

Greek Literature Weekend in Gloucester

9-10 February 2019

Course materials



Phlyax (comic actor)
South Italian, ca. 350–325 BCE

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Session 1: Introductory

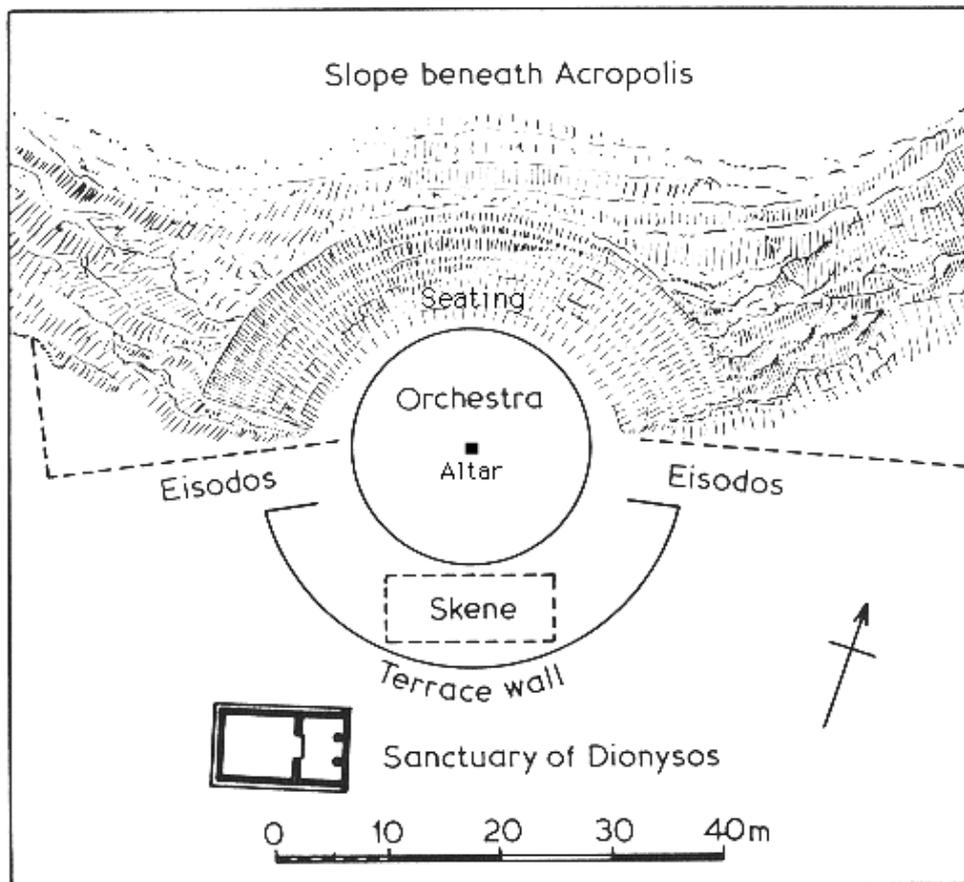
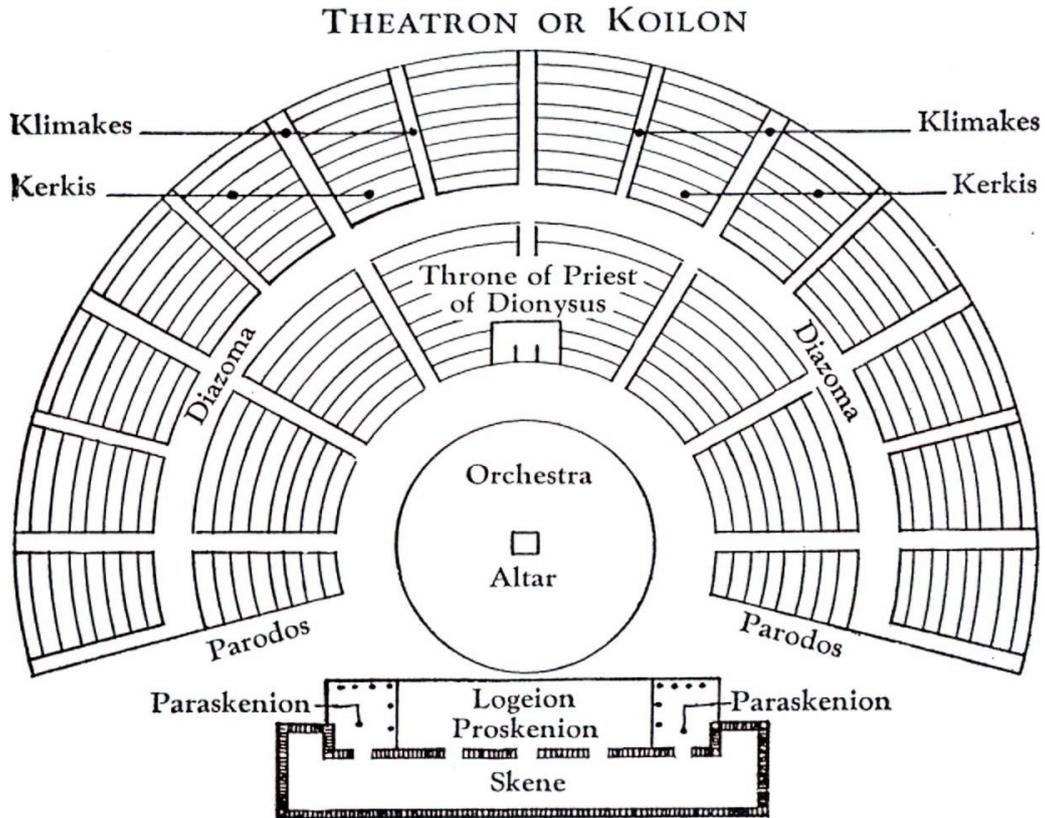
I. The Greek alphabet

Capital	Lower case	Name	Pronunciation	Transliteration
A	α	alpha	lard/cup	a
B	β	beta	bat	b
Γ	γ	gamma	goat	g
Δ	δ	delta	dog	d
E	ε	epsilon	bet	e
Z	ζ	zeta	wisdom/lids	z
H	η	eta	nag	ē
Θ	θ	theta	thin	th
I	ι	iota	bid/eat	i
K	κ	kappa	kit	c/k
Λ	λ	lambda	lot	l
M	μ	mu	mat	m
N	ν	nu	not	n
Ξ	ξ	xi	axe	x
O	ο	omicron	log	o
Π	π	pi	pat	p
P	ρ	rho	rot	rh/r
Σ	σ/ς	sigma	sit	s
T	τ	tau	top	t
Υ	υ	upsilon	Fr. lune	y
Φ	φ	phi	fat	ph
X	χ	chi	loch	ch/kh
Ψ	ψ	psi	dypsomaniac	ps
Ω	ω	omega	raw	ō

Transliterate using the rules above, and suggest English words derived from these theatrical terms:

1. δράμα
2. όρχήστρα
3. σκήνη
4. πρωταγωνίστης
5. έξοδος
6. χορός
7. μηχανή
8. θέατρον
9. πρόλογος
10. ύποκρίτης
11. κωμωδία
12. τραγωδία
13. γέρανος
14. μίμος
15. παντόμιμος
16. Ωδειόν
17. λειτουργία
18. έπέισοδος
19. προσκηνεϊον
20. Θέσπικ

II. The Theatre of Dionysus, Athens



III. A list of Greek dramas

Tragedies

Aeschylus (c. 525–456 BC):

The Persians (472 BC)
Seven Against Thebes (467 BC)
The Suppliants (463 BC)
The Oresteia (458 BC, a trilogy comprising *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers* and *The Eumenides*.)
Prometheus Bound (authorship and date of performance is still in dispute)

Sophocles (c. 495-406 BC):

Theban plays, or Oedipus cycle:
Antigone (c. 442 BC)
Oedipus Rex (c. 429 BC)
Oedipus at Colonus (401 BC, posthumous)
Ajax (unknown, presumed earlier in career)
The Trachiniae (unknown)
Electra (unknown, presumed later in career)
Philoctetes (409 BC)

Euripides (c. 480–406 BC):

Alcestis (438 BC)
Medea (431 BC)
The Heracleidae (Herakles' Children) (c. 429 BC)
Hippolytus (428 BC)
Andromache (428-24 BC)
Hecuba (424 BC)
The Suppliants (422 BC)
Electra (c. 420 BC)
Herakles (421-416 BC)
The Trojan Women (415 BC)
Iphigenia in Tauris (414-412 BC)
Ion (414-412 BC)
Helen (412 BCE)
The Phoenician Women (411-409 BC)

Orestes (408 BC)
The Bacchae (405 BCE, posthumous)
Iphigenia At Aulis (410 BC)
Rhesus (unknown)
The Cyclops (c. 408 BC)

Comedies

Aristophanes (c. 446-388 BCE)

The Acharnians (425 BCE)
The Knights (424 BCE)
The Clouds (423 BCE)
The Wasps (422 BCE)
Peace (421 BCE)
The Birds (414 BCE)
Lysistrata (411 BCE)
Thesmophoriazousae (c. 411 BCE)
The Frogs (405 BCE)
Assemblywomen (c. 392 BCE)
Plutus (388 BCE)

IV. Dramatic Parts

Tragedy 1 (session 3 part 3)

Table A: Iphigenia, Orestes, Pylades, Third Maiden

Tragedy 2 (session 4)

Table A: 4. Second episode: Guard, Creon, Antigone, Ismene, Chorus,

Table B: 1. Prologos: Antigone, Ismene

Table C: 2. First Episode: Creon, Chorus, Guard

Satyr Play (session 7)

Table B: 1. Sophocles *Ichneutai*: Kyllene, Chorus of Satyrs

Table C: 2. Harrison *Trackers*: Kyllene, Satyrs 1-12

Comedy (session 8)

Table A: 2. 738-890: Slave, Xanthias, Chorus, Euripides, Aeschylus, Dionysus

Table B: 3. 1119-1247: Euripides, Aeschylus, Dionysus

Table C: 4. 1364-1480 Euripides, Aeschylus, Dionysus, Pluto, Chorus

Session 2: Aristotle on Drama

1. The Origin of Poetry and the Growth of Drama

For the beginnings of poetry in general, there appear to have been two causes, both rooted in human nature.¹ From childhood it is instinctive in human beings to imitate, and humans differ from the other animals as the most imitative of all and getting their first lessons by imitation. By instinct also all human beings take pleasure in imitations. We have evidence of this in actual experience, for those things that are distressful to see in reality—for example, the basest animals and corpses—we contemplate with pleasure when we see highly accurate images of them.² For this too the reason is that learning things is highly enjoyable, not only for philosophers but for other people as well, only their share in it is limited. When they enjoy seeing images, then, it is because as they look at them they learn and reason out what each thing is—that this is that. For if it happens one has not seen the thing before, the pleasure is not in its being an imitation, but instead comes from its workmanship or coloring or some other source. Imitation, then, comes natural to us, and the same is true of melody and rhythm (meters clearly are parts of the various rhythms). At the outset, persons who had a special aptitude for these things, making improvements bit by bit, produced out of their improvisations the beginnings of poetry.³

In accordance with their different types of character, poetry split into two kinds. The graver spirits tended to imitate noble actions and noble persons performing them, and the more frivolous poets the doings of baser persons, and as the more serious poets began by composing hymns and encomia, so these began with lampoons. To be sure, we cannot mention any poem of this type by a pre-Homeric poet, though doubtless many composed them, but beginning with Homer we can—his own *Margites*,⁴ for example, among other similar works. Into these invectives the iambic meter came into use as something suited to their character.⁵ In fact, we now call this particular meter iambic because it was the meter in which men lampooned or “iambized” one another.

Thus among the early poets, some became poets of heroic verse and others again of iambic verse. Homer was not only the master poet of the serious vein, unique in the general excellence of his imitations and especially in their dramatic quality, but was also the first to outline the general form of comedy, dramatizing not invective, but the laughable. For his *Margites* is analogous to the comedies just as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are to the tragedies. And once tragedy and comedy had made their appearance, those who were drawn to one or the other of the branches of poetry, true to their natural bias, became either comic

¹ The two causes of poetry are the instinct for imitation and the pleasure taken in it.

² Aristotle is referring to such imitations as pictures and sculptures.

³ Since the instinct for imitation and the pleasure taken in it account for the imitative arts in general, Aristotle now adds two new other primitive causes to explain the emergence of poetry: the instinct for harmony and rhythm.

⁴ The *Margites*, now believed to be much later than Homer, was a burlesque epic poem with a blundering, humorous hero.

⁵ iambic is close to the rhythm of ordinary speech.

poets, instead of iambic poets, or tragic poets, instead of epic poets, because the new types were grander and held more esteem.⁶

Whether tragedy has reached its possible forms or not, to judge this question theoretically and in relation to the theater, is for another discussion.⁷ Its beginnings, certainly, were in improvisation, as were also those for comedy, tragedy originating in impromptus by the leaders of the dithyrambic chorus, and comedy in those of the leaders of the phallic performances, which still remain customary in many cities.⁸ Little by little tragedy grew greater as the poets developed whatever they perceived of its emergent form, and after passing through many changes, it came to a stop, being now in possession of its specific nature.

It was Aeschylus who first increased the number of actors from one to two and reduced the role of the chorus, giving first place to the dialogue.⁹ Sophocles added the third actor and introduced painted scenery. Again there was a change in magnitude. From little plots and ludicrous speech—the change was from the satyr play—tragedy came late into its full dignity, and its meter changed from tetrameter to iambic.¹⁰ Indeed, the reason why they used the tetrameter at first was that their form of poetry was suited to the satyrs and hence more oriented toward dancing. But as the spoken parts developed, natural instinct discovered the appropriate meter, since of all the metrical forms the iambic trimeter is best adapted for speaking. This is evident, since in talking with one another we often utter iambic trimeters, but seldom dactylic hexameters, or if we do we depart from the tonality of normal speech. Another change was in the number of episodes.¹¹ As for the way each of the other parts was adorned, let us take these things as said. For it would probably be a long task to go through each in detail. [*Poetics* 4]

⁶ More clearly, no poem of the ridiculing type is known before Homer, but beginning with him we can name the *Margites* and other such poems.

⁷ Tragedy now possesses its general nature as the direct, and not narrated, imitation of a serious action in suitable language and meter. Whether it has fully realized its possible forms or species (*eidé*) is a question left open.

⁸ Aristotle here indicates that tragedy developed from the dithyramb in honor of Dionysus and comedy from phallic performances associated with processions, *kōmoi*, which were also part of the worship of Dionysus.

⁹ Aristotle passes over Thespis, who is often said to have introduced the first actor and spoken parts. There are never more than three actors in tragedy.

¹⁰ In the dramatic contests of the fifth century, each group of three tragedies was followed by a satyr play, a short and ludicrous treatment of a mythological subject with a chorus of satyrs. Aristotle here suggests that the satyr play was part of the early evolution of tragedy; he does not reconcile this view with his previous remark that tragedy developed from the dithyramb.

¹¹ “Episodes” are the scenes of dramatic action separated by the choral odes. The surviving tragedies regularly include about five, which explains how later drama took on the five-act structure.

2. Tragedy Defined and Analyzed into Parts

We will discuss later the mimetic art in hexameters [epic poetry] and comedy, but let us speak now about tragedy, gathering up from what I have already said the definition of its nature. So then, tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious,¹² complete, and possessing magnitude; in embellished language, each kind of which is used separately in the different parts;¹³ in the mode of action and not narrated; and effecting through pity and fear the katharsis of such emotions.¹⁴ By “embellished language” I mean language having rhythm and melody, and by “separately in different parts” I mean that some parts of a play are carried on solely in meter while others again are sung. [*Poetics* 6]

3. Poetry Represents the Universal in the Particular

From what has already been said, it will be evident that the poet’s function is not to report things that have happened, but rather to tell of such things as might happen, that are possible in accordance with probability or necessity. The difference between the historian and the poet is not that the historian employs prose and the poet verse. The work of Herodotus (ca. 484-ca. 425 B.C.E.) could be put into verse, and it would be no less a history with verses than without them. Rather the difference is that the one tells of things that have been and the other of such things as might be. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history, in that poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular fact.¹⁵ A universal is the sort of thing a certain sort of person happens to say or do in accordance with probability or necessity, which poetry aims at, adding on the names of persons. A particular on the other hand, is what Alcibiades did or had done to him.¹⁶ This distinction is now clear in the case of comedy, where the poets, having constructed their plots out of probable incidents, then supply any names that may occur to them, and do not, like the iambic poets, take a particular individual as their subject.¹⁷ In tragedy, however, the historical names are retained. Basically, this is because the possible is credible. Until something happens we remain uncertain of its possibility, but what has happened obviously is possible, since if impossible, it would not have happened. Nevertheless, there are some tragedies in which only one or two of the well-known names occur, the rest being invented,

¹² “Serious” (*spoudaios*) implies “as carried out by morally good people of high social standing.” See Chapters 2 and 13, and Glossary under “better and worse.”

¹³ This means that metrical language alone is used in dialogue, but language fashioned to melody is used in the choruses and other lyrical parts.

¹⁴ The emotional effect of tragedy, gained through pity and fear, is placed in a general category: catharsis (see Introduction, pp. xxix—xxx, and Glossary of this text). The scholarly literature on this subject is controversial and vast. Aristotle discusses pity and fear in the Rhetoric 2.5 and 2.8. He was not the first to regard them as the special emotions of tragedy; before him, Gorgias did in Encomium on Helen, as did Plato in the Republic. There has also been significant debate about the Greek phrase “of such emotions” (*tōn toioutōn*). Some scholars think its meaning is restricted to pity and fear, while others argue that it embraces these emotions and others like them.

¹⁵ Note the use of comparative words. Poetry is more philosophical than history because it seeks the probable and thus tends toward the universal, while history tends to the particular because it records what has happened.

¹⁶ In actual or legendary history, the names come first—what Heracles or Alcibiades did.

¹⁷ Tragedy adheres to the names in myth, the “historical names”; comedy freely invents names.

and other tragedies again in which there are no famous names at all. An example is Agathon's *Antheus*.¹⁸ In this play, plot and names alike are invented, and yet it gives no less pleasure. So there certainly is no need to adhere to the traditional stories on which tragedies are based. In fact, it would be absurd to do so, since the well-known tales are well known only to a few, and nevertheless they give pleasure to all.

It is clear, then, from the foregoing remarks that the poet should be a maker of plots more than a maker of verses, since he is a poet by virtue of his imitation, and he imitates actions. Even if he writes on things that have happened, he is no less a poet, since nothing prevents some of the things that have actually happened from being the sort of thing that might probably or possibly happen, and in virtue of this he is their poet.

