Cledonomancy in the Oresteia
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CLEDONOMANCY IN THE *ORESTEIA*.

I

At one point in the closing scene of the *Agamemnon*, Aegisthus meets the challenge of force by the chorus of Argive elders with a counter-threat (1652):*

ἀλλὰ κἀγὼ μὴν πρόκωπος οὐκ ἀναίνομαι θανεῖν.

"Well then, I too have sword in hand and do not shrink from death." The elders see a happy omen in these words and formally accept it:

δεχομένοις λέγεις θανεῖν σε· τὴν τύχην δ' αἱρούμεθα.

"You speak of your death. So be it. We accept the outcome."[1] Had this last line, through one or another of the many vicissitudes of scribal transmission, slipped from the text, or had Aeschylus himself not even written it, one is sorely tempted to wonder how many of the poet's commentators would have found anything particularly ominous (or even ironic) in Aegisthus' οὐκ ἀναίνομαι θανεῖν. Dreams are another matter. We tend to be sensitive enough to their prophetic import in Greek literature,

* References to the text of the *Oresteia* follow Gilbert Murray, *Aeschyli septem quae supersunt tragoediae* (corrected second ed., Oxford, 1957).

[1] The critical dispute over the distribution of these lines need hardly concern us here. The point made remains the same whoever utters the ominous words or accepts them. MSS σε in 1653 is problematical. We should, with Lobel, probably read γε.

so that, for example, few readers will not have long anticipated Orestes' interpretation of his mother's dream at *Choephoroi*, 540 ff. But when it comes to the possibility of ominous language, it has been the practice of philologists for the most part to maintain a conservative silence before anything that is not so clearly labelled as *Ag.*, 1652 f.[2]

For a further example, one not so clearly labelled, we might ask how many commentators have found anything ominous in the closing lines of the parodos of the *Agamemnon* (255-7):

πέλοιτο δ' οὖν ἃ 'πὶ τούτοισιν εὖ πρᾶξις, ὡς
θέλει τόδ' ἄγχιστον Ἀπίας
γαίας μονόφρουρον ἔρκος.

Are we safe in seeing in them, with Méautis, a good omen for Clytemnestra: "la réponse des dieux à ses préoccupations secrètes, un véritable κληδών, qui intensifia dans son coeur la joie criminelle et monstrueuse qu'avait éveillée en elle la nouvelle de la prise de Troie"?[3]

What we are dealing with here is cledonomancy,[4] an important if not so well-known form of divination practiced in antiquity. A κληδών in this sense is an apparently casual utterance heard by a man when he is deeply preoccupied with some plan, project, or hope, and understood by him as an omen of the outcome of his preoccupation. It was felt that such an utterance might have the power of bringing about an effect, "not indeed irrespective of its meaning, but other than the meaning or intention of the person who carelessly uttered it" (Halliday), or, from another point of view, that a god makes of the speaker an instrument for presaging the future, much as he might use an inspired prophet or bird in flight (Bouché-Leclercq). So Odysseus sees a good omen (χαῖρεν δὲ κλεηδόνι) in the banal and casual remark of one of the suitors (*Od.*, XVIII, 112 f.): "Stranger, may Zeus

[2] See note 14, below.

[3] Georges Méautis, *Eschyle et la trilogie* (Paris, 1936), p. 147.

[4] The literature on the subject is limited. The fullest treatment appears in A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1879), I, pp. 154-60, 313-15. See also A. S. Pease, *Commentary on Cicero, de Divinatione* (London, 1920-23), I, p. 103; W. R. Halliday, *Greek Divination* (London, 1903), pp. 47-53, 229-34; T. Hopfner, "Mantike" *R.-E.*, XIV, cols. 1282 f.; Ernst Riess, "Omen" *R.-E.*, XVIII, cols. 373-8.

and the other immortals give you your heart's greatest desire."[5] And earlier in the *Odyssey* (II, 33-5), Aegyptius, without realizing who has called the assembly at Ithaca, prays that whoever did so may see the fulfilment of his designs—which Telemachus takes as a favorable omen (χαῖρε δὲ φήμῃ). Then there is the well-known "*Cauneas*"—the cry of the Caunian fig-seller, which Marcus Crassus could have read as a warning (*cave ne eas*) not to sail on his fatal Parthian expedition (Cic., *De Divin.*, II, 84), and the child's cry "*tolle, lege! tolle, lege!*" which figures so dramatically in Augustine's conversion to Christianity (*Conf.*, VIII, 12). κληδόνες were thought to have been more fully certified as divinely inspired if, as in the examples cited, they were completely unexpected, and the speaker's intention and meaning were remote from the preoccupation of the hearer. Calculated anticipation of *klêdones* generally tended to render them doubtful to a Greek (though not to a Roman[6]), because it impaired the purely accidental character of the revelation. To the ancient mind, it was in circumstances which we, from a scientific standpoint, would call "purely accidental"—free of human intervention and control—that divinity seemed most operative in signalling its intentions.[7] Still, as long as the source of the

[5] Note that this is much the same kind of utterance as *Ag.*, 255, referred to above. But obviously the dramatist cannot at this point make Clytemnestra's recognition of the omen as explicit as the narrative poet is free to do.

Bouché-Leclercq (p. 156) here sees the suitors' promise to conduct the beggar Irus to the land of the cruel king Echetus (rather than the casual remark preceding it) as the *klêdôn*, and so as a forecast of their own imminent death and journey to Hades. This is at best strained, if not wholly incorrect.

[6] Bouché-Leclercq, pp. 158 f.

