The Limping God and the Manly Woman:

Hephaistos and Clytemnestra in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*

*For link to paper abstract,* [*click here*](https://camws.org/sites/default/files/meeting2022/2659HephaistosClytemnestra.pdf)*.*

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| **1. Opening of beacon speech:**  Χο. καὶ τίς τόδ’ ἐξίκοιτ’ ἂν ἀγγέλων τάχος;    Κλ. **Ἥφαιστος**, Ἴδης λαμπρὸν ἐκπέμπων σέλας· (*Ag.* 280-281)  **2. Tempering and Dyeing:**  *Clytemnestra to Agamemnon:*  οὐδ’ οἶδα τέρψιν οὐδ’ ἐπίψογον φάτιν ἄλλου πρὸς ἀνδρὸς μᾶλλον ἢ **χαλκοῦ** **βαφάς**.  (*Ag.* 611-612)  *Chorus’ description of Iphigeneia:*  **κρόκου** **βαφὰς** δ’ ἐς πέδον χέουσα ἔβαλλ’ ἕκαστον θυτή-    ρων ἀπ’ ὄμματος βέλει φιλοίκτωι  (*Ag.* 239-241)  *Clytemnestra:*  ἔστιν θάλασσα, τίς δέ νιν κατασβέσει; τρέφουσα πολλῆς πορφύρας ἰσάργυρον κηκῖδα παγκαίνιστον, **εἱμάτων** **βαφάς**·  (*Ag*. 958-960)  **3. Nets**  *Hephaistos’ net, narrated:*  ἀμφὶ δ’ ἄρ’ ἑρμῖσιν χέε **δέσματα** κύκλῳ ἁπάντῃ, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ καθύπερθε μελαθρόφιν ἐξεκέχυντο, **ἠΰτ’ ἀράχνια λεπτά· τά γ’ οὔ κέ τις οὐδὲ ἴδοιτο, οὐδὲ θεῶν μακάρων**· περὶ γὰρ **δολόεντα** τέτυκτο.  (*Od.* 8.278-281)  *Hephaistos describes his net:*  ἀλλά σφωε **δόλος** καὶ **δεσμὸς** ἐρύξει…  (*Od.* 8.317)  *Clytemnestra’s account of her net:*  **ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον**, ὥσπερ ἰχθύων, περιστιχίζω, **πλοῦτον εἵματος κακόν**·  (*Ag.* 1382-1383)  *Orestes’ account of Clytemnestra’s net:*  **τί νιν προσείπω**, κἂν τύχω μάλ’ εὐστομῶν; ἄγρευμα θηρός, ἢ νεκροῦ ποδένδυτον δροίτης κατασκήνωμα; δίκτυον μὲν οὖν ἄρκυν τ’ ἂν εἴποις καὶ ποδιστῆρας πέπλους.     τοιοῦτον ἂν κτήσαιτο φιλήτης ἀνὴρ ξένων ἀπαιόλημα κἀργυροστερῆ βίον νομίζων, τῶιδέ τ’ ἂν δολώματι πολλοὺς ἀναιρῶν πολλὰ θερμαίνοι φρένα.  (*Ch.* 997-1004)  **4. Gender and Disability:**  *Hephaistos serves nectar:*  Ὣς φάτο, μείδησεν δὲ θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη,  μειδήσασα δὲ παιδὸς ἐδέξατο χειρὶ κύπελλον· αὐτὰρ ὃ τοῖς ἄλλοισι θεοῖς ἐνδέξια πᾶσιν  οἰνοχόει γλυκὺ νέκταρ ἀπὸ κρητῆρος ἀφύσσων· ἄσβεστος δ’ ἄρ’ ἐνῶρτο γέλως μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν  ὡς ἴδον **Ἥφαιστον διὰ δώματα ποιπνύοντα**.  (*Il.* 1.595-600)  *Hephaistos laments Aphrodite’s infidelity:*  Ζεῦ πάτερ ἠδ’ ἄλλοι μάκαρες θεοὶ αἰὲν ἐόντες,  δεῦθ’, ἵνα ἔργ’ ἀγέλαστα καὶ οὐκ ἐπιεικτὰ ἴδησθε, ὡς ἐμὲ χωλὸν ἐόντα Διὸς θυγάτηρ Ἀφροδίτη  **αἰὲν ἀτιμάζει, φιλέει δ’ ἀΐδηλον Ἄρηα,  οὕνεχ’ ὁ μὲν καλός τε καὶ ἀρτίπος, αὐτὰρ ἐγώ γε  ἠπεδανὸς γενόμην· ἀτὰρ οὔ τί μοι αἴτιος ἄλλος, ἀλλὰ τοκῆε δύω, τὼ μὴ γείνασθαι ὄφελλον.**  (*Od.* 8.306-312)  *Hermes to Apollo, on sleeping with Aphrodite:*  “αἲ γὰρ τοῦτο γένοιτο, ἄναξ ἑκατηβόλ’ Ἄπολλον. δεσμοὶ μὲν τρὶς τόσσοι ἀπείρονες ἀμφὶς ἔχοιεν,    ὑμεῖς δ’ εἰσορόῳτε θεοὶ πᾶσαί τε θέαιναι, αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν εὕδοιμι παρὰ χρυσῇ Ἀφροδίτῃ.”  ὣς ἔφατ’, **ἐν δὲ γέλως ὦρτ’ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν**.  (*Od*. 8.339-343)  *Clytemnestra’s heart:*  ὧδε γὰρ κρατεῖ   γυναικὸς **ἀνδρόβουλον** ἐλπίζον **κέαρ**·  (*Ag.