Among plots and actions of the simple type, the episodic is the worst.¹⁹ I call episodic a plot in which the episodes follow one another in no probable or necessary sequence. Plots of this kind are constructed by bad poets through their own fault, and by good poets on account of the actors. Since they are composing entries for a competitive exhibition, they stretch the plot beyond what it can bear and are often compelled, therefore, to dislocate the natural order.²⁰

And it is not only an action complete in itself that tragedy imitates. It also imitates incidents involving pity and fear, and such incidents are most effective when they come unexpectedly and yet occur in a causal sequence. Occurring in this way, they will have more of the marvelous about them than if they came to pass of themselves and by accident. Indeed, even accidents seem most marvelous when they appear to be intentional, as when at Argos the statue of Mityls killed the man who had caused Mityls's death by falling down on him as he stood looking at it. It is hard to believe that such things happen without design. Plots of this kind, therefore, are necessarily better than others. [*Poetics* 9]

¹⁸ Agathon (late fifth century BCE) ranked high among the tragic poets.

¹⁹ For "simple" plots, see the next chapter. As plots in which the change of fortune comes about in a succession of scenes without reversal or recognition, simple plots are more in danger of becoming episodic than complex plots. On Aristotle's scale, complex plots are the best, simple plots less good, and episodic plots the worst.

²⁰ The object of a tragic dramatist was to win a prize in the poetic contests, and winning prizes depended on the actor's skill in oral delivery. Dramatists were inclined to provide a succession of scenes that would keep a famous actor onstage in a role designed to feature his talents, even if some of these scenes were episodic.

4. The Best Form of Tragedy

Next in order after the points I have dealt with,²¹ it would seem necessary to specify what one should aim at and what to avoid in the construction of plots, and what will produce the effect²² proper to tragedy.

Now in the finest tragedy, the structure should be complex and not simple, and it should also be an imitation of fearful and pitiful events, since that is the special mark of this kind of imitation. It follows, in the first place, that good men ought not to be shown passing from prosperity to misfortune, because this does not inspire either pity or fear, but only revulsion. Nor should it show evil men rising from ill fortune to prosperity, because this is the most untragic plot of all. It lacks every requirement because it neither elicits human sympathy nor stirs pity or fear.²³ And again, neither should an extremely wicked man fall from prosperity into misfortune. A plot so constructed might indeed call forth human sympathy,²⁴ but it would not excite pity or fear. We feel pity for a person who suffers undeserved bad fortune and fear for someone who is like us, and so this situation arouses neither pity nor fear.²⁵ We are left with the man whose place is between these extremes. Such is the man who on the one hand is not preeminent in virtue and justice, and yet on the other hand does not fall into misfortune through vice or depravity, but because of some mistake,²⁶ someone of high esteem and prosperity, such as Oedipus and Thyestes and other famous men from families like theirs.

It follows that the well-constructed plot will necessarily be single in outcome and not, as some contend, double, and will consist in a change of fortune, not from misfortune to prosperity, but the opposite, from prosperity to misfortune, occasioned not by depravity, but by some great mistake on the part of one who is either such as I have described, or better than this rather than Worse. Practice confirms this. Though at first the poets accepted whatever myths came to hand, today the finest tragedies are founded upon only a few houses, for example, those of Alcmaeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, and others that have chanced to suffer terrible things or to do them. So, then, tragedy having this construction is the finest, from an artistic point of view. Consequently, people go wrong when they accuse Euripides of doing this in his tragedies and of making his plays end in misfortunes. For this is the right procedure, as I have said. The best proof is that on the stage and in the dramatic contests, plays of this kind seem the most tragic, provided they are successfully worked out, and Euripides, even if he is most faulty in other respects, seems at any rate the most tragic of the poets.

²¹ Aristotle now picks up with the discussion of tragic plots in Chapters 10 and 11.

²² The word for "effect" is *argon*, which is often translated as "function" or "purpose" in Aristotle's works.

²³ Human sympathy, as appears from the next sentence, may be felt for an evil man who deservedly suffers calamity. It is an extenuated form of pity, which recognizes that the bad man is nevertheless human and thus like ourselves.

²⁴ The Greek word for sympathy is *philanthropia*.

²⁵ Pity and fear are here briefly defined for purposes of the *Poetics*, by contrast with the lengthier treatment in the *Rhetoric* (2.5 and 2.8).

²⁶ In the best plot, the personages should be good, but not so perfectly good as to be unlikely to make a big mistake. Aristotle calls such a mistake a *hamartia*.

The second best plot, said by some to be first, is the one with a double structure, like the *Odyssey*, and it ends in opposite ways for the better characters and the worse. If it seems to be first, that is attributable to the weakness of the audience, since the poets only follow their lead and compose the kind of plays the spectators want.

The pleasure it gives, however, is not proper to tragedy, but rather to comedy, where those who are the bitterest enemies—Orestes and Aegisthus, for example—end by leaving the scene as friends, and nobody is killed by anybody. [*Poetics* 13]

5. How to Arouse Pity and Fear

Fear and pity may be created by spectacle, but they may also be created by the very structure of the events, which is superior and is the way of a better poet. For the plot should be so constructed that even without seeing the play, anyone who merely hears the events unfold shudders and feels pity as a result of what is happening. This is precisely what one would experience in listening to the plot of *Oedipus*. To achieve this effect by means of spectacle is less artistic because it requires the producer.²⁷ Those who produce through spectacle something that is not terrifying but only monstrous have no part in tragedy at all, for not every sort of pleasure is to be sought from tragedy, but only that which properly belongs to it.²⁸ Since the pleasure associated with pity and fear that a poet must arouse comes from an imitation, clearly this effect must be embodied in the events of the plot.

Let us consider, then, the kinds of occurrences that seem terrible or pitiful. Actions of this sort must happen between persons who are either friends to one another or enemies or neither. Now if enemy harms enemy, there is nothing to excite pity either in his doing the deed or in his being about to do it—nothing, that is, but the actual suffering. The same is true if the parties are neither friends nor enemies. When, however, the tragic event occurs within the sphere of the natural affections—when, for instance, a brother kills or is on the point of killing his brother, or a son his father, or a mother her son, or a son his mother, or something equally drastic—that is the kind of event the poet must try for. There is, of course, no possibility of altering the traditional stories— I mean Clytemnestra being murdered by Orestes and Eriphyle by Alcmaeon— but it is the poet's duty to find a way of using even these traditional subjects well.

Let me say more clearly what I mean by using them well. It is possible to have the action occur with full knowledge and awareness on the part of those involved, as the early poets used to do and as Euripides does when he has Medea kill her children. It is possible also to do the awful thing, but to do it in ignorance and then discover the relationship of the victim later, as Sophocles' *Oedipus* does. In this case, to be sure, the deed is done outside the play, but it is done in the tragedy itself, for example, by the *Alcmaeon* of Astydamos and by Telegonus in *Odysseus Wounded*.²⁹ A third possibility is for one who is about to do one of

²⁷ Spectacle is within the poet's art since he plans the spectacular effect. But it is less so because its success depends on the stage producer who provides the props.

²⁸ The monstrous refers to such figures as the Gorgons and the Harpies, which were an essential part of many Greek myths and an easy source of spectacular effect in drama. Such are the Furies in Aeschylus's *Eumenides*.

²⁹ In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Laius, father of Oedipus, is slain by Oedipus before the play begins. Astydamos the Younger was a contemporary of Aristotle. In his play, Alcmaeon probably slew his mother Eriphyle in a fit of

these atrocious deeds in ignorance to discover the relationship before he does it. There are no other possibilities, for the deed has either to be done or not done and with knowledge or without knowledge. Of these situations, the worst is for someone to be on the point of doing the deed with knowledge, and then not do it. This is revolting in itself, and is not tragic, since no suffering is involved. Poets, therefore, do not employ it except occasionally, as when Haemon in *Antigone* fails to kill Creon. The doing of the deed comes next in order. The better way is for it to be done in ignorance, with the recognition following afterward; there is then nothing revolting in the act, and the recognition astounds us. The best situation, however, is the last, when, for example, in *Chresphontes*,³⁰ Merope is on the point of murdering her son, but recognizes him and desists; and in *Iphigenia*, when the sister is about to slay her brother; and in *Helle*,³¹ where the son is about to give his mother up to the enemy when he learns who she is.³²

This is the reason why, as I said earlier, that tragedies are concerned with a few families. The poets, that is, in seeking out tragic situations, discovered more by luck than by art how to contrive in their plots what we have described. And this obliges them to keep returning for subjects to those few houses where dire events have happened. Enough, then, has now been said about the construction of the events and what sort of plots there should be in tragedy. [*Poetics* 14]



A pair of terracotta roundels with theatrical masks (hetaira and slave). 1st century B.C.

madness and then recovered his senses. Odysseus. *Wounded* was a play by Sophocles. Telegonus, Odysseus's son by Circe, comes to Ithaca in search of his father, is mistaken for a marauder, and in the ensuing fight fatally wounds Odysseus.

³⁰ A lost play by Euripides.

³¹ Both author and theme are unknown.

³² There is a potential problem with this last situation: when the would-be injurer desists there will be no tragic "suffering" (pathos), just as in the first and worst situation, and an unhappy ending cannot follow it with probability. Yet this type can also be thrilling, and in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Tauris*, it furnishes one of the most enthralling scenes in tragedy.

Session 3. Tragedy I: Aeschylus & Euripides

1. Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1-39

Φύλαξ θεοὺς μὲν αἰτῶ τῶνδ' ἀπαλλαγὴν πόνων φρουρᾶς ἔτειας μῆκος, ἦν κοιμώμενος στέγαις Ἀτρείδων ἄγκαθεν, κυνὸς δίκην, ἄστρον κάτοιδα νυκτέρων ὀμήγυριν, καὶ τοὺς φέροντας χεῖμα καὶ θέρος βροτοῖς λαμπροὺς δυνάστας, ἐμπρέποντας αἰθέρι ἀστέρας, ὅταν φθίνωσιν, ἀντολάς τε τῶν. καὶ νῦν φυλάσσω λαμπάδος τό σύμβολον, αὐγὴν πυρὸς φέρουσαν ἐκ Τροίας φάτιν ἀλώσιμόν τε βάξιν· ὧδε γὰρ κρατεῖ γυναικὸς ἀνδρόβουλον ἐλπίζον κέαρ. εὐτ' ἂν δὲ νυκτίπλαγκτον ἔνδροσόν τ' ἔχω εὐνήν ὀνείροις οὐκ ἐπισκοπούμενην ἐμήν· φόβος γὰρ ἀνθ' ὕπνου παραστατεῖ, τὸ μὴ βεβαίως βλέφαρα συμβαλεῖν ὕπνω· ὅταν δ' αἰεΐδω ἢ μινύρεσθαι δοκῶ, ὕπνου τόδ' ἀντίμολπον ἐντέμνων ἄκος, κλαίω τότ' οἴκου τοῦδε συμφορὰν στένων οὐχ ὡς τὰ πρόσθ' ἄριστα διαπονουμένου. νῦν δ' εὐτυχῆς γένοιτ' ἀπαλλαγὴ πόνων εὐαγγέλου φανέντος ὀρφναίου πυρὸς. ὦ χαῖρε λαμπτήρ νυκτός, ἡμερήσιον φάος πιφαύσκων καὶ χορῶν κατάστασιν πολλῶν ἐν Ἄργει, τῆσδε συμφορᾶς χάριν. ιοῦ ἰοῦ. Ἀγαμέμνονος γυναικὶ σημαίνω τορῶς εὐνῆς ἐπαντείλασαν ὡς τάχος δόμοις ὀλολυγμὸν εὐφημοῦντα τῆδε λαμπάδι ἐπορθιάζειν, εἶπερ Ἰλίου πόλις ἔάλωκεν, ὡς ὁ φρυκτὸς ἀγγέλλων πρέπει· αὐτός τ' ἔγωγε φροῖμιον χορεύσομαι. τὰ δεσποτῶν γὰρ εὐ πεσόντα θήσομαι τρὶς ἕξ βαλούσης τῆσδέ μοι φρυκτωρίας. γένοιτο δ' οὖν μολόντος εὐφιλή χέρα ἄνακτος οἴκων τῆδε βαστάσαι χερί. τὰ δ' ἄλλα σιγῶ· βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσση μέγας βέβηκεν· οἶκος δ' αὐτός, εἰ φθογγὴν λάβοι, σαφέστατ' ἂν λέξειεν· ὡς ἐκὼν ἐγὼ μαθοῦσιν αὐδῶ κού μαθοῦσι λήθομαι.	5 10 15 20 25 30 35
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WATCHMAN You Gods in heaven -
You have watched me here on this tower
All night, every night for twelve months,
Thirteen moons -
Tethered on the roof of this palace
Like a dog.
It is time to release me.
I've stared long enough into this darkness
For what never emerges.
I'm tired of the constellations -
That glittering parade of lofty rulers
Night after night a little bit earlier
Withholding the thing I wait for -
Slow as torture.
And the moon, coming and going —
Wearisome, like watching the sea
From a deathbed. Like watching the tide
In its prison yard, with its two turns
In out in out.
I'm sick of the heavens, sick of the darkness.
The one light I wait for never comes.
Maybe it never will come—
A beacon-flare that leaps from peak to peak
Bringing the news from Troy-
'Victory! After ten years, Victory!'
The one word that Clytemnestra prays for.
Queen Clytemnestra—who wears
A man's heart in a woman's body,
A man's dreadful will in the scabbard of her body
Like a polished blade. A hidden blade.
Clytemnestra reigns over fear.
I get up sodden with dew.
I walk about, to shift my aches.
I lie down—the aches harden worse.
No dreams. No sleep. Only fear-
Fear like a solid lump of indigestion
Here, high in my belly—-a seething.
Singing's good for fear
But when I try to sing—weeping comes.
I weep. There's no keeping it down.

Everything's changed in this palace.
The old days,
The rightful King, order, safety, splendour,
A splendour that lifted the heart—
All gone.
You Gods,
Release me.
Let that flame come leaping out of the East
To release me.
Where did that light come from? In pitch darkness
That point—that's new. "I
Down there, near what must be the skyline,
In the right place! It just appeared!
A flickering point. And getting bigger. A fire!
The beacon!
Tell the Queen—
It's the beacon.
It's flaring up! It's shaking its horns.
Troy has fallen.
The King is coming home.
Agamemnon is coming. Troy has fallen!
Now the Queen can rejoice
And I'll be the first to dance—Troy has fallen.
The gods have blessed our master.
They've blessed me too.
They've made me the bearer of the news.
Only let them bring the King home safely.
Let me prostrate myself at his feet
And then—what follows,
Better not think about it.
Only the foundations of this house
Can tell that story. Yes,
The tongue that could find
The words for what follows — that tongue
Would have to lift this house's foundations.
Those who know too much, as I do, about this house
Let their tongue lie still — squashed flat.
Under the foundations. [tr. Ted Hughes]

WATCHMAN No end to it all, though all year I've muttered
my pleas to the gods for a long groped for end.
Wish it were over, this waiting, this watching,
twelve weary months, night in and night out,
crouching and peering, head down like a bloodhound,
paws propping muzzle, up here on the palace,
the palace belonging the bloodclan of Atreus—
Agamemnon, Menelaus, bloodkin, our clanchiefs.

I've been so long staring I know the stars backwards,
the chiefs of the star-clans, king-stars, controllers,
those that dispense us the coldsnaps and dogdays.
I've had a whole year's worth so I ought to know.
A whole year of it! Still no sign of the signal
I'm supposed to catch sight of, the beacons,
the torch-blaze that means Troy's finally taken . . .

The woman says watch, so here I am watching.
That woman's not one who's all wan and woeful.
That woman's a man the way she gets moving.

Put down your palliase. Dew-drenched by daybreak.
Not the soft bed you'd dream anything good in—
Fear stays all night. Sleep gives me short time.

Daren't drop off though. Might miss it. The beacon.
And if I missed it . . . life's not worth the living!
Sometimes, to stop nodding, I sing or try singing
but songs stick in my gullet. I feel more like weeping
when I think of the change that's come over this household
good once and well ordered . . . but all that seems over . . .

Maybe tonight it'll finish, this watching, this waiting,
an end to the torment we've yearned for ten years.

Come on, blasted beacon, blaze out of the blackness!

sees BEACON

It's there! An oasis like daylight in deserts of dark!
It's there! No mistaking!

Agamemnon's woman —

best let her know the beacon's been sighted.
Time all the women were wailing their welcome!

Troy's taken! Troy's down and Troy's flattened.
There'll be dancing in Argos and I'll lead the dance.
My master's struck lucky. So've I, I reckon.

Sighting the beacon's a dice-throw all sixes.
 Soon I'll be grasping his hand, Agamemnon's . . .
 Let him come home to us, whole and unharmed!
 As for the rest . . . I'm not saying. Better not said.
 Say that an ox ground my gob into silence.
 They'd tell such a story, these walls, if they could.
 Those who know what I know, know what I'm saying
 Those who don't know, won't know. Not from me. [tr. Harrison]

2. Aristotle on recognition (ἀναγνώρισις)

Reversal, as we have said, is a change from one state of affairs to its exact opposite, and this, too, as I say, should be according to probability or necessity.³³ For example, in *Oedipus*, the messenger comes to cheer Oedipus by relieving him of fear with regard to his mother, but by revealing his true identity, does just the opposite of this.³⁴ [...] Recognition, as the word itself indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, leading either to friendship or to hostility on the part of those persons who are marked for good fortune or bad.³⁵ The best form of recognition is the one accompanied by a reversal, as in the example from *Oedipus*. There are, to be sure, other forms of recognition. In fact, what I have just said may occur in reference to inanimate objects or anything whatever, and it is possible to discover that someone has or has not done something. But the recognition most integral to the plot and to the action is the one I have mentioned. For a recognition joined with a reversal will be fraught with pity or with fear, and tragedy is an imitation of actions such as these because misery and happiness alike will come in recognitions of this kind. Because recognition involves more than one person, there are cases in which one of two persons already knows the other and the recognition is on one side only, and other cases in which recognition has to take place on both sides. Iphigenia, for example, was recognized by Orestes from the sending of her letter, but a second recognition was required to reveal his identity to her. Two elements of the plot, then, are reversal and recognition. A third is suffering. We have said what reversal and recognition are; suffering is an action of a destructive or painful kind, such as the deaths that take place in the open, agonies of pain, wounds, and so on. [*Poetics* ch.11]

 What recognition is in general has already been explained. To turn now to its several species, the first is least artistic and, from poverty of invention, the one they use most:

³³ Reversal in the action should not be confused with the overall change of fortune to good or ill, which may be embodied in a simple plot as well as in a complex one.

³⁴ Aristotle summarizes too briefly. The messenger does not come with this purpose. He comes to announce that Polybus, king of Corinth and Oedipus's supposed father, is dead and that Oedipus has been chosen to succeed him.

