

Conclusions

In this world
we walk on the roof of hell,
gazing at flowers.

Kobayashi Issa¹

We must agree with Freud, to whom our culture and civilization were merely a thin layer liable at any moment to be pierced by the destructive forces of the “underworld.” We have had to accustom ourselves gradually to living without the ground beneath our feet, without justice, without freedom, without security.

Stefan Zweig²

The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals . . . A man’s life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors.

Chinua Achebe³

Poetic, religious, and philosophical engagement with the beyond transcends cultures and time periods. The notion of the afterlife has always operated both literally and as a metaphor. Issa evokes the thin crust separating everyday life from the cavernous domain of death, ever present but disregarded. Zweig incites us, through Freud’s continuing influence, to examine unconscious, violent forces, both in our individual psyches and on a global level. Achebe narrates the rituals surrounding dead ancestors and the role that their masked impersonators play in traditional life, including the active mediation of quarrels for the sake of the community.

The emphasis on the afterlife is among the most significant legacies of Greek thought, a legacy that must continue to be questioned on its home

¹ Robert Haas (tr.), *The Essential Haiku* (Hopewell, NJ, 1984), 158.

² *The World of Yesterday* (Lincoln, NE, 1964), 4.

³ *Things Fall Apart* (New York, 1983), 115.

turf. The depictions of diverse afterlives in Greek literature and religion substantiate anxieties over the aftereffects of one's own deeds, one's status at death, and the actions of one's survivors. Plato's dialogues influentially propose that ethical scrutiny ought to transcend the living consequences of our actions. Yet in Greek thought until Plato, there seems to be no *structured* connection between what may happen beyond death and challenges to ethical and political values. The *Oresteia* – as the preceding chapters have argued – is the exception. Its intricate network of disparate afterlives profoundly challenges the very claims of justice it dramatizes.

Human existence beyond death is never given a single, dogmatic expression in the *Oresteia*. The trilogy dramatizes a full range of conceptions: from oblivion to glorious praise, to ghostly returns, to pacific or agitated underworld existence, to divine punishment for ethical transgressions. Aeschylus presents deliberate ideational conflicts across the trilogy and, in scenes like the *kommós*, alternates in quick succession incommensurate perspectives. Moreover, the claim that humans are subject to ethical judgment and punishment in the afterlife for specific crimes ventures beyond the practices of mainstream Greek religion and the intimations of previous literature. Drawing together the insights from each chapter within the frameworks sketched out in the Introduction demonstrates how the poetics of afterlife possibilities affects individual perspectives and outcomes, as well as notions of personal and political justice.

Afterlife Poetics and Ethics

Each character's interaction with the beyond unearths a previously unexamined subset of ethical concerns. When grouped together, new patterns in the trilogy emerge. By transforming the understood endpoint of life, every reference to the afterlife changes the ethical calculus. The specifics of afterlife existence, especially underworld punishment, compel rethinking of character actions and claims to justice, of Athena's new law, and even of the lives of the spectators.

Toward the beginning of the trilogy, several characters refer to their own death as oblivion. The Herald and the Elders several times rhetorically exclaim their desire for such an escape from life. Each instance heightens the underlying psychological pressures, for the former from the just-completed war and for the latter from the bloody coup. Their appeals to death as utter nullity and their suppressed allusions to the afterlife are indications of emotional trauma and powerlessness over the surrounding world. The thirst for oblivion is far more prominent with

Cassandra, who is facing her foreknown murder. Her appeals to death as insensibility directly respond to her violent past, current human enslavement, and continuing divine curse. As the trilogy progresses, the characters whose bloody deeds propel the plot also rhetorically wish for peace through death. Aegisthus claims he could die happy after vengeance, whereas Orestes hints that his existence will be entirely expended in the matricide. A pattern emerges that the desire for nullity is prominent in the mouths of characters who have less control over their lives but is subordinate for those who act most aggressively. It represents a little-studied aspect of the ethos of these characters. Taken together, these instances constitute an original theme in the study of the *Oresteia*, namely closure-focused relationships to death.