* 11-12)  *Clytemnestra to chorus:*  **παιδὸς νέας** ὣς κάρτ’ ἐμωμήσω φρένας.  (*Ag.* 277)  *Chorus to Clytemnestra:*  γύναι, κατ’ **ἄνδρα σώφρον’ εὐφρόνως** λέγεις·  (*Ag.* 351) | *Chorus*: Tell me, what messenger could travel here so fast?  *Clytemnestra*: **Hephaistos**. It was he who sent the bright gleam blazing on its way from Troy’s Mount Ida…[[1]](#footnote-1)  I have no deeper knowledge of enjoyment or of scandal from another man than I know **how to dip and temper red-hot metal**.  And as **her saffron-tinted cloth** fell pouring to the earth, she shot each leader standing by  an arrow from her eye, imploring pity.  The sea there is – and who could drain it dry?  The sea produces many, many dye shells, an inexhaustible supply of welling purple, worth much silver, rich for **steeping fabrics**.  [He] spun his **fastenings** around the posts from every direction, while many more were suspended overhead, from the roof beams, **thin, like spider webs, which not even one of the blessed gods could see**. He had fashioned it to be very **deceptive**.  but then my **fastenings** and my **snare** will restrain them…  I cast around him **an impenetrable mesh**, like one for netting fish, **a fatal luxury of fabric**.  **What might I call it**, striking proper terms?  A trap? A coffin-drape to wrap a corpse  from head to foot? Or no, a net,  a snare, a shawl for snagging ankles.  It’s the sort of thing a highwayman might use,  who spends his time in tricking travelers –  with this he could enjoy dispensing death.  He spoke, and the goddess of the white arms Hera smiled at him, and smiling she accepted the goblet out of her son’s hand. Thereafter beginning from the left he poured drinks for the other gods, dipping up from the mixing bowl the sweet nectar. But among the blessed immortals uncontrollable laughter went up as they saw **Hephaistos bustling about the palace**.  Father Zeus and all you other blessed immortal gods, come here, to see a ridiculous sight, no seemly matter, how Aphrodite daughter of Zeus **forever holds me in little favor, but she loves ruinous Ares because he is handsome, and goes sound on his feet, while I am misshapen from birth, and for this I hold no other responsible but my own father and mother, and I wish they had never got me.**  “Lord who strike from afar, Apollo, I wish it could only be, and there could be thrice this number of endless fastenings, and all you gods could be looking on and all the goddesses, and still I would sleep by the side of Aphrodite the golden.” He spoke, **and there was laughter among the immortals.**  And in control of this there waits a heart in hope, **a woman’s heart that organizes like a man**.  You are insulting my intelligence as though I were **some girl**.  You’ve spoken, woman, **shrewdly as a man, one of good sense.** |

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1. Translations of Aeschylus from Taplin (2018); translations of Homer from Lattimore (1961; 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)