The Creatures and the Blood

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One cannot read the *Oresteia* without being haunted by the theme of perpetually shed blood or without being struck by the prevalence in it of animal imagery.\(^1\) One cannot read that trilogy either without a sense not only of an archaic style but of an atmosphere that is more than archaic, that is in the *Choephoroe* primitive, in the *Eumenides* almost primeval.

The primordial atmosphere of the *Oresteia* is created in large part by the style, for a characteristic of the archaic style is the technique of juxtaposition.\(^2\) Just as Aeschylus uses one or two nouns or even a compound of two nouns to modify another noun and so multiplies the value of each element,\(^3\) just as he uses compound nouns with both active and passive meanings and so creates deliberate ambiguities,\(^4\) so he also juxtaposes words, themes, and images so that his audience in a subconscious but stereoscopic perception acquires an uncanny sense of some primeval significance in the *Oresteia*. The significance of the animal imagery lies in its constant juxtaposition to the factual or metaphorical mention of blood. If this juxtaposition were limited to scenes of sacrifice,\(^5\) it would be neither surprising nor perhaps of particular import. Since, however, it is not so limited but occurs throughout in both the thought and the underthought of the trilogy,\(^6\) it is extremely important: It is in fact the

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6. I take the expression from Gerard Manley Hopkins, who on January 14, 1883, wrote to Alexander William Baillie, “My thought is that in any lyric passage of the tragic poets (perhaps not so much in Euripides as the others) there are—usually; I will not say always,
to the most profound meaning of the *Oresteia*. That meaning lies in the presence, from the very beginning, of the Erinyes.  

The Erinyes developed from the winged spirits or “bacilli” that caused old age, death, and disease.\(^7\) Originally they were the Keres–Erinyes, “death-spirits angered,” and their anger usually arose from the fact that they belonged to persons who had been murdered. They were in fact the outraged souls of the murdered dead. By the time of Homer, however, they were no longer the souls themselves but rather the avengers of souls. In the *Iliad* (9. 571) Althaeca calls upon the Erinyes to avenge the death of her brothers. Since the Eriny is female and single, she is clearly not the ghosts or souls of both or either of the brothers. Elsewhere in Homer the Erinyes are avengers of crimes against blood relatives on either the mother’s or the father’s side (*Il. 19. 454; 21. 412*), and at last, in the case of Achilles’ horses (*Il. 19. 418*), they have become the agents of the fates or even the fates of death itself.\(^8\) In Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* we have Erinyes who are at one level avengers in the Homeric sense but who in many respects revert to the more primitive pre-Homeric concept of them as the outraged souls of the dead.  

In the first chorus of the *Agamemnon* Agamemnon and Menelaus are described as shrieking (*κλάζοντες*) Ares, like eagles that wheel high over the nest because they have lost the tendance of their nestlings. Some god, Apollo, Pan, or Zeus, hears their shrill bird cry (*οἰωνόθρουν γόνον ὃξυβόσαν*) and sends a late-avenging Eriny (*ὕστερόποινον . . . Ἐρινύν*) against the transgressors (48–59). The image refers most immediately to Helen, but the

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\(^7\) J. Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (Cambridge 1903) 165–75.  
\(^8\) Harrison (previous note) 213–17.
fact that the nestlings are plural (παιδων) and that the Erinys is late-
avenging makes the figure refer to the children of Thyestes as well. The
Atridae in their expedition for Helen are fulfilling Thyestes' curse upon
the house of Atreus. The concept of a nestling child also suggests Iphigenia
whose loss, another result of the curse, will in time be avenged.9 The verb
κλάζω is frequently used for the shrieking of birds (e.g. Hom. II. 10. 276;
17. 756; Soph. Ant. 112) and, in the Odyssey, of the baying of hounds (14.
30). The Erinys as developments of the winged Keres were akin to the
Sirens and Harpies, bird-women.10 The priestess at Eumenides 50–51
describes the Erinys as Harpies without wings (Φινέως γεγραμμένας /
δείνον φερούσας· ἀπτεροί . . . ), and Orestes at Choephoroe 1054 calls
them his mother's wrathful hounds (ἔγκοτοι κόνες).
Calchas interprets the omen of the eagles devouring the hare together
with her young before their birth (Agam. 119–20) as the taking in time of
Troy. That may be its immediate meaning, but his very next words suggest
other, more ominous meanings. May no malice from the gods, he prays,
darken the mighty bit forged for Troy by the army, "for holy Artemis is
angry at the winged hounds of her father for sacrificing a wretched,
trembling creature together with her young before their final course; she
loathes the eagles' feast" (Agam. 131–37).11 The alternate translation of
αὐτότοκοι πρὸ λόχου, "his own child on behalf of the army," makes the
omen predict the sacrifice of Iphigenia,12 who, sacrificed as a virgin, will be
deprieved of children. That the fetuses are plural makes the portent also recall
the feast of Thesetus, which is the cause of all the action that follows.13

