

Prophecy on the Banks of the Acheron
Thinking Cassandra Past Her Doom

Introduction

Death as the ultimate ending is the structuring assumption in the intensely moving Cassandra scene. Aeschylus reinvented this minor character from previous myths as a prophetess whom Apollo has cursed to be disbelieved.¹ Cassandra's overwhelming constraints are the emphasis from the start of the scene, the *Agamemnon's* longest (1035–330).² The Trojan princess is already marked as a war captive, a concubine to Agamemnon, and a foreign house-slave to Clytemnestra (950–5, cf. 1035–71). The tense prelude to her first words involves uncertainty about her ability to comprehend what is said. The audience watches as Apollo's curse imposes physically coercive prophecy on Cassandra, which erupts from her in poetic cries. The greatest of Cassandra's oppressions is her preternatural knowledge of her fate (e.g. 1139, 1260–4). With no meaningful choices or agency, the enslaved prophetess of the *Agamemnon* appears uniquely powerless.³

Aeschylus exploits these immense constraints for three dramatic effects. First, Cassandra's foreknowledge is integral to the ironies woven into her past and present.⁴ After the audience learns of the rejection of her

¹ The *Oresteia* is the first work that describes Apollo's relation to Cassandra and emphasizes her fatedness, Mitchell-Boyask (2006), 273. She has no prophetic powers in any of the Homeric passages in which she appears: *Il.* 13.365–7, 24.699–706; and *Od.* 11.421–2. The hypothesis of the *Cypria* points to the first instance of Cassandra foretelling the future (Κασσάνδρα περὶ τῶν μελλόντων προδηλοῖ, 1, 39, 11 Bernabé = Procl. *Chrest.* 94 Sev.). Pindar's fragmentary *Paeon* 8 ascribes prophetic powers to an unnamed Trojan woman, possibly intended to be Cassandra (8a = 52i(A) Maehler); cf. Mazzoldi (2001), 123–34, 115–77, on Ancient Greek literary and artistic sources for Cassandra as prophetess. See Neblung (1997) for a comprehensive treatment of literary sources for Cassandra in antiquity.

² Lebeck (1971), 52, labels the scene the climax of the *Agamemnon*.

³ Schein (1982), 12, likens her to a modern schizophrenic, her true insights combined with “utter helplessness.” Cf. Knox (1972), 114.

⁴ For ironies in the Cassandra scene, see Goldhill (1984a), 81–8; and Morgan (1994), 121–2. See further on irony in Greek tragedy Rosenmeyer (1996); Lowe (1996); and again Goldhill (2012), 13–37, who presents Sophoclean tragedy as a challenge to traditional notions of irony that posit a secure,

prophecy at Troy (1210, 1212), they watch the dynamic slowly repeat at Argos. Cassandra can reveal the future to the Chorus, yet she is unable to affect either her own or Agamemnon's imminent slaughter. The sense of prophetic fulfillment redoubles when the fall of Troy is reenacted in their deaths, the last Trojan and the conqueror of Troy now corpses on stage. A second reaction to her immutable fate involves Cassandra resisting her killer, Clytemnestra, in the paltry ways allowed to her. She greets Clytemnestra's words with stubborn silence and chooses to walk on her own terms to the fateful door. For this the Elders term her "brave" (e.g. 1302). Despite being doomed, Cassandra exercises an aspect of volition, which is recognized within the play.⁵ Last, Cassandra, as she goes to her death, predicts vengeance for herself as well as for Agamemnon, at least the latter of which comes to pass.⁶ She emphasizes the finality of her own death (1291–4, 1327–9) and is never again mentioned by name. Cassandra's prophesied and fulfilled death thus triggers a set of ironies, conditions her unexpected bravery, and facilitates a feeling of closure.⁷

There is, however, an element of her scene that casts doubt on Cassandra's endpoint as a character and therefore ought to provoke reconsideration of these three themes. Cassandra depicts herself as continuing in the realm of Hades as she did in life (*Ag.* 1160–1):

νῦν δ' ἄμφι Κωκυτὸν τε Κ' Ἀχερουσίους
ὄχθους ἔοικα θεσπιωδῆσειν τάχα.

Now by the Cocytus and the banks of the Acheron
it seems I will soon be singing prophecies.

This couplet has not drawn critical attention, being perhaps too brief and allusive.⁸ Yet it transforms Cassandra's fate from ending in her murder to persisting in the afterlife, not only as a shade bereft of characteristics, but as an active prophetic figure. Close attention to the couplet raises a critical set

knowing audience judging unknowing characters. The analysis of the destabilization of the perspectives and knowledge of the audience through tragic language, paradoxes, and uncertainty is applicable to the *Oresteia* as well, as this chapter demonstrates.

⁵ McClure (1999), 92–7; and Doyle (2008), 61–2, 65–74.

⁶ *Ag.* 1279–85, 1317–20, 1323–6. Verses 1324–5 are corrupt, but for the sense of asking for vengeance for herself, see Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc.

⁷ On the dramatic power of this scene and its pathos, related to Cassandra's lament and dramatic time on stage, see Wohl (1998), 24 n. 41; and Doyle (2008), 67, 74; *contra* Rosenmeyer (1982), 306–7, who claims that Aeschylus reduces reasons, morality, and guilt to bare "poetic facts" that force audiences into becoming "historians, recorders of actions that are complete in themselves."

⁸ It is ignored or treated as a vague mention of death by Fraenkel (1950), ad loc.; Denniston and Page (1957); Lebeck (1971); Goldhill (1984a); Conacher (1987); and Sommerstein (2008b).

of questions: If Cassandra continues to exist beyond her death, what becomes of the theme of foretold fate? What of the irony, resistance, and vengeance that depend on her immediate end?

In order to investigate the consequences of shifting Cassandra's end, one must conscientiously parse the couplet itself. Is her reference to the underworld simply a synonym for death, or does it literally refer to her afterlife? If the latter, we must investigate whether it is an actual prophecy or Cassandra's own deduction of her fate. The following sections thus examine the immediate context, meter, and vocabulary of the couplet. This chapter then investigates how the possibilities reconfigure our understanding of the three major dynamics arising from her inexorable death. First is how they affect the human and divine constraints that structure Cassandra's doom and consequent ironies. Second is their effects on her emphasis on closure. Last is how they shift the valences of her resistance. Attention to this afterlife couplet uncovers ethical nuances of her scene and complicates its well-known themes with previously unexamined aspects.

Cassandra's Rivers

The larger passage from which it is taken demonstrates the tensions between possible readings of the couplet. It is nearly a précis of Cassandra's life, as it refers to her childhood and includes the destructive marriage that began the Trojan War (*Ag.* 1156–61):⁹

ἰὼ γάμοι γάμοι Πάριδος ὀλέθριοι φίλων·
 ἰὼ Σκαμάνδρου πάτριον ποτόν·
 τότε μὲν ἀμφὶ σὰς αἰόνας τάλαιν'
 ἦνυτόμαν τροφαῖς·
 νῦν δ' ἀμφὶ Κωκυτόν τε κ' Ἀχερουσίους
 ὄχθους ἕοικα θεσπιωδῆσειν τάχα.

Woe, the wedding, the wedding of Paris, destructive of kin!
 Woe, the ancestral drink of the Scamander!
 Back then by your banks, wretched woman,
 I was nourished to adulthood.
 Now by the Cocytus and the banks of the Acheron
 it seems I will soon be singing prophecies.

⁹ On Cassandra's relationship to time, see Zeitlin 1966, 645; and Widzisz (2012), 61–9.

