

The Influence of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* on Seneca's *Thyestes*

THE GUILF OF ATREUS

- 1a *SATELLES* *Quid novi rabidus struis?*  
*ATREUS* *Nil quod doloris capiat assueti modum;*  
*nullum relinquam facinus et nullum est satis.*  
(Sen. *Thy.* 254-57)

- 1b *SAT.* *Sed quibus captus dolis*  
*nostros dabit perductus in laqueos pedem?*  
*inimica credit cuncta. AT. Non poterat capi,*  
*nisi capere uellet. regna nunc sperat mea*  
(Sen. *Thy.* 286-90)

THE GUILF OF CLYTEMNESTRA

- 2a *ΧΟΡΟΣ*  
*μή τινας αντιπνόους Δαναοῖς χρονίας ἐχενήϊδας ἀπλοίας*  
*τεύξει σπυδομένα θυσιάν ἕτεραν ἄνομον τιν' ἄδαιτον,*  
*νεικέων τέκτονα σύμφυτον, οὐ δει-*  
*σῆγορα: μίμνει γὰρ φοβερά παλίνορτος*  
*οἰκονόμος δολία, μνάμων Μῆνις τεκνόποιος.”*  
(Aesch. *Ag.* 150-54)

- 2b *ΧΟΡΟΣ*  
*κεῖσαι δ' ἀράχνης ἐν ὑφάσματι τῶιδ'*  
*ἀσεβεῖ θανάτῳ βίον ἐκπνέων,*  
*ᾧμοι μοι, κοίταν τάνδε ἀνελεύθερον,*  
*δολίῳ μόρῳι δαμείς*  
*ἐκ χερὸς ἀμφιτόμοι βελέμνοι.*  
(Aesch. *Ag.* 1492-96, 1517-20)

- 2c *ΑΙΓΙΣΘΟΣ*  
*ἰδὼν ὑφαντοῖς ἐν πέπλοις Ἐρινύων*  
*τὸν ἄνδρα τόνδε κείμενον φίλως ἐμοί,*  
*χερὸς πατρώιας ἐκτίνοντα μηχανάς.*  
(Aesch. *Ag.* 1580-82)

- 2d *ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ* *τοιάδε μέντοι σκῆμις οὐ δόλον*  
*φέρει* (Aesch. *Ag.* 886)

- 2e Guile as a female trait: Hom. *Od.* 3.250, 3. 308, 4.525,  
7.245, 9.32, 11.422. Aesch. *Ag.* 1635. Sen. *Med.* 260, 496,  
*Phaed.* 824-28. See also McClure 1999: 70-71.

ASSISTANT What new plot are you contriving enraged? ATREUS. Nothing that may be confined to the limits of ordinary grief; I shall omit no crime and none is enough.

ASSIST. But which guiles will capture and induce him to step with his foot into our snare? He considers everything hostile. AT. He would not be captured, unless he wanted to capture. Now he desires my kingdom.

CHORUS Let her not make long-lasting, ship-detaining, sailing delays by winds adverse to the Danaans, urging another impious sacrifice, one without a feast, a natural begetter of strife, fearless of man for there awaits a terrible, recurring, guileful housekeeper, the Wrath that remembers and takes revenge for a child.

CHORUS

You lie in this spider's web, breathing out your life in an impious death, oh me, oh me, in a place unfit for a free man, subdued by a treacherous death from this hand with a double-edged weapon.

AIGISTHUS

Having seen this man lying in the woven robes of the Erinyes, a lovely sight for me, paying off the wiles of his father's hand.

CLYTEMNESTRA Such an explanation bears no guile.