9 B. M. W. Knox, "The Lion in the House," CP 47 (1952) 18; R. J. Rabel, "The Lost
10 Harrison (above, note 7) 176–79; 197–206.
11 Among the many interpretations of this omen see W. Whallon, "Why is Artemis
187–99; J. J. Peradotto, "The Omen of the Eagles and the ΗΘΩΣ of Agamemnon,"
des Aischyleischen Agamemnon," Hermes 107 (1979) 10–32; L. Bergson, "Nochmals
Artemis und Agamemnon," Hermes 110 (1982) 137–45; H. Lloyd-Jones, "Artemis and
Iphigenia," JHS 103 (1983) 87–102; E. Belfiore, "The Eagles' Feast and the Trojan Horse:
12 W. B. Stanford, Ambiguity in Greek Literature (Oxford 1939) 143–44.
13 Lebeck (above, note 1) 34.
Artemis in the following lines is the goddess who is tender toward the dewy whelps of ravening lions and kindly to the nursling young of all wild beasts: τόσον περ εὐφρῶν ἀ καλὰ / δρόσοις αέπτοις μαλερῶν λεόντων / πάντων τ’ ἄγρονόμων φιλομάστοις / θηρῶν ὄβρικάλοισι τερπνά 140–43. She is Potnia Theron.

The Potnia Theron, originally a winged Earth-Mother goddess of the Near East, represented in the iconography as flanked by wild beasts, travelled early to Greece, for she appears in Minoan and Mycenaean art. By the archaic period she had become, in part at least, identified with Artemis, for Homer at Iliad 21. 470–71 calls her πότνια ἦρων, “Ἀρτεμις ἐγροτέρη,14 and on black-figure vases Artemis is winged and carries or is accompanied by animals. The Potnia Theron on the François Vase is, for instance, assumed to be Artemis. A proto-Attic vase shows the Potnia Theron as a Gorgon, and Chryssanthos Christou in his study Potnia Theron demonstrates that the gorgon on the temple at Corfu and elsewhere is the nether aspect of the Earth-Goddess become Artemis–Hecate.15 As such, she is, like the Harpies, the Sirens, and the Sphinx, akin to the Erinys, for all are derived from the winged Keres or death-spirits.16 Both Orestes in the Choephoroe (1049) and the priestess in the Eumenides (48) describe the Erinys as “like gorgons.” In the Oresteia then Artemis as Potnia Theron has a dark as well as a tender side. As an avenging Erinys she demands the sacrifice of Iphigenia as payment not only for the eating of the pregnant hare but as vengeance for the children of Thyestes.17 By forcing Agamemnon to pollute himself with the slaughter of his own child she is causing him to fulfill the curse upon the house of Atreus.

Calchas prays to Apollo that Artemis not send contrary winds to delay the ships and so force another sacrifice, uncustimary, uneaten (θυσίων ἐτέρων ἄνομόν τιν’ ἐδατιν Αγαμ. 150), for there remains in the house a treacherous fear, ready to rise again (παλίνορτος 154), a mindful child-avenging (τεκνόποινος 155) wrath. Such was the warning that Calchas shrieked out (ἐπέκλαγξεν 156). He too has become a bird (or a hound), an Erinys, a means to the fulfillment of the curse upon the house.

The word ἐδατιν, “uneaten,” means that the sacrifice of Iphigenia was a σφάγιον, an offering to the chthonic deities, and that she was first butchered, then burned in a holocaust. Such sacrifices were made before going into battle.18 Ἀνόμοε, “uncustimary,” means that she was a human rather than an animal sacrifice. When later the chorus says that it cannot mention what happened next, they are undoubtedly referring to the

16 Harrison (above, note 7) 176–79; 197–212.
17 Cf. Harrison 72: “It is probable, though not certain, that behind the figure of the Olympian Artemis, of the goddess who was kindly to lions’ cubs and ‘suckling whelps,’ there lay the cult of some vindictive ghost or heroine who cried for human blood.”
18 Harrison (above, note 7) 65; Burkert (above, note 14) 60.
butchering of Iphigenia.\textsuperscript{19} The σφάγιον was also an offering made to the souls of the dead to make them avengers, and that is the hidden meaning here.\textsuperscript{20} Iphigenia's blood is poured to the outraged souls of Thyestes' children to make them Erinyes. Her sacrifice is a part of the fulfillment of Thyestes' curse.

There are hints even in the Hymn to Zeus of the presence of the Erinyes. The chorus tells of Uranus being overthrown by Cronus. The Erinyes in the Hesiodic tradition were sprung from Earth impregnated by the drops of Uranus' blood when he was castrated by Cronus.\textsuperscript{21} The man who "shrieks" (κλαζον 174) for Zeus' victory usurps the bird- (or hound-) cry of the Erinyes. He celebrates the triumph of the Indo-European, Olympian, male god over the probably pre-Greek, chthonic, female goddesses.\textsuperscript{22} In the following strophe the grief of memory that drips (σταζει 179) in sleep against the heart recalls the drops of blood from which the Erinyes sprang. It also anticipates the blood that will drip, especially from the Erinyes themselves, throughout the trilogy. The πόνος that is μνησιπήμων (180) again suggests the memory of Thyestes' children.

At line 201 Calchas shrieks out (ἐκλαγεινει) another remedy, more grievous than the bitter storm, proffering Artemis as its cause. Once more he, like Artemis, acts as an Erinys. He has become her agent, and as a bird- or animal-man.

