

BABYLONIAN DIMENSIONS IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY

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This study is twofold: First, it sheds light on Babylonian mythology as one of the earliest origins of civilized human consciousness outside the industrialized West. Secondly, it explores the range of impact which is manifested by the diversity of this human cultural experience on Western consciousness illustrated primordially by ancient Greek mythology. By highlighting the cultural and philosophical dimensions of the *Enumaelish* and the epic of *Gilgamesh* as Near Eastern myths, it is hoped that a palpable vision of the impact of Babylonian mythology on its Greek counterpart and subsequently, on modern Western philosophy and literature will be validated and authenticated.

Much of the *Enumaelish* is strongly evident in Greek mythology. Many scholarly works are devoted to establish a possible connection between the two neighbouring myths. Walcot suggests that "Zeus in the *Theogony* and Marduk in the *Enumaelish* are the two gods above all others to be compared." ¹ In his comparative survey of theogony, theomachy and eventual harmony, Walcot resorts to Hesiod's *Theogony* as a manifestation of Babylonian symptoms in Greek mythology; but he falls short of extending this comparative survey to the Greek dramatic heritage.

My contention in this context is that the *Oresteia* constitutes a suitable hunting ground for the investigation of Babylonian influence on the Greek dramatic heritage. This influence can be authenticated because it is part of what appears to be a practice within the framework of a tradition:

The Greeks turned eastward only when their own society was ready to receive outside influences; ... Many Greek artists and thinkers drew stimuli from the Orient to break more abruptly with the external domination of old molds and thus to speed the tempo of a revolution which would otherwise have proceeded more slowly. For their new ideas they could draw on an abundance of Oriental motifs and techniques. ²

The *Enumaelish* and the *Oresteia* contain narrative and dramatic elements. In fact the former is described as a "dramatic ritual"³ by Jacobsen. Both narrate the historiography of the organization of the universe. According to Walcot, what Maraluk does in the *Enumaelish* is remarkably narrated to have been done by Zeus. Both works historiographize and describe how the world has come into being and, later, to a conclusive harmony after threats that it may be out of joint, so to speak.

But Aeschylus seems to take the myth of theogony a further step forward when he gives equal emphasis to the human representation or dimension in cosmology.

The relevance of the *Oresteia* to the *Enumaelish* is capturable through structural, narrative, dramatic and conceptual parallels. Structurally, the *Enumaelish* exhibits four major movements which

historiographically manifest important developments. These movements also have symphonic attributes beginning with total silence and stillness, moving on to noisy sounds of variable tones including loud and violent ones and finally settling to a stable finale.

The first movement of the *Enumaesh* is characterized by stillness and inertia which characterize the precosmic condition or the chaotic non-entity of the cosmos when nothing was intelligible or articulate. Darkness and chaos are associated at this point.

Like the *Enumaesh*, the *Oresteia* can be divided into four major movements, each of which has a divine association and a concomitant human representation. Initially, it has to be stated that Aeschylus leans heavily on the survey of theogony. According to Solmsen, Hesiod's *Theogony* constitutes the theological framework for Aeschylus' account of theogony and theomachy in the *Oresteia*. The third part of the Aeschylean trilogy, the *Eumenedes* is Aeschylus' version of theogony theomachy and eventual harmony and order. The first movement in the *Eumenedes* displays stillness and inertia represented by the sleeping Furies. The Babylonian conception of the precosmic condition as a chaotic non-entity and the association of chaos with night and darkness is almost identically reproduced by Hesiod in *Theogony* "First of all there came chaos" ⁴ and also by Aeschylus who refers to them as the daughters of darkness and the representation of irrationalism and chaos. A common feature between Apsu and Tiamat on the one hand and the Furies on the other is that both sets are characterized by stillness, motionlessness and sleep. Aeschylus here incorporates Hesiod's concept which the latter himself derives almost exclusively from the *Enumaesh*. The precosmic deities in the *Enumaesh* and the *Oresteia* are disturbed by noise and when they are forced to act it is only to retrieve the older status quo which is violated by the younger gods.

A major formative difference between the *Enumaesh* and the *Oresteia* is that the former focuses almost exclusively on the divine condition while Aeschylus in the latter introduces an even handed emphasis on the divine and human conditions. Accordingly, the first divine movement in the *Oresteia* is juxtaposed to its human representation. Just as reference in the *Eumenedes* is made to chaos, inertia, darkness, night and confusion, *Agamemnon* the first play of the trilogy opens with complaints from similar symptoms. The opening lines of the play describe how darkness, confusion and political and social chaos are brought by Clytaemnestra's intrusion on a predominantly male

world. She is associated with the forces of chaos and the irrational. There is much in Clytaemnestra that strongly recalls Tiamat; a suggestion which will be verified later in the present discussion. According to Brian Vickers, she is the embodiment of Persuasion, strong daughter of Ate, the eldest daughter of Zeus and the goddess of delusion and irrationalism. She is the embodiment of primordial female tyranny which is much older, more established and more sacred than the male intrusion. Accordingly, she is strongly related to, and associated with the Furies who pop up to take revenge upon the wrong doer, her son Orestes.

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The second movement in the *Enumaelish* is a qualitative shift demonstrating a clash between two antithetical sets of divinities who represent phenomenal contradictions. Apsu, the precosmic deity decides to destroy the younger gods in order to restore silence and inertia. Ea, the younger god slaughters Apsu and establishes his own abode upon Apsu's slain body. This exhibits the birth of the strongest of the strong and the wisest of the wise: Marduk. This is significant because just as Ea surpassed Apsu in wisdom and strength, Marduk surpassed his father in everything.