³⁵ Before the recognition, the persons may be either indifferent to one another or mistakenly hostile or friendly. Recognition is key to the complex plot and controls both the happy or unhappy outcome as well as the emotions of pity and fear.

recognition by marks or tokens. Such marks are sometimes congenital, as “the lance the Earthborn bear,” or the “stars” in Carcinus’s *Thyestes*,³⁶ and sometimes acquired, either something on the person, like a scar, or external tokens such as necklaces or the boat in *Tyro*.³⁷ Even these, however, can be used in better or worse ways. Thus Odysseus is recognized by means of his scar by the nurse and in another way by the swineherds.³⁸ Recognitions just for the sake of proof are artistically inferior, like all such recognitions, while those that occur spontaneously like the one in the Bath Scene are better.³⁹ Second are recognitions obviously managed by the poet and inartistic for that reason. An instance is the way Orestes in *Iphigenia* gets himself recognized as Orestes; Iphigenia is spontaneously recognized through the letter, but Orestes speaks for himself in terms imposed by the poet and not by the plot.⁴⁰ The fault here is close to the one just mentioned, since he might just as well have had a few marks or tokens on him. [...]

A third type of recognition comes about through memory, when someone knows something by seeing it. Thus [...] in the Alcinous episode Odysseus, when he hears the bard, is reminded of the past and weeps.⁴¹

Fourth is recognition through reasoning. This is exemplified in the *Libation Bearers*:⁴² “Someone resembling me has come; no one but Orestes resembles me; therefore Orestes has come.” [...]

Of all the forms of recognition, however, the best is that which springs from the events themselves, the shock of surprise being based on probabilities. Such are the recognitions in the *Oedipus* of Sophocles and in *Iphigenia*: it is probable that Iphigenia should wish to send a letter. Only recognitions of this kind escape the artificiality of tokens and necklaces. Next best are recognitions that result from reasoning. [*Poetics* ch.16]

³⁶ The Earthborn are the descendants of the men who sprang from earth when Cadmus sowed the dragon teeth. All evidently bore a birthmark resembling a lance, and in the play, Creon recognized his grandson, the son of Haemon and Antigone, by this mark. Similarly, the descendants of Pelops had a star on their shoulders derived from Pelops’s ivory shoulder. Carcinus the Younger was a fourth-century tragic poet.

³⁷ A play by Sophocles. Tyro, persecuted by her stepmother Sidero, had set adrift in a boat the twin sons she had secretly borne to Poseidon. They were saved by a herdsman and later recognized by their mother by means of the boat. They avenged her wrongs by slaying Sidero.

³⁸ In Book 19 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is unexpectedly recognized by Eurycleia when she bathes him; in Book 21, he announces his identity to the herdsmen Eumaeos and Philoitios and displays the scar as proof.

³⁹ In *Odyssey* 19.386—502, Odysseus’s old nurse Eurycleia, in the act of washing his feet, recognizes him by surprise when she sees the scar on his leg, incurred during a boar hunt while he was a youth.

⁴⁰ Once Iphigenia becomes known to Orestes through the letter, it is probable that he should simply announce who he is. Aristotle seems to object to the somewhat arbitrary proofs he offers.

⁴¹ *Odyssey* 1.83-95, 521-34.

⁴² *Libation Bearers*, lines 164-211.

3. Euripides *Iphigenia in Tauris* 725-833

Iphigenia

(Returning to the temple by the town-path and addressing the Attendants who follow her.)

Precede me into the temple and be ready. 725

(The Attendants enter the temple.)

Here is my letter, safe within these folds.

But I have wondered. A man who has been in danger

When he comes out of it forgets his fears,

And sometimes he forgets his promises. 730

Might it not happen that your friend, intent

Upon his own concerns again, forget

How very much this letter means to me?

Orestes And what would you suggest, to ease your mind?

Iphigenia His solemn vow to take this where I say. 735

Orestes And will you make a vow balancing his?

Iphigenia To do what, or undo what?

Orestes To make sure

He be allowed to leave this deathly place.

Iphigenia How could he keep his vow, unless he leave? 740

Orestes What makes you think the king will let him sail?

Iphigenia I can persuade the king and will myself

Go to the ship and see your friend aboard.

Orestes Then word the vow as you would have him make it.

Iphigenia You promise the delivery of my letter? 745

Pylades I promise the delivery of your letter.

Iphigenia I promise you the king will let you leave.

Pylades In whose name do you swear?

Iphigenia By Artemis,

Here in Her Temple—and implore Her help.

Pylades And I by Zeus Himself, by Heaven's King.

Iphigenia And what if you should fail to keep your word? 750

Pylades Then may I never again set eyes on Argos.

And what if you should fail in keeping yours?

Iphigenia Then may I never again set foot in Argos.

Pylades But we forget one possibility.

Iphigenia Which might affect the keeping of your vow?

Pylades How could I keep my vow if this should happen— 755

If we were wrecked by a storm, torn by a reef,

If we were sunk and everything went down,

And if my life were saved but not the letter.

If that should happen, how could I keep my word?

Iphigenia In any plan, two ways improve on one.
So I will tell you, slowly, line by line, 760
The contents of my letter, which, if need be,
You are to tell my friend. Then he will know.
For either you will place it in his hand
And the written words will speak to him or else,
If they are lost, your voice will be their echo. 765

Pylades That is a surer way, for both of us.
So whom am I to find for you in Argos?
What shall I say to him?

Iphigenia Say this to him.
Say to Orestes, son of Agamemnon,
“A greeting comes from one you think is dead.” 770
Tell him, “Your sister is not dead at Aulis
But is alive.”

Orestes Alive? Iphigenia? Oh, no!
Unless the dead come back again!

Iphigenia You are looking at her now, for I am she.
But let me finish what I ask of him.
“O brother, come and save me from a life
As priestess in a loathsome ritual—
Save me from dying in this lonely land.” 775

Orestes Where am I, Pylades? What am I hearing?
Iphigenia “Lest memory of me should always haunt you.”
The name, you must repeat it, is Orestes.

Orestes I hear a God!
Iphigenia You hear only a woman.
Orestes I hear a woman—and I hear a God! 780
Let me hear more! I hear a miracle!

Iphigenia Then tell him, “Artemis put out Her hand
And spared my life at Aulis, leaving a deer
To bleed instead.” And tell him this, “My father
Not looking when he struck, believed me dead. 785
Artemis brought me here.” The letter ends.

Pylades No word was ever easier to keep!
Lady, keep yours or not, I keep mine now! 790
I give you this, Orestes, from your sister!

Orestes How can I look at letters! Let me look —
Oh let me stare at you whom I had lost!
Oh let me touch you with my hands and prove 795
That you are real and hold you close, close!

The Third Maiden Do not lay hands, whoever you may be,
Upon a vestment sacred
To Artemis! Do not profane that robe!

Orestes You are my sister, you are my father's daughter 800
And nature will not let you turn away
From your own brother given back to you.

Iphigenia Ah, you would have me think that you are he.
Orestes is not here. He is in Argos.

Orestes Poor sister, not in Argos! I am here! 805

Iphigenia You mean Tyndareus was your mother's father?

Orestes Yes, and my father's grandfather was Pelops.

Iphigenia What are you saying? How can I believe you?

Orestes By asking me more questions—about home.

Iphigenia Say anything—say anything at all. 810

Orestes Electra used to tell us about Atreus,
About Thyestes, how they came to quarrel.

Iphigenia The fight they had over the golden lamb!

Orestes The tapestry you made of it, yourself.

Iphigenia Are you Orestes? Is it really you? 815

Orestes Another tapestry you made, of Helios
Changing His course. Have you forgotten that?

Iphigenia I can remember every single thread.

Orestes And the bath perfumes, a present for your wedding
Sent by your mother to Aulis—you remember?

Iphigenia I live each bitter moment of that day.

Orestes The lock of hair you sent back to your mother?

Iphigenia I meant it for my own memorial 820
To mark a grave where I could never lie.

Orestes The keepsake in your room! Do you remember
The ancient spear, the one Pelops had used
On Oenomaus, when he won from him
Hippodamia as a bride from Pisa? 825

Iphigenia It is, it is! Orestes! O my brother!
My home has come to me from far away,
For you have come, I have you in my arms. 830

Orestes And I have you in mine, whom I thought dead.
No wonder that our eyes are blind with tears,
Of joy, not sorrow—yet of sorrow too. [tr. Brynner]

Session 4. Tragedy II: Sophocles *Antigone*

1. Prologos (tr. Fagles)

TIME AND SCENE: The royal house of Thebes. It is still night, and the invading armies of Argos have just been driven from the city. Fighting on opposite sides, the sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polynices, have killed each other in combat. Their uncle, CREON, is now king of Thebes. Enter ANTIGONE, slipping through the central doors of the palace. She motions to her sister, ISMENE, who follows her cautiously toward an altar at the center of the stage.

- ANTIGONE: My own flesh and blood—dear sister, dear Ismene,
how many griefs our father Oedipus handed down!
Do you know one, I ask you, one grief
that Zeus will not perfect for the two of us
while we still live and breathe? There's nothing, 5
no pain—our lives are pain—no private shame,
no public disgrace, nothing I haven't seen
in your griefs and mine. And now this:
an emergency decree, they say, the Commander
has just now declared for all of Thebes. 10
What, haven't you heard? Don't you see?
The doom reserved for enemies
marches on the ones we love the most.
- ISMENE: Not I, I haven't heard a word, Antigone.
Nothing of loved ones, 15
no joy or pain has come my way, not since
the two of us were robbed of our two brothers,
both gone in a day, a double blow—
not since the armies of Argos vanished,
just this very night. I know nothing more, 20
whether our luck's improved or ruin's still to come.
- ANTIGONE: I thought so. That's why I brought you out here,
past the gates, so you could hear in private.
- ISMENE: What's the matter? Trouble, clearly . . .
you sound so dark, so grim. 25
- ANTIGONE: Why not? Our own brothers' burial!
Hasn't Creon graced one with all the rites,
disgraced the other? Eteocles, they say,
has been given full military honors,
rightly so — Creon has laid him in the earth 30
and he goes with glory down among the dead.
But the body of Polynices, who died miserably —

why, a city-wide proclamation, rumor has it,
 forbids anyone to bury him, even mourn him.
 He's to be left unwept, unburied, a lovely treasure 35
 for birds that scan the field and feast to their heart's content.
 Such, I hear, is the martial law our good Creon
 lays down for you and me—yes, me, I tell you—
 and he's coming here to alert the uninformed
 in no uncertain terms, 40
 and he won't treat the matter lightly. Whoever
 disobeys in the least will die, his doom is sealed:
 stoning to death inside the city walls!
 There you have it. You'll soon show what you are,
 worth your breeding, Ismene, or a coward – 45
 for all your royal blood.

ISMENE: My poor sister, if things have come to this,
 who am I to make or mend them, tell me,
 what good am I to you?

ANTIGONE: Decide.

Will you share the labor, share the work? 50

ISMENE: What work, what's the risk? What do you mean?

ANTIGONE: [*Raising her hands.*] Will you lift up his body with these bare hands
 and lower it with me?

ISMENE: What? You'd bury him—
 when a law forbids the city?

ANTIGONE: Yes!

He is my brother and—deny it as you will— 55
 your brother too.
 No one will ever convict me for a traitor.

ISMENE: So desperate, and Creon has expressly—

ANTIGONE: No, he has no right to keep me from my own.

ISMENE: Oh my sister, think- 60
 think how our own father died, hated,
 his reputation in ruins, driven on
 by the crimes he brought to light himself
 to gouge out his eyes with his own hands –
 then mother . . . his mother and wife, both in one, 65
 mutilating her life in the twisted noose —
 and last, our two brothers dead in a single day,
 both shedding their own blood, poor suffering boys,
 battling out their common destiny hand-to-hand.

Now look at the two of us, left so alone . . . 70
 think what a death we'll die, the worst of all
 if we violate the laws and override
 the fixed decree of the throne, its power-
 we must be sensible. Remember we are women,
 we're not born to contend with men. Then too, 75
 we're underlings, ruled by much stronger hands,
 so we must submit in this, and things still worse.
 I, for one, I'll beg the dead to forgive me —
 I'm forced, I have no choice— I must obey
 the ones who stand in power. Why rush to extremes? 80
 It's madness, madness.

ANTIGONE: I won't insist,
 no, even if you should have a change of heart,
 I'd never welcome you in the labor, not with me.
 So, do as you like, whatever suits you best —
 I will bury him myself. 85
 And even if I die in the act, that death will be a glory
 I will lie with the one I love and loved by him —
 an outrage sacred to the gods! I have longer
 to please the dead than please the living here:
 in the kingdom down below I'll lie forever. 90
 Do as you like, dishonor the laws the gods hold in honor.

ISMENE: I'd do them no dishonor . . . but defy the city?
 I have no strength for that.

ANTIGONE: You have your excuses. I am on my way,
 I will raise a mound for him, for my dear brother. 95

ISMENE: Oh Antigone, you're so rash—-I'm so afraid for you!

ANTIGONE: Don't fear for me. Set your own life in order.

ISMENE: Then don't, at least, blurt this out to anyone.
 Keep it a secret. I'll join you in that, I promise.

ANTIGONE: Dear god, shout it from the rooftops. 100
 I'll hate you all the more for silence—-tell the world!

ISMENE: So fiery—and it ought to chill your heart.

ANTIGONE: I know I please where I must please the most.

ISMENE: Yes, if you can, but you're in love with impossibility.

ANTIGONE: Very well then, once my strength gives out 105
 I will be done at last.

ISMENE: You're wrong from the start,
 you're off on a hopeless quest.

ANTIGONE: If you say so, you will make me hate you,

Naturally I have guards out there already as we speak.

Chorus Then Why do you call us 'agents of the law'?

Creon I mean you're not to lend the least support
To anyone who'd go against the order.

Chorus But who'd do that?
Who would choose to be dead?

Creon Death, yes, it would be.
But you never know.
There's always money lurking and I never
Underestimate the lure of money.

Enter Guard.

Guard Sir, I wouldn't exactly say I was panting to get here. Far from it. As a matter of fact, I was more for turning back. I was over a barrel. One part of me was saying, 'Only a loony would walk himself into this,' and another part was saying, 'You'd be a bigger loony not to get to Creon first.' It was, 'You take the high road, I'll take the low road,' then, 'What's your hurry?', then, 'Get a move on.' But when all was said and done there was only one thing for it: get here, get it out and get it over, no matter what. So here I am, the old dog for the hard road. What will be, says I, will be.

Creon What has got you into this state, guard?

Guard First off, boss, you must know I'm in the clear. I didn't do the thing, I didn't see who did it and so, in fairness, I shouldn't be blamed for it.

Creon Why do you need such fences and defences?
Your news is hardly all that desperate.

Guard Desperate enough to panic me, your honour.

Creon Then get it out, man, as you say yourself,
And get it over.

Guard Well, here's what it is. The corpse. Somebody has as good as buried it.
Somebody's after attending to it right. Casting the earth on it and all the rest.

Creon What are you saying? What man would dare do this?

Guard That, for the life of me, I cannot tell. There wasn't so much as a scrape left on the ground. No sign of pick- work or that class of thing. No rut-marks from a wheel. Nothing but the land, the old hard scabble. Whoever did it was a mystery man entirely. When the sentry showed us this morning, we were stunned. The corpse had actually gone and disappeared. But then it turned out it was only hidden, under this coat of dust. As if somebody had treated it, you know, just to be on the safe side. Somebody observing all the customs. There were no tears in the flesh, so it couldn't have been wild animals or the dogs. And then the row broke out, everybody shouting, one man blaming the next and ready to fight to prove his innocence. We'd have put our hands in fire to clear ourselves. Swearing by this and that that we'd neither done the deed nor knew

who did it. And then, when we'd more or less calmed down, one man speaks up and panics us again And what he stated was the obvious: you would have to be told, the thing could be hid no longer. So that was agreed and I was the lucky man. I drew the short straw and that, sir, 's why I'm here. The one that's never welcome, the bearer of bad news.

Chorus Creon, sir, I cannot help but think
The gods have had a hand in this somewhere.

Creon Enough. Don't anger me. Your age, my friend,
Still doesn't give you rights to talk such garbage.
The gods, you think, are going to attend
To this particular corpse? Preposterous.
Did they hide him under clay for his religion?
For coming to burn their colonnaded temples?
For attacking a city under their protection?
The gods, you think, will side with the likes of him?
Here's something else for you to think about.
For a good while now I have had reports
Of disaffected elements at work here,
A certain poisonous minority
Unready to admit the rule of law
And my law in particular.

I know

These people and how they operate.

Maybe they are not

The actual perpetrators, but they possess
The money and the means to bribe their way.
Money has a long and sinister reach.
It slips into the system, changes hands
And starts to eat away at the foundations
Of everything we stand for.

Money brings down leaders,
Warps minds, and generally corrupts
People and institutions. But in this case
Whoever took the bribe will pay the price.

You then: listen to this

For this is my solemn vow: if you do not
Apprehend, arrest and bring before me
The one who interred the corpse, I'll hang you out
And have you so carved up and pulled apart
You'll be pleading to be dead. You'll discover then
What interest your kind of money earns.

You can't, friend, have your palm greased and expect
 To get away clean. Everything comes out.

Guard Can I say a word or am I just dismissed?

Creon Dismissed. That's it. You and your news disturb me.

Guard Your conscience is what's doing the disturbing.

Creon Watch it, guard. You're overstepping here.

Guard It's that mystery man who has you really bothered.

Creon I warn you. You had better mind your mouth.

Guard But I didn't do it.

Creon Oh yes, you did. The minute you smelt money.

Guard What's happening here, Creon, is that the judge
 Has misjudged everything.

Creon And what I'm telling you
 Is this: unless you expose the guilty party to me,
 You'll rue the day you bought into this plot.
Exit Creon.

Guard O yes, of course, expose him! Bring him in.
 But be that as may be, this much is sure:
 Yours truly won't be back here in a hurry.
 Me that was done for!
 Ye gods! Ye gods!
 I'm off! *Exit Guard.*

3. The second *stasimon*

Chorus Among the many wonders of the world
 Where is the equal of this creature, man?
 First he was shivering on the shore in skins,
 Or hunched in a dug-out, terrified of drowning.
 Then he took up oars, put tackle on a mast
 And steered himself by the stars through gales.

Once upon a time from the womb of earth
 The gods were born and he bowed down
 To worship them. He worked the land,
 Stubbed the forests and harnessed stallions.
 His furrows cropped, he feasted his eyes
 On hay and herds as far as the horizon.

The wind is no more swift or mysterious
 Than his mind and words; he has mastered thinking,
 Roofed his house against hail and rain

And worked out laws for living together.
Home—maker, thought—taker, measure of all things,
He can heal with herbs and read the heavens.
Nothing seems beyond him.
When he yields to his gods
When truth is the treadle of his loom
And justice the shuttle, he'll be shown respect —
The city will reward him. But let him once
Overstep what the city allows,
Tramp down right or treat the law
Wilfully, as his own word,
Then let this wonder of the
World remember:
He'll have put himself beyond the pale.
When he comes begging we will turn our backs.

