

AESCHYLUS AND THE UNITY OF OPPOSITES*

Abstract: The idea of the ‘unity of opposites’ allows one to see important connections between phenomena normally treated separately: verbal style, ritual, tragic action and cosmology. The stylistic figure of *Satzparallelismus* in lamentation and mystic ritual expresses the unity of opposites (particularly of life and death) as oxymora. Both rituals were factors in the genesis of tragedy, and continued to influence the style and action of mature tragedy. The author advances new readings of various passages of the *Oresteia*, which is seen to advocate the replacement of a Herakleitean model of the unity of opposites with a Pythagorean model of their reconciliation.

THIS is an essay in the interconnectedness of phenomena generally considered separately: verbal style, ritual, tragic action and cosmology. Their interconnectedness will emerge from the idea of the *unity of opposites* in each of them. I begin with the use of the stylistic figure I call antithetical *Satzparallelismus* in the ritual lament (§1), and in mystic ritual – in which it passes into expression (as oxymoron) of the unity of opposites, notably of life and death. Both these rituals, I have argued elsewhere, were factors in the genesis of Athenian tragedy,¹ and I argue here that their synthesized influence is felt both in tragic verbal style and in the form of tragic action (§2). The synthesis is deployed in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* to express, in lamentation, the cycle of revenge as a unity of opposites (§3). Various puzzling passages of the *Oresteia* can only be understood as expressing the need to differentiate the unity of opposites if escape from the cycle is to be achieved (§4). This escape comes, in the *Eumenides*, only after the emphatic differentiation of chthonic and Olympian deities, and the replacement of a Herakleitean model of the unity of opposites by a Pythagorean model of their reconciliation (§5).

1. LAMENTATION

I start with an example of the stylistic figure that I will call, after Norden,² *Satzparallelismus*. I define it, rather more narrowly than Norden, as the juxtaposition of sentences (which may be as short as a single word) that are distinct in *content* but resemble each other in *form*,³ usually without connecting words and at most with μὲν ... δέ.⁴ Its effect is a solemn staccato. The sentences generally describe (or prescribe) *actions*, and are often constituted by their content as an *antithetical pair*. The phenomenon is especially frequent in, although certainly not confined to,⁵ two forms of ritual utterance – the lament,⁶ and formulae used in mystic ritual (§2); and it is in part through the influence of these rituals that this verbal form (and others closely related to it) occur

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² Norden (1915) 15–29, 50–2, 813–24, 831–2; (1923) 254–63, 355–64.

³ This formal resemblance later attracted the technical terms *παρίσωσις* (resemblance of length) and *παρονομασία, παρομοίωσις* (assonance).

⁴ And so excluded are expressions linked by ἄλλοτε ... ἄλλοτε ... or καὶ ... καὶ ... or οὔτε ... οὔτε ... *vel sim.*

⁵ For instance it occurs (albeit only occasionally) in gnomic expressions (e.g. Theogn. 831; Diog. Laert.

1.98.1; Stob. 3.1.172.100). The presence of similar figures in the funerary *enkōmion* of Gorgias (B6) probably derives (given also the shared *topoi* of *enkōmion* and lament) from the lament: Thomson (1953); Fehling (1969) 109 (poetry as the ultimate source of many of G.’s figures); *cf.* also their presence in Gorgias’ *enkōmion* of Helen (B11), and antithetical *Satzparallelismus* in Agathon’s *enkōmion* of Eros at Pl. *Symp.* 197 and later in the Asiatic style of oratory.

⁶ Alexiou (1974) 150–60; Thomson (1953) 82–3, including related genres such as Simonides’ *enkōmion* of the Spartan dead (*PMG* 531): ... εὐκλεῆς μὲν ἂ τύχα, καλὸς δ’ ὁ πότμος, βωμὸς δ’ ὁ τάφος, κτλ.

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frequently in tragedy.⁷ I begin with instances of antithetical *Satzparallelismus* in the lament in Aeschylus.⁸

- (1) Ξέρξης μὲν ἄγαγεν, ποποῖ.
Ξέρξης δ' ἀπώλεσεν, τοτοῖ. (Aesch. *Pers.* 550-1)

Xerxes led, alas.

Xerxes destroyed, alas.

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------|---------------------------|
| (2) | – παιθεῖς ἔπαισας | – σὺ δ' ἔθανες κατακτανών |
| | – δορὶ δ' ἔκανε | – δορὶ δ' ἔθανες |
| | – μελεοπόνος | – μελεοπαθής |
| | – πρόκεισαι | – κατέκτας |
| | – ἴτω γόος | – ἴτω δάκρυα. |

– struck, you struck

– you died killing

– with a spear you killed

– with a spear you died

– having done wretchedly

– having suffered wretchedly

– you are laid out

– you killed

– let wailing flow

– let tears flow.

In this lament for the dead brothers in Aeschylus' *Septem* (961-5) each of the first four lines combines *Satzparallelismus* with *antithesis* between killing and being killed in return. In the first line the antithesis is contained within each of the symmetrical limbs.

Another example is from the great Aeschylean lament for Agamemnon:

- (3) ὅτοτύζεται δ' ὁ θνήισκων,
ἀναφαίνεται δ' ὁ βλάπτων. (Cho. 327-8)

There is bewailed the dead man,

There appears the avenger.

Here the antithesis expresses the movement within the lament from the passivity of being killed to the activity of revenge. Similarly (but in reverse order, for the revenge has been taken) Klytaimnestra, as she stands over the corpse of Agamemnon, remembers the 'much-wept' Iphigeneia, and calls Agamemnon

- (4) ἄξια⁹ δράσας, ἄξια πάσχων. (Aesch. *Ag.* 1527)

having done what was deserved, suffering what is deserved.¹⁰

⁷ Fehling (1969) in his study of the whole phenomenon of verbal repetition in early Greek literature pays special attention neither to the phenomenon I have defined nor to ritual nor to tragedy, but he does note that lyric and elegiac (except for the gnomic Theognis) have few *Wiederholungsfiguren*, and that 'die Tragödienlyrik des Äschylus weicht von der übrigen Lyrik erheblich ab, wie überhaupt die Tragödie innerhalb der älteren Literatur in bezug auf Wiederholungsfiguren die auffallendsten eigenständigen Entwicklungen hat' (101).

⁸ Other instances in tragedy are Aesch. *Pers.* 550-1, *Cho.* 436-7, 461; Soph. *El.* 193-4, 197, *Trach.* 950-1; Eur. *Supp.* 778, 829-30, *Hipp.* 836. Cf. Soph. *Aj.* 394-5; Eur. *Hel.* 198-9, *Phoen.* 1291-2.

⁹ Page retains τὴν πολυκλαύτην τ' Ἰφιγένειαν ἀνάξια δράσας. And both he and Fraenkel object to the sense of Hermann's ἄξια δράσας governing Iphigeneia. But ἄξια δράσας removes the anomalous word division in the anapaestic dimeter (Ἰφιγένειαν is surely an intrusive gloss) and restores sense. Klytaimnestra's next utterance refers to Iphigeneia lovingly greeting her father in the next world, 1555-9: the chilling sarcasm is introduced by ἄξια δράσας, ἄξια πάσχων: 'he gave his daughter what she deserved – did he not? – and now accordingly he has what he deserves'. And cf. *Eum.* 868 (quoted n.94 below).

¹⁰ Though very close, this is not strictly an instance of antithetical *Satzparallelismus* as I have defined it, because it is not two sentences.

A little later in the same passage, with the body of Agamemnon still on display, the chorus sing:

- (5) ὄνειδος ἥκει τόδ' ἀντ' ὀνείδους,
 δύσμαχα δ' ἐστὶ κρῖναι·
 φέρει φέροντ', ἐκτίνει δ' ὁ καίνων·
 μῖμνει δὲ μῖνοντος ἐν θρόνῳ Διὸς
 παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα· θέσμιον γάρ. (1560-4)

this insult has come in return for insult,
 and they are hard to separate/judge;
 he despoils the spoiler, and the killer pays;
 it remains, while Zeus remains on the throne,
 that the doer suffers: for so it is established.

In the third line of this passage, as in the first line of (2), there is antithesis within each limb of the *Satzparallelismus*. In fact φέρει φέροντ' embodies even within itself something akin to antithetical *Satzparallelismus*: different inflections of the same word, referring to symmetrical but opposed deeds, are juxtaposed, giving the effect of antithetical *Satzparallelismus* collapsed into something akin to the oxymoron.¹¹

What we see in these passages is that a *stylistic* figure, antithetical *Satzparallelismus*, expresses an antithetical movement at the heart of *ritual*, from the passivity of being killed to the activity of revenge. We are reminded that, among the Greeks and others, the lament is frequently a means of creating the emotions necessary for revenge.¹² Moreover, the two phases of this movement correspond to the *action* of the first two plays of the Oresteian trilogy. In the first play Agamemnon is killed; in the second his anger is enlisted, in the great lament, to support the act of revenge. The movement is also raised, in (5), to the level of an established *universal principle* guaranteed by Zeus. Antithetical *Satzparallelismus* may, as in Gorgias, become a mere rhetorical device, but in Aeschylus it expresses a fundamental reality.

2. MYSTIC INITIATION

Although not confined to ritual, *Satzparallelismus* seems to have been especially common in various kinds of ritual utterance. A notable example, besides the lament, is mystic initiation.¹³ Although not many of the formulae uttered in mystic initiations survive, a strikingly high proportion of them exhibit *Satzparallelismus*.¹⁴

From Eleusinian initiation we have:

- (6) ἐκ τυμπάνου ἔφαγον, ἐκ κυμβάλου ἔπιον, ἐκερνοφόρησα, ὑπὸ τὸν παστὸν ὑπέδυν.
 (Clem. *Protr.* 2.14)

From the tympanon I ate, from the cymbal I drank, I carried the *kernos*, under the bed-curtain I slipped.

