanity, it is ascribed, not to physiological or psychological causes, but to an external 'daemonic'

¹⁷ The Odyssey of Homer, 15.233-234.

¹⁸ Sommerstein pgs. 7-8.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 5.

agency."²⁰ By appealing to *ate* as an explanation for his actions, Agamemnon is not attempting to excuse either himself or the act, for he offers Achilles compensation at the end of his speech. For archaic justice (as we shall see later in the case of Orestes) "cared nothing for intent — it was the act that mattered."²¹

Although Agamemnon also ascribed his *ate* to its usual agents, Zeus and the Moirai, Dodds ultimately holds that it is the Erinyes who is the immediate agent in this case because Agamemnon specifically mentions her. For support, Dodds turns to the Melampus passage, since it offers a parallel, and observes that "[i]n neither case is there any question of revenge or punishment."²² Thus, in Dodds' view, the Erinyes in these passages are acting as "the personal agent who ensures the fulfilment of a *moira*."²³

Dodds concludes that, in the Homeric poems, "*ate* is by no means necessarily either a synonym for, or a result of, wickedness,"²⁴ and states that the notion of *ate* as to the punishment "seems to be either a later development in Ionia or a late importation from outside." Rather, he holds that *ate* only refers to "objective disaster" in tragedy. More

²⁰ E. R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Boston: Beacon, 1957) pg. 7.

²¹ *ibid.*, pg. 3.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*, pgs. 5,7.

²⁴ *ibid.*, pg. 5.

recently, Mark Edwards, in his commentary on *Iliad* 19, has claimed that *ate* is essentially "remorse for an act" or otherwise a "remorse causing act." He, too, however, ultimately concludes (again citing the Melampus passage) that Dodds' explanation is sensible, adding that the Erinyes' association with *ate* "may be habitual."²⁵

The only mention of the Erinyes in archaic lyric occurs in Pindar's Second Olympian Ode. First performed in 476 B. C., it tells of how an Erinyes sees Oedipus kill Laius and causes his sons to slay each other in revenge for Oedipus' crime. This passage is noteworthy because it is the first known case of an Erinyes punishing the younger generation for a crime committed by their elders.²⁶ In this way, the Erinyes' role continues to expand, evolving through the process of abstraction and associative thinking.

The idea of the Erinyes as agents in a retributive justice system also appears in fragments attributed to the Pre-Socratic Anaximander and Heraclitus. Although debate surrounds the context of the Anaximander fragment, it

²⁵ cf. "Homer's *Litae* and *Ate*." J. A. Arieti *CJ* Vol. 84 (1988) pgs. 1-12; "Homeric *Ate*." W. F. Wyatt Jr. *AJPh* Vol. 103 (1982) pgs. 247-276 as cited in Edwards, Mark W, *The Iliad: A Commentary* ed. G. S. Kirk Vol. V: Books 17-20 (Cambridge, Cambridge UP: 1991) pgs. 247-248.

²⁶ Gantz pg. 15; cf. Sommerstein pg. 9.

nonetheless demonstrates that retributive justice was an essential element of the early Greek worldview:

ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσις ἐστὶ τοῖς οὖσι καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι κατὰ τὸ χρεῶν διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοις τῆς ἀδικίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν. (D12 B1)²⁷

To that they return when they are destroyed) of necessity; for he says that they suffer punishment and give satisfaction to one another for injustice.²⁸

Heraclitus presents the Erinyes as the guardians of the order Anaximander describes:

Ἥλιος γὰρ οὐχ ὑπερβήσεται μέτρα
εἰ δὲ μὴ Ἐρινύες μὲν Δίκης ἐπίσκουροι ἐξευρήσουσιν. (Frag. 94)²⁹

The sun will not overstep his measures; if he does, the Erinyes, the handmaids of Justice will find him out.³⁰

This passage demonstrates that the characterization of the Erinyes that we find in the Homeric poems was not strictly limited to poetry, but was common throughout the culture, and shaped their perception of the order of their world.

²⁷ Hermann Diels, Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker Funfte Auflage herausgegeben von Walther Kranz (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1922)

²⁸ Anaximander, Fragments and Commentary ed. and trans. Arthur Fairbanks, The First Philosophers of Greece (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1898) pgs. 8-16.

²⁹ Plutarch, "On Exile" Fragment 94 as cited in Diels

³⁰ John Burnet, Early Greek Philosophy (New York: Meridian, 1957)

As much as those works tell us about the Erinyes' nature and function, they offer little insight into the goddesses' physical appearance. We are told they live in Erebus and possess "merciless hearts."³¹ Sommerstein believes their epithets, ἠεροφοίτις and δασπλήτις, were quite possibly "fossilized *glossai* of no known meaning."³² Hainsworth surmises the former translates to "that walks in darkness" which therefore implies "coming unseen". He notes that "it is possible, though weak, that ἠερο- denotes simply the lower air, so that the Erinus is thought to fly like a bird-daimon," and then adds that the word could be a variant of a hypothetical epithet meaning blood-drinking based on the Cypriot word for blood (εἶρ).³³ Sommerstein posits that δασπλήτις - another attribute ascribed to the Erinyes-- may mean "who comes very close" from πελάξω plus the intensive prefix δασ-.³⁴ The obscurity of the Erinyes' epithets, as well as their very name, both "enhances [their] menace"³⁵ and highlights the fact that they are pre-Olympian figures.

The surviving artistic evidence shows that, unlike the Olympians, the Erinyes were not originally anthropomorphic,

³¹ cf. *Il.* 9.572; 19.259 as cited in Sommerstein pg. 8.

³² *ibid.*

³³ Bryan Hainsworth, The Iliad: A Commentary ed. G. S. Kirk Vol. III: Books 9-12 (Cambridge: UP, 1993) pgs. 137-138.

³⁴ Sommerstein pg. 8.

³⁵ Hainsworth, pg. 138.

but rather were imagined visually as snakes. A.J.N.W. Prag notes, "[Their] appearance and their venom were probably sufficient reason for their being treated as chthonic daemons."³⁶ Snakes often lived near tumuli and graves, consuming the food-offerings left for the dead. For these reasons, the living came to believe these creatures to be "representations or reincarnations of the dead."³⁷

At first, the image of a snake (either near a tomb or pursuing the murderer) represented the spirit of the victim. This naturalistic association also possessed religious significance, according to Marija Gimbutas. In The Living Goddesses she discusses the earliest known snake imagery – masks from the Varna cemetery in Bulgaria, products of the Old European culture of the Neolithic period.³⁸ She identifies these images with an ancient Snake Goddess, who symbolically embodied the snake's natural characteristics. Just as a snake--a creature full of lethal venom--sheds and renews its skin, so, by extension, the Snake Goddess possessed the power to destroy and create. Gimbutas traces this figure through the Minoan and

³⁶ A. J. N. W. Prag, The Oresteia: Iconographic and Narrative Tradition (Chicago: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1985) pg. 44.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ Marija Gimbutas, The Living Goddesses ed. Miriam Robbins Dexter (Berkeley: California UP, 1999) pg. 24.

