Eschilo: testo, scena, tradizione
a cura di Margherita Nimis e Francesca Chenet

A Lifelong Loyalty
Robert Böhme's *Aeschylus Correctus*

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Abstract Robert Böhme was the first modern scholar to argue that Aeschylus' *Oresteia* underwent extensive reworking in antiquity, anticipating Roger Dawe's later work. This paper reconstructs Böhme's theory and shows how it was shaped by the poet Stefan George, whom Böhme likely encountered in Heidelberg, and by his involvement in NSDAP politics. Recognizing these influences allows for a clearer assessment of his philological work. Despite his biases, Böhme engaged rigorously with linguistic, metrical, and dramaturgical problems in the *Oresteia*, offering insights that remain relevant today. The paper also recovers a neglected but revealing episode in the reception of Aeschylus in twentieth-century Germany.

Keywords Aeschylus. Oresteia. Ancient Interpolations. Aeschylus' modern reception. Twentieth-century Germany. Stefan George-Kreis.

1 Böhme's Philological Theory

1.1 Robert Böhme on the *Oresteia*: Theory and Publications

Robert Böhme (1911-1997) is a puzzle in the history of Aeschylean scholarship. From the 1930s to the 1990s, he produced a steady stream of research on Greek archaic poetry, yet he remains largely

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unknown to critics today.[1] His most provocative contribution is a theory about an ancient revision of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, which has an equally unusual publication history.

Böhme's interest in Aeschylus dates back to the late 1930s, when he published his first article on the anagnorisis scene in the *Choephori* and chose the tragedian as the subject of his *Habilitationsschrift* (1940).[2] Böhme subsequently devoted himself almost obsessively to the theory of an ancient revision of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, publishing six volumes that repeated, refined, and expanded his central thesis. His final volume appeared in 1997, the year of his death – proof of a commitment that lasted until his very last days. But what did this theory amount to, how exactly did it develop over six decades of scholarly dedication, and what ideological forces drove its formulation?

1.1.1 Böhme's *Aischylos und der Anagnorismos*

Böhme first proposed that the *Oresteia* had come down to us as a *fabula correcta* in his 1938 article *Aischylos und der Anagnorismos*, published in the German journal *Hermes*. Like other scholars, Böhme believed that the transmitted texts of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides contain extensive interpolations made by actors, as reported by Pseudo-Plutarch and Quintilian[3] – alterations that prompted Lycurgus in 330 BC to establish official copies for the Athenian archive.[4] For Aeschylus' tragedies, however, he argued something more radical, by suggesting that his texts had already undergone an official rewriting for performance long before Lycurgus'

1 I am especially grateful to Professor Petra Schierl for generously sharing bibliographical information that proved crucial in tracing Robert Böhme's biography, and to Professor Gherardo Ugolini for his invaluable advice on the reception of Greek literature, especially tragedy, in Nazi Germany. For Böhme's biographical profile, see § 2 below.

2 See Malitz 2006, 344 fn. 143, citing the University of Freiburg's *Protokollbuch der Philosophischen Fakultät* 3.6.1940 (UAF B3/798).

3 Cf. respectively [Plu.] *Vitae dec. orat.* 841f-2a40 and Quint. *inst.* 10. 1. 66.

4 Böhme cites Wilamowitz 1907, 128-33; Ziegler, *RE*, s.v. 'Tragoedia', 2068; Smyth 1933, 39. On the early textual transmission of Greek tragedies, see Battezzato 2003 (with detailed analysis of ancient sources), Finglass 2015, and Mastronarde 1994, 39-48 (with extensive discussion of the interpolation problem). On the textual transmission of Aeschylean drama, see Wartelle 1971, Zimmermann 2005, Finglass 2023. The latter, like Hutchinson 1985, challenges the notion that Aeschylus' tragedies were restaged already in the fifth century. Biles 2006-7 questions the reliability of ancient testimonies regarding the decree supposedly allowing this. On actors' interpolations, the foundational study remains Page 1934.

edition.[5] As evidence for this theory, Böhme identified two spurious passages in the recognition scene between Electra and Orestes in the *Choephori*, specifically lines 205-10 and 228.[6] According to him, a later reviser (*Bearbeiter*) had indeed inserted Orestes' footprints as a δεύτερον τεκμήριον – a second piece of recognition evidence – to answer criticism from Aeschylean successors like Euripides and Aristophanes, who had mocked the implausibility of a lock of hair serving as the sole basis for *anagnorisis*.[7]

1.1.1.1 Böhme's *Bühnenbearbeitung äschyleischer Tragödien*

After the war, Böhme substantially expanded his investigation of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* in two volumes (*Bühnenbearbeitung äschyleischer Tragödien*, where he argued for a comprehensive reworking of the entire trilogy.

The catalyst for this renewed interest came in 1952 with the publication of *P. Oxy.* 2256. 3 (*TrGF* I DID c 6 Snell, III Aesch. T 70 Radt). According to the papyrus, Aeschylus' *Danaids* trilogy defeated Sophocles to win first prize and was, therefore, produced sometime between 470 and 459 BCE, most likely in 463.[8] The archaically structured *Suppliants* now preceded the sophisticated *Oresteia* by a mere five years. For Böhme, however, it seemed highly implausible that a poet of roughly sixty years could experience such a sudden artistic *Entwicklung*. This stylistic gulf demanded an alternative explanation. Böhme, hence, concluded that the *Oresteia* must have originally resembled the *Suppliants* – archaic, ritually bound, and formally rigid. The sophisticated trilogy we possess was, instead, the result of reworking by later epigones. Finding the simplicity of Aeschylean archaic composition primitive and flawed, they had modernized the entire dramaturgy, taking as models the treatments of the Argive myth by Sophocles and Euripides.[9] According to him, these were not mere additions (that is, interpolations in the strict sense of the term), but rather operations of *Umdichtung* (rewriting),

5 In *Bühnenbearbeitung* 1, 9 fn. 11, he protested having been misunderstood by Groeneboom 1944, Fraenkel 1950, and Lesky 1954, as they claimed he had "expunged" the footprint passages in the *Choephori*.

6 The lines were already suspected by Schütz 1808, 34-5.

7 On the recognition scene and Orestes' footprint in the *Choephori*, see Fraenkel 1950, III (*Appendix D*), who extends the athetesis to 205-11 and 228-9.

8 Unfortunately, it is not certain whether line 1 contained ἐπὶ Ἀρχεδημίδου, archon in 464-3. For a full analysis of the papyrus fragment, cf. Garvie 1969, 1-28.

