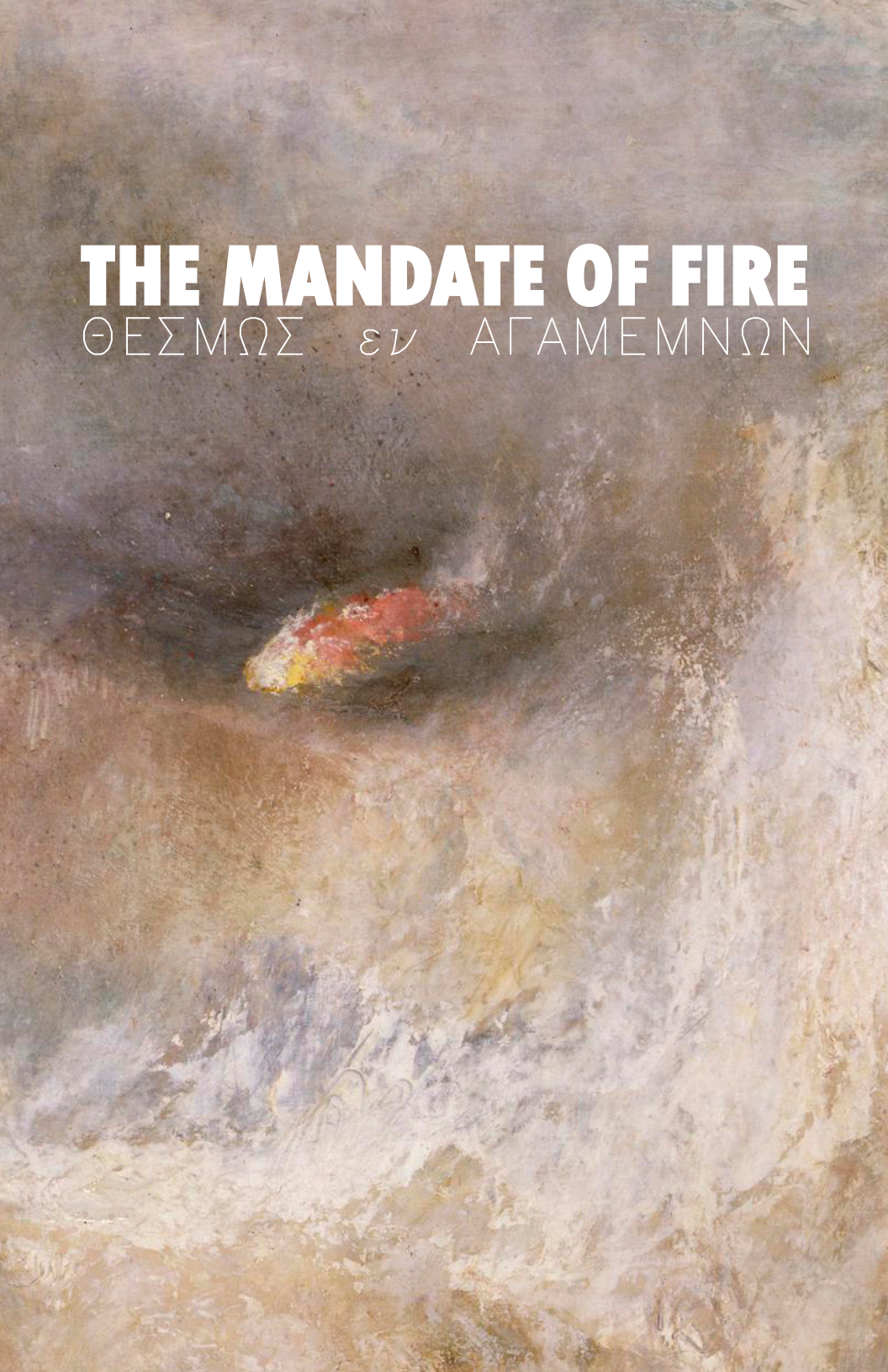
THE MANDATE OF FIRE

ΘΕΣΜΩΣ ἐν ΑΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ



THE MANDATE OF FIRE

ΘΕΣΜΩΣ ἐν ΑΓΑΜΕΜΝΩΝ

KLYTAIMESTRA Hephaistos, god of fire! He sped forth a
blazing flame from Ida!
Beacon after beacon as the fire messenger moved
from Ida to the rock of Lemnos
to the crag of Athos third,
and skimming high above the sea it shot across like joy,
the burning pine torch as another sun,
to the watcher on Makistos,
who delayed not, nor was he asleep,
so the beacon sent its sign
to sentinels of Messapion who lit a heap of heather
and sped the message on. Not yet growing dim
it leapt the plain of Asopos
bright as a moon to the cliff of Kithairon
and roused a successor of sending flame,
which the watchers did not ignore but
made an even bigger blaze
that flashed over the Gorgon's lake and
reached Mount Aigiplanktos
urging the mandate of fire further.
Then they kindled a huge beard of flame
that overleapt the Saronic Gulf
and swooped down bright upon the peak of Arachnaios,
nextdoor neighbor to us here,
and plunged at last onto the roof of Atreus—this fire
that traveled all the way from Ida.
This was my lightbringing strategy,
torch to torch over the entire course.
Victory for both the first and the last.
Such is the proof and evidence I offer you,
sent by my husband
from Troy to me
personally.

ΚΛ. Ἥφαιστος, Ἴδης λαμπρὸν ἐκπέμπων σέλας.
φρυκτὸς δὲ φρυκτὸν δεῦρ' ἀπ' ἀγγάρου πυρὸς
ἔπεμπεν· Ἴδη μὲν πρὸς Ἕρμαιον λέπας
Λήμνου· μέγαν δὲ πανὸν ἐκ νήσου τρίτον
Ἀθῶιον αἶπος Ζηνὸς ἐξεδέξατο·
ὑπερτελὴς τε πόντον ὥστε νωτίσαι
ἰσχὺς πορευτοῦ λαμπάδος πρὸς ἡδονὴν

* * * * * * * * *

πεύκη, τὸ χρυσοφεγγὲς ὡς τις ἥλιος
σέλας παραγγείλασα Μακίστου σκοπαῖς.
ὁ δ' οὔτι μέλλων οὐδ' ἀφρασμόνως ὕπνωι
νικώμενος παρῆκεν ἀγγέλου μέρος,
ἑκὰς δὲ φρυκτοῦ φῶς ἐπ' Εὐρίπου ῥοὰς
Μεσσαπίου φύλαξι σημαίνει μολόν.
οἱ δ' ἀντέλαμψαν καὶ παρήγγειλαν πρόσω,
γραίας ἐρείκης θωμὸν ἅψαντες πυρί.
σθένουσα λαμπὰς δ' οὐδέπω μαυρουμένη
ὑπερθοροῦσα πεδίον Ἀσωποῦ δίκην
φαιδρᾶς σελήνης πρὸς Κιθαιρῶνος λέπας
ἤγειρεν ἄλλην ἐκδοχὴν πομποῦ πυρός.
φάος δὲ τηλέπομπον οὐκ ἠναίνετο
φρουρά, πλέον καίουσα τῶν εἰρημένων·
λίμνην δ' ὑπὲρ γοργῶπιν ἔσκηψεν φάος
ὄρος τ' ἐπ' αἰγίπλαγκτον ἐξικνούμενον
ὥτρυνε θεσμὸν ⟨μὴ χαρίζεσθαι⟩ πυρός.
πέμπουσι δ' ἀνδαίοντες ἀφθόνωι μένει
φλογὸς μέγαν πώγωνα, καὶ Σαρωνικοῦ
πορθμοῦ κάτοπτον πρῶν' ὑπερβάλλει πρόσω
φλέγουσα· ⟨εἶτ'⟩ ἔσκηψεν ⟨εἶτ'⟩ ἀφίκετο
Ἀραχναῖον αἶπος, ἀστυγείτονας σκοπάς·
κἄπειτ' Ἀτρειδῶν ἐς τόδε σκήπτει στέγος
φάος τόδ' οὐκ ἄπαπτον Ἰδαίου πυρός.
τοιοίδε τοί μοι λαμπαδηφόρων νόμοι,
ἄλλος παρ' ἄλλου διαδοχαῖς πληρούμενοι·
νικᾶι δ' ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος δραμών.
τέκμαρ τοιοῦτον σύμβολόν τέ σοι λέγω
ἀνδρὸς παραγγείλαντος ἐκ Τροίας ἐμοί.

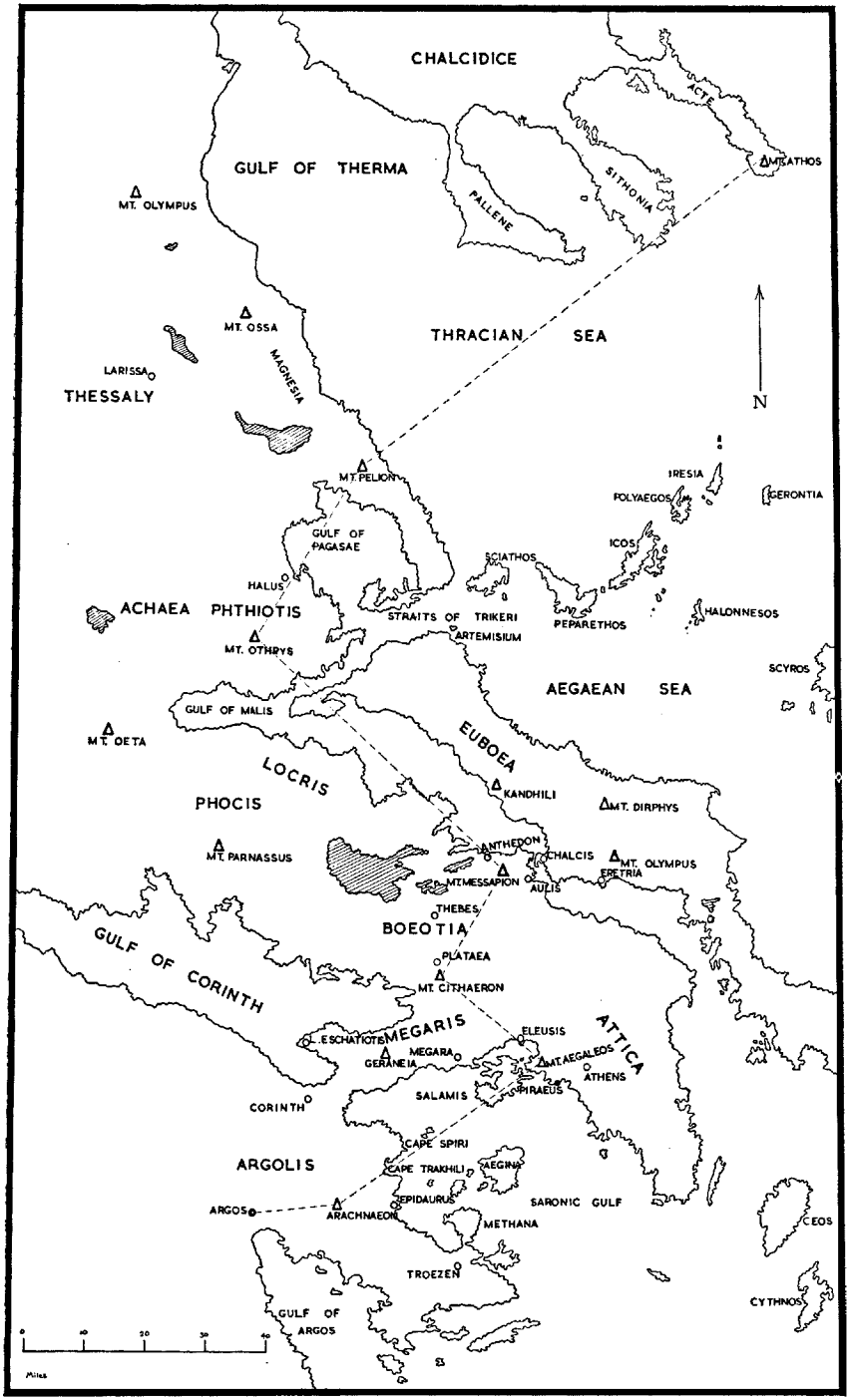
Oxford rendering

Ἥφαιστος Ἴδης λαμπρὸν ἐκπέμπων σέλας.
φρυκτὸς δὲ φρυκτὸν δεῦρ' ἀπ' ἀγγάρου[1] πυρὸς
ἔπεμπεν· Ἴδη μὲν πρὸς Ἑρμαῖον λέπας
Λήμνου· μέγαν δὲ πανὸν ἐκ νήσου τρίτον
Ἀθῷον αἶπος Ζηνὸς ἐξεδέξατο,
ὑπερτελής τε, πόντον ὥστε νωτίσαι,
ἰσχὺς πορευτοῦ λαμπάδος πρὸς ἡδονὴν

†πεύκη τὸ χρυσοφεγγές, ὡς τις ἥλιος,
σέλας παραγγείλασα Μακίστου σκοπαῖς·[5]
ὁ δ' οὔτι μέλλων οὐδ' ἀφρασμόνως ὕπνῳ
νικώμενος παρῆκεν ἀγγέλου μέρος·
ἑκὰς δὲ φρυκτοῦ φῶς ἐπ' Εὐρίπου ῥοὰς
Μεσσαπίου φύλαξι σημαίνει μολόν.
οἱ δ' ἀντέλαμψαν καὶ παρήγγειλαν πρόσω
γραίας ἐρείκης θωμὸν ἅψαντες πυρί. 3
σθένουσα λαμπὰς δ' οὐδέπω μαυρουμένη,
ὑπερθοροῦσα πεδίον Ἀσωποῦ,[7] δίκην
φαιδρᾶς σελήνης, πρὸς Κιθαιρῶνος λέπας
ἤγειρεν ἄλλην ἐκδοχὴν πομποῦ πυρός.
φάος δὲ τηλέπομπον οὐκ ἠναίνετο
φρουρὰ πλέον καίουσα τῶν εἰρημένων·
λίμνην δ' ὑπὲρ Γοργῶπιν ἔσκηψεν φάος·
ὄρος τ' ἐπ' Αἰγίπλαγκτον ἐξικνούμενον
ὤτρυνε θεσμὸν μὴ χρονίζεσθαι πυρός.
πέμπουσι δ' ἀνδαίοντες ἀφθόνῳ μένει
φλογὸς μέγαν πώγωνα, καὶ Σαρωνικοῦ
πορθμοῦ κάτοπτον πρῶν' ὑπερβάλλειν πρόσω
φλέγουσαν· ἔστ' ἔσκηψεν εὖτ' ἀφίκετο
Ἀραχναῖον αἶπος, ἀστυγείτονας σκοπάς·
κἄπειτ' Ἀτρειδῶν ἐς τόδε σκήπτει στέγος
φάος τόδ' οὐκ ἄπαπτον Ἰδαίου πυρός.
τοιοίδε τοί μοι λαμπαδηφόρων νόμοι,
ἄλλος παρ' ἄλλου διαδοχαῖς πληρούμενοι·
νικᾷ δ' ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος δραμών.
τέκμαρ τοιοῦτον σύμβολόν τέ σοι λέγω
ἀνδρὸς παραγγείλαντος ἐκ Τροίας ἐμοί.

Cambridge rendering

THE BEACON-SYSTEM FROM MT. ATHOS TO ARGOS



4

JH Quincey

CLYTEMNESTRA. Fire travels/ Fire speaks/ The God of fire raced from peak to peak/ The God of fire leapt/ scorched crackles and shrieks/ I had a hundred watchmen trained for years on highest peaks/ from here to Troy/ to light their fires when they see the smoke begin to rise from Trojan streets/ their eyes they focussed on infinity did not dare blink! They must not miss the faintest whisp that tells them something's burning/ something lives on fire/ the tunnel in the water of their eyes must pass the picture back to me/ Fire's my sign/ the sign they pass to me/ from Ida Lemnos/ Athos/ Skyros/ across the Agean Sea/ A whip lash of lightning like molten gold/ the sharks danced to see the beacons glow/ each/ sleepy watchman fired his sticks in turn/ so a current of flame streaked over Euripus/ hill to hill/ crackle scorch and burn/ it soared it swung it came/ like an avenging angel across a frozen forest of stars/ Aesopus/ it burned on to Kitheron/ burn/ the great marsh of Gorgopis/ burn burn burn/ raced on like fiery stallions to Aegyplantus peak/ lightning strokes lit the skies/ jagged veins of flame/ dancing fireflies/ then shook its beard of shimmering red/ leapt headlong across the Saronic Gulf until at last/ on Arachnus burst into bloom/ then flew like a meteor/ on to the house of Atreus/ my fire runners ran/ relay to relay/ unbroken/ my marathon of flame/ that is my news/ what have you to say?