In the lines describing the events at Aulis, blood and animal imagery are, not surprisingly, intermingled. The first mention of blood is factual. How, Agamemnon asks, can he stain the altar with virgin-slaughtered streams (παρθενοσφάγιοιν ἰείθροις 209–10)? At 215 he speaks of a

\textsuperscript{19} R. Lattimore, \textit{Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy} (Ann Arbor 1964) 40–41, makes the point that Iphigenia's rescue "was acknowledged in both the Homeric and Hesiodic lines of epic, by Sophocles and Euripides, by Polyidos, and probably by Aeschylus himself in his lost Iphigenia," and that only Pindar (Pyth. 11. 22–23), probably in 474 B.C. said that she was slaughtered. He contends therefore that Aeschylus' audience would assume that she was rescued. Pindar, however, who uses the word σφακέτσια, is powerful evidence for Aeschylus, for both work in the archaic, as opposed to either the epic or the classical, tradition, and I see no hint at all in the \textit{Agamemnon} that she was rescued. In an unpublished 1977 paper, "The Eating of Iphigenia," Laura Ward contended that the use of words like θυσία and βωμός would have put the audience in mind of a sacrifice to the Olympians and so have hinted at the possibility that she was actually eaten. On θυσία as opposed to σφάγιον see Harrison (above, note 7) 63.

\textsuperscript{20} Harrison (above, note 7) 64–65.

\textsuperscript{21} Hesiod, \textit{Theogony} 178–85.

\textsuperscript{22} This may well be an oversimplification. Recent scholarship has challenged so set a pattern. See, for instance, Burkert (above, note 14) 18–19: "Global dualisms which exaggerate the distinction between Indo-European and non-Indo-European assert themselves all too easily: male and female, patriarchy and matriarchy, heaven and earth, Olympian and chthonic . . . The myth of the generations of the gods comes from the ancient Near East, as does the idea of the opposition between the sky gods and the earth gods. It is the chthonic choai which are related to Indo-European, whereas the Olympian sacrifice has connections with Semitic tradition." Nevertheless, the traditional antitheses do seem to hold good for the \textit{Oresteia}. 
virgin’s blood (παρθενίου θ’ αἵματος) in a sacrifice to stop the winds (παυσανέμου . . . θυσίας 214). The winds are also ghosts, the souls of the dead, and the Harpies, kin to the Erinyes, were winds.23 Here they double as avenging Furies for Artemis, who used them to force the sacrifice. They help to fulfill the curse upon the house of Atreus.

Iphigenia was held above the altar like a goat, face downward. This again indicates a σφάγιον, a sacrifice to the chthonic powers.24 Her garments fell round about her (232–34). She shed her saffron-dipped robes to the ground (κρόκου βαφής δ’ εξ πέδον χέουσα 239). Here, juxtaposed to the animal image, is an instance of underthought. The words denote garments falling to the ground, connotate blood shed to the ground.25 At Agamemnon 1121–22 κροκοβαφής σταγόνων will refer to blood,26 and will twice more in this play suggest dippings into blood. A few lines later Iphigenia is described as άταυρωτός (245) and as one who was present at the pouring of the third libation (τριτόσπονδον 246) at her father’s table. Here is an animal image immediately juxtaposed to a word suggesting the pouring of blood.27 Άταυρωτός, “unmounted,” therefore “virgin,” suggests Artemis Tauropolos whose rite at Halae Araphenides included the drawing of blood from a man’s throat.28 Κρόκου, referring to Iphigenia’s saffron-dipped robes, suggests and may actually refer to the cult of Artemis at Brauron, where little girls in yellow dresses performed a bear dance and where a goat was sacrificed.29 In the aetiological legend a man had angered Artemis by killing a bear. She, in turn, sent a plague upon his people. To placate her the offender sacrificed a goat dressed in his daughter’s clothes. Clearly the goat is a substitution for a virgin child. In later legend a bear (or deer) was substituted for Iphigenia upon the altar, and in time Iphigenia at Brauron became a goddess.30 The description in Aeschylus of the sacrifice clearly owes something to the ritual of the darker Artemis, the chthonic aspect of the Potnia Theron, at Brauron and at Halae Araphenides.

23 Harrison (above, note 7) 179–83.
24 Harrison (above, note 7) 63.
28 Burkert (above, note 14) 59, 152.
30 Burkert (above, note 14) 151–52.
There is another juxtaposition of blood and animal in underthought and in open metaphor at lines 392–94. The chorus says that the evil of the man who spurns the altar of Justice is not hidden but like base bronze when put to the touchstone is proved “black-clotted” (μελαμμακαγής), since he is like a child that chases after the flying bird (ποτανὸν δρνιν). Words formed from πηγγυμι will occur throughout the trilogy to denote or connote the clotting of blood.31 Here the image refers to Paris who will bring bloodshed to his people and looks forward to the parable of the lion cub that will soak the house in gore.

The figure of the dog occurs in underthought in a number of minor, perhaps faded, expressions throughout the Oresteia. Certainly they recall Clytemnestra who claimed to be a watchdog to the house, her master’s faithful hound (Agam. 607). Perhaps they also anticipate her actual role as an avenging hound-Erinys. Later in the same chorus the elders mingle creatures and blood in underthought. People mourn the man who fell nobly in the gore (τὸν δ’ ἐν φοναίς καλάς πεσόντ’ 447) for the sake of another man’s wife. One meaning of φονή is “blood shed by slaying” (LSJ s.v.), and the participle πεσόντ’, though it modifies the man rather than the blood, reinforces that particular sense here. Next they say that some “bark” (βαυξέι 449) in secret and resentful grief “creeps” (ἐπει 450–51) against the Atreidae. Here are the figures of the dog and the viper. Both are associated with the Erinys.

