

Barbara Blackman Temenos Foundation

Annual Public Lecture 2004

Lament and Renewal in Temenos Oz

Glenda Cloughley

with A Chorus of Women

I have been wondering whether my craft of psychotherapy might be able to help Australia. For a long time now it has seemed to me that our country could do with the particular quality of attention that good-enough therapists provide to suffering souls.

So I have given my lecture the boundary of an analytic hour, which is fifty-minutes, and the shape of a therapeutic experience.

There's a lot that's strange about my endeavour. The patient hasn't asked to be analysed. I have to do the talking instead of the listening. Psychotherapy is inherently a modest enterprise and this is a big subject that is not often approached with an ear to the mythic. Perhaps it seems odd to think of Australia as a *temenos*—a sacred precinct, a place where elements might be transformed—although that is close to the way Indigenous people have thought about country for tens of millennia, and Professor Renos Papadopoloulos has written about “the alchemical vessel of the pluralist state”.

As usual, the therapy starts with tears—with a lament and cries of longing. Also with the courage to tell someone else, which is a nascent kind of hope.

Next comes a descent to the underworld of psyche and culture where the unconscious sources of fate and renewing destiny sit side by side.

A rational analysis of what has gone wrong finds some causes of present pain in traumas past. This kind of explanation is necessary for consciousness even though Jung reminds us that diagnosis only helps the doctor. It doesn't heal the patient.

With individuals, healing emerges within the *temenos* of an empathic relationship that is experienced as an alliance. In particular, it comes from listening carefully for what is trying to come into being. To wonder what the sorrow is *for* is more useful than understanding why it is so painful. “What is the sorrow for?” intimates purpose and the possibility of something growing out of the suffering.

The question I held in mind as I prepared this lecture was “What destiny does the lament serve?” This is similar to the healing question in a mediaeval Grail legend from one of our European wisdom traditions. Asked by a fool who didn't know anything about economics or managing the state, that question brought life back to the barren land and healed a political leader's incurable wound.

'LAMENT'

We begin with the tears of a hundred and fifty Canberra citizens: with the hundred and fifty women who gathered to sing a lament in the marble foyer of Parliament House on Tuesday the 18th of March last year. [*The Chorus women begin to wander onto the stage and locate themselves randomly.*] That was the day Prime Minister Howard announced Australia's participation in the invasion of Iraq.

The women arrived in ones and twos, looking so much like ordinary citizens that no one was questioned.

Several were about to enact their first public disagreement with a government, and if there had been a blood pressure machine at Parliamentary Security we'd probably all have been thrown out. My pulse was booming. Most of us were afraid. All my courage was in the ache in the middle of my chest about what was going to explode into the lives of Iraqi families and communities in the coming months. It was hard not to cry.

But we were through the door, standing around and looking as unlike a choir as possible..

It was only five days since I told a friend that I couldn't stop thinking about women's lament filling Parliament House. The sound had been in my ears for weeks. [*Judy and Zahira cry out.*] My friend said, "You better do something about that lament idea!" So I wrote some lyrics that night.

Although I didn't trust myself to write the music because what I had inside me was too raw, I knew my composer friend Judith Clingan would have the right melody in her. When she came for a cup of tea the next day I had a sheet of manuscript paper waiting. A sense of relief spread through my being when Judy said, "The music must be beautiful."

Within an hour she wrote the melody and we adjusted the lyrics. Judy and I photocopied the music and began contacting Canberra women who sing. The music passed from friend to friend through the city's networks of women and choirs. Some received it by email. Some learned it in *solfa* over the phone from Judy. I taught it to one woman *sotte voce* in the Zuchero Café in Manuka. Forty women attended a rehearsal.

So here we all were with our four-day-old song, Judy was standing on one marble staircase surrounded by several women and I was on the facing one with others around me. None of us knew how many we were, or even who would join us when we started singing at exactly one o'clock.

JUDY: Open the doors of the chambers
GLENDA: of your hearts
CHORUS: Open the doors of the chambers (of your hearts)
 Open your minds to our song
 We sing for peace through the power of love
 Hear the wisdom of women, hear our song.
 Weep for our sisters in danger
 Weep for our brothers and children
 Sound the cries of grief and despair
 Sound the lament for the dead. [*Chorus returns into the audience.*]

That night millions of Australians heard 'Lament' on television news. The ABC's political editor Fran Kelly called us 'a chorus of women' on the *7.30 Report* and those of us who wanted to keep going took her description as our name.

In the twenty months since, we have made a lot of new music, spoken texts, dances, ceremonies and ceremonial objects. We have given more than fifty performances in Canberra, Sydney, regional New South Wales and Bulgaria. 'Lament' has been sung by many Australian and overseas choirs. National and local media have carried numerous interviews and news items about us.

But that's enough of the recent story. To discover what destiny the lament serves we need to keep listening for the whispers of regeneration in the first song of tears.

Even as the lament sounded in Parliament House one could hear not only much suffering but also a stirring of seeds that sprouted quickly and without promotional effort into the archetypal social role of the chorus. Some key elements in these movements were the *temenos*, voice, history and *telos* of our lament.

Temenos

If anyone asked me to explain why these 150 singing women achieved more media coverage than the thousands of people who came to Canberra to protest about the war on the 18th of March last year, the first thing I would say is "Thank goodness they got in the door!" This relief is the optimism that accompanies the finding of a *temenos*—a facilitating environment—which the nether region of the parliamentary grounds reserved for protesters certainly is not. That great vessel, the *temenos*, of the Grand Foyer in the house of Australian democracy, was where the lament *would* be heard. It was the kind of space inside which the song could achieve a symbolic value that might make it possible for something new to emerge from the union of its ancient provenance and its sounding of a potential for cultural renewal.

