

We Might Need Prophets Here: An Examination of Divinatory Perspectives in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

- 1 Χο: ἔρμηνέως ἔοικεν ἢ ξένη τοροῦ
δεῖσθαι: τρόπος δὲ θηρὸς ὡς νεαιρέτου.
(Ag. 1062-3).¹ **Chorus:** The foreigner seems to require a plain-speaking interpreter. Her manner is like that of a newly captured beast.¹
- 2 Κ: καὶ μὴν ἄγαν γ' Ἑλλην' ἐπίσταμαι φάτιν.
Χο: καὶ γὰρ τὰ πυθόκραντα: δυσμαθῆ δ' ὅμως.
(Ag. 1254-5). **Cassandra:** And yet I know the Greek language excessively well.
Chorus: As do the Pythian oracles; yet they are difficult to comprehend.
- 3 Κ: ἥμαρτον, ἢ θηρῶ τι τοξότης τις ὡς;
ἢ ψευδόμαντις εἰμι θυροκόπος φλέδων;
ἐκμαρτύρησον προυμόσας τό μ' εἰδέναι
λόγῳ παλαιᾶς τῶνδ' ἀμαρτίας δόμων.
(Ag. 1194-7). **Cassandra:** Have I missed the mark, or, like an archer, do I strike my mark? Or am I false prophet, a door-pounding babbler? Bear witness by swearing that I know the sins, ancient in fame, of this house.
- 4 Κ: ἰδοῦ δ', Ἀπόλλων αὐτὸς ἐκδύων ἐμέ
χρηστηρίαν ἐσθῆτ', ἐποπτεύσας δέ με
κάν τοῖσδε κόσμοις καταγελωμένην ἡμέτατ
φίλων ὑπ' ἐχθρῶν οὐ διχορρόπως ἡμάτηντ'
καλουμένη δὲ φοιτᾶς ὡς ἀγύρτρια
πτωχὸς τάλαινα λιμοθνῆς ἠνεσχόμην.
(Ag. 1269-74). **Cassandra:** Look, Apollo himself is stripping me of my prophetic garb—he witnessed me, even in these adornments, being mocked doubtlessly in vain by friends who are foes—but, like some vagrant begging diviner, I bore being called a wretched, starving beggar.
- 5 Χο: κεδνὸς δὲ στρατόμαντις ἰδὼν δύο λήμασι δισσοῦς
Ἀτρεΐδας μαχίμους ἐδάη λαγοδαίτας
πομποῦς ἀρχᾶς... (Ag. 123-6). **Chorus:** The careful military prophet, having seen [the portent] recognized the warlike devourers of the hare and leaders of the host as the two Atreidae, double in spirit...
- 6 Χο: ἦ μὴν κλέος σου μαντικὸν πεπυσμένοι
ἦμεν: προφήτας δ' οὔτινας ματεύομεν. (Ag. 1098-9). **Chorus:** We have heard of your prophetic fame; but we have no need for prophets.
- 7 Χο: οὐ κομπάσαιμ' ἂν θεσφάτων γνώμων ἄκρος
εἶναι, κακῶ δὲ τῷ προσεικάζω τάδε.
ἀπὸ δὲ θεσφάτων τίς ἀγαθὰ φάτις
βροτοῖς στέλλεται; κακῶν γὰρ διαὶ
πολυεπεῖς τέχνηαι θεσπιωιδῶν
φόβον φέρουσιν μαθεῖν. (Ag. 1130-5). **Chorus:** I would not brag that I am a keen interpreter of prophecies; but these, I think, portend some evil. But what good decree from prophecies comes to mortals? Through evil means the verbose arts of prophets bring about prophecies that are fearsome to learn.
- 8 Ν: ὦ φίλοι Ἀργείων ἡγήτορες ἠδὲ μέδοντες
εἰ μὲν τις τὸν ὄνειρον Ἀχαιῶν ἄλλος ἔνισπε
ψεύδός κεν φαῖμεν καὶ νοσφιζοίμεθα μᾶλλον:
νῦν δ' ἴδεν ὃς μέγ' ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν εὔχεται εἶναι:
ἀλλ' ἄγετ' αἶ κέν πως θωρήξομεν υἱας Ἀχαιῶν.
(Il. 2.79-83). **Nestor:** Dear leaders and rulers of the Argives, if some other Achaean had told us this dream we would have been more likely to call and disregard it as false; but he who proclaims himself the mightiest of the Achaeans saw it. Come then, [let's see] if in some way we may arm the sons of the Achaeans.

¹ All translations are my own.

- 9 **Κλυ:** Τροίαν Ἀχαιῶν οὔσαν: ἢ πορῶς λέγω;
Χο: χαρά μ' ὑφέρπει δάκρυον ἐκκαλουμένη.
Κλυ: εὖ γὰρ φρονούντος ὄμμα σοῦ κατηγορεῖ.
Χο: τί γὰρ τὸ πιστόν; ἔστι τῶνδ' ἐσοί τέμαρ;
Κλυ: ἔστιν: τί δ' οὐχί; μὴ δολώσαντος θεοῦ.
Χο: πότ' ἄρα δ' ὄνειρων φάσματ' εὐπιθῆ σέβεις;
Κλυ: οὐ δόξαν ἂν λάβοιμι βριζούσης φρενός.
(Ag. 269-75).
- 10 **Χο:** οἶδ', ὦ τέκνον, παρῆ γάρ: ἔκ τ' ὄνειράτων
καὶ νυκτιπλάγκτων δειμάτων πεπαλμένη
χοῶς ἔπεμψε τάσδε δύσθεος γυνή.
Ὀρ: ἦ καὶ πέπτυσθε τοῦναρ, ὥστ' ὀρθῶς φράσαι;
Χο: τεκεῖν δράκοντ' ἔδοξεν, ὡς αὐτὴ λέγει.
(Lib. 523-7).
- 11 **Κλυ:** εὐδουσα γὰρ φρὴν ὄμμασιν λαμπρύνεται,
ἐν ἡμέρᾳ δὲ μοῖρ' ἀπρόσκοπος βροτῶν. (Eu. 104-5).
- Clytemnestra:** I said that Troy is in the hands of the Achaeans. Do I speak clearly?
Chorus: Joy is overcoming me and moving me to tears.
Clyt: Assuredly, your eye betrays your feelings.
Ch: What then is the evidence? Do you possess some proof of these things?
Clyt: Yes of course; unless a god has fooled me.
Ch: Do you trust the persuasive omens of dreams?
Clyt: I would not heed the judgement of a sleepy mind.
- Chorus:** I know, child, for I was there. Because she was shaken by dreams and night-wandering fears she sent these offerings, godless woman that she is.
Orestes: And have you learned the nature of the dream so as to tell it accurately?
Ch: She thought she gave birth to a serpent: as she herself tells it.
- Clytemnestra:** For the sleeping mind has clear vision, but by day the fate of mortals is unforeseeable.

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