Clyt. Hephaistos, sending forth from Ida a bright radiance. And beacon ever sent beacon hither by means of the courier fire: Ida (sent it) to the rock of Hermes in Lemnos; and a huge torch from the island was taken over in the third place by Zeus' peak of Athos; and paying more than what was due (?), so as to skim the back of the sea (?), the strength of the travelling torch joyously ⟨went on . . .⟩ the pine-tree blaze, after (?) transmitting, like a sun, its golden radiance to the look-out of Makistos. And he (i.e. Makistos), not dallying nor heedlessly overcome by sleep, did not neglect his share in the messenger's duty, and afar, over the streams of Euripus, the beacon's light gave the watchers of Messapion the sign of its arrival. They kindled an answering flare and sent the tidings onward, by setting
6 fire to a stack of aged heath. And the vigorous torch, not yet growing dim, leaped, like the shining moon, over the plain of Asopus to the rock of Kithairon and there waked a new relay of the sender fire. And the far-sent light was not rejected by the watch-post, which burned more than it had been ordered; and the light shot down over the Gorgon-eyed lake and reaching the mountain of the roaming goats urged (the watch-post) not to neglect (?) the ordinance of the fire. And they with stintless might kindled and sent on a great beard of flame, and it passed beyond the promontory that looks down on the Saronic straits, blazing onward, and shot down when (?)[1] it reached the Arachnaean peak, the watch-post that is neighbour to our city; and then it shot down here to the house of the Atridae, this light, the genuine offspring of its ancestor, the fire from Mount Ida. Such, thou seest, are the rules I arranged for my torch-bearers,—one from another in succession supplied to the full; and victor is he who ran first and last. Such is the proof and token that I give thee, transmitted to me by my husband from Troy.

Eduard Fraenkel

Hephaistos — sending a bright blaze from Ide.
Beacon did beacon send, from fire the poster,
Hitherward: Ide to the rock Hermaian
Of Lemnos: and a third great torch o' the island
Zeus' seat received in turn, the Athoan summit.
And, — so upsoaring as to stride sea over,
The strong lamp-voyager, and all for joyance —
Did the gold-glorious splendor, any sun like,
Pass on — the pine-tree — to Makistos' watch-place;
Who did not, — tardy, — caught, no wits about him,
By sleep, — decline his portion of the missive.
And far the beacon's light, on stream Euripos
Arriving, made aware Messapios' warders,
And up they lit in turn, played herald onwards,
Kindling with flame a heap of gray old heather.
And, strengthening still, the lamp, decaying nowise,
Springing o'er Plain Asopos, — full-moon-fashion
Effulgent, — toward the crag of Mount Kithairon,
Roused a new rendering-up of fire the escort —
And light, far escort, lacked no recognition
O' the guard — as burning more than burnings told you
And over Lake Gorgopis light went leaping,
And, at Mount Aigiplanktos safe arriving,
Enforced the law — "to never stint the fire-stuff."
And they send, lighting up with ungrudged vigor,
Of flame a huge beard, ay, the very foreland
So as to strike above, in burning onward,
The look-out which commands the Strait Saronic.
Then did it dart until it reached the outpost
Mount Arachnaios here, the city's neighbor;
And then darts to this roof of the Atreidai
This light of Ide's fire not unforefathered!
Such are the rules prescribed the flambeau-bearers:
He beats that 's first and also last in running.
Such is the proof and token I declare thee,
My husband having sent me news from Troia.

Hephaestus, from Ida speeding forth his brilliant blaze. Beacon passed beacon on to us by courier-flame: Ida, to the Hermaean scaur in Lemnos; to the mighty blaze upon the island succeeded, third, the summit of Athos sacred unto Zeus; and, soaring high aloft so as to arch the main, the flame, travelling joyously onward in its strength . . . the pine-wood torch, its golden-beamed light, as another sun, passing the message on to the watch-towers of Macistus. He, delaying not nor heedlessly overcome by sleep, neglected not his part as messenger. Far over Euripus' stream came the beacon-light and gave the signal to the sentinels on Messapion. They, kindling a heap of withered
8 heather, lit up their answering blaze and sped the message on. The flame, now gathering strength and in no wise dimmed, like unto a radiant moon o'erleaped the plain of Asopus to Cithaeron's scaur, and roused another relay of missive fire. Nor did the warders there disdain the far-flung light, but made a blaze higher than had been bidden them. Across Gorgopus' water shot the light, reached the mount of Aegiplanctus, and urged the ordinance of fire to make no dallying. Kindling high with unstinted force a mighty beard of flame, they sped it forward that, as it blazed, it o'erpassed even the headland that looks upon the Saronic gulf; until it swooped down when it reached the look-out, nigh unto our city, upon the peak of Arachnaeus; and next upon this roof of the Atreidae it leapt, yon fire not undescended from the Idaean flame. Such are the torch-bearers I have arranged—in succession one to the other completing the course; and victor is he who ran both first and last. This is the warrant and the token I give thee, the message of my lord from Troy to me.

Herbert Weir Smyth

CLYTAEMNESTRA:

The god of fire – rushing fire from Ida!
And beacon to beacon rushed it on to me,
my couriers riding home the torch.
From Troy
to the bare rock of Lemnos, Hermes' Spur,
and the Escort winged the great light west
to the Saving Father's face, Mount Athos hurled it
third in the chain and leaping Ocean's back
the blaze went dancing on to ecstasy – pitch-pine
streaming gold like a new-born sun – and brought
the word in flame to Mount Makistos' brow.
No time to waste, straining, fighting sleep,
that lookout heaved a torch glowing over
the murderous straits of Euripos to reach
Messapion's watchmen craning for the signal.
Fire for word of fire! tense with the heather
withered gray, they stack it, set it ablaze –
the hot force of the beacon never flags,
it springs the Plain of Asôpos, rears
like a harvest moon to hit Kithairon's crest
and drives new men to drive the fire on.
That relay pants for the far-flung torch,
they swell its strength outstripping my commands
and the light inflames the marsh, the Gorgon's Eye,
it strikes the peak where the wild goats range –
my laws, my fire whips that camp!
They spare nothing, eager to build its heat,
and a huge beard of flame overcomes the headland
beetling down the Saronic Gulf, and flaring south
it brings the dawn to the Black Widow's face –
the watch that looms above your heads – and now
the true son of the burning flanks of Ida
crashes on the roofs of Atreus' sons!
And I ordained it all.
Torch to torch, running for their lives,
one long succession racing home my fire.
One,
first in the laps and last, wins out in triumph.
There you have my proof, *my* burning sign, I tell you –
the power my lord passed on from Troy to me!

Robert Fagles

Hephästos, fern vom Ida sendend Feuerglanz.
Es schickte strahlend Fackel stets im Flammenlauf
hierher die Fackel; Ida erst zu Hermes Höh'n
auf Lemnos Eiland; aber dann, die dritt', empfieng
des Athos zeusgeweihte Scheitel ihren Strahl,
und hoch des Meeres Rücken überleuchtend, sprang,
auflodernd, fernen Wanderlichtes frohe Kraft —
die goldumstrahlte Fichte, flammend sonnengleich —
Makistos Hochwacht neuen Glanz verkündigend.
Die, zaudernd träg nicht, unbehutsam nicht besiegt
vom Schlummer, wahrten ihres Heroldsamtes treu;
und Kunde bringt, Euripos Wirbelstrome nah,
Mesapios Wächtern, schreitend fern, das Fackellicht.
Die, gegenstrahlend, sandten weit die Flamme hin,
anzündend trocknes, hochgethürmtes Heidekraut.
Beseelt von ewig reger Kraft, umwölket nie,
hinspringend über Asopos fette Fluren, traf
Kithärons Stirn, Selenens heitrer Scheibe gleich,
die Fackel, weckend immer neuen Feuerschein.
Der Flamme fernhin gleitend Licht verweigerte
da nicht der Wächter; heller stieg sie hoch empor.
Des Sees Gorgopis Wogen überhüpfend, schlug
ihr Glanz an Aegiplanktos ferne Bergeshöh'n,
dafs nimmer fehle meiner Fackelreih Gesetz.

Der Lohe Kraft entzündend, senden prasselnd sie
die mächt'ge Flammensäule hin, des Saronischen
Meerbusens weit den Blicken offnen Strand von fern
zu überstrahlen; hoch sich hebend weiter trifft
Arachnäos Felsenwache nah sie dieser Stadt.
Von dort erreichet endlich dies der Atreiden Dach
das Licht, noch Ida's Vaterstrahl nicht unverwandt.
So war der Fackelsender Reihe dort bestellt;
in steter Folge wahrte jeder seines Amts;
doch sieget, wer der erste, wer der letzte läuft.
Ein solches Zeichen, solche Kunde sag' ich dir,
die mein Gemahl von Troia her mir sendete.

The pattern of destruction in the *Oresteia* beginning with the murder of Thyestes' children, the killing of the pregnant hare by Zeus' eagles and the needless bloodshed at Troy leading to the sacrifice of Iphigenia ending in Clytemnestra's murderous revenge and the matricide by Orestes, follows a discernible design of crimes against the filial bond, analogous to the reactions of the mother-goddess to the impediment in the process of creation. Similarly, the fire symbol reaches a magnitude in its relationship to the nature of Clytemnestra. She revels in her relay of beacons. The dancing tendrils of her signals are reflections of her own scaring impulses, the flames of deprivation engulfing her in their blind blaze. The message heralding Agamemnon's victory and arrival is picked up by the relay, the fire growing brighter and intenser as it reaches Argos. Aeschylus skilfully builds up a feeling of impending calamity and disaster with his magnificent description of the beacons, "... the flare sickened never, but grown stronger yet ..." (l. 196) The malevolence and anticipation of revenge in Clytemnestra's beacon speech flare up, kindling primitive emotions within her and finally becoming a consuming holocaust before the relay actually reaches Argos. H.D.F. Kitto says, "... the beacon speech lifts what was no more than a competent piece of organization to the level of something more elemental. The first word is 'Hephaestos' ; the fire-god himself has brought her the news,... Again she speaks : she gives a vivid picture of the tumult and slaughter within the conquered city—and we remember the omen, and the anger of Artemis."[8] The stages in which Clytemnestra has worked herself up for the murder reveal an image of the divine mother. The mythical pattern follows Demeter, the earth-mother, mourning for Persephone, until the cycle of seasons is established by her return (see ll. 1389-92).

CLYTEMNESTRA

A god of fire sprang from the peak of Ida
And swift as a glance with news of the fall of Troy
Alit in flames on Hermes' crag—
The tip-top height of Lemnos. Leapt again
And landed on Athos. There in a flash,
The rock of Zeus was ablaze—
And my watchers were ready to feed it.
Then that flame took off, in a frenzy,
With a single stride it crossed the Aegean—
One giant wingbeat of lightning,
Showering the sea with glitter,
Bringing fish up out of the depths to be dazzled—
It landed on the heights of Makistos.
The watchman there was awake, he refreshed it
With a gloomy stack of timber,
And flung its fiery word, like a meteor,
Over the dark lands
To the channel of Euripus,
Where the Messapian guards were waiting for it.
They fed it with heath and thorns.
Stronger than ever, in a single bound
It crossed the plain of Asopus
And landed like the glare of the moon
On the crags of Cithaeron. The watchman there
Urged it on, with a crackling explosion,
From a tower of conifer trunks.
It soared over the swamp of Gorgopis
To the mountaineers awake in Aegiplanctus—
Overjoyed they heaped their beacon
With everything that would burn.
Then the far-travelled flame, redoubled,
Shook its tongues and leapt
Across the headland by the gulf of Saronis,
Touched the crag of Arachne
That overlooks us in Argos, and at last
After its huge flight—the flame descended
Direct from the flames of Troy—
Alit here, on the roof of this palace.
This was the relay race of my torchbearers.
And this is my proof—this flame. Sent to me
Straight from burning Troy by Agamemnon.

Ted Hughes

Cly. No less than Vulcan, sending forth from Ida
A brilliant light; beacon sped beacon on,
Caught from the courier-flame: Ida to Lemnos,
And its Hermæan ridge: then next the third,
The height of Athos, Jove's own hill, received
The mighty torch-fire, from the island sent—
And soaring high, to overcast the sea,
The greatness of the travelling lamp fared on,
A pine-tree blaze, transmitting, like a sun,
Its golden radiance to Makistus' watch:—
Who not delaying nor in careless wise
O'ercome by sleep neglects a herald's part,
But far away on to Euripus' stream
Tells to Messapium's guards the light's approach:
And they in turn lit up and sped it on,
Kindling with fire a pile of aged heath.
Then in its strength the lamp, not yet grown dim,
Quick leaping o'er the Asopus' meadow, like
The joyous moon, towards Cithæron's ridge,
Woke up a new relay of missioned flame—
There too the watch spurned not the fiery gift
Far sent, but lit up brighter than the rest,
And o'er the lake Gorgopis shot the light,
And to the mount of Ægiplancton coming,
Urged them to keep the ordinance of flame—
And they, with might unstinted kindling it,
Send the great beard of fire on, blazing up
Far on to passing o'er the mirror strait
Of the Saronic gulf: and then it shot,
And then it came to the Arachnæan height,
The watchtower neighbouring to this city here;
Then shoots to this our roof, the Atridæ's roof,
The light, linked on to Ida's grandsire flame—
Such is the fashion of our Race of Lamps,
Each in succession ministering to each,
And both alike are conquerors, first and last.
Such proof and token show I forth to thee,
My lord the source that sent it me from Troy.

KLYT The god of fire dispatched his blaze from Ida's peak:
beacon sent beacon on to here; Hephaistos was
my courier. He leapt from Ida to the rock of Hermes
in Lemnos; from that island Zeus's peak, the Mount
of Athos, was the third to take the mighty blaze:
then, rising up to skim the sea,
the travelling torch passed on;
the golden pine-tree gleaming like the sun
came and announced its radiant joy at Makistos.
The man on watch there was not lazy, nor did he neglect
his task as messenger, bemused by sleep: from far away
the beacon's light across the streams of Euripos
told of its coming to the guardsmen of Messapion.
They lit their pyre in answer, sent the message on
by lighting up a pile of aged brushwood.
The light did not grow dim, but full of strength
it leapt across the plain of Asopos, just like
the shining moon, to reach the rock of Kithairon
and wake a new relay of beacon-fire.
Nor did the men on duty there reject
the distant fire, but kindled even more than any yet:
the light then darted down across the lake of gorgon eyes
and reached the mountain of the roving goats,
rousing the guard there to respect the fire's command.
They did not stint their strength, but sent it further on,
igniting a great beard of flame, which passed
beyond the promontory that looks upon
the Gulf of Saron: then it darted ever on, and came
to Mount Arachneion, the lookout nearest to our city;
from there the fire leapt down to this, the house of Atreus–
a true descendant of the blaze on Ida.
So the commands I gave my light-bearers were all
fulfilled, as each took over from the one before;
and victory belongs to every one, the first as well as last.
Such is the proof and token which I give to you,
sent by my husband here to me from Troy.

'Twas Vulcan: sending forth the blazing light
From Ida's grove, and thence along the way
Hither the estafette[1] of fire ran quick:
Fire kindled fire, and beacon spoke to beacon,
Ida to Lemnos, and the Hermæan ridge:
Next Athos, craggy mountain, Jove's own steep,
Took the great torch held out by Vulcan's isle.
Standing sublime, the seas to overcast,
Shone the great strength of the transmitted lamp;
And the bright heraldry of burning pines
Shone with a light all golden like the sun
Rising at midnight on Macistus' watchtower:
Nor did Macistus not bestir him soon,
Oppress'd with sleep, regardless of his watch;
But kindled fires, and sent the beacon-blaze
To distance far beyond Euripus' flood,
To watchmen mounted on Messapian hills;
They answer'd blazing, and pass'd on the news,
The grey heath burning on the mountain top.
And now the fiery, unobscured lamp,
At distance far shot o'er Asopus' plain;
And up the steep soft rising, like the moon,
Stood spangling bright upon Cithæron's hill.
There rose, to give it conduct on the road,
Another meeting fire; nor did the watch
Sleep at the coming of the stranger light,
But burnt a greater blaze than those before:

Thence o'er the lake Gorgopis stoop'd the light,
And to the mount of Ægiplancton came,
And bad the watch shine forth, nor scant the blaze.
They burning high with might unquenchable,
Send up the waving beard of fire aloft,
Mighty and huge, so as to cast its blaze
Beyond the glaring promontory steep
Athwart the gulf Saronic all on fire;
Thence stoop'd the light, and reach'd our neighbour watchtow'r,
Arachne's summit; and from thence, derived
Here to the Atridæ's palace, comes this light
From the long lineage of the Idæan fire.
Such is the course of the lamp-bearing games,
When torches run in solemn festivals
One from another, in succession fill'd,
And the last runner and the first is victor.
Such are my proofs, and such the signal news,
Sent by my consort from the plains of Troy.

