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MYTH, HISTORY AND CULTURE IN REPUBLICAN ROME

Studies in honour of T.P. Wiseman

edited by

David Braund & Christopher Gill

UNIVERSITY of EXETER PRESS
2003

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13

Agamemnon at Rome

Roman Dynasts and Greek Heroes

EDWARD CHAMPLIN

Heroes of Our Time

Early in his biography of Aratus, Plutarch tells how his young hero overthrew Nicocles, the tyrant of Sicyon, after four months of misrule. He pauses in his narrative to observe:

> This man [Nicocles] is said to have borne a very close resemblance to Periander the son of Cypselus, just as Orontes the Persian did to Alcmaeon the son of Amphiaraus, and as the Spartan youth mentioned by Myrsilus did to Hector. Myrsilus tells us that when the throng of spectators became aware of the resemblance, the youth was trampled underfoot.[1]

What to make of this extraordinary digression? No one had the slightest idea of what a long-dead tyrant really looked like, not to mention mythic heroes

1. Plut. *Aratus* 3.4. (Loeb translation of J.W. Cohoon, modified.). Compare Luke 9: 28–33 where Peter, John and James see Jesus talking with two figures on a mountain, whom they recognize as Moses and Elijah.

In a work published in 1974, Peter Wiseman wrote of 'that penumbra . . . where social, political and literary history shade into each other' (Wiseman 1974a, 176), the vast and fascinating area of shade which he has illuminated so brilliantly. The present study of one small patch of that ground is inadequate acknowledgement for all the pleasure and profit his work has brought over the years. My thanks to him and to many colleagues at the conference for comments and suggestions.

from the wars of Thebes and Troy. Recognition must depend on some sort of broadly recognized iconography made familiar by sculpture or relief or painting, reinforced presumably, in the case of heroes, by stage attributes. Thus, in the third century Periander might be familiar from a portrait known to have been created in the fourth century, or through his inclusion in group depictions of the Seven Sages.[2] Generally speaking, resemblance to a figure of legend or myth should connote not just physical similarity but a parallel, actual or desired, in character and deed, and such a resemblance should be *useful*: it should be relevant to contemporaries. The tyrant Nicocles, or a friend, or an enemy, noticed or fabricated and drew attention to one of the great tyrants of antiquity, and others reacted. Why were such images chosen and what might they signify? That the subject is a serious one, the Spartan youth, if he existed, would be the first to attest. Plutarch says nothing further about the circumstances of his death (if die he did). Was it at Sparta or elsewhere; were the spectators Spartans or others; what were they watching; was the youth actor or audience; above all, did he die because a curious mob wanted a closer look, or perhaps because the mob didn't like him and they didn't like Hector?

Vividly resurrected on the Roman stage and then boldly manipulated in political rivalry, the familiar heroes of Greek myth took on a remarkable new vitality in the public life of the late Republic and the early Principate. The theme may best be approached through consideration of the appearances of Agamemnon, his father and his son, on the Roman scene over a period of a century and a half. Why Agamemnon? Two reasons. The first is that of all the mortal figures of Greek mythology, he must have been among the most familiar to the citizens of Rome, whatever their background, standing as he did at the intersection of two of the three great cycles of myth, the tales of Troy and the tales of the House of Atreus. The cultured would know him from Homer and the Greek tragedians, but everyone would know him from the Roman stage. A rough count suggests that he appeared in at least four tragedies of Livius Andronicus, one (possibly three) of Naevius, five (possibly seven) of Ennius, one (possibly two) of Pacuvius, and above all ten (possibly thirteen) of Accius: a total of between twenty-one and twenty-nine plays.[3] Other members of the House of Atreus account for another thirteen plays by

2. Richter 1984, 172–3. Near Sparta, Hector appeared on a throne described in minute detail by Pausanias at 3.16.9–16.
3. Livius: *Achilles, Aegisthus, Ajax Mastigophorus, Equos Troianus*. Naevius: *Equos Troianus*; possibly *Andromacha, Hector Profisciens*. Ennius: *Achilles, Hectoris Lytra, Hecuba, Iphigenia, Telephus*; possibly *Ajax, Andromacha*. Pacuvius: *Armorum Iudicium*; possibly *Protesilaus*. Accius: *Achilles, Aegisthus, Armorum Iudicium, Astyanax, Clytaemestra, Epinausimache, Myrmidones, Nyctegresia, Telephus, Troades*; possibly *Antenoridae, Deiphobus, Hecuba*.

Rome's five tragedians.[4] Given (a quite impossible) steady production of all their ninety or so known plays in the years after Accius' death, the Roman audiences would thus be presented with representations or reminders of Agamemnon every second or third time they saw a tragedy performed. Such a rate of production is of course a fantasy, but from the little we know about actual performances we might suspect that Agamemnon was presented in some fashion on Roman stages even *more* often than that, given the popularity of certain plays and subjects.

The other salient point about Agamemnon is that he seems to be the first Greek hero, as distinct from god or Hellenistic king, to be associated in any significant way with a prominent Roman, for reasons which have yet to be considered. His Roman embodiment was Pompeius Magnus.

Agamemnon

In 48 BC, after his victory at Dyrrachium, and during the slow campaign which led up to Pharsalus, Pompey was accused on all sides of avoiding a final battle in order to cling to power. He did not want to fight Caesar, men said; he wanted to have the rulers of the world as his guards and servants forever. Plutarch and Appian (reflecting their common source) tell of the many criticisms, among them taunts flung at the general by his bickering associates. First of these were the nicknames given him by Domitius Ahenobarbus: 'Agamemnon', and 'King of Kings'.[5] This equation of Pompey with Agamemnon was not original with Domitius, and we can trace it back several stages. Almost two years before Pharsalus, in a private letter, Cicero weighed the deteriorating situation between Caesar and Pompey. Atticus, apparently pondering which side to choose, had misquoted the *Troades* of Euripides: 'Where is the ship of the sons of Atreus?', to which Cicero responded that for him there was only one ship, that which would be steered by Pompey. In Euripides, the original line in fact reads 'Where is the ship of the general?', that is, precisely, the ship of Agamemnon, and it is spoken, ominously, by Cassandra.[6]

That Pompey had presented himself as the new Agamemnon is best seen in the elaborate games celebrating the dedication of his new temple of Venus Victrix during his third consulship in 55. In public, Cicero looked forward to

4. Ennius: *Eumenides, Thyestes*. Livius: *Hermiona*. Naevius: *Iphigenia*. Pacuvius: *Chryses, Dulorestes, Hermiona*. Accius: *Agamemnonidae, Atreus, Chrysippus, Erigona, Oenomaus, Pelopidae*.
5. Plut. *Pomp.* 67.3, *Caes.* 41.1, cf. *Comparatio Agesilai et Pompeii* 4; App. *BC* 2.67.
6. Cic. *Att.* 7.3.5; E. *Troades* 455.

them as 'the most lavish and magnificent games' ever, but in a memorably dyspeptic letter to a cultivated friend, he found nothing to praise:

> To be sure, the show (if you are interested) was on the most lavish scale; but it would have been little to your taste, to judge by my own . . . . What pleasure is there in getting a *Clytemnestra* with six hundred mules or a *Trojan Horse* with three thousand mixing bowls or a variegated display of cavalry and infantry equipment in some battle or other? The public gaped at all this; it would not have amused you at all.[7]

