

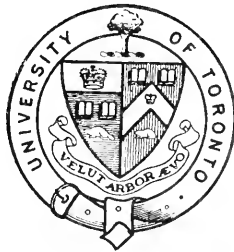
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EVPHROSYNE

*PHILOLOGARVM RERVM COMMENTARII
AD CLASSICAE HVMANITATIS STVDIVM ET CVLTVM
APVD LVSITANOS AC BRASILIENSES PROVEHENDVM*

MODERANTE

FRANCISCO REBELO GONÇALVES

GRAMMATICAE COMPARATIVAE GRAECAE ET LATINAE
IN OLISIPONENSI VNIVERSITATE PROFESSORE

EX VOLVGINE I EXCERPTVM



OLISIPONE IN LVSITANIA

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The Klytimestra of the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus¹

WHEN the Trojan Prince, Paris, had carried off the wife of Menelaus, the beautiful Helen, Menelaus and his brother, Agamemnon, — the former king of Sparta, the latter ruler in Argos, — decided to avenge this detestable outrage with a great expedition against Troy. The campaign began under favorable omens, in so far as a vision which the two kings had seen — that is: two eagles swooped down from heaven and devoured a hare — was interpreted by the sooth-sayer, Kalchas, as a sign that the kings should be successful in sacking Troy. But Artemis, who had sympathy with the wild creatures that move in field and forest, was made angry because the «winged hounds» of Zeus, the eagles, had torn to pieces the poor, timid animal; and when the fleet which was to convey the troops to Troy, had assembled at Aulis, the goddess sent an unfavorable wind. Storms wrecked the ships, and the troops suffered want, and began to lose heart. The sooth-sayer then, was constrained to tell them that if the resentment of the goddess was to be propitiated a special offering would have to be made, even if it transgressed human law, should cause a strife in the home, and might be likely to destroy the love which a woman ought to have for her husband. The meaning of this mysterious pronouncement was that Agamemnon must offer up his daughter, Iphigenia, in order to prevail upon Artemis to grant a favorable wind. The king

¹ This article is based largely upon portions of A. P. DAHL'S *Aischylos* (in Danish) with the permission of the author.

experienced a most difficult inner struggle. Said he: «My misfortune is heavy if I am to slay my child, the delight of my home, and I, her father, before the altar, pollute my hands with streams of a young girl's blood. To perform either one of these two acts — is it not fraught with misfortune? How can I betray the fleet and desert my allies in arms?»² The king was placed in a position of inextricable inner strife; he must choose between violating consideration for his family, his wife, his daughter, and neglecting his country's need and permitting the outrage, which Paris had committed against him and his brother, to go unavenged. But at last he gave way to the incumbent necessity and brought Iphigeneia to the altar as a sacrificial victim; but from that moment Agamemnon had incurred a guilt which demanded expiation. Still there was, moreover, the ancient guilt in the family — Agamemnon and Menelaus were sons of Atreus, whose wife was outraged by Thyestes, own brother to Atreus, and in order to avenge himself Atreus had slain two sons of Thyestes and offered them as food to their own father. Thyestes had, thereupon, uttered a frightful imprecation against his brother's clan. Agamemnon had incurred the guilt; he lived his life, therefore, under a heavy curse of family guilt.

Meanwhile, after Iphigeneia had been offered up, the Greeks obtained a favorable breeze; Agamemnon moved now against Troy as the commander of the expedition; but his queen, Klytimestra, who remained at home in Argos, committed adultery with Aigisthus, another son of Thyestes, and together with him laid plans that she should slay her husband, upon his home-return from Troy. She gave orders that a look-out should be kept upon the palace-roof — since that was agreed upon previously — that when Troy had been sacked, a fire should be lighted and passed on from island to island across the Aegean Sea, so that the glad tidings should as speedily as possible be brought to Argos. The drama — *Agamemnon* — begins, then, with the warder upon the palace-roof keeping watch, indulging in a fine, and edifying soliloquy. He is weary of continuously observing the heavens and the stars. «May there come now, a welcome surcease from my pains, and may the fire of the night which brings the glad tidings,

² *Agamem.* vv. 206-210.

show itself!»³ Thus the weary watcher exclaims, and at the same moment the flame shines forth. He salutes the light with joyous outcry; now shall there be a choric dance in Argos in gratitude for these happy tidings; and the watchman hastens to Klytaimestra immediately, so that she also may share in the joyful news. But the warder knows, too, that all in the house is not just as it ought to be. He expresses the wish that he may, shortly, have permission to press the hand of his chief on his home-return; but he adds mysteriously, that out of consideration for his master, he will keep silent upon other matters which have transpired or which may occur; even the house itself could clearly divulge, if it possessed speech; but he will utter a hint to those who had known before-time how matters fared, and on the other hand for those who know not, he will have no memory. Aischylos, whose mind was occupied at all times with the highest and deepest things had, at the same time, understanding of the common man and of the mood which often resided in him. Frequently the tragic poet portrays common man with understanding and sympathy, as he does also the Attic ethos which strikes through; in the place under consideration we catch the sharp glance of the man of peasant stock, and at the same time, when the talk touches on his master, he assumes a cautious mode of expression which hits it off exactly.

Now there enters a chorus of old men from Argos, and they sing a serious and beautiful choral ode.⁴ The chorus in the *Agamemnon* is a strongly sympathetic and participating spectator in connection with the action. The old men complain over the fact that their strength is only that of a child, while the «leafage» on their heads withers, they must wander along their «three-footed» way — with staff in hand — and of their own life they say that it is like a vision that shows itself in the light of day. This is a beautiful and sad expression, informing us that the life of the aged is passed in memory and in hope, while the middle aged man stands in the midst of the reality of life, clear as day. But even the old men dream day-dreams, and therefore they must be regarded as spectators of the action, and they are by no means

³ vv. 20-21.

⁴ vv. 40 ff.

indifferent spectators. The affection for the small city-state was extraordinarily strong in Greece, and the old men are living fully absorbed in the return of the King of Argos to his home, and in the hope that good fortune and welfare will fall to the lot of the home city. In consequence of their age, the «contemplative life» lies nearer to these old men than a life in war and business; and moreover, they are contemporary spectators.

The song of the chorus gives expression of the monotheism of Aischylos, which in step is firm and yet feels its way forward. Mention is made of a development in the beings of Godhood, which is, with this poet, a frequently recurrent thought: *Uranos* who once was great and mighty, and who swelled up in courage, combatted everything and everybody, shall never more be even named, and he who took his stand next, *Kronos*, has met his superior, and he also is out of the picture; but now the power belongs to *Zeus*, «whoever he may be,»⁵ as Aischylos adds characteristically. What god Zeus is, in himself and by himself, Aischylos is not wholly clear; but his penetration and brooding thought turns steadily back to the question; but the side of the deity's being which impinges upon humankind, he knows. Zeus, who conducts mortals by the road that leads to understanding of life, has given the law that there shall be a relationship between wisdom and suffering. «Discretion comes to men against their will: and this is surely a boon from the divine powers, it seems to me,»⁶ says the tragic poet, who thereby gives, at the same time, striking and carefully considered expression to the truth that the up-bringing which a man gives himself signifies less than that which life gives him. Of the poet's reverent awe for the highest God, and his deep and humble knowledge of human nature, one can have no doubt, after reading the choral ode under consideration. But how does the chorus calm itself to face the day's events? It gives first a backward glance over that which has happened before the expedition against Troy took place. This means the portent of the eagles that swooped down and devoured the hare; it means also the anger of Artemis because injury was done to the helpless creature. She therefore loathes the meal which

⁵ v. 160.

