A DIACHRONIC STUDY OF CLYTEMNESTRA'S CHARACTERIZATION

A DIACHRONIC STUDY OF CLYTEMNESTRA'S CHARACTERIZATION IN THE *AGAMEMNON*

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Lay Abstract

This thesis examines the evolution of Clytemnestra's characterization through the ancient and modern responses to her character in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. This literary study investigates how Clytemnestra's complex use of gender, specifically her use of masculinity, allows her character to be understood in a different light by a modern audience in contrast to the original interpretation of her character in ancient Greece. The transformation of Clytemnestra's understanding demonstrates the impact that she has not only on the plot of the play, but also on its survival, since the depth of her character is what continues to engage audiences even in modern day. The findings of this thesis will demonstrate the importance of female characters in Greek tragedy through examining the various layers of Clytemnestra's character that are uncovered by her modern characterization, proving how her figure and tragedy overall can evolve and influence audiences yet to come.

Abstract

My thesis examines the evolution of Clytemnestra's characterization throughout the generations of receptions of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. This diachronic study investigates how Clytemnestra's complex use of gender, specifically her use of masculinity, allows her character to be understood in a different light by a modern audience in contrast to the original perception of her character in antiquity. In analysing the aspects that contribute to Clytemnestra's ancient characterization, which display her to be dangerously masculine to a fifth-century male audience, the meaning behind her behaviour is also revealed, as it opens a discussion on masculinity in Athens through Clytemnestra's emasculation of the men around her. The true depth of her character is revealed through a study of Clytemnestra's modern characterization, as modern audiences are able to recognize the sympathetic aspects of her character in the text, which are reflected through the various feminist adaptations and performances today. The paradox of Clytemnestra's characterization demonstrates the impact that she has not only on the plot of the play, but also on its survival, as her complexity is what continues to engage audiences in modernity. The findings of this thesis will demonstrate the importance of female characters in Greek tragedy through examining the various layers of Clytemnestra's character that are uncovered by comparing her characterization in antiquity and modernity, thus proving that her figure, and tragedy overall, has the ability to evolve and influence audiences yet to come through the impact of these dynamic women.

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Declaration of Academic Achievement

The author declares that the content of this research has been completed by Maia Fiorelli, with the contributions of the supervisory committee consisting of Dr. Kathryn Mattison, Dr. Mariapia Pietropaolo and Dr. Claude Eilers during the research and writing process.

Introduction

Clytemnestra is the most infamous of all the characters in Aeschylus' plays, as she commits the treacherous mariticide in the *Agamemnon* that defines and sets up the rest of the trilogy. Known for the deaths of Agamemnon and his war prize Cassandra, Clytemnestra is often characterized as a dangerously masculine villainess, especially in an ancient context. However, this perception of her character does not remain constant throughout the generations of the play's survival, as modern audiences recognize the sympathetic aspects of Clytemnestra as seen through various receptions and modern adaptations. In this thesis I will examine Clytemnestra's complexity through a diachronic analysis of her character, while also presenting an examination of her masculine actions. I will discuss what this behaviour may have represented to an ancient male audience when exhibited by a female figure, and what her emasculation of the men around her can tell us about masculinity in Athens. The findings of this thesis will demonstrate the importance of female characters in Greek tragedy by examining the various layers of Clytemnestra's character that are uncovered by comparing an ancient perspective with a more modern one, thus proving how her character and tragedy overall is able to evolve and influence audiences yet to come through the impact of such dynamic female characters.

The Impact of Women in Greek Tragedy

The paradox of the prominence of female figures in Greek tragedy in contrast to the gender norms of the 5th century has been a topic of much debate within classics. Many scholars have questioned why tragedy consists of so many active and outspoken female characters, and more importantly, what role they serve within their plays and in the receiving society.[1]

[1] See Patterson 1998; Foley 1981, 2003 and Zeitlin 1985 for some ideas on the reasoning behind the prevalence of women in Greek tragedy.

Nevertheless, it is indisputable that these characters are integral not only to the plots of their plays, but also to the interest and popularity of Greek tragedy overall, as the actions of characters such as Medea, Deianeira, Phaedra and Clytemnestra stand out to be the most shocking events within their respective plays. But these women do not commit their misdeeds alone, as each of these female characters' transgressions are a direct result and consequence of male faults, consequently leading these female figures to act on their own, resulting in these tragic situations.[2] The question remains as to why these female characters hold such meaning within Greek drama, a question which I seek to examine and answer within this thesis. In analysing the understanding behind these characters in antiquity and modern day, the true essence of tragedy is revealed through the evolution of these women, as they have the ability to offer different sides of their characterizations in different time periods, thus uncovering the true depth of Greek tragedy.

Among these female characters, Clytemnestra exemplifies the important impact of female figures in tragedy through her masculine behaviour in the *Agamemnon*. Clytemnestra sets herself apart from her fellow tragic wives through her manipulation of gendered language, impressive use of πειθώ, and most of all her careful planning, all of which will be examined in the following chapters. Although Medea is a close second, the fact that Clytemnestra has spent years planning the demise of her husband heightens her masculine daring, leading Clytemnestra to successfully exact her revenge against Agamemnon. In addition to her gender-defiant behaviour, there is a softer side to Clytemnestra's character that can be lost in her quest for vengeance, specifically concerning her daughter Iphigenia and the motivation behind Clytemnestra's murders. Thus, Clytemnestra is a deeply complex character that warrants more study, as her characterization

[2] Medea, Deianeira and Clytemnestra are all moved by their husbands' mistakes to commit their murders (abandonment by Jason, Herakles' introduction of his bed slave into the *oikos* and Agamemnon's murder of their daughter Iphigenia), while Phaedra is instigated by Aphrodite as a result of Hippolytus' disrespect towards the goddess.

