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ÆSCHYLUS' ORESTEIA AND HIS IDEA OF JUSTICE

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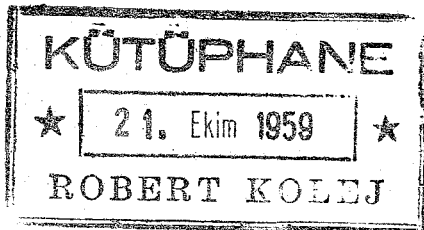
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BOĞAZICİ İNİVERSİTESİ

AESCHYLUS' ORESTEIA, AND HIS IDEA OF JUSTICE.

PART ONE

AESCHYLUS--HIS LIFE AND WORKS--

Aeschylus was born at an unknown date. Some say 513 or 512 B.C., others say the date of his birth is between 500 and 497 B.C. He was the son of Euphorion of Eleusis. Aeschylus had two sons-- Euphorion and Euaion, of whom we don't know enough to give information. He had a brother and a sister. His brother Kynegiros was killed in the battle of Salamis, and his sister's son Philocles won the first prize with his tragedy against Sophocles' masterpiece Oedipus Tyrannus. And their sons wrote tragedies and won prizes. So we see that Aeschylus' family was quite a theatrical family. At this time the great Persian Wars occurred and he fought at Marathon, Salamis and possibly at Artemisium and Platae.

Aeschylus began writing tragedies in his early youth. He produced his first play in about 500 B.C. In 490 B.C. we know that he fought against the Persians at Marathon. About this time he produced the <sup>yalvaran</sup> Suppliant Women. In 484 B.C. he won his first victory, but the name of the play is unknown. In the years 480 and 479 B.C. he probably fought at Salamis and Platae and in

472 B.C. he produced his Persians. He re-produced it the next year in Sicily, making his second visit to that country. In Athens he was defeated for the first time, by young Sophocles in 468 B.C. Then the next year he won the first prize again with his Seven Against Thebes. In 458 he produced the Oresteia, his masterpiece. Will Durant says, "After the Iliad and the Odyssey, the Oresteia is the greatest achievement in Greek literature. Here is a breadth of conception, a unity of thought and execution, a power of dramatic development, an understanding of character, and a splendor of style which in their sum we shall not find again before Shakespeare."<sup>1</sup> And Gilbert Murray, too,--quoting Swinburne-- comments on the Oresteia saying, "The Oresteia is perhaps 'the greatest achievement of the human mind.'"<sup>2</sup> Moreover, George Thomson says, "Without the Oresteia, we should have no means of determining how Aeschylus welded his three tragedies into a whole; with it, we have indirect evidence of considerable value for the problems presented by the other plays."<sup>3</sup>

Aeschylus left behind more than seventy plays  
 --(some say over ninety) about fifteen of which are  
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1- WILL DURANT, The Life of Greece, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1939, p.390.  
 2- GILBERT MURRAY, Aeschylus, Oxford, 1940, p.179.  
 3- GEORGE THOMSON, Aeschylus and Athens, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1950, p.246.

thought to be satyr-plays-- but only seven of them have survived. They are: Agamemnon, The Libation Bearers, The Eumenides, (The Oresteia trilogy) The Suppliants, Prometheus Bound, (which is likely to be a part of another trilogy since some parts of Prometheus Unbound have found) The Seven Against Thebes, and the Persians. In his lifetime Aeschylus won thirteen prizes. These victories continued after his death. He also has made his major technical contribution to the history of drama by adding a second actor to the one drawn out of the chorus. "Through the addition of another actor, the hero may be placed in a variety of situations, offered more choices, set off or tested by other characters--as was Prometheus. And in the Oresteia Aeschylus made some use of the third actor whom Sophocles had introduced by this time, and who made possible still more variety, conflict, and drama as we know it."<sup>4</sup>

Though the plots of Aeschylus are simple,--for he had little interest in plot-- the characters in his plays are God-like or great heroes. Yet, "...he was typically not much interested in the study of character, the workings of mind, the conflicts within or between characters, or any other such complications, with their possibi-

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4- HERBERT J. MULLER, The Spirit of Tragedy, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1956, p.64f.

lities of uncertainty and surprize...His vision was best realized by the solitary hero--the King of Argos, Eteocles, Prometheus, Orestes-- isolated by his destiny." <sup>5</sup> But

like Clytemnestra in the Oresteia, even his woman characters are grand and powerful rather than sweet and tender.

