

William Diebold
Humanities 110
October 9, 2009
“Verbal and Visual Oresteias”

Quotations

1) **O. Murray**, Early Greece (Stanford, 1980), 54: “. . . the Homeric poems established themselves as the bible of the Greeks.”

2) **R. Lamberton**, “Introduction,” Hesiod: Works and Days and Theogony (Indianapolis, 1993), 12: “The myths existed only in the telling, and the rules governing the telling were esthetic rules.”

23 **Odyssey, book 1, 29-43** (trans. R. Fagles; his lines 34-52): “sorely troubled, remembering handsome Aegisthus./the man Agamemnon’s son, renowned Orestes, killed./ Recalling Aegisthus, Zeus harangued the immortal powers:/ ‘Ah how shameless--the way these mortals blame the gods./ From us alone, they say, come all their miseries, yes,/but they themselves, with their own reckless ways./compound their pains beyond their proper share./Look at Aegisthus now . . ./above and beyond his share he stole Atrides’ wife./he murdered the warlord coming home from Troy/though he knew it meant his own total ruin./Far in advance we told him so ourselves./dispatching the guide, the giant-killer Hermes./”Don’t murder the man,” he said, “don’t court his wife./Beware, revenge will come from Orestes, Agamemnon’s son./that day he comes of age and longs for his native land.”/So Hermes warned, with all the good will in the world./but would Aegisthus’ hardened heart give way?/Now he pays the price--all at a single stroke.”

4) **Odyssey, book 3, 254-266** (trans. Fagles; his lines 290-302): “Gladly, my boy, I’ll tell you the story first to last . . ./Right you are, you guess what would have happened/if red-haired Menelaus, arriving back from Troy./had found Aegisthus alive in Agamemnon’s palace./No barrow piled high on the earth for his dead body./no, the dogs and birds would have feasted on his corpse./sprawled on the plain outside the city gates, and no one./no woman in all Achaea, would have wept a moment./such a monstrous crime the man contrived!/But there we were, camped at Troy, battling out/the long hard campaign while he at his ease at home./in the depths of Argos, stallion-country--he lay siege/to the wife of Agamemnon, luring, enticing her with talk./At first, true, she spurned the idea of such an outrage./Clytemnestra the queen, her will was faithful still.”

5) **Odyssey, book 3, 272-275** (trans. Fagles; his lines 310-313): “[Aegisthus] swept her off to his own house, lover lusting for lover./And many thighbones he burned on the gods’ holy altars./many gifts he hung on the temple walls--gold, brocades--/in thanks for a conquest past his maddest hopes.”

6) **Odyssey, book 3, 301-308** (trans. Fagles; his lines 341-350): “So Menelaus, amassing a hoard of stores and gold./was off cruising his ships to foreign ports of call/while Aegisthus hatched his vicious work at home./Seven years he lorded over Mycenae rich in gold./once he’d killed Agamemnon--he ground the people down./But the eighth year ushered in his ruin, Prince Orestes/home from Athens, yes, he cut him down, that cunning./murderous Aegisthus, who’d killed his famous father./Vengeance down, he held a feast for the Argives./to bury his hated mother, craven Aegisthus too.”

7) **Odyssey, book 1, 298-300** (trans. Fagles; his lines 342-345): “it’s time you were a man. Haven’t you heard/what glory Prince Orestes won throughout the world/when he killed that cunning, murderous Aegisthus,/who’d killed his famous father?”

8) **Odyssey, book 4, 521-537** (trans. Fagles; his lines 584-604): “Atrides setting foot on his fatherland once more--/he took that native earth in his hands and kissed it./hot tears flooding his eyes, so thrilled to see his land!/But a watchman saw him too--from a lookout high above--/a spy that cunning Aegisthus stationed there./luring the man with two gold bars in payment./One

whole year he'd watched . . . /so the great king would not get past unseen, . . . /The spy ran the news to his master's halls/and Aegisthus quickly set his stealthy trap./Picking the twenty best recruits from town/he packed them in ambush at one end of the house./at the other he ordered a banquet dressed and spread/and went to welcome the conquering hero, Agamemnon./ went with team and chariot, and a mind aswarm with evil./Up from the shore he led the king, he ushered him in--/suspecting nothing of all his doom--he feasted him well/then cut him down as a man cuts down some ox at the trough!/Not one of your brother's men-at-arms was left alive./none of Aegisthus' either. All, killed in the palace."

9) **Odyssey, book 11, 421-434** (trans. Fagles; his lines 476-492): "But the death-cry of Cassandra, Priam's daughter--/the most pitiful thing I heard! My treacherous queen./ Clytemnestra, killed her over my body, yes, and I./lifting my fists, beat them down on the ground./dying, dying, writhing around the sword./But she, that whore, she turned her back on me./well on my way to Death--she even lacked the heart/to seal my eyes with her hand or close my jaws. So./there's nothing more deadly, bestial than a woman/set on works like these--what a monstrous thing/she plotted, slaughtered her own lawful husband!/Why, I expected, at least, some welcome home./from all my children, all my household slaves/when I came sailing back again . . . But she--/the queen hell-bent on outrage--bathes in shame/not only herself but the whole breed of womankind./even the honest ones to come, forever down the years!"

10) **E. Vermeule**, "Boston," 6: "Two further aspects of the vase nearly demand that the Dokimasia Painter was sitting in the audience in the spring of 458 B.C. before he painted this krater."

Works of art

Pelike with Orestes and Chrysothemis Aegisthus (side A) and Clytemnestra restrained by Talthybios (side B); attributed to the Berlin Painter; painted in Athens, c. 510-500 BC (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 3725)

Calyx krater with Aegisthus killing Agamemnon, flanked by Clytemnestra, Electra (?), and two other women (side A) and Orestes killing Aegisthus flanked by Clytemnestra and Electra (?) (side B); attributed to the Dokimasia painter; painted in Athens, c. 470 BC (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 63.1246)

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