



*The Blood of*  
**AGAMEMNON**

ACT ONE The House of Atreus, Mycenae, one year later  
ACT TWO Scene 1. The same. Scene 2. The same.  
ACT THREE The Temple of Artemis at Tauris, one year later  
EPILOGUE The House of Atreus, Mycenae.  
Revised, Adapted & Directed by ROB CROSER

*Directed & adapted by ROB CROSER*  
*from plays of AESCHYLUS, SOPHOCLES & EURIPIDES*

# PART ONE -- THE EAGLE AND THE SERPENT

## CAST

AGAMEMNON	_____	David Roach
SERVANT	_____	Tony Haslam
MENELAUS	_____	John Edge
MESSENGER	_____	James Spargo
CLYTAEMNESTRA	_____	Kathryn Fisher-Dean
IPHIGENIA	_____	Anna Steen
ORESTES [aged 3]	_____	James Bakker
ACHILLES	_____	Chris Duncan
CALCHAS	_____	John Sharpe
WATCHMAN	_____	David Sinclair
SOLDIER	_____	Courtney Thackray
CASSANDRA	_____	Helen Geoffreys
AEGISTHUS	_____	Steve Trollope
ELECTRA	_____	Cath Beynon
ORESTES	_____	Simon Butters
TUTOR	_____	Norman Athersmith
PYLADES	_____	Courtney Thackray
CHRYSOTHEMIS	_____	Petra Schulenburg
SERVANT	_____	Duncan Armour
CHORUS of WOMEN	_____	Jeanette Drake, Mary Thoday Myra Waddell, Helen Geoffreys, Juliette Green Donna Hughes, Anna Steen, Petra Schulenburg Rebecca Croser, Pam Green, Emily Heywood-Smith
CHORUS of ARGIVE ELDERS	_____	Norman Athersmith, John Drake Tony Haslam, Graham Nerlich, John Sharpe, David Sinclair
SOLDIERS	_____	Duncan Armour, David Sinclair, James Spargo Courtney Thackray, Rob Zibell

## SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE The Greek army camp at Aulis, central Greece, 1250 BC

ACT TWO The House of Atreus, Argos, ten years later

-- INTERVAL --

ACT THREE The House of Atreus, eight years later

Devised, Adapted & Directed by **ROB CROSER**  
Choreographed by **CHRIS SHEPHERD**

## PART TWO -- THE EAGLE'S BROOD

### CAST

ELECTRA	_____	Cath Beynon
ORESTES	_____	Simon Butters
HELEN	_____	Helen Geoffreys
HERMIONE	_____	Juliette Green
MENELAUS	_____	John Edge
TYNDAREUS	_____	Graham Nerlich
PYLADES	_____	Courtney Thackray
TUTOR	_____	Norman Athersmith
PHRYGIAN SLAVE	_____	David Sinclair
APOLLO	_____	Chris Duncan
PRIESTESS OF APOLLO	_____	Jeanette Drake
HERMES	_____	Duncan Armour
THE GHOST OF CLYTAEMNESTRA	_____	Kathryn Fisher-Dean
LEADERS OF THE FURIES	_____	Mary Thoday, Myra Waddell
ATHENA	_____	Petra Schulenburg
PRIESTESS OF ARTEMIS at Tauris	_____	Anna Steen
HERDSMAN	_____	David Roach
KING THOAS	_____	Tony Haslam
SOLDIER	_____	James Spargo
CHORUS of WOMEN and FURIES	_____	Jeanette Drake, Mary Thoday Myra Waddell, Helen Geoffreys, Donna Hughes, Juliette Green Pam Green, Rebecca Croser, Anna Steen, Emily Heywood-Smith
ATHENIAN JURORS	_____	Norman Athersmith, John Drake, John Edge Tony Haslam, Graham Nerlich, David Roach, David Sinclair James Spargo, Courtney Thackray
GREEK and TAURIAN SOLDIERS	_____	Duncan Armour, David Sinclair James Spargo, Rob Zibell

### SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE The House of Atreus, Argos, six days later

ACT TWO Scene 1 The Shrine of Apollo at Delphi, some days later  
Scene 2 The Temple of Athena at Athens, one year later

-- INTERVAL --

ACT THREE The Temple of Artemis at Tauris, one year later

EPILOGUE The House of Atreus, Argos.

World premiere presented on June 29th, 1996

The plays are dedicated to David Roach and John Logan

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

STAGE MANAGERS \_\_\_\_\_ Kevin Martin, Margaret Rawlinson  
 ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER \_\_\_\_\_ Matthew Gordon-Clark  
 STAGE CREW \_\_\_\_\_ Carolyn Trenowden, Heather Zibell, Rob Zibell  
 PRODUCTION CO-ORDINATOR \_\_\_\_\_ Heather Zibell  
 SET DESIGN \_\_\_\_\_ Rob Croser  
 COSTUME DESIGN \_\_\_\_\_ Rob Croser, Sandra Davis  
 COSTUMES MADE BY \_\_\_\_\_ Sandra Davis, Pattie Atherton  
 DRESSERS \_\_\_\_\_ Pam Barritt, Nicola Connor  
 HAIR & MAKE-UP \_\_\_\_\_ Peacock Academy, Shane Gillespie  
 PROPERTIES \_\_\_\_\_ Diana Buratto, Debbie Law, Gay De Mather  
 PROP-MAKING \_\_\_\_\_ Brian Davis, Ross Anderson  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Diana Buratto, Debbie Law, Gay De Mather  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Margaret Rawlinson, Julie Capurso, Nicola Connor  
 REHEARSAL PROMPT \_\_\_\_\_ Chris Bleby  
 CHORUS REHEARSAL \_\_\_\_\_ Courtney Thackray, John Drake  
 MUSIC \_\_\_\_\_ John Drake, Ben Ford-Davies, Andrew Forder  
 LIGHTING DESIGN \_\_\_\_\_ Laraine Wheeler  
 LIGHTING OPERATOR \_\_\_\_\_ Paul Filmer  
 MECHANIST \_\_\_\_\_ Carmine Terreri  
 SOUND ENGINEER \_\_\_\_\_ John Palfrey  
 SET CONSTRUCTION \_\_\_\_\_ David Roach, Mark Griffin  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Rob Zibell, Matthew Gordon-Clark  
 SCENIC PAINTING \_\_\_\_\_ Lee Grafton, David Roach, Petra Schulenburg  
 PUBLICITY \_\_\_\_\_ Allen Munn, Jeanette Drake, Colleen Reilly  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Sheree Sellick, Chris Bleby, Meg Bleby, Paul Linkson, Julie Quick  
 BOOKINGS \_\_\_\_\_ Jeanette Drake  
 FRONT-OF-HOUSE MANAGER \_\_\_\_\_ Judy Chapman  
 POSTER DESIGN \_\_\_\_\_ Julie Capurso  
 PROGRAMME NOTES \_\_\_\_\_ Rob Croser  
 PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHY \_\_\_\_\_ David Wilson