Since Aeschylus was born at Eleusis, the seat of the Elusunian mysteries, he found himself, from the beginning, amidst the atmosphere of religion. This had its effects upon his character and his works. H.D.F. Kitto

says, "Wherever we look into his work we find that from the beginning the religious idea is seen as drama, and the drama seen as a religious problem. The thought and the form completely interpenetrate, so that they become one and the same thing." <sup>6</sup> Then, surely enough, the charac-

ters of Aeschylus were very moral and virtuous. Lavell takes up this point and comments. "Prudence, courage,

reverence, justice, mercy to the helpless and suppliant, and perhaps above all humility, temperance, moderation,

'nothing too much'--these are the characteristics of the virtuous man to Aeschylus." <sup>7</sup> Yet, "At his most exalted,

Aeschylus was not a God-intoxicated prophet, dedicated to the love and service of God. What he exalted was the

5- Ibid, p.66.

6- H.D.F. KITTO, Greek Tragedy, Doubleday & Company, Inc., New York, 1955, p.107.

7- CECIL FAIRFIELD LAVELL, A Biography of the Greek People, Houghton Mifflin Company, U.S.A., 1934, p.127.

heroic spirit, the civilized ideal, the Athenian state--  
 the achievements of man." <sup>8</sup> Moreover, the paragraph of

Murray on the religious aspect of Aeschylus is worth noting. "In Aeschylus especially, the thoughts about man and the world which he had to put forth in his plays were an important of his inspiration; in other words, he cared greatly about philosophic or religious truth, as well as about beauty, and used his art for expounding it. His emotions were stirred by the world of intellect as well as the world of sense and fantasy." <sup>9</sup>

"Aeschylus was not simply a poet; he is a supreme master of the art of the theatre; and he expresses his thought in every element of his complex art-- in speech, plot, situation, dance, imagery." <sup>10</sup> Lastly, Aeschylus "At his grandest was an enterprizing, resourceful playwright who not only knew what he was doing but learned to do new things, and did some better things than Sophocles and Euripides." <sup>11</sup>

Aeschylus died in Gela, Sicily, in 456 B.C.

"Meanwhile in Sicily, says an old story, an eagle had  
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8- MULLER, The Spirit of Tragedy, p.75.

9- MURRAY, Aeschylus, p.18.

10-KITTO, Greek Tragedy, p.107f.

11-MULLER, The Spirit of Tragedy, p.63.

killed him by dropping a tortoise upon his bald head,  
mistaking it for a stone." <sup>I2</sup> There he was burried and  
on his epitaph it says--

"Beneath this stone lies Aeschylus;  
Of his noble prowess the grove of Marathon can speak,  
Or the long-haired Persian, who knows it well." I3

.....

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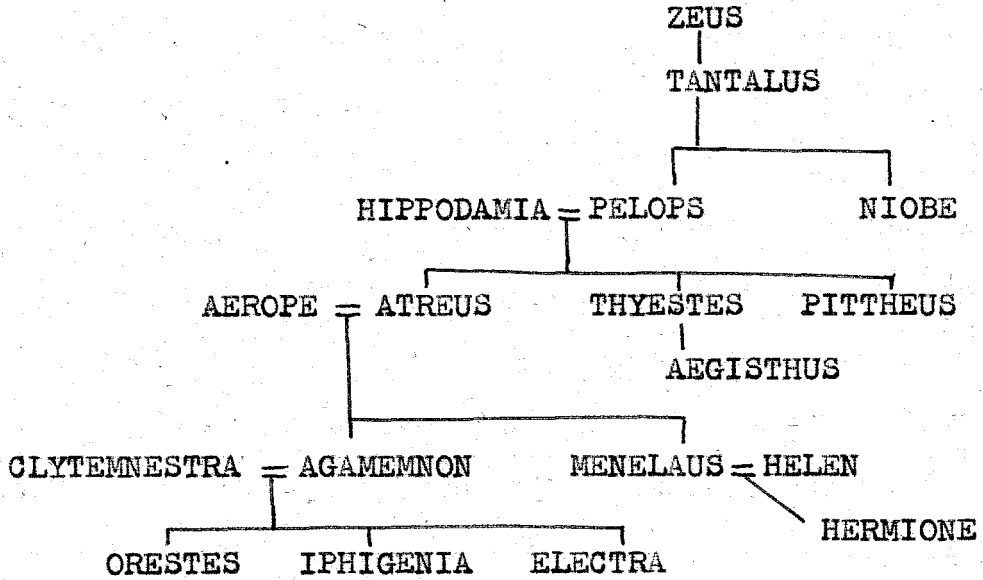
I2- DURANT, The Life of Greece, p.391.