4. The second episode

Enter Guard, leading Antigone.

Now what has happened? Is this
The gods at work?
Antigone, child of doom,
Have you gone and broken the law?
Guard This is the one. We caught her at it,
Attending to the corpse.
Where's Creon gone?

Chorus Creon knows when he's needed.
He's coming now.

Enter Creon.

Creon Needed? Why am I needed?

Guard King Creon. Sir.
There's no such thing as an oath that can't be broken
Circumstances change and your mind changes.
After the going-over you gave me here I swore
I was off for good. But every now and then
The thing you'd hardly let yourself imagine
Actually happens. So here I am again.
And here's the one that was covering up the corpse.
I was on to her in a flash: my prisoner
And mine alone. No need to draw lots this time,
I can tell you.

What's strange: I felt a sadness coming over me.
It's one thing to be let off the hook yourself,
Another thing to land your friends in trouble.
But if I don't watch out for myself, who will?

Creon You there, studying the ground: hold up your head
And tell us: is this true?

Antigone True. I admit it.

Creon (*to Guard*) All right. You're in the clear — so now clear off.

Exit Guard.

You then. Tell me

And be quick about it: did you or did you not
Know that the proclamation forbade all this?

Antigone I did know. How could I not? Didn't everybody?

Creon And still you dared to disobey the law?

Antigone I disobeyed because the law was not
The law of Zeus nor the law ordained
By justice, justice dwelling deep
Among the gods of the dead.
What they decree Is immemorial and binding for us all.
The proclamation had your force behind it
But it was mortal force, and I, also a mortal,
I chose to disregard it. I abide
By statutes utter and immutable —
Unwritten, original, god-given laws.

Was I going to humour you, or honour gods?
Sooner or later I'll die anyhow
And sooner may be better in my case:
This death penalty is almost a relief.
If I had to live and suffer in the knowledge
That Polyneices was lying above ground
Insulted and defiled, that would be worse
than having to suffer any doom of yours.
You think I'm just a reckless woman, but —
Never, Creon, forget: You yourself could be the reckless one.

Chorus This wildness in her comes from Oedipus.
She gets it from her father. She won't relent.

Creon We'll wait and see. The bigger the resistance
The bigger the collapse.

Iron that's forged the hardest
Snaps the quickest. Wild she may well be
But even the wildest horses come to heel

When they're reined and bitted right.

Subordinates

Are just not made for insubordination.

When she defied the general order
Antigone had already gone too far,
But flaunting that defiance in my face
Puts her beyond the pale. Who does she think
She is? The man in charge?

Have I to be

The woman of the house and take her orders?
She has brought death sentences upon herself
And on her sister —

Yes, yes, yes,

Ismene is involved in this thing too.
The pair of them, my own sister's daughters,
In it, up to the hilt. But neither seed nor breed
Will save them now.

Get Ismene out here.

She was inside in the house a while ago,
Raving, out of her mind.

That's how guilt

Affects some people. They simply break
And everything comes out.

But the barefaced ones

The ones who defy you when they're found out,
They're worse again.

Antigone Will it be enough for you
To see me executed?

Creon More than enough.

Antigone Then why don't you do it quickly?
Anything I have to say to you
Or you to me is sheer exacerbation.
I never did a nobler thing than bury
My brother Polyneices. And if these men
Weren't so afraid to sound unpatriotic
They'd say the same. But you are king
And because you're king you won't be contradicted.

Creon So you know something no one else in Thebes knows?

Antigone They know it too. They're just afraid to say it.

Creon But you're so high and mighty you've no qualms.

Antigone None. There's no shame in burying a brother.

Creon Your brother Eteocles also died in the war.
Antigone My father's and my mother's son, yes, dead.
Creon — And dishonoured, when you honour Polyneices.
Antigone The dead aren't going to begrudge the dead.
Creon So wrongdoers and the ones wronged fare the same?
Antigone Polyneices was no common criminal.
Creon He terrorised us. Eteocles stood by us.
Antigone Religion dictates the burial of the dead.
Creon Dictates the same for loyal and disloyal?
Antigone Who knows what loyalty is in the underworld?
Creon Even there, I'd know my enemy.
Antigone And I would know my friend. Where I assist
With love, you set at odds.
Creon Go then and love your fill in the underworld.
No woman will dictate the law to me.

Ismene is brought in.

Chorus Ismene, look, in tears!
For her sister. For herself.
Creon You bloodsucker. You two-faced parasite.
The pair of you at me like a pair of leeches!
Two vipers spitting venom at the throne.
Speak, you, now. You helped her, didn't you?
Or are you going to claim you're innocent?
Ismene I helped her, yes, if I'm allowed to say so
And now I stand with her to take what comes.
Antigone I don't allow this. Justice won't allow it.
You wouldn't help.

We cut all ties.

It's over.

Ismene But now I'm with you. I want to throw myself
Like a lifeline to you in your sea of troubles.
Antigone Too late, my sister. You chose a safe line first.
The dead and Hades know who did this deed.
Ismene Antigone, don't rob me of all honour.
Let me die with you and act right by the dead.
Antigone You can't just pluck your honour off a bush
You didn't plant. You forfeited your right.
Ismene If Antigone dies, how will I keep on living?
Antigone Ask Creon, since you seem so fond of him.
Ismene What good does it do you, twisting the knife like this?
Antigone I can't help it, dear heart. It hurts me too.

Ismene But even at this stage, can I not do something?

Antigone You can save yourself. That is my honest wish.

Ismene And be for ever shamed in my own eyes?

Antigone You made a choice, you bear the consequence.

Ismene I was against your choice and made it clear.

Antigone One world stood by you, one stood by me.

Ismene Different worlds, both equally offended.

Antigone Take heart, Ismene: you are still alive
But I have long gone over to the dead.

Creon This is incredible: one of these
Had the father's madness in her from the start
But I never thought to see it in Ismene.

Ismene You think, Creon, when you drive us to the edge
We won't go over?

Creon You went over long ago,
The minute you linked up with this one here.

Ismene My sister is the mainstay of my life.

Creon Your sister was . . . There's no 'is' any more.

Ismene You mean you'd kill your own son's bride-to-be?

Creon I would and will. He has other fields to plough.

Ismene He loves her utterly. For him, there's no one else.

Creon No son of mine will take a condemned wife.

Ismene O poor, poor Haemon! To have you for a father!

Creon You and your marriage talk. Too late for that.

Chorus Do you mean, sir, you'll rob Haemon of this woman?

Creon Hades will rob him first.

Chorus The sentence, though,
Has been decided on?

Creon It has, by me,
And I, remember, have your acclamation.
Get her away from here. And the other one.
Women were never meant for this assembly.
From now on they'll be kept in place again
And better be . . .
Yes, keep an eye on them.
Once the end's in sight they all get desperate.
Even the bravest will make a run for it.

Session 5: Philosophical criticism

1. The moral dangers of imitation (*Republic* Book 3, 391c-398b)

“So this concludes the topic of tales.⁴³ That of diction, I take it, is to be considered next. So we shall have completely examined both the matter and the manner of speech.” And Adeimantus said, “I don't understand what [392d] you mean by this.” “Well,” said I, “we must have you understand. Perhaps you will be more likely to apprehend it thus. Is not everything that is said by fabulists or poets a narration of past, present, or future things?” “What else could it be?” he said. “Do not they proceed either by pure narration or by a narrative that is effected through imitation,⁴⁴ or by both?” “This too,” he said, “I still need to have made plainer.” “I seem to be a ridiculous and obscure teacher,” I said; “so like men who are unable to express themselves [392e] I won't try to speak in wholes and universals but will separate off a particular part and by the example of that try to show you my meaning. Tell me. Do you know the first lines of the *Iliad* in which the poet says that Chryses implored Agamemnon to release his daughter, and that the king was angry and that Chryses, [393a] failing of his request, imprecated curses on the Achaeans in his prayers to the god?” “I do.” “You know then that as far as these verses,

“And prayed unto all the Achaeans,

Chiefly to Atreus' sons, twin leaders who marshalled the people,” [Hom. *Il.* 1.15]

the poet himself is the speaker and does not even attempt to suggest to us that anyone but himself is speaking. [393b] But what follows he delivers as if he were himself Chryses and tries as far as may be to make us feel that not Homer is the speaker, but the priest, an old man. And in this manner he has carried on nearly all the rest of his narration about affairs in Ilium, all that happened in Ithaca, and the entire *Odyssey*.” “Quite so,” he said. “Now, it is narration, is it not, both when he presents the several speeches and the matter between the speeches?” “Of course.” “But when he delivers a speech [393c] as if he were someone else, shall we not say that he then assimilates thereby his own diction is far as possible to that of the person whom he announces as about to speak?” “We shall obviously.” “And is not likening one's self to another in speech or bodily bearing an imitation of him to whom one likens one's self?” “Surely.” “In such case then it appears he and the other poets effect their narration through imitation.” “Certainly.” “But if the poet should conceal himself nowhere, then his entire poetizing and narration would have been accomplished without imitation.⁴⁵ [393d] And lest you may say again that you don't understand, I will explain to you how this would be done. If Homer, after telling us that Chryses came with the ransom of his daughter

⁴³ λόγων here practically means the matter, and λέξεως, which became a technical term for diction, the manner, as Socrates explains when Adeimantus fails to understand.

⁴⁴ All art is essentially imitation for Plato and Aristotle. But imitation means for them not only the portrayal or description of visible and tangible things, but more especially the expression of a mood or feeling, hence the (to a modern) paradox that music is the most imitative of the arts. But Plato here complicates the matter further by sometimes using imitation in the narrower sense of dramatic dialogue as opposed to narration. An attentive reader will easily observe these distinctions.

⁴⁵ In the narrower sense.

and as a suppliant of the Achaeans but chiefly of the kings, had gone on speaking not as if made or being Chryses but still as Homer, you are aware that it would not be imitation but narration, pure and simple. It would have been somewhat in this wise. I will state it without meter for I am not a poet:⁴⁶ [393e] the priest came and prayed that to them the gods should grant to take Troy and come safely home, but that they should accept the ransom and release his daughter, out of reverence for the god, and when he had thus spoken the others were of reverent mind and approved, but Agamemnon was angry and bade him depart and not come again lest the scepter and the fillets of the god should not avail him. And ere his daughter should be released, he said, she would grow old in Argos with himself, and he ordered him to be off and not vex him if he wished to get home safe. [394a] And the old man on hearing this was frightened and departed in silence, and having gone apart from the camp he prayed at length to Apollo, invoking the appellations of the god, and reminding him of and asking requital for any of his gifts that had found favor whether in the building of temples or the sacrifice of victims. In return for these things he prayed that the Achaeans should suffer for his tears by the god's shafts. It is in this way, my dear fellow," I said, "that [394b] without imitation simple narration results." "I understand," he said. "Understand then," said I, "that the opposite of this arises when one removes the words of the poet between and leaves the alternation of speeches." "This too I understand," he said, "—it is what happens in tragedy." "You have conceived me most rightly," I said, "and now I think I can make plain to you what I was unable to before, that there is one kind of poetry and tale-telling which works wholly through imitation, [394c] as you remarked, tragedy and comedy; and another which employs the recital of the poet himself, best exemplified, I presume, in the dithyramb⁴⁷; and there is again that which employs both, in epic poetry and in many other places, if you apprehend me." "I understand now," he said, "what you then meant." "Recall then also the preceding statement that we were done with the 'what' of speech and still had to consider the 'how.'" "I remember." [394d] "What I meant then was just this, that we must reach a decision whether we are to suffer our poets to narrate as imitators or in part as imitators and in part not, and what sort of things in each case, or not allow them to imitate⁴⁸ at all." "I divine," he said, "that you are considering whether we shall admit tragedy and comedy into our city or not." "Perhaps," said I, "and perhaps even more than that."⁴⁹ For I certainly do not yet know myself, but whithersoever the wind, as it were, of the argument blows, there lies our course." [394e] "Well said," he replied. "This then, Adeimantus, is the point we must keep in view, do we wish our guardians to be good mimics or not? Or is this also a consequence of what we said before, that each one could

⁴⁶ From here to 394 B, Plato gives a prose paraphrase of *Iliad* i. 12-42. Roger Ascham in his *Schoolmaster* quotes it as a perfect example of the best form of exercise for learning a language.

⁴⁷ The dithyramb was technically a poem in honor of Bacchus. For its more or less conjectural history cf. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy*. Here, however, it is used broadly to designate the type of elaborate Greek lyric which like the odes of Pindar and Bacchylides narrates a myth or legend with little if any dialogue.

⁴⁸ Again in the special limited sense.

⁴⁹ This seems to imply that Plato already had in mind the extension of the discussion in the tenth book to the whole question of the moral effect of poetry and art.

practise well only one pursuit and not many, but if he attempted the latter, dabbling in many things, he would fail of distinction in all?" "Of course it is." "And does not the same rule hold for imitation, that the same man is not able to imitate many things well as he can one?" "No, he is not." "Still less, then, will he be able to combine [395a] the practice of any worthy pursuit with the imitation of many things and the quality of a mimic; since, unless I mistake, the same men cannot practise well at once even the two forms of imitation that appear most nearly akin, as the writing of tragedy and comedy? Did you not just now call these two imitations?" "I did, and you are right in saying that the same men are not able to succeed in both, nor yet to be at once good rhapsodists and actors." "True." "But [395b] neither can the same men be actors for tragedies and comedies—and all these are imitations, are they not?" "Yes, imitations." "And to still smaller coinage than this, in my opinion, Adeimantus, proceeds the fractioning of human faculty, so as to be incapable of imitating many things or of doing the things themselves of which the imitations are likenesses." "Most true," he replied.

"If, then, we are to maintain our original principle, that our guardians, released from all other crafts, [395c] are to be expert craftsmen of civic liberty, and pursue nothing else that does not conduce to this, it would not be fitting for these to do nor yet to imitate anything else. But if they imitate they should from childhood up imitate what is appropriate to them—men, that is, who are brave, sober, pious, free and all things of that kind; but things unbecoming the free man they should neither do nor be clever at imitating, nor yet any other shameful thing, lest from the imitation [395d] they imbibe the reality. Or have you not observed that imitations, if continued from youth far into life, settle down into habits and (second) nature in the body, the speech, and the thought?" "Yes, indeed," said he. "We will not then allow our charges, whom we expect to prove good men, being men, to play the parts of women and imitate a woman young or old wrangling with her husband, defying heaven, loudly boasting, fortunate in her own conceit, or involved in misfortune [395e] and possessed by grief and lamentation—still less a woman that is sick, in love, or in labor." "Most certainly not," he replied. "Nor may they imitate slaves, female and male, doing the offices of slaves." "No, not that either." "Nor yet, as it seems, bad men who are cowards and who do the opposite of the things we just now spoke of, reviling and lampooning one another, speaking foul words in their cups or when sober [396a] and in other ways sinning against themselves and others in word and deed after the fashion of such men. And I take it they must not form the habit of likening themselves to madmen either in words nor yet in deeds. For while knowledge they must have both of mad and bad men and women, they must do and imitate nothing of this kind." "Most true," he said. "What of this?" I said, "—are they to imitate smiths and other craftsmen or the rowers of triremes and those who call the time to them or other things [396b] connected therewith?" "How could they," he said, "since it will be forbidden them even to pay any attention to such things?" "Well, then, neighing horses and lowing bulls, and the noise of rivers and the roar of the sea and the thunder and everything of that kind—will they imitate these?" "Nay, they have been forbidden," he said, "to be mad or liken themselves to madmen." "If, then, I understand

your meaning,” said I, “there is a form of diction and narrative in which [396c] the really good and true man would narrate anything that he had to say, and another form unlike this to which the man of the opposite birth and breeding would cleave and in which he would tell his story.” “What are these forms?” he said. “A man of the right sort, I think, when he comes in the course of his narrative to some word or act of a good man will be willing to impersonate the other in reporting it, and will feel no shame at that kind of mimicry, by preference imitating the good man [396d] when he acts steadfastly and sensibly, and less and more reluctantly when he is upset by sickness or love or drunkenness or any other mishap. But when he comes to someone unworthy of himself, he will not wish to liken himself in earnest to one who is inferior, except in the few cases where he is doing something good, but will be embarrassed both because he is unpractised in the mimicry of such characters, and also because he shrinks in distaste from molding and fitting himself the types of baser things. [396e] His mind disdains them, unless it be for jest.”

“Then the narrative that he will employ will be the kind that we just now illustrated by the verses of Homer, and his diction will be one that partakes of both, of imitation and simple narration, but there will be a small portion of imitation in a long discourse—or is there nothing in what I say?” “Yes, indeed,” he said, that is the type and pattern of such a speaker.” “Then,” said I, [397a] “the other kind speaker, the more debased he is the less will he shrink from imitating anything and everything. He will think nothing unworthy of himself, so that he will attempt, seriously and in the presence of many, to imitate all things, including those we just now mentioned—claps of thunder, and the noise of wind and hail and axles and pulleys, and the notes of trumpets and flutes and pan-pipes, and the sounds of all instruments, and the cries of dogs, sheep, and birds; and so his style will depend wholly on imitation [397b] in voice and gesture, or will contain but a little of pure narration.” “That too follows of necessity,” he said. “These, then,” said I, “were the two types of diction of which I was asking.” “There are those two,” he replied. “Now does not one of the two involve slight variations, and if we assign a suitable pitch and rhythm to the diction, is not the result that the right speaker speaks almost on the same note and in one cadence—for the changes are slight— [397c] and similarly in a rhythm of nearly the same kind?” “Quite so.” “But what of the other type? Does it not require the opposite, every kind of pitch and all rhythms, if it too is to have appropriate expression, since it involves manifold forms of variation?”

“Emphatically so.” “And do all poets and speakers hit upon one type or the other of diction or some blend which they combine of both?” [397d] “They must,” he said. “What, then,” said I, are we to do? Shall we admit all of these into the city, or one of the unmixed types, or the mixed type?” “If my vote prevails,” he said, “the unmixed imitator of the good.” “Nay, but the mixed type also is pleasing, Adeimantus, and far most pleasing to boys and their tutors and the great mob is the opposite of your choice.” “Most pleasing it is.” “But perhaps,” said I, “you would affirm it to be ill-suited [397e] to our polity, because there is no twofold or manifold man among us, since every man does one thing.” “It is not suited.”

“And is this not the reason why such a city is the only one in which we shall find the cobbler a cobbler and not a pilot in addition to his cobbling, and the farmer a farmer and not a judge

added to his farming, and the soldier a soldier and not a money-maker in addition to his soldiery, and so of all the rest?" "True," he said. "If a man, then, it seems, [398a] who was capable by his cunning of assuming every kind of shape and imitating all things should arrive in our city, bringing with himself the poems which he wished to exhibit, we should fall down and worship him as a holy and wondrous and delightful creature, but should say to him that there is no man of that kind among us in our city, nor is it lawful for such a man to arise among us, and we should send him away to another city, after pouring myrrh down over his head and crowning him with fillets of wool, but we ourselves, for our souls' good, should continue to employ [398b] the more austere and less delightful poet and tale-teller, who would imitate the diction of the good man and would tell his tale in the patterns which we prescribed in the beginning, when we set out to educate our soldiers." "We certainly should do that if it rested with us."

