

ΑΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

The effect of Greek dramatic literature was many-sided so far as it concerns the various ways in which it indirectly affected medieval thought. The pilgrim fathers of the scientific imagination as it exists today are the great tragedians of ancient Athens, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides. Their vision of fate, remorseless and indifferent, urging a tragic incident to its inevitable issue, is the vision possessed by science. Fate in Greek tragedy becomes the order of nature in modern thought.

A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*

THE WATCHMAN'S SPEECH

1. Lines 38-9

Let us begin with the words that close the Watchman's speech, the opening speech of the play: *ὡς ἐκὼν ἐγὼ/ μαθουσιν αὐδῶ κού μαθουσι ληθομαι* ('My words intentionally speak to the initiated, and pass by the uninitiated.'). This recalls Jesus' words in the deeply esoteric Gnostic Gospel of St. Thomas: 'Whoever has ears to hear should hear'. Aeschylus may explicitly be indicating that we should seek esoteric content in the words that have gone before. What might this content be?

2. Lines 1-7

To return to the opening of the speech. The Watchman is complaining of his year-long vigil on the roofs of Argos. The word *αγκαθεν* has provoked much debate. Deniston and Page noted that *αγκαθεν* as used in *Eumenides* 80—its only other occurrence in Aeschylus—means 'in your arms', in the context of holding an image in the arms; while Hermann specified that *αγκων* means not only the elbow but the crook of the arm within the elbow. Aeschylus qualifies *αγκαθεν* with *κυνοσ δικην*, 'dog-like'. Fraenkel interprets it thus: "The Watchman (like the watchdog) lies as it were thrust forward 'into his arms', with the upper part of his body between them."

Fraenkel goes on to quote Maguire:

'the watchman is lying flat on his elbows, and in this position he is like a dog in the act of watching some particular object with his head on his paws. In this position Watchman with the least trouble has the widest look-out. ... The simile is exact both in attitude and purpose, as both the man and the dog are watching, and have their heads between their forelimbs'

Certainly; but we may also imagine the dog propped on his forelegs, with his head raised in alertness. The image that now is irresistibly brought to mind—bearing in mind our hypothesis as to the esoteric nature of *Agamemnon*—is the Sphinx, which has stared out through millenia in silence from the Egyptian Giza precinct at the skies. Fraenkel acutely notes that "*κοιμῶμενος* is almost the

antithesis of φρουρα, and the combination of the two is a kind of oxymoron, like νυκτιπλανκτος ευνη in 12, 13". The customary meaning of κοιμασθαι is 'to sleep'. Denniston and Page deny that this is its sense here, preferring to interpret the Watchman as 'lying abed without sleeping'; but 'sleeping' would on the contrary be a participle highly appropriate to the Sphinx. The second of Fraenkel's oxymora can similarly be explained, as we shall see.

Just as the Sphinx, the Watchman knows

αστρων ... νυκτερων ομηγυριν
και τους φεροντας χειμα και θερος βροτοις
λαμπρους δυναστας, εμπρεποντας αιθερι ...

Λαμπρους δυναστας has been read as referring to the constellations, the observation of the night skies having been of course the key method in the ancient world of judging the timing of seasons. However, along with the constellations, the heliacal risings of the great stars also performed this function, the most notable being the heliacal rising of Sirius in Egypt in July, which marked the beginning of the Egyptian calendar, and of the inundation of the Nile, the success or failure of which meant prosperity or famine in the coming year. Δυναστης of course would aptly describe Regulus; and it is of the highest relevance here that the Persians named Regulus as one of their four 'Royal' stars, along with Aldebaran, Antares, and Fomalhaut, the dominance of which in the night sky being the basis of their rudimentary calendar, as markers of the seasons (Aldebaran at vernal equinox, Regulus at summer solstice, Antares at autumnal equinox, Fomalhaut at winter solstice). The Royal stars were mentioned by Zoroaster (c. 628 – c. 551 BCE). Wilamowicz was on the right track: "sirium, arcturum, pliadas dicit".

3. Lines 8-11

Aischylos' use of the phrase λαμπαδος το συμβολον is suggestive if inconclusive evidence, the beacon-blaze being a token of the fall of Troy, and equally a symbol of Regulus.

Here we come to the first expression of an abiding theme of the *Oresteia* as allegory, namely the supersession of the old night-gazing Goddess-oriented religions of Egypt and the Near and Middle East by the Athenian Apollonian miracle. In ωδε γαρ κρατει/ γυναικος ανδροβουλον ελπίζον κεαρ the word γυναικος has been taken as referring as Clytemnaestra. However, it should be read in terms of the allegory as meaning the Great Goddess. It is a woman who rules; and her heart is dominant like a man's, and fanciful. There is note of contempt here: on the Watchman's part, on the literal plane, for Clytemnestra; on Aischylos' part, on the plane of allegory, for the Goddess-dominated world of old, which he had helped defeat, physically, on the plain of Marathon, and now continued to combat, philosophically and dramatically, in the *Oresteia*.

4. Lines 12-15

The Watchman describes how he cannot allow himself to drift off into sleep, evoking as he does two aspects of that notional sleep, namely its dreams, and its everlastingness:

ευτ' αν δε νυκτιπλαγκτον ενδροσον τ' εχω
ευνην ονειροις ουκ επισκοπουμενην
εμην, φοβος γαρ ανθ' υπνου παρασταται,
το μη βεβαιως βλεφαρα συμβαλειν υπνωι.

Fraenkel notes that νυκτιπλαγκτον ευνην is almost an oxymoron. How can the Watchman be ‘night-wandering’ when he is lying down like a dog? Both νυκτιπλαγκτον and επισκοπούμενην (it is notable that the dreams would appear from above, rather than from within) serve to evoke, in truth, in the mind of the *connoscento*, a picture of the night sky with its ever-revolving company of stars, constellations, and planets, the dedicated and precise observation of which over tens of millenia was a preoccupation of the pre-Hellenic world. The Watchman/Sphinx does indeed ‘wander’ relative to the motion of the skies.

The Watchman of course remains awake, never descending into the sleep of which he speaks. However, it is enough for the allegory that his words suggest a picture of the Sphinx in its eternal repose.

5. Lines 16-19

Αειδεν η μινυρεσθαι – Does not ‘hum’ seem supererogatory here? ‘Sing’ would surely have been enough to make the point. The interpretation of ‘sing’ and ‘hum’ which would be wholly consistent with the allegory is that they are a reference to the Music of the Spheres. The situation could be that Aischylos wanted to use μινυρεσθαι alone, the better to describe the wordlessness of the Music of the Spheres, but felt constrained to add αειδεν in the interests of plausibility on the literal plane.

The Music of the Spheres was a Pythagorean concept, and we might expect the Watchman, if our theory of the astronomical allegory of *Agamemnon* is correct, to express unease about its evocation here. In fact, if he did not, the inconsistency of its mention would deal the theory a severe blow. Yet in the following words, which the literal plane demands to refer to Clytemnestra’s unfaithfulness, the Watchman expresses precisely the discomfort which the allegory would demand: κλαιω τωτ’ οικου τουδε συμφοραν στενων,/ ουχ ως τα προσθ’ αριστα διαπονουμενου (‘I weep and groan for the events that have overtaken this house,/ since its standards of conduct have fallen so far from the past’). It is notable that he does not specify here what those events might be. There could hardly be a more apt reproof given by a traditionalist to a fad of the present.

6. Lines 26-30

Here is a most important piece of evidence. The Watchman signals sharply to Clytemnestra to rise from her bed and begin the cries of jubilation in the city. The word which Aischylos chose to describe her rising has provoked much comment. *Επαντέλλειν* (27) has the primary meaning of ‘to rise like a heavenly body’. The scholia has *ώς επί άστρον ή σελήνης*; but Denniston disapproved: ‘but it is a disagreeable conceit, that Clytemnestra should be asked to ‘rise’ like the stars or the moon.’ Fraenkel judged it likewise:

Similarly here it is quite arbitrary to suppose an astronomical sense. In Aeschylus this sense is not inseparable from the word, as may be seen from *Cho.* 282, where *επαντέλλειν* is used just like *αντέλλειν* in *Sept.* 535. I cannot therefore agree with Keck: ‘the queen is, so to speak, the sun rising upon the house’, [and] Headlam: ‘εὐνής επαντ. is a reverent phrase, suggested by a comparison with the rising of the sun or stars’, [and] A.S.F. Gow, *Journ. Hell. Stud.* xlviii, 1928, 137 n. 12, who renders it ‘dawns’ ... In this passage, when the λαμπτήρ has just been addressed as νυκτός ήμερήσιον φάος πηφάυσκων, it would be most inappropriate in the next breath to compare the queen with the rising sun.