Built with the spoils of his Eastern campaigns and displaying permanent memorials to his victories, the theatre-temple complex has rightly been seen as offering in various of its physical components a continuous triumph, or at least a constant reminder of the triumph celebrated so magnificently six years earlier, in 61. Moreover, the plays selected to inaugurate the great stone theatre were so staged as to remind audiences yet again of the general's triumph.[8] Both publicly and privately Cicero described the games as most lavish, *apparatissimi*, and indeed the apparatus must have overwhelmed the plays, stopping the action dead. 600 mules with attendant muleteers and clean-up crews would certainly have delayed the revenge of Accius' Clytemnestra; wagons or bearers with 3,000 mixing bowls would stop traffic on stage during the *Trojan Horse* of Naevius or Livius Andronicus; horse and foot in pitched battle would have lent the hyper-realism of the arena to whatever play they presented. This was drama as spectacle indeed, life interpreting art, and the Roman audience, so quick to appreciate contemporary allusions on stage, could hardly have missed the message: Pompey's victories over Mithridates and Tigranes recalled the Greek victory over Troy under Agamemnon, West over East. His spoils were displayed in two or even three plays as the wealth of Troy, and in one of them (at least) they were explicitly presented as the spoils of Agamemnon. Given the climate of Roman theatre, the comparison could not have been inadvertent: Pompey was presenting himself as the Mycenaean King of Kings. Nor did he necessarily invent the image in 55. As he returned from the East in late 62, Pompey sent ahead a notice of divorce to his wife Mucia. Rumour circulated

7. *Fam.* 7.1.2 = Shackleton Bailey 24.1.2: *omnino, si quaeris, ludi apparatissimi, sed non tui stomachi; coniecturam enim facio de meo . . . quid enim delectationis habent sescenti muli in 'Clytemestra' aut in 'Equo Troiano' creterrarum tria milia aut armatura uaria peditatus et equitatus in aliqua pugna? quae popularem admirationem habuerunt, delectationem tibi nullam attulissent.* All translations from Cicero's letters are by D.R. Shackleton Bailey. The previous quotation is from *in Pisonem* 65.
8. Both points have been made by R. Beacham, most recently in his useful discussion of the entire complex at Beacham 1999, 62–72.

about her loose conduct during his absence, but he gave no reason for his action. We are told, however, that Caesar was the culprit, and that Pompey was accustomed to refer to him, with a groan, as Aegisthus.[9]

The image of Pompey as Agamemnon struck a chord with later generations. Thus, Cassius Dio mused on Pompey's death, recalling his victory over the pirates: once master of 1,000 ships (the number is inflated and significant), he was killed in a small boat near Egypt. 'Thus Pompey, who previously had been considered the most powerful of the Romans, so that he even received the nickname of Agamemnon, was now butchered like one of the lowest of the Egyptians themselves . . .'[10] Around AD 100, Ptolemy the Quail captured the image perfectly in his fantastic and quite untrustworthy New (or Marvellous) History: 'Pompeius Magnus never set out for war before he had read Book 11 of the Iliad, for he was a fervent admirer of Agamemnon.'[11]

The truth is the opposite: Pompey became Agamemnon only after his last foreign campaign, after he had found Asia at the periphery of Rome's Empire and left it at the centre, after he had raised up or cast down kings and princes throughout the East, and after he had finished a war against Mithridates which had lasted just about ten years. Not only is that the reasonable inference; there may also be some indirect evidence. On a visit to Rhodes in 67 or 66, after his defeat of the pirates but before the campaign against Mithridates, Pompey attended a lecture by Posidonius and asked him afterwards if he had any words of wisdom. The great scholar replied with a Homeric quotation, 'Be always among the bravest, and hold [your] head above others'. Adequate advice, but since the words are addressed in the *Iliad* to the young Glaucus and to the young Achilles, they were perhaps neither clever enough nor appropriate if the middle-aged Pompey were already acting as Agamemnon.[12] When exactly Pompey decided to present himself as the

9. Suet. *Jul.* 50.1: *nam certe Pompeio et a Curionibus patre et filio et a multis exprobatum est, quod cuius causa post tres liberos exegisset uxorem et quem gemens Aegisthum appellare consuesset, eius postea filiam potentiae cupiditate in matrimonium recepisset.* On the divorce: Plut. *Pomp.* 42; Cic. *Att.* 1.12.
10. D.C. 42.5.3–5 (Loeb translation, E. Cary).
11. Ptolemaeus Hephaestion *Noua Historia* (Photius *Bibliotheca* no. 190, 151a): 'Ο δὲ Πομπήϊος ὁ Μάγνος οὐδ' εἰς πόλεμον προίοι, πρὶν ἂν τὸ τῆς Ἰλιάδος ἀναγνώσειε, ζηλωτὴς ὢν Ἀγαμέμνονος·
12. Strab. 11.1.6 (492C), from Hom. *Iliad* 6.208 and 11.784. All translations from the *Iliad* are by R. Lattimore.

    A story in Plutarch's *Quaestiones conuiuales* (9.1.3.2) might lead to the same inference, that by late 62 Pompey was not yet Agamemnon. When he returned home, his daughter's teacher, meaning to show off her abilities, had her read from the *Iliad*, starting with a most inappropriate line, *Iliad* 3.428, spoken by Helen to Paris: 'So you came back from fighting. Oh how I wish you had died there.' Again, might not an alert employee have chosen something Agamemnonic, if he had known its relevance?

King of Kings is unclear. Certainly between 62 and 55. One might connect his naming of Caesar as Aegisthus with the divorce from his Clytemnestra in 62, but that need not be so; 'Aegisthus' could have been a taunt from any period of strained relations between the two men from 62 to 48. The date is significant, for Pompey had a rival.

> In January, 60 BC, Cicero offered this piece of gossip: Now this fine new year is upon us. It has begun with failure to perform the annual rites of the Goddess of Youth, Memmius having initiated M. Lucullus' wife into rites of his own. Menelaus took this hard and divorced the lady—but the shepherd of Ida in olden days only flouted Menelaus, whereas our modern Paris has wiped his boots on Agamemnon as well [literally: 'treated Agamemnon like a slave'].[13]

The agreed interpretation of Cicero's slangy report is that C. Memmius, the tribune of 66 and an old enemy of the brothers Lucullus, had seduced both of their wives. Marcus/Menelaus divorced his unnamed wife quickly, and we know that Lucius/Agamemnon sooner or later divorced his Servilia for immorality.[14] Now we might assume that the mythological dressing is Cicero's own moderately witty interpretation of reality, and leave the matter there, but what is Historiography without Imagination? In fact, there is more to be said about this, the earliest passage in which a Roman statesman is compared with Agamemnon.

There is a striking doublet here: two Agamemnons. Both Lucullus and Pompey fought the great kings of the East, Mithridates and Tigranes; both settled the kingdoms of the East (though Lucullus' settlements were annulled by Pompey); both returned to triumphs (though Lucullus' was long delayed). Each denied the title King of Kings to an eastern monarch, Lucullus when writing to Tigranes of Armenia, Pompey when writing to Phraates of Parthia. When not used of eastern potentates, King of Kings was a title reserved in the West for Agamemnon.[15] Within a short time, both Roman generals were compared to Agamemnon when their wives committed adultery. Now as

13. Cic. *Att.* 1.18.3 = SB 18.3 (with notes ad loc.): *instat hic nunc annus egregius. eius initium eius modi fuit ut anniuersaria sacra Iuuentutis non committerentur; nam M. Luculli uxor Memmius suis sacris initiauit. Menelaus aegre id passus diuortium fecit. quamquam ille pastor Idaeus Menelaum solum contempserat, hic noster Paris tam Menelaum quam Agamemnon liberum non putauit.*
14. Plut. *Luc.* 38, *Cat. Mi.* 24.
15. Plut. *Luc.* 21.7 (but cf. 14. 6), *Pomp.* 38.2; cf. D.C. 37.6.2—though Pompey *did* later, at his triumph, call Tigranes King of Kings, the title denied him by Lucullus. Kings of Persia/Parthia: *ILS* 842 (Phraates, *regum rex*, time of Augustus); Suet. *Cal.* 5; D.C. 66.11.3.1; *HA Valeriani duo* 1.1. Ozymandias: D.S. 17.14.2. Caesarion: D.C. 49.41.1. Agamemnon: Cic. *Fam.* 9.14.2; Liv. 45.27.10; Vell. 1.1.2; Sen. *Ag.* 45.27.10.

