

This paper presents two instances of the myth of the house of Atreus as a "vehicle for ideology". The first is the *Oresteia* trilogy of Aeschylus; the second is J.-P. Sartre's *The Flies*. The contrast between the two uses is interesting: for Aeschylus it served to make normative the basis for political change; for Sartre it served to subvert the ruling Nazi regime in France.

Aeschylus took the myth and by a combination of selection and alteration of the versions available to him, presented his own as an authoritative sanction for the changes in the organization of the Attic polity known as the Kleisthenic reforms. From Zeitlin's reading of the *Oresteia* outlines the fundamental importance to the trilogy of the oppositions between loyalties based on nature -- the blood-bond of family, and those based on culture -- the legal bond of marriage. She develops this as male vs. female in Greek culture, and reads the trilogy as the founding text for the control of the female as the requisite for social progress. I show a parallel, complementary way these oppositions played out in the political history of 5th century Athens in the Kleisthenic reforms, for which Aeschylus' trilogy provides ideological support.

The second ideological use of this myth is that in J.-P. Sartre's *The Flies*. He changed the myth in numerous particulars, expanding the action of the *Libation Bearers* into a 3-act play, and made it an existentialist treatise. Most importantly, he created a subservient populace cowed by the fear and guilt that Aegisthos and Klytaimestra cultivated so as to control them. The people believe that they share the responsibility for the murder of Agamemnon. Their remorse has paralysed their will and ability to act; they believe they deserve their bondage. Only Orestes, the existential hero, is able to accept the flies, symbols of the town's remorse, and move on.

*The Flies* was first produced in 1943 in German-occupied Paris as a call to the people of wartime France not to indulge in the remorse and guilt that many felt as a result of the "sins of the Third Republic" which led to the Nazi victory in 1940. In this version of the myth, the Nazis play the role of Klytaimestra and Aegisthos, and the French that of the people of Argos. The French were in the same position of paralysis as the Argives, refusing to believe in their ability to resist their overlords and free themselves.

A curious coda: after World War II, the play was performed in the French sector of occupied Germany with a changed message: the Germans themselves were weighted down with guilt and remorse. Now they had to "accept the flies" of responsibility so as to get on with their lives and rebuild their country. In Berlin in 1947 the play acquired yet another ideological flavouring: its presentation became a point of political tension between the East and the West: the Soviets denounced it as "evidence of bourgeois decadence", while the West saw it as testimony to the freedom of the individual.