

# Apollo's Favorites

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"Fortunate favourite of the Queen—  
or else not so fortunate."

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TREATMENTS OF THE CASSANDRA SCENE in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* have achieved some degree of consensus regarding its function. The inexorable movement of the play towards Agamemnon's death halts momentarily as the Trojan prophetess reveals the past, present, and future that are the context of that death. In so doing, she enables us to make sense of what we have so far encountered and of what we shall encounter in the remainder of the trilogy.<sup>1</sup> Her predictions serve as "a messenger speech in advance" and "reveal the theological implications of what has gone before": the scene brings the supernatural factor into focus.<sup>2</sup>

There is less agreement on the moral stature of Cassandra. Her grim and clear knowledge of her own fate and Agamemnon's evokes the pity of the audience, as well as that of the chorus (Ag. 1321). Knox sees her embodying the tragedy of the prophet, the burden of whose knowledge is "too great a load for human senses."<sup>3</sup> On this reading, Cassandra's prophetic capabilities and the tragic ironies they entail define her significance. The story of how she came to be a prophet is for Knox the symbol of a universal truth (that prophets are rejected). The abortive liaison with Apollo becomes merely an *aition* for her state of non-persuasiveness and carries no moral

<sup>1</sup> B. Knox, "Aeschylus and the Third Actor," in his *Word and Action. Essays on the Ancient Theater* (Baltimore 1979) 44f, 50; S. Schein, "The Cassandra Scene in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*," *GandR* 2 (1982) 13; B. FEICHTINGER, "Zur Kassandra-Szene in Aischylos' 'Orestie' und ihren poetischen Funktionen," *WürzJbb* n.s. 17 (1991: hereafter 'Feichtinger') 54.

<sup>2</sup> D. M. LEAHY, "The Role of Cassandra in the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus," *BullJrnlLibr* 52 (1969-70: hereafter 'Leahy') 145, 147.

<sup>3</sup> Knox (*supra* n.1) 46f; cf. Schein (*supra* n.1) 12f.

or intellectual implications. Cassandra symbolizes the prophetic mode and functions as an ironic device, or as a receptacle for feelings of sympathy displaced from Agamemnon.

A shift in focus permits a different interpretation. Concentration on the implications of the stichomythia at *Ag.* 1202–13 allowed Leahy (157) to ask and answer the question, was Cassandra “an innocent victim of outrage, or ... a sinner justly punished?” Arguing from what he perceives as a generally positive attitude in Aeschylus towards the love of a god for a mortal woman, and from the language of the stichomythia, which implies for him that Cassandra’s action was a sin, Leahy concludes that Cassandra is an offender who made an incorrect choice in her dealings with Apollo. This method of approach leads also to the radical interpretation of Kovacs, for whom Cassandra’s guilt is even more extreme: *after* embarking on a sexual relationship with Apollo, Cassandra played him false and/or deprived him of the children that would naturally have resulted from the union.<sup>4</sup> Such a determination of Cassandra’s level of guilt affects how we view Apollo in the play and trilogy. An innocent Cassandra implies a brutal Apollo (who must then ‘progress’ in the course of the trilogy), while a guilty one allows a consistently superior god throughout.<sup>5</sup> In the world of the *Oresteia*, however, it is notoriously difficult to assign characters to the categories of guilt and innocence. It would be surprising if either Cassandra or Apollo were wholly one or the other. In this world, moreover, divine vengeance typically verges on the disproportionate: thousands of Greeks and Trojans die for the sake of one adulterous woman.<sup>6</sup> One might conclude that it is futile to measure the justice of divine punishment in human terms. The gods work by their own standards. My arguments here should not, therefore, be interpreted as offering either a

<sup>4</sup> D. Kovacs, “The Way of a God with a Maid in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*,” *CP* 82 (1987) 326–34.

<sup>5</sup> For a review of the scholarship on this matter and a dismissal of the ‘progressive’ Apollo, see Leahy 152–66; for a related formulation of the problem see Feichtinger 53, 61. The question of a ‘progressive’ Apollo raises the specter of the Aeschylean portrayal of Zeus and the possibility of an ‘advanced’ theology: see S. GOLDHILL, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The Oresteia* (Cambridge 1984: hereafter ‘Goldhill’) 25 with n.47; M. Pope, “Merciful Heavens? A Question in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*,” *JHS* 94 (1974) 100–13, esp. 111ff; H. Lloyd-Jones, “Zeus in Aeschylus,” *JHS* 76 (1956) 55–67, esp. 60–65.

<sup>6</sup> The sacrifice of Iphigenia could also be cited, if one were sure of the precise nature of Agamemnon’s offense.

justification of Apollo or a condemnation of Cassandra. Given Apollo's power, crossing him has certain consequences (morally justified or not). From Apollo's point of view, Cassandra brought her fate on herself. I argue, then, neither that Apollo 'progresses' in the trilogy nor that he is a vengeful brute. He is powerful, consistent, and, for most of the trilogy, an influential force in the area of prophecy and interpretation of divine will. Whether his authority is sufficient to solve the problems raised by the action is a different question and beyond the scope of this paper.

In what follows, I shall explore how viewing Cassandra and Orestes as corresponding characters enriches our understanding the Cassandra scene, of Orestes in *Choephoroi*, and of Apollo throughout the trilogy.<sup>7</sup> Cassandra and Orestes are not, of course, the only mirror characters in the *Oresteia*. Previous scholarship has done much to illuminate the thematic and visual correspondences between Agamemnon and Cassandra, Orestes and Clytemnestra. Indeed, the construction of mirror-scenes is a major tool whereby Aeschylus emphasizes the cyclic repetition of the curse of the house of Atreus.<sup>8</sup> Parallels between Orestes and Cassandra have been less fully investigated, but they may help to define yet another thread in the pattern of the trilogy. Both characters are marked out for Apollo's favor, but the blessing of divine attention carries with it special responsibilities. Shirking them entails shouldering a fate that, as usual in the *Oresteia*, is both externally imposed and internally generated (Leahy 174–77).

## I

The Cassandra scene begins with a failure of persuasion on Clytemnestra's part that foreshadows her failure to persuade Orestes in *Choephoroi*. Clytemnestra cannot persuade the silent

<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that we should retroject lessons from *Choephoroi* into *Agamemnon*, but that understanding the Cassandra scene materially aids interpretation of Orestes.

<sup>8</sup> For precise "mirror-scenes" in the *Oresteia*, see O. TAPLIN, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (Berkeley 1978: hereafter 'Taplin, *Tragedy*') 122–27, and *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977: 'Taplin, *Stagecraft*') 321f (Agamemnon and Cassandra), 356–59 (Orestes and Clytemnestra). See also A. F. GARVIE, *Aeschylus, Choephoroi* (Oxford 1986: 'Garvie') xxxvf with n.83, li.

