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THE CHORUS OF AESCHYLUS' *CHOEPHORI**

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I wish to ask two questions about the chorus of *Choephoroi*. First, who exactly *are* they? Second, what dramatic personality and functions does Aeschylus give to them, and are these congruent with what we might, or do, expect? Even with the appearance of Garvie's fine and thorough commentary on *Choephoroi*,¹ there is nothing approaching consensus on either of these questions. I think it possible to settle the first and more concrete one and to advance understanding of the second, though in an *unsettling* way. At the end of the paper, I shall offer an opinion on how the particular investigation of the *Choephoroi* chorus may relate to the further and even more basic question: in what sense, if at all, is there a unified choral voice throughout the *Oresteia* or throughout Aeschylus?

* * * * *

First, then, identity. The chorus of *Choephoroi* consist either of unspecified foreign slave women or of specifically Trojan slave women, but which? Commentators and critics are split. As a sample, Verrall, Tucker, Wilamowitz, Lattimore are for unspecified generic foreign slave women; Conington, Sidgwick, Rose, Lloyd-Jones for specifically Trojan slave women.² And many scholars, no matter how detailed their discussion of the play and its chorus—Lebeck, Taplin, and Garvie³ may serve as examples—, make no real attempt at a firm identification at all. In fact, the issue remains entirely open. But this is the sort of situation in Greek tragedy which has to have been clear for the audience. The audience *must* be able to identify who the actors and the chorus are, and it *will* make a difference to an audience's response to *Choephoroi* as a whole whether the choral force is a group of women brought back—with Cassandra—from Troy by Agamemnon or a group of women who have been part of the palace household since before Agamemnon ever went to Troy. It can be presumed that when the audience first *see* the chorus, at or toward the end of the prologue, they know them from their costumes and masks to be slave women. The question thus becomes: how much, if any, more *specific* an identification emerges from the text?⁴

Three conceivably relevant passages, along with interesting but obscure scholia to the first of them, have been adduced as evidence of a specifically Trojan identity: 75ff., 423ff., and 935f. Although I shall treat briefly all three of these, a general dramatic consideration makes it fairly certain that only the

first one, from the epode of the parodos, can contribute to the identification of the chorus: namely, it is improbable that a choral group, or a character, will be [18]identified firmly to the audience *only* long after their first appearance in the play. Whatever identifying words are supposed to be picked up by the audience will surely be uttered early. Thus, if our chorus are to be identified any more specifically than as slave women it is inherently unlikely that such further identification will come either almost halfway through the play (the second passage, toward the end of the *kommos*) or, even more unlikely, from near the end of the play (the third passage, from the stasimon after Orestes has driven Clytemnestra into the palace).

The epode of the parodos, therefore, is critical. I give Page's text:

ἐμοὶ δ', ἀνάγκαν γὰρ ἀμφίπτολι
θεοὶ προσήνεγκαν, ἐκ γὰρ οἴκων
πατρώων δούλιόν (μ') ἐσᾶγον αἴσαν,
δίκαια †καὶ μὴ δίκαια†
πρέποντ' ἀπ' ἀρχᾶς βίου
βίαι φρενῶν αἰνέσαι, πικρὸν στύγος
κρατούσαι ... (75-81)

The passage states what the audience would know already from the chorus' costumes and masks, that they are slaves, and it establishes that at some point they have come from another land. Does it tell us anything more about the chorus? Lloyd-Jones translates the first three verses: "But as for me—since a constraint that beset my city has been laid on me by the gods; for from the house of my father they led me to a fate of servitude—...."⁵ The next lines are badly corrupt, and Page's text departs considerably from that of M, the *codex unicus* for *Choephoroi*: δίκαια καὶ μὴ δίκαια, πρέποντ' ἀρχᾶς βίου, βίαι φερομένων αἰνέσαι πικρῶν φρενῶν στύγος κρατούση. Without attempting to come to terms with the whole passage,⁶ I focus on M's ἀρχᾶς βίου. This is, as Garvie notes, "an odd expression," but together with the surrounding phrases it seems to mean something like (with my italics) "it is fitting to put up with *the rulers of my life* in matters just and unjust" (Garvie) or "and mine it is to ... consent to *their commands*, right or wrong" (Lattimore). In this reading, *no* additional background information about the chorus is being given.

With Page's reading,⁷ however, the chorus are specifying that they have been slaves from the *beginning* of their life, in which case they are quite definitely *not* describing themselves as having been brought by Agamemnon from Troy (i.e., as girls or young women). Page derives his reading from the scholia to the epode, as his *apparatus criticus* makes clear: ἀπ' ἀρχᾶς interpretatur M^Σ. He has in mind particularly a scholium which reads, without a lemma: τὸ ἐξῆς· ἐμοὶ δὲ πρέποντα καὶ ὀφειλόμενά ἐστιν ἀπαρχᾶς (corrected by Abresch to ἀπ' ἀρχῆς) βίου.... And he may also have in mind a scholium in which the lemma πρέποντ' ἀρχᾶς βίου is followed by the comment: πρέποντά μοι ἐστι καὶ ὀφειλόμενα, ἐξότε τοῦτον ἐπανήρημαι τὸν βίου,....⁸ Certainly the first scholium (if we accept Abresch's almost sure emendation) is taking the text to mean ἀπ' ἀρχᾶς βίου, though, as Garvie

points out, this does not necessarily indicate that the scholiast saw ἀπ' ἀρχᾶς βίου in the text being commented on.⁹

