

SPEECH AND SILENCE IN THE *ORESTEIA* 1:  
*AGAMEMNON* 1025–1029

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**A** G A M E M N O N HAS RETURNED in triumph, victor over Troy. Home at last after a ten-year absence, he has entered his palace at the end of a scene full of verbal and visual symbolism. His treading on red fabrics as he makes his exit clearly means something, since Clytemnestra has been so insistent on it. Just before following her husband through the door, moreover, Clytemnestra has uttered a prayer to Zeus which is terrifying in its ambiguity (Ag. 973–974). These things demand interpretation, but the chorus lack the key. At some deep level of awareness they have sensed enough so that they respond with an uncontrollable fear, and yet they cannot tell the meaning of what they have seen and heard. The song that follows the scene (975–1034) concerns that fear. Despite the chorus' efforts, however, the song never proceeds beyond instinctive emotion to explicit understanding; by the end of the ode they still cannot answer the question with which they began (975–977): "why does this fear hover constantly in front of my divining heart?"<sup>1</sup> They conclude by meditating on this failure:

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

(1025–1034)

In this, the first of two inter-connected essays, my concern is, in the first instance, with the five initial lines of this passage (1025–1029), and then with setting them in their place within the third stasimon as a whole. The second

<sup>1</sup>On this song as an expression of the chorus' perplexity at the events of the preceding scene, see O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1977) 311, 316. It may be doubted, however, that, as Taplin argues, the audience would have shared the chorus' puzzlement. The scene would certainly have challenged their powers of interpretation. But they knew, as the chorus did not, that Agamemnon was entering the palace to his death; and Aeschylus has given careful thematic preparation for the spectacle of Agamemnon treading the red fabrics—often through the mouth of a chorus unaware of the full implications of their own words.

It need hardly be said that in line 976 δέϊμα (now generally accepted) is to be preferred to δέϊγμα (the reading of F). For acknowledgements and abbreviations see last note.

essay will follow the direction of thought suggested by the first, and will consider the broader themes and issues of the *Oresteia*, especially as they are related to the opposition, implied by these lines, between the ability and the failure to use language, and more generally, between speech and silence.

## I

Anyone who seeks the literal meaning of lines 1025–1029 must confront the following questions:

- (1) To what do the words μοῖρα and μοῖραν, respectively, refer?
- (2) With what word is the phrase ἐκ θεῶν to be construed?
- (3) What is the meaning of πλεον φέρειν—“to lend aid” or “to gain more than one’s share?” Most scholars today accept the latter, as I shall;<sup>2</sup> this question will need no discussion here.
- (4) What is the meaning of “the heart outstripping the tongue?” Or is there another possible construction for γλώσσαν?

Some scholars have tried to eliminate one or another of the above problems by emending the text, although the manuscripts do not differ for these lines. The suggested alterations, however, have little to recommend them in themselves, and none yields a meaning as good as most of the meanings that can be gotten from the traditional text.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the problem with that text is not that it is unintelligible but rather that it seems open to such a variety of possible interpretations. Of some ten explanations advanced by scholars from Stanley onward, most have recently been listed (with some omissions) by Pierre Judet de la Combe, who offers a new one of his own.<sup>4</sup> It is unnecessary to survey them here. With a single exception, all can be eliminated for one or more of the following reasons.

Interpretations differ mainly according to how they explain μοῖρα μοῖραν. Many critics have claimed that the phrase expresses distinct nuances of the concept of fate (they take τεταγμένα with μοῖρα in the sense of “fixed fate”

<sup>2</sup>Cf. H. L. Ahrens, “Studien zum Agamemnon des Aeschylus,” *Philologus* Suppl. 1 (1860) 606 (cited with approval by Fraenkel on 1025–1029). See also W. W. Goodwin, “On the text and interpretation of certain passages in the Agamemnon of Aeschylus,” *TAPA* 8 (1877) 69–82, at 82. Blomfield’s often-quoted translation *proficere* is unfortunately ambiguous, since it can have either of the meanings possible for the Greek phrase (in fact Karsten seems to have interpreted it as “be of advantage”). The active voice of the verb instead of the middle (usual when the sense is “gain the advantage”) has parallels in Soph. *O.T.* 1189–1190 and *O.C.* 651 (the former cited by Ahrens, the latter by Goodwin).

<sup>3</sup>See Endnote.

<sup>4</sup>In Judet de la Combe, *Agamemnon* 2.257–268. To his list should be added the proposals of Schütz, Butler, Klausen, Bothe, and Goodwin (above, n. 2).

and understand μοῖραν variously).<sup>5</sup> They argue from the juxtaposition of two cases of the same noun. Others have inferred from the same fact that the word has the same sense in each case,<sup>6</sup> and in my opinion they are correct—not only for stylistic reasons but also because the other view makes distinctions between kinds of *moira* that are not necessitated by the wording and for the most part cannot naturally be inferred from it. The audience, hearing these lines, would have to supply too much. A conflict, in Greek belief, between “fixed fate” and a particular destiny also seems unlikely; no one, at any rate, has suggested any parallels.<sup>7</sup> On these grounds alone, over half of all the explanations can be rejected.

Interpretations that refer the second *moira* to Agamemnon or to the necessity of his death<sup>8</sup> do not sufficiently consider what the members of the chorus can know at this point in the play. These old men have a vague intuition of impending disaster arising from memories of the events at Aulis ten years before, and they have grown more uneasy at the magnitude of Agamemnon’s success and its basis in such great destruction (456–474, 750–781). They have also indicated their distrust of Clytemnestra in a way that is clear enough to the audience at least.<sup>9</sup> But the chorus do not know, nor can they anticipate, what form the disaster will take. Their forebodings have become more urgent, but no more specific, after the scene they have just witnessed. The future now seems to them both more obscure and more threatening. The view that the chorus are explaining their failure to warn Agamemnon in that scene, blaming it on their lot in general or on their inferior social status,<sup>10</sup> should also be rejected for the same reasons. In fact, they have tried to warn the King (783–808)—but in an indirect way which, whatever other reasons may be supplied, the vagueness of their apprehensions makes inevitable.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup>E.g., Butler, Peile, Fraenkel (463), Klausen, and Scott, *Phoenix* 23, 340.

<sup>6</sup>Kitto (above, n. 3) 25, Judet de la Combe, *Agamemnon* 2.265–266, and especially Goodwin (above, n. 2) 82, who says that μοῖρα μοῖραν should be taken “in a reciprocal sense, like ἄλλος ἄλλον.” This seems to me convincing.

<sup>7</sup>Such a conflict may be *implicit* at some points in the Homeric epics; but there is no evidence that it formed a sufficiently fixed tenet of belief for the audience to have brought it to bear on lines that do not clearly allude to it.

<sup>8</sup>I.e., those of Enger, Ahrens, Fraenkel, and Bothe (with divergent views about the first *moira*).

<sup>9</sup>E.g., Ag. 615–616 (corrupt, but the sense is clear enough), 548–550.

