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I, Jason Clay, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Classics.

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Seneca's Agamemnon: A Literary Translation with Annotations

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Seneca’s *Agamemnon*: A Literary Translation with Annotations

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Abstract

This project is a literary translation of Seneca the Younger’s *Agamemnon*. As the only extant Latin tragedian, Seneca’s work is invaluable to the history of drama. In the past, Seneca’s tragedies were understudied, yet they are now steadily gaining critical attention following a renewed interest in Silver Latin. This project aims to fill one of the gaps that previous inattention has caused: there are not many modern translations of Seneca’s tragedies, with the exception of Fitch’s Loeb, and A.J. Boyle’s translations and commentaries on Senecan tragedies. In my translation and annotation, I hope to underscore what makes Seneca’s tragedies so fascinating and worthy of study.

With regards to translation, I tried to remain close to the original Latin, but I also recognize that Seneca’s style can be a bit clunky if one tries to adhere too closely. A major component of Seneca’s style is the influence of rhetoric and declamation, including frequent alliteration and wordplay that I tried to include in my translation. I wanted to highlight the intense emotion these characters feel. These are characters who are struggling to control their heightened emotions, and I hope to catch their struggle. Particular attention was paid to the messenger speech by Eurybates in Act III, which describes the destruction of the Greek fleet on their return from Troy. It is bizarre, otherworldly, and eerie, and I wanted the fear of the sailors to be palpable.

With regards to annotation, I wanted to emphasize two primary elements: the ways in which Seneca develops his characters in relation to Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, which also details Agamemnon’s fatal return to Argos, and the use of Silver Latin motifs. While the plays share similarities in their casts of characters, the ways in which they act are remarkably different, especially the figures of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Additionally, Seneca highlights what
differs Silver Latin from its Gold predecessor. Among these include a high degree of intertextuality, metatheatrical components, and awareness of one’s literary past. My annotations elaborate upon these motifs.
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Act I

[The Shade of Thyestes enters]

Shade of Thyestes:

As I leave behind the black realms of Dis below, sent forth from the vast cave of Tartarus, I am here, not certain which of the two seats I should hate more: I, Thyestes, flee heaven, flee hell. Ah! My soul shudders, dread rouses my limbs: I see my paternal gods, no, they are my brother’s. This is the ancient threshold of Pelops’ home. Here it is customary that the Pelasgians enter kingship with the kingly glory of the crown. Lofty they sit on this throne, those kings that bear the scepter in their haughty hand. This is the place for holding court – this is the place for banquets.

I want to return. Is it not preferable to dwell in sad lakes? Is it not better to see the guardian of black Styx moving his triple-headed necks, manes and all? Where that man, body

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1 The text used is Zwierlein’s 1986 OCT of Seneca’s tragedies unless otherwise noted.
2 Aeschylus’ Agamemnon begins with a watchman at dawn. He has remained at Argos during the entirety of the Trojan War, where he awaited the beacon signal to announce that the Greeks have won. Whereas the end of the prologue focuses on Aegisthus’ relationship, Aeschylus’ Greek counterpart immediately characterizes Clytemnestra in terms of the masculine by placing γυναικὸς next to ἀνδρόβουλον at line 11. See notes 29 and 30 for further examples of the ways in which Seneca and Aeschylus differ their characterization of major figures.
3 The presence of divine or supernatural figures who deliver the play’s prologue is not uncommon within Senecan tragedy. The Fury and the Shade of Tantalus begins the Thyestes, and Juno begins Hercules Furens. Within these prologues, the speaker introduces the major themes and plot points of the play. Often these are single words that speak to larger concerns examined throughout each play. The words poena (punishment), scelus (crime), and fides (fidelity, loyalty) recur throughout the play, which falls in line with the “buzzwords” that frequent Senecan tragedy, both here and else. Cf. Thyestes 45, where fas, fides, and ius are paired together, as well as scelere at 25.
4 There is a textual corruption with the use of incolere at line 13. While fit for governing the accusatives tristes lacus in line 12, it seems awkward to govern custodem...iactantem in lines 13-14. Tarrant proposes that the verb videre can be used to govern both sentences. Uses of video to refer to looking upon hell are attested in Vergil, Ovid, and Pseudo Seneca’s Hercules Oetaeus. Additionally the use of videre here shares similarities with the use of video at line 6.
bound to the swift wheel, is turned on himself? Where so often labor is mocked in vain as the stone rolls back down? Where a ravenous bird eats the renewing liver? Where, even though among waves, a man is parched with burning thirst and seeks fleeing water, but his mouth is cheated, and he is soon to pay a heavy price for his feast for the gods.

But is that old man as guilty of crime as I am? Let us reconsider all those guilty men for whom the Cretan judge casts his vote because of their unspeakable deeds. I, Thyestes, will surpass all in my crimes. Will I be overcome by my brother, gorged on my three sons, buried inside me? I devoured my own children. Until now, Fortuna has not tainted the father. But in daring some crime even greater than the one done, she orders me to seek an unspeakable union with my daughter. I did not hesitate to devour her words: I undertook the unspeakable deed.

Therefore, so that I, a father, may pass through all my children, she bears a son worthy of her father in her pregnant belly under fate’s compulsion. Nature has been inversed: I have mixed the roles of father and grandfather, oh, unspeakable!, husband and father, grandchildren and children – I have confused day and night.

It is too late for there to be trust that an uncertain oracle might care for men worn down by evils: I am already dead. But as for that Agamemnon, king among kings, leader among leaders, whose banner a thousand ships followed and covered the Trojan seas with their sails….

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5 Ixion, who attempted to sleep with Juno.
6 Sisyphus, who tried to cheat death.
7 Tityus, who attempted to rape Leto.
8 Cf. Thyestes 2, in which the ghost of Tantalus refers to fugaces cibos (fleeing foods), juxtaposed here with aquas fugaces (fleeing waters).
9 The first example of the maius motif within the play. This motif is common with Senecan tragedy and Silver Latin at large, in which author and character both strive to top their literary/mythological predecessors.
10 Thyestes’ incestuous union with his daughter, Pelopia, created Aegisthus, who seeks vengeance against Agamemnon. Agamemnon’s father slaughtered Thyestes’ other children and fed them to him as revenge for stealing his wife, Aerope, and his kingdom.
Now that Ilium has been overthrown, he is home after ten years; soon he will offer his neck to his wife. Now, now the house will swim in the blood of vengeance. Swords, I see, axes, arrows, the head of the king cleaved by the double axe. Crimes are now at hand! Now treachery, slaughter, blood — a banquet is being prepared. This is why I had you, Aegisthus. Why does shame burden your face? Why does your right hand tremble with waver ing resolve? Why do you deliberate with yourself, rack your brain, ask yourself whether this befits you? Look at your father.

Why suddenly does the change of a summer night bring forth a long delay for the span of winter? What keeps the stars from falling from the sky? I am delaying Phoebus. Return day to the world!

[Exit Thyestes]

[The Chorus enters]

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11 Sanguine alterno at line 44, literally “in alternating blood.” I translated above to capture the cyclical nature of blood vengeance so inherent in the Mycenaean myths.

12 Not only does the shade of Thyestes foreshadow later events of the play, he also takes on a role similar to that of Cassandra, the prophetess who will later foresee the death of Agamemnon. Both take on an interest in the banquet that is prepared: parantur epulae at 48, epulae instructae at 875.

13 Lit. “The reason for your birth has come.” Additionally, the use of the vocative suggests that Aegisthus may be on stage for the duration of the prologue, though silent. I believe this may be possible since both Pylades and Orestes appear as silent characters in Act 5.

14 Scholars disagree on the proper reading here. Zwierlein’s OCT prints A’s reading of patrem, while Fitch’s Loeb and Tarrant both print E’s reading of matrem. I follow Zwierlein’s reading due to the fact that Thyestes has already recounted his impious deeds. Aegisthus is a child of incest, and his father’s former crimes color his nature. It is only proper that Aegisthus look to his father as a model for crime, not his mother.
Chorus:15

O Fortune fallacious in the good fortunes of kings, you place exceedingly eminent men on unstable footing. Never have scepters maintained quiet peace and a day that trusts in itself: one care wearies them, then another. A new storm troubles their minds. The sea does not burn like this in Libyan Syrtes, rolling waves in alternation, nor do the waves of the Euxine near the snowy pole swell like this when stirred from deep depths, where Bootes turns its shining wagon, untouched by cerulean waters, as Fortuna does when she wheels outright destruction for kings. They want to be feared, but they are afraid to be feared. Kindly night offers them no safe retreat. Sleep, the conqueror, cannot free their hearts from concern.