There are ethical repercussions for regarding death as a total ending of the self. It involves abdicating responsibility in two ways. First, it rhetorically negates a character's ability to mitigate their situation, thus loosening their imperative to act in life. Each such exclamation of surrender, however, contains nuances and leads to reversals. The Chorus of Elders, despite their stated need to escape from life, also attempt to resist tyranny at Argos. For Cassandra, courage in confronting the unchangeable moment of doom leads to praise in the language of glory.

The second problem of responsibility concerns ethical desert. For the characters who participate in kin-murder, a peaceful death means liberation from both guilt and overtly threatened punishments. Aegisthus and Orestes desire death to come only after they accomplish their vengeance. Their wishes thus resonate with Clytemnestra's desire to avoid punishment by buying off the curse of the house and enervating Agamemnon's spirit. In keeping with the *Oresteia's* deep concern with repercussions, the attempt at avoidance of ethical desert through a peaceful death points to a structural lack within life. It is only through divine afterlife punishment that consequences for wrongdoing seem to be guaranteed.

A similar interplay between consequences and the need for closure occurs in the competing representations of the Trojan War dead. Each family's sorrow at receiving the ashes of their fallen soldiers threatens to activate a civic curse on Agamemnon. The citizens do not see death as a peaceful closure for their own loved ones; nor is the problem of adequate recompense ever addressed. Yet the Herald glosses his comrades' deaths as peaceful rest, claiming that the benefit of victory so thoroughly compensates for their loss that they do not even wish to return. Already in this instance, death exceeds the limit of life in the Herald's speech, as he suggests (in the negative) that the war dead might rise. He subsequently

strains to exclude these same casualties from glory, only applying it to those currently living. Carefully attended, his manipulations of the legacy of the dead as an inadequate response to citizen anger insinuate doubts about positive assessments of the war.

The fate of Agamemnon reinforces these doubts, through dramatizing the incompleteness of his life and the horrors of its end. The returning conqueror is cut down for destroying his family to prosecute the war. Applying Agamemnon's claim that one can only tell the worth of a life at its close would mean that his ignominious death retrospectively contaminates his life. The depiction of a dishonored burial for the great king and father in the *Choephoroi* creates an emotional need for some postmortem transformation of his fate. Ritual is not enough; closure and peaceful oblivion are not even mentioned. Tragic pity structures the desire for a continuity of the dead.

The needs for closure and for continuity diverge ever further as the afterlife becomes more prominent in the trilogy. The haunting of the dead is central to the dramatic arc: Aegisthus justifies killing Agamemnon through his dead siblings, who reappear to Cassandra; Clytemnestra, as part of her justification, depicts Iphigeneia meeting her father in the underworld; the mourners seek the power of Agamemnon's spirit; and finally Clytemnestra's Ghost returns to demand vengeance and depicts the dead harassing her in the underworld. In diverse ways, these appeals to the dead and ghostly returns extend the bases for ethical consequences.

The revenant dead of the *Oresteia* give spectral form to the abstract notion of accountability. Cassandra's vision of the murdered Children of Thyestes belies the theme of death providing an escape from violence. The silent Children's exposed innards are a symbol of unfulfilled vengeance. Their infiltration into the present undoes the Elders' attempts to shutter the violent history of the house. The Children thus instantiate the theme that the past affects the future in the trilogy precisely through the continuation of ethical obligations to dead individuals. Yet there is a paradox inherent in the undead presaging the murder of Agamemnon: His punishment occurs exclusively in life. In Cassandra's words, the conqueror of Troy is subject to "the judgment of the gods." Although the message is delivered by afterlife figures, ethical desert is understood in her scene only as a violent death, with no mention of further punishment in the beyond. This is in line with the restriction of references to afterlife judgment to only the Choruses. The rest of the trilogy (until the last third of the *Eumenides*) by turns focuses on vengeance in life and alternate afterlives.

