

The Duration of Darkness and the Light of Eleusis in the Prologue of *Agamemnon* and the Third Stasimon of *Choephoroi*

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OVER A CENTURY AGO Walter Headlam noticed that certain phrases and images in the *Oresteia* seem to allude to the Eleusinian mysteries.¹ His life cut short, George Thomson edited and published Headlam's notes² (later developed into a full-length commentary on the *Oresteia*)³ in which he sought to buttress the case for allusion to the Mysteries. Since the scholarly response ranges from dismissing the argument altogether⁴ or ignoring it⁵ to accepting what

¹ In notations made in his copy of *Agamemnon* and in the comments of his *Choephoroe* (London 1905).

² G. Thomson, "Mystical Allusions in the *Oresteia*," *JHS* 55 (1935) 20–34; he makes his debt clear, "I am following up an inquiry which he [Headlam] did not live to complete" (20 n.1).

³ W. Headlam and G. Thomson, *The Oresteia of Aeschylus I–II* (Cambridge 1938).

⁴ Cf. A. Blasina, "Il prologo dell' *Agamennone*: didascalie sceniche scoperte e ritrovate," *SCO* 3 (1998) 1016 n.9, "contributi più rilevanti riguardo le allusioni a culti misterici." Similarly W. Verdenius, "Notes on the Prologue of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*," in J. Boeft and A. Kessels (eds.), *Actus: Studies in Honour of H. L. W. Nelson* (Utrecht 1982) 430, "References to the ἀπαλλαγὴ κακῶν in the Eleusinian mysteries ... are irrelevant and confusing ... It is even wrong to assume that 'the poet is preparing us for developments to come.'"

⁵ The possibility of the watchman, in the prologue of *Agamemnon*, uttering phrases reminiscent of the Mysteries is acknowledged neither by E. Fraenkel, *Aeschylus' Agamemnon I–III* (Oxford 1950), nor by J. Denniston and D. Page, *Aeschylus' Agamemnon* (Oxford 1957); J. Bollack and P. Judet de la

Headlam-Thomson suggest with little comment⁶ (with one early exception),⁷ it is little wonder that there is some hedging and head-scratching about the purported allusions.⁸

Combe, *L'Agamemnon d'Eschyle: le texte et ses interpretations* I–II (Lille 1981) ad *Ag.* 38, consider only the last line of the prologue in this regard, “puissant ailleurs dans l’arsenal de la sagesse populaire, le veilleur est ainsi subitement initié au langage des mystères. La référence est indéniable, mais, au même titre que les adages de la sagesse traditionnelle, elle ne prend son sens que dans la transformation que lui fait subir la logique d’un discours nouveau, qui ... est celui d’Eschyle.” Cf. C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *Tragedy and Athenian Religion* (Lanham 2003) 231–232, who, amidst a wide-ranging survey of ritual in the *Oresteia*, also overlooks this element of the prologue: “The tragedy begins with a ritual segment, the watchman’s opening words of prayer, *Theous men aito*, though the rest of the speech does not sustain this religious beginning ... The strongly religious flavor of the parodos [however] is clear and incontrovertible.” On *Choephoroi* see below. No mention of the Headlam-Thomson thesis in P. Amandry, “Éschyle et Éleusis,” *AIPHO* 9 (1949) 27–41.

⁶ Among those in favor of Thomson-Headlam and the parallels adduced are R. Böhme, *Bühnenbearbeitung äschyleischer Tragödien* (Basel 1956) II 109, 112–113; R. Seaford, “Dionysiac Drama and the Dionysiac Mysteries,” *CQ* 31 (1981) 252 n.6; J. Solomon, “Aeschylus and Eleusis,” *Platon* 67 (1982) 100–105; S. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The Oresteia* (Cambridge 1984) 193; A. Bowie, “Religion and Politics in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*,” *CQ* 43 (1993) 24; and A. Bierl, “Apollo in Greek Tragedy: Orestes and the God of Initiation,” in J. Solomon (ed.), *Apollo: Origins and Influences* (Tucson 1994) 151 n.21.

⁷ M. Tierney, “The Mysteries and the *Oresteia*,” *JHS* 57 (1937) 11–21, argues primarily against the “eschatological parallels” adduced by Thomson, but accepts the argument otherwise. Reticence about ascribing Mystery allusions to Aeschylus’ dramas already in U. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* II (Berlin 1932) 132–133: “Für fremde Länder und Sitten hat er [Aischylos] ein starkes Interesse ... Dagegen ist ihm alle Mystik fremd, selbst die seiner Heimatgemeinde.” And this despite the well-known story of Aeschylus’ profanation of the Mysteries, a story promulgated by none other than Aristotle, *Eth.Nic.* 1111a6–10 (*TrGF* III T 93). This story is sometimes made less believable by not mentioning that Aristotle is our (ultimate) source here, e.g. M. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (London 1981) 68, who attributes the tale to Heraclides Ponticus alone.

⁸ W. Stanford, *Aeschylus in his Style* (Dublin 1942) 38, “Allusions and analogies to the mystic mythologies and rituals ... seem to be behind some

In this paper I focus on two sections of the *Oresteia* in which the allusions seem most sustained in both language and imagery,⁹ the prologue of *Agamemnon* and the third stasimon of *Choephoroi*. In addition to the presentation of new evidence, I will show how the sequence of allusions made in each passage parallels the order of events at the Mysteries more closely than Headlam-Thomson or their critics realized. Furthermore, I will argue that there is a twofold purpose to the allusions: first, they provide an initial and unmistakable example of “ritual corruption” in the trilogy; second, after they reappear in *Choephoroi*, they retrospectively liken the temporal condition of Argos to concatenated periods of darkness of the Eleusinian variety in which initiands suffer before the appearance of a saving light. Finally, the argument will have implications for the text of *Choephoroi*, insofar as it lends support to the manuscript reading against two emendations, one long accepted, the other much more recent but gaining ground.¹⁰

At issue in the prologue of *Agamemnon* have been the follow-

rather obscure passages and motifs.” Cf. A. Sommerstein in the new Loeb edition, *Aeschylus’ Persians, Seven Against Thebes, Suppliants, Prometheus Bound* (2008) xix, “Some of the imagery in the *Oresteia* has been thought, probably rightly, to derive from this cult, though none of it is signalled as such (neither the Mysteries nor even Demeter is mentioned anywhere in the trilogy).” It is odd, however, that these observations do not appear in the Loeb volume II dedicated to the plays of the *Oresteia*; the reader solely in possession of the latter would not be apprised of the issue. For readings that no sooner accept the presence of Eleusinian imagery than dismiss its relevance for interpretation, see E. Petrounias, *Funktion und Thematik der Bilder bei Aischylos* (Göttingen 1976) 254 ff., and A. Garvie, *Aeschylus Choephoroi* (Oxford 1986) 304.

⁹ It has been considered axiomatic to study related images in the *Oresteia* together, see A. Lebeck, *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure* (Washington 1971) 1: “The images of the *Oresteia* are not isolated units which can be examined separately. Each one is part of a larger whole: a system of related imagery.”

¹⁰ The first emendation concerns *αἰεὶ* at *Cho.* 964, the second is *πρόμος* for *χρόνος* at *Cho.* 965.

ing lines:¹¹

- 1 θεοὺς μὲν αἰτῶ τῶνδ' ἀπαλλαγὴν πόνων,
 8 νῦν φυλάσσω λαμπάδος τὸ σύμβολον,
 αὐγὴν πυρὸς φέρουσαν ἐκ Τροίας φάτιν
 ἀλώσιμόν τε βάξιν·
 20 νῦν δ' εὐτυχίης γένοιτ' ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων
 εὐαγγέλου φανέντος ὀφθαλμοῦ πυρός.
 36 τὰ δ' ἄλλα σιγῶ· βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσση μέγας
 βέβηκεν· οἶκος δ' αὐτός, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι,
 σαφέστατ' ἂν λέξειεν· ὡς ἐκὼν ἐγὼ
 μαθοῦσιν αὐδῶ κοῦ μαθοῦσι λήθομαι.

To the gods I pray for deliverance from these toils,
 and now I await the token of a torch,
 a blaze of fire bringing word from Troy,
 and a report of capture.

Now may a fortunate deliverance from toils arrive,
 when the fire-in-darkness appears with its good message.