[7] This tendency to find the divine in the "accidental" or to refuse to accept the notion of an "uncaused" event is a particular characteristic of mythical thought, if not an abiding habit of the mind. Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, II: *Mythical Thought*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven, 1955), esp. pp. 43 ff., makes particularly fruitful reading in this respect. "Science is content if it succeeds in apprehending the individual event in space and time as a special instance of a general law but asks no further 'why' regarding the individualization as such, regarding the here and now. The mythical consciousness, on the other hand, applies its 'why' precisely to the particular and unique. It 'explains' the individual event by postu-

utterance remained quite ignorant of the hearer's preoccupation, one might wait for or actually seek out a *klêdôn*, with as much hope of reliability as when looking for traces of the future at Delphi or in the entrails of an animal. In *Od.*, XX, 100-21, Odysseus prays for just such an utterance (*φήμην τίς μοι φάσθω*), and, hearing the prayer of a meal-grinder that the suitors might eat their last meal in the house, rejoices in the omen (*χαῖρεν δὲ κλεηδόνι*). So also in Callimachus (*Epigr.*, 1) the Mysian stranger, uncertain whether to marry a girl of his own class or one of higher station, is sent into the street for his answer by Pittacus of Mytilene. There he hears a chance cry from youngsters spinning tops, "Keep to your own track!" (*τὴν κατὰ σαυτὸν ἔλα*), and accepts it as an omen (*παίδων κληδόνα συνθέμενος*).[8] Indeed, at certain oracular shrines[9] the consultant left with ears stopped after making his inquiry, his response being the first utterance heard after unstopping his ears outside.

Closely allied to the concept of cledonomancy if not a species of it is the experience of names as omens of individual destiny (*ὄνομα ὄρνις, omen nomen*). Plato's *Cratylus* clearly attests to the boundless dexterity of the Greek imagination in interpreting the meaning of a name, in struggling to discover a close correspondence between inner reality or ultimate destiny and name.[10] For a people close to mythical thinking, the name, as Cassirer says,

lating individual acts of the will. . . . It begins with the intuition of purposive action—for all the forces of nature are for myth nothing other than expressions of a demonic or divine will" (pp. 48 f.).

[8] "Out of the mouths of babes. . . ." Plutarch tells us that among the Egyptians the chance remarks of children were considered to be particularly rich in ominous content (*De Is. et Os.*, 14).

[9] E. g., the oracle of Apollo Spodios at Thebes, of the *Klêdones* at Smyrna, of Hermes Agoraios at Pharae in Achaea, and the sanctuary of Apis in Egypt (Paus., VII, 22, 3-4; IX, 11, 7).

[10] The Parmenidean contrast between *onoma* and *on* (B 8, 38 f., B 19) as well as the more radical doctrine of Gorgias that being is incommunicable (B 3) can have scarcely affected more than a small fraction of the audience attending tragic performances in the mid-fifth century. Whether Aeschylus himself believed in the efficacy of the kind of divination under discussion or merely used it for his dramatic purposes is not a question that need concern us here. But see on this point the stimulating article of Thomas Rosenmeyer, "Gorgias, Aeschylus, and *Apate*," *A. J. P.*, LXXVII (1955), pp. 225-60.

> expresses what is innermost and essential in the man, and it positively 'is' this innermost essence. Name and personality merge. In rites of initiation a man is given a new name because what he receives in the rite is a new self. The name of a *god* above all constitutes a real part of his essence and efficacy. It designates the sphere of energies within which each deity is and acts.[11]

This attitude has early precedent in Athena's pun on Odysseus' name (*τί νύ οἱ τόσον ὠδύσαο, Ζεῦ*; *Od.*, I, 62; compare Autolycus' reason for giving him that name, *Od.*, XIX, 407-9), and Penelope's disquisition on the gates of ivory and horn (*Od.*, XIX, 560-7),[12] and is later reduced to a delicate pseudo-science in the hands of Artemidorus of Daldis, whose *Oneirokritikon* is full of elaborate cledonomantic interpretations of names appearing in dreams. Readers of Aeschylus will not have to be reminded of the cledonomantic role names play in his dramaturgy.[13] One immediately thinks of Apollo the Destroyer (*ἀπόλλων*, *Ag.*, 1081), Zeus the Ultimate Cause (*διαὶ Διός*, *Ag.*, 1485),[14] the Strife-bringing Erinys (*ἔρις Sept.*, 723-6), Prometheus the Forethinker (*P. V.*, 86), Dike the daughter of Zeus (*Διὸς κόρα*,

[11] Cassirer, pp. 40 f. See also Sir James Frazer, *The New Golden Bough*, ed. Theodor H. Gaster (Doubleday Anchor repr., Garden City, N. Y., 1961), pp. 107-12, and the bibliography on p. 126.

[12] It should be noted also that in their poetic effect Homeric epithets often come very close to being significant names, or extensions of names, summing up essence or defining by dominant characteristic, much like the cult titles of divinities.

[13] For a complete list see W. Schmid, *Gesch. d. griech. Lit.*, I, 2 (1934), p. 297, n. 3.

[14] At the risk of appearing presumptuous, I would call Fraenkel's hesitancy at this passage paradigmatic of the conservatism of that too scientific philology mentioned earlier in this paper and of the aesthetic myopia which not infrequently mars otherwise brilliant scholarly achievement. As much as Fraenkel will admit is that "*διαὶ Διός* has an appeal to the ear" and that Blass and Norden "have suggested very plausibly that Aeschylus has in mind here the etymology of the god's name which is later found in Plato (*Crat.* 396 a, b) and particularly in the Stoa. . . ." That "appeal to the ear" is no idle jingle, and what is merely a plausible suggestion to Fraenkel is, I should think, an elementary poetic fact, documented—one might even say poetically glossed—far more securely by *παναιτίου πανεργέτα* (which immediately follow *διαὶ Διός* in the text) than by Plato, the Stoa, Blass, or Norden.

Cho., 948), and Helen the Wrecker (ἑλένας, ἕλανδρος, ἑλέπτολις, *Ag.*, 689).