Another aspect of Cassandra's scene introduces uncertainty into the continuation of individuals after death. Cassandra's couplet about singing prophecies in Hades opens up counterpoints to the themes of doom, closure at death, and glory in the usual interpretations of her scene. The suggestive language of the couplet is integral to transforming the overtones of determinism with which Aeschylus has surrounded her. Her potential afterlife thus points to an ethics of indeterminacy: Reevaluation of her living suffering, continuing punishment, and resistance remains feasible. In a similar way to modern reimaginations of Cassandra – such as Christa Wolf's and Anne Carson's – considering the merest possibility of her afterlife allows audiences and readers of the original to reengage Cassandra with a renewed sense of contingency and humanity.

The poetics of multiplicity manifests more patently in the central scene of mourning for Agamemnon than anywhere else. The rituals of lament in the *kommos* are intended to restore a modicum of honor to the king after his slaughter and dishonored burial. Yet his mourners deemphasize closure. Instead, they depict Agamemnon as a vengeful spirit rising from the dead, a superhuman being sending power from the beyond, a king possibly receiving honor in the underworld, and a father gaining continuity through children and burial ritual *only* if vengeance occurs. His mourners' positions contradict one another in direct succession. After the elaborate prayers fail to garner any response, Orestes declares that Agamemnon's spirit is bereft of understanding. Once Orestes hears about a possible sign in the dream of Clytemnestra (deeply connected with chthonic forces and the dead), he again reverses himself. Orestes prays to his father's tomb for fulfillment of the promised vengeance. Lastly, when Orestes appeals to his father's spirit in the *Eumenides*, it is to no avail; the Erinyes scoff at him. As a result of these speculated possibilities and reversals, Agamemnon's post-mortem state remains subject to deep uncertainty, for both the characters and the spectators.

Each of the possible afterlives in the *kommos* reopens ethical contingency, both for the dead and for the living. Some concern the dead supernaturally affecting life; others indicate a transformation of status after death, dependent on events in life. Through ritual and emotional expression, the mourning reconstructs a community around the loss of the father-king and the obligations to him. The emphasis on Agamemnon's dishonored burial and the vision of Agamemnon as he should be honored in Hades both build social pressure for vengeance. Regardless of how uncertain they may be, the perspectives of the living on the afterlife motivate (in part, for Orestes also has other reasons) decisive action.

The counterpart to the requirement for vengeance has rarely been discussed: The postmortem state of characters in the trilogy *inverts* certain of their living characteristics. Cassandra, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, and Orestes each potentially undergoes a radical transformation after death. Both alternatives for Cassandra's underworld existence are far from the powerless state in which her life ends: Either she is ensconced as a prophet (which her own words suggest) or participates in the pursuit of Clytemnestra's Ghost (as implied in that character's speech), or neither. Agamemnon is subject to a full rewriting of his legacy. Whereas Clytemnestra imagines him greeted in the underworld by the daughter he killed, Agamemnon's children go to great lengths to whitewash his crime. As they reconstruct his honors from the abased burial he was given, they characterize Agamemnon as merely an ancestor figure and promise him only familial honors. They make no mention of the glorious war exploits that were foremost in the Elders' concern with his lack of kingly funeral. This reversal also radically transmutes the familial and political dynamics of the living. Instead of ruling in the shadow of the kingliest of the Greeks, Orestes may more easily take Agamemnon's place. Orestes subsequently transmutes from a powerless son whose only accomplishment is killing his own mother to an eternally powerful civic hero. These reversals are of major ethical importance, as they demonstrate both the contingency of living reputation and the potential for radical, posthumous transformation.