9 Cf. Böhme 1956, 12.

Auseinandertrennung (separation), and *Umnähen* (restitching), which would render the original Aeschylean text irrecoverable.[10]

Böhme first grounded his case by pointing to instances of textual reworking already accepted by scholars in Aeschylean tragedy – namely, the interpolation of line 405 in the *Eumenides*; the insertion of the footprint motif in the *Choephori*'s recognition scene; and the rewriting of the final scene of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*. Setting aside the *Choephori*,[11] line 405 of the *Eumenides* was allegedly added because audiences were no longer satisfied with Athena simply walking onstage, preferring instead a more spectacular arrival by chariot.[12] The ending of *Seven Against Thebes*, meanwhile, was again revised to match the popular mythic versions in Sophocles (particularly the prologue of the *Antigone*) and perhaps Euripides (the exodus of the *Phoenician Women*).[13] All this evidence pointed to a clear conclusion: by the time Lycurgus received the Aeschylean corpus, it had already been tampered with, and this revised version subsequently became the standard text.[14]

1.1.1.2 Agamemnon

The first volume of *Bühnenbearbeitung* focuses on the first two plays of the trilogy: *Agamemnon* and *Choephori*. As for the *Agamemnon*,[15] Böhme argued that the ending had been substantially revised *zur Vervollständigung des Stücks* – that is, to complete the play in accordance with the canonical version of the myth that had emerged in later treatments by Sophocles and Euripides – following thus a

10 Cf. Böhme 1956, especially p. 11, where he states that such reworkings differ from interpolations, specifically because they cannot be deleted from the text, making the original unrecoverable.

11 See § 1.1 above.

12 Lines 404 and 405 cannot stand together. 405 implies that Athena has entered the stage in a horse-drawn vehicle; 404 that she has travelled from the Troad at superhuman speed on foot. 405 was deleted by Wilamowitz 1889, who believed that Athena entered on the *mechane*. I rather believe that Athena simply entered the stage on foot, and later some producer added line 405 to insert a more spectacular arrival (Cf. Taplin 1977, 389-90, especially fn. 2).

13 Doubts about this scene's authenticity arose in 1848, when Franz published a *didascalia* from codex **M** (*Laur. Plut.* 32.9, 10th cent.) identifying this tragedy as the third play in Aeschylus' Theban trilogy of 467 BCE. The 'open' ending, introducing a new conflict between Antigone and the city over Polynices' burial, seemed incompatible with the drama's final position in the trilogy. Wilamowitz's 1903 and 1914 deletion of both 861-73 and 1005-77 has been accepted by most scholars (see especially Dawe 1967, Dawe 1978; Erbse 1974; Taplin 1977; Hutchinson 1985; Barrett 2007; Judet de La Combe 2011).

14 Cf. Böhme 1956, 13.

15 Cf. especially Böhme 1956, 17-35, Böhme 1959, 18-42.

revision pattern similar to that of *Seven Against Thebes*. Evidence of this revision included a shift in the play's *Gesamtsprachton* (overall tone) and numerous textual details.[16]

More specifically, Böhme identified several passages as spurious. First, the scene where the Chorus hears Agamemnon's death screams and debates what to do in twelve alternating voices (vv. 1343-71). Second, Clytemnestra's entrance speech, in which she claims responsibility for her husband's murder in 'diabolical' terms (vv. 1372-9). Third, and most significantly, the entire Aegisthus section (vv. 1583-673) – with lines 1577-82 from Aegisthus' speech having instead opened Clytemnestra's post-murder speech in the original play. He also rejected all earlier references to Aegisthus in the play, including Cassandra's vision of a cowardly lion lurking in the house and thirsting for revenge (vv. 1223-6),[17] as well as some lines in Clytemnestra's later speech (vv. 1434-7). Finally, in the concluding *Ausblick*,[18] Böhme also credited the *Bearbeiter* with placing Cassandra on the chariot beside Agamemnon, thereby bringing about her direct encounter with Clytemnestra. Underlying this claim is Böhme's distinctive reading of Clytemnestra. The *Bearbeiter*, he maintained, had given her a Euripidean 'makeover' as a shameless adulteress and murderess, obliterating what Aeschylus had originally envisioned: a priestess of Δίκη acting to punish Agamemnon and cleanse her house.[19]

16 Cf. Böhme 1977, 17. Starting from v. 1583, which would mark the most significant caesura between the authentic and spurious parts of Aegisthus' speech, Böhme criticized several aspects of the versification: the harshness of the arses repeatedly resolved at short intervals (cf. *Ag.* 1584, 1590, 1600, 1605); the banality and repetitiveness both in rhythm (e.g., *Ag.* 1590-3, where the syntactic pause always falls after the first longum) and in vocabulary (e.g., the five verses in the trochaic tetrameter section all beginning with ἀλλά: 1649, 1652, 1655, 1662, 1666). Moreover, he detected a generally prosaic tone, as in the use of the εἰκάζειν device, where he claims the Chorus expresses itself in a manner contrary to Orpheus (this would also entail the anachronistic mention of Orpheus as a legendary figure). Most glaring contradictions would be the mention of the paternal hand (v. 1582), which, with the addition of v. 1583, would come to describe the hand of Atreus, whereas in Clytemnestra's words it referred to the murderous hand of Agamemnon, and the Chorus appearing armed, though they had described themselves in the parodos as weak old men unfit for war.

17 The phrase λέοντ' ἄναλκιν (*Ag.* 1224) has troubled many scholars, who consider the image absurd – the lion was in fact traditionally associated with strength – and contradictory to *Ag.* 1259, where Cassandra compares Aegisthus to a wolf. Wilamowitz 1885 deleted the line, while Fraenkel 1950, Denniston-Page 1957, and Sommerstein 1989 judged it corrupt. For a defence of the passage, see Medda 2024.

18 Cf. Böhme 1956, 113-25.

19 According to Böhme 1956, 112, the evolution of Clytemnestra is even "symbolisch für den Wandel der *Oresteia* und für die geistigen Ränge ihrer Dichter vom religiösen Genius bis zum bürgerlichen Literaten". Cf. also Böhme 1956, 106-12 and 1959, 43-53.

1.1.1.3 Choephori

The *Choephori* underwent an even more drastic reworking.[20] According to Böhme, the *Bearbeiter* had essentially rewritten the tragedy's central section, introducing Pylades and the nurse Kilissa[21] as entirely new characters and reconceiving the murder plot against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus – including the false report of Orestes' death.[22] Even more significant, however, was the difference in worldview between the *Bearbeiter* and Aeschylus. Where the original Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon to avenge Iphigenia's sacrifice, the revisor added jealousy over Cassandra as a motive. Where Aeschylus' Orestes had acted driven by his father's vengeful spirit, the revisor substituted more rational, opportunistic reasoning: Apollo's command, personal ambition, and trust in Clytemnestra's prophetic dream. The long opening *goetia* – central to Aeschylus' religious conception – thus lost its meaning in the rewrite, replaced by psychological motives borrowed from Sophocles and Euripides. The clearest break between the two versions occurred at line 510, where the Chorus responds to Electra and Orestes' *kommos* at their father's tomb by dismissively reducing their lament to "a sufficiently long speech": καὶ μὴν ἀμεμφῆ τόνδ' ἐτείνατον λόγον. They thus entirely misunderstood the Aeschylean scene, which Böhme considered the most significant representation of human-divine union in world literature.[23] Yet, the *Bearbeiter* had tampered with earlier sections too, making it impossible to recover Aeschylus' original except in broad strokes.[24]

20 Cf. Böhme 1956, 36-61.

21 The nurse character is deemed unacceptable due to her name, which departs from the mythical tradition, and because Aeschylus does not mention her as Orestes's saviour anywhere in the *Agamemnon*.