Mycenaean cultures, noting that the goddess retains her association with creation and destruction.

The Erinyes' ophidian shape likens them to Medusa.³⁹ Like the Erinyes, Medusa is a horror to behold, a fearful female goddess associated with snakes. Hesiod's *Theogony* in fact links the accounts of their genesis.⁴⁰ In addition, both possess the power to destroy.⁴¹ The connections between the Gorgon and Erinyes suggest these figures share a common religious/mythic ancestor, although whether it is Gimbutas' Snake Goddess is uncertain. Nevertheless, her hypothesis offers a compelling explanation for the origin of the association between snakes and the Erinyes, who were not consistently identified with a particular visual symbol in the literature of the time.

We cannot be sure when the Greeks began creating images of Erinyes, as there are few surviving depictions of the goddesses from the pre-Aeschylean period. A.J.N.W. Prag speculates that this is because Clytemnestra's murder formed "an insignificant part of the version of the

³⁹ *ibid.*, pg. 20.

⁴⁰ *Thg.* 185-187.

⁴¹ Further, when we examine Aeschylus' Erinyes we shall see that he has the Pythia compare them to Gorgons (*Eum.* 48-51) After they have been pacified and persuaded by Athena, she explicitly states they shall have the power both to bless as well as curse (*Eum.* 954-955).

Oresteia known to Homer."⁴² Whatever the reason, it appears that artists did not particularly concern themselves with the consequences of her murder, and left it largely unrepresented in their work.⁴³ The few pieces that do survive, however, suggest that the pictorial tradition of Orestes' flight from these Erinyes pre-dates Aeschylus' work by a century. There is further evidence that Orestes' flight from the Erinyes was an established part of the myth, if not consistently emphasized by the pre-Aeschlyean sources. The Foce del Sele metope, for example, dates to the sixth century B. C. Originally part of a series of metopes which decorated the Heraion at Paestum, it features the schematic figure of a snake wrapped around a man struggling to free himself.⁴⁴ Many scholars believe it represents Orestes attempting to flee his mother's Erinyes because two associated metopes illustrate the deaths of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra⁴⁵.

A similar piece, the Cactus Painter's Lekythos,⁴⁶ depicts a young man without armor or sword fleeing a pair of giant, entwined serpents. Monstrous entwined snakes seem to be a favorite subject of this artist, for he uses

⁴² Prag pgs. 44-45.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ no. E1 plate 28b as cited in Prag pg. 44.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*; Gantz, pg. 15.

⁴⁶ no. E3 plate 28d as cited in Prag pgs.47-48.

this motif in three separate works: Once coiled around the tree of the Hesperides, hissing at Herakles,⁴⁷ and twice pursuing an unarmed youth. In the first of the latter works, now lost, the artist depicts the snakes emerging from behind a tomb. The surviving example omits that detail, but, "otherwise the picture is the same, and one can assume the same subject is intended."⁴⁸ Prag observes that the vines do not suggest a setting by themselves, inasmuch as they are a hallmark feature of the Cactus Painter's work. Indeed, he admits, "[t]here is no way of telling whether the painter intended to specify this scene as Orestes rather than leave it anonymous."⁴⁹ Prag tentatively identifies the youth as Orestes, however, because the figure bears a close resemblance to that of the Foce del Sele metope. Furthermore, he observes that the remaining candidates, Apollo and Cadmus, must be discounted because they attack the snakes they are associated with, and do not run naked and defenseless from them.⁵⁰

If Prag's identification is correct, this piece is an important link in the evolutionary chain of Erinyes iconography, since it possesses two characteristics that suggest how representations of the Erinyes became more

⁴⁷ Prag pgs. 47-48.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

abstract: (i) There are now two snakes in place of the one which originally symbolized the spirit of the wronged individual,⁵¹ thereby transforming vengeance into a group of *daemons* while remaining within accepted artistic and mythological conventions; and (ii) without a direct equivalency between the victim and a single snake-Erinyes, the tomb image is no longer strictly necessary. Prag therefore posits that the lack of such an image in the Cactus Painter's second and only surviving version of this subject points to a further abstraction of the Erinyes. This development mirrors the process by which the Erinyes evolved in Archaic literature, and, as we shall see, the trend continued, ultimately defining both the visual and literary arts well into the mid-fifth century.⁵²

We began our exploration of the Erinyes with Hesiod's account of their birth and their duty to avenge wronged parents in the *Theogony*. Continuing through the *Works and Days*, the Homeric poems, and Pindar's Second Olympian Ode, we found that the Erinyes' original duty expanded to include a range of functions, all related to preserving the essential social bonds that preserve *dike*. This process was most clearly evident in the Homeric poems, wherein they performed the entire range of these functions, from hearing

⁵¹ Prag pg.48.

⁵² *ibid.*

the curse Amyntor laid upon his son Phoenix to checking the speech of Achilles' divine horse Xanthos. Furthermore, we discovered that when these divinities act independently of a disruption of *dike*, they paradoxically cause *ate*.

In keeping with the associative process, the Greeks' overarching perception of the goddesses as malefactors most likely arose from the nature of their original defining functions. After all, to exact vengeance is to inflict suffering. This conclusion reconciles the apparent contradiction in the Erinyes' duties, and, indeed, suggests that even as far back as the Homeric poems they were closely linked to suffering. In the following chapter we shall see how Aeschylus shaped the Erinyes into a self-aware *choros* in order to examine more thoroughly the complex moral and philosophical issues raised by the myth of the Pelopid curse.

this point, they are sleeping, for they cannot pursue their victim once he has reached Poseidon's temple. Only Clytemnestra's furious spirit awakes them, even moving them to speech, yet their rallying cry bears a striking resemblance to the noise of baying dogs rather than to the ritual speech of mortals. Apollo is the only character to offer a description of these goddesses and their functions, but satisfaction of them differs greatly from

Chapter Three

Aeschylus' Erinyes

In this chapter we shall examine the function of the Erinyes in the *Oresteia*, focusing upon the ways in which Aeschylus links the goddesses to song, and the significance of this association to. During the *Eumenides*, we watch the Erinyes evolve from indescribable horrors, incapable even of human speech, into articulate advocates of the ancient traditions. To watch the tragedy unfold, therefore, is to witness the Erinyes' birth as dramatic characters.