But the following considerations make Page's confident reliance on the scholia dubious. First, the earlier clause in the text, ἐκ γὰρ οἴκων πατρώων [19]... αἶσαν, suggests strongly, if not irresistibly, that this chorus has not been enslaved ἀπ' ἀρχᾶς βίου. Second, Page's *apparatus* implies a consistency in the scholia which is not the case. The second scholium above is much more likely to mean "since I have taken up this (kind of) life" than "since I was born." And there is a third scholium, with the lemma ἀμφίπολις, which reads: τὴν ἐκ διαφόρων πόλεων ἀνάγκην [ὅ ἐστι πόλεμον], ὡς ἀμφιμάτορας κόρους φησὶ ὁ Εὐριπίδης· ἐκ διαφόρων γὰρ πόλεων ἦσαν οἱ Ἕλληνες.¹⁰ Now the regular meaning given to ἀνάγκαν ... ἀμφίπολις in the text is "the constraint of a city besieged" (Garvie) or "constraining doom about my city" (Smyth),¹¹ but the scholiast takes the phrase as "constraint coming from various cities," and he explains, "since the Greeks came from various cities," citing as an analogy a Euripidean phrase (*Andr.* 466), ἀμφιμάτορας κόρους, where ἀμφιμάτορας has the sense, "from various mothers (but the same father)." This scholium, then, *does* take the chorus to be Trojan. Scarcely anyone, however, except the scholiast has been persuaded that ἀμφίπολις and ἀμφιμάτορας are, in these contexts, analogous or that ἀμφίπολις can here mean "coming from various cities."¹² Thus even a proponent of Trojan identification of the chorus such as Lloyd-Jones still translates ἀνάγκαν ... ἀμφίπολις simply as "a constraint that beset my city."

The fact is that the scholiastic testimony on the epode is inconsistent and indeed mutually exclusive. One scholium assumes a generic foreign slave chorus who have been part of the palace household for their whole lives; one scholium assumes a generic chorus who have come into slavery at some point during their lives; and one scholium assumes a Trojan slave chorus. On the one hand, from this inconsistency not much can be drawn in support of adopting the reading ἀπ' ἀρχᾶς βίου, which would clinch the argument for a generic slave chorus. On the other, neither ἀμφίπολις nor the troubled manuscript reading ἀρχᾶς βίου tells *against* a generic slave chorus and *for* a Trojan chorus. The epode of the parodos, therefore, which is crucial for identifying the chorus, adds *nothing* specific to the visual identification of them as generic slave women which the audience have already made upon the chorus' entrance.

The second possibly relevant passage for a specific choral identification comes in the latter part of the vast *kommós*, at the beginning of the second main section, what Lloyd-Jones terms "the conjuration proper."¹³ Page's text reads:

έκοψα κομμὸν Ἄριον ἐν τε Κισσίας
νόμοις ἠγλεμιστρίας·
ἀπρικτόπληκτα πολυπάλακτα δ' ἦν ἰδεῖν... (423-25)
I beat an Arian dirge upon my breast, after the fashion
of a Cissian wailing woman,
and with clenched fists and much spattering of blood
could you have seen... (tr. Lloyd-Jones)¹⁴

Even if we allow that at this point in the play the chorus might be announcing for the first time their identity, do these lines specify them as Trojan?¹⁵ Nothing leads in so concrete a direction. “Arians,” Herodotus (7.62) notes, is a former designation of the Medes;¹⁶ Cissia is the district of Persia containing [20]Susa (Herodotus 5.49). The terms are employed by Aeschylus simply to denote generic oriental/Asiatic emotionalism. The chorus are saying that they are/have been/were engaged (ἔκοψα) in passionate oriental wailing, which of course is perfectly appropriate for any slave women of foreign extraction.

A tantalizing problem remains in the passage: when does the mourning they describe take place? Does ἔκοψα refer to the present, recent past, or distant past? Are the chorus describing their ongoing lamentation in the *kommos* (instantaneous aorist), or their lamentation earlier in the *parodos*, or their grief long ago at the time of Agamemnon’s death? Each argument has had its proponents,¹⁷ and I see no need to restrict ἔκοψα to a single reference.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the combination of ἦν ἰδεῖν in 425, which cannot refer to a present action,¹⁹ together with the specific appeals to Agamemnon’s murder repeated in every one of the next several stanzas²⁰ makes it probable that ἔκοψα refers, at least principally, to the mourning over the slain Agamemnon,²¹ and consequently this second passage argues fairly categorically that the choral mourners were long-term slaves of the household at the time of the king’s death, not *Trojan* captives, fresh from the agony of their own city’s destruction by the same person. But even should this conclusion not be pressed, 423-25 still do not identify the *Choephoroi* chorus as *other* than generic slave women.