22 Böhme himself acknowledges that the excision of Pylades has *weittragende Konsequenzen*, specifically, the entire murder plot cannot be considered original. The reasons for excising the character of Pylades are the following: Böhme's conviction that Aeschylus did not use the third actor; the repetitions and prosaic expressions – very similar to those in Aegisthus' speech in the *Agamemnon* (cf. e.g. ὡς ἂν σαφῶς μάθω, vv. 20-1) – that punctuate Pylades' sections; and the general atmosphere of the murder plot, particularly the element of the false report of Orestes' death, which would unseemingly anticipate a *Kriminalroman*. Moreover, the *en passant* mention of the urn in which Orestes would have been buried in Phocis (*Ch.* 680-7) would be a *rein Additiv* of Euripidean inspiration.

23 "Das bedeutendste Dokument menschlich-göttlicher Einigung der Weltliteratur" (Böhme 1956, 42-3).

24 The interpolator would also betray himself through linguistic elements such as the numerous repetitions within the play itself or across the trilogy (e.g. δαίμονος πειρώμενος *Ch.* 513 – *Ag.* 1663, φίλος at the end of the line *Ch.* 683, 705, μάτην *Ch.* 82, 846, 926), and the *Markt-Alltagsjargon* (e.g. τί γάρ; καὶ πῶς; etc.).

1.1.1.4 Eumenides

Böhme devoted the second volume especially to the *Eumenides*,[25] where he claimed to identify two competing versions layered on top of one another: the original religious version conceived by Aeschylus and a secular revision built around the Areopagus trial. The original, he argued, had deep Orphic roots, with Orestes' ordeal mirroring that of the ἀμύητοι (the uninitiated), who wander in suffering until Apollo releases them. Ancient testimony seemed indeed to support this reading. The third-century CE rhetorician Apsines of Gadara reported that Aeschylus had faced charges of impiety for revealing the mysteries in the *Eumenides* (*Rh.* 2. 230 Hammer-Spengel). Yet our text contains no such mysteries, and Euripides apparently knew only the Areopagus version of the play. Böhme accounted for this discrepancy through two stages of revision. Shortly after 458 BCE, a first reviser (*Bearbeiter A*) stripped out the Orphic material and inserted the trial scene; decades later, following the production of Euripides' *Orestes* in 408 BCE, a second reviser (*Bearbeiter B*) updated the entire trilogy, bringing it into line with Sophocles' and Euripides' refashioning of the Argive myth.[26]

1.1.1.5 Böhme's View of Aeschylus and the Development of Ancient Greek Theater

Böhme's theory extended far beyond textual criticism, proposing to reshape both our understanding of ancient Greek theatre's development and the image of Aeschylus as a poet and playwright.

The *Oresteia* traditionally stands as a landmark of Greek theatrical innovation, providing the first extant attestation of the third actor,[27] and other staging techniques that became canonical in later drama. Böhme rejected this view entirely. In his account, virtually every technical advance in the trilogy stemmed not from Aeschylus but from later revisers who had modernized the plays for contemporary audiences. Specifically, with Cassandra, Aegisthus, Kilissa, Pylades,

25 Cf. Böhme 1959, 64-100.

26 The same *Einförmigkeit der Versproduktion* would also recur in the *Eumenides*, especially at the end of verses (e.g. *Eum.* 201, 215, 227, 229, all ending with the word λόγος or λέγω). Cf. Böhme 1959, 71-8 for other instances. This uniformity wouldn't be simply a sign of *Sekundär-Produktion*, but it would confirm that the same person had reworked the entire trilogy.

27 Aristotle credits Sophocles with introducing the third actor, though the specific tragedy remains unknown. Since Sophocles debuted in 468 BCE and the third actor first appears in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* (458 BCE), the innovation likely occurred in the late 460s. On the use of the third actor in the *Oresteia*, see Knox 1972, 109-17.

and the trial scene all deemed spurious, Aeschylus would never have employed the third actor – confirming that this innovation was Sophoclean, perhaps introduced around 449 BCE when the prize for actors was established. Similarly, Böhme argued that the original *Oresteia* had featured monumental choruses of 50 members.[28] The reduction to 15 would occur only after 458 BCE, with the number falling to 12 in the late fifth century under the economic constraints of the Peloponnesian War.[29] According to Böhme, Aeschylus' theater would have been far more archaic, ritually oriented, and formally rigid than traditionally supposed – a lyrical performance still intimately bound to religious ritual and not yet fully autonomous as theater.

Yet even more radical was the reshaping of Aeschylus himself as a poet. On the formal level, for instance, he would never have composed naturalistic tragic dialogue: *rheseis* and *stichomythiae* would have been constructed in strict reciprocal relation, adhering to rigid formal principles such as *Ringkomposition*. Moreover, Aeschylus would have avoided mere spectacle, which the *Bearbeiter* deliberately seeks in Agamemnon's and Athena's chariot entrances, in the *Mord-Stichomythie* at the end of the *Agamemnon*, and in Clytemnestra's breast-baring during her matricide. In terms of content, Böhme believed that Aeschylus would have excluded any form of rhetoric, gnome, psychology, and eroticism – in short, everything relating to the concrete and rational dimensions of human experience. Their presence in the trilogy could only be explained as the work of a degenerate *Bearbeiter* [30] – these were indeed the elements that, in Böhme's view, arose later in Sophocles and Euripides, transforming tragedy into "mere artificial literature".[31] In essence, Böhme's Aeschylus would have been a sacred poet, a *Tänzer* far removed from mundane reality, whom subsequent *Bearbeiter* had progressively modernized, rationalized, and ultimately betrayed.[32]

Böhme's fundamental ideas on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* are already present in his 1950s volumes, though compressed and chaotic – hastily

28 The existence of a 50-member chorus is no longer accepted (cf. Pickard-Cambridge 1968, 241-2; Taplin 1977, 203 fn. 2).

29 Cf. Böhme 1956, 121-2, Böhme 1959, 55-61. That the Chorus in the *Oresteia* was numbered 12 is based mainly on *Ag.* 1348-71. This is the view of Bamberger 1832, 55-8, generally accepted by scholars (for a fuller discussion, see Fraenkel 1950, 3: 633-5; Medda 2024, 3: 304-5). Sophocles would have increased the number up to 15.

30 Cf. Böhme 1959, 62-3.

31 In this regard, what Böhme (1959, 84) says about the *Bearbeiter*'s poetic language is particularly interesting: "Solche angelernte Routine-Produktion entbehrt des spezifisch Dichterischen – der Magie des Worts d.h. des Bindens und Entbindens überindividueller Gewalten im Sprachklang, der Gründigkeit und Fülle jenes dem Heimgesuchtsein und der Erschütterung eigenen Tons – dafür ist sie vernünftig d.h. gibt prosaisch-rationale Gedanken in prosaischer Aussage".

32 Cf. Böhme 1959, 101-2.

assembled under what he called *Außergewöhnliche Umstände*.[33] He would spend the following thirty years elaborating these ideas.