The efficacy of *klêdones*, as of curses and blessings, derives from the mythic experience of the intrinsic potency of language in general. About this experience Cassirer tells us that

> the basic assumption is that word and name do not merely have a function of describing or portraying but contain within them the object and its real powers. Word and name do not designate and signify, they are and act. In the mere sensuous matter of language, in the mere sound of the human voice, there resides a peculiar power over things. Primitive peoples 'exorcise' threatening events and catastrophe, seek to avert eclipses, storms, etc. by song and loud outcry and noise-making. But the mythical-magical power of language is truly manifested in articulated sound. The formed word is itself restricted and individual: each word governs a specific realm of being, over which it may be said to exert unlimited and sovereign power.[15]

Adapting the proposition of Leucippus (fr. 2) we might sum up the ideal form of this experience in the expression οὐδὲν ῥῆμα μάτην γίνεται. We may go a step further in the aetiology of cledonomancy and see it ultimately as a function of the mythical experience of interpenetration at all levels of reality, where nothing is accidental, where the principles of causality are *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* and *juxta hoc, ergo propter hoc*,[16] where things mirror one another, pass into one another, become one another, indeed *are* one another.[17] In such a world, the spoken

[15] Cassirer, p. 40. Cf. also M. P. Nilsson, *Gesch. d. griech. Rel.*[2] (Munich, 1955), I, pp. 157-60.

[16] Cf. Cassirer, pp. 43-9, especially his sources cited in note 18 on p. 45.

[17] It is rare to find a scholar who can speak of the mythic experience of reality without unfavorably comparing it, whether openly or by implication, with logical and scientific modes of understanding. Few men, if any, are more sensitive to this phenomenon than Eric Voegelin. I know of no more sympathetic or more beautiful description of the mythic experience of interpenetration (which he calls "participation") than the following, which I cannot forbear to quote in its entirety (*Order and History*, I: *Israel and Revelation* [Baton Rouge, 1956], p. 3):

> Whatever a man may be, he knows himself a part of being. The great stream of being, in which he flows while it flows through him, is the same stream to which belongs everything else that

word is thought to possess twofold power: it may be an index of what is happening or will happen, or it may actually precipitate events. In practice, these two aspects are not often easy to distinguish. In our original example (*Ag.*, 1652), does Aegisthus' *οὐκ ἀναίνομαι θανεῖν* become an omen for the Argive elders because it merely signals his death, or because it will actually cause his death? It is hard to say. On the other hand, the coryphaeus clearly fears that Cassandra's *explicit* reference to Agamemnon's death may bring it about, for he quickly enjoins her to keep auspicious restraint on her tongue (1247):[18]

εὔφημον, ὦ τάλαινα, κοίμησον στόμα.

Even a careless word, then, may have as much potency as a formal incantation, like the *kommos* of the *Choephoroi* or a "binding curse" like that of the Erinyes in the *Eumenides* (*ὕμνος δέσμιος*, 306 ff.).[19]

> drifts into his perspective. The community of being is experienced with such intimacy that the consubstantiality of the partners will override the separateness of substances. We move in a charmed community where everything that meets us has force and will and feelings, where animals and plants can be men and gods, where men can be divine and gods are kings, where the feathery morning sky is the falcon Horus and the Sun and Moon are his eyes, where the underground sameness of being is a conductor of magic currents of good or evil force that will subterraneously reach the superficially unreachable partner, where things are the same and not the same, and can change into each other.

[18] Auspicious restraint (*euphêmein*; compare the Roman *favere linguis*) is especially necessary on solemn or critical occasions, as at sacrifice, the purpose of which may be thwarted by an untoward word.

[19] The belief in the potency of language even applies to the *written* word. Closely related to the *hymnoi desmioi* are the *katadesmoi* and *katadeseis* (Latin *dirae* and *defixiones*) which were quite popular throughout the ancient world (and still are in some parts of Europe). Plato attacks the *ἀγύρται καὶ μάντεις* who use them (*Rep.*, II, 364 C), and in the *Laws* (X, 909 B) prescribes severe punishment for them. These "binding curses" in written form, inscribed on lead tablets or potsherds, have been discovered in many parts of the Mediterranean world, but the oldest examples come from Greece, most of them from Athens. Cf. Nilsson, I, pp. 800-4 (note 5 on p. 800 contains the best conspectus of the literature on "binding curses"); W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods* (Beacon paperb. repr., Boston, 1955), pp. 270-4; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951), pp. 194 f., Edward M. Thompson, *An Introduction to Greek and Latin*

It goes without saying that hypersensitivity to the spoken word is implied in cledonomancy and is an obvious characteristic of the orally oriented society that Athens was in Aeschylus' day and still remained even late in the fifth century. To appreciate such a phenomenon is difficult for those whose culture entails the mass production and habitual use of books. Easy access to books tends to limit attentiveness and retention. The book trade at Athens was nothing more than embryonic even late in the fifth century, although literacy, it now seems, may have been fairly widespread.[20] Yet, even where both widespread literacy and a thriving book trade later existed, cledonomancy showed no signs of weakening; Artemidorus' *Oneirokritikon*, with its cledonomantic interpretations, dates from the late second century B. C. Still, in trying to assess the degree of sensitivity to the spoken word and the use of cledonomancy in mid-fifth century Athens, one must not assume that Athenians were forever on the lookout for *klêdones*, like the Nandi of East Africa, for whom nearly everything has ominous significance and who spend most of their day keeping strict score of good and bad omens towards an evening reckoning of their status in the eyes of heaven.[21] Judging by the examples so far referred to, it is clear that cledonomancy only applies to extremely critical situations, moments of heightened awareness and earnest

Paleography (Oxford, 1912), pp. 11 f. The epigraphical sources may be found in these authors, but see especially R. Wünsch, *I.G.*, III, 3, Appendix. For examples outside Attica, cf. A. Andollent, *Defixionum Tabellae* (Paris, 1907).