CLYTAEMESTRA:
Hephaestus, sending beams from Ida's peak.
One beacon sparked another, bringing news
like Persian couriers. Mount Ida flashed
to Hermes' cliff on Lemnos. Zeus's peak,
sheer Athos, caught the island's giant flame.
Its fire's penetrating strength then leapt
its bounds and skimmed the water's back for joy.
< . . . >
A blazing pine, as though a sun, cast beams
of gold on heights of Mount Macistus next.
Nor had that hill succumbed to thoughtless sleep.
It played the ready messenger at once.
Its light flew far across Euboea's straits,
alerting those who guard Messapium.
They played their part and sent the message on,
igniting piles of withered shrubbery.
The stalwart signal, far from growing dim,
vaulted across the plain Asopus soaks,
like moonbeams lunging toward Cithaeron's peaks.
There it aroused another traveling flame,
for lookouts didn't spurn the distant light
but kindled even more than they were told.
And so it leapt the bay called Gorgon's Eye,
striking the nearby goat-infested hill
and rousing it to keep the fire's law.
Sparing no effort, it creates a beard
of flame, a giant blaze that overleaps
the cape that guards the blue Saronic strait
and then descending quickly comes to rest
at Spider Hill, our city's lookout place.
From there the light, grandchild of Ida's flame,
invades this royal house of Atreids.
Such was the relay race for beacon lights
that I devised, and they completed it,
each runner, first and last, victorious.
And that's the sort of proof I offer you,
the sign my husband sent to me from Troy.

Clyt. The Fire-god flashed it hither from Mount Ida.
Fire was the post, and beacons were the stages.
First Ida sent him to the Hermæan bluff
Of Lemnos, whence the flaring torch that rose
Was caught by Athos, Jove's own promontory;
Thence, high aloft, far-glancing o'er the sea,
The blazing pine sped on the travelling flame,
Making strange sunrise on Makistos' height,
Who, ready for that dawn, neglected not
A courier's office, but gave token soon
Across Euripus to the watchmen set
On far Messapius. They replied, and sent
The glad news onward, setting fire to a heap
Of world-old heather. And the mighty flame,
Abating nought of his bright power, o'erleapt
Asopus' flats, and, like a brilliant moon,
Touching the forehead of Cithæron, roused 19
A fresh relay of courier torches there:
Nor was the travelled messenger denied;
But, reinforcing him, that mountain-guard
Sent forth a fuller blaze than all before,
To strike beyond Gorgopis' bay, and reach
The mount of Ægiplanctus, where it stirred
Loyal renewal of the appointed fire.
Heaping on fuel with unsparing hand,
They raised a beard-like pyramid of flame,
Whose light shot past the foreland that looks down
Towards Ægina, till it lit on the height
That crowns our city, this Arachnian hill,
Whence, lastly, on the Atridæ's roof lights down
That lineal offspring of the Idæan flame.
Such torch-race had we ordered and prepared,
In bright successive courses ministered.
But here, one runner, first and last i' the race,
Hath touched the goal and shouted "Victory!"
Such is the proof and token I proclaim,
Sent by my husband from the heart of Troy.

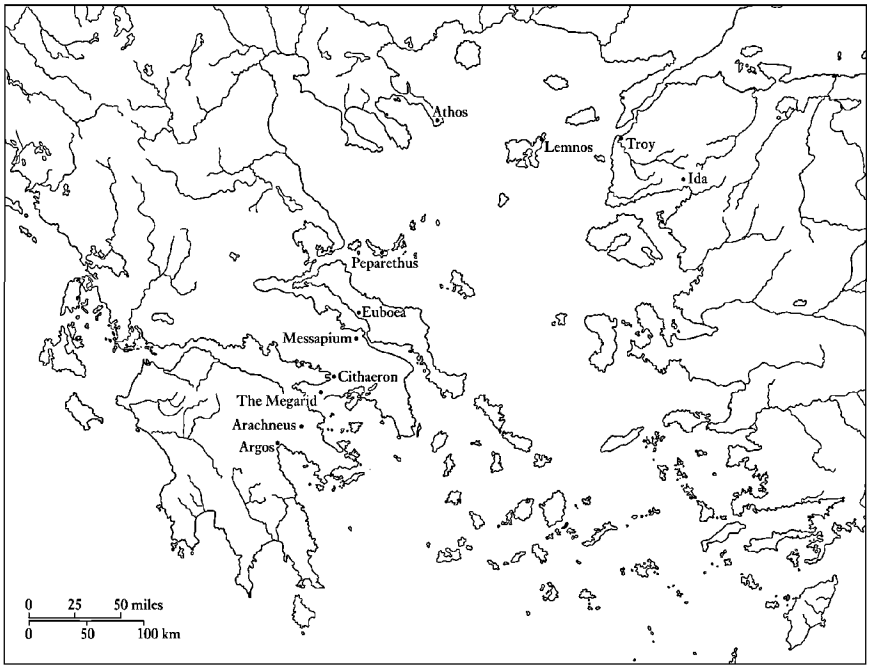
Lewis Campbell

Forth from the mountain of Ida the bright flame sent by Hephæstos
Darted; from beacon to beacon the courier-fire sped its swift flight.
First from Mount Ida it glanced to Hermes's island of Lemnos;
Then to Mount Athos the torch sped its way, and from that it flew onwards,
Skimming the sea in its joyous career; taking with it a splendour
Like to the sun in its might, till it reached the watch-towers of Macistus,
Nor was the watchman there made by sleep of his duty neglectful.
On sped the flame from Macistus, and crossed the wild streams of Euripus.
There in its turn 'twas received, and sent on by Bœotian watchers,
Lighting with fire a bundle of sticks. Still the torch sped unwearied,
Bounding as far as Cithæron, beyond the plain of Asopus.
There like a Phœnix forthwith from its ashes a new flame was kindled,
Which, having crossed the lake of Gorgopis, comes to the mountain
Called Ægiplanctus, and roused the watch there, so that in the succession,
All that night long there was no gap left, but the watchers exulting,
Sent on the bearded flame, which, blazing, passed by the great headland
Under which may be seen the Saronic gulf and its islands.
Next it gave a great bound, and arrived at the Mount of Arachnæ,
Whence the next leap brought it here, to the royal city Mycenæ.
There you may see it, of the fire of Mount Ida the lineal descendant.

She then proceeds to explain that by this beacon-light she knows Troy now to be in possession of the Greeks. She describes what she believes is the state of things within and without Troy, praying that the captors may have mercy on the captives, and reverence the gods of the country. If the victors return to their homes with evil consciences towards the gods, the curse of the gods will follow. Here she seems obscurely to hint at the approaching fate of her husband, justifying her deed in some way beforehand.

Cly. Hephæstos, a bright flash from Ida sending.
Hither through swift relays of courier-flame,
Beacon transmitted beacon. Ida first
To the Hermaean rock on Lemnos' Isle;
Thence Athos' summit, dedicate to Zeus,
The third in order, caught the mighty glow.
Upsoaring, bridging in its might the sea,
With gathered strength, the onward speeding torch,
In golden splendour, like another sun,
Its message to Makistos' watch-tower sends,
Who, nor delaying, nor by Sleep o'erpowered,
The courier's duty faithfully discharged.
The torch, far-gleaming to Euripos' stream,
Gives signal to Messapios' sentinels.
Firing of withered heath a giant pile,
With answering blaze, they pass the message on.
The stalwart flame, unwearied and undimm'd, 21
Like a bright moon, o'erleaps Asopos' plain,
And wakens, on Cithaeron's lofty crag,
Another speeder of the fiery post.
The warder hailing the far-journeying fire,
Kindles a beacon of surpassing glow;
Bounded the radiance o'er Gorgopis' lake,
And reaching Aegiplanctos' mountain peak
Urged on without delay the fiery chain.
With vigour unimpaired they onward send,
Kindled anew, a mighty beard of flame,
O'erlooking Saron's gulf. Down shooting then,
The blaze, alighting on Arachnae's height,
The city's nearest watch-tower, reached its goal;
Thence to the roof of Atreus' son this light
Darted,—true scion of Idaian fire.
Thus in succession, flame awakening flame
Fulfilled the order of the fiery course:
The first and last are victors in the race.
Such is the proof, the warrant that I give
Of tidings sent me by my Lord from Troy.

Vulcan, who lifted high a glittering torch
On Ida; whence succeeded fire to fire,
Faro to Faro spake—Made first reply
Lemnos, who caught the spark, and sent it on
From its Hermæan cliff; the Athoan mount,
Sacred to Jove, received it straight; and next,
That air-enkindling meteor, like a sun
Crossing the breast of ocean with a speed
Plumed by its joy, diffused a golden beam
On high Macistus; there, no careless guard,
Nor conquered by untimely slumber, stood
To propagate the flame, whose brilliance glanced
Along the current of the Euripus,
And warned the watchmen of Messapio.
They lighting their dry pyramid of heather,
Gave answer to the summons, carrying soon
The tidings; O'er Asopus' plains, that broad
And vigorous lustre, like the unclouded moon,
Piercing the night, upon Cithæron's peak,
Raised a progressive signal-fire, that, with
A volume even mightier than the rest,
Returned the flash, that winged its rapid flight
Far over the Gorgopean pool, nor staid
Till it reached Eglipanthon; there supplied
With a fresh impulse to exchange its gleams,
It proudly eminent raised its crimson crest
Above the cope of the Saronic strait,
And struck Arachne's crags, whose station-points
O'erhang our city, whence that beacon lit
The palace of the Atridæ. Every torch
Was born of that gendered on Ida's top;
And as amid the race of torches one
Succeeds another Lampadist in the course,
Thus these alternate signals, save that they,
The first and last, gained equally the prize.
And hence a certain argument I draw,
That they are the clear heralds of my lord,
Announcing his return to me from Troy.



23

Lazlo Solymar

SETH: You git along to the orchard, folks. I'll jine you there. (*They walk back around the left of the house and disappear. He goes to* LAVINIA *eagerly*) Say, I got fine news fur you, Vinnie. The telegraph feller says Lee is a goner sure this time! They're only waitin' now fur the news to be made official. You can count on your paw comin' home!

Clytaemestra

Hephaestus, who cast forth the shining blaze from Ida.
And beacon after beacon picking up the flare
carried it here; Ida to the Hermaean horn
of Lemnos, where it shone above the isle, and next
the sheer rock face of Zeus on Athos caught it up;
and plunging skyward to arch the shoulders of the sea
the strength of the running flare in exultation,
pine timbers flaming into gold, like the sunrise,
brought the bright message to Macistus' sentinel cliffs,
who, never slow nor in the carelessness of sleep
caught up, sent on his relay in the courier chain,
and far across Euripus' streams the beacon flare
carried to signal watchmen on Messapion.
These took it again in turn, and heaping high a pile
of silvery brush flamed it to throw the message on.
And the flare sickened never, but grown stronger yet
outleapt the river valley of Asopus like
the very moon for shining, to Cithaeron's scaur
to waken the next station of the flaming post.
These watchers, not contemptuous of the far-thrown blaze,
kindled another beacon vaster than commanded.
The light leaned high above Gorgopis' staring marsh,
and striking Aegyplanctus' mountain top, drove on
yet one more relay, lest the flare die down in speed.
Kindled once more with stintless heaping force, they send
the beard of flame to hugeness, passing far beyond
the promontory that gazes on the Saronic strait
and flaming far, until it plunged at last to strike
the steep rock of Arachnus near at hand, our watchtower.
And thence there fell upon this house of Atreus' sons
the flare whose fathers mount to the Idaean beacon.
These are the changes on my torchlight messengers,
one from another running out the laps assigned.
The first and the last sprinters have the victory.
By such proof and such symbol I announce to you
my lord at Troy has sent his messengers to me.

Clyt. Hephaestus, sending bright shine forth from Ida; and with posting fire one beacon hither still kept forwarding another on; Ida to Hermes' ridge in Lemnos, and from the island next did Athos, the steep of Zeus, receive third in his turn a mighty brand; and, mounting high, to put the ocean at his back, ... thereby announcing, like another sun, his golden radiance to the summits of Makistos. And he was by no means tardy or heedlessly overcome by sleep, to slack his duty; far over Euripus' flood his beacon light arrived, giving signal to the watchers on Messapion. They, setting fire to a stack of old gray heather, lit up an answering glare and passed the message further on: and the blaze in vigour and undimmed leaped over, like the shining moon, Asopus' plain, and coming to Cithaeron's ridge aroused a fresh relief of missionary fire. The far-
26 sped light was not rejected by that station, which burned more than their bidding; their light pitched beyond the lake Gorgopis and arriving at mount Aegiplanetus urged the fiery ordinance to make no tarrying; and kindling up with liberal ardour they sent onward a great beard of flame, that it should pass right beyond the promontory that looks down on the Saronic gulf, so blazing; then it pitched, when it had reached the Arachnaean steep, the watch-peak neighbouring the town: and then upon the roof of the Atridae here a gleam alighted that may claim an ancestry in fire of Ida. Such was the arrangement of my torch-bearers,—one from another in succession still supplied; and victory is with him who ran in the first place and the last.

Here is the warrant and the token that I give you, forwarded for me by my lord from Troy.

CLYT. Hephaestus; his bright flame from Ida sprang,
And fast in fiery post the beacons flew,
As one dispatched another: Ida first
To Hermes' hill in Lemnos; third the mount
Of Zeus in Athos caught the mighty brand
From the island thrown in turn. Then towering high
To clear the broad sea's back, the travelling torch
Shot up to the very sky the courier flame,
In golden glory, like another Sun,
Fame to the far Makistos messaging:
Whose fiery office no defaulting sleep
Or tarrying sloth let fail; his ensign flying
Over the Sound Euripos made aware
Messapion's watchmen of his advent; they
With answering countersign, a kindled stack
Of old gray heather, passed the word along:
Which vigorous lamp with unabated force
Did shining as the bright Moon overleap 27
Asopus even to Cithaeron's ridge,
There to wake new dispatch; nor being aroused
That watch denied the far-sent missioner;
They burned above their bidding, and their light
Went sailing far beyond Gorgopis lake
To the heights of Aegiplanctus, urging still
No dallying in the breathless ordinance.
Whereat with liberal heart aloft they sent
Flame in a great beard streaming, that his flight
Should clean beyond the foreland pass, that looks
O'er the Saronic gulf; nor ever stooped
His pinion ere he gained our neighbouring height,
Arachnae's vigilant peak: alighting thence
Upon the Atridae's roof a gleam there came,
That Ida's fire his ancestor may claim.
This was the ordering of my torchmen's race,
One from another in succession still
Supplied and plenished; and he that won
Was he *ran first*, though last in all this run.
Here is the proof and warrant of my joy,
Pass'd onward for me by my lord from Troy.

Walter Headlam, 1910

CLYTEMNESTRA.

A Fire-god, from Mount Ida scattering flame.
Whence starting, beacon after beacon burst
In flaming message hitherward. Ida first
Told Hermes' Lemnian Rock, whose answering sign
Was caught by towering Athos, the divine,
With pines immense—yea, fishes of the night
Swam skyward, drunken with that leaping light,
Which swelled like some strange sun, till dim and far
Makistos' watchmen marked a glimmering star;
They, nowise loath nor idly slumber-won,
Spring up to hurl the fiery message on,
And a far light beyond the Eurîpus tells
That word hath reached Messapion's sentinels.
They beaconed back, then onward with a high
Heap of dead heather flaming to the sky.
28 And onward still, not failing nor aswoon,
Across the Asôpus like a beaming moon
The great word leapt, and on Kithairon's height
Uproused a new relay of racing light.
His watchers knew the wandering flame, nor hid
Their welcome, burning higher than was bid.
Out over Lake Gorgôpis then it floats,
To Aigiplanctos, waking the wild goats,
Crying for "Fire, more Fire!" And fire was reared,
Stintless and high, a stormy streaming beard,
That waved in flame beyond the promontory
Rock-ridged, that watches the Saronian sea,
Kindling the night: then one short swoop to catch
The Spider's Crag, our city's tower of watch;
Whence hither to the Atreidae's roof it came,
A light true-fathered of Idaean flame.
Torch-bearer after torch-bearer, behold
The tale thereof in stations manifold,
Each one by each made perfect ere it passed,
And Victory in the first as in the last.
These be my proofs and tokens that my lord
From Troy hath spoke to me a burning word.