As for other matters, I fall silent. A great ox has stepped
 upon my tongue. The house itself, if it could take voice,
 would speak most clearly; I, of my own accord, speak to
 those who know; as for those who are ignorant, I am opaque.¹²

According to the Headlam-Thomson thesis, when the watchman declares that he (1) needs a release from suffering, (2) spends his watch in the dark, (3) awaits a light to end his toil, and, finally, (4) speaks only to “those who know,” he employs language and imagery drawn from the experience of the initiate at Eleusis.¹³

¹¹ Thomson, *JHS* 55 (1935) 20–34, and in *The Oresteia* argues for other, more scattered, references to the Mysteries throughout these plays, but, as these are based upon single words or images, their dramatic effect, if any, would be that much more diffuse.

¹² The difficulty of *λήθομαι* is well discussed by Bollack and Judet de la Combe ad loc.

¹³ I will use “initiand” for the participant in the rites before and during

Thomson and Headlam compare the phrase ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων in lines 1 and 20 to similar language quoted by Firmicus Maternus on the Mysteries (*Err.prof.rel.* 22):

θαρρεῖτε μύσται τοῦ θεοῦ σεσωμένου· ἔσται γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐκ πόνων σωτηρία.

Take heart initiates! The god has been saved; for you there will be a salvation from toils!

Yet, as has been noted, this passage cannot be related exclusively to the Eleusinian mysteries;¹⁴ other passages adduced by Thomson corroborate that the language concerning a release from “toils” or “ills” does appear in connection with these Mysteries, but none of the earliest passages refers unequivocally to the Eleusinian variety.¹⁵ The verbal argument aside, other readers of the trilogy have found different explanations for the imagery of light¹⁶ or the mention of secrecy.¹⁷

What is needed then is evidence, as contemporary as possible

their fulfillment and “initiate” for the one who has completed the full set of rites, as does H. Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Princeton 1994) 66 ff. There is some inscriptional evidence for such a distinction: *Agora XVI* 56 first identifies a μνησόμενος (27) and only later (34) speaks of μύσται. For discussion see K. Clinton, “A Law in the City Eleusinion Concerning the Mysteries,” *Hesperia* 49 (1980) 258–288.

¹⁴ Tierney, *JHS* 57 (1937) 13; cf. W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge 1987) 75: “It is unclear to which cult he is referring, but it is evident that the fate of the initiate is modeled on the fate of the god as represented in myth and ritual.” R. Turcan, *Firmicus Maternus: L’erreur des religions païennes* (Paris 1982) 313–315, considers five rites of initiation; he favors the mysteries of Osiris as the likeliest reference.

¹⁵ E.g. the passages cited at *The Oresteia* II 9 (ad *Ag.* 1), 178–180 (ad *Cho.* 935–971), and *JHS* 55 (1935) 22. The earliest unassailable reference to Eleusis that uses the language of release (ἀπαλλαγαί) is Ael. Arist. 22.10 K.

¹⁶ S. Tracy, “Darkness from Light: The Beacon Fire in the *Agamemnon*,” *CQ* 36 (1986) 257–260, writes about the light imagery and historical beacon fires; cf. also T. Gantz, “The Fires of the *Oresteia*,” *JHS* 97 (1977) 28–38.

¹⁷ E.g. Fraenkel ad loc.: “what we have [in βούς ἐπὶ γλώσση μέγας βέβηκεν] is clearly a widespread proverbial phrase.”

with the *Oresteia*,¹⁸ which speaks more directly to the circumstances of the watchman and connects them less ambiguously to the Eleusinian mysteries. While verbal parallels in the fifth century elude us, Euripides glosses the Eleusinian mysteries through imagery strikingly similar to that evoked by the watchman. Of particular interest will be the sequence of acts associated with the Mysteries.

In *Ion*, the chorus seethes over the possibility that the eponymous hero of the play will take part in the holy initiations that were forbidden to foreigners¹⁹ (1074–1086):²⁰

αἰσχύνομαι τὸν πολύν-
 μνον θεόν, εἰ παρὰ καλλιχόροισι παγαῖς
 λαμπάδα θεωρὸς εἰκάδων
 ἐννύχιον ἄπνος ὄφεται
 ὅτε καὶ Διὸς ἀστερωπὸς
 ἀνεχόρευσεν αἰθήρ,
 χορεύει δὲ σελάνα
 καὶ πεντήκοντα κόραι
 †Νηρέος, αἱ κατὰ πόντον
 ἀενάων τε ποταμῶν†
 δίνας χορευόμεναι
 τὰν χρυσοστέφανον κόραν
 καὶ ματέρα σεμνάν·

I feel shame before the much-hymned god, if, by the streams of the Kallichoron, he will gaze sleeplessly as a witness²¹ upon the light-in-the-night of the 20th, when Zeus' starry ether strikes up the dance, and the moon dances, and the fifty daughters of Nereus, in the sea and the eddies of ever-flowing rivers, dance in honor of the golden-crowned girl and her august mother.

Euripides' chorus fears that Ion will be an observer/participant

¹⁸ Headlam is charged with a questionable proclivity for late evidence by Fraenkel, *Agamemnon* I 59; Thomson by Tierney, *JHS* 57 (1937) 15.

¹⁹ On the *prorrhesis* of the Eleusinian mysteries see below.

²⁰ The text printed follows Diggle's *OCT* (Oxford 1981).

²¹ Musgrave emended *θεωρόν* to *θεωρός*; accepted by Diggle.

of a ritual (*θεωρός*) on “the 20th,” a preeminently important day of initiation at Eleusis.²² As if to leave no doubt about the matter, the chorus not only fixes the location of rites at the well of the Kallichoron²³ but also ends by naming Kore and Demeter as the objects of veneration. Here the initiate waits, throughout the night (*ἐννύχιος*) to see (*ὄψεται*) a torch (*λαμπάδα*),²⁴ a condition shared by the watchman of *Agamemnon*: he too, await-

²² An overview of the general contours of the Eleusinian program will help to identify the stage of initiation to which the chorus (and the watchman) is referring. To summarize G. E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton 1961): on the 13th of Boedromion (around September) ephebes set out from Athens to retrieve certain *sacra* from Eleusis. They returned on the following day, after which may have followed, on subsequent days, the washing of statues and the delivery of the *prorrhesis*. On the 17th the mystae went to the sea with a piglet for purification. On the 18th the mystae stayed at home before setting out for Eleusis on the morning of the 19th. After a thirteen-mile pilgrimage the initiates arrived at Eleusis (this same evening would be deemed already the 20th given the practice, especially prominent in religious time-reckoning, of counting days from evening to evening). More purificatory rites were performed before entrance to the Telesterion was gained. In the Telesterion the initiation proper was performed. The activities of the 21st are not attested, but most likely involved rituals concerning the *epoptai*, initiates who have returned for a deeper understanding of the mysteries. On the 22nd the Plemochoai (Hesych. *πλημοχόη τῆ ὑστεραία τῶν μυστηρίων κοτυλίσκους πληροῦσιν, οὓς καλοῦσι πλημοχόας*) took place, on the last day of the rites. For a recent discussion see K. Clinton, “Stages of Initiation in the Eleusinian and Samothracian Mysteries,” in M. Cosmopoulos (ed.), *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology and Ritual of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (London 2003) 50–78.

²³ On this well and its location at Eleusis see Mylonas, *Eleusis* 44–47.

²⁴ Commentaries on *Ion*, e.g. A. Owen, *Euripides’ Ion* (Oxford 1939) 140, and K. Lee, *Euripides: Ion* (Warminster 1997) 277, connect this passage to a procession from Athens to Eleusis by torchlight on the 20th of Boedromion; that, however, is not so clear for at least two reasons. If the night of the 20th began on the evening of the initiates’ arrival, a torchlight procession at this stage will have been unnecessary, as the journey takes place during daylight. Also against this interpretation is the letter of the text, for only one torch (*λαμπάδα*) is mentioned as the focus of attention. L. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States III* (Oxford 1907) 172, believes that the procession began on the 19th and ended in the evening (so on the 20th).

ing a blaze of fire, gazes into the night.²⁵

Not only does the passage from *Ion* indicate that initiates at Eleusis await a light in darkness,²⁶ but it adds a detail of mystic experience that also applies to the watchman, namely, the condition of sleeplessness (*ἄπνους*) suffered by the initiand. In a section of the prologue not discussed by Thomson, the watchman offers the following (14–15):

φόβος γὰρ ἀνθ' ὕπνου παραστατεῖ,
τὸ μὴ βεβαίως βλέφαρα συμβαλεῖν ὕπνω·

fear stands beside me instead of sleep—
so that I cannot cast my eyes into sleep.

