PART FOUR

ÆSCHYLUS

THE OWL OF ATHENA
XII

DEMOCRACY

There had been little outward change in the constitution of Athens under the tyrants, who had maintained their control of the administration by filling the executive offices with their own nominees. After the expulsion of Hippias and the defeat of the counter-revolution attempted by Isagoras, a new constitution was drawn up with the object of placing the rights won by the people on a secure foundation.

Athens had now passed from a simple agricultural to a monetary economy. The hereditary privileges of the landowning class had been abolished; the claims of birth had been subordinated to the claims of property. These changes had already led to profound modifications in the laws of inheritance and in the social relations of the sexes; and now the last remnants of the old tribal system, based on kinship, which had become a fetter on the new economic and social realities, were swept away. On the other hand, since the revolution thus effected consisted largely in the recovery by the common people of the equality which they had enjoyed under the tribal system, it was accompanied by the revival, in new and vastly different conditions, of some of the characteristic institutions of tribal society, such as the popular assembly, the common festivals, and the use of the lot. And lastly, since the driving force of the revolution had been the new middle class of merchants and artisans, the rise of this class to power was marked by the development of a new and distinctive outlook on society and on the world.

How the leading families of the primitive Attic clans established themselves as a ruling caste has already been described; but, although impaired by this development, which destroyed the solidarity of the clan, the structure of the tribal system maintained itself right down to the period we have now reached. The organisation of the army under the four tribal
chiefs (*phylbasileis*), elected from the Eupatridai, was tribal; and, what is still more important, the enjoyment of civic rights was dependent on membership of one of the phratries. Since the phratries were groups of clans, this meant that the citizen body was still a tribal community, composed of those who belonged to the primitive Attic clans. It was at this point that the pressure against the tribal structure was strongest, and it came from the new middle class.

The industrial development of Attica had been hampered in its early stages by shortage of labour. That, as we have seen, is why Solon had done nothing to check the dispossession of the peasantry; and for the same reason he had passed laws against idleness and encouraged the immigration of foreign artisans. These immigrants, however, could only acquire civic rights by obtaining admission to the phratries, and consequently the policy of the landowning aristocracy was to keep the phratries closed. There has been preserved from this period a law stipulating that membership of the phratry should not be restricted to clansmen. This has been claimed as proof that Aristotle was wrong in saying that the Attic phratry consisted simply of so many clans; but, of course, it proves that Aristotle was right, because it stands to reason that, if non-clansmen had not originally been excluded, there would have been no need for a law enforcing their admission. It is clear, however, that this law was largely ineffectual. We are informed by Aristotle that among the strongest supporters of Peisistratos were those who, being of impure descent, were afraid of losing their citizenship—that is to say, descendants of immigrant artisans who had been admitted to the phratries, but were in danger of being expelled by the agrarian party. How much this class owed to the tyranny is shown by the fact that, when it fell, one of the first acts of Isagoras was to disfranchise a large number of citizens who were unable to prove pure Athenian descent, and shortly afterwards, when the Spartan King entered Attica, no less than 700 families, supporters of Kleisthenes, were expelled. It is clear therefore that down to the time when it seized power under the leadership of Kleisthenes the rapidly growing class of merchants and artisans was still insecure in its possession of the franchise owing to the influence
the landlords in the phratries; and therefore in the new constitution the political functions of the phratries were abolished once and for all.

Before dealing with the reforms of Kleisthenes we must pause to consider the effects of the growth of property on the internal structure of the clan. Down to the beginning of the sixth century the ownership of property, both real and personal, was still vested, at least nominally, in the clan. The individual enjoyed only the usufruct. When a man died, his wealth reverted to his fellow clansmen, among whom it was distributed in portions no doubt determined by their degree of affinity to the deceased. It is probable that males benefited more largely than females, and of course by this period membership of the clan was transmitted in the male line.

The Attic law of inheritance, as established under the democracy, was attributed to Solon; and, while there is no reason to question the accuracy of this tradition, it must be remembered that some time would necessarily elapse before the full effects of the pew system became apparent. We may say therefore that the democratic practice in regard to inheritance had grown up gradually in the sixth century. In order to understand it, we must compare it with what is known of the inheritance of property in other parts of Greece. The Code of Gortyna, dating from the fifth century, has survived, and we know something of the Spartan practice in the time of Aristotle. This evidence, though meagre, is sufficient to set the Attic Code in evolutionary perspective, because Gortyna was economically more backward in the fifth century than Athens was in the sixth, and Sparta, even in the fourth, was more backward still.

In Attic law, the right of bequest was recognised only in default of legitimate issue, and it was exercised by means of adoption. If a man had no issue, he might adopt a son, who thereby became his heir. The primitive custom of adoption was thus put to a new use. If he died without children, legitimate or adopted, his property reverted to his kin in the following order of priority: the father, the brothers and their children, the sisters and their children, the paternal cousins and their children, the maternal cousins and their children. The exclusion
of the mother, as well as her brothers and sisters, shows that the unilateral conception of kinship characteristic of the clan had not yet succumbed to the narrower but bilateral conception characteristic of the family. If a man had issue of both sexes, the property was divided by the sons on condition that they maintained their sisters till marriage and furnished them with a dowry, the amount of which was limited. If he had only daughters, they inherited but were obliged to marry his next-of-kin, who would be in the first instance his brothers, and the inheritance passed to their sons as soon as they came of age. Thus, the rule of exogamy was violated. Moreover, if the heiress was already married, she was obliged to divorce her husband in order to marry the next-of-kin, and the next-of-kin divorced his wife in order to marry her. These restrictions on the liberty of the women in the interests of property correspond to the Attic law in respect of adultery, which was regarded as a crime so serious that a man might kill an adulterer caught in the act without incurring the guilt of homicide.

At Gortyna, the wife retained her rights over the property she had brought with her as a dowry, and, if divorced on her husband’s responsibility, she received in addition five statérès of money. When a man died, the property was disposed as follows. The town house and its contents, and the livestock, were divided among the sons; the remainder—the country estate, including the serfs tied to it and the houses and livestock belonging to them,—were shared among the sons and daughters, each daughter receiving half as much as a son. If there were no sons, the whole of the property went to the daughter, who could refuse to marry the next-of-kin, provided that she indemnified him by surrendering half the estate.

At Sparta the laws were not codified, and therefore the rules of inheritance are not so easy to determine. They can, however, be deduced from Aristotle’s remarks on the subject in the light of Attic and Gortynian law. The Spartan economy was based on the same system of family estates as the Cretan, but at Sparta, owing to the absence of money and the repression of industry and trade, there was no property apart from the estate, the serfs tied to it, and its produce.

Aristotle notes as one of the characteristics of Spartan society
The liberty and influence of the women. His account of this matter is confirmed by other writers. The women were free to go about in public; adultery was not punishable or even disgraceful; a woman might have several husbands. Of all this Aristotle severely disapproves, but we must remember that he writes from the standpoint of an Athenian bourgeois, to whom the subjection and seclusion of women appeared as a dispensation of nature. Then he proceeds to comment on the Spartan rules of inheritance:

Some have managed to acquire too much land, others very little, and so the land has fallen into the hands of a small minority. This has also been badly arranged by the laws; for while the lawgiver quite rightly made it dishonourable to buy or sell land, he did not restrict its alienation by gift or bequest, and so the same result necessarily followed. Owing to the number of heiresses and the size of the dowries, nearly two-fifths of the land are owned by women. It would have been better to prescribe no dowry at all or only a small one. As it is, a man can give the heiress to anyone he chooses, and if he dies without having disposed of her, his heir can do so.

At first sight this passage seems to imply that the Spartans recognised the right of free testamentary disposition, and that is how it has been commonly understood; but a little reflection serves to show that this is a misinterpretation. It is impossible to suppose that a right which was not admitted in the Code of Gortyna, nor in the Attic Code, nor in any other ancient code before the development of mature law, could have been recognised by the reactionary aristocracy of Sparta, which had not reached the stage of codifying the laws at all. What, then, is the alternative? Aristotle is judging Spartan practice from the standpoint of an Athenian, and what he means, when he speaks of alienation by gift or bequest, and again when he says that a man could give the heiress to anyone he chose, is simply that in Sparta, unlike Athens, Gortyna, and other Greek states, the heiress was not required to marry the next-of-kin, and consequently there was no means of ensuring the transmission of the family property to the descendants in the male line.

The social life of Sparta has already been described (pp. 103–5).
At the age of seven the boy was taken from his parents and enrolled in the *agēla*; at nineteen he came of age and took up residence in the Men’s House, eating and sleeping with the other men and spending the day in military exercises. When he married, he did not live with his wife, but merely visited her clandestinely from time to time. It is to be presumed that the bride lived with her parents, as in Crete. Plutarch says that the men continued to live in this way “for a long time”—perhaps until they obtained exemption from military service.

The girls, too, were organised in *agēlai*, but there is no evidence that they were segregated like the boys. In these circumstances, the Spartan home must have consisted of the father (old enough to be excused residence in the Men’s House), the mother, the daughters married and unmarried, and the children of both sexes under seven. In the absence of the grown sons, the daughters were at an advantage in asserting their claims on the inheritance. Not only did they obtain substantial dowries, but, owing to the continued absence of their husbands, the administration of the estate was in their hands. They were, of course, excluded from political life, but, thanks to their economic position, their influence was so great that Aristotle speaks of Sparta as a country “ruled by women.” Finally, if it is asked how this system had arisen, the answer may perhaps be found in the special conditions of the conquest. We know that the Spartan settlers had intermarried with the conquered population, and, since they were compelled to maintain a standing army composed of all the adult male citizens, the new state arose on the basis of a division of labour between the sexes. The men fought, the women administered the estates.

If we compare these three systems—the Spartan, the Gortynian and the Athenian—it becomes clear that they represent three successive stages in the development of property and in the subjection of women. Moreover, if the subjection of women in Attica was a consequence of the development of property, it follows that in earlier times the women must have enjoyed a greater measure of liberty; and this is strikingly confirmed by Attic tradition. Down to the reign of Kekrops, the women had enjoyed the right of voting with the men in the popular
assembly, there had been no formal marriage, each woman
had children by several men, and the children were named
after the mother. Thus, the status of women in Attica had once
been higher than it was in historical Sparta, and, moreover,
this was remembered in Attic tradition. This double contrast,
between contemporary Attica and contemporary Sparta and
between contemporary Attica and Attic tradition, explains
why Attic writers—Æschylus, Sophokles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle—were so deeply concerned with the
social relations of the sexes.

Thus, during the sixth century the men of property had
completed the work of the Eupatridai by whittling away what
remained of the primitive structure and functions of the clan.
In order to counteract the influence exercised by the nobility
through their clan cults, Kleisthenes continued the policy of
Peisistratos in developing the popular state festivals, but in
his hands this policy was not sufficient, perhaps was not even
designed, to eliminate completely the power which the noble
families derived from their wealth and prestige. That will
appear in the next chapter. The immediate struggle centred
in the phratry, in which, as we have seen, the nobility were
still strong enough to threaten the security of the middle class.
If that threat was to be removed—and the supporters of
Kleisthenes were insistent—the phratry had to be rendered
politically impotent, and, since it had become the pivotal point
in the tribal system, that system had to be reconstituted.

The way in which this was done was characteristic. Tribal
reconstruction was nothing new. It had been done at Kyrene,
as we remarked in an earlier chapter, and it had been done
at Sparta as part of the military reorganisation. Yet the imprint
on men’s minds of the social structure under which their
ancestors had lived continuously since human society had first
taken shape out of the primitive horde was so deep—it had
already, as we have seen, moulded their conception of the
structure of the physical universe—that it was still accepted
without question as the natural and necessary foundation for
any form of social order. Accordingly, in Attica, as elsewhere,
when the primitive tribal system was superseded, the external
features of the old order were faithfully reproduced in the new;
and when a modern historian remarks that "a system more artificial than the tribes and tritýes of Kleisthenes it might well pass the wit of man to devise," it may be replied that, whatever we may think about it, to Greeks of this period it was the most natural thing in the world.

The vital unit in the new system was the démos, or parish. As a territorial unit, the démos had existed since prehistoric times. In a great many cases it bore the name of a clan—Eupyridai, Aithalidai, Semachidai. Moreover, the word itself means properly a division, being cognate with dasmós, whose significance in relation to land tenure has already been examined. It follows from our conclusions on that subject that in its original form the démos was the moïra of land allotted to a particular clan. It had therefore a traditional association with the clan, although of course by the end of the sixth century, owing to the dissolution of the clan system of land tenure, the original connection had largely been effaced.

Kleisthenes organised the men residing in each démos as a corporation with an elective chief (démarchos) and with important corporate functions, including the maintenance of a register in which was entered the name of every male as soon as he came of age. Enrolment on this register carried with it the rights of citizenship. The original members of the démos were the adult males resident within its borders at the time the reforms of Kleisthenes passed into law—to that extent the principle of kinship was relaxed; but in subsequent generations membership was determined by descent. No matter where he might happen to reside, the son always belonged to the same démos as his father. And so, after a couple of generations, this unit grew into a body of genuine kinsmen, with its own chief, its own corporate life and its own sentimental attachments. Kleisthenes could not have devised a better way of filling the void which had been left in the minds of the people by the destruction of the primitive clan.

The number of the démoi at this period is unknown. It was probably between 150 and 200. They were divided into thirty groups, called tritýes, or ridings. As a group of démoi, the tritýes bore the same relation to the phratry as the démos bore to the clan. It had no corporate existence at all; it was a purely
geographical unit, but it provided the reformers with a cover under which they were able to introduce unobtrusively the really revolutionary feature of the new system. Of these thirty trittýes, ten were composed of démoi situated in or near the city, ten of démoi situated in the maritime districts, ten of démoi situated in the interior. The purpose of this arrangement will become clear when we see how the trittýes were grouped in tribes.

Hitherto there had been four Attic tribes. That number was now raised to ten. And each of these ten tribes contained three trittýes, one from the urban area, one from the maritime districts, and one from the interior. This meant that the urban population was securely entrenched in each tribe, and, since all political meetings took place in the city, it was in a position to muster a voting power out of proportion to its numbers. Thus the middle class of merchants, manufacturers and artisans secured a permanent advantage over the landowners, farmers and peasants, and at the same time the interests of the country were subordinated to those of the town.

Such was the new order of society which Kleisthenes had constructed on the pattern of the old. The old clans and phratries were not interfered with, but they had been effectually supplanted, and so they withered away. The effect of the new system, and the object for which it was designed, was, of course, to remove the last remaining obstacles to the development of property by the most advanced section of the community—the middle class. That is generally recognised, but it does not explain why these essential changes were embodied in so conservative a form. It has been said that “the substitution of the démos for the clan meant in effect the transition from the principle of kinship to that of locality or residence.” This is true, but it does not explain why membership of the démos was hereditary. What had happened was that the old system of kinship, controlled by the aristocratic clans, had been replaced by a new system in which the clans were ignored but the principle of kinship was so far as possible preserved. In other words, what the democrats had done was to abolish the old tribal system, which had been perverted by the aristocracy into an instrument of class oppression, and to set up in its place
a new tribal system, which, being modelled on the old but at the same time democratic, was readily accepted by the people as a reassertion of their ancient tribal rights—not a break with the past but a revival of the past.\textsuperscript{11}

Why was the number of tribes raised to ten? This innovation was connected with a reform of the calendar which was introduced at the same time. Hitherto Attica had retained the primitive lunar calendar based on twelve months with periodical intercalations controlled by the priesthood and designed to reconcile the lunar with the solar year. Under the democracy, the lunar reckoning was retained for religious purposes, just as it has been in modern Europe for the feasts of the Church; but for secular purposes Kleisthenes introduced a solar calendar based on ten periods of thirty-six or thirty-seven days. At the same time, the Council of Four Hundred instituted by Solon was raised to 500—fifty from each of the ten tribes; and these ten tribal groups of fifty members acted in rotation through the year as a standing committee of the Council. It would be in harmony with the spirit of the new constitution to suppose that this correlation between the new tribal system and the new calendar was designed to supersede a similar correlation between the old tribal system and the old calendar; and there is some evidence that this was in fact the case.