What cities has tit-for-tat vengeance not given to destruction? What cities are not wearied by impious arms? Laws, modesty, the sacred trust between husband and wife flee these halls. Harsh Bellona, hand blood-red, follows, and the Fury16 that pains the proud, accompanying always excessively great homes, which any hour can rise from high to humble.

Though arms lay idle and treacheries cease, these great things fall under their own weight, and fortune, too, fall under her own burden. Sails inflated by aiding Notus fear their own winds too much; a tower, lifting its head to the clouds is buffeted by rainy Auster. The grove that scatters thick shade sees that its ancient oaks are being shattered. Lightning strikes the high hills, bigger bodies are exposed to illness, and while the common flock runs in roving pastures, the

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15 The first choral ode is in anapests, marked short-short-long. This is the first chorus of the play, as a second chorus appears later. This chorus is comprised of citizens of Argos, like the chorus of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*. Aeschylus’ chorus of Argives plays a larger role than the one in Seneca’s *Agamemnon*. Aeschylus has his chrous interact with major characters more frequently, which gives them a larger role in the play’s narrative.

16 The Furies play a vital role in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, but also appear in Seneca’s tragedies. A Fury is included as a character in Seneca’s *Thyestes*, which details the crimes of the generation before this play, and Juno is presented as a Fury-like figure in the prologue of *Hercules Furens*. Here, the Furies and Fortuna seem closely linked in their ability to lay low arrogant men.
tallest neck is perfect for a wound. Whatever Fortuna raises on high, she raises only so that it will one day fall.

Life is longer when men are modest: Happy is he who is content with the lot of middling men, who traces the shore when the breeze is kind. Fearful of entrusting his craft to the sea, he skirts nearer to land with his oar.

[Exit Chorus]
Act II

[Clytemnestra enters]

Clytemnestra [to self]:

Why, my sluggish spirit, do you seek a safe course of action? Why waver? The better path has now been closed. Once upon a time you could protect the chaste marriage of your husband and the scepter without a king through your chaste fidelity: customs have perished, law, glory, piety, fidelity, and modesty, once it wastes away, does not know how to return. Let loose the reins and immediately stir up every sort of wickedness. The safe path through crimes is always through more crimes. Now consider the feminine wiles inside of yourself, which any faithless wife does, unable to control herself due to blind love; consider the deeds which the hands of stepmothers dare, what the virgin blazing with impious love did as she fled the Phasian kingdom in a Thessalian ship: sword, poison - Or flee the homes of Mycenae, ally at your side, in a stealthy ship. Why do you speak of cowardly crimes, exile, and flight? Your sister did these: a greater unspeakable deed befits you.

[Nurse enters]

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17 Characters in Senecan drama frequently address the emotional seat of their bodies (pectus, animus, anima) rather rather than themselves. These characters attempt to represent the stoic ideal of constantia, in which a proficiens (progressor) attempts and practices the act of guiding themselves towards Stoic calm. Senecan protagonists ultimately fail at restraining their passion.

18 Also tied into the notion of constantia is the use of the imperative verbs that are directed inward. Christopher Starr’s 2006 article, “Commanding Constantia in Senecan Tragedy” discusses the use of these self addresses in depth, including Clytemnestra within this play.

19 There are echoes here of both Phaedra and Medea, who perform terrible actions due to love they are unable to restrain. One of the frequent motifs of Senecan tragedy is the use of self-referential language. Here, Clytemnestra refers to Medea, about whom Seneca wrote a tragedy. Additionally, Hippolytus in the Phaedra refers to the titular character as Medea twice, at lines 564 (sola coniunx Aegi, Medea) and 697 (Colchide noverca). Hippolytus uses Medea to serve as the archetypal evil stepmother figure.
Nurse:

Queen of the Danaans, famous daughter of Leda, why do you turn your thoughts in silence? Why, with no control of the plan, do you bear savage emotion in your violent soul? Though you remain silent, pain covers your face. So whatever it is, allow yourself some time or space: what reason cannot calm, delay often can.

Clytemnestra:

Greater things grieve me so much that I cannot endure delay. Flames scorch my marrow, burn my heart. Fear mingled with pain gives the goad: my breast thrums with envy, foul love presses my spirit under the yoke, and refuses to be overcome; among these flames of a mind besieged, my modesty, weary indeed, cast off, and ruined, struggles. I am driven by waves of emotion: just as when the wind draws the deep here, the tide there, the wave, in hesitation, doubts at what evil it should fall. Therefore I have placed the rudder down from my hands. Wherever wrath, pain, or hope will bear me, there I shall go. I have set my ship to sea. When the mind errs, the best thing to do is follow chance.

Nurse:

Blind is the rashness which seeks chance as a guide.

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20 Within Act 2 of Senecan dramas, major characters undergo a passion-restraint scene with a Nurse or Advisor interlocutor. For example, see *Thyestes* 176-335, *Phaedra* 85-273, *Medea* 116-176. Within these scenes, the interlocutor attempts to guide the major character through the process of controlling their emotion. They frequently begin with questions and a description of the character’s pain made manifest on their body.

21 See note 20.

22 *Pessundatus* is a strange compound word attested as an adjective here, and in verbal form in Festus’ *De Verborum Significatione: plera pars pessundatur* (the greater part is given to ruin).

23 Frequent in these passion-restraint scenes are stichomythic dialogue in which the two characters exchange fast sentential statements. Throughout these exchanges the characters will build and challenge the other character’s use of words and their viewpoints. For instance, Clytemnestra and the Nurse both use the word *loco* in differing ways to advance their own arguments in lines 152 and 153, respectively.
Clytemnestra:

For one whose fortune is near its end, why fear doubt?

Nurse:

Your crime is safe and hidden, if you will allow it.

Clytemnestra:

Every crime of a royal house shines forth.

Nurse:

Your former crimes pain you, and still you are planning a new one?

Clytemnestra:

Surely a limit to wickedness is a stupid thing.

Nurse:

One who places crime on top of crime makes worse that which they fear.

Clytemnestra:

Both sword and fire often take the place of medicine.

Nurse:

No one tries the last possible option in the first moment.

Clytemnestra:

The path must be seized immediately in terrible situations.

Nurse:

The sacred name of marriage should sway you.

Clytemnestra:

Shall I look again on my husband, though a widow for ten years?
Nurse:

You ought to remember the children you had with him.

Clytemnestra:

Indeed I remember the marriage torches of my daughter\(^{24}\) and my son-in-law Achilles. He [Agamemnon] showed faithfulness to his wife.

Nurse:

She broke the delays of the immobile fleet and spurred on the sea, stuck in sluggish inactivity.

Clytemnestra:

I am ashamed, I ache. Daughter of Tyndareus, a child of heaven, I birthed a sacrificial beast for the Doric fleet! My mind turns me back to the wedding of my virgin daughter, a wedding which he made worthy for the house of Pelops, when her father stood at the alter with sacrificial prayers: what a wedding! Calchas shivered at the replies of his own voice and the retreating fires. O house, always overcoming crimes with crimes: We bought the winds with her blood, war with her slaughter. But did one thousand ships sail together? The fleet was not released at a god’s favor; Aulis cast the impious ships from her harbor.

He began the war with these auspices, and he waged it even worse. Seized with love for a captive woman and unmoved by prayer, he held the Sminthean spoil of the elderly priest of Apollo, now, now raging with passion for the sacred virgin. Unconquerable Achilles did not bend his spirit with threats, nor could he alone who sees the fate of the world, an augur trusted

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\(^{24}\) Clytemnestra is referring to her daughter, Iphigenia, sacrificed at Aulis by Agamemnon and his men. The winds prevented the fleet from sailing to Troy at Artemis’ bidding. Agamemnon summons his daughter and wife under the false pretext that Achilles, the Greek hero, wishes to take Iphigenia as a bride. The first choral ode in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* recounts her sacrifice.
among us, but unimportant to captives, nor the sick soldiers and gleaming pyres; amongst the final slaughter of the Greeks now falling to ruin, he was conquered, nary an enemy, an easy target for Venus, and he refashioned loves; so that the bed of a single man never be without a barbarian whore, he loved the Lyrnesidan maiden taken by Achilles, and felt no shame to rip her from the lap of her man. Ah! The enemy of Paris! Now with a fresh wound, he rages in mad love for a Phrygian seer, Troy made trophy, Ilium overturned, he returns married to a slave, the son-in-law of Priam.