⁶ vv. 180-184.

the eagles have had. And while the old men of the chorus feel that a part of the portent betokens good fortune and the other part ill fortune, they give expression to their frame of mind, which is divided between hope and fear, in the following words: «Sing a song of woe, yea, sing a sad refrain, but may the good prevail!»⁷ The chorus calls to mind, next, the invocation of Artemis by the sooth-sayer Kalchas, that the issue of the expedition begun might be in agreement with the favorable part of the portent, and his prayer to Apollo that he will intercede with his sister, so that she may not demand an unlawful sacrifice, which will cause strife in the home. When a child is slain there rests upon the clan a wrath which demands atonement. And, once again the chorus raises its refrain, filled with solemnity, and expressing the full ground-theme of their choral ode: «Sing a song of woe, yea, raise a mournful wail, but may the good prevail.» One does not feel clearly whether the old men are aware of the misconduct between Aigisthos and Klytaimestra, and their plots against Agamemnon, or whether they merely suspect, with that clear vision and the far distant view which may be one of the gifts attendant upon old age, that misfortune and sorrow are destined to transpire; it is probable that it is the latter impression which Aischylos intends to give, since he has a feeling for that which dawns and grows in man's thoughts and a sense of the profundities of the life of the soul. There is given no thorough-going description of Agamemnon's inner struggle, nor of his motives by which he brings his daughter to the sacrifice; he declares, merely, that his fate is terrible either if he offers up his daughter, delight of his home, or if he betrays his fellow men at arms.

Although the tragedy is called *Agamemnon*, it is *Klytaimestra* who is the chief character; in every instance she is the one who is really acting; how the poet portrays and describes Klytaimestra, will unfold as we proceed. But the cause of the consciousness with which the condition of Agamemnon's soul and his inner strife are described, is always to be sought in the peculiarity of Aischylean tragedy. That which disturbs Agamemnon in his soul is sketched in few but vigorous strokes: we are made to realize that he wavers between loyalty to his country and devotion to his

⁷ v. 121.

home, and this burns itself more firmly in our thought, than if Aischylos had permitted the king to hold a long soliloquy, in which he had disclosed to us every perplexity of his inner life. In the Aischylean tragedy, it is the action and not the portrayal of the soul which is the decisive element; it is a «fate-tragedy» which turns our glance towards God, towards the Fates, towards subconscious depths of the soul's life, but not in any particular degree towards the conscious thoughts and moods lying upon the surface of life or of the mind. Agamemnon is destined by the Fates to offer up his daughter and therefore he *will* sacrifice her. Aischylos makes a greater effort to sketch the popular mind, than the individual mind. He knows that the soul resides in a depth which lies back of that, and from which, presentiments and dreams, now and then, plunge up to the surface; but he is no «psychologist.» Agamemnon bowed himself under the yoke of necessity, which faced him, and resolved upon a guilty and difficult act; and even the offering-up of Iphigeneia is described more in detail than Agamemnon's inner struggle, over which it takes precedence, and with heart-moving sympathy with the young girl.⁸ The leaders of the expedition to Troy yearned to come into the conflict, and gave no heed therefore to the fact that Iphigeneia urgently entreated the gods and cried out to her father. The latter, having offered a prayer, bade the assistants at the sacrifice to seize his daughter, raise her high up above the altar, and prevent her from uttering a curse upon her home and her family. Then she cast down her saffron-colored robe to the ground, and she, who before on many occasions, had cheered her father's spirits with her singing, when he had offered worship to Zeus the preserver, now had to be content with casting a glance which cried out for mercy to each of those standing near. By offering up Iphigeneia, Agamemnon had rendered himself guilty of a grave crime. «For wretched infatuation, which gives base counsel, and is the original source of woe, causes men to become emboldened,»⁹ it is said. The crime is regarded in genuine Greek fashion, as a piece of folly, not as a weakness of the will, and the indication that madness is the source of woe, or that which first willed the suffering,

⁸ vv. 227 ff.

⁹ vv. 221-222.

is peculiarly typical of Aischylos who at all times seeks the ultimate beginnings.

Such, then, was the retrospect on the part of the aged men of the chorus upon that which had come to pass. How they look upon the future we judge from the frequently repeated choral refrain. Anxiety and apprehensive suspicions emerge on the surface of their thought; but they hope still for a successful triumph.

I. Now enters, meanwhile, *Klytaimestra*; the chorus salutes her and desires to hear whether she is able to give any announcement concerning the king. «May Dawn,» as the proverb has it, «emerge from her kindly mother, Night, and bring joyful tidings. The Argives have sacked Troy.»¹⁰ With these firm and solemn words the queen begins her story; one feels, instinctively, that it is a very strong and determined woman who is speaking. The chorus thinks meanwhile, that the tidings which the queen conveys are too good to be true, and they ask her whether she is not giving too much credence to a dream. *Klytaimestra* describes then, by what route the tidings came over the Aegean Sea. «Describe it again,» the old men demand. *Klytaimestra* repeats, then, that Troy has fallen, and she gives a vivid description for herself and her hearers, how in the pillaged town the shout of jubilation on the part of the victors and the cry of lamentation of those vanquished resound in mingled din. If the Greeks exhibit due reverence to the gods of the land now despoiled, those who have now captured others in war, will themselves avoid being taken. «But,» continues the queen, «even if they approach their home, it might perhaps appear¹¹ that the suffering of the dead may still prove wakeful.» *Klytaimestra* more than suggests what she will do; she is almost menacing.

Now finally it begins to dawn upon the consciousness of the aged men that the Greeks have sacked Troy, and the choral ode which they now raise, opens with a thanksgiving to Zeus and to the night, and the poet's lofty conception of God here again comes strongly into view. «As God willed, so it fared,» it is said. This is affirmed, however, not merely of God's might to complete what

¹⁰ v. 265.

¹¹ v. 346.

he ordained, but also concerning God's goodness and mercy. God punishes the wicked. «There is one who has said,» continues the chorus, «that the gods do not regard it as worth their pains to consider that there are mortals who tread under foot the holy and the inviolable — given by grace of the gods — but he who has spoken thus, is not pious.»¹² This conception of God was emancipated from every connection with story and myth; it allowed the divinities no human characteristics, but was, on the contrary, so purified and void of every decision, that it was impersonal and empty. «That which is divine,» — has to contain all, but is thereby, actually a «nothingness;» a «divine theory» of this sort, or a so-called god, is not vexed over man's injustice. He who pays homage to such a god-concept, lacks piety, says Aischylos.

In contrast with the foregoing pronouncement upon the god's indifference to right and wrong, the poet represents the chorus as asserting that he who in presumption has violated righteousness, must go to destruction; the genuineness of the bronze is proved by one's 'rubbing it and tossing it forward and back, but it is the spurious that turns black. In the same way fares then the unrighteous man; he endures no proving, but is driven on further and further away, by the goddess of Persuasion, nor is wealth any protection for him. But that is the work of Zeus, which can be traced; indeed the downfall of the unrighteous man is actually the stroke of Zeus. As an example the poet points to the fate of Paris, he who stole away another man's wife. For the seriously-minded Aischylos, the true wife of Menelaos is not «the beautiful Helen», but a wanton woman bringing ill-fortune wherever she goes; since she forsook her home, she left behind her as a heritage: a stained shield, a broken lance, the din and turmoil of war, and when she swept into the harbour of Troy, she brought with her destruction in lieu of a dowry; she risked what ought not to have been hazarded.