Verrall, though, was content to make the point anent *επορθηρίαζειν*: ‘“to sing as a morning song” (ορθηριος), pursuing the train of thought suggested by ήμερήσιον φάος, επαντείλεσαν etc...’ Keck, Headlam, Gow, and Verrall, then all mention the sun in connexion with the Watchman’s *επαντείλεσαν*. In fact, this would be just what the allegory as we have outlined it would demand, for Clytemnestra is indeed in this scheme the dawning sun, soon to engulf Regulus to give the

impression that the ‘Royal’ star has swelled to solar size (Aegisthos = star fully engulfed by sun) on this one astonishing day of the year, of its heliacal rising. Επαντελλειν is perhaps not the perfect word in a poetic sense here, on the literal plane, but it was close enough for Aischylos to use it, without jarring, to suggest the solar identification of the queen.

7. Lines 32-33

τὰ δεσποτῶν γὰρ εὖ πεσόντα Θήσομαι
τρις ἔξ·βαλούσης τῆσδέ μοι φρυκτορίας

The dice metaphor is an unusual one: ‘The fortune that has fallen well for the leaders I will score also as my own, the beacon having cast a treble six for me’. Agamemnon’s good fortune is in making his way safely home, the Watchman’s in now being released from his task. Yet for those aware of the significance of the die symbol in the ancient astronomy, a deeper possibility offers itself.

Santillana and Dechend produce much evidence for the Rig Vedas’ important place among the ur-myths, secreting an astronomical dimension, from which much of later world myth evolved. For example, the number of stanzas in the Rig Vedas is 10,800; the number of syllables, 432,000. The former quantity, together with the number 108, occurs insistently in Indian tradition; and it is also the number which Heraclitus gave for the duration of the Aiōn, according to Censorinus (*De die natali* 18). The Mahabharata gives 4,320,000 years as the total span of the cosmic cycle of four world ages, while 432,000 is exactly the number of warriors that issue from Valhalla on the final day in the Icelandic *Eddas*, as well as the total number of years lived by the kings in the list of Berossos, the Babylonian poet who wrote in Alexandria in the 3rd century BCE. 25,900 years is the length of one complete precessional cycle; and this number divided by 60 (the Sumerian *sošs*, the basis of their sexagesimal system, which we still use to measure circles and time) is equal to 432. There is a vast web of such correspondences in the literatures of the ancient world, which ultimately point to the science of the precession of the equinoxes at their heart.

In the Rig Vedas, ‘the gods themselves are said to go around like *ayas*, that is, casts of dice ... [and in RV 10.34.8] the dice are called *vrata*, i.e., an organized “gang” under a king...’.¹¹ The name of the Indian world-ages has been taken from the idiom of dicing. Further, throwing of the dice was associated with movement of the pieces in several types of proto-chess:

Thus, the dice forced the hands of the chess player—a game called ‘planetary battles’ by the Indians, and in 16th-century Europe still called “Celestial War, or Astrologer’s Game”, whereas the Chinese chessboard shows the Milky Way dividing the two camps.²

The principle underlying games of this sort is most plausibly that the pieces on the board represent the great stars and constellations, which change their positions according to the rules of precession, which is governed by number (the dice). Einstein seems to have had an uncanny awareness of this, as evidenced by his statement that ‘God does not play dice with the universe’.

Fraenkel is indeed certain that the reference is to this kind of game:

¹ Giorgio de Santillana and Hilda von Dechend, *Hamlet’s Mill* (David R Godine, Boston, 1977), 161.

² *Ibid*, 161-2

The reference is to the game (or perhaps more correctly to one of the group of games...) which consists in a combination of dice-throwing and board-game: the two players move their counters on a board, but the extent of each is determined by a previous casting of the dice.

It would be wholly consistent with the allegory outlined here if the dice of lines 32-33 indicated as symbol the principle of stellar kingship. Finally, we should note that Aischylos does not say 'leader' in the singular (and only one king has made his way home), or 'my leader(s)', but simply 'the leaders': which we might expect if he had been intending primarily to portray a scene of the night sky, with its company stars of a high magnitude of brightness.

Later, in the death scene of the king, we shall note the specifically astronomical symbolism of the net (αμφιβληστρον) in the ancient world.

8. Lines 34-35

γένοιτω δ' οὖν μολόντος εὐφιλῆ χέρα
ἄνακτος οἴκων τῆδε βαστάσαι χερί.

'And so may it befall me to uphold the welcome hand of the approaching king of the city in this my hand'. Βαστάζειν (aor. inf. βαστάσαι) bears the meanings 'to lift, lift up, raise... to bear, carry support... to hold in one's hands'. Thus Fraenkel:

βαστάζειν means not a desultory touching, grasping, or taking hold of an object (here of the hand and forearm) but the holding and poising of it, e.g. for careful examination, as in Homer φ 405 ἐπεὶ μέγα τόξον ἐβάστασε καὶ ἶδε πάντη ... This is not the same as 'shaking hands' ...

Yet Fraenkel still does not find a place for the 'uplifting' quality of the verb. Aischylos is inviting us to imagine the Watchman holding up the king's hand before him, in a prolonged and deliberate way, which yet does not seem quite right. However, βαστάζειν would in truth be perfectly fitted poetically to describe the slow rising of Regulus before and over the outstretched paws of the Sphinx. Again, the word Aischylos chose was not the ideal choice on the literal plane, but was close enough to enable its use to portray the scene on the plane of allegory without jarring the sensibilities of the audience.

9. Lines 35-39

τὰ δ' ἄλλα σιγῶ, βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσση μέγας
βέβηκεν · οἶκος δ' αὐτός, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι,
σαφέστατ' ἄν λέξειεν · ὡς ἐκῶν ἐγὼ
μαθοῦσιν αὐδῶ κού μαθοῦσι λήθομαι.

'For the rest I am silent, a great ox stands on my tongue. As for this house, if it had speech it would speak plainly. Intentionally I speak to the initiated and the to the uninitiated say nothing.'

All of these three concluding sentences are clearly wholly consistent with the allegory outlined here: the silence being of course a characteristic of the Sphinx; the tale secreted in the house being the identification of Regulus and the beacon; the Watchman's last words being an indication last words that he has speaking for those 'in the know'.

CHORUS OF ELDERS

10. Lines 40-275

Aischylos' first task was to identify the beacon announcing the fall of Troy with Regulus; and this he accomplished in the Watchman's speech. His second task was now to identify the returning king Agamemnon with that same star; and to this end he returns the action to square one, to reset the allegory.

This chorus is the longest in Greek tragedy, extending all the way to Clytemnestra's entrance at 276. In what way did Aischylos intend it to serve the allegory? Its significance lies—and this may be a barrier to those used to the traditional approach to the drama—not in what the Elders actually say, but rather in the symbolism of the duration of their speech, and of their mere presence on stage: for there can be no doubt at all that they represent the immensely ancient visible bodies—stars and constellations and planets—of the night sky.

Dawn is approaching however, on the plane of allegory as well as of the action; and we shall now see how Aischylos approached its description as allegory. The Chorus pays homage to the queen, who is now evidently visible: ἤκω σεβίζων σόν, Κλυταιμήστρα, κρατος ('I am come to honour your sovereignty, O Clytemnestra'). These words are not wholly consistent with the sense implied, that the Chorus were in fact responding to an order from the queen. Fraenkel takes up this point:

The coryphaeus says politely: 'I am come here to show my respect for your sovereignty.' He does not say outright: 'because you have given orders that we should appear here in front of the palace', but that is probably the sense of the words... It is a natural assumption that Clytemnestra sent round a messenger to inform the Elders that she wished to see them and give them information at the same time as she made arrangements for the offering of sacrifices in the town (87 ff.). This assumption is not contradicted by the words (263) οὐδέ σιγώσει φθόνος, which need be nothing more than an expression of especial politeness. The assumption that the old men appeared of their own volition to ask the reason for the sacrifice in the town which the queen has decreed is less probable, if not actually impossible. In this case also the sense of 258 would be: 'Your κρατος (i.e. your royal position, in virtue of which you have ordained the sacrifices) has caused my coming.'

Here then is yet another instance of a disharmony on the literal plane, which is on the other hand thoroughly harmonious on the plane of allegory. For the words as the playwright has written them are wholly appropriate to a description of the stars of the night sky paying homage to the dawning sun.

Five lines on is another inconsistency. The queen on the literal plane has drawn the Elders here by order, to hear her announcement. Yet here they admit the possibility of her silence: κλύοιμ' ἄν εὐφρων: οὐδέ σιγώσει φθόνος ('then graciously let us hear; or with no ill will if you remain silent') (275). Yet silence is of course a quality of the sun; and Clytemnestra will go on to remain silent throughout a large portion of the consequent speeches: an absence over which much critical ink has been spilt, yet which is entirely consistent with her role in the allegory. Notable here is the fact that the coryphaeus does not say 'or if you remain silent': but it is almost as if her speech and her silence are one and the same, which is impossible on the plane of the literal drama, but correct on the plane of Aischylos' true intention.