[20] F. D. Harvey, "Literacy in the Athenian Democracy," *R. E. G.*, LXXIX (1966), pp. 585-636. But for different estimates of Athenian literacy see F. G. Hall, *Companion to Classical Texts* (Oxford, 1913), p. 27; D. L. Page, *Actors' Interpolation in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1934), p. 1; W. C. Greene, "The Spoken and the Written Word," *H. S. C. P.*, LX (1951), pp. 38 f.; Eric A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 37-41.

[21] William Howells, *The Heathens: Primitive Man and His Religions* (Garden City, N. Y., 1948), p. 70. It is against just such superstitious scrupulosity that Cicero is arguing in relating the already mentioned story of Marcus Crassus and the Caunian fig-seller (*De divin.*, II, 84): *Quando enim ista [sc. omina] observans quieto et libero animo esse poteris, ut ad rem gerendam non superstitionem habeas, sed rationem ducem? . . . Quae si suscipiamus, pedis offensio nobis et abruptio corrigiae et sternumenta erunt observanda.*

preoccupation with the uncertain outcome of one's plans or hopes. It is precisely such moments that Attic tragedy in the main represents. Once within the theater of Dionysus, and removed from the relatively casual world of everyday affairs, the audience is compelled by the strictest economy of presentation to focus all its attention upon a crisis (in most cases, *the* crisis) in the career of a protagonist, and upon the words which may signal or precipitate its issue. Whether or not the author or his audience actually believes in the efficacy of cledonomancy hardly bears on its literary effectiveness. Greek literature is not alone in exploiting the dramatic potential of outworn beliefs.[22]

From its point of vantage outside the dramatic action, and with a general foreknowledge of the conclusion, the audience is immune from the ignorance, uncertainty, and difficulty of interpretation that plague the *dramatis personae* and their counterparts in real life when confronted by *klêdones*. It is only *after* the event that one may with absolute certainty judge that such-and-such an utterance was a *klêdôn* or that it was properly understood. Like all forms of divination, *klêdones* are, as Aeschylus' Prometheus says, δύσκριτοι (*P. V.*, 486 f.). Not everything that happens is a sign, nor every utterance a *klêdôn*, nor is even the professional interpreter invariably reliable.[23]

[22] One modern example among many that could be cited: James Joyce's use of significant names and ominous dreams in *Ulysses*. The so-called Joycian "epiphany" is actually secularized (or, perhaps better, metaphorical) divination, and when it involves random bits of conversation (as it does more often than not) it is literary cledonomancy plain and simple. By an "epiphany" Joyce meant a sudden disclosure of the whatness of a thing, "a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself" (*Stephen Hero* [New Directions edition, New York, 1944], p. 211). Joyce, like his hero, Stephen, made a collection of such epiphanies, the manuscript of which is presently in the Joyce collection of the library at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

[23] Greek literature generally shows a healthy scepticism when it comes to the *mantis* and his interpretations, long before the heyday of the sophist "enlightenment." A few of the more obvious examples: in book I of the *Iliad* (106 ff.), Agamemnon calls Calchas' interpretation in question (just as the chorus in the *Agamemnon* suggests he *should* have done at Aulis: μάντιν οὔτινα ψέγων [186]; compare Odysseus' incredulity about Calchas' interpretation of the portent at

Neither in real life nor in drama may one reasonably expect a man to examine every word for its cledonomantic possibilities.[24] Yet, a dramatist is in a position to fashion, and his audience to understand, even the most random utterances as *klêdones* signalling the future. The dramatist occupies the standpoint of a god with respect to the dramatic action, and can manipulate language to foreshadow the outcome, like the namer of Helen in the *Agamemnon*, προνοίαισι τοῦ πεπρωμένου γλῶσσαν ἐν τύχᾳ νέμων (683-5). The effect of such a device is to endow the dramatic events with the shape of universality or necessity of the kind that Aristotle admires in tragic plots (*Poet.*, 1452a). For a *klêdôn* implies *purpose* on the part of a power able to bring an event into being or foreknowledge of the place of such an event in an inevitable pattern (πρόνοιαι τοῦ πεπρωμένου). Part of the pleasure of this type of tragedy must, no doubt, be described as being in on the divine secret. But without reference to a traditional belief in the availability of hints into the hidden design of future events, and to the agonizing difficulty of discerning and interpreting them, this collusion, as it were, of author and audience easily modulates from tragic pity and fear to the less sympathetic posture of the satirist. It is for this reason that literary cledonomancy, so far as Aeschylean dramaturgy is concerned, may be a better critical term for the verbal part of what has traditionally (and often vaguely) been called tragic irony.[25]

Aulis [*Il.*, II, 299 f.]); at *Iliad*, XII, 230 ff., Hector denounces the seer Poulydamas and his craft in the most violent terms; Priam says that had the order to go to Achilles' tent for his son come from μάντιες θυοσκόοι or ἱερῆες rather than from the goddess herself, he would have called it a lie and refused to accept it (XXIV, 220-2). In the fifth century, of course, the *Oedipus Tyrannus* displays the widest range of critical attitudes, from the belief of the chorus that mantic wisdom is merely one among many ways of discovering the truth (497-503) to Jocasta's sweeping condemnation of the seer's art. That questioning the interpretation of an oracle or sign by an individual *mantis* was not considered reprehensible and that it occurred more and more often during the course of the fifth century is clear from James H. Oliver, *The Athenian Expounders of the Sacred and Ancestral Laws* (Baltimore, 1950), pp. 12 ff.

[24] See note 21, above.