According to Aristotle, the primitive Attic system had consisted of four tribes, each of which contained three phratries.\textsuperscript{12} He goes on to say that each phratry contained thirty clans and each clan thirty men. And he adds that the four tribes corresponded to the seasons, the twelve phratries to the months, and the thirty clans in each phratry to the thirty days in each month. The fictitious character of this arrangement is so palpable that many modern scholars have discredited the whole statement, even to the point of denying that the phratry was a group of clans. Yet, whether he is discussing the origin of democracy or the origin of tragedy, Aristotle's handling of historical tradition is so firm and clear-sighted that his conclusions should not be lightly brushed aside. In the present instance, his view of the relation between the phratry and the clan is certainly right, and the tradition regarding the relation of the old tribal system to the seasons, though obviously schematised, is likely at least
to be ancient, because it is based on the old lunar calendar; and indeed it may quite well be essentially correct, at least to the extent that each tribe and phratry had performed certain functions by rotation in successive periods of the year. Such an arrangement would be entirely in keeping with the elaborate ritual co-operation characteristic of tribal society, and it explains the connection between the new tribal system and the reform of the calendar.

The members of the new Council of the Five Hundred were elected by lot, and the same method was extended a few years later to the election of the highest officers of State, the archontes. The use of the lot served the same purpose in the new democratic constitution as it had originally served in the democracy of the primitive tribe; it was a safeguard of equality. Ancient democracy was a reversion to tribal democracy on a higher evolutionary plane.

The watchword of the new constitution was isonomia—equality of civic rights, equality before the law. Yet, as a later Greek historian shrewdly observed, political equality is futile without economic equality. That was a bitter lesson which Athenian democrats had yet to learn, and rather than learn it they ceased to be democrats. At this period, however, thanks to the expropriation of the landlords by the tyrants and the rapid expansion of industry and trade, this contradiction was still hidden; and in the same way the still deeper contradiction latent in the development of slave labour had not yet penetrated society to the point of forcing itself on the consciousness of honest men.

On the other hand, there was one point at which the constitution of Kleisthenes fell short even of its professed ideal. Admission to the office of archon was still subject to a property qualification, which excluded the lower classes. This restriction reveals the essential character of the democratic revolution. It was a middle-class revolution. Having rallied the whole people in the name of equality, the middle class proceeded to entrench itself in a constitution which denied equality to the masses that had enabled it to prevail. This contradiction had an effect on middle-class thought, which, since it was instinctively suppressed, was all the more profound.
The first great exponent of democratic thought was Pythagoras, a citizen of Samos who emigrated about 530 B.C. to the colony of Kroton in southern Italy. The accounts of his birth are conflicting and partly fabulous. The most probable is that he was the son of a Samian engraver of gems. At this period Samos was under the tyranny of Polykrates, which, until it was cut short by the Persian conquest of Ionia, was one of the most brilliant that Greece had seen. Polykrates overthrew the landed aristocracy, opened up direct trade with Egypt, executed enormous public works, including a mole for the harbour and a subterranean aqueduct, experimented with the coinage, and aspired to the commercial hegemony of the Ægean.

Thus, Pythagoras came from one of the main centres of the urban revolution, and his life in Italy coincided with the development of coinage in the west. According to Aristoxenos, it was Pythagoras who introduced weights and measures to the Greeks; and, though this tradition cannot be accepted in the form in which it has come down to us (we do not possess the actual words of Aristoxenos), it is likely enough that he was interested in the standardisation of weights and measures which was being effected at this time under the pressure of overseas trade. At any rate, there can be no doubt of the origin of his interest in mathematics, for Aristoxenos says that he was the first to develop that study beyond the necessities of trade.

At Kroton he founded a secret society, which differed from the Orphic thiasoi in being organised as a political party. About 510 B.C., after a political reverse, Pythagoras migrated to Metapontion, where he seems to have remained until he died. During the first half of the fifth century the Pythagoreans extended their influence all over southern Italy. Then, in one city after another, beginning with Kroton, the order was suppressed and its members persecuted.

It is obvious that, being organised as a political party, the Pythagoreans must have had a political programme related to the economic and social developments of their time. It is amusing to observe that Condorcet, the Girondin, who had a political programme of his own which bore very directly on the French Revolution, took it for granted that the early
Pythagoreans were democrats. The Pythagorean harmony of opposites made an immediate appeal to him because it so closely resembled the idea of social reconciliation expounded by the Girondins. But the majority of modern scholars, being less conscious than Condorcet of their own relation to society, have taken the view that the Pythagoreans formed the nucleus of the aristocracy. In support of this view, they quote a statement of Diogenes of Laerter that at Kroton the disciples of Pythagoras, "about three hundred in all, administered the government so well (árista) that their rule was as it were an aristocracy (aristokratía)." It is quite clear, however, that the word aristokratía is here employed in its literal and philosophical sense of the rule of the best. That the control of the state should have been in the hands of 300 persons certainly implies that their social basis was narrow, but it does not follow in the least that they were aristocrats in the sense of representing the interests of the landed nobility. On the contrary, it is hard to see how a colonist from Samos could have found himself at the head of the hereditary landowning oligarchy in a state which had been founded nearly 200 years before his arrival.

The first to reject the accepted view was Burnet, who argued that the Pythagoreans were democrats, but that their main concern was with the cult of holiness. This is a step in the right direction; but there is other evidence which shows that the statement that they were democrats needs qualification; and, if they were not concerned with a good deal more than the cult of holiness, why did they play such a strenuous part in the political struggles of the time, and why were they hunted down?

According to Apollonios, the opponents of the Pythagoreans were two—Kylon the aristocrat, who is described as the leading citizen in wealth and birth, and Ninon the democrat; and, moreover, the Pythagoreans are said to have resisted proposals for extending the franchise and making the magistrates responsible to the people. It follows that, if they were democrats, they were moderate democrats, representing the interests of the big merchants, and therefore opposed by the nobility on the one hand and the workers on the other.

It must be admitted that the political history of southern
Italy in this crucial period has not yet been clarified, but the hypothesis I have advanced not only seems to account for the evidence better than any other, but it is strongly supported by an examination of the religious aspect of Pythagoreanism. 10

The Pythagoreans believed in reincarnation, which they described as the Wheel of Necessity. They were severely ascetic and much addicted to silent meditation. They invented the symbol of the “ox on the tongue,” corresponding to the Orphic “door on the tongue” and the Eleusinian “key on the tongue.” They observed numerous taboos, some of them primitive, to which they attached an ethical significance: for example, “Don’t step over the beam of a balance”—that is to say, don’t transgress the bounds of equity. They believed in the moral responsibility of the individual for his actions, and when they returned home after the day’s work, they said to themselves, “Where have I erred? What have I accomplished? What have I left undone that I ought to have done?” They taught that the soul was immortal and something different from life; that the souls of the pure ascended to the upper region of Hades, while those of the impure were bound by the Erinyes in unbreakable bonds; that the air was full of guardian spirits which visited men in dreams, for the soul awakes when the body sleeps; and that the man who was possessed of a good soul was blest. Their rites of burial were peculiar to themselves and designed to secure their personal salvation. Admission to the society was by some form of initiation, with a probationary period of five years.

It is plain that this creed, so far from being aristocratic, has the closest affinities with Orphism, for which Pythagoras is said to have had an intense admiration. Bury indeed goes so far as to say that “the Pythagoreans were practically an Orphic community,” 30 but this is an exaggeration. All the fundamental elements—initiation, purification, salvation, the differentiation of body and soul—were common, but there were also important divergences. The patron god of the Pythagoreans was Apollo, not Dionysus. The Orphic cult of holiness was entirely, or almost entirely, ritualistic; the Pythagoreans had an elaborate code of social and moral conduct. In its intellectual content Pythagoreanism was far superior to Orphism, indicating that it was a cult of the élite rather than of the masses. And most
significant of all, while the Orphics were quietistic, content to renounce the world, the early Pythagoreans were strenuously engaged in changing it by the prosecution of a radical political programme. While Orphism had drawn its impetus from the dispossessed peasantry and the new urban proletariat at a time when they were still politically unorganised, the Pythagoreans represented the, active and class-conscious section of the popular movement—the men of money, the merchants, who, already enriched by the growth of overseas trade, found the path to further enrichment blocked by the opposition of the hereditary landowning oligarchy. Their rule at Kroton may therefore be described as a commercial theocracy.

At this point it may be helpful to consider a modern analogy. The feudal system of mediaeval Europe was based on the land, and it was destroyed by the growth of trade. It was maintained in the interests of the landowning barons, supported by the leaders of the established Church, who were themselves big landowners. Consequently, the attack on it, led by the rising bourgeoisie, necessarily involved a break with the Church—the Reformation. The basis of the Lutheran movement is thus described by Tawney. The peasants of South Germany—

found corvées redoubled, money-payments increased, and common rights curtailed, for the benefit of an impoverished noblesse, which saw in the exploitation of the peasant the only means of maintaining its social position in face of the rapidly growing wealth of the bourgeoisie.

Meanwhile a parallel movement had been developing in the towns. Like Lutheranism, it was directed against the established religion, but it was also consciously organised for the attainment of a political objective:

Where Lutheranism had been socially conservative, deferential to established political authorities, the exponent of a personal, almost quietistic, piety, Calvinism was an active and radical force. It was a creed which sought, not merely to purify the individual, but to reconstruct Church and State, and to renew society by penetrating every department of life, public as well as private, with the influence of religion. . . . Its leaders addressed their teaching,
not of course exclusively, but none the less primarily, to the classes engaged in trade and industry, which formed the most modern and progressive elements in the life of the age.

This is how Tawney describes the Calvinist state of Geneva:

The principle on which the collectivism of Geneva rested may be described as that of the omnicompetent church. The religious community formed a closely organised society, which, while using the secular authority as police officers to enforce its mandates, not only instructed them as to the policy to be pursued, but was itself a kind of state, prescribing by its own legislation the standard of conduct to be observed by its members, putting down offences against public order and public morals, providing for the education of youth and for the relief of the poor. The peculiar relations between the ecclesiastical and secular authorities, which for a short time made the system possible at Geneva, could not exist to the same degree when Calvinism was the creed, not of a single city, but of a minority in a national state organised on principles very different from its own. Unless the state itself were captured, rebellion, civil war, or the abandonment of the pretension to control society, was the inevitable consequence.

The same distinction between Luther and Calvin is drawn by Pirenne:

While Luther confined religion to the domain of the conscience, and left the temporal power to organise the Church and follow its political interests after its own fashion, Calvin submitted all human actions to theology. . . . The State, being willed by God, had to be transformed into an instrument of the divine will. It was not subordinated to the clergy, and did not derive its power from them, but it acted in conformity with the end for which it was created only by associating itself intimately with the clergy in order that the mandate of the Most High should triumph here on earth. . . . Such a system of ideas, if it is fully applied, inevitably leads to theocracy, and under the inspiration of Calvin the government of Geneva did actually constitute a theocracy.

There were, of course, profound differences between the democratic movement of ancient Greece and the rise of the modern
bourgeoisie, but, except for those who like H. A. L. Fisher can see no sequence in human history, “only one emergency following upon another as wave follows wave,” a study of the social and religious movements of sixteenth-century Europe makes it clear—for the first time, as it seems to me—why, after seizing power in the highly commercialised cities of southern Italy, the Pythagoreans were suddenly and violently expelled.

With these considerations in mind, let us now turn to the fundamental conception which lies at the root of Pythagorean philosophy—the doctrine of the fusion of opposites in the mean.

On the relation of this doctrine to Milesian philosophy Burnet wrote:

Now this discovery of the Mean at once suggests a new solution of the old Milesian problem of opposites. We know that Anaximander regarded the encroachment of one opposite on the other as an “injustice,” and he must therefore have held that there was a point which was fair to both. That, however, he had no means of determining. The discovery of the Mean suggests that it is to be found in a “blend” (krásis) of the opposites, which might be numerically determined, just as that of the high and low notes of the octave had been. The convivial customs of the Greeks made such an idea natural to them. The master of the feast used to prescribe the proportions of wine and water to be poured into the mixing-bowl before it was served out to the guests.

Since he described the encroachment of one opposite on the other as an injustice, Anaximander must presumably have regarded justice (if he defined his idea of it at all) as a state in which each opposite keeps to itself. There is no evidence that “he held that there was a point which was fair to both,” and, if he had done so, he would not have been prevented from determining it by ignorance of music or mathematics, because the doctrine of the mean had already been propounded by Solon. The truth is that Anaximander simply did not look at the problem from that point of view. According to Burnet, the idea of fusion was deduced by Pythagoras from his theory of the mean; yet, as we shall see immediately, that theory presupposes it. And this deduction sprang to his mind because the idea was “natural” to the Greeks. This slipshod thinking, which
glides with a deceptive facility past all the crucial issues, is the result of attempting to interpret Greek philosophy as a closed system of pure thought, endowed like the Platonic Soul with a power of self-movement independent of its material environment.

What Pythagoras discovered was the relation between the four fixed notes of the octave, represented by the numerical series 6—8—9—12. The terms 6 and 12 are regarded as opposites; 8 is the subcontrary or harmonic mean \( \left( 8 = 12 - \frac{12}{3} = 6 + \frac{6}{3} \right) \) and 9 is the arithmetic mean \( (9 = 12 - 3 = 6 + 3) \). What led Pythagoras to this discovery? In the first instance, no doubt, his interest in mathematics, which had its roots, as we have seen, in the social movement of his time. But, while there is no doubt that the medical and other applications of the mean were merely extensions of the musical theory, the musical theory itself is not fully explicable in terms of the phenomena it was designed to interpret. From the point of view of music or mathematics, there is nothing in the nature of the numbers 6 and 12 which demands that they should be regarded as opposites. That notion is a preconception, and at the same time it is essential. The relation between these terms is constantly described in Pythagorean writings as one of dissension or hostility, which is resolved or reconciled by their fusion in the mean. Thus, we are told by Theon of Smyrna that the Pythagoreans described concord \((\text{harmonía})\) as “an attunement of opposites, a unification of the many, a reconciliation of dissentients.” The last phrase is found again in a fragment attributed to Philolaos.24

What was the origin of this preconception? It may be said that it was derived from Anaximander, who spoke of the encroachment of one opposite on the other as an “injustice” to which a “penalty” was attached. But the Pythagorean terminology was different. The terms \textit{dicha phronéein} “dissension” and \textit{symphrónasis} “reconciliation” are Doric, and their Attic equivalents are \textit{stásidzein} and \textit{homónoia}, corresponding to the Latin \textit{certamen} and \textit{concordia}. Both these terms are derived from social relationships: \textit{stásis} means party strife or civil war, \textit{homónoia} means civil peace or concord. Thus, the \textit{symphrónasis} or
\`{h}om\`{o}noia of the Pythagoreans expressed the subjective attitude characteristic of the class which claimed to have resolved the old class-struggle in democracy. The doctrine of the fusion of opposites in the mean was generated by the rise of the middle class intermediate between the landowners and the serfs. And of this development in Greek philosophy we have a striking piece of independent evidence in the poetry of Theognis, who had lived to see his native Megara pass into the control of the hated democrats.\textsuperscript{25}

In our rams, asses and horses we endeavour to preserve a noble breed, and we like to mate them with a good stock. Yet the nobleman does not scruple to marry a low-born wife, so long as she brings him money, nor does a woman refuse the hand of a low-born suitor, preferring riches to nobility. What they honour is money. The nobleman marries into a family of base birth, the base-born into a noble family. Wealth has blended breed. So do not wonder that the breed of the citizens is dying out; for noble is being blended with base.

In these words we have in epitome the whole history of the fall of the hereditary nobility and the rise of the middle class. Theognis was not a philosopher—he is merely describing, as one bitterly opposed to them, the changes he saw taking place in the society of his time, and what did he see? He saw the opposites, \textit{esthlos} and \textit{kakos}, whom as an aristocrat he wished to keep apart, being blended by the wealth of the new middle class.

This conclusion does not, of course, affect in any way the objective value of the mathematical discovery made by Pythagoras. Its importance is that it shows how social progress had resulted in an extension of knowledge by inducing those engaged in it to adopt a fresh point of view. Just as the advancement of knowledge enables man to extend his control of matter, so material advancement enables him to extend his knowledge.

The doctrine of the mean was applied to medicine by a younger contemporary of Pythagoras himself, Alkmaion of Kroton, who declared that \textit{“health consisted in the enjoyment}
by the powers—the wet and dry, the hot and cold, the bitter and sweet, and so on—of equal rights (isonomia), while the monarchy of one or other of them was conducive to sickness.”

Here the political significance of the conception is undisguised. The reference of monarchia is probably to tyranny, because that is the word used of the tyranny in the Ionic dialect, and the state of health is described explicitly as isonomia—the watchword of democracy.

The final stage in the scientific development of this theory, which the Pythagoreans applied to mathematics, medicine and astronomy, was reached when Hippokrates, who was deeply influenced by Alkmaion, applied it to the evolution of the human race.