<sup>10</sup>The chorus’ lot: Casaubon, Klausen, A. Süßkand, “Chorpartie im Agamemnon des Aeschylus v. 942–993,” *WKP* 33 (1916) 353–357, and, rather similarly, Conington; the chorus’ social status: Nägelsbach, Keck, Enger-Gilbert, Schneidewin-Hense, Wecklein, Groeneboom, and H. Lloyd-Jones, “Ten Notes on Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*” in R. D. Dawe and others, eds, *Dionysiaca: Nine Studies in Greek Poetry by Former Pupils Presented to Sir Denys Page on his Seventieth Birthday* (Cambridge 1978) 55–57. Most of these scholars assume an aorist force in ἐξέχει—a serious awkwardness.

<sup>11</sup>As Scott has pointed out (*Phoenix* 23, 342–343), interpretations that assume that the chorus anticipate Agamemnon’s murder are contradicted by the same chorus’ failure later to understand Cassandra’s prophecies.

Most interpretations consider the lines too much in isolation from their context and make them virtually irrelevant to the third stasimon as a whole. And finally, all but the one to be adopted here fail in one way or another to relate the protasis and apodosis of the sentence closely to one another.<sup>12</sup> If conditions were not as they are, say the chorus, we would speak out in some way. But why do they express those conditions as determined by the relation between *moirai*, and what does that matter have to do with speech? Why do they describe the kind of utterance that is denied them by saying that "the heart outracing the tongue would pour these things forth?" Why do they mention heart and tongue at all, and what relation do they envision between those organs? About the best that can be done on the basis of any of these views is to say along with Denniston-Page that Aeschylus is describing speech prompted by strong feeling, that under the pressure of emotion the heart would anticipate the "control" that the tongue normally exerts. Would that kind of utterance be articulate, or in any way intelligible? Yet articulate speech is what nearly all these interpretations seem to assume.

The view evidently held by Stanley, which a few modern scholars have adopted, avoids all these difficulties and has the virtues that the others lack. According to it, the principle that one *moira* checks another explains and is illustrated by the inability of the heart to get ahead of the tongue in uttering what the members of the chorus feel. In the immediate context, that is, μοῖρα μοῖραν should be referred to tongue and heart respectively.<sup>13</sup>

*Moira*, etymologically connected with the idea of "division,"<sup>14</sup> is the principle of separation and differentiation, and thus the basis of order in the world. Everything has its allotted place or function, its *moira*, which is limited by the *moira* of every other thing. And so *moira* is closely connected with the idea of boundaries.<sup>15</sup> The protasis of our sentence alludes to this principle, and the apodosis applies it to the inner organization of man; what holds true on the large scale holds also on the small. Each organ is endowed with its proper function and cannot usurp that of any other organ. The heart receives vague intimations and feels emotions; the tongue must give them

<sup>12</sup>This criticism applies equally to the view of Judet de la Combe (*Agamemnon* 2), who successfully avoids the other problems.

<sup>13</sup>This view seems implied in Stanley's translation of the lines: "Nisi autem destinatum / Fatumque decretum Deorum / Impediret quo minus plura praedicaret, / Cor antevertens / Linguam ista effudisset." Schneidewin's interpretation has something in common with it. More recently, it has been taken up by W. B. Stanford, *Aeschylus in His Style: A Study in Language and Personality* (Dublin 1942) 11, 129; H. J. Rose (commentary *ad loc.*); D. C. C. Young, "Gentler Medicines in the *Agamemnon*," *CQ* N.S. 14 (1964) 14–15. In a brief reference to this passage, W. Schadewaldt gives a similar reading: "Aischylos' Achilleis," *Hermes* 71 (1936) 25–69, at 42–43, n. 3. Mazon (in a footnote on this passage in his Budé edition) takes a different view of the passage as a whole but seems in passing to refer one of the *moirai* to the function of the tongue.

<sup>14</sup>H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg 1954–72) 2.196–197.

<sup>15</sup>See especially Theognis 1187–1188.

intelligible utterance. If this division of functions were not maintained, the heart itself could “pour forth these things” without waiting for the tongue to shape the words. That is what the chorus clearly wish might happen. But the sentence is a “contrary-to-fact” condition; in the chorus’ case the tongue’s *moira* checks the heart’s, and the heart therefore cannot express what agitates it.

As for details of the syntax: this interpretation makes sense of the expression “the heart outstripping the tongue,” and γλώσσαν ought to be the object of προφθάσασα. To understand it as object of ἐξέχει not only necessitates emendation of line 1029<sup>16</sup> but also gives a less desirable sense. For the heart to pour forth utterance (γλώσσαν) would still be a violation of boundaries, but the idea of one organ’s *moira* intruding on that of the other would be blurred. In the second place, it is best to take ἐκ θεῶν with τεταγμένα, and to understand the phrase “assigned by the gods” as describing both *moirai* in common. Ahrens (quoted with approval by Fraenkel) maintained that the word-order makes this impossible, but word-order may not provide a very strong argument in this case. I take it that there would be no objection to construing the prepositional phrase with the participle if ἐκ θεῶν had preceded, rather than followed, μοῖραν. But perhaps μοῖραν has been moved forward for the sake of the juxtaposition with μοῖρα. The result is the “interlocking phrase” of which Kitto speaks,<sup>17</sup> which gives a sense of the balance between *moirai* that is being described. Of the other possibilities, connecting ἐκ θεῶν with εἶργε would also be consistent with the interpretation of the lines adopted here, though the notion that the gods protect the balance between *moirai* is not essential to the context. The syntax is very doubtful, however. The genitive with ἐκ can indicate the source of an action, but normally with passive or neutral verbs.<sup>18</sup> I have been unable to find an instance of this use of the preposition with a transitive verb in the active, and the presence of a subject makes such a construction unlikely, not to say illogical. Those who favor this construction here offer no parallels.<sup>19</sup> To take ἐκ θεῶν with μοῖραν, though irreproachable from the point of view of word-order, would introduce into the context a questionable distinction between types of *moira*.<sup>20</sup> Finally, we might follow Ahrens and Fraenkel

<sup>16</sup>See above, n. 3. The vagueness of τὰδε will be discussed later.

<sup>17</sup>Kitto (above, n. 3) 25, with n. 1. Others who have taken this view include Schneidewin (apparently), Goodwin (above n. 2, 82–83), Verrall, and Groeneboom.

<sup>18</sup>Schwyzler 2, 463, Kühner-Gerth 2.1, 460, Smyth 1688.lc.

<sup>19</sup>Conington, Karsten, Enger-Gilbert, Sidgwick, Denniston-Page. Both Ahrens and Fraenkel admit the possibility of this construction, though they do not favor it. The difficulty may be appreciated by comparing Ag. 735–736 with the present lines. Eur. *Med.* 197–198 may at first seem to supply the missing parallel, but in order to extract some kind of sense from those obscure lines ἐξ ὧν must be taken with the nouns θάνατοι and τύχαι rather than with σφάλλουςι.

<sup>20</sup>The construction with μοῖραν would be clarified by, if it does not actually require, the article after that noun (Conington). It also implies a conflict between “established fate” and

in understanding the prepositional phrase with *πλέον φέρειν*. If the meaning is not pressed so as to oppose different kinds of *moira*, this construction would also be compatible with the interpretation I advocate: "if one established *moira* did not prevent another from getting more than its share from the gods [the agents who would naturally administer such a distribution if it were possible] . . . ." This, then, is an acceptable alternative to construing *ἐκ θεῶν* with the participle, and my argument therefore does not stand or fall on that point.