There is another juxtaposition of animal and blood imagery in lines 595–614. Men, Clytemnestra sarcastically says, in woman’s wise, were “barking” (ἔλασκον 596) the celebratory song throughout the town. Λάσκω, like κλάζω, is a word used of screaming birds (Il. 22. 141; Hes. Op. 207) and of the howling of dogs (Od. 12. 85). It is not in the Oresteia a faded metaphor. At 607 Clytemnestra calls herself the dog (κυνα) her husband left at home. A few lines later she declares that she knows no more of another man than she does of dipping (βαυξάς 612) bronze. It is not, she (or the herald) then states, shameful for a noble wife to “bark” (λακεῖν 614) such a boast. Βαυξάς, after the lines above describing the sacrifice of Iphigenia, certainly suggests, indeed predicts, Clytemnestra’s dipping a bronze sword in Agamemnon’s blood. Her description of herself as a dog is meant to suggest to the chorus a watchdog, but it also predicts the metaphorical pack of hounds that are to appear as avenging Furies. Λακεῖν makes Clytemnestra the animal she is to become, an Erinys.

In the strophe (α) that begins at 681 we also see juxtaposed in metaphor animals and blood. Many men, bearing spears, hunting with packs of hounds (κυναγοὶ 694) down the vanished oars’ trail have beached their ships on Simois’ eternally leafing shores because of a bloody (αίματοσσαν 698) Strife. The Greek host itself has taken on the role of the Erinys.

31 Agam. 1198, 1509; Choeph. 67, 83; Eum. 191.
In the following strophe and antistrope (β) we have in the parable of the lion cub an obvious intermingling of blood and animal imagery that refers primarily to Helen, who is described in strophe γ as the thought of a windless calm entering Ilium, and also perhaps to Paris, described in the preceding antistrope (α) as fatally wedded (αἰνόλεκτρον 712). Because of him Priam’s city endured wretched blood (μέλεον αἷμ’ 716). The lines that contain the parable itself (717–36) abound in language that recalls and anticipates other characters and actions of the drama which also combine blood and animal imagery.\(^{32}\) For instance, προτέλειως at 720 echoes προτέλεια at 227, where it is used of Agamemnon’s preliminary offerings, that is, the sacrifice of his daughter, for the sailing of the ships.\(^{33}\) The word usually means the sacrifices made to Artemis before a marriage for protection against the dangers of childbirth.\(^{34}\) Iphigenia, in the Cypria, was brought to Aulis, as she thought, for her marriage to Achilles,\(^ {35}\) and in the Orestelia the sacrifice of the virgin who shed her saffron-dyed robes to the ground is a travesty of a marriage. Σατύνων (725–26) recalls the watchdog (607) that Clytemnestra declared herself to be and anticipates the hateful dog (κυνός μισητής 1229–30) that Cassandra will later call her.\(^ {36}\) Φιλόμαστον (719) recalls Artemis as the Potnia Theron or Erinys who was lovely and kind to the whoels of raving lions and tender to the breast-loving (φιλομάστοις 142) young of all wild beasts.\(^ {37}\) The house that was soaked with blood (αἴματι δ’ οἶκος ἐφύρθη 732) refers most immediately to the house of Priam but suggests very vividly the house of Atreus that will at 1533–34 be shaken by a bloody beat of rain that does not come in drops (ὁμβροῦ κτύπων δομοσφαλῆ / τὸν αἰματηρὸν· ψακᾶς δὲ λήγει) and that Cassandra describes as breathing blood-dripping slaughter (φόνον ... αἰματοσταγη 1309). The priest of Ruin (ἰερεύς τις Ἀτας 735–36) that had been reared in the house recalls Agamemnon, the priest who was the butcher at Aulis. Finally, the lion cub itself predicts all those other human beings who will become lions: Aegisthus, the strengthless lion that rolled in the master’s bed (1224); Clytemnestra, the lioness that slept with the wolf while the noble lion was away (1258–59); Orestes and Electra, the double lion that came to Agamemnon’s house (Choeph. 938).\(^ {38}\) More immediately it foreshadows Agamemnon as the Argive beast (δάκος), nesting of the horse (ἵππου νεοσσός), the raw-meat-eating lion (ἀμηστίς λέον) that leapt the wall and licked its fill of royal blood (/octet ἔλειξεν

\(^{32}\) Knox (above, note 9) 17–25 for a detailed treatment of the parable.

\(^{33}\) Knox (previous note); Lebeck (above, note 1) 18, 70–73.

\(^{34}\) Burkert (above, note 14) 151.

\(^{35}\) Such was the tradition, though Aeschylus makes no mention of it. Cf. Cypria apud Proclus Crestomathy I and Euripides, Iphigenia at Aulis.

\(^{36}\) Gilbert Murray’s text (Oxford 1955) temptingly reads λείξασα κάκτεινασα φατρόν οὕς δίκην, which makes the figure of the dog even more vivid.

\(^{37}\) Cf. Knox (above, note 9) 20.