1.1.2 The 1970s Volumes

The 1970s marked a period of renewed activity in Böhme's studies on the *Oresteia*. During this time, two volumes on the subject were published: *Pelopiden und Poeten. Zur Interdipendenz von Mythos, Dichtung, Historie, Tragödie im klassischen Athen* (1972), and *Aeschylus Correctus. Grundriss eines Problems der archaischen Tragödie* (1977), followed by *Aischylos und seine Epigonen. Folgerungen aus dem ‚Aeschylus Correctus'* (1985). In each volume, Böhme reaffirmed his theory of an ancient revision of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and advanced several specific arguments.

In *Pelopiden und Poeten*, Böhme identified the monstrous banquet of Atreus – mentioned several times in the *Agamemnon* (1095-6, 1217-22, 1590-602) – as a later addition, borrowed by the *Bearbeiter* from Sophocles' *Thyestes* (particularly the detail of the sun turning away in horror), itself modeled on Herodotus' episode of Harpagus' banquet (Hdt. 1.117-19). The *Bearbeiter*'s activity would have, thus, followed familiar patterns, contributing on the one hand to the canonization of the Sophoclean version of the myth, and on the other to the introduction of more secular motives behind the characters' actions. Indeed, Agamemnon would not die as punishment for the unjust sacrifice of Iphigenia, but as the victim of Aegisthus's revenge for the crimes committed by Atreus against his father Thyestes.

In *Aeschylus Correctus* and the 1985 *Folgerungen*, Böhme again emphasized the archaic character of Aeschylus' tragedy. Aeschylus, like Pratinas and Phrynichus, was a *Tänzer* whose simple drama (ἁπλῆ τραγῳδία) centered on the chorus and the ritual significance of music and dance. A major shift then occurred around the mid-fifth century with the third actor's innovation, greater emphasis on acting and plot, and architectural changes like the Odeon and an elevated wooden stage for actors. For Böhme, Sophocles specifically led this transformation by moving beyond the Aeschylean style – characterized by gravity, excess, and artifice – toward a more fluid dramatic language allowing greater psychological depth. These transformations marked the birth of classical tragedy, a literary rather than sacral experience, departing definitively from the archaic tradition of the *Tänzer*.[34]

33 Cf. Böhme 1956, 5. Freymuth 1959 spent most of his review trying to impose order on Böhme's work, to make it more accessible to the reader.

34 Cf. Böhme 1977, 6-8.

Böhme then found evidence of Sophoclean influence in Clytemnestra's *Angsttraum* in the *Choephori* (526-33).[35] More specifically, he argued that the *Bearbeiter* had merged elements from both Stesichorus' and Sophocles' versions of the queen's dream: the serpent motif from Stesichorus'*Oresteia* (fr. 219 *PMG* = 180 D.-F.) and the renewed sexual union between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon from Sophocles' *Electra* (417-25), composing the image of Clytemnestra giving birth to a serpent that sucks blood from her breast. Notably, in *Aischylos und seine Epigonen*, Böhme argued that such sexual explicitness was utterly foreign to Aeschylus, identifying it rather as a Euripidean innovation that gained increasing favor with later audiences.[36] According to him, the *Bearbeiter* indulged this 'vulgar taste' more than once,[37] especially in the portrayal of Clytemnestra. Evidence of this includes Clytemnestra's insults to Cassandra, mockingly called a "tree-rubber" (ἱστοτριβής *Ag.* 1443), the queen's jealousy of her husband's concubine as a psychological motivation for murder, and the staging of Clytemnestra baring her breast to elicit her son's pity.[38] This last scene would especially adapt an Euripidean motif (attested in *Electra*, *Orestes*, and *Phoenician Women*) and betray the *Bearbeiter*'s fondness for spectacle.

Who, then, revised the *Oresteia*, and when? In the 1985 volume, Böhme proposed Philocles, Aeschylus's grandson through his daughter, as the principal reviser, dating his revision to the late fifth century (407 BCE).[39] Besides the numerous debts to Euripides' *Orestes* (staged in 408 BCE), supporting evidence for this dating would include: the trochaic tetrameter finale of the *Agamemnon*,[40] Anaxagoras' reproductive theory alluded to in Apollo's speech in

35 Cf. Böhme 1977, 21-6; Böhme 1985, 14-17.

36 On vulgar elements in tragedy (and epic), see Bain 2007. He demonstrated that ancient authors avoided vulgarisms by preserving a dignified diction.

37 Fraenkel 1964, 58 observed that sensual and "provocative" elements also remarkably occur in the spurious ending of the *Septem*. See, especially, the image of the lament coming from the deep cleavage of Antigone and Ismene's lovely breasts (vv. 863-5), and the detail of the girdle (vv. 870-1).

38 Böhme detected a "secularizing" shift toward sexuality also at *Eum.* 213-18, where Apollo allegedly reduces marriage to mere sexual union.

39 Cf. Böhme 1985, 50-61.

40 Compared to the *Persians*, trochaic tetrameters are significantly less frequent in the *Agamemnon*, appearing only in the *Mord-Stichomythie* and the closing scene (cf. Medda 2024, 3: 304). This use of the tetrameter is consistent with that of Euripides in the *Trojan Women* (415 BC) and of Sophocles in his late works, *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. However, the scant evidence makes it imprudent to date a text or diagnose inauthenticity on this basis.

the *Eumenides*,[41] various references to the Peloponnesian War, and the use of a twelve-member chorus. Meanwhile, Böhme's attribution to Philocles, rather than to other Aeschylean successors, rested on ancient representations of his authorial person in comedy, which appeared consistent with the reworking of the *Oresteia*.[42] Cratinus, for instance, lamented the inconsistency of Philocles' plots (fr. 323 K.–A.);[43] Aristophanes mocked him for his ugliness (αἰσχρὸς), claiming that he would only be capable of writing αἰσχρῶς (*Thesm.* 168)[44] – this meaning for Böhme that his physical inadequacy would have made him obsessed with sex;[45] and Teleclides (fr. 15) reported that he exerted great effort to emulate Aeschylus' spirit.[46]

1.1.3 Böhme's Last Words on the *Oresteia*

Böhme's last book *Eppur si muove – und sie bewegt sich doch: das Mirakel der äschyleischen Orestie* (1997) adds no new material to the discussion over the *Oresteia*'s authenticity, but it sheds light on the intellectual framework (and attitude) underlying his arguments.[47]

Böhme argued that modern philologists had shaped their understanding of Aeschylus to conform with a particular vision of Greek civilization – one designed to validate the epistemological basis of Western rational thought. This intellectual tradition, he claimed, originated in the Christianized Aristotelianism of the French Enlightenment, which systematically marginalized or distorted the non-rational and mystical currents of Western culture: medieval

41 It is arbitrary to deny that Athenian intellectuals, including Aeschylus, may have known Anaxagoras' teachings as early as the 460s and 450s (cf. Sommerstein 1989, 206-7).

42 More likely Philocles was ridiculed in comedy because of his achievements (cf. Olson, Seaberg 2018, 72-3). He won the first prize against Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (*TrGF* 24 T 3a = Dicaearch. fr. 80 Wehrli).