While the objection may be raised that remaining sleepless during the night for a sign of fire seems to delineate little more than the condition of any watchman so employed,²⁷ several other details of the prologue make a cumulative case for Eleusinian allusions.²⁸

In addition to the imagery in the prologue already discussed, the watchman also mentions, in order, *fear* (14), *weeping* (18), and *dancing* (23, 31); by doing so he brings to mind three other elements of initiation. Here the sequence is again important,

²⁵ It may also be significant that the watchman precedes the mention of light-in-darkness with musings on the night sky and its stars (4–7), which are also part of imagery in this passage of *Ion* (1078–1080).

²⁶ In the Dionysiac mysteries, there is some evidence that initiates “saw” a light associated with the sun: see R. Seaford, “Mystic Light in Aeschylus’ *Bassarai*,” *CQ* 55 (2005) 202–206. At Eleusis, the appearance of the sudden light may have had to do with the search for Kore: Clinton, in Cosmopoulos, *Greek Mysteries* 66, “the *mystai* only succeed in ‘finding’ [Kore] when she finally reveals herself to them, presumably in the midst of the extraordinary light within the Telesterion.”

²⁷ Unlike the watchman in the *Odyssey* (4.524–525) who is on watch all year round, the watchman of the *Oresteia* specifies a night-time vigil (cf. 12, his *νυκτίπλαγκτον* bed).

²⁸ Occasionally, a case for allusion to the Mysteries in other plays has been made on much less, e.g. D. Mastronarde, *Euripides’ Medea* (Cambridge 2002) ad 482, on Medea’s mention of “holding up a saving light” (*ἀνέσχον σοὶ φάος σωτήριον*).

insofar as the first two emotions form part of the turmoil faced by the initiand, while dancing itself is more associated with the later activities of the initiates at Eleusis.

In a famous fragment of Plutarch concerning the soul and the initiand (178 Sandbach), almost universally taken to refer to the Eleusinian mysteries,²⁹ the appearance of the saving light dispels a preceding period of fear and trembling (*φρίκη καὶ τρόμος*):

τότε δὲ πάσχει (sc. ἡ ψυχή) πάθος οἷον οἱ τελεταῖς μεγάλας
κατοργαζόμενοι ... πρὸ τοῦ τέλους αὐτοῦ τὰ δεινὰ πάντα,
φρίκη καὶ τρόμος καὶ ἰδρῶς καὶ θάμβος· ἐκ δὲ τούτου φῶς τι
θαυμάσιον ἀπήντησεν καὶ τόποι καθαροὶ καὶ λειμῶνες ἐδέξαν-
το, φωνὰς καὶ χορείας καὶ σεμνότητος ἀκουσμάτων ἱερῶν καὶ
φασμάτων ἀγίων ἔχοντες· ἐν αἷς ὁ παντελής ἦδη καὶ μεμνη-
μένος ἐλεύθερος γεγονώς καὶ ἄφετος περιῶν ἐστεφανωμένος
ὀργιάζει καὶ σύνεστιν ὁσίοις καὶ καθαροῖς ἀνδράσι.

The soul suffers something like those who have been initiated into the great Mysteries ... before the end (*τέλος*) itself are all the terrible things, fear, shaking, sweat, and awe. After this, a

²⁹ On the connection of this fragment to the mysteries of Eleusis see e.g. P. Foucart, *Les mystères d'Éleusis* (Paris 1914) 393 ff.; W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* 162 n.11: "Eleusis is suggested by the 'wanderings' (grotto of Pluto?), and the 'dances in the meadow'"; Seaford, *CQ* 31 (1981) 255: "Plutarch ... describes the experiences undergone at Eleusis"; F. Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin 1974) 132 n.26: "weist der Ausdruck *μεγάλα τελεταί* auf Eleusis." For U. Bianchi, "Eleusis, Stob., IV, p. 1089 H. et Plat. Phaedr. 248 A–B," in *Mélanges de philosophie, de littérature, et d'histoire ancienne offerts à Pierre Boyancé* (Rome 1974) 73–77, Plutarch here combines not only Eleusinian material but also Platonic imagery deriving in part from Eleusinian material. P. Scarpi, *Le religioni dei misteri I* (Fond. Lorenza Valla 2003) 177, includes this fragment under attestations to the Eleusinian rites of initiation. More cautiously at first, K. Clinton, "Epiphany in the Eleusinian Mysteries," *ICS* 29 (2004) 93: "Plutarch's description is generic for mystery cults and is not specific to Eleusis"; later, however, he cites this fragment extensively for Eleusinian initiation. A more critical appraisal of the passage is in Mylonas, *Eleusis* 264–265; on Mylonas' suppression of corroborative evidence see P. Boyancé, "Sur les mystères d'Éleusis," *REG* 75 (1962) 460–482.

wondrous light is brought in, and pure places and meadows are gained which contain voices, choruses, and the majesty of holy sounds and sacred visions. Amidst these, he who has been made complete (*παντελής*) and fully initiated (*μεμνημένος*) is freed and delivered; he perambulates with a crown on his head as he celebrates and he enjoys the company of holy and pure men.

Here the initiate experiences, like the soul after death, dreadful things before the final completion of the rite (*πρὸ τοῦ τέλους αὐτοῦ τὰ δεινὰ πάντα*). Once a wondrous light is encountered (*φῶς τι θαυμάσιον ἀπήντησεν*) the mood changes completely.³⁰ Gone are fear and trembling (*φρίκη καὶ τρόμος*); instead, choruses, among other things, greet the initiate who has become free (*ἐλεύθερος*) and absolved (*ἄφετος*). How exactly fear was created in the participants is unclear; some of it, however, would be already felt before the entry into the Telesterion,³¹ in addition to being produced by the riddling *legomena* used during the preceding rites.³² The details suggest that fear and darkness form the penultimate experiences of both the initiate and the watchman.³³

Just after confessing to being fearful, the watchman also makes the following declaration (18–19):

³⁰ Cf. Foucart, *Les mystères* 405: “De la région de la terreur, les mystes passaient dans les riantes prairies des Champs-Élysées, éclairées d’une lumière merveilleuse.”

³¹ R. Gagné, “Mystery Inquisitors: Performance, Authority, and Sacrilege at Eleusis,” *CLAnt* 28 (2009) 219: “The staging of fear permeated the sanctuary ... rites regularly enacted terror among the faithful, and monuments dotted the landscape with memories of vengeance and punishment.” See Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* 103, on the comparative evidence for “psychological terror” in initiation rites and its importance for understanding the Mysteries. Tertullian (*Adv. Val.* 1.1–2) says that the Eleusimian initiates experience “torture” (*cruciant*) before admission to the full rites.

³² Cf. Seaford, *CQ* 31 (1981) 255, on Demetrius *Eloc.* 101, *τὰ μυστήρια ἐν ἀλληγορίαις λέγεται πρὸς ἐκπληξιν καὶ φρίκην*.

³³ On this change of mood, cf. Foley, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 70: “Terror, anxiety, and bewilderment turned to wonder and clarification ... darkness turned to light.”

κλαίω τὸτ' οἴκου τοῦδε συμφορὰν στένων
οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ' ἄριστα διαπονουμένου.

I cry and groan over the fortune of the house
since it is not being managed in the best manner as before.

In a passage from Firmicus Maternus, quoted by Thomson, we read (*Err.prof.rel.* 22):

nocte quadam simulacrum in lectica ponitur et per numeros digestis fletibus plangitur; deinde cum se ficta lamentatione satiaverint, lumen infertur.

On a certain night, an image is placed on a bier and it is mourned over by many with prearranged wailings,³⁴ then, after they have sated themselves with their feigned lamentation, a light is brought in.

Thomson took *nocte quadam* as a reference to the “Eleusinian nights” and referred to C. August Lobeck’s and Jane Harrison’s discussions of the same.³⁵ In the passage of Firmicus we find another clear parallel between the prologue and the Mysteries: the time period before the appearance of light is filled not only with darkness and fear but also with lamentation by the participants in the ritual. Indeed in both *Agamemnon* and the Eleusinian mysteries the sorrow arises in the community over the absence of the royal/divine personage. Other evidence corroborates that weeping occurred in conjunction with the Eleusinian mysteries³⁶ as we might expect if the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* contains some reference, however indirect, to rituals actually performed during the Mysteries.³⁷

³⁴ For *digestis fletibus* Turcan (129) offers “avec des pleurs réglés en cadence.”