Cassandra links the flow of her life to the Scamander at Troy and its ebb to the Cocytus and Acheron, those pain-filled rivers of Hades.¹⁰ The final couplet, if taken literally, indicates that Cassandra will continue beyond death. Whereas this world's currents drag her to her prophesied demise, the rivers at the end of the couplet betoken further suffering: Cassandra's curse could abide, even below the earth.

Cassandra's own second sight provides the first encounter with supernatural continuity of the dead within the *Oresteia*. Shortly after this passage, the prophetess literally sees the ghost Children of Thyestes (ὄρατε τοῦσδε τοὺς . . . νέους, *Ag.* 1217–18). The couplet fits squarely, therefore, within the concerns of the trilogy about the afterlife, as will become evident in later chapters. Important to mention here, however, is Cassandra's link to Clytemnestra, her killer. Cassandra gives Clytemnestra the multilayered epithet, “mother of Hades” (Ἄιδου μητὲρ, *Hadou mēter*, 1235). In part this refers to Clytemnestra engendering death, but more figuratively it is also borne out by the queen's descriptions of and return from the underworld.¹¹ When living, Clytemnestra claims that Iphigeneia will embrace and kiss her killer, Agamemnon, by the river Acheron (*Ag.* 1555–9), a phrasing that echoes Cassandra's earlier reference to the same river.¹² Reinforcing but also reversing the dynamics, when Clytemnestra returns as a ghost in the *Eumenides*, she complains that *she* is the one haunted by those she killed.¹³ This can be seen as a reference to Cassandra continuing in the afterlife, for the priestess is one of the two bodies over which Clytemnestra gloats on stage.

¹⁰ Cf. *Sept.* 690, 856. See Mackie 1999, esp. 493, on these rivers of Hades in Homer and their connection to the Scamander, which is “fundamental to the life of Troy.” Note that Aeschylus' combination of Cassandra's lament with these specific rivers could be read as a sophisticated Homeric allusion. In *Il.* 24.703, Cassandra bewails Hector's body with the verb κωκύω, from which the river Cocytus takes its name. She is tied to mournful shrieking in the *Odyssey*, as well; the only detail about Cassandra in Agamemnon's story is the most piteous (οἰκτροτάτην) sound she makes as she is cut down by Clytemnestra, *Od.* 11.421. Pindar's *Pyth.* 11.16–22, in which Clytemnestra is said to have sent Cassandra to the banks of the Acheron (Ἀχέρωντος ἄκταν) along with the soul of Agamemnon, seems similar enough to posit some influence. However, it is uncertain whether it dates to before or after the *Oresteia*, Medda (2017), 1.26–7.

¹¹ For further interpretations of this phrase, see Chapter 5.

¹² πρόσμευμ' ἄχέων, literally “the passage/ferry of griefs” (*Ag.* 1558), is an etymological allusion to the Acheron, Denniston and Page (1957), ad. loc.; and Mackie (1999), 487 n. 8. Garner (1990), 36, points out the ironies in this underworld scene. On Clytemnestra's justifications for killing Agamemnon, see Neuburg 1991 and Foley 2001, 211–34. On Cassandra's links to Iphigeneia, see Wohl (1998), 111–16; and Doyle 2008, 58–62.

¹³ “The reproach of those I killed never ceases among the perished” (ὧν μὲν ἔκτανον θνήσκος ἔν φθιτοῖσιν οὐκ ἐκλείπεται, *Eum.* 96–7). For the other two references to Cassandra after her death, see below, p. 85.

This comparison with Clytemnestra demonstrates how characters' perspectives on the afterlife juxtapose with each other. The witnesses themselves have various degrees of believability and may even present conflicting stories. Clytemnestra is an admitted liar and murderer, whereas her ghost gives a different version of the afterlife than she did while alive. Further, beyond even the ghost children – who are passive and appear only to Cassandra – Clytemnestra's return from the underworld presents a dead character carrying on with similar speech and concerns as in life (Chapter 6). On the one hand, the Ghost of Clytemnestra's allusion to Cassandra in Hades supports the possibility that Cassandra's couplet is literally true. On the other hand, it has a far different emphasis from Cassandra's self-depiction of her cursed existence, by hinting that she takes part in Clytemnestra's punishment – acting as her own avenger.

A third possibility for Cassandra relates to the afterlife as a place of ethical retribution. One of the three choral references to punishment in the underworld can also apply to her. In the *Eumenides*, the chthonic Erinyes explicitly reveal that the god Hades punishes every mortal who transgresses (*Eum.* 267–75).¹⁴ Cassandra's acts in life can be seen to fall into the category of “dishonoring a god” (θεόν . . . ἀσεβῶν, *theon* . . . *asebōn*, *Eum.* 270).¹⁵ Cassandra recounts that her curse is due to somehow “conceding/consenting to” (ξυναινέσασσα) and then “cheating” (ἐψευσάμην, *Ag.* 1208) Apollo's sexual advances.¹⁶ Whereas the nature of each of these actions is left undefined, it is clear that in the living world she is punished by the god for frustrating him in a sexual context (see further below, pp. 79–80). The naming of impiety against a divinity as a cause for punishment in the *Eumenides* passage revives the possibility that Cassandra will continue to suffer in the afterlife.

Named figures exist in the realm of Hades, but whether they are punished or actively punish, whether they have power or demand action in the living world all depends on the speaker. With these contradictions, the *Oresteia* avoids a definitive stance on what happens to a person after death. It forces audiences to consider multiple perspectives, each in its context, but also in interplay with one another. These explicit references to others' afterlives and allusions to Cassandra's potential continuations

¹⁴ For the other two references to afterlife punishment and further on this one, see Chapters 2 and 7.

¹⁵ Zeitlin (1965), 504, designates Cassandra as a symbol of the disrupted relationship with the gods in the *Agamemnon*, since she is Apollo's priestess, destroyed by him.

¹⁶ Morgan (1994), 125–7. On the paradoxes of Cassandra deceiving the god of prophecy and his part in avenging her, see Judet de La Combe (2001), 11.400–1.

provide the background for a closer examination of how her couplet functions on its own terms.

Prophecy or Deduction? Divergent Possibilities for Cassandra

Cassandra is the only “seer” in tragedy who literally *sees* – both a past that did not happen to her and the future for the house beyond her death.¹⁷ The stanza we are concerned with contains, by contrast, visual images related solely to her – memories of her own childhood and her own potential continuation after death. As with other personal information in her scene, this stanza is thus differentiated from her supernatural knowledge concerning the house of Atreus. The question of authoritativeness concerning Cassandra’s vision of herself in Hades rests on whether one considers it to be a product of her superhuman sight or her human deduction.¹⁸

Cassandra’s markers of emotion are the first elements in need of scrutiny. The emphatic repetition of the exclamation ἰὼ (“woe,” 1156, 1157) indicates the emotional charge of the passage and ties it to lamentation.¹⁹ These cries of woe may also relate to her inarticulate howls and shrieks whenever she prophesies.²⁰ Comparable is an earlier passage beginning with ἰὼ ἰὼ (1136–9), in which she first grieves for her own circumstances (with the pleonasm κακόποτμοι τύχαι, *kakopotmoi tukhai* “ill-fated fortunes,” 1136), then struggles to determine why Apollo has brought her to the house of Atreus, and at last determines that she is to die with Agamemnon (1139). The Chorus claim, precisely at this point, that Cassandra is out of her mind and divinely possessed (1140–5, 1150–5).²¹ Analogously, her cries in the afterlife stanza may indicate that she is in a trance. The rivers of Hades she names (1160) would then be marked as images before her, in line with the emphasis on vision in her other prophecies. In this reading of her laments, the afterlife couplet is part of

¹⁷ Rehm (2005) notes Cassandra’s unparalleled status in tragedy as a “sensually present seer,” since her prophecy also includes scents, sounds, and tactile components, 348–9. In 343–6, he discusses the use of terms for prophecy such as προφήτης and μάντις.