43 Böhme 1985, 56 stated that the *Bearbeiter* "zeigt sich seine Unbekümmertheit um die Einheitlichkeit der Konzeption, um die Geschlossenheit des Logos". However, Olson, Seaberg 2018, 72 interpret Cratinus' fragment differently: "An attack on the tragic poet Philocles for allegedly mishandling the basic plot-line in one of his plays (i.e., turning it into an unexpected, non-traditional direction)".

44 See Austin, Olson 2004, 113.

45 Böhme (1985, 57) interpretation is unacceptable. Ancient sources speak rather of the bitterness and austerity of Philocles' style that caused him to be nicknamed Χολή 'Bile' and Ἁλμίωνος 'son of Brine' (*TrGF* 24 T 1-2 = Suda φ 378 and ΣVΓ² ad *Av.* 281).

46 Cf. Böhme 1985, 59. For an overview of the possible meanings of φρόνημα in Teleclides' fragment, see Bagordo 2013, 124-5.

47 The phrase *Eppur si muove*, allegedly spoken by Galileo after abjuring heliocentrism before the Inquisition, is almost certainly apocryphal but has become proverbial for truths that endure despite official denial.

mysticism, ancient Orphism, and their persistence in early Greek tragedy. Aeschylus, as a *Tänzer* and initiate, still participated in this sacred heritage. Just as they sought to exclude Orpheus from the Greek world – eventually denying his very existence – they likewise reduced Aeschylus's ritual art to theatre, recasting him as the inventor of dramatic technique.[48]

For modern philologists, therefore, accepting Böhme's theory would entail more than denying Aeschylus his masterpiece (at least in its transmitted form): it would mean losing the very foundation of their intellectual tradition. The volume's epigraph is revealing: Böhme casts classical philology as the Church and the authenticity of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as its dogma, positioning himself as the heretic who refuses to believe. Yet one might wonder whether it was truly the evidence that drove Böhme's thesis, or whether his belief shaped how he read the evidence. The heretic, as we shall demonstrate, may simply be serving a different orthodoxy.

1.2 The Academic Backlash

Böhme's contributions did not go unnoticed in classical scholarship, particularly in its early stages.[49] The following is a list of the reviews I have been able to recover.

The academic response was, however, consistently negative, and the bitter stance of Böhme's last book can be understood, in part, as a reaction to this persistent harsh criticism. Several critics challenged the ideological assumptions behind Böhme's textual criticism. Kamerbeek, for instance, stated that he dishonored the tradition of Hermann, Wilamowitz, and Bruno Snell, by displaying "un romanticisme nébuleux qui se donne les airs d'une mystique poétique et sublime";[50] Freymuth claimed that the equation of poetry with the 'original' verbal art, not yet become literature, and the requirement of a uniform linguistic tone, more suited to lyric than to drama, betrayed a belated disciple of Friedrich Gundolf.[51] Yet with the crucial difference that Gundolf's interpretation of the

48 Cf. Böhme 1997, 9-16.

49 *Bühnenbearbeitung äschyleischer Tragödien*, vol. 1. Reviewed by: Kamerbeek 1957; Wehrli 1958; Freymuth 1959. Voll. 1-2. Reviewed by: Rose 1960; Calder 1960; Jouan 1960; Lucas 1960; Vysoký 1960; Kirkwood 1962. *Pelopiden und Poeten*. Reviewed by Wehrli 1973; Lasserre 1973; Griffith 1974. *Aeschylus correctus*. Reviewed by Gelzer 1977; Mund-Dopchie 1978; Diggle 1979; Van Looy 1979; Garvie 1979; Wartelle 1981. *Eppur si muove - und sie bewegt sich doch: das Mirakel der äschyleischen Orestie*. Reviewed by Garvie 1999.

50 Cf. Kamerbeek 1957, 254.

51 Cf. Freymuth 1959, 403.

great poets was, with few exceptions, a constructive one. Böhme, instead, "fared like the mischief-making sorcerer's apprentice in the well-known tale". Wehrli raised a similar objection, contending that Böhme should have acknowledged the historically conditioned image of Aeschylus that informed his atheteses.[52] Indeed, what most troubled critics was Böhme's conception of Aeschylus as a sublime poet who adhered strictly to "highness of style",[53] avoiding all forms of repetition, contradiction, and sophistry. In this view, Aeschylus remained so absorbed in dialogue with cosmic forces as to be incapable of engaging with the concrete realities of human life – an a priori position that disregarded both textual evidence and more recent scholarship on Aeschylus.[54]

Others questioned his philological methodology. Calder declared that "Böhme's aberration" would serve as an effective warning against the excesses of Homeric Analysts.[55] Their analytical structure would indeed collapse, and their method would end "as a parody of itself" once transferred from epic to classical tragedy.[56] Jouan criticized Böhme for basing his claims about the inauthenticity of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* primarily on impressionistic judgments of poetic quality, offering philological arguments only as secondary support.[57] Furthermore, he faulted Böhme for failing to compare the *Oresteia* with other Aeschylean plays, a comparison that would have allowed for a more nuanced characterization of his poetry.[58] The same arbitrariness was lamented by Kirkwood, who caustically commented that Böhme's "indubitable learning" was "ill spent in amassing

52 Cf. Wehrli 1958, 246.

53 Cf. Lucas 1960.

54 See Wehrli 1958; Jouan 1960; Gelzer 1977.

55 Calder mistook Böhme for a pupil of Peter von der Mühll. While Böhme was not his student, the two became connected in the 1950s, and von der Mühll's ideas on Homer's *Textgeschichte* arguably strengthened his belief in an ancient *Bearbeitung* of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Bertram Schefold (2005, 8), son of the classical archaeologist Karl Schefold, reports that several members of the George-Kreis had migrated to Basel and surprisingly embraced von der Mühll's approach – the *Homeranalyse* was indeed far removed from George's aesthetic principles. It is quite possible that Böhme reached Basel through this network.

56 In the 1956 *Ausblick* (123-4), Böhme drew an explicit parallel between the textual histories of tragedy and epic: "vor der Tragödie war dies das Schicksal aller Epik". Just as the Homerids revised and expanded the Homeric poems, Aeschylus' successors reworked his tragedies, updating them to keep his legacy alive.

57 Cf. Jouan 1960, 539; also Griffith 1974, 213.

58 Böhme never explicitly denied the authenticity of *Prometheus Bound*, though he quoted it at least twice (1956, 84; 1959, 33) alongside Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes to demonstrate that certain expressions in the *Oresteia* betrayed a later hand. The question, however, matters greatly: scholarly conceptions of Aeschylus vary considerably depending on whether the play is accepted as genuine.

inadequate evidence to support an erratic theory".[59] Mund-Dopchie more broadly emphasized the inadequacy of statistical analysis of language, given the paucity of the transmitted texts.[60]

The reviewers rightly identified serious flaws in Böhme's work, above all the ideological framework driving his scholarship (see § 2). Nonetheless, his close readings remain valuable for encouraging scholars to think outside conventional interpretive frameworks, uncovering real peculiarities within the *Oresteia* that deserve serious consideration.[61] The heuristic value of Böhme's analysis is evident in his reception by two notable scholars: Roger Dawe and Enrico Medda. Dawe admits, in a 1963 paper on inconsistency of plot and character in Aeschylus, to finding it disturbing that Böhme "very properly thrusts in our face the fact that the plays of Aeschylus very probably have received a considerable amount of revision".[62] Many years later, in 2004, he openly questions the authenticity of the *Agamemnon*'s ending (1630-73), together with some lines from the *Eumenides*' prologue, showing that Böhme's suspicions had somehow lingered in his mind. Medda, by contrast, in his edition of the *Agamemnon*, entirely rejects the hypothesis of an ancient revision of the play[63] but engages constructively with Böhme's discussions of individual passages.