Cassandra to enter the palace, just as she will be unable to persuade her son not to take her along the same path to a death similar to Cassandra's.<sup>9</sup> "Obey, if you are going to obey. Perhaps you may disobey," says the chorus (1049: *πείθοι' ἄν, εἰ πείθοι', ἀπειθοίης δ' ἴσως*). But also "Be persuaded, if you can be persuaded. Perhaps you cannot be." The issue is one of obedience, disobedience, and persuasion. It is also a question of understanding and interpretability; neither Clytemnestra nor the audience knows at this point whether Cassandra can understand what is being said. Clytemnestra's command and comment assume an added significance when we learn the nature of Cassandra's Apolline liaison. After breaking her agreement with the god, she became unable to persuade (1208–12). It is important to note, first, that Cassandra's inability to persuade is matched by a capacity to resist persuasion, and second, that her ability to remain unpersuaded despite the importuning of a more powerful personality (whether Apollo or Clytemnestra) is similar in both instances. Her ability to resist persuasion and her inability to persuade mirror each other and are grounded in her past actions.

The chorus thinks that Cassandra's failure to be persuaded is due to her need for a clear interpreter (*ἐρμηνέως*, 1062). They are following the lead of Clytemnestra, who, incisive as always, had framed the issue thus: either Cassandra does not understand her, that is, does not know Greek, or Clytemnestra is speaking within Cassandra's understanding and is persuading her (*ἔσω φρενῶν λέγουσα πείθω νιν λόγῳ*, 1052).<sup>10</sup> The dichotomy, however, is overdrawn. Clytemnestra will not conceive that Cassandra may both understand and refuse obedience, but the relationship between speech and action cannot be so easily simplified. Later in the scene the chorus will complain that Cassandra's prophecies are hard to comprehend, like the Pythian oracles, although she speaks Greek (1252–55). The difficulty in understanding has been transferred from the arena of translation to that of interpretation. Her failure to be persuaded was attributed to the need for basic interpretation, that is, translation; her failure to persuade is attributed to oracular obscurity, which she cannot adequately interpret for

<sup>9</sup> Taplin, *Tragedy* 33ff, 142. Cassandra notes the correspondence of deaths: Ag. 1318.

<sup>10</sup> See, however, the comments of J. D. DENNISTON and D. PAGE, *Aeschylus*, Agamemnon (Oxford 1957: hereafter 'Denniston and Page') 162.

them. The issue of interpretation, adumbrated at its most basic level at the beginning, continues to grow in importance as the scene progresses, and is fundamental for assessing the rôles of Cassandra and Apollo. Correct assessment of Cassandra's meaning is as problematic for audience and scholar as it is for the chorus.

Cassandra and the chorus do not use language in the same way, and therein lies at least partially the root of misunderstanding. "To what house have you led me?" cries Cassandra to the god. "To the house of the Atreidae. If you don't realize this, I will tell it to you," replies the chorus (1087ff). This reply is, as Denniston and Page (167) lament, "very dull." It has to be, in order to dramatize the interpretive dynamic that exists between the chorus and the prophetess. As when they commented on Cassandra's refusal to obey Clytemnestra, they think on too literal a level. For them, not to understand means to be ignorant, whether of a language or of specific information, such as the identification of a house. They do not see that Cassandra's question is rhetorical, just as they will not be able to interpret her imagistic and metaphorical prophecies. In sum, they have a problem with the figurative use of language.<sup>11</sup> This difficulty is not unique to interpreters of Cassandra but, for the chorus, characterizes most oracular speech (1255). We must look to the stichomythia at 1202–13 for the reason why Cassandra does not persuade.

What is the nature of Cassandra's offence to Apollo?<sup>12</sup> Kovacs believes that Cassandra refused union with the god, was overcome, then played him false. This reading depends upon the rejection of Hermann's transposition of 1203 and 1204, and on textual supplements that do not rest upon ancient evi-

<sup>11</sup> For a suggestive discussion of the possible complexities of rhetorical questions, see P. de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven 1979) 9f. It seems, indeed, that the chorus does have some awareness that the creation and interpretation of likeness is par for the mantic course. Although disclaiming oracular expertise at 1131, the chorus tentatively *likenes* the prophecies to some evil (κακῶ δέ τῳ προσεικάζω τάδε). When they are sure that they have understood Cassandra's references to Thyestes' banquet and decoded her, they refer to things that are οὐδὲν ἐξηκασμένα (1244).

<sup>12</sup> On whether Cassandra's refusal of Apollo is a new element in the story, see Feichtinger 52 n.10, who speculates that Aeschylus invents it in order to excuse the god for Cassandra's death (which tradition may have dictated).

dence.<sup>13</sup> Kovacs is disturbed because the physicality of the language at 1206 makes it seem unlikely that Apollo ceased his courtship in mid-wrestle and gave Cassandra a chance to refuse him.<sup>14</sup> This is not the kind of thing we expect from so enterprising a god. On Kovacs' reading, Cassandra will either have aborted her pregnancy or disposed of the baby. In spite of his subtle argumentation, however, there is reason to think that the old reading of the encounter between Apollo and Cassandra is substantially correct, whatever the status of Hermann's transposition. The solution to the problem lies in the presentation of Apollo throughout the trilogy. Apollo encourages Orestes to kill his mother but in the end the decision to do so must be Orestes' own. Similarly, Apollo will not force Cassandra to have sex with him, even though force is a common element in this kind of human-divine interaction. Even more significant is the account of how Apollo acquired Delphi at the beginning of *Eumenides*. He did not take the shrine by force, nor did Phoebé, his predecessor. He was given it freely as a birthday gift (*Eum.* 5–8). The emphasis of this narrative indicates that the story of forcible acquisition was at least current; Aeschylus, by contrast, wants to stress the element of consent.<sup>15</sup> It is consistent with such behavior that Aeschylus would have Apollo woo rather than rape Cassandra. Such a version implies her consent, and she confesses that she gave it (ξυναινέσσα, 1208).<sup>16</sup>

There is merit, too, in having ἐψευσάμην refer to a verbal lie rather than to an act of treachery, for in this way Cassandra's punishment is a more accurate reflection of her crime. "I consented and I lied," she says. Having gained the art of prophecy through false pretenses, her prophetic pretensions

<sup>13</sup> Kovacs (*supra* n.4) advances his supplements tentatively, *exempli gratia*; however tentative, they nevertheless add a new, purely hypothetical element.

<sup>14</sup> I have no strong opinion on whether we should take the wrestling metaphor at 1206 literally or metaphorically. M. Poliakof has shown ("The Third Fall in the *Oresteia*," *AJP* 101 [1980] 251–59) that wrestling imagery pervades the trilogy. The physicality of the language may not, therefore, be so disturbing.

