

## 2. THE *ORESTEIA* AND THE SUPERANNUATION OF THE GODS

Almost all religions began as creation myths - the existence of the world had to be accounted for - and the gods were simply the elemental powers of the world, given the names of sun, moon and stars, earth and sea, wind and rain, and so on. The gods were Nature gods, and Nature herself was thought of as a female deity by analogy with living creatures, where the female brings forth. Man's relation to these gods was one of pure subservience and helplessness, doing whatever he could think of to placate them when they seemed angry and to win their benevolence. But as man mastered the techniques of agriculture and husbandry, came to understand some of the workings of Nature, or at least became habituated to them, came to feel that he was to some extent in control of the natural world, or insulated from it by living in cities, the links between the gods and nature became tenuous, and other functions began to be assigned to them. Men now had aspirations beyond mere survival, and wished to dignify these with divine sanctions. Man's intellectual and moral development had brought him to a watershed (the moment recorded in *The Book of Job*) where the old Nature god or gods no longer fulfilled the role he required of the godhead, which was now to validate the aspirations of men in an increasingly male-dominated and civilized society.

According to Robert Graves, the religious revolution of which *The Book of Job* is part, was initiated by Ezekiel (622-570 B.C.). Graves comments on it:

The result of envisaging this god of pure meditation, the Universal Mind still premised by the most reputable modern philosophers, and enthroning him above Nature as essential Truth and Goodness was not an altogether happy one. ... The new God claimed to be dominant as Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, pure Holiness, pure Good, pure Logic, able to exist without the aid of woman; but it was natural to identify him with one of the original rivals of the Theme and to ally the woman and the other rival [the devil] permanently against him. The outcome was philosophical dualism with all the tragi-comic woes attendant on spiritual dichotomy. If the True God, the God of the Logos, was pure thought, pure good, whence came evil and error? Two separate creations had to be assumed: the true spiritual Creation and the false material Creation. [*The White Goddess*, 465]

In Persia Zoroaster (c.628-c.551 - an almost exact contemporary of Ezekiel) was instituting similar changes, converting a polytheistic nature-worship into a dualistic system of Good versus Evil, with a single male God, Ormazd or Mazda, a god of light. Religion became a quest for enlightenment in a purely mental world, the real world of nature becoming a mere obstruction or distraction (what Graves calls 'the erroneous material universe'), and the female principle being correspondingly devalued. The male intellect deifies itself.

Graves also argues that the changes initiated by Ezekiel were 'taken up by the Greek-speaking Jews of Egypt and borrowed from them by the Pythagoreans'. A specific manifestation of these changes in Greece was the founding in 592 of the Areopagus, which took justice out of the hands of archaic gods. Aeschylus was born only 67 years later.

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In *The Oresteia* Aeschylus is attempting to encapsulate this whole process into the experiences of a single family. To do this he must foreshorten history to the extent of beginning with the Trojan war, which probably took place in the twelfth century B.C., and ending, after only a year or two of dramatic time, with the founding of the Areopagus in 592 B.C. Hamlet is torn apart because he has to undergo, in his own psyche, all the pressures of moving from the Middle Ages through the Reformation and Renaissance. The time is equally out of joint for Orestes who must suffer in his own fate the evolution of Greek society from barbarism and piracy to the beginning of the great age of Athenian civilization.

*The Oresteia* is our only surviving Greek trilogy. The first part, *The Agamemnon*, provides a template for many subsequent Greek tragedies. The pattern is almost always the same. The hubristic male protagonist - Agamemnon, Creon, Oedipus, Jason, Hippolytus, Pentheus - is violently opposed to the values represented by Dionysos, or, behind him, the Great Goddess. He lives by the values of a patriarchal code, which begins as that of the warrior hero but is later to disguise itself as the voice of reason, law and order - of civilization itself. The hero's contempt for the goddess is dramatized as his victimization of actual women - in this case his wife and daughter and the conquered women of Troy. His offences reach a point where he loses his existential freedom, the possibility of redemption, and becomes a hostage to Necessity, a doomed man. This deed (the slaughter of Agamemnon's younger daughter Iphigenia in this play) starts a chain

reaction, which devastates an entire family and nation. The agent of doom is usually one of the victimized women – Clytemnestra, Antigone, Medea, Phaedra, Agave – whose creative female energies, denied and persecuted, have turned destructive, dragonish.