Thus the second movement of the *Enumaelish* moves in a steady pace from the world of stillness into the world of action and sound. At this point, the world seems progressively transforming from a static to dynamic condition. This transformation though, is not complete because old powers have not lost momentum and still constitute a potential danger for the new system. Yet, this movement ends on a partially positive note because the new order emerges as a somewhat solid alternative to the primitive, irrational and disorderly precosmic condition. An important point about this movement is that it introduces the reader to three divine generations respectively: Apsu, Ea and Marduk. This trinity symbolizes a progressive development of the cosmos through a series of changes caused by theomachy and a peaceful transformation of power.

The ancient Greek account of theogony takes an almost identical route vis-a-vis Uranus, Cronos and Zeus. This constitutes the pivot of the Hesiodic approach which is according to Slomson the starting point for Aeschylus' own approach both in *Prometheus Bound* and the *Oresteia*. Aeschylus, like Hesiod, takes some liberty with the Babylonian text. The Babylonian trinity demonstrates less savagery in the process of power

transformation than the Greek trinity. Uranus is violently overthrown by Cronos just as he himself is violently toppled by Zeus. Uranus in the *Theogony*, like Apsu is cast as the wicked parent who is embarked on killing his offsprings. Tiamat merely opposes Apsu's plot but Gaia in the Hesiodic account encourages Cronos to kill his father. Like Ea, Cronos is much more sophisticated than his father and the encounter between Zeus and Cronos is almost a replica of that between Cronos and Uranus. Like Marduk, Zeus is presented as the wisest among his forebears. However Zeus' victory and enthronement as the king of the gods, like that of Marduk do not make them immune to potential future danger. For both of them, there is a danger in the making. The older forces are standing by, so to speak, waiting for the apt moment to start their counter attack.

The Hesiodic account gives a reckoning of three divine rulers who represent three generations and who belong to one divine family curse. It is clear from the *Theogony* that the catastrophes which have befallen Uranus and Cronos are caused basically by the wrongs committed by each. It is worth noting here that the three Babylonian divine generations: Apsu, Ea and Marduk exhibit a less violent scene than the Greek account. Apsu merely threatens to kill his children but Uranus actually does so. His crime is real and so is his punishment by Cronos who represents the second divine generation. The crime of Cronos is dual: it is against his father and also against his own wife and children and so his punishment is for both crimes. The Erinyes are born as a result of the castration of his own father. It is these powers who have saved Zeus from the wrath of Cronos. Earlier, Uranus predicts that punishment is to befall the next generation of his children. Hesiod introduces the Erinyes as instruments of vengeance for Uranus against Cronos through Zeus. Aeschylus is visibly aware of them through these developments within the divine dynasty. They will pursue Cronos and see to it that he is ruined. According to Solmsen, "in Aeschylus, Erinyes and curses are synonymous".⁵ Aeschylus points out that like his father, Cronos curses the son who overthrows him; and this is a major issue in *Prometheus Bound*. This curse is justifiable because Zeus attains his rule in ways which are flagrantly at variance with filial piety. Prometheus holds the key to the secret of the son who is going to overthrow Zeus for which he undergoes a painful punishment. It is a conflict between "the irresistible and the immovable"⁶, to use Prof. Kitto's words. But they meet each other half way. Prometheus is rehabilitated and Zeus is acquitted from the curse. This is Aeschylus' account of theomachy in *Prometheus Bound*

which corresponds with the Hesiodic account and which is also exhibited in the *Oresteia* both on the divine and human levels.

Family curse seems to operate on divine and human plains. In both criteria, the agents of vengeance are one and the same. In the *Oresteia* it is clear that the house of Atreus is subject to the steady attrition of the family curse caused by ancient and recent crimes. The law of vengeance is described in the *Agamemnon* as "inexhaustible, ever new, it breeds the more we reap it / tides on tides of crimson dye our robes blood-red". (*Ag.*, 959-960) Clytaemnestra's murder of Agamemnon marks the beginning of the implementation of family curse. The three-generation formula which operates on the divine level: (Uranus, Cronos and Zeus) is equally operative on the human level. Clytaemnestra states that "Three generations / feed the spirit in the race. / Deep in the veins he feeds our blood lust - / aye, before the old wound dies / it ripens in another flow of blood." (*Ag.*, 1505-08) The three generations on the human level include Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra and Orestes. It is significant that in the same way that Zeus has survived his lot and is actually acquitted from the archaic flow of the curse on the divine family, Orestes is acquitted by Apollo and Athena from the wrath of the Furies. The Erinyes who are described as instruments of divine justice to exact punishment on the divine wrong doer are reintroduced by Aeschylus on the human level as well. They are also meant to restore the rights of older deities. This leads to the third movement which is marked by hostility resulting from the violation by new deities of older systems or values.

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The noisiest and most violent movement both in the *Enumaelish* and the *Oresteia* is the third movement where inter-divine relations are fomented with hatred, bitterness and grudge. Once more, the parallel which the *Enumaelish* reflects in Greek illustrations is both consistent and compelling. In both works the theme of succession is dealt with in a considerable detail. And although less emphasis is given to theogony in the *Oresteia*, the idea is nonetheless forcefully presented. The two texts display how each new generation of gods surpasses its elders in strength and wisdom. Both texts demonstrate generation gaps which separate old gods from new ones. In the *Enumaelish*, Tiamat is the remaining archetypal representative of old gods. Tiamat is instigated to foment conflict to avenge her husband's death, and restore the primordial

precosmic condition. She may also be instigated by grudge and envy of the supreme qualities of Marduk as a male god. She is obviously the only female deity to reckon with in the whole poem. It is also clear that the author of the *Enumaelish* is not sympathetic to Tiamat. But he seems to overlook the inconsistency between Marduk's and the new gods' accusations against her and her own motherly attitude when Apsu decided to kill their children. Tiamat visibly shows motherly affection towards her children which stands as a contrast to the hostile attitude of Apsu, the male parent. At this point, familial demands seem to be the prime mover of Tiamat's action, these demands are shown to be more sacred and more ancient than the new realities created by young male gods. Tiamat is also related to the savage world of monsters which she creates to promote her cause. She herself, is described as a dragon.