Gilbert Murray

KLYTEMNESTRA

Hephaistos the fire-god, beaconing the news,
Flashed a courier-chain of fires from peak to peak.
First from Mount Ida to Hermes Hill
In Lemnos. Mount Athos, the Rock of Zeus,
Boosted the great flame on
Across the waves, skimming the ocean's back –
A radiant messenger, branched
With golden fire, a second sun
To bring its dawn of news to Makistos' cliffs.
The watchman there was quick to pass
The message on. Glinting on Euripos' waters
It reached watchers in Messapion.
They lit an answering flame,
Dead heather kindled to new fiery life.
On went the message, a bright torch
Flaring across Asopos' plain,
A new moon above the peaks of Kithairon.
Another fire . . . and another . . . flashed
Across Gorgopos Lake to Aigiplanktos Mount.
There watchers seized the flame and matched it
To a great hoop of fire
Across the Saronic Gulf,
Faster, brighter, to Mount Arachne
Where our own neighbours kept their vigil.
So, from there, in one final leap,
The blazing news reached Argos,
Hot from the peaks of Troy
To the palace here, home of the sons of Atreus.
Such is my proof, my certainty!
Fire, fire, fire overtaking fire,
Sent to me from Troy by my king,
Agamemnon himself.

The fire, that from the height of Ida ſent
Its ſtreaming light, as from th' announcing flame
Torch blaz'd to torch. Firſt Ida to the ſteep
Of Lemnos; Athos' ſacred height receiv'd
The mighty ſplendor; from the ſurging back
Of th' Helleſpont the vig'rous blaze held on
Its ſmiling way, and like the orient ſun
Illumes with golden-gleaming rays the head
Of rocky Macetas; nor lingers there,
Nor winks unheedful, but its warning flames
Darts to the ſtreams of Euripus, and gives
Its glitt'ring ſignal to the guards that hold
Their high watch on Meſapius. Theſe enkindle
The joy-denouncing fires, that ſpread the blaze
To where Erica hoar its ſhaggy brow
Waves rudely. Unimpair'd the active flame
Bounds o'er the level of Aſopus, like
The jocund Moon, and on Cithæron's ſteep
Wakes a ſucceſſive flame; the diſtant watch
Agnize its ſhine, and raiſe a brighter fire,
That o'er the lake Gorgopis ſtreaming holds
Its rapid courſe, and on the mountainous heights
Of Ægiplanctus huge, ſwift-ſhooting ſpreads
The lengthen'd line of light. Thence onwards
waves its firey treſſes, eager to aſcend
The crags of Prone, frowning in their pride
O'er the Saronic gulf: it leaps, it mounts
The ſummit of Arachne, whoſe high head
Looks down on Argos: to this royal ſeat
Thence darts the light that from th' Idæan fire
Derives its birth. Rightly in order thus
Each to the next conſigns the torch, and fills
The bright ſucceſſion, whilſt the firſt in ſpeed
Vies with the laſt: the promis'd ſignal this
Giv'n by my lord t' announce the fall of Troy.

The Fire-God, kindling his bright light on Ida!
Beacon to beacon fast and forward flashed,
An estafette of fire, on to the rocks
Of Hermes-hallowed Lemnos: from that isle
Caught, thirdly, Jove-crowned Athos the red light,
That broader, skimming o'er the shimmering sea,
Went travelling in its strength. For our delight
The pine-torch, golden-glittering like the sun,
Spoke to the watchman on Macistus' height.
Nor he delaying, nor by careless sleep
Subdued, sent on the fiery messenger:
Far o'er Euripus' tide the beacon-blaze
Signalled to the Messapian sentinels.
Light answering light, they sent the tidings on,
Kindling into a blaze the old dry heath;
And mightier still, and waning not a whit,
The light leaped o'er Asopus' plain, most like
The crescent moon, on to Cithæron's peak,
And woke again another missive fire.
Nor did the guard disdain the far-seen light,
But kindled up at once a mightier flame.
O'er the Gorgopian lake it flashed like lightning
On the sea-beaten cliffs of Megaris;
Woke up the watchman not to spare his fire,
And, gathering in its unexhausted strength,
The long-waving bearded flame from off the cliffs
That overlook the deep Saronian gulf,
As from a mirror streamed. On flashed it; reached
Arachne, our close neighbouring height, and there,
Not unbegotten of that bright fire on Ida,
On sprang it to Atrides' palace roof.
Such were the laws of those swift beacon-fires:
So flash the torches on from hand to hand
In the holy rite, brightest the first and last.
Such is the proof and sign of victory
Sent by my husband from now captured Troy.

Henry Hart Milman

Clytemnestra's 'beacon speech' (*A.* 281–311) recounts the ordered advance of fire signals from Troy to Argos. At once a story of action and a catalogue of beacon sites, this narrative is characterized by parataxis: an accumulation of narrative elements joined by various terms without temporal significance (*de*, *te*, *kai*). Here, however, the various elements are clearly ordered in a temporal sequence, and this narrative order corresponds to the sequence of events in the fabula. Indeed, Clytemnestra speaks of 'laws' (*nomoi*, 312) that govern the transmission of the signal from one beacon to the next: her narrative of this regulated sequence reproduces the order which her narrative implicitly attributes to the events themselves.[28] Coincidence of temporal orders here serves to demonstrate and, to some extent, to put on display the effectiveness of the 'laws' of the beacons. The narrative thus 'explains' how the beacons function, as it demonstrates the skillful forethought and conspicuous talents of Agamemnon's capable wife. Here, then, the organization characteristic of catalogues helps sustain the order of both fabula and story.[29]

The Fire-god; he bade Ida's light ride post.
Torch after torch sped hitherward relays
Of courier fire. First Ida to the crag
Of Lemnos, hight Hermæan, Athos third,
The peak of Zeus, caught the great torch in turn,
And welcomed it from the island; then with glee,
On travelling in its power, the blazing pine
With one o'ermastering swing on the back o' the sea
Tossed its bright message to Macistus' towers,
Like a great sun all gleaming golden light.
No laggard he, nor captive ta'en by sleep
In senseless bonds, passed his part duly on.
And from afar the beacon light went post,
Reached the Euripus streams, and signal made
To watchmen of Messapium; they lit up
An ancient pile of heather, fire to fire
Gave answer, and the message onward sped.
Then the strong glare in no wise growing dim,
Like a bright moon sprang o'er Æsopus' plain,
Leapt on Cithæron's crag, and ready there
Another relay roused of herald fire.
The watchman did not turn his back upon
The bright far-travelled stranger, honouring it
By burning twice as much as those before.
Then on Gorgopis, and its bay, the light
Shot, and the height of Ægiplanctus won
Compelled the marshalled fire make no delay.
With might and main a right great beard of flame
They onwards flung in fiery might outcast
O'er the great headland, far in front that stands,
And sees the gulf Saronic at its feet.
Then it swooped down, and reached Arachne's height,
Our city's neighbour, standing sentinel,
And then it perched upon this roof o' the kings,
This light, the lineal heir of Ida's fire.
So run the torch-runners the appointed course;
Each takes from other, all in change fulfilled,
This wins the race both first and last in one.
Such sign I give and voucher for my words;
Such message sends my lord from Troy to me.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Hephaestus sent his brilliant courier from Mount Ida,
and from beacon to beacon the signal flame flashed here.
From Ida to the rock of Hermes at Lemnos,
from that island, third in line, on to Mount Athos,
sacred to Zeus, the great flame blazed.
Then, onward and upward, gaining strength,
soaring high above the seas,
this mighty torch forged ahead.
Sunlike, the pine-wood fires passed
their golden message to Macistus' tall towers.
Straightway, the vigilant watchman,
shaking off exhaustion, did his duty,
and far over Euripos' stream shone the beacon's light,
signaling to the sentinels on Messapion.
They, kindling a heap of brittle brushwood,
34 lit their answering fires and sent the message on.
Vaulting the plain of Asopus,
the never-dimming flame burned brighter still,
shining like the radiant moon,
until it reached the rocks of Cithaeron.
There, the watchful guards lit a blaze
brighter than they were ordered, and shot
the light far across Gorgopus' swamp,
to fall upon the heights of Aegiplanctus.
Without question or delay they built
a mighty beard of flame so vast it reached
even the Saronic gulf's jutting headland.
On it sped, down to the lookout near our city,
perched on the peak of Arachnaeus,
until, at last, it struck the roof of this House of Atreus,
a flame akin to its Trojan ancestor.
This relay-race of torches where all complete
the course and both first and last are victors,
was arranged at my command.
This is my proof, the sign I spoke of,
my husband's message, sent from Troy.

CLYT. Hephaestus,—flashing forth from Ida's crest
To post with swift relay of fiery steeds
From beacon unto beacon. Ida first
To Hermes' crag in Lemnos flung the flame,
To make third station, soaring from the isle,
At Zeus' own sanctuary aloft on Athos;
Where, towering high to bridge the sea's broad span,
The giant courier-blaze made joyful boast
That never sun shot message-beam more bright
With golden glory to Macistus' towers.
Who, faltering not nor merged in lethargy,
Fulfilled his part; athwart Euripus' flood
Unto Messapium's sentinels afar
Fled on the signal; they with answering flame
From swiftly-kindled stack of withered heath
Tossed on the story: strong, unquenchable,
O'er the Asopus-prairie leapt the light,
Ruddy as rising moon, eager to wake
High on Cithaeron's crags fresh train of radiance.
There in no churlish wise the watchmen fed
The travelled ray with fuel multiplied,
Whose gleam o'ershot Gorgopis bay, and sprang
To th' heights of Aegiplanctus, challenging
New ministry of fire; that tarried not,
But kindled lavishly a fount of flame
And sent it streaming high, clean to o'erleap
The bluff that frowns on the Saronic strait
And make true landfall where our warder-post
Crowns Arachnaeum's crest; thence to alight
Upon this royal roof, last of his line,
True issue of Mount Ida's beacon-fire.
So for this pageant marshalled I my team
In ordered sequence of replenishment.
First shall be last, and last be first: the race
Is unto him who first attains his goal.
Such is the warrant of my certitude
To speak a message of my lord from Troy.

JC Lawson

Hephästus, indem er vom Ida sendet hellen Feuerschein. Und kraft einer Postenlinie feuriger Signale schickte ein Brand den andern hieher. Der Ida nämlich sendet den seinigen zu Lemnos' hermäischem Vorgebirg, und von dieser Insel empfing Zeus' heilige Höhe von Athos die dritte mächtige Leuchte. Und übermächtig, um des Meeres Rücken zu decken, verkündete die Macht der lustig wandelnden Flamme sonnengleich von hier aus ihr goldstrahlendes Fichtenlicht der Warte auf Mekistós. Der aber hat nicht etwa zögernd oder in unvorsichtigen Schlaf gewiegt die Pflicht des Boten versäumt, sondern kündigt des Feuerzeichens Ankunft weithin über Euripus' Strömungen der Wache des Mesapios an. Die gaben Flammenantwort und förderten die Botschaft weiter durch Entzündung eines Haufens dürren Heidekrauts. Und kräftig und noch nicht ermattet sprang die Lohe, gleich einem hellen Mond, über Asopus' Flur auf Cithärons' Felsenhaupt, um der Feuerbot-
36 schaft neue Folge zu erwecken. Und die Wache dort verweigerte fernhinstrahlende Leuchte nicht, zum Aether sendend eine weiter zu fördernde Flamme. Und so schlug das Licht hinüber über den gorgopischen See, bis es, angelangt an Aegiplanktus' Berg, ermunterte, um die Feuerordnung nicht vermissen zu lassen. Und reichlich schürend entsenden diese mächtiger Flamme Schweif, dass sie fernhin lodernd auch das auf den saronischen Busen herabschauende Gestade überspräng und dann weiter schlug, bis sie zur arachnäischen Warte nächst der Stadt gelangte; und nunmehr schlägt es in der Atriden Schloss, das Licht, das im idäischen Feuer den Urahn nicht verleugnet. Siehe, das waren für meine Fackelläufer die Satzungen, deren eine von der andern aus erfüllt ward durch Ablösungen; und Sieger ist der erste wie der letzte. Dies Zeichen, dieses Unterpfand nenn' ich dir, das mein Gemahl aus Troia mir gesendet hat.

CLYTEMNESTRA. Hephaestus! He sent a bright gleam of fire out from Ida; and beacon sent on to beacon here from the messenger-fire in relays, Ida to Hermes' crag on Lemnos; and Zeus' steep on Athos was third in taking up the great torch from the island. Rising high in its strength to cross the ocean's back, the journeying flare in pleasure [*at least two lines missing*] the pine-torch, passing on the message of its brilliant golden gleam like a sun to the watch-point on Macistus. The man there made no delay at all nor failed his part as messenger by carelessly letting sleep overcome him, and from far away the beacon-light signals to the watchmen at Messapion that it has reached Euripus' currents. They lit their flare in response and passed the message forward, kindling fire in a heap of ancient heather. Strong and not yet dimmed the flare leapt above Asopus' plain like the shining moon to Cithaeron's crag, and woke a further relay in sending on the fire. The watch did not refuse the light sent from so far, the fire they burned was more than had been ordered. Over the Gorgopian lake the light dashed down; as it reached the Wander-Goat Mountain it urged no delay in the orders for the fire; they send it on, their ungrudging zeal making a great beard of flame blaze upward, to cross also the foreland which looks down on the Saronic narrows, onward as it flamed; then it dashed down, then it came to the steep of Arachnae, the watch-point neighbouring our city; and then it dashes down to the roof-top here, of the Atreidae—this light which is a true grandchild of the fire on Ida. 37

There you have my arrangements for the beacon-bearers! One after another in succession they were performed in full; the first and last to run were winners. Such is the token and proof for my telling you that my husband has passed his message on to me from Troy.

'Twas Vulcan was the messenger, *he* fired the beaming light!
The streaming flame from Ida came, and blazed upon its height:
And Ida sent the warning on to the Lemnæan steep,
And quick upon Mount Athos' top, the burning fire did leap!
Then on the surging ocean's back, the kindling flame of pine
With ruddy blaze, like some sun's rays, all gleamingly did shine!
Quick, quick, o'erleaping ocean's waves, on went the speeding lamp;
The watchman of Macistus saw, as he his round did tramp:
He linger'd not, but sent it on, and soon the light did gleam
From such a self-same beacon flame, back from Euripus' stream:
The watchman of Mesapius saw the glittering signal burn,
And spread the light by kindling bright a heap of wither'd fern.
Azopus' plain the blazing torch, in brightness no way dim'd,
Unto Cithæron's rugged steep, like dancing moonbeams, skim'd:
Torch blazed to torch! fire answer'd fire! the kindling beacons burn:
And through the night, the far-sprung light the wakeful watch discern.
Gorgopis' darken'd waters then reflect the crimson light:
With rapid force it speeds its course to Ægiplancton's height:-
High o'er the steeps from peak to peak, it flashes high and higher,
Until the mountain-range becomes *one streaming beard of fire!*
The frowning crags that towering rise o'er the Saronic stream,
To Arachne's height then sent the light, like the lurid lightning's gleam!
38 Till Argos saw the beacon blaze that Ida had begun,
And knew with joy that mighty Troy was captured and won!

Clytæm. Hephæstos flashing forth bright flames from Ida :
Beacon to beacon from that courier-fire
Sent on its tidings; Ida to the rock
Hermæan named, in Lemnos: from the isle
The height of Athos, dear to Zeus, received
A third great torch of flame, and lifted up,
So as on high to skim the broad sea's back,
The stalwart fire rejoicing went its way;
The pine wood, like a sun, sent forth its light
Of golden radiance to Makistos' watch;
And he, with no delay, nor unawares
Conquered by sleep, performed his courier's part:
Far off the torch-light to Euripos' straits
Advancing, tells it to Messapion's guard:
They, in their turn, lit up and passed it on,
Kindling a pile of dry and aged heath.
Still strong and fresh the torch, not yet grown dim,
Leaping across Asôpos' plain in guise
Like a bright moon, towards Kithæron's rock, 39
Roused the next station of the courier flame.
And that far-travelled light the sentries there
Refused not, burning more than all yet named:
And then the light swooped o'er Gorgôpis' lake,
And passing on to Ægiplanctos' mount,
Bade the bright fire's due order tarry not;
And they, enkindling boundless store, send on
A mighty beard of flame, and then it passed
The headland e'en that looks on Saron's gulf
Still blazing. On it swept, until it came
To Arachnæan heights, the watch-tower near;
Then here on the Atreidæ's roof it swoops,
This light, of Ida's fire no doubtful heir.
Such is the order of my torch-race games;
One from another taking up the course,
But here the winner is both first and last;
And this sure proof and token now I tell thee,
Seeing that my lord hath sent it me from Troïa.