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*The Agamemnon*, like several plays of Shakespeare's, communicates its deepest meaning through its imagery, some of which is lost in even the best translations.

Within a few lines the first chorus launches into an elaborate metaphor for the anger of Menelaus and his brother Agamemnon at the 'rape' of Helen.

Then loud their warlike anger cried,  
As eagles cry, that wild with grief,  
On some steep, lonely mountain-side  
Above their robbed nest wheel and sail,  
Oaring the airy waves, and wail  
Their wasted toil, their watchful pride;  
Till some celestial deity,  
Zeus, Pan, Apollo, hears on high  
Their scream of wordless misery;  
And pitying their forlorn estate  
(Since air is Heaven's protectorate)  
Sends a swift fury to pursue  
Marauding guilt with vengeance due.

[43]

Here Aeschylus, for heavy irony, borrows Homer's trick of the overelaborate and wholly inappropriate simile. The vultures scream because their nest has been robbed of their young. Menelaus and Agamemnon are not seeking revenge for slaughtered children; they scream because they are denied the opportunity to slay the innocent children of Troy. Agamemnon had merely lost a sister-in-law, and she had flown of her own accord. The chorus would like to cast Agamemnon in the role of avenging eagle, but the imagery works against them. We know that his motive for going to Troy was not vengeance but robbery, pillage, rich pickings. The 'rape' of Helen was a heaven-sent excuse for the rape of Troy, in which so many Greek princes who cared nothing for Helen were glad to share. The image of a swift fury

screaming for vengeance for murdered children does not fit Agamemnon but fits Clytemnestra perfectly. This speech is immediately preceded by her anticipatory cry of triumph from within the palace, and immediately followed by her first appearance at the doors. The original audience would know that when Agamemnon had killed her husband and forcibly married her, he had also slaughtered the child at her breast, and that, as we are shortly to be reminded, he had sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia to buy a favourable wind for the Greek fleet at Aulis. They would also know of the curse upon the house of Atreus. The horrible facts of it - Atreus, Agamemnon's father, had served his brother Thyestes with the flesh of his own children at a feast - work just below the surface of *Agamemnon* until the end, when Aegisthus tells the whole story, concluding: 'That deed gave birth to what you now see here, this death' [98].

The chorus shortly returns to the image of the two eagles, this time real ones, which had been seen by the army as it set out for Aulis:

Two kings of birds, that seemed to bode  
Great fortune to the kings of that great fleet.  
Close to the palace, on spear-side of the road,  
One tawny-feathered, one white in the tail,  
Perched in full view, they ravenously tear  
The body of a pregnant hare  
Big with her burden, now a living prey  
In the last darkness of their unborn day. [45]

The prophet Calchas interprets the omen. The hare is Troy; the eagles the 'relentless pair' Agamemnon and Menelaus. But he warns them against arousing the enmity of Artemis by their savagery:

For virgin Artemis, whom all revere,  
Hates with a deadly hate  
The swift-winged hounds of Zeus who swooped to assail  
Their helpless victim wild with fear  
Before her ripe hour came;  
Who dared to violate  
(So warning spoke the priest)  
The awe that parenthood must claim,  
As for some rite performed in heaven's name;  
Yes, Artemis abominates the eagles' feast! [46]

Calchas addresses Artemis as

You who love the tender whelp  
Of the ravening lion, and care  
For the fresh-wild sucking young  
Of fox and rat and hind and hare [46]

He warns the brothers against transforming the lovely Artemis, Lady of the Wild Things, into what Fagles translates as a 'child-avenging Fury'. Since the ravening lion is clearly Agamemnon, her protection extends to Iphegenia, 'the tender whelp of the ravening lion', as well as to the as yet unborn young of Troy.