EPEISODION I

11. Lines 276-362

The significance of this episode is to be found, again, in the duration of speeches and the presence of the queen on the stage. Clytemnestra's physical appearance on stage, for the first time here, portrays as allegory the 'false dawn', when the night sky lightens somewhat as the dawning sun approaches the horizon, but before it has actually begun to peep above it. This interpretation is entirely consistent with the sequence of the action, for we know that in the episode to follow the Herald will represent the aura of Regulus as it first becomes visible prior to the dawning of the star itself (arrival of Agamemnon).

Clytemnestra begins with a four line speech announcing her arrival. There follows a dialogue with the chorus, where they exchange single lines over a span of thirteen lines in all. This paints as allegory the ever-so-gradual interpenetration of the luminous bodies of the night sky by the rays of the sun, which is yet to dawn. Aischylos will employ precisely the same technique to describe the appearance of the first premonitory rays of the as yet invisible Regulus (543-55). This need not be the precise moment of dawning on the literal plane—we might expect the king's arrival rather to coincide with it—yet Clytemnestra does indeed, significantly for the allegory, make this identification in her τῆς νῦν τεκούσης φῶς τόδ' εὐφρόνης λέγω.

The queen now describes for the chorus the transmission of the signal flame from one beacon to another, beginning at Mt. Ida in Troy, and ending at Mt. Arachneus, visible from Argos. On the plane of allegory, however, the beacons of course blaze contemporaneously, for they represent stars of the night sky. This gives a beautiful explanation to a line which has puzzled the commentators: νικᾷ δ' ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος δραμῶν. ('He wins who runs first and last').

The Chorus now intermit the two longer speeches of Clytemnestra with a short three-line expression of wonder, and a plea to her to go into more detail about the beacons. The brevity of their interjection indicates that the false dawn is now established. Interestingly, Clytemnestra now makes no attempt whatsoever to answer their request. Wherever there is such a nonsequitur or awkwardness on the literal plane we look toward the allegory for enlightenment. Aischylos clearly intended the queen's choice of subject to suggest that the primary significance of her speech does not reside in the plane of action.

STASIMON I

12. Lines 367-493

This is again a long speech by the Chorus. It precedes the arrival of the Herald just as the opening anapests and parodos preceded the first appearance of the queen, and its purpose is the same, to suggest the steady immensity of the night sky with its company of luminous bodies.

Fraenkel makes an important observation anent the epode which closes this stasimon, which yet has broader relevance for the *Oresteia*. (We have noted it already in the Watchman's speech, 11). So

many times Aischylos has the opportunity to use the name 'Clytemnestra', yet substitutes instead a non-specific noun:

The language of the old citizens is here very acrimonious: the fact that they never say 'Clytemnestra' or 'the queen' outright, but speak, in thinly veiled language like a malcontent though powerless opposition, about woman's government, woman's orders which are willingly accepted, and woman's speech, makes their words none the more innocent. Everything is tuned to one and the same note ; the repetition at such close intervals of γυναικός, θῆλυς, γυναικογήρυτον, and the pointed antitheses all serve to express passionate disapproval.

'Passionate disapproval' indeed, of the Elders here, but ultimately of Aischylos for the night-worshipping Goddess-dominated religions of Egypt, the Near East, and Persia.

There is still a further problem with this epode, for which the allegory provides a solution. Verrall's translation will suffice to give its tenor:

First Elder The beacon hath spoken fair, and the report is spreading swiftly among the folk ; but hath it spoken true? Who knows? It is indeed miraculous,—if not false.

Second Elder How can one be so childish, so crazed of wit, to fire with hope at a sudden message of flame, and risk the pain of altered news?

Third Elder With woman's impulse it is natural to give indulgent credit before the proof.

Fourth Elder She is too ready of belief, a boundary quickly passed and encroached upon ; but quick to pass away is the rumour that women cry.

Here is Fraenkel:

For the feelings expressed in 475 ff. [481 ff. Verrall], however natural in themselves, seem to be quite inconsistent with the tenor of the bulk of the stasimon, which is based on the certainty of the conquest of Troy ... The moment which the poet has chosen for the utterance of the Elders' doubts was dictated to him by considerations of dramatic structure, that is to say the need for an effectual foil to the Herald's speech.

'By considerations of allegoric structure' would be more precise, for the Elders' expression of their doubts will be essential for the function of the otherwise problem-riddled speech beginning τάχ' εισόμεσθα (494 ff.), —the last of the epode before the Herald's opening speech—which will be, as we shall now see, to call into question the validity of events on the literal plane. Are they what they seem to be, or something else entirely?

13. Lines 494- 507

These fourteen lines of the Chorus immediately precede the Herald's first speech. Here is the first problem therein (498-503):

κήρυκ' ἀπ' ἀκτῆς τόνδ' ὀρῶ κατάσκιον
κλάδοις ἐλαίας. μαρτυρεῖ δέ μοι κάσις
πηλοῦ ξύνουρος διψία κόνις τάδε,
ὡς οὔτ' ἄναυδος οὔτε σοι δαίων φλόγα
ὔλης ὀρείας σημανεῖ καπνῷ πυρός,
ἀλλ' ἢ τὸ χαίρειν μᾶλλον ἐκβάξει λέγων —

Verrall comments:

Yon herald comes from the shore, as I see by his shade of olive boughs ; and the thirsty dust, sister of the mire and neighbour, testifies to me this, that, not with dumb signals of fire-smoke, burning you a bonfire of wood upon a hill, but with a plain word, he will either explicitly bid us rejoice or—etc.—
The riddle of this passage awaits solution. The question is, What *dust* is meant, and how does it show that the herald brings some important news which will presumably throw light upon the recent report? The conventional answers may be divided thus: (1) the dust is that which the herald raises ; this shows his haste and hence the importance of his news : (2) the dust and the mud are upon the garments of the herald (the mud being on his shoes and the dust on his clothes they are ‘neighbours’ or ‘contiguous’) ; they show that he has come a long way and so suggest that he has come from Troy (Paley). But neither of these is tolerable. As to (1), it is ridiculous to say ‘I see that man is in haste, *because he makes a dust*’). Even supposing that one man running would make a noticeable dust, and that the herald is in violent haste (which there is no reason to suppose), it would still be absurd to cite the dust as evidence of the visible fact that he is running. Moreover this explanation takes no notice at all of the description ‘sister of the mire and neighbour’, which is set aside as a mere flourish but, if it has nothing to do with the subject, should rather be called mere nonsense. Paley’s explanation (2) is an honest attempt to meet this last difficulty, but we need scarcely dwell on it.

The dust represents in truth, as we have noted, the aura of Regulus which is now invading the dark of the night sky from below the horizon. It is κάσις πηλοῦ ζύνουρος because the aura is contiguous with the darker sky above and surrounding it. And what of κατάσκιον κλάδοις ἐλαίας ? Κατάσκιος was commonly used of a hat or headpiece. Fraenkel quotes Verrall, that ‘The herald is wreathed, as the ship itself was wreathed, in sign of gratitude to the gods for the safe conclusion of a voyage’, but himself finally admits ‘I do not know of any really cogent explanation’. Aischylos was faced with a technical challenge, in that the Chorus must see the approach of the herald, whose physical body is yet not required, at this stage and in this speech, by the allegory. He answered it by making the herald visible by his crown of the ‘young slips of olive’, the correlate on the plane of allegory perhaps being olive trees down towards the shore over which the star is about to rise.

Intriguingly, Peile suggests a possible translation for καπνῷ πυρός of ‘splendour of fire’ or ‘gleam of fire’, which of course would be perfectly apt for the aura:

Καπνῷ πυρός , Blomfield translates *ignis splendoris*, but gives no authority for this interpretation, which is both more spirited in itself, and more in character with the context. A more recent editor of the Agamemnon ... notices a similar use of *Aura* amongst the Latins: e.g. *luminis auras* Virg. Georg. ii. 47. Aen. vii. 660. *auri per ramos aura refulsit*, Aen. vi. 204. which Servius interprets *splendor*, comparing Hor. Od. ii. 8, 24. *tua ne retardet aura maritos*. The etymology, we may add, of κάπνος (*καπτω* or *καπω*, *το πνεω*, whence *καπος* and *καπνος*, Eustath.) favours the metaphorical translation, *gleam of fire, gleam of gold, beauty, &c.*

Verrall’s gnomic judgement that ‘sister of the mire and neighbour... should be called mere nonsense’ if irrelevant to the subject, could well apply also to ‘whether, burning brands of mountain olive, he speechless signals by smoke of fire’. We might well think it implausible to say the least that the herald, having alighted from the ship, would be content to convey his news by smoke-signals, instead of in person. Like the dust Aischylos has him raise, it is a tenuous connexion, and the whole scenario fails by quite a margin to gel. Either the playwright has let his grip slip temporarily from the tiller, or we are missing the point of these lines. Αναυδος and καπνῷ πυρός would on the other hand be perfectly appropriate to Regulus, if we think of the smoke-fire conjunction as allegorically equivalent to the aura-burning star. But let us leave our conclusion in abeyance for a short time.