- (7) ὕε κύε (Procl. *In Tim.* 293c; Hipp. *Ref.* 5.7)

Rain! Conceive!

¹¹ Rather different, though perhaps influencing Aeschylus, is *Il.* 18.309, the war god as killing the killer (κτανέοντα κατέκτα).

¹² Seaford (1994a) ch.3.

¹³ For other kinds, see esp. the interrelated genres of funeral oration, enkomion and hymn: Thomson (1953)

77-83; Norden (n.2 above).

¹⁴ As do passages influenced by mystic initiation in both style and content, such as I *Corinthians* 13. The Eleusinian and Attis formulae are gathered and discussed by Thomson (1953).

From the mysteries of Attis we have:

- (8) ἐκ τυμπάνου βέβρωκα, ἐκ κυμβάλου πέπωκα, γέγονα μύστης Ἄττεως. (Firm. Mat. Err. 18)

From the tympanon I ate, from the cymbal I drank, I have become an initiate of Attis.

- (9) ἔφυγον κακόν, εὖρον ἄμεινον. (Dem. 18.259)

I fled from the bad, I found the better.

And from the formulae of (Dionysiac) mystic initiation inscribed on the funerary gold leaves¹⁵ we have:

- (10) νῦν ἔθανες καὶ νῦν ἐγένου, ...
ταῦρος εἰς γάλα ἔθορες·
αἶψα εἰς γ(ά)λα ἔθορες·
κριὸς εἰς γάλα ἔπεσε(ς).

Now you died and now you came into being/were born...
a bull to the milk you rushed;
quickly to the milk you rushed;
a ram to the milk you fell.

- (11) κύκλο(υ) δ' ἐξέπταν βαρυπενθέος ἀργαλέοιο·
ἡμερτο(ῦ) δ' ἐπέβαν στεφάνο(υ) ποσὶ καρπαλίμοισι.
δεσ(σ)ποίνας δ' ὑπὸ κόλπον ἔδυν χθονίας βασιλείας.

I flew out of the miserable circle of much grief.
I reached the lovely crown with swift feet.
I slipped under the lap of the royal mistress of the underworld.

All these formulae express the movement of the mystic initiate through initiation. All except perhaps (6) and (8) combine *Satzparallelismus* with *antithesis*, and in (9), (10) and (11) the antithesis expresses the passage through suffering or death to the eternal blessedness that we know from other texts to be the outcome of mystic initiation. Again, Pindar refers to the mystic transition with antithetical *Satzparallelismus*:

- (12) ὄλβιος ὅστις ἰδὼν κείν' εἶσ' ὑπὸ χθόν'.
οἶδε μὲν βίου τελευτάν,
οἶδεν δὲ διόσδοτον ἀρχάν. (fr. 137 Snell)

Blessed is he who having seen those things will go beneath the earth.
He knows the ending of life,
He knows the god-given beginning.

One of the earliest pieces of evidence for Dionysiac mystic initiation is the report by Herodotos (4.79) that the Scythian king Skyles was initiated in the Greek colony of Olbia. From the same city have survived numerous polished bone plates, of which a group of three (first published in 1978), dated to the fifth century BC, are inscribed with the following words.

¹⁵ Text in Riedweg (1998).

- (13) βίος θάνατος βίος ἀλήθεια Διό(νυσος) Ὀρφικ[οί]
 death life death truth Dio(nysos) Orphic(s?)
- (14) εἰρήνη πόλεμος ἀλήθεια ψεῦδος Διόν(υσος)
 peace war truth falsehood Dion(ysos)
- (15) Διό(νυσος) ἀλήθεια]α ψυχή
 Dio(nysos) truth (?) soul

The 'truth' may be the truth revealed in Dionysiac or Orphic initiation. Does 'life death life' refer, like our other mystic formulae, to *transition* through death to eternal blessedness? Or does it, like the identity of opposites apparently being affirmed in (14), refer to the *unity* of life and death? There is a striking resemblance between these inscriptions and several fragments of Herakleitos, notably:

- (16) ἀθάνατοι θνητοί, θνητοὶ ἀθάνατοι, ζῶντες τὸν ἐκείνων θάνατον, τὸν δὲ ἐκείνων βίον τεθνεῶτες. (22 B62 DK)

immortals mortals, mortals immortals, living the death of those, and dying the life of those.

- (17) ὁ θεὸς ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη, χειμὼν θέρος, πόλεμος εἰρήνη, κόρος λιμός ... (B67)¹⁶

God is day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger ...

This unity of opposites is explained as follows:

- (18) οὐ ξυνιᾶσιν ὅκως διαφερόμενον ἐωυτῶι ὁμολογέει· παλίντροπος ἀρμονία ὅκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης. (B51)

They do not understand how in being at variance it agrees with itself; backward-stretching *harmonia* as of bow and lyre.

The considerable influence of mystery cult on Herakleitos in various respects¹⁷ makes it likely that here too the influence is from mystery cult rather than vice versa. Now for Herakleitos opposites are also subject to transformation into each other:

- (19) τὰ ψυχρὰ θέρεται, θερμὸν ψύχεται, ὑγρὸν ἀναίνεται, καρφαλέον νοτίζεται. (B126)

Cold things are warmed, warm is cooled, wet is dried, dry is made wet.

¹⁶ This may be a radical development of the use of antithetical *Satzparallelismus* to express the power of deity in transforming human fortunes into their opposite: Hes. *Op.* 1-10; cf. Pl. *Symp.* 197d; Hom. *Il.* 20.242-3; Hubbard on Hor. *Carm.* 1.34.12.

¹⁷ The older arguments to this effect by Pfeleiderer, Nestle, Macchiore, Cornford, Thomson and Guthrie were spectacularly confirmed by the discovery of the Olbian bone inscriptions and the Derveni papyrus: West (1983); Seaford (1986); Laks and Most (1997) 18-19, 133, 135. See now also Schefer (2000).

The cycle of cosmological transformation involves the *soul*:¹⁸

- (20) ψυχῆισιν θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι, ὕδατι δὲ θάνατος γῆν γενέσθαι· ἐκ γῆς δὲ ὕδωρ γίνεται, ἐξ ὕδατος δὲ ψυχή. (B36)¹⁹

For souls it is death to become water, for water it is death to become earth: and from earth water comes into being, and from water soul.

This illuminates (13): βίος θάνατος βίος may refer both to the transition through death back to life *and* to the unity of life and death that is implied by this transition. The idea that death is also birth, expressed in the mystic formula (10), implies the unity of death and life expressed in (13) and (16). Reduced – as in (5) – to its bare minimum, antithetical *Satzparallelismus* becomes oxymoron. (Throughout this paper I mean by oxymoron the juxtaposition, or near-juxtaposition, of two words antithetical in sense.)²⁰ And the oxymoron expresses the idea, associated with mystery cult, that we have an immortal soul contained or imprisoned in a mortal body, so that for our immortal soul life is a kind of death and death a return to immortal life. In mystic ritual this may involve the experience of a kind of death while still alive.²¹

This experience of death in mystic ritual is, along with numerous other features of mystic ritual, projected in the experiences of Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*.²² He experiences a kind of death while alive, first within the house²³ and then as wearing 'the adornment that he will take to Hades' (857). The costume referred to is also *female*. Indeed, it is striking that Pentheus seems to unite in himself, just before death, the basic oppositions of living and dead, adult and infant (968-9), male and female, human and animal (990, 1107-8). All these basic oppositions, each one crucial to identity, are likely – to judge from the surviving evidence – to have been united in the liminal phase of mystic initiation: the initiand becomes like a dead person, an infant,²⁴ of the opposite sex, a sacrificed animal.²⁵ The mystic unity of opposites contributes to the structure of tragic action.

In Aeschylus Agamemnon, just before his death, undergoes something similar: he is bathed and wrapped in a cloth by his wife as if already dead.²⁶ And he allows himself to be treated like a 'woman' (918), a 'barbarian' (919), a 'god' (925), and is 'sacrificed' as if an animal.²⁷ I do not claim that this is designed to reflect mystic initiation. It is though a characteristically tragic representation, which may owe something to the influence that – I have argued elsewhere²⁸ – mystery cult had on the genesis of tragedy. It is as alien as is mystery cult to the spirit of Homer.

More specifically, tragedy contains tragic oxymora uniting life and death,²⁹ for instance:

- (21) (a) τὸν ζῶντα καίνειν τοὺς τεθνηκότας λέγω. (Aesch. *Cho.* 886)

I say that the dead are killing the living.

¹⁸ For the importance of cosmology for the fate of the soul in mystic doctrine, see Seaford (1986); Most (1997).

¹⁹ Also B77; Seaford (1986) 14-20.

²⁰ For a discussion of the oxymoron (more broadly defined) in early Greek literature, see Fehling (1969) 286-92.

²¹ Passage (10); Plut. *fr.* 178; Pl. *Phaedo* 108a; Ps.-Pl. *Axioch.* 371de; Ar. *Frogs* 154-8, 313-459; *Clouds* 257; Seaford (1994a) 282.

²² Seaford (1996) 42.

²³ *Bacch.* 616-37; Seaford (1996) 201.

²⁴ E.g. Kingsley (1995) 267; Fridh-Haneson (1987).

²⁵ Seaford (1996) 43, 222.

²⁶ Seaford (1984).

²⁷ *Ag.* 1118, 1278, 1433, 1504; Seaford (1994a) 369-70.

²⁸ Seaford (1994a).

²⁹ By far the closest expression in Homer is *Il.* 6.500: αἱ μὲν ἔτι ζῶν γόον Ἔκτορα ὦτι ἐνὶ οἴκῳ, which, significantly, is from a passage that – it has been argued on various grounds – is a late passage of Athenian inspiration, with other affinities with tragedy: Lorimer (1950) 442-7; Shipp (1972) 254-8; Bethe (1922) 314-16; Sale (1987); Seaford (1994a) 330-8 (and *cf.* 166-72).