¹⁸ Budelmann and Easterling (2010), 294, accurately point out that Cassandra moves from her visual images to deductions drawn from them as early as verses 1095–7, and that this remains a distinct epistemic structure throughout her scene; *contra* Rehm (2005), 349.

¹⁹ Dué (2006), 152–3, compares the lament in verses 1167–71 to this passage and also gives a taxonomy of lament in tragedy, 8–21; cf. Judet de La Combe (2001), ad 1072.

²⁰ See Nooter (2017), 44–8, 138–43, for Cassandra’s cries as something between embodying an animal and channeling a god; cf. Heirman (1975).

²¹ Judet de La Combe (2001), ad 1150–5.

her visionary speech that causes an almost physical response of woe. It would thus be a prophetic, divinely guaranteed representation of her fate.

The scene, however, keeps the opposite perspective in tension. For the language surrounding the couplet could also indicate that the basis for Cassandra's declaration about the afterlife is *not* a divine vision. The Chorus proclaim that Cassandra is intelligible for the first time directly thereafter (1162–7).²² Taking their usual, overly literal approach, with its emphasis on clear communication, they now understand her mention of Hades as only referring to death. They refer specifically to being struck by a “deadly” or “murderous” (φοινίῳ, 1164) bite on account of her painful fate (δυσαλγεῖ τύχῃ, *dusalgei tukha* 1165).²³ Their response suggests that the couplet is metaphorical, nonprophetic speech.

In addition to the choral response, another clue is that Cassandra begins the larger passage (1156–61) by tapping into her own memory. She recalls her childhood by the river Scamander, which she links to the rivers of Hades. The balanced correlative construction, “then by (your banks) . . . now by (the banks of)” (τότε μὲν ἀμφὶ . . . νῦν δ' ἀμφὶ, *tote men amphi . . . nun d' amphi*, 1158, 1160) marks an analogy. This suggests Cassandra's mind at work, rather than an induced vision. The earlier passage (1136–9) could be seen as a parallel regarding this point as well. There she asks a question (“why have you brought miserable me here?” 1138) only to answer it herself with a deduction clearly not linked to any visual language (“for no reason except to die with another, what else?” 1139).²⁴ If the two passages were truly akin, Cassandra's language in the afterlife couplet would have to be read as figurative. That is, even if the image refers to her literal afterlife – rather than death – Cassandra would be speaking on her own authority; she would be speculating about what will happen to her in the hereafter. Yet there is no way to choose between these two distinct ways of reading her cries of woe and visual image of the underworld. That very fact shows that neither the markers of emotion nor the invocation of her past resolves whether the passage is literal or metaphorical, a prophecy or human inference.

²² On “clarity” in the context of the general failure of communication in this scene, see Goldhill (1984a), 81–8; and cf. Bees (2009), 190–1.

²³ On the Chorus's obtusely literal responses to Cassandra and the miscommunication this engenders, see Morgan (1994), 125. Budelmann and Easterling (2010), 292–8, argue that the Chorus demonstrates an emotional understanding of her situation despite their inability to get at her literal meaning.

²⁴ Using punctuation from Sommerstein (2008b) rather than the OCT.

Does the difference, then, relate to whether Cassandra's prophetic lines are sung or spoken? That is, can the meter of these lines determine their register? The couplet is in iambic trimeter (1160–1), whereas the earlier lines of the stanza are lyric (1156–9). Cassandra includes trimeters from 1080 onward within her four exchanges with the Chorus, of which this stanza is the penultimate. The lyric verses are sung, but it is not clear whether the trimeters are. Scholars generally agree that, at the very least, Cassandra's trimeters "indicate a note of restraint."²⁵ McClure locates Cassandra's transition away from lamentation and "involuntary" speech at her full shift to trimeters (1178ff.), which occurs only after the stanza in question.²⁶ However, Morgan (1994, 128) points to Cassandra's later "prophetic frenzy, even though she continues to speak in trimeters (1215ff.)." This is clearly accurate, as 1214–16 are verses filled with lamenting cries and references to prophetic agony (δεινὸς ὀρθομαντείας πόνος, 1215) preceding her vision of the dead children.

The issue of the afterlife couplet then turns on whether the trimeters indicate speech that the character delivers in her own voice, whereas the lyric portion is "inspired." In fact, the correlative construction (τότε μὲν ἀμφὶ . . . νῦν δ' ἀμφὶ, *tote men amphi . . . nun d' amphi*, 1158, 1160) crosses this metrical boundary. It is doubtless possible that these two parts of a single construction are delivered in different registers, but is it plausible that Cassandra would *sing* about her Trojan childhood and then *speak* her prophetic vision of the underworld? This would contradict the rest of her prophetic scene. It is therefore impossible to prove that there is a rigid correspondence between meter and content here. Meter, for us readers at least, can provide no certain guide as to the inspired status of the couplet.

A third element that indicates ambiguity traces back to the language at the heart of the couplet. The verb *ἔοικα* (*eoika*, "I seem" or "it seems that I," 1161) bears a great deal of interpretive weight in determining whether Cassandra *sees* herself in Hades or *deduces* that she will continue there. This verb crowds the Cassandra scene, occurring five times in fewer than 120 lines, more than in any other scene in Aeschylus.²⁷

²⁵ Denniston and Page (1957), 165–6; and Sommerstein (2010a), 151–4. This is the usual interpretation of Aristotle's labelling trimeter a spoken meter in *Poetics* 1449a20–26, although he does not there contrast it to lyric, but to "satyric" tetrameter. Cf. Hall 1989, 130–1, who sees Cassandra's lyricism as barbarian, set against ordered, Greek trimeters.

²⁶ McClure (1999), 94–6. For more on the changing meter in the Cassandra scene, see Weil (1908), 270–1; Fraenkel (1950), 11.487–8, 539; Lebeck (1971), 54; Goward (2004), 75–6; and Medda (2017), 111.148–55.

²⁷ *Ag.* 1062, 1083, 1093, 1161, 1180 account for five out of the eighteen uses in the Aeschylean corpus, including fragments.

The general range of meanings of *ῥοικα* relates to comparison: “to be like,” “to liken,” “to seem,” “to be seemly or fitting,” and so on.²⁸ In some Homeric uses, *ῥοικα* with the dative means “looks like,” indicating that the comparison concerns something literally visible to the speaker.²⁹ When used with a participle or an infinitive, it tends to stress the intellectual activity of comparison or conjecture: “to seem to do something,” “to be like.”³⁰ Of course, the comparison still relies on sensory input, since there must be physical indications for one thing to resemble another or for someone to seem to do something.³¹ Yet the observable component of something that “seems about to happen” is not generally emphasized.³² It would be especially difficult, typically, to read a visual meaning into the use of *eoika* with a future infinitive, since humans cannot “see” the future to compare it to the present. Thus, for Cassandra’s couplet, the normal translation of *ῥοικα* *θεσπιωδῆσειν* (*eoika thespiōdēsein*) would be, “I seem about to sing prophecies” or, in the impersonal translation, “it seems that I will sing prophecies.” This understanding of *eoika* points toward Cassandra’s mental deduction, not a literal vision.