Prepare yourself, soul; you are fashioning heavy conflict. The crime must be undertaken. What day do you await, sluggish soul? Do you wait until Phrygian wives hold the scepter of Pelops? Do virgins widowed at home delay you? Orestes, like his father? Soon-to-come troubles must move you! Some storm of affairs hangs overhead. Why yield, pitiful woman? [Ah! A raging stepmother is here for your children!] Let the sword pierce your side, let it slay both, if nothing else is possible. Mix blood, kill your husband by your own death; it is a beautiful death to die together with the one you want to die with.

Nurse:

Queen, restrain yourself! Cease your impulses! Think about what you are planning! The conqueror of fierce Asia has come, avenger of Europe, who dragged down captive Pergamum and the Phrygians, conquered long ago; now you are stealthily trying to attack this man with deception? A man whom Achilles did not injure with his fierce sword, though savage, he had armed his insolent hand? Nor did the Greater Ajax when he raged, death decided, nor Hector, the

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25 Apollo rained down plague upon the Trojans when the daughter of Apollo’s priest, Chryses, was taken by Agamemnon.
26 Refers to Briseis, taken by Agamemnon from Achilles in Book I of the Iliad. This act sets in motion Achilles’ anger.
27 Refers to Cassandra, daughter of Priam and priestess of Apollo, whom Agamemnon brings back as a spoil from Troy.
sole delay in war for the Danaans, nor the accurate shafts of Paris, nor black Memnon, nor Xanthus, gathering up bodies and arms, unable to tell them apart, and Simois as it drove along waves made purple due to blood, nor Cycnus, snowy offspring of the water god, nor the Thracian phalanx with warlike Rhesus, nor the Amazon with her painted quiver, hand armed with the axe, and pelta [crescent-shield]. Do you intend to kill this man as he returns home, and stain the altars in impious slaughter? Will vengeance-taking Greece allow this deed to go unpunished? Imagine horses, arms, the strait that bristles with fleets, soil deeply drowning in slaughter, the entire fate of the captive Dardanian home turned against the Danaans! Restrain your wild emotions and calm your mind, for your sake.

[Nurse exits, Aegisthus enters\textsuperscript{28}]

Aegisthus [to self]:

It’s here, isn’t it? That time I always have feared deep in my heart and soul, the height of my misfortunes. Why are you turning back, spirit? Why do you place down your arms at your initial reaction? You must believe that the cruel gods are fashioning ruin and dire fate for you. Offer your worthless life for every punishment, Aegisthus, and receive sword and flame in a willing chest. It is not a punishment for someone born so vilely to die.

[To Clytemnestra]

You, daughter of Leda, my ally in danger, accompany me, at least: that cowardly leader, that strong father must pay blood for blood. But why are your trembling cheeks turning white, why does your gaze lie stunned with a blank expression?

\textsuperscript{28} While the manuscripts provide no stage directions, the fact that the nurse attempted to restrain Clytemnestra’s passions gives credence to the idea that she would leave the stage. Aegisthus emerges as a figure that attempts to un-restrain Clytemnestra, and it seems strange that the Nurse would remain silent.
Clytemnestra:

Love for my husband has won, it turns me back.\(^{29}\) I am brought back to the place that I should have never left in the first place. Now chaste fidelity must be sought again, for it is never to late to take the path to good morals. If one regrets their crime, they are basically guiltless.

Aegisthus:

Where are you going? You’re out of your mind! Do you really believe, really hope that Agamemnon has been a faithful husband to you?\(^{30}\) Though there is nothing hidden in your soul that creates crippling fear, still his arrogant fortune, powerless over its excessive pride, would give forth a bloated ego. When Troy still stood, he was a pain to his allies. What do you think that Troy had added to a spirit savage in and of itself? He was the king of the Mycenaeans, but he will return a tyrant. Prosperity exalts the minds of men. A crowd has come to pour around his whore with such celebration! But only a slave stands out from the crowd, a priestess of the truth-telling god, she clings to the king. Will you, overcome, lead a partner to your marriage chamber? Ah, she will not allow it to be so! When a whore openly possesses a wedded house, this is the greatest evil for a wife. Neither kingdoms nor wedding torches know how to handle a third.

\(^{29}\) In a rare turn of events within Senecan drama, Clytemnestra seems to have been swayed by the Nurse’s appeals for restraint. When placed in comparison with the Clytemnestra from Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, this Clytemnestra retains love for husband. Her language (casta... fides) hints at sincerity, though it is impossible to know for certain. I think, however, Clytemnestra’s characterization would be deepened and made more tragic if Aegisthus successfully manipulated her into action. In Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, her desire for revenge does not waver as it does here.

\(^{30}\) Aegisthus differs greatly from his Aeschylean counterpart. Aeschylus’ Aegisthus takes a lesser role than he does in this play. In fact, he does not emerge until Clytemnestra has already murdered Agamemnon. Even then his appearance is brief before Clytemnestra brings the play to a close.
Clytemnestra:

Aegisthus, why do you again drive me headlong to ruin? Why do you stoke my anger and passion, though it now is receding? As victor, he has allowed himself something with his captive. It does not befit a wife or lady to pay this any mind. There is one law for the throne, another for the private bed. Why does my spirit not allow me to exact harsh penalties against my husband, though I know his wicked crime? One who stands in want of pardon should easily give pardon.

Aegisthus:

Is that so? Did you two agree on mutual pardon? Are the laws of ruling unknown to you? Are they new? Kings are hostile judges to us, but they favor themselves. They think that this is the greatest pledge of kingship: if something is not allowed for others, it is allowed for them alone.

Clytemnestra:

He pardoned Helen. She has returned to Menelaus in marriage, though she ruined Europe and Asia alike with her wickedness.

Aegisthus:

But no woman stole Agamemnon in a secret affair nor did one seize his heart, still joined to his wife. Now he seeks crime and fashions excuses to justify it! Assume that you had undertaken no crime; what good is an honest life that is free from fault? When a lord feels hate, one becomes guilty, even if not investigated. Will you return to Sparta as a scorned runaway, to your Eurotas, to your father’s home? A king’s divorce offers no escape. You are trying to lighten your fear with false hope.
Clytemnestra:

Nobody knows my wrong except those I trust.$^{31}$

Aegisthus:

There is no such thing as trust in a royal palace.

Clytemnestra:

I shall use my wealth to buy fidelity with a bribe.

Aegisthus:

When loyalty is obtained by a bribe, by a bribe it is overcome.

Clytemnestra:

The remaining shame in my spotless mind is rising. Why do you oppose this? Why do you speak evil plans in such a convincing voice? Am I, a noble-born, supposed to marry you, an exile, because the king of kings is gone?

Aegisthus:

Why do you think that I am lesser than Agamemnon? Because I am the son of Thyestes?

Clytemnestra:

If that is not enough, remember that he’s your grandfather, too!

Aegisthus:

I was born because Apollo ordered it! I am not ashamed of my birth!

Clytemnestra:

You claim that Phoebus Apollo is the founder of your unspeakable lineage, yet you all cast him out from the sky with sudden night when he tried to turn back his chariot? Why do we include the gods in base deeds? You know how to snatch a marriage bed with deception, but we

$^{31}$ Clytemnestra and Aegisthus enter into stichomythic dialogue. Here, Aegisthus attempts to undo whatever progress the Nurse made.
know that you are a man because of your illicit affair. Get out of here, now! You’re a disgrace to my house! Get out of my sight! This house has no king, no husband.

Aegisthus:

I am used to exile, I am used to evil. If you order it, queen, I leave not just this house, but Argos, too. I do not at all hesitate to open my breast, weighed down with pains, to the sword, as you so order.

