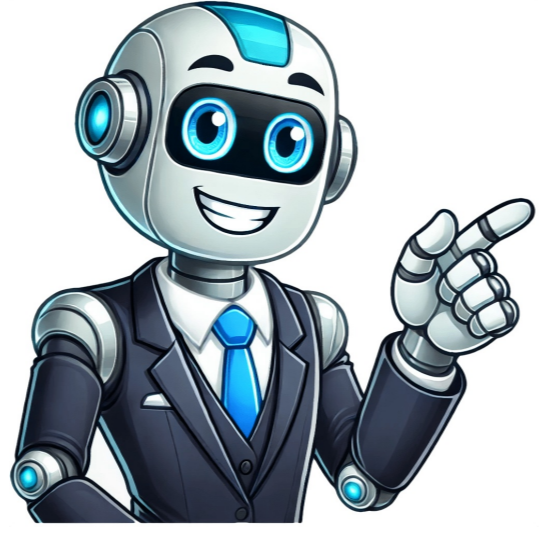


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The Eumenides is an Attic tragedy by Aeschylus, one of the most famous tragedians of classical Athens. It was originally staged in 458 BCE at the City Dionysia, an annual dramatic festival in which playwrights would compete to entertain the citizens of Athens. It serves as the final play of the *Oresteia*, a trilogy of connected tragedies depicting the murder of Agamemnon and its aftermath.In the Eumenides, Agamemnon's son Orestes is tormented by the Erinyes (the Furies) as punishment for killing his own mother Clytemnestra (which he did to avenge her murder of Agamemnon). Supported by the gods Apollo and Athena, Orestes receives a trial on the Areopagus in Athens and is ultimately acquitted.The play, which explores the themes of law, purification, and familial and religious piety, is still widely read today.The title Eumenides (Greek, translit. [Emmendes]) comes from a euphemistic name for the Erinyes, or FuriesOrestes tormentors in the play. Significantly, however, the term Eumenides never occurs in the text; there is thus some doubt as to whether this was the original title.Eumenides (Emmendes)[yoo-MEN-i-dēez]/yumn diz/Aeschylus (ca. 525/4456/5 BCE) was the oldest of the three canonical Attic tragedians (the other two being Sophocles and Euripides). Regarded as the father of tragedy, Aeschylus introduced important innovations to the genre and was highly esteemed for his dextrous use of symbolism and metaphor, as well as his exploration of justice and the role of the gods in human life.A hern, conventionally said to be a bust of Aeschylus (first century CE)Capitoline Museums, RomePublic DomainFrom the many legends surrounding Aeschylus life, we can extract a few details that are probably factual. Aeschylus was born to an aristocratic family from Eleusis (or thereabouts). He began producing tragedies in the 490s BCE, winning his first victory at the Dionysia in 484 BCE. He fought against the Persians at Marathon in 490 BCE and at Salamis in 480 BCE. Around 470 BCE, he visited Sicily at the invitation of the Syracusean tyrant Hieron; he later returned to Sicily and ultimately died there.Own the course of his distinguished career, Aeschylus composed some ninety plays and won thirteen victories at the Dionysia. He was revered both during his life and after, though by the fourth century BCE his plays were increasingly seen as archaic, especially compared to the works of his successors, Sophocles and Euripides.As the final entry in Aeschylus Oresteia trilogy, the Eumenides covers Orestes experiences following the events of the previous play, the Libation Bearers. In the Libation Bearers, Orestes returns to Argos after a long exile to punish his mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus for their murder of his father Agamemnon (Agamemnon's death, in turn, is the central event of the Agamemnon, the first play of the Orestia).By the end of the Libation Bearers, Orestes has successfully enacted his revenge; but by shedding the blood of his own mother, he incurs the wrath of the Erinyes, the Underworld goddesses responsible for pursuing murderers.The Eumenideswhich begins at an unspecified time after Orestes murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthusdescribes Orestes journey to Athens. There he is finally acquitted of his crimes through a trial at the Areopagus. Orestes acquittal breaks the cycle of violence and retribution that has haunted his family for generations.While the first two plays of the Orestia closely follow events from Homers Odyssey, the Eumenides is not indebted to Homer in the same way. In fact, the play sometimes contradicts details from Homers account. For example, while Homer has Orestes travel from Athens to kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, Aeschylus Eumenides depicts him coming to Athens only after he has carried out his revenge.[1]Other key details from Aeschylus playsuch as Apollo commanding Orestes to avenge his father, and the Erinyes pursuing Orestes after the factare absent from Homers epics. Aeschylus probably based the plot of his Eumenides on the works of Stesichorus and Semonides, both of whom seem to have had Apollo advise Orestes on how to avenge his murdered father. Apollos role in the myth is also hinted at in Pindars eleventh Pythian Ode.Augustan fresco showing Apollo with a kithara from the House of the Scapae Caci on the Palatine Hill in RomePalatine Museum, Rome / Dody escouade dellaPublic DomainIn the play, it is said that Orestes will protect the Athenians after his death. This was probably modeled on the belief, reported by Herodotus, that it was the Spartans recovery of the gigantic bones of Orestes that allowed them to prevail in their war with Tegea.