does not remain the same over the course of almost 2,500 years. In an ancient context, her masculine actions are shocking and considered to be dangerous to a fifth-century male audience, yet to a modern audience the sympathetic elements of Clytemnestra's back story and her past trauma play a larger part in her characterization, contributing to this contrasting understanding of her character. Furthermore, during antiquity female characters like Clytemnestra are created for and with men in mind, as these women act almost as stand-ins for men to reflect on their own masculinity, while in modernity these female figures are more likely to be seen as women who act based on the poor decisions of the men in their life. Therefore, Clytemnestra's manipulation of gender is able to elicit contrasting reactions and understandings of her character from different generations and audiences, displaying how her masculinity and agency in the *Agamemnon* are what make this play so stimulating even in modern times, consequently adding to the depth of tragedy and the significance of women in Greek drama.

Methodology

Throughout this thesis I examine how Clytemnestra's gender-breaking behaviour in the *Agamemnon* is perceived and understood in various time periods, and the different lessons that her character reveals depending on the audience. My goal in conducting this research is not to simply show that tragedy has changed from antiquity to modern day, but rather to explore what this evolution means and what it tells us about the genre of Greek tragedy and the women who dominate it. One of the reasons I believe that tragedy has been able to remain relevant and interesting over so many years is the fact that it has the ability to offer different sides of the same story to different audiences and groups, thus accounting for the evolution of Clytemnestra's character that I will be discussing over the course of three chapters. Yet this varied perception of characters and meanings is not inherent in all kinds of literature, as I argue that the reason why

we have this change in Greek tragedy is due to the overall complexity of the content, but more specifically the construction of the female characters. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to prove that the significance of female figures like Clytemnestra in tragedy is a result of their ability to remain interesting and relevant through their changing characterizations, allowing new receptions and audiences to be able to connect to these plays. Clytemnestra perfectly exemplifies tragedy's depth, as Aeschylus' plays not only inspired an ancient audience, winning first prize at the festival of Dionysus, but also continue to do so through many modern adaptations and re-stagings focusing on Clytemnestra's central role. Through this study, the significance of tragedy is revealed, and we see the integral part that dominant woman play within tragedy, allowing these plays to be complex and ever changing, showing new sides of itself through time.

Both gender studies and reception theory play core parts within my research, as I analyse how Clytemnestra's improper use of masculinity and femininity throughout the *Agamemnon* not only portray her to be a dangerous antagonist to an ancient male audience, but also indirectly encourage these men watching Clytemnestra's actions to re-examine the societal values of masculinity during their time. In the first two chapters of my thesis, I will conduct a close reading of the original text in order to examine and understand how Clytemnestra was perceived by an ancient male audience, and the message her character conveys to these men through her emasculation of the male characters in the *Agamemnon*. In Chapter 1, I will conduct a philological analysis of the language used to describe Clytemnestra, alongside the language she herself employs, in order to uncover the role that she plays within the social context of the 5th century, as well as to introduce a basis to examine the manner in which her characterization has changed throughout time. The research of Laura McClure and Helene Foley are integral to my analysis of this language, as Foley examines the function and language of the elder male chorus

who are against Clytemnestra,[3] while McClure introduces Clytemnestra's act of "codeswitching" in her manipulation of gendered speech, a theory which I will build upon in the first chapter.[4]

Chapter 2 closely follows the same methodology as the preceding chapter, with more focus on gender theory in tragedy. I dive into the question of the function of gender-breaking women in drama in more depth in this chapter, asserting that Clytemnestra's role in the *Agamemnon* is to encourage men to reflect upon their collective sense of masculinity, rather than to serve as an anti-model for women. Before examining how Clytemnestra influences an ancient male audience to think about the boundaries of masculinity in their society, I will analyse Froma Zeitlin's theory that women in tragedy comment on men and masculinity rather than femininity, applying her ideas to Deianeira and Medea, tragic women who like Clytemnestra deviate from gender norms and act against their husbands' wishes.[5] This approach will allow a strong basis to build upon Zeitlin's theory in applying it to Clytemnestra's role in the *Agamemnon*, in which I will perform a close reading of Clytemnestra's masculine depiction in contrast to the powerless male characters that surround her, as an in-depth analysis of the Greek displays her overwhelming power over them. Moreover, I will examine the lessons that arise from this close reading and the characterizations of Clytemnestra and these men, further using this analysis to prove that Clytemnestra's masculinity provides a comment on gender norms for the men in the audience to receive and consequently re-think the expression of masculinity in their society collectively.

My approach for the final chapter differs from the first two, as it centres on the study of reception theory and analysing its effect on Clytemnestra's character in the *Agamemnon* through

[3] Foley 2003a and 2003b.
[4] McClure 1999.
[5] Zeitlin 1985.

the generations. I begin this research by first identifying the sympathetic aspects of her character that are already present in the ancient text, including Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* in this analysis as well, as is commonly done with modern adaptations with the *Oresteia*. This allows us to further recognize the complexity of tragedy through these female characters, as Clytemnestra's dynamic characterization that leads to this contrast in perception is present in the text from the very beginning. I will then move on to analysing the importance and function of reception theory, drawing largely upon Hans Robert Jauss' foundational ideas on reception, in which he states that literature has the ability to change overtime with each receiving generation, exposing various new sides of the story.[6] Modern reception theorists must also be included in this discussion, since the field continues to grow within classics, as Lorna Hardwick and Edith Hall continue to write about its importance.[7] Finally, I will study how these theories and ideas directly relate to Clytemnestra's evolution though reception, and how this translates through the various modern adaptations and performances of the *Agamemnon* and *Oresteia* trilogy. Thus, through these methods it becomes clear not only how and why Clytemnestra's characterization has changed so drastically in modernity, but also how female characters like her are responsible for the continued influence of Greek tragedy over the years, and that its complexity will be able to grow.