Clytemnestra:

I wish that I, a bloodstained daughter of Tyndareus, could allow this to happen! She who sins with another owes fidelity to the crime. Come with me instead, so our joint planning may make sense of this uncertain and ill-boding state of affairs.

[Clytemnestra and Aegisthus exit]

[Chorus enters]

Chorus:

Sing Phoebus, ye glorious youth! For you, the joyous crowd garlands their heads, for you, the unwedded race of Inachus shakes the laurel and pours forth their virgin locks in the customary way. Thespian guests, join our dance, too, and you who drink from the chilly springs of Erasinus, you who drink from the Eurotus, and you who drink from the Ismenus, silent on its green bank. The seer Manto, daughter of Tiresias, has warned you to worship Artemis and Apollo with sacrificial rites.

O Phoebus, o conqueror, now that peace is restored, loosen your bow and remove the quiver heavy with slender arrows from your shoulders. Let the lyre tunefully sound when

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32 This choral ode, like the first, is in anapests. The chorus includes mythological examples of the dangers of excess and competition. The Giants’ attempt to take Olympus came from a place of arrogance, which ultimately led to their ruin. Niobe, too, in her boast about her children, brought about their deaths.
plucked by your swift fingers: I’d like to hear a sweet song that does not resound in heroic meters, but that sort of simple song you usually play in a lighter style, while the learned Muse goes through your songs. Though you could play on a heavier string like you used to sing when the gods saw the Titans overcome by lightning, or when mountains upon mountains fashioned a path for savage monsters: Ossa stood placed upon Pelion, the pine-bearing Olympus on top of both.

Be present, o great gods, sister and wife, you who share in the scepter, queenly Juno: We Mycenaeans, your people, we worship you. You alone watch over Argos when it is in trouble, when it kneels before your power. You alone wage wars and bear peace by hand. Now, as victor, receive Agamemnon’s laurel. For you, the box-wood flute with many holes solemnly sings; for you, young girls skillfully strum strings in pleasant song; for you, Greek mothers cast a torch as a votive gift: the white bride of the bull, unaware of the plow, will fall at your altars, its neck not marked by any yoke.

You, too, daughter of the great Thunderer, famous Pallas, you who have often aimed your shaft at Dardanian towers, women young and old worship you in a joint chorus. The priestess opens the temple doors at your approach, goddess. For you, the crowd comes crowned in woven garlands; to you, weary old men give thanks for prayers fulfilled, and they pour wine in libation with hands trembling.

We pray to you, too, Trivia in our next song. We did not forget you. You, Lucina, ordered maternal Delos to stand still, to stop wandering the Cyclades, now here, now there, at the whim of the winds; now still and with roots fixed fast, she holds onto the earth; she spurns the breezes and harbors ships, though it was once in her nature to follow them. You prevailed over
the Tantalids and tallied losses for a mother: now a weeping rock\textsuperscript{33} stands on the highest peak of Sipylus, and to this day, the ancient marble still weeps fresh tears. Man and women alike eagerly worship your twin divinity.

You, before all others, father and ruler with power of the bolt, at whose nod the furthest reaches of the world tremble together, founder of our race, O Jupiter, gladly take our gifts; as our great-grandfather, look at your worthy offspring.

[Eurybates enters]

But look!\textsuperscript{34} A soldier hastening with a long stride hurries forth, carrying clear signs of happiness (for his spear bears the laurel on its iron tip). Eurybates is here, always a true friend to the king.

\textsuperscript{33} Seneca alludes to Ovid 6.311-12 here: \textit{Ibi fixa cacumine montis liquitur, et lacrimas etiam nunc marmora manant} (There, she is left, fixed on a mountain top, and even now, the marble sheds tears).

\textsuperscript{34} The manuscripts of Greek and Roman tragedy do not include stage directions. However, it is possible to look to the text for coded language that suggests what is happening on stage. For instance, the use of \textit{ecce} (look!) signals that a character is entering onto the stage. Additionally, the use of demonstratives, particularly forms of \textit{hic, haec, hoc} that show proximity to the speaker, can indicate particular individuals or props currently in use (e.g. if a speaker says, “With this sword”).
Act III

Eurybates\textsuperscript{35}:

Shrines, altars of the gods, my paternal home… Weary after such a long journey, I can hardly believe my eyes! On my knees, I worship you! Give thanks to the gods above! The great glory of the Argive land returns at last: victorious Agamemnon is home at last!

Clytemnestra:

Happy is the news that has come to my ears! Where is my husband whom I’ve sought for ten years? What’s the delay? Is he on land or sea?

Eurybates:

He is safe and sound. With greater glory and illustriously praised, he sets foot to return to a longed-for shore.

Clytemnestra:

Let us honor this desired day with sacrifice, and honor the gods, even if they were slow to be favorable. But tell me: is my husband’s brother alive? Tell me: where is my sister?

Eurybates:

I seek better things in my prayers and call the gods as my witness: for the lot of the wavering sea prevents me from saying anything for certain. When the scattered fleet took to the swelling seas, the allied ships could not see each other. Agamemnon himself, in his course over the vast sea, suffered graver damages on sea than in war. He returns like a conquered man.

Though victor, he brings back only a few mangled ships from his once large fleet.

\textsuperscript{35} Eurybates is a stock messenger character. Included within all of Seneca’s dramas, a named or unnamed character delivers an account of events that happen offstage, but that are often integral to the plot. Here, Eurybates recounts the ill-fated voyage of the Greek fleet on their way back from Troy. While these speeches are often laced with epic material, Eurybates’ speech is more epic than usual, owing much to famous storm narratives from both Vergil, Ovid, and the epic subject matter of the\textit{ Nostoi}, the disastrous return of the Greeks at Troy.
Clytemnestra:

    Tell me what disaster consumed our ships, what misfortune of the sea broke apart our leaders.

Eurybates:

    You are asking me about things that are difficult to say\(^{36}\), you are forcing me to defile a happy day with inauspicious news. My mournful mind refuses to speak, it trembles at such evils.

Clytemnestra:

    Tell me. A man who refuses to know his own misfortune makes fear worse. Uncertain evils torture men more.

Eurybates:

    When all of Pergamum fell to Doric fire, the spoils were divided, and, in haste, they sought the sea. By now, the weary soldier had already unburdened his waist of his sword, and on the sterns’ summits, shields sat unattended. The oar is worked by soldiers’ hands, and to the hastening soldiers, every delay was far too long. When the signal from the king’s ship gave the go-ahead and the distinct horn announced to the happy oarsman that it was time, the golden prow marked the first path, and opened the path which one thousand ships would cleave.

    At first, a light breeze drove the ships onward as it fell on the sails; the calm sea, scarcely having a gentle motion, wavered under the blowing of soft Zephyr. The sea shined because of the fleet, and disappeared, too. It made them happy to see that the shores of Troy were barren, it made them happy to see the deserted places of abandoned Sigeus. Every youth rushed to bend the oars, pulled together in tandem, aided the winds with their action, and moved their strong

\(^{36}\) Both a play on the common \textit{mirabile dictu} supine, as well as a reference to \textit{Aeneid} 4.454 in which water blackens and wine turns to blood as Dido wishes for death.
arms in alternating effort. The cleaved current gleaned, the flanks groaned, white foam cutting through the cerulean sea.

When a stronger breeze stretched the swelling sails, the soldiers set down their oars. The ship has been entrusted to the winds. Spread out on the rower’s seats, a soldier either noted the lands fading in the distance (as much as the sails permitted sight)\(^{37}\), or told stories of the war about the threats of brave Hector, his chariot, his body returned to a purchased pyre, Hercean Jove spattered with the blood of a king.\(^{38}\) Then the Tyrrenian fish who frolic back in forth on the still sea, and jump across the swollen sea with bent backs, and leap over the entire sea move in circles and swim beside the flank, like an ally. They happily swim before the ships, then fall back and follow their course. Now the group frolics and touches the beak of the first ship, now they surround and encircle the thousandth ship. Now the entire shoreline is covered, the fields lay hidden, the peaks of Mt. Ida vanish, fading from sight; the one thing a steady gaze can see, smoke from Troy scarcely visible as a black mark in the distance.