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

<p>           Mark Wilson            Ann Peters - S.A. CASTING            The Church of the Good Shepherd, Plympton            Our Lady of Victories Church, Glenelg            AMCOR            Sante Buratto            Theatre 62            Leanne Cenzato - S.C.A.T.S.            State Theatre Company            MOSTLY KIDS            Dr Ron Newbold            Foundation S.A.            Bill Peacock            Deborah Pontifex            Rebecca Gerschwitz            Christopher Naylor         </p>	<p>           Heidi Kliche            Pulteney Grammar School            The Rev'd Barry Davis            Father Peter McIntyre            Creative Cartons            Roger Buratto            Malone's Carriers            Colleen Reilly            Nick Niarchos            Liz Philippou            Prof. David Hester            Alison Tucker            Mark Griffin            Jean Matthews            Chris Pope            Peter Kelly         </p>
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**25 Pinn St, St Mary's. 276 2411**

## THE GENESIS OF *THE BLOOD OF AGAMEMNON*

Many years ago, in a fit of megalomania explicable only in terms of my extreme youth, I mounted, in a church hall at Glenelg, a production of Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which the great American dramatist had based on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy. Having been passionately interested, since school days, in Greek and Roman history and mythology, this was my introduction to Aeschylus' towering work, which I devoured, never dreaming that I might, some day, consider directing it.

Last year, I directed Peter Shaffer's latest play, *The Gift of the Gorgon*, which deals with a modern playwright who is obsessed with the ancient Greek notion of the necessary rightness of revenge, using Clytaemnestra as his prime example.

Shortly before starting detailed work on the play, I chanced upon a recording of Gluck's opera, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and bought it, following it up by ordering his *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Apart from loving them as operas, they added book-end information to my existing knowledge of the *Oresteia* story, and led me to the plays by Goethe and Racine, upon which the operas were based. A publisher's bookservice to which I subscribe then offered a selection of Greek tragedies, including a new translation of the *Oresteia*, which I ordered, and re-read as research for the Shaffer play. Then, one day, I noticed in a Glenelg second-hand bookstore window, a copy of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the basis for the Racine play.

All these apparently unrelated strands seemed to be drawing together, as I continued my research for *Gorgon*. I then read Sophocles' and Euripides' *Electra* plays, Euripides' extraordinary *Orestes*, as well as both *Iphigenias*, until I began to see that, by interweaving eight plays by all three great Greek tragedians, the full and incredible story of the family of Agamemnon could be told -- from the start of the Trojan War through to its final reconciliation. Thus, *The Blood of Agamemnon* -- which I decided to call the saga -- was conceived and ultimately born.

At its core is Aeschylus' majestic, cosmic *Oresteia*, around and into which have been interwoven the more human and personal insights of Sophocles and Euripides. Different in style and emphasis, they add complexity, detail and texture to each other and the cycle, by providing justifications and motivations behind the larger issues, and thus enlarging the journey for both the characters and the audience. For example, the Clytaemnestra of the *Agamemnon* is much more understandable when we have seen her live through *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Similarly, Euripides' *Orestes* play adds another dimension to Orestes' sufferings before and during his trial in Athens. I worked from as many as eight translations of the plays, and have pruned and shaped them as a whole, with only minor alterations to text, where consistency between factual situations needed to be maintained. To construct an epilogue which drew together strands from all the plays, some additional help was sought from the great German poet, Goethe.

Fascinating as the history and situations are, they are primarily the vehicle for wider and deeper issues. Moving through the plays, there is a progression from darkness to light, from primitivism to civilisation. We see people finally learning from their sufferings, that violence need not be the only response to evil, that we need not be irrevocably tied to past, or the sins of our forbears, and, finally, that vengeance can and should be replaced by reason and justice. What struck me most about the plays was their immediacy -- how little fundamental human behaviour has changed in two and a half thousand years.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Independent Theatre committee for sharing my faith in the project; to my wonderful cast and crew, who have worked enthusiastically and tirelessly in coming to grips with, and enriching a massive work; to David Roach for patiently living with my obsessions; and especially to our dear friend, playwright John Logan, for sharing and encouraging my passion, and for acting as an invaluable sounding-board and mentor throughout the adaptation and development process.

**ROB CROSER**

## THE HOUSE OF ATREUS

Pelops, king of Argos, had two sons -- Atreus and Thyestes. After their father's death, they quarrelled over his throne. In addition, Thyestes seduced his brother Atreus' wife. Driven into exile, he later returned and begged his brother for mercy. Atreus pretended to welcome him, and invited him to a banquet of reconciliation. But the meat for the feast was the flesh of Thyestes' own children [all but the youngest, Aegisthus]. When he realised what he had eaten, Thyestes laid a curse on the royal house of Atreus, and fled with his baby son into exile.

After Atreus' death, his sons Agamemnon and Menelaus inherited the kingdom of Argos. They married Clytaemnestra and Helen respectively, daughters of King Tyndareus and Queen Leda of Sparta. Four children were born to Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra -- Iphigenia, Chrysothemis, Electra and Orestes. Helen and Menelaus had a daughter -- Hermione.