Fraenkel quotes Housman: ‘σοι cannot be right ; for it is as certain as anything about Greek plays can be certain that Clytaemestra is not now on stage.’³ Housman’s confidence may be misplaced here; for it would be entirely consistent with the allegory if the queen had remained all the time in silence on stage since her first appearance at 276 , as the premonitory aura of the rising sun, which after all does not fade once it has become perceptible. One looks anew at ἄναυδος in the same line in light of this consideration.

ἀλλ’ ἢ τὸ χαίρειν μᾶλλον ἐκβάξει λέγων (‘but that he would rather express his greeting by speaking it’). Let us look now at the line which follows: τὸν ἀντίον δὲ τοῖσδ’ ἀποστέγω λόγον (‘The opposite word to these I keep to myself’). It follows from everything we have noted thus far about this speech that τὸν ἀντίον λόγον is an esoteric reference to its allegorical dimension, which is the polar opposite to the facts on the literal plane. The ‘dust’ is in fact light, and it shows that the Herald will in truth remain silent, like smoke shed by a fire, and will not give his salutation by speech. The following, antepenultimate, line of the speech is now seen to describe beautifully the increase of the aura until the ultimate good—Regulus itself—should appear: εὖ γὰρ πρὸς εὖ φανεῖσι προσθήκη πέλοι.

The speech closes with:

ὅστις τὰδ’ ἄλλως τῆδ’ ἐπεύχεται πόλει,
αὐτὸς φρενῶν καρποῖτο τὴν ἁμαρτίαν.

Καρποῖτο (καρπω, ‘I bear as fruit’, ‘I reap the fruits of’) is a remarkable choice of word here. It of course could be ironical, as so often in this sort of figure of speech; but it does accord beautifully with the positive nature of ἁμαρτίαν—again, the esoteric meaning being the polar opposite of its literal meaning—on the plane of allegory. Whoever ‘errs’ in supposing a different scenario will reap rich rewards indeed.

To return to the beginning of the speech, which we are now in a position correctly to interpret (494-497):

Τάχ’ εἰσόμεσθα λαμπάδων φαεσφόρων
φρυκτωριῶν τε καὶ πυρός παραλλαγᾶς,
εἴτ’ οὖν ἀληθεῖς εἴτ’ ὄνειράτων δίκην
τερπνὸν τόδ’ ἐλθὼν φῶς ἐφήλωσεν φρένας·

The opening juxtaposition of three nouns and one adjective all in the genitive has exercised the minds of the critics. Verrall is certain: ‘The accumulation of synonyms has a certain contemptuous effect. “We shall not depend on that sort of intelligence any more.”’ Perhaps, but the syntactical challenge remains, as recognised by Fraenkel, and here by Deniston:

...but the three genitive nouns seem clumsily joined and redundant in sense. Better to take εἰσόμεσθα as governing both the gen. λαμπάδων (‘We shall soon know about the light-bearing torches’) and the accus. παραλλαγᾶς (‘the relays of beacon-watchings and fire’). So Conington, quoted by Fraenkel, who however finds it ‘too laboured to be convincing’ ; with this judgement we may well agree, and we ought perhaps therefore mark the text as corrupt.

³ Housman, *J. Phil.* Xvi, 1888, 265.

Conington's suggestion in truth sorts closely with the allegory: λαμπάδων φαεσφόρων being a beautiful term for the great stars; while φρυκτωριῶν τε καὶ πυρός παραλλαγῆς, using—perfectly appropriately here—a different construction with εἰσόμεισθα, portrays the objects, symbols of the great stars, on the literal plane. They are different in construction, but ultimately one in esoteric meaning.

Lines 3 and 4 of this speech above (εἴτ' οὖν ἀληθεῖς ...) beautifully serve the allegory, our eye being once again directed to seek out the opposite sense: in this case, the true (ἀληθεῖς) scenario lying in 'the joyous light that has come to beguile our minds as in a dream'. For it is when we dwell on the beacons in the visual imagination that their symbolism becomes stark.

EPEISODION II

14. Lines 508-686

Let us review in sequence the structure of this episode:

1. A 35 line speech by the Herald
2. A 13 line sequence of single stichomythia (Herald and Coryphaeus)
3. A 32 line speech by the Herald.
4. A 4 line speech by the Coryphaeus
5. A 28 line speech by Clytemnestra
6. A 5 line speech by the Coryphaeus
7. A 16 line sequence of double stichomythia (Herald and coryphaeus)
8. A 45 line speech by the Herald

There follows the second stasimon.

Here is another instance of the high-level macro structure of the drama—the mere presence of the actors on stage, and the length and timing of their speeches—yoked to the astronomical allegory.

In the previous speech we have seen that the aura of Regulus, now just beginning to invade the stary night from below the horizon, is linked to visual images which are independent of the person of the Herald. Here, however, it is the Herald himself who represents the aura. Thus does his opening speech flow straight from the final lines of the first stasimon. The first passage of stichomythia portrays, just as it does earlier with regard to the queen (aura of the sun producing the 'false dawn'), the very gradual invasion of the night sky by the aura of Regulus. Consistently, this passage is bookended by substantial speeches by the Herald. A lengthy speech by Clytemnestra is framed by the short speeches from the Chorus: the solar aura still a remarkable presence in the sky before the dawn proper, with the radiance of the stars now reduced in intensity. The double stichomythia (eight exchanges of double lines between the Herald and Chorus) indicates that the invasion is proceeding more quickly now, as Regulus itself approaches ever more closely its appearance. Finally the presence of the aura is asserted.

14.1 Herald's first speech

In the Herald's first speech (508-542), we note that the phrase he uses of Agamemnon, φῶς ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φέρων, 'bearing light in the darkness' (527), is of course perfectly suited to describe Regulus. Another suggestive phrase is αγωνιους θεους, '(I salute all) the gods in Assembly' (518), to which Fraenkel devotes a long exposition, dismissing 'gods of the market-place' and 'gods of assembly', as offered by other commentators, to arrive at the rendering given here. 'Gods in Assembly' would be an apt description of the great visible bodies of the night sky. The Herald's οὐ γάρ ποτ' μῆκον τῆδ' ἐν Ἀργεΐα ξθωνί/ θανῶν μεθέξειν φιλτάτου ταφου μερος, 'I never expected to have a share of a blessed tomb in this land of Argos' (511-12) would clearly be highly appropriate for the allegorical death to come, when aura and star alike will be engulfed by the dawning sun (Clytemnestra).

In the foregoing examples the balance is weighted evenly towards literal and allegorical planes. But consider these lines with which the Herald greets the city:

ἰὼ μέλαθρα βασιλέων, φίλαι στέγαι,
σεμνοί τε θᾶκοι, δαίμονης τ' ἀντήλιοι,
εἶ που πάλαι, φαιδροῖσι τοισίδ' ὄμμασι
δέχασθε κόσμῳ βασιλέα πολλῶ χρόνῳ.

Kennedy translates:

O thou the dwelling of our kings, beloved roof,
and holy seats, and ye, sun-facing deities,
if e'er of old, with these your eyes of happy cheer
in order due receive ye the long-absent king.

The principal meaning of μέλαθρον is in fact 'roof' or 'ceiling', the plural being commonly used of a dwelling (cf. tecta). Yet the primary meaning remains. And note the plural βασιλέων. Στέγαι is explicitly 'roofs'. The primary meaning of θᾶκος is 'a chair of office', and Homer uses it of 'a sitting in council' and hence 'a council'. Ἀντήλιοι, 'opposite the sun', is invariably translated as 'eastward-facing'; however, it can equally mean 'like the sun' (formed like ἀντίτηρος, Eur.). Verrall informs us that φαιδροῖσι means "bright both literally and in the common derived sense of 'glad'".

That is to say, the entire span of these four lines can translate naturally and without compulsion as referring to the night sky, the 'ceiling' or 'roof' with its 'holy seats of office' and 'sun-like deities' with 'bright eyes', immensely ancient, about to receive into their midst, on this one day of the year, Regulus, the king star.

14.2 First stichomythia

In the sequence of thirteen single line stichomythia which follows, the Herald's first line χαίρω. τεθνᾶναι δ' οὐκ ἀντερῶ θεοις (544) is notable. Fraenkel, while agreeing with Verrall's judgement that 'This line is hopeless', concludes that 'the sense in general is fairly clear all the same, the more so as 550 [555 Verrall: see below] is also related to this line: 'Yes, I do rejoice: and I would not refuse if the gods now decreed my death' [check]. This sentiment hearkens back to 511-512 and also forward to 555 (below). Verrall raises the intriguing possibility that χαίρω may function as an address to the dead, and quotes in support the farewell scene between Polyxena and Hecuba (Eur.