The ethical claims of the dead are spectrally embodied in Clytemnestra's Ghost. She is self-moving; the Ghost has not been summoned. Instead of having others speak for her, as Agamemnon's children do for him, or having the support of Olympians, as Orestes has, Clytemnestra's Ghost is fundamentally reliant on her own rhetoric. She therefore paints a picture of afterlife dishonor to rouse the Erinyes. In her depiction, the afterlife is an "elsewhere," beyond the political world of Argos but maintaining the interpersonal dynamics of honor. The Ghost draws on all the resources of language to describe a suffering below. Although interpreters have generally claimed that Clytemnestra is paying for her crimes after death, her Ghost carefully avoids the issue of ethical punishment from divine forces. It is those she killed whom she blames for her persecution, and her Ghost treats the situation as *contingent*. The dead queen desires the Erinyes to intervene in the living world in order to return her honor and save her from this harassment. That is, the Ghost projects the values of life into the underworld and actively works to change her fate.

When the Ghost of Clytemnestra shrieks of being a murdered mother, her ethical reference is twofold: Not only has Orestes killed his parent, but

Clytemnestra's vengeance on Agamemnon was for her daughter. As much as the Ghost focuses her claims on herself, the Erinyes assimilate them to universal ethical rules. Although Clytemnestra's character is compromised by her living acts and deception, the chthonic demons at first uphold her allegations as both locally and globally valid, expanding her claims to a general obligation to avenge the murder of family. It is only when they are pressed that they narrow their purview to avenging transgressions against blood kin, excluding other sacred relationships. The trial then sweeps away the Ghost of Clytemnestra's ethical claims. Within the play, the vote overseen by Athena vindicates the matricide for gendered and political reasons. The dominant figure in earlier stages of the trilogy, Clytemnestra recedes into a vaguely monstrous representative of the old law. The positive, divine, civic persuasion of Athena seems to correct the vengeful, human, selfish persuasion of Clytemnestra. Putting the Ghost to bed adds to the dramatic satisfaction of the ending.

Yet the Ghost's challenge is multivalenced. Just as Clytemnestra's reappearance amplifies the claims of the dead, so her speech and costume metatheatrically draw attention to representational issues and their ethical effects. Clytemnestra, living and dead, is a verbally compelling figure, weaving fictions and challenging her society by force of personality. The insubstantial figure dreamt by the previously invisible Erinyes points to her spectral body as proof of her claims. In some ways, the Ghost is symbolic of the layers of tragedy itself. She is seen but untouchable, costumed in symbolic blood, present but absent. Although living Clytemnestra was condemned for her vengeance, the staging of the Ghost ethically problematizes seeing her own murder as simply just. Not only is the trial about her murder, the same actor would also have played Athena. It illustrates that Athena's new law subdues not just the personal aspect of vengeance, but the claims of the individual in contrast to political forces. However, whereas Agamemnon, Orestes, and even the Erinyes are purified of their bloody deeds, Clytemnestra never achieves a postmortem reversal of reputation. Unredeemed, the Ghost of Clytemnestra may continue to haunt the spectators and readers of the *Oresteia*. Will they allow themselves to be moved by her ethical claims as a human being despite all her crimes, despite her deceptions, despite her lack of rehabilitation?

Lastly, both in order and eschatologically speaking, the *Oresteia* decisively links ethical concerns and the afterlife with a rare reference to punishment in Hades for all mortals. The human Choruses of the first two plays hint at retribution after death. The chthonic Erinyes, by contrast, concretely claim that Hades' punishment is part of the ethical

structure of the universe. Their revelation diverges greatly from the numerous other outcomes for the dead described by human characters, but it interweaves with those of the other Choruses and is never contradicted by other divinities. The reference to Hades has been assimilated by some scholars to Sicilian or nonstate Greek religious ideas. Other scholars have merely taken note of it in passing, as an early intimation of the later Platonic and monotheistic focus on ethical postmortem judgment. Within the trilogy, however, ethical punishment by the Erinyes in life and Hades in the afterlife has no salvational aspect. Instead, it expands the suffering reserved for a few great sinners in the *Odyssey* to all humans who have transgressed. It also differentiates the *Oresteia* from earlier literature (including Pindar's *Olympian 2*), from contemporary mainland cultic practice (such as mystery cults), and from later philosophical and religious afterlife depictions. Punishment by Hades in the *Oresteia* draws attention to individual ethical transgression without reference to belief, ritual, or group identity.

