

Agamemnon as Eagle and Vulture: Animal Single-Parent Images in the *Oresteia*

Jennifer A. Stanull  
The Altamont School  
jenstanull@gmail.com

All translations by Richmond Lattimore.

1. *Ch.* 246-51

Ζεῦ Ζεῦ, θεωρὸς τῶνδε πραγμάτων γενοῦ:  
ἰδοῦ δὲ γένναν εὖνιν αἰετοῦ πατρός,  
θανόντος ἐν πλεκταῖσι καὶ σπειράμασιν  
δεινῆς ἐχίδνης. τοὺς δ' ἀπωρφανισμένους  
νῆστις πιάζει λιμός: οὐ γὰρ ἐντελεῖς  
θήραν πατρῶαν προσφέρειν σκηνήμασιν.

Zeus, Zeus, direct all that we try to do. Behold the orphaned children of the eagle-father, now that he has died entangled in the binding coils of the deadly viper, and the young he left behind are worn with hunger of starvation, not full grown to bring to their shelter slain food, as their father did.

2. *Ch.* 255-59

καὶ τοῦ θυτῆρος καί σε τιμῶντος μέγα  
νεοσσοὺς τούσδ' ἀποφθείρας πόθεν  
ἔξεις ὁμοίας χειρὸς εὐθιοῖνον γέρας;  
οὔτ' αἰετοῦ γένεθλ' ἀποφθείρας, πάλιν  
πέμπειν ἔχοις ἄν σήματ' εὐπιθῆ βροτοῖς:

If you destroy these fledglings of a father who gave you sacrifice and high honor, from what hand like his shall you be given the sacred feast which is your right? Destroy the eagle's brood, and you have no more means to send your signs to mortals for their strong belief:

3. Garvie, *Ch.* 1. 259

If [Zeus] betrays the offspring of the bird that is especially sacred to him, no one will believe his word again.

4. *Ag.* 42, 48-54

Μενέλαος ἄναξ ἠδ' Ἀγαμέμνων,  
...  
μέγαν ἐκ θυμοῦ κλάζοντες Ἄρη  
τρόπον αἰγυπιῶν, οἷτ' ἐκπατίοις  
ἄλγεσι παίδων ὕπατοι λεχέων  
στροφοδινοῦνται  
περύγων ἐρετμοῖσιν ἐρεσσόμενοι,

Agamemnon as Eagle and Vulture: Animal Single-Parent Images in the *Oresteia*

Jennifer A. Stanull  
The Altamont School  
jenstanull@gmail.com

δεμνιοτήρη  
πόνον ὀρταλίχων ὀλέσαντες:

Menelaus and Agamemnon, my lord, . . . Their cry of war went shrill from the heart, as vultures stricken in agony for young perished, high from the nest eddy and circle to bend and sweep of the wings' stroke, lost far below, the fledglings, the nest, and the tendance.

5. Ag. 205-217

ἄναξ δ' ὁ πρέσβυς τότε εἶπε φωνῶν:  
'βαρεῖα μὲν κῆρ τὸ μὴ πιθέσθαι,  
βαρεῖα δ', εἰ τέκνον δαΐ-  
ξω, δόμων ἄγαλμα,  
μιαίνων παρθενοσφάγοισιν  
ρείθροις πατρώους χέρας  
πέλας βωμοῦ: τί τῶνδ' ἄνευ κακῶν,  
πῶς λιπόνους γένωμαι  
ξυμμαχίας ἀμαρτῶν;  
παυσανέμου γὰρ θυσίας  
παρθενίου θ' αἵματος ὀρ-  
γᾶ περιόργως ἐπιθυ-  
μεῖν θέμις. εὖ γὰρ εἶη.'

The elder lord spoke aloud before them: "My fate is angry if I disobey these, but angry if I slaughter this child, the beauty of my house, with maiden blood shed staining these father's hands beside the altar. What of these things goes now without disaster? How shall I fail my ships and lose my faith of battle? For them to urge such sacrifice of innocent blood, angrily, for their wrath is great- it is right. May all be well yet."

6. Ag. 799-802

σὺ δέ μοι τότε μὲν στέλλων στρατιὰν  
Ἑλένης ἔνεκ', οὐ γὰρ σ' ἐπικεύσω,  
κάρτ' ἀπομούσως ἦσθα γεγραμμένος,  
οὐδ' εὖ πραπίδων οἶακα νέμων

But I: when you marshalled this armament for Helen's sake, I will not hide it, in ugly style you were written in my heart for steering aslant the mind's course

Agamemnon as Eagle and Vulture: Animal Single-Parent Images in the *Oresteia*

Jennifer A. Stanull  
The Altamont School  
jenstanull@gmail.com

7. *Ag.* 60-67

οὕτω δ' Ἀτρέως παῖδας ὁ κρείσσων  
ἐπ' Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πέμπει ξένιος  
Ζεὺς πολυάνορος ἀμφὶ γυναικὸς  
πολλὰ παλαίσματα καὶ γυιοβαρῆ  
γόνατος κονίασιν ἐρειδομένου  
διακναιομένης τ' ἐν προτελείοις  
κάμακος θήσων Δαναοῖσι  
Τρωσὶ θ' ὁμοίως.

So drives Zeus the great guest god the Atreidae against Alexander: for one woman's promiscuous sake the struggling, legs tired, knees grinding in dust, spears broken in the onset. Danaans and Trojans they have it alike.

8. *Ag.* 55-59

ὑπατος δ' αἶων ἢ τις Ἀπόλλων  
ἢ Πᾶν ἢ Ζεὺς οἰωνόθροον  
γόνον ὄξυβόαν τῶνδε μετοίκων  
ὑστερόποινον  
πέμπει παραβᾶσιν Ἐρινύν.

Yet someone hears in the air, a god, Apollo, Pan, or Zeus, the high thin wail of these sky-guests, and drives late to its mark the Fury upon the transgressors.

Works Cited

Fraenkel, Eduard. *Aeschylus Agamemnon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962.

Garvie, A. F. *Aeschylus Choephoroi*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Goldhill, Simon. *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The Oresteia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Lattimore, Richmond, trans. *Oresteia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.