If the sick had benefited by the same diet and regimen as the healthy—if there had been nothing better to be found, the art of medicine would never have been discovered or sought after—there would have been no need for it. What forced men to seek and find medicine was sheer necessity, because the sick do not, and never did, benefit by the same regimen as the healthy. To go still further back, I maintain that even the mode of life and diet which we enjoy at the present day would never have been discovered, if men had been content with the same food and drink as the other animals, such as oxen and horses, which feed, grow up and live without pain on fruit, wood and grass, without the need for any other diet. Yet in the beginning, I believe, this was the diet of man himself. Our present mode of life is in my opinion the outcome of a long period of invention and elaboration. So long as men partook of crude foods strong in quality and uncompounded, their brutish diet subjected them to terrible sufferings—just the same as they would suffer now, attacked by acute pains and diseases quickly followed by death. In former ages no doubt they suffered less, because they were used to it, but severely even then. Many of them, whose constitutions were too weak to stand it, naturally perished, but the stronger resisted, just as now some men dispose of strong foods without difficulty, others only with severe pain. And that I think is the reason why men sought for a diet in harmony with their constitutions until they discovered the diet which we use now.
It was the Orphics who, following Hesiod, had first thought of human life as a struggle, because for the masses whose aspirations they voiced it was a struggle; but, since those masses were unconscious of their strength and therefore unable to exert it, they had placed the prize of victory the other side of death. Since then, however, the new middle class had thrown itself into the struggle and won the prize of democracy; and accordingly the world order appeared to them as a cessation of the agelong strife of opposites, which by blending and merging into one another had ceased to be opposites; and these ideas were then applied to the historical process which had engendered them. Human civilisation appeared in retrospect as a dynamic and progressive conflict, in which men had been compelled by their material needs to extend their mastery of their material environment. All this is implicit in the words just quoted, but already a generation before Hippokrates the same ideas had been worked out in poetry by Æschylus, who was himself a Pythagorean and a democrat.
XIII

ATHENS AND PERSIA

The earliest inhabitants of Mesopotamia were Semitic nomads from the Arabian desert who had begun to clear the swamps and till the soil by irrigation when they were subjugated by Sumerian invaders from the east. For a short time after the conquest the whole area was ruled under a centralised monarchy, but before long it broke up into a number of agricultural city-states, each ruled by a hereditary priest-king. With the rapid advance of agriculture and metallurgy, the competition between these states became intense, and in each state there arose a merchant class opposed to the ruling priesthood. The role of such usurpers as Urukagina of Lagash seems to have resembled that of the Greek tyrants. But these Sumerian city-states developed differently from the Greek. The needs of irrigation imposed a check on the development of property in land and the freedom of communication facilitated expansion by means of war. The first imperialist unification of Babylonia was effected by Sharrukin and his successors, a dynasty belonging to the Semitic stock, but it was followed by a period of civil wars in which the Sumerian nobility recovered their position. Then, towards the end of the third millennium, Hammurabi of Babylon built up an empire which extended as far as Armenia in the north and Palestine in the west. The Babylonian dynasty was overthrown by the Assyrians, who however made no attempt to organise their conquests, and their empire broke up. The second great imperialist movement took place under the Persian dynasty of the Achaemenidai, who by the end of the sixth century had subjugated Lydia, Ionia, Babylon and Egypt.

The Persian Empire was far too strong for the Greeks to attack it, and they were therefore unable to unite on the basis of imperialist expansion in the east. Similarly, in the west, expansion was restricted by the growing power of Carthage.
Hemmed in on both sides, the Greek city-states were forced along the path of internal development. The competition between them was so keen that there was no possibility of organised resistance to the Persian conquest of Ionia. After the fall of Miletos, a large part of her trade went to Athens and Corinth. The Persian capture of Samos, at a time when it was heading under Polykrates for the commercial hegemony of the Ægean, removed an obstacle from the path of the Athenian tyrants, who were aiming at the same objective. Consequently, when in 499 B.C. the Ionian Greeks revolted, they received little help from the mainland, and the revolt was suppressed. The mainland Greeks then found themselves threatened by the same fate. The effect was to intensify the internal contradictions in each state.

The Athenians knew that, if they submitted, they would be subjected to tribute and to the rule of a tyrant in the Persian interest. The democratic movement would therefore be arrested. On the other hand, if they resisted, they would have to seek help from Sparta, whose attitude to the democracy they had already experienced. In these circumstances the only chance of preserving the democracy was to fight Persia with Spartan assistance in the hope that victory would give them sufficient strength to stand up to their former ally. This policy was eventually adopted, with signal success, but only because the people were strong enough to force it through.

The democratic revolution effected under the leadership of Kleisthenes was the outcome of a three-cornered struggle in which the opposition to democracy was divided. After this defeat, the reactionaries closed their ranks. The differences between the followers of Hippias and of Isagoras, both intent on overthrowing the democracy, so far disappeared that in the year 506 Sparta sent another expedition to Attica with the object of restoring Hippias. The expedition broke up owing to the withdrawal at the last minute of Corinth, who had no desire to see Spartan influence extended north of the Isthmus or to weaken the Athenians at a time when they were engaged in a trade-war with her own commercial rival, Aigina.

While Hippias appealed to Sparta, Kleisthenes appealed to Persia. Without consulting the people, he offered to submit to
the Persians, no doubt on the understanding that he would be installed as tyrant. This action on his part is not adequately explained by fear of Sparta. The lower classes, whom he had excluded from the franchise, were already beginning to make their influence felt, and so, as leader of the middle class, Kleisthenes was faced with the choice of retreating from democracy or being ultimately swept aside. When the nature of his negotiations with Persia became known, he attempted to cover himself by repudiating his envoys, apparently without success, because shortly afterwards he dropped out of Athenian politics entirely. What happened to him is obscure, but he is said to have been sentenced to exile.

Weakened by the loss of their leader, the Alkmaionidai moved still further to the right. It was probably with their support that the adherents of Hippias secured the election as archon of Hipparchos, a close relative of Hippias himself (496 B.C.). Meanwhile, having lost confidence in Sparta, Hippias went to Sardis to press his claims, in which his ancestral rivals the Alkmaionidai had now acquiesced, as the prospective tyrant of an Athens subjugated by Persia. The moderates had drifted over to the reactionaries.

During the next three years, while the Persians were crushing the Ionian revolt and laying plans for a campaign against the mainland, two new figures appear on the scene. One is Themistokles, the new leader of the radical democrats, who was elected to the archonship in 493. Themistokles was the first political leader at Athens who did not belong to one of the old noble families. He had risen to power by detaching the lower middle class from the Alkmaionidai, but he was not yet strong enough to pursue an independent line, and contented himself with playing off his opponents against each other. The other was Miltiades, whose father had been installed by Peisistratos as tyrant of the Thracian Chersonese (Gallipoli) after its annexation by Athens. Miltiades had succeeded his father, but he had broken with the Peisistratidai by supporting the Ionians, and now, after the failure of the revolt, he was back at Athens as a fugitive. Miltiades belonged to the illustrious clan of the Philaidai. He was not, of course, a democrat, but he saw the opportunity of rallying to himself the support of the people
against the reactionary and defeatist policy of the Peisistratidai and the Alkmaionidai by placing before them the alternative of fighting Persia with Spartan aid. His opponents tried to forestall him by impeaching him on a charge of misgovernment in the Chersonese, but Miltiades was acquitted. His acquittal shows that Themistokles had decided, for the time being, to support him.

After mopping up Ionia, the Persians closed in on Euboia and landed a division at Marathon. The Athenians sent an urgent appeal to Sparta, but the Spartans procrastinated. Evidently there were many of them who thought that, notwithstanding the risk to themselves, the best course was to leave Athenian democracy to the Persians. Meanwhile, at the head of the Athenian army, Miltiades attacked at Marathon. The battle was short, but long enough for Hippias, watching from a Persian flagship, to see a flash from a shield on the heights overlooking the bay. It was a signal to him—a wink from the Alkmaionidai to say that they were ready to betray the city to the tyrant from whom they had delivered it twenty years before. The Athenians fought well and drove the Persians into the sea, then rushed back to the city to meet the danger of an enemy landing at Phaleron. The Persians did in fact cruise into Phaleron, awaiting a signal to land, but, thanks to the result of Marathon, the Alkmaionidai did not venture to wink again. In the evening the Spartan army arrived, to be informed by the victorious Athenians that their assistance was no longer required. There was nothing for the Spartan commander to do but to present his compliments and retire. Once more the Spartans had miscalculated.

A few months after Marathon, Miltiades led an expedition against the island of Paros, which had gone over to the Persians. The circumstances of the expedition are obscure, but its object was probably, as Walker has suggested, to organise the Cyclades as an outer line of defence against the Persians, for whom the defeat at Marathon had not been in any way decisive. The expedition ended in a complete fiasco, and on his return Miltiades was impeached by Xanthippos, the brother-in-law of Megakles, who was the new chief of the Alkmaionidai. Miltiades was already dying of a wound he had received
during the expedition. But for that he would have been sentenced to death. As it was, the sentence was reduced to a fine, and he died shortly afterwards.

Walker says that the failure of this expedition "was a blow to the cause which Themistokles had at heart, and he must have used his influence to secure the acquittal of Miltiades, or at least the mitigation of the sentence." This view renders the course of events unintelligible. On this occasion, as at the previous trial two years before, the prosecutors of Miltiades were the Alkmaionidai. At the previous trial, as we have seen, Miltiades, then a newcomer with no organised following, was acquitted. Since then the Battle of Marathon had been won; Miltiades had been acclaimed as the saviour of Athens, while the Alkmaionidai had suffered a crushing defeat and lay under a suspicion of treachery which it took them a generation to live down. It is incredible that they could have secured the condemnation of Miltiades in these circumstances without the support of Themistokles. Nor are the motives of Themistokles far to seek. He had supported the anti-Persian policy of Miltiades because he was not yet strong enough to pursue it independently, but he knew that the ultimate objective of this scion of the Philaidai was no more democratic than that of other wealthy noblemen who had offered their services to the people. The radicals were beginning to learn their lesson. Therefore, at the first opportunity, he took advantage of the division between Miltiades and the Alkmaionidai to get rid of Miltiades. And shortly afterwards he succeeded in getting rid of the Alkmaionidai. In 487 their nominee, Hipparchos, was banished; in the following year their leader, Megakles, was banished; in 484 Xanthippos, the prosecutor of Miltiades, was banished; in 482 Aristides, one of their most influential adherents, was banished. Thus, in the years following Marathon, one after another of the opponents of Themistokles was swept off the board. Thanks to the promptitude with which they had dealt with Miltiades, the people were able to take the defence of their country into their own hands.

Themistokles saw that, notwithstanding the victory of Marathon, the real struggle with Persia was still to come, and he saw that the only hope of final victory lay in the construction
of a navy. This policy was opposed by the Alkmaionidai, because it meant an access of power to the poorest class of the city and the ports, from which the personnel of the navy would have to be drawn. Themistokles carried it through in spite of them. Even so, their opposition was very nearly fatal, because, when the decisive moment came, the new navy was still not strong enough for Athens to carry her claim to the supreme command at sea.

Meanwhile the Emperor Xerxes, who had succeeded his father, Darius, was preparing a full-scale invasion of Greece. The army he had mustered was too large to be transported across the Egean, and accordingly it marched overland by a bridge of pontoons over the Hellespont and thence along the Thracean coast into Thessaly. Its advance was to be covered by the fleet, which could be used to land troops in the enemy's rear if he ventured to resist. It was a formidable armada, and the position of Sparta and Athens, both marked out for exemplary punishment, might well have seemed desperate.

On the situation created by the Persian Wars Bury wrote:

The Persian war, in its effects on Greece, illustrates the operation of a general law which governs human societies. Pressure from without, whether on a nation or a race, tends to promote union and cohesion within. In the case of a nation the danger of foreign attack increases the sense of unity among individual citizens and strengthens the central power. In the case of a race, it tends to weld the individual communities into a nation or federation. In the latter case, the chance of realising a complete or permanent unity depends partly on the strength and duration of the external pressure, partly upon the degree of strength in the instinct for independence which has hitherto hindered the political atoms from cohesion.

It is not often that modern English historians venture to formulate general laws of human society, and this exception is not a very happy one. Indeed, it is difficult to see what relation it bears to the events in which its operation is said to be illustrated. When the Ionian cities were first threatened with the loss of their independence, there was mooted, it is true, a
proposal for a pan-Ionian union, but nothing came of it. When these cities endeavoured to throw off the Persian yoke, they appealed for assistance to Sparta and Athens, but the response was chilling, and the revolt collapsed owing to defections among themselves. We have already seen how first Kleisthenes and then Hippias had offered to sell Athens for their own advantage, and the pressure that prompted these offers was internal. Late in the year 481, when the Persian plans were complete, delegates from a number of Greek states met at the Isthmus to concert their defence under the leadership of Sparta, who, thanks to her unrivalled army, was still the most powerful state in Greece. Corinth and Athens were willing to co-operate, and Athens reached an agreement with Aigina. The Thessalians and Boeotians also joined the confederacy, but they were known to be unreliable. The ruling aristocracy of Thebes was pro-Persian, and so was the Thessalian clan of the Aleuadai. In the Peloponnese itself, Argos, who had recently been defeated but not conquered by Sparta and was now leaning towards democracy, refused to join, and so did the Achæan cities along the northern coast. Across the Gulf of Corinth, the Delphic Oracle was more than ever equivocal, and there were grounds for suspecting that it was ready to go over to Xerxes. Further north, the city of Kerkyra, which was a commercial rival of Corinth for the trade with the west, promised to send assistance, but failed to do so. Emissaries were sent from the congress to the Ægean and to the west, but the results were negative. There was no question of winning over the Ionians, who, thanks to the conciliatory policy astutely adopted by Persia after the revolt, were now furnishing contingents to the Persian fleet. The cities of Crete devoutly sheltered behind an oracle from Delphi. In the west, probably as a result of Persian diplomacy, Gelon, the tyrant of Syracuse, found himself preoccupied with a war against Carthage, and perhaps too he paused to reflect that the fall of Corinth and Athens might react not unfavourably on Syracusan trade. It must be admitted that the response to this pan-Hellenic clarion call from the Isthmus was discouraging. Apart from the class divisions inside each “political atom,” the smaller states were evidently actuated by one or both of two motives—the belief that the
external pressure was so strong as to render resistance futile, and the fear that unity under Spartan rule would prove hardly more congenial than the present lot of Ionia.

The Greeks were heavily outnumbered both on land and sea. Neither their army nor their fleet could afford to offer resistance except in narrow positions where the enemy would be unable to deploy his forces. On the other hand, if they could inflict a defeat on the enemy at sea, they would be able to draw off his army by harrying the coast of Asia Minor. The difficulty was to decide where to meet him. The Spartans had strong reasons for awaiting the enemy at the Isthmus. If they sent their troops further north, they would be exposed to a Persian landing on the coast of Argos, which, if it was followed, as it well might be, by a rising of the serf population of Sparta itself, would be fatal. On the other hand, if the defence were confined to the Peloponnese, Athens, being unprotected, would probably come to terms, and without the Athenian fleet the Spartans would soon be forced back from the Isthmus. Accordingly, Themistokles proposed that the Spartan army should march north and hold the pass of Tempe, the gateway of Thessaly, while the fleet sought an engagement with the enemy at the northern entrance to the Euripos.

The Spartans accepted this plan, but without the energy necessary to make it a success. They sent a small force to Tempe, but withdrew without fighting. Then they sent a still smaller force to Thermopylai, the pass leading from Thessaly into Boiotia, which the Persians caught in the rear and annihilated. Boiotia and Attica were now defenceless. After an inconclusive engagement off Artemision, the Greek fleet withdrew to the channel between the Attic mainland and the island of Salamis. The population of Attica was hastily evacuated to Salamis, Aigina and Troizen. Shortly afterwards the Persian army entered Attica, ravaged the countryside, seized the Akropolis, and burnt the temples to the ground.

The Greek defence was now cracking up. The Spartans wanted to withdraw the fleet to the coast of Megara and revert to their original plan of making a stand at the Isthmus. This meant abandoning the Athenian refugees on Salamis and relinquishing the one remaining chance of meeting the Persian
fleet in narrow waters. Themistokles rose to the occasion. He declared that, if Salamis were abandoned, the Athenians would take their refugees on board their ships and migrate *en masse* to Italy. Meanwhile he sent a message to the Persians suggesting that they should attack immediately, as the Greek fleet was planning to escape. It was now late in the autumn, and the Persians, impatient of delay, fell into the trap. Caught between Salamis and the mainland, their ships fell into disorder and they suffered a crushing defeat. Xerxes withdrew his fleet to Asia for the winter, leaving his army under Mardonios in Thessaly.