[2]The protection of a specific city from the grave was an important function of Greek heroes, and Orestes represents a magnification of that function, protecting not only his own city of Argos (or Mycenae, according to some accounts) but also allied cities as well (whether Athens or Sparta).The Eumenides also served another function, dramatizing the origins of the Areopagus famous Athenian court and council. The aetiological myth, or origin myth, of the Areopagus put forward in the Eumenides rests on a connection between Orestes and Athens that may have emerged quite early in Greek history. Nonetheless, Aeschylus Eumenides is the only surviving source to fully flesh out that connection.Orestes trial is not the only aetiological myth connected with the Areopagus. In another tradition, the murder court of the Areopagus was established when the god Ares was tried there for his murder of Poseidons son Hallirrhothius, who had raped Ares daughter (hence the name of the Areopagus, which means Hill of Ares).[3]The Areopagus in general was tremendously important in the mythology of Athens; it was here, for instance, that Theseus was said to have warded off the Amazon invasion. Thus, Orestes association with this specific hill is fairly significant.The Acropolis of Athens by Leo von Klenze (1846)Neue Pinakothek, MunichPublic DomainOrestes was also connected to Athens via the Choesthe second day of an Athenian festival known as the Antheseria. It was believed that on this daywhich was said to commemorate Orestes arrival in Athensthe dead would rise up from the Underworld and visit the world of the living. During the festival, celebrants would sit and drink by themselves.The Eumenides also serves as an origin story for the cult of the Eumenidesor, perhaps more accurately, for the cult of the Semnai Theai, the Holy Goddesses. In fact, the term Eumenides never actually occurs in the play (and may not have been the original title), while the cult of the mollified Erinyes has important similarities with the Athenian cult of the Semnai Theai.The Erinyes were known as punishers of murderers and guarantors of order from the very earliest times; their name is even attested in the Bronze Age. Yet Aeschylus seems to have been the first to identify them with the Semnai Theai, goddesses of justice worshipped in a cave between the reopagus and the Acropolis.The following is a list of characters from Aeschylus Eumenides, in order of appearance:Pythia (priestess of Apollo at Delphi)Orestes (son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra)Apollo (god of prophecy, healing, and music)Ghost of Clytemnestra (wife of Agamemnon; mother of Orestes)Chorus (the Erinyes)Athena (goddess of war and wisdom)Second Chorus (Athenian women)In Greek tragedy, it was conventional for all speaking parts to be distributed among no more than three actors. In the case of the Eumenides, however, scholars disagree on how exactly these parts were assigned.It is possible that one actor (the Protagonist) played Orestes; a second actor (the Deuteragonist) played the ghost of Clytemnestra and Athena; and a third actor (the Tritagonist) played Apollo. The Pythia could have been played by either the Deuteragonist or the Tritagonist. The jury at Orestes trial and various court officers would have been played by additional mute actors.The play opens in front of the temple of Apollo at Delphi. In the prologue, the Pythia details the history of Delphi as she prepares to open the temple. Once inside, she is alarmed to find Orestes, who is surrounded by the sleeping Erinyes.Apollo arrives, explaining that his attempts to purify Orestes for murdering his mother Clytemnestra have been unsuccessful thus far. He therefore instructs Orestes to travel to Athens to seek the aid of Athena.As Apollo and Orestes exit, the ghost of Clytemnestra materializes to awaken the Erinyes. Roused from their slumber, the Erinyes sing their first choral ode (the parodos), in which they censure Orestes as well as the Olympian gods who support him.Paestan red-figure bell-krater by Python (ca. 330 BCE) showing Orestes (center) at Delphi, flanked by Apollo (right) and Athena (left); one of the Erinyes can be seen above (top center)British Museum, London / JastrowPublic DomainApollo returns to the stage and argues the justice of his cause with the Erinyes. This debate maps onto the conflict in Orestes parental allegiances; after all, the very reason Orestes finds himself in trouble in the Eumenides is that he murdered his mother in order to avenge his father. In other words, Orestes has embraced the power of the father (represented by the new gods) over the power of the mother (represented by the old gods).It is no accident, then, that it is Athena who ultimately reconciles the opposing forces of the play. While Athena does, by birth, belong to the younger generation of gods, she is also female, like the older gods. However, her femininity does not manifest itself in the