The prophets in Troy understood that her coming would cause sorrow and misfortune; and Menelaos returned home to Greece, wistful. Formerly she had been his own true wife, the mistress of his home; but now it seemed to him that a vision was walking there in her place; he has the beautiful statues, but nothing is

¹² vv. 370-372.

any longer charming in his eyes, in dreams, sorrowful forms appear before him; they bring him no comfort or consolation. And it is not only this solitary home that is filled with such sorrows; every home in Hellas has sent forth a father or a son whom the family holds dear, but they receive back again only an urn of ashes.¹³ The chorus now describes how the tidings that a man has fallen, is received in the homestead; there are many who declare that he fell nobly, but others are muttering:¹⁴ «But yet that was for another man's wife,» and the chorus comprehends that such utterances from the depths of the folk are dangerous. At the close of the choral ode the aged men display their uneasiness lest some calamity shall ensue, which no one yet suspects; one must be aware that the gods are ever observant of those who shed blood. If a man has had fortune with him, but in such a manner that unrighteousness cleave to it, the dusky gods of vengeance turn his good fortune into sorrow and bring upon him gloomy death; to win an excess of glory is a heavy fate, for it is the pinnacles that are struck by Zeus' thunderbolt. The old men prefer moderate fortune which does not waken any envy; they wish that they may never be sackers of any town, nor themselves fall into another's power. Their forebodings of sorrow and calamity are presented more strongly here than in their first choral ode.

One of the aged men of the chorus now declares that a rumor which portends good news has spread through the city; but others suggest caution, not accepting it as true, until one has clear proof of its certainty. But now the leader of the chorus discovers at the moment a herald approaching from the sea-coast with olive branches in his hands, and announces that soon they will receive definite reports concerning what has transpired. He hopes that the herald will be able to bring favorable news, but should he bring a report of sorrow the leader refuses to believe it. We have here an echo of the frequently repeated refrain: «Sing a sorrowful tune; yea, raise a mournful wail, but may the good prevail!» And when the chorus-leader has expressed the wish that the joyful occurrences which have come to pass may be accompanied by other equally happy events, another participant in the chorus adds the following

¹³ vv. 430 ff.

¹⁴ vv. 447-449.

words: «If there is anyone who entertains other desires as touching the State, may he himself reap the wicked fruits which his heart deserves.»

Now enters the herald, and he is jubilant with gladness. Never had he dreamed that he should be permitted to die in Argos and be buried there, as the custom of his fathers demanded, and as he so fervently desired. «Hail! to thee, my fatherland! Hail to thee light of the Sun! Hail to thee, Zeus! chief overlord of the land, and hail to him who rules in Pytho, Apollo!» — thus the happy herald bursts forth. He calls to mind that the last mentioned god, Apollo, in front of Troy, had shot his arrow against the Greeks, but now he prays to him that he should be their saviour and healer. He hails Hermes, patron-god of heralds; he hails all the gods of the State, and he hails the demigods, the souls of the kings who have died long since, who because of their achievements were taken up among the gods; these are the heroes who sent the Argive out to battle. He hails the halls of the kings, and the statues of the gods which stand before the king's castle. Agamemnon has returned after having laid waste Troy with the avenging spade of Zeus. Neither Paris nor his town can boast that his action was greater than the suffering, which has now afflicted Troy. The herald is so happy that he will now die joyfully if that is the will of the gods.¹⁵ It is a fine touch, that the poet has the young man desire his death in the midst of his happiness. After the great experience, which it was for him again to look upon the city of his fathers, he does not wish to struggle against the pettinesses and pains of daily life nor to watch his powers waning in a cheerless old age. The chorus answers him, saying that as those who had gone far away had longed for those who remained at home, so these last mentioned had also longed for those who were absent. Sometimes their fear had been so great that it would have been a joy for them to die. The herald replies: that if he should relate all the troubles the Greeks had been obliged to suffer before Troy, he would not soon be finished. But who is free from adversity and suffering, all his whole life through, except the gods alone? But now our troubles have passed by, and for the dead are they past indeed, so that they never will care to rise up again.¹⁶

¹⁵ v. 539.

¹⁶ vv. 568-569.

Why should the living take account of the fallen? And why should one feel sorrow, because the Fates wrinkle their brows? Troy is sacked, and we will honor the grace of Zeus, who has granted to us that the task has been accomplished. The herald is the common man who has surmounted his troubles and is unwilling that his happiness shall be clouded by a backward glance towards past miseries.

II. Now enters *Klytaimestra*. She recalls, that when the fire brought the first tidings of the victory, there were those who asked her, derisively, whether she was so rash as to believe that Troy was laid waste just because the report came by means of the fire-signal, but now she will soon hear all from the conqueror himself. What joy, she asks, is as great in the eyes of a woman than that which she shall feel when she opens the door of the home to her husband, when God has preserved him so that he returns home from the campaign. And this frightful woman, full of character, but double-tongued, continues: «Bid the conqueror come as speedily as possible, for he is beloved by the town; may he find his wife in the home, as faithful now as she was when he left her and set out on the campaign, a faithful watch-dog of the home, well-disposed to her husband, a foe to all his enemies, herself the same in all; of pleasure with any other man or of scandalous report know I not one jot.»

The queen's high sounding words are freighted with a guilty conscious, and are a blending of hypocrisy and boorish frankness; she says that the king is beloved by the towns-folk, but not that he is loved by her, herself; and hardness and coldness pervade her every word. «Such a lofty speech, overflowing with truth, is not unseemly on the lips of a nobly born lady,» says the herald, who is so happy to be at home that he suspects nothing bad. The chorus, however, discerns more closely. The anxious presentiments of the aged citizens, that sorrow and calamity will ensue, have assumed a firmer form, since they have listened to the queen's icy-cold and ambiguous speech. «'Tis a good speech indeed for those who can clearly and rightly interpret it,»¹⁷ they remark, significantly. The chorus begins, then, to place confidence in the report that Agamemnon is on the point of returning home. «May

¹⁷ vv. 615-616.

that which you tell us, prove both true and a cause of joy at one and the same time,» sounds their prudent word. The anxiety on the part of these aged servitors, lest they let themselves go, at these glad tidings which later may be refuted by facts, is finely delineated.

In reply to the question of the chorus as to how matters fared with Menelaus, the herald answers: «that it is not seemly to tarnish a joyous day with a tongue that brings evil tidings; the honor which is due the gods shall be kept for them. When a messenger with bitter sorrow in mind must give report of calamity, it seems to him that he is singing a paean to the Erinyes; but when he can report liberation and release, why should he relate at the same time anything sad, and by so doing cause his tidings to be mingled with an after-taste of the bitter and the hard?»¹⁸ Curiously enough, but typical of his station, the good herald, who is so apprehensive lest he may tarnish the honor due the gods by relating disaster, can not forbear to tell what actually occurred. When the Greeks set sail for home, a mighty storm broke loose, which wrecked many of the vessels, but the ship on board which the herald sailed escaped: «it was the saving will of fate that sat on board and some god or other, not a human being had taken the rudder.»¹⁹ How it fared with Menelaus, the herald does not know, but he trusts that Zeus will not wholly destroy the stock of Atreus, and therefore he hopes that Menelaus as well, will at last return home. Now follows an ode by the chorus. Once more the aged councillors employ harsh words concerning Helen; they find that she bears her name rightfully since she has captured, yea, and has destroyed, ships and men and cities.

When Helen came to Troy, the brethren of Paris struck up the song in praise of the bride; but Priam's city, in its venerable days, has had to learn again and strike up now with loud voice the song of grief over Paris' accursed wedlock. Once upon a time, so the chorus tells us, — a young lion was reared in a man's house; while it was small it was friendly with the children of the house, and was a joy to the older people; but after the lion-cub grew up, it became conscious of its own nature and began to make inroads

¹⁸ vv. 636 ff.

¹⁹ v. 663.

upon the cattle; it was nurtured in the house as a priest of corruption, which had been sent by God. And as it fared with the lion-cub, so it fared with Helen. So likewise, one could say, that the woman who came to Ilion was a symbol of calm on the sea without a ripple; that she was wealth's gentle feminine ornament; and that she sent forth a soft glance of the eye which is the flower of love and which pierced all hearts; but suddenly it was perceived that she brought ill-luck to Priam's son, like an avenging goddess whom young brides bewail.