1.3 Beyond Criticism: Böhme's merits

Despite its flaws, Böhme's radical approach to tragic interpolation was highly progressive for its time and advanced several ideas that have since found favour with classical philologists.[64]

The chief merit of Böhme's method lies in his insistence on moving beyond the traditional conception of interpolation. While primarily concerned with demonstrating the impossibility of distinguishing

59 Cf. Kirkwood 1962, 214.

60 Cf. Mund-Dopchie 1978, 608.

61 "Einstweilen sind seine vorläufigen Ergebnisse dazu angetan, Vorsicht und Zweifel an der Sicherheit zu wecken, mit der aus dem überlieferten Text unmittelbar eine Anschauung vom echten alten Aeschylus gewonnen werden kann […] An einer ernsthaften Auseinandersetzung mit dieser Aufgabe wird die Aeschvlus-Philologie nicht mehr vorbeigehen können" (cf. Gelzer 1977, 251). "Il n'y en a pas moins beaucoup à glaner en suivant l'auteur dans le détail d'une argumentation fondée sur une analyse minutieuse du texte. Celle-ci a en particulier le mérite de montrer toutes les difficultés, pour ne pas dire les énigmes, que pose à chaque pas la lecture de l'*Orestie*, même après la publication de si amples et si savants commentaires" (cf. Jouan 1960, 541).

62 Cf. Dawe 1963, 21.

63 Cf. Medda 2024, 1: 208-10.

64 The seeds of Böhme's theory date back to 1938.

authentic material from spurious additions – and thus of recovering Aeschylus' original text – he advocated for a fundamentally broader understanding of interpolation, an issue that remains central to classical philology today. His perspective reflects a crucial insight: the early transmission of ancient Greek tragedy was characterized by a textual fluidity foreign to modern cultures.[65] Original texts were subject to actual rewriting as successive generations prioritized the vitality and continuity of the tragedian's legacy over strict preservation of his words. Consequently, revised versions sometimes supplanted the originals entirely, with the reworking encompassing not only additions but also replacements, cuts, and even the interweaving of original and new material.[66] Yet, Böhme insists this represents not loss but gain – a deeper understanding of ancient textual culture and an enriched appreciation of works that sacrifice none of their beauty while acquiring historical depth. At the end of his last book, he offered us a telling analogy: the *Oresteia* emerging from his analysis would resemble Chartres Cathedral, where Romanesque and Gothic elements coexist harmoniously, neither diminishing the building's beauty nor preventing worshippers, however educated, from prayer and contemplation.[67]

From this perspective, the interpolator appears less as a clumsy corrupter of the text and more as a skilled poet in his own right – one who could not only emulate Aeschylus' style but also enrich it by drawing creatively on the innovations of Sophocles and Euripides. He accordingly embarked on an innovative "stylistics of the interpolator", seeking to identify all the principal features of his poetic technique.[68] Moreover, Böhme kept the dramatic essence of the tragic text clearly in mind, attending to stagecraft as well as language – an aspect long

65 On the complex process of textualization of ancient Greek tragedy, see Page 1934; more recently, Montana 2016; Cozzoli 2023.

66 Page 1934 already demonstrated a broader understanding of interpolation by including dittographies and actors' cuts. Crucially, he recognized both the evidential value of ancient interpolations for tracing early textual transmission (*Intr.*, x) and the methodological challenge they posed: actors' interpolations could be well written and therefore difficult to detect (116).

67 Cf. Böhme 1997, 160.

68 Tarrant 1987, 298 advocated precisely for this: "we might even be in a position to embark on a stylistics of interpolation, and to specify the details in the handling of Latin which separate the gifted professional from the poetaster and the amateur. These discoveries, of course, lie far in the future, but mention of them may remind us that the study of interpolation, despite its long and contentious history, is in some respects only now beginning".

neglected in modern textual criticism of Greek tragedy.[69] In keeping with this holistic view, he envisioned the *Bearbeiter* as a theater professional who also addressed dramaturgical concerns in his reworking of the *Oresteia*. Böhme's investigation aimed primarily to distinguish "Geist von Geist", that is, to separate Aeschylus from the *Bearbeiter* and thereby recover the original version of the *Oresteia*. However, his positive engagement with spurious passages anticipates a significant shift in scholarly orientation: the tendency to move beyond canonical and, to some extent, classicist assumptions of authorship toward exploring marginalized and anonymous authorial voices.[70] This approach, now firmly established in classical philology, allows us to reassess the transmitted corpus of Greek literature with fresh eyes and has indeed proven highly productive for Aeschylean criticism, as exemplified by the studies of Judet de La Combe[71] and Barrett on the spurious ending of *Seven Against Thebes*.[72]

This striking combination of genuinely innovative scholarship – grounded in meticulous linguistic, metrical, and dramaturgical analysis – with wholly untenable views about Aeschylus and, more broadly, ancient Greek tragedy raises an inevitable question: who was Robert Böhme, and what historical, cultural, and political circumstances converged to produce his distinctive theory of an ancient theatrical reworking of the *Oresteia*? As we shall see, the answer to these questions lies in Böhme's biography, which reveals a deep connection between his scholarly work and the intellectual climate of early twentieth-century Germany, not least the troubling influence of Nazi ideology.

69 A turning point came with Taplin 1977, which sought to reconstruct a grammar of Aeschylean dramaturgy and devotes a substantial section to the dramaturgical analysis of the spurious ending of *Septem*. More recently, Medda 2013, 317 conducted a similar study on the exodus of Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, emphasizing that it is precisely in matters of stagecraft and dramatic structure that the interpolator's intervention becomes most detectable.

70 Finglass 2021, 131: "Interpolations are […] also testimony to the vibrancy of the genre, in that there was so much reworking of the works of others. Anonymity here is a mark of creativity".

71 See Judet de La Combe's 2011 'aphorism': "Le Nachdichter est un Dichter".

72 See Barrett 2007, and Hutchinson 1985, 211, who says: "We would seem to have before us a specimen of post-classical tragedy longer and better-preserved than the fragments on papyrus, more illuminating and representative than the early Rhesus or the eccentric compositions of Lycophron and Ezekiel".