Thus I would support an interpretation which, because its adherents have merely stated it with practically no discussion, has found little favor. Yet it is not merely superior to its rivals. It places lines 1025–1029 squarely in context as part of the conclusion of the third stasimon and gives them a meaning that clarifies the chorus' situation at this point in the drama and has very interesting implications for the *Agamemnon* and the *Oresteia* as a whole. It is not at all, as the most recent commentator has characterized it, a "banalisation."<sup>21</sup>

## II

Lines 1025–1027 express an idea firmly rooted in early Greek thought: that the world-order is an equilibrium of separate parts each with its own circumscribed place and function (*moira*), and that in parallel fashion man's experience consists of a regular alternation of events, fortunes, and conditions. The principle of reciprocal restraints on one another by the *moirai* of different things, by which this order is maintained, is *dike*.<sup>22</sup> Since it designates the observance or enforcement of limits, this term not only applies to the physical world but also can take on legal and ethical meanings. When limits are transgressed, the powers that exact punishment and restore order are the Erinyes.<sup>23</sup> One Homeric passage which shows them in this role is

"fate in the hands of the gods" (Peile); for an objection, see above, n. 7. Scott has suggested that *μοῖραν ἐκ θεῶν* is a "special dispensation" from fixed fate given to "selected men" (*Phoenix* 23, 341–342). Such stories as those of Apollo and Admetus (*Eum.* 723–728) and Achilles' horse Xanthos (*Il.* 19.404–418) come to mind. But even if they can be interpreted as examples of such a conflict, both cases are clearly exceptional and viewed as reprehensible. The chorus can hardly suppose that Agamemnon might receive a similar "dispensation."

<sup>21</sup>Judet de la Combe, *Agamemnon* 2.260. Cf. Lloyd-Jones (above, n. 10) 55.

<sup>22</sup>For the connection of *Moirai* with *Dike*, see Hesiod *Theog.* 904 and West *ad loc.* On the meaning of *dike* and its application to Aeschylus, see M. Gagarin, *Aeschylean Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1976) 66–79. Anaximander DK VS<sup>11</sup> 12 B 1 and Heraclitus *ibid.* 22 B 80 especially throw light on Ag. 1025–1027.

<sup>23</sup>See Heraclitus *ibid.* 22 B 94, Ag. 1432–1433, Paus. 2.11.4, and Fraenkel 728–730 (on Ag. 1535 f.). Cf. also West on Hesiod *Theog.* 217 and W. C. Greene, *Moira: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought* (Cambridge, Mass. 1944) 17. That Fraenkel (462–463, n. 4) cites Heraclitus fr. 94 and *Il.* 418 in connection with Ag. 1024, whereas they can just as well be applied to lines 1025–1029, shows how closely the latter lines, according to the interpretation advocated here, fit with what precedes them.

especially interesting for our purposes. At the end of Book 19 of the *Iliad* Hera gives the immortal horse Xanthos the ability to speak (αὐδῆντα δ' ἔθηκε, 407) and he prophesies Achilles' death. "And when he had spoken thus the Erinyes restrained his speech" (Ἐρινύες ἔσχεθον αὐδῆν, 418). Here the Erinyes, as executors of *dike* and protectors of the arrangement of things made by *moira*, check a use of speech which is, as we should say, "unnatural."<sup>24</sup> The horse has obtained speech by a goddess's gift, but in granting it Hera has disrupted the world's normal order. Xanthos has gotten more than his *moira*, and the balance must be redressed. Speech and silence, it appears, are subject to the same rules of limit as everything else. Here it is a question of what kind of being can speak, but for humans the appropriateness of speech might depend on changing circumstances or on the exercise, by the various faculties of perception, intellection, and articulation, of their respective functions.

As far as I can discover, however, there is no parallel for the application of the concept of mutual limitation between *moirai* to the body's internal organs.<sup>25</sup> This weakness in the argument—if it is one—should not be unduly exaggerated. The doctrine is so pervasive that the usage postulated here, which seems implied by the structure of the sentence under discussion, is natural; if speech and silence (*Il.* 19.418, above) and states of consciousness (sleep and waking, *Od.* 19.591–593) have *moirai*, there is no reason why internal organs should not have them as well. Besides, the third stasimon of the *Agamemnon* contains the most specific and detailed references to these faculties and their functions in all of extant Greek tragedy. Therefore, neither the idea's appearance here nor its absence elsewhere is surprising. When the positive advantages of this interpretation of lines 1025–1029 are set against the lack of a parallel, they will seem far more significant.

It is for the tongue to frame in articulate speech what the heart feels or the mind knows. Io in the *Prometheus Bound* shows what happens when the tongue loses control over this function:

ἐλελεῦ ἐλελεῦ·  
 ὑπό μ' αὖ σφάκελος καὶ φρενοπλήγης  
 μανίαι θάλλουσ', οἷστρου δ' ἄρδις  
 χρίει μ' ἄτυρος,  
 καρδιά δὲ φόβῳ φρένα λακτίζει,  
 τροχοδινεῖται δ' ὄμμαθ' ἐλίγδην,  
 ἔξω δὲ δρόμου φέρομαι λύσεως  
 πνεύματι μάργῳ γλώσσης ἀκρατῆς,

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Schol. T on this line: ἐπίσκοποι γάρ εἰσι τῶν παρὰ φύσιν.

<sup>25</sup>The closest passage known to me is *Cho.* 309–310, which sets "hostile tongue" against "hostile tongue" in a prayer addressed to the Moirai. But there the tongue seems rather the instrument of the opposition of *moirai* than endowed with its own *moira*. And of course there is no opposition between the tongue's and another organ's function.

θολεροὶ δὲ λόγοι παίουσ' εἰκῇ  
 στυγνῆς πρὸς κύμασιν ἄτης.

(877–886)

There are some remarkable similarities here with the way the chorus describe their symptoms in the third stasimon of the *Agamemnon* (we shall return to them later), but there is also one difference: Io says that she is unable to control her tongue (γλώσσης ἄκρατῆς), whereas in the *Agamemnon* the chorus envision the heart bypassing the tongue entirely and directly expressing what agitates it. These are, however, slightly variant ways of describing the same phenomenon: the heart usurping the function of the tongue, and perhaps using the tongue as its instrument, to unburden itself. The result, on Io's account of her state, is unintelligibility. As her madness sweeps her "outside the course"—that is, outside the normal channels of thought—"words beat at random in a confused torrent upon the waves of hateful ruin." Of course, Io does utter articulate words here and—except, perhaps, for the last phrase—their meaning is lucid. We are asked to believe what is being described, without being shown it. But these lines are her last in the play, and she exits driven to a frenzy by the gadfly. She can no longer play an articulate role in the drama.