At the beginning of the following year (479), Aristeides, who had been recalled with other exiles at the outbreak of the war, was elected to the command of the Athenian forces in place of Themistokles. This suggests that the Athenian resistance (Attica was still evacuated) was near breaking-point; but, when Mardonios offered Athens a separate peace, the offer was fiercely rejected and a citizen who supported it was lynched, together with his wife and family. Another urgent appeal was sent to Sparta, and after an agonising delay a Spartan army under Pausanias crossed the Isthmus. Mardonios met it in Boiotia, and the result was a decisive victory for the Spartans. The crisis was now over. The Ionians rose in revolt and were organised under Athenian leadership in an anti-Persian confederacy.

The next few years were occupied in harrying the Persians throughout the Ægean as far as Cyprus and the coast of Phœnicia. There now opened before the victors a new and alluring prospect of commercial expansion. On the Athenian side, these operations were conducted by Aristeides and Kimon, the son of Miltiades, who had married a granddaughter of Megakles. The rival clans of the Philaidai and the Alkmaionidai were thus reconciled, and between them, in 471, they secured the banishment of Themistokles, who fled to Argos and there engaged in anti-Spartan intrigues. At first, under Pausanias, the Spartans had taken an active part in the Ionian operations, but in 476 Pausanias was recalled and accused of intriguing first with Persia and later with Themistokles for the overthrow of the Spartan constitution by means of an insurrection among the serfs. Pausanias was put to death, and in response to a
Spartan protest Themistokles was summoned home to answer a charge of treason. Failing to appear, he was hunted from Argos to Kerkyra, from Kerkyra across the mountains to the Ægean coast, and thence to Ephesos, where he found safety under the protection of the Persian Emperor.

This is a startling bouleversement. What had happened? We are told that Pausanias had his head turned by success, and that as a novus homo Themistokles was no match for the combined prestige of his high-born opponents; but this is mere tittle-tattle of the same order as the explanation offered by Plutarch, who says that Themistokles fell from power “because the people were fed up with him.”

The political alignments at Athens and Sparta had changed because the situation had changed. The objectives remained in each case the same. When Persia had been strong, the Alkmaionidai had counselled submission, but Themistokles had carried through the alternative policy of resisting her with the aid of Sparta. Now Persia is weak. The Alkmaionidai are all for organising Ionia in an anti-Persian crusade. Themistokles, on the other hand, is determined to oppose Sparta, if necessary with Persian assistance.

The war had left Athens at an advantage. Thanks to her fleet and to her commercial organisation, she was able to follow up the victory. The wealthy commercial houses seized this opportunity of securing the economic control of the Ægean and at the same time they were anxious to cultivate friendly relations with the anti-democratic government of Sparta. That government had been shaken. Unless it were to abandon its traditional policy, it stood to gain comparatively little from the war, but it could not embark on a policy of commercial expansion without endangering the supremacy at home of the land-owning aristocracy whose interests it represented. It was forced therefore to recall Pausanias, who was evidently aiming at a tyranny. Themistokles perceived that, in the new situation, the danger threatening Athenian democracy was not the might of Persia, which had now been broken, but the anti-democratic régime of Sparta, and therefore he supported the attempt of Pausanias to overthrow it. But the Athenian people, whose nationalist passions had been inflamed by the war, could not
be persuaded that Persia was no longer the enemy, especially as the prospect of enrichment offered by the conservative opposition was substantial. They were caught off their guard, and consequently they were induced to drop their pilot. They paid the price seventy years later, when, with a Spartan army at their gates, their democratic rights were torn from them in a bloody counter-revolution (404 B.C.).

Seven years after the banishment of Themistokles the town of Sparta was destroyed by an earthquake (464 B.C.). Hundreds of citizens perished. It seemed to the serfs that at last the hour of their deliverance was come. In many parts of Laconia and all over Messenia they rose in revolt. The Spartans were saved by a contingent of troops from Mantineia in Arcadia, where they had installed a régime friendly to themselves after the war. The rebels retreated to the fastness of Mount Ithome in Messenia, where they held out for several years. The Spartans were not trained for siege operations, and they appealed to Athens to send them troops. The appeal met with strenuous opposition from Ephialtes, the new leader of the radical party and, like Themistokles, a commoner. The radicals saw that they had now an opportunity, which was not likely to recur, of retrieving the blow they had suffered by the loss of Themistokles. On the other side, the conservatives were equally intent on responding to the appeal, and the influence of Kimon prevailed. The Assembly voted him a force of 4,000 heavy-armed troops, with which he hastened to Messenia to lay siege to Mount Ithome. But still the siege made no progress, there was friction between the Athenian and Spartan troops, and eventually the Spartan Government was obliged to request their allies to return home. The causes of the friction are not stated, but it has rightly been conjectured that Kimon was unable to restrain the sympathy of his rank and file for the insurgents. When Kimon returned to Athens, he found both himself and his party utterly discredited. The alliance with Sparta, which had been maintained since the Persian War, was annulled, and an alliance was concluded with her rival, Argos, instead. In the following year Kimon was banished.

The radicals were again in power. It was too late for effective intervention in Sparta, but they were able to introduce some
important reforms at home. Since the year 480, when the conservatives had regained the ascendancy, the Council of the Areopagus, which had always been the most reactionary body in the state, had recovered a large measure of its influence. At the instance of Ephialtes, all the powers of the Council, excepting its jurisdiction in cases of homicide, were divided between the Council of the Five Hundred, the Assembly, and the popular courts of law. The significance of this reform is shown by the fact that it was repealed by the counter-revolutionaries at the end of the Peloponnesian War; nor was it lost on the conservatives at the time, for a few months later Ephialtes was assassinated. The radicals replied by removing the last remaining restrictions on the franchise. The offices of state were thrown open to the lowest property class but one, and the lowest class of all, though still formally disqualified, were in practice admitted by a legal fiction. This was in 456 B.C., the year in which Æschylus died.

Meanwhile the structure of Athenian society was being surreptitiously but rapidly transformed by the development of slave labour and the conversion of the anti-Persian confederacy into an Athenian Empire. By the middle of the century Athens had entered irrevocably on the path of imperialist expansion. This development will be examined in a later chapter. Its immediate effect was to relieve the class tension among the citizen population by joint exploitation of slavery and empire. The conflict underlying the democratic revolution was now to be solved by the negation of democracy. Of this negative aspect of the revolution, except to some extent in his latest work, Æschylus was hardly aware; but he was intensely conscious of its positive aspect, which was indeed the inspiration of his art. For him, who was old enough to remember the tyranny of Hippias, the struggle had been won, the opposites had been reconciled.
XIV

TETRALOGY

The festival of the City Dionysia, as reorganised by Kleisthenes at the end of the sixth century, lasted five or six days. The programme of the first day has been described in Chapter X. The order of events during the remainder of the festival is uncertain. The regulations governing the competitions were as follows.¹

Ten dithyrambs were performed, one from each tribe. The training of the choir devolved on a wealthy citizen nominated by and from the tribe and known as the choregós. If a citizen nominated for this purpose considered that the choice should have fallen on another member of his tribe, he could challenge him either to take his place as choregós or to exchange properties. A panel of judges was elected by the Council of Five Hundred with the assistance of the choregoi, and from this panel ten names were selected by lot. The prize, as we have already remarked, was a bull.

The dramatic performances were independent of the tribal system. It was open to any citizen to compete. The citizen who wished to do so submitted to the árkon epónymos four plays, consisting of three tragedies and one satyr play. The nature of the satyr play will be explained later. This group of four plays was known in later times as a tetralogy, and the three tragedies taken by themselves were known as a trilogy. Throughout the fifth century there was never a dearth of competitors. From the applicants the árkon selected three, to each of whom he assigned a choregós nominated by him from the citizen body as a whole. The rules relating to the choregoi and the judges were the same as for the dithyramb. The prize was a goat. The word tragoidía means properly "goat-song."

The reason why the dithyrambic competition was tribal and the dramatic non-tribal is not clear. It seems probable that the
tribal character of the former was anterior to the reorganisation of the festival by Kleisthenes, because otherwise it is hard to see why he should have discriminated between them. The hypothesis that suggests itself is that the dithyrambic contest existed in some form before the tyranny of Peisistratos, who in taking it over left its tribal character undisturbed, but took care to place the dramatic contest, which was new, on a more popular basis.

More important is the wider question why all the performances at this festival, dithyrambic and dramatic alike, were competitive. There is nothing corresponding to this feature in mediaeval drama. The competition was very keen. Rich citizens vied with one another as choregoi for the sake of political prestige. Not only was the archon who selected the three tetralogies a political officer who changed from year to year, but the method of assigning them to the three choregoi nominated by him did not preclude the possibility of collusion between the choregos and the poet. In 493 B.C. a tragedy called The Sack of Miletos was produced by Phrynichos. Its subject was the fall of that city at the close of the Ionian revolt. The play aroused great indignation—evidently among the adherents of the pro-Persian Alkmaionidai—and the author was fined. Seventeen years later Themistokles dedicated a votive tablet commemorating a victory won at the tragic contests by him as choregos and Phrynichos as poet. We cannot affirm that Themistokles was choregos to The Sack of Miletos, but it is impossible not to suspect that he had a hand in its production. It was, of course, unusual for the subject of a tragedy to be drawn from contemporary life, but in many of the extant tragedies, especially by Æschylus and Euripides, the myths are handled with open reference to political events, and it follows that both the choice of the archon and the verdict of the judges must have been influenced, consciously in some cases, by political bias.

What, then, was the origin of this element of civic rivalry represented by the institution of the choregia? It was not the only institution of its kind. Besides the choregos, there was the gymnasiarchos and the hestiator, both nominated in the manner described, the former for training boys for the athletic festivals,
the latter for giving public feasts to the members of his tribe. The generic term for services of this kind was leitourgía, which is derived from látion or látion, the Æolic equivalent of prytnéton. These “services in the Men’s House” carry us back to the days before Theseus, when every Attic village settlement had its own prytnéton (pp. 74–5), in which the tribesmen met under the presidency of the local chief for ritual celebrations, preparing boys for initiation, and communal meals. The leitourgíai are the form in which these primitive customs had been reorganised under the democratic constitution—reorganised rather than revived, because there is evidence that they had lingered on under the aristocracy in the practice of keeping open house. Thus, we are told by Plutarch, with references to Aristotle and Kratinos, that Kimon the son of Miltiades used to keep at home a table plain but sufficient for a large number, to which all members of his dèmos had free access:

Kimon’s generosity outdid all the old Athenian hospitality and liberality. . . . By offering the use of his house as a prytnéton and by permitting travellers to eat the fruits growing on his estate, he seemed to restore to the world that community of goods which is fabled to have existed in the reign of Kronos.

In thus acting as a hestíaor on his own account, Kimon, who was very proud of his aristocratic traditions, was evidently maintaining an old family custom, in which Plutarch rightly recognises a relic of primitive communism.

Our next task must be to solve, if possible, the problems presented by the tetralogy. Why was the candidate for the tragic prize required to offer three tragedies and a satyr play?

The satyr play resembled tragedy in its structure, but in tone it was burlesque, and its chorus always represented a band of satyrs. The satyrs were mythical creatures part man, part beast. Their origin is at present unknown. The evidence relating to them has been assembled by Pickard-Cambridge together with a full statement of the insuperable objections to the theory (based on a misunderstanding of Aristotle) that the satyr play represents the original element in the art of tragedy,
from which tragedy proper was an offshoot. Pickard-Cambridge’s treatment of this question leaves nothing to be desired, but, since it is possible in my opinion to extract from the evidence a more positive conclusion than he has done, it is necessary to deal briefly with certain points.

First of all, let us take the ancient tradition. It was Arion at Corinth who “first introduced satyrs speaking in verse,” and it was Pratinas of Phleious (a few miles south of Corinth) who “first produced satyr plays.” Pratinas had settled at Athens, where he competed with Æschylus for the tragic prize between 499 and 496 B.C. He is said to have written fifty plays, of which thirty-two were satyric. It follows that he must have been competing at Athens before the rule of the tetralogy came into force, otherwise the ratio between these two figures cannot be explained. Now, we know that the festival was reorganised during the last decade of the sixth century—probably in 502/1 B.C., and it is therefore very likely that the rule of the tetralogy was instituted then. This conclusion, that, so far from representing the kernel of tragedy, the satyr play was a late accretion, is confirmed by a consideration of its structure, which, so far as can be judged from the extant remains, followed exactly the same lines as tragedy. If the satyric chorus is regarded as a survival of the primitive form of the tragic chorus, it becomes impossible to explain why there are no other primitive features in the structure of the satyr play. Nothing further need be said here regarding the other arguments adduced for this theory, which have been rebutted by Pickard-Cambridge. My conclusion is therefore as follows. Of the early history of satyric drama at Corinth and Phleious, nothing is known beyond the bare facts recorded in the tradition already mentioned. It was imported into the Athenian convention by Pratinas during the last quarter of the sixth century B.C. and its structure was then assimilated to that of tragedy, which was already approaching maturity. Finally, in the last decade of the century, when the City Dionysia was reorganised, it was given a permanent place in the new convention of the tetralogy, which it retained almost without exception throughout the ensuing century.

Before proceeding further, we must pause to deal with a
difficulty which has been raised—gratuitously, as it seems to me—by Pickard-Cambridge himself. Aristotle's statement that "tragedy arose from the leaders of the dithyramb" has been discussed at length in a previous chapter, where it was found to accord both with the internal Greek evidence and with the conclusions drawn from our general study of primitive ritual. Aristotle continues in the same passage as follows:

Beginning with small plots and humorous diction, on account of its satyr-like origin (ek satyrikos), tragedy eventually became serious, and the iambic trimeter was substituted for the trochaic tetrameter, the latter having been employed at first on account of the satyr-like (satyrikén) and dance-like character of the poetry.

The question turns on the meaning of satyrikós, literally "satyr-like." This word had two applications. First, in general, it meant "like a satyr" or "pertaining to a satyr," just as basilikós meant "kingly" or "pertaining to a king." The satyrs were lascivious creatures, and the nearest equivalent to satyrikós in this sense was hybristikós, "lewd," "wanton," "obscene," "boisterous," "full of animal spirits." Secondly, it was used in a technical sense with special reference to satyr plays, which were commonly called sátyroi but also sometimes satyrika drámata. Both senses follow naturally from the formation of the word. The first is not found earlier than Plutarch, while the second is attested by Plato, but, since the word does not occur more than a dozen times in all, this discrepancy is insignificant, and in fact it can be shown that the first sense was almost certainly familiar to Plato, who speaks of a sátyros hybrístés, a "wanton satyr," just as Plutarch describes someone as satyrikos kai hybristikós, "wanton and satyr-like."

Which, then, did Aristotle mean—that tragedy was originally boisterous, wanton, obscene, or that it originated in the satyr drama? Since either interpretation is linguistically possible, the point must be decided in the light of the general probabilities of the case. There is no evidence that the dithyramb had any connection with satyr drama, or that Aristotle thought it had. Therefore, if we understand him to mean that tragedy originated in the satyr drama, we are imputing to him a
contradiction. The alternative interpretation involves no difficulty at all. Originally, he says, tragedy was not serious; its plots were petty, its diction was comic—it was low, lewd, obscene. We are reminded of the dithyramb of Archilochos, performed when the leader was “thunderstruck with wine.” It seems clear, therefore, that this is what Aristotle meant.

I have dwelt on this question at some length, because Pickard-Cambridge’s treatment of it is a very serious blemish on an excellent book. After admitting that “we cannot tell” in which sense the word is used by Aristotle, he expresses the opinion that “the balance of probability is in favour of the literal interpretation,” i.e. the technical sense, referring to satyr drama, but repeats his caveat that this interpretation “cannot be held to be beyond dispute.” Then, throwing his own caveat to the winds, he proceeds to argue as though the alternative interpretation did not exist, and so, having convicted Aristotle of self-contradiction, reaches the following conclusion:

We have, in short, to admit with regret that it is impossible to accept Aristotle’s authority without question, and that he was probably using that liberty of theorising which those modern scholars who ask us to accept him as infallible have certainly not abandoned.

It is not necessary to believe in the infallibility of Aristotle in order to see that the method by which Pickard-Cambridge sets aside his authority at this vital point is thoroughly fallacious; and it is a matter for regret that a critic who has exposed so many pitfalls underlying current theories of the origin of tragedy should have stumbled into a ditch of his own digging.