Calchas reveals that the North wind, which prevents the Hellene fleet from leaving Aulis Bay week after week, has been sent by Artemis. Why? Obviously because she knows what suffering of innocents there is bound to be when Agamemnon's army 'in time shall make King Priam's town their prey' [46]. Yet the remedy she offers Agamemnon - that she will stop thwarting him if he will slaughter his own child, Iphegenia - seems to be in violation of all she stands for. But it is not that she *wants* Agamemnon to kill his daughter, rather that she forces him to make an existential choice, to present to him in the starkest and most personal form the moral implications of what he proposes to do to Troy. As one might say to a pacifist, would you stand by and watch your own child murdered, so Artemis is saying to Agamemnon, 'Is this "vengeance", this punitive expedition, with its promise of rich spoils, for the recovery of an adulteress, really so important to you that it is worth the sacrifice of many innocent lives, that it is even worth the sacrifice of your own most loved daughter?' The gods can pose such questions not hypothetically, but in reality.

Agamemnon is fully aware of the horror of the act:

What can I say?  
Disaster follows if I disobey;  
Surely yet worse disaster if I yield  
And slaughter my own child, my home's delight,  
In her young innocence, and stain my hand  
With blasphemous unnatural cruelty,  
Bathed in the blood I fathered! [49]

But it is not a matter of disobeying. It is a matter of making a free choice between this sacrifice or disbanding the fleet, abandoning his command, betraying the alliance, and earning 'the deserter's badge'. That he cannot contemplate. Within ten lines he has made his decision - 'a maid must bleed'. Up to this point he had been a free man; but with this decision he puts on 'the harness of Necessity', he wears 'the chains of those who lose Freedom and life to war and Fate', he becomes a man marked by the gods, doomed. And the nature of his doom is already hinted at in the image of harness, and the images of nets and meshes which follow. Clytemnestra, aided by the Furies, will weave her spiderweb of intrigue. Literally, she will wrap Agamemnon in a cleverly sewn bathrobe, 'a trap made like a gown', virtually a straight-jacket:

I cast on him  
As one who catches fish, a vast voluminous net. [90]

Clytemnestra is a mere agent, acting out of that Necessity whose harness Agamemnon put on when he elected to kill his daughter. That was an act of 'shameless self-willed infatuation', of 'blasphemy', even of madness. The eagle is so maddened by blood-lust that he plunders his own nest:

Heedless of her tears,  
Her cries of 'Father!' and her maiden years,  
Her judges valued more  
Their glory and their war. [50]

It is typical of the tight poetic organization of the play, its Shakespearean metaphorical coherence and density, that we should later be told that during the storm which wrecked the Greek fleet on its return from Troy: 'The sky was a mad shepherd tearing his own flock' [65]. This is the play's controlling image of unnaturalness.

Agamemnon is to be punished not simply for the murder of Iphigenia. That act was merely an extreme manifestation of Agamemnon's sickness, his dedication to the false male value-system of stiff-necked honour, courage in killing, holding life cheap, power and plunder. The play contains remarkably modern-sounding anti-war passages:

They sent forth men to battle,  
But no such men return;

And home, to claim their welcome,  
Come ashes in an urn.  
For War's a banker, flesh his gold.  
And back to waiting homes he sends  
Slag from the ore, a little dust  
To drain hot tears from hearts of friends;  
Good measure, safely stored and sealed  
In a convenient jar - the just  
Price for the man they sent away. [58]

The sack of Troy had been as bad as Artemis feared. And Agamemnon  
boasts of it:

We have made Troy pay  
For her proud rape a woman's price. The Argive beast,  
The lion rampant on all our shields, at dead of night  
Sprang from the womb of the horse to grind that city's bones,  
A ranked and ravening litter, that over wall and tower  
Leaping, licked royal blood till lust was surfeited. [71]