<sup>15</sup> See T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth* (Baltimore 1993) 88, for other versions of the founding of Apollo's oracle. Cf. A. H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus, Eumenides* (Cambridge 1989) 80f.

<sup>16</sup> David Schenker suggests to me (per litt.) that there may be some word play in the juxtaposition of τέκνων (1207) and τέχναισιν (1209), the two commodities being traded.

must now always be deprived of content and effect. She does not persuade because she was not persuaded. The lie that inaugurates her prophetic career casts its shadow over her entire future. When the chorus declares her oracles worthy of trust (1213), it speaks with a larger perspective that embodies the knowledge of the audience (which, to some degree, it represents). This creates a somewhat paradoxical situation on stage as Cassandra achieves the persuasion that is usually denied to her. We should note, however, that even though the chorus takes her accurate revelation of the past as an earnest of her powers, it refuses, despite its forebodings (1242–55), to be convinced of the imminence of Agamemnon's death. Trustworthy her oracles may be but they are still deprived of effect; Cassandra's statement that she persuaded nobody of anything (ἔπειθον οὐδέν' οὐδέν, 1212) implies that she could not persuade anybody to *do* anything. In *Agamemnon* we see this curse fulfilled as the chorus dithers during Agamemnon's death. Literal interpretation of a prophecy is only half the battle. Aeschylus has the prophetess enter the mythological scene with a gesture that creates a radical disjunction between speech and action, and she relives this disjunction in everything she does subsequently. The understanding both of words spoken to her and of words that proceed from her is complex and insecure. She is enmeshed in a net of falsity and interpretation from which there is no escape. Successful, that is to say effective, interpretation of mantic speech by the addressee must take into account the status of the prophet. The speaker is part of the sign.<sup>17</sup>

Cassandra's problematic sexual and hermeneutic status is underlined by the simile at 1178, where she switches from lyric meters to spoken trimeters: she will no longer express herself in veiled terms but clearly. The precise image is notable: ὁ χρησμὸς οὐκέτ' ἐκ καλυμμάτων ἔσται δεδορκῶς νεογάμου

<sup>17</sup> In stressing interpretation and persuasion throughout this article, I am, of course, following the lead of Goldhill 17 and *passim*. Goldhill treats the Cassandra scene at 81–88 and emphasizes well the importance of persuasion and the failure of reception. Goldhill, using a deconstructionist approach, traces the importance of these themes for the whole trilogy (and all the characters in it) and analyses “the difficulties of placing defined limits to the text's meaning” (4). Clearly, my own goals are more modest. I am interested in the successes and failures of interpretation and persuasion as they reflect the particular choices of characters (Orestes and Cassandra) who are connected with the patron god of interpretation (Apollo).

νόμφης δίκην. The oracle will no longer look forth from veils, like a newly-married bride. The reference is to the *anakalypsis*, the moment when the ancient Greek bride unveils herself to her husband.<sup>18</sup> Cassandra's lyric speech is analogous to the veiled bride, while her trimeters correspond to the bride unveiled. It is significant that she concentrates on the moment that marks the passage of a young woman into marriage and sexuality, because it is precisely this transition that she refused to make with Apollo. Indeed, the simile is almost an indispensable prerequisite for the disclosure of her relationship with him. Formerly she was ashamed to speak of it (1203). Only when she has made a metaphorical bridal gesture in speech can she reveal her abortive Apolline bridal, but her abandonment of virginal reticence has come too late. The simile, then, points us towards Cassandra's status as chosen consort of the god, who would not yield her virginity, but also to her status as Agamemnon's concubine, one who was compelled to yield to the mortal king what she would not be persuaded to give to the god. Clytemnestra will call Cassandra Agamemnon's πιστή ξύνευος ("trusty bedfellow," 1442). It is ironic that this should be a wife's appellation for a concubine, and doubly so when we recall that the prophetess refused to perform that rôle for Apollo and could thus no longer produce trustworthy speech. For Apollo and Agamemnon, Cassandra is the bride who is not a bride. The bridal image that looks to the prophetess' sexual history is deployed as a gloss on the interpretive status of her speech. She attempts to capture the clarity and persuasiveness that would have attended her submission to Apollo by enacting bridal disclosure in speech.<sup>19</sup> This results in the story of her liaison, and in the chorus' comment that she speaks trustworthy things (πιστά, 1213). Yet her success is only partial; almost immediately she is swept away again by prophetic frenzy, even though she continues to speak in trimeters (1215ff).

As the scene progresses, Cassandra becomes more explicit about the imminence of her own death, and her feelings towards Apollo become more violent. Her prophetic staff and fillets are a mockery to be trampled (1264ff). It is Apollo who is undressing her and leading her to her fate (1269–78). Here again,

<sup>18</sup> As R. SEAFORD notes ("The Tragic Wedding," *JHS* 107 [1987: hereafter 'Seaford'] 128), the image is not chosen arbitrarily. See also A. Lebeck, *The Oresteia. A Study in Language and Structure* (Cambridge 1971) 54f.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. R. Rehm, *Marriage to Death* (Princeton 1994) 48.



we see bridal imagery, mixed with imagery of the slaughter house and of sacrifice. Seaford has noted that the Cassandra scene contains a “sustained evocation of the negative elements in the situation of a bride”: the Greek marriage ceremony began at the bride’s father’s house, when the bride would be handed over to her new husband. She was then transported to her new house in a chariot and was expected to weep and show reluctance.<sup>20</sup> Cassandra comments that instead of her father’s altar, a chopping-block awaits her (βωμοῦ πατρώου δ’ ἀντ’ ἐπίξηνον μένει, 1277); in a bridal context, reference to the father’s home left behind seems to be traditional.<sup>21</sup> For Cassandra, marital sacrifice has become a slaughter,<sup>22</sup> and the traditional procession in a chariot and show of reluctance has been transposed to be the beginning of the episode, where she arrives in Agamemnon’s chariot as a perverse bridal substitute. Her refusal to enter the house is only too well motivated. As before, the overlay of marriage imagery is thematically significant because of the importance of Cassandra’s sexual history. She is the doomed concubine of a mortal king instead of the honored partner of the god (she could not be πιστή to him; she must now be so ironically to Agamemnon), and it is Apollo who has led her away from her old home and now undresses her for a mortal consummation.

Cassandra has been trying to flee Apollo, but all that happens leads back to him—in a perverted and frightening form. Thus at the beginning of the scene, when Clytemnestra calls Cassandra to the sacrifice, she talks of the ἐστίας μεσομφάλου, the “mid-navel hearth” (1056). This curious phrase has perplexed commentators. Fraenkel states that the epithet referred originally to the Omphalos at Delphi, and that it is used here “in an arbitrarily generalized sense.” He castigates Verrall’s suggestion that Clytemnestra uses the vocabulary of Apollo’s cult to mock the

<sup>20</sup> Seaford 128; Rehm (*supra* n.19) 44.