When they first appear, the Erinyes are indeed the monsters of archaic epic. The first character to behold them, the Pythia, comes on stage unable to describe them or even walk, she is so terrified at the sight of them.¹ At this point, they are sleeping, for they cannot pursue their victim once he has reached Apollo's temple. Only Clytemnestra's furious spirit finally wakes them, even moving them to speech, yet their rallying cry bears a stronger resemblance to the noise of hunting dogs rather than to the usual speech of mortals.² Apollo is the first character to offer a description of these goddesses and their function, but estimation of them differs greatly from

¹ *Eum.* 34ff.

² *Eum.* 117ff.; 140

our analysis of their functions in the Homeric poems. For while the Erinyes were fearsome upholders of *dike* in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, they were not the bloodthirsty sadists Apollo would have them be when he disparagingly presents their traditional role in the worst possible light.³ When the Erinyes respond to this speech, they are surprisingly well-spoken, logical defenders of their role — echoing the positive aspect of their lot, first apparent in the Homeric poems. Aeschylus, therefore, has not changed the Erinyes fundamentally; they represent themselves in keeping with their traditional literary identity. Wilson and Taplin rightly regard the moment when Aeschylus gives his extraordinary *choros* the opportunity to sing their own song as the climax of the trilogy, when analyzed as an expression of *antimolpon*: the Binding Song. Here the Erinyes paint their own portrait, singing their *antimolpon*, the song against song:

ἄγε δὴ καὶ χορὸν ἄψωμεν, ἔπει
 μούσαν στυγεράν
 ἀποφαίνεσθαι δεδόκηκεν,
 λέξαι τε λάχη τὰ κατ' ἀνθρώπους
 ὡς ἐπινωμὰ στάσις ἀμά. (*Eum.* 307–311)

Come let us link in dancing too since we have a mind to display our hateful music and to say how our party manages its allotted roles among men.⁴

³ *Eum.* 179ff.

⁴ Collard pg. 94.

As they sing, they set forth their task, and by extension their collective identity. Beginning by naming Night their mother, they offer an account of their actions by describing their role in the Olympian order: "[W]e appear as true witnesses in support of the dead/exacting payment for bloodshed with authority."⁵ They go on to explain their paradoxical nature: why they are necessary defenders of justice and yet--unlike the altar of justice itself--are without honor, banished to the sunless depths of Hades.⁶ We learn from the Erinyes themselves that they embrace their hateful aspect because they ultimately accomplish their task as preservers of *dike* through fear:

τίς οὖν τὰδ' οὐχ ἄζεται
 τε καὶ δέδοικεν βροτῶν,
 ἐμοῦ κλύων θεσμὸν
 τὸν μοιρόκραντον ἐκ θεῶν
 δοθέντα τέλεον; (*Eum.* 389-393)

Who can there be of mortals
 not in holy awe and fear of this,
 in hearing from me
 fate's decreed ordinance?⁷

Further, their hymn "which binds the mind, no lyre's music"⁸ reminds one of the destructive blindness of *ate*,

⁵ Collard pg. 94.

⁶ cf. *Eum.* 538; 385ff.

⁷ Collard pg. 96.

which is brought on by the Erinyes. The discordant song itself reflects the disorder and collective crimes of the House of Atreus. Thus, the goddesses' *antimolpon*, which is a motif throughout the *Oresteia*, expresses both the acts that provoke their fury and the punishments they inflict. Even the vocabulary Erinyes choose to describe themselves ties them to both the Great Dionysia and tragic situations.⁹ They contrast themselves with the Muses, the harmonious divine *choros*, who move mortals to create *molpe* (ordered songs), as opposed to the Erinyes, who brought *antimolpon* to Argos. This *choros* from Hades serves as the terrifying counterpoint to the Muses, inspiring disorder, disharmony, and madness.

At first this analogy may seem incomplete, because it is unclear precisely what art form would have such a *choros* as a patron. If the epic poet calls upon the Muses for inspiration, who would call upon the Erinyes? The Erinyes offer an answer when they identify themselves as maenads,¹⁰ thus linking themselves with Dionysus and tragedy. Here is an art form descended from choral song, which, mirroring the nature of the Erinyes themselves, paradoxically communicates disorder, disharmony, and indeed, madness

⁸ *ibid.*, pg. 94.

⁹ cf. *Eum.* 552ff.

¹⁰ *Eum.* 500.

through an established structure. By explicitly and implicitly linking the Erinyes with the motif of corrupted *mousike* together with curses, suffering, and vengeance, Aeschylus has fashioned a new role for them. For they sing the song of disorder: tragedy's song. They are ancient goddesses who define a new art form: they are tragedy's Muses.

This innovation in their significance represents one more step in their evolution as traced in the preceding chapter. To say that the Erinyes in *Eumenides* embody the self-referentiality of tragedy as a whole, as Taplin and Wilson do, blurs the essential point, which is that the links between the Erinyes and the maenads are internal in Hellenic culture. The connections upon which they are based are established within the text as well as its wider traditional context, including, above all, choral performance. The connections are not always explicit, but such is often the nature of metaphoric, mythic, and symbolic meanings. This, indeed, is the crux of Wilson and Taplin's thesis, for they suggest that:

On a non-explicit and figurative level of self-reference [...] the incorporation of the Erinyes can be seen to represent the incorporation of tragedy itself (i. e. the organized, contained Great Dionysia) within the city of Athens."¹¹

¹¹ Wilson and Taplin, pg. 175.

The Erinyes to whom Athena grants the robes and rights of *metoikoi* therefore possess an identity and a cultural history. The question then becomes, is an interpretation offered in terms of modern literary theory necessarily anachronistic? That would hinge on whether or not the hypothesis itself relies exclusively upon an element of modern theory in order to remain cohesive. In this particular case, however, the essential link between the Erinyes and the themes of tragedy, far from being a creature of literary theory, is organic to the trilogy. As Padel notes, "[The] Erinyes [...] explain the violence people do to each other and themselves,"¹² that is to say, they symbolize the ultimate source of tragedy. Indeed, this is their function in both the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*, particularly in the exchange between Cassandra and the *choros* of the *Agamemnon*.