The notion of “seeming” is not a neutral one in the *Agamemnon*, however.³³ In several other uses in the Cassandra scene, the verb *eoika* itself is part of a web of words and concepts indicating precisely the questioning of vision, communication, and knowledge.³⁴ In the first two instances of the verb, both spoken by the Elders about Cassandra, *eoika* almost

²⁸ LSJ s.v. It is rarely used in tenses other than the perfect and then ambiguous with *εἶκω*, “to be like, seem likely.” These are grouped together in Chantraine, s.v.

²⁹ LSJ I. ³⁰ LSJ II and IV; cf. Smith (1985), 34–5; and Blanc (2012).

³¹ Aeschylus emphasizes this through a peculiar use of *προσεικάζω* in *Cho.* 12. When Orestes sees the procession of women in black, he exclaims: “To what misfortune should I liken it?” See Lebeck (1971), 97–8.

³² This is evidenced by the other grouping of the term *ῥοικα*, in the *Choephoroi*: First Orestes will “seem to be a stranger” (*εἰκῶς* with the dative, *Cho.* 560), then the Chorus claim that this stranger “seems to be making trouble” (*ῥοικεν* with the present infinitive, 730). These are both knowing deceptions based on false appearance. The next two uses include future infinitives and are deduction from immediate circumstances: To the Servant “it seems” that Clytemnestra will be killed (*ῥοικε* with the future infinitive, 883–4), then “it seems” to Clytemnestra that Orestes is going to kill his mother (*ῥοικας* with the future infinitive, 922), both of which occur. Last, Clytemnestra exclaims “I seem to be singing a useless dirge, while living, to my tomb” (*ῥοικα* with the present infinitive, 926), a first-person and metaphorical usage that echoes, to a certain extent, Cassandra’s. Yet Clytemnestra’s use of *ῥοικα* is not followed by the future infinitive, nor does it have any possible “prophetic” interpretation. It is a poetically phrased deduction.

³³ As is, by now, widely recognized, see Goldhill (1984a), 14–88, and (1986), 3–29.

³⁴ *ῥοικα* with the meaning “seem” occurs in *Ag.* 1062, 1083, 1093, 1161, 1180. Within that range, the related *προσεικάζω* (“liken”) occurs in verse 1131; and *ἐξηκασμένα* (from *ἐξεικάζω*, “make like, adapt”) in 1244.

immediately indicates the unreliability of what appears to be the case (*Ag.* 1062–3 and 1083):

ἐρμηνέως ἔοικεν ἢ ξένη τοροῦ
δεῖσθαι·

The foreigner seems (*eoiken*) to need some clear interpreter.

χρήσειν ἔοικεν ἀμφὶ τῶν αὐτῆς κακῶν·

She seems (*eoiken*) about to prophesy concerning her own troubles.

In both quotations, *eoiken* with the infinitive establishes audience expectations about Cassandra, only for her to promptly subvert them. Cassandra does *not*, in fact, need an interpreter to understand Greek, as she “seems” to the Elders to need at first. Neither does she immediately prophesy about her own troubles after they declare that she “seems” about to (with the future infinitive *χρήσειν*). Rather, Cassandra surprises the Elders by communicating in Greek her uncanny knowledge of the history and future of the house of Atreus (1085–1129). The Elders’ use of *eoika* thus marks their mistaken deductions about Cassandra.³⁵ On a more general level, the Elders’ struggle to process her prophecy and their consequent inability to act on it both emphasize their limited, merely human understanding of the present, past, and – especially – future.³⁶ In this scene, they are a foil to the infallibility of Cassandra’s prophetic knowledge, which is exempted from human epistemic uncertainty.³⁷

Two possible readings of *eoika* in the afterlife couplet emerge, each with its own implications. If Cassandra’s use of *eoika* with the future infinitive is not marked as prophetic, she would be stitching an afterlife onto the end of her life without the authority of revelation. The term *eoika* would exemplify human mental deduction, what “seems” to be the case, and would thus partake of uncertainty. The second possibility derives from the warping of normally unproblematic language due to Cassandra’s abnormal abilities.

³⁵ In these cases, *εοικα* cannot be unlinked from the more prevalent *δοκέω*, in its meanings “I think, it seems to me,” LSJ 1, 11 1–4. *δοκέω* is used to mark human beliefs that in tragedy later events often contradict. The examples in the Cassandra scene are still complex. The Chorus reply to Cassandra that to them she “seems” to be prophesying believable things (ἡμῖν γὰρ μὲν δὴ πιστὰ θεοπίπειν δοκεῖς, 1213), yet do not act. Cassandra herself denounces Clytemnestra for “seeming” to rejoice at Agamemnon’s return (δοκεῖ δὲ χεῖρειν, 1238). On the connection of *δοκέω* in Aeschylus to unstable images, see Catenaccio (2011), 222–3.

³⁶ On the limits of the Chorus’s knowledge, which is partly tied to the impenetrability of what lies beyond death, see Thalmann (1985a), 114–17; cf. Knox (1972), 112, 120–3.

³⁷ Goldhill (1984a), 88. Rehm (2005), 346, contrasts Cassandra insisting on the correspondence of her prophecy with truth in *Ag.* 1195–7 and 1272–3 with the fears of false prophecy in Greek culture generally and in Cassandra’s scene specifically.

As detailed above (p. 74), Cassandra is precisely the one figure able to *see* the future. The example of the Children of Thyestes illustrates this, for they appear to her “bearing the forms of dreams” (ὄνείρων προσφερεῖς μορφώμασιν, 1218). The phrasing emphasizes that they are observable by the senses, having forms, yet are also somehow beyond perception; they are dreams seen by only the one with second sight, while she is awake and communicating to others. The disparity between Cassandra’s literal vision and that of other humans is brought to the fore by her question to the Elders about the children: “do you see?” (ὄρατε, *horate*, 1217).³⁸ They, of course, do not. The exceptional abilities of Cassandra, then, prompt us to be wary of interpreting *eoika* in this scene based on its regular usage. Due to Cassandra’s second sight, *eoika* with the future infinitive may indicate that she is having a literal vision of her own future in Hades, precisely the unseen realm. From the mouth of the still-robed priestess of Apollo, this statement about continuing in the afterlife would gain sanction from a chain of authority leading to the highest supernatural powers of the Greek pantheon.³⁹

The ethical and dramatic implications of these two possibilities for the afterlife couplet require the reexamination of the three major components of her scene in greater detail. Each of them depends almost exclusively on Cassandra’s death as total ending: the dynamics of compulsion and fate, Cassandra’s own emphasis on closure at death, and the rhetoric of resistance to fate. At the end of the final section, I will also draw out a further afterlife possibility for Cassandra. These interrelated aspects of Cassandra’s death undergo profound reversals when her possible afterlife is taken into account. Moreover, the two separate readings of her couplet we have outlined interact disparately with each theme in the scene.

Compulsion, Fate, Irony

Over the course of her scene, Cassandra reveals the increasingly powerful forces constraining her, from human coercion to divine determination. The intimations of forced marriage in three temporal realms mark her sexual, political, and supernatural captivity. In the past, Cassandra denied

³⁸ Sommerstein (2008b) punctuates this as a question: “do you see . . . ?” But the form is ambiguous with the imperative “see . . . !” Either way, all indications point to Cassandra literally seeing what the Elders cannot and continually emphasizing this disparity with her language.

³⁹ Cassandra does not disrobe until at least *Ag.* 1264. Griffith (1988), 552–3, claims that the disrobing of characters in the *Oresteia* before going to their deaths reveals their major characteristic through its loss, and that Cassandra’s disrobing is her loss of prophecy. On Apollo’s authority, see Fontenrose (1971), 85.