When Agamemnon and Menelaus went off to fight the Trojan war, Aegisthus did not join their expedition, preferring to stay behind at Argos and plot revenge on the house of Atreus with his new-found mistress, Clytaemnestra.

## THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS and THE TROJAN WAR

Paris was the second son of Priam, king of Troy, and Hecuba his queen. He was rejected at birth, in fear of a prophecy that he would bring about the downfall of Troy, and was reared on the slopes of Mount Ida by shepherds.

At the wedding of Peleus and the sea-nymph Thetis [parents of the warrior Achilles], Eris, the goddess of Strife, incensed at not being invited, threw among the guests a golden apple, inscribed with the words: "For The Fairest". The goddesses Athena, Hera and Aphrodite all claimed it. So, Zeus sent the rival goddesses to Mount Ida, for Paris to judge them. Each goddess offered Paris inducements to vote for her -- Hera guaranteed to make him ruler of all Asia; Athena promised him wisdom, and victory in combat; Aphrodite offered him the love of the most beautiful woman in the world -- Helen of Sparta. Paris awarded the golden apple to Aphrodite.

He travelled to Sparta, and was received hospitably by Menelaus, who then left for Crete to attend a funeral. Aided by the oriental luxury by which he was surrounded, and by his beauty [which Aphrodite had enhanced], Paris won Helen's love, and she eloped with him to Troy.

Outraged by this violation of the sacred Greek laws of hospitality, Menelaus and Agamemnon rallied the armies of Greece, and, after sacrificing to the goddess Artemis at Aulis, were granted favourable winds to sail across to the Hellespont, and lay siege to Troy.

The war lasted ten years, and was finally brought to an end when the Greeks tricked the Trojans into believing that they were withdrawing, and sailed off in their ships, leaving a giant wooden horse on the beach. The jubilant Trojans pulled the horse into the city, and made it the focus of their victory revels. But during the night Greek soldiers, who had been hidden inside the horse, let themselves out, and opened the city gates to the returning Greek armies. The impregnable walls of Troy were, thus, breached for the first time in the ten-year siege. The Greeks laid waste to the city, killed all the men and boys, and took all the women in slavery back to Greece.

## THE BLOOD-FEUD

In an age before law, the blood-feud took the place of law. The duty of bringing down the triumphant wrongdoer fell upon some individual or some small family group. It was a grievous duty. It meant that the avenger must live for it alone, in hardship and constant danger, sacrificing all pleasure in life till he had saved the honour of the injured dead. We must realise, too, that to fail in this duty would not, in ancient times, be regarded as an act of charity towards the murderer, but as a lack of pity for the murderer's victim.

**Gilbert Murray, *Aeschylus***

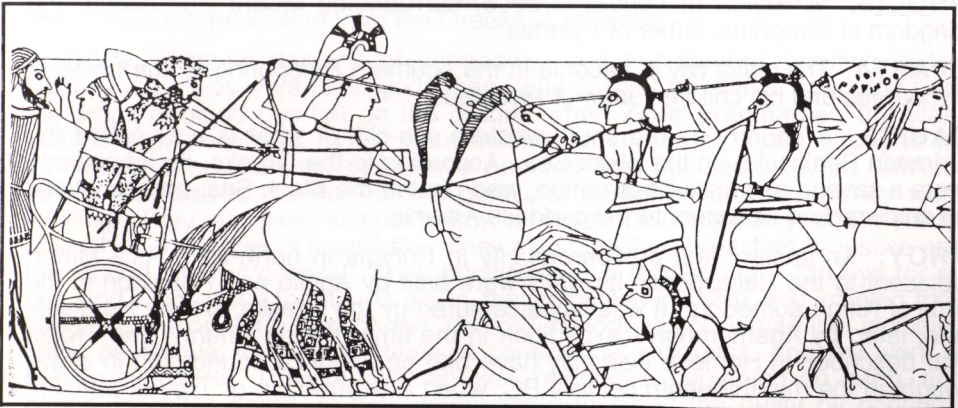
The theatre would not live on by itself, without the issues it raises. The issues at stake in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy are not remote or parochial. Revenge is still the instinctive response of those who have been wronged, especially those whose close kin have been murdered. How far can, or should, people take revenge into their own hands? Where does vendetta stop? What claims does the family have, regardless of the laws of the state? How far does the greater good of society take these claims of blood? In the *Oresteia*, it takes *persuasion* to untie some of these knots. Is persuasion anything other than rhetoric and manipulation? Yet how can people ever find solutions to their dilemmas without it?

**Oliver Taplin, *Greek Fire***

## POLLUTION

The Greeks believed that certain crimes and breaches of taboo automatically caused a person to be tainted in an almost physical way. This taint, or pollution, was not the same thing as guilt. It could be incurred as easily by an accidental, or unavoidable, offence as by a wilful one, and as easily by a minor breach of taboo as by homicide. Its existence was independent of the offender's mental state, and even of his knowledge of the offence. Nevertheless, it made him unholy in the sight of the gods, and caused them to hate him and to punish him. It could be inherited by the offender's children, and it could contaminate his companions, or his entire city. For this reason, a man believed to have been polluted would be shunned, and excluded from the religious and social life of his city. Apollo was greatly regarded as the god of purity, and his oracle at Delphi was instrumental in spreading the remedy for blood-guilt, namely ritual purification.

**Andrew Brown, *A Companion to Greek Tragedy***



## GEOGRAPHY

**ACHAEA.** A region of the northern Peloponnese. Homer uses the term "Achaean" as his commonest word for "Greek".

**ARGOS.** A city in the Peloponnese. In Homer, Agamemnon's city is Mycenae [though he is sometimes called "king of Argos" -- meaning the whole region]. Aeschylus, in the *Oresteia*, places Agamemnon in Argos, six miles from Mycenae. Faced with conflicting traditions, Sophocles and Euripides tend to write as though Argos and Mycenae were alternate names for the same place. For the sake of consistency, here, I have standardised the references to Agamemnon's throne, and situated it in Argos.