In Cassandra's great scene, she first identifies the source of the Watchman's *antimolpon*: the Erinyes. This is why it moved him to weep. It is not simply a lament, it is an unnatural song: the product and reflection of the *anomia* which plagues Argos, and the House of Atreus in particular. Cassandra, as a prophetess, is the only character with any direct link to the divine realm, so it follows that she

¹² Padel pg. 184.

alone would see them at this point. Even the exchange between actor and choros is awkward and strained. Cassandra sings of this corrupted song herself as she “envisions *stasis* [...] raising the *ololyge* over the coming sacrifice”.¹³

στάσις δ' ἀκόρετος γένει
κατολολυξάτω θύματος λευσίμου. (Ag. 1117-1118)

[N]ow let insatiable discord
for the family cry its triumph for the sacrifice which
incurs stoning.¹⁴

The sacrifice she references is of course no proper observance, but Agamemnon's impending murder. The *ololyge*, then, customarily, “a ritual cry of joy and thanksgiving”, will itself become a disordered shriek.¹⁵ Yet, who could utter such a cry? Aeschylus hints at its source in the choros' reply:

ποιάν' Ερινὺν τήνδε δώμασιν κέλῃ
ἔπορθιάζειν; (Ag. 1119-1120)

Here, they ask, singing in the mode of the prophetess, “What Erinyes do you bid raise her cry over the house?”¹⁶ They themselves have linked disordered music and sufferings with the Erinyes, but they do not yet understand how they

¹³ Wilson and Taplin pg. 172.

¹⁴ Collard pg. 31.

¹⁵ Wilson and Taplin pg. 172.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

specifically relate to the royal family. Cassandra accounts for the presence of these goddesses in the spoken portion of her scene.¹⁷ She proclaims they are attracted by and are, therefore, inseparable from the crimes of the family:

τὴν γὰρ στέγην τήνδ' οὔ ποτ' ἐκλείπει χορὸς
 ξύμφθογγος οὐκ εὐφῶνος· οὐ γὰρ εὖ λέγει.
 καὶ μὴν πεπωκῶς γ', ὡς θρασύνεσθαι πλέον,
 βρότειον αἷμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει,
 δύσπεμπτος ἔξω, συγγόνων Ἐρινύων.
 ὕμνοῦσι δ' ὕμνον δῶμασιν προσήμεναι
 πρῶταρχον ἄτην· (Ag. 1186–1192)

From this roof a chorus never departs – it sings in unison, but makes no pleasant sound, for its words are not pleasant. Yes, and it has drunk – and so grows bolder – human blood; and it remains, a *komos* in the house, hard to send away, of Erinyes of the race. And they sing their song, besetting the halls, sing of the madness that began it all ...¹⁸

In this, the first explicit connection between the Erinyes, corrupted *mousike*, *ate*, and suffering, the Erinyes appear to Cassandra as a *choros*. This is the trilogy's first coherent picture of the Erinyes, incorporating their traditional characteristics with their Aeschylean connection to *mousike*. They are symbols of the Pelopid curse; they are the source of the corrupted *ololyge*. Indeed, they are a *choros* precisely because their influence manifests itself through disordered *mousike*.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Wilson and Taplin pg. 172.

Clytemnestra's speech to the *choros* after she emerges from the palace confirms the veracity of Cassandra's disturbing vision.¹⁹ For here the queen proclaims that she has sacrificed Agamemnon to the family-Erinys.²⁰ At this point, the Erinys no longer describe only the Pelopid curse; they are active in the drama itself. Later, a jubilant Aegisthus echoes Clytemnestra's belief that was indeed sacrificed to the family-Erinys, in accordance with Cassandra's vision.²¹ Since Clytemnestra has created the *anomia* in Argos, the fact that she explicitly associates herself with an Erinys-figure further strengthens the connections made explicitly by Cassandra.

In the *Choephoroi*, the *choros* proclaims that murder cries out for an Erinys, cementing the connection between these goddesses and those Cassandra saw plaguing Agamemnon's *oikos*.²² This again confirms the connection between the Erinyes' traditional function and the image Cassandra left with the *choros* in the *Agamemnon*: goddesses who drink blood and thrive on suffering, whose triumphal song is *aphorminktos*: not simply sung without the lyre, but opposed to it. Aeschylus then definitively unites the

¹⁹ *Ag.* 1432ff.

²⁰ Wilson and Taplin pg. 173.

²¹ *Ag.* 1577-1582

²² *Choe.* 400

mythic and dramatic functions of his terrible goddesses when Orestes finally sees his mother's Erinyes.²³ His description of them begins the process of moving the mythic story of the Pelopid Curse into a non-mythical setting which encompassed the political reality of Aeschylus' audience, effectively investing them with an interest in the outcome of the tragedy. Thus, in time, the audience too will see what Orestes (and later the Pythia at the opening of the *Eumenides*) sees, and their city will serve as the setting for the final act of this drama. By bringing the Erinyes on stage as an anthropomorphic *choros*, Aeschylus allows for a rational solution to Orestes' tragic dilemma. This is only possible because the Erinyes, who are immediate, physical actors in this drama, now represent the curse. Albeit inescapable, they are nonetheless capable of discourse, unlike the curse which "cannot be made to end".²⁴ Thus, the creatures that give corporal form to the *Oresteia's* horrors themselves hold the key to the restoration of *dike*. Song, as Damon said, has a political function. To see the Erinyes as self-referential embodiments of tragedy — its dark Muse — is not at all to distract from their

²³ *Choe.* 1048ff.

²⁴ Thomas G Rosenmeyer, The Art of Aeschylus (Berkeley: California UP, 1962) pg. 343.

crucial political function. To the contrary, it supplements and completes their political significance. This dramatic resolution of the Pelopid Curse directly reflects tragedy's essential social function, articulated by Padel as: "[to] accep[t] horror in the mind and city and tur[n] [it] into something it [is] possible to see as good."²⁵

Yet, how do we know what the original audience members associated with the Erinyes? Of course we cannot know for certain, but the closest evidence we have, short of contemporary records or literary criticism, are the works of art that were produced after the *Oresteia's* debut. For here we see Aeschylus' original dramatic vision as filtered through the lenses of an assortment of artists. Since they must translate material from the piece into an image suited to various media, their works may be taken as examples of how the original audience conceived of and ultimately interpreted the *Oresteia*, since the images which survive are common enough to suggest that the consumers identified with them. In the next chapter, we shall analyze these works and demonstrate how they support Wilson and Taplin's interpretation.

²⁵ Padel, pg. 192.

Chapter Four

Post-Aeschylean Presentations of the Erinyes

In the years after the *Oresteia*'s debut, artists transformed the visual depictions of the Erinyes from simple, schematic snakes into beautiful winged women dressed in hunting costumes. First appearing in scenes taken from the *Oresteia*, they soon appeared in illustrations of other tragic scenes as well, becoming visual symbols of suffering. A similar process occurred in post-Aeschylean tragedy, where the Erinyes were predominantly associated with suffering and misfortune.