Throughout these three chapters, there are a variety of words that I use in a specific context and meaning, and thus should be introduced here. Chapters 1 and 2 include a strong focus on gender and gender norms. In terms of gender, it is important to remember that this refers to aspects that a specific culture and society attribute to each sex, which Kirk Ormand simply yet astutely boils down to, "certain traits and behaviors that are identified as masculine or

[6] Jauss 1970, 10.
[7] Hardwick 2003 and Hall 2004.

feminine".[8] The term "gender norms" is of course interrelated, as gender norms refer to the behaviour, language, actions and appearances that are expected from each gender when one presents themself in public. Thus, this is contingent on the categories of masculine and feminine, and what is considered to fall into these categories. In my research, I am concerned with the idea of masculinity and femininity as understood in fifth-century Athens, particularly with the belief that women should stay within the *oikos* and not speak nor act in the *polis*, aspects of femininity which Clytemnestra constantly break in the *Agamemnon*, as we will explore in Chapter 1.

Another term that must be clarified that appears in Chapter 1 is "demonize". Though used today to generally portray something or someone as evil or villainous, in using it to describe Cassandra's frenzied monologue against Clytemnestra's actions I wish to highlight the monstrous sense of this word instead.[9] When referring to Cassandra's "demonization" of Clytemnestra in her speech, I am not simply stating that Cassandra is making Clytemnestra out to be the villain, though this is true, but that she is quite literally "demonizing" her with her language, likening and transforming Clytemnestra into a demonic monster to an ancient male audience. Thus, I ask you to understand this word quite literally in tandem with Cassandra's fixation on monsters and beasts during her speech.

The words "effeminize" and "emasculate" should also be defined due to their prominence in the second chapter. These terms tend to be used synonymously today, yet they have different meanings since they refer to separate genders. To "effeminize" someone or something is to make them more feminine, while to "emasculate" is to take away their masculinity. Though this might seem to be the same thing, it is important to remember that the absence of masculinity does not

[8] Ormand 2018, 6. In his introduction Ormand provides an in-depth explanation on the difference between gender, sex and sexuality. Though commonly confused with one another and used interchangeably, he sets the three definitions apart.
[9] A shorter and simplified explanation of my intended use of this word can also be found in footnote 21 in Chapter 1.

inherently result in femininity, as we have established that masculinity and femininity exist in their own socially defined categories. Therefore, to emasculate someone does not mean that they become more feminine, but only lose the masculinity that they previously possessed or were expected to possess. Consequently, someone who is effeminized begins to display the common characteristics that women are expected to portray, though they are usually expected to portray the masculine gender norms. The difference between these terms will be exemplified in Chapter 2 through the contrast of the emasculated Agamemnon and effeminized Aegisthus.

Finally, the term "sympathetic" is used often throughout this thesis, most notably in Chapter 3 when referring to the modern characterization of Clytemnestra. When discussing the sympathetic aspects of Clytemnestra that motivate her sympathetic characterization, this term is not specifying how she can simply evoke sympathy from a modern audience, but how this sympathy for her character allows them to understand her actions in a more nuanced way. When an audience is able to identify and engage with these sympathetic emotions that they feel for Clytemnestra and her situation, they then allow themselves to view a distinct side to her character that is not influenced by the dominant patriarchal view of the 5th century, a view that is still present today as well. Instead, this initial "sympathy" that a modern audience feels due to her past trauma gives them the opportunity to understand her masculinity in a different light, creating an independent and justified version of Clytemnestra with which they can sympathise and connect, rather than merely characterizing her as pitiable or dangerous.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter 1 of this study focuses on the ancient male characterization of Clytemnestra as presented through the speech of her supporting characters. I argue that the dangerous portrayal of her character is gradually reinforced throughout the *Agamemnon* through the devaluing remarks

of both the elder male chorus and Agamemnon when he returns home from Troy, as they continually undermine her authority due to her gender, disapproving of her masculine actions as she skilfully inverts the gender norms with these male characters. In addition to these comments, Cassandra's monologue also paints a deeply negative picture of Clytemnestra's character, as she demonizes her through likening her behaviour with that of mythical monsters such as the Furies and the man-killing Scylla, dehumanizing Clytemnestra and marking her as dangerous to a fifth-century audience before she even enacts her killings. This pejorative characterization is not only underlined through the words of other characters in the play, but also through Clytemnestra herself, as I will prove by analysing her dangerous use of πείθω to manipulate others, as well as building upon McClure's theory of "codeswitching" when Clytemnestra purposefully switches between masculine and feminine language in order to get her way. Through these analyses, we will achieve a better understanding of how Clytemnestra's masculine and deviant character was presented to an ancient male audience.

In the second chapter I explore the purpose of Clytemnestra's ancient dangerous depiction, and the meaning behind her masculine actions as presented to a fifth-century male audience. Instead of accepting the reading that Clytemnestra's character only serves to represent the danger of women in power, I argue that her skilful masculinity works to inspire the men in the audience not only to rethink the societal standards of masculinity, as a woman exhibits masculinity better than all the men in the *Agamemnon*, but also encourages them to expect more from themselves collectively. This idea is first introduced through scholars such as Zeitlin, Wohl and Mendelsohn, who remind us that the function of women in tragedy always has a male focus, which can also be applied to many other female figures in Greek drama, such as Medea and Deianeira. After examining this theory in the context of Greek tragedy as a whole, I will apply

this reasoning to Clytemnestra in order to understand the function of her deviant masculinity within the *Agamemnon*, contrasting her use of masculine power to the emasculated and effeminized male characters of the chorus, Agamemnon and Aegisthus, who all demonstrate some pitfalls of masculinity. Clytemnestra herself also exhibits the dangers of excessive power on masculinity as she becomes a kind of tyrant alongside her lover Aegisthus, further demonstrating to an audience in antiquity the insecurities and weaknesses of the Athenian sense of masculinity, while also leading them to want more from themselves as men.