The chorus advances now its thoughts concerning the cause of the calamity which has broken over Troy. They explain the law by which a state or a family comes to destruction, by an old proverb, which for a long time has been current among men, and which declares, that when man's fortune comes to full maturity, it breaks down by contrast, while its off-spring are filled with misfortune and woe.²⁰ But over against this external and material opinion, in accordance with which deity is an envious and capricious being who deals out good fortune and bad fortune without reference to a man's guilt or innocence, and who breaks off connection between man's worth and his fate, the chorus sets up another point of view which is very strongly accented: «I keep myself apart from others and have my own thoughts.»²¹ Thus sound the words of the chorus. «It is the impious deed which begets, afterwards, a still more wicked deed, just like itself; but when a house is controlled righteously, the praise of its off-spring is fine and beautiful. One ancient outrage produces another later occasion for other wicked men to commit a new outrage, until it begets an indomitable profane rashness, which may be likened to the infatuation of the dark goddesses who bring calamity upon the house. But justice shines also in a house, which is filled with smoke and over him who acts rightly and with moderation; but she forsakes, also, with averted glance, the gilded abodes, when men's hands are unclean, and she goes, thence, to where righteousness and holiness abide; she does not reverence the power of wealth, which has received a false stamp of mankind's approval; she guides everything to its destined end.» With great authority Aischylos here maintains his conception of the law of the downfall

²⁰ vv. 750 ff.

²¹ vv. 757 ff.

of a man's life, or that of a family or a people; there is here a considerable advance in thought from the belief of former times, — that a man's fortune, when it approaches perfection, always, without reference to the man's worth, causes his downfall, — to the assertion of Aischylos that there is a goddess of justice who allots luck and ill-luck, entirely according as a man's life is in keeping with her will. Aischylos has concluded from the life of his own people, from their heroic fight against Persian superiority, that he has a witness to show that justice protects him who practises it. One notices furthermore, that the chorus, by its own words here according to its own conception, is concerned with the Trojans, and the wrong committed by them brought about by Paris's abduction of Helen in reality exercises a strict condemnation for Agamemnon, and predicts his downfall. It is incident to the art of tragic poetry that it permits grief or calamity to come upon men, without their perceiving it themselves, nor do those nearest them, — and that it permits one of the chief characters of the tragedy, without his being aware of it, to pronounce a judgment which is on the point of being accomplished. And «the first tragic poet» was a master of his art; permitting the old men, who earlier had such apprehensive presentiments, now, at their king's return home, to cast aside apparently their load of anxieties; and then unknown to themselves to pronounce a doom upon Agamemnon. In so doing Aischylos has given us a striking example of man's blindness and smallness and the power of fate when fully brought to accomplishment. Mankind thinks his thoughts and chooses his way, says the poet; but Fate is in full mastery, so that man's thoughts shall be more than a mere spun web of the brain, and Fate leads him another way than that which he himself chose.

But the action of the tragic drama moves on. Agamemnon enters, accompanied by Cassandra, daughter of the Trojan king, and a considerable retinue, and the chorus turns now its speech towards Agamemnon, the king. The old men have lived long enough to realize that there is a goodly share of beautiful beings in the world; many mortals, they say, place that which *seems* to be beautiful above that which is, in reality, beautiful.²² When it goes hard with a man, everyone is ready to draw a deep sigh,

²² v. 788.

despite that no sting of grief comes to his heart at all, and, in obvious reality, one shares in another's joy with false-smiling face; but the man who has a clear eye does not let himself be deceived, because a man fawns with a friendliness which is, in reality, as thin as water. But the aged gentlemen of the chorus will not conceal from their king that they regard it as a hideous offence that he offered up Iphigeneia; but now they extend to him from the heart, welcome, and they rely upon it that he knows how to examine and to question so that he shall be clear in his mind who in Argos has been honest, and who they are who have been competent custodians of the state. Thereupon Agamemnon takes up the speech: he salutes first Argos and brings his guilty thanks to the tutelary deities of the city, who have helped him to plunder and lay low the city of Troy, where the Argives, the brood of the horse of wood, saved their decisive leap until the time when the Pleiades were setting. After that the king declares: that he shares the chorus's bitter view upon life.²³ There are only a few men to whom this trait is native born: without jealousy, to honor the friend whom good fortune attends; many a man laments when he sees the prosperity of another. «I speak as one who knows,» continues the king. «In comradeship it is reflected how a man really is; and I have drained experience to the dregs; — that they who have pretended that they were very kindly disposed towards me, have proved to be only the shadow of a shade; only Odysseus, be he alive or dead I know not, has most faithfully gone under the yoke and tugged on the trace with me.» As to what concerns the state and the worship of the gods, the king desires a meeting for counsel in the assembly of the folk. «Upon what is well may we set to work, so that all may abide as in the old days; but where there is need for the physician's skill, may we attempt to cure the diseases either by cautery or surgery. May victory follow me for all time to come, as it has done until now.»

III. Now enters *Klytaimestra*, upon the scene. She will not be ashamed to show, she says, how dearly she loves her husband.²⁴ She has lived through a difficult time; it is a terrible evil for

²³ vv. 830 ff.

²⁴ vv. 855 ff., esp. 850.

a «woman to sit alone at home separated from her husband, and to hear one rumor after another, each one worse than the preceding, concerning what fate has overtaken him. If he had been wounded as many times as rumors came, speeding, he would have had as many holes in his body as a net, and if he had been killed as many times as rumor announced, he must have had three bodies, like a second Geryon — and he could boast of having received a coverlet of earth over him three times, having died once for each of his three forms. In consequence of so many adverse rumors — one after another — her attendants had to loosen halters which the queen had stretched round her neck.»

The Greeks appear to have had a peculiarly rugged way of speaking of life and death. One thinks, for example, of Perikles' speech before the fathers whose son had fallen in the Peloponnesian War, in which the eminent statesman seeks to comfort the bereaved parents by saying that some of them are still so young that they can get themselves a few more children. One thinks also upon the imperturbable peace of mind with which Socrates with the poison draught before him converses about that which was at hand. But even in a Greek's ear, the words which Aischylos puts on the lips of Klytimestra must have sounded as a harsh and cuttingly raw speech. Hatred for Agamemnon sounds through every word she utters; it is a satisfaction for her to speak of Agamemnon's death; and with her words about holes in a net, she hints at the way in which she will bring about that death.

Now Klytimestra relates that when, time after time, she had believed that Agamemnon was dead, she had sent their son, Orestes, to a friend, Strophios of Phocis, so that the boy might remain under the friend's protection. And, as to the queen herself — «the gushing fountain of her tears has run dry; there is not a drop more left in it; my eyes, while repose night after night, came late, suffered injury, while I wept with longing to see the signal-fire, which should bring news of thee, which never was brought; by the gentle buzzing of a humming gnat I was awakened from the light web of dreams in which I saw more calamities for thee than could have befallen in the brief hour of my sleep.» After this vivid description of her sorrow and yearning, or rather, her hate, Klytimestra salutes her lord as: «the trusty watch-dog of the fold, as the mainstay that upholds the ship, as the pillar of the lofty house, firmly fixed in the ground, as a father's only begotten

son, as land seen by sailors after they had given up hope, as the day that is most beautiful to behold after the storm, as the flowing fountain to the thirsty wayfarer.»²⁵ The cruel speech of the queen to her husband contains a deal of fawning as if, however, it were attended by a shivering cold, and she places an exceedingly thin veil over the frightful hate which some time soon, she will *not* conceal at all. «Let all jealousy be absent,» the queen continues, immediately after she has concluded her ugly speech of adulation, which was well suited to incite Agamemnon to an act of presumption which could rouse the jealousy of the gods. And she finds it unworthy that the foot that trampled down Troy in the dust, shall tread upon the bare ground. «Ho! slaves, why do ye delay?» she cries to her attendants, «I have already given you orders to spread carpets in the path which he shall walk upon. Let his way be purple-strewn, so that justice may guide him to this home which he had never expected again to look upon. As for all else, my care that does not let itself be overcome by sleep, shall suitably arrange, with the aid of the gods, and as Fate appoints.»²⁶