dangerous sexuality that characterizes Clytemnestra in the Agamemnon and the Libation Bearers; in fact, Athena is a virgin goddess and therefore asexual. This sexuality, which she shares with the bestial Erinyes, allows Athena to find common ground with the Erinyes, and thus to ally with them. In taking the old gods into the fold of her city, Athena transforms them and further consolidates the power of the new gods and their world order on a basis based on justice and law.The "Varvakeion Athena" (first half of the third century CE), after the Athena Parthenos by PhidiasNational Archaeological Museum, Athens / George E. KoronaiosCC BY-SA 4.0The city of Athens itself also plays a central role in the Eumenides. Much of the action of the play is set in Athenes same location where the entire Oresteia trilogy was first produced. Thus, the Eumenides, as performed in antiquity, would have blended with its physical surroundings.The play integrated itself with the city on a political and historical level, too. Today most scholars agree that the Eumenides was responding to at least two specific historical events that had taken place shortly before the play was first produced.First, Orestes promise of eternal friendship between his kingdom of Argos and the city of Athens reflects the historical alliance between Argos and Athens that had just been signed in 461 BCE, three years before the staging of the Oresteia.Second, the Eumenides goes to great lengths to describe the origins of the court and council of the Areopagusan institution whose powers had recently been diminished by the political reforms of Ephialtes in the 460s BCE. Through these historical allusions, the Eumenides engages with the world of contemporary Athens in a very concrete way. The Eumenides had an almost immediate impact on both audiences and other tragedians. Indeed, the entire Oresteia trilogy was quite popular among the ancient Athenians and greatly influenced the works of Aeschylus successors. Both Sophocles and Euripides followed in Aeschylus footsteps in writing plays about Orestes murder of his mother and the consequences of that crime. In contrast to its importance in antiquity, the Oresteia trilogy was not widely read in the Middle Ages or Renaissance. In the eighteenth century, however, it began to resurface in Europe, with many important productions and adaptations.More recently, Eugene O'Neills 1931 play cycle Mourning Becomes Electra relocated the Oresteia to an American Civil War setting. T. S. Eliots The Family Reunion (1939) and Jean-Paul Sartres Les Mouches (The Flies) (1942) similarly retell Aeschylus story for a more modern world.Today, the Eumenides and the other plays of the Oresteia remain among Aeschylus most widely read and admired works.Translations of Aeschylus Eumenides usually appear together with the other two plays of the Oresteia trilogy (the Agamemnon and the Libation Bearers). The following is a selected chronological list of important and useful English translations: Smyth, Herbert W., trans. Aeschylus. Loeb Classical Library 146. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926: An old but reliable prose translation. It was replaced in the Loeb Classical Library by a new translation in 2008 but is still available online through the Perseus Project.Lloyd-Jones, Hugh, trans. Oresteia. London: Duckworth, 1979: An accurate translation with helpful annotations, best suited for more advanced readers.Harrison, Tony, trans. The Oresteia. 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The trilogy as a whole, originally performed at the annual Dionysia festival in Athens in 458 BCE, where it won first prize, is considered to be Aeschylus' last authenticated, and also his greatest, work."The Eumenides" tells of how Orestes is pursued to Athens by the vengeful Erinyes for the murder of his mother, Clytemnestra, and how he is tried before Athena and a jury of Athenians to decide whether his crime justifies the torment of theErinyes.Orestes Floeing Synopsis - The EumenidesSummaryStill tormented by the Erinyes, after killing his mother, Orestes finds temporary refuge at the new temple of Apollo in Delphi. As the play begins, the Pythia, Apollo's priestess, enters the temple and is shocked by a scene of horror and wonder when she finds the exhausted Orestes in the suppliant's chair, surrounded by the sleeping Furies, and urges them to continue hunting Orestes. In a haunting sequence, the Erinyes track down Orestes by following the scent of his slain mother's blood through the forest and then through the streets of Athens. When they see him, they can even see rivulets of blood soaking the earth beneath hisfootsteps.Finally surrounded again by the threatening Furies, Orestes begs Athena for help. The goddess of justice intervenes and brings in a jury of twelve Athenians to judge Orestes. Athena herself presides over the