Confusion of speech, then, is a sign of the overthrow of inner equilibrium—in Io's own word, madness (μανία). Whatever the truth about the authorship of the *Prometheus Bound*, the comparison with Io is at the very least interesting. What the chorus of the *Agamemnon* contemplate but see as an impossibility in their own case actually happens to her. Within the *Agamemnon* also there is a girl who is the victim of divine lust, is in an abnormal mental state which is reflected in her language, and contrasts significantly with the old men of the chorus. That is Cassandra.<sup>26</sup> When she finally breaks her silence, she cries out at first in unintelligible syllables; only Apollo's name can be made out (1072–1073, 1076–1077). Throughout the first part of the ensuing scene (up until line 1177), when she sings in agitated lyrics, she alludes to various horrors and shifts from one to the other in a way that would confuse all but those who already know not only the story of the past but also that Agamemnon's death is impending (as the audience does, but not the chorus). Even when she speaks in iambic trimeter, and says that she will utter her oracle no longer through riddles (1178–1183—among the most magnificent but highly wrought and difficult lines in the trilogy), her words are still hard to understand because for the most part she describes her visions of past and future. She expresses her subjective feelings of horror at the royal house, its past, and the murderess who lurks within it, and—when she is about to enter it—at the fate that awaits her there. Only twice does she simply convey information, both times in short

<sup>26</sup>Compare the descriptions of the recurrent onsets of frenzy in Io and Cassandra: *P.V.* 878–879 (ὑπό μ' αὖ σφάκελος καὶ φρενοπλήγες / μανίαι θάλπουσιν), *Ag.* 1215–1216 (ὑπ' αὖ με δεινὸς ὀρθομαντείας πόνοσ' / στροβεῖ ταρασσών . . .).



passages of stichomythia—first when she tells the chorus about her punishment by Apollo (1202–1213) and then when she prophesies straightforwardly, and in a single line, the death of Agamemnon (1246).

Still, though her mode of expression is for the most part mantic and riddling, Cassandra can give shape to her knowledge and her feelings in articulate speech. To the audience, she makes all too much sense. She compels language to serve her need for expression. She deals in metaphor and image rather than the language of rational discourse, but her words have a sweep and a force that match the power of her vision. She thus provides a strong contrast with the chorus, who in the third stasimon cannot speak what is in their hearts and who in this scene cannot fully understand her. She may be doomed never to be believed, but her gift of prophecy frees her from the necessity that one organ's lot check another's, which is for most mortals the precondition for intelligible speech. Cassandra thus occupies a privileged position, one that is intermediate between Io (also an ordinary mortal), whose heart in her frenzy gets ahead of her tongue and who therefore loses control over language, and the chorus of the *Agamemnon*, who remain despite their fear in a state of normal awareness, are bound by the rules that usually govern speech, and cannot adequately express their deepest feelings.<sup>27</sup>

### III

By setting the sentence we have been examining in its context within the third stasimon, we shall be able to understand why the chorus end by referring to the relation between heart and tongue and to form a clearer idea of why they cannot put into words all that is in their hearts. The ode consists of two self-contained strophic pairs, with a change of subject, as well as of metrical pattern, after line 1000. The first two stanzas describe the chorus's fear—describe the emotion, that is, without specifying its object. In the second pair, the chorus try to give reasons for that fear. Lines 1025–1029, along with their continuation in lines 1030–1034, draw together the basic themes of the song.<sup>28</sup>

Why this fear? The expedition against Troy is over, and whatever the cost was, Agamemnon is safely home. The evil has been done and suffered.<sup>29</sup> And yet (ὄμως, 990—surely the right reading) the *thumos* sings the Erinyes'

<sup>27</sup>J. de Romilly, *La crainte et l'angoisse dans le théâtre d'Eschyle* (Paris 1958) 61–62, 75, finds a steady increase in fear in the play, with the chorus' emotion intensifying Agamemnon's hesitation to walk on the fabrics and prefiguring Cassandra's "délire." But the differences are more important than this scheme would indicate. These characters are more fruitfully compared in regard to the degree and kind of their insight, and the language in which they express it.

<sup>28</sup>The most recent, and perhaps the most careful and consistent, discussion of this ode is by Judet de la Combe, *Agamemnon* 2.206–280. My analysis differs considerably from his, which seems to me to find meaning too subtle for the text to bear or an audience in the theater to comprehend.

<sup>29</sup>The corrupt text of lines 984–987 has been emended, and proposed emendations variously

lament, and the turmoil that the chorus feel within them is not in vain. All they can do is make the prayer that ends the antistrophe. So the thought seems to run in the first strophic pair. At about the same point in each stanza, the fear before the chorus' heart is said to express itself in song—the prophetic song which in the antistrophe is identified as the dirge of the Erinyes (note the metrical correspondence between lines 979 and 991).<sup>30</sup> Song is a kind of utterance, and so the references to it are related to the concern with speech at the conclusion of the stasimon. But what exactly is the relation? The attractive suggestion has been made that the third stasimon itself,<sup>31</sup> or at least the second strophic pair,<sup>32</sup> is to be identified with the *θρήνος Ἐρινύος*. If so, the audience would actually be hearing the horrifying sounds, portending disaster, which well up from within the chorus. But why then do the chorus end by talking about their *inability* to express what is inside them? After all, they emphasize the spontaneity of the prophetic song (*ἀκέλευστος ἀμίσθος ἀοιδά*, 979) and of the *thumos*' singing (*αὐτοδίδακτος*, 991)—that is, their lack of control over it. Perhaps instead the stasimon is merely an approximation, the counterpart at the level of conscious awareness and verbal articulation, of what the *thumos* sings deep within them. The chorus *sing about* that song because they cannot *sing it*. Lines 1025–1029 explain why, and by stressing that the chorus have failed in their attempt at expression, indicate that there is a disparity, perhaps not very great but important nevertheless, between the inner and the outer songs.

If we want to know where in the *Agamemnon* we hear the authentic song of prophecy, we must look once again to the Cassandra scene, as Scott has suggested.<sup>33</sup> There it is Cassandra who sings that song, however, and not

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interpreted, so as to yield a reference to the Greek fleet's delay at Aulis (Abresch, Klausen, Peile, L. Campbell in *AJP* 1 [1880] 436, Verrall), its departure from Aulis (Pauw, Karsten, Schneidewin, Ahrens, Wilamowitz, Fraenkel, and others), its arrival at Troy (Heath, Schütz, Butler, Headlam-Thomson, Young [above, n. 13, 11–12], I. C. Cunningham in *JHS* 86 [1966] 166–167, Denniston-Page), and its departure from Troy at the end of the war (Enger in Klausen-Enger; in his own edition he took the lines as describing the expedition's landing at home). Any of these would give a tolerable meaning. However, I prefer a reference to the embarkation from Aulis, for essentially the reasons advanced in Sansone, *Metaphors* 49. I would add that it is hard to see what a description of the landing at Troy would contribute to the context (the danger to the expedition began with its departure from the Greek mainland and ended, presumably, with its homecoming). But if the reference is to Aulis, we should not infer, as some (e.g., Schneidewin) have, that the chorus are thinking specifically of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia and fearing that Agamemnon must pay for it. The audience might make this association, but nothing in the text, however it is restored, indicates that the chorus do. For the same reason, *ἄρα*, which Page suggests, is too explicit (it also involves inexact metrical respension with line 999—but see Young as cited above).

<sup>30</sup>On the similar form of these stanzas, see Sansone, *Metaphors* 49.

<sup>31</sup>De Romilly (above, n. 27) 76–78. Cf. Schneidewin on his lines 957 ff., who includes the play's earlier choral songs also in the reference.