The king enters upon his answer with the observation that Klytimestra's lengthy speech tallies well with his long absence; a seemly praise would he gladly hear, but thus may it come from other lips than from those of his own queen; she should not boast of him, as is the custom of wives, nor should she in the manner of a foreigner cry out to him with gaping mouth; neither will the king allow that she spread carpets upon his path, invoking jealousy upon him; in this manner one does honor to gods; but a mortal must cherish a loathing to tread upon all sorts of artistically wrought handiwork. She shall honor him as *man* and not as a *god*; if a man does not think evil and mad thoughts, that is God's greatest gift. One shall look upon the outcome of a man's life and then call him happy.

Agamemnon — and Aischylos — are clearly conscious of the differences between the Hellenes and the «barbarians». The servile, Oriental manner of greeting a king wounded Agamemnon, and likewise would wound the tragic poet. The king acts so far agreeably and finely. He says: «Let us now be men, neither more

²⁵ vv. 895 ff.

²⁶ vv. 912-913.

nor less.» His word is stamped with a clear, self-testing and self-controlling spirit. But a peculiar hardness and warlike gruffness which very likely could be called forth by the jarring tone in his queen's address to him, is there, pervading his words and his personality. Curiously enough! As Klytaimestra, earlier, had pronounced judgment upon him in ambiguous words, so now the poet permits Agamemnon — with his speech, in which he declares that one shall call a man happy only when he is dead — himself to pronounce judgment upon himself. We are led to feel that Fate is on the way to being accomplished.

IV. *Klytaimestra* in the meantime demands urgently, that the king shall go into the palace walking upon the purple tapestry; there is not any lack of purple in the castle, and the supply from the sea is inexhaustible. The king declares then, that he will conform to his queen's wish, but adds, with reference to *Kassandra*: «This foreign woman mayest thou receive kindly; God looks from afar with kindness upon him who treats his captive mildly.»²⁷ This is the Attic mildness, and humaneness, which the tragic poet puts into the thoughts expressed by the pitiful king. As *Agamemnon* treads upon the purple on his way into the castle, *Klytaimestra* offers an impassioned prayer to *Zeus*: «Oh *Zeus*, the accomplisher, bring my prayers to fulfilment, and may that which thou art about to do, lie close to thy care.»²⁸

Now follows a choral ode: «Why doth this flitting phantom of fear continually hover before the doors of my heart like a strange token? And why does my song become an unbidden and unrewarded portent? Of the king's return home I am convinced by what I myself have seen. I am my own witness. And yet my heart within me, self-taught, raises the doleful song of the *Furies*, which knows not the lyre.»²⁹ In such vivid words the chorus describes its anxiety. And the aged compatriots continue with a comparison between human fortune and physical health: «As health and sickness are separated only by a thin wall, so the fate of man thrusts forward in a straight line, and strikes upon a hidden reef, which causes disaster; and yet the whole house does not

²⁷ vv. 950-952.

²⁸ vv. 973-974.

²⁹ vv. 1010-1024.

suffer ship-wreck if the master casts overboard a part of his valuable riches. But when man's dark blood has once fallen to the ground who can by any charm recall it? And did not Zeus bring to cessation the life of that man who had learned how to resuscitate the dead, in order to rouse up reverence for the gods?»³⁰ The chorus, however, will not give full expression to their anxiety, since in the midst of their despair they cannot give up the hope that, since divine powers often come into collision, the fate, which is going to bring about Agamemnon's destruction, might perhaps be defeated by another power which is stronger and which will contradict it.³¹ There is in these words a presentiment that liberation from the blood-guilt in which Agamemnon has become involved, will some day arrive.

V. *Klytaimnestra* now invites *Kassandra* to step down from the chariot and include herself among the other slaves; she has reason to be grateful because her master possesses long-established prosperity, and therefore he is kindly towards his slaves, while those who against their own expectation have amassed wealth, in every respect and even beyond every measure and every limit, are savage to their slaves. Aischylos has known that it often requires several generations to create a humble, truth-loving, moderate character. The queen meanwhile, does not comprehend *Kassandra's* language, she says, but adds equivocally, that the sacrificial animals are now standing at the hearth and the joy she had not expected is at hand. After the daughter of the Trojan king dismounts from the car, she cries out: «Woe, Woe, Apollo, Apollo!» The chorus is astonished that *Kassandra* utters her cry in connection with the god's name,³² since he as a god of the evenly-balanced, happy, free song and music, has no connection with sorrow and the song of mourning. Furthermore, the chorus understands: «that the divine also abides in the soul that is enslaved.»³³ *Kassandra* now exclaims that Apollo has brought her to ruin. The god had destroyed her in the first instance by bestowing upon her the gift of foreseeing the future, which no one in her father's city, Troy,

³⁰ vv. 975 ff.

³¹ vv. 1025-1027.

³² vv. 1078-1079.

³³ v. 1084.

had believed ; and a second time did the god destroy her, by bringing her to the place where she is at present. Why has the god brought her there? To a house which is hated by the gods, and which is secret with many a frightful murder about members of its own clan; a house in which there is committed a slaughter of kinfolk, and where it streams with blood; a house in which small children weep that they are slain, and that their roasted flesh is eaten by their father.³⁴ But the clairvoyant woman sees with her inner eye not merely the past of the House of the Atridae, but also, though temporarily veiled, its future fate. «Ah! what is that *she* is thinking upon?» the king's daughter bursts forth. «What sort of new, great grief is she plotting to perpetuate in this house, a misfortune which no friends can bear and which can with difficulty be cured.»³⁵ She knows that Klytimestra will carry out a frightful deed, but she does not know actually what it will be. Presently she sees more clearly meanwhile. «Ah! miserable woman,» she exclaims, «thy husband who reposed by thy side, wilt thou first bathe him in the bath? And then? How shall I fully describe the end? for it will come to pass quickly. What is that which now appears before my sight? Is it a net? which will entwine him in the house of Hades? She who reposed near his side is herself the net, accessory to his murder. She catches him with cunning and stabs him with her black horn, which will mean his destruction, which she carries out with trickery and slaughter, perpetrated in the bath.» After *Kassandra* has foretold *Agamemnon's* death in such words, a new stream of lucidity of madness springs up over her mind, and she foresees the fate that awaits her herself. «To what end didst thou bring me, wretched one, hither?» she asks complainingly, and she herself answers that it was only that she should die together with *Agamemnon*. When the chorus likens *Kassandra* to the small greyish brown bird which incessantly seeks and complains, she praises the lot of the nightingale and identifies it with her own fate. «The gods clothed the nightingale in a winged body and gave her a sweet life without weeping; but for me it is prepared that I shall be cleft by the two-edged lance.»³⁶ Back of *Kassandra's* assertion that

³⁴ vv. 1090 ff.

³⁵ vv. 1100-1103.