Apollo in connection with an aggressive erotic encounter;⁴⁰ in the present, she is an enslaved concubine to Agamemnon, the destroyer of her country; and in the future, she will be a “bride of Hades.”⁴¹ The supremely violent, sexualized depictions of this subjugated woman must be kept near to fully grasp her emotionally laden scene.

The duress of foreseeing her early death further cleaves Cassandra from the rest of humankind, who are spared the knowledge of their final day.⁴² In performance, her braided prophetic garb enmeshes her with the very god to whom she has lost her freedom.⁴³ Metaphorically, it is a net that indicates she will soon be dragged down to the underworld.⁴⁴ Yet if, as she claims, Apollo has sent her to death (1275–6), a force more pervasive than his curse oversees her demise as well – fate.⁴⁵ For Cassandra’s scene reverberates with terms that overlap in their references to destiny and death: ἀνάγκη (*anankē*, “necessity”), τύχη (*tukhē*, “fortune”), and μοῖρα (*moira*, “portion/lot/fate/death”).⁴⁶ Ostensibly, Cassandra lacks all self-determination and choice.

⁴⁰ By indicating that Apollo came to her as a “wrestler” (πρωλαιστής, 1206), Cassandra marks his act as an assault. Many audience members would have known firsthand the violence and imposition of will in actual Greek wrestling, unsuited to the disparity in power between a god and a mortal woman. Aeschylus consistently uses wrestling as a metaphor in warfare and highly charged confrontations. Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc., note that love is rarely described as a wrestler. Cf. Judet de La Combe (2001), ad 1206–8; and Medda (2017), ad loc. Since the context includes Cassandra’s human sexual slavery, her words strongly imply that the encounter was nonconsensual. Whether Cassandra escaped it through her “lying/cheating” is ambiguous. She is not with child, which is unlike other mythic sexual encounters of mortals with divinity (cf. *Od.* 11.249–50). Thus, “cheating” could be taken as a unique-in-myth reference to abortion, on which see Kovacs (1987), 333. This dynamic of unwanted pursuit and then an ambiguous/ambivalent sexual encounter with a god occurs earlier in Aeschylus with Io and Zeus throughout the *Suppliants*, befitting a play deeply concerned with unwanted and violent human sex and marriage, on which see Sommerstein (2010a), 114–18. It also seems to occur with the satyr play attached to that trilogy, the *Amymone*, in which the title character is pursued by a satyr and then is either forced by or consents to Poseidon (the sources are split), 107–8.

⁴¹ The scene’s perverted ceremonies of marriage define Cassandra as a commodity and as a virgin bound to death, see Seaford (1987), 106–7, 127–8; Wohl (1998), 110–14; Foley (2001), 92–4; Mitchell-Boyask (2006); Doyle (2008), 58–74; Brault (2009), 212–13; and Debnar (2010). On the sacrifice of virgins in general as the obverse of marriage ritual and on the motif of marriage to Hades, see Loraux (1987), 27–8; Rehm (1994); and Ormand (1999), 1–7, 95–8.

⁴² Her insight reverses the ignorance of the death day with which Prometheus mythologically “blinds” the rest of mankind (*PV* 248–50). Cf. Schein (1982), 11–12; and Rehm (2005), 350.

⁴³ Sommerstein (2008b), ad 275, identifies her costume as “most likely the ἄγρηθόν, a reticulated woolen overgarment” worn by prophets on stage, according to Pollux.

⁴⁴ See Lebeck (1971), 63–8, on the imagery and role of nets as a marker of fate and death throughout the play.

⁴⁵ For a reading of Apollo’s role in Cassandra’s destruction as more general, rather than specifically sentencing her to death, see Fontenrose (1971), 109; and cf. Roberts (1984), 65–72.

⁴⁶ These terms are extraordinarily prevalent in Cassandra’s scene: ἀνάγκη, 1042, 1071; τύχη or τύχαι, 1042, 1129 (κακόποτμοι τύχαι) 1136, 1165, 1230, 1276; μοῖρα, 1266, 1314; μόρος, 1145, 1246, 1297, 1321; and μορσίμων, 1048. Fraenkel (1950), ad *Ag.* 1535ff., gives his take on these terms, in which *Moira* (or the *Moirai*) sometimes denotes not destiny in general, but a more particular fate that invariably

Although there is much scholarship on tragic fate, Cassandra's situation differs significantly from other instances of divine compulsion in the *Oresteia*.⁴⁷ As discussed in the Introduction, the trilogy contains a number of scenes in which characters are driven by both divine constraints and human considerations into a choice between two abhorrent alternatives. As such, the decision in these fated moments is sometimes assimilated to the tragic agent's character, both their personality and political or familial role.⁴⁸ Yet the decision is also one for which the individual will suffer, the recurrent theme of *drasanti pathein*.⁴⁹ Cassandra, however, is neither a political actor nor one who can choose between sets of consequences. She frames her own situation as one without alternatives: Cassandra does not describe her cheating of Apollo as one of two paths, nor does she articulate any extenuating circumstances.⁵⁰ Cassandra also offers little by way of family curse or inherited traits by which to judge her actions toward Apollo and on stage.⁵¹

Bereft of choices, knowing her inexorable fate in advance, Cassandra is, in some respects, an exemplar of dramatic irony. The major ironies are in the disparity between the knowledge of the audience and that of the characters, dramatized in Cassandra's miscommunication with the Chorus and their failure to act on her prophecies. We get the sense that audience members ought to believe Cassandra, for their own knowledge of the story from Homer should make them fairly certain that her prophecy about Agamemnon will be fulfilled.⁵² Similarly, there seems to be a Greek literary convention about prophecy – that it always comes true, but that the characters do not know this.⁵³ Aeschylus manipulates such expectations masterfully. As elsewhere in the *Oresteia*, the staged action first correlates to the off-stage story and then puts a twist on it. The Chorus of Elders affirm Cassandra's preternatural knowledge of the past (1106, 1242–4) and, unlike

punishes each sin. Thalmann (1985a), 100–4, sees *moira* as the universal division and bounding of harmonious parts, in alternation. Rehm (2003), 70–1, conceptualizes *moira* as “the circumstances into which we are born,” contrasting *tukhē* as “‘chance’, ‘luck’, ‘fortune’, whatever ‘happens’ to us.”

⁴⁷ She differs as well from the later *OT*. Sewell-Rutter (2007), 1–14, 137–75, gives a relatively recent in-depth analysis of fate in Greek tragedy, with bibliography. However, he also claims that fate in tragedy does not have a strong causal role, depth, or significance, at least when compared with narrative genres such as epic and Herodotus' histories, 149–50.

⁴⁸ On tragic fate and the choices within it in relation to “character,” see Sewell-Rutter (2007), 174–5; cf. the discussion of tragic character in the Introduction.

⁴⁹ For the theme of “the doer suffers” or “unto the doer it is done,” see Gagarin (1976), 60–1; and Sommerstein (2010a), 195–6.

⁵⁰ Morgan (1994), 125–7; and Debnar (2010), 132–3. ⁵¹ Rosenmeyer (1982), 296–7.

⁵² On the miniature *Oresteia* in Homer, see D'Arms and Hulley (1946); and Marks (2008), 17–35.

⁵³ Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (1990), 323–4; and Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 239–41.

the Trojans, claim to believe her (1212–13). Painfully, poetically, the cursed prophetess on stage unfurls the future in (eventually) comprehensible terms. Yet, to her frustration (1254), she ends up misunderstood, pitied, and still unable to convince her interlocutors to act. Instead, the Elders try to evade the revelations (1247). They cannot and will not prevent Agamemnon's death – or Cassandra's. The ironies of the scene therefore also depend on the rupture between the uncertainty of human knowledge and the certainty of divine inspiration in literary convention.