The final chapter of my research moves to analyse the modern understanding of Clytemnestra, and question why her characterization is so different from that of antiquity. Through many years of reception, Clytemnestra's character has evolved from a dangerous tyrant into a sympathetic and misunderstood mother, inspiring many artists to rework her story in modern feminist adaptations of the *Oresteia*. The influence of this shift of perception can be found directly in Aeschylus' text, as the complexity of her character not only allows fifth-century men to see parts of their own collective selves in Clytemnestra, but also permits her figure to evolve and become richer throughout generations of reception. A modern perspective can identify many sympathetic aspects of her character, especially when including Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, through the focus on Iphigenia's sacrifice and Agamemnon's crimes against his *oikos*. I also argue that Clytemnestra's relationship with her son Orestes, though commonly used to villainize her character even further, can also be recognized as justification for Clytemnestra's sympathy to a modern audience. The glimpses of her sympathetic characterization as recognized in a modern context are also strengthened with the study of reception theory. Using the foundational studies of Jauss alongside the modern theories of Hardwick and Hall we can see that these female figures in tragedy have the ability to evolve and

stay relevant through years of reception. This is further displayed through various modern adaptations that place Clytemnestra at the forefront of their plays, such as Martha Graham's production which focuses on Clytemnestra's point of view. This metamorphosis of her character proves the immeasurable impact of female figures in Greek drama, as their rich characterizations continue to ignite the interest of modern audiences in Greek tragedy.

Concluding Remarks

My objective of this thesis is to understand the purpose and importance of gender-breaking female characters in Greek tragedy, while also investigating how these women's characterizations evolve through new receptions. Although this research is focused on Clytemnestra's character, I believe this study can be expanded and applied to many other tragic women who break the gender mould during the 5th century, since Clytemnestra is not alone in her masculine behaviour. Nevertheless, the analysis of Clytemnestra's ancient understanding and the meaning of her character to a fifth-century male audience in the first two chapters gives us valuable insight into the function of female characters in tragedy, as Clytemnestra's dangerous characterization serves more than to confirm that outspoken women cause chaos. Instead, it encourages these men in the audience to recognize their faults through her actions while also inspiring them to redefine their collective sense of masculinity, since Clytemnestra displays her masculinity far more successfully than any man in the *Agamemnon.* In understanding the ancient purpose behind Clytemnestra's masculinity, the true complexity of Greek tragedy is revealed through analysing the change of her character in modern day through the application of reception theory and an examination of modern adaptations, uncovering how tragedy has the ability to transcend time through rich female characters such as Clytemnestra. Despite being written thousands of years ago, Aeschylus' Clytemnestra is still the powerful woman she was originally

depicted to be, though modern receptions have highlighted a more sympathetic side to her characterization, allowing Clytemnestra, and Greek tragedy in general, a chance to inspire a new generation of audiences.

Chapter 1: Dangerous Masculinity: Clytemnestra's Ancient Characterization

Though titled the *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus' first play in his *Oresteia* trilogy focuses on the woman who murders the man after whom the play is named: the vengeful Clytemnestra. As a result of this hateful act against her own husband Agamemnon, Clytemnestra is often regarded as the negative paradigm for women and wives, demonstrating to men the threat women pose when they gain too much power, as well as the destruction that can occur from this to both the *oikos* and the *polis.* The echoes of Clytemnestra's dangerous masculinity are present in many other ancient texts,[1] revealing how influential her characterization was during antiquity, since her masculinized speech and behaviour illustrates improper use of femininity and masculinity, marking her as dangerous to an ancient audience. This pejorative perception of her character is prominently highlighted in the *Agamemnon* through the derogatory and critical language that other characters use to describe Clytemnestra, as evidenced by the chorus, Agamemnon and Cassandra, further exhibiting the ancient perception of her gender-breaking characterization. In addition to this, Clytemnestra's own employment of masculine and deceptive language in order to accomplish her murderous plan reinforces the danger that her character poses to societal norms, as she subverts ancient gender roles while also improperly using femininity to her advantage. Therefore, through an analysis of the devaluing language used against Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, as well as the masculine speech she herself employs, I will demonstrate that a pejorative characterization of her figure is carefully constructed throughout the play, portraying Clytemnestra as the antagonist to an ancient audience, as she threatens the structure of the city through her improper femininity and disturbance of gender norms in ancient Greek society.

[1] For examples of Clytemnestra's influence on tragedy see Eur. *IA.*, Eur. *El.*, Soph. *El*., and on Latin literature see Prop. *Eleg.* 4.7.57, Ovid. *Ars*. 3.11-12 among others.