- (b) ζῶντα μ' ἔκτεινεν θανόν. (Soph. *Trach.* 1163)³⁰

Dead he killed me living.

- (c) ἥδ' ἡμέρα φύσει σε καὶ διαφθερεῖ. (Soph. *OT* 438)

This day will give you birth and destroy you.

- (d) μιᾷ σε τῇδ' ὁδῷ θανόντα τε / καὶ ζῶντα. (Soph. *El.* 1314-15)

You on this one journey dead and alive.

- (e) ἔμψυχον ἡγοῦμαι νεκρόν. (Soph. *Ant.* 1167)

I consider (him) a living corpse.

Homer and Hesiod contain far fewer, and weaker,³¹ oxymora than tragedy does.³² It is no coincidence that the most striking oxymoron in all of Homer and Hesiod refers to Semele giving birth to Dionysos:

- (22) ἀθάνατον θνητή. (Hes. *Theog.* 942)

a mortal to an immortal,

– a myth closely associated with death and rebirth in mystic initiation.³³

Dionysos predicts that Pentheus will return from the mountainside ‘carried ... in the arms of your mother’ (Eur. *Bacch.* 969). This suggests a baby carried by his mother, but actually Agaue will return carrying the severed head of her son. United here is the most intimate of all relationships (between mother and baby) with the most savagely hostile (the hunter with her victim’s head). Similarly, the hostility between Orestes and his mother is expressed in his identification with the snake of her dream, which sucked at her breast:

- (23) (a) ὥστ' ἐν γάλακτι θρόμβον αἵματος σπάσαι. (Aesch. *Cho.* 533)

so as to draw a clot of blood in the milk.

- (b) θρόμβωι τ' ἔμειξεν αἵματος φίλον γάλα. (Aesch. *Cho.* 546)

and mixed the dear milk with a clot of blood.

This may be described as an oxymoronic trimeter, i.e. a trimeter wholly devoted to expressing a unity of opposites. This is not uncommon in tragedy: other examples are (21a) and (21c).

The extreme isolation of the tragic individual (e.g. Pentheus, Agamemnon, Orestes), which may perhaps derive in part from the isolation of the initiand in mystic ritual,³⁴ is expressed in the

³⁰ ‘Living’ is there only for the sake of the oxymoron, just as at *Ajax* 1385, *Ant.* 871.

³¹ Of the oxymoron I distinguish between two forms: a strong form, which expresses the identity of opposites, and a weak form, which merely draws attention to an opposition.

³² I am aware of the following in Homer: *Il.* 1.299;

4.43 (sim. 7.797), 104; 6.484, 500; 9.378; 11.654 (sim. 13.775; *Od.* 20.135); 16.176; 21.483-4; 22.9; 23.116; *Od.* 1.242; 5.155; 8.329; 13.80 (?); 15.488-9; 17.466 (cf. 20.307; 4.346; 17.476); 18.73 (?), 404; 23.97. In Hesiod I am aware of *Theog.* 585, 609, 942; *Op.* 58, 179, 318.

³³ Seaford (1996) 196-7.

³⁴ Seaford (1994a) ch.8.

unity of the opposites of φίλος and ἐχθρός, frequently embodied in *oxymora* such as the following.³⁵

(24) (a) φίλου γὰρ ἐχθρά ... (Aesch. *Sept.* 695)

the hostile (curse of my) dear (father).

(b) ἀπέρωτος ἔρωσ. (Aesch. *Cho.* 600)

(sexual) love (that is) no love.

(c) μήτηρ ἀμήτωρ. (Soph. *El.* 1154)

mother (who is) no mother.

(d) φίλαι τε κοῦ φίλαι. (Eur. *El.* 1230)

dear and not dear.

(e) γάμον ἄγαμον. (Eur. *Hel.* 690)

marriage (that is) no marriage.

What I suggest is that the unity of opposites – of life and death, of φίλος and ἐχθρός – is manifest both in the verbal *style* of tragedy and in its representation of *action*. It is manifest also, we have seen, in mystic *ritual*, and in the *cosmology* of Herakleitos. It is also manifest in tragic cosmology. For instance the Sophoclean Ajax, just before dying, states that he has been ‘feminised in speech’, and then uses oxymora³⁶ to express the insight that in the cosmos the opposites alternate – summer and winter, night and day, and so on – and that accordingly he will act on the assumption that an ἐχθρός will become φίλος and vice versa. I have argued elsewhere that the passage also evokes mystery cult,³⁷ and so embodies the unity of opposites in all our four areas of *verbal style*, *ritual*, *action* and *cosmology*.³⁸

3. MYSTERY CULT, LAMENTATION, TRAGEDY

I have argued elsewhere that important elements in the genesis of tragedy were mystery cult and hero-cult. These two cultic forms were able to combine because of what they had in common, in particular lamentation (for Dionysos or the hero).³⁹ Lamentation, like mystery cult, unites death with life, both in the death-like state of the mourners⁴⁰ and in the life accorded to the mourned – as when Orestes says to his dead father (Aesch. *Cho.* 504) ‘you are not dead even though you died (οὐ τέθνηκας οὐδέ περ θανών)’.

Here I expand the argument to include the style of ritual utterance: mystery cult and lamentation also had in common, as we have seen, antithetical *Satzparallelismus*.

The antithesis expressed in ritual *Satzparallelismus* may be sequential or simultaneous. In the mystic formulae it is in (6) and (8) sequential, although in these it is barely an antithesis. In

³⁵ Cf. also e.g. Soph. *OT* 416, 1214, 1256.

³⁶ Soph. *Aj.* 647: φύει τ’ ἄδηλα καὶ φανέντα κρύπτει, 665: ἐχθρῶν ἄδωρα δῶρα, 676: λύει πέδησας.

³⁷ E.g. the oxymoron at 692: ... δυστυχῶ, σεσωμένον; see further Seaford (1994b).

³⁸ For another example of the effect of mystic cosmology on tragic action, see Seaford (1986).

³⁹ Seaford (1994a) 319, 322-7, 398; note esp. Hdt. 5.67.

⁴⁰ Arist. *fr.* 101 Rose; Seaford (1994a) 86.

other mystic formulae – (7), (9), (10), (11), (12) – it is unclear whether it is sequential or simultaneous: for instance, the antithetical *Satzparallelismus* νῦν ἔθανες καὶ νῦν ἐγένου seems to refer to two distinct events of death and birth, and yet the repetition of νῦν implies that they are simultaneous – as in the lamenting *Satzparallelismus* at Aesch. *Cho.* 1014 νῦν αὐτὸν αἰνῶ, νῦν ἀποιμῶζω παρών. This simultaneity of death and life is implied also in (13) βίος θάνατος βίος, which may also, however, as we have seen, imply *transition* from life through death to life.

Ambiguity between sequentiality and simultaneity in antithetical *Satzparallelismus* occurs also in our passages of Aeschylean lament. In (3) the emergence of ὁ βλάπτων (the dead Agamemnon) may follow or coincide with his being bewailed. In (2) the reciprocal death blows may have been simultaneous or (barely) sequential. (1) is sequential, but the symmetry of the *Satzparallelismus* implies that the expedition was doomed from the start. There is a similar effect in (4) and (5).

Let us look more closely at this effect in (5). Offence and counter-offence are sequential, but the antithetical *Satzparallelismus* – reduced to its most economical form (φέρει φέροντ', ἐκτίνει δ' ὁ καίνων ... παθεῖν τὸν ἔρξαντα) – expresses the symmetry and inevitability of the sequence, and thereby the unity of offence and counter-offence. Though opposites, they are 'hard (δύσ-μαχα) to separate' (κρίναι) – i.e. hard to judge. And δύσμαχα may in this context imply that they are locked together like two fighters.⁴¹ The result is, the chorus conclude, that the clan is stuck fast to destruction (1565-6). If each offence makes inevitable a counter-offence indistinguishable from itself, then there is no end to the chain of revenge. The indistinguishability of violent opposites makes resolution of conflict impossible. Seen as embodying the unity of opposites, the vendetta can have no end.

Antithetical *Satzparallelismus* may be reduced to the juxtaposition of two antithetical words, both in the lament (φέρει φέροντ') and in mystery cult: the oxymoronic βίος θάνατος βίος (13) and θνητοὶ ἀθάνατοι (16) express the unity of opposites implied by the mystic chant νῦν ἔθανες καὶ νῦν ἐγένου. And just as there is no end to the chain of offence and counter-offence, so too, in mystery cult, the passage of the soul seen as embodying the unity of opposites may seem endless, a 'miserable cycle' (11). Passage (16), taken together with other fragments of Herakleitos, implies a cycle of reincarnation:⁴² the immortal soul enters a mortal body, leaves it at the death of that body, enters another body, and so on. But (11) indicates that in mystic ritual escape from the cycle is possible.⁴³

What I am suggesting is that in the earliest extant tragedy the synthesis of mystery cult and lamentation involves the synthesis of their similar modes of verbal expression. The idea of the unity of opposites is in mystery cult expressed in antithetical *Satzparallelismus*, as it is also in Aeschylus, where it converges with the antithetical *Satzparallelismus* of the lamentation that drives on the reciprocal violence. And we shall suggest in §5 that the importance of escape from the cycle of reincarnation (in mystery cult) contributes to the Aeschylean representation of the importance of escape from the cycle of reciprocal violence.

4. DIFFERENTIATION OF UNITED OPPOSITES IN THE *ORESTEIA*

In the lament from which (4) and (5) are taken it is said that lamentation by Klytaimestra for her husband would be ἄχαριν χάριν (*Ag.* 1545). Whereas φέρει φέροντ' implies the unity of what are in fact *sequential* reciprocal acts, ἄχαριν χάριν is more completely oxymoronic, for it embodies an act of (positive) reciprocity (χάριν) that is *simultaneously* its own exact antithesis (ἄχαριν). Because Klytaimestra is a friend who is an enemy, her χάρις is ἄχαρις.