2 Böhme's Ideology

2.1 Robert Böhme: A Biographical Sketch

Robert Böhme was born in Karlsruhe (Baden-Württemberg) in 1911 and studied classical philology at the University of Heidelberg, where he earned his doctorate in 1934 with a dissertation entitled *Das Prooimion. Eine Form sakraler Dichtung der Griechen*.[73]

During his doctoral years, Böhme joined the paramilitary Sturmabteilung (SA) in 1933 and became president of the Classical Philology Fachschaft in 1935. Tellingly, his dissertation co-supervisor was Hans Oppermann, himself a committed National Socialist, who in 1934 was appointed professor at the University of Freiburg to replace Eduard Fraenkel. Two years later, Oppermann brought his former student to Freiburg. There, Böhme completed his *Habilitation* on Aeschylean tragedy in 1940. He was then sent to the Eastern Front, where he was captured by Soviet forces and held prisoner until 1949. Upon his return, Böhme sought reinstatement at the University of Freiburg, but his well-known past as a Nazi activist proved decisive in keeping him at the margins of German academia.[74] From that point until his death in 1997,[75] no evidence exists (to my knowledge) of any official university position.

Böhme's career reflects indeed the turbulence of mid-century German history. His early adherence to National Socialism brought him rapid professional advancement, but then he emerged from the war without prospects. The foundational works on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* belong to this difficult postwar period. Regardless, the urgency with which he assembled the two volumes of *Bühnebearbeitung* (plausibly an attempt to re-establish his academic profile), combined with the ideological underpinnings that many critics have detected in his scholarship, suggests that Böhme's core ideas originated in the 1930s. Yet characterizing Böhme's work as a product merely of Nazi ideology would be reductive, if not misleading: his engagement with the regime emerged from a fundamentally aesthetic vision of the world shaped by deeper intellectual currents.

73 Cf. Böhme's *Lebenslauf* (1937, 89).

74 Cf. Malitz 2006, 343-4, especially fn. 143 devoted to Robert Böhme.

75 Cf. *Gnomon* 70 (1998), 286.

2.2 Aeschylus (and Böhme) in Early Twentieth-Century Germany

Böhme's fascination with Aeschylus, traceable at least to the late 1930s, drew on a prestigious, if relatively recent, tradition of German reception. Aeschylus was first revived by the Romantics, who in the nineteenth century celebrated him as the poet of the sublime, attracted by his archaic style, religious depth, and untamed poetic force.[76] Nietzsche radicalized this reading in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872),[77] presenting Aeschylus as the final voice of authentic Dionysian tragedy – a magnificent poet who arrived, tragically, too late to save Greek culture and its theater from decline.[78] Nietzsche's stark opposition between Aeschylean inspiration and Euripidean rationalism proved deeply influential for subsequent German interpretations and resurfaces in Böhme's work on Aeschylus's *Oresteia* as well. Remarkably, however, Böhme never cites Nietzsche directly; the philosopher's influence remains subterranean, mediated through another crucial figure of the period: the poet Stefan George. Böhme likely encountered Stefan George[79] through Friedrich Gundolf, his professor of German philology at the University of Heidelberg, and the poet proved far more decisive for his intellectual formation.[80] George saw himself as Nietzsche's successor and sought to realize the philosopher's vision through his own exemplary existence.[81] Responding to Nietzsche's diagnosis of cultural crisis, he in fact developed a vision of the poet as priest-prophet, elevating artistic creation into a sacred mission

76 Cf. Ziolkowski 2017, 225-30.

77 For Nietzsche's original text, see the canonical edition of Colli, Montinari 1988, *KGW* 1, 9-156. For a good Italian translation, see Serpa 1972, which collects the texts of the polemic on Greek tragedy between Nietzsche and Wilamowitz, with contributions by Erwin Rohde and the composer Richard Wagner.

78 Cf. Fischer-Lichte 2017, 69-90.

79 On Stefan George and his circle, see Norton 2002, Aurnhammer et al. 2016, and Raulff 2009, who focuses specifically on the history of the George-Kreis in the aftermath of the poet's death.

80 Many members of the George-Kreis pursued academic careers in various disciplines, ranging from Germanic studies to archaeology and economics. In his final years (1924-33), George devoted himself primarily to supporting the research of younger friends and maintaining his personal relationships (cf. Norton 2002, 653). On the ambivalent relationship between Stefan George and academia, see Böschenstein et al. 2005.

81 It should be noted that George's ambition was to surpass Nietzsche, rather than being merely his epigone. On George's complex relationship with Nietzsche, see David 1952, 308-9. Robertson 2005, 189-98 broadens the discussion to encompass the poet's relationship with National Socialism.

that would lead Germany toward spiritual and cultural regeneration.[82] Through George and his Circle, Böhme absorbed this mystical conception of poetry – which synthesized Nietzschean philosophy with quasi-religious aestheticism – and later, arguably, projected it back onto Aeschylus in his philological research, seeing in the tragedian the very prototype of George's poet-priest: the inspired artist capable of redeeming his culture through his tragic art.

Alongside this elite tradition, another strand of Aeschylean reception emerged in early twentieth-century Germany, one equally significant for understanding Böhme's interest in Aeschylus. Riding the wave of Aeschylus' growing popularity in the early twentieth century, when Wilamowitz's translations especially made him accessible to the broader public,[83] the Nazis too appropriated the tragedian for their cultural program. Some key moments in the Nazi reception of Aeschylus include the publication of Alfred Rosenberg's *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* in 1930, which first incorporated Aeschylus into a racial-ideological narrative;[84] the high-profile staging of the *Oresteia* at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, where the advent of a new and bright order in the *Eumenides* – with Athena's founding of the Areopagus and Orestes' purification – was meant to evoke Germany's entry into a new era under Nazism; and Günther Eggert's 1937 article *Die Orestie des Aischylos als Beispiel einer rassenseelischen Interpretation einer Dichtung*, which expanded Rosenberg's racial interpretation of the Aeschylean trilogy to promote its inclusion in German school curricula. According to these interpretations, the *Oresteia* depicted the triumph of the Greeks' Nordic spirit (Athena and Apollo) over an older Asian population (the Erinyes), thereby making Aeschylus the Nordic poet *par excellence*.[85]

All these events occurred in the 1930s and arguably influenced Böhme's decision to focus on Aeschylus, ultimately choosing him as the subject for his *Habilitationsschrift* – as a young and enthusiastic *NSDAP* activist, he was presumably eager to make his philological research also relevant to contemporary politics. Nonetheless, his

82 Cf. Walter 2005, especially 47-8; Braungart 2016, 516-23.

83 Cf. Ziolkowski 2017, 235. Wilamowitz's translation of the *Oresteia* was published in 1900.

84 Cf. Rosenberg 1930, 42-4.

85 On the 1936 Berlin *Oresteia* and the propagandistic use of Greek tragedy in Nazi theaters, see Bierl 1996, 28-9; Flashar 2009, 164-80; Fischer-Lichte 2017, 143-6. For an in-depth analysis of Lothar Müthel's production, its cultural context (particularly the Nazi appropriation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* as well as Wilamowitz's scholarship on it), and its immediate reception, see Maxwell 2016 and Ugolini 2025. More sophisticated was Gerhart Hauptmann's rewriting of the Atreides myth in the *Atriden Tetralogie* (1940-5), although his project must have originated within the context of this propagandistic use of the *Oresteia* (see Fornaro 2023).

work on the *Oresteia* appears fundamentally independent of National Socialist propaganda.[86] Even if one might argue for a post-war expurgation of all racial and Nazi ideas from his thought, it seems more plausible that Böhme genuinely cared more about presenting Aeschylus in a Georgean fashion, seizing the opportunity offered by the new dating of the *Supplices* to reinforce the image of him as an archaic and sacred poet (he had already defined Aeschylus as archaic in his 1938 article). Tellingly, he excised the entire trial scene from the trilogy – a passage central to the Nazi interpretation – and proposed an inverted reading. Where the Nazis saw in the *Oresteia* the society's ascent from savage bloodshed to civilization through divine and state justice, Böhme interprets this progression as the degenerate innovation of the *Bearbeiter*.[87] Modernity reveals itself as decadence, a fall from the archaic consonance between gods and humanity.