Voice

I want to emphasise that while Judy and I wrote the song, the voice of love and wisdom that sounded in Parliament House belonged to every singer. 'Lament' expressed the active empathy of all the singers with the pity and cruelty, the terror and horror that is the human cost of war. This humanizing voice knows the anguish by sitting in it; by refusing bitterness or rage; by resisting the closing down of feeling from saturation in media coverage of tragedies. By keeping a kind of vigil with people who will be grievously affected by the political judgements of other people, it knows and sings what *must* happen; what *always* follows a decision for war.

The Greeks call this immortal voice *Ananke*, mother of the Fates, whose name means Necessity. It is a voice that is not hysterical or depressed; not polemical; does not want maliciously to deconstruct or destroy anything or anyone; has nothing to do with opposing in the customary way of political parties and protesters. It is a woman's voice. And it does not seek or need therapy. Its song *is* therapy.

History

The woman's chorus is a very ancient, widely spread element of European Indigenous prehistory, even though it has been pretty quiet since the Greek theatres of the fifth century BCE.

The earliest images we found in a not-very-comprehensive literature search date from 6500BCE. Artifacts from then until well into the historical period consistently portray its sacred roles in maintaining mysteries associated with the intergenerational cycle of death and renewal through ceremonies for funerals, birthing, menarche and marriage, and the annual round of ploughing, sowing, harvest and the long sleep of winter.

With the theatres of the Greek city-states, choral dance and song became differentiated as well as separately located from ceremony. The theatres often had proximity to political power. The Athenian chorus commented on events and spoke not only to the audience of which it was an extension, but also into the adjacent democratic political Assembly.

There was certainly a political element to our action in the big Assembly at the centre of the Australian city-state. But my concern here is more with therapeutics than activism, and much more with the enactment of family and community health than the formulation of a political critique. To activate the therapeutic course one needs to be well aligned with the natural trajectory of health. And this brings me to the element of purpose and, therefore, the future.

Telos

In the twenty months since my friend said "You better do something about that lament idea!" I have often felt as though we women of the Chorus are being drawn along by something that knows what to do with us. I regard the capacity to tune in to this beckoning force as a universal democratic reality in human nature that we are potentiating to the extent that thirty busy women can.

The Greek word for this kind of energetic pull is *telos*, which means a purpose or goal; destination or destiny.

Jung recognized the *telos* of psyche as the energetic driver of healthy development and the patterned lifelong individuation project through which one becomes fully oneself. Caterpillars become butterflies and bright flowers shoot from little brown bulbs through *telos*. The implicate order of the universe described by the physicist David Bohm unfolds telically. *Telos* cannot be understood reductively since its energy comes from the future: from an opposite source than the past events behind causality and fate. By definition, *telos* is non-adversarial. It is in the poetry, the music and images of the *Zeitgeist*—the particular spirit of an age—that waits for the receptive symbolizing capacities of artists. It co-locates the "thoughts in search of a *thinker*" that British psychoanalyst Wilfrid Bion described, and fuels the search for self that usually draws someone to a Jungian analyst's consulting room.

So what was the *telos* of our song? What was trying to come into being in our lament?

Rae Jacobson gave a clue when she said, "I don't feel impotent any more"—a feeling shared by many of the women who sang in Parliament House. Her statement might seem odd to the rational part of your mind since our lament did nothing to stop Australia going to war. But the impotence we all felt before the 18th of March last year was never a failure of rationality. The telic call we answered was for the collective potentiation of something radically other than reason.

In the basic equation of relationship and reason, love and will—called *eros* and *logos* by the ancient Greeks—we re-sounded a voice of empathy and human connection that had been silent. In this moment when Australia's commitment to democracy seemed as though it might be falling off its fulcrum, we sang up the kind of balance that could comfort and even inspire people because it put the weight of human love and loss back on the scales of democratic consideration.

Perhaps a renewing *telos* at work in the polity of Australia as well as the fledgling Chorus was intimated by the animation many of us felt after singing 'Lament' in Parliament House. We certainly seemed to have struck a therapeutic value that was bigger than ourselves: something on the edge of the mythic, even though the potent link between lament and renewal in Western stories is not well recognized.

MYTH

I am going to turn back into some of the Western myths that tell of the power of women's lament, and what may happen when it is silenced or ignored. I hope these might provide a storied, poetic vessel for your considerations of current Australian dramas that affect us all.

I also offer the perspective they provide from an Indigenous European point of view as a respectful response to the senior Warlpiri man Andrew Spencer Japaljarri. In a conversation with my colleague Dr Craig San Roque, Japaljarri said: "You, the white people, have lost your dreaming ... You have to learn your songs, your *whitefella Tjukurpa*. To turn to us for the songs is not right."

The *Tjukurpas* that Japaljarri knows, and the *whitefella Tjukurpas* he is trying to get us to sing up from our own heritage are ways to find the meaningful relationship between present events and the natural laws that govern what happens. Myths can help track trajectories at work in culture as well as individual psyches because they encode the dynamic patterning of human nature.

It is the job of songmen and songwomen, and I think also therapists, to understand these laws well enough to be able to tell them in songs, stories, images that identify the consequences of acting against the law, that heal by relating people's lives to mythic dramas; their struggles to the predicaments of gods; their creative efforts to the activities of creation beings and the patterns of life's constant renewal. Many wisdom traditions teach that the health and happiness of the Earth and the gods themselves depend upon such activities. These tasks are implied in the very etymology of 'therapy', which comes from an old Greek verb *therapeuin*, meaning 'service to the gods'.

Jocasta's Lament

Five years before the lament we sang in Parliament House I took a paper called 'Jocasta's Lament' to an international archaeomythology symposium in Greece. This included a cycle of songs for voices that do not sound in classical or Freudian tellings of the myth of Oedipus and Jocasta, king and queen of the Greek city-state of Thebes. I observed that women's lament leads to renewal in the myths of many diverse ancient cultures.

In Greece, Demeter's sorrow brings her daughter Persephone, the Spring, out of the underworld.