[25] The confusing nature of "irony" as a critical term is seen in the fact that it is used of tragedy, comedy, satire, and the pedagogic

II

To believe that the word is capable of evoking the deed is basic to cledonomancy, and it is just such a belief that is expressed by the chorus and the Herald (and, to a lesser extent, the Watchman at lines 36-9) in the *Agamemnon*. The Herald is afraid to defile what he thinks is an auspicious day with disastrous news (636 f.):

> *εὔφημον ἦμαρ οὐ πρέπει κακαγγέλῳ*
> *γλώσσῃ μιαίνειν.*

But he has already done so, albeit unwittingly, at line 527 by verifying what we know is Clytemnestra's secret hope (concealed beneath her public statement of concern, 338-47) that the Argive army may have sacked Trojan sanctuaries, thereby earning divine displeasure.[26] Again, at 573 f. (*ἡμῖν δὲ τοῖς*

dissimulation of Socratic dialectic (only the last of which a Greek might have understood by the term, and even then as a vice rather than as a virtue: cf. Aristotle's cool attitude toward it in *N. E.*, IV, 7, 1127a22 ff., where it is an extreme opposite *alazoneia*, and Theophrastus' devastating attack upon the *eirôn* in the first essay of his *Characters*). For a brief survey of the protean transformations undergone by this word, see G. G. Sedgewick, *Of Irony, Especially in Drama* (Toronto, 1948), pp. 3-27. It will become evident in the ensuing discussion that the concept of cledonomancy covers a far wider range of verbal phenomena than "dramatic irony" (meaning language mocked by the reality of the play), e. g., the calculated avoidance of ill-omened language, out of fear of its untoward effect.

[26] *βωμοὶ δ' ἄιστοι καὶ θεῶν ἱδρύματα.* The second half of the line even matches that of line 339 in Clytemnestra's remarks. In addition, it is not unreasonable to suppose that *βωμοὶ δ' ἄιστοι* would have recalled that part of the first stasimon where the chorus spoke of the divine punishment incurred by the man who "has kicked the great altar of Justice out of sight" (*λακτίσαντι μέγαν Δίκας/βωμὸν εἰς ἀφάνειαν*, 383 f.).

Fraenkel, following Salzmann and others, argues for the deletion of 527, mainly because no herald as pious as this one seems to be would have boasted of an action so offensive to Hellenic religious sensibilities. But the authenticity of the line would seem to be a dramatic necessity and is so defended by Dennison-Page (*Aeschylus, Agamemnon* [Oxford, 1957], pp. 120 f.) on the grounds that otherwise the important question of possible sacrilege by the Argives would be nowhere answered.

Clytemnestra's wish at 341-50 may well have struck an Athenian audience as divination by opposites, a form of cledonomancy by which one says publicly the opposite of what he hopes the gods have determined. For examples in Homer, see C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the*

λοιποῖσιν Ἀργείων στρατοῦ/νικᾷ τὸ κέρδος), his words are a ringing confirmation of the queen's counterfeit fear (341 f.):

ἔρως δὲ μή τις πρότερον ἐμπίπτῃ στρατῷ
πορθεῖν ἃ μὴ χρὴ κέρδεσιν νικωμένους.

As for what concerns Clytemnestra's more immediate plans, two casual remarks of the Herald seem like cledonomantic assurances of success. Within five lines of his entrance he says, "I never hoped to die here in Argos and to be buried like others in the land I love" (506 f.):

οὐ γάρ ποτ' ἤλπιζον τῇδ' ἐν Ἀργείᾳ χθονὶ
θανὼν μεθέξειν φιλτάτου τάφου μέρος.

Later, after the description of the loss of the fleet in the storm at sea, he slips even more dreadfully: "If now there are any survivors, surely they speak of us as dead men" (671 f.):

καὶ νῦν ἐκείνων εἴ τις ἐστὶν ἐμπνέων,
λέγουσιν ἡμᾶς ὡς ὀλωλότας, τί μήν;

Who but the most prosaic of readers cannot imagine Clytemnestra's silent response, δεχομένη λέγεις θανεῖν σε?

The chorus is even more sensitive to the potency of language. During their long and detailed description of the binding of Iphigeneia for sacrifice in the parodos, the girl's name is not once mentioned, almost as if to do so would hasten the retribution that must come from her murder.[27] We have already noted how, on the occasion of Cassandra's unambiguous reference to Agamemnon's impending death, the coryphaeus cries out in alarm against her δυσφημία (1247). And yet, as a matter

Heroic Tradition (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 341, n. 13. Whitman also cites the modern Greek game of κλήδονας as an analogy.

[27] The same fear apparently motivates Calchas in his interpretation of the portent of the eagles and the hare (126-37). While he is quite explicit and (for a seer) remarkably clear in identifying the eagles as the Atreidae and the hare as Troy, he becomes evasive in the matter of the unborn young and what they correspond to in the real world—primarily, the innocent victims of the devastation at Troy (cf. 327 f. [with Weil's emendation, φυτάλμιοι παιδῶν γέροντες], 461 f., and 358-61). He knows how unwise it would be to refer too explicitly to that part of the omen which is unpropitious (κατάμομφα, 145), the cause of Artemis' anger.

of fact, the chorus' own most explicit reference to Agamemnon's death (1338-42) is followed immediately by the cry of the king from within, almost as if the murderers had been waiting for their cue, or as if this single failure to couch their fears in cautious vagueness has ominously invited the disaster; indeed, the repetition, *θανοῦσι θανὼν . . . θανάτων*, has all the ring of an incantation:

> *νῦν δ' εἰ προτέρων αἶμ' ἀποτείσει*
> *καὶ τοῖσι θανοῦσι θανὼν ἄλλων*
> *ποινὰς θανάτων ἐπικρανεῖ,*
> *τίς τᾶν εὔξαιτο βροτῶν ἀσινεῖ*
> *δαίμονι φῦναι τάδ' ἀκούων;*

The chorus, laboring under its preoccupation with impending doom, tries very hard to avoid a too explicit expression of their fears for Agamemnon. So, for example, when they catch sight of the Herald, they say that he will either give them firmer grounds for their joy at Clytemnestra's beacon speech or else—but here they break off and leave the alternative unexpressed (498 f.):

> *ἀλλ' ἢ τὸ χαίρειν μᾶλλον ἐκβάξει λέγων·*
> *τὸν ἀντίον δὲ τοῖσδ' ἀποστέργω λόγον.*[28]

Yet time and again the burden of their inmost thoughts slips out in unpropitious utterance. In the parodos, the simile of the vultures robbed of their young (49-54) turns into something more appropriate to Clytemnestra robbed of Iphigeneia than to Menelaus deprived of Helen, and betokens divine vengeance upon Agamemnon just as much as upon Paris.[29] When they speak of the guilty man unable to appease divine wrath (69-71), their words once again carry an unlucky double reference to Paris and Agamemnon. They unwittingly subvert their closing prayer that affairs may turn out favorably despite their lamentable prospect by adding the ill-omened clause which we noted earlier in our discussion (255-7): "May prosperity crown these events, *just as Clytemnestra wishes. . . .*"

Again, in the first stasimon, the chorus begins by celebrating

[28] Compare *Cho.*, 1031 f.