They remain the divine avengers of Hesiod and Homer, but, after the *Oresteia*, are more closely associated with their tools rather than their task.

The change in the Erinyes' image is more immediate, compelling, and better evidenced in art than in literature, and clearly indicates how the Erinyes were perceived at the time. In the following survey of *Oresteia* artwork, as well as supporting passages from the work of Sophocles, we shall see how Aeschylus' Erinyes were absorbed into the culture as clearly defined characters with a new symbolic dimension directly linked to their transformation at the conclusion of the *Eumenides*.

I. The Erinyes in Post-Aeschylean Art.

Art is a symbolic medium, and in the case of Attic vase painting, where the genre demands that the artist create figurative representations of well-known literary episodes, it is necessarily an abstraction. Since the Erinyes are concrete characters in the original work -- as they are in the illustrations of the Orestes cycle we shall analyze -- the manner in which they are depicted is of great importance, for it directly reflects the particular aspect of the mythological character the artist wished to emphasize. This is especially true if a character appears in a scene in which he did not appear in myth.

Until roughly "ten years or so after the middle of the fifth century"¹ art related to the Erinyes focused upon the snake figure. After that, there is a dramatic shift in the way in which the Erinyes are depicted. Prag writes:

Five vases appear that "indisputably show Orestes fleeing to the protection of Apollo from one or more Furies who may have snakes in their hands or in their hair, and are sometimes winged and sometimes not, but who are otherwise perfectly normal women, in dress and in form."²

¹ Prag pg. 48.

² *ibid.*

Prag also notes that snakes link the Erinyes iconographically with maenads, as well as the more archaic Gorgons and Harpies.³ He cites the Pythia's description of these fearful goddesses at the opening of the *Eumenides*:

οὔτοι γυναῖκας, ἀλλὰ Γοργόνας λέγω,
οὐδ' αὐτε Γοργείοισιν εἰκάσω τύποις.
εἶδόν ποτ' ἤδη Φινέως γεγραμμένας
δεῖπνον φερούσας· (*Eum.* 48-51)

[N]o, I do not mean women, but Gorgons; but on the other hand, I can't compare them to Gorgon-figures. I did see those in a painting once before, carrying off Phineus' banquet.⁴

This passage also recalls how Orestes likened the Erinyes to Gorgons at the end of the *Choephoroi*.⁵ Prag speculates:

"This was a mental picture that Aeschylus seems to have had before, for his 'Fury bending her foot', of the Seven Against Thebes (791) [which] seems to recall one of those knee-running flying Gorgons of the earlier archaic vases, and he brought the Gorgons themselves on stage in his satyric *Phorcides*."⁶

This account of the evolution of Aeschylus' Erinyes offers an interesting visual analysis of how the playwright may have conceived of the Erinyes as a composite of Gorgons,

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Collard pg. 86.

⁵ *Choe.* 1048

⁶ Prag pg. 48.

vengeful Erinyes, and kindly Eumenides. Further, the artistic traditions associated with each of these groups suggest that Aeschylus' Erinyes, although they were themselves novel, were part of a mythological and iconographical tradition when they stepped on the stage.

Pausanias records that Aeschylus represented the Erinyes with snakes in their hair, "but there is nothing terrible in their images."⁷ This seems to be a reference to the statues by Calamis and Scopas, depicting "three women in long chitons holding a snake in one hand and usually a flower in the other, accepting the prayers of one or more worshippers."⁸ In Prag's view, these statues attest to what he calls "yet another primitive aspect of the Furies, as beneficent Eumenides rather than vengeful Erinyes."⁹ In contrast, A. L. Brown holds the Erinyes and the Eumenides were two different groups of goddesses, but further evidence suggesting otherwise, chiefly provided by Pausanias, is inconclusive at best.¹⁰

Even if we cannot know the precise relationship that existed between the Erinyes and the Eumenides prior to the *Oresteia*, we may at least be reasonably confident that

⁷ as quoted in *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ A. L. Brown, "Eumenides in Greek Tragedy" *CQ*, New Series Vol. 34 No.2 (1984) pgs. 260-281.

Aeschylus' Erinyes were culturally organic creatures "immediately recognizable to his audience."¹¹ Further, Prag contends, "[i]t was natural, too, that the artists of the mid-fifth century should take up this [sc. Aeschylus'] conception of the Furies."¹² He believes this because post-*Oresteia* depictions of the Erinyes are defined mainly by the two characteristics which Aeschylus highlights in the course of the *Eumenides*: their identification with snakes and as hunters.¹³ These descriptions tie the image and the task traditionally associated with the goddesses to their new anthropomorphic identity.

Prag focuses on four examples of this artistic trend, evidenced by four Late Mannerist painters: the Orestes Painter, the Hephaestus Painter, the Duomo Painter, and the Undetermined Mannerist Painter. The design plan of each vase is similar, which suggests the artists were professionally connected.¹⁴ The layout includes three figures: Orestes on a structure resembling an altar of stones, Apollo, his protector, and a running Erinyes, as seen on the Orestes Painter's vase.¹⁵ His colleagues add other details in order to emphasize different aspects of

¹¹ Prag pg. 48.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*, note esp. *Eum.* 111-113, 130, 147, and 244.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pg. 50.

¹⁵ *ibid.* pg. 49. see also no. E4 plate 30a.

the *Eumenides*' structure and characters. For example, the Hephestus Painter includes an additional Erinyes, which, in Prag's view, means he is "laying emphasis on the Chorus' role."¹⁶ The Duomo Painter places Athena on Orestes' left, the direction in which his sword-arm points. This detail, Prag observes, "stress[es] the second half of the play."¹⁷ Also, in this piece it is clear that Orestes stands upon an altar, a reference to Orestes' flight to Athens and supplication of her patroness, as well as the scene wherein the *choros* sings their Binding Song, encircling Orestes on stage.¹⁸ Finally, the Undetermined Late Mannerist Painter's composition also includes two Erinyes, one wearing a short chiton and the other a peplos. Since the chiton is associated with hunting, and, by extension, the Erinyes, while the peplos is linked with the Eumenides, Prag once thought that these two figures could therefore represent their dual aspect - Erinyes and Eumenides. At the time of publication, however, he found this interpretation doubtful because the trend does not appear to be consistent.¹⁹ Aeschylean Erinyes continue to appear in illustrations of the Orestes myth well into the next century, as Python's

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pg. 50, see also no. E5 plate 30b.

