CHAPTER 1

The Herald of the Agamemnon
Accounting the Dead

Introduction

The arrival of the Herald marks a transition from the world of war to the anxious anticipation at the palace. He breaks the impasse between Clytemnestra's descriptions of the fall of Troy and the Elders' doubt. Before the Herald speaks, the Elders set up a simple dichotomy of positive and negative news, corresponding to the truth or falsehood of Clytemnestra's statements. Either they or Clytemnestra (editors are divided) emphasize that his human testimony can be interrogated, in opposition to the speechless signal fires from which the queen claims her knowledge.[1] This prelude primes the audience to expect a clear-cut report of the war's conclusion from him, accompanied by the appropriate emotional response.[2] As has sometimes been noticed, the Herald, while repeatedly claiming that he is attempting to fit his message of victory into a positive framework, is aware that many of the events he has experienced fall into the category of evils.[3] These he would rather mute. However, cracks appear during his narrations of the expedition's victory, return, and glory earned; the horrors of war and shipwreck seep into his speech. The Herald's attempts to annul negative forces (which nevertheless arise) are especially evident in his problematic references to his own death and those of his fallen companions.

[1] *Ag.* 498–9, which the codices and the OCT attribute to Clytemnestra, but many other editors to the Chorus. Cf. Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc. On the epistemological issues in this passage, see Goldhill (1986), 17–18.

[2] As Judet de La Combe (2001), 1.169, points out, the Herald's speeches never address the dispute over knowledge, only raising further issues with his tale of the shipwreck, on which see below, pp. 47–8.

[3] See his later rhetorical question: "How am I to mix good things with the bad ones?" πῶς κεδνὰ τοῖς κακοῖσι συμμείξω, 648. Yoon (2012), 48–51, claims that the Herald has an unconscious relationship to his bad news. While it is certain his words exceed his intended meaning, he also makes statements, including this one, that explicitly refer to the negative aspects of the expedition.

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The Herald, this chapter will demonstrate, creates a set of unexpected relationships to these personal and public deaths. Since he is an anonymous character, only appearing in one scene, at times his individual perspective has been ignored.[4] At other times, he has been understood as an everyman.[5] This has led to normalizing his oftentimes unusual statements and reducing their potential impact. Yet we will see that the Herald is far more personalized than other messenger characters in Aeschylus, especially in his language concerning death at war, at sea, and at home.[6] Moreover, the implications of his references to his own demise and burial resonate with the Herald's treatment of the war dead later in his scene in ways that have not been explored.

This chapter will first examine how his ethos emerges in relation to the types of death he has avoided and to the one to which he looks forward.[7] The next two sections turn to his attempts to remove the Trojan War dead from any consideration by the living. Lastly, we will see how his language represents the working of unseen forces in life and how these are connected to divinities of the afterlife. These themes in the Herald's scene form a human, nonheroic background for the supernatural afterlives that develop so strongly in the remainder of the trilogy.

Return to a Tomb

The Herald's arrival speeches are marked by several surprising turns toward his own death, the import of which has been minimized in most readings. There has been a tendency to view him at first as a straightforwardly positive character, whose language is altered by the responses of the Chorus to become ever darker and more portentous.[8] It is true that the Chorus react to his statements with unspecific hints of the

[4] Literature about herald and messenger speeches in tragedy has tended to discuss their authority and conventionality, as well as, more recently, emphasizing the undercutting role of language. See Heiden (1989), esp. 48–64; and Barrett (2002), which only briefly mentions the Herald of the *Agamemnon*. Scodel (2006), 115–21, is an exception, focusing on the use of the memory of the Trojan War in political speech and analyzing the Herald's control over the war narrative.

[5] On the Herald as a "plain man," who would have spoken directly to the experience of nonelite audience members, see Fraenkel (1950), II.293–4; cf. Denniston and Page (1957), xxx.

[6] Although the Herald is unnamed in the *Oresteia*, the hypothesis to the *Agamemnon* names him Talthybius, after Agamemnon's herald in the *Iliad*. This is possibly influenced by that character's appearance in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*, which are set in Troy. See Garvie (1986), xxii–xxiii, for the contemporary visual representations of Talthybius and his possible role in Stesichorus' lost *Oresteia*.

[7] On the ethos of a character as one way of interpreting ethics in tragedy, see the Introduction.

[8] Indeed, interpreters have often taken the Herald – who does announce victory – to display "unqualified optimism," Fraenkel (1950), II.293; or a "futile cheerfulness," Denniston and Page

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baneful situation in Argos and sometimes twist his meaning (542–50). Upon examination, however, it becomes evident that the Herald creates a thoroughly individual relationship to death that precedes their promptings.

Immediately upon his entrance, the Herald uses several positively valenced words, hailing his paternal country. This language sufficiently indicates his gratefulness to be home and seems to mark him as a character who will lighten the ominous tone.[9] Yet even before he prays to the gods, as is conventional upon return from war, the Herald subjoins the issue of his own demise (506–7):[10]

> οὐ γάρ ποτ᾽ ηὔχουν τῇδ᾽ ἐν Ἀργείᾳ χθονὶ
> θανὼν μεθέξειν φιλτάτου τάφου μέρος.
>
> For I would have never said that, having died in this Argive land,
> I would gain a share of a most dear grave.[11]

The Herald's immediate mention of death and the addition of a desire for a "most dear grave" signal more than relief at homecoming. This is evident from a contrast to the Messenger of the *Persians*. That less defined character merely declares that he has survived to see the day of his return, beyond even his hopes (ἀέλπτως, *Pers.* 261). The specific focus on burial is thus an added element in the later *Agamemnon*, which individualizes the speaking character.[12]

Moreover, the Herald soon makes an even more abrupt pivot to his own death. He responds to the Elders' greeting (χαῖρε, *khaire*, *Ag.* 538) cheerfully enough, but with a striking addendum (539):

> χαίρω· τὸ τεθνάναι δ᾽ οὐκέτ᾽ ἀντερῶ θεοῖς.
>
> I *am* happy (*khairō*)! As to dying, I will no longer oppose the gods.[13]

(1957), xxx. Conacher (1987), 25, claims it is "the Chorus who gradually infect the cheerful Herald with their own mood of gloom."

9 E.g. Fraenkel (1950), II.293, "He thoroughly enjoys being alive and safely back after so many toils and perils." Cf. Medda (2017), ad loc.

10 For conventional prayers upon return to the homeland, see Fraenkel (1950), ad 503.

11 See Medda (2017), ad loc., on the use of αὐχέω, often translated "boast," in negative phrases meaning only an unmarked "said." *Contra* Fraenkel (1950), ad 1497, who has it as a verb of thinking, not speaking, in Aeschylus, especially with an infinitive.

12 In fact, the Herald of the *Agamemnon* later contrasts himself as a bearer of good news to a herald announcing disaster to a city (638–47). It is as though Aeschylus were alluding to the Messenger of the *Persians* (249–514), although there may well have been others in the lost plays.