2.2.1 Böhme's Necrology of Stefan George

Compelling evidence of Stefan George's profound influence on Robert Böhme emerged from an unexpected archival discovery: Böhme's necrology of the poet, published in the "kulturpolitische Beilage" of *Der Heidelberger Student* (issue 73),[88] the NS student journal at Heidelberg University, in 1933/34. In the necrology, Böhme delivers what amounts to a personal manifesto, fusing Georgean aestheticism with National Socialist ideology.

The text begins by legitimizing George's appropriation by the Nazi regime, citing Minister Rust's proclamation of the poet as a spiritual precursor to National Socialism. Böhme then develops a theory of poetry as an organic, necessary expression of national vitality rather than mere cultural ornament. Explicitly rejecting both liberalistic and overtly propagandistic conceptions of art (including mass media like cinema, radio, and newspapers), he insists that true poetry draws from human and religious sources and alone possesses the power – as guardian of the "sacred fire" – to forge a spiritual community. In this pedagogical vision, the poet emerges, therefore, as the agent of cultural regeneration – a transformation that Böhme believed could finally be realized after the advent of National Socialism. Central to

86 Significantly, in 1936, *Reichsstudentenführer* Gustav Adolf Scheel identified Böhme's devotion to Stefan George as the sole blemish on an otherwise spotless record (cf. Malitz 2006, 344 fn. 143).

87 In this respect, Wilamowitz's interpretation of the trilogy was more in line with the Nazis' than Böhme's was (see Fornaro 2023, 167-8).

88 Issue 73 can be accessed at the following link: `https://doi.org./10.11588/diglit.2779#0529`.

Böhme's idea is indeed an opposition between the hero, who lives in unconditional obedience to his inner vocation (*Schicksal*) and is prepared for tragic self-sacrifice, and the modern man who, by contrast, is characterized by individualism, utilitarianism, hedonism, and excessive faith in rational thinking. The heroic temperament, Böhme argues, can be found both in medieval German literature (the *Edda*, the *Hildebrandslied*) and Greek poetry (Homer, Attic tragedy), forging a spiritual genealogy that ultimately culminates in the figure of Stefan George. Having celebrated George's heroic existence, Böhme then emphasizes the concrete presence of his followers within academic institutions and the National Socialist party. This declaration serves as self-legitimization: Böhme implicitly positions himself among those disciples who have transformed the master's aesthetic vision into political and cultural praxis.

The necrology provides a key to interpret Böhme's claim at the end of *Bühnenbearbeitung* 1,[89] where he insists that the *Oresteia* allows modern readers to experience competing spiritual levels: Aeschylus's voice – poetic, inspired, transcendent – against the *Bearbeiter*'s revision – merely literal, learned, and earthbound. This aesthetic experience, Böhme maintains, nurtures both the "Humanum" and also deepens our interior life. By assigning to poetry, and accordingly to philology, a formative mission, he therefore actively resists the materialist historicism dominating contemporary academia, demonstrating his enduring commitment to George's program of cultural renewal.[90] Yet George's influence may extend far beyond this pedagogical vision: Böhme's entire conception of Aeschylus appears to be modeled on the figure of the German poet himself. Scholars have observed how members of the George Circle frequently transfigured their master into the heroes of history and literature, creating what amounts to a portrait gallery of the poet in various guises.[91] Böhme may well represent a late instance of this hagiographic tendency, transposed into the domain of classical philology. The Third Reich had ended in catastrophic failure, exposing the perversion of his ideology, but Böhme's devotion to his master remained unshaken,

89 Cf. Böhme 1956, 125.

90 George's and Böhme's relationship with antiquity falls squarely within the ideals of Third Humanism. Within this cultural program, philology was assigned a crucial formative role in education, as it was meant to provide both the criteria and the instruments for a productive engagement with the textual tradition (see Stiewe 2011, especially 172-207).

91 See Bolay 2017, who analyzes how, in the early twentieth century, members of Stefan George's Circle produced biographical studies of historical figures (Caesar, Napoleon, Shakespeare, Goethe, Nietzsche) as heroes within a genealogy culminating in George himself. The Circle developed a concept of heroism based on an archetypal model that could be embodied by different individuals, promoting a shared heroic ethos designed to shape the Circle's structure as a community of devotees.

resurfacing decades later in his idealized portrait of Aeschylus – a hermeneutical operation that brought Stefan George back to life behind the mask of the poet-prophet he himself had created, and which fundamentally directed Böhme's textual criticism.

3 Conclusion

Robert Böhme's theory of an ancient revision of the *Oresteia* has not gone unnoticed. His publications are held in numerous European libraries, careful reviews by prominent philologists are readily accessible online, and his arguments have found (at least in part) reception among distinguished scholars of Aeschylus' text, as evidenced by the work of Roger Dawe and Enrico Medda. Nonetheless, Böhme's identity and biographical background have faded into obscurity – whether because he worked most of his life outside the academy, or because of his active involvement with the NSDAP, or both, remains unclear. In this paper, I have traced Böhme's biography and, more importantly, his intellectual (and ideological) profile. The aim, however, has not been the biographical recovery per se, but rather understanding the aesthetic, literary, and philological principles that shaped his approach to the Aeschylean text.

What has emerged from this investigation is that Böhme's work on Aeschylus germinated in the 1930s under the combined influence of the poet Stefan George, National Socialist ideology, and, more broadly, the ideals of Third Humanism. Aeschylus, in his vision, becomes the archetype of the Georgean poet-prophet – Böhme's work might even be read as a covert portrait of Stefan George – the hero who could access subterranean divine forces and guide humanity toward cultural and moral renewal. Philology, likewise, is the formative discipline *par excellence* – the means through which one cultivates the "Humanum" and achieves spiritual formation. Böhme's fully developed his theory in the 1950s, having survived the war and Soviet captivity, and found in the discovery of *P. Oxy.* 2256 a new foundation for his now-anachronistic ideals. For the remainder of his life, Böhme continued gathering (and repeating) evidence for his theory of an ancient reworking of the *Oresteia*. While he moderated the more idealized tones of his Aeschylean portrait, he grew convinced that classical philologists maintained a dogmatic resistance to his work. For him, no scholar was prepared to strip Aeschylus of the *Oresteia*, his masterpiece.

Böhme's work proves surely controversial, both for its ideological premises and its argumentative method, raising questions particularly about how he marshaled philological evidence in support of his thesis. This paper reconstructs the cultural context necessary for properly evaluating Böhme's contribution and, in doing so, sheds light on a

neglected – yet revealing – episode in the twentieth-century German reception of Aeschylus and Greek tragedy.

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