Stefan Weinstock observed, Cicero's dressing up of the seducer Memmius in mythological guise, as 'this Paris of ours', was *not* his own invention. To identify him with the favourite of Venus was to refer to his familial claim, amplified no doubt by Memmius and the poet Lucretius, to actual descent from Venus, the Mother of the Romans. That claim first appears on coins minted by a Memmius in the late second century, two or three decades after the same genealogical claim was first proffered on coins by the *other* Roman family to claim descent from *Venus genetrix*, the Iulii Caesares.[16] It is strange indeed that a Julius Caesar should be the man accused of adultery with the wife of the *other* contemporary Agamemnon, Pompey the Great, but here imagination fails.

Nevertheless, if we accept that the image of Memmius as Paris was Cicero's reaction to the adulterer's ancestral claim, perhaps there is also more to be said about the cuckolded husbands, Menelaus and Agamemnon, the Licinii Luculli. The essential starting point is some remarks offered by Peter Wiseman in 1982, concerning the poet Licinius Archias and his

> . . . extended historical poem on the Mithridatic war, which was finished by 61 BC at least and probably in time for Lucullus' triumph in 63 BC. It has . . . been suggested . . . that Archias' poem was one of Plutarch's main sources in his life of Lucullus. The epic battle of Tigranocerta in Plutarch's chapters 27–28 could well have been Archias' culminating set piece, and the repeated portents, visions, and divine interventions seem to betray the poet behind the biographer. After Lucullus' own 'battle of the Granicus' . . . and his dramatic relief of Cyzicus, he went to the Troad and spent time at Ilion in the temple of Aphrodite; warned by the goddess (Aeneas' mother, of course), he sailed out of the 'harbor of the Achaeans' in time to intercept a squadron of Mithridates' fleet. In this episode, resonant with echoes of Homer and Alexander, we may even have a line from Archias' poem itself, in the hexameter spoken by Aphrodite: [in English: 'Why do you slumber, great-hearted lion? The fawns are nigh.'][17]

Greathearted, *megathumos*, should be a clue, an eminently Homeric epithet, appearing some sixty-two times in the *Iliad* alone. There are of course many metaphorical lions in Homer, but no warrior is more leonine than the Agamemnon depicted in Pompey's favourite reading material, Book 11 of the

16. Full references in Weinstock 1971, 17–18 (Caesares), 23–4 (Memmii).
17. Plut. *Luc.* 12.1: τί κνώσσεις μεγάθυμε λέον; νεβροὶ δέ τοι ἐγγύς. Wiseman 1982, 28–49 = Wiseman 1987, 263–84, at 268. The assignment of this fragment to Archias' epic had already been made by Reinach 1890, 442 with 427; cf. Coarelli 1981, 254–7 (on the parallels between Lucullus and Alexander).

Iliad. During his rampage in that book, the great king is compared no fewer than four times to a lion before he is wounded. The first of these similes begins:

> And as a lion seizes the innocent young of the running
> deer, and easily crushes and breaks them caught in the strong teeth
> when he has invaded their lair, and rips out the soft heart from them . . .

This is the only instance in the Iliad where a lion is shown attacking fawns, which should be the extreme measure of inequality between opposing warriors; the lion is Agamemnon, and every poet worth his hire knew that.[18] The inference to be drawn is this: the first identification of a Roman conqueror in the East as Agamemnon should be traced to an epic poem penned by a client Greek intellectual to recount the general's exploits (and we could pursue the Homeric tendencies of this part of Lucullus' biography).

In a slightly earlier letter to Atticus, written in July of 61, Cicero notes that Archias has written a Greek poem for 'the Luculli', plural. Wiseman, following Shackleton Bailey's hint ad loc., accordingly observed that the plural suggests that the poem also included M. Lucullus' noteworthy deeds in Thrace, which had earned him a triumph in 71. Alternatively, or additionally, we should remember that M. Lucullus accompanied his brother as a commissioner working to settle the territory of Mithridates from 70 to 66. That is to say, the new Agamemnon was accompanied on his conquest of the East by his equally warlike brother, Menelaus.

If we attribute to Archias' epic the first comparison of a Roman general to the leader of the Greek army at Troy, two observations follow. First, it confirms Cicero's reputation as the great wit of the late Republic: his remark about Paris and the Atreid brothers gains immeasurably, becomes more worthy of Cicero, as it very cleverly comments on the gossip of the day by combining Memmius' claim to Trojan ancestry and descent from Venus/Aphrodite—recently reasserted by Memmius (so Weinstock speculated) in a poem or a speech—with the equally recent representation of Lucius and Marcus Lucullus by Archias as the latter-day Agamemnon and Menelaus. Second, it confirms Pompey's reputation as the great thief of the late Republic: he stole Lucullus' command, his soldiers, his settlement, his glory—and he stole his hero. Despite Archias' best efforts, thereafter it was Pompey alone who was to be called Agamemnon, and in his last days King of Kings. Ironically, Lucullus was to die not as Agamemnon but as that other,

18. *Iliad* 11.113ff. Lion and fawns otherwise appear together in the Odyssey in a repeated simile predicting Odysseus' treatment of the suitors: *Odyssey* 4.336, 17.127.

quite unadmirable King of Kings, *Xerxes togatus*, Xerxes in a toga: the witticism, variously attributed to Aelius Tubero and to Pompey himself, and elicited at the sight of Lucullus' canal at the Bay of Naples, may have been even more pointed than it first appears. In his letter on Pompey's games of 55, the games in which the general presented himself to the Roman public as Agamemnon—after Lucullus' death, be it noted—Cicero remarks in passing that Atellan farces were presented. Would Pompey have had the nerve to present Pomponius' relatively recent farce, *Agamemno Suppositus*, 'The False Agamemnon'?[19]

During his lifetime Pompey monopolized Agamemnon, who essentially died as an icon with him. The immediate sequel is one of farce. In 44, Cicero proposed himself as a Nestor to the outrageous Dolabella's Agamemnon, *rex regum*, King of Kings, an embarrassment which he must soon have regretted. Even worse, when Brutus and Cassius quarrelled in private at Sardis, the would-be philosopher Favonius burst into the room and addressed them as Nestor had addressed the quarrelling Achilles and Agamemnon, at which Cassius burst out laughing and Brutus manhandled the intruder from the room.[20] Thereafter, Agamemnon flickers into life only once again.

In his recital of Tiberius' cruel deeds Suetonius has the following:

> The word of no informer was doubted. Every crime was treated as capital, even the utterance of a few simple words. A poet was charged with having slandered Agamemnon in a tragedy, and a writer of history with having called Brutus and Cassius the last of the Romans. The writers were at once condemned and their works destroyed, although they had been read with approval in public some years before in the presence of Augustus himself.[21]

The historian is clearly Cremutius Cordus, who was prosecuted in AD 25 by agents of Sejanus; he had, indeed, praised Brutus and Cassius, and he had indeed, been read without disfavour by Augustus. The aged Cordus starved himself and a futile attempt was made to burn his writings.[22] But who was the poet? He is generally assumed to be the ex-consul Mam. Aemilius

19. *Xerxes togatus*: Plut. *Luc.* 39.3 (Tubero); Plin. *Nat.* 9.170 (Pompey). *Agamemno Suppositus* Nonius 473 M, 758 L.
20. Cic. *Att.* 14.17A.2 (SB 371A); Plut. *Brut.* 34.3, quoting *Iliad* 1.259.
21. Suet. *Tib.* 61. 2–3 (Modern Library translation, J. Gavorse): *nemini delatorum fides abrogata. omn crimen pro capitali receptum, etiam paucorum simpliciumque uerborum. obiectum est poetae, quod i tragoedia Agamemnonem probris lacessisset; obiectum est historico, quod Brutum Cassiumque ultimo Romanorum dixisset; animaduersum statim in auctores scriptaque abolita, quamuis probarentur ant aliquot annis etiam Augusto audiente recitata.*
22. Tac. *Ann.* 4.34–5; D.C. 57.24.1–4.