The third and last possibly relevant passage comes at the beginning of the third stasimon, the victory-song delivered after Clytemnestra and Orestes (and Pylades) have entered the palace:

ἔμολε μὲν Δίκη Πριαμίδαις χρόνῳ,
βαρῦδικος ποινά: ... (935-36)

There came Justice²² in time to the sons of Priam,
there came a heavy retribution;...

Although it has been claimed that this comment fits easily enough as a reference to themselves (Conington, e.g., states *ad loc.*, “Like Cassandra, *Ag.* 1286foll., the Trojan captives who form the Chorus naturally dwell on the visitation that fell on their city,...”), it is exceedingly difficult to imagine Aeschylus composing these words for a *Trojan* chorus to sing about their own people. And what Conington offers as the parallel sentiment from *Agamemnon* is precisely not a parallel because Cassandra’s brooding upon the destruction of Troy there (and also elsewhere in her scene, e.g., at 1167ff.) lacks altogether any invocation of *dikê* (“justice”) to describe what has happened. Cassandra speaks of the horror of Troy’s fall; the *Choephoroi* chorus ascribe the fall to *dikê*. The one utterance is fully natural for a Trojan character, the other is surely problematic.

The inescapable conclusion that emerges from the analysis of these three passages is that the chorus of *Choephoroi* never give themselves nor ever are given a specifically Trojan identity. In the *parodos*, both visually and verbally,

they announce themselves as foreign slave women, long-time palace servants; this identity is established by the audience's initial response, and throughout the play it never changes. The evidence of the text is consistent in nowhere admitting specificity.

[21]Two observations lend further support to a generic, non-Trojan choral identity. First, at 171, as Electra and the chorus-leader start their dialogue over the lock of hair, the latter asks:

πῶς οὖν παλαιὰ παρὰ νεωτέρας μάθω;

Then may my old age learn from your youth?

Although *παλαιά* cannot be pressed too hard in an expression that is highly conventional, nevertheless its use comes more appropriately from one who is a long-time household servant than from one who when taken from Troy is likely to have been relatively young and productive, and thus not significantly older than Electra herself.²³ Second, it is worth reiterating a general and familiar point of dramatic strategy: in *Choephoroi* Agamemnon is studiously presented as proper father and rightful ruler; one would scarcely know that this figure, so revered by the chorus as well as by Orestes and Electra, was the sacker of Troy and the sacrificer of Iphigenia. Such is clearly Aeschylus' dramatic purpose. How odd, then, it would be for Aeschylus to ignore in the language of the play Agamemnon's "career" before and at Troy, yet at the same time to give his chorus an identity which would inevitably call constant attention to that very side of Agamemnon.

In short, despite the fact that many scholars continue to describe the *Choephoroi* chorus as Trojan and even more shy away altogether from deciding between a Trojan chorus and a generic slave chorus, the answer is clearly dictated by the text itself: generic slave chorus. I venture to hope that this problem of long standing is resolved. The answer, moreover, as we shall see, is no less significant than it is certain.

* * * * *

What does Aeschylus *do* with his chorus of generic female household slaves? What dramatic functions does he give them? This large issue of interpretation, which has had to wait until the question of identity could be settled, will lead us into a dilemma which I summarize before proceeding to analyze relevant passages of the text.

Aeschylus' female slaves form one of the most determined, vehement, "take-charge" choral groups in surviving tragedy. They start to display these characteristics in their very first exchange with Electra after the parodos, and they display them again and again throughout the play.²⁴ One thinks immediately, of course, of the unique intrusion of the chorus-leader into the plot action when she persuades the Nurse, who is setting off to summon Aegisthus, to modify the message in a crucial respect. But this scene is far from being the only, or indeed the most central, display of choral forcefulness. As the play unfolds before the audience, a tension grows between the chorus' lowly, passive *status* and their authoritative *manner* as they exhort Electra and Orestes, preach implacable vengeance, instruct Cilissa, and so on. The critical

dilemma, then, that emerges by the play's end is: why has Aeschylus created a choral *role* so at variance with the choral *identity*? Do the audience experience the discrepancy as jarring? Does Aeschylus make it “work”?

Let me begin by pointing to some examples of the chorus' marked assertiveness. The very first verbs in the parodos are not, in fact, active ones, conveying initiative, but rather are passive or intransitive, referring to the task [22]the chorus have been set and the grief they feel: *ἰαλτὸς ... ἔβαν ... βόσκεται ... ἔφλαδον ... πεπληγμένων* (22-31). Before the parodos is finished, however, the slave women have advanced to a solemn, ringing declaration of the majesty of Agamemnon, who is now lost, and of the sure arrival, at some point, of Dike (55-61): *σέβας δ' ἄμαχον ἀδάματον ἀπόλεμον τὸ πρὶν / δι' ὧτων φρενὸς τε δαμίας περαίνου / νῦν ἀφίσταται.... ῥοπὰ δ' ἐπισκοπεῖ Δίκας...* (“And the awe that once irresistible, invincible, not to be withstood, passed through the ear and mind of the people now stands far away; ... But the balance of justice [visits]....”).