Hades' judgment in the trilogy is unique in a number of other respects. These include the delineation of distinct transgressions and the use of Athenian legal vocabulary. The types of transgressions, procedural terms, and universality of his judgment draw attention to Hades' diremption from politically based judicial systems. His justice diverges from the workings of Athenian law, which has a split-authority structure, allows appeals to mutual benefit, and gives the possibility of release. The fact that Hades is the invisible, singular overseer removes him from being affected by personal overtures, suppliance, political institutions, and even religious purification. Seeing all things and recording them permanently, Hades' purview is understood as unlimited and his judgment inexorable.

Attention to the justice of Hades allows for a new perspective on the previous ethical claims in the trilogy. The divine revelation of a universal code raises the possibility that the actions of characters have entirely different postmortem consequences than they themselves believed. Taking it seriously means one must reexamine Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's afterlives, among others: Can they really be rewritten after death? Did they, and Orestes, commit ethically unabsolvable crimes? The trilogy only hints at such questions, but thinking them through allows for a deeper engagement with the potential afterlives of each character and the ideas surrounding the afterlife more generally.

The set of relationships Hades governs are of paramount concern within the trilogy. The parent-child, guest-host, and human-divine relationships are presented as absolutes, whose violation must be scrupulously punished.

Yet in every part of the trilogy, they are transgressed by humans in the narrative, divinities in mythical times, and states in times of war. It is notable that within the trilogy not a single instance of these violations is ever described as having been punished by Hades. By the end, Athena's new law transforms each of these relationships for political reasons.

Athena deliberately separates the realm below in her benedictions for Athens. Her divine alliances with chthonic and Olympian powers are meant to keep it at bay. This puts the ethical justice of the underworld god and Athena's political justice in implicit conflict. In ethical terms, I argue that the trilogy is hinting at the irreconcilable divergence of the individual and the state. This conflict is at the forefront of many tragedies and connected to numerous other themes. Yet it is generally lost in the seemingly total focus on the Athenian *polis* in the *Oresteia*'s ending.

To sum up, through its contradictions, the afterlife in the *Oresteia* connects poetics and ethics in two ways. First, it literarily draws attention to numerous, divergent outcomes for human beings. The possibilities of continuation provide leverage for characters to challenge their own ethical situations and those of others. The afterlife overturns what seems to be a final accounting. Thus what I have termed the poetics of the beyond gives characters and spectators another set of tools to question absolute claims about values and justice. Secondly, the trilogy extends ethical uncertainty even after divine revelation. The poetics of multiplicity of conflicting but possibly valid views encourages continual ethical scrutiny.

Human and Divine Politics

Continuity after death radically alters the *Oresteia*'s political structures and actions. Staged ghosts call for vengeance against the rulers of Argos, the debased prestige of its murdered monarchs requires avenging, and the casualties from the Trojan War weigh down on its citizenry. Conversely, Athena explicitly curtails chthonic powers and integrates them into the Athenian political system. The contrasting afterlives possible in the trilogy provide insights into representations of political choices, rulers, cities, warfare, and the Athenocentric ending as it redefines human–divine relationships.