Scaurus, nobleman, orator and libertine. According to Tacitus, this man was brought down in 34 by Macro, who based his attack on the theme of a tragedy Scaurus had written, adducing verses that might be applied to Tiberius. Dio elaborates well: Scaurus was convicted because of his tragedy *Atreus*, one line of which imitated Euripides in advising subjects to bear the thoughtlessness of the ruler. When Tiberius heard this, he declared that the words were directed against him, that he was Atreus because of his bloodthirstiness, and that he would make Scaurus an Ajax (that is, a suicide). The actual charge, however, Tacitus and Dio agree, was not his play but his adultery with Livilla, to which Tacitus adds the practice of magic. Scaurus killed himself.[23]

There is a danger of falling into the bed of Procrustes here, for Suetonius does not square with Tacitus and Dio at all. Unless we are to disbelieve the biographer entirely, the charge against the anonymous playwright was based on his writing, as was that against Cremutius, and not on trumped-up stories of adultery and magic. The author had traduced Agamemnon, that is, had written bad things about a great king; whereas Scaurus had presented a notoriously bad king in a way that could be applied to the current Caesar: these are two very different matters. Further, if we take Suetonius at face value, the offending play was written and recited under Augustus—how then could Tiberius possibly see himself as Atreus, if Atreus was indeed the subject, twenty or more years after the lines were written? The conclusion, improbable though it may seem, should be that there were indeed two politically offensive plays condemned under Tiberius, and that their offences were quite different: Tiberius did not wish to be compared to Atreus; but Agamemnon was another matter.

Suetonius seems to suggest that the anonymous poet and the historian Cremutius Cordus fell at the same time, and, indeed, his extended narrative of Tiberius' cruelties is essentially chronological, placing their fall before the withdrawal to Capri, the exile of Agrippina, and the fall of Sejanus, which (of course) preceded that of Aemilius Scaurus.[24] Cremutius died in 25. In the year 26, the orator Domitius Afer, after successfully prosecuting a relative of the elder Agrippina, was embarrassed to run into Agrippina herself. 'Be

23. Tac. *Ann.* 6.29: *[Macro] detuleratque argumentum tragoediae a Scauro scriptae, additis uersibus qui in Tiberium deflecterentur*, D.C. 58.24.3–5: 'Ατρεὺς μὲν τὸ ποίημα ἦν, παρῆνει δὲ τῶν ἀρχομένων τινὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὸν Εὐριπίδην, ἵνα τὴν τοῦ κρατοῦντος ἀβουλίαν φέρῃ. μαθὼν οὖν τοῦτο ὁ Τιβέριος ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ τε τὸ ἔπος εἰρῆσθαι ἔφη, 'Ατρεὺς εἶναι διὰ τὴν μιαιφονίαν [εἶναι] προσποιησάμενος, καὶ ὑπειπὼν ὅτι καὶ ἐγὼ οὖν Αἴαντ' αὐτὸν ποιήσω, ἀνάγκην οἱ προσήγαγεν αὐτοεντεὶ ἀπολέσθαι.

24. The run of Tiberius' cruelties at *Tib.* 61–7 is clearly chronological: 62, he grew more cruel after the death of his son Drusus (AD 23); 62, Capri (AD 27); 64, exile of daughter-in-law, Agrippina, and her children (AD 29); 65, death of Sejanus (AD 31).

of good courage, Domitius,' she said, 'I don't hold you responsible, but Agamemnon,' cleverly reworking the words of the wrathful Achilles to the messengers of Agamemnon in *Iliad* 1.[25] But perhaps she was even more cleverly recalling the recent outrage over the playwright's attack on Agamemnon, at a time in the mid-20s when Tiberius, no mean *imperator* himself, could take offence at an attack on the great Greek king. That is to say, in AD 25, Tiberius was still acting as the *ciuilis princeps*, first among equals—and by the same token, the offence in calling Brutus and Cassius the last of the Romans lay not in any Republican and anti-Caesarian sentiment, but in its assertion that the Republic was no more. Yet, even as he defended Agamemnon, Tiberius acted as Atreus.

Already an anachronism, Agamemnon now disappears as a usable icon.[26] His day had been precisely that of the last generation of the Republic, when great dynasts cast about for an appropriate image to convey the deeply ambiguous glory of first among equals. Roman *principes* from Augustus onwards well understood the flaw in Agamemnon's position, as it was summed up by Odysseus in *Iliad* 2: 'Lordship for many is no good thing. Let there be one ruler, one king', a sentiment which Dio of Prusa would use to argue that monarchy was preferable to aristocracy. It was the 'philosopher' Areius who first injected the lines into Roman politics, in sinister fashion, as Octavian pondered the fate of Caesarion. He changed one word in Homer to remark, 'Caesarship for many is no good thing.' Caesarion was put to death. When foreign kings were vaunting their nobility at dinner one evening Caligula interrupted with the line, 'Let there be one ruler, one king'; when Domitian discovered the servants of a relative dressed in white like his own servants, he remarked ominously, 'Lordship for many is no good thing.' The lesson is clear: Agamemnon, first among equals, was not a usable model for the new Principate.[27] It is not surprising that, in the decades after Pompey's death, on the bumpy road to monarchy, two other images emerge, related and opposed: the tyrant and the rightful prince.

25. D.C. 59.19.2 (under the year AD 39, but referring to the prosecution of Claudia Pulchra in 26 cf. Tac. *Ann.* 4.52), with *Iliad* 1.335.

26. I can find only two examples, neither with any resonance. (1) Juv. 4.65: at a dramatic date of AD 83, before the council of Domitian recounted in Juvenal's Fourth Satire, the fisherman is brought into the presence of the emperor in mock-epic fashion, *itur ad Atriden*. Since the piece is a parody of a serious epic by Statius, *de Bello Germanico*, it is possible that the equation Domitian = Agamemnon is in Statius, but we do not know. (2) D.C. 76.15.1: in AD 210 Septimius Severus allegedly urged his soldiers to massacre the Caledonians without mercy, quoting to them Agamemnon's words to Menelaus about the Trojans at *Iliad* 6. 57–9. What his army made of this erudite exhortation we do not know.

27. *Iliad* 2.204–5: οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω, εἷς βασιλεύς; D. Chr. 3.46 Plut. *Ant.* 81. 4; Suet. *Cal.* 22.1, *Dom.* 12.3. Ap. Philo, Legat. 149

Emperor as Agamemnon: Artemidorus 5. 16

Atreus

On Atreus the tyrant at Rome, the essentials have been set out in a splendid paper by Matthew Leigh, 'Varius Rufus, Thyestes and the Appetites of Antony'.[28] Leigh extensively illuminates the establishment of the theme of Atreus and Thyestes as 'the fundamental paradigm for anti-tyrannical discourse in tragedy' and, specifically, the deeply disturbing trope of the tyrant as cannibal, so common in the grisly literature of the late Republic and early Empire. He contends 'that those tragedies centred on characters such as Atreus, Thyestes or Tereus engage with the idea of the tyrant and presuppose an ideological connection between the cannibalistic violation of commensality and the disastrous appetites which tyrants display'. The two landmarks are Accius' tremendously influential *Atreus*, perhaps from the 130s, and Varius Rufus' much-admired *Thyestes* of 29 BC. Two additions to Leigh are in order.