13 Translation as per Headlam and Thomson (1966), who prefer, however, the emendation τεθναίην δ᾽. κτλ. Against this emendation, see Fraenkel (1950), ad loc., who daggers the line – agreeing with

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At first glance, his words seem to merely indicate the level of his joy, as rhetorical exaggeration: "Now I could die happy!"[14] The phrase would then simply indicate the great relief the Herald feels at no longer having to struggle to survive. Yet the reception of the internal audience demonstrates the significance of his word choice. After ten lines of stichomythia, the Argive Elders move from their joy at welcoming the army to a pointed return to the Herald's mention of dying (550):

> ὡς νῦν, τὸ σὸν δή, καὶ θανεῖν πολλὴ χάρις.
>
> As you said just now, even to die is a great boon (*kharis*).

The fact that they are responding to the Herald's second reference to his own death renders incomplete those interpretations that posit a simple dichotomy between a lighthearted Herald and morbidly anxious Elders.

Deliberately echoing the Herald, the Elders even magnify dying itself into a positive (*kharis*).[15] The implication, built up throughout the earlier scenes of the *Agamemnon* and pervading the Elders' speech, is that the political situation in Argos is so repugnant that they would gladly escape it through the repose offered by death.[16] The recurrent dynamic of the Elders twisting the Herald's comments to their own meanings, of which this is only one example, ought not to blind us to the ways each of these statements characterizes the speakers' attitudes to death. The Elders' rhetoric of dying as an evasion of living evils might be inconspicuous, considering their repeated references to their senescence and death.[17] The Herald, however, is marked as a character of army age.[18] Civilian death ought not to be his immediate concern; his rhetoric makes it so. The unanticipated pattern of the Herald harping on his own demise upon arrival home requires, and rewards, examination.

We may clarify the Herald's words through contrasting the two other instances in the trilogy where someone announces a willingness to die after an extreme undertaking. Each is the exclamation of a character central to

Verrall (1904) concerning its hopelessness – but accepts the sense. For the latest on the textual debate, see Judet de La Combe (2001), ad loc.; and Medda (2017), ad loc.

[14] For earlier examples of the theme, see *Od.* 7.224–5; *Hy. Aphro.* 153 ff.; cf. Garvie (1986), ad *Cho.* 438, with examples from later literature. For the objection to interpreting in their specificity lines that touch on commonplaces in Greek literature, see the Introduction.

[15] Note the similarity between χαίρω· τὸ τεθνάναι, 539, and θανεῖν πολλὴ χάρις, 550.

[16] On death as oblivion in tragedy, see Martin (2020), 34, 37–45.

[17] For the numerous relationships to death in the Elders' speeches and songs, see Chapter 2.

[18] Both in his words and, presumably, costume. On the construction of character through costume, see Wyles (2011), esp. 53, 117–18, 133–4.

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the trilogy's plot. First, Aegisthus declares at the end of his gloating introductory speech (*Ag.* 1610–11):

> οὕτω καλὸν δὴ καὶ τὸ κατθανεῖν ἐμοί,
> ἰδόντα τοῦτον τῆς Δίκης ἐν ἕρκεσιν.
>
> Even dying is therefore noble for me,
> having seen this man in the nets of Justice.

Similarly, Orestes, before he undertakes to murder his mother, announces (*Cho.* 438):

> ἔπειτ᾽ ἐγὼ νοσφίσας ὀλοίμαν.[19]
>
> When I have removed [her from life], let me perish!

One could assimilate these two passages to the Herald's earlier example and label all three as merely rhetorical amplifications of the greatness of a particular event, which overwhelms one's life to the point that one wishes for a quiet death. This is certainly part of the meaning of each. However, there is a vast asymmetry between these two characters and the Herald. Aegisthus and Orestes are each concerned with a grim vengeance that consumes their lives. They each plot and murder, and the death of each is meaningful on a narrative level. Aegisthus' reference to dying ironically foreshadows his own murder. Orestes' is followed by having to fight for his life. The result in Orestes' case, moreover, is not restful oblivion, but an afterlife existence as a hero. These factors add layers of complexity and significance to those characters' rhetorical wishes for death (Chapter 5). The Herald's statements about dying, by contrast, come from a character who neither acts within the trilogy nor is heard from again.

One must therefore examine the Herald's language further to understand how its nuances demonstrate his values. Having just returned from a ten-year war and avoided shipwreck, he closely links his homecoming and his tomb. Interpretations for μεθέξειν φιλτάτου τάφου μέρος (literally "to have a share of a most dear grave," 507) include joining with "all those who die in the home country," Fraenkel (1950), and partaking of a "beloved family tomb," Sommerstein (2008b). In either case, the verb μετέχω (*metekhō*, which often means to "partake of something in common"), the partitive idea in τάφου μέρος, "share of a grave," and the φίλος (*philos*) root of φιλτάτου all indicate that the Herald looks forward to reentering the

[19] The text follows Garvie (1986). The OCT's addition of Page's <σ'> would not affect the interpretation.

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familial and social realms he left behind.[20] Thus his words might resonate with the same pathos as the exclamation of shipwrecked Odysseus (*Od.* 7.222–5): "having seen my home . . . let life leave me!" By contrast, the Herald is not lost at sea, pledging his life for the barest return home; he has already arrived safely. His reintegration is thus more analogous to Odysseus' burial of an oar far inland, a symbol of the alternate deaths he has eluded.[21] The Herald's language is less metaphorical; it is not the oar that will be buried. He thus represents his reintegration only through his tomb, not a living reunion with family, the extensive theme at the end of the *Odyssey*. In fact, nothing in the Herald's language about himself pertains to the benefits of life that other characters who complete a *nostos* from the Trojan War (such as Odysseus, Agamemnon, or Orestes) strive to regain: control of a house, companionship of family, and children for continuity of the line (cf. *Cho.* 757–8; Chapter 5). He depicts family and community only through their loss.[22]

It is thus significant that the Herald characterizes himself as having actively denied death in the past. The negative and double negative ("not ever," οὐ . . . ποτ', 506; "no longer will I deny," οὐκέτ' ἀντερῶ, 539) in these phrases intimate his previous fear of death abroad. His language hints at the hurdles a soldier in an extended overseas war must overcome to achieve even the least and last rite of civilian life, interment at home. By contrast to Aegisthus and Orestes, in the Herald's mouth the rhetorical wish for death indicates his lack of agency within the momentous events into which he was drawn. In countermanding (ἀντερῶ, literally, "I will speak against") the gods, the Herald characterizes as a speech-act his previous endeavor to ward off death. Yet upon his return, he abrogates the same denial of his end. In a poetic juxtaposition, this second speech-act, that of surrender, evokes externally determined fate while simultaneously emphasizing a decision. Having evaded violent annihilation, invoking peaceful death is the Herald's rhetorical assertion of control over his life.

The Herald's language of return contains further negations that can more precisely locate his values. He mentions the land five times within his first seven lines, with special emphasis on it being paternal and

[20] Although τάφος may mean funeral rites (LSJ A), in Aeschylus it seems to always refer to the grave or tomb itself: *Pers.* 684, 686; *Ag.* 1311; *Cho.* 108, 168, 336, 352, 488, 501, 540, 894; *Eum.* 598, 767; *Sept.* 914 (1037 and 1046 may refer to the funeral rites, in the portion many scholars suspect to be a later addition, following the *Antigone*'s concern with those rites).

[21] *Od.* 11.121–36, 23.263–87. On the whole range of devices in the *Odyssey* for reintegrating Odysseus, see e.g. Segal (1962) and (1967).