<sup>21</sup> Seaford 128 with n.215. There are other possible layers of allusion in the reference to the father’s altar. The thoughts of the audience may be directed to the death of Iphigenia at a father’s altar, or to Neoptolemus’ murder of Priam at his own altar. See F. ZEITLIN, “The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*,” *TAPA* 96 (1965: hereafter ‘Zeitlin’) 471.

<sup>22</sup> Zeitlin (467–70) notes that both Clytemnestra and Cassandra read the murder of Agamemnon as a sacrifice. Cassandra views her own death also as a sacrificial offering.

prophetess.<sup>23</sup> Without going as far as Verrall, we may still suggest that the use of the epithet is less than arbitrary. Whatever intent we attribute to Clytemnestra, the reference to Delphi and thus to the god establishes Apollo's operative presence right from the beginning of the episode. Cassandra is drawn towards the god and the place of sacrifice against her will.<sup>24</sup> This contrasts strongly with Orestes, who ends *Choe-phori* by making voluntarily and literally the move towards Delphi that Cassandra makes metaphorically and perforce.<sup>25</sup> The parallel is underlined by the repetition of μεσόμφαλος. Orestes says that he will go μεσόμφαλόν θ' ἴδρυμα, Λοξίου πέδον (*Ch.* 1036). For Orestes, the movement to Loxias promises deliverance.

In sum, the Cassandra scene plays out issues of obedience, persuasion, and interpretation in a context of sexual transgression with strong religious overtones. For Cassandra, sexual choice becomes religious trespass when her failure to submit to divine passion entails playing the god false. She disobeys and is not persuaded; obedience will finally be compelled. As a prophetess, a *locus* where human and divine intersect, Cassandra's actions are particularly paradigmatic. But the paradigm has been perverted. Apollo must wait for another favorite for a proper playing-out of the dynamic of obedience, persuasion, and interpretation. This favorite will be Orestes,

<sup>23</sup> E. FRAENKEL, *Aeschylus, Agamemnon III* (Oxford 1950: hereafter 'Fraenkel') 482.

<sup>24</sup> So also Feichtinger 61: "Der Gott kann vernichten, und er vernichtet auch die, die er liebt, und zwar dann, wenn man sich verweigert, seinem Willen widersetzt."

<sup>25</sup> I cannot agree with Feichtinger (61) that Cassandra comes to see Apollo as a positive force at the end of her life. This interpretation rests on identifying Apollo with the Helios on whom Cassandra calls as she is about to enter the palace (1323–26) and on assuming that Apollo (as Helios) will guarantee vengeance for her (Feichtinger 53). The earliest explicit evidence for the identification of Apollo with Helios seems to be *Aesch. Suppl.* 212ff and fr. 83 Mette (W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, tr. J. Raffan [Cambridge (Mass.) 1985] 149 with n.55). There is no evidence, however, that it was a regular identification. In the *Suppliants* passage the names "Apollo" and "Helios" are closely juxtaposed, which is not the case in *Agamemnon*. Cassandra does not mention Apollo when she calls upon the Sun. It is clear from the context that Cassandra is calling upon the physical light; nothing except predisposition would suggest Apollo here. Moreover, when Orestes makes a parallel call upon Helios (*Ch.* 985f; discussed below) to witness his mother's unholy deeds, he is evidently not calling on Apollo who, after all, already knows them.

who will obey Apollo and thus gain the god as his patron. There is no indication at all that Orestes is aware that he is following in Cassandra's footsteps, although Cassandra can speak of him as her avenger (1280). On the other hand, a series of resonances between *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroi* indicates that the audience is meant to be aware of the parallel.

## II

At *Ch.* 269–305, Orestes outlines the issues at stake in avenging his father. Urged by the chorus to be silent lest news of his arrival spread, Orestes replies that the oracle of Loxias will not betray him, because it commanded him to undergo this danger. In fact, it threatened him with dire consequences should he not pursue the guilty (271–74). Orestes is very sure of his interpretive skills with respect to the oracle and has no trouble in communicating it to his sister and the chorus.<sup>26</sup> He was told to pursue the guilty *in the same way* (τρόπον τὸν αὐτόν), and he then adds his own gloss on Apollo's meaning: "saying [or perhaps "meaning"] to kill them in return."<sup>27</sup> If Orestes fails to take his revenge, his father's Furies will visit him with sickness, ulcers, sleeplessness, and madness. In the end he will be driven from his city and die friendless and dishonored (275–96). The description of madness, exile, and dishonor is prophetically ironic, for this is precisely the fate that awaits him from his mother's Furies (*cf.* Garvie 117). Orestes faces a dilemma, but in this instance Apollo's oracle (and his own desires, 298–304) tip the scale. The god clarifies the implications of Orestes' actions and acts as a guarantor of the consequences of both obedience and disobedience, throwing his weight

<sup>26</sup> Note the contrast with *Agamemnon*. The chorus forebode Cassandra's meaning, but they cannot bring themselves to accept it, both because they do not wish to and because they cannot navigate a course through her figurative language. In *Choephoroi*, Orestes is telling his audience precisely what they want to hear and speaks in concise and simple terms. It is only at the end of the play that Orestes' incipient madness complicates his ability to communicate with the chorus. I shall explore this complication further below.

<sup>27</sup> I accept Page's comma after τὸν αὐτόν. Garvie (112) argues that the phrase is better taken with what precedes (thus: "to kill them in the same manner in their turn"), because Page's punctuation weakens the meaning. But it seems entirely characteristic of oracular speech to tell Orestes to pursue the guilty in the same manner and to mean by it that he must kill them.

behind the father's Furies. At 297f, therefore, Orestes comments τοιοῖσδε χρησμοῖς ἄρα χρὴ πεποιθέναι; κεί μὴ πέποιθα, τοῦργόν ἐστ' ἐργαστέον: such oracles inspire trust. He must be persuaded by them and obey them. His obedience is a structural counterpart to Cassandra's disobedience, and the winning force of persuasion will therefore aid him at his trial.<sup>28</sup>