First, there is a point of chronology. Despite some signs that Accius' tyrants were pressed into political service from an early date, their heyday begins with Caesar and Antony—and, as Leigh shows, the association with Atreus of Sulla, the first real tyrant of republican Rome, is actually a retrojection by imperial authors.[29] Cicero, of course, dominates, indeed his fascination with the play seems to have set the pace: by one count, he is responsible as the only or the first source for at least two-thirds of the surviving lines of the play, some of which he quotes more than once.[30] Two items are particularly relevant. Once before, and four times after, Caesar's death, in four letters and in his 13th Philippic, Cicero somewhat obsessively repeats his longing to flee from Rome (or to move the city itself) to any place where he will hear of neither the name nor the deeds of the Pelopidae. The verses which he quotes (with some variation) surely come from the *Atreus* of Accius, and the Caesarians are the new sons of Pelops.[31] The most famous

28. Leigh 1996.
29. Seneca on *oderint dum metuant* (*de Ira* 1.20.4) explains alliteratively if inaccurately that the words were written in the time of Sulla, *Sullano scias saeculo scriptam:* in fact Accius wrote the words some fifty years—and their author died some time—before Sulla really got going as a tyrant. In writing of the boyhood heroics of Cato the Younger, Plutarch tells of the 14-year-old's outrage at the severed heads of Sulla's victims and the laments of the bystanders. To his question, why did no one kill this man, his pedagogue replied, 'Because, my boy, they fear him more than they hate him.': *Cat. Mi.* 3.3. The Accian colour smacks of the schoolroom and, as Leigh points out, the story appears without the 'hate and fear' motif at V. Max. 3.1.2—with, it may be added, more convincing circumstantial detail.
30. That is, some 26 lines in Warmington against 13 from Nonius and Priscianus. References include: *de Orat.* 3.217, 218; *Tusc.* 2.13, 4.55, 77; *N.D.* 3.68; *Phil.* 1.34; *Planc.* 59; *Sest.* 102; *Off.* 1.97, 3.102, 106; *Pis.* 82. Cf. n. 28.
31. Cic. *Fam.* 7.28.2 (SB 200), 7.30.1 (SB 265), *Att.* 14.12.2 (SB 366), 15.11.3 (SB 389), *Phil.* 13.49. Leigh (at 193 n. 44) shows convincingly that the lines come from Accius' play.

tag from the play, *oderint dum metuant*, 'let them hate me so long as they fear me', he quotes at least three times, twice as a generally deplorable sentiment, but the third time with direct reference to the tyrannical Mark Antony.[32] With the growth of one-man rule, Atreus becomes its symbol for the opposition.

Not surprisingly, the tyrannical image of Atreus and Thyestes offered by Accius and Varius Rufus proved perilously attractive to dramatists in the first century of the Principate: after Accius and Varius Rufus, a Sempronius Gracchus produced a *Thyestes* under Augustus; Aemilius Scaurus an *Atreus*; Pomponius Secundus an *Atreus*; Seneca a *Thyestes*; and Curiatius Maternus a *Thyestes*. How did the emperors react? Gracchus, convicted of adultery with Julia, was exiled by Augustus and executed by Tiberius; Scaurus (as we have seen) was charged with magic and with adultery with Livilla, and killed himself; Seneca was implicated in the Pisonian conspiracy and forced to suicide; Curiatius Maternus may have died suddenly under Vespasian or been executed by Domitian; Pomponius, the only one who certainly died in his bed, was prosecuted for treason.[33] It would seem that the *principes* did not appreciate attention being drawn to Atreus. As Cicero remarked, *oderint dum metuant* was a phrase picked up by bad citizens.[34] In his *de Ira* Seneca calls the sentiment *illa dira et abominanda*, abhorrent and ill-omened; later in his *de Clementia* it is *ille execrabilis versus*, that accursed verse.[35]

The tag smacks of the stage tyrant, and there is no good evidence that emperors used it themselves. Nero is made to say something like it in his debate with Seneca, in the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*, but it is not attributed to him in real life. Caligula, we are told, often repeated the dread phrase, but no context is given by Suetonius, and the allegation adds a nice dramatic touch to a more specific catalogue of Caligula's cruelties. The one unequivocal use of the phrase is by the emperor Tiberius, and it is much more what we should expect, that is, a clever appropriation and redirection of criticism. The older Tiberius clearly did *not* relish a comparison with Atreus, as Scaurus learned to his cost. But when anonymous criticisms of his moral policies began to surface earlier in his reign, Tiberius handsomely attributed them to people's impatience with his reforms: such criticisms represented their anger and frustration, not their true opinions, their guts (*bilis et stomachus*), not

32. *Sest.* 102 (Accius the source of much wisdom, but also unfortunately of that tag); *Off.* 1.97 (if Aeacus or Minos spoke this line it would not be appropriate to their characters, but people applaud when Atreus speaks it); *Phil.*1.34.
33. Gracchus: Tac. *Ann.* 1.53. Scaurus: above. Sen.: e.g., Tac. *Ann.* 4.60–3. Curiatius: Cameron 1967 (Vespasian); Barnes 1981 (Domitian, citing D.C. 67.12.5). Pomponius: Tac. *Ann.* 5.8 (AD 31); D.C. 59.6.2, 26.4.
34. Cic. *Sest.*102, *quod exciperent improbi cives.*
35. Sen. *de Ira* 1.20. 4, *Cl.* 1.12. 4, cf. 2.2.2.

their minds (*animi sententia*). *Oderint dum probent*, he added, substituting *probent* for *metuant*: 'let them hate me so long as they approve me', restating the contrast between guts (*oderint*) and mind (*probent*)—that is to say, he was *not* Atreus, people might not like him but they should approve of his actions. The bloody tyrant is turned into the stern but just father. This, not stagey ravings, was the proper way for a Roman *princeps* to deflect criticism.[36]

Orestes

Just as Atreus was dragged from the stage and pressed into service against monarchy, so another character was enlisted in its support. About a decade after Cicero rejected Caesar and the Caesarians as the Pelopidae and blackened Antony as the stage tyrant, another Caesarian embraced another image from the Pelopidae. Here recent and independent lines of inquiry converge. In 1988, Michael Dewar argued that in the powerful simile which concludes the first *Georgic*, Virgil meant to compare Octavian with Orestes; in 1990, he noted the explicit comparison of the two by the poet Claudian; in 1991, Philip Hardie suggested that the role of the *Aeneid* in the age of Augustus was similar to that of the *Oresteia* in fifth-century Athens; and in 1993, Natale Cecioni drew attention to a relevant passage in Pausanias' description of the Heraion at Argos:

> There are statues standing in front of the entrance both of women who have been priestesses of Hera and of Orestes and other divine heroes. They say that the one with an inscription saying that this is the emperor Augustus is really Orestes.[37]

The same passage was considered independently in 1991 by Tonio Hölscher, in a brief paper on 'Augustus and Orestes'. It is worth quoting at some length on the question of why Augustus turned to Orestes as a model at a particular point in his career, to give an idea of the resonance of the hero:

36. *Octavia* 457–8; Suet. *Cal.* 30.1; *Tib.* 59.2: *quae primo, quasi ab impatientibus remediorum ac non tam ex animi sententia quam bile et stomacho fingerentur, uolebat accipi dicebatque identidem: oderint dum probent.*

37. Dewar 1988; Dewar 1990 (Claudian, *de Sexto Consulatu Honorii Augusti* 113–18); Hardie 1991; Cecioni 1993; Pausanias 2.17.3 (Penguin translation, P. Levi): ἀνδριάντες τε ἑστήκασι πρὸ τῆς ἐσόδου καὶ γυναικῶν. αἳ γεγόνασιν ἱέρειαι τῆς Ἥρας, καὶ ἡρώων ἄλλων τε καὶ Ὀρέστου. τὸν γὰρ ἐπίγραμμα ἔχοντα, ὡς εἴη βασιλεὺς Αὔγουστος, Ὀρέστην εἶναι λέγουσιν. Delcourt 1998 adds little, and seems to confuse the Temple of Saturn with the Temple of Concord.