Cassandra's prophecy provides a further set of ironies concerning her own continuity beyond death. She claims that there will be vengeance against the killers for Agamemnon and herself. This demonstrates her ability to transcend her human oppressors through knowledge that extends past her murder. It also shows that Cassandra is not meant to be seen as a futile character, for her prophecies are continually fulfilled. They structure the action of the rest of the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi*. Yet there is no further mention of Cassandra by name after her death. Once Orestes closes the circle of prophecy by taking vengeance, Cassandra seems to have entirely discharged her dramatic function and to have been lost in the process.⁵⁴ The distance between Cassandra's impassioned prophecy of vengeance for herself and the later disregard for her creates a sense that her words were in vain. The dynamics of prophecy within the scene and following it reenacts Cassandra's curse. Yet foretold doom and foretold vengeance both depend on Cassandra's death as her endpoint.

Shutting the Prophetic Eye, Silencing the Swan's Song

Cassandra's language itself heavily emphasizes death as closure. Despite the appearance of the ghost children and her couplet about singing in Hades, Cassandra seems to annul her unique connection to the afterlife. The three examples of Cassandra's use of the term "Hades" instantiate this theme. In each, it can be treated as a simple metonym for death, which translators generally do. Her first use of Hades is in a rhetorical question: "is it some hunting-net of Hades?" (1115). Here, "of Hades" ("Αἰδου, *Hadou*) only operates as a synonym for "of death/deadly." More layered is her description, mentioned above, p. 72, of Clytemnestra as a "mother of Hades" ("Αἰδου μητὲρ", *Hadou mēter*, 1235). Despite its multiple possible allusions, the modifier, on its surface, acts as a synonym

⁵⁴ On the fulfillment of Cassandra's prophecies through Orestes' vengeance, see Lebeck (1971), 54–5; Rabinowitz (1981), 168; Schein (1982), 15; and Roberts (1985), 283–97.

for “murderous.”⁵⁵ Lastly, Cassandra apostrophizes the entrance into the house of Atreus: “I address these as the gates of Hades” (Ἄιδου πύλας, *Hadou pūlas*, 1291). This reference is to both the entryway of the blood-soaked house and the gates of the underworld as a geographical place, with its well-known gates.⁵⁶ However, again there is no mention of souls or an afterlife existence. References to the underworld might call attention to the possibility of continuity, yet in the Cassandra scene, aside from the couplet in question, neither the Elders nor Cassandra touch on human existence in the afterlife. Instead, in these three references, “Hades” in the genitive attaches to a noun that represents the closure of life: the fatal net, the deadly agent, and the doors that lead to death.⁵⁷ Rather than calling attention to the underworld, these phrases are focused on death as ending.

The restriction to life can also be seen in the sole reference to divine judgment in the scene. The Elders had alluded to punishment after death before Cassandra arrived (*Ag.* 461–7). Yet when Cassandra refers to divine judgment and its results, she locates it *before* death (*Ag.* 1288–9):

οἱ δ' εἶλον πόλιν
οὕτως ἀπαλλάσσουσιν ἐν θεῶν κρίσει

Those who took the city
are coming off thus in the judgment of the gods

That is, Cassandra makes the divine punishment of the sackers of Troy coterminous with Agamemnon’s impending murder.⁵⁸ This is consonant with the Children of Thyestes, who seem to seek Agamemnon’s death, as does Clytemnestra in Cassandra’s prophecy. It is also the reasoning behind Cassandra’s repeated calls for vengeance against her murderers to take place in life. Through these, she appears to utterly deplete the prophetic power inherent in her last moments.⁵⁹ Cassandra’s own curse and the violence against others in her prophecies reinforce the idea of one’s lifetime as the locus of retribution.

Cassandra’s statements concerning vengeance are analogous to her couplet about the afterlife. She attributes them neither to a vision nor to speech from a god. Her predictions occur after she throws off her prophetic

⁵⁵ Denniston and Page (1957), ad loc.

⁵⁶ On the gates of Hades, see Vermeule (1979), 35–6; Garland (1985), 48–51; and Tasso (2016), 1–25.

⁵⁷ As such, they connect with the Herald’s “a watery Hades,” *Ag.* 667, see Chapter 1.

⁵⁸ On the links in this scene between the fall of Troy and the Atreid family curse that the Chorus avoid addressing, see Lebeck (1971), 52–8. Cf. Daube (1939), 125–8; Fraenkel (1950), ad 1288; and Knox (1972), 113.

⁵⁹ She asks the Elders “as one about to die” (ὡς θανουμένη, 1320) to bear witness for her after her death (1317).

accoutrements. Their phrasing, too, makes it difficult to see them as theologically authoritative. Cassandra's reference to judgment by an unnamed collective of deities (ἐν θεῶν κρίσει, *en theōn krisei*, 1289) is more akin in its vagueness to speculation by human choruses than to divinely inspired knowledge. Yet her declarations still carry weight; their source is a prophetess, herself on the verge of death, condemned by a god in life. Cassandra's statements about judgment in this life are thus tensely poised between divine revelation and human speculation. There is an unresolved contradiction between two possibilities of authority that mirrors the one in her couplet about the underworld. Despite the emphasis on closure, there is a pattern of doubtful authority behind Cassandra's statements. Such uncertainty may enable audiences not to take them at face value when they concern matters beyond her death.

Finally, in the last part of her scene Cassandra repeatedly describes her own death as a definitive end (1292–4):

ἐπεύχομαι δὲ καιρίας πληγῆς τυχεῖν,
ὡς ἀσφάδατος αἰμάτων εὐθνησίμων
ἀπορρυέντων ὄμμα συμβάλω τόδε.

I pray to receive a mortal stroke,
as one unstruggling; my blood having poured out
with easy death, let me close this eye.

The termination of vision in verse 1294, a physical sign of death, cuts off Cassandra's insight simultaneously with her life. It seems to contradict the notion that she could continue as a seer in Hades. Her prayer for the relief of an easy, good death (ἀσφάδατος, εὐθνησίμων) may also be seen as an attempt to obviate any punishment thereafter. For the remainder of her scene, she maintains this emphasis on total oblivion. Near her last lines, Cassandra utterly renounces living ("Enough of life!" ἀρκείτω βίος, 1314; cf. 1327). When exiting the stage into the palace, she compares mortal existence to a shadow (σκιᾶ, 1328) and its end to a picture wiped out (1329).⁶⁰ There is no hint of a shade or soul that could continue in an afterlife. In encountering her death, Cassandra wishes for closure, for a rest from struggle.

The trilogy itself reinforces the theme of closure for Cassandra. In the rest of the *Oresteia*, Cassandra goes unnamed and almost unaccounted

⁶⁰ On the sense of closure in the ending of Cassandra's scene, including the three delays before going to death, see Goward (2004), 77–8. Cf. the Chorus treating death as eternal sleep (*Ag.* 1448–51) and a way to escape knowing evils (1538–40), shortly after the Cassandra scene, analyzed in Chapter 2.

for. The three remaining references to her are all by Clytemnestra. The third was discussed above, pp. 72–3, the first two are sexualized and give her no form of continuity.⁶¹ But there is a significant aspect to the first, in which after murdering her, Clytemnestra claims that, like a swan, Cassandra has sung her last song (*Ag.* 1440–7). By so powerfully closing off the voice of the prophetess, Clytemnestra negates the idea of Cassandra “singing prophecies” in the afterlife. Together, these references to closure at death – both desired by Cassandra and imposed on her from the outside – create a potent feeling of ending. In killing Cassandra, the trilogy seems to exchange her cursed sight for eternal blindness, her singing for silence.