**ATHENS.** Although Athens was an important site from the Bronze Age on, there are relatively few myths that properly belonged there. By the sixth century, Athens controlled the whole of Attica, in central Greece, and was one of the most prosperous of Greek states. In that century, the foundations of Athenian democracy were laid, and tragedy was invented. For much of the fifth century, Athens was at war with Sparta, by whom she was defeated in 404BC. In the intervening period, Athens was the unquestioned centre of Greek culture.

**AULIS.** A sheltered port on the mainland coast of Boeotia, opposite Chalcis, where the Greek fleet gathered, and waited to sail for Troy. Chalcis is on the island of Euboea, separated from the mainland by the narrow strait of Euripus.

**DELPHI.** A town in Phocis, on the slopes of Mount Parnassus, the site of the principal oracle of Apollo. Apollo's temple contained a perpetually burning fire, and also a sacred stone, called the Omphalos, or Navelstone, which was supposed to mark the centre of the earth. It was presided over by the prophetic priestess, the Pythia, who made oracular pronouncements, inspired by the god.

**HELLAS.** The usual Greek name for Greece. Hence, "Hellene" means "Greek".

**MYCENAE.** A hilltop fortress-city in the north-east Peloponnese, and reputedly the city of Agamemnon. Archaeology has shown that it was one of the richest sites in Bronze Age Greece, giving its adjectival name to the Bronze Age culture of the Greek mainland.

**PELOPONNESE.** The part of Greece south of the Corinthian and Saronic gulfs, connected to mainland Greece by the Isthmus of Corinth.

**PHOCIS.** A region of central Greece, surrounding Mount Parnassus, the kingdom of Strophius, father of Pylades.

**SPARTA.** The major city of Laconia in the southern Peloponnese, the home of Tyndareus and his children, later of Menelaus.

**TAURIS.** A country on the south-western sea-cliff of what is now called the Crimean Peninsula, on the Black Sea. According to the Greeks, its inhabitants were a savage and uncivilised nation, who pirated the Black Sea, and sacrificed all shipwrecked strangers to the goddess Artemis.

**TROY.** An ancient and prosperous city in Phrygia in north-west Asia Minor, adjacent to the Hellespont. Its walls were built by Apollo and Poseidon in the time of King Laomedon. It was twice captured by the Greeks, first by Heracles, and, later, by Agamemnon's expedition in the time of King Priam. The Trojan war described in Homer's *Iliad* may have had an historical foundation in a war fought in the mid-thirteenth century BC, when a destruction of Troy is attested archaeologically, but this is far less certain than has sometimes been claimed.



## THEOLOGY

**ZEUS.** The supreme god, brother of Poseidon, Hades, Hestia, Demeter and Hera, who was also his wife; father of Apollo, Artemis, Athena, Dionysus, Heracles, and many other mythical figures. He wrestled down the previous lord of the universe, his own father, Kronos, who himself had dethroned *his* own father, Uranus. God of the sky and the weather, Zeus' weapon was the thunderbolt. He was thought of as controlling all that happens. None of this, however, was felt to be inconsistent with the belief that other gods had wills and powers of their own, or that human beings were responsible for their actions. He was thought of as enforcing justice on earth by ensuring the punishment of crimes, especially the more unnatural and disturbing crimes such as those against kindred or the gods. He presided over oaths, and punished those who broke them. Certain groups who had no human protector -- suppliants, beggars, strangers and guests -- were under his special protection.

**APOLLO.** Son of Zeus and Leto; brother of Artemis; one of the most important and popular of the gods, worshipped all over Greece, but especially at the oracular shrine of Delphi. He was the archer god; the god of music and poetry; the sun-god; and the god of purification; but in tragedy, he is, above all, the god of prophecy, acting as the spokesman of his father, Zeus. He tended to shun anything sorrowful, unclean or ill-omened.

**ATHENA.** Daughter of Zeus; she sprang in full armour from her father's head, after Hephaestus split it with an axe in order to release her. She was a virgin warrior, who brought victory to those mortals whom she favoured. She was also a goddess of arts, crafts and wisdom. In the Trojan War, she took the side of Greece, having been rejected by the judgment of Paris.

**HERMES.** Son of Zeus and Maia, he was the herald of the gods, the guide of travellers on earth, and the god who conducted the dead to the underworld.

**ARTEMIS.** Daughter of Zeus and Leto; sister of Apollo. Like her brother, she was usually benevolent, but she had her darker side. She was a virgin huntress, but also a protectress of wild animals. She helped women in childbirth, and was commonly invoked by women in their oaths. For her motive in demanding the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis, two opinions are given by the tragedians -- one, that Agamemnon had angered Artemis by earlier killing one of her sacred stags; the other, that she foresaw the wholesale slaughter of unborn innocents at Troy, and demanded retribution from the Greeks in advance.

**FURIES.** Female demons of vengeance and punishment dwelling in the Underworld. They were older gods than Zeus or the Olympians, springing from the drops of blood that fell on the ground when Zeus' grandfather, the titan, Uranus, was castrated. They were invoked in curses by those wronged by blood-relations, and they personally ensured that the curses were fulfilled, calling themselves the Fury of the particular person whose curse they were fulfilling. They punished, without mercy, all violations of filial duty, or the claims of kinship, or the rites of hospitality. They also punished breaches of justice and the natural order in general. Their principle was a simple one -- "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." As a rule, they remained invisible, and inflicted their vengeance upon earth through the "natural" misfortunes of human life, including wars, pestilence, the secret stings of conscience, madness, and the work of human avengers. Their punishment was relentless, beginning on earth, and continuing after death, in hell, where they punished the guilty by continual flagellation and torments.