<sup>32</sup>Sansone, *Metaphors* 48.

<sup>33</sup>Scott, *Phoenix* 23, 344: "The music of anxiety was internal in the stasimon; it becomes

the chorus. Their role is once again to describe and comment on the prophetic song of disaster, and they do so in terms that recall the language with which they have described the song of their *thumos* in the third stasimon.<sup>34</sup> They remain spectators, and there is a clear difference between these ordinary men and the seer. Not even Cassandra, however, gets to the center of the horror in this trilogy. She herself hears and describes a song (here a *ῥυμος*)—that of the actual Erinyes in the house of Atreus, the “band of revellers hard to send outside,” who sing of the crime that began the succession of wrongdoings (1188–1193). In the last play of the trilogy, we see the Erinyes at last, and we hear their “hateful song” (μοῦσαν στυγεράν, *Eum.* 308)—the frightful ode they sing to bind Orestes when they have finally run him to ground. This “song from the Erinyes, fettering the mind” (*ῥυμος ἐξ Ἑρινύων* / *δέσμιος φρενῶν*) is “unaccompanied by the lyre” (*ἄφορμικτος*), like the one referred to in the third stasimon of the *Agamemnon* (*ἄνευ λύρας*; *Eum.* 331–333, *Ag.* 990).<sup>35</sup> The song of the Erinyes does eventually become audible, then, but only those divinities can utter it. The chorus of the *Agamemnon* sense it within themselves without being able to give it voice. Cassandra’s singing comes closer to it in nature, but points beyond itself to the true daimonic song. This progression marks the trilogy’s development: in the last play the song becomes objectified, and then the horror is resolved.

The concern, in the closing lines of the ode, with the difference in function among organs of the body and with the symptoms of inner disturbance recalls the chorus’ attempt in the first strophic pair to describe the effect of their dread by specifying the response of each organ. The *καρδία* (1028), or *κέαρ*, and the *φρήν* (1034), or *φρένες*, have figured prominently earlier (975–978, 980–983, 995–997), along with the *θυμός* (990–994). Detailed discussion of these difficult lines in the first strophic pair is beyond our scope here; but as Sansone has shown in part, and as I hope to argue elsewhere in a different way, they and other Aeschylean passages imply a coherent conception of man’s inner organization whereby the physical location, nature, and function of the several organs are differentiated. In my view, the *thumos* typically feels a strong emotion, which is communicated to the *kardia*, and the *phren* is affected from there to a greater or lesser degree. Thus the idea of the organs’ particular *moirai* and the boundaries between them, stated at

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external and public in the scene with Cassandra.” I would like to distinguish more sharply than he does, however, between the chorus’ and Cassandra’s roles and degrees of insight even within this scene.

<sup>34</sup>Scott, *Phoenix* 23, 344. He cites *Ag.* 1140–1142, 1152–1153, 1164–1166, 1174–1176.

<sup>35</sup>Compare the terrible incongruity of the “paean of the Erinyes,” *Ag.* 645 (cf. *Ag.* 1075, 1119–1120). Most editors understand “without the lyre” as equivalent to “with the flute” (the instrument that accompanied the *threnos*) and hence as “gloomy” rather than “discordant.” But in view of Cassandra’s description of the Erinyes as *χόρος* / *ξύμφθογγος οὐκ εὐφωνος*, *Ag.* 1186–1187 (for their singing cf. 1191), I find it difficult to decide between these two possible meanings.

the end of the stasimon, is adumbrated already in the first two stanzas.

Sansone has pointed out the broad distinction between the *phren*, the organ of cognition, understanding, and planning, and the *kardia* and *thumos* (the collective term for which is evidently σπλάγχνα), which respond to a situation with emotion—typically dread or terror.<sup>36</sup> A man's normal state, in the settled conditions of everyday life, would be characterized by the *phren*'s control over these less rational parts, and prudent action would depend on the maintenance of this hierarchy.<sup>37</sup> But in the pathological state of fear the organs of emotion escape all control, respond independently of one another and of the personality as a whole, throb, whirl, and sing spontaneously. No less than the *phren*, however, they can perceive and prophesy. They differ from the *phren* because they operate irrationally; we would call their insights instinctive or intuitive rather than reasoned. Thus, as Sansone says, "those who . . . prophesy with their *phrenes* have a clear picture of the future and are able to *give an account of it*."<sup>38</sup> The examples he gives are gods or divinely inspired prophets like Cassandra, whom we have already contrasted with the chorus. We can now begin to understand why the *kardia* here cannot "pour forth" what it divines. The chorus cannot bring up onto the level of conscious utterance what some part of them perceives deep within precisely because they cannot know what that is in any rational sense: σπλάγχνα δ' οὔτοι ματὰ / ζει πρὸς ἐνδίοις φρεσὶν / τελεσφόροις δίνειαι κυκλούμενον κέαρ (Ag. 995–997)—"Not in vain are the *splanchna*—the heart whirled in eddies that bring fulfillment against [πρὸς] the . . . *phrenes*."<sup>39</sup> According to whether the prepositional phrase is to be taken with ματᾶζει or (as I prefer) with κυκλούμενον, πρὸς implies a boundary, and physical proximity, between the *phrenes* and either the *splanchna* together or the *kear* in particular. If the latter, there is, as commentators have often noted,

<sup>36</sup>Sansone, *Metaphors* 49–52. I would want to make some adjustments in what he says. It would go against my whole argument here if, as he remarks (51–52), the *thumos* as well as the *phren* could "be the source of speech." But Ag. 48, the only support he cites for this, refers to a war-cry (like the cry of birds), not rational, articulate speech, and that is why the *thumos* is its appropriate source. See Sansone's own comments, 83. Also, his identification of the *phren* as the particular seat of confidence (*tharsos*), which is an irrational feeling, is difficult in view of Ag. 991–994. It will be seen that I adhere to the "dualist" position recently criticized by Judet de la Combe, *Agamemnon* 2.227–231—but without the consequences that he says it entails (blurring the distinction between these organs and abstracting them from their concrete physical reality).

<sup>37</sup>Cf. *Persae* 764, where it is said of an earlier Persian king, in contrast to Xerxes, that "his *phrenes* held the rudder of his *thumos*."

<sup>38</sup>Sansone, *Metaphors* 50 (italics his). Cf. his pp. 44–45.

<sup>39</sup>Omitted from this translation is the difficult ἐνδίοις in line 996. If this word does mean "in which there is *dike*" (Fraenkel), it implies neither that the *phrenes* are not physical (Denniston-Page) nor that they understand the present situation. It need only describe a *capacity* for understanding *dike*, if the chorus only had the necessary information on which to form a judgement.

a close parallel in *P.V.* 881 (quoted earlier), where Io's *kardia* kicks her *phren* in its fear. Orestes after his matricide is in similar plight. "Fear is ready to sing against [πρός] the heart," he says (*Cho.* 1024–1025). Here the *kardia* is said to *receive* emotion (perhaps from the *thumos*) rather than to kick the *phren*. But as with Io, Orestes' *phrenes* go out of control with the other organs and sweep his whole personality along with them (φέρουσι γὰρ νικώμενον / φρένες δύσαρχτοι, *Cho.* 1023–1024). Like her he will soon be reduced to silence and will exit hounded by a demonic power.<sup>40</sup> This state, which is virtual madness, is a direct, conscious expression of emotion, but it involves the sacrifice of articulateness. For the chorus of the *Agamemnon*, bystanders less marked out for suffering, possession is less complete. Their *phren* is affected by the turmoil in the neighboring *kardia*—with lack of confidence in the first strophe (980–983), with inflammation at the end of the ode (ζωπυρουμένας φρενός, 1034).<sup>41</sup> But it retains a precarious control. Therefore they remain in normal possession of language, but they cannot discharge their feelings.