302 f. Poets are not always kind to their interpreters, or to topographers looking for straightforward identifications. Aeschylus here plays hide and seek with them. In this description, which undoubtedly as Wilamowitz says (*Griech. Tragoedien* ii. 307 n. 1) 'reveals exact knowledge of the localities', he twice substitutes a poetic circumlocution for a proper name. *αἰγίπλαγκτον*, 'ranged over by goats', can hardly have suggested to Athenian ears the name of a mountain, and it is quite possible that Aeschylus coined the word (cf. on 12 *νυκτίπλαγκτον*) himself.[1] It has been generally assumed, following Ernst Curtius, *Peloponnes*, ii. 552, that Geraneia is meant, and this is undoubtedly right. It is true that the *ὄρος Μεγαρίδος* of the scholiast, which is consistent with this assumption, could easily have been got from the context (cf. on 289 *Μακίστου*). But a glance at the map shows that a line drawn from Kithairon over the westernmost tip (cf. on 306 f.) of the Saronic Gulf to Arachnaion must pass through Geraneia, or at least its outlying spurs. It would in any case be absurd to go out of one's way to find some insignificant hill-top between Kithairon and the straits east of the Isthmus, with the mighty mass of Geraneia there at hand, *ἠερίη Γεράνεια*, familiar to every Athenian from so many of its aspects. And throughout this speech it is clearly the high mountain tops dominating their surroundings that are selected for the beacons; in such a connexion any idea of a minor elevation in the foothills is obviously inappropriate.

304. *ὦτρυνε* (as often from Homer downwards) has a dependent infinitive, the object of which is *θεσμὸν πυρός*. The object of *ὦτρυνε* did not need mentioning, since it can be understood without ambiguity from the preceding lines: it is the watch on the *αἰγίπλαγκτον ὄρος*, or—it comes to the same thing—the mountain itself (cf. 290 f.). The expression *θεσμὸν . . . πυρός* is irreproachable, continuing as it does the idea of *τῶν εἰρημένων* (301). It would be incomprehensible that the obviously genuine *θεσμόν* should have been assailed again and again, did we not know that many critics, when at a loss over a notorious corruption, look round in the neighbourhood, seize upon a word which is perfectly good in itself, find fault with it, and so patch up the whole in sorry fashion. Here there can be no mistaking the seat of the corruption: *μὴ χαρίζεσθαι* does not make sense. Early critics of Aeschylus were quite clear about this. Older conjectures, from Triclinius' *δὴ χαρίζεσθαι* downwards, are sufficiently refuted by Ahrens, 497. Heath's *χατίζεσθαι* still finds supporters; it is supposed to mean 'hortabatur ne constituta ignium lex desideraretur' (Enger in Klausen, 2nd ed.). Th. Bergk's objection that there is no evidence for a passive of *χατίζειν* has not been overthrown by Hermann. Even more serious is the syntactical difficulty involved in a passive infinitive construction depending on *ὦτρυνε*. Weil is justified in his argument (1858) against both Heath's conjecture and Casaubon's *μὴ χρονίζεσθαι*,[2] adopted by many editors: 'quae mihi videntur abhorrere a Graecorum usu loquendi, qui non solent verba hortandi et iubendi, ut Latini *iubere*, cum infinitivo passivo iungere'. Several editors seem as a matter of fact to take *χρονίζεσθαι* as a middle, e.g. Paley (who regarded *χρονίζεσθαι* as a *pis aller*, see below): 'and urged on the succession [?] of the fire not to linger in its course'; Headlam: 'urged the fiery ordinance to make no tarrying'. But such a middle can hardly stand in view of the general use of *χρονίζειν*, and in particular of *Sept.* 54 *καὶ τῶνδε πίστις οὐκ ὄκνωι χρονίζεται*. None of the numerous conjectures really commends itself, and I find myself in agreement with Paley: 'the reading is so uncertain that it has been marked with an obelus.' What one expects is an infinitive in the sense of 'obey', 'respect', or, if *μή* is the poet's own (and this is by no means certain), 'not to neglect' or something similar.

Eduard Fraenkel

CLYTEMNESTRA.

From Ida's top Hephæstus, lord of fire,
Sent forth his sign; and on, and ever on,
Beacon to beacon sped the courier-flame.
From Ida to the crag, that Hermes loves,
Of Lemnos; thence unto the steep sublime
Of Athos, throne of Zeus, the broad blaze flared.
Thence, raised aloft to shoot across the sea,
The moving light, rejoicing in its strength,
Sped from the pyre of pine, and urged its way,
In golden glory, like some strange new sun,
Onward, and reached Macistus' watching heights.
There, with no dull delay nor heedless sleep,
The watcher sped the tidings on in turn,
Until the guard upon Messapius' peak
Saw the far flame gleam on Euripus' tide,
And from the high-piled heap of withered furze
Lit the new sign and bade the message on.
Then the strong light, far-flown and yet undimmed,
Shot thro' the sky above Asopus' plain,
Bright as the moon, and on Cithæron's crag
Aroused another watch of flying fire.
And there the sentinels no whit disowned,
But sent redoubled on, the hest of flame —
Swift shot the light, above Gorgopis' bay,
To Ægiplanctus' mount, and bade the peak
Fail not the onward ordinance of fire.
And like a long beard streaming in the wind,
Full-fed with fuel, roared and rose the blaze,
And onward flaring, gleamed above the cape,
Beneath which shimmers the Saronic bay,
And thence leapt light unto Arachne's peak,
The mountain watch that looks upon our town.
Thence to th' Atrides' roof — in lineage fair,
A bright posterity of Ida's fire.
So sped from stage to stage, fulfilled in turn,
Flame after flame, along the course ordained
And lo! the last to speed upon its way
Sights the end first, and glows unto the goal.
And Troy is ta'en, and by this sign my lord
Tells me the tale, and ye have learned my word.

EDA Morshead

CLYTEMNESTRE.

Non ! je le tiens des dieux ennemis du mensonge.
Sur le mont Arachné, vois l'ardent tourbillon :
Il devait s'allumer quand la forte Ilion,
Tombée aux mains des Grecs, gigantesque décombre,
De l'herbe sur son front sentirait flotter l'ombre.
Or, ce feu qui vers nous accourt d'un pied léger,
Tu le vois, c'est Vulcain, le divin messager,
Qui, de l'Ida parti, des mers franchit l'abîme,
Et jusqu'à l'Arachné bondit de cime en cime !
Maintenant, espérons que les vainqueurs chez nous
Ne rentrent point chargés du céleste courroux ;
Qu'ils ont, pieux soldats, dans la ville abattue,
De la sainte Clémence honoré la statue.
Sinon, malheur sur eux !... Je ne répondrais pas
Que le deuil et la mort ne marchent sur leurs pas !

CLYTEMNESTRA: The God of Fire from Ida sent forth light
And beacon from beacon brought the trail of flame
To me. From Ida first to Hermes' cliff
On Lemnos, and from thence a third great lamp
Was flashed to Athos, lofty mount of Zeus;
Up, up it soared, and lured the dancing shoals
To skim the waves in rapture at the light;
A golden courier, like the sun, it sped
Post-haste its message to Macistus' rock,
Which vigilant and impatient bore it on
Across Euripus, till the flaming sign
Was marked by watchers on Messapium,
Who swift to answer kindled high the blaze
Of withered heath, whence with new strength the light
Undarkened yet rose like the radiant moon
Across the valley of Asopus, still
Relayed in glory, to Cithaeron's heights.
Onward it sped, not slow the sentinels
But burning more than was commanded them,
Till at one leap across Gorgopis' lake
To the peak of Aegiplanctus it passed the word
To burn and burn, and they unsparing flung
A flaming comet to the cape that looks
Over the gulf Saronian. Suddenly
It swooped, and pounced upon the Spider's Crag,
Next neighbour of this city, whence at last
It found its mark upon the roof of Atreus,
That beacon fathered by the fires of Ida.
Such were the stages of this torch-relay,
One from another snatching up the light,
And the last to run is victor in the race.
That is my evidence, the token which
My lord has signalled out of Troy to me.

It is the beacon fire on Ida's crest
By flaming convoys that hath brought the news.
From Ida's woods to the Hermæan crag
Of Lemnos—then from Lemnos to the heights
Of Athos—Athos consecrate to Jove—
Passed the broad brand of flame. Then towering high
And gathering strength, e'en as it sped its course,
It spanned the sea, and, like a golden sun,
Flashed its red glow athwart Macistus' cliffs.
And there the watchman, watching not in vain,
44 Wrought at his labour till Euripus' flood
Reddened again, and by Messapian towers,
Heaping the beacon high with withered heath,
His comrades saw and sped the message on.
Then without stop or stay, nor yet bedimmed,
Like a bright moon, the flaming herald flew
Over Asopus' plain, and wakened up
Fresh fiery signals on Cithæron's rock.
Nor did the watchman on that distant height
Refuse the flaming message sent from far;

But sped it on till, blazing yet more high,
It swooped on the Gorgopian lake and climbed
The cliffs of Ægiplanctus, warning wide
To heap the bale-fire with unstinting hand.
And then rekindled, in unbroken might,
Swept the huge beard of flame, and soared above
The headland which looks down upon the waves
Of the Saronic gulf, and thence once more
It flashed upon the Arachnæan cliffs
And the watch-towers that near the City stand,
Till on the Atreidæ's roof it lighted last,
Claiming descent from Ida's far-off fires.
  So have I ordered the succession due,
As in a torch race, where each man in turn
Receives from other; and the first and last
Is deemed victorious. Now thou hast the proof
Of the news sent me by my lord from Troy.

The Fire-god :—he from Ida splendour hurled.
Beacon to beacon flung the courier-flame
Hitherward. Ida gleamed to Hermes' crag
In Lemnos. From the isle that giant torch
Did Athos third, the scaur of Zeus, receive.
Soaring o'er flame-lit ridges of the sea
That torch triumphant journeying in his strength,
The pine's gold-gleaming splendour, like a sun,
Passed to Makistus' heights its message on :
Nor loitering he, nor heedless, as by sleep
O'ermastered, failed his part in heralding :
But o'er Euripus' flood the beacon-gleam
Far-flying brought Messapius' watchmen word.
They flashed back answer, sped the tidings on,
Touching with fire a heath-pile sapless-old.
46
The Titan torch in yet unminished might
High leaping o'er Asopus' plain—it seemed
A bright moon rising—to Kithairon's crag,
Uproused a new relay of courier-fire.
And there the watch disowned it not, the light
Far sent, but lit a huger bale than all.
And the glare darted o'er Gorgopis' mere,
And, winning unto Aigiplanktos' hill,
Bade, 'Stint not ye the ordinance of fire!'
Uptossed they, kindled in unscanted might,
A giant beard of flame that glaring soared
Over the foreland that on Saron's firth
Looks : down it lightened then, until it won
Arachnê's watchtower-steeps hard by our town.
Thence to the Atreids' palace down it flashed,
This far-descended child of Ida's fire.
Thus they which ran my torch-race by such rule,
Hand passing it on to hand, fulfilled their course ;
Victor the first is, though he raceth last.
Such sign, such token, tell I unto thee
Of tidings sent me by my lord from Troy.

Every word tells. The fire becomes a courier, leaping from height to height. Instead of a vague generalization, all the mountains are singled out and painted. The scaur (λέπας) of Lemnos, with its sides scarred and seamed by torrents; the great upheaved cone or hump (αἰπὸς) of Athos; the scaur again of Cithæron; the watch-height of Macistus; the beetling headland looking down on the Saronic Gulf; the flame passing from pinnacle to pinnacle, now ridging the sea with fire, now like "the golden sun," and now like "the pale clear moon;" at one time *lifting* itself like a gigantic torch, at another tossing and shaking its "mighty beard of fire;" now stooping over the Gorgopian lake, and now blazing up from the pile of "grey old heath:" all these are exquisite poetical touches, worthy of the first of sensuistic artists; that is, of artists who think only of addressing their compositions to the senses.

47

In the mouth of Clytemnestra this description answers another purpose. Put side by side with the elaborate artificial description, which follows, of the capture of Troy, it intimates the veil of restraint thrown over her intentions: it betrays the real coldness, at least, of her affections: and it exhibits her as a queen "grandiloquent and noble," in order to balance the degradation of her character as an adultress; and so to preserve, as in the case of Agamemnon, some mixture and proportion of good and evil, lest either the good should extinguish the blame, or the evil should obliterate the pity, and in either case the moral lesson should fail of its personal application.

CLYT. Hephaestus, launching a fine flame from Ida,
Beacon forwarding beacon, despatch-riders of fire,
Ida relayed to Hermes' cliff in Lemnos
And the great glow from the island was taken over third
By the height of Athos that belongs to Zeus,
And towering then to straddle over the sea
The might of the running torch joyfully tossed
The gold gleam forward like another sun,
Herald of light to the heights of Mount Macistus,
And he without delay, nor carelessly by sleep
Encumbered, did not shirk his intermediary role,
His farflung ray reached the Euripus' tides
And told Messapion's watchers, who in turn
Sent on the message further
Setting a stack of dried-up heather on fire.
48 And the strapping flame, not yet enfeebled, leapt
Over the plain of Asopus like a blazing moon
And woke on the crags of Cithaeron
Another relay in the chain of fire.
The light that was sent from far was not declined
By the look-out men, who raised a fiercer yet,
A light which jumped the water of Gorgopis
And to Mount Aegiplanctus duly come
Urged the reveille of the punctual fire.
So then they kindle it squanderingly and launch
A beard of flame big enough to pass
The headland that looks down upon the Saronic gulf,
Blazing and bounding till it reached at length
The Arachnaean steep, our neighbouring heights;
And leaps in the latter end on the roof of the sons of Atreus
Issue and image of the fire on Ida.
Such was the assignment of my torch-racers,
The task of each fulfilled by his successor,
And victor is he who ran both first and last.
Such is the proof I offer you, the sign
My husband sent me out of Troy.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Hephaestus.
It was he who sent the bright gleam blazing on its way
from Troy's Mount Ida; and then beacon after beacon
passed along a chain of couriers to here.
The hills of Ida sent it to Hermaeon crag on Lemnos;
from that island, next the towering promontory
of Athos took in hand the mighty torch.
Then, flaring bright to leap across the sea's rough back,
<the flame-light reached Peparathos,
where piles of resin-pine passed on>
the golden sunlike messenger to make its landfall
on the lookout peak of Macistos.
That stage was not delayed by carelessness or sleep,
but flashed the beacon-signal far across the straits of Aulis
to the watchmen on Massapion.
They kept the sequence going strong by lighting heaps
of dried-out brushwood, so the torch undimmed
jumped right across the plain of Asopus
to rouse the next link of the chain high on Cithaeron's crags.
The watch there kindled even more, and sent the beacon
swooping over Gorgon Lake to Mount Geranion.
The men there waiting, keen to follow, sent the beard of flame
across the headland overlooking the Saronic gulf.
And then it swooped and safe arrived
on Arachnaeon's height, our neighboring lookout point.
So finally it leapt upon this rooftop
of the sons of Atreus—this light,
direct descendant from the fire of Troy.
This is the way I organized my relay race
of beacons, carried to its end
by handing on from one stage to the next.
Such is the quality of proof I tell you of,
transmitted from my man at Troy to me.

KLYTAIMNÊSTRA:

A courier of fire,
from peak to peak,
from Troy to Argos,
beacon signals from fire-god Hêphaistos.
In the flash of an eye,
it sped from Ida to Hermês Crag on Lêmnos,
then leapt to Athos, where the Rock of Zeus
took flame in the night,
and rising high above the sea's back,
a speeding torch,
a second sun,
it brought its dazzling news to the heights of Makistos.
The watchers, awake,
waste no time in feeding the flame
and speeding it across the waters of Euripos
to the sentinels waiting on Messapion.
There they kindle an answering flame
with heather and dry brush,
till it blazes to the shame of its predecessor,
then leaps like a brilliant moon,
across the Plains of Asopos
to light on the peaks of Kithairon,
igniting fire after fire
that flashes the news on its course.
And the distant flame is not rejected by the watch,
but urged onward beyond the Swamp of the Gorgon
to the Mountain of Roving Goats,
where the watch does itself proud.

Sparing nothing,
they set blazing a mountain of kindling
that shakes its great head of flaming hair
and soars out across the headland
that looks down upon the Gulf of Saron,
then down and down to Spider Peak,
the watchpost nearest our city—
and,
in one final leap,
plunges to the roof of this palace
of the sons of Atreus.

This is my proof!
This my certainty!
Fire upon fire upon fire,
a relay race of flame,
sent me by my king from the blaze at Troy,
my husband,
Agamemnon.