Obedience and concomitant persuasion guarantee that speech matches action throughout most of *Choephoroi*. This is especially evident towards the end of the play. When Orestes confronts his mother and hesitates to murder her, Pylades makes his famous response in terms of standing by one's pledges: ποῦ δαὶ τὸ λοιπὸν Λοξίου μαντεύματα τὰ πυθόχρηστα, πιστὰ τ' εὐορκώματα; ἅπαντας ἐχθροὺς τῶν θεῶν ἡγοῦ πλέον (900ff). If Orestes stops now, Apollo's oracles will be reduced to nothing, as will trustworthy pledges. These pledges are both Apollo's to Orestes and Orestes' promises that he will fulfil the god's will.<sup>29</sup> It is instructive to make explicit the contrast with Cassandra here. If Orestes had disobeyed Apollo and refused to kill his mother, he would have deprived of productivity the god's pledges to him and his to the god. He would have made the god his enemy, and by playing him false would have earned madness, exile, and a dishonorable, friendless death, just as Cassandra did. If Apollo's oracles are trustworthy, this implies both that he lives up to them and that their recipients must also. Orestes thus decides to make Clytemnestra abide by her own pledges and reap the consequences of her actions. He will kill her by the side of her paramour (just as Clytemnestra gloats that Agamemnon lies in death by the side of his [1440–46]), because she preferred him to Agamemnon (904–07). Orestes returns to this theme when he makes his entrance after the murders. Their oath, he says, stands by its pledges: they swore to kill Agamemnon and to die together: καὶ τὰδ' εὐορκῶς ἔχει (977ff). He has made them keep their oath and has kept his own promise. Speech has predicted

<sup>28</sup> Noted also by Feichtinger 61: "Die Verweigerung Kassandras steht dem Gehorsam des Orest gegenüber."

<sup>29</sup> Garvie (294) prefers the former to the latter and considers the two interpretations alternatives. It seems clear, however, that Orestes had made at least an implicit agreement with the god. Another option is to take the oaths to be those of Orestes and Pylades: D. Roberts, *Apollo and his Oracle in the Oresteia* (= *Hypomnemata* 78 [Göttingen 1984]) 46 with n.18.

and defined action, and action has validated speech. It seems that everything is on the right track.

When Orestes comes to describe his mother, however, words begin to fail him. This is a rhetorically effective ploy: the horror of Clytemnestra's crimes leaves him at a loss for the appropriate metaphor. What does she seem to be? Some kind of poisonous viper? One might well say so, considering her daring and injustice (994ff).<sup>30</sup> Yet Orestes' move into metaphorical expression cannot help but remind us of Cassandra. Both of them speak similarly of Clytemnestra. Cassandra was also at a loss: τί νιν καλοῦσα δυσφιλὲς δάκος τύχοιμ' ἄν; ἀμφίσβαιναν, ἢ Σκύλλαν (*Ag.* 1232f); compare Orestes' question: τί σοι δοκεῖ; μύραινά γ' εἶτ' ἔχιδν' ἔφν (*Ch.* 994). Both refer to Clytemnestra's reckless daring (τολμᾶ, *Ag.* 1231; τόλμης, *Ch.* 996). As Orestes continues, the parallels become even more striking. At line 997 he asks: τί νιν προσείπω, κἄν τύχῳ μάλ' εὖστομῶν; This formulation echoes Cassandra's question, quoted above, but the referent of νν is problematic. In the following lines it becomes clear that he is talking of the binding robe in which Agamemnon was trapped before he was struck down, and which he now displays. Yet earlier context seems to demand that the referent be Clytemnestra.<sup>31</sup> Conington and Verrall propose that a frenzied Orestes identifies Clytemnestra with the net. Garvie rejects this interpretation on the grounds that Orestes is still entirely sane at this point in the scene. The matter is further complicated by a possible parallel with *Ag.* 1114–17, where in her lyric frenzy Cassandra asks τί τόδε φαίνεται; ἢ δίκτυόν τι γ' "Αἰδου; ἀλλ' ἄρκυς ἢ ξύνευρος, ἢ ξυναιτία φόνου. Cassandra has a vision of the netlike robe and seems to identify it with Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's bedmate. Fraenkel (503ff) rejects this identification, even though he considers it grammatically stronger, because he thinks the prophetess is still struggling to understand what she sees and does not yet have the ability to interpret her visions. "The poet's conception is consistent," he says, "and does not admit of any break." Yet Cassandra's previous exclamations at *Ag.* 1107–11 establish clearly (pace Fraenkel) that she conceives Clytemnestra as the future murderess (note the description of

<sup>30</sup> Textual problems obscure the precise nature of Orestes' comparison. See Garvie 324ff.

<sup>31</sup> For a good summary of the difficulties and attempts to evade them, see Garvie 326f.

Agamemnon as bedfellow, ὁμοδέμνιον at 1108, preparing us for Clytemnestra as ξύνευνος at 1116). Cassandra's questions at 1109 (πῶς φράσω τέλος;) and 1114 (τί τόδε φαίνεται;) are to be read as expressions of horror, as a struggle to match speech and vision convincingly. This struggle is, as we have seen, characteristic of Cassandra, and it would not be uncharacteristic of riddling and oracular speech to see Clytemnestra as a net.

If we accept the identification of Clytemnestra with the net in *Agamemnon*, where does this leave us with regard to *Choe-phori*? Garvie's argument against the same identification at *Ch.* 997–1000 is formally similar to that of Fraenkel in the Cassandra scene. Fraenkel argued against the identification on the grounds that Cassandra was still too frenzied to make rational interpretation possible. Garvie argues that Orestes is still too sane to make frenzied interpretation possible. Both want an orderly progression from frenzy to rationality (in whatever direction). Surely this is too reductive a vision of the density of Aeschylean imagery (*cf.* Goldhill 202). Cassandra's frenzy masks an insight more powerful than that of anyone around her. Orestes makes no explicit reference to the onset of madness until *Ch.* 1021, but it is not unreasonable to see indications of mental disturbance earlier. Indeed, such disturbance may not only point to the madness to come, but also attest a deepening of insight. If Cassandra's function in *Agamemnon* is partly to act as a negative paradigm for Orestes, it is not surprising to find him echoing her mantic identifications as he attempts to deal with the implications of his actions. One great difference, as Orestes remarks, is that he does not know where his actions and mental state are leading him (οὐ γὰρ οἶδ' ὅπη τελεῖ, *Ch.* 1021), whereas Cassandra knows quite well. By using Cassandra as a paradigm, however, the audience can make its own prophecy. Just as Cassandra's disobedience led through frenzy to death, so Orestes' obedience will lead through frenzy to salvation. No παίων presides over Cassandra's speech (*Ag.* 1248), but Apollo, the god of healing, will defend Orestes at his trial.<sup>32</sup>

It is no accident, then, nor is it a sign of irremediable corruption or interpolation, that both Cassandra and Orestes use similar language to make a similar point about Clytemnestra. It is rather a sign of a thoroughgoing parallelism. Nor is this the only example. As Orestes begins to descend into madness, he

<sup>32</sup> For the word play on παίων see Denniston and Page 183f.