In the arc of the mythical Argive monarchy, the invasions of afterlife figures undercut attempts to consolidate power after political coups. The Children of Thyestes haunt the ruling line of Atreus. Both Aegisthus, their sibling, and Clytemnestra, through her references to Iphigeneia in Hades, put themselves forward as avengers of the dead against

Agamemnon. Simultaneously with fulfilling the claims of the dead, Aegisthus recovers the rulership of Argos through regicide. What should be an honored, kingly tomb then becomes an inverse site of political symbolism. After Agamemnon's overthrow, Clytemnestra keeps the citizens and family from his funeral and mutilates his corpse to control his afterlife. "Let him not boast gloriously in Hades," Clytemnestra declares, gainsaying Agamemnon's claim to epic glory both in the political world and in the underworld. When vengeance comes for her, Clytemnestra immediately understands "the dead are killing the living," a phrase that encapsulates both the continuing influence of Agamemnon's spirit and the revival of the heir, Orestes, from his feigned death. Clytemnestra's Ghost, no longer able to affect the political world directly, nevertheless reappears from her dishonored afterlife to urge vengeance on Orestes, which threatens to extinguish the chain of succession. These extensions of personal claims and honor after death focus an Athenian audience on the structural issues with monarchy, a government – unlike theirs – dependent on the life of the ruler.

When considered on a civic scale, the afterlife plays a role in critiques of both violence and monarchy itself. Lament for the war dead is the basis of citizen anger against the rulers of Argos and a counterpoint to the Herald's and Agamemnon's narratives of heroic glory. The Chorus of Elders as collective in this case speak for and in some sense exemplify the citizenry. Through them, pity as a civic emotion accrues to the offstage citizens of Argos who have lost their sons. It is modeled onstage by pity for Cassandra, the victim of the war, who laments her lost kin and civilization. The Chorus of Slave Women reinforce this collective emotion concerning war in their laments for their own losses, intertwined with the laments for Agamemnon. Thus, the audience hears of losses to both the victors and the defeated. Threats against the leaders arising from the mass bloodshed do not stop at a civic curse, for, according to the Elders, the Erinyes come down on the "killers of many," and there is "no defense among the unseen." Even early in the trilogy, the possibility of punishment in the afterlife for bloodshed reinforces political critique.

The corollary to the static conception of the dead as focusing critiques of political acts is the possibility of a change of fate after death. One must here note the absence of an afterlife theme that is prominent in later world literature, religion, and history: political martyrdom for an improved afterlife. The Chorus of Elders, Aegisthus, and Orestes do rhetorically express desire for death in conjunction with their violent resistance to the

current regime. Aegisthus and Orestes, however, only imply by this that their life would be fulfilled in taking vengeance, whereas the Chorus of Elders imply that death would demonstrate bravery in a fight against tyranny. No character in the *Oresteia* imagines that they would receive a positive afterlife through dying in the service of political change.

More central to the play is the metamorphosis of two rulers of Argos after their death. Orestes and the mourners pointedly never offer civic cult to Agamemnon. Their promised future honors are so limited as to reduce the great conqueror to an anodyne ancestor figure. Agamemnon's post-mortem fate also cuts against the historical reality of his Peloponnesian cult status. The character arc of this most powerful ruler demonstrates the theme of circumstances after death altering political legacy. The lesson one might draw from such a radical transformation is that, in the *Oresteia*, contingency is the essence of human politics.

The conversion of Orestes into a hero picks up on the issue of human contingency in the political ending of the trilogy. Ancestral heroes as chthonic semidivinities not only bless the ruling house in the *Oresteia*, they also oversee the expedition to Troy. Yet these two functions are later split between Agamemnon and Orestes. After his children minimize the role of the dead Agamemnon as a possible heroic protector of Argos, Orestes foretells his own direct influence upon Argive policy from the grave. The reconceptualization of Agamemnon as a family figure allows his son political freedom. The moment he gains unchallenged control over Argos, though, Orestes uses this freedom to link himself to a foreign city. Since he was released by Athens from his promised death and afterlife punishment, Orestes promises to personally curse any Argives who march on Athens. The historical alliance of Athens and Argos thus receives an afterlife, heroic aetiology. Crucially, no change of policy will ever be possible. Orestes' heroic protection of the treaty begins the *Eumenides'* supernatural assault on the problem of contingency in human politics.