[29] On this point see E. T. Owen, *The Harmony of Aeschylus* (Toronto, 1952), pp. 65 f.

the vengeance of Zeus upon Paris, but ends with dark allusions, which, though presumably meant as generalizations, point straight to Agamemnon: the anger of Zeus against the man fortunate without justice (464), the πτολιπόρθης (472, the very term used in addressing Agamemnon at 782) responsible for many deaths (461), praised to excess (468, as Agamemnon by Clytemnestra). In the same way in the second stasimon, a consideration of the divine vengeance taken upon Paris and Troy leads to ill-omened statements suggesting that the same fate awaits Agamemnon. The parable of the lion cub in the house prefigures Clytemnestra's murder of the king no less than it recalls the doom of Priam's house through Helen.[30] The designation of Paris as αἰνόλεκτρος (713) suits Agamemnon as well (he is called δύσδαμαρ at 1319). When the chorus speaks of that Justice which, "with no reverence for the power of wealth stamped with praise" (δύναμιν οὐ σέβουσα πλούτου παράσημον αἴνῳ, 779 f.), deserts the house that possesses it, and honors the righteous life (ἐναίσιμον . . . βίον, 775), they are unconsciously prophesying the fusion of wealth and disproportionate praise which the treading of the purple symbolizes; Agamemnon later implies that Clytemnestra's praise is not righteous (ἐναισίμως αἰνεῖν, 916 f.), and shows some hesitancy about "ruining the house" by spoiling its *wealth*, represented by the tapestries (948 f.):

> πολλὴ γὰρ αἰδὼς δωματοφθορεῖν ποσὶν
> φύροντα πλοῦτον . . . .

Clytemnestra also directs the ill-omened utterance of the chorus at the house of Atreus when she praises its wealth (962, 1043):

> πένεσθαι δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται δόμος.
> . . . ἀρχαιοπλούτων δεσποτῶν πολλὴ χάρις.

The *klêdôn* comes true quite literally when Agamemnon is enmeshed in "the evil *wealth* of robe" (πλοῦτον εἵματος κακόν, 1383).

The chorus has watched Agamemnon walk over the tapestries, summing up and fulfilling in that one gesture all their judgments about the fate that awaits wealth, praise, and injustice.

[30] The interpretation is that of Bernard Knox in "The Lion in the House," *C. P.*, XLVII (1952), pp. 17-25.

They have seen Clytemnestra effortlessly inducing her husband to do this deed, and, by her flattery, strengthening the application of their *klêdones* to him and the house. Clytemnestra's climactic prayer to Zeus Teleios to accomplish his own and her designs, which are now so clearly one and the same, brings home to the chorus the realization that events are truly turning out ὡς θέλει τόδ' ἄγχιστον Ἀπίας γαίας μονόφρουρον ἔρκος. These cumulative revelations, added to their abiding preoccupation with inevitable destiny, lead the chorus to the mantic terror which opens the third stasimon and the abulic despair at its close. Reproducing the run of the sense in this ode is complicated by a number of things: a hopelessly corrupt text in the second strophe, the emotional agitation of the chorus itself (κυκλούμενον κέαρ, 997; ζωπυρουμένας φρενός, 1034), and its fear of expressing its premonitions too explicitly. Nonetheless, the following paraphrase is offered, not without some trepidation, as a generally workable reconstruction of the poetic logic of the passage, its verbal content as well as the unspoken assumptions that give it support, impetus, and direction.

975-1000: The problem is that the chorus has seen Agamemnon and the army return safely. Yet they are more and more terrified by what they have since observed in Agamemnon's behavior and Clytemnestra's apparent plans, and by their own conviction that no one does what Agamemnon has done and escapes retribution. Feeling (*kardias* 977, *thymos* 993, *splanchna* 995, *kear* 997, *kardia* 1028, *phrenos* 1034) mantically knows for a certainty what the rational, calculating mind only vaguely apprehends—the imminent murder of Agamemnon. Is any remedy possible?

1001-16: Some critically dangerous states are remediable. Two such critically dangerous states are excessive wealth and health, for sickness is next-door neighbor to health, and uninterrupted prosperity, like a too direct sea-route over hidden reefs, leads to its opposite. But remedies are at hand for both. Excessive wealth a man may himself remedy *before* disaster occurs by the timely jettisoning of excess cargo; as for the sickness that comes from famine (νῆστιν νόσον, 1016), Zeus can remedy that *after* the event by bestowing abundant crops in compensation.

1017-34: By contrast, the present situation involves a man's

death, for which there is no remedy. Zeus' *moira* has made the situation irremediable on two counts: (1) *after* the event, there is no resurrection to compensate for death (like abundant crops after famine), for Zeus has nullified the efficacy of incantations to raise the dead (witness his treatment of Asclepius); (2) furthermore (unlike the timely action of jettisoning cargo), any words *before* the event are fruitless,[31] since Zeus' *moira*—here the automatic retribution which follows upon such actions as Agamemnon's—makes Agamemnon as good as dead already and keeps the chorus from accomplishing any timely purpose whatever.