> This choice fitted exactly the specific situation of the heir of Julius Caesar: Orestes was the mythical prototype of revenge, as Octavian had made revenge the principal motif of his political ascent; Orestes had avenged his father Agamemnon who had been murdered, as Octavian had avenged his father Julius Caesar; Orestes had thereby become the antagonist of Klytaimnestra, wife of Agamemnon, as Octavian had been the antagonist of Kleopatra, who had lived with Caesar in marriage-like relations; Orestes, moreover, had become the antagonist of Aegisthus, the lover of Klytaimnestra, as Octavian was the antagonist of Antonius, the lover of Kleopatra; Orestes had to fight for the rightful heritage of his father against the pretended claims of this couple, as Octavian had to fight for the political succession of Julius Caesar; Orestes had accomplished his revenge by the order of Apollo, as Octavian had fought under the protection of this god; Orestes finally had shed the blood of relatives and had to be absolved; in the same sense the victory of Octavian over fellow-citizens was a pollution which needed purification.[38]

The bones of Orestes had been preserved in the Temple of Diana at Nen from where, according to Servius, they were transferred and buried befor the Temple of Saturn in Rome. Servius gives no idea of the date, bu Hölscher notes with approval the conclusions of Fittschen and Pensaben that the prime mover was Augustus himself, 'after the battle of Actium, whe L. Munatius Plancus had gone over to Octavian, had built the new templ of Saturnus and by means of the decoration with tritons had connected th building with the victory over Antonius'. He also cites Simon's demor stration that a relief in the Villa Medici shows precisely the Temple of Satur with the urn of Orestes standing before it, flanked by Apollo and Diana, an he adds two private reliefs to support the revived significance of the Oreste theme in the age of Augustus.[39]

And now, thanks to Dewar, we may see an anxious contemporary reactio to the new Orestes, as Virgil prays to the guardian gods of Rome to allow th young Octavian to save the ruined world. Fields lie untilled, foreign wars an civil war are everywhere:

> The barriers down, out pour the chariots,
> Gathering speed from lap to lap, and a driver

38. Hölscher 1991.

39. *Id.* 165–7. Serv. A. 2.116 (= Hyginus *Fab.* 261), 6.136.

Tugging in vain at the reins is swept along
By his horses and heedless uncontrollable car.[40]

Unaware of the external evidence linking Octavian and Orestes, Dewar argued for a close correspondence between Octavian's uncertain future at the end of the first *Georgic* and the onset of madness in Orestes near the end of *The Libation Bearers*, as the son of Agamemnon compares himself to a charioteer losing control (lines 1021–5). Vengeance led to blood and madness: would Octavian lose control?

In hindsight, it is easy to see that Augustus seldom lost control. The singular aptness of Orestes to Octavian's situation in the 30s and 20s attests yet again to his genius for choosing and adapting the resonant symbol. Orestes was a familiar figure on the Roman stage. Cicero remarks in one place on the shouts of the ignorant mob in the theatre, and in another how they leapt to their feet to applaud, excited by the scene in Pacuvius' *Chryses* where Orestes and Pylades are prepared to die for each other. By the time Augustus had finished solemnly installing him in the heart of Rome, the ashes of Orestes had been promoted to one of the seven pledges of Rome's hold on Empire.[41] Hölscher makes the striking observation that in Orestes Octavian found a Greek hero who had never been a model for any previous ruler.[42] One can see the danger in the choice, and the daring: Orestes was not only a murderer but a matricide and temporarily a madman. Yet in choosing him as a model, Octavian simultaneously portrayed and justified his revenge of his father in mythological terms, acknowledged his pollution in the deaths of Roman citizens, and claimed purification.

Orestes the avenger faded out in the Augustan programme, as vengeance gave way to healing. But he makes one final, spectacular appearance, with an emperor who was a zealous imitator of Augustus, for we are assured that Orestes the matricide was one of Nero's favourite theatrical roles.[43] Now,

40. G. 1.511–14 (Penguin translation, L.P. Wilkinson, modified): *saeuit toto Mars impius orbe,/ut cum carceribus sese effudere quadrigae,/addunt in spatia, et frustra retinacula tendens/fertur equis auriga neque audit currus habenas.*
41. Cic. *Fin.* 5.63, *Amic.* 24; Serv. A. 7.188 (Orestes' ashes, *cineres Orestis*, here; his bones, *Orestis ossa*, at 2.116)
42. Nor, of course, for any Roman statesman. Orestes became a *cognomen* in a branch of the Aurelii, 'but what connection this had with the wanderings of Agamemnon's son is not known': Wiseman, 1974b = Wiseman 1987, at 211, on prominent families of the second century BC. Four Roman consuls bore the singular name of Orestes (157 BC, 126, 103, and 71 [adopted by an Aufidius]); an Aurelia Orestilla married Catiline; and the name passed by marriage or adoption into the family of the Scipiones, to produce an *Orestinus comes Tiberii Caesaris* (*AE* 1992. 186: possibly the same as the P. Scipio Orestinus of *ILS* 5987) and the Cornelia Orestina or Orestilla who was to marry Caligula.
43. Suet. *Nero* 21.3; D.C. 63.9.4–10.1.

given the alacrity with which Roman audiences reacted to contemporary references on stage, intentional or otherwise, Nero the matricide playing Orestes the matricide on stage, sometimes in a mask bearing his own features, seems a highly provocative, not to say foolhardy, act. But the emperor knew exactly what he was doing. For Nero, the key to the story of Orestes was not that he was a matricide, but that he was a *justified* matricide.[44] He departed from the Augustan precedent in that an image of him as the avenger of his father Claudius was never developed. But at the time of Agrippina's death, Nero did offer the other reasonable defence against the charge of matricide: she was trying to kill him and to replace the rightful prince.

The news of Agrippina's death was greeted with public delight, real or feigned. The officers of Nero's guard congratulated the emperor on his escape. Sacrifices were offered and congratulations on his narrow escape. Seneca composed in his name a careful letter to the senate. It recounted the story of the shipwreck and of the freedman and the dagger, and it claimed that in her guilt Agrippina had killed herself when discovered. One rhetorical line of the letter survives, a breathless exclamation: 'I cannot yet believe or rejoice that I am safe.'[45] Seneca writing as Nero also raked up, or invented, all the old accusations: Agrippina's original purpose had been to share the power of the emperor; when balked of this, she had turned against the soldiers and the Senate and people, refusing them their accustomed largesse; she had endangered the leading men of the state; she had had the temerity to enter the senate house and to receive foreign embassies; and she had been responsible for all the crimes of the reign of Claudius. Her death, he asserted, had been brought about by the good fortune of the state.

At Rome, the senate responded with enthusiasm, decreeing that thanksgivings be offered at every shrine. The festival of Minerva was to be celebrated henceforth with annual games, to commemorate the day on which the plot was discovered, and a golden statue of the goddess was to be set up in the senate house next to a statue of Nero. The day of Agrippina's birth was to be entered in the list of inauspicious days. For his part, Nero recalled from exile prominent enemies and victims of his mother. Finally, after a delay of three months, the emperor returned from Campania to a rapturous public welcome in Rome, conducted as if it were a triumph over a military enemy.[46]

44. Delcourt 1959, 65–77, is central to what follows.
45. Quint. 8.5.18. The same source quotes (8.5.15) a remarkable line from a speech by the orator Julius Africanus: 'Your Gallic provinces beg, Caesar, that you bear your felicity with fortitude' (*felicitatem tuam fortiter feras*).
46. On 5 April, AD 59, the Arval Brethren record various public sacrifices which they undertook because of the thanksgivings decreed for the safety of Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus; on 23 June they sacrificed for his safety and return: *ILS* 230.

For Nero, the value of Orestes was not that he had killed his mother because his father's death and the command of Apollo clamoured for vengeance, but because Clytemnestra had stolen his inheritance from him, and the people of Mycenae were suffering under the tyranny of a woman. In the words given him by Aeschylus:

> Here numerous desires converge to drive me on:
> the god's urgency and my father's passion, and
> with these the loss of my estates wears hard on me;
> the thought that these my citizens, most high renowned
> of men, who toppled Troy in show of courage, must
> go subject to this brace of women . . . [47]

This was the essence of the posthumous campaign against Agrippina, especially as recounted in Seneca's letter to the senate: that she had gone beyond her womanly role to aim at supreme power, undermining loyalties and even planning to murder her son, as indeed Clytemnestra was said to have threatened the infant Orestes; Nero's preservation was closely tied to the eternal preservation of the Empire, *aeternitas imperii*. A skilful performance might even draw a parallel between Agrippina pointing to her womb and Clytemnestra baring the breast which had nourished Orestes: the public good had overcome filial piety.[48] Just as Orestes' heroic act had liberated Mycenae, so Nero's great sacrifice saved Rome.