For these old men are not gifted like Cassandra with prophecy by the *phren*. To express what agitates them would bring release, but in default of the *phren* the heart would have to unburden itself directly and by-pass the tongue. The result would be not intelligible speech but a "pouring out of these things" in the manner of Io—the sort of confusion that a violation of proper boundaries necessarily entails. The need for articulate speech, then, acts as a curb on the heart, for speech is the tongue's function or *moira*. But the tongue could only utter what is in the heart if that were fully known—that is, if it were understood by the *phren*. Here this requirement is not met; the forebodings remain in the chorus' hearts. Conversely, it seems to be assumed that what cannot be formulated in words cannot be known. For that reason, τὰδε in line 1029, to which some commentators have objected, is *necessarily* vague. Its imprecision is the whole point: the chorus cannot specify what it is that disturbs them.<sup>42</sup>

The ode thus ends in a stalemate, in which these pent-up feelings can be neither soothed nor discharged in speech. The νῦν δέ of line 1030 marks the

<sup>40</sup>Orestes also resembles Cassandra in the effect of his vision upon him: with the verb which the chorus use of him at *Cho.* 1051–1052 (τίνες σε δόξαι . . . στροβοῦσιν), cf. Cassandra's description of her condition at *Ag.* 1215–1216 (στροβεῖ). The similarity of these lines in turn with *P.V.* 878–879 (see above, n. 26) links these two figures and Io together—although the prophetess Cassandra's *phren* never loses control altogether.

<sup>41</sup>I am not convinced by Sansone's suggestion (*Metaphors* 72–73) that ζωπυρουμένας refers to disease ("feverish"). It is difficult to give this meaning to the active form of the verb at *Sept.* 290 (which he cites). He also explains lines 1030–1034 this way: "Here the *kardia* . . . is incapacitated and helpless because the *phren* is feverish." I would put the matter the other way around: the heart is θυμολγής because it cannot unburden itself in speech, and its agitation works on the *phren*.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. lines 998–1000, where a similar imprecision (lack of a definite subject for πεσεῖν) may arise from the same cause.

non-fulfillment of the “unreal condition” in lines 1025–1029. The heart “roars”<sup>43</sup> in the darkness deep within. It is in pain (θυμολγής) and has no hope that it will ever accomplish (or unwind?) anything timely. Whether or not we are justified in hearing in ἐκτολυπέυσεν a live metaphor from the winding off of wool from the spindle (and it would be a fine description of orderly speech),<sup>44</sup> the important word here is surely καίριον. It may here imply speaking in a timely fashion so as to avert the danger that the chorus obscurely feel threatening. But the word must also have the more basic sense of speaking in a way appropriate to the situation—that is, in this case, so as to describe what now is only dimly sensed (a precondition, after all, for the ability to intervene in the action). Since the heart cannot do this it remains in a frenzy, its terror made the more acute by incapacity to speak. This emotion is communicated to the *phren*, which, however, does not know the reason for that fear or its object. The lines that close the stasimon magnificently describe the inner tumult that remains after an attempt at expression has been frustrated and while inchoate thoughts continue to exert their urgent pressure on the consciousness.

That the whole stasimon represents such a failed attempt will become clearer when we have considered the part of the second strophic pair (1001–1024) in which the chorus evidently try to account for their fear. Like the first two stanzas, this passage prepares thematically for the concluding lines of the song: it shows the same concern as they do with the idea of boundary (the word for which, τέμα, occurs in the second line of the strophe). Despite difficulties of text and interpretation,<sup>45</sup> we can at least understand the controlling thought and its development. In the strophe, a series of four examples illustrates the principle that actual or threatened excess is followed by a reassertion of limits. These examples set off by contrast (an effect heightened by the break between the stanzas) the one irreversible change: the passage from life to death (1019–1024).

The boundary of great good health is insatiable (first example, 1001–1004);<sup>46</sup> but disease, “a neighbor who shares a common wall,” exerts a

<sup>43</sup>Young (above, n. 13) argues convincingly that this is the meaning of βρόμειν. But that is no reason for adopting, as he does, βλέπει, the reading of F before correction. All we need do is discard the weak traditional rendering “mutters.” The result is greater vividness.

<sup>44</sup>See Fraenkel 464–465, who is skeptical about this possibility.

<sup>45</sup>I.e., the evident corruption in line 1001, with the resulting uncertainties in the antistrophe, the lacuna before or after line 1005, suspicions which have been raised about the text in lines 1008–1014 in large part because of the shifts in subjects of the verbs, and the text and meaning of lines 1022–1024.

<sup>46</sup>This much can be inferred from the text in its present state. I take it that ἀκόρεστον is transferred from the condition, health, to the boundary which flourishing health violates when its constant striving to increase itself has brought it to the point of excess. The parallel passage at Ag. 1331–1332 shows the normal form of the expression. This explanation is preferable to taking ἀκόρεστον in both places as active (“not satisfying:” Heath, Klausen, Ahrens). If the

counter-force.<sup>47</sup> Evidently the general idea is that good health grown to excess pays the penalty and loses ground to illness, as in the Hippocratic aphorism often cited by editors, in the kind of process envisioned by the theories of Anaximander and Heraclitus.<sup>48</sup> In the next example (1005–1007), excess seems not to be at issue.<sup>49</sup> According to the text as we have it, a man's fortune, proceeding on a straight course, strikes a hidden reef. In human life, it seems, good and evil necessarily alternate (the emphasis, however, continues to be on the downward part of the cycle). Vicissitude creates and safeguards equilibrium, as in the first example, but here excess of good fortune is prevented, not punished, by disaster. The next example (1008–1014), although it continues the nautical imagery and the concern with prosperity, offers yet another perspective on the concepts of balance and limit. Apparently a wealthy house is likened to a heavily laden ship in danger of being swamped in a storm.<sup>50</sup> The bulk of the property (or cargo) can be saved if one prudently recognizes danger (feels ὄκνος) and avoids excess by jettisoning the right amount of the goods.<sup>51</sup> Thus the image, by demonstrating the advantage of moderation, suggests that although transgressions will inevitably be disciplined, a prosperous man is not automatically doomed to excess and its consequences. Moderation is within his control, if he will only recognize the fact.<sup>52</sup> The final example (1015–1017), although it too illustrates the inviolability of limits, inverts the others. Whereas all

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notion of a boundary marker being pushed beyond its proper position is implied here (Verrall), the image then shifts abruptly when disease is described.

<sup>47</sup>Γάγ in 1002 is difficult. Unless there is a lacuna after it as some editors have suggested, it may explain a suppressed thought: "men never think they have prosperity enough (regardless of the danger they incur); for disease . . . is ever at hand" (Paley).