It is more than likely that the celebrations of the Dionysiac thiasos contained much that we should describe as obscene. Primitive ritual abounds in sexual self-expression of all kinds, because its function is to make things grow by means of mimetic magic; and at the same time it is quite serious, because the fulfilment of that function is a stern necessity. But, as the real technique of production develops, the magical element decays, and then two things may happen. The ritual may pass into the official liturgy of a ruling class. In that case it becomes repressive, and the element of sexual self-expression is either eliminated
or else confined within prescribed limits. Or, alternatively, 'abandoned by the ruling class, it survives among the peasantry, for whom it provides a release from the inhibitions induced by social repression through obscene and riotous behaviour. In an earlier chapter it was argued that this was the stage which the Dionysiac passion play had reached at the time when it was adopted by the state as part of the City Dionysia. This created a new tension, which had an important effect on its development. While the middle class strove to refine its intellectual content and to remove it from direct contact with reality, the peasantry and urban proletariat continued to seek in it the fulfilment of its earlier function. The result was that, as Aristotle says, it took a long time to become serious. Indeed, the comic element was never entirely eliminated. While it was being extruded from the tragedies, it reappeared in the satyr play, and on this basis at the end of the sixth century the art-form attained a final equilibrium, which owed its stability to the fact that in the meantime the comic element was finding a new and independent outlet. Thus the evolution of tragedy and the emergence of comedy were both directly related to the interplay of internal tensions which is the dynamic of society.

In regard to comedy, I shall confine attention to those aspects which illustrate most clearly its connection with the art of tragedy. Starting from a comparison of the structure of Aristophanic comedy with the peasant festivals of modern Macedonia, which contain one or two specifically Dionysiac elements, Cornford has argued that Attic comedy is founded on the ritual pattern of death and resurrection which has been interpreted in the present work in the light of primitive initiation—the same ritual, in fact, to which I have traced the origin of tragedy. Cornford's theory is in need of modification at certain points. Assuming that both the Macedonian ritual and the structure of Attic comedy were more coherent than they really were, he has endeavoured in my opinion to prove too much. On the other hand, I am convinced that his general thesis—that comedy is derived from primitive ritual of the type which I have discussed in Chapter VIII—is sound. It is necessary to insist on this, because his theory has been challenged in toto by Pickard-Cambridge, who has no difficulty in pointing out
incidental defects but shows himself quite unable to appreciate its essential significance. Pickard-Cambridge’s point of view is that several of the features of comedy which Cornford has sought to explain are “natural.” Thus, discussing the part of the Cook in the *Knights*, who, as Cornford perceives, is related to the traditional doctor who restores the dead to life, he answers Cornford as follows:

The rejuvenation by cooking is surely no more than a reminiscence of the story of Medea and Pelias in a comic context—a variation on the rejuvenation of an elderly person which certainly does occur in several plays, and is natural enough in a comedy in which the old rustic was a traditional character and would be granted his heart’s desire best by becoming young again. It needs no ritual to explain this.

To this criticism, it may be suspected, Cornford would reply, quite rightly, that it leaves unexplained all the things that require to be explained. What is the significance of the myth of Medea and Pelias? Why was the old rustic a traditional character? Why does the theme of rejuvenation occur in several plays? For Pickard-Cambridge it is sufficient to say that these things were “natural.” The same point of view is expressed in his comment on the evidence relating to the animal disguises of the comic chorus.

Indeed, the practice of dressing up in the guise of animals is world-wide; in some countries it may go back to a totemistic origin; in others (or in the same) it may be connected with magic rites for securing the fertility of the ground or of the human species; and very often, probably oftener than anthropologists always allow, it may have been done just for fun, either because any religious reason for the custom has long been forgotten, or (perhaps more often) because the child in mankind dies hard.

It is world-wide, it may have been this or that, or it may have been just for fun. Such remarks as these show that Pickard-Cambridge’s mind moves within a narrow circle. Within that circle, no student of Greek drama is more thorough and acute; outside it, he does not think at all. The last remark, that the child in mankind dies hard, is to me unintelligible.
Like the dithyramb, comedy developed in Attica under influences from the Peloponnese. The medium through which these influences were conveyed was probably immigration, which, as we have seen, was going on throughout the sixth century. Unfortunately we know very little about Peloponnesian drama. There is evidence from an early period of a ritual drama connected with the cult of Artemis Orthia at Sparta and comprising two traditional figures, the quack-doctor and the old woman, which we meet again in Attic comedy; but these figures have a wide distribution, both in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, and it cannot therefore be assumed that Attic comedy derived them from the Peloponnese. There is also a record—probably from Sikyon, but the locality is not certain—of a band of mummers who entered the orchestra improvising a hymn to Dionysus. Their leader, whose face was smeared with soot, carried the phallus. After the hymn was finished, they ran up to individuals among the audience and mocked at them. It is tempting to recognise in the phallus the prototype of the modern maypole. The Black Man, whom we have already met at Eleutherai as Melanthos, is another traditional figure. The mocking of the bystanders is clearly related to the function of the Aristophanic parábasis.

It was in Megara, however, that Peloponnesian drama developed most rapidly and fully; and, since Megara is only a few miles across the Attic frontier, it may be regarded as certain that Attic comedy owed a good deal to this source. Moreover, we are expressly told that Megarian comedy developed under the democracy, which was established about 580 B.C.; and, since Megara was the first Peloponnesian state (perhaps, in the sixth century, the only one) to attain this stage, we have here a plain indication that comedy no less than tragedy was bound up with the democratic movement.

Attic comedy originated at the Dionysiac festival of the Lenaia, celebrated in December and probably identical with the Country Dionysia which was held about the same time in the Attic villages. In 487/6 B.C. competitions in comedy were officially instituted at the City Dionysia on the same basis as the tragic contests, except that the comic poet competed with a single play. It is noteworthy that this date falls at
a time when Themistokles, the leader of the radical democrats, was at the height of his power. It is possible that similar competitions were already being held unofficially at the Lenaia, but these did not receive state recognition until 442 B.C.

The Lenaia was originally a feast of the Lenai or "mad-women": that is to say, it was based on the ritual of a Dionysiac thiasos. It began, like the City Dionysia, with a pompé, the character of which can be partly deduced from Aristophanes' parody of the pompé at the Country Dionysia. The procession was headed by girls carrying sacrificial baskets and followed by a male choir whose leader carried the phallus. As they marched, the choir improvised a hymn, in the course of which they jeered at individuals among the crowd of spectators. An animal was sacrificed, and probably at this point a priest pronounced the words "Call the god!" to which the congregation responded, "Dionysus, son of Semele, giver of wealth!" It is to be presumed that the sacrifice was followed by a kómos. The word komoidía means "kómos-song." Thus, the ritual of the Lenaia reveals the same sequence—pompé, ágon, kómos—which we have already traced at the City Dionysia; and the possibility suggests itself that the latter festival had been consciously modelled on the Lenaia.

The comedies of Aristophanes (444–388 B.C.) are based on a structural pattern subject to considerable variation, but nevertheless clearly marked. The principal elements are the párodos or entry of the chorus: the ágon, an altercation or debate sometimes preceded by a fight; the parábasis, in which the poet addresses the audience through his chorus on personal and political matters; and the étodos, which usually has the character of a kómos. Interspersed between these are scenes of iambic dialogue in which one or more characters take part, and the párodos is preceded by a prologue.

Aristotle says that comedy arose "from the leaders of the phallic hymn," just as tragedy arose from the leaders of the dithyramb. What he means is clearly that it was the leader of the phallic hymn who by speaking in character transformed the ritual into drama, just as it was the leader of the dithyramb who became the tragic actor. It is generally agreed by modern critics that the prologue and other iambic scenes, in which the
dramatic element is concentrated, are of later origin than the other parts; and, when these are eliminated, we are left with the párodoς, which we recognise as the pompe, the agón, the parábasis, and the éxodos or kómos. Apart from the character of the agón, which is clearly founded on a ritual mock-fight, and the parábasis, which is peculiar to comedy, this is the sequence we have already identified as the substructure of tragedy. The two art-forms go back to a common origin.

The comic element in the tragic convention, represented by the satyr play, has now been accounted for, and it remains to be considered why the tragedies were composed in groups of three. On this question I wrote in my edition of the Oresteia:18

I do not believe that Æschylus invented the trilogy. The practice of composing tragedies in groups of three, even though they dealt with different themes, is not likely to have arisen from the innovation of a particular dramatist, nor would it have persisted after its significance had disappeared unless it had formed an ancient and fundamental part of the tragic convention.

This argument is demonstrably unsound. Why the Æschylean practice of composing tetralogies on a single theme was eventually abandoned is a question which will be considered in due course; but, since all the evidence goes to show that the satyr play was a late accretion, the assumption that the trilogy was primitive cannot be sustained.

In this matter I was misled by the seductive hypothesis, suggested by Murray, but unsupported by the evidence, that the trilogy was designed to represent the birth, death and resurrection of the god.19 That the art of tragedy goes back to ritual of this type seems to me certain, and the credit for discovering it belongs mainly to Jane Harrison, whose study of Greek religion was the starting-point for Cornford’s work on comedy and Murray’s on tragedy; but, whereas Cornford rightly looked for ritual vestiges in the basic structure of comedy, Murray concentrated his attention mainly upon the tragic plots, which from this point of view are a superficial element, and consequently in his case the hypothesis broke down. The trilogy is capable of a simpler explanation.
The plots of early tragedy, so Aristotle tells us, were small. How were they enlarged? A serious obstacle was presented by the chorus. The actor might change characters, but the chorus necessarily remained the same throughout the play. The only way in which this difficulty could be surmounted was to multiply the number of the plays. The several plays of the Greek trilogy corresponded functionally to the several acts of the Elizabethan play: they served to extend the scope of the plot by effecting complete breaks in the action. Without the trilogy, it would have been impossible for ᾿Æschylus to treat at length the myth of ᾿Edipus, which was one of the themes he handled in this way. The first play dealt with the father, the second with the son, the third with the son’s sons. Thus, the whole trilogy covered three generations. Sophokles, it is true, covered the first two generations in a single play, the ᾿Edipus Tyrannus, but he was only able to achieve this masterpiece of concentration because he had behind him his predecessor’s achievements on the larger scale.

To the question, did ᾿Æschylus invent the trilogy, all that can be replied is that he is known to have been writing not more than six years after the date at which the rule of the tetralogy was probably established in its final form, and therefore it is likely enough that he had a hand in fixing it. What is certain is that it was ᾿Æschylus who brought the tetralogy to perfection. We have seen how it had grown out of the social history of the period. ᾿Æschylus worked at it and fashioned it into a dramatic form which for breadth of scope, organic unity, and cumulative intensity, can only be compared with the symphony of Beethoven.

Some doubt has been expressed in modern times regarding the artistic propriety of the satyr play, and it must be admitted that the Ichneutai of Sophokles and the Cyclops of Euripides (the only ones that survive) cannot have done much to enhance the effect of the tragedies that preceded them. In the case of ᾿Æschylus, however, there are two reasons, apart from the paucity of the evidence, why we should withhold judgment. As a writer of satyr plays, he was regarded by the ancients as so far superior to Sophokles and Euripides that, while he was placed first, the second place was given to a dramatist whose
work is unknown to us, Achaios of Eretria. Furthermore, the Æschylean satyr play was an organic part of the tetralogy. Thus, the Proteus, which followed the trilogy of the Oresteia, dealt with the adventures of Menelaos after the Trojan War as a scherzo to his brother’s tragic homecoming; and it is not difficult to imagine a Proteus charged with the romantic atmosphere of the Odyssey which would round off in a whirl of irresponsible gaiety the liturgical grandeur of the Oresteia.²⁰

Even more significant was his treatment of the trilogy itself. In his hands, as we shall see in the next chapter, it became a vehicle perfectly adapted to the natural movement of his thought, being designed to express the offence, the counter-offence, and the reconciliation—strife and the reward of strife, the resolution of discord into harmony, the triumph of democracy.
Oresteia

Aeschylus was a native of Eleusis. His father’s name was Euphorion. We do not know the name of his clan, but his family belonged to the Eupatridai. This is important, because it means that he was heir to an aristocratic tradition going back to the tribal society of primitive Attica. The year of his birth was 525 B.C. He was therefore old enough to remember the tyranny of Hippias and to vote on the democratic reforms of Kleisthenes. He made his début at the City Dionysia in the year 500, but did not win the prize until fifteen years later. He fought at Marathon, where his brother Kynegeiros was killed, and again at Salamis. He is said to have composed about ninety plays in all, of which only seven have survived. Most of his life was spent in Attica, but he paid at least two visits to the court of Hieron, tyrant of Syracuse, where some of his plays were produced—the first about 471 B.C. and the second after the production of the Oresteia in 458. He died at Gela two years later, leaving a son, Euphorion, who won four victories with tetralogies which his father had composed but not produced.¹

He is described by Cicero as being “a Pythagorean as well as a poet—such is the tradition.”² Cicero had studied at Athens, so that, even if it were not abundantly confirmed by the internal evidence of the surviving plays, there would be no reason to reject this tradition, and Wilamowitz’s attitude on this point—he dismisses the statement as a “lapse of memory” on Cicero’s part—can only be described as perverse. It is also clear that Aeschylus was deeply imbued with the mystical traditions of his birthplace. According to one tradition, not very well authenticated, some of the costumes he had designed for the tragic stage were taken over by the high priests of Eleusis. It might appear on the face of it that the borrowing would rather have been the other way, but we must remember that the
Eleusinian Mysteries were being reorganised in this period no less than the City Dionysia, and therefore the tradition may be accepted as evidence of interaction between them. According to another, which goes back to Aristotle, Æschylus was prosecuted for revealing in his plays some of the mystical secrets, but was acquitted on the plea that he was unaware that they were secrets. We shall see that the dramatic use of mystical ideas is an outstanding feature of the Oresteia.

Of the seven surviving plays, the Suppliants is generally agreed to be the earliest and is usually assigned to the first decade of the century. The Persians was produced in 472, the Seven against Thebes in 467, and the Oresteia in 458. The date of the Prometheus Bound is still controversial, but for reasons which I have given elsewhere I believe that this is the latest of the extant plays, and the possibility cannot be excluded that it was one of those produced posthumously by Euphorion.9

The Suppliants and Prometheus were the first plays in their respective tetralogies, the Persians was the second, and the Seven was the third. The Oresteia is a complete trilogy—the only one we possess. Moreover, with the exception of the Persians, all these plays belonged to tetralogies of the interconnected or unitary type. The Suppliants and Prometheus are first acts, and the Seven against Thebes is a third act, in dramas of which the remainder has in each case been lost. Without the Oresteia, we should have no means of determining how Æschylus welded his three tragedies into a whole; with it, we have indirect evidence of considerable value for the problems presented by the other plays. For these reasons it is expedient, despite the chronological order, to give first place to the Oresteia.

When Pelops died, he left two sons, Atreus and Thyestes, who disputed the succession. Atreus drove his brother out of the country, but some time later, on the pretext of a reconciliation, he recalled him and entreated him to a feast at which he served up to him the flesh of his children, whom he had secretly murdered. When Thyestes discovered the crime, he cursed the House of Pelops. After the death of Atreus, the kingdom was divided between his sons, Agamemnon and Menelaos, who had married two sisters, Clytemnestra and Helen. Menelaos was visited by Paris, a son of the King of
Troy, who fell in love with Helen and eloped with her. That was the occasion of the Trojan War. The Greeks assembled at Aulis under the leadership of Agamemnon, but the departure of the expedition was delayed by a storm. Agamemnon was told by his prophet Kalchas that the storm was due to the anger of Artemis, who could only be appeased by the sacrifice of his daughter Iphigeneia. Accordingly, Odysseus was sent to Argos to fetch the girl from her mother on the pretext that she was to be married to Achilles, and she was slaughtered by her father. The expedition then sailed for Troy. Shortly afterwards, Clytemnestra began an intrigue with Aigisthos, a son of Thyestes who had escaped the feast which Atreus had given to his father. In order to facilitate her intrigue, she had her son Orestes, then a child, sent away to Phokis. The war lasted ten years. When Troy fell, the Greeks incurred the anger of the gods by plundering the temples, and consequently the fleet was scattered by thunder and lightning. Menelaos and Odysseus disappeared and did not return for many years. Agamemnon returned in safety, but was murdered by his wife with the complicity of her paramour. Kasandra, a daughter of the Trojan King, whom he had brought home as a concubine, was murdered at the same time. Some years later, Orestes received a command from Apollo’s oracle at Delphi to avenge his father’s murder. Returning in secret with his friend, Pylades, the son of his host at Phokis, he revealed himself to his surviving sister, Elektra, and with her assistance killed both his mother and Aigisthos. Pursued by his mother’s avenging spirits, the Erinyes, he fled to Delphi, where he was purified by Apollo. Still harried by the Erinyes, who refused to recognise the validity of his purification, he continued his wanderings until at last he was tried and acquitted on the charge of matricide at the Athenian Court of the Areopagus, founded for this purpose by Athena.