Thus, by the time their leader begins her dialogue with Electra at 106, the chorus have demonstrated a certain degree of strength. Electra herself in her opening speech, before the dialogue, reflects this by addressing the chorus not as subservient followers but as a group possessing wisdom and loyal energy at least equal to her own, and worthy to advise her on every step she is to take (84-91): *δμωιαὶ γυναῖκες, ... γένεσθε τῶνδε σύμβουλοι πέρι· / τί φῶ ...; / πῶς εὐφρον' εἶπω; πῶς κατεύξωμαι πατρί; / ... ἢ τοῦτο φάσκω τοῦπος...;* (“You servant women, ... give me your counsel in this matter! What am I to say...? What wise words may I utter, what prayer may I make to my father? ... Shall I speak the words...?”). She sums up her series of appeals (100-101): *τῆσδ' ἔστε βουλῆς, ὦ φίλαι, μεταίτια· / κοινὸν γὰρ ἔχθος ἐν δόμοις νομίζομεν* (“Share my responsibility, dear women, in deciding this; for we share the hatred that we cherish in the house”). This, then, is to be a chorus who, far from merely reacting and obeying, actually counsel and urge. We shall see the process take some extraordinary turns, but even here we are already struck by the fact that this strength comes from a group of foreign slave women.

In the stichomythia, 106-23, it is indeed the coryphaeus who takes the lead and who in fact guides Electra into a powerful prayer of hatred and vengeance that Electra herself at the beginning of the stichomythia could not articulate, e.g.:

Χο. λέξω, κελεύεις γάρ, τὸν ἐκ φρενὸς λόγον.

Ηλ. λέγοις ἄν, ... (107-108)

Ch. I will tell you, since you so order me, the thought that comes from my heart.

El. Tell it me, ...

Χο. μέμνησ' Ὀρέστου, ...

Ηλ. εὐ τοῦτο, κάφρένωσας οὐχ ἥκιστά με. (115-16)

Ch. Remember Orestes, ...

El. Well said! Excellently have you instructed me.

Ηλ. καὶ ταῦτά μοῦστὶν εὐσεβῆ θεῶν πάρα;

Χο. πῶς δ' οὐ, τὸν ἐχθρὸν ἀνταμείβεσθαι κακοῖς;(122-23)

El. And can I ask this of the gods without impiety?

Ch. Surely you can ask them to pay back an enemy with
evil!

[23]And Electra, thus prompted and instructed by the slave woman, launches into a prayer of a quite different dimension from what she had been prepared to do twenty verses earlier. It is an arresting passage of grim education.

Before turning to the great *kommos*, it is worth noting that in the first segment of the recognition scene the coryphaeus makes the inference (177), ahead of Electra, that the lock of hair may come from Orestes. Also to be noted is the virulent emotion of the coryphaeus (267-68) toward Clytemnestra and Aegisthus at the end of her comment separating Orestes' prayer to Zeus and his account of Apollo's oracular command: ... οὐς ἴδοιμ' ἐγὼ ποτε / θανόντας ἐν κηκίδι πισσῆρει φλογός ("...them may I one day see perish in the pitchy ooze of the flame!").

Who dominates and controls the *kommos*? The way in which critics refer to the participants suggests a hierarchy of importance: "Orestes, Electra, and the Chorus sing lyric stanzas in alternation, with marching anapaests by the chorus at regular intervals"²⁵ or "The first part of the play builds toward a *kommos*, the 200 line lament and invocation sung by Orestes, Electra, and the chorus"²⁶ or "Brother, sister, and the Chorus now unite in this great appeal for help."²⁷ And yet of the 173 lines in the *kommos* (306-478), 96 belong to the chorus, 42 to Electra, and 35 to Orestes, precisely the reverse of what one might expect from the standard formulation of the participants. Almost 60% is choral, considerably more than the combined utterances of Orestes and Electra, and even if one subtracts the 30 verses of choral anapaests, the remaining 66 verses of choral lyric still nearly match the combined total for Orestes and Electra. The chorus begin the *kommos* with nine lines of anapaests before Orestes sings the first strophe,²⁸ and they even more emphatically end the *kommos*: the last strophe and antistrophe and three concluding anapaests are all theirs. Thus, simply on numerical and structural grounds we ought to regard the *kommos* as performed by the chorus, Electra, and Orestes, in that hierarchy, and when the actual conjunction takes place at 423ff. this is indeed the order followed.²⁹

What the chorus chant and sing in the *kommos* is consistent with their overall structural dominance. They immediately set a tone of unrelenting vengeance in the introductory anapaests, e.g., 310-11: τοῦφειλόμενον / πράσσουσα Δίκη μέγ' ἀντεῖ ("as she demands her due, loud cries the voice of Justice"). And as soon as Orestes has delivered his first stanza they address him as τέκνον (324), and rather than reflecting deferentially on what he has just sung, they start to lecture and exhort him. Throughout the *kommos* the chorus steadily remain initiator, adviser, and inciter to Electra and Orestes; the children never ask or direct the chorus to follow or support *their* lead. Thus, at 376-79,