¹⁷ *ibid.* see also no. E6 plate 31a.

¹⁸ *ibid.* cf. *Eum.* 235ff; 328, 341.

¹⁹ *ibid.* see also no. E7 plates 31 b-c.

bell krater demonstrates.²⁰ This piece shows Orestes at Delphi kneeling at the omphalos, with a large tripod in the background. There are two Erinyes dressed as hunters in the scene: one positioned above the tripod with snakes in her hair and around her arms, while the other stands on the far right of the scene, identical to her sister except for the fact that she is winged. Pylades and Leto are pictured in the upper corners, while Apollo and Athena stand on either side of Orestes. The former "seems to be chiefly concerned with keeping the Furies away from his suppliant, for he turns to face the Fury standing beside him, while the one behind him seems to aim her malice at him in particular."²¹ The most notable feature of this fourth century work, "allowing for the elaboration and greater freedom" of the time, is its similarity to the fifth century pieces mentioned above.²² Prag observes that, "[i]n both [sc. the Duomo Painter's and Python's works] Apollo is the active protector, but both painters have also indicated that the final appeal will be to Athena."²³ By including Athena in his composition, Python makes it clear that he is combining elements from the main scenes of the play in

²⁰ *ibid.*, pg. 49. see also plate 33a

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

order to represent a distilled version of the plot, culminating in the trial itself.²⁴

Prag, therefore, concluded that the iconographic tradition relating to the Eumenides clearly shows a pre-Aeschylean and post-Aeschylean period. Works illustrating Orestes and an Erinys in the sixth and early fifth centuries portrayed a young man being pursued by a monstrous snake -- representing the Erinys -- or spirit of the vengeful dead (possibly introduced into the myth by Steseichorus).²⁵ Following 458 B. C., however, the Erinyes become anthropomorphic figures, "in the manner Pausanias attributes to Aeschylus."²⁶ A further group of vases then appear circa 440 B. C. (such as Python's bell krater), which illustrates the plot of the *Eumenides*, rather than any specific scene from the play.²⁷ This evidence, in Prag's estimation:

[S]uggests that in the *Eumenides* Aeschylus brought about a shift of emphasis: the conclusion to the story was no longer Orestes' vengeance, but the working out of the consequences of his vengeance; at the same time, partly through theatrical necessity and partly as a result of the spirit of the time, he changed the primitive monstrous spirit of vengeance into a rational and controllable creature.²⁸

²⁴ cf. *Eum.* 40-42, 79-80; 205.

²⁵ cf. Ch. 2; Prag pg. 57.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ *ibid.*

Thus, both in the *Eumenides* itself, and in later artistic interpretations of the work, Aeschylus' anthropomorphic Erinyes are depicted as the representatives of emotional, irrational retributive justice cast in the light of rational art. The inchoate phantoms of the Homeric poems now possessed forms and faces so that one might be able to come to terms with them.

II. The Erinyes in Post-Aeschylean Tragedy.

Perhaps the most striking appearance of the Erinyes in the later tragedies occurs in Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus*. Winnington-Ingram posits "a close relationship of thought"²⁹ between it and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, on the grounds that "both dramas performed, in terms of the same conceptions, a religious function which tragedy was peculiarly suited to perform."³⁰ Aeschylus, and later Sophocles, used this approach to reconcile the bright world of the Olympians -- who were worshipped as sources of blessing -- and the "dark, primitive, infernal" chthonic powers, regarded as the fearsome source of curses.³¹ This dualism is

²⁹ R. P. Winnington-Ingram, "A Religious Function of Greek Tragedy: A Study in the *Oedipus Coloneus* and the *Oresteia*" *JHS* Vol. 74 (1954) pg. 16.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.* pgs. 19, 22.

personified in the contrast between Zeus *ouranios* and Zeus *chthonios*. Since Aeschylus believed that Zeus was "the supreme ruler of the universe and the upholder of moral order," and that "in his world there could not be a divided responsibility for good and evil,"³² he needed to reconcile Zeus' two identities. He did so both artistically and philosophically in the *Oresteia* by crafting the story of the Pelopid Curse into a cycle of offence and retaliation, which, as Winnington-Ingram observes, is "nothing short of a formula for tragedy."³³ The acts of retaliatory justice in the play ultimately "emanate from Zeus" and are carried out by his chthonic agents of revenge: the Erinyes.³⁴ Their persuasion, reconciliation, and, finally, their transformation into Eumenides at the end of the trilogy is, according to Winnington-Ingram's interpretation, the process by which Aeschylus brings the old gods into a harmonious relationship with the new: Zeus presided over both generations, manifested in the old order by the Erinyes, and, in the new, by the wisdom of Athena.³⁵

Winnington-Ingram notes that the structure of Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus*, like that of the *Oresteia*, is defined by a cycle of retaliation driven by a curse and its

³² *ibid.* pg. 22.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*, pg. 19.

³⁵ *ibid.*, pg. 21.

divine agents, the Erinyes. Oedipus, like Orestes, is caught in such a cycle. He is released only when, at Zeus' bidding, he enters into the Eumenides' sacred grove and joins them, becoming a chthonian himself.³⁶ Sophocles links goddesses who finally allow Oedipus to rest with Athens during the course of the play, recalling that Aeschylus locates the cult of his Erinyes-Eumenides at Athens.³⁷

Sophocles puts Oedipus' supplication of the Erinyes in a significant place: between Oedipus' first curse upon his sons and the *choros*' questions.³⁸ This is, as Winnington-Ingram observes, "between the tragic future and the tragic past," both determined by the actions of Erinyes.³⁹ By bidding him to take his place below the earth, Zeus -- via the Eumenides -- resolves the necessarily destructive pattern of retributive justice by allowing the blindly passionate Oedipus a place among the Erinyes themselves, freeing him from his earthly torment. Since the *Eumenides* allow for Oedipus' reconciliation, Winnington-Ingram concludes these divinities are Aeschylus' transformed Erinyes, who similarly allowed both Orestes and Athens to

³⁶ *ibid.*, pg. 16,18.

³⁷ cf. O. C. 106ff., 457ff., 1010ff. as cited in *ibid.*, pg. 22.

³⁸ *ibid.*, pg. 18.