⁴¹ For μαχ- of athletic fighting, see *LSJ* s. μάχομαι III.

⁴² Seaford (1986).

⁴³ Seaford (1986); Zuntz (1971) 320-2; Aristoxenos *ap. Diog. Laert.* 8.14; *Orphicorum Fragmenta* fr. 229 and 230.

The unity of opposites expressed by ἄχαριν χάριν is fundamental to the plot. In the next play Klytaimnestra, ‘intending χάριν ἀχάριτον’ (*Cho.* 44), sends the chorus and Elektra to pour libations and pray at Agamemnon’s tomb. The self-contradictory mission puts Elektra in a quandary: should her prayer accompanying the offerings be for positive reciprocity (89 παρὰ φίλης φίλῳ) or negative reciprocity (94-5 ἴσ’ ἀντιδοῦναι ... δόσιν γε τῶν κακῶν ἐπαξίαν)?

Persuaded to pray for the latter, i.e. revenge (144 τοὺς κτανόντας ἀντικαθθανεῖν), she separates out, in cumbersome antithetical *Satzparallelismus*, the opposites unified in the χάρις ἀχάριτος, the prayer for blessings from the dead (for us) and the prayer for harm from the dead (for them):

- (25) ταῦτ’ ἐν μέσῳ τίθημι τῆς καλῆς (Schütz: κακῆς M) ἀρᾶς,
κεῖνοις λέγουσα τήνδε τὴν κακὴν ἀράν. (*Cho.* 145-6)

These things I put in the middle of the good prayer,
against them speaking this evil prayer.

She then urges the chorus to sing a ‘paian of the dead’ (151 παῖνα τοῦ θανόντος) – an oxymoron in that the paian is often a song of triumph and certainly so in this context. Accordingly they sing a lament together with a celebration of the strength of the future avenger.⁴⁴ Once again, the sequence of violence and counter-violence that structures the trilogy is embodied in an oxymoron – here expressing a unity of opposites, paian and lament, in the same ritual song.⁴⁵ But the unity of opposites provides no release, no resolution. And so the wish is expressed for the differentiation of the opposites into a sequence: ‘Instead of laments at the tomb may the paian ...’ (342-3).⁴⁶

My hypothesis is that the need to differentiate united opposites is a dominant idea in the *Oresteia*.⁴⁷ Deriving from ritual, it is manifest in verbal style, in the shaping of events, and intermediately in various statements, some of which have seemed cumbersome or puzzling, for example (25). What remains of this section explores this theme with further examples. It will illuminate not only passages whose meaning is disputed but also passages in which what is hard to see is Aeschylus’ motive in writing them.

The omen of the eagles devouring the pregnant hare at Aulis, in the parodos of the *Agamemnon*, is described by Kalchas as a unity of opposites: δεξιὰ μὲν κατὰ μομφὰ δὲ ... (145), ‘favourable but inauspicious’. It is favourable because it means the sack of Troy, inauspicious because Artemis, resentful at the eagles

- (26) αὐτότοκον πρὸ λόχου μογερὰν πτάκα θυομένοισι (*Ag.* 137)

sacrificing the poor trembling hare with offspring before birth,

will demand θυσίαν ἑτέραν, generally translated ‘another sacrifice’ but meaning in fact ‘the other sacrifice’: and indeed the sacrifice of Iphigeneia both reciprocates the ‘sacrifice’ of the hare and is, as I have shown elsewhere, in various respects its polar opposite.⁴⁸ This being so, it is

⁴⁴ At 154: κενῶν κακῶν expresses (however we read this problematic passage) the same unity of opposites.

⁴⁵ As also at Eur. *Tro.* 126.

⁴⁶ This occurs in reverse at Thuc. 7.75.7.

⁴⁷ Compare the connection made by Girard (1977), in Sophocles and Euripides, between violence and the effacement of differences between the antagonists.

⁴⁸ The ‘meal of the eagles’, their ‘sacrifice’ of the hare, is like a hunt (‘... hounds ...’) by one species of another (extreme distance), whereas the ‘no meal’ sacrifice of Iphigeneia is not only same species but same family (extreme closeness) – with normal sacrifice (same household, different species) in between. See further Seaford (1989) 90-1.

significant that, as Stanford notes,⁴⁹ every word of (26) could refer also to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia: ‘sacrificing a trembling, cowering woman, his own child, on behalf of the army’. This description, by uniting the opposites, corresponds to Kalchas’ δεξιὰ μὲν κατάμομφα δέ. Faced with this symmetry of reciprocal opposite ‘sacrifices’, the latter to be reciprocated (151-5) by yet another ‘sacrifice’ (of Agamemnon, 1118, 1433, etc.), the chorus can conclude – in the hope to escape from the unity of opposites, to create positive sequentiality – only by repeating the starkly antithetical ritual *Satzparallelismus*

(27) αἴλινον αἴλινον εἶπέ, τὸ δ’ εὖ νικάτω (121, 138, 159)

sing the linos-cry (lament), but may the good prevail,

followed immediately by the famous hymn to Zeus, which begins thus:

(28) Ζεὺς ὅστις πότ’ ἐστίν, εἰ τόδ’ αὖ-
τῶι φίλον κεκλημένῳι,
τοῦτό νιν προσεννέπω·
οὐκ ἔχω προσεικάσαι
πάντ’ ἐπισταθμώμενος
πλὴν Διός, εἰ τὸ μάταν ἀπὸ φροντίδος ἄχθος
χρὴ βαλεῖν ἐτητύμως. (160-6)

Zeus, whoever he is, if to be called by this name is pleasing to him, thus do I address him. I am unable to liken him to anything, putting everything on the scales,⁵⁰ except Zeus, if from my mind the vain burden must be cast genuinely.

The traditional doubt about the nature of deity is developed into a statement of his incomparability. Nothing may be likened to Zeus, except Zeus. From προσεικάσαι (liken) we move rapidly to the similar notion of *equivalence*: nothing is like Zeus, and nothing (not even all things together) is equivalent to Zeus – in the way that equivalence is established by weighing on a balance.⁵¹ Even were all things to be put on (ἐπι-) the scale, they would not be enough to remove the weight (ἄχθος) from the mind. Only Zeus can do that, as the god who, as in Homer, inclines the fate-deciding scales.⁵² Equilibrium in Aeschylus is not a dead metaphor,⁵³ but an image of the unity of opposites no less perfect than the bow and lyre used as illustrations by Herakleitos in passage (18). The key to understanding the ‘abrupt’ (Page) transition to the hymn to Zeus is that only Zeus, who has established the principle of learning through suffering (177 πάθει μάθος), can resolve the dreadful unity of opposites implicit in the omen interpreted by Kalchas.⁵⁴ The principle is restated at the end of the song: ‘the skills of Kalchas are not without fulfilment

⁴⁹ Stanford (1939) 143-4, whose translation I give.

⁵⁰ σταθμός may mean ‘scales’, and σταθμάω means ‘measure’ or ‘weigh’ (e.g. Ar. *Frogs* 797). ἐπισταθμάω occurs only here.

⁵¹ The move is facilitated by (in a dynamic common in Aeschylus) the notion of equivalence being contained already in προσεικάσαι. It is not coincidental that in the third century BC εἰκάζειν is found meaning ‘to estimate a quantity’ (*LSJ* s.v. III). At Aesch. *Cho.* 518-19, θανόντι ... δειλαία χάρις ... οὐκ ἔχοιμ’ ἂν εἰκάσαι τάδε / τὰ δῶρα· μείω δ’ ἐστὶ τῆς ἀμαρτίας means not what it is usually taken to mean (e.g. ‘I do not know to what to liken these her gifts’, Lloyd-Jones) but ‘I am not able to liken these gifts (as *equivalent*) to the offence against the dead

man’, which is then clarified in the words that follow.

⁵² It is surprising that the commentators do not adduce Hom. *Il.* 8.69-72 and 22.209-19, where the fall of one side of the divine scales is caused by the (respective weights of the) two fates put on the scales by Zeus, and 19.223-4, where it is caused by Zeus himself (κλίνεισιν). Cf. Hom. *Il.* 16.658: Διὸς ἱρὰ τάλαντα; 14.99; Aesch. *Pers.* 346, a god loads the scales (of battle) οὐκ ἰσορρόπῳι τύχηι.

⁵³ Cf. e.g. *Ag.* 437-43.

⁵⁴ Similarly at 182 the χάρις βίαιος of the gods (mss. βιαιῶς makes no sense) is an oxymoron that implies the unity of violent reciprocity with the positive reciprocity that, as a divine gift, emerges from it.

(i.e. the cycle of violence will continue), but Justice for the sufferers inclines the scales to learning' (250-1 Δίκαια δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσιν μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει⁵⁵).

The sack of Troy, prefigured by the omen, is occurring as the dramatic action begins. Klytaimestra's lengthy description of this event derives entirely from her opening insistence on separating the two kinds of cry now heard in Troy.

- (29) οἶμαι βοὴν ἄμεικτον ἐν πόλει πρέπειν·
 ὄξος τ' ἄλειφα τ' ἐγγέας ταύτῳ κύτει
 διχοστατοῦντ' ἄν οὐ φίλως προσεννέποις·
 καὶ τῶν ἀλόντων καὶ κρατησάντων δίχα
 φθογγὰς ἀκούειν ἔστιν ... (Ag. 321-5)

I think an unmixed cry is clearly heard in the city:
 vinegar and oil, having poured them into the same container,
 you would call set apart in no friendly manner;
 and the voices of the captured and conquerors
 one may hear separately ...