Now Titan was lightening his weary neck from the yoke. Now light moved towards the stars. Now day was falling forth. A small cloud, as it was growing into a discolored ball, stains the bright ray of Phoebus as he set. The various colors of the sunset made the sea suspect. The first sign of night had spackled the sky with stars, the sails fall flat, abandoned by the wind. Then a deep murmur fell from the hilltops, threatening greater trouble; shore and stone groan for a long time. The waves swell, tossed by the approaching winds. Suddenly the moon is hidden, the

\(^{37}\) Lit. “as much as the sails receded.” The billowing sails prevent the soldiers from constant sight of the lands in the distance.
\(^{38}\) In order: the chariot refers to the chariot in which Achilles dragged Hector’s body around the walls of Troy after their duel in Book 22 of the *Iliad*; the purchased pyre refers to the scene in Book 24 of the *Iliad* in which Priam goes as a suppliant to Achilles in order to ransom the body of his son. The blood of the king refers to the murder of Priam by Neoptolemus at an altar of Jupiter in *Aeneid* 2. Seneca here combines both Greek and Roman epic for tragic use.
stars hide: there is not just one night. A deep fog covered the shadows. When all light was gone, the fog confused sea and sky. All at once, on all sides, winds fell. They seized the sea, brought it up from the seabed. Zephyrus fought Eurus, Notus fought Boreas. Each sent forth their own arms and stirred the sea in hostility. A whirlwind spun the ocean.

The Strymonian Eagle sends deep snow in gusts. Libyan Auster stirs up the sandy Syrtes, \[39\] [the wind does not remain in the south; Notus becomes heavy with clouds], and makes the clouds larger with rain. Eurus moves the east as it shakes the realms of Nabataea and the Eooan gulf. What about savage Corvus as he thrusts his head from the ocean? You would think that the whole world was being pulled up from its bottom, that the gods themselves were leaving the broken sky, that black chaos was being returned to the world. Because of the wind, the tide stood still, but then the wind rolled the tide back again. The sea does not restrain itself: it is lifted to the stars. The sky is gone, rain and wave become one.

Indeed no solace is given to their troubles. They cannot see or know why they are perishing. Darkness obscures their sight, the black night of cruel Styx. Though their fires went out, a fierce bolt flashed from a fractured cloud. Light is such a sweetness to these miserable men that they even ask for this flash of lightning.\[41\]

\[39\] Line 481 (\textit{nec manet in Austro: fit gravis nimbis Notus}, is considered spurious by Zwierlein on the grounds that it does not make sense as is. Notus is already a wet wind, so it becoming heavy and filled with water sounds strange. Any other proposed emendation presents difficulty. Tarrant suggests a fuller description or qualifying description of Notus is needed, but no clear emendation is given.

\[40\] This line, \textit{in astra pontus tollitur, caelum perit}, appears in the manuscripts after line 470, but Tarrant and Zwierlein move this line to after line 489. Both argue that while it is not spurious, it is out of place at its initial location, and better fits into context here, both in content, structure, and rhythm.

\[41\] The proper reading of this line is questionable. Seneca seems to be suggesting that the sailors are so frightened that even evil light would alleviate their fear. Tarrant offers several options for emendation, but offers no clear answer. I choose to punctuate the line as \textit{miserisque lucis tanta dulcedo, et mala}, where the \textit{et} takes on an adverbial meaning.
The fleet fell upon itself, prow damaging prow, flank on top of flank. The sea, parting the fleet, seized it headlong, swallowed it, then spit it back onto the deep sea. One sank under its burden, another gave its fractured flank to the waves, the tenth wave buried another; another floated on, battered and without the weight of every plundered prize. Neither sails nor oars remain, nor does the mast remain upright, bearing lofty yardarms, but it floats over the entire Ionian sea as a mutilated stern.

Reason and experience are no use. Skill falls in the face of evils. Fear grips limbs, every soldier stands stunned, his own duty abandoned, the hand shuns the oar. The greatest fear drives the miserable men to prayers, and the Trojans and Danaans ask the gods above for the same things. What fate is able to do! Pyrrhus envies his father, Ajax Ulysses, Menelaus Hector, Agamemon Priam. All who are called happy lie at Troy, those who deserved to fall in their place, whom fame preserved, whom the conquered earth covers.

“Will the sea and waves carry men that dared nothing noble? Will an unfitting fate kill brave men? Must death be wasted? Whoever you are of the gods above, not yet satisfied with such evils, calm your power at last! Even Troy would weep for our devastation. If your angers endures, and it pleases you that the Doric race is being sent to ruin, why do you enjoy that these men perish along with us, for whom we have died? Calm the dangerous seas: does this fleet bear Danaans? It bears Trojans, too!” He could say no more: the sea stole his voice.

Look! Another loss! Pallas, armed with the bolt of angered Jove, tries with her father’s fire whatever the threatening spear or frightening Gorgon aegis cannot. New breezes blow in the sky. Ajax struggles, the only one unconquered by evils. Falling fire comes close to him as he tries to control his own sails, the rope stretched. Another bolt is launched: Pallas sent this aimed bolt from her drawn back hand as hard as she could, just like her father. It pierces Ajax and his
ship, it takes Ajax and part of his ship. He is not deterred. He juts out from the sea like a lofty
crag, though burned, he parts the mad sea and breaks the waves with his breast, and as he clung
to the ship, he caught fire. Ajax shined brightly in the dark sea. The entire strait gleamed.

At last he stands on a rock and shouts in fury: “I am glad that I have overcome the savage
water and fire, that I have conquered the sky, Pallas, bolt, and sea. The fear of the war god did
not make me flee, [I endured both Hector and Mars on my own]\textsuperscript{42}, Phoebus’ arrows did not drive
me from my course. I overcame those men with the Phyrgians. Should I be afraid that you are
throwing someone else’s weapons with an uncertain hand? Why won’t Jupiter throw them
himself?” In his rage, he dared more. Father Neptune broke the rock, struck it with his trident,
raising his head from the depths of the waves, he shattered the mountain. Ajax took it with him
as he fell, he lies overcome by earth, fire, and sea.

Another greater destruction shipwrecked us. There is a small wave, deceitful because of
their shallow shoals, where deceptive Caphereus hides its rocks, hidden in swift whirlpools. The
sea churns on the rocks, wave after wave continually surging. A steep citadel above overlooks
the sea in both directions: on one side, the shores of your Pelopian land and the Isthmus, with its
narrow crossing, that bends back and keeps the Ionian sea from joining the Phrixus. On the other
side, Lemnos\textsuperscript{43}, known for crime, Chalcis, and Aulis, that notorious delay for ships. That
ancestor of Palamedes captured this citadel. As he drew down bright light from the mountaintops
with an evil hand, he led to fleet onto the rocks with a false fire. Ships stuck, fixed fast to the
sharp rocks; some the shallow shoals shattered, the current useless. The first part of these ships

\textsuperscript{42} Possibly spurious. This line interrupts the non me... nec me structure of lines 547 and 549.
Tarrant suggests that it is possible this line can be taken as a parenthesis, which would retain the
structure. Tarrant notes, however, that line attributes accomplishments of Ajax the Greater to
Ajax the Lesser.

\textsuperscript{43} The women of Lemnos are said to have murdered their husbands when they took Thracian
women as wives.
are dragged out, the other part sits on the rock. One ship clashed into another as it drew its course back, mutual destruction. Now ships fear the land, they prefer the sea. Fury has fallen at the return of light. After Troy has been avenged, Phoebus returns and sorrowful day reveals the night’s destruction.

Clytemnestra:

I don’t know whether I should grieve or be glad that my husband has returned. I am glad that he has returned, yet I am driven to weep the grave wound of my kingdom. Return now, father who shakes the kingdom that thunders on high, gods kindly disposed to the Greeks. Now let every head be wrapped in the happy frond, let the sacrificial flute pour forth sweet verses, let the snow white victim fall before our great altars.

[Chorus enters]

But look! A sad crowd of Trojan women, hair undone, is here, in front of whom, Phoebus’ unrestrained priestess, with a swift step, shakes the divine laurel.