Such is the story of Orestes as told by Æschylus. The same story is told in the Homeric poems, but with no mention of the feast of Atreus, the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, the Delphic oracle, the persecution by the Erinyes, the purification by Apollo, or the trial for matricide. In judging the significance of these omissions, it has to be remembered, on the one hand,
that Homer does not purport to tell the story in full and, on the other, that there is a general tendency in epic to modify popular tradition in the interests of the monarchy. The feast of Atreus is a myth of the same type as the feast of Tantalos discussed in an earlier chapter (p. 113); the custom of human sacrifice at the inauguration of a campaign is attested elsewhere as a feature of early monarchy combined with a politically powerful priesthood; and the persecution of Orestes by his mother's Erinyes points to matrilineal descent. Of these three elements, which may all be regarded as primitive, the third survived independently in various local traditions. In one of these, Orestes was cured of his madness by sitting on a stone fetish called Zeus Kappotas, which was evidently a thunderstone; in another, he was cured after gnawing away one of his fingers, and dedicated a thank-offering of hair to the Erinyes. In a third, he was purified by nine men of Troizen at a holy stone in front of a temple of Artemis. In all these traditions Apollo plays no part, and in the third the idea of purification seems to have been superimposed on a preanthropomorphic cult like that of Zeus Kappotas. It may be inferred therefore that the purification by Apollo belongs to the period of the landed aristocracy, and this inference is supported by other evidence. It was during this period that the Spartans procured an oracle from Delphi authorising the removal of Orestes' bones from Tegea to Sparta in order to reinforce their claim to the political hegemony of the Pelopon- nese, and there is reason to believe that the lost Oresteia of Stesichoros was designed to serve Spartan interests. Lastly, the trial at the Areopagus is clearly an Athenian accretion, developed in conscious opposition to the Spartan version. It was probably Æschylus himself who assigned the rôle of prosecutors to the Erinyes and made the trial of Orestes the occasion for the institution of the Court. In the Elektra of Euripides the Erinyes simply vanish into the ground, overcome with grief at their defeat. In the Eumenides, too, they vanish into the ground, but conducted amidst popular rejoicing by Athena's escort. We may take it then that the escort and all that it implies was added by Æschylus. Thus, as he tells it, the story of Orestes is a stratified piece of social history embodying
the accumulated deposits of the primitive tribe, the early monarchy, aristocracy and democracy.  

The opening of the _Agamemnon_ is designed with reference to a distinctive feature of the plot. Clytemnestra is a conspirator and cannot speak her mind. Shakespeare would probably have revealed her purpose, as Seneca did, in a dialogue with Aigisthos or in soliloquies and asides; but the method of Æschylus is more economical. We hear her before we see her; we see her long before she speaks. Each time she appears at the threshold of the palace, the words of the Chorus provide an unconscious comment on what is passing in her mind, so that, when at last she speaks, we are ready to catch the hidden meaning in her words and are thus prepared for the final revelation of her motive, which is the more impressive because so long deferred.

The hour is shortly after midnight, the season late autumn, marked by the setting of the Pleiades, when it became dangerous to cross the sea. The Watchman has been on duty since the beginning of the year, the tenth of the war and, according to prophecy, the last.

He is tired, and longs to be released (1–2):

I’ve prayed God to deliver me from evil
Throughout a long year’s vigil.

A little later this prayer is repeated, but in consequence of what has intervened its significance has changed—it has become a prayer, not merely for his own release, but for the deliverance of the House he serves from the curse that hangs over it (16–21):

And when I start to sing or hum a tune,
And out of music cull sleep’s antidote,
I always weep the state of this great House,
Not in high feltte as it used to be.
But now at last may good news in a flash
Scatter the darkness and deliver us!

“Deliverance from evil” or “from labour” was one of many phrases which had passed into common speech from the
language of the mysteries, in which, as we have seen, it denoted the means whereby the mystic hoped to attain that state of spiritual bliss which was the reward of purification from the evils of mortality. The Watchman has no thought of this significance, but in the course of the trilogy it is gradually brought out.

The conquerors are asleep in the captured city, unconscious of the disasters that await them (347–9):

Free from the frosty sky,
From heaven's dew delivered—O how blest
Their sleep shall be, off guard the whole night long!

While Orestes is murdering his mother, the Trojan serving-women, who have fondly persuaded themselves that the House has at last been purified, chant a hymn, which, as will be seen later, is based on Eleusinian ritual (Cho. 941–4):

Cry alleluia, lift up in the house a song,
Deliverance from ill and from the waste of wealth
By the unholy sinners twain,
From rough thorny ways.

Soon afterwards the purifier is himself in desperate need of purification (Cho. 1057–8) and he is instructed by Apollo to go to Athens (Eum. 81–3):

For there,
With judgment of thy suit and palliatives
Of speech, we shall find out at last a way
From all these evils to deliver thee.

Hunted down by the Erinyes, the fugitive throws himself on the mercy of Athena (Eum. 297–8):

O may she come—far off, she still can hear—
And from these miseries deliver me!

The Watchman prayed to the gods. The second play opens with another prayer, to Hermes, the intermediary between the living and the dead; and at the beginning of the third the Delphic priestess prays to Pallas (Athena), Loxias (Apollo) and
other deities, ending with Zeus the Perfecter (Eum. 28). It was
the custom after supper to offer a grace of unmixed wine, first
to the gods of Olympus, next to the spirits of the dead, and
finally to Zeus the Third, also called the Perfecter or Deliverer;
and in the Agamemnon the Chorus relate how, in the happy
days before the war, the girl Iphigeneia used to sing a hymn
of thanksgiving for her father at the performance of this cer-
emony (254–8). But Iphigeneia has been murdered, and stand-
ing over the dead body of her murderer the triumphant mother
cries (1384–6):

Then on his fallen body
    I dealt the third blow, my drink-offering
    To the Zeus of Hell, Deliverer of the dead.

Intent on murdering his mother and her paramour, Orestes
takes up the blasphemy (Cho. 574–6):

    My steel shall strike and make a corpse of him,
    And so a Fury never starved of slaughter
    Shall drain her third draught of unmingled blood.

The Fury is the Erinys. After much suffering Orestes is delivered
(Eum. 757–63):

    O Pallas, O deliverer of my house,
    I was an outcast from my country, thou
    Hast brought me home again; and men shall say,
    Once more he is an Argive, and he dwells
    In his paternal heritage by the grace
    Of Pallas, and of Loxias, and third
    Of him who orders all, Deliverer

Let us now return to the Agamemnon. The Watchman’s task
has been imposed on him by the sanguine hopes of a woman
(10–11), the wife of Agamemnon (26), Clytemnestra (84), who
is now dreaming of victory. When at daybreak she announces
that Troy has fallen, the news will be dismissed by many as an
idle dream, too good to be true (286, 496); but, after its truth
has been proved, the deepening conviction that she is working
for another victory will turn this dream into a nightmare (966–
84). At the beginning of the second play this woman will dream,
not of victory, but of retribution (Cho. 32–41), and again her
dream will come true (Cho. 928); and, finally, the dreamer will
herself become a dream, stirring the drowsy Erinyes to revenge
(Eum. 116).

This woman has the will of a man (11). Her personality is
masculine (363), though she herself ironically disclaims it (361,
1661, Cho. 668–9); and she lacks the modesty that becomes her
sex (618–19, 847, 931, 1372, Cho. 627–8). Yet her feminine
charm, when she cares to exercise it, is irresistible (932–4). Her
story of the beacons is scoffed at as a piece of woman’s folly
(489–93), but she is not deflected from her purpose (595–9).
When her suspicions are aroused by the disguised Orestes,
Aigisthos is inclined to discount them as the scare of a frightened
woman (Cho. 844–5), but when the moment comes for action,
it is the woman who cries, “Bring me a man-axe!” (Cho. 888).

Unlike his mistress, the Watchman dares not dream (12–15).
To keep awake, he sings, but his song turns into a lament for
the House of Atreus. Then, after his prayer for deliverance, he
sees the beacon flash. The blessed light has shone, the darkness
has been scattered, tears are turned into joy.

Having hailed the beacon, the Watchman calls the Queen to
raise the alleluia, and begins to dance for joy—but breaks off
abruptly, arrested by some unexpressed misgiving. His joy is
indeed delusive. Later in the day the inspired imagination of a
prophetess will see the Erinyes dancing on the roof where he
has danced (1185–9) and hear their fearful alleluias (1105–7).
Again and again such premature rejoicing will pass into brood-
ing premonition. The Chorus of old men enter with firm con-
fidence in the past, but before long they are seeking to allay
their fears for the future (99–103). Reverting to the past, they
recall the auspicious beginning of the war, but then they
remember the terrible price paid for it, the sacrifice of Iphi-
geneia, so that, when the dawn breaks at last, it seems to herald,
not the deliverance for which the Watchman prayed, but worse
calamity (259–69). After the Queen’s announcement, they
begin a joyful hymn of thanksgiving for the punishment of
Paris (367), but the hymn ends with anxiety for Agamemnon
(465–76). The Herald salutes the rising sun in an ecstasy of
joy (513, 580) but he is soon forced to confess that victory has
already been overtaken by disaster. The Elders are at pains to
greet Agamemnon in a spirit befitting the occasion (774–800).
then they have to watch helplessly while he walks into the trap;
and after a final struggle between hope and fear (966–1018)
they surrender themselves in fascinated horror to the inevitable.
So in the second play. The Chorus of serving-women, confident
of victory, urge the brother and sister to pray for revenge; but
later, losing heart, they can foresee nothing but disaster (461–
73). While Orestes is at his task, they rejoice in the deliverance
of the House (934–70), but at the close of the play they are
asking in despair when will its afflictions cease. Not until
the end of the trilogy will tribulation issue in true and lasting
joy.

All this is latent in the Watchman’s speech. Overcome with
doubts, he seeks refuge in silence (36–9):

The rest is secret—a heavy ox has trod
Across my tongue. These walls, if they had mouths,
Might tell tales all too plainly. I speak to those
Who know, to others—purposely forget.

The mystery is for “those who understand.” With these words
the Watchman disappears into the palace, and then, as if in
response, we hear out of the darkness “Alleluia!”—Clytem-
nestra’s cry of joy.

In the párodo, and again in the first stásimon, the poet begins
by taking our minds back ten years to the beginning of the war.
Together they form the longest choral passage in his extent
work, and of the stásima which follow each is shorter than the
last—a device by which the tempo is quickened as we approach
the crisis. Absorbed in the past, we forget the present, and when
the action is resumed, the plot advances so rapidly that we
accept without question the poet’s time-scheme, in which
widely separated events are compressed within a single day.

The párodo provides a background for the first appearance
of the Queen. The sons of Atreus, in their anger at the rape of
Helen, are likened to two eagles robbed of their young. The
discrepancy is striking and deliberate. The eagles appeal to the
gods, who visit the transgressor with an Erinys (59). At this
point Clytemnestra comes out of the palace and begins to
sacrifice in silence at the shrines standing at the gates. Meanwhile, still thinking of Paris, the Elders declare that the sinner's sacrifice is vain. Then they speak of themselves; too old to fight, they have been left at home, as feeble as children or dreams floating in the daylight (79–82). Finally, they catch sight of Clytemnestra, turn to her and ask what is her news (99–103). Their question is left unanswered. The Queen silently leaves the stage on her way to the other altars of the city. We expected to hear her speak, but the climax has been postponed.

If the Elders are too old to fight, they are not too old to sing; and they sing of the sign from heaven which appeared at the departure of the expedition, and the prophet’s reading of it. Two eagles appeared, devouring a hare in the last stages of pregnancy. The eagles are the kings (we observe that these are now the oppressors, not the oppressed), and the hare is Troy, destined to fall in the tenth year just as the hare was to have been delivered in the tenth month. But Artemis, goddess of childbirth and protectress of the wild, is offended, and demands in recompense another sacrifice. The first part of the prophet's interpretation was plain enough, but now he seems to foresee dimly things which even he does not understand (161–3):

   Terrible wrath that departs not,
   Treachery keeping the house, long-memoried,
   children-avenging.

At this point the fluent narrative is interrupted by a slow and grave meditation on the sovereignty of Zeus, who has laid down the law that man must learn wisdom by suffering (186–91):

   He to wisdom leadeth man,
   He hath stablished firm the law,
   Man shall learn by suffering.
   When deep slumber falls, remembered sins
   Chafe the sore heart with fresh pain, and no
   Welcome wisdom meets within.

The old Hesiodic proverb that suffering teaches sense, which was merely a warning to the man who sought too much, has here been charged with a new and positive value.
When the story is resumed, the rhythm has become constrained and tense. The storm blows, Agamemnon wavers, the fleet is wasting, the voice of God has spoken, until, without pausing to question the priest’s authority, the King is driven by imperial ambition to kill his own child, stifling her cries of evil omen.

The arts of Kalchas achieved their purpose.  
But Justice leads man to wisdom by suffering.  
Until the morrow  
Appears, afflict not thy heart; for vain it is  
To weep before trouble comes.  
It shall be soon known as clear as daybreak.

During these words (260–6) Clytemnestra reappears on the threshold of the palace, standing against the background of her past.

Again, what news? This time she deigns to answer (276–9):

Good news! So charged, as the old proverb says,  
May Morning rise out of the womb of Night!  
It is yours to hear of joy surpassing hope.  
My news is this: the Greeks have taken Troy!

And at the end of the dialogue, asked what time the city fell, she replies (291):

The night that gave birth to this dawning day.

Her language is coloured by ten years of brooding over her murdered child. Then, impatient of her questioners, she breaks into an outburst of flamboyant rhetoric, tracing the course of the beacons relayed across the Ægean. Like the sun, or the moon, or a trailing comet, the light rises out of the darkness, and as it leaps from peak to peak it seems to change its character, swooping on the roof of the palace like a thunderbolt. Then, in a more sombre vein, the Queen describes what she imagines to be happening in Troy. The captives are mourning the death of those they loved, the conquerors are at rest. The Greeks have won, but they must respect the sanctuaries of the fallen city. Actually, like the Persians who plundered Attica, they did not. Like the prophet Kalchas (136), Clytemnestra qualifies her
good news with a warning (353–6), to which she adds a thinly-veiled threat (357–9):

And if they came guiltless before the gods,  
The grievance of the dead might then become  
Fair-spoken—barring sudden accident.

The second stásimon draws a subtly élaborated parallel between Paris and Agamemnon. Emboldened by riches, Paris grew proud and so incurred the jealousy of the gods. The spirit of Persuasion or Temptation raised his hopes, made him reckless, and so induced him to commit an overt act of insolence leading directly to his fall. All this, as we have seen, is traditional. The originality of the ode lies in the skill with which these traditional ideas are dramatised. As Headlam wrote:

It opens with a confident Te Deum after triumph; by the time you reach the end you have gradually been plunged into the deepest gloom of apprehension: and the result has been achieved by the consummate skill of the transitions, which carry you from shore to shore, from thought to thought, as boldly and rapidly as the reflections of a rapid mind.

The opening meditation on the danger inherent in excessive prosperity (381–91) is ostensibly a comment on the fate of Paris, though the general terms in which it is couched invite a wider application; the fate of those who trample on inviolate sanctities (382–4) recalls Clytemnestra’s warning (353–4); the compelling power of Temptation (396–7) reminds us of the sin of Agamemnon (232–3); and the sinner’s prayers which win no hearing (406) are also familiar (69–71). The spirit of Temptation is embodied in Helen, who lured Paris and his people to destruction (413–24), and was mourned by Menelaos (425–34). And, just as he, bereft of the substance, was left with a dream (429–34), so all the Greeks who sent their loved ones to the war are repaid in urns and ashes (445–51). The people mutter in resentment against the war-lords who ordered all this bloodshed (456–8). Thus, by the end of the stásimon, our attention has been surreptitiously shifted. At the beginning (379–95):
By Zeus struck down, ’Tis truly spoken,
With each step clear and plain to track out. . . .
Help is there none for him who, gluttoned with gold, in wanton
Pride from his sight has kicked the great altar of watchful
Justice.

That was Paris; but now it is Agamemnon (468–76):

   The black’
Furies wait, and when a man
Has grown by luck, not justice, great,
With sudden overturn of chance
They wear him to a shade, and cast
Down to perdition, who shall save him?
In excess of fame is danger.
With a jealous eye the lord Zeus in a flash shall smite him.