³⁶ vv. 1096 ff.

the nightingale, despite her complaint is more fortunate than she, lies the thought that the bird's lament is not conscious, while she herself sees her own misery with the highest degree of clearness. Now she permits her glance to turn back over the days of her youth. She is reminded of Scamandros,³⁷ her homeland's river, near whose banks she, the unfortunate one, — was brought up; but now she must soon sing her prophetic song inspired by the god upon the banks of Kocytos and of Acheron. She sees what has been the fate of her father's city, and she herself awaits the same fate; «I wish my burning soul must soon fall to the ground,» she declares. But after this gentle, sad backward glance upon her own fate and that of her father's city, a new, irresistible wave of clarity wells over the unhappy woman, and she announces that now shall her oracles no longer look forth as from a bride's veil;³⁸ now shall they come as a stormy blast, and now she will no longer speak in riddles; yet, curiously enough, there is still something figurative and obscure in Cassandra's utterances. That band that sounds from the house — she continues — sings always concordantly, but at all times inharmoniously. One receives from her utterance a feeling that there upon the walls of the house is written an inscription which Cassandra interprets always clearly; or that the house is shot through with some contents which Cassandra with a sixth or seventh sense is able to perceive. «And now,» she exclaims, «a swarm of kindred goddesses of vengeance hold sway in the house, a band which is difficult to expel; whose abiding place is in the halls, and they sing their song of the primeval curse or, as it might be called in the real Greek manner: Original Folly.»³⁹ «Am I a false prophet? who gossips from door to door? or do I know accurately the crimes which have been committed in this house?» Cassandra now asks of the old men. Since they must concede her knowledge, while they marvel over it, Cassandra describes to them, the source of this mantic art. The god of sooth-sayers, Apollo, had been in love with her and bestowed on her the gift of prophecy. She had felt ashamed to speak of this she adds with feminine modesty, whereupon the chorus, dryly and a bit facetiously remarks that «everyone in prosperity is some-

³⁷ vv. 1150 ff.

³⁸ vv. 1178 ff.

³⁹ vv. 1190-1192 ff.

what more delicate.» Cassandra had given the god her word, but she broke it, and from that moment the god had added this stipulation to his gift, actually the gift of prophecy, — that no one of her countrymen would believe her predictions. So, she who had rejected the god's affection, was also solitary and lonely among her own people. Since Apollo was the bright and festive god of future prognostications, Cassandra now possessed the power of vision in matters of sorrow and misfortune; which the future would bring to pass, and as a prophetess of bad luck she was an object of disgust and ridicule among the Trojans generally, day in and day out. When Cassandra refused the god his desire, he seized her mind and filled it with such clairvoyance that her human side was broken. Among the expressions of Cassandra, one sounds forth conspicuously: «Fortunate are they who do not know and who cannot see.» After having spoken thus in regard to her own misfortune, the prophetess reverts anew to that which is happening and is about to take place within the palace. Under the workings of the new wave of madness, and of clairvoyance, which now streams in upon her mind, she sees two young children sitting in front of the palace.⁴⁰ «They resemble forms of dreams, and in their hands they hold portions of their own flesh, of which their father ate. As punishment for that offence, the lioness, the guardian of the house, is meditating upon the murder of my lord, yes «my master,» for I must now bear the yoke of slavery. She is a serpent, a Scylla, and like the audacious woman she is, she exulted in the shout of victory, all the time pretending delight over her husband's return home and his safety.» The chorus answers that it understands that Cassandra has spoken of the banquet which was prepared for Thyestes; but what she said about the immediate future, they failed to comprehend; how that the aged courtiers should see Agamemnon dead, and that no healing god could hinder the Fate that ordains this.⁴¹ The thought is: that there are sorrows and misfortunes which can be averted by the intervention of a merciful and healing god. But, the fate of death which threatens Agamemnon, cannot be averted.⁴² «By no means may it occur!» the chorus breaks out. In these words

⁴⁰ vv. 1214 ff.

⁴¹ v. 1248.

⁴² v. 1249.

there is expressed a prayer to the supreme god where the healing god cannot avail. But immediately Cassandra responds emphatically: «You are making prayers, while those within the house are bent on murder.» And now a new wave of fire comes over the prophetess. «Woe is me! Lyceian Apollo!» she cries out, «that two-footed lioness bedded with the wolf, -- while the noble lion is absent, — will also slay me, unfortunate that I am! While she is now preparing something, as if it were a healing potion, she solemnly promises that against her wrath she will win requital from me, and that as soon as she has whetted her sword for her husband, in revenge, because he has brought me here, she will repay him with murder. Why therefore do I keep these things which are insult to me — the wand, and the fillet round my neck, tokens of my prophetic office?» With these words Cassandra casts her tokens of the mantic art down upon the ground, and treads them under her feet. «I will destroy you before my fate destroys me myself,» she exclaims, «when you lie fallen there, I have requited you for what you wrought upon me.» So severely does the seeress chide them, she who by her particular gift has been deceived. In the following speech she gives warning of Orestes. «But we shall not die dishonored by the gods, for in his own time shall there come *one* who shall be our avenger, a shoot from the stem, who shall slay his mother and shall win requital for that which was perpetrated upon his father. But now I will dare to die. The gates here I address as the entrance to the realm of the dead. Let me now be through with life. And I beg that I may receive one blow upon a vital spot, a fatal blow, so that without a struggle, my life-blood flowing in an easy death, I may close my eyes.» After that, Cassandra prays to the sun that her enemies may come to pay the penalty for her death — the death of a wretched slave, and she utters her last words thus: «Hard is man's lot; when he is prosperous, then can his prosperity be overturned by a mere shadow, and when he is unfortunate, then can a wetted sponge obliterate every trace with a single stroke. And this last causes me far more affliction than the former.» Here then, is concluded the most pathetic scene of this tragedy, which presents the unfortunate prophetess, whose fateful lot it was to go to her death, which she longed for, since it would free her from cruel suffering in both mind and body, but which she hated because she had never lived. The description of Cassandra consti-

tutes a high point in the *Agamemnon* and in the whole range of Aischylos' poetry. The most difficult fate for a human being is described with such abundant art, that the harsh reality is forgotten and is felt almost as something beautiful. To present the hard and the sorrowful in the garments of beauty so that the grief fades out, is a stroke which characterizes Greek art. Indirectly too, the prophetess portrays the wicked queen.

The graphic descriptions of Kassandra's fate and inner life represent a high-point in the portrayal of man in tragedy, while, with the words of the chorus, after the prophetess has gone in at the palace entrance, which she had saluted as the gate to the realm of the dead, we move forward to a high point in the *thought* in Greek tragedy. The words follow then: «Prosperity, although she is kind, ever remains insatiate among mortals. There is no one of men who with a rebuff shuts her out from the envied halls and says: «No longer enter here.» The blessed gods have willed that Agamemnon should sack the city of Priam, and he comes home honored by the gods; but now if he must pay the penalty for the blood of former victims, and if he knows that to die for the dead shall merely clear the ground for another's death, what mortal could then boast that he was born with a fate in which there lurked no harm?» Aischylos endeavors to say that there is a relationship between man's fates within a family, and that it is difficult to disentangle the threads in the individual life, while his fate and his guilt are fixed by that which earlier lived and worked in the race and that which will occur in posterity. The tragic poet expresses this a little heavily; one notices that he labors with the thought and with the words, which might be informative. But on the contrary that which is groping, and yet so serious, and is ever striving after clarity on the part of Aischylos, wakens our admiration and sympathy. The poet's words contain in embryo the thought that there is a connection between mankind's fates within a given clan. When his word sounds thus: «that no man is born into a prosperous fortune in which there lurks no harm,» he has come near saying that all mankind's fates are entangled together with each other and that there is a connection in guilt throughout the whole human family. Aischylos approaches here to the idea of an inherited guilt.

Suddenly a dreadful groan is heard from within the castle. This groan comes from Agamemnon who «has been struck

a deadly blow.» Each of the old men of the chorus sets forth now his opinion as to what plan of action they shall choose in order that they may come to the aid of the king. No one of them is, however, in position or condition to enact a swift or strong handling of the affair, and only in one of the utterances does one hear the brave defender of the fatherland and champion of freedom, which is in reality the voice of Aischylos. It sounds thus: «Nay! thus would it be better to die, for that would be a gentler fate than tyranny.» While the old men are speaking, *Klytimestra* is busy at her murderous deeds within the palace, and the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra are now presented in full view.

