

## EROTIC UNDERTONES IN THE LANGUAGE OF CLYTEMNESTRA\*

Well over a decade ago now, John Moles drew attention to the fact that the words of Clytemnestra at Aesch. *Ag.* 1388ff. included some striking sexual imagery that had gone unnoticed.<sup>1</sup> To summarize a rich and detailed discussion, he said: 'Clytemnestra represents the dying Agamemnon as having an ejaculation of dark blood—and herself as rejoicing in reciprocal climax as her husband bespatters her—with his blood'. My purpose here is to draw attention to two more examples of this kind of language to be found in close proximity to the foregoing.

(a) *Ag.* 1444ff.

ὁ μὲν γὰρ οὕτως, ἡ δὲ τοι κύκνου δίκην  
τὸν ὕστατον μέλψασα θανάσιμον γόον  
κεῖται φιλήτωρ τοῦδ' · ἐμοὶ δ' ἐπήγαγεν  
εὐνῆς παροψώνημα τῆς ἐμῆς χλιδῆς.

1445

I wish to suggest that, in lines 1446–7, there are connections between sex and food, sex and death, and finally food and death. The text and interpretation of the lines is far from certain.<sup>2</sup> A particularly important question is who is the subject of ἐπήγαγεν and what is its precise meaning. It seems that four interpretations are possible, which I shall divide into two groups:

I (a) Agamemnon brought in over my head a side-dish to the luxury of my bed [i.e. *he hoped to enjoy Cassandra's favours as mistress in addition to my own*].<sup>3</sup>

I (b) Cassandra brought in a side-dish to the luxury of my bed [i.e. *she was herself the dish and she intended herself as an extra treat for Agamemnon*].

II (a) Agamemnon brought a side-dish to the luxury of my bed [i.e. *he intended to enjoy Cassandra as mistress but I killed Cassandra and I enjoyed it*].

II (b) Cassandra brought in a side-dish to the luxury of my bed [i.e. *although she had the audacity to think she could rival me, I killed her and I enjoyed it*].

It is not really possible to demonstrate conclusively who is the subject of the verb, but it seems to me that this is not the main question.<sup>4</sup> The real difference between groups I and II lies not in the question of who brought the παροψώνημα, but of who

\* I should like to thank Dr. Christopher Pelling and *CQ*'s anonymous reader for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this piece.

<sup>1</sup> J. Moles, *LCM* 4.9 (Nov. 1979), 179–89. Tragedy is not so elevated that it cannot mention sex. Jocasta, I believe, is referring to precisely this when she sings of παιδοποιὸς ἄδονά (Eur. *Phoen.* 338) and Hecuba does not shy away from it at Eur. *Hec.* 824–8. In Homer, too, Agamemnon can taunt Chryses by referring to his anticipation of sex with Chryseis (*Il.* 1. 31).

<sup>2</sup> εὐνῆς \*πάροψον, ὄμμα τῆς ἐμῆς χλιδῆς (Denniston and Page) does not recommend itself since \*πάροψον is not attested. Fraenkel reads χλιδῆς, seeing no difficulty with the double genitive: what is brought is an εὐνῆς παροψώνημα which is also a παροψώνημα of her χλιδῆς. More immediately problematic is the fact that Fraenkel believes that εὐνῆς itself is a corruption because he cannot imagine Queen Clytemnestra talking so openly of the pleasures of her bed. Thus he also argues that the language of 1391f. is not sexual but has to do with Clytemnestra's lust for revenge. The sexual connotations of lines 1389–92 seem to me so plain (see Moles, art. cit.) that I have no hesitation in retaining εὐνῆς.

<sup>3</sup> Denniston and Page say that ἐπάγω can have this meaning of 'to bring in somebody over another' and cite Soph. *Aj.* 1296, *Tr.* 378. The verb need not have this meaning. It can simply mean, 'to introduce'; cf. LSJ s.v. Hence other interpretations are possible.