³⁵ Thomson, *JHS* 55 (1935) 26 n.34.

³⁶ Proclus *In Rem publ.* I 125.20–22 K. and Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 2.12.2; for discussion of these passages and their relevance to the Eleusinian mysteries see N. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974) 22–25, and R. Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual* (Oxford 1994) 319. Cf. N. Loraux, *The Mourning Voice: An Essay on Greek Tragedy* (Ithaca 2002) 73, on the lugubrious associations of Iakkhos, the personified cry at the Mysteries.

³⁷ At the well mentioned in *Ion*, Demeter weeps: *Hymn.Hom.Cer.* 99, before

A third detail indicates that the allusions to the Eleusinian mysteries in the prologue are not presented at random but rather follow the sequence of initiation itself. After the appearance of the much wished-for beacon, the “fire-in-darkness”³⁸ (ὄρφναίου πυρός, 21), the watchman announces that it is a light that will be the cause of much choral dancing in Argos (πιφάυσκων χορῶν κατάστασιν, 23), a dance whose first steps he is willing to begin (αὐτός τ’ ἔγωγε φροίμιον χορεύσομαι, 31). Not only does his emotional experience veer from despair to joy (25 ff.), itself mirroring the change of mood induced in the initiand, but he envisions a communal response. While one could dance in joy following almost any happy outcome in ancient Greece,³⁹ choral dancing was also performed at Eleusis *after* initiation proper.⁴⁰ Indeed, the choral passage in *Ion* mentions dancing three times after the appearance of light and in conjunction with the 20th of Boedromion.⁴¹ The language in *Agamemnon* is remarkable in this regard, for the light (λαμπτήρ) causes to appear (πιφάυσκων)⁴² the arranging of choruses and so would seem to mirror the revelation of choruses beside

drinking the *kukeon* at 208 ff.; mention of her distress and wailing at 82, 90, and 98. For an effort to read the hymn in reference to the Mysteries see Seaford, *CQ* 31 (1981) 252, 257, 265.

³⁸ Or, more literally, “dark light”; on this see now R. Seaford, “Aeschylus and the Unity of Opposites,” *JHS* 123 (2003) 157.

³⁹ Cf. Denniston-Page ad loc., “χορῶν κατάστασιν: a common way of celebrating success,” and Fraenkel ad loc., “this is the natural way to celebrate a piece of good fortune or a success achieved.”

⁴⁰ On the *Ion* passage as indicating a παννυχίς at Eleusis see Mylonas, *Eleusis* 257: “we must conclude that the rest of the night was spent in singing and dancing in honor of the Goddess”; Plut. fr.178 mentions choruses following upon the appearance of light, ἐκ δὲ τούτου φῶς ... καὶ χορείας.

⁴¹ *Ion* 1079, 1080, 1084. Although there is some textual corruption here, the several mentions of dancing are not affected by it. Owen, *Euripides’ Ion* ad loc.: “There is an absence of antistrophic correspondence”; Diggle prints daggers around 1082–1083.

⁴² On this sense of πιφάυσκων see Verdenius, in Boeft and Kessels, *Actus* 437.

initiates upon the introduction of light into the proceedings.⁴³

Lastly, in each of the descriptions, the “fire” is qualified by a single adjective, either ὀρφναῖος (“dark”) or ἐννύχιος (“in the night”) that produces a light like the day (ἡμερήσιον φάος). Oxymoronically, a “dark/benighted fire” emits the bright light of day. While this is poetically memorable in its own right, to this formulation we may compare the Eleusinian nights as they are described in two inscriptions recently discussed by Kevin Clinton:⁴⁴

ὦ μύσται, τότε μὲν εἶδες ἀνακτόρου ἐκ προφανέντα
 νυξίν ἐν ἀργενναῖς, νῦν δὲ ...

O initiates, you saw me then appearing from the Anaktoron in the bright nights, but now ...

ἰστάμεθ' ἀγχιθύροι
 Δηοῦς καὶ Κούρης δαιδηφόρου, οὐδέ με νύκτες
 [λή]σοντ' ἡελίου κάλλ[ει λα]μπόμεναι.

We stood near the door with Demeter and Persephone the torch-bearer, nor will nights shining with the beauty of a sun forget me/escape my notice.

The oxymora “dark-light” and “shining-nights” underscore the particular interplay of light and darkness at Eleusis. What seems memorable enough to become part of the permanent record is the appearance of light so much like the day, and this at the time when it is otherwise least expected: night plays host to a light like the sun and so reflects the abrupt emotional change, from fear and woe to joy.

⁴³ The hierophant too “causes” appearance: K. Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* (New York 1967) 90: “*hierophantes* means not he who ‘shows’ the holy things—that would have had to be called *hierodeiktes* in Greek—but ‘he who makes them appear,’ *phainei*.” Cf. Clinton, *ICS* 29 (2004) 98: “The implication is rather clear that the images in the Mysteries are illuminated from within (or at least from close up, so as to give an impression of illumination from within).”

⁴⁴ Clinton, *ICS* 29 (2004) 90–96: *IG* II² 3811 and 4058 = Clinton, *I.Eleusis* 637 and 399.

Before passing to a discussion of related imagery in *Choephoroi*, it will be useful to recapitulate the points of correspondence between the watchman's words and the Mysteries. In the Eleusinian mysteries, initiands waited fearfully in the dark, lamenting, without sleep, for a light, the appearance of which marks an end to the preceding period and is followed, among other things, by choral dancing. The watchman of *Agamemnon* mentions that he cries, remains sleepless, waits in the dark for a beacon fire, and, upon its appearance, expects choruses to appear. Nor is this all, for it is only after all of the foregoing that he speaks to those "who know" (38–39). Now made an "initiate" himself, he can indicate as much to the initiates seated in the audience. While it may lie beyond the state of our evidence to affirm that phrases such as ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων figured verbatim in the *legomena* of the Eleusinian mysteries of the fifth century, a focus on imagery and action allows us to appreciate that the sequence of mystic allusions in the prologue of *Agamemnon* is patterned closely upon key *dromena* and *deiknumena* of Eleusis at the very high point of its ceremonies.

The second densest cluster of images drawn from the Eleusinian mysteries occurs in the third stasimon of *Choephoroi*,⁴⁵ during which Orestes is engaged offstage, dispatching his mother after having killed Aegisthus. Many of the same allusions found in the prologue of *Agamemnon* appear here as well:⁴⁶

942 ἐπολολύξατ' ὦ δεσποσύνων δόμων
ἀναφυγᾶ κακῶν καὶ κτεάνων τριβᾶς
ὑπὸ δυοῖν μιστόροιν
δυσοίμου τύχας.

Shout the *ololugmé* at the release of the royal house
from evils and from the attrition of goods
under the rule of the two agents of pollution,

⁴⁵ This ode is often neglected in monographs on the *Oresteia*, e.g. Lebeck, *The Oresteia* 130, "The first half of the play [*Choephoroi*] lends itself to close analysis; the rest is action." More in Goldhill, *Language* 195–198.

⁴⁶ This is, again, Page's OCT version and quite different from the recent Teubner, see below for discussion.

during this period of difficult misfortune.

961 *πάρα τὸ φῶς ἰδεῖν, μέγα τ' ἀφηρέθη
ψάλιον οἴκων.
ἀναγε μὲν δόμος· πολὺν ἄγαν χρόνον
χαμαιπετῆς ἔκεισο δῆ.*

The light is here to see, a great curb has been lifted
from the house!

Rise up house! Far too long
have you lain upon the ground!

A release from evils (*ἀναφυγὰ κακῶν*) and the imminent appearance of light in darkness (*πάρα δὲ φῶς ἰδεῖν*) are here further connected to the removal of pollution.⁴⁷ Restraint and its removal are found not only in Greek mystery cults but also cross-culturally in initiatory contexts;⁴⁸ moreover, an early fourth century inscription indicates that initiates are held until they are “released” from Eleusis itself.⁴⁹ Indeed, on the basis of this and other imagery alone, parallels between the third stasimon and the Mysteries have been deemed certain, and yet readers are advised against considering the implications of the Eleusinian references⁵⁰—and this when even more literal-

⁴⁷ Achieving a state of ritual purity was at a premium for induction into the rites of Eleusis; cf. L. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932) 75: “eine Menge kathartischer, apotropäischer und verwandter Riten den Mysten in den für die heiligen Handlungen erforderlichen reinen und gesicherten Zustand versetzen.”