justifies himself by an appeal to Apollo. The god told him to act; the penalties for disobedience are unrepeatable. Why? Because “no one will reach the troubles with his bow” (*Ch.* 1033, tr. Garvie 339): that is, they are difficult to express. Cassandra too had compared herself to a bowman, but a successful one, at *Ag.* 1194 when she described the band of Furies that haunts the house of Atreus. We may think here of Apollo as the prophetic bowman whose shots never miss; that both of his creatures use the metaphor in a mantic context reflects their Apolline associations.<sup>33</sup> It is, however, a little troubling that Orestes chooses to use the metaphor in this particular context. He says that he cannot name the penalties of disobedience, but has already done so earlier in the play (*Ch.* 269–96). A natural reluctance to dwell on the possibility of punishment by Apollo has been cited as the reason for this omission, as well as the playwright’s desire not to repeat an earlier passage, and both of these reasons are plausible (Garvie 339). There is an additional possibility. Orestes’ inability to find the right words may correspond to the onset of madness. Cassandra’s inspired words hit the mark. When Orestes, under the influence of Apollo, is calm and clear about his upcoming task he too can be an accurate bowman. But in the aftermath of Clytemnestra’s murder Apollo cannot free Orestes from the pursuit of his mother’s Furies. He must flee to Delphi to regain clarity and protection. Only after purification will he be able to master his own speech again (*Eum.* 276–79). In any case, how could Orestes, as he is driven into madness and exile, articulate the madness and exile with which Apollo threatened him? The coincidence of the threat and the current situation would seem insane. It is this collision of punishments that partly constitutes Orestes’ insanity, this seeming equivalence of the father’s and the mother’s Furies. Apollo has posed himself as the solution to the incoherence. We should not forget, however, how deeply

<sup>33</sup> D. Sansone, *Aeschylean Metaphors for Intellectual Activity* (=Hermes Einzelschrift 35 [Wiesbaden 1975]) 7f, shows that Aeschylus frequently describes a speaker or his tongue as an archer and speech as an arrow. This certainly weakens the force of the coincidence. Yet I still find Orestes’ and Cassandra’s use of the metaphor resonant, as both speak of oracular pronouncements derived from Apollo (the bowman par excellence) and of the possibility of effectively expressing them in speech. For Apollo as bowman, see C. Faraone, *Talismans and Trojan Horses* (Oxford 1992) 59–64.

implicated he is in its construction.<sup>34</sup> Later it will appear that Delphi is not the end of Orestes' travels, but at this point in the trilogy Apollo is the only available answer.

As noted, Orestes, like Cassandra, is headed for a location described as μεσόμαλον, in this case, Delphi. The parallel is heightened by physical reminiscence. In *Agamemnon*, Cassandra carries a prophetic staff (σκήπτρα) and mantic fillets around her neck (μαντεῖα ... στέφη, 1265). It is these adornments she calls a mockery and strips from herself, realizing as she does so that the action is really Apollo's and that he leads her to a place of perverted sacrifice. When Orestes declares that he is on the way to Delphi, he has furnished himself with the branch of the suppliant, wreathed with white wool (ξὺν τῷδε θαλλῶ καὶ στέφει, *Ch.* 1035).<sup>35</sup> He too is moving towards a hearth (ἐστίαν, 1038), but for him the sacrifice will be one of purification, one that will allow him to flee the bloody history of his house (φεύγων τόδ' αἶμα κοινόν, *Ch.* 1038). Both Cassandra and Orestes are driven from the stage (θηλάτου/βοὸς δίκην, *Ag.* 1297f; ἐλαύνομαι, *Ch.* 1062);<sup>36</sup> both can no longer remain, but the ends that await them are very different.<sup>37</sup> The accoutrements of Apollo that Cassandra strips off are, then, structural counterparts to the tokens of Apollo's complicity carried by Orestes. She moves away from the god and Orestes moves towards him. The taking-up of the suppliant's branch corresponds to the rejection of the prophet's staff and emphasizes on a visual level the consequences of obedience and disobedience.

The visions of Orestes and Cassandra in their respective plays are described in like terms and make like impressions upon the chorus. The chorus tells both of them to cease speaking words of ill omen (εὐφημον ... κοίμησον στόμα, *Ag.* 1247; μηδ' ἐπιζευχθῆς στόμα φήμη πονερᾶ μηδ' ἐπιγλωσσῶ κακά, *Ch.*

<sup>34</sup> R. P. WINNINGTON-INGRAM describes in detail Apollo's alliance with the chthonian world: "Orestes and Apollo," in his *Studies in Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1983: hereafter 'Winnington-Ingram, *Studies*') 137-45.

<sup>35</sup> On the nature of the στέφος see Garvie 340. Orestes' entrance also recalls that of Clytemnestra at *Ag.* 1372, as long noted: cf. Taplin, *Stagecraft* 358f with bibliography.

<sup>36</sup> Note the descriptions of Orestes as the consecrate and sacrificial beast by the Furies at *Eum.* 304f.

<sup>37</sup> I would like to thank Mark Griffith for his observation that the direction of their exits reinforces this difference: Cassandra goes into the house; Orestes departs down an *eisodos*.



1044f). Both recoil in horror and fear (φόβος, *Ag.* 1306; μὴ φοβοῦ, *Ch.* 1052) before visions of dripping blood: in Cassandra's case the blood-dripping breeze from the interior of the house (αἵματοσταγῆ, *Ag.* 1309), whereas for Orestes it is the Furies (κάξ ὀμμάτων στάζουσιν αἷμα, *Ch.* 1058). Both see things that the chorus does not see and does not, therefore, believe. Both are thought to be mentally disturbed (*Ag.* 1140, 1308; *Ch.* 1056). Just as Cassandra is whirled about and disturbed by her prophecies (πόνος στροβεῖ ταρασσών, *Ag.* 1215f), so the chorus asks Orestes what semblances whirl him about (στροβοῦσιν, *Ch.* 1052), what disturbance (ταραγμός, *Ch.* 1056) has fallen upon his mind.<sup>38</sup> Both affirm the reality of their visions and call upon Apollo for aid. In their agony, Cassandra and Orestes call for witnesses who will give meaning to their pain. The prophetess tells the chorus to be witnesses three times (*Ag.* 1185, 1196, 1317). Orestes demands it once of the Argives (in a corrupt passage: *Ch.* 1041), states once that the deadly robe is a witness for him of his mother's guilt (*Ch.* 1010), and, shortly after his entrance, expresses his intention that Helios, the sun, the father who sees all things, shall be a witness for him at his time of trial. We recall that Cassandra's last prayer was also to the sun, that she might in some way be remembered when vengeance was finally taken (*Ag.* 1323ff).<sup>39</sup> This prayer is never, of course, explicitly answered, yet the coincidence of the two prayers to the sun may insure that the audience, at least, acts as the witness that was required. Indeed, it is only the audience, one of the few constants between the first play and the second, that is in a position to be an effective witness for both Cassandra and Orestes. Only the audience can extract meaning from the parallel rôles of Orestes and Cassandra, using the parallels of vocabulary and situation discussed above. Only the audience can apply the lessons learned from Cassandra to the fate of Orestes.