<sup>4</sup> Fraenkel (ad loc.) is sure that Cassandra is the subject but, as Denniston and Page point out, the pronoun τοῦδε in line 1446 may be enough to introduce Agamemnon as the new subject.

enjoyed it. There is a remarkable vagueness in Clytemnestra's phrasing and this allows for irony. Henderson has shown that the Greek sexual vocabulary is much inclined to describe the pleasures of sex in terms of food.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Davidson has drawn attention to the way in which some Greeks connected the eating of fine foods (*ὀψοφαγία*) with decadence and sex.<sup>6</sup> So it is quite possible for Clytemnestra to describe Cassandra as a dish whom Agamemnon expected to enjoy. This is, I think, the superficial meaning of her words. But there is more. Moles' examination of 1388ff. showed very clearly that killing produced a sort of sexual pleasure for Clytemnestra. If killing is linked to sexual pleasure and sexual pleasure to food, then it is perfectly possible to understand Clytemnestra as implying that she derived from the murder of Cassandra a pleasure that was both sexual and akin to that derived from food. The irony is that Agamemnon never got to enjoy his prize but his wife, in a different sense, did. A link between food and death may also enter into the equation; Clytemnestra described Agamemnon's murder as a sacrifice at 1433. Sacrificial animals were usually killed with the expectation that they would provide a pleasurable meal.<sup>7</sup> Clytemnestra does not eat Agamemnon, of course, but the pleasure is of a similar kind. Furthermore, we may recollect that the entire family is branded by the fact that Atreus served up Thyestes' children to their father as dinner. This theme is raised in the play and a perverted relationship to food is clearly present.<sup>8</sup>

(b) *Ag. 1434ff.*

οὐ μοι φόβον μέλαθρον ἐλπὶς ἐμπατεῖ  
 ἔως ἂν αἴθῃ πῦρ ἐφ' ἐστίας ἐμῆς  
 Αἰγισθος . . .

Superficially, Clytemnestra is saying that she will fear no reprisals as long as she has Aegisthus in the house. Fraenkel and others point out that it is the customary right of the man of the house to perform sacrifice on the family hearth.<sup>9</sup> It seems to me, however, that the phrase has yet a further meaning. We know from the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* that Hestia, goddess of the hearth, was one of the three goddesses who would have nothing to do with the works of Aphrodite.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the hearth and virginity seem to have been linked in Greek thought. This is presumably at the root of

<sup>5</sup> J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse* (Yale, 1975), pp. 47–8, 52, 60f., 142ff., 174. Although Henderson's observations about the double-meanings of words are based on the language of Old Comedy, one assumes that not all these usages were invented overnight by Aristophanes. It is far more reasonable to suppose that these are reflections of connections that already existed in the language.

<sup>6</sup> J. Davidson, 'Fish, Sex and Revolution', *CQ* 43 (1993), 53–66, esp. pp. 62ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the recurrent Homeric formula οὐδέ τι θυμὸς ἐδεύετο δαιτὸς ἑστῆς; also *Hdt.* 8.99, ἦσαν ἐν θυσίῃσι τε καὶ εὐπαθείῃσι.

<sup>8</sup> *Ag.* 1095ff., 1191ff., 1241f.

<sup>9</sup> Fraenkel on 1435. There may, however, be some tensions beneath the surface here. The hearth in Greek thought is rich in feminine connotations, see J.-P. Vernant, 'Hestia-Hermes: the Religious Expression of Space and Movement in Ancient Greece', in (id.) *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks* (Eng. tr. London, 1983), pp. 127–175. We have been told that Clytemnestra is somewhat manly (*Ag.* 11); Aegisthus' masculinity, already called into question by Cassandra (1224) and later by the chorus (1625f.), may in fact be subordinate to that of Clytemnestra. It seems highly suggestive that she calls the hearth *her own* (ἐμῆς; 1435), making Aegisthus appear less like the dominant male and more like a household attendant.