He carried the performance as Orestes beyond the limits of the stage, complaining histrionically for the rest of his days that he was harried by his mother's ghost and by the Furies with their scourges and their flaming torches. Seven years after the murder, in 66, he first came into contact with Persian *magi*, through whom he tried to summon and appease his mother's ghost. He soon found that they were frauds and gave up magic when the implacable spirit of his mother proved to be uncharacteristically shy.[49] The following year, during his tour of Greece, as Suetonius records, he avoided the mysteries at Eleusis as one who was impure. Dio adds that he kept away from Athens 'because of the story about the Furies', and from Sparta because

47. *Ch.* 299–304 (Chicago translation by R. Lattimore). The brace of women is Clytemnestra and (the womanish) Aegisthus.
48. The parallel is suggested at Krappe 1940, 471.
49. Suet. 34; Plin. *Nat.* 30.14–17, for the date and for Nero's disgust. Contemporary writers adopted his vision with relish. At *Octavia* 593ff., Agrippina bursts from Hell with torch and scourge. At Statius *Silvae* 2.7.116–19, the ghost of Lucan is granted a vision of Nero in Hell, 'pale in the light of his mother's torch': she chases him still.

of the restrictive laws of Lycurgus.[50] But there is a far more plausible explanation for his avoidance of these places: he had no interest in them. The *only* cities which the imperial artist and athlete did visit in mainland Greece were the six which held 'periodic' festivals, the major athletic and artistic competitions that together comprised the regular circuit, the *periodos*, for competitors: as Nigel Kennell has argued 'Nero did not go to Greece to admire the monuments of Classical Greek culture, but to be admired himself'.[51] The story about the Furies was a dramatic excuse, possibly by then even a joke, but he was quite willing up to his last days to identify himself with the archetypal matricide.

The central point is that it was Nero and not his enemies who chose to mythologize the murder of his mother. By presenting Orestes as one of his favourite roles; by underscoring this with a fondness for playing the other great matricide of myth, Alcmaeon the son of Amphiaraus; by dramatizing the torments of conscience in his life off-stage; by performing the matricide on-stage in a mask that bore his own features, Nero framed the terms of the debate over his own guilt.[52]

Unquestionably, he succeeded. The clue lies in this: his ancient critics were compelled to react by seeking to demonstrate that he was *not* comparable with Orestes, and they went out of their way to do so. Juvenal objected that Orestes had acted on the authority of the gods, and he never killed his sister or his wife, poisoned his relatives—or sang the part of Orestes on stage, or wrote a *Troica*! Philostratus, in his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, noted that Orestes' father had been murdered by his mother, but Nero owed his adoption and the Empire to his mother. The elder Philostratus pointed out that, while Orestes had been avenging his father, Nero had no such excuse. And a pasquinade contemporary with Nero fits the same mould, as recorded by Suetonius: the first part seems to represent the heroic posturing of the official version, 'Nero Orestes Alcmaeon, mother-slayer', parodying his official name, Nero Claudius Caesar; but the second half redirects

50. Suet. ibid.; D.C. 63.14.3. Dio may be confused: Athens should have been a place of refuge for the new Orestes. Athena had after all been the goddess who had saved Orestes from the Furies there, and in her Italian form as Minerva she had saved Nero.
51. Convincingly argued at Kennell 1988.
52. Alcmaeon: Suet. *Nero* 21.3; D.C. 63.9.4–10.1. Alcmaeon is routinely linked with Orestes in standard attacks on Nero.

attention to its simple horror, 'Or put it another way: Nero killed his own mother.'[53]

The clearest glimpse into the public debate over guilt comes in an obscure anecdote. One day, as Nero was passing by, the Cynic philosopher Isidorus loudly reproached him in public, crying out 'that he sang the ills of Nauplius well, but disposed of his own goods badly'.[54] Around the clever puns on good and evil (*mala bene/bona male*) was built a pointed contrast between Nero's success on stage and his failure as emperor, a criticism which sent Isidorus into exile. The ills of Nauplius, *Naupli mala*, are a problem. Nauplius was the father of the wise Palamedes, the great inventor and one of the leaders of the Greek army at Troy. Odysseus, to settle a personal grudge, and with the connivance or acquiescence of the other kings, accused Palamedes of betraying the Greek army to the Trojans for gold. He was convicted on the strength of fabricated evidence, and stoned to death. In revenge, his father Nauplius later lured the Greek fleet to its destruction by false signals, as it was sailing home from the war. The woes of Nauplius have been taken to refer in some way to the death of his son Palamedes, and it has been assumed that Nero must have written a poem on the theme. But it is simpler to understand *mala* as not the woes suffered by Nauplius, but the evils caused by him. For when he had failed to win any recompense for his son's death from the Greek leaders, Nauplius sailed back from Troy and visited many of their wives in turn, telling each one that she would be replaced by a Trojan concubine. Several of the queens then fell into adultery, chief among them being Clytemnestra, the wife of Agamemnon. Thus, with the *Naupli mala*, Isidorus was alluding to the tragic events which culminated in the story of Orestes, and which were performed on stage by Nero—rather well performed, as the philosopher had to admit, if only to keep the epigram pointed. On that reading, Isidorus tried to reconstruct the barrier between theatrical myth and life. Like Nero's other opponents, he tried to sever the specious

53. Juv. 8.215–21; Philostr. *VA* 4.38; Pseudo-Lucian [Philostratus the Elder] *Nero* 10; Suet. 39.2: Νέρων Ὀρέστης Ἀλκμέων μητροκτόνος/Νεόψηφον Νέρων ἰδίαν μητέρα ἀπέκτεινε.

Greek sources preserve a slightly different version of the first line only, 'Nero, Orestes, Alcmaeon, mother-slayers': D.C. 61.16.2; Philostr. *VS* 1.481; Sopater *Prolegomenon in Aristidem* (740 Dindorf). This, the standardly accepted version, is incorrect. By making the noun plural these authors have lost the joke of the original iambic line, which transferred the three names (*tria nomina*) Nero Claudius Caesar into Nero Orestes Alcmaeon: so Delcourt 1959. Compare the vinous nickname of a predecessor, Tiberius Claudius Nero, *alias* Biberius Calidius Mero: Suet. *Tib.* 42.1.

I am not sure what to make of the late scholiast's note on Luc. 5.113 (cf. 139, 178), which claims that the Delphic oracle replied to Nero, 'I do not respond to parricides': that is precisely what it *had* done to Orestes and Alcmaeon.

54. Suet. *Nero* 39.3: *transeuntem eum Isidorus Cynicus in publico clara uoce corripuerat, quod Naupli mala bene cantitaret, sua bona male disponeret.*

bond between the tale of Orestes on stage and the real fortunes of Nero's empire.

Greek Heroes in Roman Public Life

'Tell me, my dearest Agamemnon, do you know the twelve labours of Hercules or the tale of Ulysses, how the Cyclops tore off his thumb? I used to read about it in Homer when I was a boy. I even saw the Sibyl at Cumae with my own eyes, hanging in a bottle . . . .'[55] To say that Greek myth pervaded Roman life in art and literature, in theatre and folktale, is to state the obvious. One striking effect of this ubiquity was the effort made by public figures at Rome to portray themselves or to portray their rivals as Greek heroes, relying on the responsiveness of a society deeply familiar, high and low, with the old stories.