⁴⁸ Cf. W. Burkert, *Homo Necans* (Berkeley 1983) 268: “binding or veiling of the eyes in initiation is not fortuitous ... the candidate must suffer the unknown ... He is captive ... previously isolated, made insecure, and frightened, he must now experience ... blissful liberation.” Cf. V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca 1967) 96: “The neophyte may be buried, forced to lie motionless in the posture and direction of customary burial, may be stained black, or may be forced to live for a while in the company of masked and monstrous mummers.”

⁴⁹ *Agora* XVI 56.34 establishes a period of activity for certain officials from the middle of Boedromion “until the initiates are released,” *μέχρι ὃ ἂν μύσται λυθῶσιν*.

⁵⁰ Garvie, *Aeschylus Choephoroi* 304: “though the parallels [with the Eleu-

minded commentators on this passage concede that there is some connection to initiation rites.⁵¹ Without, at this point, judging the relative merits of other approaches to the stasimon, we may rather ask about the possible audience reaction to the parallels, such as they are drawn.⁵²

First, it is clear to which stage of initiation both the prologue of *Agamemnon* and the third stasimon of *Choephoroi* allude: towards the end of initiation, the mystae were gathered together in the dark before being shown a light. Among other *deiknumena*, the hierophant appeared either holding a torch or bathed

sinian mysteries] are undeniable it seems unnecessary to interpret the ode in mystic terms. The language is fully explicable in the dramatic context of the play itself." Recent trends in textual criticism and translation, however, show that certain words are not so well understood as Garvie took them to be, see below.

⁵¹ E.g. Petrounias, *Funktion und Thematik* 254, who, uncharacteristically, writes, "Ein stärkeres Argument für die Mysterien-Beziehung ist die Erwähnung und die Erscheinung des Lichtes ... Der Ausdruck *πᾶρα δὲ φῶς ἰδεῖν* konnte ein Zitat sein: Es scheint, dass im zweiten Teil der Mysterien, am 6. Tag des Festes, der Hierophant mitten in der Nacht im Licht erschien." He no sooner concedes the point, however, than dismisses it by trying to liken the language to the Panathenaea instead, for which the unequivocally initiatory language (release from restraint, standing up, the very passage from darkness to light) would make no sense whatever. In an attempt to play down the "stärkeres Argument," Petrounias also states (254) that most of the audience would be hard put to catch such allusions to the Eleusinian mysteries since so few of them would have been initiates, a position that contradicts the wide-spread popularity of this rite. See e.g. W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1985) 285–286 ("Most but not all Athenians were initiates"); cf. Lucian *Dem.* 11 claiming that practically all Athenians were initiates. Surely a majority of the audience was Athenian, even if there were other Greeks present (who of course could also have been initiates).

⁵² An odd tendency of Aeschylean criticism has been to avoid discussion of what a trilogy like the *Oresteia* might have meant for an Athenian of the fifth century. See e.g. R. Seaford, "The Last Bath of Agamemnon," *CQ* 34 (1984) 247: "Most of the work done on tracing persistent themes and images in the *Oresteia* has failed to take account of the associations of the theme or image for the original audience." Cf. the New Critical approach taken by Petrounias.

in light himself;⁵³ the appearance of this light seems to have signaled the end of the darkness, fear, and anxiety built up during the prior stage of the initiation. The emotional force was calculated for maximum effect.⁵⁴

In *Choephoroi*, the chorus, after a long period of suffering,⁵⁵ likens the imminent release and the salvation of the house of Atreus to this Eleusinian “deliverance.” As the watchman did at the outset of *Agamemnon*, they have waited in the dark for a saving light which is, they trust, now at hand. Even before the appearance of the Erinyes (whether on stage already or only present to Orestes), we may be sure that such a definitive end to their suffering has not yet been achieved, for the chorus’ attempt to map this ritual onto the actions inside the house would involve a perversion of the very rites invoked,⁵⁶ for the taint of murder already darkens the possibility of salvation.

More specifically, the chorus imagines that Orestes is delivering the house by removing the “sources of pollution”—both by

⁵³ C. Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon, und Klemens von Alexandria* (Berlin 1987) 50: “Der plötzliche Umschlag von Nacht in Licht erfolgt im Ritus von Eleusis beim Höhepunkt der Schau offenbar durch die Öffnung des Anaktorons, eines kleinen, unverrückbaren Raumes nicht ganz in der Mitte des Telesterions, zu dem allein der Hierophant Zugang hatte.” Cf. Hippol. *Haer.* 5.8.40, αὐτὸς ὁ ἱεροφάντης ... νυκτὸς ἐν Ἐλευσίνι ὑπὸ πολλῶ πυρὶ τελῶν τὰ μεγάλα καὶ ἄρρητα μυστήρια.

⁵⁴ Burkert, *Greek Religion* 93: “The experience is patterned by antithesis, by moving from extremes of terror and happiness, darkness and light.” So already Deubner, *Griechische Feste* 87: “Von wesentlicher Bedeutung für die Mysterien waren, wie man weiß, die Lichteffekte, der plötzliche Wechsel von Dunkel und Helligkeit und die dadurch bedingte psychische Beeinflussung der Mythen.” Cf. Lactant *Div. Inst.* 23.7, who confirms that the rite is complete with the change from darkness to joy: *per noctem Proserpina inquiritur, et ea inventa, ritus omnis gratulatione ac taedarum jactatione finitur.*

⁵⁵ They claim, earlier in the play (26), to have been engaged in funeral lamentation throughout their lives: δι’ αἰῶνος δ’ ἰγγμοῖσι βόσκεται κέαρ.

⁵⁶ On the perversion of sacrificial ritual in the trilogy see F. Zeitlin, “The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*,” *TAPA* 96 (1965) 463–508.

killing Aegisthus and now Clytaemnestra.⁵⁷ The ritual travesty lies in the realization of Eleusinian release by means of murder, the countering of miasma with yet more miasma. While modern readers and theatergoers may feel unsettled by this identification of murder—matricide, of all forms—with collective salvation for the house of Atreus, for the audience at the City Dionysia this would have been anathema.

Before the beginning of the various rites leading up to the journey to Eleusis, on the 15th of Boedromion the hierophant and the heralds proclaimed, in their *prorrhesis*,⁵⁸ that barbarians and murders were to be excluded (ἐῤῥγεσθαι) from the Eleusinian mysteries (Isoc. *Paneg.* 157):

Εὐμολπίδαι δὲ καὶ Κήρυκες ἐν τῇ τελετῇ τῶν μυστηρίων ...
τοῖς ... βαρβάροις ἐῤῥγεσθαι τῶν ἱερῶν ὥσπερ τοῖς ἀνδροφόνοις
προαγορεύουσιν.

The Eumolpidae and the Heralds at the initiation rites of the Mysteries proclaim to the barbarians that they are excluded from the rituals just as are those who have committed murder.⁵⁹

The implications for the matter at hand are rather striking: how is it that Orestes' act of matricide can be associated in any measure with the initiatory practice of Eleusis when murderers

⁵⁷ Thomson, *JHS* 55 (1935) 24: "in the imagination of the poet, a parallel is being drawn, or is about to be drawn, between the murder of Clytemnestra and mystic ritual." P. Groeneboom, *Aeschylus' Choephoroi* (Groningen 1949) ad loc., believes that Orestes is exiting the house as these words are sung.

⁵⁸ Deubner, *Attische Feste* 72, connects the gathering of initiands and the declaiming of the *prorrhesis* to the first day proper of the festival as such: "ist der ἀγυρμός, an dem sich die Mysteren versammelten und der als der erste Tag der Mysterien bezeichnet wird, am 15 Boedromion anzusetzen, und auf denselben Tag wird man passenderweise die πρόρρησις des Hierophanten und Daduchen in der Poikile verlegen, durch die Barbaren und Mörder fortgewiesen wurden."