[22] Similarly, later in his speech the Herald declares that if Menelaus is alive, it means Zeus "does not yet wish to eradicate his stock" (Διὸς οὔπω θέλοντος ἐξαναλῶσαι γένος, *Ag.* 677–8).

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Argive.[23] By implication, he thus links his homeland burial to the two alternatives he has avoided, namely the loss of the body at sea and the grave on the foreign battlefield. His ascription of both the storm and the war to divine forces allows for an inclusive ambiguity in his reference to denying death to the gods. Since these two types of death abroad diverge in their personal and ritual meanings, it is worthwhile to examine each in turn.

Taking the most recently avoided alternate death first, the Herald alludes to shipwreck in his opening lines with the metaphorical "although so many hopes of mine have been broken" (πολλῶν ῥαγεισῶν ἐλπίδων, 505).[24] He describes with great pathos the storm that shattered the other returning ships (648–73), including the sickening image of the sea "blossoming with corpses" (659). The shipwreck narrative contains the first instance of the name Hades in the trilogy: The Herald relates that those on his ship were spared with the phrase "having fled a watery Hades" (Ἅιδην πόντιον πεφευγότες, 667).[25] This mention of the underworld god has an outsized importance in teasing out the meaning of death at sea for the Herald. Commentators have generally considered it merely a synonym for death. Yet the Herald's earlier emphasis on the land and tomb at home raises the question of whether he is hinting that drowning would entail a different "Hades," that the loss of the corpse at sea would be a hurdle to entering the underworld proper.

Death at sea was dreaded throughout Greek literature. It is terrifying for the individual not only for the immediate horror of drowning but also for the imagined devouring of the corpse by underwater creatures.[26] Odysseus himself vividly fears drowning (e.g. *Od.* 5.400–50), yet his sorrow at the perdition of his shipwrecked companions is mentioned only in passing (12.417–19). It receives far less emphasis than, for instance, the threefold lament for those killed by the Ciconians in battle (9.62–6). For kin, the loss of the body at sea might lead to the uncertainty over death that Telemachus

[23] ἰὼ πατρῷον οὖδας Ἀργείας χθονός, 503; Ἀργείᾳ χθονί, 506; νῦν χαῖρε μὲν χθών, 508; χώρας, 509. Verrall (1904) followed by Fraenkel (1950), ad 503, imagines the Herald throwing himself on the ground as the physical correlative of his words.

[24] Either alluding to the breaking of the ships themselves, as Sommerstein (2008b) translates, or to the snapping of mooring or anchoring cables, as Fraenkel (1950) interprets. On hopes as anchors or cables, see Headlam and Thomson (1966), ad loc.

[25] It is one of seven uses of the name Hades in the *Oresteia*. The other five in the *Agamemnon* also principally refer to death rather than the divinity or a place in the afterlife (1115, 1235, 1291, 1387, 1528). However, on the double valence of Cassandra's uses of it, see Chapter 3. The exception is the single, crucial mention of Hades in *Eum.* 273, on which see Chapter 7.

[26] A fate similar to the constant Homeric threat of dogs and birds eating the unburied battlefield corpses, Vermeule (1979), 12. Cf. *Supp.* 800–1.

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in the *Odyssey* suffers concerning his father, and it is the main thread of the Herald's lengthy response as to the fate of Menelaus (*Ag.* 617–79).

The missing corpse meant that a cenotaph was needed to facilitate a burial ritual, with at times a substitute body and a *sēma* (grave marker) for memory.[27] Together, they were intended to strengthen the chances of the dead soul successfully arriving at rest in the underworld despite the loss of the corpse. The burial *ritual* was the differentiating factor, both in practice and in literature. The *Odyssey* contains a number of references to a cenotaph, including one for Odysseus.[28] Yet the *Odyssey* never refers to an inability to gain entrance into the realm of Hades proper for those who are lost at sea. In fact, it pointedly does not differentiate drowning from other types of death in its version of the underworld: Odysseus asks the dead Agamemnon whether he drowned with the ships or died in combat (11.397–403). Neither in the literary-mythical world nor elsewhere is there clear evidence that those who were shipwrecked would suffer a different fate in Hades.[29] Thus the Herald is not clearly referring to a forfeiture of underworld entry through the phrase "a watery Hades." In this instance, it really is a synonym for death. We will see below that this limited reference to Hades is part of a wider pattern in the Herald's speech.

The other death that the Herald has avoided is in the war itself. In both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, a battlefield death that earns glory is praised rather than feared.[30] The theme occurs within the *Oresteia* when Agamemnon's children wish that he could have died at Troy by the spear.[31] The Herald's emphasis on glory for Agamemnon and the leaders of the war later in his speech (*Ag.* 574–81) demonstrates this set of values. Yet the Herald's language about himself betrays ideas antipodal to most of the warrior elite. His avidness for sharing a tomb with kin is a subtle repudiation of glorious death in combat (in which, as a herald, he presumably would not have engaged).

[27] See Vermeule (1979), 45, on the substitute body and *sēma* as memorial, and 187–8, on the cenotaph; cf. Garland (1985), 102, 165; Sourvinou-Inwood (1995), 121, 128; and Johnston (1999), 122.

[28] Athena tells Telemachus he might have to erect a cenotaph for Odysseus, referred to as a *sēma* (φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν σῆμα, *Od.* 1.290–2, cf. 220–3). Menelaus erects one to Agamemnon, referred to as a tomb or mound (τύμβον, ἵν᾽ ἄσβεστον κλέος εἴη, 4.583–4).

[29] The notion, for example, that the Athenian *stratēgoi* of Arginusae were executed in 406 BCE because the bodies left at sea would prevent the dead sailors from entering into the underworld is supported by neither Xen. *Hell.* 1.7 nor Diod. Sic. 13.97–101. Loraux (1986), 18, attributes the Athenian anger to the casualties losing the honor of public burial; cf. Plato, *Menex.* 243c6–8.

[30] For the Homeric theme, see e.g. *Il.* 12.310–28 and *Od.* 1.230–43, in which Telemachus wishes that Odysseus had died in this way rather than having disappeared. Cf. Schein (1984), 67–84, 186–8; and Vernant (1991), esp. 55–7.

[31] For the theme of death at war for Agamemnon's glory, see *Cho.* 345–74 and Chapters 4 and 5.

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Again, the issues of burial and the underworld in his speech can be fruitfully contrasted with their representation in epic. The Herald's nonheroic register is in some ways akin to Elpenor's story in the *Odyssey*. The young man, whose drunken death is entirely overlooked by his companions, cannot enter Hades proper until he is buried. Elpenor's shade, the first soul to appear to Odysseus, is concerned with burial, however, precisely because his corpse lacks it.[32] Even Elpenor desires a miniature *kleos*; beyond the call for Odysseus to remember him long enough to bury him (*Od.* 11.71–2; cf. *Il.* 23.69), Elpenor desires to be objectified through a *sēma*, his oar, by which those in the future may know of him (11.75–9). By contrast, the Herald's concern with his homeland grave is a living one. His family burial would naturally encompass rites to send him to Hades, a grave marker, continued memory, and regular ritual visits. In expressing his desire for burial at home so emphatically, the Herald inserts an implicit challenge to the logic behind a glorious war death, a challenge that will be amplified when he speaks of the casualties themselves.

