

SOPHOCLES' ELECTRA 495-7

The text of the relevant parts of strophe and antistrophe in L is as follows: -

479	ὑπεστί μοι θάρσος ἀδυσπνόων κλύουσας ἀρτίως ὄνειράτων.	495	πρὸ τῶνδ' ἐτοίμ' ἔχει μήποθ' ἡμῖν ἀπεγές πελᾶν τέρας τοῖς δοῶσι καὶ συνδροῶσιν
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Emendation of the antistrophe has turned largely upon the question, - could *μ' ἔχει* by itself be understood in the sense of *θάρσος μ' ἔχει*? To this the answer must surely be, no; and it is this which has led editors (Wilamowitz, followed by Pearson) to substitute *θάρσος* for *μ' ἔχει*, and to complete metrical respon- sion by accepting the repeated negative *μήποτε μήποθ'* of A rec. Others, with some slight MS support, insert *θάρσος <τι>* after *μ' ἔχει*, keeping the single *μήποθ'* of L. (See Jebb's note on 495-498, and app. crit.).

But a serious difficulty arises from the interpretation of the phrase as a whole and *ἀπεγές* in particular. The alleged sense is: "I am confident that the portent will not come home to them in such a way that they will not find fault with it". *παθόντες γὰρ*, as the Scholiast says, *ψέξουσιν τὸ ὀφθέν*. That is, when the portent comes to fruition, they will complain of it. This seems acceptable but is not as straightforward as it looks. Why will they complain of the portent when they have suffered? Does it mean that they will then realize that it portended ill and will wish that it had never occurred? But Clytemnestra is already apprehensive, already she is finding fault with the dream (427). Or does it mean that when disaster ensues, they will then complain of the portent as having disappointed them, portending ill instead of good? As if there were any way in which the portent could come to fruition which did not involve disaster for Clytem- nestra! This interpretation is tortuous, if not downright impos- sible dramatically.

Best and easiest sense is obtained by taking *ἀπεγές* with *ἡμῖν*, as the flow of words in any case would naturally suggest. The sense then is: "I am confident that the portent will come

home to them in such a way as will not be found fault with by us"; that is, the portent will not disappoint us; it will surely bring disaster upon Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, even as we hope and expect. To obtain this sense, however, we must dispense with *μήποθ'*; we do not want a negative here at all, much less two of them.

The text should, I believe, be restored as follows: – *πρὸ τῶνδὲ τοι θάρσος/ἴσχει μ', ἤδη ποθ' ἡ/μῶν ἀπεγῆς πελᾶν τέρας* etc. These three cola are all iambic dimeters, with double syncopation in each of the first two. *ἤδη ποθ' ἡ* – corresponds to – *πνοον κλονοσ* – cf. O. T. 651 = 680. The *ratio corruptelae* involves several separate stages of corruption but they are all easy. *μ' ἤδη ποθ'* was misread as *μήποθ'*; *θάρσος* fell out because of the same word standing in exactly the same position in the strophe, whereupon *ἴσχει μ'* became *μ' ἴσχει* to avoid hiatus after *τοι*, and subsequently became *μ' ἔχει* when *θάρσος* of the strophe had given rise to *θράσος* (L ac rec.). Other scholars (e.g. Michaelis and Kvíčala, quoted in Jebb's Appendix) have suggested texts without the negative, but their restorations are further from the received text and to that extent less probable<sup>1</sup>).

It should be noted too, that the phrase *ἤδη ποτέ* (forthwith, at any moment now) is dramatically valuable. It intensifies the sense of immediacy, of imminent disaster and greatly enhances the Chorus' efforts to encourage Electra. It is wholly in line with the emphatic assertion of the futures which begin both strophe and antistrophe – *εἰσιν ἅ Δίκα* (475–6); *ἤξει ... Ἐρινύς* (488–90), and with the tone of the ode as a whole.

A final remark. If the iambic tripod is a legitimate metrical unit (cf. Trach. 528) we could then read *ὑπεστί μοι θράσος* in the strophe and *πρὸ τῶνδὲ τοι θράσος* in the antistrophe. This would at least have the advantage of eliminating one of the steps in the presumptive chain of corruption.

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<sup>1</sup>) Kapsomenos (*Τραγικὴ Λέξις*, Thessalonike 1960, p. 12f. [164f.]) has already suggested *ἤδη*, but in place of *ἡμῶν*; he also retains *μ' ἔχει* in 495 that is, he does not restore *θάρσος*), and for *ἀπεγῆς* reads *ἀπαλάξ*, on the basis of his restoration of Hesych. A 8939, where he reads *ἀπαλά (ξ) πελάξ*: *ἀπορητι πορεύεται*. This last may well be right, but I cannot believe that the Hesychius gloss refers to the passage of Electra under discussion. Kapsomenos' interpretation: chorus se sollicitum esse dicit, ne portentum ... fallat sine strepitu in flagitiorum auctores ... incedens, does not seem to make good sense in the dramatic context, in the light of the characterization of the Chorus and its relation to Electra.