<sup>48</sup>Hippocrates *Aphor.* 1.3. See Thomson in Headlam-Thomson (the idea of excess can hardly be implied by πολλὰς, as he asserts, but is suggested instead by ἀχόρεστον). For Anaximander and Heraclitus, see the fragments cited above, nn. 22 and 23. Alternatively, these lines may imply a static equilibrium, whereby health and disease would limit each other by constant counter-pressure. The definition of health as the result of the mean between extreme states, to which Thomson objects, would not enter in here.

<sup>49</sup>Excess (the arrogance arising from prosperity) is at issue in the use of the same image at *Eum.* 564. But commentators have imported it too freely into the present passage.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. *Sept.* 769–771. Despite the parallel, early editors assumed that the object of jettisoning the cargo was to float the ship off the reef that it had struck in line 1007. They were guided by a desire to establish close connections and a coherent sequence of thought among all four of the examples in this strophe. But these images are essentially independent though loosely connected in some ways.

<sup>51</sup>For the meaning of line 1010, see Fraenkel 454–455 (on 1008 ff.). His argument amounts to a vindication of Schütz's view. Unlike Fraenkel, however, I also adhere to Schütz's (and Hermann's) interpretation of εὐμέτρου. The idea of proper measure, intimately related as it is to the importance of boundaries, is basic to this entire passage. The preposition ἀπό presents no problem to this reading of the lines (as Denniston-Page claims it does) as long as we bear in mind Schütz's explanation of σφενδόνας: "instrumentum, quo res peragitur, rei ipsius loco."

<sup>52</sup>Because this example enters an important qualification, Housman's translation of καί in line 1008 as "yet" seems right: "The Agamemnon of Aeschylus," *JPhil* 16 (1888) 272.

the changes so far contemplated have been from a desirable to a bad state, these lines describe a movement from famine to abundance of crops.<sup>53</sup> Here too, however, a state of excess is cancelled by a shift to the opposite condition. Presumably a period of plenty would later be ended by a return of famine, so that here again equilibrium consists of an oscillation between antithetical extremes. In fact, the last word of the strophe, νόσον (now in the specific sense of "famine"), echoes νόσος from line 1002. The repetition not only rounds off the strophe to sharpen the contrast with what follows; the entire stanza gives the impression of a full cycle of alternation between opposite states, from health to disease and back to health.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the considerable differences among the four examples reveal the various applications of the law of limits. In the physical world balance is maintained by the encroachment upon each other of opposites. Within a man's life either excess is prevented by the alternation of good and bad fortune or, if one has too much wealth, disaster threatens but may be averted by a timely acceptance of limit.

In all these cases boundaries are permeable, although their transgression is invariably chastised. But the boundary between life and death is absolute, and so the act of bloodshed is irrevocable (1019–1021). Despite this heavily stressed contrast between change as the principle of order and the impossibility of change,<sup>55</sup> the idea of limit is central here as in the strophe. In the next lines (1022–1024) the language is obscure and the text uncertain, but the scholiast is probably right in finding a reference to the story of Asclepius' punishment by Zeus for restoring dead men to life.<sup>56</sup> If so, the chorus prove the general rule by citing the limiting example, just as the laws governing speech are illustrated when the Erinyes stop Achilles' horse from speaking in the *Iliad*.

Lines 1025–1029 may seem to differ in several ways with at least some of the foregoing examples. The *moira* of the tongue prevents the *moira* of the heart from gaining more than its due, rather than correcting its excess. Perhaps it is sufficient to observe that earlier the concern has been with

<sup>53</sup>Since this example provides a counter-movement to the others, the abruptness of transition produced by the lack of a connecting particle, which has troubled many editors, is effective, and τοι is perfectly appropriate. See J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*<sup>2</sup> (Oxford 1954) 542–543, and Fraenkel 458. Housman (above, n. 52, 272–273) defends the particle on different grounds. His suggestion that the contrast between strophe and antistrophe is between a man's substance and his life is plausible, but I would lay equal stress on the opposition between the possibility and the impossibility of redressing the imbalance between extremes by change. I therefore would not rely solely on his argument.

<sup>54</sup>The strophe also gains a self-enclosed form from the chiasmic arrangement of the examples: the first and fourth (related by the idea of physical "disease") frame the two that use nautical imagery to describe human experience.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. *Eum.* 644–651.

<sup>56</sup>Of the various proposals, the text of these lines given by Page is perhaps the best.



states like prosperity and misfortune, whereas now the function of organs is at issue: the proper order must be preserved if the body is to function at all. But dynamic and static equilibria are merely alternative means of safeguarding order, identical in their ultimate results. Even within the strophe, Aeschylus seems to have conflated them, for lines 1005–1007, like 1025–1029, evidently describe a static equilibrium. By either method, one *moira* checks another. In the second place, lines 1001–1024 deal for the most part in pairs of opposites. Tongue and heart may also imply an opposition (though on a different plane)—between reason and irrationality, since except in madness the tongue is associated with the *phren*. In any case, the reciprocal limiting of *moirai* is not confined to opposites. The *moirai* of people can restrain one another, for example, and the same can happen among the gods; such conflicts, as we shall see later, form the very basis for the action in the *Oresteia*. Pairs of opposites are simply a particularly vivid way of illustrating the regularity of *moira* and *dike*. And it is not clear that lines 1005–1007 use polar opposites like the other examples.

Since lines 1025–1027 state a general truth which is found, in lines 1028–1029, to apply to the relation between human faculties, they perform a double duty: they both sum up, generally and abstractly, what has previously only been implied by a series of concrete instances, and they function as the protasis of a conditional sentence that reveals the law of limits operating in yet another way. That is, the chorus are experiencing within themselves, even as they sing, the truth of what they have identified as the principle of order in the world at large. Although this principle can bring beneficent results (as when the flourishing of crops cancels famine), its operation can also be ruinous for the man who flouts it. Even for the prudent, this stern law often requires the failure of aspiration, the frustration of effort. The limits on human speech, like the finality of death, are an aspect of the constraints imposed on all men by their nature.

If the chorus are feeling this law at work within themselves, their song, by its failure to give full expression to their deeper intuitions, demonstrates the hindrance of the heart's *moira* by the tongue's and thus exemplifies the existence of boundaries. For the chorus, who in the first two stanzas merely described their fear and the song of their *thumos* (rather than actually singing that song), are no more successful at telling why they are afraid in the second half of the ode. Essentially, they only summon up bits of traditional wisdom, and these act as a substitute for a precise definition of the particular situation that confronts these old men. Certainly these formulas are ominous for Agamemnon (and in their turn for Clytemnestra and Orestes). In particular, in Agamemnon's treading upon the fabrics we have seen a display of over-abundant wealth. The abuse of the costly possessions, far from being a prudent jettisoning of superfluity, was an implicit boast that the house had inexhaustible stores—or that was how Clytemnestra viewed it (958–962,

probably delivered while Agamemnon walked over the cloth to the palace door).<sup>57</sup> But we, the audience, make the connection between that scene and lines 1008–1014. It is quite legitimate for us to do so, especially since other references to excessive wealth earlier in the play (456–474 and 750–781, whatever the latter passage means in detail) have clearly had implications, from the audience's perspective, for Agamemnon's fate. But we must recognize that neither here nor earlier do the chorus say that Agamemnon is headed for disaster because he has had too much success. They cannot make such explicit statements because to do so would exceed their knowledge. The most they can do is to reflect generally on the way the world works, because they know only traditional ideas derived from the experience of their culture. Particular events in the past had enough essential similarities that they taught certain general lessons. Impending events may also fit the same patterns, but the chorus at this point cannot know *whether* they will, or *how*. The audience does know, but its perspective is privileged, the chorus' perspective limited. Actually, the reasons for Agamemnon's murder will be much more complex than superfluity of wealth by itself, although they will include it.