She continues with a lengthy account of the sufferings of the Trojans, the release from suffering of the Greeks, and the hope that the Greeks may not themselves come to grief (by offending the gods, or because of the sufferings of the dead), and concludes with the wish 'may the good prevail, to be seen not in equilibrium (διχορρόπως)'. Similarly, the herald arrived from Troy will optimistically say of the Trojan war 'the gain prevails, suffering does not outweigh (ἀντιρρέπει) it' (574).

Why does Klytaimestra insist on the cry (βοή) being 'unmixed', dwell on the simile of the liquids being unmixed (unlike the mixed milk and blood of passage 23b),⁵⁶ and emphasize the separate sufferings of the Greeks and the Trojans? Because of the tragic focus on the unity of the opposites, of intensified utterance seeming to express both joy and grief, which gives rise to oxymora such as, for instance, our earlier 'paian of the dead', or Elektra's sobbing compared to laughter (448), or the play on the ambiguity of βοή between joy and grief at Soph. *OT* 420,⁵⁷ or the wedding song that has to be relearned as a lament later in the *Agamemnon* (705-12) and which is said, in another evocation of the scales, to fall to (ἐπέρρεπε) the kinsmen of the *bridegroom* to sing.⁵⁸

Like the chorus in (27), Klytaimestra's concluding wish 'that the good may prevail not in equilibrium (349 ... μὴ διχορρόπως ἔχειν)' uses the power of speech to resolve the 'equilibrium' of the unity of opposites. This suggests that, three lines earlier, the corrupt ἐγγήγορον qualifying the 'suffering of the killed' should be εὐήγορον,⁵⁹ 'fair-spoken'. Similarly, the herald insists that a 'fair spoken' (εὐφημον, i.e. auspicious) day should not be polluted with the telling of bad news – he means the storm suffered by the Greek fleet on its return:

- (30) εὐφημον ἦμαρ οὐ πρέπει κακαγγέλωι
 γλώσσηι μιαινέειν· χωρὶς ἡ τιμὴ θεῶν. (636-7)

It is not seemly to pollute an auspicious day
 with the voice of bad news. Separate is the honour (for the gods below)
 from the (Olympian) gods.

⁵⁵ Cf. Hom. *Il.* 14.99: ... αἰπὺς ὄλεθρος ἐπιρρέπει, and *réπειν* at *Il.* 8.69-72 and 22.208-19; Ar. *Frogs* 1393.

⁵⁶ Cf. Eur. *Ion* 1016-17.

⁵⁷ Seaford (1987) 119. Cf. e.g. Soph. *Aj.* 976; Eur. *El.* 756, *HF* 751, 895.

⁵⁸ The point of the scales image may be that the anomalous absence of the *bride's* kin resolves the equi-

librium inherent in the normal wedding (between sorrow and joy, bride's kin and bridegroom's kin) irreversibly into lamentation by bridegroom's kin: see further Seaford (1987) 123-7.

⁵⁹ Headlam's brilliant conjecture. Page ignores the decisive objections (Headlam, Fraenkel, Thomson) to ἐγγήγορός (Porson).

The allusive brevity of χωρίς ἡ τιμὴ θεῶν implies the familiarity of the principle, unfamiliar to us, that gods above and gods below must be kept apart.

The herald continues by describing at length an example of what *would* be bad news, namely the sack of a city. In the case of such suffering, he adds, it is appropriate (πρέπει again) to utter παιᾶνα τόνδ' Ἑρινύων, 'this paian of the Erinyes (Furies)'. This description is meant as hypothetical. But in fact a city (Troy) *has* been sacked, and so 'this paian of the Erinyes', referring to the hypothetical description, is a reality (hence the unusual role of the deictic τόνδε). We are reminded that a Greek paian means its opposite (lament) for the Trojans: whereas a paian, expressing triumph, belongs to the gods above (notably Apollo), the Erinyes are of the world below, and agents of revenge.⁶⁰ This confirms, by the way, the interpretation I have given of (30) – following Thomson and Fraenkel – against Page's 'separate (i.e. from pollution) is the honour due to the gods'. The herald's attempt to keep the opposites separate is thwarted by his own choice of a detailed description of the sufferings of a sacked city as an example of what would be bad news. The oddity of this is the price paid for the manifestation of the power of the unity of opposites (of good news with bad, of victory with defeat, of the gods above with the gods below) over his intention to keep them separate. There is the same manifestation in his very next words, beginning the account of the storm that ravaged the Greek fleet (648-51):

- (31) πῶς κεδνὰ τοῖς κακοῖσι συμμεῖξω, λέγων
χειμῶν' Ἀχαιοὺς οὐκ ἀμήνιτον θεῶν;
ξυνώμοσαν γάρ, ὄντες ἔχθιστοι τὸ πρίν,
πῦρ καὶ θάλασσα ... (648-51)

How shall I mix good with bad, telling
of a storm for the Achaians that was not without the anger of the gods?
For fire and sea, being previously most hostile to each other, swore alliance ...

Despite the intentions of the herald, the opposites combine, even at the level of cosmology: sea combines with fire.

Agamemnon arrives. Rejecting Klytimestra's invitation to walk on the textiles, he tells her not to spread cloths on his path, for it is gods who should be honoured thus, and for a mortal to walk on embroidered finery (923 ἐν ποικίλοις ... κάλλεσιν) is not without fear. He tells her to honour him as a man, not a god, and continues,

- (32) χωρίς ποδοψήστρων τε καὶ τῶν ποικίλων
κληδῶν ἀντεῖ. (926-7)

Separately proclaims the utterance⁶¹ of 'footmats' and 'embroideries'.

Agamemnon is here emphasizing the distinction he has just made: footmats (for men) are distinct from embroideries (for gods). However, Page translates rather 'Fame shouts aloud, without footwipers and embroideries' (i.e. my fame speaks for itself), ignoring Fraenkel's decisive objections to this translation: in particular ποδόψηστρα are contemptible and so cannot be equivalent in this context to ποικίλα, which have just been said to be appropriate for a god not a man. Page objects that κληδῶν, ἀντεῖ and the strong coupling with τε καὶ are all inappropriate to the translation he rejects, failing to see that the strong coupling expresses a unity of opposites (between footmats for men and embroideries for gods, both mats) that the emphatically placed χωρίς and the strangely emphatic κληδῶν ἀντεῖ are needed to separate. Once again, an unexpected, seemingly cumbersome expression makes sense as emphatic differentiation of opposites.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Ag.* 1075, 1078-9. For the juxtaposition of the paian with its chthonic opposite in tragedy, see Rutherford (1994-95).

⁶¹ Or name, as at *Eum.* 418.

τε ... καί has a similar function earlier in the same scene:

- (33) γνώσῃ δὲ χρόνῳ διαπευθόμενος
τόν τε δικάϊως καὶ τὸν ἀκαίρως ... (807-8)

You will know in time by investigating
the one who justly and the one who unseasonably ...

– opposites which Agamemnon disastrously fails to separate, just as in the event he fails to separate ποδόγηστρα and ποικίλα, thereby also fatally uniting the opposites of man with god (922-3), male with female (918), and Greek with barbarian (919).

Just as Agamemnon is killed by a φίλος, Cassandra remembers how she was mocked (her prophecies disbelieved) by her own relatives:

- (34) φίλων ὑπ' ἐχθρῶν οὐ διχορρόπως, μάτην. (1272)

by hostile friends not in equilibrium, in vain.

Page comments 'nothing whatever can be made of the words οὐ διχορρόπως μάτην'. Fraenkel takes them together as meaning 'not equivocally in vain', i.e. 'and their delusion clear beyond doubt', on the grounds that οὐ διχορρόπως goes harshly with ὑπ' ἐχθρῶν and 'does not add to the powerful phrase φίλων ὑπ' ἐχθρῶν anything essential'. But it does. Once again, what seems cumbersome and pointless acquires point as resolving the unity of opposites (expressed as equilibrium) – here of φίλος with ἐχθρός.⁶² It is the hostility that prevailed.⁶³

Like the bow and lyre of Herakleitos, scales in equilibrium embody the unity of opposites, but are also – unlike bow and lyre – an instrument of divine Justice. It is this that implies hope. Δίκη δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσιν μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει (*Ag.* 250-1; cf. *Cho.* 61): escape from the unity of opposites means Justice, or Zeus (passage 28), inclining the scales. The divine scales are fleetingly evoked along with the idea of the gods as jurors voting 'not with equilibrium (οὐ διχορρόπως)' for the destruction of Troy (*Ag.* 815-16). In the trial of Orestes in *Eumenides* the votes of the human jurors are equal⁶⁴ – a potentially disastrous unity of opposites resolved by the casting vote of Athena. Only one obstacle then remains to permanent escape from violence and suffering. The Erinyes, equally capable of causing devastation or blessings, remain angry. Athena addresses them thus:

- (35) οὐκ ἂν δικάϊως τῇιδ' ἐπιρρέποις πόλει
μῆνιν τιν' ... (888-9)

Not justly would you bring down (as in a balance) on the polis
any anger ...

Here again ἐπιρρέπειν is not a dead metaphor: rather than meaning merely 'inflict', it expresses resolution of a unity of opposites, of a situation in the balance, of which the Erinyes may incline either side.

⁶² Cf. Eur. *Phoen.* 1446: φίλος γὰρ ἐχθρὸς ἐγένετ',
ἀλλ' ὅμως φίλος.

⁶³ μάτην then refers (if not corrupt) to the disastrous
outcome of their mocking.

⁶⁴ Seaford (1995).