Resistance, Bravery, and the Possibility of Glory

In contrast to both the ironic futility of her fate and the quiet closure of her death is the theme of Cassandra’s defiance, emphasized in more recent scholarship. Cassandra resists human and even divine forces as much as she can within the parameters of her situation. Her silence in the war-chariot dramatically foils Clytemnestra’s verbosity.⁶² Cassandra’s journey into the house also reverses the dynamics of Agamemnon’s earlier exit along the same path. The king loses the battle of language to Clytemnestra, defiles with his boots the rich fabrics she lays before him (repeating his sacrilege at Troy), and knows nothing of his coming murder. The enslaved prophetess, conversely, repels the deceptive language of the queen, strips off Apollo’s prophetic robes, and leaves the stage with full knowledge of her fate.⁶³ Trampling her robes and other prophetic implements signals Cassandra’s rebellion against Apollo.⁶⁴ Her protest is predicated on her upcoming death, as can be seen in her apostrophe to those accoutrements of the god: “I will destroy you before meeting my fate (*μοίρας, moiras*)” (1266). These scraps of resistance are a crucial element of Cassandra’s scene – they return to her a measure of

⁶¹ In the second reference, Clytemnestra alludes to Cassandra by claiming that Agamemnon’s infidelity is justification for murdering him (*Cho.* 918). Debnar (2010), esp. 133–8, addresses the sexual status of Cassandra implied in these passages.

⁶² On Cassandra’s resistance through silence, as well as indications of her conformity to gender norms and barbarian status, see McClure (1999), 93–4; Hall (1989), 131; and Goward (2004), 74; *contra* Doyle (2008), 61–2, 65–74.

⁶³ Taplin (1977), 321–2; and Mueller (2016), 56–7.

⁶⁴ Mitchell-Boyask (2006), 278, focuses on tearing off the robes as a defiance of both the symbolic marriage to and prophetic control of Apollo. Cf. Sider (1978), 15–17; Morgan (1994), 128; and Rehm (2005), 351–5.

agency before she succumbs to doom. In broad outline, then, Cassandra's resistance in response to her known demise counterpoises the irony of unheeded superhuman knowledge.

The fruits of such resistance lead back to the afterlife theme, for they could continue beyond the end of her life through glory. Cassandra's attitude toward suffering and her confrontation with fate earns distinction from the Elders for bravery. As she nears her death, over some thirty verses the Chorus and Cassandra exchange assonant words with *τλ-* and *τολμ-* roots meaning "suffering," "daring," and "being courageous."⁶⁵

Within this range, the Chorus even posit that Cassandra's death is glorious (*εὐκλεῶς*, *eukleōs*, 1304). This implies that her death could have a positive outcome. Yet Cassandra herself challenges these evaluations in her exchange with the Chorus (1300–5):

Χο. ὁ δ' ὕστατός γε τοῦ χρόνου πρεσβεύεται.
 Κα. ἦκει τὸδ' ἡμᾶρ. σμικρὰ κερδανῶ φυγῆ.
 Χο. ἀλλ' ἴσθι τλήμων οὐσ' ἀπ' εὐτόλμου φρενός.
 Κα. οὐδεὶς ἀκούει ταῦτα τῶν εὐδαιμόνων.
 Χο. ἀλλ' εὐκλεῶς τοι κατθανεῖν χάρις βροτῶ.
 Κα. ἰὼ πάτερ σοῦ σῶν τε γενναίων τέκνων.

Chor. Nevertheless, the last moment is most honored.

Cass. The day has come. I will profit little by fleeing.

Chor. But know that you are courageous from a daring heart.

Cass. None of the fortunate hears these things said of them.

Chor. But I say to you it is a favor for a mortal to die gloriously.

Cass. Woe, father, for you and your noble children!

Cassandra's political and personal circumstances force scrutiny of the terms the Elders choose. When could one who has lost her city and family enjoy the "favor" or "boon" (*χάρις*, *kharis*, 1304) of a glorious death?⁶⁶ Commendations for bravery and the promise of *kleos* are both inherently problematic for someone about to be murdered. This difficulty is brought to the fore by Cassandra's insistence that she "will profit little" (*σμικρὰ κερδανῶ*, *smikra kerdanō*, 1301) by staying alive any

⁶⁵ *τλήσομαι*, 1290[1289]; *εὐτόλμως*, 1298; *τλήμων οὐσ' ἀπ' εὐτόλμου φρενός*, 1302; ὁ *τλήμων*, 1321.

⁶⁶ On the "essentially virile" glory of virgins about to die in tragedy, see Loraux (1987), 47–8. She ascribes Cassandra's victory as a *parthenos* to "agreeing to a bloody death that would launch the cycle of murders and so avenge her fallen family." This formulation, especially in its connection of victory with vengeance and glory, is problematic. First, Cassandra does not *agree* to her death, only faces it bravely, knowing that she can hardly delay it. Secondly, the only mention of glory comes from the Chorus, who do not grant it for future vengeance, but her present fortitude. Lastly, Cassandra never frames either the murder of Agamemnon or the killing of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in terms of her agency in achieving vengeance for Troy or of her own glory. Cf. Wohl (1998), 31–7.

longer.⁶⁷ The Chorus imply that such glory ought to comfort her before death, but Cassandra's negativity in verse 1303 directly refutes them. Her claim that no actually fortunate person would "hear" (ἀκούει) such things said about themselves focuses on the living.

Along these lines, Cassandra's lament to her dead family in verse 1305 has generally been interpreted as either denying a glorious death to them – and by extension, to herself – or as a *non sequitur*, completely ignoring the previous statement of the Chorus.⁶⁸ Yet her response, having no adversative particle, could instead connect her upcoming death to that of her family in the Trojan War.⁶⁹ Read this way, Cassandra is not absolutely denying her own glory but might be implicitly supporting it by invoking the nobility of her dead siblings (γενναίων, 1305). Since at least some of them died in war, they are presumably eligible for the very "boon" and "glorious death" about which the Chorus speak.⁷⁰ However, Cassandra does not differentiate them nor mark their fate as positive; rather, her lamenting response to the Chorus (ιώ, 1305) indicates that she considers that even those who died bravely in war have encountered a sorrowful fate. On this reading, Cassandra's words deny the very premise that glorious death is a boon, either to those fallen in battle or to their living relatives. None of her responses show Cassandra taking comfort in the Elders' offer of glory. She focuses, instead, on living misfortune, anguish at the moment of death, and the lamentable memory of her family.

Cassandra's rebuttals against the benefits of bravery and *kleos* in her last moments evoke another possibility. The Elders' positive valuation of her bravery at death could be directed to Cassandra's status *after* her life's end. This is an idea explicitly stated in a previous Aeschylean play, when Eteocles defends his decision to face his own brother in battle (*Sept.* 683–5). Eteocles addresses the possibility of death in a situation also framed as supernaturally imposed (in the context of a curse coming to fulfillment, ἀραὶ τελεσφόροι, *Sept.* 655). For him, the enjoyment of "profit" (κέρδος,

⁶⁷ This hearkens back to the earlier Herald's speech, where he claims that the suffering of the war has passed so that the war dead "do not even care to ever rise up again" (*Ag.* 568–9), and that for the survivors, "profit has prevailed" (νικᾷ τὸ κέρδος, *nika to kerdos*, 571[574]), see Chapter 1. Cf. Cairns (2013), xxxi–xxxiii, for Antigone's *kerdos* in escaping her evils through death (*Ant.* 460–70).