But since the whole second strophe serves essentially to focus attention on the finality of murder, it might be supposed that lines 1019–1021 give an explicit enough reason for the chorus' fear. The argument made above holds true even here, however. It may be granted that the story of the house of Atreus contains several acts of bloodshed both past and—at this point in the trilogy—still to come. It may be granted further that these lines represent the first occurrence of an image which will recur a number of times throughout the rest of the trilogy: that of blood spilt upon the earth. They are, therefore, a partial interpretation of the spectacle represented in the preceding scene, of the red cloths spread over the ground.<sup>58</sup> The language certainly invites us to discover this meaning and to connect these lines with Agamemnon in particular, but it would be quite another matter to claim that the old men of the chorus intend to express so much, or even that they understand the implications of their own words. Just how the lines bear on Agamemnon's case, moreover, is uncertain even to us. Editors have explained them as a reference either to the sacrifice of Iphigeneia, so that they imply the necessity of Agamemnon's death now as punishment, or to the imminent murder of the king himself. The allusion might be to either event, or to both at once.

<sup>57</sup>See Taplin (above, n. 1) 309.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. Robert F. Goheen, "Aspects of Dramatic Symbolism: Three Studies in the *Oresteia*," *AJP* 76 (1955) 115–126, particularly 118–119; A. Lebeck, *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure* (Washington 1971) 80–91; Taplin (above, n. 1) 315. (I share Goheen's view of the limitations on the chorus' knowledge at this stage in the action and disagree with Taplin on this point.) In addition, the juxtaposition of the ideas of the earth's bounty (lines 1015–1017) and blood spilled on the ground looks ahead to the perversion of natural fertility (e.g., Ag. 1388–1392) which is set right in the song that ends the *Eumenides*.

That the lines are open to several interpretations is precisely the point. The statement they make is open-ended because it is so general. To the audience it suggests much; from the chorus' point of view it remains a universal maxim which may or may not fit this particular situation.

Lines 1025–1029 are thus a confession of the failure of language—at least language as used by ordinary mortals—to express a meaning which has originated below the level of consciousness, is doomed to remain there until revealed by events, and therefore cannot be known. The ode as a whole, though rich in implications to the audience, is imprecise; lacking other substance, it inevitably turns into a meditation on its own failure.<sup>59</sup>

### *To Be Continued*

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### ENDNOTE

Of attempts to avoid the idea of the heart outstripping the tongue, the most famous is Schütz's. Whereas in his first edition he contented himself with the observation that normally one speaks of the tongue anticipating the heart (or the mind), in his second edition he altered the text of lines 1028–1029 to προφθάσασα καρδίαν / γλώσσα πάντ' ἄν ἐξέχει. He was followed by Abresch, Karsten, Schneidewin, Hermann, Enger-Gilbert, Schwerdt (*Methodologische Beiträge zur Wiederherstellung der griechischen Tragiker* [Leipzig 1886] 110–116), Platt (*JPhil* 32 [1913] 62–63), A. Y. Campbell, and H. D. F. Kitto (*Form and Meaning in Drama* [London 1956] 25)—some of whom took different ways from Schütz of avoiding hiatus between γλώσσα and ἄν. The fatal objection to what is anyway an unfortunately literal-minded conjecture is that καρδία is clearly the subject of the sentence that follows in 1030–1034. Besides, the chorus' whole point is the impossibility, or at least the inappropriateness, of whatever action is described in 1028–1029.

Another expedient was suggested by Weil (who was followed by Klausen-Enger): to leave the cases of the nouns alone, but to take γλώσσαν as object of the verb (he changed ἐξέχει to παρεξέχει). Thus "the heart, divining evil,

<sup>59</sup>Standard texts and commentaries of Aeschylus and other ancient writers are referred to above by the author's name alone. Citations of the Greek text of Aeschylus are from Page's Oxford edition. I wish to thank the anonymous referees for *Phoenix* for their careful reading and valuable comments, and Professor William C. Scott of Dartmouth College who, although he holds other views, generously gave me the benefit of his advice. I refer to his paper "The Confused Chorus (*Agamemnon* 975–1034)," *Phoenix* 23 (1969) 336–346, as "Scott, *Phoenix* 23," to David Sansone, *Aeschylean Metaphors for Intellectual Activity*, (Wiesbaden 1975, *Hermes Einzelschriften* 35) as "Sansone, *Metaphors*," and to Jean Bollack and Pierre Judet de la Combe, *L'Agamemnon d'Eschyle: le texte et ses interprétations* 2 (Lille 1982, *Cahiers de Philologie de l'Université de Lille* 8) as "Judet de la Combe, *Agamemnon* 2."

would pour forth utterance.” This gives tolerable sense and eliminates τάδε, which has troubled many by its vagueness of reference (Stanley had already suggested τόδε, which Pauw adopted and referred to πλέον). But the participle προφθάσασα is then left without an object. To supply μοῖραν from what precedes (Weil) is difficult. Weil was following a line of interpretation originated by Bothe, who took γλώσσαν as object of the verb without emendation. Others, dissatisfied with his explanation of τάδε as *sic*, tried to eliminate this word in other ways (ἄν τάχ’, Bamberger, *Philologus* 7 [1852] 158, followed by Enger—but this, rather than τάχ’ ἄν, is unparalleled; ἀντ’ ἄν, Ahrens [above, n. 2]—i.e., “openly,” but this attributes too precise an understanding of the situation to the chorus).

Efforts have also been made to eliminate the double occurrence of *moira*. By changing an accent Pauw produced the redundant μοῖρα μοιρᾶν ἐκ θεῶν, which was supposed to mean “*fatum supremum*.” In order to provide the verb with an object he was then compelled to alter μή most improbably to με. Karsten’s μοῖρα καιρόν results in the latter word’s being picked up in line 1033—too mechanically. Schwerdt (followed by Enger in Klausen-Enger) conjectured μοῖρα μοῦσαν, so that μοῦσαν ἐκ θεῶν would be object of πλέον φέρειν (to which he gave the sense “weiter führen”). This is something of a curiosity, but it is interesting because it relates these lines to the chorus’ singing—an important connection, but one that I argue can be made on the basis of the ms. reading. Finally, Herwerden’s re-writing, μοῖρά μοί τις ἐκ θεῶν μ’ εἶργε μὴ πλέω θροεῖν, yields a precise sense, but does not allow for an explanation of why, in the apodosis, speech should be described as the heart outstripping the tongue. Schütz at least saw the problem. An answer can be given by interpreting the traditional text—a more economical method than emendation.