5. PERMANENT RESOLUTION

It was the unity of opposites – the indistinguishability of offence and counter-offence – that seemed to make resolution of the conflict impossible. Just as the killing of Agamemnon is assimilated – in (4) and (5) – to the killing of Iphigeneia, so the killing of Klytaimestra is assimilated to the killing of Agamemnon: offence and counter-offence form a unity of opposites. The assimilation is expressed in antithetical *Satzparallelismus*, for instance

- (36) (a) ἀντὶ μὲν ἐχθρᾶς γλώσσης ἐχθρὰ
 γλώσσα τελείσθω ...
 ἀντὶ δὲ πληγῆς φονίας φονίαν
 πληγὴν τινέτω. δράσαντι παθεῖν ... (*Cho.* 309-13)

In return for words of hate
 let words of hate be paid ...
 In return for bloody blow
 let bloody blow be paid. The doer must suffer ...

- (b) Ἄρης Ἄρει ξυμβαλεῖ, Δίκαι Δίκαι. (*Cho.* 461)

Ares clashes with Ares, Justice with Justice.

This results in ‘suffering that is hard to put a stop to’ (470). Apollo tells Orestes to go after his father’s murderers ‘in the same way (τρόπον τὸν αὐτόν), meaning to kill them in return’ (274). The display of a male and a female corpse will mirror the same display at the end of *Agamemnon*,⁶⁵ and evokes the same ironical reference to their lying together in love (*Ag.* 1446, *Cho.* 906). And the identity of agency is expressed by the formal symmetry of stichomythia:⁶⁶

- (37) Klyt. ἡ Μοῖρα τούτων, ὦ τέκνον, παραιτία.
 Or. καὶ τόνδε τοῖνυν Μοῖρ’ ἐπόρσυνεν μόρον. (910-11)

Klyt. Fate is partly responsible, o child, for these things.
 Or. And so it is Fate that brings this death too.

Similarly the same agents (the Erinyes) both impel Orestes to kill his mother and punish him for killing her:

- (38) Klyt. ὄρα, φύλαξαι μητρὸς ἐγκότους κύνας.
 Or: τὰς τοῦ πατρὸς δὲ πῶς φύγω παρεῖς τάδε; (924-5)
- Klyt. Look, beware the angry dogs of your mother.
 Or How am I to escape those of my father if I fail to do this?

This threat of attack on Orestes by the Erinyes of his father had been proclaimed by Apollo (*Cho.* 283-4). To be sure, the Erinyes of the father may be thought to be in a sense distinct from those of the mother. But Orestes envisages his matricide as a third drink of unmixed blood for the Erinyes (singular, *Cho.* 577-8): i.e. the same Erinyes is actively involved in the whole chain of revenge.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Taplin (1978) 125-6.

⁶⁶ Cf. the weighing of single tragic lines against each other at *Ar. Frogs* 1378-1413.

⁶⁷ See also *Ag.* 155, 1119, 1190 1433, 1501, 1569, 1580; *Cho.* 402, 651.

Offence and counter-offence, dramatized in the first and second plays of the trilogy respectively, are assimilated to each other, and have failed to bring resolution (*Cho.* 1073-6). Accordingly, the third play brings resolution by distinguishing between them. The judicial decision is a 'separation' (δοιπεῖν: *Eum.* 472, 488, 630, 749), that must occur ἐτητύμως (488) – the adverb used of the definitive resolution in the hymn to Zeus (passage 28). Killing Agamemnon and killing Klytaimestra are 'not the same thing' (625).

A crucial precondition for this separation is that the superhuman involvement, which we have seen in the first two plays intensifying the unity of the opposed acts of violence, should be differentiated (as it is, vainly, in passage 30). Hence early in the *Eumenides* the repeated emphasis that the Erinyes, who in the *Choephoroi* were aligned with Apollo (283-4), are separate from – and detested by – the Olympian gods (69-73, 185-91, 197, 350-2, 365-6, 385-6). The physical presence of Apollo and the Erinyes underpins the differentiation of opposed principles that allows the judicial differentiation of the acts of violence. But differentiation is only the necessary first step. Permanent escape from the cycle of violence, like permanent escape from the cycle of life and death, requires reconciliation of the opposites in a new order.

How is this reconciliation to be achieved? First we should glance at Anaximander and Heraikleitos, each of whom imagines a cosmology pervaded by opposites.⁶⁸ Anaximander imagines that the opposites 'give penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice according to the assessment of time', a process that also seems to be reabsorption and reuniting of the opposites into the 'unlimited' (ἄπειρον), from which they had been separated out.⁶⁹ For Heraikleitos the tension between opposites, and the transformation of opposites into each other, is controlled by the *logos*. I argue elsewhere⁷⁰ that the cosmology constituted by the unity and interaction of opposites controlled by a third party – imagined in their different ways by Anaximander and Heraikleitos – is in part a projection of *interpersonal* opposition that is controlled ultimately by the polis.

We have seen that central to the *Oresteia*, too, is the unity and interaction of opposites, which – though dominated by interpersonal oppositions – seems all-pervasive, even acquiring a cosmological dimension, and is eventually controlled, with the help of the gods, by the polis. And so the *Oresteia* dramatizes the kind of social process that is, in Presocratic philosophy and even in the *Oresteia* itself, projected onto the cosmos. What distinguishes the civic optimism of the *Oresteia* is that the polis does not merely control an unending cycle of oppositions but permits an escape from the cycle into permanent well-being.⁷¹

We have noted the influence of mystery cult on Heraikleitos, and in particular on his idea of the passage of the soul through the transformation of opposites into each other. Whether, like mystic doctrine, he also believed that the soul could escape from this cycle of cosmological transformation into permanent well-being is unknown (it is not indicated in the extant fragments). But the mystic doctrine is certainly analogous to the escape dramatized in the *Oresteia*, even if it did not influence it.

But perhaps it did influence it. The overall conception of events in the *Prometheia* (whether or not that trilogy was by Aeschylus) was influenced by the mystic idea of the passage of the soul through the cosmological cycle to eventual liberation.⁷² Moreover, several passages of the *Oresteia* have been identified as evoking the mystic ritual at Eleusis.⁷³ To these I would add that the beacon in the darkness welcomed by the watchman as signifying 'release from sufferings' (*Ag.* 20-1) would have evoked the light in the darkness that signified salvation after sufferings in the Eleusinian ritual.⁷⁴ But firelight can be delusive (492) or even destructive (389). What the

⁶⁸ Comparison of Aeschylus with the Presocratics has been surprisingly thin: most detailed is Rösler (1970).

⁶⁹ B1 DK; Vlastos (1970) 77-80.

⁷⁰ Seaford (2004).

⁷¹ This is not of course to say that punishment will become unnecessary: see e.g. passage (5) and *Eum.* 954-5.

⁷² Seaford (1986).

⁷³ Thomson (1966) index s. Eleusinian Mysteries; Seaford (1994a) 373-4.

⁷⁴ Seaford (1996) 202; Thomson (1966) on *Ag.* 1.

watchman sees is generally translated ‘light in the darkness’ but actually means ‘dark light’ (21 ὀρφναίου πυρός).⁷⁵ It is only at the end of the trilogy that this unity of opposites is resolved by the direct association of the torchlight escorting the Erinyes with the permanence of their benevolence to Attika (*Eum.* 1029-31). The Eleusinian mysteries are a festival of the Athenian polis, and combine salvation for the individual initiate with the celebration of the gift of corn for all humankind. The liberation of Prometheus in the *Prometheia*, modelled on the mystic passage of the individual soul, brings permanent blessings for all humankind.⁷⁶ Similarly the liberation of Orestes brings to the Athenian polis blessings (the cult of the Erinyes, the law court, the alliance with Argos) whose *permanence* is repeatedly emphasized.⁷⁷

This permanent resolution depends on reconciliation of the opposites that are early in the *Eumenides* so emphatically differentiated, the chthonian Erinyes and the Olympian gods. In the aetiological narrative of the Eleusinian mysteries, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Persephone is rescued from Hades by Zeus, but will have to spend a third of each year with Hades, an arrangement ratified by Zeus (445-8); and Demeter, though she fails to immortalize Demophoön, bestows on mortals happiness after death through initiation. Both outcomes incorporate the claims of death into the permanent victory over it. Death and life, the lower and the upper world, are reconciled so as to produce not a symmetrical unity of opposites but the predominance of the more desirable opposite. And this is also the incorporation of Persephone and Demeter into the male predominance of Hades and Zeus (414, 485). Similarly in *Eumenides* the claims of the chthonian female Erinyes are incorporated into the permanent well-being of the male-dominated polis. But what form does this incorporation of the Erinyes take?

The chorus of the *Agamemnon*, in their anxiety as the king enters the house, sing:

- (39) μάλα γάρ τοι τᾶς πολλᾶς
 ὑγιείας ἀκόρεστον
 τέρμα· νόσος γὰρ
 γείτων ὁμότοιχος ἐρείδει. (1001-4)

Much health has an insatiable boundary. For disease, sharing a party wall, presses upon it.

The text is incurably corrupt,⁷⁸ but sense emerges. There are parallels, cited by the commentators, for the idea that it is damaging to pursue health too far. An excessive cargo – continue the chorus – causes the ship to founder on a reef; excessive wealth and famine are remediable, but (aptly for the context) blood once fatally shed cannot be restored. This introduces the idea that what produces unity of the opposites (by destroying the party wall between them) is excess.⁷⁹ Their differentiation is maintained by moderation. The desired state is situated between extremes. This applies to the basic goods of health and wealth as well as – we inevitably feel – to the impending act of revenge. Accordingly the same word ἀκόρεστος, ‘insatiable’, is used here of health, of the wealth that ends in disaster (1331), of the disaster that may spring from good fortune (756), and of the reciprocal violence (1117, 1484): things pass, through excess, into their opposite. The Erinyes will spell out the implication of this view:

⁷⁵ Cf. *Cho.* 319: σκότωι φάος ἀντίμοιρον; *Soph. Aj.* 394: σκότος, ἐμὸν φάος; *OC* 1549: ὦ φῶς ἀφεγγές.