Hec. 426 ff). It is a remarkable thing to say; and it of course would be utterly apt for the death of the aura which is fast approaching.

Line 555 (coryphaeus) ὡς νῦν--τὸ σὸν δὴ--καὶ θανεῖν πολλὴ χάρις ('As you have well said, now would be a delightful time to die') would refer, in the allegory, to the coming death of the starry sky (Chorus of Elders) in the rays of the risen sun. We now see how the Herald's χαίρω (544), as an address to the dead, would find its place in this scenario: albeit the Chorus have one foot in the grave, without yet having as yet actually died. Certainly, death has an unusually high profile in this scene set at dawn, typically a time of optimism and new beginnings.

14.3 Herald's second speech

The significance of this speech, in which the Herald expatiates on the Argive host's suffering and privations in Troy, is to be found in its deliverance on stage, rather than details of its content. However, we may of course note here once again the central importance of fall Troy—as the decline of the constellation of Ursa Major together with Thuban (α Draconis), the pole star in the Classical era—in the astronomical system of the *Iliad*, as interpreted by Edna Leigh.

14.4 Coryphaeus' first speech

Here, the Coryphaeus' νικώμενος λόγοισιν οὐκ ἀναίνομαι (588) is harmonious both on the literal and allegorical planes, implying in the latter that the stars adjacent to the strengthening aura are being extinguished. The following line ἀεὶ γὰρ ἦβᾶ τοῖς γέρουσιν εὖ μαθεῖν ('for always it is a youthful thing for the old to learn well') suggests that the annual helical rising of Regulus, and renewal of the cycle, keeps these immensely ancient bodies forever young.

14.5 Clytemnestra's speech

This speech is rich with allegorical meaning. Here is Verrall's translation of the first stanza:

My joy was uttered some while ago, when the first fiery messenger came in the night, telling that Ilium was taken and destroyed. Then there were some who found fault with me, and said, 'Art thou for a beacon persuaded to think that Troy is taken now? How like a woman's heart to fly up so high!' Thus they argued, proving my error. But for all that I would sacrifice, and by womanly ordinance the townfolk one and all took up the loud cry of holy gladness and in the sacred temples stilled with feeding incense the sacred flame.

We have of course already noted why the queen (dawning sun) should feel joy on the return of Agamemnon on this particular day (heliacal rising of Regulus). But remark here again the derogation of woman in ἡ κάρτα πρὸς γυναικὸς ἄρρεσθαι κέαρ, and Aeschylus' striking use of ἄρρεσθαι, 'to be hoist', 'to be uplifted', 'to be raised', &c., a word superbly fitted to describe the rising of the sun. 'By womanly ordinance' (γυναικείῳ νόμῳ) is also striking in this context.

We may conclude from this passage that the fires lighted in the temples of Troy γυναικείῳ νόμῳ represent nothing less than the sun itself. The line θυηφάγον κοιμῶντες εὐώδη φλόγα ('calming the incense-devouring sweet flame' (i.e. as the incense is fed to it)) (602) may be taken as a beautiful description of the flame of the sun, which appears so still from earth. θυηφάγον is evidently a neologism, formed by the playwright specifically to the purpose. Fraenkel agonises over these lines, concluding, 'How this 'lulling' was managed, the poet refrains from telling us: possibly it was done, as Paley guesses, by pouring wine over the ashes'. But spreading the fire moderately with incense would have the effect of partially suffocating it, leaving it more smouldering than flaming.

In the second stanza, the queen continues in the same vein. Her τί γὰρ/ γυναικὶ τούτου φέγγος ἥδιον δρακεῖν/ ἀπὸ στρατείας ἄνδρα σώεσαντος θεοῦ/ πύλας ἀνοῖξαι (‘What light is sweeter for a woman to see than this, when she opens the gates to her husband, whom the gods have delivered safe from war’) (606-9)—is clearly consonant with the allegory, as identifying the king once more with light. Πύλας ἀνοῖξαι may be taken as a striking representation of the effect of a star as it first peeps above the horizon, as through a gate.

Here, in the penultimate couplet of the queen’s speech, is an image over which much critical ink has been spilt, only to leave it finally unresolved, yet for which the allegory can offer a striking explanation:

οὐδ’ οἶδα τέρψιν οὐδ’ ἐπίψογον φάτιν
ἄλλου πρὸς ἄνδρὸς μᾶλλον ἢ χαλκῶ βαφάς. (616-7)

‘I know of pleasure or blameworthy address from another man no more than of dyeing bronze.’ For Verrall, χαλκῶ βαφάς is ‘an unknown mystery’. What is the origin of this proverb, if proverb it be? Or does it just mean ‘an impossibility’? A typically thorough Fraenkel considers then dismisses the possibility that βαφάς might refer to tempering of a metal, where χαλκῶ could mean ‘of iron’ rather than ‘of brass’. Fraenkel tentatively suggests that the allusion could be to the colouring of metal, although ‘the hypothesis... remains based on slender grounds’. ‘But ‘dyeing bronze’ makes perfect sense in light of the allegory, where the rich golden colour of bronze is a beautiful match for the glow of the sun, which has remained untainted and undiminished (undyed) since Regulus last dawned directly above it. This again would appear to be an invention of Aeschylus’ rather than a borrowing of a pre-existing saying.

The critics have allocated the final couplet of this speech τοιόσδ’ ὁ κόμπος, τῆς ἀληθείας γέμων./ οὐκ αἰσχρὸς ὡς γυναικὶ γενναίᾳ λακεῖν (618-9) to different characters. For Peile, following the MSS, it belongs to the Herald. Verrall, commenting ‘here again is a passage defying arrangement or explanation with the received list of *dramatis personae*’, looks forward to the next problematic speech of the chorus, and invents a ‘second conspirator’, to which Fraenkel responds: ‘I find it difficult to take his conspirator seriously, although I feel by no means sure that the wretch will not rise again some day from his well-deserved place in Hades’. Fraenkel, following Hermann, concludes that it belongs to the queen; and certainly, the allegory would favour this allocation. ‘A boast such as this, filled with the truth, it does not misseem a noble lady to speak’. Let us now proceed to the next lines, which refer back to what we have just heard from Clytemnestra’s lips..

14.6 The Coryphaeus’ second speech

αὕτη μὲν οὕτως εἶπε μανθάνοντι σοι
τοροῖσιν ἐρμηνεῦσιν εὐπρεπῶς λόγον.

‘She speaks thus to you who learns from appearances, but to the true interpreters her words are specious.’ These first two lines of a short speech have provoked a welter of analysis. Verrall asks: ‘Where are the *commentators* [ἐρμηνεῦσιν] on the queen’s address to whom the elders refer? No answer so much as plausible has been suggested to this question...’ Whence his invention of the ‘second conspirator’. Fraenkel’s reading is strained, and will not do: ‘Probably it is best to regard the expression μανθάνοντι ... λόγον as a kind of explanatory afterthought to the terse clause preceding it: “she has spoken thus, to you, if you can reach understanding through clear interpreters, a speech which appears proper”’. Kennedy comes closer, but finds no place for a key meaning

(‘learns *from appearances*’) of *μανθάνοντι* : ‘To you, a learner, thus indeed she makes her speech, to those who thoroughly interpret, speciously’. In fact, the straightforward rendering I have given above is entirely adequate to the scene when viewed in light of the allegory. We recall the formulaic *ως εκων εγω/ μαθουσιν αυτω κου μαθουσι ληθομαι* which closes the Watchman’s speech, and which is Aeschylus’ direct allusion to the occult content of what has gone before. And so here, where *μανθάνοντι σοι* is a direct apostrophisation of the hypothetical uninitiated reader who hears only the literal content of the lines; and *τοροῖσιν ἐρμηνεῦσιν* an apostrophisation of the *μαθουσις* of the Watchman.

14.7 *Second stichomythia; the Herald’s third speech*

Technically, these double-line stichomythia have a slightly different import from the single-line variant which has preceded it: the two line units indicating that the gradual invasion of the pre-dawn sky by the aura of Regulus has become more thorough now. The aura is approaching full radiance now (Herald’s third speech, which will close this episode).

We now hear the story of the storm, and Menelaus who may or may not have survived it. Edna Leigh can again throw great light on what is going on here. For Leigh has shown to a high degree of certainty that Menelaus represents, in the astronomical system of the *Iliad*, the constellation Scorpius (82-3). The storm, which has all but destroyed the returning fleet, bears the allegorical value of the rays of the dawning sun, which blot out the weaker stars of the constellations, so that, in the case of Leo, only the brightest (alpha) star, namely Regulus, remains visible. The sun is indeed intimately involved with the fate of Menelaus:

ἔκυρσας ὥστε τοξότης ἄκρος σκοποῦ (633)

‘like a bowman you have hit the consummate mark’

οὐκ οἶδεν οὐδεὶς ὥστ’ ἀπανγγεῖλαι τορῶς,
πλήν τοῦ τρέφοντος Ἥλιου χθονὸς φύσιν. (636-7)

‘no one can tell this plainly,
save the sun which sustains the creatures of the earth.’