Derogatory and Misogynistic Language against Clytemnestra

In studying the ancient implications of Clytemnestra's character, it is important to begin with examining how a fifth-century Greek audience would understand her figure and actions. Through a surface reading of this first play in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy, the *Agamemnon*, it becomes clear that the playwright depicts Clytemnestra in a harsh light, painting her as dangerous while Agamemnon becomes the tragic hero who is deceived by his wife, despite being the valued King of Argos and head of his family. This characterization can be seen through the doubtful remarks of the chorus throughout the play, Agamemnon's curt language when he reunites with his wife, and during Cassandra's intense monologue, in which she verbally attacks Clytemnestra for the two murders that she knows are to come. The actions and words of these characters encourage the audience to believe that Clytemnestra's behaviour is inappropriate for her gender, as they signal themselves to be more trustworthy than Clytemnestra either due to their sex as the male chorus does, or due to divine prophecy in Cassandra's case. Furthermore, I argue that Clytemnestra's utilization of bold and dominant language throughout the play demonstrates how much power she holds over the male characters, which highlights her improper use of masculinity and femininity, as she not only dares to display masculinity as a woman, but also willingly chooses when to manipulate and switch between these genders to her own advantage. This exploitation of gender norms signals to an ancient male audience the danger and chaos that can ensue when someone, especially a woman, inverts the gender roles within a functioning society, effectively labeling Clytemnestra's masculinity as treacherous. This argument then opens the discussion on how Clytemnestra's gender-breaking and vilified characterization is not only highlighted through other characters' descriptions and remarks towards her, but also first-hand through her own masculine use of language and behaviour.

Devaluing Comments by the Chorus

One of the most evident signs that Clytemnestra is acting outside of her gender are the reactions from the chorus. The opinions of the chorus are an important first step in examining the perceptions of other characters in tragedy, as the role of the chorus is generally believed to serve as an indication to the audience on how they should feel and react to certain situations and individuals.[2] Although there has been some debate over this,[3] I argue that this notion holds true with the chorus of Argive elders in the *Agamemnon,* as the devaluing language from the all-male chorus solidifies Clytemnestra in this vilified and dangerous role. Unlike Medea's interactions with her sympathetic female chorus and nurse, Clytemnestra lacks a confidant who would reveal her side of the story to the audience.[4] Instead, the male chorus here underestimates and undermines Clytemnestra's power and intelligence behind her back, despite her being queen, until she physically proves her strength to them through her murders. This is first seen in lines 274-277, in which the chorus does not believe Clytemnestra's news that Troy has fallen and instead pester her with questions:

> Χορός: πότερα δ᾽ ὀνείρων φάσματ᾽ εὐπιθῆ σέβεις;
> Κλυταιμήστρα: οὐ δόξαν ἂν λάβοιμι βριζούσης φρενός.
> Χορός: ἀλλ᾽ ἦ σ᾽ ἐπίανέν τις ἄπτερος φάτις;
> Κλυταιμήστρα: παιδὸς νέας ὣς κάρτ᾽ ἐμωμήσω φρένας.[5]
>
> Chorus: Is it that you believe the persuasive visions of dreams?
> Clytemnestra: I do not believe anything that comes from a drowsy mind.
> Chorus: But then is it some unconfirmed rumour that excited you?

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[2] Swift 2016, 103. August Schlegel 1847 was the first to call the chorus the "ideal spectator", giving birth to this idea.

[3] Foley 2003b; Billings, Budelmann and Macintosh 2013 and Weiner 1980 are few among the many who discuss the debate surrounding the function of the chorus, as they all mention Schlegel's foundational theory along with other ideas that have surfaced throughout the years, such as Vernant and Vidal-Naquet's support of Schlegel, while Aristotle seems to contradict this, saying that the chorus' role is functional. Modern study tends to focus on choral identity, as Foley explores, starting down a new path regarding the tragic chorus.

[4] Swift 2016, 104-5.

[5] The Greek of the *Agamemnon* and the *Libation Bearers* comes from Sommerstein 2009 (Loeb), while sections from *Iphigenia in Aulis* in Chapter 3 are from Kovacs 2003 (Loeb). All translations are my own unless stated otherwise.

> Clytemnestra: You truly mock my mind as if I am a little girl!
>
> Aesch. *Aga*. 274-277.

The chorus takes care to express their disbelief of the queen's information in a way that still shows their false sense of respect and courtesy to Clytemnestra. Despite their best efforts, Clytemnestra is sharp enough to recognize their skepticism from the onset, replying to their feigned joy with, "For your eyes truly indicate what you are thinking" (εὖ γὰρ φρονοῦντος ὄμμα σου κατηγορεῖ).[6] Moreover, the fact that these Argive elders initially assume that the only way that Clytemnestra could have obtained this important piece of information is through womanly and therefore unreliable methods, such as dreams and rumours, further demonstrates their true impression of her character. Since the chorus exhibits this disbelief, a fifth-century male audience is also expected to follow suit as male choruses are regarded to be more trustworthy than female choruses, since Greek society did not support autonomous women, as shown through Clytemnestra here and other female choruses who break conventional boundaries.[7] In addition to this, choruses that are comprised of elder men tend to represent the opinions of the *polis* and the men who participate in it, voicing the thoughts and beliefs that are easily accepted by a male dominated audience.[8] Thus, due to the chorus' behaviour and language regarding Clytemnestra, an ancient male audience would believe that despite Clytemnestra's increased power and status over these old men as the queen and wife of Agamemnon, she should never truly be trusted due to her gender. The chorus' treatment of Clytemnestra as a stereotypical woman instead of the powerful Queen of Argos demonstrates to an ancient audience that she should be considered to

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[6] Aesch. *Aga*. 271

[7] Foley 2003b, 20. Foley goes on to explain that male choruses are only bound by other aspects such as their physical limits, yet female choruses face the skepticism of the audience from the onset of the play.