Again the image of a womb unnaturally giving birth to death. Clytemnestra  
had expressed the hope that the victors would not profane the holy places in  
Troy, but the Herald's account indicates that the vengeance on Paris had  
been in every way disproportionate, and carried out in a spirit of  
indiscriminate blood-lust and gratuitous destruction, a spirit disqualifying  
the enterprise from any claim to be considered a holy war, performing the  
will of the gods:

The Avenger's plough  
Passed over Troy, to split her towers, scar and subdue  
Her fields, raze the altars and temples of the gods,  
And from her fair soil extirpate her seed. [61]

At this moment Agamemnon enters in his chariot, followed by  
another bearing the riches he has plundered, including the Trojan princess  
Cassandra. The chorus greets him with obsequious praise and reverence. In  
their eyes now, the whole enterprise has been justified by its success, the  
rights of women and children, the cost in corpses, all forgotten.

Clytemnestra spreads before Agamemnon a long carpet of crimson silk. His scruples about treading on it have more to do with his unwillingness to soil such precious stuff than with humility:

It offends modesty, that I  
Should dare with unwashed feet to soil these costly rugs,  
Worth weight for weight of silver, spoiling my own house!  
But let that pass. [75]

Clytemnestra knows the significance of that heart's purple:

There is the sea - who shall exhaust the sea? - which teems  
With purple dye costly as silver, a dark stream  
For staining of fine stuffs, unceasingly renewed.  
This house has store of crimson, by Heaven's grace, enough  
For one outpouring. [74]

A Greek audience would know the relevance of the sea, and why purple dye was so costly. It was produced by crushing alive millions of Murex snails. Again the image is of Nature violated for man's self-indulgence. Agamemnon's last words are: 'Treading on purple I will go into my house' [75].

There can be no doubt that Agamemnon deserves to die. As Clytemnestra says, he 'drains his own cursed cup to the last dregs'. And she has more justification than anyone to be the agent of his death:

Who with as slight compunction as men butcher sheep,  
When his own fields were white with flocks, must sacrifice  
His own child, and my own darling, whom my pain brought forth -  
He killed her for a charm to stop the Thracian wind! [92]

Almost the only image in the play of natural fertility is uttered by Clytemnestra in her description of the death-blow:

There spurted from him bloody foam in a fierce jet,  
And spreading, spattered me with drops of crimson rain;  
While I exulted as the sown cornfield exults  
Drenched with the dew of heaven when buds burst forth in Spring.  
[91]

It is as though the shedding of Agamemnon's blood cleanses the world and makes possible a resumption of the processes of fertility.

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*The Libation-Bearers*, though it takes place only a few years after *Agamemnon*, belongs to a different world-age, when human moral sense comes to revolt against such a barbaric code. Orestes, returning home to find that his father has been butchered by his mother, seeks advice from Apollo, who has shown little sign of any highly developed moral sense in his dealings with Cassandra. He is told that he must kill his mother, or be hounded to madness by the Furies. This shows a complete misunderstanding by Apollo of the nature of the Furies, who are far more outraged by the murder of a mother than of a husband.

The Eumenides, strikingly, are not at all interested in Clytemnestra's crime, because they are agents of Nature, and Clytemnestra's crime is not seen by them as unnatural. Nor has she shed the blood of a blood-relative. It is Apollo, not the Furies, who insists that she must in turn be killed, for no better reason, it seems, than that she is a woman and cannot be allowed to get away with killing a man. The Eumenides have nothing to do with morality. Their function is anterior to it. They are concerned only to defend Nature, which cannot be separated from human nature, from violation. They are no more moral than phagocytes rushing to destroy pathogens. Yet a principle of Justice had been abstracted from their behaviour and given divine sanction - blood for blood - vengeance.