⁵⁹ Isocrates mentions that the exclusion of barbarians is an innovation resulting from the Persian Wars and the burning of Eleusis; the proscription of murderers would be traditional. For discussion of this and related passages on the *prorrhesis* see still A. Lobeck, *Aglaophamus* (Königsberg 1829) 14 ff.

are explicitly, indeed publicly, barred from participation in the first place?⁶⁰ The answer lies in the general tendency of ritual, whether configured as sacrifice or not, to be perverted throughout the *Oresteia*.⁶¹ The corruption of this part of the Eleusinian program would then be a paradigmatic instance of how the *Oresteia* uses ritual language and imagery to show how abnormal Argos has become: no ritual, no matter its sanctity, can remain untainted on the lips or in the imagination of those suffering under the weight of so much intra-familial miasma. Ritual is here damned before its *telos* is even in sight.

This view not only provides further evidence for the parallels between the *Oresteia* and the Mysteries, but also is able to show how the prologue of *Agamemnon* and the third stasimon of *Choephoroi* are connected to the thematics of the trilogy. From the outset of the first play, the Eleusinian imagery, by its very deviation from normative application, alerts the audience to problems in ritual itself at Argos: Agamemnon's return, while longed for, is still the return of a murderer, whose blood guilt almost immediately dominates the thoughts of the chorus in the *parodos* of the first play. He can no more be a symbol of Eleusinian deliverance than can his son, Orestes. In the second example the transgression of the rite is made all the more explicit; and so the first cluster of allusions does in fact "prepare us for developments to come."⁶² And this too is a well-noted Aeschylean practice of introducing a theme at first only opaquely, which is to be developed, as the drama unfolds, in a

⁶⁰ Mylonas, *Eleusis* 246: "Exactly what was stated in the proclamation we cannot know, but the sense can be pieced together ... Anyone burdened with the guilt of homicide was completely excluded from participation."

⁶¹ Beyond sacrifice see e.g. the perversion of the ritual bath for the dead: Seaford, *CQ* 34 (1984) 247–254. See also P. Roth, "The Theme of Corrupted *Xenia* in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*," *Mnemosyne* 46 (1993) 1–17. At the very outset of *Choephoroi* Electra, Orestes, and the chorus conspire to transform the apotropaic ritual devised by Clytemnestra into its opposite, the virtual conjuring of Agamemnon's spirit more fully into the world of the living.

⁶² Contra Verdenius, in Boeft and Kessels, *Actus* 430.

more elaborate fashion.⁶³ It is true that our knowledge of the exact composition of rituals associated with the Mysteries is incomplete and this is even truer of our appreciation of what beliefs coalesced around these rituals for participants and non-participants alike.⁶⁴ In this instance, however, the parallels reflect a specific feature of ritual as it is presented and developed in the *Oresteia*.

The Eleusinian allusions are, I believe, connected even more closely with the action of the *Oresteia*, but before this can be explored, a textual issue needs to be addressed. Just after the evocation of the Eleusinian mysteries in the third stasimon (961–964), Page in the OCT (1972) prints (*Cho.* 965–968):

τάχα δὲ παντελῆς χρόνος ἀμείψεται
 πρόθυρα δωμάτων, ὅταν ἀφ' ἐστίας
 μύσος ἅπαν ἐλαθῇ
 καθαρμοῦσιν ἀτᾶν ἐλατηρίοις.

Soon Time, in full completion, will cross
 the threshold of the palace, once all the pollution
 has been driven from the hearth, by means
 of rites of purification which send off destruction.

The presence of *χρόνος* as the subject of this strophe, although sound in the manuscript tradition (meager as it is), is excised from the text by Martin West in his Teubner edition (1990). He replaces the word altogether and offers the following arguments:⁶⁵

⁶³ Cf. the comments of Isaac Casaubon in his edition of *Agamemnon* as quoted by Fraenkel, *Agamemnon* I 37: “debemus notare ... Aeschylum solitum esse quod dixit obscuris verbis postea quid intelligat explicare ... ut iam diximus semper solet Aeschylus illa quae satis obscure dixit postea illustrare clariori sententia.”

⁶⁴ There is of course some evidence that Aeschylus himself pushed the bounds of acceptable allusions to the Mysteries too far, if we believe Aristotle's testimony (see n.7 above).

⁶⁵ M. West, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Stuttgart 1990) 260.

I adopt Lafontaine's *πρόμος*⁶⁶ for the impossible *χρόνος* of **M**⁶⁷ and sch., which must be accidental repetition from *χρόνον* in 963. Time could be called *παντελής* and it could be said to drive pollution from the hearth; but it cannot be said to go through a doorway (since it is never localized), nor to perform expulsoy purification rites.

Against this stands, e.g., the view of A. F. Garvie, who, in his commentary on *Choephoroi* (1986), had, just a few years earlier, reached the opposite conclusion:⁶⁸

the personification of time ... is less natural in English than in Greek, in which time itself may be said to do what happens in the course of time, or to accompany a person who takes time to do something ... there in no good reason to suspect the text.

An appreciation of the Mystery parallels provides, as I will show, for another line of defense in favor of the manuscript tradition;⁶⁹ but, as the textual arguments of West are primarily philological, it is best to begin here.

⁶⁶ Auguste Lafontaine, *Aeschylus' Tragödien* (Halle 1822) II 282 ad loc., "Geändert habe ich *χρόνος* ... v. 945 vulg., ich *πρόμος*, was der Sinn fordert."

⁶⁷ **M** is the only source manuscript of *Choephoroi* which survives. The manuscripts **Ma**, **Mb**, and **Mc** are all copies of **M**; for discussion see A. Turyn, *The Manuscript Tradition of the Tragedies of Aeschylus* (New York 1967) 17–19 and 100 ff.

⁶⁸ Garvie, *Aeschylus Choephoroi* 314. Cf. H. Lloyd-Jones, *Aeschylus, The Libation Bearers* (Englewood Cliffs 1970) 65, "To us this personification of time seems strangely artificial, but in Greek it is not uncommon."

⁶⁹ West's edition forms the basis for translation and discussion of this passage: C. Collard, *Aeschylus' Oresteia* (Oxford 2002) ad 965, offers in his translation of West's Teubner: "Soon now, as the absolute head of his house, Orestes will come through the doorway." There is no note to the effect that this translates the conjecture *πρόμος*, "the absolute head," for *χρόνος*, although elsewhere Collard is careful to indicate where he accepts variations from the standard readings. Cf. the new Loeb by A. Sommerstein (2008) which now also follows West and includes the following note: "the transmitted reading ... is, as [West] shows, unacceptable" (337 n.190). West and Sommerstein also cite another conjecture, *ἄλβος*, credited to one Kayser, whom West, *Studies* lxvi, identifies as "nescio quis Caesarum hic fuerit."

First, it should be mentioned that other editions have neither printed the change nor even acknowledged Lafontaine's conjecture in the apparatus.⁷⁰ Even before Lafontaine, Elmsley and Blomfield sought to alter the text at this point, prompting Hermann to respond "nihil mutandum";⁷¹ Wilamowitz also keeps the manuscript reading while cautioning against a suspicion of this word arising from our modern views about what Time can and cannot do.⁷² Second, neither of two studies devoted to the language and theme of Time in antiquity registers any doubt about the reading of the passage in question.⁷³ Third, the change to *πρόμος*, while perhaps considered innocuous, introduces a martial term into a context of predominantly ritual language, not an impossible development in and of itself, but surely one that deserves at least as much comment as the judgment against *χρόνος*.⁷⁴ Fourth, the impu-

⁷⁰ Not recorded in the editions of G. Hermann (1852), Sedgwick (1892), U. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1914), P. Mazon (1925), Murray (1937), nor in Page (1972). Moreover, K. Sier, *Die lyrischen Partien der Choephoren des Aischylos* (Stuttgart 1988), whose list of editions consulted is among the longest, does not include Lafontaine's edition (or his suggestion).

⁷¹ G. Hermann, *Aeschyli Tragoediae, Adnotationes*² (Leipzig 1852) 568: "Elmsleio ad Med. 86. audacter, ut ait, *χρόνος* in *χορός* mutantū assensus est Blomfieldius. Nihil mutandum. Scholiastes non male, quamquam non satis accurate, ὁ πάντα τελῶν χρόνος τὰ πρόθυρα τῶν οἴκων ἀλλάξει ἀπὸ κατηγορίας εἰς λαμπρότητα."