I3- Ibid, p.391.

## PART TWO

### A. THE HOUSE OF ATREUS

The story of the House of Atreus goes back to a man named Tantalus, son of Zeus. He was honored by the Gods and he was even allowed to eat at their table. One day he gave a feast to the Gods and he chopped his son Pelops into pieces and served him as a meal. The Gods understood what he had done and punished him by sending him to Hades. They restored Pelops to life by putting his pieces together. Pelops married Hippodamia, and she bore him three children-- Atreus, Thyestes, and Pittheus. Yet this house was doomed. This time Thyestes fell in love with Atreus' wife. Atreus, learning this, chopped Thyestes' children to pieces and served them to their father. Thyestes learned what Atreus had done and cursing the whole house, he left with his only son Aegisthus, who was born after the horrible feast. Atreus had married Aerope and had two children-- Agamemnon and Menelaus. Agamemnon married Clytemnestra and had three children-- Orestes, Iphiginia, and Electra. Menelaus, on the other hand, married Helen, Clytemnestra's sister, the fairest of all the women at that time. So the geneology of the House of Atreus was like this:



Paris, a Trojan prince, seduced Helen and kidnapped her. Menelaus gathered the Greek army against the Trojans to take his wife back. Agamemnon, being his brother, joined in the enterprise and the Greek army with all its grandeur sailed for Troy. On their way to Troy, the Greeks slew a hare of Artemis. The Lady of Wild Things was very angry at the Greeks because of this. Then by the interpretation of the soothsayer Calchas, she said that "the way to calm the wind and ensure a safe voyage to Troy was to appease her by sacrificing to her a royal maiden, Iphigenia, the eldest daughter of the Commander in Chief, Agamemnon." <sup>I4</sup> So Agamemnon sent a message to Clytemnestra to send Iphigenia for a marriage with Achilles. Then they carried the poor thing to the altar and

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killed her. Clytemnestra was mad with anger and sorrow when the news of Iphigenia's death reached her. (Some books say that she saw her daughter die in Aulis.) She had loved Agamemnon, but his lie and killing her daughter made her hate him. Then she took Aegisthus into the house as her lover. (Aegisthus, we must not forget, was the son of Thyestes, thus the cousin of Agamemnon whose father had killed his brothers.) The Trojan War lasted for about ten years and Aeschylus' trilogy The Oresteia, begins when a watchman sees the sign from the roof of the palace indicating that the war has been won by the Greeks and Agamemnon, his master, is coming back to his home.

## B. THE ANALYSIS OF THE TRILOGY

### 1) Agamemnon

The characters in the first play, Agamemnon, are:

a watchman  
 Clytemnestra  
 Herald  
 Agamemnon  
 Cassandra  
 Aegisthus, and  
 the chorus of  
 Argive Elders.

In the first play of the trilogy, Agamemnon comes from Troy with Cassandra, Priam's daughter, now his <sup>mistress</sup> concubine, on a chariot with all his grandeur, not knowing the doom that awaits him.

Clytemnestra greets him saying--

"Grave gentlemen of Argolis assembled here,  
 I take no shame to speak aloud before you all  
 the love I bear my husband." I5

Then she continues--

"...this is my own sad life  
 all the years this man was gone to Ilium.  
 It is evil and a thing of terror when a wife  
 sits in the house forlorn with no man by..." I6

And later in her long speech she says--

"For me: the rippling springs that were my tears have dried  
 utterly up, nor left one drop within. I keep  
 the pain upon my eyes where late at night I wept  
 over the beacons long ago set for your sake,  
 untended left forever. In the midst of dreams  
 the whisper that a gnat's thin wings could winnow broke

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I5- AESCHYLUS', Oresteia, tr. by Richmond Lattimore, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1953, p.61.