2. The quarrel between poetry and philosophy (*Republic* Book 10, 595a-608b)

"And truly," I said, "many other considerations assure me that we were entirely right in our organization of the state, and especially, I think, in the matter of poetry." "What about it?" he said. "In refusing to admit at all so much of it as is imitative; for that it is certainly not to be received is, I think, [595b] still more plainly apparent now that we have distinguished the several parts of the soul." "What do you mean?" "Why, between ourselves—for you will not betray me to the tragic poets and all other imitators—that kind of art seems to be a corruption of the mind of all listeners who do not possess, as an antidote, a knowledge of its real nature." "What is your idea in saying this?" he said. "I must speak out," I said, "though a certain love and reverence for Homer that has possessed me from a boy would stay me from speaking. [595c] For he appears to have been the first teacher and beginner of all these beauties of tragedy. Yet all the same we must not honor a man above truth, but, as I say, speak our minds." [...]

"In heaven's name, then, this business of imitation is concerned with the third remove from truth, is it not?" "Yes." "And now again, to what element in man is its function and potency related?" "Of what are you speaking?" "Of this: The same magnitude, I presume, viewed from near and from far does not appear equal." "Why, no." "And the same things appear bent and straight to those who view them in water and out, or concave and convex, owing to similar errors of vision about colors, and there is [602d] obviously every confusion of this sort in our souls. And so scene-painting in its exploitation of this weakness of our nature falls nothing short of witchcraft, and so do jugglery and many other such contrivances." "True." "And have not measuring and numbering and weighing proved to be most gracious aids to prevent the domination in our soul of the apparently greater or less or more or heavier, and to give the control to that which has reckoned and numbered or even weighed?" [602e] "Certainly." "But this surely would be the function of the part of the soul that reasons and calculates." "Why, yes, of that." "And often when this has measured and declares that certain things are larger or that some are smaller than the others or equal, there is at the same time an appearance of the contrary." "Yes." "And did we not say that it

is impossible for the same thing at one time to hold contradictory opinions about the same thing?

[603a] “And we were right in affirming that.” “The part of the soul, then, that opines in contradiction of measurement could not be the same with that which conforms to it.”

“Why, no.” “But, further, that which puts its trust in measurement and reckoning must be the best part of the soul.” “Surely.” “Then that which opposes it must belong to the inferior elements of the soul.” “Necessarily.”

“This, then, was what I wished to have agreed upon when I said that poetry, and in general the mimetic art, produces a product that is far removed from truth in the accomplishment of its task, and associates with the part in us [603b] that is remote from intelligence, and is its companion and friend for no sound and true purpose.” “By all means,” said he. “Mimetic art, then, is an inferior thing cohabiting with an inferior and engendering inferior offspring.” “It seems so.” “Does that,” said I, “hold only for vision or does it apply also to hearing and to what we call poetry?” “Presumably,” he said, “to that also.” “Let us not, then, trust solely to the plausible analogy from painting, but let us approach in turn [603c] that part of the mind to which mimetic poetry appeals and see whether it is the inferior or the nobly serious part.” “So we must.” “Let us, then, put the question thus: Mimetic poetry, we say, imitates human beings acting under compulsion or voluntarily, and as a result of their actions supposing themselves to have fared well or ill and in all this feeling either grief or joy. Did we find anything else but this?” “Nothing.” “Is a man, then, in all this [603d] of one mind with himself, or just as in the domain of sight there was faction and strife and he held within himself contrary opinions at the same time about the same things, so also in our actions there is division and strife of the man with himself? But I recall that there is no need now of our seeking agreement on this point, for in our former discussion⁵⁰ we were sufficiently agreed that our soul at any one moment teems with countless such self-contradictions.” “Rightly,” he said. “Yes, rightly,” said I; “but what we then omitted must now, I think, [603e] be set forth.” “What is that?” he said. “When a good and reasonable man,” said I, “experiences such a stroke of fortune as the loss of a son or anything else that he holds most dear, we said, I believe, then too,⁵¹ that he will bear it more easily than the other sort.” “Assuredly.” “But now let us consider this: Will he feel no pain, or, since that is impossible, shall we say that he will in some sort be moderate in his grief?” “That,” he said, “is rather the truth.

[604a] “Tell me now this about him: Do you think he will be more likely to resist and fight against his grief when he is observed by his equals or when he is in solitude alone by himself?” “He will be much more restrained,” he said, “when he is on view.” “But when left alone, I fancy, he will permit himself many utterances which, if heard by another, would put him to shame, and will do many things which he would not consent to have another see him doing.” “So it is,” he said.

⁵⁰ 439 B ff.

⁵¹ 387 D-E.

“Now is it not reason and law [604b] that exhorts him to resist, while that which urges him to give way to his grief is the bare feeling itself?” “True.” “And where there are two opposite impulses in a man at the same time about the same thing we say that there must needs be two things in him.” “Of course.” “And is not the one prepared to follow the guidance of the law as the law leads and directs?” “How so?” “The law, I suppose, declares that it is best to keep quiet as far as possible in calamity and not to chafe and repine, because we cannot know what is really good and evil in such things and it advantages us nothing to take them hard, [604c] and nothing in mortal life is worthy of great concern, and our grieving checks the very thing we need to come to our aid as quickly as possible in such case.” “What thing,” he said, “do you mean?” “To deliberate,” I said, “about what has happened to us, and, as it were in the fall of the dice, to determine the movements of our affairs with reference to the numbers that turn up, in the way that reason indicates would be the best, and, instead of stumbling like children, clapping one's hands to the stricken spot and wasting the time in wailing, [604d] ever to accustom the soul to devote itself at once to the curing of the hurt and the raising up of what has fallen, banishing threnody by therapy.” “That certainly,” he said, “would be the best way to face misfortune and deal with it.” “Then, we say, the best part of us is willing to conform to these precepts of reason.” “Obviously.” “And shall we not say that the part of us that leads us to dwell in memory on our suffering and impels us to lamentation, and cannot get enough of that sort of thing, is the irrational and idle part of us, the associate of cowardice?” “Yes, we will say that.” “And does not [604e] the fretful part of us present many and varied occasions for imitation, while the intelligent and temperate disposition, always remaining approximately the same, is neither easy to imitate nor to be understood when imitated, especially by a nondescript mob assembled in the theater? For the representation imitates a type [605a] that is alien to them.” “By all means.” “And is it not obvious that the nature of the mimetic poet is not related to this better part of the soul and his cunning is not framed to please it, if he is to win favor with the multitude, but is devoted to the fretful and complicated type of character because it is easy to imitate?” “It is obvious.” “This consideration, then, makes it right for us to proceed to lay hold of him and set him down as the counterpart of the painter; for he resembles him in that his creations are inferior in respect of reality; and the fact that his appeal is to the inferior part of the soul [605b] and not to the best part is another point of resemblance. And so we may at last say that we should be justified in not admitting him into a well-ordered state, because he stimulates and fosters this element in the soul, and by strengthening it tends to destroy the rational part, just as when in a state one puts bad men in power and turns the city over to them and ruins the better sort. Precisely in the same manner we shall say that the mimetic poet sets up in each individual soul a vicious constitution by fashioning phantoms far removed from reality, and by currying favor with the senseless element [605c] that cannot distinguish the greater from the less, but calls the same thing now one, now the other.” “By all means.”

“But we have not yet brought our chief accusation against it. Its power to corrupt, with rare exceptions, even the better sort is surely the chief cause for alarm.” “How could it be

otherwise, if it really does that?" "Listen and reflect. I think you know that the very best of us, when we hear Homer or some other of the makers of tragedy [605d] imitating one of the heroes who is in grief, and is delivering a long tirade in his lamentations or chanting and beating his breast, feel pleasure, and abandon ourselves and accompany the representation with sympathy and eagerness, and we praise as an excellent poet the one who most strongly affects us in this way." "I do know it, of course." "But when in our own lives some affliction comes to us, you are also aware that we plume ourselves upon the opposite, on our ability to remain calm and endure, [605e] in the belief that this is the conduct of a man, and what we were praising in the theatre that of a woman." "I do note that." "Do you think, then," said I, "that this praise is rightfully bestowed when, contemplating a character that we would not accept but would be ashamed of in ourselves, we do not abominate it but take pleasure and approve?" "No, by Zeus," he said, "it does not seem reasonable." [606a] "O yes," said I, "if you would consider it in this way." "In what way?" "If you would reflect that the part of the soul that in the former case, in our own misfortunes, was forcibly restrained, and that has hungered for tears and a good cry and satisfaction, because it is its nature to desire these things, is the element in us that the poets satisfy and delight, and that the best element in our nature, since it has never been properly educated by reason or even by habit, then relaxes its guard over the plaintive part, [606b] inasmuch as this is contemplating the woes of others and it is no shame to it to praise and pity another who, claiming to be a good man, abandons himself to excess in his grief; but it thinks this vicarious pleasure is so much clear gain, and would not consent to forfeit it by disdain the poem altogether. That is, I think, because few are capable of reflecting that what we enjoy in others will inevitably react upon ourselves. For after feeding fat the emotion of pity there, it is not easy to restrain it in our own sufferings." [606c] "Most true," he said. "Does not the same principle apply to the laughable, namely, that if in comic representations, or for that matter in private talk, you take intense pleasure in buffooneries that you would blush to practise yourself, and do not detest them as base, you are doing the same thing as in the case of the pathetic? For here again what your reason, for fear of the reputation of buffoonery, restrained in yourself when it fain would play the clown, you release in turn, and so, fostering its youthful impudence, let yourself go so far that often ere you are aware you become yourself [606d] a comedian in private." "Yes, indeed," he said. "And so in regard to the emotions of sex and anger, and all the appetites and pains and pleasures of the soul which we say accompany all our actions, the effect of poetic imitation is the same. For it waters and fosters these feelings when what we ought to do is to dry them up, and it establishes them as our rulers when they ought to be ruled, to the end that we may be better and happier men instead of worse and more miserable." "I cannot deny it," said he. [606e] "Then, Glaucon," said I, "when you meet encomiasts of Homer who tell us that this poet has been the educator of Hellas, and that for the conduct and refinement of human life he is worthy of our study and devotion, and that we should order our entire lives by the guidance of this poet, [607a] we must love and salute them as doing the best they can, and concede to them that Homer is the most poetic of poets and the first of tragedians, but we

must know the truth, that we can admit no poetry into our city save only hymns to the gods and the praises of good men. For if you grant admission to the honeyed muse in lyric or epic, pleasure and pain will be lords of your city instead of law and that which shall from time to time have approved itself to the general reason as the best." "Most true," he said. [607b]

"Let us, then, conclude our return to the topic of poetry and our apology, and affirm that we really had good grounds then for dismissing her from our city, since such was her character. For reason constrained us. And let us further say to her, lest she condemn us for harshness and rusticity, that there is from of old a quarrel between philosophy and poetry. For such expressions as "the yelping hound barking at her master and mighty in the idle babble of fools," [607c] and "the mob that masters those who are too wise for their own good," and the subtle thinkers who reason that after all they are poor, and countless others are tokens of this ancient enmity. But nevertheless let it be declared that, if the mimetic and dulcet poetry can show any reason for her existence in a well-governed state, we would gladly admit her, since we ourselves are very conscious of her spell. But all the same it would be impious to betray what we believe to be the truth. [607d] Is not that so, friend? Do not you yourself feel her magic and especially when Homer is her interpreter?" "Greatly." "Then may she not justly return from this exile after she has pleaded her defence, whether in lyric or other measure?" "By all means." "And we would allow her advocates who are not poets but lovers of poetry to plead her cause in prose without metre, and show that she is not only delightful but beneficial to orderly government and all the life of man. And we shall listen benevolently, [607e] for it will be clear gain for us if it can be shown that she bestows not only pleasure but benefit." "How could we help being the gainers?" said he. "But if not, my friend, even as men who have fallen in love, if they think that the love is not good for them, hard though it be, nevertheless refrain, so we, owing to the love of this kind of poetry inbred in us by our education in these fine polities of ours, [608a] will gladly have the best possible case made out for her goodness and truth, but so long as she is unable to make good her defence we shall chant over to ourselves as we listen the reasons that we have given as a counter-charm to her spell, to preserve us from slipping back into the childish loves of the multitude; for we have come to see that we must not take such poetry seriously as a serious thing that lays hold on truth, but that he who lends an ear to it must be on his guard [608b] fearing for the polity in his soul and must believe what we have said about poetry."

Session 6: Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*

I. Translation

ὥς ἄρ' ἔφη καὶ παῖδα λαβὼν φέρε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων.
σὺν δ' ἄρα φρασσάμενος τότε δὴ κρατὺς Ἀργειφόντης
οἰωνὸν προέηκεν ἀειρόμενος μετὰ χερσὶ, 295
τλήμονα γαστροῦς ἔριθον, ἀτάσθαλον ἀγγελιώτην.
ἔσσυμένως δὲ μετ' αὐτὸν ἐπέπταρε· τοῖο δ' Ἀπόλλων
ἔκλυεν, ἐκ χειρῶν δὲ χαμαὶ βάλε κύδιμον Ἑρμῆν.
ἔζετο δὲ προπάροιθε καὶ ἔσσύμενός περ ὁδοῖο
Ἑρμῆν κερτομέων καὶ μιν πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπε· 300
θάρσει, σπαργανιώτα, Διὸς καὶ Μαιάδος υἱέ·
εὐρήσω καὶ ἔπειτα βοῶν ἴφθιμα κάρηνα
τούτοις οἰωνοῖσι· σὺ δ' αὖθ' ὁδὸν ἡγεμονεύσεις.

συμφράζομαι *contrive*; οἰωνός *a large bird, bird of prey; a bird of omen or augury; omen*;
τλήμων *stout-hearted; overbold*; ἔριθος *labourer*; ἀτάσθαλος *reckless, presumptuous, wicked*

- (a) So spoke Apollo and grabbed the child
and picked him up,
but Strong Argeiphontes had his resources.
While still held in his arms,
he distracted Phoibos Apollo by issuing an omen:
A fat peasant appeared out of nowhere.
Then Hermes sneezed.
Apollo tuned into it and dropped the boy
and, though eager to get going, played along,
sitting right down on the ground with Illustrious Hermes.
"Fear not, little Hermes," he said, "Son of Zeus and Maia —
I'll find the strong cattle by means of these omens,
and you shall show me the way." [tr. Stein, 2019]

(b) So said Phoebus Apollo, and took the child and began to carry him. But at that moment the strong Slayer of Argus [295] had his plan, and, while Apollo held him in his hands, sent forth an omen, a hard-worked belly-serf, a rude messenger, and sneezed directly after. And when Apollo heard it, he dropped glorious Hermes out of his hands on the ground: [300] then sitting down before him, though he was eager to go on his way, he spoke mockingly to Hermes: "Fear not, little swaddling baby, son of Zeus and Maia. I shall find the strong cattle presently by these omens, and you shall lead the way." [tr. Evelyn-White, 1914]

(c) Thus saying, Phoebus did uplift
 The subtle infant in his swaddling clothes,
 And in his arms, according to his wont,
 A scheme devised the illustrious Argiphont.

50.

...

...

And sneezed and shuddered — Phoebus on the grass 390

Him threw, and whilst all that he had designed

He did perform — eager although to pass,

Apollo darted from his mighty mind

Towards the subtle babe the following scoff:—

‘Do not imagine this will get you off, 395

51.

‘You little swaddled child of Jove and May!

And seized him:—‘By this omen I shall trace

My noble herds, and you shall lead the way.’— [tr. Shelley, 1824]

295-303. The incident is quite in keeping with the general tone of the hymn. But the precise meaning of the two “omens” is doubtful. Both are clearly intentional (cf. “σὺν δ’ ἄρα φρασσάμενος”); but it is uncertain whether the second omen is merely a reduplication of the first, or whether Hermes intended to supplement the original “οἰωνός”. The further question arises, whether the omens refer to Hermes or Apollo. According to Hermann, Mercurius, “καταπαρδῶν Ἀπόλλωνος”, significabat parum se ira Apollinis moveri. So Baumeister, who adds that the sneeze is also intentional, ut inhonestius augurium honestiori callide occultaret, although Apollo is not to be deceived. This explanation is not satisfactory; and Gemoll is probably right in understanding that Hermes intends both omens to confirm Apollo's prophecy “ἀρχὸς φηλητέων κεκλήσεται”. The first omen is, in Gemoll's view, a mere piece of impudence; this is no doubt correct, but the editors do not notice that it is a parody of a favourable omen from Zeus “ὑψιβρεμέτης”. Cf. Eq. 639 (with Neil's note)⁵². An accidental sneeze would also be lucky; the humour lies in the fact that it is intentional. For the omen of sneezing cf. Od. 17.541, 545, Herod.vi. 107, Xen. Anab.iii. 2. 9, and other exx. quoted by Bouché-Leclercq Divination i. p. 162 f. and Blaydes on Av.720 “πταρμόν τ’ ὄρνιθα καλεῖτε”. Apollo of course is not deceived by Hermes, but ironically interprets the “omens” in his own way. [Allan & Sykes, 1904]

⁵² ταῦτα φροντίζοντί μοι
 ἐκ δεξιᾶς ἀπέπαρδε καταπύγων ἀνήρ.
 κἀγὼ προσέκυσα (Eq. 638-40)

2. Hermes the new-born rogue

(a) [1] Muse, sing of Hermes, the son of Zeus and Maia, lord of Cyllene and Arcadia rich in flocks, the luck-bringing messenger of the immortals whom Maia bare, the rich-tressed nymph, when she was joined in love with Zeus, [5] —a shy goddess, for she avoided the company of the blessed gods, and lived within a deep, shady cave. There the son of Cronos used to lie with the rich-tressed nymph, unseen by deathless gods and mortal men, at dead of night while sweet sleep should hold white-armed Hera fast. [10] And when the purpose of great Zeus was fulfilled, and the tenth moon with her was fixed in heaven, she was delivered and a notable thing was come to pass. For then she bare a son, of many shifts, blandly cunning, a robber, a cattle driver, a bringer of dreams, [15] a watcher by night, a thief at the gates, one who was soon to show forth wonderful deeds among the deathless gods. Born with the dawning, at mid-day he played on the lyre, and in the evening he stole the cattle of far-shooting Apollo on the fourth day of the month; for on that day queenly Maia bare him. [20] So soon as he had leaped from his mother's heavenly womb, he lay not long waiting in his holy cradle, but he sprang up and sought the oxen of Apollo. But as he stepped over the threshold of the high-roofed cave, he found a tortoise there and gained endless delight. [25] For it was Hermes who first made the tortoise a singer. The creature fell in his way at the courtyard gate, where it was feeding on the rich grass before the dwelling, waddling along. When he saw it, the luck-bringing son of Zeus laughed and said: [30] “An omen of great luck for me so soon! I do not slight it. Hail, comrade of the feast, lovely in shape, sounding at the dance! With joy I meet you! Where got you that rich gaud for covering, that spangled shell —a tortoise living in the mountains? But I will take and carry you within: you shall help me [35] and I will do you no disgrace, though first of all you must profit me. It is better to be at home: harm may come out of doors. Living, you shall be a spell against mischievous witchcraft⁵³; but if you die, then you shall make sweetest song.” Thus speaking, he took up the tortoise in both hands [40] and went back into the house carrying his charming toy. Then he cut off its limbs and scooped out the marrow of the mountain-tortoise with a scoop of grey iron. As a swift thought darts through the heart of a man when thronging cares haunt him, [45] or as bright glances flash from the eye, so glorious Hermes planned both thought and deed at once. He cut stalks of reed to measure and fixed them, fastening their ends across the back and through the shell of the tortoise, and then stretched ox hide all over it by his skill. [50] Also he put in the horns and fitted a cross-piece upon the two of them, and stretched seven strings of sheep-gut. But when he had made it he proved each string in turn with the key, as he held the lovely thing.