<sup>10</sup> *Hy.* 5.21ff. For more details see the article 'Hestia' in *Der kleine Pauly* (Munich, 1979), Band 2, pp. 1118ff.

Hesiod's injunction not to turn one's semen-bespattered genitals towards the hearth after sex.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps because of its intimate seclusion, the hearth seems to have acquired a symbolic connection with the female sexual organs. Henderson has noted that, in comedy and elsewhere, the almost synonymous word *ἐσχάρα* could denote the vagina (p. 143). There may even be an allusion of this kind in Euripides' *Helen*.<sup>12</sup> The association between passion and fire is, of course, ubiquitous.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, I submit that there is a sexual undertone here. Clytemnestra has nothing to fear for as long as she and Aegisthus are together in their liaison and he continues to light her fire.<sup>14</sup>

In drawing attention to the sexual connotations of these passages, I am not interested in sexual language merely for its own sake. We hear at the very outset that Clytemnestra has an *ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ* (11). We see that she is probably, in fact, more masculine than most of the men in the play. When, in the Beacon Speech (281ff.), she summons up far away vistas for the chorus and audience, we feel that she knows things hidden from most men, to say nothing of women.<sup>15</sup> Her cunning intelligence and powers of ironic dissimulation and persuasion also set her apart from the other characters.<sup>16</sup> Her language here must add to our perception of her as a profoundly disquieting character.

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<sup>11</sup> Hes. Op. 734ff. with M. L. West's note ad. loc. (Oxford, 1978).

<sup>12</sup> At line 234f., Helen says that Paris *ἐπλευσε βαρβάρῳ πλάτῃ / τὰν ἐμὰν ἐφ' ἐστίαν*. Given the purpose of his voyage, the presence of Aphrodite (238), and the possibly phallic connotations of the barbarian oar, I do not think we can rule out this slightly risqué thought.

<sup>13</sup> Sappho 31.9f. is a well-known example.

<sup>14</sup> It appears that there did indeed exist in Greek an idiom comparable to that of the popular song lyric 'Come on baby, light my fire'. We find at Xen. Cyr. 5.1.16 the phrase *αἰθεσθαι τῷ Ἔρωτι* and at Ap. Rhod. 3.296f. *ὑπὸ κραδίῃ εἰλύμενος αἶθετο λάθρῃ / οὐλος Ἔρως*. cf. A.P. 12.83 (Meleager) where *ἀνάπτω* and *αἰθομαι* are used respectively of *Ἔρως* and its effects.

<sup>15</sup> She also has an awareness of these places as military installations, e.g. 293, 301; scarcely a feminine concern.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. the false sincerity of 601ff., 896f.; the 'Carpet Scene', 931ff.

### PHAIDRA'S *AIDOS* AGAIN\*

W. D. Furley, 'Phaidra's pleasurable *aidos* (Eur. *Hipp.* 380–7)', *CQ* 46 (1996), 84–90 is in part a response to my article, 'αἰδώς in Euripides' *Hippolytos* 373–430: review and reinterpretation', *JHS* 113 (1993), 45–59. Furley states that I suggest that *aidos* is 'a euphemism for *aidoia*, the genitals, thus = sex'. This is an over-simplification. I argue (at pp. 45, 55, 56) that 'in this context, αἰδώς is a euphemistic metonymy for ἔρως'; that 'in terms of linguistic use, αἰδώς may be viewed as the natural reaction to the αἰδοῖα . . . just as γελῶς is to γελοῖα'; and hence that 'the linguistic associations and semantic nuances of αἰδώς are sufficient to allow the word, in appropriate contexts, to mean "sex"'.

Furley concedes that '[sex] would certainly give a viable pleasure for Phaidra's list'; but objects that 'there is no direct parallel for *aidos* = sex, and the sense required would be most abrupt'. On the question of a parallel he allows that Theognis 1263–6 (a passage adduced by me) 'implies sexual gratification', but finds that this is 'only by

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