whatever the best readings in this exceedingly murky passage may be, it is the chorus who first make the point that the children “have no *living* helpers, and must therefore act themselves.”³⁰ And in their stanza at 386-93 they raise the bloodthirstiness to a still higher level and call explicitly for the slaying of Clytemnestra: ἐφυμνήσαι γένοιτό μοι πευ-/κάευντ’ ὀλολυγμὸν ἀνδρὸς / θεινομένου γυναικὸς / τ’ ὀλλυμένας (“May it be granted to me to raise a piercing cry of triumph when the man is smitten and the wife perishes!”). Again, at 439-40 the chorus act as graphic instructors about the dishonoring of Agamemnon’s corpse: ἐμασχαλίσθη δέ γ’, ὡς τὸδ’ εἰδήεις / ἔπρασε δ’ [24]ἄπερ νιν ᾧδε θάπτει (“He was mutilated; I must tell you this; and the doer was she who gave him this funeral”). They are the ones at 451-55 to summarize authoritatively what has been established, e.g., 453-54: τὰ μὲν γὰρ οὕτως ἔχει, / τὰ δ’ αὐτὸς ὄργα μαθεῖν (“For these things are as we say; yourself be passionate to hear the rest!”). And when the children and chorus go on to share a strophic pair (456-65), a single verse from each of the children is capped by three from the chorus. Orestes appeals movingly to Agamemnon, ξυγγενοῦ πάτερ φίλοις (456), but the chorus, in a clearly balancing appeal, are far more implacable, ξὺν δὲ γενοῦ πρὸς ἐχθρούς (459). It is true, as Garvie points out,³¹ that at the very end of the *kommos* the chorus, not Electra or Orestes, express foreboding, but it must be remembered that the final strophic pair and anapaests are given entirely to the chorus. Thus, the chorus who have propelled the *kommos* throughout are also the ones able to recognize and express the magnitude of what has been resolved.

The role of the chorus in the *kommos* is remarkable by any standard. The fact that they are foreign slave women makes their dominating presence even more startling. Indeed, critics often seem, in discussing the *kommos*, to avoid naming the choral group at all, as though out of embarrassment. Lebeck, for instance, in one of the finest analyses of the *kommos*,³² although she credits the strength of the chorus (e.g., “...under their tutelage Orestes gains greater understanding of the constraint imposed upon him...”³³), in 21 pages does not once use any more specific a phrase than “the chorus.” For her, as for others, the strain of matching the choral force with slave women is best solved by avoidance.

The *kommos* is followed by stichomythia between Orestes and Electra in which they both continue to appeal for Agamemnon’s help. The coryphaeus comments on their exchange with a slightly impatient call for action (512-13): ...ἐπειδὴ δρᾶν κατώρθωσαι φρενί, / ἔρδοις ἂν ἤδη δαίμονος πειρώμενος (“...since you are resolved to act, do now the deed and make trial of your fortune”),³⁴ and then proceeds to be Orestes’ informant on Clytemnestra’s dream. Why does Aeschylus assign this function to the chorus-leader rather than to Electra? Would it not be more probable for Electra to possess the knowledge? A factor may be that the information to be given to Orestes should be clear and unhesitating, motivating him to an impassioned response, and these qualities have been—remarkably—more present thus far in the slave coryphaeus than in Electra.³⁵

After the ornate mythological paradigms of crimes by women in the first stasimon, which ends in the final antistrophe (646) by forecasting: *Δίκας δ' ἐρείδεται πυθμὴν* ("the anvil of justice is planted firm"), and the ensuing entrance, through deceit, by Orestes and Pylades into the palace, the chorus have their notable encounter with Cilissa. An audience would not expect the Nurse to be subservient to the chorus' wishes. Cilissa is an old, loyal, trusted personal servant, surely with a standing at least that of a group of palace slaves. She has a name, something extremely unusual in tragedy for anyone of low status.³⁶ Eurycleia and Phaedra's Nurse remind us that nurse-figures could exert considerable authority and independence. And yet the anonymous chorus through their anonymous leader dominate and direct Cilissa, severely charging [25]her to ensure that Aegisthus comes alone.³⁷ Further, as often noted, Aeschylus has *created* this piece of plot interference; it was not forced upon him.³⁸ He marks the coryphaeus' control formally by breaking the strict stichomythia with the Nurse with four lines of choral directions (770-73), and the scene's final exchange caps the relationship that has been established (779-82):

- Χο. ἄγγελ' ἰούσα, πρᾶσσε τὰπεσταλμένα.
μέλει θεοῖσιν ὧνπερ ἂν μέληι πέρι.
Τρ. ἀλλ' εἴμι καὶ σοῖς ταῦτα πείσομαι λόγοις·
γένοιτο δ' ὡς ἄριστα σὺν θεῶν δόσει.
Ch. Go, take the message, do as you are ordered!
The gods are caring for whatever is their care.
Nu. Well, I will go and do as you say in this;
and with the gods' granting may all turn out as
well as may be!