One further echo of Cassandra by Orestes has long been noted. When Cassandra prophesies that an avenger will come, she predicts the return of a φονγὰς δ' ἀλήτης τῆσδε γῆς ἀπόξενος (*Ag.* 1282), an exile, a wanderer, one far from his own country. This characterization refers to Orestes in exile before his revenge. It is, as Fraenkel notes (596), "a frightful duplication"

<sup>38</sup> The echo of Cassandra's στροβεῖ (*Ch.* 1052) was noted by Fraenkel (559).

<sup>39</sup> On the problematic text see Fraenkel 617f; Denniston and Page 190.

that Orestes will end in exile after his deed as before (so Garvie 342f). Orestes underlines this duplication by precise verbal repetition: ἐγὼ δ' ἀλήτης τῆσδε γῆς ἀπόξενος (*Ch.* 1042).<sup>40</sup> What the commentators do not remark is that the parallel is not confined to a repetition of Cassandra's prophecy. Cassandra's life after her rejection of Apollo was miserable; she was mocked by friends who were enemies (*Ag.* 1272) and, like a wandering mendicant prophetess (φοιτὰς ὡς ἀγύρτρια, *Ag.* 1273), she endured being called a wretched beggar and a starveling (*Ag.* 1274; see Fraenkel *ad* 1272ff). This situation is a distant echo of Orestes'. In his case too, the distinction between *philoï* and *echthroï* breaks down. Both of them must wander and endure an unenviable reputation (καλουμένη, *Ag.* 1273; τάσδε κληδόνας, *Ch.* 1043). Given the difference in their situation, however, we can predict the happy ending for Orestes that we could not for Cassandra. Cassandra's wanderings (both mental and physical) were a result of playing Apollo false. Her torment will come to an end in a perverted sacrifice at a perverted Apolline hearth, that of the Atreidae. Orestes, on the other hand, has been true to Apollo. By the end of *Choephoroi*, he has realized that his wanderings cannot cease in Argos after his vengeance. Rather, he supposes that they will end with Apollo, who told Orestes to turn to no other hearth than his (οὐδ' ἐφ' ἐστίαν ἄλλην τραπέσθαι Λοξίας ἐφίετο, *Ch.* 1038f). The god does not impose Orestes' mental and physical wanderings (except for the trip to Delphi); they come from an external source, and one not validated by him (namely, Clytemnestra's Furies). Thus the final scene of *Choephoroi* both sketches the repetition of the misfortunes associated with the House of Atreus, and indicates that the pattern has undergone a change because of Orestes' obedience.

Orestes is not yet aware that Delphi is not the solution. Just as Aeschylus, at the beginning of the trilogy, set the action in a wide divine context (Zeus and his obscure moral plan for the world), so, at the end, he will broaden the divine scope, so that it is Athena and Zeus who finally resolve the problem of Orestes and the Furies through the mechanism of the polis (Winnington-Ingram, *Studies* 147–50). It is not my purpose here to discuss how satisfactory or successful we find Apollo and his morality to be. Scholars often note, and correctly so,

<sup>40</sup> Taplin, *Tragedy* 36, *Stagecraft* 360.

that he is a profoundly ambiguous figure.<sup>41</sup> Yet the limits of this ambiguity need to be carefully defined. If by ambiguity we mean that the god can be both cruel and kind, the term is useful. If, on the other hand, it implies that we should perceive his actions to be inconsistent or random, we misrepresent the evidence. Apollo casts a long shadow over *Choephoroi* and over sizeable portions of *Agamemnon* and *Eumenides*. He is the divine measure that evaluates the characters and their actions, and that measure is consistent throughout. It is beyond doubt that Apollo has the power to impose his will—or one might say, his interpretation—for the first two plays of the trilogy. Only in *Eumenides* does Athena impose a larger polis-oriented vision on the action, encompassing and superseding the Apolline perspective.

The parallels between Orestes and Cassandra, then, are both informative and misleading. Both Orestes and Cassandra enter into a compact with the god and can choose whether or not to live up to it. In both cases, disobedience brings (or would bring) disaster. The nature of their choices and (dis)obedience reflects one of the trilogy's major themes, the relationship between male and female. Cassandra stepped outside the limits of her natural rôle (as understood by Apollo, at least). As we shall learn at *Eum.* 657–61, the woman's rôle is to be the passive recipient of male desire and male seed. Cassandra would not fulfill this rôle for Apollo and was therefore cursed by him.<sup>42</sup> Her show of independence came to nothing; she remains at Apollo's disposal. Orestes, on the other hand, must choose to become active and male in order to obey Apollo's will. He must regain his patrimony and free Argos from the rule of the female (*Ch.* 302–05). Apollo desires that both his favorites obey him, but in each case their choice is whether to conform to the gender rôle that he and society have assigned.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> On the complexity of Apollo see e.g. Roberts (*supra* n.29) 56–70; Feichtinger 53; Goldhill (157f) also remarks on the paradox of Apollo's rôle and the divergence of scholarly evaluations to which it has given rise. Ambiguity is a central attribute of the god of prophecy.

<sup>42</sup> Admittedly, the case of Cassandra is somewhat unique, because she is involved in a divine/mortal liaison, rather than a purely mortal one. Yet she does on some level give her consent to the union.

<sup>43</sup> The rôle of gender in the *Oresteia* has been treated extensively. See especially R. P. Winnington-Ingram, "Clytemnestra and the Vote of Athena," in *Studies* 101–31; F. Zeitlin, "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the *Oresteia*," *Arethusa* 11 (1978) 149–84.

## III

My analysis suggests that the Cassandra scene has prophetic significance on two levels. Within *Agamemnon* it illuminates the past history of the curse on the House of Atreus and indicates its future workings. This is the function of Cassandra's speech. Yet Cassandra is also herself a sign: a structural rather than explicit prophecy. As such, she provides yet another moral and theological framework through which to read the events of *Choephoroi*. This reading is directed at the interpretive audience, not at the characters. The only possible exception to this is Apollo, who is a special case, as we would expect from a god associated with poetry and prophecy; in both these realms Apollo is the master of interpretation. In one sense, the interpreting presence of Apollo adds to the tragedy of familial vengeance a dimension of obedience to the will of the god.<sup>44</sup> As the trilogy progresses, we are drawn closer and closer to the unmediated presence of Apollo. In *Agamemnon* we have access to him chiefly through his wayward prophetess. As Cassandra has played him false, her words can only reflect the situation and cannot affect it. Apollo's vengeance is played out on his prophetess; he involves himself in the action at one remove.