[Clytemnestra and Eurybates depart]

Chorus:\n
Alas how sweet is the evil added to mankind, that dire desire for life, although escape from evil is possible and death, unimpeded, calls forth miserable men, the still harbor with eternal calm. No fear moves this man, neither a whirlwind of wild fortune, nor the flames of the angry thundered. Deep peace fears no crowds of citizens, nor the wild threats of a conquered, nor

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This is a second chorus that consists of captive Trojan women. Tarrant notes that the similarities of this chorus in both situation and context resemble the first chorus of the pseudo-Senecan Hercules Oetaeus. The chorus is metrically complex. The first 47 lines (589-636) are polymetric, meaning they consist of multiple meters. Among these include asclepiads with many variations, Sapphic stanzas, and glyconics. The variation in meters perhaps speaks to changes in speed of speech and movement as the chorus recounts the fall of Troy. At 637 the chorus begins to sing in anapests, the meter of the first two choral odes.
the sea that rages with the harsh west wind, nor does it fear savage beasts, or the clouds of dust that are kicked up by barbarian cavalry, nor the cities collapsing, people and all, as enemy fires lay waste to the walls, nor does it fear wild war. A single man will break all servitude, a man who thinks the gods light, who looks at the face of black Acheron, who looks at sad Styx with a calm face, and dares to place an endpoint on life. That man will be equal to a king, equal to the gods. How terrible it is to not know death!

We saw our country collapse on that sad night, when you Doric flames set fire to Dardanian homes. Troy was not overcome neither by war nor weapons as it once fell to the Herculean quiver. Not did the son of Peleus and Thetis overturn her, nor the man beloved by too-savage Achilles, when, as a false Achilles, he shined in borrowed armor and laid low Trojans. Or when Achilles himself, grieving, raised his savage spirit, and the Trojan women on the ramparts feared his swift step. She lost her final glory in the midst of evil, bravely defeated. Troy stood for ten years, only to perish in one night through deception.

We saw the lifelike gift, so large, and we brought in the fatal offering of the Danaans with trusting hand. Often the hollow horse shook on the entranceway, bearing kings and war buried inside. We could have flipped the tables so the Greeks themselves fell into their own trap: Often shields clapped together and made a sound, a quiet murmur struck our ears when Pyrrhus scoffed at obeying Ulysses’ evil trick.

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45 Cf. *Troades* 135-38, which mentions the attacks on the Dardanian walls and Herculean arrows.
46 Achilles.
47 Patroclus, who enters the battlefield of Book XVI of the *Iliad*. Though warned by Achilles not to proceed too far, Patroclus becomes lost in the fury of combat and is eventually killed by Hector with the aid of Apollo. His death caused Achilles to return to the battlefield.
48 The narrative of the fall of Troy owes much to Vergil’s description in Book II of the *Aeneid*, characteristic of Silver Latin’s use of intertextuality.
The Trojan youth, free from fear, enjoyed touching the sacred rope. Here Astyanax leads squadrons of his peers, there the woman given to the Haemonian pyre\textsuperscript{49}: she leads women, he leads men. Joyous mothers offer votive offerings to the gods, joyous father stand at the altars. The entire city has one face: happiness. Hecuba is happy! We never saw that after Hector’s funeral.

Unhappy pain, what do you intend to weep first? What last? Walls constructed with the aid of the gods, demolished by ours? The temples burnt to ash on top of their own gods? There is no place to weep these evils. Great father, Trojan women weep for you. I saw, I saw that Pyrrhus’ weapon was barely touched by blood, though stuck in the old man’s neck.

\textsuperscript{49} Polyxena. Her death is recounted in Seneca’s \textit{Troades}.
Act IV

[Cassandra enters]

Cassandra:

Restrain your tears, Trojan women. Time will ask for them. Weep for your own dead in a lamentable groan. My sorrows need no friend. Remove your laments from my misfortunes. I will be enough for my own evils.

Chorus:

It comforts us to join our tears with yours. Cares wound more those who burn in secret. It is comforting to weep your loved ones in public. You will not be able to weep such ruins, though you are an unyielding virgin and endure evil. Neither the sorrowful nightingale who sings her skilled song, singing “Ity’s” in warbling sounds, nor the chattering Bistonian bird, who tells of the impious threat of her savage husband while seated on the rooftops, would be able to weep for your home in fitting lament, though Cycnus, bright among the snow-white swans would want to sing his swan song on Hister or Tanais, though Halcyons lightly sing their Cecyus on weeping waves, when, trusting in a wicked wind, they foolhardily trust the sea again, they fearfully watch over their young in a tottering nest, not if the sad crowd, imitating soft men, would cut their arms with you, a crowd of the tower-crowned parent, stirred by the loud boxwood flute, strikes their breasts so they may weep Phrygian Attis. There is no limit to tears, Cassandra, because we have endured something far beyond a limit.

But are you tearing the sacred garlands from your head? I would think that the gods above must especially be worship by pitiful ones.
Cassandra:

My misfortunes have now overcome every fear. I am not trying to appease the gods with a single prayer for my own sake, nor do they have anything with which they can harm me, even if they wish to be cruel. Fortuna herself has used up her strength. What country now remains for me? What father? What sister? Altars and tombs have gulped down my blood. What about that happy crowd of my brothers together? It is gone, you see. Pitiful old men have abandoned their kingdom made empty, and throughout so many bedchambers, they see other widowed virgins… except for the Spartan woman.\(^5^0\) That mother of so many kings, the guide of the Phrygians, Hecuba, fruitful for fires\(^5^1\), knowing the new laws of fate, donned a raging appearance. All around the ruins of her city, she barks, raging mad. She survives Troy, Hector, Priam, herself.

Chorus:

Suddenly Phoebus’ priestess falls silent. Whiteness overtakes her cheeks, a constant shaking seizes her whole body. The ribbons stand on end, her soft hair bristles.\(^5^2\) Her panting breast resounds, voice trapped inside. Her eyes roll about, twisted in one direction, then move in the other direction, stuck still. Now she raises her head higher than habit, and walks towering. Now she prepares to unseal sealed lips, now she fails at containing words in her closed mouth, like a maenad disobeying a god.

Cassandra:

Why do you drive me headlong into a new fury? Why are you taking advantage of my mind’s weakness, you sacred peaks of Parnasus? Leave, Phoebus! I no longer belong to you.

\(^5^0\) Helen, who returns to Sparta with Menelaus after the fall of Troy.

\(^5^1\) Meaning Hecuba gave birth to many children who were cremated on funeral pyres.

\(^5^2\) Cassandra is entering a trance-like state. Cf. Aeschylus’ Agamemnon 1072-1330 in which Cassandra and the chorus sing back and forth before Cassandra recounts Agamemnon’s death inside of the palace.
Quench the flames fixed fast in my breast. For whom do I wander in madness? For whom is this Bacchic frenzy? Troy has already fallen. What can I, a false prophet, do?53

Where am I? Kindly light is gone, dark night covers my eyelids, the sky hides deep in the shadows. But look! Day is shining forth with twin suns, twin Argos raises high double homes. Do I see Idaean groves? Is the fatal shepard sitting among powerful goddesses as their judge?54

Be afraid of the secretive race, kings. That is my warning. That rustic child will overturn the house. Why is that mad woman holding a drawn weapon in her feminine hand? What man does she attack with her right hand, that woman in Spartan clothing, holding an Amazonian sword? What is this other sight that now turns my eyes? The beast conqueror lies low, the Marmarican lion offers his neck to the undeserving teeth and bloody bites of the daring lioness.

Why do you call me forth, the sole survivor of my family, you shades of my loved ones? I follow you, father, buried in all of Troy. Brother, aid to the Phrygians, terror to the Danaans, I do not see your former glory, your burning hands from burning ships. But I see your rent limbs, those arms, wounded by the heavy chain. I follow you, Troilus, who joined Achilles in battle too quickly. Deiphobus, you bear an uncertain expression, a gift of your new wife. I enjoy marching towards those Stygian lakes, I like seeing the savage dog of Tartarus, and the kingdom of greedy Dis! Today this raft will carry kingly souls over dark Phlegethon, conquered and conqueror alike. I beg you, shades, and waves sworn by the gods, I beg you, too! At least pull back the surface of the dark pole, so that this small crowd of Phrygians may behold Myceanae. Look, wretched ones: Fate changes its course again.