⁶⁸ Both interpretations appear in Conington (1848) ad loc.; Verrall (1904); Fraenkel (1950); Denniston and Page (1957); and Sommerstein (2008b), with the later commentators either quoting or echoing the earlier ones.

⁶⁹ Wohl (1998), 111–13.

⁷⁰ This is precisely how Euripides' Cassandra, seemingly demonstrating her madness, characterizes the fall of Troy and the death of her relatives at *Tro.* 386–402. On the glory earned in the Trojan War and for Agamemnon's loss of it, see Chapters 1, 2, and 4.

kerdos) and “glory” (εὐκλείαν, *eukleian*) occurs specifically only after life is over (“among the dead,” ἐν τεθνηκόσιν, 684–5).⁷¹ Cassandra’s statement about profiting little by extending life allows for the prospect that she, too, could benefit from glory, but only if she could continue to exist after death. Cassandra’s afterlife couplet then opens up the possibility that she might enjoy the positive outcome of glory for a brave death, in addition to the possibility that it would be merely an extension of her curse.

Summations/Connections

In line with how afterlife notions impact the rest of the *Oresteia*, the two options for interpreting Cassandra’s couplet affect the reading of fate, irony, resistance, and bravery in her scene and beyond. On the one hand, if the vision of the underworld is Cassandra’s own speculation – if her verses mean she “thinks it likely” that her punishment will continue even after death – Cassandra’s actions on stage would indicate meaningful resistance. An unspoken reason for Cassandra trampling her prophetic implements would be in order *not* to sing prophecies in Hades. They represent her accursed role, and she rejects them not only for her last few moments but also into her possible continuity in the afterlife. Cassandra would thus extend into the future her control over her own voice, an observable theme from her silence to Clytemnestra and her discursive language to the Chorus. By desecrating the tokens of Apollo’s priesthood, she would be trying to forestall an eternal continuation of compelled speaking.

In this reading, Cassandra’s actions on stage have an aspect of volition beyond the recognized ones of initial silence and walking willingly to her death. While claiming there is no way to delay her final day, Cassandra battles her fate after all. She thus expands her limited opportunity for heroism and its rewards in an unexpected way. This branch of possibilities beyond the end of her time on stage allows an audience to consider that she could enjoy the *kleos* the Chorus offers if her resistance to divine forces were successful. These actions could allow Cassandra to achieve her desired oblivion, escape from punishment through her resistance, or gain the satisfaction of recognized bravery in an existence beyond. Such a bettering of one’s fate after death is a clearly stated possibility for other main characters. Agamemnon’s children and the Chorus of the *Choephoroi* make every effort to reverse his dishonored death, going so far as to

⁷¹ Seaford (2012), 168–9.

envision him as an honored king in the afterlife (Chapter 4). Orestes claims heroic powers after death (Chapter 5). Clytemnestra's Ghost seeks a change in her honor below despite her murderous actions above (Chapter 6). Much in the same way, Cassandra's actions would overturn the narrative of her death. It becomes possible that she liberates herself from the hold of fate.

The situation would be radically different if Cassandra's vision were understood as divinely inspired. In that case, her fate would be truly ineluctable, even after death; none of her actions could thwart it. Divine provenance would unproblematically run its course using Cassandra only as a mouthpiece for prophecy. Dramatically speaking, Cassandra would be situated within the theistic structure of the *Oresteia* so that, once her prophecy is completed by the vengeance she predicts, she is forgotten.⁷² For Cassandra as a character, however, a divine fulfillment of her vision would forcibly reclothe her in the very priestly garments she trampled; her eyes would reopen, her mouth would sing again. Cassandra would gain no reprieve for her suffering through biological death, no *kleos* through bravery, and no relief from the curse of Apollo. Her afterlife could be understood as a second round of punishment.⁷³ Even the sense of completion from the trilogy's later consummation of Cassandra's prophecies would be partially undercut, since she would, presumably, be issuing new ones.⁷⁴ Perhaps her ignored prophecy would continue forever, extending the ironies of her life – there is no indication otherwise. All praise of Cassandra's resistance while living would also contribute to irony, since only punishment awaits her. In the nullification of her agency and in suffering for eternity, she would lose any reward for heroism and much of her relatable humanity.

As was demonstrated, the afterlife couplet is ambiguous between these two possibilities. Moreover, there is another option in interpretive tension with both: The couplet could be metaphorical, simply referring to death. One can thus deny any possibility of an afterlife, considering the closure and forgetting Cassandra seeks as the last word on her fate. Yet the trilogy itself does not let Cassandra rest; it revisits her afterlife through the Ghost

⁷² Cassandra, seen as a dramatic element, plays a central role in the ominous tone, divine machinery, and themes of the *Oresteia* as a whole. Cf. Morgan (1994); and Debnar (2010), 142–3.

⁷³ It would thus connect to the three choral statements about punishment in Hades, on which see Chapter 7.

⁷⁴ Though it might seem counterintuitive to sing prophecies in Hades, there is, of course, precedent: Tiresias has the ability to see the future among the dead, not as a punishment, but a gift from Persephone (*Od.* 10.490–5; 11.90–137).

of Clytemnestra's reference. This hint presents a third and different understanding of Cassandra's afterlife, from an undead character who herself continues below, who still has a voice after death (Chapter 6). Taking these indications about Cassandra's afterlife seriously returns us to the key question of this and the following chapters: What is the reason for maintaining multiple possibilities concerning continuation after death?

Instead of Cassandra's foretold ending, the couplet hints at alternatives through deliberately multivalenced vocabulary, meter, and content. The continual slipperiness of tragedy's poetic language has a role in undercutting the certainty of her speech, yet far more specific to Cassandra's couplet is the ambiguity concerning whether her end is truly her end.⁷⁵ The two readings of Cassandra's afterlife each present her as an open-ended problem. It is precisely through the tension between each possibility that Cassandra's scene can interact in a more layered way with the idea of fixed fate she herself presents.

This polysemy of endings sophisticates our understanding of her extreme constraints. Cassandra's choices become significant again – to the point that her rebellious living actions may even alter her envisioned situation in Hades. The theatrical audience may understand that Cassandra's prophecies are fulfilled, but even this does not close off her character. If she continues in the afterlife, there is always the possibility of her suffering punishments or singing new prophecies. During life, she ineffectively resists the political and divine narratives in which she is caught up; conversely, the story of her haunting Clytemnestra in Hades suggests a continuing agency, resistance, and retaliation against her own murderer. Cassandra's potential continuation also returns the possibility of some reward for her bravery, the enjoyment of which may be feasible in the afterlife. Aeschylus thus mediates between an entirely deterministic view of fate and this tragic character's humanity.⁷⁶ The enslaved, doomed seer accrues pathos in direct proportion to how nondefinitive her future is. Only thus does Cassandra circuitously reenter the contingency that envelops the rest of humankind. The afterlife multiplicity in her scene keeps even the prophetess synonymous with a fated end from being subsumed by it. Cassandra's potential for existing in the beyond reestablishes the barest basis for her freedom.

⁷⁵ For a similar dynamic, see the reversal of Oedipus' tragic fate in the *OC* as a challenge to the idea of the "tragic" in Marx (2012).

⁷⁶ These themes are far from the didactic use of her death, the "clarification," "enlightenment," or "learning" through Cassandra's suffering that a number of commentators have offered as the main effect of her scene, Gagarin (1976), 149; Lebeck (1971), 52, 58; Knox (1972), 123–4; Schein (1982), 15; and Brault (2009), 212–15.