The Herald, therefore, should not be considered merely a freely speaking, joyful messenger or a character who does not know the meaning of his own words in the context of the situation in Argos. Although his message is of victory and his scene contains strong elements of irony, his concern with personal death distinguishes him from other herald and messenger characters in the extant plays of Aeschylus. His phrasing hints at a need for closure that individuates him as a soldier returning from traumatic war and connects him to the *nostos* of Odysseus. It also foreshadows the vengeance that more central characters take. His words, in contrast to theirs, sketch out the attitude of a powerless individual swept up in prodigious events he cannot affect. The Herald's focus on a homeland grave has a specificity of its own, in that it differentiates his fate from the drowning and battlefield deaths that his companions suffered. Whereas a grave at home is far preferable to a lost body at sea, the Herald never makes reference to afterlife differentiation, reinforcing his rhetorical focus on closure at death in the personal part of his scene. Moreover, the relief at not having a glorious death abroad inserts a nonelite perspective into the discourse concerning the Trojan War. Crucially, the Herald's attitude toward his own death affects in unexpected ways the interpretation of his public announcements concerning the war, to which we now turn.

[32] *Od.* 11.71–8. On Homeric grave monuments and memorialization, see Sourvinou-Inwood (1995), 108–39.

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Silence about the Dead?

The Herald's official announcement of the end of the Trojan War aims to condition the responses to it.[33] The transition from personal concerns to the official speech about the war has puzzled commentators, for it occurs in direct reply to the Elders' declaration that "even to die would be a great boon."[34] The Herald seems to take their meaning as an expansion to the whole city of his personal relief at the end of the war. This is supported by his immediate remarks. He labels the affair well accomplished (*Ag.* 551) and adds gnomic statements to the effect that over time some things may be said to "fall out well" and others not, for only the gods live a life free of pain (551–4). These insipid truisms on their own could support the reading that the Herald offers the first positive contribution to the trilogy.

In fact, the Herald's public speech contains a set of extreme rhetorical moves in the attempt to minimize the negatives of the war. He follows these aphorisms with a token depiction of the army's suffering at Troy (555–66). It has been noted by many that he never even mentions battle, only the unpleasant camp and sailing conditions. What has not received enough attention is the astounding set of nullifications with which he cuts off his own narrative (*Ag.* 567–73):[35]

> τί ταῦτα πενθεῖν δεῖ; παροίχεται πόνος·
> παροίχεται δέ, τοῖσι μὲν τεθνηκόσιν
> τὸ μήποτ᾽ αὖθις μηδ᾽ ἀναστῆναι μέλειν,
> ἡμῖν δὲ τοῖς λοιποῖσιν Ἀργείων στρατοῦ
> νικᾷ τὸ κέρδος, πῆμα δ᾽ οὐκ ἀντιρρέπει.
> τί τοὺς ἀναλωθέντας ἐν ψήφῳ λέγειν,
> τὸν ζῶντα δ᾽ ἀλγεῖν χρὴ τύχης παλιγκότου;
>
> Why is it necessary to mourn these things? The suffering has passed.
> It has passed, so that the dead
> do not even care to ever rise up again.
> But for us, those remaining from the Argive army,
> profit has prevailed, and pain does not counterbalance it.

[33] On the "official capacity" of the Herald, see Yoon (2012), 48–51. Agamemnon's speech about the war (810–54) follows the Herald's closely, Conacher (1987), 30.

[34] Goldhill (1986), 7, labels it "an extraordinary *non sequitur*" that "seems to stress the uncertainties in the process of communication"; cf. (1984a), 52. Instead, the analysis herein relates the Herald's statement first to his personal relationship to death, discussed above, "Return to a Tomb," and second to his framing of the war dead.

[35] The OCT editors admit uncertainty as to the order of lines and have transposed a number of them in this passage on the basis of "flow of ideas" for the following section. Cf. West (1990), 192–4; and Judet de La Combe (2001), ad 570–2. I have used the OCT text here but have translated verse 569 as though it ends with a period. The order does not affect the argument.

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Why should we reckon those expended in the account,
and why should the living one grieve over malignant fortune?

At first glance, the Herald's statements fall under the category of prudent speech that he previously articulated. Human affairs contain a mixture of desirable and undesirable outcomes, and one ought not to verbalize evils for fear of provoking pain and pollution.[36] These statements match the introductory characters' emphasis on silence, which creates a foreboding atmosphere in the first part of the *Agamemnon*.[37] This is the central strategy of the passage quoted above. Suffering and death, when described, must be closed off as soon as possible for the reintegration of the living. In his telling, these matters are so painful that they cannot be spoken aloud, so painful that one wishes to lie about them (*Ag.* 620–3). When he speaks, he expresses concern to keep descriptions short (*Ag.* 629). Yet even before this passage, the Herald has begun to speak of adverse outcomes, and eventually, under questioning, the dam bursts. With the lengthy narrative of shipwreck (*Ag.* 648–70), he depicts the corpses floating on the sea. By the end, silence in the service of apotropaic vigilance is discarded.

The pressure not to speak of the worst parts of the war instead deforms into an entirely unexpected stance that the Herald takes throughout, that of excluding the dead from any further consideration. The rhetorical questions in the passage above seem to presuppose that the war dead contribute nothing except anguish. The Herald denies the impetus to "mourn these things" (ταῦτα πενθεῖν, 567). "These things" properly refers to his previous descriptions of mere hardships in the war, pain which has now gone (παροίχεται πόνος, 567). Yet the anadiplosis of παροίχεται (*paroikhetai*, 567, 568) reapplies the notion of closure to the casualties of war. The Herald thus closely links two ideas, the latter of which does not follow from the former: There is no use in lamenting suffering in the past, therefore those who have passed do not concern themselves with the living world. They do not care to return from the dead, as they might in the case of uneasy spirits.[38] The Herald immediately pushes this idea to a further extreme in the last two verses of this

[36] Cf. 551–5, 572 [570], 574, and, more explicitly, 636: "it is not proper to pollute an auspicious day (literally 'a speaking-well day') with evil-announcing tongue," εὔφημον ἦμαρ οὐ πρέπει κακαγγέλῳ γλώσσῃ μιαίνειν. Montiglio (2000), 210–12, addresses the Herald's insistence on ritual silence for fear of pollution, seeing each failure of silence as announcing future misfortune.

[37] The Watchman and Chorus have already promoted a silence of political caution, e.g. *Ag.* 36–9; 498–9, 548; cf. Thalmann (1985b), 228–9; Schenker (1991), 69–71; McClure (1999), 96; Scodel (2006), 123–4; and Nooter (2017), 127–34.

[38] Sommerstein (2008b) gives an alternate translation of 568–9: "for the dead, it is so thoroughly past that they don't even have to worry about reveille any more." Whereas "reveille" as a translation for

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passage: Since the end of the war resulted in victory, there is no need for the living to grieve for the dead.[39] He does not replace grieving with remembrance or praise, as epitaphs for the war dead and funeral orations traditionally do.[40] He thus denies them a heroic afterlife in the manner of the war dead of Athens and other states.[41] The Herald goes so far as to claim that the living should not even *account* for the dead. Such a sinister economics deserves further scrutiny.