Heroes are essentially different from gods in their quotidian exploitation by the Romans. As far as image is concerned, gods are attributes, mostly personifying desirable virtues; they tend to the static, even when tales about them are exploited. Heroes have the advantage of being human, they act and suffer, and they tend to be exploited for the stories about them that reveal their characters. Familiar from the stage, they arouse emotions. As we have seen in the appearances of the family of Pelops, the shift from Republic to Empire was matched by a shift in appropriate theatrical image, from one of first among equals, to the negative and positive embodiments of monarchy, the tyrant and the rightful prince. A great deal of attention has been paid to the complex relations between Roman leaders and their deities in the late Republic and early Empire, Caesar's Venus and Pompey's Neptune, Apollo and Dionysus and Hercules, but these represent eternal virtues and are, to an extent, interchangeable; they are heralded in grand artistic and social programmes. Yet we catch the echo of something different with the heroes, more the rough and tumble of formulation and reformulation, on the street and in the forum, in the law court and in the theatre. No one disputed Jupiter's imperial qualities or the emperor's Jove-like attributes; Atreus was another matter.

This process of secular heroization in private and in public life is markedly creative. We can imagine a sort of hour-glass. No matter how complex the psychological insight, no matter how complicated the action, the characters of tragedy and epic are reduced to a codified set of actions and attitudes, a set of tableaux reminiscent of the arrangement of the *Lexicon Iconographicum*

55. Petr. 48. The text is uncertain, but if the Cyclops tore off Ulysses' thumb, this is not in Homer.

Mythologiae Classicae: Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia, Agamemnon sends Briseis to Achilles, Agamemnon returns home and is murdered, and so forth. The skill of the players is then to select the image and interpret the codes, to give new meanings to the stories on the one hand and to real life on the other. This involves negotiation and confrontation, for the material was alive and volatile. The image of a hero was summoned to make a point, and people reacted. It might be accepted and applauded. Or it might be vigorously denied: Lucullus was not Agamemnon, Favonius was not Nestor, Tiberius was not Atreus, Nero was not Orestes. But there was always a danger that it might be accepted and reinterpreted. Augustus used Orestes to justify his vengeance and raised the hero into one of the protectors of Rome; but Orestes was a murderer and a madman as well, and Virgil was not so sure about him. Agamemnon was a great king, but he had many flaws: while he was conquering in the East his wife was committing adultery at home and, as men reminded Pompey before Pharsalus, King of Kings was not an appropriate role for a Roman *nobilis*. Indeed, the image might backfire spectacularly. In prosecuting Caelius Rufus, the young Sempronius Atratinus apparently called him *pulchellus Iaso*, insinuating that he was a gold-digging pretty-boy, Jason in search of his Golden Fleece. Caelius shot back that his accuser was *Pelia cincinnatus*, a Pelias in ringlets, suggesting that Atratinus wanted him dead, as Pelias had wanted his nephew Jason dead. Then Caelius' counsel, Cicero, brilliantly deduced that if Caelius was Jason then Clodia must be the Medea of the Palatine, a monster of depravity.[56]

Public responsiveness to heroic references in the theatre at Rome is notorious—witness the audience's vociferous approval of the mutual loyalty of Orestes and Pylades. Cicero gives two familiar instances in the 50s. In one, several lines from an unknown tragedy, beginning with 'By our suffering are you great', were hurled by the actor with huge public approval against Pompey the Great at the Ludi Apollinares; in the other, the travails of the unjustly exiled Cicero were presented, again to loud demonstrations, through a performance of Accius' *Eurysaces*.[57] In neither instance do we know the tales being performed, but there can be no doubt that the misdeeds and the sufferings of Greek heroes were being forcefully applied to Roman public life. The stunning effect of such applications can be seen in the accounts of Julius Caesar's funeral:

56. Respectively, Fortunat. *Rh.* 3. 7 (124 Halm); Quint. 1.5.61; Cic. *pro Caelio* 18. There is a subject to explore here, what might be called the negative mythological oxymoron. Compare *quadrantaria Clytemnestra* ('tuppenny Clytemnestra', Caelius Rufus on Clodia: Quint. 8.6.53); *Ulixes stolatus* ('Ulysses in a gown', Caligula's admiring term for his great-grandmother, Livia: Suet. *Cal.* 23.2); *Cassandra caligaria* ('Cassandra in army-boots', Trimalchio's exasperated name for his wife, Fortunata: Petron. *Sat.* 74); et al.
57. Cic. *Att.* 2.19.3 (SB 39); *Sest.* 120–2.

> Somewhere from the midst of these lamentations Caesar himself was supposed to speak, recounting by name his enemies on whom he had conferred benefits, and of the murderers themselves, exclaiming, as it were in amazement, 'Oh that I should have spared these men to slay me!' The people could endure it no longer.

Thus Appian; or in Suetonius' version:

> At the funeral games, to rouse pity and indignation at his death, these words from the *Armorum Iudicium* of Pacuvius were sung: 'Oh that I should have spared these men to slay me!' and words of a like purport from the *Electra* of Atilius.[58]

The impact of Ajax' lament is dramatic. Everyone could grasp the lines instantly. The deep emotions of a theatrical experience, here sorrow and outrage, were summoned and re-employed to colour, to intensify, to concentrate the emotions of real life. 'The people could endure it no longer': murder and arson followed. Properly deployed, heroic comparison could be a matter of life and death: witness Caesarion; witness the Spartan youth in Plutarch's *Aratus*.

Whether deployed in public or private, there is an intense theatricality about such comparisons. When he arrived in Rome in 44, the young Octavian allegedly held a *consilium* with family and friends, and described his plan of action. He concluded that he would risk any danger to prove himself worthy of Caesar. He then turned to his mother and addressed her in the words of Achilles to his mother Thetis, speaking of the death of Patroclus, 'I must die soon then; since I was not to stand by my companion/when he was killed.'[59] He then pedantically explained that Achilles had won undying glory from these words and his subsequent deeds, and that Caesar had been not a friend but a father, not a comrade but a commander, and not a soldier fallen on the field of battle but the victim of murder. Whether or not the conversation actually took place, it would play well in public: Caesar was to Octavian everything that Patroclus was to Achilles, and much more. That summed the relationship up neatly. To say that this is 'theatrical' is not to deny its reality. For us, if someone today acts like a character from a book or a film it may seem unnatural, artificial, but for a Roman to act Ajax or Hector it could be normal, expected, and moving.

The actions and sufferings of Greek heroes could express, in compact and powerful form, the deepest of Roman feelings. In March of 49, Cicero and

58. App. *BC* 2. 146 (Loeb translation, H. White); Suet. *Jul.* 84. 2 (Modern Library translation, J. Gavorse, modified).
59. *Iliad* 18. 98–9. The source is App. *BC* 3. 13–14.

Atticus exchanged letters and advice about how to react to Caesar's arrival in arms. Atticus offered a brilliant description for Caesar's disreputable followers, one with which Cicero was much taken. They were a *nekuia*, a band of dead men, the criminals and outcasts of Roman society. His advice to Cicero: 'if nothing happens to Pompey and he establishes himself somewhere, you should leave this underworld (*nekuian*) and think defeat at his side a lesser evil than rule with Caesar in the sink of iniquity (*colluuie*) we can see ahead of us here.'[60] The band of dead men, as commentators note, recalls the *nekuia*, the procession of the dead before Odysseus, in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*. But the bite in the quotation is surely Atticus' implied echo of the words of the dead Achilles to Odysseus, 'I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another/man . . . ./than be a king over all the perished dead.' That is a potent distillation of the agonizing decision that faced the last generation of the Roman Republic.

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60. Cic. *Att.* 9.10.7 (SB 177; cf. 9.11.2 [SB 178] and 9.18.2 [SB 187]): *si M' Lepidus et L. Vulcatius remanent, manendum puto, ita, ut si saluus sit Pompeius et constiterit alicubi, hanc νέκυιαν relinquas et te in certamine uinci cum illo facilius patiaris quam cum hoc in ea quae perspicitur futura colluuie regnare.*

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