The old men conclude by pointing the moral—a prayer recalled
from the beginning (389–91) that they may be permitted to
lead the middle life, neither conquerors (like Agamemnon) nor
captives (like Kasandra).
In language which mockingly reflects the imagery of her
beacon-speech the old men declare their doubts about Clytem-
estra’s story (482–507), only to be refuted by the arrival of
a Herald from the army. With tears of joy springing from bitter
memories of war he salutes the gods of his fatherland, which
he had never hoped to see again, and he bids the Elders prepare
a fitting welcome for his master (530–5):

   Him who with mattock of just-dealing Zeus
Has levelled Troy and laid her valleys waste . . .
Great son of Atreus, master, sovereign, blest.

“Call no man blest until he is dead.” That was the proverb.
In the stress of emotion the Herald has applied to his master
the same invidious epithet which Clytemnestra has already
used with deliberate malice (348). Then comes a moment of
embarrassment, as the Elders inadvertently let fall a hint of
treachery at home, but the Herald’s anxious enquiries are
impulsively brushed aside: “Now it were joy to die” (555). In
his second speech he is more pensive. As he calls to mind the
hardships of war and the comrades who have not returned,
he falters, rallies, falters and with an effort rallies again. Scarcely has he recovered his serenity when the ominous figure of the Queen reappears at the palace door. Instead of promising him the expected largess for his good news, she declares that she has no need of him—she will welcome her master herself, being "as loyal as he left her . . . to enemies unkind, and in all else the same" (612-14); and after further menacing allusions to her secret intentions she retires abruptly into the palace. The Herald turns in dismay to the Elders, who, with an unlucky change of subject, enquire after Menelaos. It is now his turn to answer unwelcome questions. He is compelled to reveal that the fleet has been scattered by a storm, and the scene ends in deep gloom, which he endeavours in vain to dispel (676-7):

And now, if any of those others live,  
Why, they must deem that we are dead and gone.

Menelaos is destined to survive, Agamemnon is not.  
The Chorus resume the slow, meditative music which we heard in the first stásimon (170-93). Their theme is Helen, taken from the middle of the second stásimon (413-27) and aptly reintroduced after the news of Menelaos. The parallel between Paris and Agamemnon is now to be completed by another between Helen and Clytemnestra. Just as Helen tempted Paris, so her sister will tempt Agamemnon. She was like a lion-cub reared by a herdsman, at first the darling of old and young; at first tender and seductive, but in the end (746-8):

With the guidance of the stern wrath  
Of Zeus she came as a bridal-bewailing Fury.

Her sister is again standing at the palace door, ready to welcome Agamemnon; and the old men continue as though in a dream, or like seers unaware of the meaning of what they see (762-5):

Behold, whenever the time appointed come,  
A cloud of black night, spirit of vengeance irresistible,  
Horror of dark disaster hung brooding within the palace!
Then the conclusion, in which the conclusions of the two preceding stasima are combined and reinforced (767–73):

And where is Justice? She lights up the smoke-darkened hut, Yea, she loves humility. From gilded pinnacles of polluted hands She turns her eyes back unto the dwelling of the pure in heart; So, regarding not the false Stamp on the face of wealth, leads all to the end appointed.

Agamemnon enters in the royal chariot at the head of a triumphal procession, followed by another chariot in which is seated the captive Kasandra. To the greeting of the Elders, studied in its moderation and designed to warn him of his danger, he replies (801–4):

First, it is just to greet this land of Argos With her presiding gods, my partners in This homecoming, as in the just revenge I dealt to Priam’s city.

With these words Justice, the leading motive of the trilogy, steps from the orchestra to the stage, and with unconscious irony the King couples together, as both ordained by heaven, the fall of Troy and his own return to Argos. He acknowledges the warning of the Elders as though already on his guard, but then, secure in the sense of his own greatness, dismisses them (842–5):

But now, returning to my royal hearth, My first act shall be to salute the gods Who led me hence and lead me safely home. Victory attends me; may she rest secure!

Clytemnestra stands silent, waiting for her opportunity. Her purpose is to induce him to commit an overt act of pride which will symbolise the sin he is about to expiate. That is the significance of the sacred tapestries on which she makes him tread.

He addressed the assembled people, ignoring her. She retorts by doing the same. There has never been any love between these two. She begins slowly, in language cold and colourless,
as she describes the lot of the wife, left alone at home; she speaks too of her fears for his safety, though secretly she means her longing for his death; then, with an unobtrusive transition to direct address, she excuses the absence of Orestes; then, in a heightened tone, she reaffirms her love, her language becomes richer and more highly coloured, and after a magnificent crescendo of adulation, in which one extravagant image is piled upon another, she commands her servants to spread out the purple at their master's feet (896–904):

And now, beloved,
Step from the chariot, but do not plant
Upon the ground those feet that trampled Troy.
Make haste, my handmaids whom I have appointed
To strew his path with outspread tapestry.
Prepare a road of purple coverlets
Where Justice leads to an unhoped-for home;
And there the rest our sleep-unvanquished care
Shall order justly, as the gods ordain.

That is her answer to his challenge. The issue of the trilogy is knit: "With Strife shall Strife join in battle, Right with Right" (Cho. 459). We have already learnt from the Chorus that this, the rule of the vendetta, is not justice, but another generation must pass away before the House of Atreus finds it out.

The Queen stands behind the gorgeous display of wealth, inviting. All eyes are turned to Agamemnon.

With frigid formality he acknowledges her address and declines her homage (916): "Honour me as a man, not as a god." He has refused to be tempted; her plan has failed. Having led us within sight of the climax, the dramatist now takes us back to where we started and begins again.

Clytemnestra changes her tactics. She abandons rhetoric and argues with him. She understands his character, and plays upon his weakness. Her arguments are a woman's, illogical but nimble. She is too quick for him. She makes a gesture of deference to his authority (922), extracts from him a conditional consent (924–5), touches his pride (926–7), and as he begins to weaken, she flatters him (931–2):
Ag. It is not for a woman to take delight in strife.
Cl. Well may the victor yield a victory!

The business of men is war, and women are for their recreation. Sure of their own superiority, they take pleasure in humouring feminine caprice. Agamemnon hesitates:

Ag. Do you set store by such a victory?
Cl. Be tempted, freely vanquished, victor still!

She has won. "With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him." After ordering his sandals to be untied, because he is about to tread on holy ground, he draws attention to the captive Kasandra and with unperturbed effrontery asks his wife to extend her welcome to his concubine. Then, as he sets foot on the sacred purple, the flow of imagery bursts out afresh, suggestive of the dangers of abundance, of blood about to be shed and of a girl's blood shed ten years before. Agamemnon comes like the star of summer after the long winter's cold (961–3):

So, when Zeus from the bitter virgin-grape
Draws wine, then coolness fills the house at last,
As man made perfect moves about his home.

The stage is now empty, save for the silent figure seated in the chariot. The slow music begins again (966), now tense and sinister. The theme of the stásimon is fear, which has routed hope, and it is expressed in the language of divination. When the music ceases, we are at a loss to know what is to happen next: are we to hear the death-cry from the palace or the voice of Kasandra? Then to our astonishment Clytemnestra re-appears at the door of the palace. The Greek dramatists, tied to traditional themes, had little use for the element of surprise; but sometimes, after insistently impressing on our minds a sense of the inevitable, they give a sudden turn to the situation which could not have been anticipated.

Clytemnestra has determined that her husband's paramour shall share his death. Once more she exerts her powers of persuasion, assisted this time by the Chorus, who, cowed with terror, behave as though in a trance. And as she speaks we
realise that she is using the language of the Mysteries. With
blasphemous audacity she imagines Kasandra as a candidate
for initiation, herself as the officiating priest, and the impending
murder as a holy mystery (1034–6):

\begin{quote}
Nay, if she speak not like the chattering swallow
Some barbarous tongue which none can understand,
With winning words I’ll charm the heart within.
\end{quote}

But her second victim knows what is to come, and, deaf alike
to appeals and menaces, she neither speaks nor moves. Clytem-
nestra has no time to lose, and returns into the palace.

After a long pause we hear a low moan. It is Kasandra cry-
ing to Apollo. Then, in a delirious flood of prophecy, she sings
of the children slaughtered long ago, sees the murder that is
being done within, hears the Erinyes chant for joy and sees
them dancing on the roof; and, finally, with poignant grief she
mourns her own death and the passing of the House of Priam.
When the trance has left her, she interprets the song of the
Erinyes—they are celebrating the sin of Atreus; and she goes
on to relate how Apollo inspired her with the art of prophecy
(1177–1212). Suddenly the ecstasy returns: the children of
Thyestes appear before her eyes—this is the crime for which
Aigisthos is now exacting retribution; then she calmly tells the
Elders that, like the \emph{epōptai}, they are about to look on Agamem-
non’s death (1213–54); but the Elders are at a loss—they can-
not understand (1252). Suddenly the ecstasy returns. Predict-
ing once more her own death, she foretells the homecoming of
the exile, who “to avenge his father shall kill his mother”
(1280); and with a last cry to Priam and his sons she approaches
the door, but recoils sick with horror, then approaches again,
but still she lingers, staying to repeat her assurance of retribu-
tion to come (1316–19), and her last words are a passionate
lament for her fate and Agamemnon’s, captive and captor,
slave and king, both confronted by the same death.

After she has gone, our attention is recalled to Agamemnon
(1334–6):

\begin{quote}
Unto him heaven granted the capture of Troy,
And he enters his home acclaimed as a god.
\end{quote}
These words show that the triumphant return of Agamemnon is regarded as a *kômos*. His deification is his death.

The effect of the scene as a whole is to concentrate on Kasandra the compassion we might otherwise have felt for Agamemnon, to set Clytemnestra’s crime in relation to the past and future, and by delaying the action to intensify the climax.

The Elders confer in anxious whispers, but do nothing. That is in keeping with the proverbial view of old age—wise in counsel, weak in action. But the artistic purpose of the dialogue is to relieve the tension in order that we may respond to the culmination of the play, which is still to come. At the end of the dialogue, when the Elders approach the palace, the illusion intended is that they actually break in and discover the scene that follows. The stage doors are thrown open, revealing a tableau—the dead bodies of Agamemnon and Kasandra laid out on the bloodstained purple, with Clytemnestra standing over them. Exultantly she describes how her husband fell, entrapped in his own wealth, and now at last she is free to proclaim her motive (1415–18):

To exorcise the storms,
As though it were a ewe picked from his flocks
Whose wealth of snowy fleeces never fails
To multiply, unmoved, he killed his own
Child, born to me in pain, my best-beloved.

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 to explain it. And the reason why Æschylus, unlike Homer, has made her the prime agent in the murder is now plain. The man who killed her child must die by her hands alone. That Aigisthos has a feud of his own with Agamemnon is of no concern to her, and when she mentions her paramour it is not as an accomplice, but as her protector after the act (1435–8).

Slowly the horrified denunciation of the Elders turns to grief. Clytemnestra, too, becomes more tranquil, declaring that
when she did this thing she was possessed by the avenging spirit, the hereditary daimon of the House, which demanded blood for blood (1476–81, 1498–1505, 1528–31). 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 (1567–76). That, however, is not the view of the Elders, who turn her own plea against her (1562–3):

The law abides yet, as long as Zeus shall reign,
The sinner must suffer—so 'tis ordered.

To this scene the epilogue (1577–1672) is a pendant and a contrast. If Clytemnestra is masculine in her strength of purpose, Aigisthos is a woman-hearted coward. She remains noble despite her depravity, but he is entirely contemptible. There was awe as well as accusation in the attitude of the Elders towards her, but the spiteful bombast of this upstart sets them beside themselves with indignation, leading to the defiant cry (1646–8):

Oh, does Orestes yet
Behold the light of life, that he may come
Favoured of fortune home, and prove himself
The sovereign executioner of both?

Our sympathies already lie with the exile far away. The vulgar truculence of Aigisthos, into whom the dramatist has put all his hatred of the tyranny, makes us feel that, after all, this was only a senseless and sordid crime; and Clytemnestra, too, as she listens in silence, seems to feel the same. Harassed and oppressed she pleads for peace. But the Elders remain defiant to the end, and peace will be denied to her. The discord is unresolved.

The fate of Agamemnon has been illustrated by the figure of the hunting net, which was first cast over the city of Troy and then became a disastrous robe, symbol of his excessive wealth, in which he was trapped and slain. So in the next play Clytemnestra is figured as a snake which, after strangling the eagle in its eyrie and leaving its nestlings to starve, is itself slain by the snake to which it has given birth. And in the last play Orestes becomes a flying fawn or hare with the hell-hounds hot upon
his tracks. Apart from these leading figures, the Agamemnon is characterised by a profusion of incidental imagery. The sun and moon, the stars and interstellar spaces, the sea, with its inexhaustible riches, now sunk in midsummer calm, now lashed to fury by hail and lightning, the snows of winter in which the birds drop dead, budding corn, ripening grapes, the harvest and the vintage, and, above all, the beacons which flash across the darkness and fade into the dawn—the whole pageantry of Nature is displayed as a background to the conflict of man with man. In contrast to this, the image of the Choephoroi will be less lavish and more sombre—a withered forest oak, meteors, dragons and monsters of the deep. But at the end of the Eumenides the bright colours will return, when the maledictions of the Erinyes break into sunshine and gentle breezes bringing fruitful increase to crops, to cattle and to men.

The interval between the action of the first two plays is not stated, but it is evident that several years have elapsed. The boy whom Clytemnestra sent from home, now a young man, brave, devout and ambitious, has secretly returned to Argos, accompanied by Pylades, the son of his host in Phokis. Standing in the morning twilight at his father's grave, he hears from the palace a sudden shriek. As the play proceeds, the dawn breaks unnoticed. By the time his task is done, it will be dusk again, and, once more an exile, he will flee from home with his mother's avenging spirits at his heels.

As before, the prologue falls into two parts, divided this time by the cry from the palace, which is a cry of panic in contrast to the joyful “Alleluia!” heard in answer to the Watchman. The text is badly mutilated, and the gist of what is lost must be restored in the light of considerations drawn from the rest of the play. Two points in particular are invested in the sequel with such significance that we may be sure they were at least fore-shadowed here.

First, Orestes has received from Apollo an express command to avenge his father by killing his mother and her paramour (268–304, 1027–31). “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (311–13, 434–6, 645–8, 835–7). This law, which Clytemnestra and the Elders have already invoked,
the one in justification for the murder of Agamemnon, the others in anticipation of her own, has now received divine sanction; and, if Orestes is to be convicted of murder in the time to come, his guilt must be shared by Apollo, who has not only promised to exculpate him for obeying his command, but has threatened him with the direst penalties if he should disobey (375–95). Orestes has no option: he is an agent of the gods, and, knowing this, he faces his task with confidence. We are thus prepared for the final conflict of the trilogy, in which the feud between mother and son will become a feud between the deities of Heaven and of Hell affecting the welfare of all mankind.

Secondly, the death of the two sinners is necessary to cleanse the House of sin. The partisans of Orestes regard him as a divinely appointed purifier or deliverer (159–63, 865–7, 1044–5). What neither he nor they foresee is that in purifying the House he must take its pollution on himself (1015).

After a prayer to Hermes and to his father's spirit, Orestes lays a lock of his hair upon the tomb, and then we hear the cry—"heavy, haunting shriek of fear" (34–5). Presently he sees a company of women, dressed in black, coming from the palace, and stirred by the sight of his sister, walking among them bowed in grief, he calls upon the name of Zeus (18–19):

O Zeus, may I avenge
My father's death! Defend and fight for me!

The women are beating their breasts and tearing their hair in an Oriental dirge. The Queen has had bad dreams, in which the dead have signified their anger, and she has sent these serving-women with propitiatory offerings to her husband's tomb. But when blood has once been shed, there is no cure for it (47, 69–73; cf. Ag. 1004–6) and no escape from Justice, who visits some in this life, others in Purgatory and Hell. Clytemnestra is destined for a violent death, and her murderer will barely be saved from her avenging spirits dragging him down to eternal torment. In conclusion, the women reveal their own identity—they are captives from the sack of Troy. They obey their masters by compulsion; their goodwill is reserved for the avenger, when he comes.
Though older than her brother, Elektra is still only a girl, whose gentle nature has not yet been embittered by her unhappy upbringing. She cannot ask a blessing of her father for the wife who murdered him, but it does not occur to her, until the serving-women suggest it, to pray for revenge. Even then she is reluctant to comply, and the thought of her mother’s wickedness prompts her, not to anger, but to a prayer that to her may be granted greater purity of heart.