The Expended Dead and the Glory of the Living

At first glance, the Herald's auditing seems dispassionate, for he closely conjoins words of balance (ἀντιρρέπει, 571), expenditure (ἀναλωθέντας, 572), and financial calculation (ἐν ψήφῳ λέγειν, 572). Specifically, the Herald strikes from the loss column all emotional suffering (πενθεῖν, 567; πόνος, 567; πῆμα, 571; ἀλγεῖν, 573). Instead, he insists that for the survivors, "profit" (τὸ κέρδος, *kerdos*, 571) preponderates over pain (πῆμα δ' οὐκ ἀντιρρέπει, 571).[42] Therefore the war would be entirely positive if only one should forget all its casualties and focus on its benefits.[43]

Audiences must again be on guard, as always with positive language in tragedy: "Profit" (*kerdos*) – in the context of war, especially – is seldom an innocent term.[44] Scholars, in the debates concerning the authenticity of the Herald's description of the destruction of Trojan temples (527, on which more below, p. 46–7) sometimes link it to Clytemnestra's

ἀναστῆναι can work in a military context (for ἀνίστημι as "waking up," see e.g. *Il.* 10.32), it does not seem to be the primary meaning in this passage. Casualties never need concern themselves with further military duty, whether the war is won or lost. The Herald is specifically referring to victory dampening their concern with the living world. Nevertheless, we should leave room for the ambiguity on the local level, as discussed in the Introduction.

[39] See Medda (2017), ad 568–74; and Judet de La Combe (2001), 1.209–10.

[40] E.g. Simonides 531.3, πρὸ γόων δὲ μνᾶστις, ὁ δ' οἶκτος ἔπαινος. Cf. Currie (2005), 91–2. On the theme of suppressing lament, especially in favor of praise, see Loraux (1986), 44–50; and Sourvinou-Inwood (1995), 192–3.

[41] Loraux (1987), 1–2, emphasizes that in instances of the Athenian funeral oration, the city itself gains glory *through* the praise of the dead, precisely the opposite of the dynamic here; on the public burial and heroization of the war dead, see further the Introduction and Chapter 5.

[42] Scodel (2006), 119–21, suggests a general connection between the accounting language of this passage and an attempt to exclude the very suffering the Herald describes from the memory (or "master narrative") of the Trojan War.

[43] On this passage one may again quote Fraenkel (1950) for a contrast: "Hitherto there has been heard no utterance of assured confidence . . . only the Herald can utter words of joyful satisfaction." Kitto (1961), 73, is more distrustful of the positive valence and closure offered in this speech: "The Herald, like the Watchman, is profoundly glad to be rid of it all. They all suffered; many are dead. But victory has come! – Victory being another of the false lights that illuminate the whole trilogy."

[44] See Seaford (1998) and (2012), 196–205.

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premonitory language concerning this same event (338–40).[45] *Kerdos* provides a second, foreboding linguistic resonance between the two speakers. For the issue of profit from war is at the heart of Clytemnestra's suggestion that disaster might enmesh the victorious Greeks (*Ag.* 341–2):

> ἔρως δὲ μή τις πρότερον ἐμπίπτῃ στρατῷ
> πορθεῖν ἃ μὴ χρή, κέρδεσιν νικωμένους·
>
> Only let no desire (*erōs*) first fall on the army
> to plunder what they should not, conquered by profit (*kerdos*).

Clytemnestra predicts a scenario, later found to be true, in which the living bring destruction down on their own heads, ambushed by their own *erōs* and defeated by profit (κέρδεσιν νικωμένους, *kerdesin nikōmenous*).[46] Clytemnestra's words reveal the tension between the unmarked use of *kerdos* to mean "beneficial gain" and the charged signification of her use of it as "*desire* for gain."[47] The Herald uses the same combination of verb and noun (νικᾷ τὸ κέρδος, *nika to kerdos*, *Ag.* 571) to make profit the justification for the war and the reason for revoking any consideration of the dead.

There is a further, crucial resonance in Clytemnestra's earlier passage, as she invokes the possibility of the dead being a cause of harm to the living. Her warning that if the army should return without offense, "the pain (πῆμα) of the dead might be awakened" (346) is a double entendre. Within the immediate context of the expedition, these are the war dead.[48] The reference then is to the Trojans, whose city and gods would be dishonored

[45] E.g. Goldhill (1986), 6–8, contrasts the Herald's "optimism in the end of toil and in his role as simple message conveyor" and ironic unawareness of the links and ramification of his own words with Clytemnestra's "web of dissimulation and deceit, manipulating language as an opportunity for furthering her plot."

[46] Echoes of Clytemnestra's use of *erōs* can also be found in the exchange between the Chorus and Herald: *Ag.* 540, 544. On the erotics of Clytemnestra's speeches, see Goldhill (1984a), esp. 91–5; Wohl (1998), 101, 106–7; Foley (2001), 207–34; and Vogel-Ehrensperger (2012), 198–232.

[47] On these meanings of *kerdos*, see Cozzo (1988), 41–82; and Seaford (2012), 168. Wohl (1998), 59–117, uncovers the network of links in the *Agamemnon* between commodification of women (and men), the Trojan War, sexuality, profit, and the problematic violence that results. Cf. Cairns (2013), xxi–xl, on the interplay of *kerdos* and *atē* in the *Antigone*. The same tension continues throughout the *Oresteia*, where the other uses of *kerdos* alternate, on their face, between these two meanings, but where even the ostensibly positive uses should also evoke the problematic issues of one's own gain being at another's expense: *Cho.* 825–6; *Eum.* 539–41, 704, 990–1. There seems to be a strong link in the rest of Aeschylus between *kerdos* and death: e.g. *Sept.* 683–4, 697; *PV* 747.

[48] On the difficulties of this passage, see Fraenkel (1950), ad 345–7, but his assumption that this phrase must somehow be comforting is not shared by other commentators. Cf. Denniston and Page (1957), ad 345–7.

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in this scenario, or the Greek dead, whose suffering, angry families at Argos will soon be invoked. However, with Clytemnestra's language, the dead Iphigeneia is never far away. It is in fact the dead daughter who is the immediate cause of Agamemnon's death. Since Clytemnestra has already uttered her warnings, the Herald's vocabulary of profit at the expense of the dead should not be understood without this set of sinister undertones.[49]

Rather than financial gain, which is a primary denotation of *kerdos*, the "profit" that the Herald specifies is the ability to boast.[50] Taking up the value system of the *Iliad*, to glory the Herald turns. Yet his depiction of the victors' boasts and desired plaudits from the city are peculiar in a number of important ways (*Ag.* 574–81):

> καὶ πολλὰ χαίρειν συμφοραῖς καταξιῶ,
> ὡς κομπάσαι τῷδ' εἰκὸς ἡλίου φάει
> ὑπὲρ θαλάσσης καὶ χθονὸς ποτωμένοις
> "Τροίην ἑλόντες δή ποτ' Ἀργείων στόλος
> θεοῖς λάφυρα ταῦτα τοῖς καθ' Ἑλλάδα
> δόμοις ἐπασσάλευσαν ἀρχαῖον γάνος."
> τοιαῦτα χρὴ κλύοντας εὐλογεῖν πόλιν
> καὶ τοὺς στρατηγούς·
>
> I think it worthy even to rejoice much at these events,
> as it is proper for us, flying over sea and earth,
> to boast to this light of the sun:
> "The expedition of Argives having taken Troy once upon a time,
> nailed up in temples for the gods across Greece
> these spoils, an ancient splendor."
> Having heard such things, it is necessary to praise the city
> and the generals.