In Egypt, the great goddess Isis weeps for her murdered, beloved Osiris and causes the annual fertile river flood when one of her tears falls into the Nile.

In Sumeria, not far up the Euphrates River from today's big Iraqi oil port of Basra, the hero Dumuzi is resurrected from death through the potent laments of his lover Inanna, his mother Sirtur and sister Gestinanna.

The main point of my paper was that this is not what happens in Jocasta's story. And the consequence is that her family and city are locked inside the juggernaut of a compulsively repeated pattern of tyranny and war-making that rumbles on down the generations until it falls out of the myths into history and arrives in our very own time.

This is the dark stage in our therapeutic process.

Because of Freud, Jocasta's fate has been an integral background element in Western psychology and thought for the past hundred years.

In 1900 Freud published the parallels he discovered between the core drama in the psychological development of children and the mythic drama of the immature king Oedipus, who kills his father, Laius, and marries his mother, Jocasta. The degree of Freud's disinterest in Jocasta is evident in his omission of her suicide from the synopsis he provided of Sophocles' tragedy—a slip that no one else seems to have noticed.

As you might imagine, the plot means something else from Jocasta's point of view. Thankfully, hers is not the story at work in most Australian families, where the *temenos* of a good- and safe-enough, loving environment *does* provide the underpinning basis for a healthy society. But hers is a sadness that often visits my therapeutic practice. And it is vital to know the tale of Jocasta's unfulfilled life and silent grief—to hear her *stifled* lament—because it tells us about the origin of tyrannical cultural elements in Australia and every other society.

Like many people whose potential has been crushed by overbearing demands or an absence of empathic encouragement, Jocasta is an unhappy, silent woman. Her first baby is taken away by King Laius, her husband. Laius skewers the newborn's feet with wire and orders a servant to leave him for the wolves on Mount Kitharon. No myth records Jocasta's distress, or the baby's screams.

Laius is a homosexual pederast who has never desired her. He is bitter and angry, probably because he was removed from his family when *he* was a young boy. Their marriage is a political union

between families descended on both sides from the Phoenician colonizers of this land and the Indigenous people.

Neither of them knows that Laius's orders are ignored and their child adopted. No one knows it is their boy who unwittingly murders his father before disempowering the monstrous Sphinx on the road between Delphi and Thebes some twenty years later. So Jocasta could not know who the young hero, Oedipus, really is when he claims the city's gift of the throne and her hand in marriage for getting rid of the Sphinx.

She never speaks to her young husband of her old sorrow, or indeed of any private emotion. She fears the rage inside him for it reminds her of Laius. She keeps things in order—is a compliantly dutiful queen, wife, mother of their four children. When the thread begins to unravel she pleads with Oedipus not to pry into the city's secrets. He doesn't listen. The skein unwinds and unwinds until the incestuous truth tumbles out. Then she cries the only statement of true feeling Sophocles gives her: "Have I not suffered enough!" Oedipus pays no attention. She runs to the bedroom, bolts the doors and hangs herself.

When he has worked out the riddle, Oedipus rams open the door, cuts the rope, takes the brooches from her gown and stabs out his eyes.

Soon after, Oedipus goes into exile with Antigone and Ismene, his two daughters. He curses his sons, as well as leaving the throne for them to share year about.

The city's seer, an old blind lawwoman-man called Teiresias, says the dreadful fate at work in Thebes started when the city was founded four generations earlier. We Australians should listen to this, for Teiresias says the trouble began when the colonists invaded the land and killed a dragon, a big snake, who lived in a sacred waterhole. The colonists didn't know this creature was a creation being and they didn't recognize that other people had belonged to this country for a long, long time. After the big snake was killed, all the Indigenous people died except the five the king made a deal with. Teiresias says the dragon will go on demanding blood in every generation until the people do the right thing by the law.

After Jocasta's death, her daughter Antigone and the next Theban queen, her sister-in-law Eurydice, both commit suicide. The sons of Oedipus and Jocasta fight a war and kill each other in hand-to-hand combat after causing thousands of deaths. Two of the grandsons fight another war for the throne. And two generations after them the last king of Thebes flees the city in his nightgown, driven mad by the *Erinyes*, the Furies.

The Thebans are sick of kings by then, so they set up an oligarchy. Then history emerges from myth. What happened then? More of the same. The Thebans captured a young prince of Macedonia called Phillip and treated him cruelly before he was rescued. When Phillip's son Alexander, known as "the Great", took the throne of Macedonia, revenge was his very first action. He took an army to Thebes, murdered every Theban adult and child he could find and razed the city. The only house he left standing belonged to the poet Pindar who had written many songs in praise of heroes and warriors.

When Jocasta and the fate-riven Thebans got under my skin many years ago, I was not moved in the way Freud was. The first song I ever wrote was for Jocasta's baby at three days old.