⁷⁶ Seaford (1986).

⁷⁷ *Eum.* 291, 484, 572, 670-2, 683, 708, 763, 853, 891, 965, 975, 977, 992, 1031.

⁷⁸ On metrical grounds. In particular, τᾶς πολλᾶς may be an intrusive gloss: West (1990) 207-9.

⁷⁹ An idea beautifully expressed in 1013, πημονᾶς γέμων ἄγαν, which should not be changed to πλησμονᾶς ... : Page’s objection – ‘what the ship is too full of ... is not “woe” but “wealth”, “surfeit of goods”’ – fails to recognize the unity of opposites.

- (40) μήτ' ἄναρκτον βίον
 μήτε δεσποτούμενον
 αἰνέσῃς· παντὶ μέσῳ τὸ κράτος θεὸς
 ὥπασεν, ἄλλ' ἄλλαι δ' ἐφορεύει. (*Eum.* 526-30)

approve neither an ungoverned life
 nor a tyrannized one;
 god gave power to every mean/ middle,
 though he oversees different things in different ways.

This principle has a psychological dimension: it is, continue the Erinyes, from 'health of minds that much-prayed-for well-being comes'. Their early enunciation of the principle (before the trial of Orestes) and its reiteration by Athena (696-7) prefigure the eventual reconciliation, in which they pray for the permanent exclusion of 'insatiable' (976 ἄπληστος) civil conflict, and praise the Athenians (1000) for having achieved σωφροσύνη (moderation, self-control).

The principle in passage (40) is *universal* ('every mean', with παντὶ in emphatic position).⁸⁰ And so it is comparable to another strand of contemporary philosophy, namely Pythagoreanism. The earliest Pythagorean whose words survive is Philolaos (c. 470-390 BC). Among the very few authentic extant fragments we have:

- (41) (a) Nature in the world-order was fitted together (or 'harmonized', ἁρμόχθη)
 from unlimiteds and limiters (ἐξ ἀπείρων καὶ περαινόντων), both the whole
 world-order and the things in it. (44 B1 DK)
- (b) ... since these beginnings (the unlimiteds and limiters) pre-existed and were
 neither alike each other nor even related, they could not have been ordered (κοσμηθῆναι)
 if ἁρμονία (fitting-together, harmony) had not come upon them (ἐπεγένετο) ... (B6)

This is followed immediately by a discussion of musical ἁρμονία.⁸¹ In Plato's *Symposium* the Pythagoreanizing doctor Eryximachos speaks of concord brought to hostile opposites as a principle in both medicine⁸² and music. Some Pythagoreans maintain, according to Aristotle (*Met.* 986a), that the fundamental constituents of the world are ten pairs of opposites (including good-bad). This idea seems to go back to the fifth century.⁸³ Other passages of Aristotle indicate that the first pair in the list – limit-unlimit – is (as it is for Philolaos) fundamental,⁸⁴ and that the list is (as suggested by the presence of the pair good-bad) *evaluative*: there is a 'column of the goods', and 'the bad belongs to the unlimited, the good to the limited'.⁸⁵

We have then two models for the relation of opposites to each other. One is found in the Ionians Anaximander and Herakleitos. In this model the opposites may be thought to form a unity, in any of various ways: they constantly encroach on, or are transformed into, only each other; or they form a single continuum; or they depend on each other; or they are two aspects of the same entity or process. Neither opposite is superior to – or can ultimately prevail over – the

⁸⁰ Even though the illustration they go on to give is, once again, of the excessively loaded ship foundering on the reef (of Justice).

⁸¹ B6A: for the authenticity and continuity of this fragment, see Huffman (1993) 147-60. Philolaos seems to have known of the harmonic mean, even if he did not call it 'harmonic': see A24 and Huffman (1993) 167-71.

⁸² 186d-7a. This resembles the idea of health propounded by Pythagoras' fellow-Krotonian Alkmaion (24 B4 DK), who was a contemporary of Aeschylus (see next note). With Eryximachos' puzzlement over Herakleitos,

Plato satirizes the confusion between Herakleitos and Pythagoreanism that persists even today (see n.86 below). Herakleitean 'harmony', in contrast to Pythagorean, involves tension or strife between the opposites: Guthrie (1962) 435-7.

⁸³ Aristotle says that he does not know whether it influenced Alkmaion of Kroton or vice versa. Alkmaion probably lived in the early to mid fifth century: Guthrie (1962) 341-4, 357-9.

⁸⁴ *Met.* 990a8; *EN* 1106b29; Guthrie (1962) 246.

⁸⁵ *EN* 1096b15, 1106b29.

other. And so tension or strife persists. This is the model from which the *Oresteia* is constantly trying to escape.⁸⁶ The other model, associated with Pythagoreanism, is of opposites which retain their separate identities but combine to form an ordered whole. In this order one opposite may be superior to and dominate the other: for instance Philolaos' idea of the fitting together of limiteds and limiters through *harmonia* is not an identity or mutual encroachment of limit and unlimited but a limitation of the unlimited;⁸⁷ and Plato in his Pythagoreanizing⁸⁸ ontology in the *Philebus* clearly believes that the limit should control the unlimited and 'put an end to the conflict of opposites', notably in health and music (25d-26b). This is the model in which the *Oresteia* finds a solution.⁸⁹

The process envisaged in the first model – the alternating encroachment of opposites on, or their transformation into, only each other – is unlimited both in the sense that there is no limit to prevent the opposites successively annihilating each other and in the sense that the cycle has no end. But the second model implies – as does the Erinyes' notion of the mean (39) – a limit preventing either opposite from prevailing – a limit like the party wall between health and disease. The unlimits with which the *Oresteia* is most concerned are those of reciprocal violence and the accumulation of wealth. They are related in that the reciprocal violence brought control of the wealth of the royal household.⁹⁰ Χαίρετ' ἐν αἰσιμύϊσι πλούτου, uttered by the Erinyes (996), means in effect 'rejoice in the individual *limits* to wealth'.⁹¹ But they stress the power of *every* mean, and Philolaos regards the fitting together of limiters and unlimiteds as *universal*.

Although there was an ancient tradition that Aeschylus was a Pythagorean (Cic. *Tusc.* 3.23), and attempts have been made to find evidence of this in his dramas, I do not assert the direct influence of Pythagoreanism on Aeschylus any more than I do the direct influence of Herakleitos. The point is that these ideas are not the recondite property of marginal researchers, but have – in varying forms – a widespread currency that derives at least in part from the similarity of social processes in the advanced city-states.⁹² The (pre-Pythagorean) political origin of the importance of the mean is manifest in the poetry of Solon, who is – like Aeschylus – concerned with the cohesion of the polis, and sees that from the unlimited accumulation of wealth comes ruthlessly destructive civic conflict (13.71-6; 4.5-6), in which he mediates between rich and poor (5; 36.19-20; 37.9-10). He sees – again like Aeschylus – that what is required is moderation (4c 3: ἐν μετρίοισι τίθεσθε μέγαν νόον), and even universalizes and projects onto the cosmos the limits implicit in this attitude of moderation: 'it is very difficult to apprehend the mind's invisible measure (μέτρον), which alone holds the limits (πείρατα) of all things'.⁹³ And

⁸⁶ And so I regard the following incidental remarks in books on Aeschylus as profoundly misleading: at the end of the *Oresteia*, 'violence et contre-violence débouche sur l'harmonie. C'est l'union des contraires. Ainsi se manifeste une conception dialectique de l'univers ... qui au début du V^e siècle s'épanouit ... dans deux oeuvres de nature différente, celle du dramaturge et celle du philosophe Héraclite' (Moreau (1985) 290). 'The basic ethical pattern or rhythm revealed by the action of the *Oresteia* is one of reciprocity and balance' (Gagarin (1976) 59).

⁸⁷ Huffman (1993) 37-53. In the two extant fragments of Philolaos' cosmogony the first thing fitted together (ἀρμοσθέν), at the centre of the sphere, is called 'hearth' (B7), and the κόσμος comes to be from the centre outwards (B17): i.e. fitting together produces a limited piece of the unlimited (fire): Huffman (1993) 42-3.

⁸⁸ Huffman (1993) 106.

⁸⁹ Aristotle records that according to the Pythagoreans supreme excellence and goodness are not present in the beginning, on the grounds that although for plants and animals their beginnings are causes, excellence and perfection are in their outcome (*Met.* 1072b30). Cf. Guthrie (1962) 248-51.

⁹⁰ *Ag.* 1574, 1638, *Cho.* 301.

⁹¹ Cf. αἴσιμος at *Hom. Od.* 21.294; 23.14.

⁹² Seaford (2004).

⁹³ *Fr.* 16: γνωσοσύνης δ' ἀφανὲς χαλεπώτατόν ἐστι νοῆσαι / μέτρον, ὃ δὴ πάντων πείρατα μόνον ἔχει. Cf. *Jr.* 13.52, the ἱμερτῆς σοφίης μέτρον of poetry. So too Philolaos seems to imply that in some way *knowing* involves limiting: B3. ἀρχὰν γὰρ οὐδὲ τὸ γνωσούμενον ἐσσεῖται πάντων ἀπείρων ἐόντων. This interpretation, with γνωσούμενον active in sense, is cogently argued by Huffman (1993) 118-20, who also compares Pl. *Theaet.* 161c-2d. Others have taken γνωσούμενον as passive (cf. the Aristotelian belief that an unlimited object is unknowable).

just as Solon denies victory to both sides (*fr.* 5.6), so in Aeschylus the Erinyes are assured that they have not been defeated (*Eum.* 795): it is the city of Athens (903, 915, 1009) and the principle of permanent positive reciprocity⁹⁴ that has won the victory. Here again, we may add, there is escape from the unity of opposites, for the positive reciprocity is not also negative reciprocity and the victory is not also defeat, whereas in the *Choephoroi* Elektra's prayer (passage 25) combined positive and negative reciprocity (44 χάριν ἀχάριτον), and Orestes' 'victory' was simultaneously a defeat (1017, 1023).