During her prayers at the tomb she discovers the lock of hair, which resembles her own, and at once she thinks of Orestes. Presently she observes in the ground, leading away from the graveside, two sets of footprints. Planting her feet in the first, she finds they match her own. Torn between hope and doubt, she follows them up step by step to the spot where, unknown to her, her brother is standing, and as she approaches him she cries out in her perplexity (210): “What agonies are here, what shattered wits!” It is as though these words were addressed to him, and they are an unhappy augury.

Orestes comes forward, and Elektra draws back in alarm. He tells her who he is. She cannot at first believe him. With gentle raillery he chides her, and at the same time offers proof of his identity—the gnorismata or tokens, a garment she wove for him before he left home. Face to face with the brother, on whom, bereft of father and sister and estranged from her mother, she has lavished in absence the full devotion of a loving nature, Elektra forgets everything save the happiness of this moment. But Orestes is already uneasy at the danger in which this reunion has placed them, and presently the Chorus remind him of the future (242–4):

Trust in thy courage, and thou shalt repossess
Thy father’s heritage, if only Might
And Right stand by thy side, and with them third,
Of all the greatest, Zeus Deliverer.

Orestes at once responds:

Zeus, Zeus, look down upon our state, regard
The eagle’s offspring orphaned of their sire,
Whom the fell serpent folded in her coils
And crushed to death.
With implicit faith in the Delphic oracle—"Apollo will not break his faith" (268)—and fully determined to obey, he seems at the end of the scene almost light-hearted in his confidence.

The chant at the tomb which follows is technically a threnos, or lament, the ritual basis of which was examined in Chapter XI. It is a capital example of the manner in which primitive ritual was raised by Æschylus to the level of dramatic art.

The choral odes of Sophokles are always relevant and serve dramatic purposes, but within each ode there is usually little movement. The Chorus comments, anticipates, points a moral or a contrast, but in general it does not directly contribute to the advancement of the plot. The Æschylean ode, on the other hand, is at its best highly dynamic. It moves and grows within itself: The action of the play is at a standstill, yet as we listen to the music we feel that something is happening within our minds. We have already come across two of his masterpieces in this kind—the first two stásima of the Agamemnon. But the chant at the tomb which we have now to consider is even more remarkable. Like those, it effects a revolution in our attitude of mind; but, being set for two voices in addition to the Chorus, it affords greater scope for dramatisation. Each of the three parts is a little drama in itself; the participants react upon each other, and out of their successive changes of mood is evolved a highly complex and organic whole. If we compare it with the invocation of Darius in the Persians, we have a striking measure of the artist's progress. There we are impressed by the magical incantations of the Elders and by the appearance of the ghost in answer to them; but these effects are external and spectacular—there is nothing inherently dramatic in the chant itself. Here the dramatist has dispensed with magic and the ghost remains invisible; yet, listening to the prayers of the brother and sister, we feel their father's spirit slowly entering their hearts. The action is wholly internal, yet for that very reason more moving and impressive.

Orestes and Elektra begin with a lament for their father's death (314-21 = 331-8, 344-52 = 362-70) but at the persistent instigation of the Chorus (305-13, 322-30, 374-8) this lament is transformed into a passionate appeal, in which the Chorus join, for the punishment of the murderers (379-98).
Meanwhile, as the Chorus observe the effect of their incitement on the other two, their own confidence begins to waver, and they are assailed with doubts (409–16). Elektra then takes the lead, recalling her own sufferings and the maltreatment of her father’s body (417–21, 428–32, 443–8). Thereupon Orestes, who has himself felt a momentary dismay (404–8), is spurred to a renewal of his determination (433–7) and the Chorus now return to the attack, joining with Elektra in urging him to action (438–42, 449–53). We are thus brought to the second climax, in which all three are once more crying out for vengeance (454–8); but then the Chorus again lose faith (461–3) and they break off the chant with a lament for the future sufferings of the House of Atreus (464–73). It was they who first raised the cry of blood (311–12) and dictated it to the others (385–8); now they are weeping over what they have done. It is a fine conclusion, and essentially musical in conception.

The music ceases, the chant is at an end. In the hands of a less accomplished artist, the invocation too would have ended there, but Æschylus still has a coda. The son and daughter remain at the graveside; deaf to the ominous lamentation of the Chorus, they continue to cry out for vengeance, but alone. The curse of Atreus has risen from the tomb and lives again in them.

The effect upon Orestes is to confirm his resolution. After hearing the particulars of Clytemnestra’s nightmare—she dreamt that she gave birth to a snake, which drew from her breast milk mixed with blood—he interprets it with ruthless assurance (546–8):

Then surely, as she gave that monster life,
So she must die a violent death, and I,
The dragon of her dream, shall murder her.

Henceforward his whole mind is devoted to the successful execution of the plot, though, as we shall see, he will falter once again.

The effect upon Elektra is to transform her. The girl who a short time ago could hardly bring herself even to pray for retribution has now boasted that she will prove as savage and relentless as her mother (420–1). Under the irresistible force of
the ancestral curse, she has become a second Clytemnestra, and conversely we might infer that there had been a time when Clytemnestra was as innocent as she. Modern critics have almost all misunderstood the character of Elektra in this play, and the reason is their failure to recognise that human character changes with its environment.

After explaining his plan of action, Orestes gives his final instructions to the serving-women (579–82):`

To you a tongue well-guarded I commend,
Silence in season and timeliness in speech.
The rest is for my comrade’s eyes alone,
To supervise this ordeal of the sword.

The phrase “silence in season” is another of those that passed into common speech from the language of religion; and its origin lies in the vow of secrecy imposed on the candidate for initiation at Eleusis. At a later stage, as we have seen, the initiate became an epóptes, one who was admitted to the secret rites performed in the Hall of Initiation and who superintended the initiation of others (p. 125). So here, the serving-women have been admitted into the secret of the plot, but its execution is a higher mystery which is not for them to behold. The act itself, which will take place inside the palace, is for Orestes to perform under the guidance of Pylades, who will stand over him and watch.

As they dwell on the enormity of Clytemnestra’s crime, unparalleled in the annals of female wickedness, the Chorus recover their faith in the avenger (645–8):

There comes to wipe away with fresh
Blood the blood of old a son,
Obeying some inscrutable
Fury’s deadly purpose.

It is now late evening. Orestes approaches the palace, accompanied by Pylades and disguised as a Phocian pedlar. He asks to speak with someone in authority—“a woman, or more fittingly a man” (660). His plan is to kill Aigisthos first. Scarcely has he spoken, when Clytemnestra, the real master of the house, appears in person, accompanied by Elektra, who is acting in accordance with her brother’s instructions (577–8).
The Queen addresses the newcomers with cautious reserve. She is ready to give them hospitality, but, if their business is for men to deal with, then she will send for men. Orestes delivers his message, announcing his own death, and Elektra supports the deception with a feigned lament (687–95):

O Curse of this sad House, unconquerable,
How wide thy vision! Even that which seemed
Well-ordered, safe beyond the reach of harm,
Thou hast brought down with arrows from afar,
And left me desolate, stripped of all I loved.
And now Orestes—he who wisely thought
To keep his foot outside the miry clay,
Now that one hope of healing which might yet
Have exorcised the wicked masquerade
Within this palace, mark it not as present.

These words contain a double irony. Elektra tells her mother to count Orestes as dead, although in fact he stands before her eyes, and she does this without actually pronouncing the ill-omened word. But to the audience she conveys a deeper meaning. Orestes has been caught at last by the curse of his fathers. He was wise to keep out of the way: his return will be his ruin. And then her own desolation will no longer be a fiction.

Orestes continues in the same vein of sinister equivocation, asking pardon for being the bearer of bad news and at the same time affirming his determination to carry out the task he has undertaken. Clytemnestra replies with an equally guarded welcome, but reveals her elation at the news, if true, in a spiteful taunt at Elektra, whom she orders as though a slave to wait upon the strangers (711–14). Throughout this tense dialogue her attitude to the strangers is profoundly suspicious. But she does not suspect Elektra, and that is her undoing. By treating her as a slave, she plays into her hands.

Her next step is to convey a message to Aigisthos, asking him to return at once and bring his armed bodyguard. The messenger she chooses is the old family nurse, who, left to herself, would have suspected nothing and so enabled her mistress to defeat the conspiracy; but on her way she encounters the
Chorus, who instruct her to deliver the first part of the message and suppress the second. This nurse is garrulous, simple-minded and affectionate, but her reminiscences of the infant Orestes are strictly dramatic, being designed to forewarn us against the extravagant acclamations with which Orestes is soon to be saluted and to prepare us for the moment when his mother will plead for mercy (895–7):

O stay, my son! Dear child, have pity on
This bosom where in slumber long ago
Your toothless gums drew in the milk of life!

In the previous stásimon the Chorus sang of the wickedness of Clytemnestra; now they pray for the success of the heaven-sent deliverer who is to slay the monster. Orestes is engaged in a chariot race, and the prize of victory is his ancestral heritage. They have forgotten their fears and urge him to show no mercy (829–36).

Aigisthos appears in answer to the summons. He is inclined to discredit the report of Orestes’ death, not, however, because he suspects the messenger, but because it seems too good to be true. Conceited and self-assured, he walks straight into the trap. The excitement grows, and as they await the issue, the Chorus utter a final prayer for victory (865–7):

So much is at issue, and single he goes,
Orestes the god-like, and twain are his foes;
O grant that he goeth to conquer!

We recall the old saying that Agamemnon had on his lips but not in his heart: “Honour me as a man, not as a god.”

While the issue is in the balance, the serving-women draw aside, fearing to compromise themselves in the event of defeat (871–3; cf. 77–9). Then the man-servant comes to the door, displaying the same hesitancy, but now it is a register of success (874–9). He calls for help to the women’s quarters, but the doors are bolted. This is Elektra’s doing (577–8). Then he pauses to reflect. If Aigisthos is dead, he must prepare for a change of masters. His third cry is less a call for help than a summons to justice:
What is Clytemnestra doing?
Where is she? Now at last, it seems, her head
Shall touch the block beneath the axe of Justice.

At last she comes: “What is the meaning of that shout?” The answer is grimly oracular: “It means the living are being killed by the dead.” Orestes, reported dead, has killed Aigisthos. But she recognises at once the fulfilment of her dream. Meeting the crisis with all her old defiance, she calls for an axe, but before she can get it Orestes confronts her, sword in hand, the body of Aigisthos at his feet. This is the crucial moment. He hesitates. Lowering his sword, he turns helplessly to his companion: is he to spare his mother? And Pylades speaks for the first and last time (899–901):

What then hereafter of the oracles
And solemn covenants of Loxias?
Let all men hate thee rather than the gods.

Clytemnestra pleads for her life. Reminded by her son of Aigisthos, she reminds him of Kasandra (917–20):

Cl. No, no—remember too his wantonness!
Or. Accuse him not—for you he toiled abroad.
Cl. It is hard for a woman, parted from her man.
Or. What but his labour keeps her safe at home?

Failing to persuade, she threatens him (923): “Beware the hounds of a mother’s curse!” But Orestes is not to be moved again. “Ah me, I bore a serpent, not a son.” “Turned dragon,” as he said himself, her son drives her in and kills her.

The last stásimon is a hymn of mystical exultation, springing from the conviction that, by means of the ordeal of blood now being enacted in the palace, the House of Atreus has died and is born again, thus throwing off the incubus of sin which has so long lain upon it. The Chorus have already prayed that the House may be divested of its veil and adorned with the crown of glory (804–7):

Let us rejoice and set a crown on the palace;
O let it swiftly appear,
Gleaming and friendly and free,
Out of the veil of encircling darkness!
Now the struggle is over, the House of Atreus is delivered, it will err and stray no more (941–4):

Cry alleluia, lift up in the house a song,
Deliverance from ill and from the waste of wealth
By the unholy sinners twain,
From rough thorny ways!

Then they greet the blessed light and call upon the House to arise like a sinner who has been purified (959–62). It will soon be made perfect, and the inmates, whose weeping has been turned to joy, shall behold the usurpers laid low like the prostrate multitude of the uninitiated (963–9).

One of the ceremonies of mystical religion (not, probably, Eleusinian, but clearly in the same tradition) is described as follows:¹⁰

Upon a certain night an image is laid upon a couch and mourned with cries of grief disposed in numbers; next, after they have had enough of their feigned lamentation, a light is brought in; and thereupon the throats of all those who wept are anointed by the priest, who then whispers in a slow murmur:

Take courage, mystics, for our God is saved:
Deliverance from evil shall be yours.

The Chorus have already acclaimed the deliverance of the House and saluted the light; and finally they sing (967–9):

With kind fortune couchèd and fair-eyed to see
For all those that weep
Shall aliens within be laid low again.

Night has fallen, and, while the Chorus chant this hymn of deliverance, the doors of the palace are thrown open, revealing a blaze of torchlight, in which Orestes, the deliverer, is seen standing over a couch on which is laid the dead body of his mother.

The intensity imparted to the climax by this sustained parallel with the ritual of Eleusis must have made a deep impression on all those to whom that ritual was the symbol of a living faith; and it is characteristic of Æschylus that the
parallel is enforced not so much by similarity as by contrast. The rising spirits of the Chorus have reached their highest point just when they are to be plunged into disillusionment and disaster.

Orestes spreads out for all to see, as the testimony that shall vindicate him at the day of judgment, the purple robe in which this monster who was his mother once displayed the body of his father. The Chorus, however, are already filled with misgivings, and Orestes too begins to lose confidence (1014–15). As the struggle becomes more acute, revealing the first signs of approaching insanity, he reminds himself of the command of Apollo and announces his intention of seeking sanctuary at Delphi; and the Chorus recall, though no longer with conviction, the heroic nature of his achievement (1044–5):

Thou art deliverer of the land of Argos,  
With one light stroke lopping two dragons’ heads.

While they speak, Orestes catches sight of the Erinyes (1046–8):

What are those women? See them, Gorgon-like,  
All clad in sable and entwined with coils  
Of writhing snakes!

It is as though a fresh crop of monsters had sprung from the blood of the dragons he has slain. The Chorus seize in desperation on the name of Apollo, which now rings out, much as the name of Orestes himself rang out at the end of the Agamemnon, with the promise of deliverance to come (1057–8):

Thou shalt be purified! Apollo’s touch  
From these disasters shall deliver thee!

In the Agamemnon, the Watchman, the Herald and the Chorus, in one ode after another, find themselves constrained as by some hidden power to turn from rejoicing to ever-deepening apprehension, and by this recurrent rhythm a tremendous impetus is imparted to the plot. Then, when all is ready for the crisis, the action is delayed by one expedient after another, until the suspense seems interminable; yet the accumulated pressure is so great that the tension is never
relaxed, with the result that the climax, when it comes, is almost more than we can bear. The movement of the Choephoroi is different. It depends on repeated contrasts of mood, in which the Chorus play the leading part. When Elektra is at a loss, the Chorus dictate a prayer for vengeance. When Orestes is embracing his sister after years of absence, the Chorus remind him of his patrimony. When Orestes and Elektra are weeping beside the tomb, the Chorus are crying out for blood. When Orestes and Elektra are bent on vengeance without mercy, the Chorus are weeping for the Curse of Atreus. That is the first movement of the play. After that the tempo is relaxed, then gathers pace again; and in the last scene of all, when victory is swept away in horror and despair, the Chorus turn in rapid succession from rejoicing to dismay, from dismay to half-convinced assurance and desperate consolation. This ever-shifting interplay of conflicting moods is like an elaborate piece of counterpoint, in which two themes, continually varied, are played in two long crescendos one against the other.

The theme of the trilogy—the murder of Agamemnon and its consequences—is treated in the third play in such a way as to become much more than that. Its significance is steadily extended and enriched until the vicissitudes of the House of Atreus appear in retrospect as the battle-ground of human progress. The fate of Orestes concerns us still, but with it is now bound up the future of humanity at large. The issue is not merely whether the matricide is to be absolved, but whether mankind is to succeed in its struggle towards a new social order.

Before proceeding further, it will be as well to guard against possible misunderstanding by some general remarks on the nature of primitive symbolism. For, though Æschylus belongs to a period in which the development of scientific thought was already considerable, he has chosen to express himself through the more primitive medium of mythology. Objectively regarded, myths are symbols of reality. They are the forms in which reality presents itself to the primitive mind. It follows that to the primitive mind, as distinct from ours, the symbol and the reality are indistinguishable—they are one and the same thing.

Take the evolution of the goddess Athena. The city of Athens