⁵³ Pliny notices the efficacy of the flesh of a tortoise against witchcraft. In *Geoponica* i. 14. 8 the living tortoise is prescribed as a charm to preserve vineyards from hail.



How to play the ancient Greek lyre: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFPXzvlDQpk>

[55] At the touch of his hand it sounded marvelously; and, as he tried it, the god sang sweet random snatches, even as youths bandy taunts at festivals. He sang of Zeus the son of Cronos and neat-shod Maia, the converse which they had before in the comradeship of love, telling all the glorious tale of his own begetting. [60] He celebrated, too, the handmaids of the nymph, and her bright home, and the tripods all about the house, and the abundant cauldrons.



Symposium musician with his seven-stringed lyre beside the fluted column of a building. Attic Red Figure Kylix ca. 460 BCE, by the Amphitrite Painter

But while he was singing of all these, his heart was bent on other matters. And he took the hollow lyre and laid it in his sacred cradle, [65] and sprang from the sweet-smelling hall to a watch-place, pondering sheer trickery in his heart — deeds such as knavish folk pursue in the dark night-time; for he longed to taste flesh.

The Sun was going down beneath the earth towards Ocean with his horses and chariot when Hermes [70] came hurrying to the shadowy mountains of Pieria, where the divine cattle of the blessed gods had their steeds and grazed the pleasant, unmown meadows. Of these the Son of Maia, the sharp-eyed slayer of Argus then cut off from the herd fifty loud-lowing kine, [75] and drove them straggling-wise across a sandy place, turning their hoof-prints aside. Also, he bethought him of a crafty ruse and reversed the marks of their hoofs, making the front behind and the hind before, while he himself walked the other way.⁵⁴ Then he wove sandals with wicker-work by the sand of the sea, [80] wonderful things, unthought of, unimagined; for he mixed together tamarisk and myrtle-twigs, fastening together an armful of their fresh, young wood, and tied them, leaves and all securely under his feet as light sandals. That brushwood the glorious Slayer of Argus [85] plucked in Pieria as he was preparing for his journey, making shift⁵⁵ as one making haste for a long journey.

[tr. Evelyn-White]

(b)

13.

He drove them wandering o'er the sandy way, 95
But, being ever mindful of his craft,
Backward and forward drove he them astray,
So that the tracks which seemed before, were aft;
His sandals then he threw to the ocean spray,
And for each foot he wrought a kind of raft 100
Of tamarisk, and tamarisk-like sprigs,
And bound them in a lump with withy twigs.

14.

And on his feet he tied these sandals light,
The trail of whose wide leaves might not betray
His track; [tr. Shelley]

⁵⁴ Hermes makes the cattle walk backwards way, so that they seem to be going towards the meadow instead of leaving it (cp. 1. 345) ; he himself walks in the normal manner, relying on his sandals as a disguise.

⁵⁵ Such seems to be the meaning indicated by the context, though the verb is taken by Allen and Sikes to mean, "to be like oneself," and so "to be original."

3. Hermes the cunning thief and bare-faced liar

(a) Then the lord, far-working Apollo, answered him: "O my father, you shall soon hear no trifling tale though you reproach me [335] that I alone am fond of spoil. Here is a child, a burgling robber, whom I found after a long journey in the hills of Cyllene: for my part I have never seen one so pert either among the gods or all men that catch folk unawares throughout the world. [340] He stole away my cows from their meadow and drove them off in the evening along the shore of the loud-roaring sea, making straight for Pylos. There were double tracks, and wonderful they were, such as one might marvel at, the doing of a clever sprite; for as for the cows, the dark dust kept and showed their footprints leading towards the flowery meadow; [345] but he himself —bewildering creature —crossed the sandy ground outside the path, not on his feet nor yet on his hands; but, furnished with some other means he trudged his way —wonder of wonders! —as though one walked on slender oak-trees. [350] Now while he followed the cattle across sandy ground, all the tracks showed quite clearly in the dust; but when he had finished the long way across the sand, presently the cows' track and his own could not be traced over the hard ground. But a mortal man noticed him [355] as he drove the wide-browed kine straight towards Pylos. And as soon as he had shut them up quietly, and had gone home by crafty turns and twists, he lay down in his cradle in the gloom of a dim cave, as still as dark night, so that not even [360] an eagle keenly gazing would have spied him. Much he rubbed his eyes with his hands as he prepared falsehood, and himself straightway said roundly: 'I have not seen them: I have not heard of them: no man has told me of them. I could not tell you of them, nor win the reward of telling.'"

[365] When he had so spoken, Phoebus Apollo sat down. But Hermes on his part answered and said, pointing at the Son of Cronos, the lord of all the gods:

"Zeus, my father, indeed I will speak truth to you; for I am truthful and I cannot tell a lie. [370] He came to our house to-day looking for his shambling cows, as the sun was newly rising. He brought no witnesses with him nor any of the blessed gods who had seen the theft, but with great violence ordered me to confess, threatening much to throw me into wide Tartarus. [375] For he has the rich bloom of glorious youth, while I was born but yesterday —as he too knows —, nor am I like a cattle-lifter, a sturdy fellow. Believe my tale (for you claim to be my own father), that I did not drive his cows to my house —so may I prosper— [380] nor crossed the threshold: this I say truly. I reverence Helios greatly and the other gods, and you I love and him I dread. You yourself know that I am not guilty: and I will swear a great oath upon it:—No! by these rich-decked porticoes of the gods. [385] And some day I will punish him, strong as he is, for this pitiless inquisition; but now do you help the younger."

So spake the Cyllenian, the Slayer of Argus, while he kept shooting sidelong glances and kept his swaddling-clothes upon his arm, and did not cast them away. But Zeus laughed out loud to see his evil-plotting child [390] well and cunningly denying guilt about the cattle. And he

bade them both to be of one mind and search for the cattle, and guiding Hermes to lead the way and, without mischievousness of heart, to show the place where now he had hidden the strong cattle. [395] Then the Son of Cronos bowed his head: and goodly Hermes obeyed him; for the will of Zeus who holds the aegis easily prevailed with him. [tr. Evelyn-White]

(b)

57.

'I never saw his like either in Heaven
Or upon earth for knavery or craft:—
Out of the field my cattle yester-even, 445
By the low shore on which the loud sea laughed,
He right down to the river-ford had driven;
And mere astonishment would make you daft
To see the double kind of footsteps strange
He has impressed wherever he did range. 450

58.

'The cattle's track on the black dust, full well
Is evident, as if they went towards
The place from which they came — that asphodel
Meadow, in which I feed my many herds —
HIS steps were most incomprehensible — 455
I know not how I can describe in words
Those tracks — he could have gone along the sands
Neither upon his feet nor on his hands; —

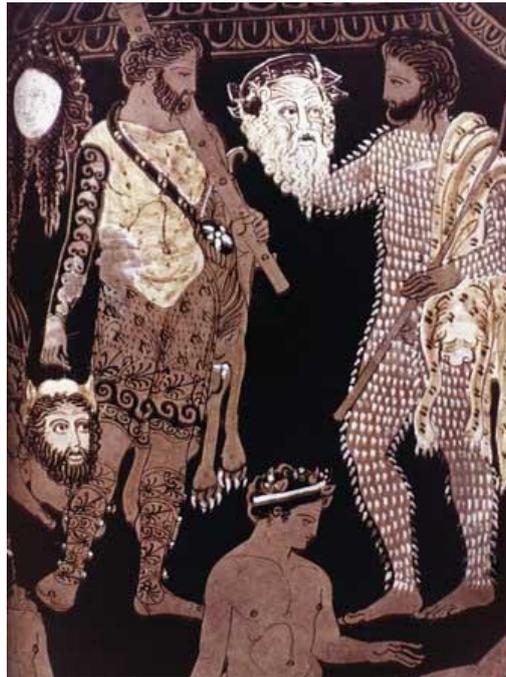
59.

'He must have had some other stranger mode
Of moving on: those vestiges immense, 460
Far as I traced them on the sandy road,
Seemed like the trail of oak-toppings:— but thence
No mark nor track denoting where they trod
The hard ground gave:— [tr. Shelley]



Detail from Attic white-ground lekythos, 440–430 BC.

7. Satyr Play



Actors holding masks of Hercules (left) and Silenus, detail of a Greek krater attributed to the Pronomos Painter, c. 410 BCE.

1. Sophocles *Ichneutai*

KYLLENE: You wild beasts, why have you attacked
this green and wooded place with all this noise?
What's the idea? Why have you changed the work
with which you used to bring your master joy?
Always a little drunk, wearing the skins of fawns,
and carrying the gentle thyrsos in your hands,
you used to follow him chanting the ritual cry, together
with your families — the nymphs, and crowds of children.
Now I do not understand! Where are these newest twists
and turns of madness heading? It is very strange. I heard
some clarion calls like those of hunters
coming near a wild beast's cubs inside its lair,
and at the same time . . . thief . . .
you talked about a stolen . . . and also . . .
. . . a proclamation . . .
then you stopped all that, and stamped your feet
all together here, beside my house.

230

...

I heard this crazy . . .

240

. . . something's wrong with you.

You wouldn't hurt an innocent wood-nymph?

SATYRS: Beautiful nymph, do not be angry!
 I don't come to bring the strife
 of enemies and war to you, nor will a hostile,
 foolish word from us hurt you.
 Do not assault us with reproaches,
 but please kindly tell us what is happening here;
 who sung that sound under the earth, which
 was so wonderful, almost divine? 250

KYLLENE: This behaviour is much nicer than before;
 A hunting like this you will learn more
 than by a deed of violence or harassment of
 a frightened nymph; I do not like to see
 loud quarrels started by an argument.
 So please be calm, and tell me
 just exactly what you want.

SATYRS: Queen of this place, Kyllene,
 I will tell you later why I came.
 But tell me all about this sounding voice,
 and who on earth is setting us on edge with it.

KYLLENE: Well, first you must know clearly that
 if you don't keep my story to yourselves,
 there'll be a penalty for you!
 This deed is hidden in the palaces of gods,
 so Hera does not come to know of it.
 Zeus came in secret to this house of Maia,
 Atlas' daughter, and took her virginity
 forgetting all about his beautiful goddess wife. 270
 In this cave he created Maia's son,
 and I nurse him in my own arms,
 because his mother's strength is wracked by illness.
 I remain beside his cradle, and provide
 his infant needs — food, drink and all -
 both night and day.
 And he gets bigger every day - unnaturally, quite
 astonishingly large; I am amazed, and scared.
 He's only six days old, but he
 is thrusting forward to the peak of boyhood. 280
 He's a sprout which shoots straight up without delay;
 such is the child our storage room conceals.
 His name is Hermes, given by his father.
 As for this sound you asked about, which rang out by

a strange device, he invented it himself
in just one day, out of an upturned shell.
That is the thing which he discovered — pleasure from a creature
which has died . . .

(fragments of seven lines)

SATYRS: . . . to make
a dead creature sing like that.

KYLLENE: Don't disbelieve; a goddess' words are true, and smile on you.

SATYRS: How could I believe so loud a voice comes from a corpse?

KYLLENE: Believe. In death it got a voice it never had alive. 300

SATYRS: What shape was it? Long, humped or short?

KYLLENE: Short, pot-shaped, spotted skin, all creased.

SATYRS: Perhaps a bit like a cat or a panther?

KYLLENE: Not at all; it's round, and has short legs.

SATYRS: Then it's more like a weasel or a crab?

KYLLENE: No, not that either; have another guess.

SATYRS: Well then, perhaps it's like a horned Aitnaian beetle?

KYLLENE: Yes; you've very nearly guessed what it's most like.

SATYRS: Which bit of it makes sound; inside or out?

KYLLENE: Its shell makes different sounds, just like an oyster. 310

SATYRS: What name d'you call it? Tell me, if you know.

KYLLENE: The boy calls the animal a tortoise and the instrument a lyre.

*(fragments of twelve lines. Kyllene explains that Hermes made his lyre by stretching ox-bide
across the tortoise shell)*

. . . It is the only thing he has to cure and comfort him when
he's unhappy; then he loves to go all wild and sing in
harmony with it; playing the lyre gives him a high.
That's how the boy contrived to make a dead beast sing.

SATYRS: The voice rings loud across the land;
the hand-plucked strings make clear, fantastic sounds 330
scatter like flowers all around.

But here's what I am getting at:
know that the god (whoever he may be)
who made this, and nobody else
- lady, know this — can be our thief.
Please don't be difficult
with me, or take this hard.

KYLLENE: You must be mad! What theft do you allege?

SATYRS: Lady, I really do not want to stir you up.

KYLLENE: Are you calling Zeus' son a thief?

SATYRS: Yes; I would gladly catch him with the goods.

KYLLENE: And fair enough, if you are right.

SATYRS: You're right; I am.

KYLLENE: But are you sure he stole the cows? '

SATYRS: I am quite certain that he did,
because he fixed the hide onto the shell,
after he cut ...

(fragments of four lines)

KYLLENE: . . . now at last I realize, 352

you wretch, you're grinning at me as if I were stupid.

You good-for-nothings! Everything's as joke to you.

Well, for the future, it is fine by me —

if it will make you happy or you think you'll gain —

for you to laugh at me until your heart's content;

but do not slander someone who is clearly Zeus' son
by stirring up new charges levelled at a new-born boy.

He's not a thief's son on his father's side, 360

and there's no theft among his mother's relatives.

Got somewhere else to find your thief (if there
is really one) - and look in vain; Olympos up above

will show who this boy is. Just pin this crime

where it belongs; he has nothing to do with it.

You've always been quite childish; you're a full-grown

man, but fool round with your yellow beard just like a goat.

Stop making your smooth prick swell up with joy!

The gods will make you weep out loud for all

your silly jokes, and I will laugh at you.

SATYRS: Twist and turn your words! Create

whatever sharp ideas you can; you never will persuade me

that the boy who made this thing

by patching hides together stole the skins

from any other cows than Loxias'.

Don't try to put me off the track. 377

(three or four lines missing)

... madness 380

KYLLENE: You utter wretch . . .

... quick ... anger ...

SATYRS: The truth . . .

KYLLENE: . . .

SATYRS: The boy's a thief . . .

KYLLENE: Wretched behaviour . . .

SATYRS: Slander . . .

KYLLENE: But if it's true . . .

SATYRS: You must not . . . 389
(fragments of seven lines)

KYLLENE: Many cattle graze . . . 397

SATYRS: But even more were . . .

KYLLENE: Outrageous! Who has got them?

SATYRS: That boy whom you've got shut up in there. 400

KYLLENE: Stop slandering the son of Zeus.

SATYRS: I'll stop when someone brings the cattle.

KYLLENE: You and your cows are making me quite sick.

SATYRS: If they are doing that, drive them out here at once.

The remaining fragments are too small to be translated; but it is clear from one part of the next surviving column of the papyrus that Apollo re-entered at line 452; he probably admitted that the satyrs have earned the golden crown. It is likely that Hermes emerged from the cave soon afterwards, and gave the lyre to Apollo in compensation for the stolen cattle.

[tr. Ewans]



Reveling Satyrs, Attic psykter (wine cooler) in the red-figure style, signed by Douris, c. 480 BCE.

2. Tony Harrison *The Trackers of Oxyrhinchus*

KYLLENE Bestial creatures! Wherefore have you brought
to this secluded spot your uproar foul?
What novel sports are these? They are not they
wherewith of old you made your master glad,
who clad in his fawnskin and with thyrsus high
was wont to chant of yore the holy hymns
with, for escort, nymphs and youthful throngs?

SATYR 1 (*Under the stage*) She means Dionysos, pissed, sang us old songs.

KYLLENE Now I know not what possesseth you
nor what crazed folly spinneth you awry . . .
I heard like hunters' halloos from deep within
a cry when keen trackers close upon their prey
and hap upon the beast deep in its lair.
And then such harsh words as theft and thief
assailed my ears and some god's proclamation.
Your fragments of furore reached me down there
and then an utter cacophony commenced.
I feared that you would do my person harm.

SATYR 1 (*Joining in 'tragic' tone*) Stay thine anger, nymph of the deep zone.

We are no bringers of disruptive strife.
Nay, all that we humbly wish is that you disclose
the meaning of that hidden sound we heard.

KYLLENE That is a better way to learn what you desire
than by alarming here a poor defenceless nymph.
Quarrels are most distressing to my soul.
Now I implore proceed and make your plea.

SATYR 1 Ruler of this region, Kyllene, Queen,
our purpose later will I you explain.
But this voice we heard, what is it, pray?
It frayed our nerves and set our teeth on edge.
Who is it that bringeth the gooselumps on our flesh?
What is it that raiseth the spine hairs on our back?

KYLLENE I must advise you ere I do commence,
should you disclose what I to you disclose,
there will be severest suffering in store.

SATYR 2 (*Groaning under weight of stage*) I wish she'd get to t'point. My back's that sore.

KYLLENE These things are secret, guarded by the gods.
The heavenly ones keep Hera in the dark.

SATYR 3 (*Under stage*) Zeus, again, I bet, and some new lascivious lark!

KYLLENE Zeus hither hied where Maia doth abide

and all unbeknowst to Hera, hither hied
and made the fair one his clandestine bride.

SATYR 1 (*Under stage*) Zeus never could resist a bit on t'side.

KYLLENE In the cave the nymph brought forth a son
the which, because his mother Maia
doth languish in a fever nurse I in these arms.
But the babe doth burgeon greatly day by day.
'Tis a great wonder to me and a fright.
Born six days ago and yet hath boyhood reached.
He blossometh and shooteth up without a pause.
Such is the babe whose nurture I have here.
We conceal him for his mighty father's sake.