After the murders, as the final scene begins (973ff.), Orestes reemerges from the palace, displaying the bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.³⁹ In a series of three speeches (973-1006, 1010-17, 1021-43) separated by two sets of choral anapaests, Orestes attempts to defend his deeds and determine his next course of action, but feels himself slipping into madness. To whom does he make his appeals? The chorus of slave women are certainly there and provide all the responses. But Orestes' language is formal and somewhat legal and seems to invoke representatives of the whole community, perhaps men specifically. At 980, he addresses his hearers as *τῶνδ' ἐπήκοοι κακῶν* ("you who take cognizance of this sad work"), and at 1040 he says, *τάδ' ἐν χρόνῳ μοι πάντας Ἀργείους λέγω* ("This command I lay upon all men of Argos, as time goes on"). Many commentators, therefore, bring onto the stage at 973 a silent group of Argives to provide the appropriate audience for Orestes. Lloyd-Jones, for example, postulates, "It is a reasonable surmise that the stage is occupied not only by the chorus but by others representing the people of Argos summoned to the palace by Orestes," and his stage-direction reads, "A crowd of Argive citizens, admitted to the palace by order of Orestes to hear his speech, enters the stage."⁴⁰ Both Taplin and Garvie, however, among others, reject decisively, and rightly, such a premise and regard the chorus as the sole

recipients of Orestes' words (except for one or more attendants who bear Agamemnon's robe and are addressed at 983).⁴¹

This leaves the female slave chorus in a remarkable position, a position which both Taplin and Garvie acknowledge with one critical gesture but evade with another. Taplin continues his comments on the staging of the final scene: "It might, I suppose, be claimed that the chorus of slave women is not a suitable audience for Orestes' defence; that they do not qualify as the *ἐπήκοοι* of 980. But in performance this would not matter.... The chorus does in any case represent the house of Agamemnon, and even the city to some extent...."⁴² And Garvie continues his comments: "...Orestes addresses the Chorus ... as the conventional representatives of Argos. The fact that they are technically slave-women is forgotten."⁴³ But why be so dismissive? The chorus have not changed their appearance in any way. The audience have just seen them and their leader directly confronting Cilissa as fellow slaves. What Aeschylus has [26]done quite deliberately is to *invest* his slave chorus with the presence and aura of citizen witnesses. Why run from this final example of what has been a series of startling roles given by Aeschylus to the *Choephoroi* chorus?⁴⁴

The generic slave women of *Choephoroi* participate in the play with extraordinary power. No other slave chorus in surviving tragedy is remotely comparable,⁴⁵ and very few choruses of any kind: the Erinyes, the Danaids, perhaps the Bacchae. How are we to respond to them? We might assert that the *Choephoroi* chorus essentially act like any other chorus: this amounts to denying that a dramatic problem exists. Such an attitude is reflected in the way Taplin and Garvie react to the chorus as quasi-citizens in the final scene. It is also reflected in the notable reluctance of many sensitive critics to refer to the chorus as either slave or female. Throughout his chapter on *Choephoroi*, the only time Taplin uses words more specific than "the chorus" is, I believe, in the statement quoted above. The absence of identifying terms for the chorus in Lebeck's discussion of the *kommos* extends throughout her whole chapter.⁴⁶ Rosenmeyer uses such phrases as "Like the Furies of the first part of *Eumenides*, the companions of Electra..." and "In spite of the differences between choruses—between the virgin truculence of the Danaids, the old men's wisdom and feebleness of the aged Argives of *Agamemnon*, and the singleminded vengefulness of Electra's companions...";⁴⁷ he names directly all other choral groups, but not the slave women of *Choephoroi*.

Rosenmeyer develops in considerable detail the argument for a general choral personality shared from play to play. For instance, the second sentence quoted above continues, "In spite of the differences between choruses ... there is an underlying choral psychology, if that is the term, which binds all tragic choruses together...." And again, "The chorus of *Libation-Bearers* is not the same, dramatically speaking, as that of *Agamemnon*. But in an important sense it is, for it is acted by the same persons, and in any case there is a larger identity that binds all choruses together."⁴⁸ In fact, so homogenized are all choruses for him that "nor does it matter whether the specific role of the chorus is that of free men, women, or slaves."⁴⁹

If the approach which Rosenmeyer represents at its most cogent is fully adequate, then my analysis of the *Choephoroi* chorus is largely unnecessary. But why, in that case, does Aeschylus create such a choral force? If the audience does *not* entertain essentially different dramatic expectations from male choruses and female, from free and slave, from old and young, why do these types exist in tragedy at all? It is perfectly true that all choruses have common elements and common generalizing functions. So too do such "characters" as kings and queens, princes and princesses, seers and nurses. But I am not persuaded, to speak only of Aeschylus' choruses, that the Persian elders, the Theban women, the Danaids, the Oceanids, the elders of Argos, the foreign slave women, the Erinyes display more of a common identity than they do their individual characters and specific roles. And so I hold to another response to the slave women of *Choephoroi*, namely that their exceptional participation and power in the play run sharply counter to what we initially expect when in the prologue we first see Electra entering with a slave chorus, and provide us with one disquieting surprise after another.