Tiamat's second husband, Kingu is a subordinate male deity who functions through her order and who illustrates female supremacy and dominance of the familial and political systems. He was unable to develop a cult of his own or become a central figure in the forthcoming conflict. He was merely instrumental for Tiamat whose character, purpose and action reversed the existing stereotype, i.e., the male domination of the pantheon. The conflict in this movement is between ancient familial demands championed by Tiamat and the unparental shift illustrated by Marduk and the younger gods. So, it has political and social dimensions. The new gods are pushing for the establishment of an organic world order which has a conceivable and purposive pattern. This new mode finds its true expression in the character of Marduk, the young male deity who represents dynamism, rationalism and wisdom. He seems to give priority to what can be described as state demands at the expense of family demands which appear to be obstructing the establishment of the new system. In this sense, the state should replace the family and the male should replace the female.

In this movement, theomachy is violent and bloody. Marduk, the apotheosis of male power, the god of historicism and individualism, the god of light faces Tiamat, the archaic female prototype of irrationalism, darkness and anarchy. He uses weapons which are more advanced than her primitive ones. The physical conflict is preceded by a verbal bitter clash. But this verbal clash is almost exclusively unidirectional. Tiamat supposedly takes the verbal initiative but the author does not give her any room to argue her point. She is allowed only one line to argue her case, but ironically, it is missing from the poem. By contrast, he gives Marduk all the space he needs to justify his attack against Tiamat. His prejudice

against Tiamat is unmistakable and so is his bias for Marduk who accuses her of hatred and unnatural feelings towards her children. He also blames her for taking Kingu as a husband (perhaps, the Orestes complex and later, the Oedipus complex have originated here) and bestowing on him credentials which he is unqualified for. Her response to Marduk's 'logic' is actually an act of frenzy, irrationalism and furious screams which leads to a vicious battle that ends in the swift defeat and death of Tiamat. In the *Enumaelish*, the female question is dealt with through a culture which is male orientated, and which maintains sharp contradistinctions between the male and female representations. This approach characterizes the female as instinctive, wild, primitive, irrational and archaic while the male is hailed as rational, wise, sophisticated and historical. Tiamat's mutiny is portrayed as a regressive attempt to restore the precosmic conditions. By contrast, Marduk moves forward to enhance the progress and cosmic achievements by eliminating the archaic forces whose very existence endangers the new cosmic order.

The special significance of the *Oresteia* in this contrast is that the encounter between Marduk and Tiamat in the third movement of the *Enumaelish* is reprocessed by Aeschylus through the direct confrontation between Apollo who represents the Olympian deities and the Furies, the representatives of archaic values. Like the *Enumaelish*, the *Oresteia* also demonstrates the notion of generation gap between old and new gods. It is the *Eumenedes* which illustrates this generation gap. It starts with a display of bitterness, hostility and injustice by the Furies, Night's children. Zeus and the other Olympian gods have seized power at the expense of older gods who forcefully argue their political personal grievances against the Olympian gods. The daughters of Night emerge from the underworld to fulfil their duties and claim back their lost rights. Like Tiamat, they are the older divinities proud with age. Also, like her, they are female deities who come from the past to claim their rights. Unlike her, however, they are allowed enough time to argue their case and morally win the argument against Apollo, the god of rationalism, wisdom and light. However, much like Marduk's argument against Tiamat Apollo's, argument against the Furies is not meant to be convincing. Both deities are basically concerned with establishing their cosmic authorities.

Aeschylus' outlook is basically discerned through the two formative influences on tragedy, namely the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Thus, he can be described as the historiographer of the Greek myth. In other words, the *Oresteia* manifests a chronological survey of Apollonian and

Dionysian impulses, their struggle, evolution and eventual harmony. In the *Eumenedes*, Apollo stands up to the female archaic forces of darkness and irrationalism represented by the Dionysian Furies who can be seen as variations on the character of Tiamat. He is the deity who will transform the world from an archaic condition to a historical one. All these Apollonian characteristics seem to correspond closely to those of Marduk who dismisses Tiamat's archaic ontology.

Divine conflict which is manifested in the third movement of the *Oresteia* parallels its human representation visibly and forcefully. The figure of Tiamat which finds its true expression in the archaic daughters of Night and aboriginal chaos is reprocessed on the human level by Aeschylus through Clytaemnestra. Like both Tiamat and the Furies, she has divine affiliations. She embodies persuasion, the strong daughter of Ruin. Like Tiamat, she faces two major confrontations. Tiamat faces her husband Apsu and a descendant of hers: Marduk. Similarly, Clytaemnestra encounters her husband Agamemnon and later, her son Orestes. Tiamat is moved because Apsu plans to kill their children. Clytaemnestra's action against Agamemnon is basically a result of his murder of their daughter Ipheginia. Tiamat views the bonds of parenthood to be much stronger than the bonds of marriage and so does Clytaemnestra. The textual analogy here has a striking exactness. Tiamat rebukes Apsu for his destructive plot. Almost identically, Clytaemnestra justifies her murder of Agamemnon because he has destroyed the bond between them. According to B. Knox "Ipheginia's death in the most important link between these two"⁷. Agamemnon is the typical male stereotype. He kills his daughter in response to state demands which seem from the male point of view, to be more important than familial demands.