Their speech has all along served another purpose than their own; it has provided Clytemnestra with *klêdones* endorsing the congruence of Zeus' *moira* and her own designs. No words (or actions) running counter to that *moira* and those designs can be expected to succeed. If anything, they make matters worse by hastening the destined events. The paralysis of will and despair reach the point of metaphysical formulation in the closing lines of the ode (1025-33):

> εἰ δὲ μὴ τεταγμένα
> μοῖρα μοῖραν ἐκ θεῶν
> εἶργε μὴ πλέον φέρειν,
> προφθάσασα καρδία
> γλῶσσαν ἂν τάδ' ἐξέχει.
> νῦν δ' ὑπὸ σκότῳ βρέμει
> θυμαλγής τε καὶ οὐδὲν ἐπελπομέ-
> να ποτὲ καίριον ἐκτολυπεύσειν. . . .

This formulation in turn receives its dramatic demonstration in the pathetic escape from action into inane discussion which follows Agamemnon's death-cry (1343-71).[32] Here they restate

[31] Up to this time they had made a few abortive attempts to save the king, couched in language too oblique to be understood. Their sinister remark that they had cause for fear in Agamemnon's absence (550), and the disguised suggestion that Clytemnestra's boast of conjugal fidelity is false (615 f.) are both utterly lost on the simple Herald. The too general nature of their warning to Agamemnon himself (782-809) obscures the more immediate source of danger in Clytemnestra's plot.

[32] On this scene, see the excellent analysis by Garry Wills, "*Agamemnon* 1346-71, 1649-53" *H. S. C. P.*, LXVII (1963), pp. 255-62.

a previous observation (1017-24) about the impossibility of words to charm life back into a corpse (1360 f.)—

> δυσμηχανῶ
> λόγοισι τὸν θανόντ' ἀνιστάναι πάλιν—

and end on the sheer edge of comedy with the limp epistemological principle that the mantic inference of murder requires more substantial grounds than outcries to that effect (1366-7):

> ἦ γὰρ τεκμηρίοισιν ἐξ οἰμωγμάτων
> μαντευσόμεσθα τἀνδρὸς ὡς ὀλωλότος;

Distrust in the efficacy of language to accomplish or signify anything other than Zeus' preordained purpose can go no further than this cledonomancy-in-reverse.

By contrast to the chorus' despair and inaction, Clytemnestra's *elpis* [33] is based upon the conviction that her plans congrue with the *moira* of Zeus.[34] While they complain of being able to accomplish nothing *kairion* by speaking (1033), she can boast after the murder of having used language *kairiôs* (1372). But Clytemnestra herself does not escape the implications of her own unpropitious utterances—*klêdones* so far as the audience is concerned—though their fulfillment does not occur until the *Choephoroi*. Her vigorous rejection of dream portents (275) will be her undoing in the second play. Her own ironic "dipping of bronze" simile (χαλκοῦ βαφάς, 612) points ahead not only to Agamemnon's death but to her own and Aegisthus' as well,

[33] She is characterized by her ἐλπίζον κέαρ (11), the chorus, by the precise opposite: κυκλούμενον κέαρ (997); for her, οὐ . . . φόβου μέλαθρον ἐλπὶς ἐμπατεῖ (1434), while they by contrast have no ἐλπίδος φίλον θράσος (994). The relationship of *elpis* to Clytemnestra's industry and the contrasting inaction of the chorus coincides with the representation of *elpis* in the *Prometheus Bound* as the gift of Prometheus to mankind to replace the animal certainty about death, thus clearing the way for ambition and industry (248-50):

Πρ. θνητούς γ' ἔπαυσα μὴ προδέρκεσθαι μόρον.
Χο. τὸ ποῖον εὑρὼν τῆσδε φάρμακον νόσου;
Πρ. τυφλὰς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐλπίδας κατῴκισα.

[34] After the murder, Clytemnestra can boast of having been the instrument through which a divine avenger worked (1497-1504). Compare 912 f.:

> τὰ δ' ἄλλα φροντὶς οὐχ ὕπνῳ νικωμένη
> θήσει—δικαίως σὺν θεοῖς εἱμαρμένα.

for in the second play Orestes is to strike with "swift-footed bronze" (*ποδώκει χαλκεύματι*, 576), "forged ahead of time" for the usurpers by Fate (*προχαλκεύει δ' Αἶσα φασγανουργός*, 647). When she speaks of Orestes as the guarantor of her and Agamemnon's marriage pledges (878),

ἐμῶν τε καὶ σῶν κύριος πιστωμάτων,

she has ironically designated him as her murderer, for as *kyrios* of the pledges, he must recompense his father for their violation. Later, in the *Choephoroi*, the exposure of her breasts and the accompanying plea for mercy (896-8)—

ἐπίσχες, ὦ παῖ, τόνδε δ' αἴδεσαι, τέκνον,
μαστόν, πρὸς ᾧ σὺ πολλὰ δὴ βρίζων ἅμα
οὔλοισιν ἐξήμελξας εὐτραφὲς γάλα,

initiates the fulfillment of her portentous nightmare as it was described at line 531:

αὐτὴ προσέσχε μαστὸν ἐν τὠνείρατι.

Her excuse for taking a lover in Agamemnon's absence is that it is painful for women to be kept from their men (920)—ill-omened words now that Aegisthus is dead:[35]

ἄλγος γυναιξὶν ἀνδρὸς εἴργεσθαι, τέκνον.

Finally, her exegesis of the dream snake as Orestes is immediately followed by the dream's fulfillment (929). As for her paramour, Aegisthus, he fares no better. In the *Agamemnon* in addition to the *klêdôn* at 1652 (which served as our starting-point in this essay), he slips as badly as the Herald at another point (1610):

οὕτω καλὸν δὴ καὶ τὸ κατθανεῖν ἐμοί—

"With things as they now stand, I would consider even death a beautiful thing."