## THE JUDGMENT OF ATHENA

Among others, the Furies persecute both the mother-killers, and neglectful men who fail to avenge the bloodshed of their kin. Orestes' case becomes difficult because the one who killed his father happens to be his mother. Apollo insists on the legal bond between husband and wife while the Furies uphold the natural bond of the blood relationship between mother and son. **Haruo Konishi**

Both Apollo and the Furies have been shown to disparage an intimate human relationship. The human jurors' vote not only corresponds to the balance of the argument, but is also a sign that Orestes was confronted with an intolerable dilemma, being subjected to contradictory claims, both based on the blood-tie, and backed by the law of the vendetta.

**R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Clytaemnestra and the Vote of Athena***

What Athena is saying is that, as long as Athens keeps the patriarchal social system, male superiority must be maintained. In other words, the system, not the intrinsic value of the male sex compared to the female sex, demands male superiority. The result of the trial implies that, although male and female are equally important, the superiority of male must be maintained, simply because Athenian society is patriarchal in reality. After the trial, therefore, Aeschylus shows that the female side must be honoured with utmost reverence to compensate for its disgrace. **Haruo Konishi**

If the *Oresteia* can be viewed as a gynocentric document, as an enquiry into the nature and limits of feminine power, this last act completes the transference of *political* power [along the lines of the myth of matriarchy], which Clytaemnestra had brazenly claimed in the first play, to the *ritual* power of the female exemplified by the role assigned to the Furies in Athens.

**Froma Zeitlin, *Myth and Mythmaking in the "Oresteia"***

If Zeitlin defines the *Oresteia* as a chauvinistic document, she is mistaken, because Aeschylus thinks that, since in this universe the political power and the ritual power are both **equally** important, in a patriarchal society like Athens, men should look after the political affairs, while women should take responsibility in religious affairs. Only when one regards ritual affairs to be less important than political affairs does the *Oresteia* become a chauvinistic document.

**Haruo Konishi**

## WOMEN IN ATHENS

In law, an Athenian woman had no independent existence. She was always assumed to be incorporated into the household which was headed by her *kyrios*, or male guardian. Until she was married, a woman came under the guardianship of her father, or male next-of-kin. On her marriage, her husband took over the role of *kyrios*. If she was subsequently divorced or widowed, and she had no sons, she returned to her original guardian.

The function of a woman's *kyrios* was, in general, that of protection. As well as being responsible for her economic maintenance and her overall welfare, he acted as an intermediary between the private domain occupied by the woman, and the public sphere from which she was excluded.

A woman, by law, could not enter into any contract "beyond the value of one measure of barley". Her ability to own property was severely limited. Direct

inheritance by a woman would have been comparatively rare. A woman was legally incapable of arranging her own marriage. Athenian women were not considered to be *politai* -- citizens with full political rights. They could not attend or vote at meetings of the Assembly, sit on juries, or serve as Council members. Their exclusion from the political arena extended even to public speech.

**Sue Blundell, *Women in Ancient Greece*.**

Clytaemnestra is repeatedly represented as having behaved in a masculine fashion during her husband's absence at the Trojan War. There are many items in her conduct which an audience of Athenians would have identified as masculine : choosing her own sexual partner, ruling over Argos while Agamemnon is away, and finally securing political power for herself when he returns from Troy.

**Sue Blundell**

In both tragedy and comedy, conflicts between male and female characters often form the focus of the action. The ideological separation of masculine and feminine spheres in fifth-century Athenian society made gender relations a fruitful base for the exploration of other differences.

Rapid political and social change had generated an intellectual atmosphere in which thinkers were challenging assumptions about the natural basis for conventional divisions within society, and these tensions were both reflected and engendered in the plays of the period. In particular, the questioning of notions about the "naturalness" of sexual divisions found an outlet in drama. Prior to the fourth century BC, gender issues had apparently excited little interest among Greek philosophers.

**Sue Blundell**

Even if women did attend theatrical performances, this would not alter the fact that tragedy was essentially a man's affair. Men wrote, staged and acted the plays, including the numerous female parts and choruses. There is no stranger spectacle that we can construct from public life in ancient Athens than these day-long gatherings of men in the theatre. In life, men had reduced their women to shadowy creatures, cut off from most forms of social intercourse, their numbers thinned by childbirth, their health undermined by disregard for their medical and nutritional needs. On the stage, these men impersonated, out of the dimly remembered ancestral past, powerful, fearsome women, driven by superhuman passions: a Clytaemnestra exulting over the slain bodies of her husband and Cassandra; an Antigone braving death in her defiance of the law; an Agave coming onstage brandishing the severed head of her son on a stick -- all impersonated by men. Murder, incest, rape, cannibalism, all the horrors of the mythological past were trotted out to view, as men munched their fruit, the ancient equivalent of popcorn. After the performances, according to Aristophanes, then men went home and looked under the furniture for their wives' supposed lovers. It is small wonder that ancient tragedy has been the prime source material for scholars with a psychological bent.

**Eva Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus***

### **SANDRA DAVIS -- Costumier to the Gods**

The credit -- "costumes made by" -- does little justice to the monumental work of Sandra Davis, who has, almost single-handedly, made every costume from raw calico, which she has then hand-dyed and decorated. The whole company is indebted to her, and acknowledges it here, with love and gratitude.

## GREEK THEATRE

In earliest times, Greek villagers sang their praises to the gods at harvest festivals, dancing in the circle of the threshing-room floor [the *orchêstra*], giving thanks for the renewal of life. In time, a choric song and dance grew out of these harvest rites. The song was called the *dithyramb*. Legend has it that, at some point, one of the chorus must have stepped forward and started a dialogue with the leaders of the dithyramb. By tradition, this innovation is attributed to Thespis. The separation of the individual from the group gave rise to a series of responses, either spoken or sung, which contain a simple form of drama in the inevitable tension between two identities. What makes the dithyramb crucial to the development of Greek theatre is that it was the hymn to one god in particular -- Dionysus, a god of trance and danger, as well as of life and growth.

The classical Greek theatre reached its height at the annual festivals in honour of Dionysus. From the second half of the fifth century BC, competitions were held under the auspices of the city-states. The main tragedy festival in Athens was the city Dionysia, which took place from February until the beginning of April. Dramatic performances were given on the south slope of the Acropolis. On each of three consecutive days, three tragedies, followed by a comic satyr play [each "tetralogy" written by the one poet] were presented. Performances began at dawn, and went for most of the day.