53 After Cassandra spurned Apollo’s advances, he cursed her with the ability to foresee the future with the caveat that no one would ever believe her.
54 Refers to Paris. His judgment of Aphrodite as the most beautiful goddess was rewarded with the hand of Helen, the most beautiful mortal. Paris’ theft of Helen from Sparta was the impetus for the Trojan War.
Scaly sisters slither forth, they shake snaky whips, left hand holds half-burnt torches, pale cheeks swell, garment of black mourning girts their rotting loins. Nighttime fears rustle, the bones of a large body, spoiled by long stagnation, lie in a muddy marsh.

Look! A weary old man, forgetting his thirst, does not try to draw waters that mock him towards his mouth. He mourns the coming death. Father Dardanus rejoices and has a glorious gait.

Chorus:

Now roving fury breaks upon itself, and she falls on bended knee like a bull before the altar, wound marked on its neck.\(^55\) Let us lift her up.

[Agamemnon comes onstage, possibly with Clytemnestra\(^{56}\)]

Ah\(^57\) Agamemnon, crowned in the victor’s laurel returns to his home at last! His joyous wife went straight to him and returns joined in harmonious step.

Agamemnon:\(^58\)

At last I return safe and sound to my father’s home! Hail, famous land! Barbarian races have given so much spoil for you. For you the long happy mistress of powerful Asia has lowered her hand.

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\(^{55}\) Manuscript A has a scriptum manu that reads *incisa*, while manuscript E prints *incertum*. I follow Tarrant’s suggestion of reading from manuscript A. Though manuscript E is considered the better manuscript in most cases, Tarrant argues that while the printing of *incertum* has echoes of Vergil’s *Aeneid* 2.223f. In Vergil, the *incertum* blow allows the victim to escape. *Incisa* implies the blow worked and foreshadows Cassandra’s eventual death. She has now been marked for slaughter. An emendation of *incertum*, Tarrant argues, could have arisen from scribal familiarity with Vergil’s uses.

\(^{56}\) See note 60.

\(^{57}\) The use of *en* at line 778 draws audience attention to Agamemnon’s entrance.

\(^{58}\) Agamemnon’s appearance marks a point of departure from Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*. Cassandra appears onstage with Agamemnon, but remains silent until Agamemnon and Clytemnestra go inside the palace, despite Clytemnestra’s taunt that Cassandra can only speak in a barbarian tongue. Additionally, Agamemnon does not have a conversation with Cassandra, but does ask Clytemnestra to treat her kindly.
Why is that priestess falling to the ground, trembling, neck bobbing to and fro? Pick her up, servants, restore her with cold water. She is now regaining consciousness, but her face still droops. Rouse your senses: The harbor you have sought from your sorrows is here. Oh happy day!

Cassandra:

It was a happy day for Troy, too.

Agamemnon:

We ought to worship at the altars.

Cassandra:

My father fell before altars.

Agamemnon.

We should pray to Jove together.

Cassandra:

Hercean Jove?\(^{59}\)

Agamemnon:

Do you think that you see Troy?

Cassandra:

I see Priam, too.

Agamemnon:

This is not Troy.

Cassandra:

Wherever Helen\(^{60}\) is, know that it is Troy.

\(^{59}\) The altar at which Priam fell.
Agamemnon:

    Do not fear your mistress, slave.

Cassandra:

    Freedom is at hand.

Agamemnon:

    Live free from care.

Cassandra:

    The only freedom from care for me is death.

Agamemnon:

    You have no reason to be afraid.

Cassandra:

    But there is a great reason for you.

Agamemnon:

    What can a conqueror fear?

Cassandra:

    That which he does not fear.

Agamemnon:

    Trusted band of servants, restrain this woman until she shakes off the god lest her lack of control over her fury cause her to sin in some way.

60 Cassandra is either imagining that she is in Troy, or equating Clytemnestra’s wickedness with Helen’s. Both women commit adultery and bring about death. Cassandra appears to still be in a trance state, believing they should pray to Hercaean Jove, and insisting that she sees Priam. I suggest Clytemnestra is on stage, silent, and the sight of her evokes Cassandra’s confused response.
But you, father, who throws harsh bolts and parts the clouds, who rules the stars and earth, to whom victors in triumph carry spoils, and you, sister of a husband with sway over all, Argive Juno, I will gladly worship you with votive cattle, incense\textsuperscript{61}, and entrails in supplication.

[Agamemnon and Cassandra exit stage, Chorus remains]

Chorus:

Agros, noble because it has noble citizens, Agros, beloved by an angry stepmother, you always rear mighty sons, you have always balanced an unequal number of gods.\textsuperscript{62} That great Hercules of yours deserved to be appointed to haven due to his twelve labors, that man for whom Jupiter made double the hours of dewy night by breaking the laws of the world. He ordered Phoebus to draw his swift chariot slower and to return slowly your double-yoked team, o bright Phoebus.

The star that changes its name in alternation and retraces its steps has been stunned that it is called Hesperus. Aurora has moved her head in the accustomed way, and as she glided down, she placed her neck on her old husband.\textsuperscript{63} The sunrise and sunset realize that Hercules is born. That violent man could not have been born in just one night. For you the world in motion stood still, boy who will soon enter heaven.

The destructive Nemean lion felt you, strangled tight in your arms, as did the Parrhasian hind\textsuperscript{64}, the dweller of the Arcadian fields, and the bristling bull bellowed as it left Dictaean land. He tamed the death-dealing dragon and kept it from birthing more heads from its perishing necks. In a leap he crushed the twin brothers born from a single breast as if from three monsters

\textsuperscript{61} Lit. “gifts of the Arabian.”

\textsuperscript{62} Tarrant notes that the precise reference is unclear.

\textsuperscript{63} Tithonus, who married Aurora, but a fault in Aurora’s prayer for Tithonus’ immortality led him to become immortal, but to continue aging.

\textsuperscript{64} The Ceryneian hind.
with a strike of his club. He led the cattle of the Hesperides to the east, the spoil of triple-bodied Geryon. He led the Thracian flock, which the tyrant did not pasture on the grass of the Strymonian river or on the banks of the Hebrus: the cruel man offered the blood of guests to his savage horses. But his blood was the last to wet the bloodied jaws of his own team. Savage Hippolyta saw her spoil snatched from around her breast; the Stymphalian birds fell from lofty heaven when the sky was struck by arrows; the tree, abundant in golden apples, dreaded his hand, not used to being picked, it fled to the breezes with a lighter branch. The cold guard who knew no sleep heard a sound from the clanging metal, when Hercules left behind the grove, now empty of tawny metal; he held them all. The hound of hell, drawn to heaven in tripled chains became silent, none of its three mouths barked because it feared the hue of unknown light. When you led, the lying house of Dardanus fell, and realized that it should again fear your bow; when you led, the house fell in as many days as it did years for Troy to fall.65

65 i.e. 10 years.
Act V

[Cassandra enters?] 

Cassandra:

Something remarkable is happening inside, something equal to those ten years at Troy. Alas! What is this? Soul, rise! Seize the reward for your fury. We conquered Phrygians have conquered! All is well: you are rising again. Though leveled, you have dragged down Mycenae, too. Your conqueror shows its back! Never has the raging of my prophetic mind revealed things so clearly to my eyes! I’m watching. I’m inside. I enjoy this. Let us watch.

Feasts are prepared and celebrated in the royal palace, just like the Phrygian’s final feast. The couch shines with Trojan purple, they drink unmixed wine in the gold cups of ancient Assaracus. The man himself lies on top of an ornate blanket, bearing the proud spoils of Priam in hand.

His wife orders him to take off the enemies’ garb, and instead to put on clothes woven by the hand of a faithful wife. I am frightened and I tremble in my soul. Will an exile kill a king? Will an adulterer kill a husband? Fate has come. The final banquet will see the blood of the lord. Blood will fall in the wine. The fatal garment binds and hands over the king to treacherous

66 It is unclear whether Cassandra was on stage during the choral ode. On the one hand, that would be an oddity within Senecan drama. On the other, Cassandra’s sudden emergence at the beginning of the act is not marked by the chorus, who usually have a short speech announcing the appearance of a character onto the stage. However, Cassandra’s final words of Act IV suggest she is entering the house to worship. This seems heightened by the use of the future tense, colam at line 807.

67 An oddity, again. Cassandra immediately begins by continuing with the chorus’ sentiment about Hercules taking down Dardanus’ house in as many days as it took for Troy to fall. This makes it unclear whether Cassandra was present during the choral ode or whether she divined their ode from inside of the palace or something of a similar nature.