By killing Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra replaces male tyranny by a female one. The male lord of the *Oikos* is absent; so his wife is to assume his post but the female's position is politically and socially artificial. She is supposed to be a figurehead while a mature male nearest of Kin should assume real power. In Clytaemnestra's case, it is Aegistheus who fits in that category. There is a lot in Aegistheus that recalls Kingu. Both are installed in a post which they are unqualified to occupy. Both are subordinate to female authority and supremacy and it is clear that both Clytaemnestra and Tiamat have the absolute initiative over their male surrogates. Tiamat states her supremacy when she appoints Kingu as the figurehead of her army but he "remains curiously wooden and lifeless"⁸. Likewise, Clytaemnestra reverses the stereotype by not yielding power to Aegistheus who is merely a follower of the queen: "I swear my hopes /

will never walk the halls of fear / so long as Aegistheus lights the fire of my hearth. / loyal to me as always." (Ag., 1461-64) Another meeting point between Tiamat and Clytaemnestra can be noticed through bestial and monstrous associations attributed to both. Tiamat is described as a dragon which has given birth to eleven terrible monsters. Similarly, Clytaemnestra is repeatedly referred to in terms of wild associations. She is the watchdog, the hell hound, monster of Greece, viper, lioness and brutal. Like Tiamat, Clytaemnestra gave birth to Orestes who is described as a snake. Electra describes her mother as a wolf and herself and her brother as young wolves.

The second confrontation by Clytaemnestra is against her son Orestes who can be considered as the human representation of Marduk, Tiamat's grandson. Here too, the conflict is between familial demands and state demands. It also symbolizes the male attempt to retrieve his authority which is usurped by female intrusion. Orestes' action is instigated by Apollo the god of the *Polis* who has total disregard for familial and particularly female demands. Like Tiamat, Clytaemnestra is a stumbling block which hinders the full establishment of the new state system. The Tiamat - Clytaemnestra duality can be forcefully contrasted to the Marduk - Orestes duality. Tiamat has committed a 'wicked crime' by her uprising against the new authority. Likewise, Clytaemnestra's "wicked crime" symbolises an undesirable archaic setback. The Clytaemnestra - Orestes encounter strongly recalls the Tiamat - Marduk scene. Tiamat is accused of wickedness and hatred towards her descendants by the young gods and later by Marduk - an accusation which is inconsistent with her earlier defence of her children. Clytaemnestra faces similar charges by Apollo, her son, the chorus and almost all critics. She is identically misrepresented or at best underrepresented. However, Aeschylus shows a more sophisticated artistic vision because her counter argument reveals a dexterity of speech which overwhelmingly justifies her audacity of action. Orestes' accusation focuses on the unmaternal disposition of his mother. But it is clear that she kills her husband partly because of his murder of her daughter. It is easier for her to rebuff Orestes' claims which sound as ridiculous as Apollo's logic against the Furies. By sending him away as a child, Clytaemnestra shows more concern for the bond between parent and child than Agamemnon whose action is totally unparental. She wins the moral argument although she is clearly going to be killed by her son. Much like the death of Tiamat, that of Clytaemnestra is meant to reintroduce male tyranny and establish a solid basis for a male orientated *Polis* which will subdue the demands of the *Oikos*.

The fourth and final movement in the *Enumaelish* is a celebration of Marduk's victory over Tiamat and the foundation of a new cosmic order. Heidel argues that "the high point of this celebration is the proclamation of Marduk's fifty names"⁹. However, I think that the ultimate conclusion of his supremacy is attained only after appeasing the defeated gods who have earlier sided with Tiamat. By doing so, he diffuses all potential future theomachy. Because although they are defeated, these gods still constitute a potential future danger. Marduk shows a sophisticated political vision by recognizing the fine line between constitutional monarchy and arbitrary despotism. Restoring them to life and rehabilitating them in the Anunnaki is Marduk's main achievement because the outcome of his move leads to a reconciled, harmonious and fulfilled cosmos.

The creation of man is to be seen as an important step in this direction. One aspect of humiliating the defeated gods was to impose slavery upon them. However, the creation of man was part of divine reconciliation. According to Heidel, the creation of man "is of rather secondary importance; it merely serves the purpose of satisfying the discontented gods ... and of further enhancing Marduk's glory" ¹⁰. However, the new cosmic divine order exhibits no concern for man's plight whose existence for the gods is exclusively mechanical and has no moral implications. According to this system, man is a contemptible creature whose relation to the gods is merely a slave - master relationship. Man's mortality is conceived as a representation of his origin. He sprang from a sinful dead god. This explains his contemptibility for the gods and his morality. Since his existence is a representation of his original sin, his life should be an act of toil and suffering which is alien to any divine interests. The Mesopotamian view of life as illustrated by Gilgamesh exhibits an awareness of, and a fear from mortality. It also manifests an obsession with the idea of immortality which is frustrated by his origin and nature. Throughout the *Enumaelish*, we are constantly led to believe that the divine and human conditions are invariably and uncompromisingly incompatible.

In the *Oresteia*, the fourth movement, on the divine level, witnesses the overall victory of Olympian standards against the principles of the archaic period represented by the Furies. However, like Marduk's victory, that of the Olympian gods remains shaky and incomplete because older

deities are still a considerable force to reckon with. So a harmonious formula must be worked out in order to achieve a new divine order. At this point, Apollonian-Dionysian duality begins to exhibit symptoms of power sharing replacing a long period of power struggle. Apollonian criteria can now coexist with Dionysian standards. They can even be complementary to each other. Apollonian values will no longer attempt an exclusive rule of the universe, nor will archaic, Dionysian features in nature wildly exercise their brutal force. Like the *Enumaelish*, the *Oresteia* ends on a note of grace which embraces only the divine world. But what is available of Aeschylean tragedies does not specifically indicate a thematic manifestation of that agreement on the human level.