\(^{38}\) Knox (above, note 9) 22–23 and Lebeck (above, note 1) 50–51.
Agamemnon’s licking of the royal blood makes him too an avenging Fury, for one of the most significant facts about the Erinyes is that they drink, suck, lick, and vomit blood. They are, in effect, vampires. When at line 1188 Cassandra declares that the inharmonious chorus that does not leave the roof of the house has drunk human blood to embolden itself the more (πεπωκώς γ’, ὡς θρασύνεσθαι πλέον, / βρότειον αἵμα), she does not speak metaphorically. The Erinyes, who are the outraged souls of the murdered dead, must enliven themselves with human blood to wreak vengeance. At Choephoroe 577 Orestes says that the Erinyes, not stirred by gore, will drink her third draught of blood unmixed (φόνου δ’ Ἐρινύς οὐχ ὑπεπανισμένη / ἀκρατον αἵμα πίεται τρίτην πόσιν). This too is more than metaphor. At Eumenides 183–84 Apollo says to the Erinyes, “You disgorge in agony the black foam from men, vomiting clots of gore you sucked” (ἀνής υ’ ἀλγος μέλαν· ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων ἄφρον, / ἐμούσα τρόμβους οὔς ἀφεῖλκυσας φόνου). At 264–65 the Erinyes themselves threaten to suck the ruddy clot of gore from Orestes’ living limbs (ἐπὶ ξύντος ῥοφεῖν / ἐρυθρὸν ἐκ μελέων πελανόν). Here there is no question at all of metaphor.

Clytemnestra also becomes her own avenging Fury. At 958–60 she says, “There is the sea—Who will drain it dry?—fostering ooze (κηκίδα), costly as silver, ever refreshed, of plenteous purple dyes for our robes (πολλῆς πορφύρας . . . εἰμάτων βαφάς).” The ooze of purple, actually the color of congealed blood,39 in itself foretells blood. Εἰμάτων βαφάς, close in sound to αἴματων βαφάς,40 recalls the shedding of Iphigenia’s robes (κρόκου βαφάς 239) and of her blood and Clytemnestra’s own remark that she knows no more of another man than she does of dipping (βαφάς 612) bronze. Once more she foretells the murder she is about to commit because of Iphigenia.

After Clytemnestra has murdered Agamemnon, she exults in being spattered by her husband’s blood (1388–92):

οὕτω τὸν αὐτόν θυμόν ὄρμαίνει πεσῶν κάρκυσιων ὄξειαν αἵματος σφαγήν βάλλει μ’ ἐρεμνή ιακάδι φοινίας δρόσου, χαίρουσαν οὔδὲν ἥσson ἤ διοσδόται γάνει σκορπήτος κάλυκος ἐν λοχεύμασιν. 1390

The image is primarily sexual, but the word σφαγήν makes Agamemnon another sacrifice to the underworld,41 and Clytemnestra, “spattered with dark drops of bloody gore,” has “drunk” his blood and so become the avenging Erinys of Iphigenia, while Agamemnon has drunk to the dregs in his house the mixing bowl that he himself had filled with accursed evils (1397–98):

39 Pliny, NH 9. 135.
40 Stanford (above, note 12) 156.
41 Cf. Lebeck (above, note 1) 60–63.
He was his own Erinys. He punished himself for his own wrongdoing. There is no word for blood in the particular passage, but lines 970–71, in which Clytemnestra says that when Zeus makes wine from the unripe grape (απ’ ὁμφακός πικρᾶς / οἶνον), then there is straightway a chill in the house (ἐν δόμοις) when its rightful master roams its halls (δῶμ’), are often taken to refer to Iphigenia. They establish an association of blood, wine, and the house which echoes here.

The chorus, horrified at Clytemnestra’s deed, asks her what potion (ποτόν 1407) drawn from the sea has caused her to make this sacrifice (θῦος 1409). In murdering Agamemnon, she has poured his blood to the avenging spirit of Iphigenia. The expression ῥυτᾶς ἔξ ἀλός (1408) in recalling the earlier passage in which purple ooze was drawn from the sea makes ποτόν in 1407 suggest that Clytemnestra here drinks blood and so becomes an Erinys herself.

At 1427 the chorus says, “You barked overweingly” (περίφρονα ἔλακες). Λάσκω is not here and not elsewhere a faded metaphor. Clytemnestra as an Erinys does “bark” like a dog or “shriek” like a bird. “Even as your mind,” the elders say, “is maddened by this blood-dripping (φονολίβει) 1428) act, so a drop of blood (λίβος . . . οὐμάτος 1429) is plain upon your face” (“eyes”: ὁμίατων 1429). This is to be taken literally.42 Clytemnestra, the dog-Erinys, has drunk blood. Her face is smeared with it. So the Pythia says of the Erinys: ἐκ δ’ ὁμίατον λεῖβοσι δυσφιλῆ λίβα (Εὐμ. 54). She herself then says that she slaughtered (ἐσφαξάξ’) Agamemnon to Justice exacted for her child, to Ate, and to the Erinys (1433).