The Baby's Song

Baleeleewah
Baleeleewah
The baby cries
In the mountain night

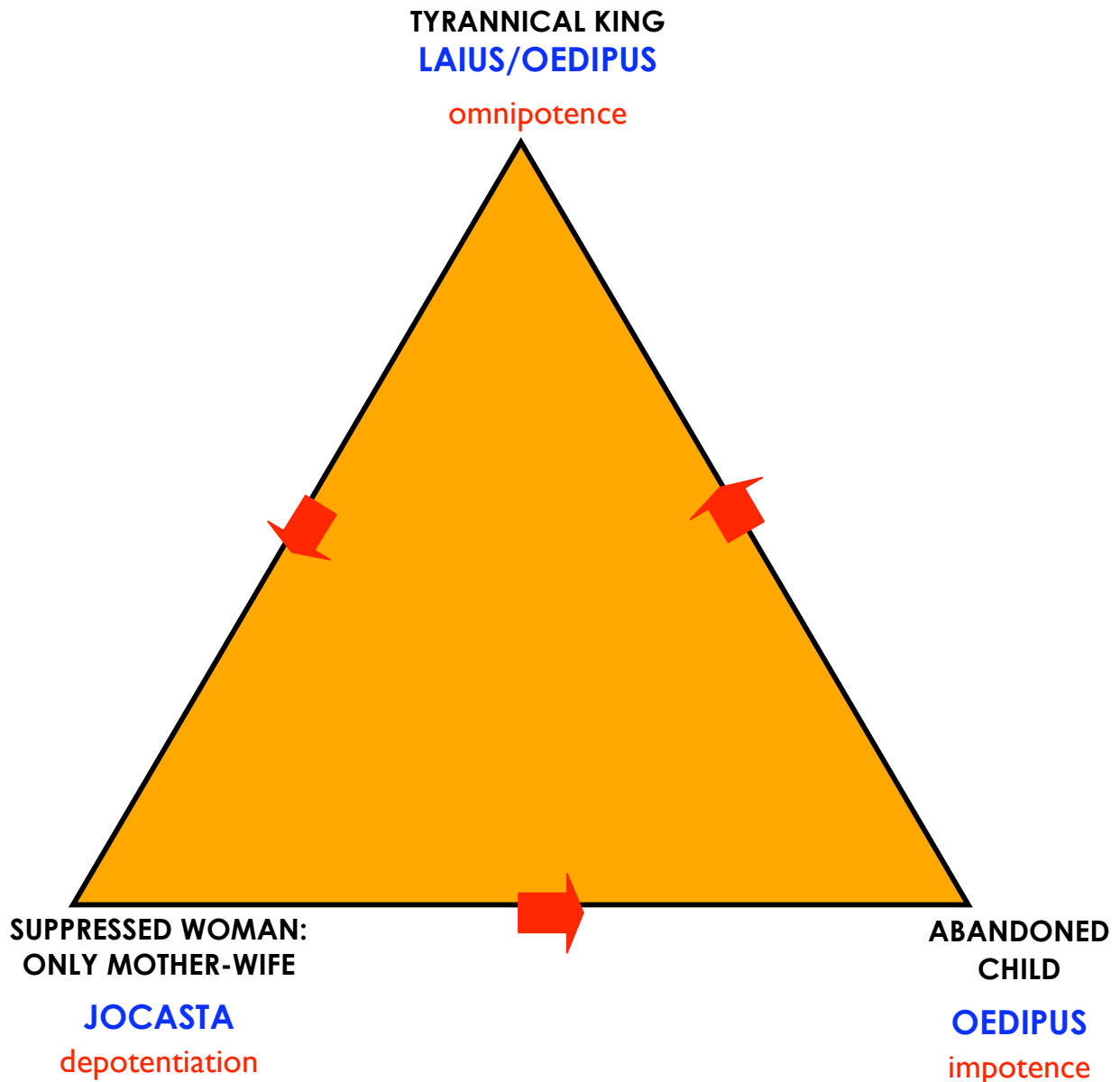
Baleeleewah
Baleeleewah
His ankles pinned
Unloved, bereft

Baleeleewah
Baleeleewah
The baby bleeds
For the father's curse.

Baleeleewah
Baleeleewah
A shepherd's rough hands
No queen, no breast
Baleeleewah

For months I wept every time I sang his song, but I couldn't stop. I felt that some healing might come if I kept singing it, though I couldn't make any sense of this intuition.

I wrote seven more songs, including one for Jocasta's erotic voice. And slowly, I pieced together a pattern I had seen in the lives of some powerful people I met in my first careers of newspaper journalism and public affairs consultancy, and many others I have heard about—including Winston Churchill, Joseph Kennedy, Josef Stalin, Slobodan Milosevic, Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden.



The pattern starts in the bottom right-hand corner, where the emerging sense of self in an abandoned child is traumatically wounded by experiences of helpless impotence in a world without empathy that doesn't support a sense of going-on-being. Incarcerated here are the children of Dachau, Auschwitz, Mattheusen. Boys and girls growing up in Australia's detention centers, in Palestine, Chechnya, Kosovo, Dafur. The Australian children who were removed from their families by governments.

Material hardship is not the main pathogenic factor in the sad story that begins here. Perhaps like Winston Churchill and nearly all the men of his class and time this little child had a wet nurse instead of a mother from birth, was sent to boarding school from six and hardly spoke to his parents until he was grown up and ready to run the world. Perhaps both his parents