In *Choephoroi* Apollo has two agents, Orestes and Pylades. Orestes acts in obedience to the god's will as well as in accordance with his own desires. The coincidence of divine and human desire allows the god a more effective presence. Divine command and human speech and action all work in harmony for a time.<sup>45</sup> The themes of persuasion, obedience, and interpretation that were so problematic in *Agamemnon* become less so. Orestes has no difficulty interpreting Clytemnestra's serpent dream to his own and the chorus' satisfaction. He judges the dream in such a way that it is συγκόλλως ("glued together" or "fitting exactly," *Ch.* 542), and the chorus chooses him as its diviner (τερασκόπον, *Ch.* 551).<sup>46</sup> Even though Clytemnestra's dream features the same density of metaphor (where humans

<sup>44</sup> Subsequently, of course, the more civilized values of Athena supersede both paradigms.

<sup>45</sup> At least until Orestes murders his mother and madness sets in.

<sup>46</sup> Roberts (*supra* n.29: 67) also draws the parallels between Cassandra's and Orestes' relationship to Apollo and his prophecies. See Goldhill (156) on Orestes' production of a coherent structure through interpretation.

are seen as animals) as Cassandra's visions, Orestes can interpret accurately, engender conviction, and persuade. Prior to the murder there is only one occasion in the play where this harmony threatens to break down. When Clytemnestra bares her breast to her son, he hesitates: as he stands sword in hand, the audience is reminded of the prophetic dream he interpreted so well—where he, as snake, drew blood from the same breast (Taplin, *Tragedy* 61). Yet when the breast, a symbol in his dream, is actually displayed before him, he must ask Pylades what to do. The impact caused by Pylades' first and only lines in the play has often been noted. When the silent third actor finally speaks, it is as if he is the very voice of Apollo.<sup>47</sup> He urges Orestes not to void the words of the god. This reminder is sufficient to put Orestes back on the path of correct interpretation: he *judges* that Pylades prevails (κρίνω, *Ch.* 903) and proceeds to kill his mother. Just as Cassandra resisted persuasion by Clytemnestra, so does Orestes; but whereas Cassandra's strength came from disobedience and results in a failure to interpret her, Orestes' resolve arises from obedience to the god. Congruence of speech and action is reinforced rather than undermined.

The final play of the trilogy brings our closest encounter with Apollo, as he appears in person to defend Orestes. In his capacity as a seer who never lies (μάντις ὧν δ' οὐ ψεύσομαι, *Eum.* 615), Apollo explains how Orestes killed her mother justly. Interpretation of human action is now entirely in the hands of the god; there is no room for equivocation or doubt (at least from his point of view). Apollo's voice, then, speaks with increasing clarity as the trilogy progresses. We begin with the prophetess of the god who has cut herself off from him; she is difficult to understand and to persuade, difficult to interpret. In the second play we see the prophetic voice of the god at work in the actions of Orestes and especially in the speech of Pylades, whose quasi-oracular pronouncement suffers no refusal and admits of no misinterpretation. Finally, Apollo appears and attempts to lay all doubts to rest. In each play, the voice of Apollo is the voice of the third actor.<sup>48</sup> Unexpected and

<sup>47</sup> K. G. Müller, *Dissertations on the Eumenides of Aeschylus* (London 1853) 47; so also (among others) Knox (*supra* n.1) 42; Taplin, *Tragedy* 106.

<sup>48</sup> On Apollo as the third actor in the *Eumenides*, see Knox (*supra* n.1) 41. If the tritagonist was the same through the entire trilogy, the relationship between the three 'voices' of Apollo would be even more marked.

obscure when delivered through Cassandra, this voice becomes more comprehensible as the trilogy progresses. Aeschylus' stagecraft mirrors this revelation. If Apollo does indeed fade from the scene at the end of *Eumenides*, having seen the successful completion of his scenario of the action (punishment of wayward women, re-establishment of the authority of the male), it is a signal that, once clarified and seen in all its shortcomings, this scenario of personal vendetta can be replaced by one of the justice of the city.<sup>49</sup>

Interpreting the engagement of Apollo with the dramatic action of the trilogy in this way allows an enlightening perspective, based on Apollo's rôle as a seer who gives and interprets signs. The favorites of the god (whether or not they are seers) are endowed with paradigmatic force. That is, they are themselves signs of the will of the god, signs that we the audience must interpret correctly if we wish to attain an accurate understanding of the action. We interpret this "structural prophecy" by recognizing a pattern of action that is not accessible even to the characters. Cassandra comes closest to preceiving this pattern and her place in it, but even her understanding is incomplete. She sees her death as incidental, and it is ignored when vengeance is finally achieved. This is because the characters in the plays are preoccupied with the cycle of family vengeance; it requires a heightening of perspective to see that other issues (such as keeping one's word to a god) are involved.

We have seen that Cassandra's punishment is in fact a reification of the implication of her lie to Apollo. It is no coincidence that Apollo's threats to Orestes can be similarly interpreted. Whatever Orestes does, he will be pursued by Furies. Apollo's contribution to this situation is to give his authority to the punishment that would be inflicted on Orestes by Agamemnon's spirit; when Orestes mentions this threat at the end of *Choephoroi*, he refers the penalty for disobedience only to the god, not to Agamemnon (1030-33). Orestes' potential punishment is a reification of the importance that Apollo (and Zeus) assign to the rôle of the father. Conversely, Apollo's sponsorship of Orestes guarantees the secondary importance of the mother.

<sup>49</sup> See Taplin, *Stagecraft* 395-407, for a discussion of the problems associated with Apollo's entrance and exit in the trial scene.

It is a commonplace that Greek tragedy is paradigmatic. The fates of the mythological characters serve as a kind of lesson for the citizens of the polis. I have argued that Apollo, the god of signs, and those he chooses to represent him emphasize this paradigmatic force in the *Oresteia*. I conclude by drawing attention to a final passage in *Choephoroi* where Orestes, in a prayer to Zeus, sums up this vision of himself as a sign. He asks Zeus to restore his house, and in doing so he engages in a sustained and oracular metaphor (*Ch.* 246–61): he and Electra are the children of an eagle father killed by a snake, and are now pressed by hunger. If Zeus allows the offspring of the eagle to perish, he will not be able to send persuasive signs (σήματα' εὐπιθῆ, *Ch.* 259) to mortals. The fortunes of the children of Agamemnon are assimilated to signs from the gods that can give lessons to men.<sup>50</sup> In order for the signs to be persuasive, the gods must live up to their commitments, just as mortals must. This reciprocal network of persuasion and trust informs the structure of the entire trilogy and allows us to give Cassandra, as well as Orestes, her due significance.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> For an extended explication of these lines, see Goldhill 133–35.

<sup>51</sup> I would like to thank June Allison, Mark Griffith, Andrea Nightingale, and David Schenker for their extensive and helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.