In time, these three tragedies often became linked thematically, into a trilogy. The only such trilogy which survives is Aeschylus' *Oresteia* [which is the core of the present cycle]. He also wrote the satyr play, *Proteus*, which followed it.

The physical shape of the Greek theatre included three components : an extensive *thêatron*, with the hill hollowed out and stepped [mostly with boards, but, later consolidated in stone], and accommodating up to fifteen thousand spectators; an *orchêstra*, or circular performing floor, on which the chorus could sing and dance; and the *skêne*, or scene-building behind the orchestra, from which entrances could be made, and where actors changed costumes and masks. Indoor or off-stage scenes were often reported by elaborate "Messenger" speeches, or revealed to the audience by tableaux set on a huge cart, called the *ekkyklêma*, which was wheeled out from the *skene* doors. Acts of violence were never depicted on-stage. In later times, appearances by gods were achieved by means of the *mêchanê*, a kind of crane which could swing characters round into sight, and then set them down on stage. Specific scenery and stage-properties were minimal, focussing the audience's attention squarely upon the language and the performances.

Each of the three chosen tragic poets wrote the music for his own plays, and rehearsed the chorus, and, often, also took part in the production as an actor. A jury appointed by the state was responsible for choosing the winner.

The poets drew their material principally from the old stories of the gods and heroes as handed down by oral and written tradition in epic and lyric poetry, particularly from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Within these limits, they were free to select, expand, reshape and interpret, drawing from them new developments of theme, plot and character. Their audiences knew the stories in advance, and so, the novelty was in the playwright's treatment.

The foundation of the Greek theatre was the Chorus, which, as already stated, grew from the choral hymn in honour of Dionysus. The dialogue between chorus and actor developed in the hands of Thespis from the monologue and

dialogue of the chorus. Later, Aeschylus introduced a second actor, and Sophocles a third. The chorus dominated Greek drama, commenting on and interrupting the action, even, in early plays, functioning as the principal participant. Later, as less weight became attached to the elements of music and dancing, the chorus also diminished in importance.

The chorus has two basic functions, which interweave throughout the plays, often in defiance of logic and dramatic probability. The first function is as narrator -- it dispenses information and tells stories. The introduction of individual actors enabled the chorus to become a participant in the action as well, so that it could be both character and narrator. The chorus can thus be in the play, or out of it. It can work within the limits of the action as a character, knowing no more than such characters would know; or it can stand outside the action as an impartial commentator, objective and omniscient, and illuminate factors in the action of which the principals themselves are not aware. It lives simultaneously in the world of the play and the world of the audience.

Regardless of the gender of its characters, the chorus comprised only male performers. Like the principals, they were masked. They sang and danced elaborately, accompanied by drum and reed-pipe. There were originally 50 chorus members, but, as the number of actors increased from one to two, and then to three, the chorus diminished to 15, and then further to 12.

All character parts were played by male actors, of whom there was only ever a maximum of three. By changing his mask and costume, the same actor was required to take on several parts, with awe-inspiring versatility. The plays were constructed in such a way as to enable one character to leave the stage in enough time to allow the actor to change and reappear as another character. For example, it seems likely that in *Agamemnon*, the same actor played the Watchman, the Herald, Agamemnon and Aegisthus. Similarly, throughout the *Oresteia*, it is likely that the principal actor played Clytaemnestra in *Agamemnon*, Orestes in *The Libation-Bearers*, and Athena in *The Eumenides*. Corpses and other non-speaking roles were taken by masked supernumeraries.



**The murder of Aegisthus.**

**AESCHYLUS [c.525-456 BC]** was born at Eleusis near Athens, and died at Gela in Sicily. He fought against the Persians in the battle of Marathon. He is said to have written ninety plays, of which seven only survive -- *The Suppliant Maidens*, *The Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *Prometheus Bound*, and the *Oresteia* trilogy. He won the playwriting prize at the Athenian Festival thirteen times. He may reasonably be regarded as the founder of European drama. By reducing the size of the chorus and introducing a second actor into the drama, he made the histrionic part as important as the lyric, and turned oratorio into drama, by allowing interplay between individual characters, where, hitherto, all interaction had, by necessity, been between individual and chorus. In his later plays, he utilised the further innovation of a third actor, introduced by Sophocles.

Aeschylus transformed myth into drama. The ancient mythology describes the struggles of successive dynasties of Gods for Olympian supremacy, just as the city-states were to struggle for the mastery of Greece. The special vision of Aeschylus was to see his victorious Athens as the newest cycle of that struggle, and to weld it into cosmic tragedy. Although he deals with public and political life, with great historical or mythological events, and fates of families, cities and nations, he echoes archaic ritual in recalling a lost golden age, a perfect world poisoned by death.

Aeschylus normally made his three competition plays into a connected trilogy, in which each part, though complete in itself, was a coherent part of a larger unity. This gave the drama an amplitude which has never been approached since. The normal scheme might be baldly summarised as the offence, the counter-offence and the resolution; sin provokes sin until justice asserts itself.

These conceptions were matched by an immense concentration, a wonderful dramatic sense, and magnificent poetry. Aeschylus made the utmost use of spectacle and colour; and, in virtue of the beauty and strength of his choral odes, he might well be regarded as one of the greatest of lyric poets, as well as, possibly, the greatest of dramatists. As a unique honour to him, it was enacted in Athens, after his death, that his plays might be revived at the festivals, to which normally only new plays were admitted.

Aeschylus capitalised on an ancient device which has always captivated human beings -- the telling of stories. The myths were stories of a long-lost past and a golden age, legends of enormous power which embodied the heroic ideal of what man should be, and do, and suffer. He renewed Greek mythology in the theatre, but more than that, by enacting myth in the person of human individuals, he found a dramatic form and symbolism for society's unconscious.