I6- Ibid, p.61.

my sleep apart. I thought I saw you suffer wounds more than the time that slept with me could ever hold." I7

These were the tender words of Clytemnestra to Agamemnon. Furthermore, she, by her deceitful talking, urged him to commit hybris.--Miss Hamilton explains hybris as 'to claim superiority in anything over any deity'-- by making him walk over a purple carpet.

"Now, my beloved one, step from your chariot; yet let not your foot, my Lord, sacker of Ilium, touch the earth." I8

"Then, as he sets foot on the sacred purple, the flow of imagery bursts out afresh, suggestive of the dangers of of abundance, of blood about to be shed and of a girl's blood shed ten years before." I9

Agamemnon enters the palace and Clytemnestra, with Aegisthus, kills him.

When she reappears on the stage with blood all over her dress after Agamemnon's cry, she is unshaken and very calm. "She had punished a murderer, the murderer of her own child." 20

"The revelation of Clytemnestra's character is now complete. In the course of ten years her love for her first-born has been transformed into hatred of the man who wronged her, and the whole of her passionate nature devoted to revenge. Yet this hate was the outcome of love. Her crime is terrible, but her motive is adequate

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I7- AESCHYLUS, Oresteia, tr. Lattimore, p.62.

I8- Ibid, p.62.

I9- THOMSON, Aeschylus and Athens, p.261.

20- HAMILTON, Mythology, p.355.

to explain it. And the reason why Aeschylus has made her the prime agent in the murder is now plain. The man who killed her child must die by her hands alone." <sup>21</sup> Whereas on the other hand, "Agamemnon is himself unconscious of sin; he feels himself rather a favorite of the Gods and a most deserving one. His death on the mere human plane is the result of the blood feud; Aegisthus has the plain duty of avenging his brothers upon their slayer, Atreus, or since Atreus is dead, upon his son, Agamemnon. Clytemnestra has also her personal motives: the death of Iphigenia, Agamemnon's infidelities, and her own love of Aegisthus." <sup>22</sup>

"For her the murder was a necessary rite of purification, a perfect sacrifice by which the family has been purified of its hereditary madness; and now that her task is done all she asks is to live in peace." <sup>23</sup>

At the end of the play Aegisthus enters and stands near Clytemnestra, looking at the dead bodies. Clytemnestra talks to the chorus in an appeasing tone--

"No, my dearest, dearest of all men, we have done enough. No more violence. Here is a monstrous harvest and a bitter reaping time. There is pain enough already. Let us not be bloody now. Honored gentlemen of Argos, go to your homes now and give way to the stress of fate and season. We could not do otherwise

21- THOMSON, Aeschylus and Athens, p.263.

22- MURRAY, Aeschylus, p.193f.

23- THOMSON, Aeschylus and Athens, p.264.

than we did. If this is the end of suffering, we can be broken as we are by the brute heel of angry destiny."24

The play ends with Clytemnestra's words to Aegisthus:

"...dearest; you and I have the power; we two shall bring good order to our house at least."25

.....

### 11) The Libation Bearers

The second play of the trilogy is The Libation Bearers

with: Orestes  
 Pylades  
 Chorus of foreign serving-women  
 Clytemnestra, now the Queen of Argos and wife of Aegisthus  
 Aegisthus  
 Cilissa, the nurse etc.

The first part of the play takes place at the tomb of Agamemnon and the last part takes place before the palace. If Orestes had been in Argos to welcome his father, there was no doubt that Aegisthus would have killed him. But he had been sent away to live with somebody else. When the scene opens we see Orestes and Pylades, who are back in Argos, at Agamemnon's tomb. Orestes laments and puts a lock of his hair on the tomb. Then the chorus enters with Electra. They come to make offerings to the dead. Orestes hides himself and hears them talk. When Electra sees the hair, she discovers that

24- AESCHYLUS, Oresteia, tr. Lattimore, p.89.