The Herald pictures the victors boasting (κομπάσαι, 575) in the form of dedications at temples accompanying the spoils of war.[51] For this, the Herald uses the language of Homeric epic (including the form Τροίην, 577).[52] He also speaks of the victory in words that appear more suited to the distant past: δή ποτ' ("once upon a time," 577) and ἀρχαῖον ("ancient," 579).

[49] For Athena's attempts to reverse the negative implications of *kerdos* in her blessings, see Chapter 7.

[50] On the connections of *kerdos* and money in tragedy, see Seaford (2003).

[51] For the various renderings of the thought behind the metaphorical ὑπὲρ θαλάσσης καὶ χθονὸς ποτωμένοις, see Fraenkel (1950); and Medda (2017), ad loc. The idea likely being conveyed is that, as the returning Argives sped home from Troy, they dedicated spoils at each temple they visited, with the additional layer of meaning that their fame thus spread widely.

[52] The OCT prints Τροίαν from T, but I retain Τροίην from F, following Medda (2017), ad 577–9; cf. Judet de La Combe (2001), ad loc. The same commentators also note that Ἀργείων στόλος (577) has a Homeric resonance.

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Scholars have felt these two temporal markers to be deeply problematic; some choose to supply a double lacuna.[53] Others tie them closely to dedicatory inscriptions, with the idea that the Herald's phrasing already addresses the readers of the far future.[54] However, this passage does not conform with the actual use of ποτέ in archaic and classical epigrams and epitaphs (in the latter of which it is quite rare, and δή ποτε nonexistent).[55] Still others suggest that δή ποτε (the only instance in the corpus of Aeschylus) means here "at last, after a long time" and that ἀρχαῖον merely attests to the long-standing tradition of dedication, rather than to the proleptic antiquity of the spoils themselves.[56]

The debate about the phrasing of this imaginary dedication will likely continue, but its poetically ambiguous terms hint at the problems of when and to whom glory is ascribed, magnifying an issue already present in the Herald's speech. The temporal markers draw attention to glory as something enduring, which will be seen in the future. As with any dedication, this imaginary one contains the past timeframe of the action, the present time of its composition, and the future time of reading. However, the events of the Trojan War as well as the *Oresteia* as a whole happen in *mythical* time. They are all "at some time" and "long ago" regarded from the vantage point of the audience.[57] This mythical time is hinted at by the epic language and phrasing. Yet whereas the Homeric epics and real dedications of spoils counterbalance the ephemerality of human life by ensuring posthumous fame, the Herald only demands the ascription of fame now to those still alive (χρή . . . εὐλογεῖν . . . τοὺς στρατηγούς, 580–1).[58] Conspicuously missing are the dead, whose tombs go unmentioned, whose praise goes unsung.

As we saw above (pp. 38–40), the Herald himself has just contrasted the dead and "us" (568–71) and then insisted that the living should not take the dead into account at all (572–3). In counterbalancing their deaths with

[53] Sommerstein (2008b), 68–9 n. 122; and West (1990), 192–4.

[54] E.g. Weil, quoted in Fraenkel (1950), ad loc.: "de rebus praesentibus quasi de praeteritis loquitur"; and Verrall (1904), ad loc.: "the praise is worded as it will be spoken a long time hereafter," followed by Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc.

[55] Wade-Gery (1933), 71–82, in a study on the use of ποτέ in epigrams and epitaphs, denies that its use there parallels this passage or mythical poetry in general (77 n. 28). He insists that ποτέ marks a specific past time relative to the moment of inscription and never the indefinite past from the point of view of the reader.

[56] Medda (2017), ad 557–9, following Klausen; and Judet de La Combe (2001), ad loc.

[57] Judet de La Combe (2001), ad loc., distinguishes ἀρχαῖον from παλαιόν in this context as giving a mythic gleam (γάνος) to the spoils. On temporal issues in the *Oresteia* as a whole, see Chiasson (1999); and Widzisz (2012).

[58] Scodel (2006), 115–17, elucidates the paradox: "Yet the boast, whose content demands that it be spoken in the future, belongs emphatically to this day."

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profit, the Herald severs the casualties from their rightful mourning and glory. By the time the Herald speaks these words, the call for living eulogies is more problematic than it seems. Lament for the casualties of the Trojan War has already materialized as a political problem in Argos before the Herald takes the stage. In the first stasimon, the Elders describe the "mourning" (πένθεια, *pentheia*, *Ag.* 429–30) by those who lost sons in the war using a term with a root identical to that with which the Herald later denies mourning (πενθεῖν, *penthein*, 567).[59] Concerning specifically the share of praise owed to the casualties, the Elders had previously described the families praising their dead with the same vocabulary (εὖ λέγοντες, 445) as the Herald ascribes only to the living.[60] Moreover, in the remainder of the play, further issues and ironies emerge from this speech, to which the Summations/Connections section will point.

Heroes, Hades, and the Unseen

Before concluding, it is important to examine the Herald's references to the divine world for further insight into his overarching stance on the afterlife. The Herald's attempts to control his own death and the reception of the war are often in direct response to the divinities who affect these events. He regularly names supernatural forces that oversee war, disease, and storms, as well as any possible escape.[61] A number of his references to such forces are the first, the only explicit, or otherwise distinct from those of other characters. Each returns later in the trilogy with strong chthonic and afterlife associations. Do these same associations emerge when the Herald first refers to them?

The Herald's claim that the war dead are uninterested in rising and his attempts to remove them from consideration ought to be understood in the context of the powerful role the dead play in the trilogy. Importantly, his speech contains the only use of the term ἥρως (*hērōs*, "hero," *Ag.* 516) in Aeschylus. The Herald's prayer to the heroes as the local divinities who sent off and now receive back the expedition is traditional. Yet this recognition of their powers also undercuts his insistence that the dead are not

[59] πένθεια is either an otherwise-unattested, poetic form of πένθος, "sorrow, grief, mourning," or a reference to a "mourning woman," Bollack and Judet de La Combe (1981), ad 429–31.

[60] As Judet de La Combe (2001), 1.221–2, puts it, the Herald's eulogizing presents the vision of a universal situation that has no temporal boundary, refers to panhellenic glory, and transcends all dissent.

[61] He and the Elders both tend to refer to specific divinities, whereas the named characters of the *Agamemnon* almost invariably refer to the gods in vague language, Zeitlin (1965), 503–4.

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concerned with life, and that one ought not to be concerned with them. The category of hero specifically applies to dead humans who are supernaturally effective in the living world. Later in the *Oresteia*, the ideas and terminology of hero cult surround both the dead Agamemnon in the *Choephoroi* and the still-living Orestes in the *Eumenides* (Chapter 5).