As individual and political violence resounds throughout the trilogy, the chthonic Erinyes become ever more prominent. They have often been seen to embody the curse of the house, but from the start they are also called upon in the context of the Trojan War. When they arrive on stage, they depict themselves as restraining the dark forces internal to humans. The Erinyes punish acts based on *eris* as desire for vengeance and *erōs* as desire for gain. They claim that another emotion, fear, ought to keep humanity from transgressing on both personal and civic levels. The Erinyes' original separateness enables them to reject Olympian interference on the one hand

and deny that political power is a defense on the other. The nonpolitical aspects of the Erinyes' curse-law manifest in its overly personal nature. Their law is entwined with their own honor and excessive in its denial to an individual of any supplication or end to punishment. Its bloody, perpetual structure pollutes them and their claims to justice.

The new law uses the Erinyes as intermediaries against the pernicious influence of the underworld. The dark power they are meant to restrain below is, metaphorically, the brutal nature of humanity (its *eris* and *erōs*) and, literally, the claims of the dead for honor and vengeance. One may also interpret the underworld as the chthonic divinities' potential influence on the world through their nonpolitical justice. Athena, in her new law, denies all such chthonic claims through a rhetoric of mutuality, light, release, and eternity. This parallels the dramatic replacement of named figures in the first two plays by the anonymous, collective structure of Athens. Politically, checking the underworld means rejecting the focus on the individual.

Nevertheless, Athena's new law is not a template for either peaceful coexistence or democracy. Instead, the ending of the trilogy emphasizes the divinely chosen status of Athens, the piety of the Athenians, the need to fear the authority of the Areopagus (never the *demos*), and the need for total unity. More pointedly still, Athena and the Erinyes offer benedictions to Athens on two political conditions: absolute submission to civic authority and constant external conquest. These putatively lead to release from all harm and eternal civic profit, understood as flourishing combined with guiltless victory. In Athena's language, the city and the army are synonymous. Her calls for total unity negate plural perspectives. Where is the room for separate opinions and debates? After the trial, the united divinities sanction external territorial wars as the cure for civil strife. Rather than only occurring under the "old law" of vengeance, violence is the foundation and sustaining feature of the new law of Athena.

The political obligation to Athens is not just for local heroes or minor divinities: Zeus and the *Moirai*, previously common to all, now link themselves specifically to one city. The exorbitance of divinities lined up on behalf of Athens and the insistence on eternity bespeak apprehension concerning not only human choices but also the fickleness of the anthropomorphic pantheon. If the Erinyes can change, why not other divinities? Athena lines up blessings against contingency, both historical and divine.

The emphasis on total divine justification leads to a perilous theological politics. Divinities, when acting in the world, become subject to its circumstances. The Erinyes are now to judge with the interests of Athens

foremost. For this reason, they are unable to punish Orestes; they are no longer free to act outside of a human social and political framework. Whereas previously the Erinyes set a law for all humanity, henceforth they are part of Athena's separation between Athenians and non-Athenians, the latter being the objects of conquest. This theme has its template in Orestes' promise as an afterlife hero to punish his own citizens from the grave if they break with Athens. Under the new law, not only Orestes and the Erinyes but even the most universal divinities justify total warfare.

It has not been recognized that Athena's new law is countered by one divine force within the play: Hades. The underworld seems to remain a separate realm to which humans still depart after death and in which the judgment of the divinity continues. The *Oresteia's* representation of divinities tied to the city thus contains a deliberate reserve: Greek gods are not *all* constrained to support Athens or to sanction its political violence. Hades' judgment opposes centering value on political unity and warfare.