[8] Though perhaps it can be argued that this is not true with other playwrights and instead these old men have aged out of society, Aeschylus still shows respect for the wisdom of elders within his plays. Nevertheless, they are still marginalized due to their age and thus play the role of the chorus instead of an active character.

be distrustful, as all women are in their opinion, consequently dismissing and patronizing female speech while also beginning the pejorative characterization of her figure.[9]

In addition to this initial condescension from the chorus, these old men continue to distrust Clytemnestra's words even after she explains how she devised the torch relay, contradicting their previous acceptance of her plan after she leaves:

> τίς ὧδε παιδνὸς ἢ φρενῶν κεκομμένος,
> φλογὸς παραγγέλμασιν
> νέοις πυρωθέντα καρδίαν ἔπειτ᾽
> ἀλλαγᾷ λόγου καμεῖν;
> ἐν γυναικὸς αἰχμᾷ πρέπει
> πρὸ τοῦ φανέντος χάριν ξυναινέσαι.
> πιθανὸς ἄγαν ὁ θῆλυς ὅρος ἐπινέμεται
> ταχύπορος· ἀλλὰ ταχύμορον
> γυναικογήρυτον ὄλλυται κλέος.
>
> Who is so childish or senseless, that they let their heart be inflamed by the recent torch relay, yet afterwards are distressed when the report is different? It is clearly a woman's nature to celebrate before all things come to light. A woman's mind is far too persuasive and spreads too swiftly, but the rumour proclaimed by a woman is also swiftly forgotten.
>
> Aesch. *Aga*. 479-487.

Similar to their former comments, the chorus illustrates their true perception of Clytemnestra and her intelligence as ruler through these degrading comments, though in these lines they are able to be more candid about their distrust since they are outside of her presence. These pointed remarks about Clytemnestra, and women in general, not only demonstrate the ancient view on gender norms and feminine power, but also contribute to the gradual undermining of her character by the chorus and an ancient male audience. These elder men illustrate to the audience that Clytemnestra is unfit to rule in Agamemnon's absence, something that she will ultimately prove when she commits her murders and usurps the throne like a tyrant near the end of this play.[10] Furthermore,

[9] McClure 1999, 74.
[10] The argument of the presence of tyranny within this play as shown through Clytemnestra and Aegisthus will be further explored in Chapter 2 in connection with the influence Clytemnestra's masculinity has on ancient Greek masculinity itself.

this distrust by the chorus is amplified by the entrance of the messenger who confirms what Clytemnestra has gathered through her torch relay. Following the misogynistic ode above, these men rejoice at the arrival of a man who can reliably speak about the outcome of the Trojan War, since they regard him to be more credible than Clytemnestra due to his gender.[11] This reaction by the chorus once again highlights how critical they are of Clytemnestra's power while also expressing their overall views of female language and intelligence, effectively revealing to fifth-century audience that women like Clytemnestra are foolish and not to be trusted unless their words are verified by a reliable man.

The incredulity of the chorus is a continuous motif throughout the *Agamemnon*, as they proceed to patronize Clytemnestra even after her self-claimed sacrifice of Agamemnon and Cassandra.[12] Once again, the chorus initially does not believe that Clytemnestra has planned and committed this un-womanly deed of her own free will, and instead assume that some sort of poison or drug has caused her to descend into madness and kill her husband:

> τί κακόν, ὦ γύναι,
> χθονοτρεφὲς ἐδανὸν ἢ ποτὸν
> πασαμένα ῥυτᾶς ἐξ ἁλὸς ὀρόμενον
> τόδ᾽ ἐπέθου θύος, δημοθρόους τ᾽ ἀράς;
> ἀπέδικες ἀπέταμες· ἀπόπολις δ᾽ ἔσῃ
> μῖσος ὄβριμον ἀστοῖς.
>
> Oh woman, what evil food or drink grown from the earth have you eaten, what potion from the sea has incited you, what has caused you to place this sacrifice on yourself, and this curse that is uttered by the public? You have cast him out and cut him down! You will be banished from the city and despised by all the citizens.
>
> Aesch. *Aga*. 1407-1411.

[11] Aesch. *Aga*. 493-502.
[12] Clytemnestra refers to her murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra as sacrifices to Zeus in lines 1386-1394, calling upon him when she presents their dead bodies to the chorus while also claiming that these deaths were caused by the ἀλάστωρ of the house of Atreus in lines 1497-1504. Neither of these statements are true, and instead make her more untrustworthy to an ancient audience as she claims these things sacrilegiously.

Evidently, the chorus of men cannot come to terms with the fact that a woman has succeeded in killing their king, instead jumping to the conclusion that there must be some sort of external factor that has caused their leader to fall so easily at the hands of a woman, such as feminine potions. This assumption that she could have never done this of her own free will effectively dehumanizes Clytemnestra since it suggests that she does not have the agency to act or think on her own, since instead the chorus assumes that she ate or drank something that made her do this, as if she were an animal mindlessly grazing in a field. Moreover, they automatically propose banishment as her punishment, which is usually offered in situations of involuntary homicide in ancient Greece.[13] This suggestion further illustrates her dehumanization as the chorus is not particularly concerned with punishing Clytemnestra for her deeds, but rather trying to understand and make sense of how a woman, whom they believe to be unreliable and irrational, was able to overthrow their powerful king.[14] The realization of Clytemnestra's authority and willingness in this deed causes the chorus to verbally attack her in their disbelief, calling out her *hubris*, declaring her insane and launching themselves into a misogynistic ode about the evil dangers of the sisters Helen and Clytemnestra, calling Helen "demented" and responsible for the deaths of the soldiers at Troy, naming both of them to be full of power, strength and hatred.[15] The chorus strongly believes and declares that the misdeeds and inappropriate actions of women like Helen and Clytemnestra are what cause both soldiers and kings to die, since in their eyes both sisters were motivated by adulterous lust to commit their crimes.[16] This continues to confirm to a fifth-century male audience the danger that

[13] Foley 2003a, 212. Foley explains in the footnotes how voluntary and involuntary homicides were dealt with at different locations and had different penalties in ancient Greece. Someone who claims to have planned the murder as Aegisthus does would be considered voluntary, but since Clytemnestra is a woman, the chorus treats her murder as involuntary, as if she did not know what she was doing.
[14] Foley 2003a, 212-213.
[15] Aesch. *Aga*. 1455-1471.
[16] O'Daly 1985, 16. The chorus in the *Libation Bearers* also criticize Clytemnestra, as the chorus diminishes her in lines 585-651 (see Anderson 1932 for more on these lines) while the Nurse claims that she was never a mother to Orestes nor Iphigenia in lines 749-750.

women pose when they act outside of their gender in the *polis,* as the chorus not only dehumanizes Clytemnestra through their disbelief of her power, but also vilifies her when they finally accept her authority. Therefore, there is a clear devaluing of Clytemnestra and other masculine women throughout the *Agamemnon*, painting Clytemnestra to be recognized as the antagonist of this story by an ancient audience, actively shaping and influencing her characterization in an ancient context.