ἐπεὶ δ’ ἀνῆλθε λαμπρὸν ἡλίου φάος
ὀρῶμεν ἀνθοῦν πέλαγος Αἰγαῖον νεκροῖς

‘and when the bright sun dawned
we saw the Aegean flowering with the dead’

εἰ δ’ οὖν τις ἀκτὶς ἡλίου νιν ἱστορεῖ

‘if then any ray of the sun discovers him’

In the first example, the arrow bears its immemorially ancient mythic value of a ray of the sun or moon (cf. Diana the huntress). As a ‘spindly’ (Wood 82) constellation it is possible that it may all have disappeared in the sun’s blaze—but only the sun can know.

Further, the lines *ξυνώμοσαν γάρ, ὄντες ἔχθιστοι τὸ πρὶν, / πῦρ καὶ θάλασσα ...* (655-6) are highly suggestive: ‘for they conspired who before had been enemies, fire and sea...’ We shall discuss the

sea = night sky equation at some length below; let us accept it provisionally for now, and note also the fire = sun identity. So that πῦρ καὶ θάλασσα may be taken as beautifully portraying the environment of the eclipse of Scorpius.

EPEISODION III

Let us first outline the allegory as portrayed by the events on stage. The arrival of Agamemnon represents the first peeping of Regulus above the horizon. Clytemnestra has a key ongoing role in this episode, as the night sky remains suffused by the light of the sun in the false dawn. Aeschylus will not mark the precise moment of the first appearance of the sun, but Agamemnon's disappearance inside the palace, the scene of his murder, will portray the engulfing of Regulus by its the strengthening radiance. The completion of the dawning of Regulus, so that all of it now lies above the horizon, will be marked by the descent of the king from the chariot. The length of his speeches, and that of Clytemnestra, together with his initial refusal to descend to tread the purple carpet, express the prolonged character of this dawning. The carpet's colour identifies it as representing the sky, which is now a band between the horizon and the star, the gradual increase in width of which is portrayed in Agamemnon's walking along it into the palace, until finally it disappears into the solar aura. Passages of stichomythia describe in their interchange of single lines the slow penetration of the one principle (night sky in the false dawn) by the other (light of Regulus). The presence of Cassandra in the chariot alongside Agamemnon is, as we have seen, an expression of the ancients' awareness of the nature of Regulus as binary star. Hence she hesitates, as did the king, before alighting from the chariot; while her prophetic knowledge of Agamemnon's murder inside the palace reflects the fact that she is, on the plane of allegory, being murdered alongside and precisely contemporaneously with him.

15. Lines 801-845: Agamemnon's first speech.

Aeschylus has the king begin by thanking the gods as principle sponsors of the quest against Troy. They voted not by speech, but by casting a pebble:

ἔς αἵματηρόν τεῦχος οὐ διχορρόπως
ψήφους ἔθεντο· τῷ δ' ἐναντίῳ κύτει
ἐλπὶς προσήει χειρὸς οὐ πληρουμένῳ.

'Unwaveringly they cast their votes into the blood-bringing urn, but the hope only of a hand passed above the opposite urn which failed to fill.' There are three features here worthy of notice: The gods are the principal sponsors; they voted in silence; and they voted 'Yes' by casting stones into an urn. The gods' role here is consistent with the astronomical nature of the changing of the pole star. We have remarked above (35, 275) the significance in this play of 'silence' as an attribute of the visible bodies of the sky. Finally, the gods' method of voting recalls the casting of dice, to the key astronomical mythico-symbolic significance of which the Watchman has alluded (32-3). The king acknowledges the lengthiness of his address to the gods: θεοῖς μὲν ἐχέτεινα φροίμιον τόδε· (820). Just so will he refer to the queen's opening speech to him: μακρὰν γὰρ ἐχέτεινας· (907). They are drawn out for a purpose, which is to suggest the massive presence of the star and the sun, and creeping prolongation of the dawning of the former.

The fall of Troy represents the gradual setting below the horizon of the constellation of Canis Major, which had formerly been prominent throughout the night at the celestial north pole,

consequent on the phenomenon of the precession of the equinoxes. Now the new pole star would be Polaris, supplanting Thuban (α -Draconis), of which Canis Major had been a marker. The imagery Aeschylus employs here portrays this scenario. We have seen (498-503) that fire in this play can represent the star or sun, the smoke its aura. And just so here, where the fire is now reduced to embers with the setting of the constellation:

καπνῶ δ' ἀλοῦσα νῦν ἔτ' εὔσημος πόλις.
ἄτης θρηλαῖ ζῶσι· συνθνήσκουσα δὲ
σποδὸς προπέμπει πίονας πλούτου πνοάς.

‘By smoke the captured town now is signified. The gusts of its ruin are alive. The dying embers send forth reek of wealth.’ (809-11)

The king’s speech continues to be highly suggestive. His complaint about the disloyalty of his generals—with the exception of Odysseus—could well refer to the dimming of the stars in the light of the dawning sun. The king’s confession that he knows ὀμιλίας κάτοπτρον, εἶδωλον σκιᾶς (830) is of course appropriate on the literal plane, but could plausibly also refer to the generals’ natures as star-symbols, and hence themselves ‘a mere reflexion of companionship, a phantom of a shadow’. Odysseus alone remains faithful. He represents, in Leigh’s interpretation of the Iliad, Arcturus, the alpha star of the constellation Boetes, and so he quite plausibly in this context would remain unextinguished in the sun. But one suspects, from Agamemnon’s emphasis on the yoking of Odysseus and himself (ζευχθεὶς ἔτοιμος ἦν ἐμοὶ σεραφόρος (833)), that an astronomical effect—unidentifiable at this point—is being referred to here.

16. Lines 846-904: Clytemnestra’s first speech

This is, again, a lengthy speech, for reasons why we have seen. The queen’s words here are full of occult significance:

καὶ τραυμάτων μὲν εἰ τόσων ἐτύγκανεν
ἀνὴρ ὄδ', ὡς πρὸς οἶχον ὠχετεύετο
φάτις, τέτρηται δικτύου πλέω λέγειν·
εἰ δ' ἦν τεθμηκῶς, ὡς ἐπλήθυνον λόγοι,
τρισώματός τ' ἄν Γηρυῶν ὁ δεύτερος
πολλήν--ἄνωθεν, τὴν κάτω γὰρ οὐ λεγώ--
χθονὸς τρίμοιρον χλαῖναν ἐξηύχει λαβῶν,
ἅπαξ ἐκάστῳ κατθανῶν μορφώματι.

‘As for wounds, if my lord was wounded as often as the conduits of fame brought news of it, he hath holes in him more in number than a net. And had he died, as report thereof multiplied, he might, with three bodies like another Geryon, have boasted many times three—not beds, but coverlets rather of earth taken on to him, if he had one death for each of his shapes’ (Verrall). (857-64).

This identification of the notionally wounded king with a net of course anticipates the murder scene, wherein the net will bear, as here, a highly significant allegorical value, as we shall see. Of most interest here is however the reference to triple-bodied Geryon, and the specific and decidedly odd description of the king’s death—‘not beds, but coverlets rather of earth taken on to him’. For Regulus is in fact, as we have seen, a triple star—albeit Aeschylus combines Regulus B and Regulus C in the person of Cassandra, just as in nature an amateur telescope can distinguish two

stars, the second of which is, on closer inspection, itself a binary system. The mode of burial here might be a beautiful description of the notional sinking of Regulus A-B-C below the horizon, so that the earth masks but does not actually enclose it, as it might for example a volcano or thermal spring.

The queen commands the purple be laid (a band of sky to appear); and there is delay on the part of the slaves, with further hesitation to come from Agamemnon: so slow and prolonged is the process of dawning of a star or the sun.

17. Lines 905-21: Agamemnon's second speech

Here is another powerful identification of the heliacal rising of Regulus with the Goddess-oriented East. Agamemnon protests that to tread the purple path would be womanish and contemptible; yet he will of course soon tergiversate on this resolution, while yet his obloquy will not be unsaid: (909-13)

καὶ τᾶλλα μὴ γυναικὸς ἐν τρόποις ἐμὲ
ἄβρυνε, μηδὲ βαρβάρου φωτὸς δίκην
χαιμαίπετρες βόαμα προσχάνης ἐμοί,
μηδ' εἵμασι στρώσασ' ἐπιφθονὸν πόρον
τίθει.