25- Ibid, p.90.

it is exactly like hers. She says that it can be nobody's hair but Orestes'. While Electra speaks, Orestes comes back and addresses them saying that he is Orestes, the owner of the hair, for whom they had waited so long. The next is his speech about Apollo's oracle--

"The big strength of Apollo's oracle will not forsake me. For he charged me to win through this hazard, with divination of much, and speech articulate, of winters of disaster under the warm heart were I to fail against my father's murderers; told me to cut them down in their own fashion, turn to the bull's fury in the loss of my estates. He said that else I must myself pay penalty with my own life, and suffer much sad punishment." 26

and continues--

"Shall I not trust such oracles as this? Or if I do not trust them, here is work that must be done. Here numerous desires converge to drive me on: the God's urgency and my father's passion, and with these the loss of my estates wears hard on me; the thought that these my citizens, most high renowned of men, who toppled Troy in a show of courage, must go subject to this brace of women; since this heart is female; or, if it be not, that soon will show." 27

The certainness of revenge in his talking makes them happy. Then Orestes learns from the chorus that Clytemnestra had a dream in which she bore a snake and <sup>gave</sup> it her breast for milk.

Orestes says--

"But I pray to the earth and to my father's grave then this dream is for me and that I will succeed." 28

26- AESCHYLUS, Oresteia, tr. Lattimore, p.103.

27- Ibid, p.103f.

28- Ibid, p.112.

They make plans and decide that Orestes and Pylades will go to the palace as messengers and tell the dwellers of the palace that Orestes is dead, the news which both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus would be glad to hear. And it so happens that when Orestes tells the news to Clytemnestra, "he is shocked to see a secret joy hiding in her grief."<sup>29</sup> Then she goes inside the palace to tell the news to Aegisthus. The two friends, too, enter the palace and Orestes kills Aegisthus. Just after a follower tells Clytemnestra what happened indoors, Orestes and Pylades enters with their swords drawn. This scene is the most crucial moment of all. Here we see a son ready to kill his mother, but Clytemnestra's words--

"Hold, my son. Oh take pity, child, before this breast where many a time, a drowsing baby, you would feed and with soft gums sucked in the milk that made you strong." 30

makes him think for a while. He asks Pylades--

"What shall I do Pylades? Be shamed to kill my mother?" 31

Pylades answers him reminding,

"What then becomes thereafter of the oracles declared by Loxias at Pytho? What of sworn oaths? Count all men hateful to you rather than the Gods." 32

This throws away all his doubts and hesitations, for he answers--

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29- DURANT, The Life of Greece, p.389.

30- AESCHYLUS, Orestea, tr. Lattimore, p.124.

31- Ibid, p.124.

32- Ibid, p.125.

"I judge that you win. Your advice is good.  
(To Clytemnestra)

Come here.

My purpose is to kill you over this body.  
You thought him bigger than my father when he lived.  
Die then and sleep beside him, since he is the man  
you love, and he you should have loved got only your hate." 33

He kills her. He revenges his father by killing the two  
murderers. Over the dead bodies he speaks--

"Behold the twin tyrannies of our land, these two  
who killed my father and who sacked my house. For a time  
they sat upon their thrones and kept their pride of  
state,  
and they are lovers still. So may you judge by what  
befell them, for as they were pledged their oath abides.  
They swore together death for my unhappy sire  
and swore to die together. Now they keep their oath." 34

At the end of the play Orestes sees visions of the Furies  
coming after him.

" Orestes

Women who serve this house, they come like gorgons, they  
wear robes of black, and they are wreathed in a tangle  
of snakes. I can no longer stay.

Chorus

Orestes, dearest to your father of all men  
what fancies whirl you? Hold do not give way to fear.

Orestes

These are no fancies of affliction. They are clear,  
and here; the bloodhounds of my mother's hate." 35

He runs away.

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33- AESCHYLUS, Oresteia, tr. Lattimore, p.125.

34- Ibid, p.128.

35- Ibid, p.130f.

iii) The Eumenides

In the third and last play of the Oresteia, The Eumenides,

we have: Pythia  
 the Priestess of Apollo  
 Apollo  
 Ghost of Clytemnestra  
 Orestes  
 Athene  
 Chorus of Eumenides, and for the second chorus,  
 Women of Athens.

The first part of the play takes place in Delphi, before the sanctuary of Apollo. The last part takes place on the Acropolis, Athens, before the temple of Athene.