³⁹ *ibid.*

endure at the close of the *Eumenides*.⁴⁰ Both playwrights' *Eumenides* ultimately reconcile the Olympians with the chthonian, and simultaneously represent both the conflicts and resolutions of both works, encompassing the nature of tragedy as a whole. For this reason, Winnington-Ingram labels them "those great symbols of tragic process, whether they are to be called Erinyes or Eumenides."⁴¹

Sophocles also introduced the Erinyes into the *Trachiniae*, although they did not play a role in the underlying myth: The innocent, dying Heracles refers to the cloak which will kill him as a "net of the Erinyes,"⁴² thereby (i) associating his own suffering with the tortures the Erinyes inflict upon their victims, and (ii) rendering the noun "Erinyes" purely descriptive. Further, the use of *uphanton*, as Davies notes,

...shows that what is referred to is not a real net but a robe metaphorically described as a net. In other words, we have a literary kenning whereby a noun used metaphorically is qualified by an adjective denying a quality of that noun in its literal sense to emphasize the noun's metaphorical status.⁴³

This phrase is also mirrored in the *Ajax*:

⁴⁰ *ibid.* pg. 23.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *Trac.* 1051 my own translation.

⁴³ Sophocles, *Trachiniae* ed. Malcolm Davies (Clarendon: Oxford, 1991) pg. 238.

ἀρ' οὐκ Ἐρινὺς τοῦτ' ἐχάλκευσε ξίφος (Aj. 1034)

Conclusion

Did not an Erinys forge this sword?⁴⁴

Aeschylus uses similar constructions in the *Oresteia*, which suggests another link between Sophocles and his predecessor,⁴⁵ and directly parallels the symbolic use of the Erinyes in visual art, and is further evidence of the transformed goddesses' assimilation into Greek culture.

In art, too, the Erinyes appeared outside the *Oresteia* legend. For example, the Urn de Volterre, illustrates Agamemnon leaving his family for Troy, which is an interesting example of this trend.⁴⁶ Also, a head of an Erinys appears above an illustration of Phaedra and Hippolytus in the *Amphore a col compaignienne*.⁴⁷ These examples clearly suggest that Aeschylus' Erinyes were used by visual artists to identify tragic scenes, or rather, in Winnington-Ingram's words, "symbols of the tragic process."⁴⁸ Created by a tragedian for Dionysus' stage, they became symbols of tragedy itself.

⁴⁴ my own translation.

⁴⁵ cf. Aj. 1034; Ag. 1580; Choe. 492 as cited in *ibid.*

⁴⁶ LIMC, Vol. III (Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1986) see Erinys 22.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, see Erinys 98.

⁴⁸ Winnington-Ingram pg. 23.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Wilson and Taplin boldly concluded: "[o]n a non-explicit and figurative level of self-reference...the incorporation of the Erinyes can be seen to represent the *incorporation of tragedy itself [...] within the city of Athens.*"¹ Notwithstanding the boldness of this claim, I believe it is substantially correct. Aeschylus' anthropomorphic Erinyes changed the common conception of the goddesses from shadowy avengers into an anthropomorphic representation of the structure and nature of tragedy. Aeschylus achieves this transformation by introducing the Erinyes, in the *Agamemnon*, as the source of disordered song, *antimolpon*, which the Watchman, the *choros*, and Cassandra take as a sign and symptom of the *anomia* afflicting Argos.² The singing band of Erinyes sitting atop the palace roof encourages, and, arguably, therefore represents, the retributive justice of the Pelopid Curse, thereby retaining their traditional Homeric function as upholders of *dike*. Significantly, however, their defining motif -- song -- symbolizes order itself. As noted by Wilson and Taplin, in Plato's *Republic* Socrates quotes

¹ Wilson and Taplin pg. 175.

² *ibid.* pgs. 170, 172.

Damon on the political implications of music: "The modes of music are never disturbed without disturbance of the most fundamental political and social *nomoi*."³ Because they represent the consequences of abrogating *dike*, the goddesses' song is discordant and their presence unwelcome. This is precisely how they characterize themselves in the Binding Song:

ἐπὶ δὲ τῷ τεθυμένῳ
 τόδε μέλος, παρακοπά,
 παραφορά φρενοδαλῆς,
 ὕμνος ἐξ Ἐρινύων,
 δέσμιος φρενῶν, ἀφόρ-
 μικτος, ἀυονὰ βροτοῖς. (*Eum.* 328-333)

Over the one who is made our sacrifice this is our song:
 derangement, distraction, ruination of the mind in a hymn
 from the Furies which binds the mind, no lyre's music,
 withering mortal men dry.⁴

By transforming the Erinyes into an anthropomorphic, self-referential, and self-aware *choros*, Aeschylus gave them a form and an identity. More specifically, they compare themselves to the Muses, setting themselves up as the anti-Muses whose song is *antimolpon* and *aphorminktos* – contrary to song and the lyre.

When they call themselves "maenads," they express not only the Maenad-like intensity with which they pursue

³ Plato, Republic 4.424c as translated and quoted in *ibid.* pg. 169.

⁴ Collard pg. 94.

wrongdoers,⁵ but they also link themselves to Dionysus and the Great Dionysia, the festival at which tragedies were performed. Aeschylus thus defines them in terms of the literary and mythological structures through which tragedies came to be: they are a *choros*, and tragedy is, by definition, a choral performance.

This is reflected in the beginning of the Binding Song: "Come let us link in dancing too since we have a mind to display our hateful Muse."⁶ The Muses move mortals to compose harmonious melodies, which reflect their Father Zeus and the cosmic justice he superintends. Conversely, the Erinyes sing "hateful" songs, which reflect the darker side of justice – the gruesome punishments by which Zeus' order is upheld.

By the end of the play, the Erinyes have given up their discordant song of punishment, exchanging it for a song of blessing.⁷ Thus, the metaphor of song, first introduced as *antimolpon* in the *Agamemnon*, has now been restored to harmony because the Erinyes are satisfied by Athena's promise of cultic honors. Nevertheless, they still possess their terrifying chthonic aspect:

⁵ Sommerstein pg. 174.

⁶ Collard pg. 94. I have changed Collard's translation "music" to "Muse" to reflect the original Greek more accurately.

⁷ cf. *Eum.* 902.

πόντι' Ερινύς παρά τ' ἀθανάτοις
 τοῖς θ' ὑπὸ γαῖαν, περί τ' ἀνθρώπων
 φανερώς τελέως διαπράσσουσιν,
 τοῖς μὲν αἰιδάς, τοῖς δ' αὖ δακρῦων
 βίον ἀμβλωπὸν παρέχουσαι. (*Eum.* 951-955)

The sovereign Furies have great power
 among both immortals and those under the earth;
 and in the case of men it is clear that they work their
 will to fulfillment,
 giving some cause for singing but others
 a life with eyes dimmed by tears.⁸

The Erinyes grant *aidoi* (ordered songs) to some and tears
 to others, according to their works.

