

Several years ago, in an article published in this journal¹, I argued that *Od.* 21.293 ff., addressed by Antinous to an Odysseus disguised as a beggar, represents a rebuke “tailored to fit the ignorant old beggar he imagines he is addressing”. Its language is redolent of fable and there is irony in that its tale of offence and punishment relates more nearly to the speaker than to the addressee who is shortly to kill him.

Some years after the article’s publication, it occurred to me that a close parallel for some (not all) of the effects I discerned is to be found in the scene at Aesch. *Ag.* 1035 ff., where Clytemnestra orders Cassandra into the palace, and reminds her of the fate once endured by Heracles. Note especially 1040-41:

καὶ παῖδα γάρ τοί φασιν Ἀλκμήνης ποτέ
πραθέντα τλῆναι †δουλίας μάζης βία†.

Eduard Fraenkel, in his commentary *ad loc.*², characteristically emphasised those features³ (καὶ... γάρ, φασιν, ποτέ) which stamp the two lines with the imprint of popular story-telling. But his attempt to explain *why* the device should have been used here was, perhaps, less successful or helpful. “It is difficult”, he observed, “to make out whether the ancient audience felt as significant Clytemnestra’s having recourse in this way, both in form and subject-matter, to θρυλούμενα. What prompts Clytemnestra”, he went on, “is hardly disdain, in the sense that she is fobbing off old tales upon her victim”. He considered the possibility that Clytemnestra is represented as proffering “some friendly remark” to conceal her real feelings, by recourse to the “conventional phrases which are always ready to hand”, and ended by not wishing “to exclude the possibility that what is intended [is] a suitable reference to a dignified, heroic example”.

This last possibility is firmly ruled out by the homely or humble features, markedly not dignified, of popular narrative to which Fraenkel himself drew attention. The notion of an insincerely intended ‘friendly remark’ has a little

¹ *Homer and the Fable*, “Prometheus” 27, 2001, 195-210. The quotation that follows comes from p. 203. I take this opportunity of noting that in this article I forgot to cite (as its author later courteously drew to my attention) the chapter on “Myth in Homer” which Lowell Edmunds contributed to *A New Companion to Homer*, edd. by I. Morris and Barry Powell, Leiden 1997, 415-441. On pp. 418-420, Edmunds considers the same Odyssean passage and, without approaching it, as I did, from the angle of fable, reaches very similar conclusions regarding the ironic effect of Antinous’ speech.

² Oxford 1950, ii. 470 f.

³ On καὶ γάρ and ποτέ see further my remarks in “CQ” 56, 2006, 584 f., esp. p. 585 n. 17. On φασιν see *ibid.* p. 585.

more plausibility, especially since vv. 1041-42 are reminiscent of the technique of *consolatio*⁴. But the tone of Clytemnestra's opening instructions at 1035 ff.⁵, with their brutal and unveiled hostility, tells against this interpretation too.

That what prompts Clytemnestra is very much 'disdain'⁶, *pace* Fraenkel, seems confirmed by the Odyssean passage with which I began. In both cases, a character in an apparently impregnable position patronisingly and condescendingly addresses another who is in a seemingly servile position, employing an elliptical and condensed narrative, supposedly appropriate to the addressee's lowly standing. The element of irony is less immediate in the Aeschylean passage, but none the less profound for that. The patronised 'beggar' in Homer strikes back and kills his seemingly impregnable tormentor within two hundred lines. There is no direct equivalent to this in the *Agamemnon*. But, even if we restrict our gaze to the scope of that play, we will note how, in the words of Colin Macleod⁷, Cassandra "the captive, resists Clytemnestra's attempts at persuasion", and one might say, as he does, that she "comes closest of all the characters in the *Oresteia* to a Homeric hero". And if one extends one's gaze to the trilogy as a whole, one sees how Clytemnestra too, like Antinous, though with a longer lapse of time, receives her due punishment. At the end of the *Agamemnon*, the audience is aware that "soon [she and Aegisthus] will lie where Agamemnon and Cassandra lie, their penalty paid"⁸.

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ABSTRACT:

Clytemnestra's address to Cassandra at Aesch. *Ag.* 1035 ff. is shown to use much the same technique and ironic effect as Antilochus' to Odysseus at *Od.* 21.293 ff. Both paradigms patronise the apparently helpless addressee, who is actually in a morally stronger position than the speaker.

KEYWORDS: fable, consolation, paradigm, irony.

⁴ For this, and in particular the cliché 'even Heracles had to suffer', see the article by me cited above n. 3, esp. p. 585, n. 18. Cf. Finglass on Soph. *El.* 153-4. Denniston-Page are accurate in their comment on vv. 1035 ff.: "there is something ironical, almost contemptuous, in the futile consolation of 1040-1".

⁵ "Perhaps not very polite", is Fraenkel's meiotic comment on the tone of v. 1035.

⁶ Though not "in the sense that she is fobbing off old tales upon" Cassandra, to re-quote the oddly expressed view of Fraenkel (in English one expects 'fobb off with').

⁷ "CQ" 32, 1982, 231 f. = *Collected Essays* p. 44 f. For Cassandra as the first character in the play to thwart Clytemnestra see further e.g. O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977), pp. 308 ff. For the related paradox that Cassandra, who initially seems not to understand Greek, actually understands the issues of life and death better than anyone in the play, see H. Diller in *Grecs et Barbares* (Entretiens Hardt 8, 1961), 48 f. = *Kl. Schr.* 428 f.

⁸ D. L. Page's *Introduction* to the commentary cited n. 4 above, xxxvi.