In this play "The Furies (Eumenides) represent the old-time religion, rooted in fear, preaching the harsh morality of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; 'gloomy children of the night', they protest bitterly against the new-fangled ideas of the young Gods. The triumphant Athena represents the civilized ideals of these new Gods, 'divinities that face the sun'".<sup>36</sup>

"The Agamemnon was a play tragic in tone and lyrical, partly dramatic with quite a new emphasis laid on action. The Eumenides carries this development further; it is a play entirely different in spirit and purpose, therefore in technique too, from the Agamemnon-- a difference which is felt as soon as we compare the calm and interesting opening speech about the transmission of the oracle with the uneasy cry of the Watchman or the solemn beginning of the Choephoroi."<sup>37</sup>

36- MULLER, The Spirit of Tragedy, p.70.

37- H.D.F.KITTO, Greek Tragedy, p.90.

The first scene begins with the Pythia's talking. Then she enters the temple and immediately rushes out telling what she has seen.

"Things terrible to tell and for the eyes to see  
terrible drove me out again from Loxias' house  
.....  
and on the centerstone I see a man with God's  
defilement on him postured in the suppliant's seat  
with blood dripping from his hands and from a new-drawn  
sword,"<sup>38</sup>

Then when the temple doors open, we see Orestes surrounded by the sleeping Furies. The Pythia describes them as:

"...I think I call them rather gorgons, only  
not gorgons either, since their shape is not the same.  
.....  
...they are black and utterly  
repulsive, and they snore with breath that drives one back.  
From their eyes drips the foul ooze, and their dress is  
as is not right to wear in the presence of the God's  
statues, nor even into any human house."<sup>39</sup>

Apollo and Hermes stand besides Orestes. (Orestes till that time had been a wanderer and he was pursued by the Furies all the time.) Apollo says that he'll send away the afflictions since he is the one who told him to kill his mother. "Aeschylus makes it perfectly clear that the theme of the play is not to be the increasing tragedy of Orestes; Apollo's first words, 'I will not forsake thee', show that. We need not underestimate Orestes' present danger and sufferings, and his dramatic attainments are such that we shall not think of him as a puppet in another's

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38- AESCHYLUS, Oresteia, tr. Lattimore, p.136.

39- Ibid, p.136.

drama, but when Apollo promises him deliverance and himself assumes responsibility for what Orestes has done we feel the assurance that the outcome will be, for him, a happy one. He may have the Furies against him, but he has the God on his side." <sup>40</sup> After they exit, the ghost of

Clytemnestra enters and talks to the Furies, trying to wake them up, and runs after Orestes. When Clytemnestra leaves, Apollo enters and tells the Furies to go out.

"Get out, I tell you, go and leave this ~~mant~~ house. Away <sup>41</sup> in haste, from your presence set this mantic chamber free"

but the Furies accuse Apollo saying that he has all the guilt.

"My Lord Apollo, it is your turn to listen now. Your own part in this is more than accessory. <sup>42</sup> You are the one who did it; all the guilt is yours."

The next scene is on the Acropolis, before Athene's temple. Orestes is by the statue, talking to it. The chorus enters looking angrily for Orestes and tells him that neither Apollo nor Athene should free him from his state.

"Neither Apollo nor Athene's strength must win you free, save you from going down forgotten, without knowing where joy lies anywhere inside your heart, blood drained, chewed dry by the powers of death, a wraith, a shell." <sup>43</sup>

Then Athene comes in, and Orestes tells her everything.

"...I am of Argos  
and it is my honor that you ask the name  
of my father, Agamemnon, lord of seafarers,  
and your companion when you made the Trojan city  
of Ilium no city any more. He died

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41- AESCHYLUS, Oresteia, tr. Lattimore, p.141.

42- Ibid, p.141.

43- Ibid, p.145.

without honor when he came home. It was my mother  
of the dark heart, who entangled him in subtle gyves  
and cut him down. The bath is witness of his death.  
I was an exile in the time before this. I came back  
and killed the woman who gave me birth. I plead guilty.  
My father was dear, and this was vengeance for his blood.  
Apollo shares responsibility for this.

He counterspurred my heart and told me of the pains to  
come  
if I should fail to act against the guilty ones.

This is my case. Decide if it be right or wrong. 44  
I am in your hands. Where my fate falls, I shall accept."