### THE GUILF OF THE VICTIMS

3a *ATREUS Fas est in illo quidquid in fratre est nefas. quid enim reliquit crimine intactum aut ubi sceleri pepercit? coniugem stupro abstulit regnumque furto: specimen antiquum imperi fraude est adeptus, fraude turbavit domum.* (Sen. Thy. 220-24) Cf. *dolus* in 176-81

3b *ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ*  
οὐδὲ γὰρ οὗτος δολίαν ἄτην  
οἴκοισιν ἔθηκ’;  
ἀλλ’ ἐμὸν ἐκ τοῦδ’ ἔρνος ἀερθὲν  
τὴν πολυκλαύτην  
Ἰφιγένειαν ἀνάξια δράσας  
ἄξια πάσχω μὴδὲν ἐν Αἴδου  
μεγαλαυχέτω, ξιφοδηλήτω  
θανάτωι τείσας ἅπερ ἤρξεν. (Aesch. Ag. 1523-29)

### NET IMAGERY

4a *ΚΛΥΤ. ἅπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον, ὥσπερ ἰχθύων, περιστιχίζω, πλοῦτον εἴματος κακόν.* (Aesch. Ag. 1382-83)

4b *ATREUS Plagis tenetur clausa dispositis fera: et ipsum et una generis inuisi indolem iunctam parenti cerno. iam tuto in loco uersantur odia. uenit in nostras manus tandem Thyestes, uenit, et totus quidem. uix tempero animo, uix dolor frenos capit. sic, cum feras uestigat et longo sagax loro tenetur Vmber ac presso uias scrutatur ore, dum procul lento suem odore sentit, paret et tacito locum rostro pererrat; praeda cum propior fuit, ceruice tota pugnat et gemitu uocat dominum morantem seque retinente eripit.* (Sen. Thy. 491-503)

### ANIMAL IMAGERY

5a *ΚΑΣΣΑΝΔΡΑ αὔτη δίπους λέαινα συγκοιμωμένη λύκωι, λέοντος εὐγενοῦς ἀπουσίαι* (Aesch. Ag. 1258-59)

*ΚΛΥΤ. λέγοιμ’ ἂν ἄνδρα τόνδε τῶν σταθμῶν κύνα*  
(Aesch. Ag. 896)

*ΚΑΣ. τί νιν καλοῦσα δυσφιλὲς δάκος τα τύχοιμ’ ἂν; ἀμφίσβαιναν ἢ Σκύλλαν τινὰ*  
(Aesch. Ag. 1232-33)

ATREUS Whatever is wrong against a brother is right against him. For what did he leave untouched by offence or when did he spare a crime? He stole my wife by adultery and my kingdom by theft: by fraud he obtained the ancient token of my power, by fraud disturbed the house.

### CLYTEMNESTRA

For did he not bring deceitful ruin upon the house? But for his unworthy deeds to my offspring conceived by him, the much-bewailed Iphigeneia, he suffers worthily: let him not brag in Hades, paying for what he started, with a death by sword.

CLYT. I put all around him an endless casting-net, like those used for fish, a wicked, rich garment.

ATREUS The beast is shut up in the spread nets: and I see together him and this hope of the detestable family joined with their father. My hatred is already in a secure place. At last Thyestes has come to my hands, in his entirety he has come. I can hardly restrain my mind, my pain can hardly be bridled. Such as, when a keenscented Umbrian hound traces out the beasts, is held on a long leash and probes the path with his snout pressed down, while he catches the scent of the boar far off and faintly, obeys and roams around silently scouring the place; when the prey is closer, he struggles with his whole neck and loudly barks at his slow master and escapes from his restraint.

CASSANDRA This two-footed lioness sleeping next to the wolf, in the absence of the noble lion

CLYT. I would call this man a watchdog of the homestead

CAS. What hateful beast’s name should I call her by to be right? A serpent or some Scylla?

5b *NUNTIUS* *Silva iubatus qualis Armenia leo  
in caede multa victor armento incubat  
(cruore rictus madidus et pulsa fame  
non ponit iras: hinc et hinc tauros premens  
vitulis minatur dente iam lasso inpiger),  
non aliter Atreus saevit atque ira tumet  
ferrumque gemina caede perfusum tenens,  
oblitus in quem fureret*  
(Sen. Thy. 732-37) Cf. 707-14: Tigris of Ganges

#### CLYTEMNESTRA AND THE FURIES

6a *ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ* *μητρός ἔγκοτοι κύνες* (Aesch. Cho. 1054)