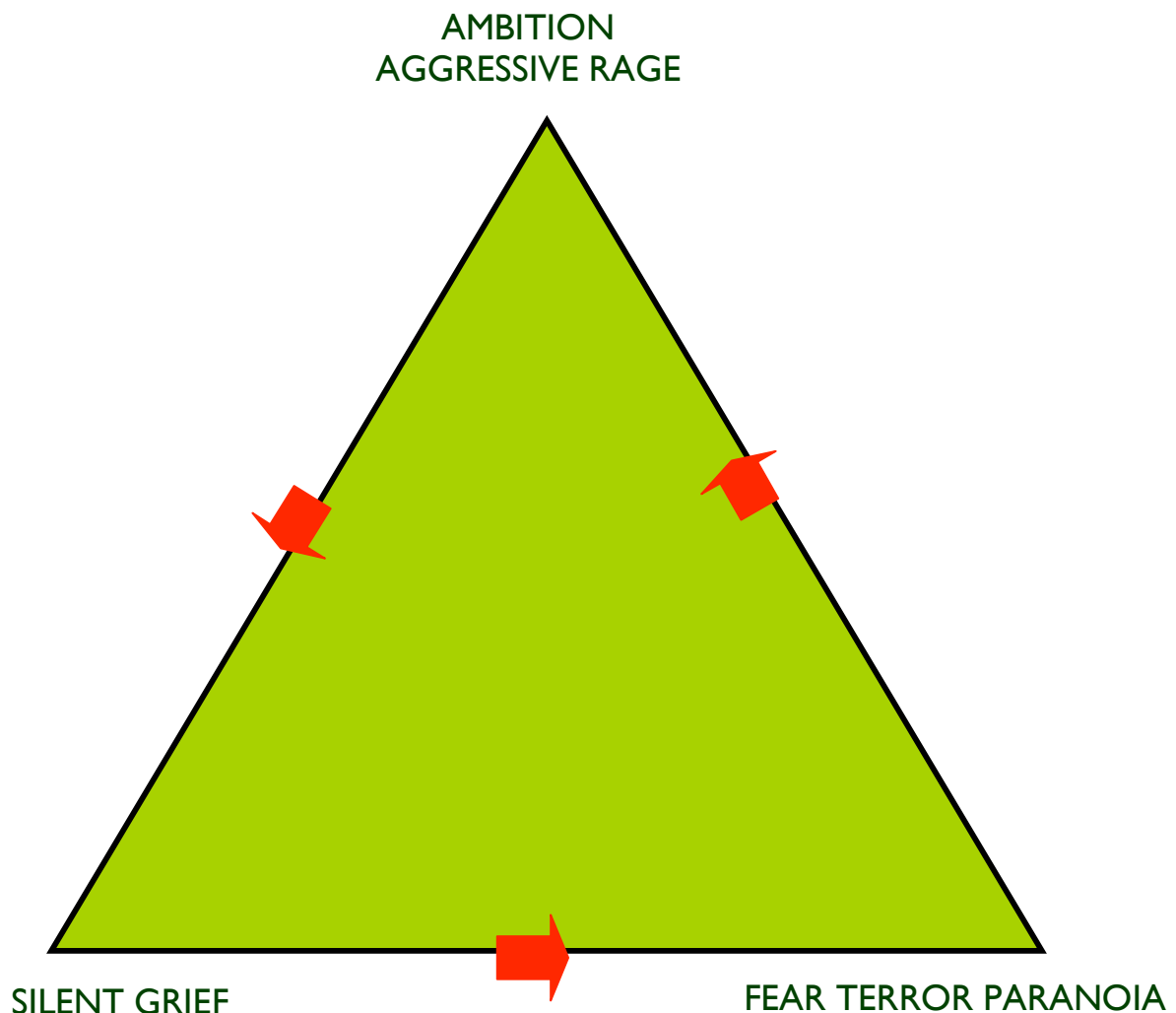
killed themselves, which happened to young Slobodan Milosevic. Perhaps his father had 51 other children, which is part of Osama Bin Laden's story. Many Australian men with powerful positions in business and politics have tragic childhood stories.

Omnipotence is a characteristic psychological defence against feeling this terrible wound. For most people this doesn't work. They have painful confrontations with the hollowness of their attempts to control everything. The consequences of their rage and paranoid anxieties throw their inner emptiness or deadness in their face. These awful experiences sometimes lead them to seek help.

It may be different for the one who inherits or acquires a throne of some kind—in business, politics, the church, armed forces, a big charity, public institution. The power is more important than its location. The tyrannical management style of this one—usually but not necessarily a man—is supported by the part of the world he rules. The hierarchical structures of large organizations are modelled on his psychology. Only the most courageous, noble spirits among these ones seek therapy.

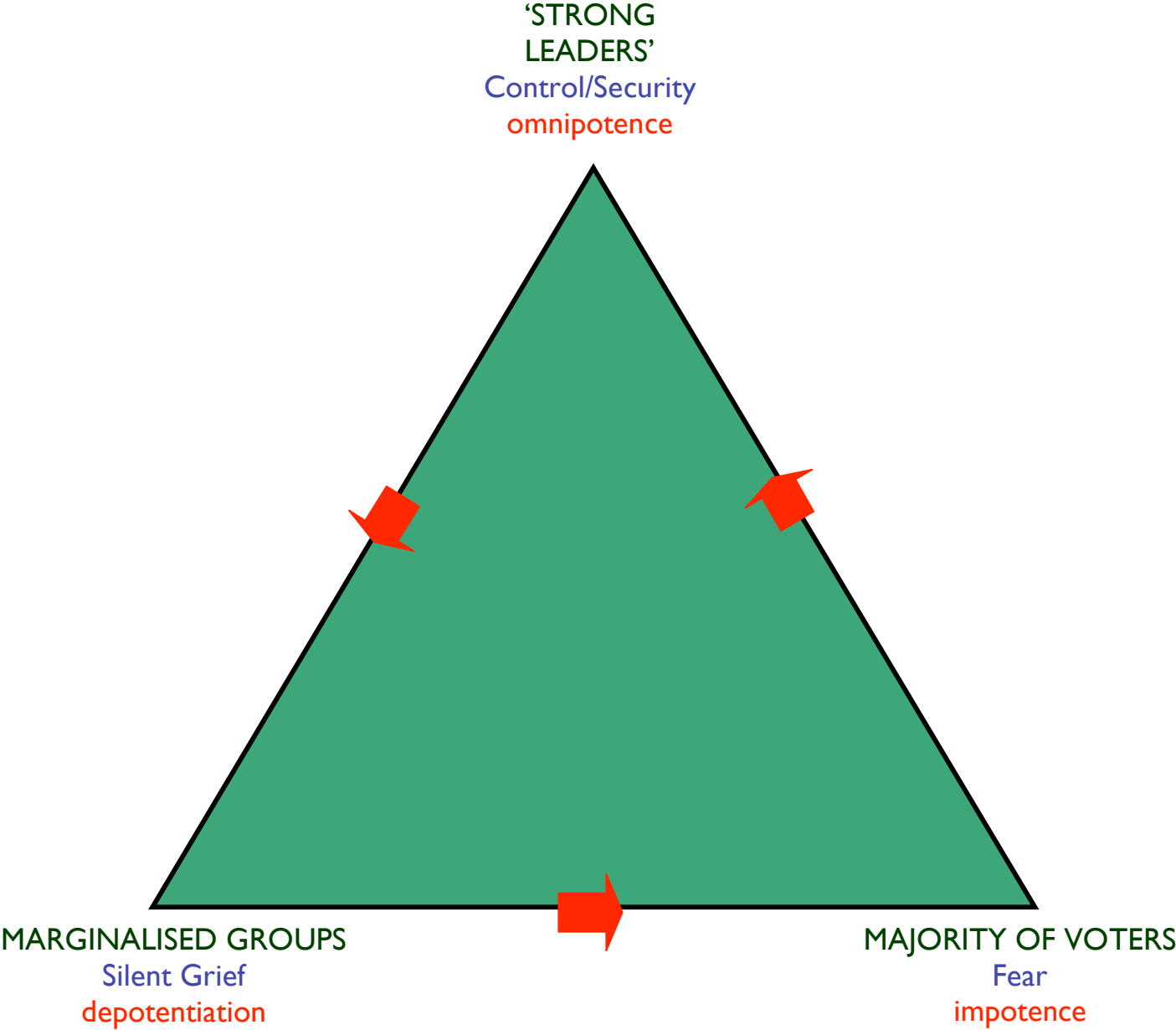
And what of the other side of the triangle's base, where we find Jocasta? The songs from there are muffled, prettied up, stripped of authentic emotion, expressive of social roles designated by others. The possible realization of self in this corner is limited through depotentiation.