trial, instructing her citizens to watch and learn how a trial should be conducted. Apollo speaks on behalf of Orestes, while the Erinyes act as advocates for the dead Clytemnestra. When the trial votes are counted, the voting is equal, but Athena persuades the Erinyes to accept her own decision in favour of Orestes as the castingvote. Orestes visiting the Pythia at Delphi to request help from Apollo and Athena, 4th century BCE Vindicated, Orestes thanks Athena and the people of Athens, and leaves to go home to Argos, a free man and the rightful king. Athena then placates the furious Erinyes, renaming them "The Eumenides" (or "The Kindly Ones"), and ruling that they will now be honoured by the citizens of Athens. Athena also declares that, henceforth, hung juries should always result in the defendant being acquitted, as mercy should always take precedence overharshness.As the play ends, the women attending Athena sing praises to Zeus and Destiny, who have brought this marvellous arrangement topass.Analysis "The Oresteia" (comprising "Agamemnon", "The Libation Bearers" and "The Eumenides") is the only surviving example of a complete trilogy of ancient Greek plays (a fourth play, which would have been performed as a comic finale, a satyr play called Proteus, has not survived). It was originally performed at the annual Dionysia festival in Athens in 458 BCE, where it won first prize.Although technically a tragedy, "The Oresteia" (and therefore "The Orestia" as a whole) actually ends on a relatively upbeat note, which may surprise modern readers, although in fact the term "tragedy" did not carry its modern meaning in ancient Athens, and many of the extant Greek tragedies do not. In the Chorus of "The Oresteia", Athena is more integral to the action than the Chorus in the works of the other great Greek tragedians, Sophocles and Euripides (particularly as the elder Aeschylus was only one step removed from the ancient tradition in which the whole play was conducted by the Chorus). In "The Eumenides" in particular, the Chorus is even more essential because it consists of the Erinyes themselves and, after a certain point, their story (and their successful integration into the pantheon of Athens) becomes a major part of the play.Throughout "The Oresteia", Aeschylus uses a lot of naturalistic metaphors and symbols, such as solar and lunar cycles, night and day, storms, winds, fire, etc, to represent the vacillating nature of human reality (good and evil, birth and death, sorrow and happiness, etc). There is also a significant amount of animal symbolism in the plays, and humans who forget how to govern themselves justy tend to be personified asbeasts. Orestes Pursued by the Furies - William Adolphe Bouguereau Other important themes covered by the trilogy include: the cyclical nature of blood crimes (the ancient law of the Erinyes mandates that blood must be paid for with blood in an unending cycle of doom, and the bloody past history of the House of Atreus continues to affect events generation after generation in a self-perpetuating cycle of violence begetting violence); the lack of clarity between right and wrong (Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Orestes are all faced with impossible moral choices, with no clearcut right and wrong); the conflict between the old and the new gods (the Erinyes represent the ancient, primitive laws which demand blood vengeance, while Apollo, and particularly Athena, represent the new order of reason and civilization); and the difficult nature of inheritance (and the responsibilities it carries withit). There is also an underlying metaphorical aspect to the entire drama: the change from archaic self-help justice by personal revenge or vendetta to the administration of justice by trial (sanctioned by the gods themselves) throughout the series of plays, symbolizes the passage from a primitive Greek society governed by instincts, to a modern democratic society governed by reason. The tyranny under which Argos finds itself during the rule of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus corresponds in a very broad way to some events in the biographical career of Aeschylushimself. He is known to have made at least two visits to the court of the Sicilian tyrant Hieron, and it is clear that the democratic society of Athens, the tension between archaic monarchy, a common theme in Greek drama, is palpable throughout the three plays.By the end of the Oresteia, Orestes is seen to be the key, not only to ending the curse of the House of Atreus, but also in laying the foundation for a new step in the progress of humanity. Thus, although Aeschylususes an ancient and well-known myth as the basis for his The Orestia, he approaches it in a distinctly different way than other writers who came before him, with his own agenda to convey.

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