[27]I come, then, to some final tentative thoughts on why Aeschylus composed *Choephoroi* with this particular chorus. The *Oresteia* is full of bold dramatic moves, nowhere more so than in the choruses. The stories, apocryphal or not, attached to the effects which the first sighting of the Erinyes in *Eumenides* had on the audience are only the most notorious sign of this feature of the *Oresteia*. The dramatic risks to a large extent involve issues of gender and gender roles. Females in the trilogy are powerful, resolute, intelligent, violent; males are regularly hesitant, ineffectual. The Argive elders in *Agamemnon* are easily recognized as timorous and vacillating; a tremendous arc spans the distance between that chorus and the Furies. The slave women of *Choephoroi* form an uneasy middle between these extremes. They should be more irresolute, more obedient than the male citizen elders, but are exactly the opposite; and yet their female forcefulness, for all its range and intensity, is clearly less than what the audience will experience with the Erinyes. Once *Eumenides* is under way, the progression from ineffectual elders to dominant slave women to awesome female divinities may assume an overall shape to the audience. But during the course of *Choephoroi* itself, the role of the chorus is intended to unfold as a succession of shocks. We are *not* meant to be comforted by feeling that this choral group could be almost any other; that is impossible. The female slaves, as they control, urge, drive those around them, make us tense and uneasy. They are yet another social element that is not acting within normal constraints. Their choral personality contrasts pointedly with the male elders of *Agamemnon* and to an extent foreshadows the Furies, but they themselves are not to be reduced to anything typical. Aeschylus creates a choral group for *Choephoroi* that "works" in a powerful, individual, and disturbing way, reflecting the pattern of so much else in the trilogy.⁵⁰



NOTES

*This paper hopes to contribute to a tangled area of Aeschylean studies in which Tom Rosenmeyer has presented some of his own most elegant and sophisticated arguments, the area of choral personality and function in Greek tragedy. Since my suggestions will to a fair degree run counter to views expressed in his splendid *The Art of Aeschylus*, esp. Chap. 6, "The Chorus," 145-87, I offer them with some trepidation. I am heartened, however, by the certain knowledge that nothing is more welcome to him than difference and debate over a genuine problem.

1. A. F. Garvie, *Aeschylus, Choephoroi* (Oxford 1986).
2. A. W. Verrall, *The 'Choephoroi' of Aeschylus* (London 1893) 3; T. G. Tucker, *The Choephoroi of Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1901) 4-5; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Aeschyli Tragoediae* (Berlin 1914) 248; R. Lattimore, tr., *Aeschylus, Oresteia* (Chicago 1953) in his list of "Characters" to the play; J. Conington, *The Choephoroe of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1857) xv, xxiii; A. Sidgwick, *Aeschylus, Choephoroi* (Oxford 1900) xvii-xviii; H. J. Rose, *A Commentary on the Surviving Plays of Aeschylus*, II (Amsterdam 1958) 128; H. Lloyd-Jones, tr., *Aeschylus, The Libation Bearers* (Englewood Heights, N.J. 1970) 11.
- [28]3. A. Lebeck, *The Oresteia. A Study in Language and Structure* (Cambridge, Mass. 1971), Part Three, "Choephoroi," 93-130; O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977), Chap. 7, "Choephoroi," 333-61; Garvie (supra n. 1) 53-54. Garvie seems to favor generic slave women, but leaves the door open to Trojan slave women.
4. One can not, of course, absolutely exclude the possibility that the costumes themselves *might* indicate something specific. For instance, if the staging of *Agamemnon* included, at Agamemnon's entrance, an entourage of female captives and if, subsequently, the costuming of the *Choephoroi* chorus were the same or very similar, then a Trojan identification might be indicated by sight rather than verbally. But there is no sign of such an entourage with Agamemnon; cf. Taplin (supra n. 3) 304-306.
5. Lloyd-Jones (supra n. 2) 13.
6. Garvie's commentary (supra n. 1) gives a judicious analysis from which I draw freely.
7. Also the reading of, e.g., Paley, Blass, and Sidgwick (supra n. 2).
8. O. L. Smith, *Scholia in Aeschylum I* (Leipzig 1976) 17.
9. Garvie (supra n. 1) 66.
10. Smith (supra n. 8) 17.
11. LSJ gives just one adjectival sense for ἀμφίπολις, "encompassing city," and cites this single passage.
12. Garvie (supra n. 1) 66, for example, calls the scholium "an impossible interpretation."
13. Lloyd-Jones (supra n. 2) 27.
14. The translations throughout will be those of Lloyd-Jones (supra n. 2) unless otherwise noted.
15. Cf. Sidgwick (supra n. 2) xvii: their Trojan identification is "further confirmed by the passage."
16. A scholium glosses Ἄριον with Περσικόν.
17. Recently, e.g.: for the first, A. H. Sommerstein, "Notes on the *Oresteia*," *BICS* 27 (1980) 66-67; for the second, Lloyd-Jones (supra n. 2) 33; for the third, Garvie (supra n. 1) 158.

18. Lloyd-Jones' "I beat," deliberately or not, leaves open the temporal reference, though his comment—see previous note—limits the reference just to the *parodos*.

19. Thus Sommerstein emends to δῆ 'στ' (Paley had suggested δ' ἕστ'); M's actual reading is δῆν, which Robortello corrected to δ' ἦν.

20. This fact remains valid whether or not one believes in the transposition of Orestes' stanza at 434-38 to follow 455.

21. Cf. S. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: the Oresteia* (Cambridge 1984) 147-48: "This [ἔκοψα] may refer to the hymn just passed ... or to the time of Agamemnon's death ... or to the *parodos* ... —once again the openness of the reference allows the implication of the repetition of events: Electra, however, recalls the non-burial of Agamemnon, which suggests a narrowing of reference."