**SOPHOCLES [c.496-406 BC]** was born and died at Coloneus, near Athens, and lived through the Age of Pericles, and Athens' long struggles with Sparta. Of his reported one hundred and twenty plays, only seven tragedies survive, as well as substantial portions of a satyr-play, *The Trackers*. The extant plays are *Ajax*, *Antigone*, *The Women of Trachis*, *Oedipus the King*, *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*, this last written when he was nearly ninety. He won eighteen victories at the Athenian festivals, the first over Aeschylus in 468 BC.

His plays are pervaded with his own serenity and charm. But it is a serenity that comes from triumph over suffering, not from avoidance of it. Few things in the theatre are more poignant than Sophocles' tragic climaxes. The human condition -- man's inability to escape his fate -- was the theme that haunted him most. Man is depicted as helpless in the face of an unalterable destiny, decreed by irrational forces beyond his understanding and control. In his last plays,

Sophocles depicts man finding redemption born of suffering; he is ennobled by the vengeance and arbitrary injustice of the gods. He is not an innocent victim, but is somehow sanctified, as though by ordeal. Through his tragedies Sophocles brings to his audience the dual experience of weeping over man's downfall, yet, at the same time, rejoicing over the renewal of his spirit. His plots are masterpieces of construction.

He approached the drama in a very different spirit from Aeschylus, and was responsible for introducing the third actor. Since his main interest was in the tragic interplay of character and circumstances, he abandoned the statutory trilogy on a cosmic scale, and always presented, at the Festival, three separate plays. He also reduced the role of the chorus and made its functions purely lyrical -- to emphasize a climax, or prepare the way for a sudden change of mood. The analysis of tragedy by Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, is based, in the main, on Sophoclean tragedy.

**EURIPIDES [c.485-406 BC]** is said to have written ninety-two plays, of which there survive seventeen tragedies, and the only complete satyr play now in existence -- *Cyclops*. Best-known among the extant plays are *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Andromache*, *Hecuba*, *The Trojan Women*, *Electra*, *Orestes*, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Helen*, *Hippolytus*, and *The Bacchae*. In his lifetime, Euripides aroused great interest, as well as great opposition and ridicule, on account of his realism, his interest in abnormal psychology, and his portraits of women in and out of love. He was the first dramatist to deal with the individual rather than the community, with personal passions rather than broad questions of morality and religion, and with specific social problems like war. After his death, his fame eclipsed that of both Aeschylus and Sophocles, for he alone spoke directly to the new age.

Of the three great dramatists, he was the closest to the modern mind -- the personification of the new Athenian order, the move towards reason. He gave form to the dilemma of the man of conscious intellect, struggling to acknowledge forces beyond his control, and immune to rational understanding. These forces will not be ignored, yet they cannot be fought. The impression from his plays is of reason and passion, earth and heaven, perpetually at war. The awesome gods who peopled Aeschylus' imagination held no terrors for Euripides. He wanted to reduce the legendary heroic past to a human scale. The characters he created were to be recognisable mortals. The dramatic interplay of the protagonists interested him more than the chorus, whom he reduced to commentators on the main action, inevitable when plays began dealing with private rather than public issues.

One of Euripides' innovations has been important in the history of drama -- the "prologue", spoken sometimes by a character, sometimes by an external god, summarising the story up to the point where the action begins.

**SOURCE MATERIAL for the text of THE BLOOD OF AGAMEMNON**

**AESCHYLUS** -- Agamemnon; The Libation-Bearers; The Eumenides.

**SOPHOCLES** -- Electra.

**EURIPIDES** -- Iphigenia in Aulis; Iphigenia in Tauris; Orestes; Electra.

**GOETHE** -- Iphigenia in Tauris.

## GREEK TRAGEDY

Tragedy is an achievement peculiarly Greek. They were the first to perceive it, and they lifted it to its supreme height. The special characteristic of the Greeks was their power to see the world clearly, and at the same time as beautiful. Tragedy was a Greek creation because, in Greece, thought was free. Men were thinking more deeply about human life, and beginning to perceive more and more clearly that it was bound up with evil, and that injustice was of the nature of things. And, then, one day, this knowledge of something irremediably wrong in the world came to a poet, with his poet's power to see beauty in the truth of human life, and the first tragedy was written. For tragedy is nothing less than pain transmuted into exaltation by the alchemy of poetry.

**Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way***

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with every kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these and similar emotions.

**Aristotle, *Poetics***

**Tragedy** -- a play dealing in an elevated, poetic style with events which depict man as the victim of destiny, yet superior to it, both in grandeur and misery.

***Oxford Companion to the Theatre***

The loftiness of theme and treatment, the nobility with which the hero suffers his misfortune and recognises the justice of his suffering [in atonement for his tragic guilt], and which purges the spectator's mind through terror and pity, leading to **catharsis** [the elevated feeling that results from a deep, moral experience combined with the aesthetic pleasure caused by such feelings, even in the face of the hero's most dire misfortunes] -- all these aspects of tragedy have been endlessly discussed.

**Martin Esslin**

The theatre became the medium in which life's tensions were mercilessly exposed -- man against the gods, against fate, against the past, and, of course, against himself. It was a form born of practical necessity: the art of drama had to fulfil and extend the function that ritual had performed in the past, enacting the process whereby man, the tragic hero, came to be involved in a new scheme of things, and to question his own role.

**Ronald Harwood, *All the World's a Stage***

The tragic arose from the awareness of the necessity of making decisions, and reached its full development as the decisions engendered a greater sense of urgency and perplexity.

**Bruno Snell**

Mythology is the dream-world language of society's unconscious: individuals dream, and try to interpret their dreams; myths try to make sense of those forces in the world which are beyond the reach of reason. Both dream and myth offer means of taking a symbolic hold, privately or collectively, on realities deeper and more literally unspeakable than those which our everyday lives will contain or represent. In creating the art of theatre, the great Greek dramatists were attempting to give expression to all these co-existing forces in a single communal form.