A similar combination of blood and animal imagery continues to define Clytemnestra as an avenging Fury. At 1460, speaking of Helen, the chorus says that she has crowned herself with long remembrance because of blood that cannot be washed away (αἱμ’ ἀνιπτον). Clytemnestra tells the chorus not to turn their wrath against Helen as though she alone were the slayer of many Danaan men, the worker of woe past all cure (ἀξύστατον 1467). The word is used of milk that will not curdle and suggests here blood that will not clot.43 The ancients apparently thought of clotting, curdling, and

42 Fraenkel (above, note 26) III 672–73, on 1428, takes it to refer to her maddened bloodshot eyes.
43 Aret. CD 1. 13. Jennifer Smith, in a paper read on April 5, 1990 at a meeting of the Classical Association of the Midwest and South, “Miasma and Medicine in the Oresteia,” suggests that the expression ἀξύστατον ἀλος means a wound that will not heal because its edges will not come together. “This problem,” she says, “was typical of the chronic ulcer (τὸ ἀλος πεπαλάμωνον) and was sometimes solved by incising the wound so that the shape was more elongated (Ulc. 2).”
freezing as similar processes, for they used the same word, πήγνυμι, for all three phenomena.44

At 1468 the chorus addresses the demon that has fallen upon the house and the twin descendants of Tantalus, wielding a sway that bites to the heart (καρδιόδηκτον 1471) and matches the temper of women. Here is the figure of the viper or perhaps the dog. Clytemnestra, the elders then say, stands like a crow (δίκαιον κόρακος 1472–73) over her husband's corpse. She is not only the raven that feeds on carrion but a bird-woman, another aspect of the Erinys.

Clytemnestra next tells the chorus that they have correctly named the thrice-gorged demon of the house, for the lust for licking blood (ἔρως αἵματολοιχός 1478) is nourished in the maw. Before the old agony leaves off, fresh blood (νέος ἵχωρ 1480) spills. Here again is the vampire Erinys, the curse of the house, in its most recent epiphany Clytemnestra herself.

At 1492 the chorus addresses the dying Agamemnon. "You lie," they say, "a spider (ἄραχνης) in this web." He is the victim of the spider that murders in its mating. At 1501 Clytemnestra, the spider-woman, tells the elders that the ancient harsh avenger (ἄλαστωρ) of Atreus, that grim banqueter, taking the form of the corpse's wife, has repaid him, sacrificing (ἐπιθύσεας 1504) a full-grown man for the babes. Clytemnestra and the avenging Fury have become one. She is avenging the death of Thyestes' children as well as that of Iphigenia. She is the demon that fulfills the curse upon the house. The chorus does not quite believe her, but grants that the avenger might well be from the father (πατρόθεν 1507), for black Ares with streams of kindred blood (ὁμοσπόροις / ἐπιρροολάτων αἵματον 1509–10) forces his way forward to where he will offer justice for the clotted blood of children served for meat (πάχναι κοινοβόραι 1512). This is a clear reference to Thyestes' children. In the following stanza the chorus repeats its address to Agamemnon as the spider dying in the web (1516). Thyestes who ate the roasted flesh and "drank" the clotted blood of his own children became, in Aeschylus, the first of the Erinys in the Tantalid house. At the end of the Agamemnon Aegisthus describes that banquet. Like the Furies themselves, who vomit clots of blood, Thyestes as his own Erinys vomits back the slaughtered flesh (Ἀπὸ σφαγῆν ἔρων 1599).

In the first chorus of the Choephoroe we have a now familiar intermingling of blood and animal imagery. The women with their nails cut bloody furrows in their cheeks (πρέπει παρης φοινισσ' ἀμυνγμοις / ὀνυχος ἀλοκε νεοτόμω 24–25). In the following antistrope the dream-interpreter "barked" or "shrieked" (ἔλακε) for terror from the innermost chamber, and the dream-interpreters "shrieked" (ἔλακον) that those beneath the earth (τοὺς γας νέρθεν) were exceedingly angry at their slayers (35–41). The dream-interpreters who are under pledge to the gods (Θεόθεν . . . υπέγγυς 39) abet the Erinys, the gods below, who, since they are plural,

44 Cf. Lebeck (above, note 1) 99.
are not just Agamemnon but also Iphigenia and the children of Thyestes. The dream-interpreters partake now of the cycle of vengeance.

In the next strophe the women say that Clytemnestra has sent them forth to perform an ἀπότροπον κακόν (44). She is attempting a riddance ceremony, offerings to placate the ghosts of the dead. But what redemption is there, the chorus asks, for blood once it has fallen to the ground (τὶ γὰρ λύτρον πεσόντος αἵματος πέδοι 48)? So in the Agamemnon the elders had asked, “Who could with charms call up again the black blood of a man once it has fallen in death to an earth?” (1019-21):

τὸ δὲ ἐπὶ γὰν πεσὸν ἀπαξ θανάσιμον
πρόσαρ ἀνδρὸς μέλαν αἵμα τίς ἀν
πάλιν ἀγκαλέσαι’ ἐπαείδον;

The expression is not entirely metaphorical, for the answer is, no one: The Erinyes have drunk it to enliven themselves for revenge. The blood of the victim nourishes those who have been murdered before him in this chain of violence. So in the next strophe (γ) the women say that because of blood drunk to her fill by nourishing earth the vengeful gore clots and does not drain through (66-67):

δὲ αἷματ’ ἐκποθένθ’ ὑπὸ χθονὸς τροφοῦ
τίτας φόνος πέπηγεν οὐ διαρρῦδαν.

There is more blood now than even the Erinyes can drink.