Agamemnon's Suppressing Language

Although Agamemnon is present and speaks for a short amount of time during his eponymous play, the language he uses against Clytemnestra follows the same pattern as the chorus. Agamemnon not only notices but also mentions Clytemnestra's masculine behaviour from the moment he meets her on the front steps of their home, remarking upon her praise-filled greeting of him:

> Λήδας γένεθλον, δωμάτων ἐμῶν φύλαξ,
> ἀπουσίᾳ μὲν εἶπας εἰκότως ἐμῇ·
> μακρὰν γὰρ ἐξέτεινας· ἀλλ᾽ ἐναισίμως
> αἰνεῖν, παρ᾽ ἄλλων χρὴ τόδ᾽ ἔρχεσθαι γέρας.
>
> Daughter of Leda, guardian of my household, your speech was similar to my absence, for it was far too long. But in order to be praised properly, this honour must come from another.
>
> Aesch. *Aga*. 914-917.

This censure and rebuke of Clytemnestra's language and the length of her speech further highlights the impropriety of her behaviour, as McClure notes that Agamemnon's response demonstrates that the act of praising men and blaming women in the public sphere is something that only men should do, and that her presence and excessive use of masculine language outside of the *oikos* is not fitting for her gender.[17] Thus, this deviant behaviour not only shocks Agamemnon, eliciting this response, but also surprises a fifth-century male audience, causing them to side and identify with

[17] McClure 1999, 78.

Agamemnon's first words to his wife. Moreover, the way in which Agamemnon speaks to Clytemnestra throughout this exchange and during the tapestry scene is neither warm nor loving. To a modern audience, this would paint Agamemnon in a cruel and harsh light, but to an ancient audience of men this would not seem out of the ordinary considering the remarks that have been made by the chorus before his entrance alongside Clytemnestra's masculine behaviour.[18] As the head of the household, it is Agamemnon's duty to teach his wife how to properly act both in the *polis* and in the *oikos*, and to chastise her when she has stepped out of line, as he does here with this response. Therefore, Agamemnon's first harsh words to his wife are completely acceptable and understandable in the context of ancient Greek society, underlining Clytemnestra's improper use of gender roles and continuing to mark her character as the antagonist in this play through her deviant language and behaviour.

After Agamemnon's initial disapproving remarks to Clytemnestra, she begins to persuade him to enter the house by walking upon the expensive purple tapestry. This entire scene puts Clytemnestra's improper use of gender norms on display through her own actions and language, as will be discussed in the second half of this chapter. Agamemnon's comments about his wife also reveal her deviant behaviour, consequently contributing to her defamation in antiquity. Clytemnestra once again shocks her husband with her presumptuous speech, eliciting Agamemnon to wonder, "Surely it is not womanly to wish to argue" (οὔτοι γυναικός ἐστιν ἰμείρειν μάχης).[19] Agamemnon directly addresses her bold speech once again and chides her for it, attempting to re-establish the gender norms that Clytemnestra has inverted in this situation.[20] This response demonstrates to the audience that Agamemnon does not hold the power in this interaction with his

[18] Denniston and Page 1957, 149.
[19] Aesch. *Aga*. 940.
[20] McClure 1999, 80.

wife, even if Agamemnon does not realize it himself. Though he might think he has the upper hand by condemning Clytemnestra to remember her place in society as a woman, Clytemnestra is not easily silenced and continues to use her masculine speech to control her husband. As Clytemnestra blocks the entrance to the *oikos* during their tense exchange, it becomes clear to an ancient audience that Agamemnon will not be able to enter the house unless on her terms, as she manipulates her husband without him even noticing. Aeschylus' construction of this scene demonstrates Clytemnestra's power to a fifth-century audience and the danger this poses for unsuspecting Agamemnon, reminding them of how dangerous deceptive language is, especially in the hands of a woman. This language allows women to become defiant against their husbands, leading to chaos in both the *oikos* and the *polis* as Clytemnestra destroys her family and the city of Argos when Agamemnon is not in control of her. Thus, even before the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra, Clytemnestra is already set up to be the antagonist of this play, as her deviance from societal gender roles and gendered speech marks her as unconforming to societal order. Accordingly, Clytemnestra's pejorative characterization is firmly built up before her bloody deeds through the critical language of these characters which is not only gradually suggested over the course of the play, yet also openly indicated by these character's devaluing remarks, exemplifying to an ancient audience the danger and malice of a woman's deceptive language and actions in the *polis*.