Harmony between the old and new deities bears a cosmological necessity. It is predicted in *Prometheus Bound* and perfected in the *Oresteia*. But as in *Prometheus Bound*, the disjunction between divine welfare and the human condition persists in the *Oresteia*. The unmistakable influence of the *Enumaelish* on the *Oresteia* is basically seen through its approach to the divine condition and also through the attitude towards the human condition. After a rough exchange of threats and counter threats, old and new deities agree on a formula of power sharing. Athena offers them: "a royal share of our land -/ justly entitled, glorified for ever .../ where all the pain and anguish end." (*Eum.*, 899-901) Consequently, the leader of the Furies feels that Athena's "magic is working ... I can feel the hate, the fury slip away". (*Eum.*, 909)

While divine deadlock is resolved, that for the members of the ill-fated house of Atreus is not. The significance of the Areopagus for Aeschylus is most probably understood in its divine totality where only divine antagonism is resolved. The only possible impact of this divine harmony on the human condition is that both sets of deities have eventually agreed to introduce a joint label which has the characteristics of both sets on human conduct. Unlike the *Enumaelish*, the *Oresteia* does not give an account of man's creation. However, like the Babylonian epic, the *Oresteia* highlights, man's inferior position as totally insignificant for the gods who have no interest in human welfare. Gilbert Murray's stimulating argument fits in that perspective:

And when they have conquered their Kingdoms, what do they do? Do they attend to the government? Do they promote agriculture? Do they practise trade and industries? Not a bit of it. Why should they do any honest work? They find it easier to live on the revenues and blast with thunderbolts the people who do not pay. They are conquering chieftains, royal buccaneers, they fight, and feast, and play, and make music; they drink deep, and roar with laughter at the lame smith who waits on them.¹¹

This basically applies to the *Oresteia* because the trial of Orestes has failed to produce any practical benefits in favour of the victims of the house. They are even ignored when the real divine issue emerges. If Orestes' action was the central issue of divine conflict in the *Eumenedes*, the resulting divine harmony would include a new definition of the legal position of this or future defendants. Instead, at the end of the trial, the now Eumenedes are still able to assume the same rights against matricides as before and it is in fact Athena who blesses these rights: "I enthrone these strong, implacable spirits here / and root them in our soil. / Theirs, / theirs to rule the lives of men, / it is their fated power. / But he who has never felt their weight, / or known the blows of life and how they fall / the crimes of his fathers hale him towards their bar, / silent, majestic in anger / crushes him to dust."

Orestes' acquittal is an exception and his departure is quite undramatic and even unobserved. On the contrary, there is a persistence and an emphasis on the same old values concerning matricides and the Furies' historical and now legal right and perhaps, duty to pursue them. It is crucial to observe at this point that this old law is reinforced against man by the new deities. John Jones is perfectly right when he argues that harmony is beyond the reach of the house of Atreus: "those (and they are many) who look to the trial of Orestes for a solution to the troubles of the house of Atreus will always be disappointed. The trial solves nothing".¹² Orestes' acquittal is an insignificant by-product of the overall reconciliation because the trial according to Calarco, "virtually ignores him as an individual".¹³

Like the *Enumaelish*, the *Oresteia* demonstrates the divinities' concern with healing the rift between the old and new generations. But in the process, Aeschylus is anxious to expose the radical insecurity of the human condition by highlighting the dichotomy between it and the divine condition. It is the triumphant Apollonian-Dyonysian features which both deepen and widen the groove between the divine and human worlds into unbridgeable proportions. This image is most beautifully drawn by Nietzsche: "the smile of this Dionysos has given birth to the Olympian gods, his tears have given birth to men."¹⁴

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The *Enumaelish* is of that kind and of that depth that it can be articulated as a literary work replete with structural intensity and conceptual stimulation which characterize the divine condition and simultaneously, foreshadows the tragic disposition of the human condition. The dramatic significance of the *Enumaelish* to Aeschylus is based on an understanding that the Babylonian epic emphasizes among other things, the dichotomy between the macrocosm and the microcosm. The human representation which Aeschylus introduces as a structural parallel to a divine situation conceals an irretrievable discrepancy between the divine and human conditions.

As in the *Enumaelish*, in the *Gilgamesh* epic, the gods are still involved in action, and their presence is a decisive factor in determining the shape and nature of things. But unlike the former, the latter concentrates on the human condition as the pivot of its attention. The *Gilgamesh* epic is an illustration of man's struggle and his tragic search for security in a hostile cosmos that is indifferent to his suffering. In other words, the major difference between the two Babylonian epics is that the *Enumaelish* is a divine myth while *Gilgamesh* is a heroic myth.

The *Gilgamesh* epic has a dramatic spirit. The life of the hero is a series of dramatic episodes revolving about what constitutes man's eternal demands: a drive towards establishing name and fame and a promotion of individualism. The narrative, structural and conceptual lines in this epic are demonstrably relevant in their fantasy and complexity to the ancient Greek frame of mind. The Oedipal saga bears a striking resemblance to the *Gilgamesh* epic. Sophocles perfects this parallelism through his account of the story of Oedipus. Analogy in the narrative line between the

two works is striking: Claudius Aelianus narrates Gilgamesh's birth, childhood and rise to power:

When Seuchoros reigned over the Babylonians, the Chaldeans said that the son who would be born of his daughter would wrest the kingdom from the grandfather. At this he was alarmed and, to express it jocularly, became an Acrisios to the girl, for he guarded her very closely. But without his knowledge - for Fate was more ingenious than the Babylonian - the girl became a mother by an obscure man and bore a child. (Her) guards, in fear of the king threw it from the Acropolis, for it was there that the aforementioned girl was imprisoned. But an eagle very quickly saw the child's fall, and before the infant was dashed upon the ground got underneath it and received it on his back, and carrying it to an orchard, he set it down very cautiously. The caretaker of the place, seeing the beautiful child, loved it and reared it; it was called Gilgamos and reigned over the Babylonians.¹⁵

Jacobsen states that "Aelianus' story probably derives ultimately from Berossus"¹⁶ This is important because Berossus, is one of the key catalysts between Babylonian and Greek cultures. According to Walcot, it is in fact Berossus along with other scholars who "made the contents of Near Eastern texts available to a Greek speaking public".¹⁷ Much of the story of Gilgamesh's birth and childhood is a paradigm for that of Oedipus whose experience appears to be a variation on the Babylonian story which was undoubtedly familiar to the consciousness of the ancient Greeks long before Sophocles.

Gilgamesh emerges as a tragic prototype whose human associations qualify him as the forebear of tragic figures in the history of human consciousness. E.Lansing describes him as "the first of the world's supermen, the model for all those who came after him."¹⁸ At this point I think it is now expedient to examine Gilgamesh as a model for one of

those who came after him. Of the many heroic figures who appear to be off-shoots of the Gilgamesh type in Greek mythology, I think that Oedipus can be considered the closest Greek character to Gilgamesh. The Sophoclean vision demonstrates an inevitable ontological collision between the microcosm and the macrocosm. In the dramatic heritage of the ancient Greeks, it was initially Aeschylus who magnified this idea. But according to E.R.Dodds:

It was above all Sophocles, the last great exponent of the archaic world view who expressed the full tragic significance of the old religious themes in their unsoftened, unmoralized forms ... and who made these thoughts part of the cultural inheritance of Western man.¹⁹

The tragic experiences of Gilgamesh and Oedipus can be divided into two major periods separated by a period of transition. In both paradigms, the first period illustrates the emergence of historicism as a progressive concept replacing the more primitive archaic or unhistorical culture. Archaic Gilgamesh manifests these primitive symptoms by alienating himself from his people. These symptoms seem to be part of archaic typicality. Tragedy is the daughter of historicity. According to Calarco, the major difference between archaic ontology and tragedy is that the former "provides a ready-made resolution of all contradictions and a determinate scheme in which the value of action and event are invariable" whereas the latter "feeds on irony and on paradox".²⁰ In the light of this, Gilgamesh's transformation from the archaic to the historical is a change from the invariable to the variable. Gilgamesh's natural self is archaic; but historicistic transformation exhibits an acquired self. As a historical figure, Gilgamesh demonstrates a persistent desire to establish his individuation and insulate it with the blessing of history. For this purpose, Gilgamesh has to undergo certain tests to boost his claim as a historical man. The first challenge is meant to set a pattern of heroic behaviour which has later become a model for many Greek heroes. Elizabeth Lansing argues that "every hero must slay his dragon, and Gilgamesh, like all the great heroes of history, had to perform this test of his powers."²¹ In the text, Gilgamesh, who decides to confront the dragon, means to appear as the saviour of his city because the dragon is portrayed

by Gilgamesh as a symbol of evil. As a historical man, Gilgamesh who is clearly aware of the discrepancy between the divine and human conditions finds an alternative in historicism: "If I fall, I will establish a name for myself / Gilgamesh is fallen! they will say in combat / with terrible Huwwawa / an everlasting name I will establish for myself" (III. IV. 148-160) Gilgamesh demonstrates his historicistic quest once more in the epic when he turns down Ishtar's matrimonial proposal and later kills the terrible bull of heaven. These two incidents mark the Zenith of his historicism and the apotheosis of his individualism. For Gilgamesh, historicism is an artistic alchemy which can resolve the contradictions of existence. In his bid to establish an everlasting name for himself in history, Gilgamesh wants to establish a human version of immortality. he envisages his heroic action as a process of redemption from human limitations, and release from archaic unhistorical ontology. He views historicism as the highest and most transcendental celebration of human version of permanence because after two heroic deeds, Gilgamesh is initiated as the celebrated hero of Uruk.

Similarly, Oedipus, whose experience exhibits a remarkable affinity with that of Gilgamesh, emerges from the rubbles of archaism. His version of archaism is different from that of Gilgamesh in the sense that the latter's archaic origin is an active semi-divine one while that of Oedipus is a negative archaism regenerating itself through the family curse and the cyclic repetitiveness of doom on his house beginning with Cadmus, Labdacus, Laius, Oedipus and his off-springs. Oedipus' quest for historicism is generated by archaic necessity, and his historicistic journey partly means that he must put as great a distance as possible between himself and his supposed parents. Oedipus' action maximizes the two major components of tragedy: irony and paradox. Like Gilgamesh, Oedipus has to pass a remarkably similar process of initiation in order to qualify as a historical man. So he has to follow a tradition primordially originated by Gilgamesh. Like Huwwawa, the Sphinx is a threat to the city and an obstacle to its progress. Also, it is a symbol of evil which has to be eliminated. In killing the Sphinx, Oedipus is attempting to make himself rather than remake the past in the sense that his rational purposive action is a progressive challenge to the archaic nature of the curse. In the process, like Gilgamesh he becomes a champion of his city. Both Gilgamesh and Oedipus are progressive, semi-divine rulers, guardians of their respective cities, and peoples. They are portrayed as dynamic despots who created prosperity and progress changing their cities from

primitive archaic anarchy into stable political entities, instigated by their progressive drive towards historicism and self-fulfilment. The second historicistic test for Gilgamesh came when he was called upon to save his city from the terrible bull of heaven. Likewise Oedipus had to undergo a second test as a champion of his city by ridding it from the terrible blight.