The Furies have not yet needed to appear. They are there, a 'bloody ravening pack', in case they are needed. Cassandra sees them. Clytemnestra has done their work for them, extirpating the guilt of Agamemnon. (Aegisthus describes Agamemnon's body as 'tangled in a net the avenging Furies wove ... in the trap of Justice' [97-8].) When we see them at last, in the final play, they are monstrous - women, but not women, though certainly female. Gorgons, yet not quite Gorgons, something like Harpies

but these

Are wingless, black, utterly loathsome; their vile breath  
Vent in repulsive snoring; from their eyes distils  
A filthy rheum; their garb is wickedness to wear

In sight of the gods' statues or in human homes.  
They are creatures of no race I ever saw; no land  
Could breed them and not bear the curse of God and man. [149]

In other words, they seem to be manifestations of everything unnatural and evil; yet they are also 'Powers of the deep earth' and felt to be, in some way, necessary. They are primeval nature spirits, chthonic divinities, unaffected by all the wars in heaven and the advent of the Olympian gods. But why are they so ugly and destructive? They are associated with plagues and barrenness, as Artemis is associated with fertility and health. Every Olympian deity had his or her dark underworld counterpart or opposite. Every deity can be turned into or replaced by its opposite if defiled. Up to the sacrifice of Iphigenia, Artemis is a major force in *The Oresteia*. Subsequently, she is never heard of again. Her role as Nature goddess is taken over by her underworld equivalents, the Eumenides. Nature once violated becomes in turn violent and destructive. The behaviour of Agamemnon in killing his daughter (as in his whole dedication to war and wealth) and of Orestes in killing his mother, is unnatural. Each has to distort his own nature to perform such a deed. Each thereby severs the umbilical cord which connects him with the sustaining and creative forces of Nature. Orestes denies the right of these powers to determine his life. He thrusts them down into the underworld of his own unconscious where they coil, reptiles of the mind, poisoning the whole being and bringing madness.

Orestes has to choose between two courses, both fatal. Apollo rashly promises an immunity he cannot enforce. Once Orestes has obeyed Apollo, killed his mother, and is being hounded by the Furies nonetheless, Apollo can only advise him to seek the protection of Athene, famed for wisdom. And suddenly, in *The Eumenides*, we find the whole drama turning away from the tragic mode and beginning to deal with these intractable problems as though they were fairly easily soluble after all, given Athene's sweet reasonableness. The implacable Furies improbably agree to accept her arbitration. Athene will form a jury of 'wisest citizens' and vest her judgement in them. She gives her casting vote in advance to Orestes on the ground of 'male supremacy in all things' and the relative dispensability of women. On that casting vote Orestes is acquitted. The Furies make a few noises, but as soon as Athene offers them an honoured and guaranteed place in the life of Athens, they graciously accept, turn into 'Friendly Goddesses', and give their blessing to the city in terms more appropriate to a fertility goddess:

Fortune shall load her land with healthful gifts  
From her rich earth engendered  
By the sun's burning brightness.

No ill wind  
Shall carry blight to make your fruit-trees fade;  
No bud-destroying canker  
Shall creep across your frontiers,  
Nor sterile sickness threaten your supply.  
May Pan give twin lambs to your thriving ewes  
In their expected season;  
And may the earth's rich produce  
Honour the generous Powers with grateful gifts.  
I pray that no untimely chance destroy  
Your young men in their pride;  
And let each lovely virgin, as a bride,  
Fulfil her life with joy. [178]

Athene concludes 'Thus God and Fate are reconciled', and everyone, presumably, lives happily ever after.

Surely this won't do. It can't be that easy. The Furies are supposed to retire to their home beneath the ground and never raise their ugly heads again. As for crime, the jury system will take care of that. Not only are the Furies to be superannuated, so is Athene herself. She can become her own statue, a merely nominal presiding presence, since she identifies her own wisdom with that of 'wisest citizens'. The gods withdraw, leaving human reason to guide the future of Athens and of Western Civilization:

Let your State  
Hold justice as her chiefest prize;  
And land and city shall be great  
And glorious in every part. [180]

Thus the worship of Athene becomes the worship of Athens, the city, whose walls include man and exclude Nature, as an end in itself, an absolute, almost a god.