In the family dynamic depicted in the triangle, this is the mother-wife whose baby is sent away by a husband jealous of her maternal care of *him*. So her baby is abandoned to the other side of the triangle and acquires the omnipotent defences that keep the awful impotence of his inner life away from consciousness. He marries a mothering woman to compensate for his childhood loss of the maternal care we all need to get very far in psychological maturity. He envies his baby's claim on the body of his wife. The curse is reconstructed. And so its intergenerational transmission goes on, down millennia.



In the emotional dynamics of the (above) pattern fear turns into ambition and oppressing aggressive rage that keeps grief unexpressed and suppressed so that nothing new can come. The Women’s Chorus in the second play of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia* has been telling this derivation of a tragic fate for two and half thousand years. From Jocasta’s position in the triangle they sing:

Once [divine] Awe held men fast,
 binding the[ir] hearts ... [But]
 now Fear is rife
 and success their god ...
 I hide my tears in robes
 Sorrow freezes my heart.



The above triangle is not a *temenos*. Political power and the relational web of kinship—the eros that binds all of humanity—are torn apart. No fellow feeling for people who suffer and neither wisdom nor an ethical sensibility can emerge from it. Nevertheless, its

phenomenology is probably always working to a greater or lesser degree within the psychopolitical dynamics of social systems as complex as nation-states and as avowedly committed to justice, equity and human rights as 'advanced' democracies of the twenty-first century.

To be more specific:

In the bottom right-hand corner are the majority of voters. Their fear, perhaps of invasions by terrorists or foreigners, gives rise to paranoid fantasies and a craving for absolute security.

Only 'strong leaders' can offer this level of secure control. They use false empathy with the fear to comfort people at the same time as they allow marginalized target groups to be blamed for the problems. Groups identified for marginalisation may include artists, thinkers, visionaries and anyone else inclined to disagree with these strategies. Scapegoating and vengeful attacks, possibly including wars follow.

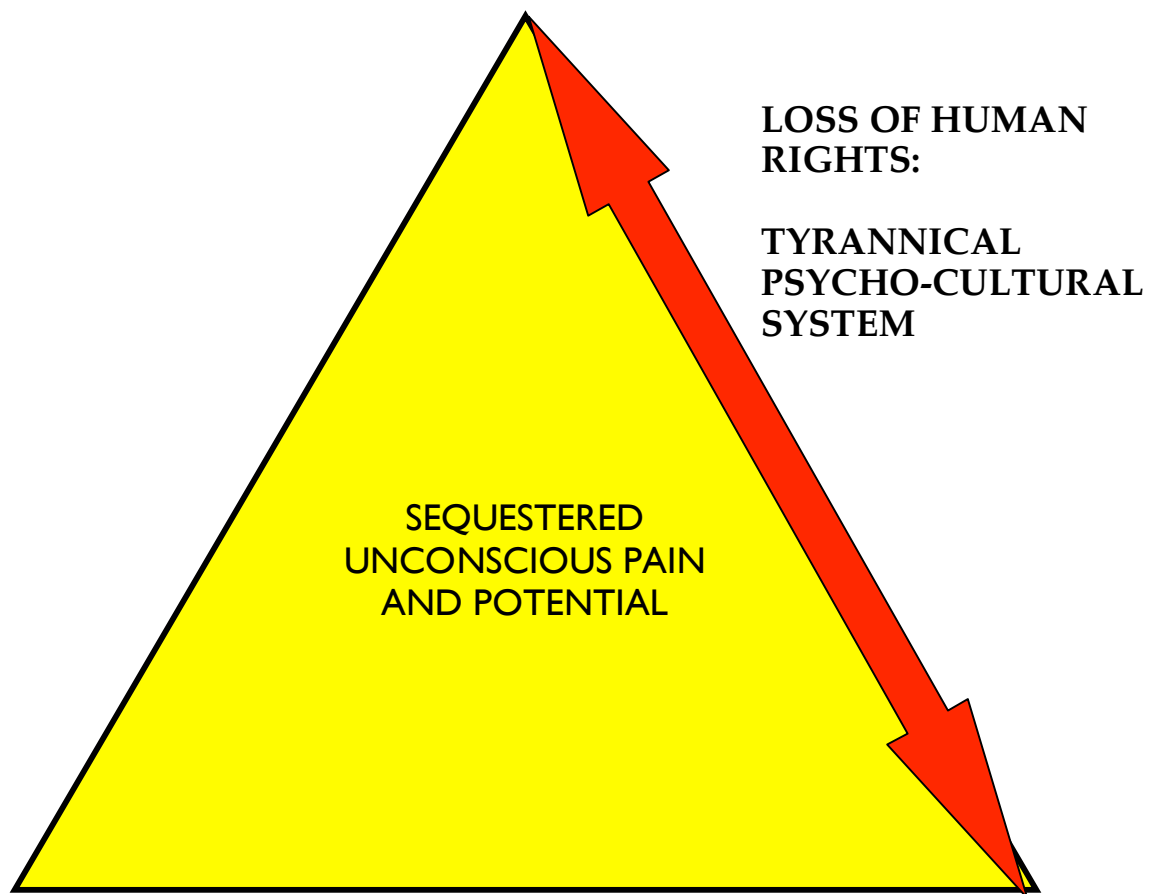
If the anger of the marginalized people becomes uncontrollable, the fear of the majority is likely to rise, seeking even stronger guarantees of security, making for high public tolerance of more omnipotence, fewer civil liberties, less public freedom, more bad publicity and oppression for marginalized and depotentiated people.

