

This paper analyzes the psychological transformation that is revealed within Orestes in his prayer to Athena (Eum. 235-43). Aeschylus' presentation of Orestes as confident and composed marks a pronounced shift of tone since the hero's last appearances in the trilogy (Ch. 1061-2 and Eum. 85-7). By highlighting this departure from fearful uncertainty, Aeschylus not only underlines the power of purification that has occurred, but also sets the stage for the final resolution of justice. Dyer and Sidwell have closely examined the means by which Orestes undergoes this purification, and Sommerstein makes note of the resulting change in temperament. All, however, seem to have neglected the particular significance of this passage and the sea change that it initiates. While the theme of justice has been central throughout the Oresteia, Aeschylus introduces here a new form of justice, whereby redemption may be achieved through purification. Thus, in Orestes' prayer he signals an imminent end to the long chain of vengeful murders and lays the foundation for a peaceful conclusion.