SATYR 1 (*Under stage*) I wish I could escape, that babe sounds queer.

SATYR 2 (*Under stage*) Gerronwi'it! Mi back's about to break.

KYLLENE As for the voice which caused you such affright
bursting forth from some unseen source of sound
it came from something turned the wrong way up.
The babe I nurse devised it in a day
from a dead creature, as a source of joy.
He plays his strange device both night and day.

SATYR 3 (*Under stage*) I hope that's the end. Mi back's giving way.

SATYR 4 Ay, buggger the whatsit, and the miraculous boy
wanking about with the dead creature toy.

SATYR 5 Excuse me, but how can summat dead, like, sing?

SATYR 6 Ay, how come a voice came from a dead thing?

SATYR 7 Dead but vocal! A corpse that can carol.

SATYR 8 Seems somebody's snout's been into the barrel.

SATYR 9 It's a stiff and it warbles. How come?

SATYR 10 Ay, how come?

KYLLENE Dead it has a voice. Alive it was dumb.

SATYR 11 Give us a clue. Is it bent, fat, short or what?

KYLLENE 'Tis spotted and shaped somewhat like a pot.

SATYR 12 A leopard, of course, or some sort of cat.

KYLLENE No, sorry. It isn't at all like that.

SATYR 4 Not a crab, not a lobster, not a crustacean?

SATYR 5 Then it's gotta be the bug part of creation.

SATYR 6 A beetle? The Etna horned scarab, mayhap?

SATYR 1 (*Under stage*) Solve her damned riddle and cut all the crap.

(*KYLLENE moves the vast pediment on her head slowly in answer to the last guess.*)

SATYR 7 Madam, what bit of it makes that horrible din?

SATYR 8 Does that horrible noise come from outside or in?

KYLLENE From what you might call the creature's crust.

SATYR 2 (*Under stage*) Solve the bloody riddle. My head's going to bust.

SATYR 9 If we may be so presumptuous as to inquire.

KYLLENE (*After a long pause during which the pediment-weighted head moves from one side to the other.*) The beast's called a tortoise. The invention's the lyre.

(*KYLLENE indicates the lyre with the baby projected on the front screen. The SATYRS listen as the lyre sounds again.*)

CHORUS OF SATYRS

1

It could be a goat
to judge from its note

All

BUT!

2

It could be a duck's the guts that he plucks

All

BUT!

3

It could be a cat
A cat sounds like that

All

BUT!

4

Dog's gut or hound's
could be making these sounds

All

BUT!

I bet it's bullock gut.
Summat's been flayed
for this sweet serenade

5

It's not just the tortoise's hollow shell
there's some other creature in there as well.

All

Summat's been flayed
for this sweet serenade.

6

It isn't just a tortoise, is it, though?
There's some other sound in it. Some sort of low.

All

Summat's been flayed for this sweet serenade.

Yer, some other sound keeps coming through.
It's more than a tortoise. It's got like a *moo*.

All

Summat's been flayed for this sweet serenade.
And the question is
to this kid that's a whiz
where did you get that gut?
Them leather thongs
he twangs into songs
to comfort, or, maybe, carouse,
we don't have to go through
the whole bloody zoo
they come from Apollo's nicked cows.

(KYLLENE is tipped off the stage. her pediment falls. Four SATYRS try to lift it. They can't. KYLLENE raises it again with effortless Olympic lift. Exits with as much dignity as possible.)

KYLLENE ως απολλυμαι κακως . . . O woe! O woe!
I'm not in the right play. I'd better go.



Attic red-figure kylix, 6th c. BCE. Hermes, nude except for loincloth, fashioning caduceus (?) from branch of pine; behind him vine-like branches.

According to the Homeric hymn which tells of Hermes' birth and childhood, Apollo gives Hermes, "a splendid staff of riches and wealth: it is of gold with three branches...." One can see in this representation a remembrance of the source of Hermes' staff which only later, as the god became more mystical, acquired serpents and wings. In the Archaic period Hermes is still a god of flocks and herds (a quality he seems to lose later), to whom it was more fitting that he should make his own staff.

Session 8: Comedy

1. *Frogs* synopsis

The Frogs, by Aristophanes, was produced the year after the death of Euripides, and laments the decay of Greek tragedy which Aristophanes attributed to that writer. *The Frogs* tells the story of the god Dionysus, who, despairing of the state of Athens' tragedians, travels to Hades (the underworld) to bring the playwright Euripides back from the dead. (Euripides had died the year before, in 406 BC.) He brings along his slave Xanthias, who is smarter and braver than Dionysus. As the play opens, Xanthias and Dionysus argue over what kind of jokes Xanthias can use to open the play. For the first half of the play, Dionysus routinely makes critical errors, forcing Xanthias to improvise in order to protect his master and prevent Dionysus from looking incompetent—but this only allows Dionysus to continue to make mistakes with no consequence. To find a reliable path to Hades, Dionysus seeks advice from his half-brother Heracles, who had been there before in order to retrieve the hell hound Cerberus. Dionysus shows up at his doorstep dressed in a lion-hide and carrying a club. Heracles, upon seeing the effeminate Dionysus dressed up like himself, can't help laughing. When Dionysus asks which road is the quickest to get to Hades, Heracles tells him that he can hang himself, drink poison, or jump off a tower. Dionysus opts for the longer journey, which Heracles himself had taken, across a lake (possibly Lake Acheron). When Dionysus arrives at the lake, Charon ferries him across. Xanthias, being a slave, is not allowed in the boat, and has to walk around it, while Dionysus is made to help row the boat. This is the point of the first choral interlude (*parodos*), sung by the eponymous chorus of frogs (the only scene in which frogs feature in the play). Their croaking refrain greatly annoys Dionysus, who engages in a mocking debate (*agon*) with the frogs. When he arrives at the shore, Dionysus meets up with Xanthias, who teases him by claiming to see the frightening monster Empusa. A second chorus composed of spirits of Dionysian Mystics soon appear. The next encounter is with Aeacus, who mistakes Dionysus for Heracles due to his attire. Still angry over Heracles' theft of Cerberus, Aeacus threatens to unleash several monsters on him in revenge. Frightened, Dionysus trades clothes with Xanthias. A maid then arrives and is happy to see Heracles. She invites him to a feast with virgin dancing girls, and Xanthias is more than happy to oblige. But Dionysus quickly wants to trade back the clothes. Dionysus, back in the Heracles lion-skin, encounters more people angry at Heracles, and so he makes Xanthias trade a third time. When Aeacus returns to confront the alleged Heracles (i.e., Xanthias), Xanthias offers him his "slave" (Dionysus) for torturing, to obtain the truth as to whether or not he is really a thief. The terrified Dionysus tells the truth that he is a god. After each is whipped, Dionysus is brought before Aeacus' masters, and the truth is verified. The maid then catches Xanthias and chats him up, interrupted by preparations for the contest scene. The maid describes the Euripides-Aeschylus conflict. Euripides, who had only just recently died, is challenging the great Aeschylus for the seat of "Best Tragic Poet" at the dinner table of Pluto, the ruler of the underworld. A contest is held with Dionysus as judge. The two playwrights take turns quoting verses from their plays and making fun of the other.

2. 738-890

Scene: Before PLUTO's palace. XANTHIAS and an elderly SLAVE of PLUTO 's are engaged on light menial tasks.

- SLAVE: Oh, he's a real gentleman, your master is, I can tell that.
- XANTHIAS: Yes, you can always tell. There are only two things a real gentleman understands: soaking and poking.
- SLAVE: No, but I mean, fancy him not beating you for making out that you was the master and him the slave!
- XANTHIAS: He'd have been sorry if he'd tried.
- SLAVE: Ah, that's the way I like to hear a slave talking. He, he, he! I love that.
- XANTHIAS: Love it, eh?
- SLAVE: Why, there's nothing I like better than cursing the master behind his back.
- XANTHIAS: Ah, you sly old beggar! I bet you mutter a few under your breath when he's had a bash at you, eh?
- SLAVE: Muttering? He, he, he! Yes, I like a bit of muttering.
- XANTHIAS: [*encouraging the chuckles*]: And what about prying into his private affairs?
- SLAVE: Prying? He. he, he! Yes, I like a bit of prying,
- XANTHIAS: Ah, we're going to get along fine, you and me. Have you ever tried eavesdropping when he's got company?
- SLAVE: Eavesdropping? Ah, that's real sport, that is.
- XANTHIAS: And then you pass it all on to the neighbours, eh?
- SLAVE: Well, that's where the fun comes in, ain't it? No end of a kick, that gives me.
- XANTHIAS: Put it there, grandpa: give us a hug, that's right. — Listen, my dear old soulmate, my partner in crime, what's all that yelling and shouting and quarrelling going on in there?
- SLAVE: That'll be Aeschylus and Euripides.
- XANTHIAS: What on earth are they up to?
- SLAVE: Oh, there's great going's on among the dead these days, great goings on. Civil war, you might almost call it.
- XANTHIAS: What's it all about?
- SLAVE: Well, you see, all the fine arts and that, the skilled professions like, there's a sort of custom down here, whoever's the best in each profession, see, he has the right to have his dinner in the Great Hall, with his own chair of honour, up near Pluto, you follow me?
- XANTHIAS: I see.
- SLAVE: But if somebody else comes along that's better in his profession than what he is, then he has to stand down and let the other feller have the chair.
- XANTHIAS: Oh. Well, what is it that's upset Aeschylus so much?
- SLAVE: Well, he had the chair for Tragedy, see, because he was the best like.
- XANTHIAS: Who's got it now?

SLAVE: Well, then along comes Euripides, and starts showing off to all the fellas we've got down here - cut-throats, highwaymen, murderers, burglars, regular rough lot they are — and of course he soon has them all twisted around his little finger, with all his arguments and clever talk and that. And they all start saying to themselves, 'He's got something this bloke,' and getting all worked up, see? So then Euripides, *he* thinks he ought to have the chair instead of Aeschylus; so he goes and sits in it, and pushes Aeschylus out.

XANTHIAS: Well, didn't he get flung out on his ear?

SLAVE: Not a bit of it: the people all said they had the right to judge which was the cleverest.

XANTHIAS: What people? All those cut-throats and pickpockets you were on about?

SLAVE: Yes, and a devil of a row they kicked up too.

XANTHIAS: Didn't anyone side with Aeschylus?

SLAVE: Well, you see, there ain't many decent folk down here: just take a look for yourself. [*He indicates the audience*]

XANTHIAS: What's Pluto going to do about it?

SLAVE: Oh, he's going to have it all done proper, like a contest, see, and both of them showing their skill, and proper judging, like.

XANTHIAS: Just the two of them? Hasn't Sophocles put in a claim?

SLAVE: Oh, no, when he came down here he went straight up to Aeschylus and took his hand and kissed him like a brother. And Aeschylus says, 'Come on,' he says, 'you must have the chair now,' he says. But Sophocles, he won't hear of it. But now he's sent a message: with this contest coming on, he says, he'll stand by for third man - if Aeschylus wins he'll just go on as before, but if Euripides wins he'll take him on himself.

XANTHIAS: It's really coming on, then?

SLAVE: Any minute now, here where we're standing. [*Confidentially*]
They'll want the scales out here, see, for weighing the poetry.

XANTHIAS: Weighing the poetry? I've never heard of a poet trying to give short weight. [*SLAVES emerge from the palace, carrying fantastic pieces of weighing and measuring equipment, and arranging the seating for the contest. Simultaneously, the CHORUS makes an unobtrusive entrance.*]

SLAVE: Oh, yes, it's all got to be weighed and measured up proper, with rulers and yardsticks for the words, and compasses and wedges and I don't know what.

XANTHIAS: Regular torture chamber.

SLAVE: Yes, Euripides says he's going to put every line to the test.

XANTHIAS: I reckon Aeschylus must be boiling with rage by this.

SLAVE: He's been going round an day with his head down, glaring like a bull.

XANTHIAS: Who's the judge going to be?

SLAVE: Ah, that was a ticklish problem: hard to find anyone clever enough. And then Aeschylus said he couldn't see eye to eye with the Athenians anyway —

XANTHIAS: All those burglars and what not. Quite. I see his point.

SLAVE: - and as for the others, he says, none of them could tell a poet from the hind leg of a donkey. So in the end they settled on your master, who's supposed to be a bit of an expert, after all. But we'd better go in: you never want to get in their way when they're busy, it just doesn't pay.

[XANTHIAS and the SLAVE withdraw, as DIONYSUS emerges from the palace, surrounded by DANCING GIRLS, ATTENDANTS, and a company of the DISTINGUISHED DEAD, who now take their seats in order to watch the contest. EURIPIDES and AESCHYLUS appear, arguing heatedly.]

CHORUS: Ah, how impressive the rage that burns in the heart of the Thunderer!
Vainly the fangs of his rival are bated in a gesture of hate!
Note how superbly he raves, with what fine independence his eyeballs
In divers directions gyrate!
Words are their weapons: watch out, as the armour-clad syllables hurtle,
Helmeted, crested, and plumed, from the lips of the Poet Most High!
Wait for the clash and the din as the metaphors mingle and jumble,
The sparks as the particles fly!
See the great spread of his mane, as it bristles in leonine fury:
No one can doubt any more that those whiskers are truly his own!
Huge are the words that he hurls, great compounds with rivets and bolts in,
And epithets hewn out of stone
Now 'tis the challenger's turn to reply to this verbal bombardment:
Neatly each phrase he dissects, with intelligence crafty and keen;
Harmless around him the adjectives fall, as he ducks into cover
And squeaks, 'It depends what you mean!'

EURIPIDES: [*leaping to his feet*]: I see no reason at all why I should withdraw.
I happen to be the better poet.

DIONYSUS: What do you say to that, Aeschylus? No comment?

[AESCHYLUS remains speechless with rage.]

EURIPIDES: Isn't that rather typical of the whole Aeschylean approach?
The majestic silence, pregnant pause?

DIONYSUS: I do feel, Euripides, that you've made rather a sweeping claim, you know.

EURIPIDES: I saw through him years ago. All that rugged grandeur - it's all so uncultivated. No restraint. No subtlety at all, just a torrent of verbiage, stiff with superlatives, and padded out with pretentious polysyllables.

AESCHYLUS: [*on the verge of apoplexy*]: Ohh! Well, I suppose that is about the level of criticism to expect from a person of your rustic ancestry! And what are your tragedies but a concatenation of commonplaces, as threadbare as the tattered characters who utter them?

DIONYSUS: Now, Aeschylus, aren't we getting a little heated? Calm down!

AESCHYLUS: Not till I've told this - this cripple-merchant where he gets off.

DIONYSUS: Fetch me a black lamb quickly! Stormy weather blowing up.

AESCHYLUS: Not only do you clutter your stage with cripples and beggars, but you allow your heroes to sing and dance like Cretans. You build your plots round unsavoury topics like incest and –

DIONYSUS: Whoa there, stand back! [*He thrusts Aeschylus firmly back into his seat*] With all due respect, Aeschylus! Euripides, you poor fellow, wouldn't it be wiser if you moved back out of range a little? I should hate you to get hit on the head by a principal clause and give birth to a premature tragedy. Aeschylus, you must try not to lose your temper. Surely two literary men can criticize each other's work without screaming at each other like fishwives, or flaring up like a forest fire.

EURIPIDES: I'm ready for him! Let Aeschylus have the first word if he likes: I can take it! Criticize what you like - diction, lyrics, plot. I don't care which play you take: *Peleus, Aeolus, Meleager; Telephus* - yes, even *Telephus*.

DIONYSUS: Aeschylus?

AESCHYLUS: I had hoped to avoid having a contest here: it puts me at a considerable disadvantage.

DIONYSUS: How so?

AESCHYLUS: Well, you see, my works happen to have outlived me, so I don't have them down here with me. His died with him. But never mind: let's have a match by all means, if you think that's a good idea.

DIONYSUS: Then we must do the thing properly. Bring the brazier and the incense! As the judge of this most, ah, interesting cultural event I must offer up a prayer, before the shafts of wit begin to fly.

[*DIONYSUS rises, takes incense and a libation cup from an attendant and goes to the altar. All present put wreaths on their heads. DIONYSUS burns incense and pours a libation.*]

DIONYSUS [*to the Chorus*]: A hymn to the Muses!

CHORUS: When men of sage and subtle mind
 In fierce debate their views do vent,
 And strive some deathless phrase to find
 To mask each specious argument -
 Then Zeus' daughters nine
 Stand by to watch the sport divine.
 Come then today, ye Muses bright!
 Two grimmer foes ne'er took the field:
 For one is armed with words of might,
 And one the sword of wit doth wield.
 O heavenly maids, your presence lend!
 The fight is on! Descend! Descend!

DIONYSUS: Now you two must each offer a prayer, before we begin.

AESCHYLUS: O Demeter, that didst nourish my brain, may I prove worthy of thy Mysteries!

DIONYSUS: And now Euripides: take the censer, it's your tum.
EURIPIDES: No, no thank you, I pray to other gods.
DIONYSUS: What, special ones of your own? A private Pantheon?
EURIPIDES: Precisely.
DIONYSUS: Carry on, then; pray to your lay gods.
EURIPIDES: Hail, Ether, my grazing ground! Hail, Pivot of my Tongue!
Hail, Mind! Hail, sentient Nostrils! Inspire me with all
the right answers, amen!

3. 1119-1247

EURIPIDES: Well now, let's turn to your prologues — first things first,
after all - and put your famous skill to the test. I maintain that they
fail to give a clear picture of the situation.

AESCHYLUS: Which of them do you propose to criticize?

EURIPIDES: Any number of them. But let's start with the opening
lines of *The Libation Bearers*.

DIONYSUS: Silence for Aeschylus.

AESCHYLUS [*reciting*]: Earth-haunting Hermes, that with tutelar eye
Keep'st watch and ward o'er the paternal realm,
Oh, hear my prayer: save me, and be my friend!
Lo, to this land I come and do return.
Do you find anything to criticize in that?

EURIPIDES: A dozen points at least.

DIONYSUS: But he's only recited four lines.

EURIPIDES: With a score of mistakes in each.

DIONYSUS: You'd better not recite any more, Aeschylus: it seems
you're four lines down already.

AESCHYLUS: What, stop for him?

DIONYSUS: I think it would be wise.

EURIPIDES: You see, he starts off right away with a preposterous blunder.

AESCHYLUS: Nonsense!

EURIPIDES [*as if washing his hands of the whole subject*]: Oh, well, if
that's how you feel . . . It couldn't matter less to me.

AESCHYLUS [*recapitulating*]: What is this mistake I've made?

EURIPIDES: Give me those first two lines again.

AESCHYLUS [*reciting*]: Earth-haunting Hermes, that with tutelar eye
Keep'st watch and ward o'er the paternal realm –

EURIPIDES: And Orestes says this over the tomb of his dead father?