⁷² *Aischylos Orestie* (Berlin 1896) 239: "Uns ist es befremdlich, das der *χρόνος παντελής* über die vorhalle kommen soll, weil wir die zeit ganz von den dingen lösen." Cf. M. Davies' review of West, *CR* 42 (1992) 255–263, in which he judges, "One sometimes gets the impression, surprisingly enough, that he proposes his emendations without having spent an appropriate amount of time on understanding the text, or what his predecessors have written about it" (257).

⁷³ H. Fränkel, "Die Zeitauffassung in der frühgriechischen Literatur," in *Wegen und Formen der frühgriechischen Literatur* (Munich 1955) 1–22, and J. de Romilly, *Time in Greek Tragedy* (Ithaca 1968) 54, 57, both accept the manuscript reading.

⁷⁴ Lafontaine explains only that he is offering "what the sense demands," (see n.66 above). West does not discuss what *πρόμος* would mean in this

tation that *χρόνος* must be repetition from *χρόνον* (963) would seem to overlook the character of this stasimon in specific, where the word appears in almost every strophe;⁷⁵ *χρόνος* also makes repeated appearances in earlier parts of the trilogy (as is the case throughout *Agamemnon*)⁷⁶—and this is not to mention Aeschylus' well-observed penchant for word repetition at close intervals in general and especially in choral sections.⁷⁷ But, it still may be asked, can Time cross a threshold?

At *Agamemnon* 984 *χρόνος* is the subject of *παρήβησεν*, in a phrase that seems to indicate that “time has passed out of youth”—another context of Time crossing a boundary which thus provides an internal parallel for such an expression.⁷⁸ Euripides (and Shakespeare after him)⁷⁹ would speak of “the foot of Time” (*Bacch.* 889), albeit in a passage written long after the *Oresteia*. If time has feet and can walk, can it then not go through a doorway?⁸⁰ Pindar speaks of a time, in the nominative, that arrives (*Ol.* 10.7–8, *Nem.* 4.43), although the “motion” associated with time is in participial form. Furthermore, against West's statement that time cannot perform expulsoy rites, Time causes purification at *Eumenides* 286, in a

context. Stanford, *Aeschylus* 91, however, reminds us that “Aeschylus is outstanding in the boldness and vividness of his personifying metaphors.”

⁷⁵ Garvie, *Aeschylus Choephoroi* 314, “*χρόνος* frames the whole ode.”

⁷⁶ Twice in the first strophe of this stasimon, once in the second strophe, and in the second antistrophe. On the *Oresteia* as a whole cf. Fränkel, *Wegen und Formen* 21: “Der *Ag.* allein hat nicht weniger als 17 Belege für *χρόνος*, und diese Tragödie ist überhaupt mit Zeitbewußtsein durchsättigt.”

⁷⁷ K. Schinkel, *Die Wortwiederholung der Aischylos* (diss. Tübingen 1973), again and again confronts the various charges of dittography and finds them largely unsubstantiated. Moreover, on polyptoton in general he writes (50) “das Polyptoton ... erfreut sich bei Aischylos und überhaupt bei den griechischen Tragikern besonderer Beliebtheit ... in den lyrischen Partien z.B. finden sich bei Aischylos doppelt soviel Polyptota wie bei Pindar.”

⁷⁸ For this interpretation of the passage see Fraenkel, *Agamemnon* ad loc.

⁷⁹ *As You Like It* III.ii.282, “the lazy foot of Time.”

⁸⁰ In Orphic literature there was a figure of Time who had both wings and could copulate: see M. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford 1983) 70 ff.

line which, although excised by others, is kept by West.⁸¹

In sum, against West's condemnation of *χρόνος* at *Cho.* 965, there are independent reasons to accept the manuscript reading, as the vast majority of editors are wont to do.⁸² It is certainly the *lectio difficilior* in the choice between it and the more prosaic *πρόμος*. And yet the subject of this sentence would not cause such problems if its placement here were better understood. The question remains: why should Time come forward to cross the threshold of the house in a passage otherwise laden with allusion to the Eleusinian mysteries?

On the preponderance of evidence, Time seems to be coming out from inside the house, although *ἀμείβεσθαι* can refer to either entering or exiting.⁸³ The chorus, of course, has seen an entry into the palace and is awaiting a return. Taken in this way, there is a conflation of Orestes' imminent return and that of "Time fully-completed."⁸⁴ Time will cross from the house

⁸¹ West, *Studies* 260 n.28, calls the two lines "of course not comparable," but does not explain why. A. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus Eumenides* (Cambridge 1989) ad *Eum.* 286, deems the line "rhetorically disastrous" with "no grammatical connection within its context."

⁸² In addition to Hermann, Wilamowitz, Sedgwick, Tucker, and Garvie, see the support for *χρόνος* in Sier, *Die lyrischen Partien* ad loc.

⁸³ The verb is ambiguous and the passage could be read as intimating that Time is going into the house, but, to the degree that Orestes and Time are here linked, as attempts at emendation show, it is more appropriate to understand that since Orestes has already gone in (at *Cho.* 934) he "will" exit (at 976); this argument then supports the view of Garvie, *Aeschylus Choephoroi* ad 965–966, who also takes *ἀμείβεται ... πρόθυρα δωμαίων* as "pass out of the front door of the house." West, *Studies* 260: "The chorus looks forward to the re-emergence of Orestes as master of the house." See also the discussion of Sier, *Die lyrischen Partien* ad loc. A. Verrall, *The 'Choephoroi' of Aeschylus* (London 1893) ad 963–966, spells out the difficulty: "the ambiguity of *ἀμείβεται* (*pass in, pass out, or alter*) makes trebly obscure the part which is to be played by 'all-accomplishing time.'"

⁸⁴ The identification of the actual subject with "Time" is not only possible in Greek (as Garvie and Wilamowitz would have it) but also in English, e.g. Shakespeare's *Richard II*, when Lord Berkeley asks the young Bolingbroke (the future Henry IV) about his seditious activities during King Richard's campaign in Ireland: "to know what pricks you on / To take advantage of

once the pollution from the hearth has been driven away by rites of purification (*καθαρμοῖσιν ἀτῶν ἐλατηρίοις*).

The adjective *παντελής*, although rare, has a meaning here that the audience has been well prepared for. Not only does it follow on sustained reference to the Mysteries, but it also has a specific association with mystery religion: Plutarch applies it to the initiate who has gone through all the preparatory stages just before the completion of the rite itself in the passage quoted above (fr.178).⁸⁵ Once the crisis of fear and anxiety has been surmounted, the initiand becomes an initiate, for he has seen the light which was the *telos* all along. The audience is brought once again to the point in the rites earlier alluded to by the watchman of *Agamemnon*. What would then follow is entirely positive, the dancing and joy expected by both the watchman, the chorus of Euripides' *Ion*, and the "soul" in Plutarch's fragment. While *χρόνος* itself is nowhere else called *παντελής*, Pindar applies the adjective to the year, personified (*Pa.* 1.5–8):

ἰ]ῆ ἰή, νῦν ὁ παντελής Ἐνιαυτός
 Ὠρα[ί] τε Θεμίγονοι
 πλάξ]ιππον ἄστυ Θήβας ἐπῆλθον
 Ἀπόλ]λωνι δαῖτα φιλησιστέφανον ἄγοντες·

Iê! Iê! Now the Year, fully completed,
 and the Seasons, descendants of Themis,
 have come to the horse-driving city of Thebes

the absent time, / And fright our native peace with self-born arms" (II.iii.80–82). "The absent Richard" or "Richard's absence" is what is meant by the phrase.

⁸⁵ Although Thomson, *JHS* 55 (1935) 27, had earlier recorded Headlam's connection of this adjective to the language of the Eleusinian mysteries, in the full commentary *The Oresteia* (243) he writes, "The full implication of *παντελής χρόνος* is not clear, but there can be little doubt that it contains an allusion to the 'perfect year' of Orphic philosophy." On the difficulty of connecting Eleusinian and Orphic matters, see Foucart, *Les mystères* 252 ff.: "De telles conceptions [Orphiques], faute originelle, rachat gagné par les mérites, aussi bien que le cercle des existences successives, sont absolument étrangères à la religion d'Éleusis" (254–255). Reservations also in West, *The Orphic Poems* 20–24. A circumspect appraisal in Graf, *Eleusis*, esp. 182–186.

and they bring to Apollo a feast enamored of garlands.