6b *ΚΛΥΤΑΙΜΝΗΣΤΡΑ*

*γυναῖκα πιστήν δ' ἐν δόμοις εὖροι μολῶν  
οἴανπερ οὖν ἔλειπε, δωμάτων κύνα  
ἐσθλήν ἐκείνῳι, πολεμίαν τοῖς δύσφροσιν,  
καὶ τᾶλλ' ὁμοίαν πάντα, σημαντήριον  
οὐδὲν διαφθείρασαν ἐν μήκει χρόνου·  
οὐδ' οἶδα τέρψιν οὐδ' ἐπίμογον φάτιν  
ἄλλου πρὸς ἀνδρὸς μᾶλλον ἢ χαλκοῦ βαφάς.  
τοιόσδ' ὁ κόμπος, τῆς ἀληθείας γέμων,  
οὐκ αἰσχρὸς ὡς γυναικὶ γενναίαι λακεῖν.*  
(Aesch. Ag. 606-14)

6c *ΚΑΣΣΑΝΔΡΑ*

*τὴν γὰρ στέγην τήνδ' οὐποτ' ἐκλείπει χορὸς  
ζύμφθογγος οὐκ εὐφωγος· οὐ γὰρ εὖ λέγει.  
καὶ μὴν πεπωκῶς γ', ὡς θρασύνεσθαι πλέον,  
βρότειον αἶμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει,  
δύσπεμπος ἔξω, συγγόνων Ἐρινύων·*  
(Aesch. Ag. 1185-90)

6d *ΚΛΥΤ.* *φανταζόμενος δὲ γυναικὶ νεκροῦ  
τοῦδ' ὁ παλαιὸς δριμύς ἀλάστωρ  
Ἄτρεύως χαλεποῦ θοινατῆρος  
τόνδ' ἀπέτεισεν  
τέλεον νεαροῖς ἐπιθύσας.*  
(Aesch. Ag. 1500-4)

#### ATREUS AND THE FURY

7a *FURIA* *Perge, detestabilis  
Umbra, et penates impios furiis age.  
Certetur omni scelere et alterna vice  
stringatur ensis; nec sit irarum modus  
Pudorve, mentes caecus instiget furor*  
(Sen. Thy. 23-27)

MESSENGER As in the forest of Armenia a maned lion falls victoriously upon the herd in much slaughter (his jaws soaked with blood and driven by hunger, he does not abandon his anger: attacking the bulls here and there, unwearied threatens the calves with his jaw-teeth already weary), so much Atreus rages and swells with anger holding the sword soaked by a double murder, forgetful of whom he is furious with.

ORESTES Wrathful dogs of the mother

CLYTEMNESTRA May he come and find his wife as faithful as he left her, a watchdog of the house, good for him, hostile to the ill-disposed, and similar in everything else, having broken no seal in this long time. I know no pleasure or blameful rumor by another man more than the tempering of steel. Such a truthful boast is not shameful for a noble woman to utter aloud.

CASSANDRA

This chorus never leaves this roof, singing in unison but not pleasantly. For they speak evil words. And drinking human blood, so that it emboldens itself more, this revel-band of the kindred Erinyes, stays in the house and is hard to send away.

CLYT. Taking the form of this dead man's wife the old fierce avenging daimon of Atreus, the cruel lord of the feast, paid him out by adding a full-grown sacrificial victim to the young ones.

Proceed, abominable shade, and stir the impious house with rage. Let there be competition in every crime and let the sword be unsheathed in turns; let there be no limit to anger nor shame, let blind madness incite their minds

7b AT. *Excede, Pietas, si modo in nostra domo  
umquam fuisti. dira Furiarum cohors  
discorsque Erinys ueniat et geminas faces  
Megaera quatiens: non satis magno meum  
ardet furore pectus, impleri iuuat  
maiore monstro.*  
(Sen. *Thy.* 249-54)

AT. Go away, Piety, if ever you have  
been in our house at all. Let the dreadful  
throng of the Furies and the discordant  
Erinys come and Megaera brandishing  
her twin torches: my chest burns with a  
madness, one not great enough, and to be  
filled with a greater monster pleases me.

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