If the people in the bottom left-hand corner do eventually find their way into the mainstream—as have the Australian children of most 'wogs' who came here after World War II, and Russia in the post-cold-war world—the system will still be hungry for someone to transfer the fear to. Enter the Aborigines, Asians and illegal migrants who are abusing Australia's wonderful tolerance of a fair go. Enter the white world's Islamic panic .

Whenever this system is enculturated as a sociopolitical norm it becomes a strong unconscious driver of public policy formulation that erodes democracy as it sequesters the telic energies of psyche in a political backwater, cutting them off from the populist mainstream.

At its worst, enculturated trauma is transmitted across generations in a pattern of impotence seeking omnipotent retraumatizing revenge so that, for example, Israel's perpetration of terror against the Palestinians is a fateful consequence of Nazi Germany's genocidal impulse, and the fate of Palestinian iteration of the pattern in future generations is currently being sealed:

TYRANTS
UNEMPATHIC AGGRESSOR / VICTOR
Psychic defence of traumatising omnipotence



THE DEFEATED / OPPRESSED / VICTIMS
Psychic wound of traumatic impotence

I wonder whether this diagram provides a psychological background to Lord Acton's maxim "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely". Perhaps an underlying cause of power's corrupting effect is to be found in experiences of absolute *powerlessness*? Could it be a natural law of psycho-cultural dynamics that the cause of power's corrupting effect is actually to be found in the corrupting agony—the decomposing effect upon a person's sense of self—of experiences of impotence as absolute *powerlessness*?

The Eumenides

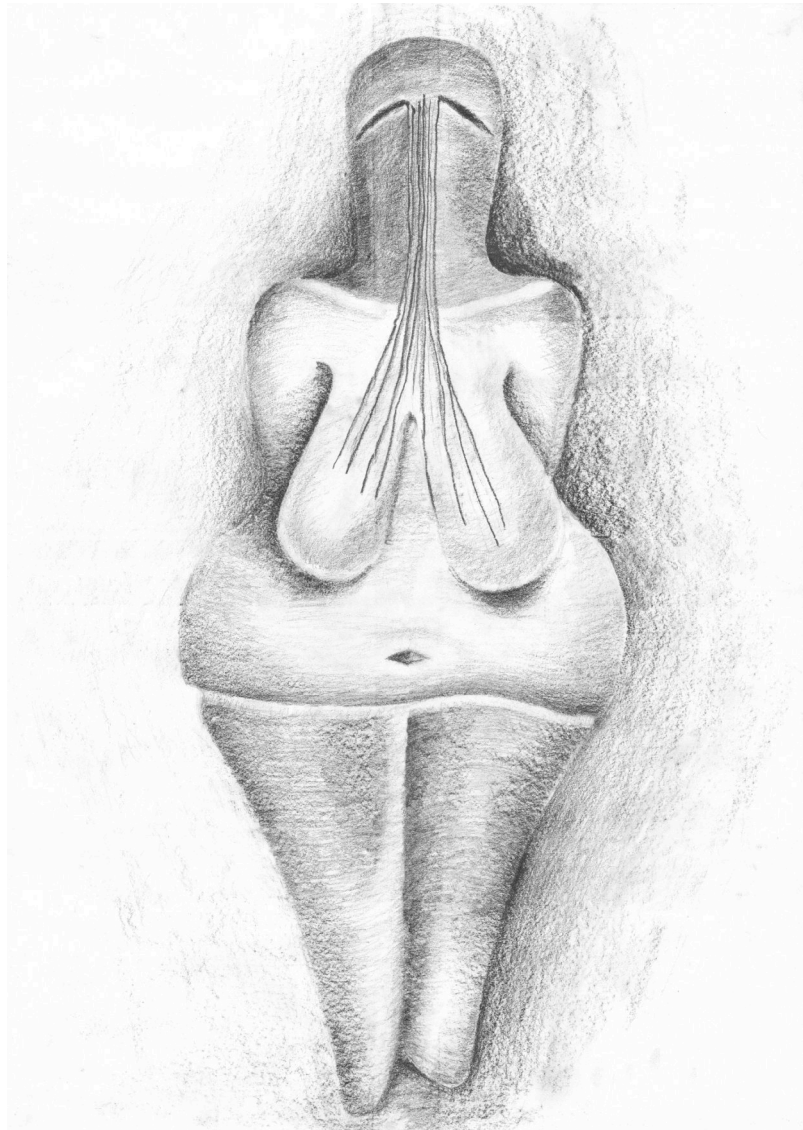
So how do we get out of the nightmare? What moves people from fate to destiny? Where do we find the songs of *telos* that might sing into our cultures the real protection of public goodness and a healthy ethos that accords with Temenos Academy's commitment to "art in the service of the sacred"?