**Ronald Harwood**



There is a common misconception that "all the important *action* in Greek tragedy takes place off stage; on-stage it is merely spoken and sung about." My claim is, on the contrary, that it is the action which takes place *on stage* which *is* important, and is part of what the play is about: the action off-stage is only of interest insofar as it is given attention on stage. The error comes from a simple-minded preconception of what constitutes action; it only counts the huge violent events of narrative history -- battles, riots, miracles, natural disasters, and so forth. This is to miss the point that the stuff of tragedy is the individual response to such events; not the blood, but the tears.

**Oliver Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action***

We live in an era of horrors. Some of them are age-old -- natural disasters, unpredictable violence, political instability, family conflict. Others are of more recent origin. There are the bombs that can unleash unimaginable destruction and death within minutes. There is AIDS -- and who can say what still more virulent diseases may yet develop?

Our world is full of things that do not bear thinking about. If someone we love, or even someone we know, is killed in a car crash, or contracts leukaemia, we find this hard enough to face. Life seems so unreasonable, chaotic, so unfair. Why him? Why me? If we were to try to *feel fully*, we would be reduced to blind incomprehension, or go mad. While television brings the disasters and atrocities into everyone's home, the only possible way to live through them is to turn one's heart to stone. Television news is Medusa, the Gorgon's head. Confronted with reality, we turn our faces away, we are lost for words.

What is the connection of all this with tragedy? Greek tragedy puts the worst into words, and expresses the full human response. Through facing up to older, closer, primal terrors, tragedy shows us how terrors can be confronted and perhaps survived, even those of the late twentieth century. In the theatre, we not only stare without averting our eyes, and listen without blocking our ears, we actually want the sufferers to go on expressing their terrible experiences, and we want to feel their agonising emotions with them. And, at the end of the play, we discover that we have **not** been turned into stone. We get up, leave, and return to life, whether in the fifth century B.C., or the twentieth A.D. We return with the experience as part of ourselves.

**Oliver Taplin, *Greek Fire***

### **WHY THE CLASSICS ARE BACK**

Suddenly, a flood of classical translations is pouring from the presses. Why this burst of interest in dead writers who have hardly been taught in schools and universities for a generation? There must be something attracting readers. What might that be? Much the likeliest something is classical subject-matter, that chimes with present-day concerns. In the works of the epic poets and the tragedians, two themes that were out of fashion not long ago stand out as sharply topical again: what it means to be a hero, and the role of chance in history. It is no longer convincing to treat history as slow and implacable, like the shifting of the earth's tectonic plates: chance counts and accidents matter; individuals do make a difference.

***Weekend Australian*, June 1, 1996**

It is irrelevant how many centuries may separate us from a bygone age. What matters is the importance of the past to our intellectual and spiritual existence.

**Ernest Curtis, eulogy to archaeologist, Heinrich Schliemann, 1891**

## AESCHYLUS' WORLD-VIEW

What is the status of a mere human being who walks the world of Greek theatre? At first sight, it might seem that he or she is destined to be a mere victim: the inert solution to a monstrously complicated equation of those vast and varied divine forces, supernal and infernal. But, here we return to an aspect of Aeschylus' universe that seems to be of central importance. This is a universe in which everything matters and everything interacts. And "everything" includes, as it must, living men and women.

Underlying the ancient, metaphorical, mythical and religious language, in which the Greeks necessarily expressed themselves, appear to be insights into our world that might still make good sense to a contemporary geneticist, environmentalist, or, indeed, psychologist. Furthermore, that language seems capable of relating to all the phenomena of life. Any human being's existence, at any date, is conditioned and limited, externally, by the family, the society, the landscape, and the climate in which he lives; internally, by his heredity and by the constant tension between the clear, bright images created in his conscious mind and the dark, unanalysable forces that well up from the unconscious. The majestic totality of those factors in human behaviour may perhaps be more easily and effectively represented to the mind in the ancient mythical language -- once its grammar and syntax have been relearned -- than it actually is through the discrete languages and sublanguages that have been generated by the various modern sciences.

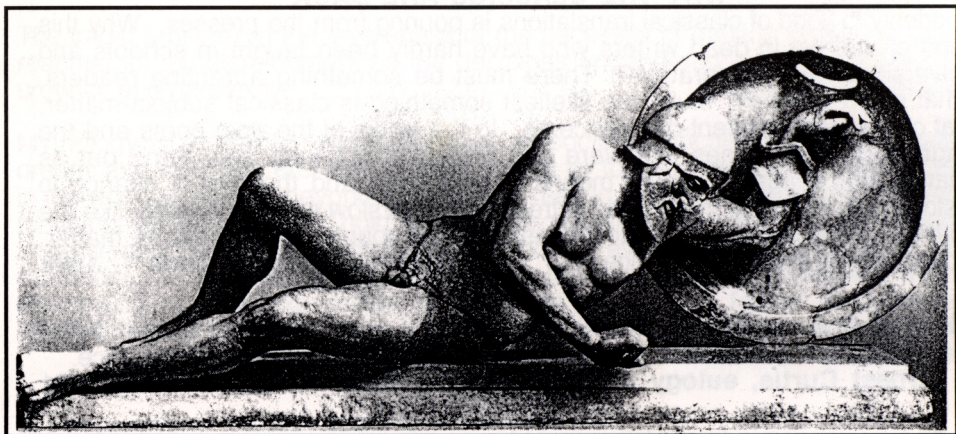
**John Herington, *Aeschylus***

In the Aeschylean world-vision, it is just not possible to isolate a human being in such a way, to disentangle him or her artificially from the seamless web of the material and the spiritual universe.

**John Herington**

What Aeschylus builds upon the house of Atreus is a grand parable of progress, that celebrates our emergence from the darkness to the light, from the tribe to the aristocracy to the democratic state. At the same time, Aeschylus celebrates man's capacity for suffering, his courage to endure hereditary guilt and ethical conflicts, his battle for freedom in the teeth of fate, and his strenuous collaboration with his gods to create a better world.

**Robert Fagles, *Introduction to his translation of the "Oresteia"***



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