VI. *The queen* takes her stand at the side of Agamemnon's body and acknowledges her deed. «Thus have I wrought, nor will I deny it,» she declares, «I smote him twice, and while he sent forth two groans his limbs relaxed, and when he had fallen down I gave him yet a third stroke as a boon to Hades beneath the earth, the saviour of the dead in order that he might curse him. I boast of what I have done.» Indeed, she says furthermore, that drops of the king's blood sprinkled upon her made her rejoice no less than the sown field rejoices in the refreshing rain. Later she repeats her acknowledgement of the murder in a slightly different utterance; «With a heart that trembles not, I say to you, who know this already beforehand, — whether you are disposed to commend or condemn my act, it is all the same to me, — that this is Agamemnon, my husband, who now is dead, the work of this right hand of mine, and that hand a righteous worker. So stands the case.» When the chorus retorts that the fatherland will cast *Klytimestra* forth as she has cast out Agamemnon, she answers with indignation, that when Agamemnon offered up his daughter whom she had borne with a pain which was dear to her, the chorus had not had a word to say, although it was he who should have been exiled. And she continues: «By the accomplished vengeance which I have attained for my child, and by the goddess of deceit and by the envying Fury to whom I sacrificed this man here, no expectations of fear treading my halls, so long as Aigisthos, who is kindly disposed to me as formerly, tends the fire upon my hearth; for he is for us no slight shield, and gives us confidence. But here lies the man who brought this woman, who stands here, to ruin, he who was the darling to all

the Chryseises who were found in Iliou. Here lies this woman, taken by the lance, the sorceress, his concubine, this fortune-teller, who so faithfully shared his couch and who also slept upon the seamen's rowing benches.» «Now she has sung her last swan-song» continues the queen without knowing that, in these words, she is describing *Kassandra* appropriately and beautifully. When the aged councillors behold the dead body of *Agamemnon* they desire death for themselves, and once more they utter resentful words against *Helen*, but still they understand that the one who really caused the murder is the evil spirit which is the foe of the house, and who has a disposition equally as hard as that of the woman whose hand has wielded the sword.¹³ Still all takes place by the will of *Zeus*, the cause of all, the worker of all. *Klytaimestra* replies to the chorus thus:¹⁴ «Do you declare that this deed is mine? You must not say that I am the wife of *Agamemnon*. It is *Atreus*, — he who was host at that pernicious banquet, — whose old, inexorable spirit of vengeance has taken upon itself the form of a woman who was married to «that body there;» it is he who has made use of this man as a penalty, offering up a full grown man as requital for the infant children.» There is something disdainful in the queen's words. «That body there,» she calls her husband. Despite their scorn, there is, nevertheless, a tone of complaint in *Klytaimestra's* words. She who has just said: «I have wrought this deed,» says now: «It is not I who have done this; I am only an instrument for the spirit of vengeance of the House.» *Klytaimestra* makes both *Agamemnon* and herself impersonal; they are not human beings, but spirits of vengeance and the harsh laws of existence, who prevail. The chorus replies immediately: «Who will bear witness that thou art innocent of this murder. It is you, by no means! And yet the avenging Fury of the father can be called your helper; the black Fury of destruction presses on his way with might, while he pours out streams of kindred blood until he has approached the point where he can exact revenge for the congealed blood of the murdered children.» It is the spirit of vengeance that has accomplished this which has occurred, and yet *Klytaimestra* is not innocent. *Aischylos* has

¹³ vv. 1485-1486.

¹⁴ vv. 1498 ff.

pondered over the question whether mankind is free acting, and responsible for his actions or whether he is an instrument for divine beings and powers, and thus his freedom and his responsibility disappear. The problem is both old and new. The chorus now asks who shall bury Agamemnon, and who shall sing a dirge over him. «Wilt thou,» they ask the queen, «dare to do this — after slaying thy husband with thy own hand — to mourn over him and thus bestow upon his soul a thankless favor? Who shall grieve over the king in sincerity of heart?»

VII. *Klytaimestra's* reply to the question of the chorus: «Who shall bury Agamemnon?» is frightful in its cutting scorn.⁴⁵ «Iphigeneia, his daughter, as is her right, shall meet her father at the passage of sorrows, where the waves flow swiftly, and she shall put her arms around him and kiss him.»

The time is short in which to assemble the traits with which the tragic poet has equipped *Klytaimestra*, who is the protagonist in this tragedy. Her acting is far preferable to that of *Agamemnon*, whose character is not nearly so distinctly marked as that of his queen. In regard to the motive by which she enters into illicit relation with *Aigisthos*, it is not because she feels a burning affection for him; she declares, as already mentioned, that he is well disposed towards her now as previously and that she will not lose hope and courage so long as he tends the fire upon her hearth; but that is a speech of good will and confidence, not one of love. In a tragic drama the thought of the poet must often be read outside of the action, so that it may be difficult to decide whether he has intended to say this or that. A tragic drama is either a sermon or a dissertation; it shows us a cross-section of a life experience, and when two human beings present such a picture of actual life, their interpretations are never alike. But the thought appears, however, that it was inherent in our tragedy that *Klytaimestra* has attached herself to *Aigisthos* — the more personable woman with the less distinguished man. She has conceived this attachment because of anger against *Agamemnon*. He slew *Iphigeneia*, whom she had borne with suffering, and further, according to *Klytaimestra's* assertion, he had involved

⁴⁵ vv. 1555-1559.

himself in liaison with every Chryseis in Troyland. He has conveyed Cassandra with him to Argos. Sophocles' Antigone is «created to love» the Klytāimēstra of the *Agamemnon* is created to hate. There is, as she herself asserts, a spirit of vengeance which has taken her in his power. She is a Fury, but she is also a prey for the Furies. Neither can it be denied that the *hate* directed towards Agamemnon, — who had set considerations of state above consideration for his wife and daughter, and outraged his wife deeply by his conduct with Chryseis, — as a motive, is built on a grander scale than the mere affection for Aigisthos could have been. It lifts the action up to a higher plane than it would have been if the queen had had dealings with Aigisthos simply because she wanted a man just then. Klytāimēstra is portrayed as a very strong woman. Most deeply perceived is the will of the gods and the Fates who act through her. But the Fates choose to employ her hatred and not her love as a mainspring for the action, which is destined to come to pass, through her; but from the hate towards Agamemnon there arises on the other hand towards Aigisthos a feeling which resembles love.

It is the Fates who set the wheels in motion, and they use as a starting propulsion this rage of Klytāimēstra, which, while not unjustifiable, is over-flowing, impassioned and vindictive. But although Klytāimēstra is in the power of the Fates, and her rage is also a part of her own fate, we hear in only one of her last words any complaint over the curse which broods upon the family, and whose instrument she herself is. Does she begin to suspect that there will come vengeance upon her also? Or is there something, despite her tremendous hatred, which weeps within her, because she knows that she is the thrall of the Fates, and thereby of her own hate?

The chorus expresses the thoughts of Aischylos upon the law of retribution which rules in life;⁴⁶ as they say the following: «He who spoils, himself is spoiled; he who slays must pay the penalty; so long as Zeus sits upon his throne, this stands fast, that for whatever crime a man has perpetrated, he must suffer, for that law abides. Who can expel the accursed brood from the house? The race is fast bound to calamity.» This is an utterance

⁴⁶ vv. 1500-1501.

which, in seriousness and depth, does not stand so very much behind that previously quoted, namely: that no one can boast that he was born with a fortune in which there is no defect, when Agamemnon by his death had to pay the penalty for another's death.