Gilgamesh's exaltation in historicism comes to an abrupt and anticlimactic conclusion. This can be described as the transitional period. It creates a new reality instigated by the death of Enkidu which sounds as the ultimate curse on the human condition. It exposes the fragility of man's quest for name and fame in history. Enkidu's death manifests the hollowness of Gilgamesh's historicism. This period of transition magnifies a paradoxical coincidence of conflicting characteristics: the progressive process of historicistic construction is twisted into an impending antithesis which is characterized by decline and destruction. His success as an individual will be deformed into a failure as a type. This conclusion marks a mockery of historicistic and individualistic achievements. Death is a unidirectional termination fatefully preprogrammed to be man's ultimate end. This transitional period marks a twist from the blessing of history which characterizes the first period to the terror of history which characterizes the second period. In other words, the first period is distinguished by redemption in illusion, but through the transitional period, it is exposed as the illusion of redemption.

For his part, Oedipus' drive towards historicism is undermined as self-destructive. Like Gilgamesh, Oedipus, operates within a framework of irony and paradox. The man of history ejecting from archaic family curse in *Oedipus the King* is now paying a heavy price for his drive towards historicism, especially when he learns that what he hopes to be another historical victory proves to be a sound defeat. In both paradigms, it is clear that history cannot be redeemed from destiny. The experiences of Gilgamesh and Oedipus reveal an invariable contradiction in the ground of being because quotidian existence which nourishes on illusion will ultimately be exposed to the terror of truth. In the second period, it is time which seems to be the protagonists' major concern. They become haunted by their positions in time particularly when they realize that they have to face death as man's conclusive truth. In the first period, Gilgamesh perceives of himself as the master of time but in the second period he degenerates into the slave of time. The essential contradiction in the ground of being is manifested by the sharp contrast between the

immortal macrocosm and the mortal microcosm. It is a contrast between cyclic time and linear time. The first is sacred, infinite and unchangeable. The second is profane, finite and changeable. Cyclic time is a divine advantage while linear time is a human disadvantage marked by regressive change. Gilgamesh's disillusionment with historical, linear time is a violent shock to his name and fame as man's version of permanence. Linear time is a loose combination of the 'no more' and the 'not yet'. Utnapishtim's revelation exposes the discrepancy between the divine and human conditions. Now he is aware that linear, historical time in its abstract concept is composed of an infinite number of identical 'nows' which emerge from the future only to pour in the past. As a historical man, Gilgamesh has tried to get hold of the world of 'now' and fix himself to it. But slippery 'now' evades any permanent contact. Moreover, every 'now' inflicts its own portion of damage on him. The world of the divinities is symbolized by the word 'forever' which is repeatedly used by Utnapishtim. It is a reference to the divine world of positive always whereas the gods live beyond time. By contrast, the human condition which is marked by finite and regressive becoming only leads to a negative formula of permanence. The world of 'never' which is the human version of archaic time cannot be redeemed by historical, linear time. On the contrary, Gilgamesh's journey in linear time is a transitory one before he is reintegrated into his original dark corner in archaic time.

At this juncture, Gilgamesh becomes maximally unhistorical because of his total failure to relate himself to history. His fear of death is intensified to a pathetic degree when he begs Utnapishtim to teach him the secret of eternity as an alternative to death. The end of his journey demonstrates his ultimate failure to accommodate himself to time. He has no illusion about the aesthetic vision of the world which is suggested by the barmaid. He comes to the conclusion that positive permanence is beyond his reach. Even the petty consolation prize is denied him because a snake snatches it away and eats it. Thus, throughout the epic, Gilgamesh's quest for a purposive action leads to an overwhelming tragic conclusion because the destructive and indestructible power of time exhibits him as Time's tragic fool.

The second period of Oedipus' experience is marked - like that of Gilgamesh - by a disillusionment with history. His earlier attempts to boost his position in the *Polis* as a historical figure is highlighted by his desire to restore law and order. To achieve this, he reminds Teiresias of

his individual, historicistic achievements. But this foreshadows a tragic anticlimax: "this day will show your birth and will destroy you." (O.K., 438) The regressive transition in Oedipus' position marks the disintegration of both his individuation and his place in history into an archaic, unhistorical background.

The Sophoclean view of time reveals an imperspicuous attitude. There is an uneasy combination of linear and cyclic shapes of time relating to the divine and human conditions. Linear time is a manifestation of paradoxical images of life and death, the recurrence of which is singular rather than multiple in the sense that they do not eternally alternate to produce a positive image of the human condition. 'Change' and 'end' are the two ultimate realities which constitute man's position in linear time. Disillusioned by Dionysian, unhistorical archaism, man tries to eject out of it to seek recourse in Apollonian historicism which proves equally destructive. In fact, man is seen to wither 'by' and 'in' linear time.

From this perspective, I think Sophocles' attitude towards time which is a true expression of the ancient Greek typicality towards that concept is an extension of the Babylonian outlook manifested in the epic of *Gilgamesh*. According to Bernard Knox "the theme of man, the gods and time is from start to last one of the main concerns of Sophoclean tragedy".²² Indeed, in Sophocles' treatment of time, the ever - increasingly explicit gap between the world of the gods and the human condition is being made all the more vivid. Man, the gods and Time constitute a significant trichotomy: the components of which interact only to emphasize the existence of man in time and the gods beyond time. Immunity from time is a divine advantage which is unwilling to extend its privileges to man. The gap between the two worlds is symbolized by the blessing of the eternity of being which is a divine domain and the curse of the transitoriness of devolutionary becoming which is a human domain. Thus, in his second period, Oedipus, the old blind begger and wanderer manifests an astonishing replica of Gilgamesh's second period. Like Gilgamesh who has lost his sense of historicism, in *Oedipus At Colonus*, Oedipus is now a wanderer. He has learnt the lesson which the barmaid has taught Gilgamesh and which has later been affirmed by Utnapishtim. Oedipus tells Theseus, "Most gentle son of Aegeus! the immortal / gods alone have neither age or death / All other things almighty Time disquiets. / Earth wastes away: the body wastes away / faith dies: distrust is born."