22. "Justice" may not, of course, be a sufficient translation; cf. Goldhill (supra n. 21) 195: "Δίκη is once again both in the abstract sense of 'Justice' and in the sense of 'retribution' as picked up by βαρῦδικος ποιῶ...."

23. Cf. Tucker (supra n. 2) *ad loc.*: "That the Chorus does not consist of Trojan captives should appear from παλαιὰ (which is not = παλαιτέρα)."

24. Cf. W. C. Scott, *Musical Design in Aeschylean Theater* (Hanover, N.H. 1984) 82, "...the slave women are fixated on the idea of getting the murder done. Others in this play may have to be persuaded to do the deed, but the chorus is unvarying in its conviction that Clytemnestra must be killed."

25. Lloyd-Jones (supra n. 2) 26.

26. Lebeck (supra n. 3) 93.

[29]27. Garvie (supra n. 1) 122.

28. Lebeck (supra n. 3) 120 makes a significant omission when she says, "Orestes *began* [my italics] the *kommos* with a question," and quotes 315-17.

29. I assume that Orestes' stanza at 434-38 is not to be transposed after 455. But if it were, the relegation of Orestes to a minor role in the conjuration would be even more striking.

30. Garvie (supra n. 1) 143; his emphasis.

31. Garvie (supra n. 1) 170-71.

32. Lebeck (supra n. 3) 110-30.

33. Lebeck (supra n. 3) 113.

34. Garvie (supra n. 1) 184 suggests, "Perhaps ... there is an element of irony; 'you might get down to the business at hand.'"

35. After Orestes' interpretation of the dream, the chorus-leader has a three-line response, 551-53, which begins: *τερασκόπον δῆ τῶνδέ σ' αἰροῦμαι πέρι* ("I choose you my interpreter to read these dreams," tr. Lattimore). M marks the verse with a paragraphus, and it certainly should be assigned to the coryphaeus, with Kirchhoff's δῆ for M's δὲ. But for more than three centuries editors treated the line, with M's reading, as the end of Orestes' speech, as though the chorus were so powerful that Orestes, having given an interpretation, feels it necessary to ask the coryphaeus to give one as well.

36. Garvie (supra n. 1) 244; cf. Taplin (supra n. 3) 346 n. 1, "Kilissa is the only slave in tragedy to be named."

37. Cf. Garvie (supra n. 1) 243, "The Chorus is obeying Orestes' orders (cf. 581-2...), but its interference in the plot is still a surprising and unusually bold use of the chorus as an actor in the drama." Garvie understates the case: at 581-82 Orestes only gave the chorus general instructions *λέγειν τὰ καίρια*. Taplin (supra n. 3) 346 points to an additional unusual feature in the chorus-leader's opening greeting to Cilissa (732-33): "While there are quite a few places where one actor speaks a few lines to another on

entry before his first line, the only other place where the *chorus* does this is at *S. Aj.* 1316f....”

38. E.g., Garvie (*supra* n. 1) 243, “Aeschylus could have avoided any reference to the bodyguard at all.”

39. Much of interest concerning the chorus occurs between the end of the Cilissa-scene and the appearance of Orestes with the corpses at 973, but nothing which adds a new element to their role. At 848-50, when the coryphaeus encourages Aegisthus’ entrance into the palace, Taplin (*supra* n. 3) 347-48 notes, “Sometimes in later tragedy it is an accomplice rather than the assassin himself who herds the victim inside...., though not the chorus.”

40. Lloyd-Jones (*supra* n. 2) 65.

41. Cf. Taplin (*supra* n. 3) 358, “I can see no trace of [the new crowd of Argive citizens] in the text”; Garvie (*supra* n. 1) 316, “There is no good reason to suppose the presence ... of a crowd of Argive citizens.”

42. Taplin (*supra* n. 3) 358.

43. Garvie (*supra* n. 1) 316-17.

44. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* 65 points to still another unexpected sign of the chorus’ centrality: “It is ... possible to start one’s plotting of the action of a play by checking how often, and under what circumstances, the chorus is left alone on the stage. Surprisingly, *Libation-Bearers* wins the crown; the conspiratorial developments of the plot make it virtually certain that the chorus is left in control of the stage seven times: 22-83, 585-651, 719-29, 783-837, 855-74, 931-72, 1065-76. ... The frequency with which the chorus occupies the stage alone sets *Libation-Bearers* apart from the other two plays of the trilogy....” The figures he assigns to the other plays are: *Agam.* probably 4; *Pers.* 3; *Sept.* 3; *Supp.* 2; *Eum.* 1; *Prom. O.*

[30]45. Cf. the choruses, all Euripidean, of *Hipp.*, *Hec.*, *Tro.*, *IT*, *Hel.*, *Ion*, *Phoen.*

46. Lebeck (*supra* n. 3) 93-130.

47. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* 173, 168.

48. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* 146.

49. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus* 168; cf. 173 for a similar statement.

50. An early version of this paper was given at the 1985 APA meetings in Washington, D.C. Colloquium presentations at Stanford and Berkeley elicited much helpful criticism. I am extremely grateful to the editors and to M. Edwards and J. Solodow for substantial improvements.