In the *Choephoroi*, Orestes and the chorus are quite conscious of the power of language to affect events. He explicitly warns them against ill-omened utterances (581)—

[35] In the same vein, Orestes had earlier said to his mother: *φιλεῖς τὸν ἄνδρα; τοιγὰρ ἐν ταὐτῷ τάφῳ/κείσῃ* (894 f.), and after the murder, he refers to the victims as *φίλοι δὲ καὶ νῦν* (976).

ὑμῖν δ' ἐπαινῶ γλῶσσαν εὔφημον φέρειν,

and bids them speak only *ta kairia* (582); they themselves search for means of fulfilling this injunction (720 f.):

πότε δὴ στομάτων
δείξομεν ἰσχὺν ἐπ' Ὀρέστῃ;

One of their pious remarks (780)—

μέλει θεοῖσιν ὥνπερ ἂν μέλῃ πέρι,

closely echoing Clytemnestra's prayer to Zeus in the *Agamemnon* (974), bodes well for Orestes, suggesting the shift of divine support from Clytemnestra to her son. But they too slip unconsciously into *klêdones* later fulfilled contrary to their intentions. They have in mind, of course, Agamemnon's murder when they speak of slaughter rousing up an Erinys from those slain in the past to bring fresh disaster upon disaster (402-4):

βοᾷ γὰρ λοιγὸς Ἐρινὺν
παρὰ τῶν πρότερον φθιμένων ἄτην
ἑτέραν ἐπάγουσαν ἐπ' ἄτῃ.

But the words themselves refer as well to Clytemnestra's murder, the attack of the Erinyes upon Orestes, and the seemingly undiminished power of disaster (*μένος ἄτης*, 1076) with which the play ends. And just as the Argive elders warned Cassandra against ill-omened words, yet seemed to bring on Agamemnon's death by too explicit reference to it, so here the coryphaeus, apprehensive about Orestes' allusions to his exile and possible death, warns him to use more cautious language (1044 f.)—

μηδ' ἐπιζευχθῇς στόμα
φήμῃ πονηρᾷ μηδ' ἐπιγλωσσῶ κακά—

yet his own untimely allusion to the murdered pair as *snakes* (*δρακόντοιν*, 1047) seems immediately to conjure up the Erinyes, *πεπλεκτανημέναι πυκνοῖς δράκουσιν* (1050).[36]

[36] For the Erinys as snake, see Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*[3] (Cambridge, 1922), pp. 232-7. On p. 37 (fig. 55) Miss Harrison reproduces a scene from an early black-figure "Tyrrhenian" amphora (cf. also *J. d. I.*, VIII [1893], pl. 1, and Pfuhl, *M. u. Z.*, fig. 207), in which a snake is rising up out of the body of a

In the *Eumenides*, cledonomancy has no part, mainly because the speakers are for the most part gods. But in addition to that, the attitude toward language and its power has changed together with nearly everything else in the apocalyptic conclusion of the trilogy. In the *Agamemnon*, the chorus' hopeless inertia was the result of a determinist view of the world together with a belief that language accomplishes only what the gods have preordained to happen.[37] Where words can accomplish no autonomous purpose and can only expedite the fulfillment of one's worst fears, silence is all that is left.[38] Language is tortuously indirect where it is not actually repressed (like the Watchman's—*βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσσῃ μέγας βέβηκεν*, 39) or suppressed (like Iphigeneia's *φθόγγον ἀραῖον*, 237), and even the most direct and primitive form of oral communication—Agamemnon's cry for help at 1343 and 1345—is left unanswered allegedly for lack of supporting evidence. By contrast, the *Eumenides* concentrates upon the secular, civilizing efficacy of language. After an ineffectual bout of mutual verbal abuse by Apollo and the Erinyes, we are presented with Athena's *peitho* as a paradigm of language free of superstitious dread and capable of accomplishing the union of opposing forces without which the community cannot

murdered woman (Clytemnestra? Eriphyle?) to pursue the killer (Orestes? Alcmaeon?) as he escapes with drawn sword.

[37] Cf. Paul Vicaire, "Pressentiments, présages, prophéties dans le théatre d'Eschyle," *R. E. G.*, LXXVI (1963), pp. 339 f.: "Les présages, signes du monde physique (ou du monde mental, comme les rêves), doivent être déchiffrés et interprétés avec attention, étant des annonces de l'inévitable. Dans la tragédie ils font prévoir, de façon parfois ambiguë, mais toujours troublante, que les événements vont être dirigés dans un certain sens, voulu par les dieux, et que, spontanément ou non, les personnages se feront les aides des forces surnaturelles qui sont à l'oeuvre."

[38] The chorus' attitude verges on that of some primitive societies in which the taboos on naming fearful objects are so intense and numerous that the extinction of all speech is a real threat. Cf. Heinz Werner, *Die Ursprünge der Metapher* (Leipzig, 1919), p. 77. This work is an exhaustive analysis of the origins of metaphor as a deliberate substitution to avoid the frank designation of tabooed objects. See also Wayne Schumaker, *Literature and the Irrational* (Washington Square repr., New York, 1966), pp. 91-108.

exist.[39] This *peitho* is a free and active instrument, and its use contrasts sharply with the passivity and fatalism which cledonomancy involves.

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[39] Discourse is, of course, an indispensable element of the whole concept of communal life and especially of the *polis*. For an Athenian, the opposite of *anarchia* was *peitharchia* (*Antigone*, 676), obedience to the laws based, as the word implies, upon persuasive speech rather than fear of brute compulsion. In Thucydides' classic description of *stasis* at Corcyra, the internal disintegration of the *polis* is accompanied by the decomposition of traditional verbal meanings (III, 82, 4). One of Aristotle's proofs that man is by nature a *politikon zôon* is that he alone among animals possesses speech, the natural purpose of which is to communicate that for which the *polis*-partnership is formed—the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore the right and the wrong (*Pol.*, 1253a8-19).