(*Colonus*, 607-11) The withering effects of linear time leave their mark on Oedipus and make him a complete contrast to his former self. The young man is now old, the strong is now weak, the brighteyed king becomes a blind begger. The first of men becomes the last and most wretched of all men. In *Colonus*, it is clearly stated that "death is the finish".(*Colonus*, 1223) This unidirectional conclusion emphasizes the same wisdom which Gilgamesh learns. The intensity of Oedipus' pessimism is perhaps one degree higher than that of Gilgamesh who accepts a petty consolation prize offered him by Utnapishtim as a reward for his persistent wanderings. But Oedipus dismisses a divine consolation prize with contempt. Ismene tells him "for the gods who threw you down sustain you now." But Oedipus replies: "Slight favour, now I am old! / my doom was early". (*Colonus*, 394-95) Like Gilgamesh, Oedipus had to accept his lot and resign himself to the ultimate wisdom about the essential condition of man. But until he reached the Dionysian wisdom that he was essentially time's victim, Oedipus, again like Gilgamesh, had been invariably time's fool.

Gilgamesh and Oedipus have come to an understanding of a peculiar quality. Their tragic humility and resignation can be associated with Nietzsche's account of Dionysiac men. Such a resignation is expressive of the experiences of both men. It is also descriptive of their historicistic journeys; the conclusion of which results in a new Gilgamesh and a new Oedipus because

both have looked deeply into the true nature of things, they have understood and now loath to act. They realize that no action of theirs can work any change in the eternal condition of things and they regard the imputation as ludicrous or debasing that they should set right the time which is out of joint. Understanding kills action for in order to act we require the veil of illusion.²³

* * *

The mythology of Mesopotamia as one of the world's oldest recorded cultures is a major inspirational source for ancient Greek culture and

thought. The *Enumaelish* exhibits an unmistakable impact on the ancient Greek concepts of theogony, cosmogony, divine evolution and the existential condition. It stimulates theogonic, epical and dramatic appeals. Of all these three levels, it is the dramatic appeal which sounds all the more comprehensive and all-embracing. Aeschylus' treatment of theogony and theomachy in *Prometheus Bound* and to a greater extent the *Oresteia* has brought these issues down to earth, so to speak. By creating a parallel human representation of many of these divine issues, he has illustrated the dramatic diversity of this Babylonian myth which contains images and ideas recreatable for his audiences.

Sophocles who has taken many Aeschylean conclusions concerning theogony, theomachy and divine harmony for granted, has invested in another area of Mesopotamian concerns which is the human condition. This is why the *Gilgamesh* epic becomes an apt hunting ground for his conceptual and philosophical concerns. Gilgamesh, whose experience represents the Babylonian world view comes to the conclusion that time is not merely an aspect of reality. It is embedded in the nature of things. Time is a vehicle for change and becoming which constitute an ultimate negation of being. The epic of *Gilgamesh* manifests that the divine components of the macrocosm constitute a paradigm for cyclic recurrence which is characterized by an eternal reaffirmation of the universe. By contrast, the human components of the macrocosm are parts of a linear concept of time characterized by negative temporality. The combination of the mythical, the philosophical and the real is brought about by Gilgamesh's intellectual and active attempt to resist his own finitude in an indifferent and ruthless world. It is evident that Gilgamesh is made to pay a heavy price for his attempt to exceed his human limitations through heroic deeds. In this context, Gilgamesh's heroic excess results in a tragic excess.

The Gilgamesh paradigm is echoed by Sophocles' presentation of the Oedipal saga. Oedipus' heroic nobility emerging from his self-awareness tries to dissociate itself from external, archaic considerations by way of apotheosizing his historicistic self. This is highlighted through his self-assertion as an independent and free entity who becomes the master of his own destiny. However, this apotheosis of the individualistic self is doomed to be tragic and self-consuming. Thus, like Gilgamesh's heroic excess, that of Oedipus which is expressive of Sophocles' emphasis on individual self-consciousness leads him through an ironic and paradoxical twist to his tragic downfall. Hatab states that "Sophocles maintains the

traditional belief that individuation is limited by fate".²⁴ Thus, like Gilgamesh, Oedipus according to Hatab "alone confronts and reconciles himself to the terrible limits of individuation."²⁵

Finally, Goethe offers modern European and Western readers an important advice which marks a significant starting point for the understanding of their cultural heritage:

Indeed a man of really superior endowment will feel the necessity of this; need for an intercourse with great predecessors is the sure sign of a higher talent. Study Moliere, Study Shakespeare; but above all things, the old Greeks and always the Greeks.²⁶

Parallel to this advice, it can also be suggested that in order to understand and appreciate the mythical, intellectual, philosophical and conceptual background of ancient Greek heritage and culture, one should study above all things, the Babylonians and always the Babylonians.

ENDNOTES

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3. Thorkild Jacobsen, "Religious Drama in Ancient Mesopotamia", in *Unity and Diversity*, ed. by Hans Goedicke and J.J. Roberts, John Hopkins Univ. Press, Baltimore & London, 1975 pp. 65 - 97 (p. 73).
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