AESCHYLUS: That is correct.

EURIPIDES: Ah! So he is saying that when his father was brutally murdered
by his own wife as the result of a secret intrigue, this all happened

under the approving eyes of Hermes?

AESCHYLUS: Certainly not. He is addressing himself to Hermes the Helper, 'earth-haunting Hermes', not to Hermes as the god of trickery. This is made quite clear by the words that follow: 'o'er the paternal realm'. His underground function is a perquisite derived from Zeus, his father.

EURIPIDES: That makes it even worse than I had thought.

DIONYSUS: Underground perquisites, eh? Sounds like a rake-off on the tomb offerings.

AESCHYLUS: A remark in the worst of taste, Dionysus.

DIONYSUS: Give him a bit more, Aeschylus. And you, Euripides, watch out for the mistakes.

AESCHYLUS [*reciting*]: Oh, hear my prayer: save me, and be my friend!
Lo, to this land I come and do return.

EURIPIDES: The great Aeschylus tells us the same thing twice.

AESCHYLUS: What do you mean, the same thing twice?

EURIPIDES: Well, listen. I'll repeat the line. 'Lo, to this land I come', he says, 'and do return.' The 'coming' and the 'returning' are the same thing, surely?

DIONYSUS: So they are: like saying to a neighbour, 'Lend me a looking glass – or a mirror would do.'

AESCHYLUS: The two things are not the same. The trouble with you is, you're obsessed with this verbal juggling of yours. The line is a particularly good one.

EURIPIDES: Please explain.

AESCHYLUS: Anyone can 'come' to his native country, if he belongs there still: nothing need have happened to him at all. But when an exile comes home, he 'returns'. [*Applause from the audience on the stage.*]

DIONYSUS: Well done! What do you say to that, Euripides?

EURIPIDES: I say that Orestes never did 'return' home in that sense: he had to come secretly, he didn't trust the people in power. [*Frenzied applause from the stage audience*]

DIONYSUS [*baffled by the applause*]: Brilliant! Brilliant! Wish I knew what you were talking about!

EURIPIDES: Come on, let's hear some more.

DIONYSUS: Yes, come along, Aeschylus, get on with it.
[*To Euripides*] And you, pounce on the howlers.

AESCHYLUS [*reciting*]: Here on this mound I call on my dead father
To hear me, and to listen.

EURIPIDES: There he goes again, the same thing twice: 'to hear me and to listen'.

DIONYSUS: He's calling on the dead, don't you understand? Even three times would hardly be enough.

AESCHYLUS: And how did you construct your prologues?

EURIPIDES: I'll show you. And if I say the same thing twice, or if you find

a single word of irrelevant padding, you can spit on me for a liar.

DIONYSUS: Carry on, then. I shall listen most carefully to your choice of words.

EURIPIDES [*reciting*]: A happy man was Oedipus at first –

AESCHYLUS: Was he at any time? When even before he was born Apollo had decreed that he should kill his own father? You call that being a happy man?

EURIPIDES [*reciting*]: But he became the most unfortunate of mortal men.

AESCHYLUS: He didn't become so, he was so all along. Look at his story. First of all, as a new-born baby, he is dumped out in the cold, cold snow in an earthenware utensil, to prevent him from growing up and murdering his father; then he comes limping to Corinth with both his feet swollen: then he marries a woman old enough to be his mother; and then, as though that wasn't bad enough, he finds out that she is his mother. And finally he blinds himself.

DIONYSUS: Better to have been an Athenian Commander at Arginusae!

EURIPIDES: I still maintain that my prologues are good.

AESCHYLUS: Even without splitting hairs over every word, I assure you I can demolish any prologue of yours with a little bottle of oil.

EURIPIDES: My prologues, with a bottle of oil?

AESCHYLUS: Just one little everyday bottle of oil. You see, the way your prologues are written, you can fit in anything: bottle of oil, pieces of wool, bag of old rag. Tiddly tum. I'll show you what I mean.

EURIPIDES: All right, show me.

DIONYSUS [*to Euripides*]: You must recite one.

EURIPIDES [*reciting*]: Aegyptus, who, the oft-told story runs,
Once put to sea with fifty daughters fair,
Touching at Argos –

AESCHYLUS: - lost his bottle of oil.

EURIPIDES: What do you mean, lost his bottle of oil? You'll regret this.

DIONYSUS: Recite another prologue. I believe I see the idea.

EURIPIDES [*reciting*]: Lord Dionysus of the fawnskin cloak,
Who leaps with ivy wand amid the pines
Of fair Parnassus - '

AESCHYLUS: - lost his bottle of oil.

DIONYSUS: Two bottles down.

EURIPIDES: He can't keep it up. I've got one here that is guaranteed bottleproof [*reciting*]
No one is ever fortunate in all:
One man, high-born, loses his wealth; another,
Of lowly birth, has –

AESCHYLUS: - lost his bottle of oil.

DIONYSUS: Euripides!

EURIPIDES: Yes?

DIONYSUS: Reef your sails a bit: this is going to be a storm in an oil bottle!

EURIPIDES: Don't you believe it. This one'll knock it right out of his hand.

DIONYSUS: All right, let's have it: but watch out for bottles!

EURIPIDES [*reading*]: Leaving his native town of Sidon, Cadmus,
Son of Agenor –

AESCHYLUS: - lost his bottle of oil.

DIONYSUS: If I were you, I'd make him an offer for the sole rights
in his bottle; otherwise you won't have any prologues left.

EURIPIDES: His bottle! I like that! Anyway, I've got lots of prologues
he can't fit it into.
[*Reciting*:] Pelops the Tantalid, with his horses swift,
Riding to Pisa –

AESCHYLUS: - lost his bottle of oil.

DIONYSUS: You see, he's done it again. Sell it to him, Aeschylus, for
heaven's sake. You can get a beautiful new one for an obol.

EURIPIDES: No, no, I've got a lot more prologues yet.
[*Reciting*:] 'Tis said that Oineus –

AESCHYLUS: - lost his bottle of oil.

EURIPIDES : You might at least let me finish one line.
'Tis said that Oineus, offering to the gods
first fruits of harvest –

AESCHYLUS: - lost his bottle of oil.

DIONYSUS: What, in the middle of a sacrifice? How very awkward
for him. Who took it, I wonder?

EURIPIDES: Don't encourage him. See what he can do with this one:
Almighty Zeus, so Truth herself relates –

DIONYSUS [*anxious to forestall this blasphemy*]: You're beaten, and you know it.
That bottle of oil keeps turning up like a sty on the eye.



Terracotta comic theatre mask, 4th/3rd century BC (Stoa of Attalus, Athens)

4. 1364-1480

DIONYSUS: I think we've had enough lyrics now.

AESCHYLUS: I've had enough of them too. And I now propose that we settle this matter once and for all by a simple test. Let the scales be brought; then we shall be able to judge whose poetry is the weightier, his or mine.

[*An enormous pair of scales is brought out, or let down from above. Meanwhile PLUTO appears at an upper window.*]

DIONYSUS: Come over here, then, both of you, and I'll be the grocer, weighing out your verses like pieces of cheese.

CHORUS: How thorough these geniuses are!
But these are the cleverest by far.
Did ever you hear
Such a brilliant idea,
So simple, and yet so bizarre?
I'd not have believed it, I swear,
If a man that I met in the square
Had said that a friend
Of a friend of his friend
Had known of a man who was there!

DIONYSUS: Now, each of you stand by one pan of the scales.
[*AESCHYLUS and EURIPIDES take up their positions.*]

AESCHYLUS: Right.

EURIPIDES: Right.

DIONYSUS: Now you must each take hold of your own pan and hold it steady, and each recite one line; and when I call 'Cuckoo!' you'll both let go. Ready?

AESCHYLUS: Ready.

EURIPIDES: Ready.

DIONYSUS: All right, speak your lines into the scale.

EURIPIDES: 'Would that the Argo ne'er with winged sail . . .'

AESCHYLUS: 'Spercheios' watery vale, where cattle graze . . .'

DIONYSUS: Cuckoo!

AESCHYLUS & EURIPIDES [*letting go*]: Right!

DIONYSUS: Oh, look, this side's going right down.

EURIPIDES: Now why should it do that?

DIONYSUS: He put in a river. Like the wool merchants: they wet the wool to make it weigh more. Whereas you with your 'wingéd sails' . . .

EURIPIDES: Well, let's try again. See what he can do this time.

DIONYSUS: Right, take hold again.

AESCHYLUS & EURIPIDES: Ready.

DIONYSUS: Fire away, then.

EURIPIDES: 'No temple hath Persuasion, save in words.'

AESCHYLUS: 'Alone of all the gods, Death takes no gifts.'

DIONYSUS: Let go. Now, let's see - yes, it's this one again. You see, he put in Death; that's a heavy word if you like.

EURIPIDES: Well, what about Persuasion, doesn't that carry any weight? A beautiful line, too.

DIONYSUS: No, Persuasion won't do: mere empty words without sense. You'll have to think of something really ponderous, to weigh your side down. Something strong and big.

EURIPIDES: What have I got that's strong and big? [*A thought strikes him but he rejects it.*] - Umm, let me think.

DIONYSUS: What about that stirring line 'Achilles threw two singles and a four'? Well, come on now, this is the last round.

EURIPIDES [*triumphantly*]: 'He seized his mighty bludgeon, ribbed with iron.'

AESCHYLUS [*triumphantly*]: 'Chariot on chariot, corpse on corpse was piled.'

DIONYSUS: He's licked you again.

EURIPIDES: I don't see why.

DIONYSUS: All those chariots and corpses - a hundred Egyptians couldn't lift that lot.

AESCHYLUS: As far as I am concerned, this line against line business is too easy by far. Let Euripides get into the pan himself; with his children, and his wife, not forgetting Cephisophon of whom we have heard so much, and the whole of his collected works into the bargain. I undertake to outweigh the whole lot with two lines of mine.

DIONYSUS: You know, I like them both so much, I don't know how to judge between them. I don't want to make an enemy of either. One of them is so *clever*, and the other is so *good*, don't you think?

PLUTO [*sepulchrally*]: In that case you've been rather wasting your time down here, haven't you?

DIONYSUS: Well, supposing I do make a choice?

PLUTO: You can take one of them back with you: whichever you prefer. No point in coming all this way for nothing.

DIONYSUS: Bless you! Well now, listen, you two. I came down here for a poet.

EURIPIDES: What do you want a poet for?

DIONYSUS: To save the City of course. If the City isn't saved, there won't be any more drama festivals, and then where shall I be? Now, whichever of you can think of the best piece of advice to give the Athenians at this juncture, he's the one I shall take back with me. Now, here's my first question: what should be done about Alcibiades? Athens is in a very tricky situation, you know.

EURIPIDES: What do the Athenians think about it, themselves?

DIONYSUS: Ah. You may well ask. They love him. But then again they hate him. And then again, they want him back. But you tell me what *you* think, both of you.

EURIPIDES [*after consideration*]: Quickness and brains are what we seek, I know:
He's quick - to harm, but when we need him, slow;
 Brilliant enough to plan his own escape,
 But useless when the City's in a scrape.

DIONYSUS: That's neat. I like that. Very good. And Aeschylus, what's your opinion?

AESCHYLUS: It is not very wise for city states
 To rear a lion's whelp within their gates:
 But should they do so, they will find it pays
 To learn to tolerate its little ways.

DIONYSUS: Honestly, I can't decide between them, when one's so clever that you can't tell what he means, and the other's about as clear as the purest mud. We'll try one more question. I want each of you to tell me how you think the City can be saved.

EURIPIDES [*raising his hand*]: I know, sir, please sir, can I speak now, sir?

DIONYSUS: Well, Euripides?

EURIPIDES [*very rapidly*]: Believe the unsafe safe, the safe unsure,
 Mistrust what now you trust, and fear no more.

DIONYSUS: The unsafe safe - I'm afraid that's a little bit beyond me, Euripides. Couldn't you give us something a wee bit clearer, not quite so *epi* — *epig*— *epepig*— something not quite so damn clever?

EURIPIDES: It seems perfectly plain to me. If we are now putting our trust in [*mysteriously*] certain persons, and *not* putting our trust in certain other persons, and the City *is not* being saved, then it seems to me that the only reasonable hope of saving the City lies in reversing the procedure. Elementary, my dear Dionysus.

DIONYSUS: Amazing, my dear Palamedes! Well now, Aeschylus, what's your advice?

AESCHYLUS: Tell me, what kind of people is the City using nowadays?
 Presumably they are honest, capable, patriotic –

[*DIONYSUS begins to laugh, gently and not unkindly, but uncontrollably. Soon everyone on the stage except AESCHYLUS is helpless with laughter.*]

DIONYSUS: You *are* out of touch, aren't you! No, those are the people she hates most of all.

AESCHYLUS: You mean she prefers dishonest people?

DIONYSUS: She doesn't prefer them, of course not. But she has no choice.

AESCHYLUS: Well, if the City doesn't know its own mind, I don't see how it *can* be saved.

DIONYSUS: You'll have to think of something, if you want to come back with me.

AESCHYLUS: I'd rather reserve my opinion till I get there.

DIONYSUS: Oh, no, you don't: fair's fair. You must send them your good advice from here.

AESCHYLUS: Well, in my day everyone knew the answer:
Treat enemy soil as yours, your own let go.
Your ships are wealth, all other wealth is woe.

DIONYSUS: That's all right, except that the 'other wealth' all goes to the jurymen these days.

PLUTO: Now please decide.

DIONYSUS: Well, in my heart of hearts I have known all the time.
No question about it, the man for me is –

EURIPIDES: Now remember you swore by the gods to take me home!
[*Emotionally*] Our old friendship . . . you can't go back on an oath!

DIONYSUS: [quoting that fatal line]: 'My tongue it was that swore ...'
Come, Aeschylus.

EURIPIDES: What? - Why, what have you done, you unspeakable monster?

DIONYSUS: What have I done? I have declared Aeschylus the winner, that's all.
Any objections? [*Loud applause, in which PLUTO joins.*]

EURIPIDES: Can you dare to look me in the face after playing such a low-down, shameful trick?

DIONYSUS: I appeal to the audience.

EURIPIDES: 'Oh, heart of stone, wouldst leave me here to die?'
Well, to go on being dead, anyway.

DIONYSUS [*quoting that other fatal line*]: 'Who knows if death be life and life be death?' -
And fork be knife, and knife be fork and spoon.
[*EURIPIDES, struggling wildly, is removed by ATTENDANTS.*]

PLUTO [*in his usual sepulchral voice*]: Dionysus and Aeschylus, kindly step inside my palace.

DIONYSUS [*dismayed*]: Why, what have we -?

PLUTO: - where I propose to offer you the hospitality the occasion seems to demand. One for the road, gentlemen, won't you come in?

DIONYSUS/AESCHYLUS [*together, in the same sepulchral tones*]: That's extremely kind of you, Pluto; I don't mind if I do!

Appendix 1: Time line

BCE

800

c.730 Homer

c.710 Hesiod

700

7th – 6th c. Homeric Hymns

600

c. 530 Homeric Hymn to Hermes

500

c. 525-456 Aeschylus 458 *Agamemnon, Libation Bearers, Eumenides*

496-406 Sophocles c. 441 *Antigone*

484-406 Euripides c. 414-412 *Iphigeneia in Tauris*

469-399 Socrates

447-386 Aristophanes 405 *Frogs*

400

427-347 Plato c. 370 *Republic*

384-322 Aristotle c. 335 *Poetics*

300

200

100

CE

100 ? [Apollodorus] 1st – 2nd century CE *Library of Greek Mythology*

Appendix 2: Apollodorus on Hermes

[2] Maia, the eldest, as the fruit of her intercourse with Zeus, gave birth to Hermes in a cave of Cyllene.⁵⁶ He was laid in swaddling-bands on the winnowing fan, but he slipped out and made his way to Pieria and stole the kine which Apollo was herding. And lest he should be detected by the tracks, he put shoes on their feet and brought them to Pylus, and hid the rest in a cave; but two he sacrificed and nailed the skins to rocks, while of the flesh he boiled and ate some,⁵⁷ and some he burned. And quickly he departed to Cyllene. And before the cave he found a tortoise browsing. He cleaned it out, strung the shell with chords made from the kine he had sacrificed, and having thus produced a lyre he invented also a plectrum.⁵⁸ But Apollo came to Pylus⁵⁹ in search of the kine, and he questioned the inhabitants. They said that they had seen a boy driving cattle, but could not say whither they had been driven, because they could find no track. Having discovered the thief by divination,⁶⁰ Apollo came to Maia at Cyllene and accused Hermes. But she showed him the child in his swaddling-bands. So Apollo brought him to Zeus, and claimed the kine; and when Zeus bade him restore them, Hermes denied that he had them, but not being believed he led Apollo to Pylus and restored the kine. Howbeit, when Apollo heard the lyre, he gave the kine in exchange for it. And while Hermes pastured them, he again made himself a shepherd's pipe and piped on it.⁶¹ And wishing to get the pipe also, Apollo offered to give him the golden wand which he owned while he herded cattle.⁶² But Hermes wished both to get the wand for the pipe and to acquire the art of divination. So he gave the pipe and learned the art of divining by pebbles. And Zeus appointed him herald to himself and to the infernal gods. [Apollodorus *Library* 3.10.2]

⁵⁶ The following account of the birth and youthful exploits of Hermes is based, whether directly or indirectly, on the beautiful Homeric Hymn to Hermes, though it differs from the hymn on a few minor points, as to which Apollodorus may have used other sources. Among the other literary sources to which Apollodorus may have had recourse was perhaps Sophocles's satyric play *Ichneutae*, or *The Trackers*.

⁵⁷ In the HH Herm. 115ff. we are told that Hermes roasted the flesh of two oxen and divided it into twelve portions (for the twelve gods), but that in spite of hunger he ate none of it himself.

⁵⁸ Compare Sophocles, *Ichneutae* 278ff. In the HH Herm. 22ff., the invention of the lyre by Hermes precedes his theft of the cattle.

⁵⁹ In the HH Herm. 185ff. it is to Onchestus in Boeotia, not to Pylus, that Apollo goes at first to inquire after the missing cattle.

⁶⁰ Compare the HH Herm. 213ff., where it is said that Apollo discovered Hermes to be the thief through observing a certain long-winged bird.

⁶¹ Compare the HH Herm. 511ff., where, however, nothing is said about an attempt of Apollo to get the pipes from Hermes, or about an exchange of the pipes for the golden wand. However, there is a lacuna in the hymn after verse 526, and the missing passage may have contained the exchange in question and the request of Hermes for the gift of divination, both of which are mentioned by Apollodorus but omitted in the hymn as it stands at present.

⁶² For the gift of the golden wand, see HH Herm. 527ff.

Appendix 3: Further Reading

[Apollodorus]

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