Logos must now join with eros. It is time for imagination and hope and an engagement of the heart. At this stage in the therapeutic process we need a big story that shows the path of healing as well as all the suffering.

But where to go? I fretted for weeks about this part of my lecture, in an old grief at having no particular spiritual home to bring you back to. I so wanted to leave you in the hope I feel for

myself, my family and Canberra community, our country, since we women went to Parliament House and found a resurgence of ourselves by singing a lament.

I kept taking out the big image Bronwyn Goss drew for me of the Great Goddess of our Palaeolithic heritage, hoping she would whisper the answer.



She is such an eloquent *whitefella Tjukurpa*. In 24,000BCE an emotionally articulate artist made her—an eleven centimetre figurine—from a paste of clay and ground bone at a place now called Dolni Vestonice in the Czech Republic. See how expressive she is, with her tears streaming over her big generative body—this Indigenous, most ancient European divinity who knows at once sorrow and renewal; who keeps the unbroken regenerative *temenos* that is tomb *and* womb. How do I invite her to make a conclusion for my talk? I kept wondering.

Sometimes when I'm in a hard place like this I read Greek tragedy for the old songmen's extraordinary knowledge of the law. Aeschylus is often the most rewarding.

I kept the image of the goddess with me as I hung around his *Oresteian Trilogy*, reading of Cassandra, feeling her pain. In the first play she is in Argos where terror reigns, far from her hometown of Troy. She is singing wild laments and blood-soaked prophesies in the Grand Foyer of the house of government. Although the Citizens' Chorus tells her that "the past shrieks through the city", only Cassandra knows the way the law works and sees the patterns of future consequence. "The pain of knowing/ Drives through me like a storm-lashed sea," she says. But no one is interested. No one believes her because she is cursed by Apollo, Reason, Enlightenment. Rationality can never make sense of the oracular voice.

But then I realized that Cassandra sees only the triangle and its repeating fate of tyranny begetting tyranny. Hers is not a generative, healing oracle. She does not know the law about lament and renewal that is engraved in the body of the ancient Goddess. She doesn't see that lament serves any destiny. Perhaps that is also why they didn't believe her?

It is the third play, *The Eumenides*, usually translated as *The Benevolents* or *Kindly Ones*, that we could use in Temenos Oz.

In this drama, cast as a Chorus of three women, the Great Goddess shows the generativity of her double face of Sorry Fury and Benevolence after a therapeutic intervention of profound social significance.

The drama opens with Cassandra's dire prophesies fulfilled. It concludes with a temenos for the telos of order and humanity established in the city and its people.

So I placed my trust in the advice Aristotle gives in *Poetics*, that theatre which works always shows "what *would happen* [in life]". And I read and re-read under the speeches trying to discover what that big lawman Aeschylus knew. For here in *The Eumenides*, beneath plot and character, I felt he was not just showing that the state *can* be a temenos, but also revealing a way to create it.

At the outset, we see three old, black, repulsive women with heavy, rasping breath, their eyes oozing a discharge, sleeping in a restless huddle on the floor of a temple. Their dreams are a saturation of blood—warriors' blood, civilians' blood, blood of old men and women, mothers' blood, children's blood, dragon's blood—blood desecrating the sacred body of the Earth, which it is their eternal mission to protect. In this sleep they make hideous moans and bone-rattling ululations. They fail all the p.r. department's image tests for would-be social rejuvenators. But I always feel a resonance with their suffering—their unbearable burden, of feeling all the emotional pain edited out of television news, election campaigns and the biographies of powerful men; the silenced grief of hundreds of generations of mothers; and the tears of all the wise men and women who have yearned to cry out that this unholy river of blood is not the true dreaming of humanity.

The image problem doesn't get any better when they wake, seeing blood stream from the navelstone of the Earth and shrieking the demand of blood for blood as they set about the day's grisly business of avenging a wronged mother.

Their problem is different to Cassandra's. *Everyone* believes them, but the "lethal spell of their voice", the "salt black wave of [their] anger", are universally feared and hated. No one adores or worships them, until Athena—wise, civilizing goddess of the city—listens beneath the fury to their grief and hears the longing for Life that is its other side.

Calmly she asks who they are.

"Deep in the halls of Earth they call us Curses", they say.

She defers to them for they are older than her—as old as the Earth, whose voice they sound. "The years have taught you more [than me]", she says.

Her respectful humility reaches under the façade. They begin to show the doubleness of their provenance, telling her they are

The proud heart of the past, driven under the earth,
Condemned like so much filth.

Athena responds:

I will never tire
Of telling you your gifts ...
Please stay ...

She pleads persuasively for their blessing of protection, offering them a sanctuary within the city boundary so they might come to love the people as she does. "No house can thrive without you", she tells them.

The Furies say:

Your magic is working ... I can feel the hate,
The fury slip away.

Love's ineffable therapeutic mystery is acting upon the wounded, suffering source of Life itself.

The Eumenides give the people of the city the blessing of protection by their furious will *and* their kindly love, bringing the real security of health to the state, making the whole of it sacred.

"You will praise the fortunes of your lives", they promise the citizens.

Thus do the dynamic energies of Earth and the human spirit join love and will, goodness and power—moving the sound of lament and fury of death into the song of renewal that it has always been the proper destiny of people to sing in every place.

Glenda Cloughley, October 2004 ©

Presentations

- *Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. 31 October 2004 (followed by Websong)*
- *National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. 6 November 2004 (followed by Websong)*
- *National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. 20 November 2004 (followed by Websong)*
- *A slightly revised version of this lecture was presented with members of A Chorus of Women during the International Human Rights Day Symposium 2004, "Acts of Human Rights: Human Rights and the Creative Arts, Centre for Public Culture and Ideas, Griffith University.*

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