The next two lines are corrupt but seem to say that the guilty man suffers calamity and “teems with sickness” (νόσον βρόειν 69). This may refer to the Erinyes in their most primitive guise: when they still were disease-causing Keres.

The chorus goes on to say that for him who has violated a bridal chamber there is no cure, and all streams though they flow in one course rush on in vain to cleanse the hand that is polluted with gore (χερομυσθή
φόνον 73). The passage refers to Thyestes, who had seduced Atreus’ wife, and so makes clear that the Erinyes in this play are not just Agamemnon’s avenging spirits but those of the victims who preceded him. Finally, in a fine example of underthought the chorus says that it is itself chilled, i.e. “clotted” (παχνουμένα 83) with hidden grief.

In the scene that follows this choral passage Electra is occupied in the actual performance of the riddance ceremony, and there are a number of instances of the forms of the verb χέω (87, 92, 95, 109, 129) and the noun χοάς (149). At 155 the chorus specifically calls the “pouring” an ἀπότροπον, and at 164 Electra calls the libations (χοάς) earth-drunk (γαπότους). This is not just a metaphor. The spirits of the murdered dead beneath the earth have drunk them.

The interchange between Electra and Orestes which occurs later in the same scene contains a number of animal images, preceded by Electra’s saying that thirsty drops (σταγώνες 186) fall from her eyes (ἐξ
ομμάτων...πίπτουσι 185) at the sight of Orestes' lock. The many occurrences throughout the trilogy of the word πίπτω to denote or connote the shedding of blood to the ground make these lines also suggest blood, and in their anticipation of the Erinys, who will at the end of the play "drip hateful blood from their eyes" (κάξ ομμάτων στάζουσιν αίμα δυσφιλές 1058), make Electra another, albeit paler, avenger, a weaker Erinys. At lines 400–03 the chorus will say that it is the law that drops of murder-blood (φονίας σταγώνας) poured upon the ground will demand other blood (άλλο...αίμα).

Not many lines later Electra declares that she fawns (σαίνωμα 193) on hope. Orestes calls himself and Electra the bereaved brood of the eagle-father (αίετοι 247) who died in the woven nets and spires of the dread viper (δενής εχίδνης 249). Orphaned and pressed by hunger, they are not fully grown to bring to the nest their father's quarry (θήραν 251). "If you destroy," he prays to Zeus, "these nestlings (νεοσσοῦς 256) of a father who made sacrifices and held you in high honor, from what like hand will you receive the homage of fine feasts?" Once more he calls his sister and himself αίετοι γένεθλι' (258). The chorus' caution to the two to be discreet lest someone repeat their words to their master ends in the wish that they may see Clytemnestra and Aegisthus dead in the pitchy ooze of flame (θανόντας εν κηκίδι πισσήρει φλογὸς 268). Κηκίδι suggests here, as it did before (Agam. 960), indeed predicts, blood. At 275 Orestes speaks of himself as "made bull" (ταυρούμενον) by the loss of his possessions. This too is an expansion of the animal imagery—of birds, dogs, snakes—that defines the characters of the drama as avenging Erinys.

At 420–23 Electra says of Clytemnestra that she may fawn (σαίνειν), but the miseries that she and Orestes have endured from her will not be soothed, for the temper they have from their mother is like a savage wolf (λύκος...ωμόφρων) and implacable (ἀσαντός). At 446 Electra declares that she has been kennelled like a vicious dog (πολυσινοῦς κυνὸς δίκαιν) and that she pours forth tears (λίβη χέωσα 447–48). This again anticipates the real Erinys who will distil from their eyes δυσφιλῆ λίβα (Eum. 54).

At lines 525 ff. Orestes does unequivocally become an Erinys. Clytemnestra, the chorus says, explaining the riddance ceremony that she is having Electra perform, dreamed that she gave birth to a snake (τεκεῖν δράκοντι ἔδοξεν 527). It drew clotted blood with her milk (ἐν γάλακτι θρόμβων αίματος στάσει 533). Then she, an Erinys herself, shrieked (κέκλαγεν 535) from out her sleep. Orestes interprets the dream so that it fits (clots?, συγκόλλως 542) at every point. If it mixed clotted blood with her own milk (θρόμβωι τ' ἐμείξεν αίματος φίλον γάλα 546), then he, turned serpent (ἐκόρακοντοθεῖς 549), will kill her as the dream declares. He has drunk blood, become an avenger. He could not be more clearly be an Erinys, a vampire-snake.
Aegisthus, referring to the reported death of Orestes, says that this would be a burden dripping fear (†δειματοστασεωςτ 842)\textsuperscript{45} to lay upon a house already wounded and bitten (δεδημένους 843) with former gore (φόνωι 842). Here in underthought is a fine mixture of blood and animal imagery. The Erinyes lurk behind this as behind so many other passages. Orestes the avenger is already at hand.

