NOSTOS: Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*

*Oresteia* staged in 458 BCE: Aeschylus was 67 (4th play of tetralogy not preserved)

Aeschylus was 45 in 480, when the Persians sacked Athens and destroyed her temples

Religiosity Conflict of opposites (see Zeitlin p. 112) Polis Ideology Justice

optimism?

War, violence; man/woman; guilt, Fury of revenge, nemesis

(obessive) imagery: blood, fire, net of slavery

language: daring similes: stars ablaze as the armies of night

omens: twin vultures feeding on a pregnant hare

Synopsis of the play:

Prologue 1-39: Lone watchman: stars ablaze as the armies of night

Parodos 40-262 (Old men of Argos): Trojan War in its tenth year: revenge; twin vultures

hymn to Zeus: suffer into truth

like Oedipus, Agamemnon slips his neck into the strap of Fate (p. 110)

Iphigenia can't pray because she's gagged: a sound will curse the house of Atreus

Calchas' technique succeeds, but we must suffer into truth, i.e. we must learn the future when it comes: Do not meet trouble half-way

1\(^{st}\) episode 263-354: Chorus Leader and Clytemnestra: she informs the chorus of Troy's fall

imagery back to Hesiod's *Th.:* night, mother of this morning

like a man

1\(^{st}\) stasimon 355-487: Hymn to Zeus and Night: Zeus Xenios offended by Paris Alexander; Justice

Persuasion (p. 118)

2\(^{nd}\) episode 488-680: Herald evokes sufferings of war; reports on storms and shipwrecks

2\(^{nd}\) stasimon 681-781: Violence breeds more violence: the chain of revenge must be broken: Justice

looking forward to the solution in the *Eumenides*

3\(^{rd}\) episode 782-954 **climax:** Agamemnon comes home; Cassandra is along

imagery of red and blood

3\(^{rd}\) stasimon 955-1058: Fate?

4\(^{th}\) episode part 1 1058-71: Cassandra is taken in

kommos 1072-177: begins **Cassandra scene (1072-330):** the kommos is sung; Cassandra's visions 1090-129:

house of Atreus as a place of murder 1090-92; Thvestes' banquet; Thvestes' children whom Atreus

killed and served to Thvestes in revenge for Thvestes' seduction of his wife 1095-7; Aegisthus kills

Atreus 1100-4; Agamemnon's bath 1107-11; net of death entangles Agamemnon 1114-18;

Cassandra's prophecy 1136-72;

4\(^{th}\) episode part 2 1178-1330: 1st Cassandra speech: tries to convince chorus of her vision's truth reluctantly

disclosing the origin of her powers 1178-213; 2nd speech: her language becomes more violent: can't

the chorus see Thvestes' children? 1214-55; 3rd speech: steps into the future; sees her own death;

matricide (on Tantalus, Pelops, Atreus and Thvestes, see Fagles/Stanford's intro pp. 14-15)

Chorus' anapests 1331-42: lust for power never dies

5\(^{th}\) episode 1343-447: Agamemnon dies; Clytemnestra exacts her revenge; she is like a man and rebukes the

chorus of old men for treating her like a desperate woman (p. 102)

Chorus leader's strophe 1407-11: mad with ambition, some Fury raves her brain

kommos 1448-576 Chorus and Clytemnestra: like a Helen

Epilogue 1577-673 Aegisthus, Chorus Leader, Clytemnestra

Play results in two corpses: Cassandra and Agamemnon
Red-figure Attic cup, ca. 420 BCE (Museo Nazionale di Ferrara)
Clytemnestra about to hit Cassandra with an axe