Restrictions of references to the afterlife are the rule in the Herald's speech. This is the case with his one possible allusion to the Mysteries, in the phrase characterizing the return of Agamemnon as "bearing light in darkness for you" (ὑμῖν φῶς ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φέρων, 522).[62] No part of the Herald's speech amplifies it to be any more than an echo of salvational ritual; instead, as we will see below (pp. 46–8), he connects both light and sight to life on the one hand and (nonmystical) knowledge on the other. Analogously, the Herald's statement that the dead "do not care to ever rise up again" (569) is belied throughout the *Oresteia*. Risen humans as ghosts play a significant role in the trilogy: the murdered Children of Thyestes are visible to Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*, Agamemnon's spirit is called to rise in the *Choephoroi*, and the Ghost of Clytemnestra manifests to the audience in the *Eumenides*. The Herald's rhetoric of excluding the dead is in every way anomalous within Greek culture and the trilogy.

The Herald's references to divinities are similarly free of the significant afterlife associations they have in the rest of the *Oresteia*. The Herald's one mention of Hades (667) is as a synonym for death. As we saw above (pp. 35–6), it does not indicate a different afterlife fate for those lost at sea. Worth comparing are the Herald's unmarked mentions of other divinities who have explicit chthonic associations in the following two plays. The Herald's early invocation of his own tutelary deity, Hermes (515), ignores the god's well-known psychopomp aspects, to which other characters refer in both the *Choephoroi* (1, 622) and *Eumenides* (89–92).[63] Likewise, the Herald's paradoxical "victory song to the Erinyes" (παιᾶνα . . . Ἐρινύων, *Ag.* 645) is part of his counterfactual depiction of a messenger of defeat arriving in the city. The Erinyes, the chthonic divinities who have already been part of the first stasimon about the

[62] Cf. *Cho*. 459 and Chapter 4. Headlam and Thomson (1966), ad loc., draw attention to the similarities in phrasing with Xen. *Symp*. 1.9, where it is grouped with other allusions to mystery religions. Nevertheless, the claim that these phrases refer specifically to the Eleusinian Mysteries was challenged as early as Tierney (1937), 11–15. See further below, pp. 46–8, on the use of light in the Herald's speech.

[63] Cf. Garvie (1986), 48, and (1970). Hermes acts as psychopomp in *Od.* 24.1–5, cf. 11.626; *Il.* 24.331ff.; *Hy. Dem*. 377. In Aeschylus, at *Pers*. 629–30, he is invoked as part of the summoning of Darius. Chthonic Hermes was also part of the Dionysian Anthesteria festival, on which see Burkert (1985), 156–9, 217; and Johnston (1999), 55, 63–6.

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afterlife (461–8) and who will themselves appear and sing of the judgment of Hades (*Eum.* 267–75), are mentioned in passing, without any afterlife connotations. In the Herald's mouth, they stand for forces of destruction in the living world.

One might also include two divinities whose interaction with the Erinyes is pivotal in the trilogy. First is Apollo, to whom the Herald prays to change from harmer to healer.[64] Orestes reports that Apollo's oracle threatens him with a father's Erinyes and other chthonic punishments in the *Choephoroi* (269–97, 925), and then the god himself fights against a mother's Erinyes on stage in the *Eumenides*. The second divinity is actually omitted by the Herald, for Athena is the goddess traditionally responsible for the storm the Herald reports.[65] She is never mentioned in the first two plays of the *Oresteia* but later harnesses the power of the Erinyes and the underworld. Thus, in line with the Herald's refusal to account for the dead, all his mentions of divinities are limited to their operation within the world of the living.

To complete the analysis of the Herald's reference to Hades, it is necessary to trace out its connection in Greek to "the unseen" (Ἅιδης, *Hadēs*, was generally thought to come from ἀ-ἰδεῖν, *a-idein*, "not to see," as discussed in the Introduction). The *Oresteia*, like Homeric epic, repeatedly connects seeing with being, light with life.[66] Sight terms for life and death run throughout the Herald's descriptions of the war and return home. The Herald metaphorically connects eradication with becoming invisible in his much-discussed reference to the army's obliteration of even the sacred places of Troy: βωμοὶ δ' ἄιστοι (*bōmoi d' aistoi*, "and the altars have disappeared," *Ag.* 527).[67] The Scholia gloss ἄιστος (*aistos*, "unseen, invisible," which is also from ἀ-ἰδεῖν, *a-idein*) with ἀφανής (*aphanēs*, "unseen, especially of the netherworld").[68] The Elders have already used this latter

[64] *Ag.* 509–13; cf. Yoon (2012), 49. [65] Sommerstein (2008b), 77 n. 136.

[66] Barrett (2002), 12–13. On this theme in Homer, see Gazis (2018), 25–6.

[67] Some editors prefer to delete this verse, but the reasons given are unconvincing. The shocking nature of its sacrilege is exactly the point: it is consonant with the Herald's other declarations and the Chorus's earlier mention of kicking the altar of justice into invisibility, using the same vocabulary (*Ag.* 383–4). There is no definitive argument to be made from the nearly identical verse in the *Persians* (βωμοὶ δ' ἄιστοι, δαιμόνων θ' ἱδρύματα, *Pers.* 811), which could just as well indicate its authenticity. Nor does its interruption of the flow of the previous metaphor mean it was "probably added by a producer or actor for a revival in the late fifth century," as claimed by Sommerstein (2008b), 61 n. 112. See Fraenkel (1950), ad loc., for earlier arguments that rely on notions such as the Herald being too "religious" to say such a thing or Aeschylus thinking the destruction of temples by Greeks too atrocious to write down; cf. Headlam and Thomson (1966). For recent coverage of the arguments, see Judet de La Combe (2001), ad loc.; and Medda (2017), ad loc.

[68] *Ag.*, hypothesis-scholion 527a1, in Smith (1976).

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word in a similar context with the same sense of utter destruction as the Herald does, proleptically connecting it with desecrating an altar: "for one who has kicked the great altar (*bōmon*) of Justice into invisibility (*aphaneian*)," (λακτίσαντι μέγαν Δίκας βωμὸν εἰς ἀφάνειαν, 383–4). Further, the conjunction between being seen and being alive occurs again in verses 630–4, when the Chorus ask whether other sailors speak of Menelaus as living or dead. The Herald replies that only the sun knows. In the course of elaborating, the Herald returns to these same heavily visual terms, answering that there is some hope of his homecoming (*Ag.* 676–7):

> εἰ δ' οὖν τις ἀκτὶς ἡλίου νιν ἱστορεῖ
> καὶ ζῶντα καὶ βλέποντα
>
> If some ray of the sun observes him
> both living and seeing

For Menelaus, no longer being seen or seeing means no longer being present, no longer living. In this passage, and ones like it, sight and being seen take on special significance when their absence is emphasized.[69]

The Herald's hesitation to declare Menelaus dead, however, parallels his difficulties with discussing the casualties. He uses ἄφαντος (*aphantos*) in a weaker sense at 624 to say that Menelaus "has disappeared," as he does at 657, describing the other ships lost in the storm as ἄφαντοι (*aphantoi*, "disappeared"). In both instances, he deliberately clarifies that all those who are thus unseen may still be alive, only unbeknownst to those who have returned.[70] This carefully maintained ambiguity reverses both the first mention of ἄιστοι (*aistoi*) and the Elders' employment of ἀφάνειαν (*aphaneian*) as synonyms for "destroyed." The application of "unseen" to Menelaus and the ships demonstrates that what is invisible may still exist even for the Herald. Within the context of the Herald's scene, this is not a truism but another telling convolution of language. It reveals the strain between this character's attempts to close off thinking about what is

[69] Compare the Messenger of the *Persians*, who indicates his gratefulness to be returning alive after the destruction of the army: "and I myself see the unhoped-for light of return" (νόστιμον βλέπω φάος, 261).