With the reconciliation of the Erinyes, their Muse is
 no longer hateful; indeed, they will act as chthonian
 Muses, now granting mortals ordered songs in the manner of
 their Olympian sisters. Thus, Aeschylus resolves the
 metaphor of song, reflecting the joy of the trilogy's
 conclusion.

We began this analysis with the goal of formulating an
 understanding of Aeschylus' Erinyes in a manner that would
 reflect the fact that they themselves were organic cultural
 creations, not theoretical creations imposed upon tragedy.
 If the *choros* of Erinyes encompassed all of the defining
 aspects of tragedy in a manner familiar to Aeschylus'
 original audience, we must return once again to the Binding

⁸ Collard pg. 111.

Song. In setting themselves up in opposition to the Muses, they sing their own song -- the song which defines *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* -- tragedy's song.

The Erinyes are tragedy's Muses, and as such represent the fearful, chthonic, emotional, irrational, pre-Olympian world as well as those aspects of human nature which tragedy -- of all the ancient art forms -- regards with an unflinching eye. For, as Aeschylus understood, one can only appreciate the light if one examines the darkness. He worked through tragedy in order to discover her governing metaphor, her patron goddesses, and then he brought them on stage, changing his culture's conception of the Erinyes forever.

Appendix A

The following images, as noted in the text, are taken from

A. J. N. W. Prag. The Oresteia: Iconographic and

Narrative Tradition. Chicago: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1985.

They appear in order of reference.

PLATE 28



b

E1. Metope from the 'Heraion' at Foce del Sele: Orestes and the Fury. Paestum Museum. After *Heraion* ii pl. LXXXIX.

PLATE 28



E3. Lekythos by the Cactus Painter: Orestes and the Furies (?). Athens NM 12821.

PLATE 30



a

E4. Column-krater by the Orestes Painter: Orestes and the Fury. London 1923.10-16.10.

PLATE 30



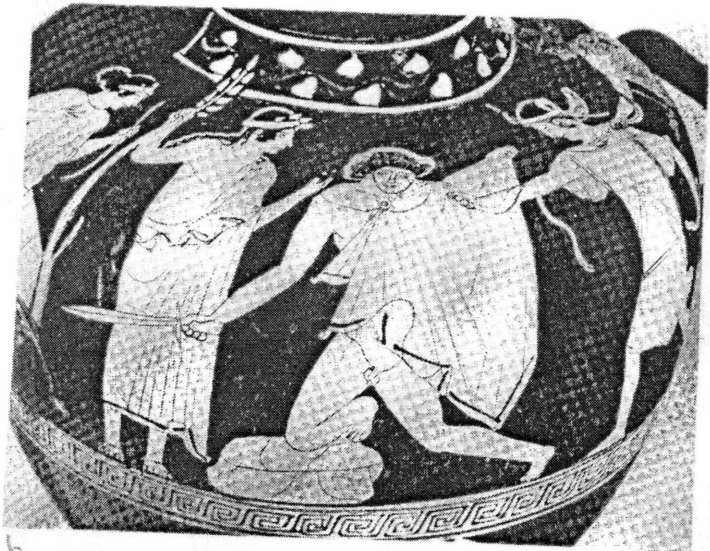
b

E5. Bell-krater by the Hephaestus Painter: Orestes and the Furies. Syracuse 41621.



a

E6. Column-krater by the Duomo Painter: Orestes and the Fury. Louvre K343.



b-c. E7. Later Mannerist hydria: Orestes and the Furies. Berlin (West) F2380.



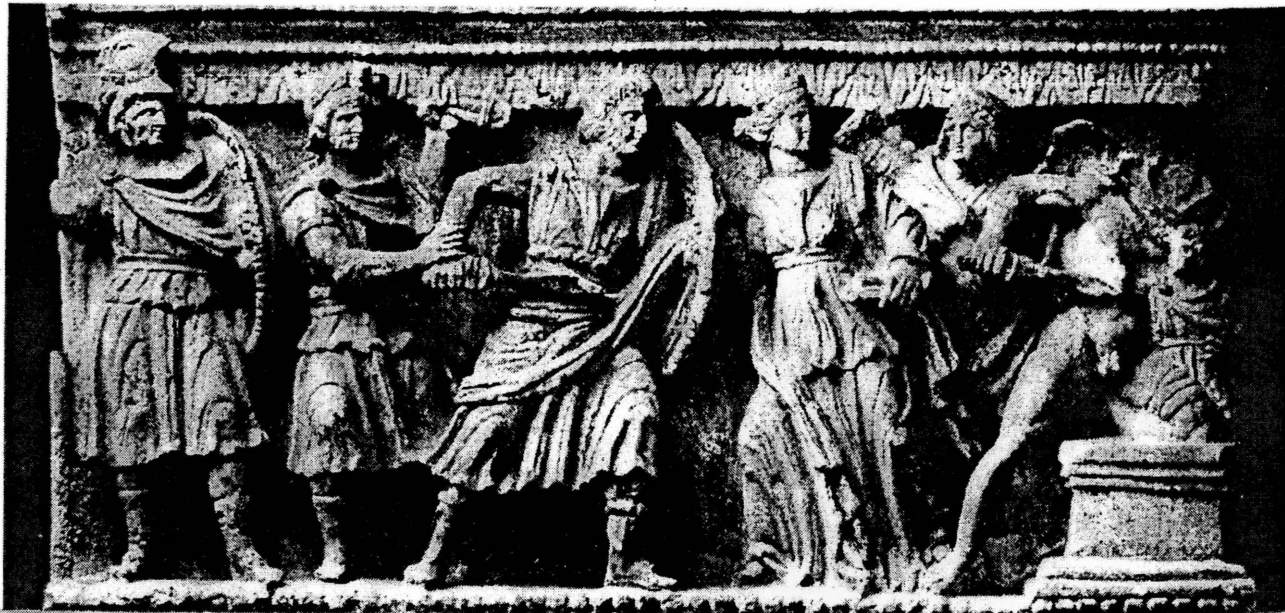
a Paestan bell-krater by Python: Orestes and the Furies. London 1917.12-10.1.

Appendix B

The following images are taken from the Lexicon
Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC) Vol. III.
(Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1986.)

Erinys 22 is an image of the Urn de Volterre in alabaster dated to the 2nd century B. C. It depicts Agamemnon's departure for Troy. The winged female figure on the far right has been identified as an Erinys.

Erinys 98 is an image of the Amphore a col companienne. Produced circa 325-300 B. C. it shows Hippolytus with a nurse and Phaedra. An Erinys with large wings hovers above them.



Erinys 22



Erinys 98

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