Athene says she cannot judge this case for right or wrong,

"The matter is too big for any mortal man  
who thinks he can judge it. Even I have not the right  
to analyse cases of murder where wrath's edge  
is sharp, and all the more since you have come, and clung  
a clean and innocent supplicant, against my doors." 45

but she assures Orestes that she'll be back with some  
just citizens and clear the situation with them. Athene

returns with twelve citizens as jurors with herald and  
other citizens. The trial begins with Apollo and Athene  
on Orestes' side, defending, and the Furies on the other,  
accusing him. Athene initiates the trial and says to  
the Furies--

"I declare the trial open. Yours is the first word.  
For it must justly be the pursuer who speaks first 46  
and opens the case, and makes plain what the action is."

Orestes doesn't deny anything when the Furies ask him  
whether he killed his mother or not and says--

"Yours to bear witness now, Apollo, and expound  
the case for me, if I was right to cut her down.  
I will not deny I did this thing, because I did  
do it. But was the bloodshed right or not? Decide

44- AESCHYLUS, Oresteia, tr. Lattimore, p.151.

45- Ibid, p.151.

46- Ibid, p.155.

and answer. As you answer, I shall state my case.

Apollo

To you, established by Athene in your power,  
I shall speak justly. I am a prophet, I shall not  
lie. Never, for man, woman, nor city, from my throne  
of prophecy have I spoken a word, except  
that which Zeus, father of Olympians, might command.  
This is justice. Recognize then how great its strenght  
I tell you, follow our father's will. For not even  
the oath that binds you is more strong than Zeus is strong" <sup>47</sup>

Apollo's "first attempt, an appeal to the authority of  
Zeus, is abortive, because appeals to authority are use-  
less when there is a conflict of authority; and so we  
are brought back to the dilemma with which the controver-  
sy began-- Orestes has avenged his father by dishonouring  
his mother." <sup>48</sup>

He makes a second attempt. "He contends  
that, since the murder of Agamemnon was a crime, the  
execution of the murderess was not. This is a plea of  
justifiable homicide, seeking to discriminate between  
acts similar in effect but different in motive; but the  
Erinyes reply with the caustic comment that such a plea  
comes ill from the spokesman of Zeus, who bound in chains  
his own father Kronos." <sup>49</sup> To this Apollo answers--

"You foul animals, from whom the Gods turn in disgust,  
Zeus could undo shackles, such hurt may be made good,  
and there is every kind of way to get out. But once  
the dust has drained down all a man's blood, once the man  
has died, there is no raising of him up again." <sup>50</sup>

47- AESCHYLUS, Oresteia, tr. Lattimore, p.157.

48- THOMSON, Aeschylus and Athens, p.287.

49- Ibid, p.287.

50- AESCHYLUS, Oresteia, tr. Lattimore, p.158.

At the end of the trial they take votes and Orestes becomes free of sin. Apollo says--

"The man before us has escaped the charge of blood. The ballots are in equal number for each side." 51

And the Furies become the Benignant Ones, the protectors of the suppliants.

" Athene

No household shall be prosperous without your will." 52

After the acquittal of Orestes, the spirit of evil which haunted his house finishes.

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51- AESCHYLUS, Oresteia, tr. Lattimore, p.162.  
52- Ibid, p.166.

PART THREEAESCHYLUS' IDEA OF JUSTICE

It was stated earlier in the paper that Aeschylus writes religious works, that his tragedies are full of religious feelings with the thought of judgement. Aeschylus felt that his tragedies should deal with the idea of justice; for, he thought, this idea is almost the same as the definition of man-- and in everything a man does, he creates a problem of justice. The Oresteia is based on the idea of judgement. "...we have a real story in which the action is strong and progressive; we have plot culminating in murder, a vengeance, and a trial."<sup>53</sup> "The effort of the drama is to make us feel what it is to take a city, to sacrifice a daughter, to hate a husband so much as to kill him, or to feel driven to an act so horrible as the slaying of one's mother."<sup>54</sup> Aeschylus, Murray says, "refuses to believe that great bliss or wealth, in itself, leads to a fall; wealth can be innocent, and then provokes no Nemesis. It is wealth combined with injustice or unholliness that alone leads to destruction."<sup>55</sup> So, surely enough, the 'on him that doeth it shall be done' idea is clearly

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53- MURRAY, Aeschylus, p.177f.

54- Ibid, p.179.