The reference to *Eniautos* and the Seasons indicates the year-end, given the adjective *παντελής*.⁸⁶ Thus the sense of *παντελής* is not just one of any completion but rather of *full* (*παν*) completion of various sub-sequences—in this case, the passage through the different seasons.⁸⁷

In the third stasimon of *Choephoroi* a similar meaning obtains: Time, only after the necessary ritual preconditions have been met, will cross, in full completion (*παντελής*), from the inside of the house.⁸⁸ Time, in its normative flow, has been bottled-up by the serial pollutions of the house,⁸⁹ leaving the community at large to suffer in darkness until the light comes.⁹⁰ The wish was the same on the part of the watchman at the beginning of *Agamemnon*: the return of the king was to spell the end of an overlong period of darkness, restraint, and fear. Agamemnon, the “light-in-the-darkness,” was expected to grant a “release from toils” just as Orestes is now to do the same.⁹¹

⁸⁶ I. Rutherford, *Pindar's Paean* (Oxford 2001) 256: “The epithet *παντελής* applied to Eniautos suggests that the festival happens at the end of one calendar year and the beginning of another.” *παντελής*, moreover, can have both an active and a passive valence (“fully-completed” or “fully completing”). While the passive sense seems to be preeminent given the context, the active meaning would fit equally well in that Orestes and the Time he is inaugurating are bringing a ritual program to completion.

⁸⁷ On the thematic centrality of the *telos* phenomenon in Aeschylus see U. Fischer, *Der Telos Gedanke in den Dramen des Aischylos* (Hildesheim 1965), who unfortunately does not treat *παντελής*.

⁸⁸ For ritualized renewal after purification in Greek religion see J. Bremmer, “Scapegoat Rituals in Ancient Greece,” in R. Buxton (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion* (Oxford 2000) 271–293 (originally *HSCP* 87 [1983] 299–320).

⁸⁹ A. Sidgwick, *Aeschylus' Choephoroi* (Oxford 1892) ad loc.: “it is an audacious personification: as though the Delay of Vengeance were pictured as *Time himself waiting inside* till he be ripe to go forth.”

⁹⁰ De Romilly, *Time* 57: “in the *Choephoroi*, Aeschylus makes time not only arrive but cross a threshold ... There is a feeling of mystery and sacred epiphany, but no real personification.”

⁹¹ The scholiast on *Cho.* 965 has ὁ πάντα τελῶν χρόνος τὰ πρόθυρα τῶν

In both instances of mystic allusion, the Eleusinian time of darkness-before-saving light, the time of suffering, has been used to cover an even longer period of time: in the first case a year's darkness in waiting for Agamemnon, and in the second the period of pollution associated with the rule of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. The second instance of allusion makes explicit what was only implied in the former: the house has lain "too long" upon the ground (*Cho.* 963). It is thus appropriate for the chorus to hope that finally now the time of darkness is over and that joy is at hand. Here too comparing the protracted difficulties of Argos to the difficulty of Eleusinian initiation is apt: while Eleusinian writings on the experience of time in the Mysteries proper are in short supply, Plato, the astrologer Vettius Valens (2nd cent. A.D.), and Tertullian emphasize the difficulty of initiation in part by reference to its long duration.⁹² The *Oresteia* then invokes a rite that was felt to be long and difficult and then uses that temporal association to characterize the long periods of darkness at Argos before the appearances of light, embodied first in Agamemnon and now in Orestes. There is even a protracting of this time-period from the first play to the second: in the first the watchman likened his year-long watch to an unbroken Eleusinian night, in the second the chorus retrospectively sees the whole tenure of Clytemnestra-Aegisthus under the same guise. What never truly materializes is the period after the difficulties (*παντελῆς χρόνος*), in which joy and light replace all the preceding trials.

οἴκων ἀλλάξει ἀπὸ κατηφείας εἰς λαμπρότητα. The "darkness" could then be the area behind the stage doors, the light the stage area itself before the audience.

⁹² Plato (*Phd.* 108A), after sustained comparison with the soul after death to the initiand at the Mysteries, speaks of how it experiences fear for a long time in the visible realm: *πολὸν χρόνον ἐπτοημένη καὶ περὶ τὸν ὄρατὸν τόπον*). Vettius Valens 9.1 also emphasizes the long trial of initiation: *πολυχρονία πείρα καὶ πόνοις συνεμφυρεῖς*. For discussion of these passages and their connection to the Eleusinian mysteries see Tierney, *JHS* 57 (1937) 19. Tertullian *Adv. Val.* 1.1–2: *nam et illa Eleusinia, haeresis et ipsa Atticae superstitionis, quod tacent, pudor est. idcirco et aditum prius cruciant diutius initiant quam consignant.*

The Eleusinian language and imagery of the third stasimon in its coloring of the experience of time at Argos may also help us to recover another part of the manuscript tradition, here from an emendation long accepted by most editors.⁹³ In the section quoted above the manuscript offers in the last two lines (963–964):

ἀναγε μὰν δόμος· πολὺν ἄγαν χρόνον
χαμαιπετεῖς ἔκεισθ' αἰεῖ.

Get up house! Far too long

Have you lain upon the ground again and again.

Emendation affects the whole of the second line, but radiates from discomfort over the last word, which is either changed from αἰεῖ (or ἀεῖ) to δῆ as, for example, by Page, or dropped altogether by Wilamowitz, Murray, and West and others. Against αἰεῖ we find the following sort of judgment: “das überlieferte αἰεῖ (ἀεῖ), ‘dauernd, immer wieder’ (Ag. 891, Pr. 645), verträgt sich schlecht mit πολὺν χρόνον.”⁹⁴ On the interpretation offered here, however, the notion that the house has lain upon the ground “again and again” or “continuously” for too long appropriately emphasizes the connection between the imagined Eleusinian periods of darkness. In the first case, the house lay prone too long in waiting for Agamemnon’s return, itself only the briefest glimpse of hope before darkness re-gathered. In the second round of gloom, the house languished yet again, this time waiting for Orestes to set matters aright. In each case the hope was for the true king to dispel the gloom and usher in light instead. The image is one of concatenated periods of suffering in the dark, waiting first for one, ultimately deceptive, light and then another after a similar period of anxious suffering. It is, I believe, the cumulative case which can be made for allusion to the Mysteries that allows for

⁹³ No change, however, in the edition of Hermann, a fact which of itself should give us pause.

⁹⁴ Sier, *Die lyrischen Partien* 297; cf. Garvie, *Aeschylus Choephoroi* ad loc., “ἀεῖ would scan, but the sense is awkward.”

a reconsideration of the manuscript reading. And if the sense of *αἰεῖ* is indeed strained, this would be meaningful in context inasmuch as it conspicuously brings together the different periods of darkness during which the house has lain prostrate.⁹⁵

Contrary, however, to the hopes of the chorus of *Choephoroi*, the imagined moment of deliverance is quickly upended—a result already foreshadowed by the breathless dochmiacs in which they sang.⁹⁶ Orestes returns to them, with the slain bodies of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, but is himself arrayed in suppliant garb, ready to leave Argos and leave it again without a proper ruler. Darkness now rises to meet him in the form of the Furies. Such a close conjunction of what was supposed to be ritual finality with a new period of darkness, suffering, and anxiety proves the ultimately ineffectual nature of ritual in the *Oresteia* to realize its normative *telos*: despite sacrifice, apotropaic rites, supplication, and prayers for release, ritual alone cannot guarantee a return to normality. It will not be until the verdict of Athena's Areopagus that a deliverance from toils, an *ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων*, can be achieved. Then, finally, in a torch procession reminiscent of the Panathenaea (*Eum.* 1021 ff.),⁹⁷ light will escort offstage those children of Night, the Erinyes, to an underground lair where their darkness, if not fully extinguished, can be usefully contained.

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⁹⁵ The last editor I have found who keeps *αἰεῖ* is N. Wecklein, *Aeschyli Fabulae* (Berlin 1885).

⁹⁶ Headlam and Thomson, *The Oresteia* 130: dochmiacs are “the rhythm which Aeschylus has consecrated to the unseen Avengers.” Cf. W. Scott, *Musical Design in Aeschylean Theater* (London 1984) 106: “Each time dochmiacs have been heard they have been closely associated with a murder ... Through such music the poet reminds the audience that little fundamental change has occurred in the second play.”

⁹⁷ W. Headlam, “The Last Scene of the *Eumenides*,” *JHS* 26 (1906) 268–277.