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Freud saw the importance of the ending of *The Oresteia* for the future of our civilization:

This turning from the mother to the father points in addition to a victory of intellect - that is an advance in civilization, since maternity is proved by the evidence of the senses while paternity is a hypothesis, based on an inference and a premise. Taking sides in this way with a thought-process in preference to a sense perception has proved to be a momentous step. [Moses]

Lawrence, on the other hand, saw it as a disastrous step:

In Aeschylus, in the *Eumenides*, there is Apollo, Loxias, the Sun God, Love, the prophet, the male: there are the Erinyes, daughters of primeval Mother Night, representing here the female risen in retribution for some crime against the flesh; and there is Pallas, unbegotten daughter of Zeus, who is as the Holy Spirit in the Christian religion, the spirit of wisdom.

Orestes is bidden by the male god, Apollo, to avenge the murder of his father, Agamemnon, by his mother: that is, the male, murdered by the female, must be avenged by the male. But Orestes is child of his mother. He is in himself female. So that in himself the conscience, the madness, the violated part of his own self, his own body, drives him to the Furies. On the male side, he is right; on the female, wrong. But peace is given at last by Pallas, the Arbitrator, the Spirit of wisdom. And although Aeschylus in his consciousness makes the Furies hideous, and Apollo supreme, yet, in his own self and in very fact, he makes the Furies wonderful and noble, with their tremendous hymns, and makes Apollo a trivial, sixth-form braggart and ranter.

[*Phoenix* 482]

Surely every reader must feel the decline in power and depth of insight from play to play; and the plays seem different in kind as well as in quality. If the *Agamemnon* and *The Eumenides* were extant, and their authorship unknown, who would suppose them part of the same trilogy? *Agamemnon* is one of the greatest plays of world literature. It seems engaged with its themes (and they are deep far-reaching themes) at the

fullest. Its highly poetic, that is metaphorical, language opens it up to the full play of Aeschylus' imagination, gives every incident ramifications and resonances in all directions. The metaphorical structure gives its own interpretation of events, an interpretation inherent in the events and in human psychology, not imposed by Aeschylus to lead to some resolution decided in advance. Indeed there is no resolution, only a sense of awe. To move from *Agamemnon* to *The Libation-Bearers* is like moving from a tragedy to a problem play, from *King Lear* to Ibsen's *Ghosts*. It is a fine play, but relative to the *Agamemnon*, limited, two-dimensional. To *The Eumenides* is a steeper drop, for surely it degrades what has led up to it by imposing an artificial resolution in terms of the merest propaganda, as though there were political or legalistic solutions to the problem of evil.

The decline is also evident in the status of the gods. The great female goddesses, even Earth herself, were rapidly declining in importance. Artemis, whom Aeschylus elsewhere calls 'Lady of the wild mountains' (Fragment 342), stands for the deepest natural bonds between human beings, which cannot be broken without the direst consequences not only for the individual and the family but also for the nation and the race - for Nature herself. By the third part of the trilogy, she has been quietly dislodged by her brother Apollo, whose first act as a new-born baby had been to slay the great female serpent Delphyne (whose name is connected with an old name for the womb). Tony Harrison records that 'there is an alternative version of the story of the peaceful transition of the shrine of Delphi from Gaia to Apollo as told, for example, in the *Oresteia*. In some stories Apollo bludgeoned his way into possessing what was once a female shrine' [*Trackers* xix]. Apollo, like Athene, a child of Zeus, belongs to the patriarchal age. He even denies, at Orestes' trial, that woman has a necessary or important role in childbearing (Artemis was the patroness of childbirth). Athene was a goddess born from Zeus' brain without the aid of woman. She employed in her rituals exclusively priests, not priestesses. All this is part of the process Slater calls 'dematification'.

