

One might say that Cassandra – the woman and the slave – is closest of all the characters in the *Oresteia* to a Homeric hero. The stuff of epic is what the Achaeans did and suffered (or ‘endured’);⁶ and in the *Iliad* the heroes fight and act in the knowledge that death is always imminent.⁷ So it is not surprising that Cassandra’s words in *Ag.* 1289 find a striking parallel in the mouth of a heroic figure from later Greece, Cleomenes III of Sparta: see Plutarch, *Vit. Cleom.* 31. 10 δέῃ γὰρ τὸν αὐθαίρετον θάνατον οὐ φυγὴν εἶναι πράξεων, ἀλλὰ πρᾶξιν.⁸

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⁶ *Od.* 8. 490; cf. 4. 242. For Iliadic heroes as sufferers or endurers see also *Il.* 3. 157; 11. 317; 14. 85–7; 23. 607; 24. 505; *Od.* 3. 104.

⁷ E.g. *Il.* 6. 486–9; 12. 322–8; 14. 83–7.

⁸ Cleomenes is here refusing to commit suicide; two or three years later he did so, again with words of action in his mouth: Plut. *Cleom.* 37. 12 παρεκάλεσε πάντας ἀξίως αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν πεπραγμένων τελευτᾶν.

SOPHOCLES, *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS* 1403–8¹

ὦ γάμοι γάμοι,
ἐφύσαθ’ ἡμᾶς, καὶ φυτεύσαντες πάλιν
ἀνείτε ταῦτ’ ὅν σπέρμα, κἀπεδείξατε
πατέρας, ἀδελφούς, παῖδας, αἷμ’ ἐμφύλιον,
νύμφας γυναικας μητέρας τε, χῶπόσα
αἵσχιστ’ ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἔργα γίγνεται.

After consulting the commentaries and the fine remarks of ‘Longinus’ (23. 3) on this passage, a reader may still reasonably feel dissatisfied. Lines 1405–7 are normally taken to mean ‘you have shown fathers, brothers, sons and brides, wives, mothers to be kindred blood’; for the position of αἷμ’ ἐμφύλιον Schneidewin–Nauck compare *Od.* 4. 229–30:

Αἰγυπτίῃ, τῇ πλείστα φέρει ζεῖδωρος ἄρουρα
φάρμακα, πολλὰ μὲν ἐσθλὰ μεμειγμένα, πολλὰ δὲ λυγρά.

But this is unhappy. The μέν . . . δέ . . . in the *Odyssey* passage make clear what remains unclear here, which words form the predicate; and it detracts from the unnatural horror that sons (παῖδας) and mothers (μητέρας) naturally share the same blood. Further, when we consider that ‘murder of kindred’ was a great part of Oedipus’ destiny, and that that is what αἷμ’ ἐμφύλιον regularly means, it is fair to agree with Campbell that the unparalleled sense ‘kindred blood’ should not be given to these words.

The humble τε may help towards a better construction of the phrase. In a word-pattern of the form *x y z τε* and in a phrase like this, it is natural to take *x* as the subject and *y z τε* as the predicate; for a mere series of three words would normally take the form *x y z* or *x (τε) y τε z τε*. If, then, γυναικας μητέρας τε is predicate to νύμφας,² it follows that the lines should be punctuated thus:

. . . κἀπεδείξατε
πατέρας ἀδελφούς, παῖδας αἷμ’ ἐμφύλιον,
νύμφας γυναικας μητέρας τε, χῶποσα . . .

¹ I am very grateful to Professor Hugh Lloyd-Jones and Dr R. C. T. Parker for valuable discussion of this problem. The most helpful exposition of the problems is in Kamerbeek’s commentary.

² So Mazon and Longo; but their treatment of line 1406 founders on the meaning of αἷμ’ ἐμφύλιον. Campbell’s own translation, however, will not do either (‘. . . dire confusion | Of father, brother, son, bride, mother, wife, | Murder of parents and all shames that are’), because the words ‘dire confusion’ correspond to nothing in the Greek.

The result is something clearer and sharper: 'you have shown fathers (to be) brothers, sons (to be) shed blood of kindred, brides (to be) wives and mothers'. The metonymy in αἷμ' ἐμφύλιον may be compared with φόνος = '(cause of) murder' in *Il.* 16. 144 and *Od.* 21. 24, though Sophocles is bolder and more expressive; for a similar boldness, cf. *Tr.* 1278 κοῦδὲν τούτων ὅτι μὴ Ζεὺς ('all this was Zeus's doing'). It is peculiarly forceful here because it equates the son with the blood he should never have shed, just as the other two phrases equate pairs of relationships which should never have been fused together. The terrible power of Oedipus' marriage, already represented by the apostrophe (ὦ γάμοι γάμοι...), is thus further stressed: it not only makes him and his wife incestuous, but also reveals him to be a parricide. The sense of the lines, like the *tricolon crescendo*, thus corresponds very closely to 1184–5:

... ὅστις πέφασμαι φύς τ' ἀφ' ὧν οὐ χρῆν,³ ξὺν οἷς τ'
οὐ χρῆν ὁμιλῶν,⁴ οὕς τέ μ' οὐκ ἔδει κτανῶν.⁵

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³ 'Since he was foredoomed to the acts which the following clauses express' (Jebb).

⁴ cf. νύμφας γυναῖκας μητέρας τε and πατέρας ἀδελφούς.

⁵ cf. παῖδας αἷμ' ἐμφύλιον.

RITUALISTIC FORMULAE IN GREEK DRAMATIC TEXTS

Ritualistic formulae and acts pervade the political, legal, societal and religious life of the ancient world. In many instances there are striking similarities between the formulae of the Greco-Roman world and those of the Near East. Often illumination exists from one to the other.¹ Here I wish to notice a few passages in Greek drama where I think such illumination is possible.

First, from Sophocles' *Electra*. Clytemnestra, after a disturbing dream, declares (644 ff.):

ἃ γὰρ προσεῖδον νυκτὶ τῇδε φάσματα
δισσῶν ὀνείρων, ταῦτά μοι, Λύκει' ἀναξ,
εἰ μὲν πέφηνεν ἐσθλά, δὸς τελεσφόρα,
εἰ δ' ἐχθρά, τοῖς ἐχθροῖσιν ἐμπαλιν μέθες.

A similar passage occurs at Aeschylus *Persae* 217–19, where the chorus, in dialogue with Atossa, who has had a disturbing dream, says:

εἴ τι φλαῦρον εἶδες, αἰτοῦ τῶνδ' ἀποτροπὴν τελεῖν,
τὰ δ' ἀγάθ' ἐκτελῇ γενέσθαι σοί τε καὶ τέκνοις σέβειν
καὶ πόλει φίλοις τε πᾶσι.

The silence of the commentators suggests that readers of these plays assume that the sentiments here expressed are reasonable *ad hoc* inventions of the playwrights. I think not. Rather, I suspect that we have here ritualistic formulae that were to be recited after a dream that might appear ill omened. We have several clear examples of such formulae in Near-Eastern texts. One occurs in the Talmud:² 'Oh Lord... I have dreamed a dream and I do not know what it is. Whether I have dreamt about myself or my friends have dreamt about me or I about others, if they are good dreams then make them strong and confirm them... But if they need healing then heal them... Turn

¹ For instructive examples see the articles by M. Weinfeld at *JAOS* 93 (1973), 190–9 and *Ugarit Forschungen* 8 (1976), 379–414.

² Bab. Tal. Ber. 55b.