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Hands to Oars: Aeschylus' Cosmo-*Phthoric* Spin on Empedocles' Whirlpool

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Abstract:

As verso to the obverse of the gorgonic gaze of Iphigeneia 'written' in the fixed, all-apparent *graphais* in the Artemisian sacrifice, this study unfolds in the *doxic* Aphrodesian register the dynamics of Helen's disembodied *opsis*, her image, that crosses both into Menelaus' psyche and out through the hands of the warriors put to oars. Empedocles' optics are argued to constitute a visual ray between viewer and object joined in the metaphorical grasping of hands. This grasping figures simultaneously metaphorical hands within Menelaus' mind through which the *opsis* passes into unconsciousness and the physical hands put to oars. Menelaus' *pothos*, longing, for Helen, drives the Trojan debacle as the vortex of Aeschylus' cosmo-*phthoric*, cosmos-destroying, spin on Empedocles' cosmogonic whirlpool of Aphrodite and Ares. Aeschylus' pathways, *keleuthoi*, on which the *opsis* moves in the register of *doxein*, contrast Empedocles' pathways of the generations of forms in that of *idein*, and figure finally beneath the tapestries Agamemnon treads. In Aeschylus' construction of the novel advent of proto-*imagination*, that is, of the inward experience of the untethered image, the self-reflection of the auditor-spectator is instantiated as that of a bracketed, suspended [I] and is invoked there in the *theatron* to cycle between, on the diegetic level, the all-destroying vortex, on the dramaturgic-mimetic level, the discharging of the dionysiac thrall in the dawning awareness of the illusion of the *Gesamtwerk* of Tragedy. The suspension of the dionysiac thrall reveals the ungrounded underpinning of Kierkegaard's teleological suspension of the ethical as the abyssal [I] whence the movement of faith would spring up. Subtending then the singularity of Abraham, Knight of Faith, is the bracketed [I] shaken loose from the dæmonic tyranny of the symbolic order in the suspension of the unmediated commandment of the pagan gods as divine sanction of the sacrifice and the ethical universal.