Athene represents a further development, when gods become merely personifications of human values, in this case reason and justice. Apollo graduated from cow-keeper and sun-god to the patron god of high culture and enlightenment. The Furies declined from being psychological realities, to bloodhounds of the law, to toothless retired aunts.

The assumption is that reason banishes or transforms evil, and that man's purpose is to make the world and the gods consonant with his own civilized ideals. Socrates and Plato were later to give an elaborate

philosophical superstructure to this movement away from Nature and its incarnate gods towards the worship of mental concepts and abstractions and the pursuit of knowledge as the highest good. They helped to determine that Western Civilization should take the course it has taken, a course determined by dualism, rationalism and the arrogant male intellect, in despite of Nature. Nature, once Isis or Artemis Mother of the Gods, became evil, doomed to manifest her powers only destructively; for when God becomes a god of light *only*, the dark side of god, which won't go away, or be pensioned off, becomes a terrible burden of sin and guilt, a terrible impulse to hatred and violence in the human psyche. The Furies had been conned, and it did not take them long to find out.

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When the *Oresteia* was first performed, at the Great Dionysia of 458, the triumph of Apollo and his stooge Athene was not the end of the matter. Aeschylus was obliged to provide an epilogue (or antidote) in the form of a satyr play. If the purpose of the satyr plays was merely to release the tension of the tragedies, why could that function not have been performed by a comedy? And why were the tragic poets required to write satyr plays rather than the comic poets? And why was there no gap between the tragedies and the satyr play? The audience must have been nearing the end of its attention span. Clearly the satyrs were felt to bring into the same world as tragedy some essential missing element:

In the satyr play, that spirit of celebration, held in the dark solution of tragedy, is precipitated into release, and a release into the worship of Dionysus who presided over the whole dramatic festival. ... This journey back into the service of the presiding god seems to be paralleled by the release of the spirit back into the life of the senses at the end of the tragic journey. ... The sensual relish for life and its affirmation must have been the spirit of the conclusion of the four plays. The satyrs are included in the wholeness of the tragic vision.

[*Trackers xi*]

Tony Harrison is here paraphrasing Nietzsche:

The cultured Greek felt himself absorbed into the satyr chorus, and in the next development of Greek tragedy state and society, in fact all that

separated man from man, gave way before an overwhelming sense of unity which led back into the heart of nature. The metaphysical solace (with which, I wish to say at once, all true tragedy sends us away) that, despite every phenomenal change, life is at bottom indestructibly joyful and powerful, was expressed most concretely in the chorus of satyrs, nature beings who dwell behind all civilization and preserve their identity through every change of generations and historical movement. With this chorus the profound Greek, so uniquely susceptible to the subtlest and deepest suffering, who had penetrated the destructive agencies of both nature and history, solaced himself. Though he had been in danger of craving a Buddhistic denial of the will, he was saved by art, and through art life reclaimed him.

[*The Birth of Tragedy*, 50-1]

Not one of Aeschylus' many satyr plays survives; but in the one surviving satyr play of Sophocles, the *Ichneutae* (or *Trackers*), Apollo comes off very badly in his 'transition from macho cowpoke to cultural impresario' (Harrison). How could Aeschylus have reconciled the Dionysian earthiness of the satyr play with the triumph of Apollo (or indeed the triumph of Apollo with the whole spirit of the Great Dionysia)? Apollo is the male will to power; intellect, formalism, idealism raised to an unquestionable absolute; the arch-enemy of Nature and the female; the bully. Nietzsche wrote:

In opposition to all who would derive the arts from a single vital principle, I wish to keep before me those two artistic deities of the Greeks, Apollo and Dionysos. They represent to me, most vividly and concretely, two radically dissimilar realms of art. Apollo embodies the transcendent genius of the *principium individuationis*; through him alone it is possible to achieve redemption in illusion. The mystical jubilation of Dionysos, on the other hand, breaks the spell of individuation and opens a path to the maternal womb of being.

[op.cit. 97]