The use of Athenian legal vocabulary evokes the immense discrepancies between human judicial process and Hades' divine mind. Primary among these is Hades' distance from human law, which is based on multiplicity and contingency. The trilogy dramatizes an exemplary trial, with its adversarial forensic oratory, sly appeals to the judge, extraneous promises and threats to the city, a divided jury, and a blanket acquittal. Many members of the audience would have had experience in contemporary Athenian courts and assemblies, with their plural voices in debate, arguments over evidence and reliability, split votes, appeals for pity, arguments concerning political benefit, the influence of minority opinions, and the possibility of later reversal. The qualities of Hades' justice contradict these processes at every turn through divine knowledge, lack of debate, singular judgment, and eternal punishment without the possibility of mitigation. Hades is not only unbribeable, he is exclusively concerned with individual action as opposed to civic good.

The profoundly political distinction between the law of Athena and that of Hades presents a challenge to every aspect of the Athenocentric ending. Whereas the goddess differentiates between humans based on their allegiance, Hades judges the actions of individuals without political relationships, justifications, or protections. The trial overseen by Athena acquits the one who transgressed both parent-child bonds and *xenia*, using arguments that undercut the validity of the bonds themselves. These are the human relationships Hades' law is said to protect. Killing in warfare is not immune from Hades' judgment. The descriptions of the Trojan War, for

instance, emphasize its violations of *xenia* and its transgressions against the gods. Humans who participate in such total destruction are said to be subject to afterlife requital. Moreover, the ethical system that Hades represents is never assimilated to what would be a single-voiced jingoistic “message.” Once the Erinyes join Athens, Hades provides the sole continuation of the old law, of total punishment. Just as Athena’s Areopagus and *Semnai Theai* restrain civic misdeeds through fear, the *Oresteia* implies that Hades’ justice presents a *competing* fear. This parallel divine law denaturalizes the collective, bellicose, eternally blessed future of Athens.

No single facet of any theme in the *Oresteia*, including afterlife judgment, is straightforward. The dramatic use of gods particularizes the law represented by each: Athena puts her justice in gendered terms; the Erinyes depict Hades in their violent, curse-like songs. As a continuation of their terrifying punishments, they designate Hades a *miastōr*. That is, instead of his law being unproblematically court-like, the Erinyes implicate him in the pollution of violence. His implacability – previously the Erinyes’ quality – means he himself ignores a sacred Greek law, the right of suppliants. Eternal violence thus stains both the Athenocentric ending and judgment in the underworld.

If the *Eumenides* offers revelation, it also provides no plenary, singular imperative; its divine world remains manifold. The inconcinnity between gods bound to a particular state and the universal judgment of individuals below maintains multiplicity. It suggests an excess that subverts the promised unanimity of the divine in favor of Athens. There is never an explicit contrast between Hades’ law and Athena’s. Yet their diverging demands on humanity enjoin audiences to reapply the assumptions, character, and consequences of Hades to Athena and vice versa. One may imagine mirrors, an echo chamber, or even mutually revenant concepts – each eternally haunting the other. All are possible metaphors for this interplay. By describing the law of Hades and that of Athena, the *Eumenides* makes ethics and politics reciprocally critical.

This book has examined how diverse representations of human possibilities beyond death transform values within the *Oresteia*. In the trilogy, as in the world more generally, ethical claims and political promises look toward a *telos*. Both justify significant, often violent acts with a pledge of resolution. Yet, as we have seen, divergent potential continuations after death intrinsically evoke questions about endings. On an individual scale, the death of characters does not efface elements of their value as a person. Their ethical claims may and should continue to affect the world. On a political scale, references to afterlife ethical punishment invite audiences and readers

to think past the ostensible closure of the bellicose finale. Hades' realm implicitly challenges Athena's new order. The multiplicities in the poetry and polytheism of the trilogy thus foster reconsideration of its major themes. This efflorescence of possibilities is widely applicable to the world outside tragedy as well. The plural poetics of the beyond suggests an ethically and politically responsible pathway for considering the run of history, the eternal tomorrow.