[70] *Ag.* 671–3. Cf. *Od.* 1.235–6, where Telemachus complains of Odysseus that "the gods have made him unseen (ἄϊστον) beyond all other men," and 1.242–3, where he continues that Odysseus "is gone unseen, unheard" (οἴχετ' ἄϊστος, ἄπυστος). This invisibility, and thus uncertainty, obscures Odysseus' glory. Even disregarding the audience's probable knowledge of Menelaus' return, the Herald's language contains an equivocation as to whether this disappearance is real destruction. Both his role in the *Odyssey* and the fact the satyr play, *Proteus*, which followed the *Oresteia*, was about Menelaus seem to guarantee survival. See Peradotto (1969), 261–3. On attestations for the tetralogy, see Gantz (2007), 40, 43–4.

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"gone," such as the casualties of war, and the continuations of the dead so important in other contexts. Thus, there is a tension between the unseen and even chthonic forces that are active in his speech and his stance – unique in the trilogy – that barricades off consideration of any sort of afterlife.

Summations/Connections

The poetics of the beyond in the *Oresteia* begins to manifest in the Herald's perspective on his own death and the casualties of war. Little attention has been paid to the Herald's repeated focus on closing off his own life and to his consistent shuttering of afterlife possibilities for others. These have therefore not been read as giving insight into his particular ethos, providing background for the afterlives of other characters, or affecting the understanding of war in the trilogy.

In terms of ethos, the Herald frames his values in the negative, through his relationship to death. As a survivor of mass violence, his need for some control over life expresses itself rhetorically through the repeated supersession of his death and burial at home over any positively phrased desiderata. In this way, he presents a more personal perspective on war, return, and reintegration than any other messenger in Aeschylus. A quiet death as an escape from hardship is a subtle theme in the Herald's speech, yet it is only the first instance of death as oblivion in the *Oresteia*. The rest of the trilogy represents characters in extreme situations expressing similar thoughts. The Elders more clearly and repeatedly articulate such a notion, first in response to his words and again later in the *Agamemnon* (Chapter 2). Aegisthus and Orestes each enunciate a version of it, with quite different meanings for their ethos (Chapter 5). Taking the Herald's words seriously provides context for these other rhetorical wishes for death.

As the only representative of the nonheroic survivors who return home, the Herald gives a unique viewpoint on the war. His focus on a homeland tomb implies that he does not accept for himself the equation of glory for battlefield death. By contrast, Herald's focus on closure and his vocabulary of calculation relegates his companions to oblivion. In convoluted statements, the Herald's language strives to seal off relationships to the casualties. He negates further action or motivation on the part of the fallen; gone is their desire to participate in life. Concurrently, the Herald claims the living should not concern themselves with the dead. He explicitly denies mourning, never mentioning rituals such as funerals for the dead. Thus he

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cuts off the traditional manner of cultivating the memory and even immortality of the dead in return for their deeds.

The Herald's restriction of focus to the positives transforms the war into a zero-sum proposition. Silencing its casualties is the currency with which profit, the joy of victory, and the glorification of the survivors is bought. The Herald, having just eliminated consideration of the dead, is hard-pressed to declare that Agamemnon and his army will only gain fame posthumously. His tortuous language of dedication thus gives long-ago glory to the living. The bookkeeping of the Herald presages the significant theme throughout the *Oresteia* of tallying up value, especially the value of death in individual and political contexts. The Herald's phrase "to reckon in the account" (ἐν ψήφῳ λέγειν, *en psēphō legein*, *Ag*. 572) uses the vocabulary of calculating with a pebble (*psēphos*), the same pebble as the one used for voting, a political theme that repeats in the trilogy.[71] When Agamemnon arrives on stage, he continues the Herald's boasting about victory by declaring that the gods voted unanimously for the destruction of Troy (ψήφους ἔθεντο, *psēphous ethento*, *Ag.* 816). The Herald's problematic accounting thus draws attention to Agamemnon's own tendentious characterization of the war. The Herald's reckoning of the dead involves vocabulary heavily associated throughout the trilogy with decision-making, the erotics of profit (*kerdos*), the unaccounted-for carnage of war, the tyrannical need for total violence, and even Athena's new law (Chapter 7). These links demonstrate the limitations and perils of the Herald's valuation of the dead as merely ciphers in the debit column.

The omission of funerals and consideration of the dead resonates with another set of themes surrounding the Trojan War and Agamemnon himself. First, Agamemnon, upon receiving ostentatious glorification from Clytemnestra, insists that a life only be valued after a good death.[72] Thus the Herald's claim that glory is not for the dead soldiers but for the living leaders is actually rebuffed by its main recipient. Secondly, in terms of the casualties, Agamemnon's speech fails to praise or even mention the Argive dead. His public position, analogous to the Herald's speech, contrasts with the stated fury of the bereaved families at the Argive

[71] At the end of the trilogy, this vocabulary of voting recurs often, in a seemingly positive context, when the Athenian jurors deliberate concerning the life or death of Orestes (e.g. *Eum.* 597, 630, 675, 680, 709, 735, 748, 751).

[72] *Ag.* 928–9. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of this passage in context of Agamemnon's own afterlife. The gnomic statement by the Chorus in verse 485, that *kleos* proclaimed by a woman vanishes quickly, demonstrates that concern about the transitory nature of glory is already present immediately before the Herald's entrance.

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leadership.[73] Thirdly, explaining away all temporal issues with the dedication and the living ascription of glory would lose the irony of its implications: Clytemnestra's murderous actions soon correct the anachronism of living eulogies for Agamemnon. Thereafter, the Elders concern themselves with Agamemnon's lack of a proper public funeral, specifically mentioning his "great deeds" and the expected praise over his tomb (ἐπιτύμβιον αἶνον, 1543–50). Agamemnon's own children later wish that he had died at war (*Cho.* 345–53). Attention to the Herald's convolutions – grammatical and ideational – thus uncovers the quandaries inherent in his attempts to close off consideration of the dead. Especially so since the *Oresteia* itself repeatedly returns to the issue of untimely death, glory, and afterlife transformations of reputation. Further, each of the stances the Herald takes to the war dead clearly contrasts with the values of ancient Greek cities, particularly the Athenian state, which heavily memorialized the war dead at this time, even granting the exceptional dead special cult, treating them as heroes.[74]

Lastly, the Herald's language consistently restrains the afterlife associations of the divinities he names. There are numerous possible human continuations after death and chthonic forces that lurk beneath the Herald's speech. His prayers to the heroes, Apollo, and Hermes, and his references to Hades and the Erinyes, all operate within a restricted semantic range that excludes the afterlife. His language puts the "unseen" outside of knowledge and beyond calculation, a traditional human epistemic position echoed throughout the *Oresteia*. These restrictions set the stage for the very forces he mentions to demonstrate their effectiveness in life all the more strikingly as the play progresses.

[73] *Ag.* 427–60, on which see further Chapter 2. [74] See Currie (2005), 89–119.

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