At 924 Clytemnestra warns Orestes, who is about to kill her, “Beware a mother’s wrathful hounds” (μητρός ἐγκύτους κόνας). It is not clear that she is speaking metaphorically, for when Orestes does see the Erinyes, he calls them exactly that (μητρός ἐγκότοι κόνες 1054).\textsuperscript{46} A few lines later she calls him the snake that she suckled (δφιν ἐθρεψάμην 928). At 938 the chorus, referring presumably to Orestes and Electra, say that a double lion (διπλοῦς λέων) has come to Agamemnon’s house. The lion is not associated with the Erinyes, but it was a common attribute of the original Potnia Theron, and it is one of the creatures that Artemis as Potnia Theron cherishes.\textsuperscript{47} At 994–95 Orestes calls Clytemnestra a sea-serpent and a viper whose very touch without her bite would rot (μυραινά γ’ εἰτ ἔχιδν’ ἔρων σήπειν θιγόδος’ ἄν ἄλλον οὐ δεδημένου). At 1047 the chorus tells Orestes that he has freed all the city of the Argives by lopping off the heads of the two snakes (δυοῦν δρακόντων). Immediately afterward he sees the Erinyes, like Gorgons, black-robed and braided about with swarming snakes (δράκουσιν 1050). Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, avenging the wrongs done them, become serpent-Erinyes. Orestes, born a snake, takes vengeance, as Agamemnon’s Eriny, upon them. Now he is pursued by his mother’s snake-women avengers, the wrathful hounds (ἐγκότοι κόνες 1054) whose eyes drip blood (σταζοσυν αίμα 1058); here in a culmination of the blood and animal imagery are the Erinyes made manifest.

At the opening of the Eumenides the priestess sees Orestes, now an Eriny himself, sitting, a suppliant at her shrine with blood-dripping hands (αimidati / σταζοντα χειρας 41–42). There follows soon after her description of the Erinyes as like Gorgons (48–49) or Harpies (50), loathsome, black, snorting women whose eyes ooze disgusting drops (ἐκ δ’ ὀμμάτων λείβουσι δυσφιλή λίβα 54).

When the ghost of Clytemnestra appears, she says to the Erinyes that they have often licked (ἐλείξωτε 106) the wineless libations (χοάς 107) that she has poured to them. These were not literally of blood, for she goes on to describe them as μειλίγματα, offerings presumably of milk, water, and honey, but the words she uses by the associations they have accumulated throughout the two previous plays certainly suggest blood. Only a few lines later, in the image of the hunt that is in this play to be

\textsuperscript{45} Page’s daggers. “Vix tolerabile,” he says. M has -σταγ’· ες.
\textsuperscript{47} Christou (above, note 15) 138.
sustained, she says that Orestes, like a fawn (νεβροῦ δίκαος 111) has leapt from their nets and got away.

At 128 Clytemnestra clearly states that she is herself an Erinys. She refers to herself as the wrath of the dread snake (δεινῆς δρακαίνης . . . μένος). The earlier snake and viper imagery comes now to fulfillment in this appearance of the avenging ghost of Clytemnestra. She was in life and is now in death an animal-woman, a vindictive Fury.

Apollo, when he addresses the Erinyes, in instances of underthought as well as in the plain statements he makes, creates that primeval atmosphere that is so peculiar to the Eumenides. He threatens to shoot them with a winged, glistening snake (δφν 181) to make them vomit the clotted gore (Θρόμβους φόνου 184) that they have sucked from men. They belong, he tells them, where there are sentences of beheading, the gouging out of eyes, slitting of throats, mutilations, stonings, and where men are impaled (παγέντες 190) beneath their spines. Παγέντες here means “stiffened” in a sense other than “frozen” or “clotted,” but the association with blood is there. The Erinyes belong, Apollo then says, in the den of a blood-gulping lion (λέοντος ἀντρον αἰματορρόφου 193). This too harks back to the Agamemnon, where Agamemnon, himself a lion, lapped the royal blood at Troy and so became an Erinyes.

At 245 ff. the Furies declare that they like a hound pursue the fawn and track him down by drops of blood (αίμα . . . σταλαγμών 247). The smell of human blood makes them laugh with joy (ὀσμή βροστίου αἰμάτων με προσγελάι 253). The dog that was in the earlier plays Clytemnestra has now become the bloodthirsty hound of her avenging spirit. Once more the imagery has come to fulfillment in the actual appearance of the Erinyes.

At 478–79 Athene does not speak metaphorically when she says that if the Erinyes lose their suit, venom (ιός) from their hearts falling upon the ground (πέδοι πεσών) will bring perpetual pestilence (αἰανής νόσος) to the land. She predicts their own threat. The venom which will “fall to the ground” suggests and probably meant blood which will quite literally devastate the land. At 782–83 the Erinyes call the venom a drop from the heart (ιόν ιόν . . . καρδίας σταλαγμών) that will blight both leaf and child. These creatures, born of drops of blood, curse of a house that drips blood, themselves threaten to drip blood to destroy the land, its creatures, and its crops. In the end, however, they pray that the dust not drink the black blood of its citizens (πεθοῦσα κόνις μέλαν αίμα 980) and consent to don robes, reddened not with blood but “dipped” in a “crimson dye” (φοινικοβάπτως 1028), of celebration.

The power of the juxtaposition of the creatures and the blood throughout the Oresteia lies in the fact that it is not completely metaphorical. The human beings who drink blood do, almost literally, become their own Erinyes. Just as the Erinyes, snake-women, are not entirely human, so the characters of the trilogy are in part animal. It is only when they, like the Furies of the Eumenides, have abandoned the concept of
δίκη as Vengeance for the concept of δίκη as Justice that they will take their proper and human place in the order to be established by the anthropomorphic Olympian deities.⁴⁸

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