Clytem. Hephæstus. He from Ida shot the spark;
And flaming straightway leapt the courier fire
From height to height; to the Hermæan rock
Of Lemnos, first from Ida; from the isle
The Athóan steep of mighty Jove received
The beaming beacon; thence the forward strength
Of the far-travelling lamp strode gallantly
Athwart the broad sea's back. The flaming pine
Rayed out a golden glory like the sun,
And winged the message to Macistus' watch-tower.
There the wise watchman, guiltless of delay,
Lent to the sleepless courier further speed;
And the Messapian station hailed the torch
Far-beaming o'er the floods of the Eurípus.
There the grey heath lit the responsive fire,
Speeding the portioned message; waxing strong,
52 And nothing dulled across Asopus' plain
The flame swift darted like the twinkling moon,
And on Cithæron's rocky heights awaked
A new receiver of the wandering light.
The far-sent ray, by the faithful watch not spurned,
With bright addition journeying, bounded o'er
Gorgópus' lake and Ægiplanctus' mount,
Weaving the chain unbroken. Hence it spread
Not scant in strength, a mighty beard of flame,
Flaring across the headlands that look down
On the Saronic gulf. Speeding its march,
It reached the neighbour-station of our city,
Arachne's rocky steep; and thence the halls
Of the Atridæ recognised the signal,
Light not unfathered by Idæan fire.
Such the bright train of my torch-bearing heralds,
Each from the other fired with happy news,
And last and first was victor in the race.
Such the fair tidings that my lord hath sent,
A sign that Troy hath fallen.

We can use this principle to interpret the ambiguous speeches and their meanings in the play. Clytemnestra exploits it to create a discrepancy between what she says and what she means. She is adept at meaning both more and less than she says. Her purposeful deceit resides in her ability to dissociate what she means from what she says, and her chain of beacon fires demonstrates this skill. While the ingenious signal system serves severally to warn her of Agamemnon's return, display her command of technological resources, and disclose her masculine character (a woman of man-counseling heart), it also demonstrates Clytemnestra's control over the process of communication. Clytemnestra gives two proofs of Troy's fall to the chorus, two speeches that, viewed in the context of communication and exchange, could not be more different. The first speech is a purely technical description of how the message traveled from Troy to Argos, proving Clytemnestra's familiarity with geography, while the content of the second speech is almost oracular in its images and prophetic truth. This juxtaposition of form and content, of message and meaning, amply reveals Clytemnestra's ability to control the process of communication to her advantage. The beacon signal in itself means nothing, it only gains significance in the context of a prearranged system, a code. By explaining her coding system to the chorus, Clytemnestra establishes her skill and knowledge. It is only in the second speech that she reveals to the chorus the signal light's meaning, where she gives a detailed, prophetic account of the destruction and violation at Troy. The separation of the two proofs in two separate speeches, and the separation of form from content, emphasizes the arbitrary connection between what is said and what is meant, the code and its content, that marks the verbal exchanges in the trilogy.

THE FIRE TELEGRAM.

(From the "Agamemnon" of Æschylus).

Hephaistos from tall Ida
  Sends forth the radiant glow ;
From beacon-top to beacon-top
  The fiery couriers go !
From Ida tall to Lemnos,
  Whence Athos' sacred steep
Took next the brand,
  Whose long beams spanned
The intervening deep.

Then at a bound o'erleaping the broad back of the main,
With lusty light the traveller-torch sped bravely forth again ;
And sunlike on Makistos the golden gleaming rays,
Flashed from the high look-out towers, transmit the tiding-blaze ;
Nor tarried he, nor slumbered, but sped the tidings by,
Till, lo, the far reflected beams,
54 Bright signalled on Euripus' streams,
Messapian watchers spy.

Then brightness answered brightness, and each the tidings spread,
And kindled high with fuel dry, tireless the torch-lamp sped ;
And still he sped and bounded, and seemed no whit to wane,
As o'er Asopus gleaming, he passed athwart the plain.

Before that moonlike splendour Kithairon's steep awoke,
And next the missive-radiance her blazing summit took ;
Nor tarried she, nor slumbered, nor left her task undone,
Till leaping o'er Gorgopis' wave the courier-radiance shone.

Next high on Aigiplanktos, but faint, the flambeau stood,
Then, kindling at the ample pyre,
Like to a mighty beard of fire,
Where Saron's narrowing waves retire,
Athwart the gulf he strode.

Then sprang from yonder headland to Arachnaion's steep,
And stirred the guard,
Who watch and ward
Fast by our city keep ;
And on Atreides' palace alighting last he shone,
Derived from that ancestral glow,
That kindled first on Ida's brow
To tell of triumphs won.

CL. Hephæstus, his clear light from Ida sending.
Torch-fire from torch-fire, with successive gleam,
Sped hither: Ida to the' Hermæan crag
Of Lemnos sends it: Jove's Athoan steep
Caught the bright beacon from the island next,
And speeds it in its onward strength, o'erpassing
The deep's broad bosom, harbinger of joy,
Sun-like, its radiance golden-bright despatching
To watch-tow'rs of Makistus. He, to sloth
Not yielding, nor by sleep ill-tim'd o'ercome,
Left not undone the messenger's part, but far
O'er the Euripus tide the torch-light speeds,
As signal of their task to those who on
Messapian heights kept watch. They recognis'd
The sign, and sent it onwards, kindling straight
Græa's heath-pile in answer. In full strength,
Undimm'd in splendor, bounding, the beacon-light,
O'er the Asopus plain, like a glad moon,
To the Cithæron cliff-height, speedily rais'd
Of flame enkindling flame another course
Streaming in quick succession: nor disown'd
The light despatch'd to him from far the watch
There station'd, but with brighter still replied:
Glanc'd o'er Gorgopis then the blaze, the hill
Of Ægiplanctus tow'rds, and there bade meet
Observance to the watch-fire's law be paid.
They, to full might enkindling it, send forth
The beard-like flame, high rear'd, in onward course
Ardent to glance it o'er the headland-height
The bay o'erhanging of Saronicus.
Impetuous then it bore it, till it reach'd
The height of Arachnæum, station-points
Neighbouring the city, and then strikes upon
The roof here of the' Atridæ this fair light,
No dubious offspring of the' Idæan flame.
Such were the laws observ'd me in due course
By the torch-bearers, each by each reliev'd.
To him alike who first, to him who last
Runs, is the prize awarded: such the proof,
The signal such, which, by my lord despatch'd
To me from distant Troy, I now announce thee.

James Kennedy-Bailie

CLYTEMNESTRA: Beacon fires, of course.
They tossed a fire-flash
Across the dark Aegean.
First, they lit a beacon
On Mount Ida, near to Troy.
It blazed all the way to Lemnos
And across the cruel sea-wastes
To Athos and through the night
With another spear of flame,
Making the fishes dance
As if the sun had risen.
Up steep Macistos,
From Euripus to Messapion,
Across Asopus and up
To the crags of Cithaeron,
Over the marsh of Gorgopis,
Up Aegiplanctus
And around the gulf to Arachnus.
You can see it from Mycenae,
The cousin of that flame
Lit in the ashes of Troy.

Cl. The fire-god was the messenger. From Ida he sped forth the bright blaze, which beacon after beacon by courier flame passed on to us. Ida sent it first to Hermes' rock in Lemnos; and to the great bonfire on Lemnos' isle succeeded third Zeus' mountain of Athos, with such a soaring pile of wood upon it as might strengthen the travelling torch to pass joyously over the wide main; and this, with the golden light as it were of a sun, blazed on the message to the outlook on Makistos. Nor he for any delay, or for overcoming sleep, neglected heedlessly his messenger-part. Far over Euripus' stream came his beacon-light and gave the sign to the watchers of Messapios. These raised an answering light to pass the signal far away, with pile of withered heath which they kindled up. And the torch thus strengthened flagged not yet, but leaping, broad as a moon, over Asopus' plain to Cithaeron's scar, roused in turn the next herald of the fiery train; nor there did the sentinels refuse the far-heralded light, but made a bonfire higher than was bid, whose flying brightness lit beyond Gorgopis' water, and reaching the mount of Aegiplanctus, eagerly bade him not to slack the commanded fire. They sped it on, throwing high with force unstinted a flame like a great beard, which could even overpass, so far it flamed, the headland that looks down upon the Saronic gulf, alighting then, and only then, when it reached the outlook, nigh to our city, upon the Arachnaean peak; whence next it lighted (at last!) here upon our royal roof, yon light, which shows a pedigree from the fire of Ida. Such are the torch-bearers which I have ordained, by succession one to another completing the course:—of whom the victor is he who ran first and last. Such is the evidence and token I give thee, my husband's message sped out of Troy to me.

CLYTAEMNESTRA

Hephaestos, god of fire, sent his bright blaze
speeding here from Ida, his messenger,
flames racing from one beacon to the next—
from Ida to Hermes' rock in Lemnos.
From that island the great flames sped
to the third fire, on the crest of Athos,
sacred to Zeus, and then, arcing high,
the beacon light sprang across the sea,
exulting in its golden fiery power,
rushing on, like another sun, passing
the message to the look-out towers
at Macistus. The man there was not sleeping,
like some fool. Without a moment's pause,

he relayed the message, so the blazing news
sped on, leaping across Euripus's stream,
to pass the signal to the next watchmen,
at Messapion. Those men, in their turn,
torched a pile of dried-out heather, firing
the message onward. The flaming light
was not diminished—its strength kept growing.
Like a glowing moon, it jumped across
the plain of Asopus, up to the ridges
on mount Cithaeron, where it set alight
the next stage of the relay race of fire.
Those watching there did not neglect their work—
that light which came to them from far away
they passed on with an even greater blaze,
which dashed across the shores of Gorgopus,
to reach mount Aegiplanctus, with orders
for those there to keep the beacon moving.

They lit a fire, a huge flaming pillar,
with unchecked force, speeding the message on—
its light visible even at the headland
by the Saronic Gulf. It swooped down,
once it reached the crest of Arachnaeus,
that look-out near our city—and from there
jumped down onto the roof of Atreus' sons,
flames directly linked to blazing Troy.
I organized these messengers of fire,
setting them up in sequence, one by one.
In that race the first and last both triumph,
the ones who sent the message and received it.
That's the evidence I set before you,
a message from my husband, dispatched
all the way from burning Troy to me.

Zwischen dem Berg Ida und dem Königsschloß von Mykenä (Gesamtentfernung 555 km) sind sieben Zwischenstationen eingelegt mit folgenden Abständen: 1. Hermesfels auf Lemnos, 150 km, 2. Zeusspitze auf Athos, 70 km, 3. Warte des Makistos auf Euböa, 180 km, 4. Berg Messapios in Böotien unweit des Euripus, 30 km, 5. Kithäron in Böotien, 25 km, 6. Berg Aigiplanktos in Argolis, 50 km, von wo auf die Endstrecke bis Argos noch 20 km entfallen Während so die Stationsentfernungen sich im allgemeinen zwischen 20 und 70 km bewegen, beträgt das erste Intervall 150 km, das dritte sogar 180 (Eisenbahnentfernung Nürnberg-Meiningen 186 km). Auf diese Entfernung ist ein brennender Holzstoß nicht mehr zu sehen, geschweige denn ein qualmender Haufen Heidekraut.

Between Mount Ida and the royal castle of Mycenae, total distance 555 km, there are seven intermediate stops with the following distances: 1. Hermes Rock on Lemnos (150 km) 2. Zeus Peak on Athos (70 km) 3. The Watchtower of Makistos on Euboea (180 km) 4. Mount Messapios in Boeotia, not far from Euripus (30 km) 5. Kithairon in Boeotia (25 km) 6. Mount Aigiplanktos in Argolis, (50 km), where the final distance to Argos is 20 km. Whereas the station distances are generally between 20 and 70 km, the first interval is 150 km, the third even 180 km (the rail distance from Nuremberg-Meiningen is 186 km). At this distance, a burning woodpile is no longer visible, let alone a smoking heap of heather.

Wolfgang Riepl (translated by Grant Leuning)

Clytaemnestra:

Hephaistos, bringing forth from Ida a radiant blaze:
A courier sent here to light bonfire after bonfire.
First, Ida to the rock of Hermes at Lemnos
And then, from that isle, the great bonfire third in line
On Zeus' mountain at Athos received he
Who on his back high over the sea
Conveyed that pleasing pine-torch of the strong flame:
Its golden light another sun,
Its blaze passing on the message to the towers of Makistos.
But he did not stop and neither did he - since there was no reason -
Let sleep triumph over him and so let go of his role as messenger.
Thus to the streams of Euripus from afar came the bonfire's radiance,
A sign to the watchmen of Messapios:
And, as the messenger passed on by them, they answered,
Raising a fire from their pile of gnarled wood.
The torch, vigorous and far from extinguished,

Bounded over the Asopian plain
To the rocks of Cithaeron as bright as the moon
So that the one waiting there to begin that fire, jumped up:
And those guards, praising this torch conveyed from afar,
Lit a fire greater than any I have spoken of before.
Then, the torch was rushed over lake Gorgopis
To reach the peak of Goat Mountain -
Rousing there a fire-ritual not for some favour
Where without envy of its might the kindled fire sent upwards
A great beard of flame -
And so on and over, beyond where the Saronic channel
Reflects the cliffs, onwards and blazing!
Then, rushing on, it then reached the summit of Spider's rock
And so approached the watch-towers of this town.
Thence - to the roof of the Atreidae here - rushed
What had not been without a father since that fire at Ida:
That torch, there!
Thus, willingly, were the functions of those who race with torches,
One after the other, fulfilled in succession
By he who, being first and last, was the victor.
I say to you, by such a sign and means
Did my man pass the message out of Troy to me.

KLYTAEMNESTRA

Hephaistos, from Ida flinging the bright glare.
Then beacon hitherward with posting flame
Sped beacon ; Ida first to Hermes' rock
On Lemnos ; from whose isle Athos, the peak
Of Zeus, was third to accept the mighty brand ;
And lifted high to bridge the wide backed sea,
The pinewood, heaped to please the travelling torch,
Sustained the blaze gold-gleaming like a sun,
Passing it onward to Mākistos' height.
He, tarrying naught, nor heedlessly by sleep
Subdued, neglected not his task as messenger ;
But o'er Euripos' streams arrived from far
His beacon's glow signalled Messapios' watch,
Who with an answering light passed on the sign,
Kindling a great stack of old withered heath.
Thence vigorously the light as yet undimmed
Leaping across Asopos' plain, most like
A bright full moon, on to Kithairon's crag,
Roused there a fresh relay of courier fire.
Nor did the watch deny the far-sped glow,
But raised into the skies a herald flame.
Then over lake Gorgopis the beam shot,
And having reached mount Aigiplanktos, there
Urged swift performance of the fiery rite.
Kindling they launch with generous energy
A mighty beard of flame which could o'erpass
The cliff that frowns o'er the Saronic gulf
Far flaring : then it alighted, then it reached
Arachne's sentinel peak, our city's neighbour.
And last here on the Atreidae's roof comes home
This light, true-fathered heir of Ida's fire.
These are the stages of my torch-racers,
Thus in succession each from each fulfilled.
But he's the winner who ran from first to last.
Such is the proof and token that I give thee,
This message sped to me by my lord from Troy.

The metaphorical mode of the speech is evident in two ways, her self-alliance with the gods and her exuberant appropriation of natural phenomena. She begins with Hephaestus, not simply a personification of fire but the god of fire, because she is allying herself with the will of the gods: 'Hephaestus, sending from Ida a bright flame' (281).[19] Hence she also invokes landmarks of Hermes (283) and Zeus (285). She further aligns herself with the avenging gods in her prophetic account of the Greeks' destruction of temples at Troy (336-44). Later she will invoke Zeus *teleios*, 'fulfiller' (970, 973-4), in a personal sense, different from the Chorus', and finally Zeus of the dead (1385-7).[20] The reflection of beacon fires from mountain-top to mountain-top, close to the realm of the gods, is therefore particularly appropriate, for she is presenting this as a realm in which she has control, and a purpose shared with the gods. As if she is creating her own universe, she compares the beacon fires to a sun (*hōs tis hēlios*, 288) and then to the moon (*dikēn phaidras selēnēs*, 297-98), while placing them in a generational relation to the first fire on Mount Ida, their 'grandfather' (*ouk apappon*, 311). (Beyond the limits of her present knowledge, this is a wonderful parallel to the generations of crimes.) She puts herself in control of this world at the end of the speech in a dative of reference or even possession (*moi*, 312) which strengthened by the four other *-oi* sounds in the line, by *plēroumenoi* (313), *soi* (315), *emoi* (316), and finally by the Chorus' response, *theois* (317).[21] The unsleeping fires (291) sweep the geography as if independent of the people who set them and burn with unsparing strength (*aphthonōi menei*, 305), a phrase which perhaps better than any other describes Clytemnestra herself.[22]

CLYTEMNESTRA *Hephaestus, sending from Ida a bright flame.*
And beacon began to send beacon this way by means of the courier fire;
Ida sent it to the rock of Hermes
in Lemnos, and as the mighty torch came from the island
Zeus's crag of Athos was third to receive it.
And rising aloft to skim the surface of the sea
the might of the traveling torch . . . . . .
the pine, like another sun, passing on
the golden light of its flame to the watchers of Macistus.
And he delayed not, nor was he in heedlessness overcome
by sleep, so as to neglect the duty of a messenger;
but far off the beacon's light
signaled to the guards upon Messapion its coming over the waters of Euripus.
And they shone an answering light and passed far on the message,
kindling fire in a heap of gray brushwood.
And in strength the torch and not yet growing dim, 65
leaping over the plain of the Asopus,
like a radiant moon, to Cithaeron's rock
awoke another succession of convoying fire.
And the light sent from afar was not rejected
by the watch; it burned more than was appointed;
and the light plunged beyond the lake of the Gorgon face,
and reaching the mountain of the wandering goats
urged that the covenant of the fire be not [neglected?].
And kindling the fire with unstinting strength the men sent ahead
the great beard of flame, so that it passed far beyond
the headland that looks upon the crossing point of Saron,
blazing as it went. Then it plunged downwards, and reached
to the peak of Arachne, the watch close by the city.
And then it plunged down upon this house of the Atreidae,
this light not without an ancestor in the fire of Ida.
Such are the laws that govern my torch-bearers;
each is supplied in relays from another;
and victory belongs both to the first and to the last to run the course.
Such is the proof and token that I tell you of,
since my husband has sent the news from Troy to me.