VIII. We must take note of Klytaimestra's answer.⁴⁷ «I, for my part,» she says, «am willing to enter into final compact with the divinity which is the enemy of this house, and I will let myself be content with this, which is come to pass, and that he shall depart from this house. A small portion of the wealth of the kingdom will be sufficient for me, when I can free the house from the madness of murdering one after another.» Thus Klytaimestra desires to come outside the magic circle of the curse. Now enters Aigisthos, her weak foil. He rejoices, as a son of Thyestes, over that which has occurred. When his father had discovered that he had partaken of the flesh of his two sons, he had pronounced a frightful curse upon the House of Pelops. This curse had now come to fulfillment, and Aigisthos himself had laid the plans.

We come now to a scene of intense quarreling, in connection with braggadocio between Aigisthos and the chorus. He announces that the aged servitors have a tongue quite the opposite of that of Orpheus⁴⁸ in manner of speech. Towards the close of this encounter it appears that the argument between the two parties will become a disorderly brawl. There is also a trace of mockery, in that the poet portrays Aigisthos as inviting the twelve old men of the chorus to engage in battle with him. In every respect Aigisthos is shown to be a character very inferior to Klytaimestra; he is merely the favorite, the paramour of the powerful, grandiose queen, «the Moon borrows its light from the Sun.» Just as the more serious conflict between Aigisthos and the chorus is about to begin, the queen enters as the mediating and calming influence. She proclaims: «That which we have already done we had to do, for we were grievously smitten by the heavy, cruel stroke of Fate. But now there has been bloodshed enough. Thou, Aigisthos, do not pay any attention to the idle barking of these oldsters. Thou

⁴⁷ vv. 1566.

⁴⁸ vv. 1629-1630.

and I shall rule over this House as masters, and we shall bring all things into proper order.»⁴⁹

I shall close this character-sketch of Klytāimēstra with the words of my famous and beloved teacher, B. L. GILDERSLEEVE: «This frightful woman — if she still be worthy of the name — deigns to become the masterful promoter of peace; as portrayed by Aischylos in the *Agamemnon*, she is terrific to the last.»

Charlottesville, Virginia, U. S. A., October 1954.

HERBERT PIERREPONT HOUGHTON.

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⁴⁹ vv. 1054 ff.

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SUMMARIVM

De Clytaemnestra Aeschyli fabulae, quae *Agamemnon* inscribitur, hoc disputat opusculum. In qua fabula, quamquam contra dicit inscriptio, primas ea agit partes. Considera enim haec octo momenta quibus Clytaemnestra apparet:

1) Ea introit, choro senum Arginorum salutante, et lumina Troiam captam indicasse nuntiat.

2) Ea in memoriam redigit verba sua esse derisa, sed mox eos ex ore uictoris similia audituros dicit. Re uera reditus eius mentitur desiderium.

3) Ea coniugem recipit et speciem amoris praebet, de doloribus illo absente clare sed falso loquens. Haec est longa oratio bene ab Agamemnone intellecta.

4) Ea iubet regem domum procedere purpuras sacras calcantem.

5) Ea Cassandram inuitat, ut de curru descendat et aliis se adiungat seruis.

6) Ea locum capit apud corpus regis et suum profitetur facinus.

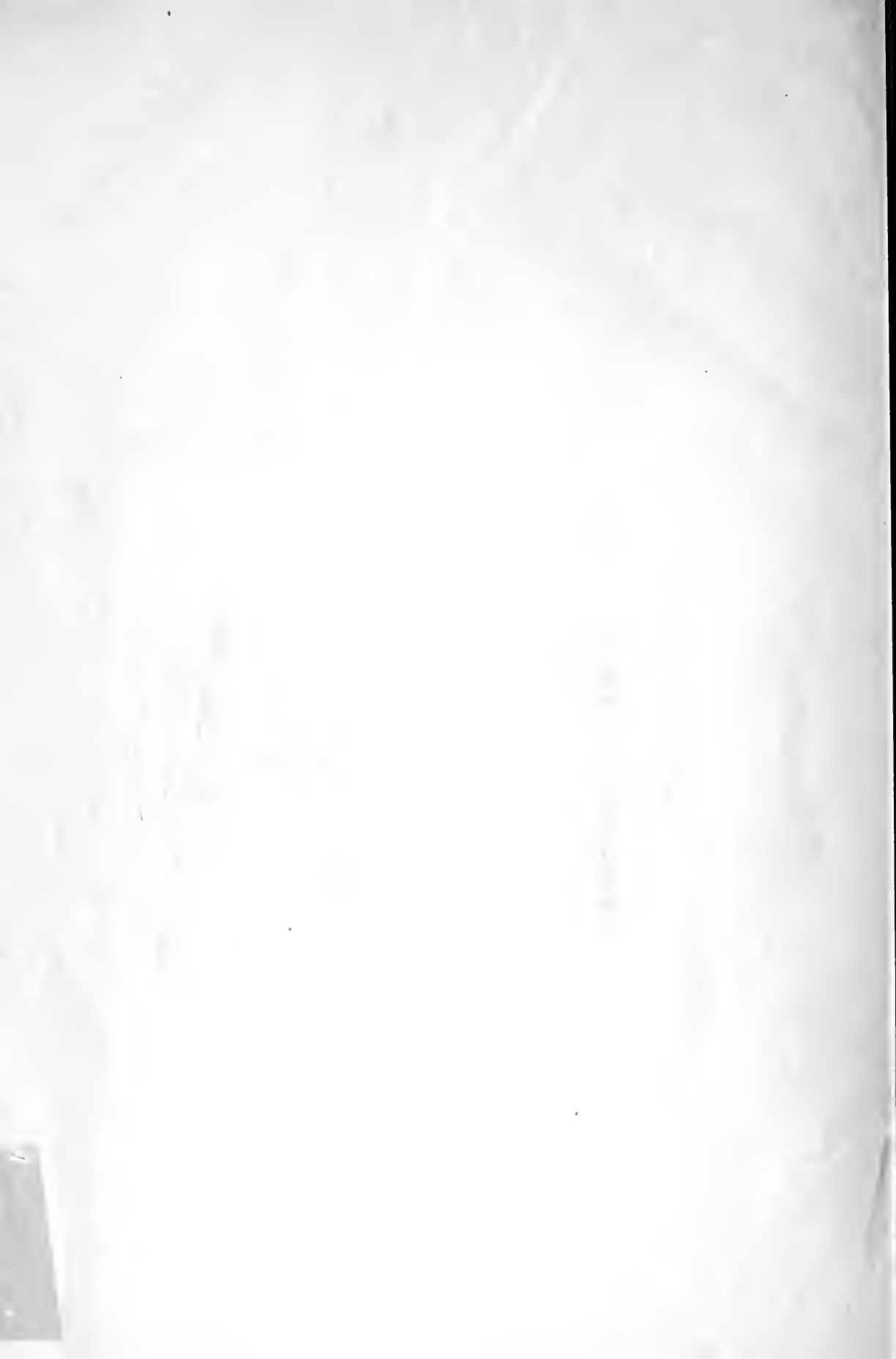
7) Ea quaerenti: «Quisnam sepeliet regem?» respondet: «Iphigenia cum patre conueniat ad uiam doloris eumque amplectatur et osculetur.»

8) Clytaemnestrae Aegisthus est minister, quem ea usque ad deridendum superat. Haec terribilis femina, denique, et partem quae ad moueat pacem agere uult. «Haec femina, si etiam hoc nomine digna sit», ut ait B. L. Gildersleeve, «ab initio usque ad finem eximie perterrens est.»

Scriptum HERBERTVS PIERREPONT HOUGHTON
et MARINVS COLKER.







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