'For the rest, offer no womanish luxuries to me, nor before me, as before a king of the East, grovel with open-mouthed acclaim, nor with vestures strown draw jealous eyes upon my path.' (Verrall)

18. Lines 922-34: Stichomythia

Clytemnestra tries to persuade—successfully, as we shall see—the king to alight from his car and tread the purple path she has strown. Aeschylus intended the single-line stichomythia to suggest gradual interpenetration: this time of the false (pre-) dawn sky by the body of Regulus.

19. Lines 935-65: Agamemnon's third speech; Clytemnestra's second speech

Agamemnon descends from the chariot, taking care to commend Cassandra (Regulus B-C) to the queen. She welcomes him with a speech, every word of which is full of allegoric import: (949-58)

ἔστιν θάλασσα, τίς δέ νιν κατασβέσει ;
τρέφουσα πολλῆς πορφύρας ἰσάργυρον
κηκίδα παγκαίνιστον, εἰμάτων βαφάς.
οἶκος δ' ὑπάρχει τῶνδε σὺν θεοῖς ἄλις
ἔχειν· πένεσθαι δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται δόμος.
πολλῶν πατησμὸν δ' εἰμάτων ἄν ηῤῥάμην,
δόμοισι προυνεχθέντος ἐν χρηστηρίοις
ψυχῆς κόμιστρα τῆσδε μηχανωμένη.
ρίζης γὰρ οὔσης φυλλὰς ἴκετ' ἐς δόμους,
σκιὰν ὑπερτείνασα σειρίου κυνός.
καὶ σοῦ μολόντος δωματῆτιν ἐστίαν,
θάλπος μὲν ἐν χειμῶνι σημαίνεις μολῶν·
ὅταν δὲ τεύχε Ζεὺς ἀπ' ὄμφακος πικρᾶς
οἶνον, τότε ἤδη ψῦχος ἐν δόμοις πέλει
ἄνδρὸς τελείου δῶμ' ἐπιστροφωμένου.
Ζεῦ Ζεῦ τέλειε, τὰς ἐμὰς εὐχὰς τέλει·
μέλοισι δέ τοι σοὶ τῶνπερ ἄν μέλλης τελεῖν.

‘There is a sea—and who can drain it dry?—feeding with store of purple an ever-renewing ooze, dyer of garments, which is worth its weight in silver. The house begins to have of it together with the gods, and it does not stand in poverty of it. I had prayed for a treading of many garments, had it been proposed to me in some temple of divination, when I was preparing a ransom for your life. For the bed of leaves is first a root, which then comes over the house, spreading a shade against the dog star. For when you return to hearth and home, you signal that warmth is coming in winter. And whenever Zeus makes wine of the unripe bitter grapes, then already cool is in the house, when the man of authority is now walking its halls. Zeus, Zeus the accomplisher, bring these my prayers to fruition, and let your providence do even as you will.’

Here is Verrall on this memorable and highly poetic speech:

‘There is purple enough in the sea, *and enough within.*’ As the king proceeds to the door along the path with its crimson *ποικίλματα*, it is to the eye of the queen, who foresees the *εἰμάτων βαφάς* that are to follow within (v. 1382), as though already he walked in blood. There is also in the mere sound and imagery of the opening verse the feeling of her hatred, deep, cruel, and inexhaustible. But no commentary can exhaust the significance of this marvellous scene, which for spectacular writing, if the phrase may be used, has probably never been rivalled.

This last sentence may at least be correct. But there is a problem with Verrall’s analysis of the opening lines. The image is of the sea, which can never resemble fresh blood in colour. Aeschylus, continuing the Homeric usage of purple in regard to the sea, specifically names this rather than any shade of red as the colour. Neither can blood spurting or even just flowing from a wound be described as ‘ooze’, nor as ‘ever-renewing’. The image seems overall more than a little ill-fitted to the purpose, and not to the standard we would expect from the playwright.

The speech as a whole has a grandeur which does not quite sort with its theme on the literal plane, namely the hate-filled anticipation of a murderess. On the other hand, the sea bears in Homer, according to Leigh’s scheme, the allegoric value of the sky. And everything in this speech, down to its finest detail, falls into place when we assign to it this value. The dawn sky is indeed ‘ever-renewing’ and slowly establishes itself like an ‘ooze’. It is ‘worth its weight in silver’ in that it is the alter ego of the night sky—silver is typically the mytho-symbolic colour of the moon, and we may extend this to the visible bodies of the night sky, stars and planets included.

Aeschylus uses here the word *ὑπάρχει*, the primary meaning of which is ‘begins’. Yet Verrall shuns this sense in favour of the meaning ‘there is’, ‘there exists’: ‘And we have, O king, I trust, a chamber of such from which to take thereof...’ Similarly, Kennedy has ‘of such things by the favour of the gods, O king, our house hath ample store...’ Peile renders it thus: ‘And there is a houseful of these things for us, with permission of the gods, O king, to keep; and what poverty means the family knows not.’ Taking *ὑπάρχει* in a similar way, Fraenkel points out that *οἶκος* must now be problematic:

It has long been realized that the MS reading cannot be retained ... *οἶκος ὑπάρχει ἔχειν* could only mean either ‘the house is there to have or hold something’ or ‘the house is there for someone to hold’. Porson’s *οἴκοις* is satisfactory and probably correct.

And so on. Yet the given *οἶκος ὑπάρχει ἔχειν* rendered as ‘the house begins to have’ is perfectly consonant with the occult content of this sentence: for it is the time of the inception of day.

Significantly, another great star which had a heliacal rising, namely Sirius, the dog star, appears here in the lines *ρίζης γὰρ οὐσης φυλλὰς ἵκετ’ ἐς δόμους, / σκιὰν ὑπερτεῖνασα σειρίου κυνός*. The

‘root’ is generally taken to refer to the life of Agamemnon which the queen has mentioned in the previous line. But it is another odd image. Why, if σκιὰν means ‘shade’, would any house require shade against a star?—Unless it be at its heliacal rising, which occurs on only one day of the year, in the case of Sirius in mid-July in Hellenistic times. Yet in the following lines Aeschylus insists on the king’s identification with early winter, not before but some time after the heliacal rising Sirius. Or why, if σκιὰν means ‘shadow’, would the playwright name Sirius as illuminator of the house, now shadowed by the vine, when the moon would have been more appropriate, as being many orders of magnitude more brilliant than the brightest star? All becomes clear if we read γὰρ to refer to the queen’s activity, described in the immediately preceding lines, of commissioning new purple-dyed vestures. For it is the dawning sun that paints the sky in purple, after its night journey in black and silver. The image sorts beautifully with its occult theme of the gradual perfusion, from below to above, of the sky with the sun’s rays, until even the dog star, one of the brightest in the heavens, is outshone and masked.

θάλλπος μὲν ἐν χειμῶνι is entirely consistent with the time of the heliacal rising of Regulus in early winter; as is, in another way, ψῦχος ἐν δόμοις, after the heat of summer when the wine is matured from the unripe grapes. Fascinatingly, Aeschylus may have been thinking here of an Egyptian hymn. This would of course be consonant with the allegoric identity of the Watchman as the Egyptian Sphinx. Here is Fraenkel:

Therefore the comparison drawn later (*Hermes*, lxii, 1927, 287 f.) by Wilamowitz with the ancient Egyptian song to Sesostris III (A. Erman, *Die Literatur der Aegypter*, 180 f.) is wholly apposite. The relevant section of that hymn runs: ‘How great ... is the lord to his city; he alone is a million ... he is like a dike, which holds off the river in flood ... like a cool house which lets a man sleep on into the daytime ... a bulwark which protects the fearful from his enemy ... the shadow of the flooding season to bring coolness in summer ... a warm, dry, corner in the winter ... a mountain that holds off the storm, at the time of heaven’s fury ... he is like Sechemet [a goddess of war] towards the enemies who cross his borders.’ I have not omitted a single comparison, in order to show that every one is concerned with protection and defence. This makes the similarity to the *Agamemnon* passage much greater even than Wilamowitz noticed ... However, there is no need to follow W. Kranz, *Stasimon*, 102, 294, in supposing that Aeschylus was indebted to some definite Egyptian panegyrics.

On the contrary, the likelihood that Aeschylus was indeed thinking of the Egyptian hymn increases when we consider that Sesostris III was pharaoh of Egypt from 1878 – 1839 BCE, and was one of the few kings to be deified in his lifetime. That is, he would have been readily available to the playwright as an incarnation of Regulus.

STASIMON III

20. Lines 966-1018

A relatively brief choric ode, and of little value, so one might think, to this investigation. And yet, certain words and concepts in the following lines (966-8; 973-9) arrest our attention:

τίπτε μοι τόδ’ ἐμπέδως
δειγμα προστατήριον
καρδίας τετρασκόπου ποτᾶται ...