CLYTEMNESTRA:

Hephaestus, who sent the blazing light from Ida;
then beacon after beacon's courier flame:
from Ida first, to Hermes' crag at Lemnos.
Third came the Athos summit, which belongs
to Zeus: it, too, received the massive firebrand.
Ascending now to shoot across the sea's back,
the journeying torch in all its power and joy
[...]
The pine wood, like a second sun, conveyed
the gold-gleam to the watchtower on Macistus.
66
Prompt and triumphant over feckless sleep,
unslacking in its task as courier,
passing Euripus' streams, the beacon's light
signaled far off to watchmen on Messapion.
They sent out light in turn, sent on the message,
setting alight a rick of graying heather.
Potent against the dimming murk, the light
went leaping high across Asopus' plain
like the beaming moon, and at Cithaeron's scarp
roused missive fire for still another relay.
The lookout there did not defy the light
sent from far off; the new blaze shot up stronger.

The glow shot past the lake called Gorgon's Face;
arriving at the mountain where the goats roam,
it urged the fire-ordnance on [...]
With all their strength, men raised a giant flame,
beard-shaped, to overshoot and pass beyond
the headland fronting the Saronic strait—
so bright the blaze. Darting again, it reached
Arachne's lookout peak, this city's neighbor;
then it fell here, on the Atreides' mansion.
The light we see descends from Ida's fire.
Torchbearers served me in this regimen,
with every handoff perfectly performed.
The runners who came first and last both win.
This is my proof, the pledge of what I tell you.
My husband passed the news to me from Troy.

The sentinel on Whitehall gate looked forth into the night,
And saw o'erhanging Richmond Hill the streak of blood-red light.
Then bugle's note and cannon's roar the deathlike silence broke,
And with one start, and with one cry, the royal city woke.
At once on all her stately gates arose the answering fires;
At once the wild alarum clashed from all her reeling spires;
From all the batteries of the Tower pealed loud the voice of fear;
And all the thousand masts of Thames sent back a louder cheer:
And from the furthest wards was heard the rush of hurrying feet,
And the broad streams of pikes and flags rushed down each roaring street;
And broader still became the blaze, and louder still the din,
As fast from every village round the horse came spurring in:
And eastward straight from wild Blackheath the warlike errand
68 went,
And roused in many an ancient hall the gallant squires of Kent.
Southward from Surrey's pleasant hills flew those bright couriers forth;
High on bleak Hampstead's swarthy moor they started for the north;
And on, and on, without a pause, untired they bounded still:
All night from tower to tower they sprang; they sprang from hill to hill:
Till the proud peak unfurled the flag o'er Darwin's rocky dales,
Till like volcanoes flared to heaven the stormy hills of Wales,
Till twelve fair counties saw the blaze on Malvern's lonely height,
Till streamed in crimson on the wind the Wrekin's crest of light,
Till broad and fierce the star came forth on Ely's stately fane,
And tower and hamlet rose in arms o'er all the boundless plain;
Till Belvoir's lordly terraces the sign to Lincoln sent,
And Lincoln sped the message on o'er the wide vale of Trent;
Till Skiddaw saw the fire that burned on Gaunt's embattled pile,
And the red glare on Skiddaw roused the burghers of Carlisle.

Clyt. Hephaestus launched a radiant signal forth,
Which ran in swift relays of courier flame.
Ida despatched it first to Hermes' bluff
O'er Lemnus' waters, thence huge Athos, mount
Of Zeus, received the giant torch ablaze.
Coursing in strength—so high the rosined pile
Surmounted yon wide sea—that swiftfoot light
Swept gaily brushing o'er the level brine,
And to Macistus' summit, like a sun,
Announced its golden splendour. He nor dozed
Nor dallied with his serviceable task.
Far shot the blaze and by Euripus' flood
Challenged Messapion's guards, who answering sped
The message, mirrored in a flaring heap
Of hoary heather. Swift athwart the gloom
The beacon crossed Asopus' plain, as 'twere
A moonlit wrack, and from Cithaeron's crags
Flung yet another tale of missive fire;
For greeting its bright advent, nothing loth,
Their watch uplit a larger hoard than all.
Beyond Gorgopis' bay it soared and shone,
And climbing Aegiplanctus lingered not,
Nor respited the fiery ordinance.
Full soon his vigorous fuel threw aloft
A mighty beard of flame, whose instant sheen
Vanquished the headland high o'er Saron's gulf
In one brave leap to Arachnaeus' cliff.
Then from his watch, that marches with our town,
To Atreus' royal eyrie flew apace
The lineal child of Ida's parent flame.
So was my lamp-race ordered; each to each
The rival fires succeeded, but the prize
Was his, who ran from first to last alone.
Thus passed my lord's announcement unto me
From Troy. Behold his token and my proof!

GCW Warr

Clytemnestra

Firegod Hephaistos flashed out from Mount Ida
flame after flame bore the beacon's despatches,
jaded flame to fresh flame bearing the firenews.
Ida to Crag Hermes on the island of Lemnos.
From there its third stretch to the top of Mount Athos,
the peak that Zeus favors, then further upwards
and over the ocean dazzling and flaring
luring up fish-shoals to see what the flash is,
a fire-tailed comet transmitting its message
to the watchtowers scanning the sky on Macistos.
They weren't caught napping. They flung the flame onwards
and it hurtled over Euripus and watchmen
marked it from their Messapion outpost.
They kindle heaped brushwood and speed the flame further
It gathers momentum. It doesn't diminish.
It streaks like a meteor over Asopus
And lands on Cithaeron and sparks off the next one.
Again not neglected. So eager the watchmen
they get up a blaze that doubles the last one.
From the bog of Gorgopis to Mount Aegiplanctus
the bright chain of firelinks remaining unbroken.
They spare no effort and heap on the kindling,
the flamehair streaming out over the headland
that faces gulf Saron and then dropping southwards
to the crag of Arachne that borders on Argos
and straight to the roof of the palace of Atreus,
the flame that was fathered in Troy's conflagration.
My torchbearers bore all the batons of blazes
That's the sign, the proof you've been wanting
all the way from Troy, from my manlord to me.

'Twas Vulcan; He, from Ida's cliffs, despatched
The glorious light, while Beacon answering Beacon
Hither the telegraphic fire sent on.
First, Ida, on to the Hermæan crag
Of Lemnos; next, high Athos, Jove's own Mount,
From Vulcan's isle, the mighty splendour caught.
Soaring aloft, the seas to overridge,
In golden radiance, on Macistus' watchtower
Broke, like a Sun, the Pine's careering might.
Not slow, nor inconsiderately by sleep
O'ercome, Macistus plied his herald's part;
And far away, far o'er Euripus' stream
Bright-beaming, to Messapion's Warders gave
Due signal; they, in turn, blazed on the news,
Kindling with fire a pile of heather gray.
Thence, o'er the Asopian plain, as yet, undimmed,
Unflagging, leapt the vigorous Flame and, like
The Moon, above Cithæron's rocky brow
Resplendent, woke up fresh relays of Fire.
Nor scorned the Watch there the far-wafted light,
But sent up flames yet brighter than the rest.
Now over lake Gorgopis glanced the Light
And, reaching Ægiplancton's summit, bade
Its Warders, not let flag the line of Fire.
They, kindling too, with ungrudged force, send on
The beard of flame, o'er the Saronic Gulf's
Far mirror blazing; glancing thence, it reached
Arachne's height, the station next our Town;
And, last, on Argos' towers down swoops the Light,
Kin to that Fire, which rose on Ida's hill.
Such the appointed order of the Torch-race,
Each, in succession, after each, while First
And Last, alike, are Victors in the strife.
Such is the symbol, such the proof, I tell you,
Sent, by my Husband, from the fields of Troy.

William Peter

CLYTAEMESTRA: The great god of fire himself, Hephaistos! He has sent a bright light from Mount Ida, in Troy. Then, torch to torch, like a human herald, this light first shone in Trojan Ida, then on Mount Hermes in Lemnos and from that island, the third torch arrived at Zeus' Rock at Mount Athos. Then with a huge leap over the great sea, the flame travelled hard but happily and, like the sun, transferred its rays through the watchtowers of Makistos.

From there, without delay, like a good herald, refuting sleep, conquering sleep flew far to the streams of Evripos where it tells the news to the guards of Mount Messapios, in Evoea.

The Messapians gathered a mount of dried heather and by lighting it continued the light's progress. Now, the light, strong

and clear like a full moon sped over the valley around River Esopos and the tip of Mount Kitheron, setting off another lot of fiery signals.

The guards there lit an even greater fire, great enough for it to leap over the lake Gorgopis' waters and the Mountain of the Goats where the guards obeyed the flame's purpose with enthusiasm and lit up a huge beard of flame, huge enough to leap over the Saronic Gulf and land upon the Rock of Arahne, at the guard houses near the city.

After that, the flame, the very descendant of the flame of Troy's Ida can be seen up there, on the roof of this house, the house of Agamemnon, of the family of Atreidis.

My husband and I have arranged this method by which I would be notified when Troy fell and these were the orders we gave to all the torch bearers in this relay race.

Equal in dignity to both, the first and the last of them.

Héphaistos, de l'Ida lâchant la flamme claire. Grâce au courrier de feu, chaque fanal allait dépêchant un fanal vers Argos. L'Ida envoie au cap d'Hermès à Lemnos, et un signal éclatant, parti à son tour de l'île, a reçu accueil de l'Athos, dont Zeus possède les sommets. Là, le pin enflammé élève vers le ciel sa lueur messagère, et, d'un bond puissant qui franchisse la croupe des mers, le flambeau voyageur s'élance à cœur joie, transmettant sa lumière d'or, soleil de la nuit, aux rochers du Makistos. Le mont veillait : sans retard il s'est chargé du message, et l'éclat de son fanal part au loin vers l'Euripe rapide porter la nouvelle aux gardiens du Messapios. Ceux-ci, allumant un amas de bruyère sèche, ont fait luire leur réponse
73 et transmis l'ordre au loin. Toujours sans défaillance, la flamme vigoureuse traversait d'un vol 73
rapide la plaine de l'Asôpos, semblable à la lune brillante, et venait éveiller sur le sommet du Cithéron un nouveau relai du lumineux coureur. La garde s'empressait alors de faire jaillir, plus haute même que je ne l'ordonnais, une flamme infatigable, qui bondit par-dessus le lac Gorgôpis et vient sur l'Égiplancte inviter les signaux prescrits à ne pas s'attarder. On allume un brasier fougueux et dévorant, et l'on dépêche une gerbe de flamme assez haute pour que la clarté en aille au loin dépasser le rivage entrevu au delà du golfe Saronique. Elle s'élance, s'arrête sur le mont d'Arachné, poste voisin d'Argos. Et enfin il vient s'abattre sur le toit des Atrides, ce feu descendu du feu de l'Ida. Telles étaient les lois fixées à mes lampadéphores ; pour y satisfaire, ils se sont passé tour à tour le flambeau, laissant la victoire au dernier parti et premier arrivé. Voilà mon sûr indice, le signal que mon époux m'a transmis de Troie.

CLYTEMNESTRA
I told you, a god.
The god of fire.
Is that not good enough for you?
The first fire, the kindling, was Troy,
blazing into ruin.
Then beacon after beacon took flame.
Mount Ida took it,
then the horn of Hermes on Lemnos.
Pine timbers, heaps of silvery brush flashing into gold.
Then the great white face of Zeus at Athos.
Rising higher and higher, it could not sleep,
skywalking above the ocean's shoulders;
a rock climber mastering the cliffs of Macistus;
a great courier waking men at every turn,
74 or a bend in the mountains;
leaping Euripus it seared Messapion.
And there my watchman heaped a mountain
of evergreen branches, timber, and caulked barrels,
and it leaped and rolled over like the harvest moon,
through the Asopus valley to Cithaeron.
There my men outdid themselves,
building a beacon even higher than I ordered,
flooding the startled white marsh of Gorgopis;
flashing a white beard of flame,
it ignited the fierce crags of Aegyplanctus' mountain;
then drove on, westward, one last relay,
leaping the Saronic Strait,
and finally illuminating our watchtower
here on the Arachnian Rock.
And now I am the beacon that blazes,
my hair and my face,
the innermost parts of my body and soul,
illuminated, fired by the message sent to me
by my lord, Agamemnon.

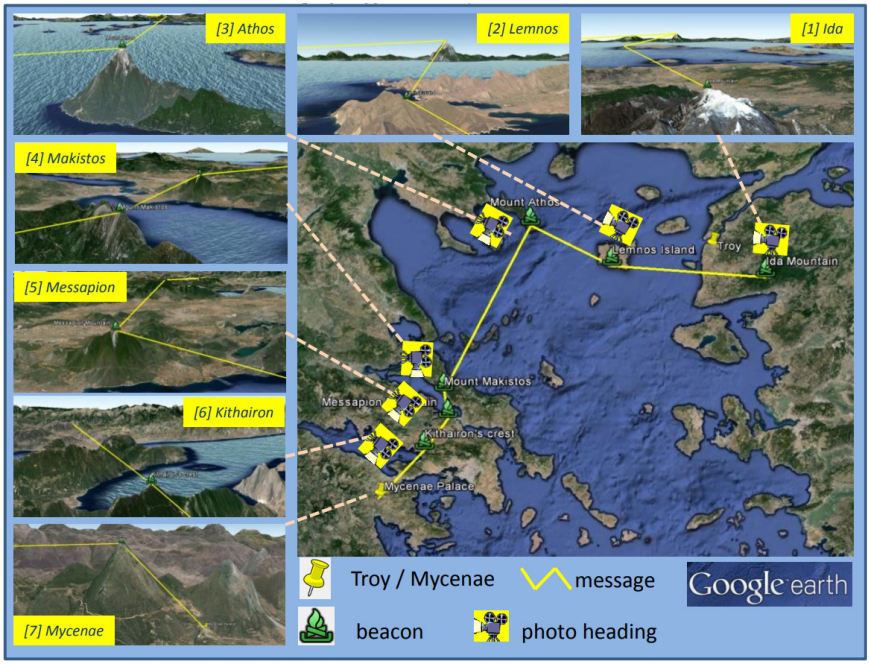
In the Beacon Speech, the metaphor of the torch race is apt in some respects and not in others. Post after post receiving the signal and passing it on can be construed as the handing over of the "light" at fixed points along the course—provided we ignore as irrelevant what is different in the two events. In a λαμπαδηδρομία, for example, a single torch passes from hand to hand, while in a chain of fire-signals the fire is each time a different one. Far from being glossed over, however, the point that this fire is one and the same is brought into the foreground with perverse insistence. The torch is lit from a torch on Ida and sent to Argos by "courier fire" (282). Radiance announces its arrival at each watch-post, and each time a new "courier" is ready to receive it. The light of the torch "heralds" its coming to the lookout of Makistos (παραγγείλασα, 289) and "signals" (σημαίνει, 293) the garrison of Messapion; it "awakens" (ἤγειρεν, 299) the next relay of the fire at the rock of Kithairon; it "incites" (ὥτρυνε, 304) the post on the mountain of the roaming goats. More than that, the flame has a life of its own: it is not only sent and received, it travels (πορευτοῦ λαμπάδος, 287), it leaps (ὑπερτελής, 286), it arrives (ἐξικνούμενον, 303), and it "hurls down" (ἔσκηψεν, 302; 308; σκήπτει, 310). Its features are stressed with jarring concreteness: it is a "big torch" (μέγαν . . . πανόν, 284) and "vigorous" (σθένουσα, 296); it looks forward to "pleasure" (πρὸς ἡδονήν, 287).[63] Like a person, it has a pedigree, being the descendent of the fire on Mount Ida (311). In addition, unlike the runners in a torch-race, "courier-fires" compete against no one. As Fraenkel said, "a form of the metaphor could be devised in which that difference could be treated as unimportant and even even pass unnoticed."[64] But, as he points out, this has not been done in the *Agamemnon.* Clytemnestra concludes precisely by proclaiming a winner, as though victory had been the goal all along: νικᾷ δ᾽ ὁ πρῶτος καὶ τελευταῖος δραμών (314), "winner is the one who ran first and last." Her enigmatic line fits neither vehicle nor tenor of the metaphor, since in a relay race no single runner can be both first and last. This is patently a riddle.