In the Pythagorean table of ten oppositions preserved by Aristotle the good is associated with limit, male, still and light, the bad with unlimit, female, moving and darkness. The textile by means of which Klytaimestra kills her husband is called an 'unlimited ἀμφίβληστρον⁹⁵ ... a bad wealth of cloth' (*Ag.* 1382-3), and is associated with the textiles on which Agamemnon walks,⁹⁶ which were bought, Klytaimestra boasts, with the unlimited wealth of the house.⁹⁷ The unendingness of the murderous (*Cho.* 1015) textile is emphasized again by Apollo in the trial scene (*Eum.* 634-5: ἐν δ' ἀτέρμονι / κόπτει πεδήσας' ἄνδρα δαιδάλωι πέπλωι). Klytaimestra's bathing and wrapping of her still-living husband is perverted death ritual,⁹⁸ and death ritual is a completion, a *limit*. Just as the Euripidean Elektra vainly calls the textile covering her murdered mother an 'end of the great sufferings of the house',⁹⁹ so the 'unlimited' textile with which Klytaimestra murdered her husband and covered his corpse evokes the unendingness of the sufferings of the house (as well as of its wealth). This unendingness is associated with the spirits of revenge, Klytaimestra's female champions the Erinyes, as is the covering textile (*Ag.* 1580: ἐν πέπλοις Ἑρινύων).

We have then an alignment of female with bad and with the unlimit that subverts the limit of ritual. This corresponds to the Pythagorean table of opposites. Given the opposition between on the one hand the Erinyes' permanent and universal mobility¹⁰⁰ and on the other the domestic fixity eventually achieved by Orestes (and indeed by the Erinyes), we may add the opposition still-moving. And we may also add the polarity light-darkness, given the association in the *Eumenides* of the Erinyes – and of the womb – with darkness,¹⁰¹ together with the theme of light in the darkness described above.

Resolution of the conflict depends, we noted, on making a distinction between offence and counter-offence. This distinction is eventually found in the famous distinction between the male as parent of the child and the female as the mere environment for the seed to grow in. This argument, justifying Orestes in killing his mother to avenge his father, is put forward by Apollo with a reference to the motherless Athena (658-66), and then endorsed by Athena referring to her own motherlessness (735-8). Similarly, just as Philolaos envisages the creating of the world as a limiting of the unlimited, so – at the level of the microcosm – he envisages sperm as 'constructing' (κατασκευαστικόν) the animal that is constructed (τὸ κατασκευαζόμενον ζῷον), with the womb as the 'place' in which this occurs.¹⁰²

⁹⁴ *Eum.* 974-5: νικᾷ δ' ἀγαθῶν ἔρις ἡμετέρα διὰ παντός. Note how *Eum.* 868, εἰ δρῶσαν, εἰ πάσχουσαν, echoes the antithetical *Satzparallelismus* of passage (4), ἄξια δράσας, ἄξια πάσχων. Cf. 984-6, 992: εὐφρονας εὐφρονες αἰεῖ, 999: φίλας φίλοι.

⁹⁵ ἀμφίβληστρον is from the verb ἀμφιβάλλω, 'put around', which is used for dressing the corpse, and so suggests a shroud. It is 'unlimited' (ἄπειρον), because the funerary garment was wrapped around the hands and feet of the corpse, and sometimes even the head, and in the hands of Klytaimestra encloses, like a net, which is ἄπειρον in the sense that it has no limit past which the quarry can escape. But ἄπειρον is also associated with the 'bad wealth of cloth'.

⁹⁶ Taplin (1978) 79-82; Seaford (1998) 130.

⁹⁷ *Ag.* 949, 958-62; Seaford (1998) 124-31.

⁹⁸ Seaford (1984).

⁹⁹ *El.* 1232; cf. *Ag.* 1107-9: ... τέλος.

¹⁰⁰ Memorably described by Apollo at *Eum.* 76-7.

¹⁰¹ Womb: *Eum.* 665; Furies: *Cho.* 285-6, *Eum.* 72, 322, 370, 378-80, 396, 416, 844, 922.

¹⁰² 44 A27 DK; Huffman (1993) 298-9. Plato in his Pythagoreanizing cosmogony divides the cosmos into three kinds of thing. There is what he likens to the mother: that which, itself formless, receives forms, which are imitations of what (permanently) exists. There is what he likens to the father: the source or model for what comes into being. And there is what comes into being: the offspring, which is in between father and mother (*Tim.* 50cd).

The casting vote in favour of this principle, and so for the acquittal of Orestes, is given by Athena, who thereby resolves the equilibrium of opposed votes. She is herself a unity of opposites, as a female who has no mother and, having just come from the battlefield (397-404, *cf.* 292-6), is probably dressed in armour (as she is in Homer and frequently in vase painting) – a female warrior. For her to announce that she favours the male in ‘all things’ (737) is female endorsement (and so more acceptable to the Erinyes) of a universal asymmetrical relationship between male and female. The unity of opposites announced in the first oxymoron of the trilogy (*Ag.* 11: γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ... κέαρ) is finally differentiated.

To conclude. Tragedy, performed at a festival of the polis, develops out of a synthesis of the rituals of mystic initiation and (lamentation in) hero cult. This synthesis, based in part on the antithetical *Satzparallelismus* common to both kinds of ritual, bequeathes to tragedy a focus on the unity of opposites – notably of life and death and of friend and enemy – manifest both in verbal expression and in the shape of action. Further, the synthesis is deployed, in the *Oresteia*, to express the *political* problem of the perpetuation of reciprocal violence. The identity of offence and counter-offence, expressed in antithetical *Satzparallelismus*, is an especially problematic instance of the unity of opposites, as it precludes the differentiation of opposites that would permit an end to the cycle of violence. The need to escape from this grievous cycle has a model in the need of the soul to escape, through mystic ritual, from the grievous cycle of reincarnation. The struggle to differentiate united opposites, which is a frequent theme of *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi*, succeeds in *Eumenides* with the opening out to polis and cosmos: the gods of the upper and lower world are emphatically differentiated so as to enable the incorporation of the latter into a new order controlled by the former and of the female into a new order controlled by the male-dominated polis.¹⁰³

The polis is constituted by the integration of potentially conflicting groups. The creation of the Athenian polis included – according to the version preserved in Plutarch’s *Life of Solon* – both the control of reciprocal violence by the polis and the control of women (especially their funerary practice) by the men. Early Greek cosmologies, in imagining the universe in terms of society, imagined it as constituted by opposites whose interaction is controlled by an overall power – the ‘assessment of time’ (Anaximander), the *logos* (Herakleitos), *harmonia* (Philolaos). The *Oresteia* too projects onto the cosmos (as the Olympian and chthonian deities) a controlled interaction of opposites. At first it represents opposites – as do Anaximander and Herakleitos – as a unity, identical with or giving rise to each other; but finally it represents them – as does Pythagoreanism – as asymmetrically reconciled. But it differs from all three ‘philosophical’ cosmologists in its comprehensiveness: it represents the *relationship* between the social and the (anthropomorphic) cosmic order, as well as *transition* – under the influence of mystic and civic optimism – from the unity of the opposites to their differentiation and reconciliation in a permanent new order.

Finally, my argument contributes incidentally to the debate between myself and Simon Goldhill on the question of whether we can say, as I have, that, despite the ‘manifest complexity and ambiguity’ of the *Oresteia*, in the end ‘the questions are indeed answered and the conflicts resolved’.¹⁰⁴

There is a sense in which, at the end of the *Oresteia*, anxiety remains. The well-being of Athens will continue to depend on the awe and fear (*Eum.* 517-25, 698-703) needed to ensure respect for the Areopagus and performance of cult for the Erinyes. In this sense we can indeed point to the failure of resolution. But for Goldhill, failure of resolution belongs to the text itself, in the form of persistent ambivalence. The crucial role of Athena as warrior female who chooses

¹⁰³ Note esp. 973: ἀλλ’ ἐκράτησε Ζεὺς ἀγοραῖος,
1045-6: Ζεὺς παντόπας οὕτω Μοῖρά τε συγκατέβη.

¹⁰⁴ Seaford (1994a), (1995); Goldhill (2000).

the male is a paradox that contributes – as does the tied human vote that requires her intervention – to the failure of the civic discourse at the end of the *Eumenides* to ‘repress a sense of its own insecurities’. In the ambivalent figure of Athena the tensions in the opposition between the sexes are ‘displaced but not fully resolved’.¹⁰⁵

To be sure, any spectator or reader of the drama may leave with a ‘sense’ that the tensions were ‘not fully resolved’.¹⁰⁶ But it is in my view a mistake to see the ambivalences as (consciously or even unconsciously) devised to evoke this sense. The whole argument of this paper suggests rather that the unity of opposites, both in the tied vote and in the gender of Athena, is a precondition for – and persuasive means of – reconciling the Furies to the *transition* to a final settlement in which the opposites are definitively differentiated and reconciled.

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¹⁰⁵ Goldhill (1986) 31, 50-1.

¹⁰⁶ For Goldhill (2000: 56) the choice of whether to read for closure or for ambiguity expresses a politicized position. I agree that the choice may well be (consciously or unconsciously) influenced by a basic orientation that is (in a broad sense) political. Goldhill allows that his political belief that ‘commitment and openness are not necessarily mutually exclusive values’ is reflected in

his critical perspective on the *Oresteia*. I believe that our postmodern openness may in fact function (unconsciously) as a way of avoiding political commitment. And I allow that this belief of mine is not unconnected with my insistence on the *political* significance for Aeschylus of his construction of a transition from the unity of opposites (a strong form of ambiguity) to differentiation and clarity.

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