... χρόνος δ' ἐπὶ
πρυμνησίων ξυνεμβόλοις
ψαμμί' ἀκτᾶς παρή-
βησεν, εὖθ' ὑπ' Ἴλιον
ᾧρτο ναυβάτας στρατός,
πεύθομαι δ' ἀπ' ὀμμάτων
νόστον, αὐτόμαρτυς ὦν.

Certain commentators have preferred δειμα, 'fear' or 'object of fear', to δειγμα. Verrall chooses the latter, rendering it as 'sign' or 'warning', while rejecting 'apparition' or 'spectre' as an 'impossible translation, as it does not give the proper meaning of δεικνυμι.' Peile informs us that 'Προστατήριος is properly applied to the statue of a tutelary deity ; e.g. Diana, Theb. 449, προστατηρίας Ἀρτέμιδος εὐνοίαισι...' This is all highly suggestive of the scene enacting itself in allegory, of the envelopment and apparent hyper-magnification of Regulus in the sun's rays. 'Object of fear' or 'warning sign', or even indeed 'apparition', together with προστατήριον its usual hieratic sense, would be perfectly appropriate for this scene.

The lines χρόνος κτλ. have proved intractable to sensible interpretation. Kennedy glosses 'this strangely expressed passage' thus (mutatis mutandis) : 'χρ. παρήβησεν, time has outgone its youth, ἐπὶ ξυνεμβόλαις, after the castings-together, πρυμνησίων, of the cables, ψαμμίας ἀκάτας, of the vessel on the sands'. Verrall renders it: 'Yet time hath heaped the sand-grains of the shore upon the anchor-stones, since the naval host set forth to Troy.' And Peile: 'for it's great while since, with cables all embedded in the sandy shore, the naval host wasted its freshness, at the time when it had set out with the intention of dropping anchor under the walls of Troy'. One cannot be more conclusive than to say that the astronomical allegory may offer a consistent and meaningful solution here. The phrase ὑπ' Ἴλιον ᾧρτο, 'rises up against Troy', is suggestive of the rising in the sky of an astronomical body, even as Troy (Ursa Major) sinks ever further toward the horizon.

One's interest is piqued by the juxtaposition of αὐτόμαρτυς (above) and αὐτοδίδακτος in the immediately following lines (980-3):

τὸν δ', ἄνευ λύρας ὅπως, ὕμνωδεῖ
θρηῆνον Ἐρινύος αὐτοδίδακτος ἔσωθεν
θυμός, οὐ τὸ πᾶν ἔχων
ἐλπίδος φίλον θράσος.

'My soul within sings a threnody of Doom without a lyre, as it were, and self-taught, not to the full having the welcome assurance of hope.' There is an emphasis here on the immediacy and authenticity of the elders' experience—they are 'self-witnessing' and 'self-taught'—which is augmented by the highly poetic ἔσωθεν θυμός. It is as if they had 'inside knowledge'. We have seen that the Chorus bears throughout *Agamemnon* the allegoric value of the stars, or the starry sky; while the 'humming' of the Watchman is most plausibly a reference to the Music of the Spheres. The latter is echoed in ἄνευ λύρας ὅπως, ὕμνωδεῖ. There can be little doubt, therefore, that this four-line purple patch of poetry portrays the mysterious and even numinous wheeling of the heavens, with Regulus and the sun upstage.

The metaphor of the following lines (984-6) is awkward with respect to the literal plane, and the translators have laboured unsatisfactorily under its burden. Yet it is wholly coherent and full of significance on the plane of allegory:

σπλάγκνα δ' οὔτοι ματάζει,
πρὸς ἐνδίκους φρεσὶν τελεσφόροις
δίνας κυκλούμενον κέαρ.

Notable here is the use of σπλάγκνον, φρήν, and κέαρ, all three of which could be translated as 'heart' or 'region of the heart'. Verrall glosses it thus: '*the throb that with meaning recurrence the heart repeats to the unmistakable breast*', literally "the coming round of the heart with portentous revolution against the truth-telling breast". The form of expression is strange to our language but in itself is powerful and natural.' And Kennedy: 'The three lines imply: "the beating of my heart is not unmeaning : it bodes something, against which I must pray"' Peile renders it: '*my heart*, I say, *whirled about amid thoughts justly-entertained*, as (or, *and*, it might have been with τε) *tending to sure accomplishment*'.

First let us note κυκλούμενον, which could of course be used of the regular recurrence of such as the beating of the heart, but is not the most effective word Aeschylus could have found in the context of the drama, one would have thought. Relevant here also is that the Arabs knew Regulus as Qalb al Asad, 'heart of the lion', which would famously find its way as a regal epithet into English history. 'In eddies' (δίνας) suggests, for example, waves spreading out symmetrically from a stone cast into a pool. The phrase δίνας κυκλούμενον κέαρ therefore is specifically and powerfully descriptive of the dawning of Regulus. But Aeschylus is even more creative in his depiction of the scene, for the primary meaning of φρήν (dative φρεσὶν), to which the translators have done scant justice, is 'diaphragm'. This muscle has a convex upper curve (like the sun) , and is located below the heart, dividing it from the abdominal cavity. The diaphragm therefore stands in relation to the heart as the sun does to Regulus at the time of its heliacal rising. And now the allegorical import of τελεσφόροις ('tending towards a end') becomes crystal clear: the end being the engulfment of the star.

To continue the point-to-point fit of this ode to the event taking place in the dawn sky, here are the next lines (990-2) : μάλα γέ τοι τὸ μεγάλας ὑγείας/ ἀκόρεστον τέρμα : νόσος γάρ/ γείτων ὁμότοιχος ἐρείδει, 'Truly, the boundary of good health is insatiate; for disease leans upon it as if sharing a common wall'. Again, one would think that the image of the ἀκόρεστον τέρμα is not strictly called for in the literal context; that Aeschylus has failed, by a small but significant margin, to 'nail' the metaphor he required: yet it is perfectly descriptive of the visible surface of the sun.

Here yet again, in the lines 993-1000, is a metaphor which has puzzled the critics, yet into which the astronomical allegory can throw much light:

καὶ πότης εὐθυπορῶν
ἀνδρὸς ἔπαισεν ἄφαντον ἔρμα.
καὶ τὸ μὲν πρὸ χρημάτων
κτησίων, ὄκνος βαλῶν
σφενδόνας ἀπ' εὐμέτρου,
οὐκ ἔδου πρόπας δομος
παμονᾶς γέμων ἄγαν,
οὐδ' ἐπόντισε σκάφος.
πολλὰ τοι δόσις ἐκ Διὸς ἀμφιλαφῆς τε, καὶ
ἐξ ἀλόκων ἐπετειῶν
νῆστιν ὄλεσεν νόσον.

‘And the unswerving path of man may strike a hidden reef. And as for the goods belonging to one’s self, if fear may cast some of it away from a well-measured sling, then the whole house, weighed down too much by goods, would not be swallowed, nor the hull be submerged. Great and abundant is the gift of Zeus, which destroys out of its furrows the yearly disease of famine.’ Verrall describes this as ‘a difficult passage, in some points not explicable with the existing materials’. Here is his gloss on 995-1000:

The metaphor is taken from a boat which may be saved if not overloaded; but neither the meaning nor the construction can be fixed without further information on σφενδόνας ἀπ’ εὐμέτρου. The current explanation is that ὄκνος is the ‘fear’, which throws the cargo overboard in a storm, and that σφενδόνας ἀπ’ εὐμέτρου means ‘with well-measured throw’. But a *sling* has nothing to do with the casting away of cargo, still less has the *measure* of a sling, whether referred to the capacity of a sling, or (if this is possible) to the length of the throw. None of the meanings of σφενδόνη, which are various but all traceable to that of a *sling*, is admissible here; and as the words are manifestly genuine, there is an infinite field for conjecture as to their unknown sense.

The first two lines καὶ πότμος κτλ. are clear enough with respect to the allegory. So too is ‘hull’; and one might hold Aeschylus’ conflation of δομοῦς and the ship to be well-judged, with regard to Regulus. But what of the problematic σφενδόνας ἀπ’ εὐμέτρου? Imagine a sling, with the stone held in its bottom; and then the orbit (perhaps elliptical) of a heavenly body, with the planet or star itself held at a point in that orbit at any one time. Yes, this is the significance of σφενδόνας here; to which εὐμέτρου adds an apposite note of Pythagorean exactitude of measurement.

Let us note in the following three lines 1001-3 the richness and abundance of the gift of Zeus, and the words ἀλόκων and ἐπετειῶν. Herodotus in fact uses ἀμφιλαφής as meaning ‘wide-spreading’, like a tree. This is a powerful paean to the sun and Regulus, which unite once a year in their ‘furrows’, apparently to hyper-magnify the latter, to sate the spiritual hunger of the yearning folk.

Nor does this ode as allegory end with a whimper. Yet again we find lines that are problematic on the literal plane, yet which are a perfect and indefectible fit to the scene unfolding before our eyes in the morning sky:

(tbc)