CLYTEMNESTRA

The god of fire. The first fire
was Troy going down in ruin.
Then beacon after beacon took fire.
Mount Ida took it, then the flame raced
to the horn of Hermes on Lemnos, then it scaled
the blank rock face of Zeus at Athos.
It towered skyward, and overarched
the ocean's shoulders. Pine timbers
crackled into gold like the noonday sun.
The fire climbed the heights of Macistus—
it was like a winning runner or the herald of light.
76 It didn't sleep. It straddled the Euripus,
struck Messapion. There my watchman heaped
up stacks of heather, evergreen branches,
pyramids of caulked barrels.
Like the harvest moon, it rolled over
the Asopus river valley to Cithaeron.
There my men built an even higher
warning beacon than I had commanded.
It whitened the staring bog of Gorgopis,
ignited the crags of Aegyplanctus,
then galloping westward to me, it passed
the Saronic Strait, and set off our watchtower
here on the Arachnian Rock. Look,
a light has fallen on the House of Atreus.
I made this chain of beacons. I chose
each watchman. Agamemnon's in Troy. My husband
is sending me this message of fire.

[Points to torch on the roof]

Robert Lowell



Titus Tienaah & Emmanuel Stefanakis

Vulcain : les rayons éclatants qu'il a lancés du mont Ida. De fanal en fanal, le feu messager a envoyé jusqu'ici la nouvelle. De l'Ida elle passe au promontoire d'Hermès, dans Lemnos; après Lemnos, le mont de Jupiter, l'Athos la reçoit, et le troisième signal s'allume : immense, flamboyant, voyageur qui porte la joie, il franchit d'un bond puissant la croupe des mers, et il
78 vient, comme un soleil, dorer de sa lumière les rochers du Maciste. Là, on se hâte, on ne se laisse pas aller à l'oisiveté du sommeil; et bientôt à son tour le fanal du Maciste avertit au loin les gardiens du Messapius, sur les bords de l'Euripe. Ceux-ci ont répondu; ils ont fait avancer la nouvelle en allumant un immense amas de bruyères sèches : clarté forte et soutenue, qui franchit les plaines de l'Asopus, pareille à la lune étincelante, et qui, jusqu'au faîte du Cithéron, continue la succession des flammes messagères. La garde du mont n'a point refusé de propager la nouvelle :

là, un feu brillant s'est allumé, plus grand même que les autres, et dont la lueur a percé par delà les marais de Gorgopis, jusqu'au mont Égiplancte, où d'autres gardiens s'empressèrent d'accomplir l'ordre donné. Ils font jaillir un vaste tourbillon de flamme : l'horizon, à cette lueur intarissable, s'embrase jusqu'au delà du promontoire qui domine le golfe Saronique; et le signal arrive, rayonnant encore, au mont Arachné, à ce poste voisin d'Argos. 79
C'est de là qu'on a transmis au palais des Atrides cette lumière dont le feu de l'Ida fut l'aïeul le plus éloigné. Tels étaient les fanaux que j'avais fait disposer, et qui se sont relevés les uns les autres; mais les vainqueurs de la course, c'est le premier qui donna le signal et le dernier qui le reçut. Voilà les sûres nouvelles que mon époux m'a envoyées de Troie.

Clyt. Vulcan it was,
From Ida issuing forth a lightning flash;
And beacon beacon here from courier fire
Sped onward—Ida to the Hermæan scaur
Of Lemnos; and from the isle a giant torch
Third in its place did Jove's Athoan cone
Catch up; and with it, soaring till the might
Of the careering torch ridged all the sea,
The pine-tree fire rejoicingly, that told,
E'en like a sun, the golden lightning on
To watch-heights of Macistus. Nor did he
Ought dallying, or listlessly o'ercome
With sleep his heralds portion-task let slip,
But from afar the beacon's light on-travelling
Over Euripus' tides, signals the tale
Unto Messapius watchers; and in turn
They lighted up and told it farther on,
A pyre of grey old heath touching with fire.
And in its strength the flame not smould'ring yet,
Leap'd o'er Asopus' plain, like the fair moon,
Unto Cithæron's scaur, and there woke up
Another fresh relay of courier fire;
And the far-darted blaze the embattled watch
Refused not to acknowledge, kindling up
A pile far vaster than the mentioned yet.
O'er Gorgopia's lake it shot the light,
And to the mount of Œgiplanctus stretching,
It roused the ordnance there posted not
To stint its fire; and they did onward speed,
Upkindling it with might unhusbanded,
A giant beard of flame, till the beak'd cliff,
That gazeth down on the Saronic frith,
It overshot on-blazing—then it stoop'd,
Until it reach'd Arachne's upheaved mount,
Watch-heights, our city's vicinage. And then
Unto this roof of the Atridæ stoops
The light we saw—no child unlinear
Of Ida's fire. Such my appointed laws
Of our torch-bearing races—one from other
In due successions filled; and he doth beat
That runneth first and last. Such is the proof
And signal that I tell thee, my own spouse
Having the tidings sped to me from Troy.

CLYTEMNESTRA: The god of fire!
Ida first launched his blazing beam; thence to this palace
Beacon lit beacon in relays of flame. From Ida
To Hermes' crag on Lemnos; from that island, third
To receive the towering torch was Athos, rock of Zeus;
There, as the blaze leapt the dark leagues, the watch in welcome
Leapt too, and a twin tower of brightness speared the sky,
Pointing athwart the former course; and in a stride
Crossing the Aegean, like the whip-lash of lightning, flew
The resinous dazzle, molten-gold, till the fish danced,
As at sunrise, enraptured with the beacon's glow,
Which woke reflected sunrise on Makistos' heights.
The watchman there, proof against sleep, surprise or sloth,
Rose faithful to the message; and his faggots' flame
Swept the wide distance to Euripus' channel, where
Its burning word was blazoned to the Messapian guards.
They blazed in turn, kindling their pile of withered heath,
And passed the signal on. The strong beam, still undimmed,
Crossed at one bound Asopus' plain, and like the moon
In brilliance, lighted on Cithaeron's crags, and woke
Another watch, to speed the flying token on.
On still the hot gleam hurtled, past Gorgopis' lake;
Made Aegiplanctus, stirred those watching mountaineers
Not to stint boughs and brushwood; generously they fed
Their beacon, and up burst a monstrous beard of fire,
Leapt the proud headland fronting the Saronic Gulf,
To lofty Arachnaeus, neighbour to our streets;
Thence on this Atreid palace the triumphant fire
Flashed, lineal descendant of the flame of Ida.

Such, Elders, was the ritual race my torchbearers,
Each at his faithful post succeeding each, fulfilled;
And first and last to run share equal victory.
Such, Elders, is my proof and token offered you,
A message sent to me from Troy by Agamemnon.

The doubting questions of the Chorus provide the cue for the two great speeches of the Queen which follow. In the first, the famous 'beacons speech' (281–316), she describes with vivid imagery the sequence of fiery messages, from Troy to Argos, by which the news of Agamemnon's victory has reached her; in the second (320–50), she pictures the scenes in the captured city with such mantic power as to dispel (at least for the moment) all doubts about the victory.

Clytemnestra's depiction of the 'beacons message' is intended, ostensibly, to replace persuasion with proof, but the beacon fires sustain, of course, a powerful symbolic meaning as well. They look backward to the victor's fires at Troy and they portend, in Clytemnestra's mind, her own victorious vengeance on the King. Hence, for the Queen, it is a speech of *arousal*, a point which the bold personifications (' ... and the torch *aroused* [ἤγειρεν, 299] yet another successor' ... 'and the flame kept urging ...' 304) help substantiate. So, too, the 'god-sent' origin of the message (Ἥφαιστος ... ἐκπέμπων ... 281; cf 283, 305) forms (if only by the metonymy 'Hephaistos' for 'fire') part of a sequence of other divine despatches in the play, some benevolent and some sinister for the Argives.[31] Thus, in portending the hidden doom of Agamemnon, the 'triumphant' 'beacons speech' anticipates the Chorus' ambiguous treatment, in the coming ode, of Agamemnon's victory. 'First and last runner share the victory': Clytemnestra's closing irony (314) will be remembered when the Chorus sings (462–7) of the Erinyes closing in on Agamemnon.

Hephaestus, sending the gleaming signal from Ida. And beacon sent beacon on, sped by the courier flame. Ida sent it to the Hermaean crag of Lemnos; and thirdly the height of Athos, sacred to Zeus, received the great flame from the island. Then leaping high, so as to skim the sea, the mighty torch, proceeding on its joyous way, bright as a sun, announced the golden-gleaming light of the pine to the watchman on Macistus. But he, not delaying, nor foolishly overcome by sleep, passed on the messenger's duty; and the light of the torch went far on to the streams of the Euripus, and gave the signal to the guards of Messapium. And they in turn lighted their fire and sped the message on, kindling a heap of gray heath. And the mighty torch, not yet dimmed, leaped over the plain of the Asopus, like the gleaming moon, to the crags of Cithaeron, and there roused a new succession of the courier flame. And there the guard did not reject the far-sent light, and sent the courier flame mounting to heaven. Then the light darted over Lake Gorgopis, and coming to Mt. Aegiplanctus, exhorted the succession of the fires not to fail. And they sent on a great beard of fire, kindling it with unstinted might, so that it flamed onward and even overleaped the cliff which looks down upon the Saronic Gulf. Then it darted on, and then it came to Mt. Arachnaeum, our neighboring watch. And then it strikes upon this roof of the Atreidae, this flame, true child of the fire kindled on Ida. Such are the ready stations of the torch-bearers, filled one in succession from another; and the first and the last runners are both victors. Such proof and such token I give to you, my husband having sent me the message from Troy.

Hephaestus, who from Ida sent bright flame:
and beacon kept despatching beacon here,
with fire as courier: Ida to Hermes' cliff
in Lemnos, darting high a carrier blaze
of pine wood: thirdly Athos, steep of Zeus,
received a mighty flambeau from the isle,
and rising high to clear the sea's *broad* back
the travelled lamplight's strength with transport sprang,
and ushered in the rays of golden sheen
84 like a sun-*rising* to Makistus' peaks.
And he, no loiterer, nor unheedfully
subdued by sleep, sent on his share of news:
and far the fire-sign to Euripus' streams
came, and gave notice to Messapion's guards.
They lit in turn and sent the watchword on,
kindling with fire a heap of grizzled heath.
And the stark lamplight, even yet not dimmed,
o'erleaping Asop's plain, in manner of
the radiant moon*beam*, to Cithaeron's rock,
awaked a fresh relay of fire express.
The frontier-guard spurned not the light despatched
from far, but lit up more than was imposed:
so the light flashed across Gorgopis' lake
and having reached the mountain Ægiplanct

roused up the edict not to stint me fire:
they made a blaze, and sent with zeal ungrudged
a mighty beard of flame even to o'ershoot
the headland that looks down on Saron's frith
illuming it: then flashed *until* it reached
the Arachnaean steep, heights near the town.
Then to the Atreids' roof, there, shot the flame
not without far descent from Ida's fire.
Such my lamp-bearing racers' rules o' the course:
each wins, the first-stage-runner and the last,
all run the full course by relief of each.
Such proof I give you and concerted sign,
my lord transmitting it from Troy to me.

CLYTEMNESTRA

A god! The fire-god flashing from Mount Ida.
Beacon sped beacon on, couriers of flame.
First, Ida signaled to the island peak
of Lemnos, Hermes' rock, and swift from there
Athos, God's mountain, fired the great torch.
It leaped, it skimmed the sea, a might of moving light,
joy-bringing, golden shining, like a sun,
and sent the fiery message to Macistus.
Whose towers, then, in haste, not heedlessly
or like some drowsy watchman caught by sleep,
sped on the herald's task and flashed the beacon
afar, beyond the waters of Euripus,
to sentinels high on Messapius' hillside,
who fired in turn and sent the tidings onward,
touching with flame a heap of withered heather.
86 So, never dimmed but gathering strength, the splendor
over the levels of Asopus sprang,
lighting Cithaeron like the shining moon,
rousing a relay there of traveling flame.
Brighter beyond their orders given, the guards
kindled a blaze and flung afar the light.
It shot across the mere of Gorgopis.
It shone on Aegiplanctus' mountain height,
swift speeding on the ordinance of fire,
where watchers, heaping high the tinder wood,
sent darting onward a great beard of flame
that passed the steeps of the Saronic Gulf
and blazing leaped aloft to Arachnaeus,
the point of lookout neighbor to our town.
Whence it was flashed here to the palace roof,
a fire fathered by the flame on Ida.
Thus did they hand the torch on, one to other,
in swift succession finishing the course.
And he who ran both first and last is victor.
Such is my warrant and my proof to you:
my lord himself has sent me word from Troy.

Edith Hamilton

Hephaistos, the lame God,
And spriteliest of mortal messengers;
Who, springing from the bed of burning Troy,
Hither, by fore-devis'd Intelligence
Agreed upon between my Lord and me,
Posted from dedicated Height to Height
The reach of land and sea that lies between.
And, first to catch him and begin the game,
Did Ida fire her forest-pine, and, waving,
Handed him on to the Hermæan steep
Of Lemnos; Lemnos to the summit of
Zeus-consecrated Athos lifted; whence,
As by the giant taken, so despatcht,
The Torch of Conquest, traversing the wide
Ægæan with a sunbeam-stretching stride,
Struck up the drowsy watchers on Makistos;
Who, flashing back the challenge, flash'd it on
To those who watch'd on the Messapian height.
With whose quick-kindling heather heap'd and fired
The meteor-bearded messenger refresht,
Clearing Asopus at a bound, struck fire
From old Kithæron; and, so little tired
As waxing even wanton with the sport,
Over the sleeping water of Gorgopis
Sprung to the Rock of Corinth; thence to the cliffs
Which stare down the Saronic Gulf, that now
Began to shiver in the creeping Dawn;
Whence, for a moment on the neighbouring top
Of Arachnæum lighting, one last bound
Brought him to Agamemnon's battlements.
By such gigantic strides in such a Race
Where First and Last alike are Conquerors,
Posted the travelling Fire, whose Father-light
Ida conceived of burning Troy To-night.

CL. Vulcan from Ida's top, in circling flame;
Torch answer'd torch, till here the signal flew:
First Ida to th' Hermæan crag which crowns
The sea-girt Lemnos; next the herald blaze
Reached Athos, sacred seat of sovereign Jove.
Triumphant thence, borne on the foaming waves,
Whose wreathing tops it tipped with lambent beams,
Th' advancing light, effulgent as a sun,
Poured on Macistus golden radiance.
Reckless of sleep, impatient of delay,
The fiery wonder moved—Euripus flamed
With bright illumined waves, Messapus thence
Caught the glad signal, and the stationed guard,
Firing a heathy pile, the fervid blaze
Transmitted onwards with augmented power.
88 The splendid conflagration wide diffused
The glad intelligence, and bounding o'er
Th' Asopian plain, bright as the full-orbed moon
When at her noon of glory, lighted up
Cithæron's lofty head, enkindling there
Responsive zeal and corresponding fires;
By generous rivalry the guard inspired
Bid the fierce blaze, with ever-gathering strength,
Hold on its course; Gorgope's marshy plain
Was all illumined: Ægiplanctus next
Wore on his giant head the crown of flame.
Up the proud steep, whence to the eye expands
The gulf Saronic, next, the kindling power,
Shaking its fiery tresses, soared sublime.
Th' adjoining post, Arachne's craggy height,
It scaled, it reddened o'er; the light deriv'd
From Ida's top thus finally diffused
Its beamy splendour o'er the royal house
Of the Atreidæ: thus it reached our shores.
Torch kindled torch successive, but my heart
Of these the first and last most warmly hails.