55- Ibid, p.87.

seen in his works. Take, for example, Prometheus. He who stole fire from Zeus' thunderbolt to help mankind is chained to a peak of the Caucasus. In this play "Aeschylus reaches the conception of a supreme Tyrant, the enemy of man, ruling the world, and of a champion of mankind, standing up against him." <sup>56</sup>

Prometheus, the son of two Titans, is the wisest of all man; and, for stealing the fire is punished and pays his sin for his boldness. "This Dike, or law of retribution, has two scopes: it is a law of nature, stating a fact, and also a moral law, enjoying a moral duty. The sinner both is punished, and ought to be punished." <sup>57</sup> Murray continues, and asks us to realize

that "from the outset that Orestes is nowhere accused of ~~ferocity or of yielding to angry passions. 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 greivous 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 realize, 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 or consideration for the murderers victim.~~" <sup>58</sup> This is the idea of the Greeks

showing that every sin will be found out and it will be

avenged. "Not Aigisthos, not Clytemnestra, nor Orestes;

but the Law, however we phrase it, by whatever instrument

it works, is the true and inevitable slayer. The Law works" <sup>59</sup>

56- MURRAY, Aeschylus, p.88.

57- Ibid, p.186.

58- Ibid, p.196.

59- Ibid, p.199.

On the other hand, Thomson also comments on Aeschylus' Idea of Justice saying, "though he was in the mystical traditions of Eleusis, he was not a mystic in his attitude to society, because he had no need to seek refuge from a reality in which his aspirations had been fulfilled. Accordingly, asked to define his idea of justice, he would, it may be suspected, have replied in one word-- democracy."<sup>60</sup> For Kitto, "In both these late tragedies, the Oresteia and the Prometheia, Aeschylus is concerned with the growth of moral, social, political order out of primitive disorder, and in each trilogy Zeus the Conqueror is the symbol of authority--not yet wisdom and mercy."<sup>61</sup> This shows the falsity of Judgement of Zeus. It is He who asks Orestes to kill his mother and it is also He who punishes him. Yet "The democratic Greek instinctively cared more for Law and Justice Νόμος and Δικαιοσύνη."<sup>62</sup> The reason for the Trojan War is also the punishment of wrong. Paris is punished and his city lies in ruins. Along with many examples, we have the Oresteia in hand and let us deal with its problems.

Then, shortly, the situation is like this: Agamemnon kills his daughter Iphigenia. As a punishment Clytemnestra and Aegisthus kill Agamemnon. They both have their

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60- THOMSON, Aeschylus and Athens, p.291.

61- H.D.F.KITTO, Greek Tragedy, p.97.

62- MURRAY, Aeschylus, p.95.

personal motives. Aegisthus avenges the death of his brothers, Clytemnestra avenges the death of her daughter. Then, to punish the two murderers, Zeus through the interpretation of Apollo, orders Orestes to avenge his father's murderers.

"Slay the two who slew.  
Atone for death by death.      63  
Shed blood for old blood shed."

Since this Law, Dike, is inevitable, and unescapable, Orestes has to kill. Aegisthus must die, but he is not enough to satisfy justice, since Clytemnestra took part in killing his father. Then the question comes up. Would it be justice to kill his mother? It is his duty to kill his father's murderers but what would the Gods do when he kills his mother? Besides, the Furies, the daughters of the Night, run after him all the time to punish the guilt of his shedding kindred blood. (The Furies were not after Clytemnestra after she killed Agamemnon because they thought that the victim and the offender were not 'of the same blood'.) Then the situation of Orestes, as Miss Hamilton says, was a very difficult situation to be in. "He who wanted only to do right was so placed that he must choose between two hideous wrongs. He must be a murderer of his mother or he must be a traitor to his father." <sup>64</sup> And, if he doesn't kill his mother, he doesn't perform the most

63- HAMILTON, Mythology, p.357.

64- Ibid, p.357.

sacred duty which Zeus ordered him to do; thus he will be punished very severely. So, he kills his mother. After some time--Orestes suffering because of the Furies running after him-- Athene and Apollo say that Orestes was just in what he had done, and he becomes purified of ~~ain~~ at the Court of Areopagus. Then there remains another question. What will become of the Furies? Is it justice to free Orestes from their hands? Aeschylus solves this problem very wisely by Athene turning them to Eumenides, the benignant Ones. At the end of the trilogy we see that everything comes out even. Aeschylus solves every problem concerning Justice and lets Orestes free to live without any doom awaiting him-- a man ready to begin a new generation.

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