68 This use of the first person plural present subjunctive has a metatheatrical function in the sense that Cassandra is presenting herself as the play’s director. While the scene she is describing does not occur on stage, Cassandra treats the chorus as spectators to the scene, much like the audience viewing the play itself.
slaughter. The loose and impenetrable garment allows no escape for his hands. It covers his head. That half-man⁶⁹ pierces his side, though his hand trembles; the wound is too shallow. He stands stunned mid-wound. But Agamemnon, just like when a shaggy boar deep in the woods, though bound in a net, still tries to escape, he only tightens the knots with his movement, and rages in vain, just so does he wish to cut through the invisible garment that covers him on all sides and though entangled, he lunges at his enemy.

The raging daughter of Tyndareus arms her right hand with a double-blade axe, just like a priest that marks the neck of bulls at the altar with their eyes before he strikes with the swod, so too does she swing an impious hand here and there. He takes the blow, he’s finished. His amputated head cruelly hangs by a thin piece and blood flows from this wound all over his body, his face still stuck in a scream. They linger. Now he seeks to cleave the lifeless corpse, she helps by stabbing. Each shows themselves worthy of their lineage by committing such a crime. He is the son of Thyestes, she the sister of Helen. Look! Titan stands in doubt, day completed. Should he run his own path, or that of Thyestes?

[Electra and Orestes enters]

Electra⁷⁰:

Run! You are the only source of aid for our father’s death! Run! Flee the hands of your enemies! They are guilty! The house has been entirely overturned. Our kingdom is finished.

[Strophius and Pylades enter, but Pylades is a silent character]

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⁶⁹ Refers to Aegisthus. In this play, his masculinity is not questioned as much as it is in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*. In that play, Clytemnестra is the first to deliver blows to Agamemnon, and reports his death in detail at 1372ff. As mentioned previously, Aegithus’ role is explored more thoroughly in Seneca’s *Agamemnon* than in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*.

⁷⁰ Electra does not appear in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*. Though she appears later in the *Oresteia* in the *Choephorι*, her brother, Orestes, plays a vital role in the *Choephoι* and the trilogy’s conclusion, the *Eumenides*. Seneca’s decision to have Orestes onstage as a silent character is a strange innovation.
Who is this man that drives a swift chariot in haste? Brother, I will hide your face in this garment. Why do you hesitate, mad mind? Why do you fear foreigners? You should fear this house. Now place down your anxious fear, Orestes. I see the trusted protection of a friend.

Strophius:

I, Strophius, now that I have left Phocis, I return with the glory of the Elian palm. The reason for my visit was to congratulate my friend. At the strike of his hand Troy fell, though shaken by war for ten years.

Yet who is this woman? Her mourning face is covered in tears, sad and afraid. I recognize the race of kings. Electra, what is the reason for tears in your happy house?

Electra:

My father lies dead by a mother’s crime. His son is being hunted as companion to a father’s slaughter, while Aegisthus holds the longed-for power because of an affair.

Strophius:

Oh there is no happiness in the passing of time!

Electra:

By the memory of my father, by his scepter known through the lands, by doubtful gods, I beg you. Take this man, Orestes, and hide the proper theft.

Strophius:

Though Agamemnon’s death teaches that there must be fear, I shall go and gladly shelter you, Orestes. [Favorable fortune seeks fidelity, but adverse fortune requires it]. Take this honor of the games, crown your brow. While holding the victory palm in your left hand, may it conceal your face in its green foliage. Let the palm, a gift of Pisonian Jove serve as both a covering and
good omen for you. And you, Pylades, who sits as an ally while your father drives the reins, learn fidelity from your father’s example.

Now with Greece as witness, go, you swift horses! Flee these treacherous lands as fast as you can!

[Strophius departs]

Electra:

He’s gone. He’s left. I can’t see the chariot, so swift its motion. Safe and sound I wait for my enemies. I will willingly offer my neck to the wound.

[Clytemnestra enters]

The bloody conqueror of her own husband is here! She bears the mark of slaughter on her blood-spattered clothes. Her hand still drips with fresh blood, her savage stare makes clear her crimes. I will retreat to the altars. Grant me your prophetic headband, Cassandra. We fear the same things.

Clytemnestra:

Enemy of your mother, you impious, daring thing, in following what custom do you seek public meetings even though you’re a virgin?

Electra:

I have left the house of adulterers. It doesn’t befit a virgin.

Clytemnestra:

Who would believe that you are a virgin?

Electra:

Your daughter?
Clytemnestra:

    Be kinder to your mother!

Electra:

    Do you teach piety?

Clytemnestra:

    You carry spirit that resembles a man’s in your swollen breast. But when you are subdued by evil, then you will learn to act like a woman.

Electra:

    Unless I’m somehow mistaken, the sword befits women.

Clytemnestra:

    Are you out of your mind? Do you think that you compare to us?

Electra:

    To you two? Who is that other Agamemnon? Speak! You are a widow! Your husband is dead!

Clytemnestra:

    I am an indomitable queen. I will soon crush the words of this impious virgin.

Meanwhile, tell me now! Where is my son? Where is your brother?

Electra:

    He’s left Mycenae.

Clytemnestra:

    Give me back my son right now!

Electra:

    And give me back my father!
Clytemnestra:

Where is he hiding?

Electra:

He is calm, safe, and fears not new kingdoms: that is enough for a just mother.

Clytemnestra:

But not enough for an angry mother. You will die today.

Electra:

So long as I die by your hand. I am going to the altars. If it pleases you to plunge the sword into my neck, I offer it to you; if you want my neck to be cut like a cattle’s, my eager neck awaits your blow. The crime is prepared. Cleanse your right hand with this blood: it is already covered in the blood of your husband, defiled by his blood.

Clytemnestra:

Equal partner in danger and my kingdom, Aegisthus, come forth! My daughter impiously lashes at her mother with abuse! She is hiding her brother in a secret spot.

[Aegisthus enters]

Aegisthus:

Mad virgin, cease the sound of your abominable voice. Stop speaking words that do not befit a mother’s ears.

Electra:

Will he still warn me, the crafter of cruel crime, born through crime, of indeterminate origin, both son of a sister and grandson to his father?
Clytemnestra:

Aegisthus, are you hesitating to cut off her impious head? She must either hand over her brother or her life at once.

Aegisthus:

She will end her life hidden in a dark, stony prison. If she is tortured in every possible manner, perhaps she will be willing to return the man she is now hiding. Helpless, deprived of necessities, enclosed, covered in filth, widowed before marriage, an exile, despised by all, deprived of daylight, she will at last fall to evils.

Electra:

Allow me to die.

Aegisthus:

If you were to reject death, then I would allow it. Only an inexperienced tyrant exacts punishment with death.

Electra:

Is there something worse than death?

Aegisthus:

Life, if you long to die. Slaves, get this monster out of here, drag her far from Mycenae. Bind her, entomb her in the furthest reaches of the kingdom, in the blackness of a gloomy cave so prison may tame this wild virgin.
Clytemnestra:

But this captive wife, whore of the king’s bed, she will pay the price with her life. Get her out of here! She must follow the husband she stole from me!

Cassandra:

Don’t you touch me! I will walk in front of you. I am excited to be the first bring home news to my Phrygians: the sea is filled with flipped ships, Mycenae is captured, the leader of a thousand leaders has perished in his home, by the disgrace, by the deceit of a woman, all so that he may atone for Trojan evils with an equal fate. I do not delay. Take me! I am actually grateful! Now, now, I am happy, so happy, to have lived longer than Troy.

Clytemnestra:

Mad woman, you will die.

Cassandra:

Fury will come to you two as well.

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71 Lit. “Drag her away so that…” I choose to ignore the *ut* clause to capture Clytemnestra’s heightened emotion.

72 Lit. “Don’t drag me.”

73 The Latin has remarkable alliteration and repetition that is difficult to render in English (*iam, iam iuvat ... iuvat*).

74 Cassandra cleverly foretells the events to come. Orestes will come as a Fury-like figure to avenge his father’s death. Orestes, in turn, will be chased by the Furies. Cassandra is combining the Furies’ relation with madness and vengeance.

75 Sudden endings are frequent in Senecan tragedy (cf. *Thyestes*, *Phaedra*, etc).
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