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**Subversion of Genre and Ritual in Aeschylus' Cassandra Scene**

My paper will analyze how the Cassandra scene of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1072-1330) combines elements from various forms of traditionally non-dramatic choral poetry. As is usual in tragedy, such combination of poetic forms involves substantial distortion of those forms, and this scene is no exception. My task will be to map the various levels of distortion at work and to suggest how these distortions, taken together, contribute to Aeschylus' characterization of Apollo and the Erinyes, figures who are opposed throughout the trilogy, and whose absence from the stage in the first two plays is answered by their appearance in the third.

On the level of genre, Cassandra's sung visions combine the language of Paeon, Threnos, and Dithyramb. This mixture of the Olympian and the chthonic, and more particularly of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac, is characteristic of tragedy's appropriation of other choral genres. The ambivalence about Apollo produced by this sort of combination is significant because of Cassandra's special relationship to Apollo in the play, and his special relationship to Dionysus in cult. The conventions of choral poetry are subverted in this scene as well. While Threnos is a feminine genre and so is appropriate for Cassandra's song, Paeon is, in general, a masculine, choral genre, and Cassandra is an individual female. Yet Cassandra's lines are sung in alternation with the chorus of elders, and each of their exchanges stands in metric response to the next. So even as Cassandra is to some extent made part of the dramatic chorus she is sharply differentiated from it both by the nature of her speech and by her prophetic knowledge which the chorus cannot understand—indeed, this lack of understanding on the part of the chorus marks the inversion, and characteristically tragic failure, of ritual in this scene.

Cassandra's description of the chorus of Erinyes (1186ff.) will serve as the centerpiece of my discussion. In tragedy, such a description usually creates ironic dissonance between the chorus on stage and the described chorus, with an effect similar to the subversion of genre and ritual that tragedy enacts in other contexts. Neither the sympotic nor epinician association of the traditional *kômos* is unambiguously operative here; indeed, the furies can be understood to work against the integrative, *polis*-oriented role of epinician *kômoi*. Aeschylus even goes one step further in developing the subversive nature of choral projection: Cassandra describes a chorus but is not herself, properly speaking, a choral character—the tragic convention of subversion is thus itself subverted.