Cassandra's Monstrous Monologue

Cassandra is another complex female character in the *Agamemnon* who defies gender norms and the expectations of women during this time period. Though she remains quiet for most of her time onstage, Cassandra suddenly breaks out into a feverish and dramatic monologue after Clytemnestra departs inside following Agamemnon. She begins with multiple laments to

Apollo concerning her situation while explaining to the chorus her troubled past with the god before reciting her prophecy about what Clytemnestra intends to do when she enters the house:

> ἒ ἔ, παπαῖ παπαῖ, τί τόδε φαίνεται;
> ἦ δίκτυόν τί γ᾽ Ἅιδου;
> ἀλλ᾽ ἄρκυς ἡ ξύνευνος, ἡ ξυναιτία
> φόνου. στάσις δ᾽ ἀκόρετος γένει
> κατολολυξάτω θύματος λευσίμου.
>
> Ah ah! What is this that has appeared? It is a net of Hades? But the snare is his wife, who is an accomplice in his murder. Let the insatiable Fury[21] raise a cry over this sacrifice that will end in stoning!
>
> Aesch. *Aga*. 1114-1118.

This theme of equating Clytemnestra to different monsters, whether divine, real or mythical, is recurrent throughout the various speeches that Cassandra gives to the chorus before she walks inside to her death.[22] There is also a connection present here with the chorus' remarks about Clytemnestra's free will in this act, since just as the chorus dehumanizes her through their distrust in her agency, Cassandra too dehumanizes Clytemnestra, though more pointedly by associating and likening her with monsters. This demonization[23] of Clytemnestra's figure begins when Cassandra associates her with the avenging Furies, an especially fitting comparison as these monsters have a prominent role in the final play of the trilogy, the *Eumenides*, when Clytemnestra reappears as a shade to rouse the chorus of sleeping Furies, eagerly calling them to exact revenge on her behalf.[24] I believe that the connection between Cassandra's words and Clytemnestra's actions in the third play are not a coincidence, as Aeschylus uses this opportunity

[21] The exact translation is "insatiable race of discord", or something along these lines. I have chosen to interpret these words as "Fury" since the chorus responds to Cassandra with "What Fury do you urge to raise a cry over this house?" (ποίαν Ἐρινὺν τήνδε δώμασιν κέλῃ ἐπορθιάζειν;) in lines 1119-1120, clarifying that the creature Cassandra speaks about is in fact a Fury.
[22] Betensky 1978, 21.
[23] In using the word "demonize" when explaining Cassandra's language against Clytemnestra, I am specifically drawing out the demonic and monstrous sense here to relate with Cassandra likening Clytemnestra to different monsters, instead of using it in the more general sense.
[24] Aesch. *Eum*. 94-120.

to create the motif of likening Clytemnestra with these terrifying female monsters, which he continues throughout the trilogy. Clytemnestra even names herself in the *Agamemnon* as the "ancient bitter avenging spirit of Atreus" (ὁ παλαιὸς δριμὺς ἀλάστωρ Ἀτρέως), personally taking on the monstrous role.[25] Moreover, the strong vocabulary that Cassandra uses within this passage to describe Clytemnestra as murderous and her actions as monstrous also contribute to her demonization quite plainly, as she fails to signal her danger to the chorus, but successfully enlightens the audience.

Cassandra's demonization of Clytemnestra through her constant allusions to monsters is further heightened in lines 1214-1245 when she foretells Clytemnestra's murders and Agamemnon's blindness of his wife's treachery. She begins this by explaining how oblivious Agamemnon was of Clytemnestra's actions during the tapestry scene, lamenting, "He did not know that the tongue of the hateful bitch, who licked his hands and who stretched out her cheerful ears, as is the custom of deceptive Ate, would result in ill fortune" (οὐκ οἶδεν οἷα γλῶσσα μισητῆς κυνός, λείξασα καὶ κλίνασα φαιδρὸν οὖς, δίκην Ἄτης λαθραίου, τεύξεται κακῇ τύχῃ).[26] Already, Cassandra is referring to Clytemnestra in a negative way, though lines 1231-1236 truly express the hatred she has for her:

> τοιάδε τόλμα· θῆλυς ἄρσενος φονεὺς
> ἔστιν. τί νιν καλοῦσα δυσφιλὲς δάκος
> τύχοιμ᾽ ἄν; ἀμφίσβαιναν, ἢ Σκύλλαν τινὰ
> οἰκοῦσαν ἐν πέτραισι, ναυτίλων βλάβην,
> θύουσαν Ἅιδου μητέρ᾽ ἄσπονδόν τ᾽ Ἄρη
> φίλοις πνέουσαν;
>
> Such boldness: a woman slays a man! What hateful monster should I happen to call her? A double-headed serpent? Or a Scylla, settling in the rocks, a detriment to sailors, a raging mother of Death, breathing deadly destruction on her loved ones?
>
> Aesch. *Aga.* 1231-1236.

[25] Aesch. *Aga*. 1501-1502.
[26] Aesch. *Aga*. 1228-1229.

Once again Cassandra makes a fitting parallel between Clytemnestra and a murderous monster, as both Scylla and Clytemnestra are figures known for killing men in horrible ways, further contributing to the demonization of Clytemnestra's act and the dehumanization of her overall characterization.[27] The comparison and connection that is made between Clytemnestra and Scylla not only marks her as morally evil in this play, but further dehumanizes Clytemnestra to an ancient male audience, demonstrating to them that a woman who makes these masculine and thus dangerous gender-breaking choices is closer to the actions of monster than a human, as she has no respect for anyone other than herself. Furthermore, the mention of the snake is also important to note since this appears in Clytemnestra's dreams in the *Libation Bearers,* warning her of Orestes' return and her eventual death.[28] In addition to Cassandra's monstrous depiction of Clytemnestra, she continuously calls her acts shameless and murderous, while also attacking her lover Aegisthus by calling him a cowardly wolf with whom the lioness, Clytemnestra, sleeps while the lion is away.[29] The strong monster and beast imagery prevalent in Cassandra's speeches is notable to examine since all of the monsters that Clytemnestra is compared to are female, despite her being characterized as masculine by many characters in this play. This comparison to female monsters continues to demonstrate the danger of women who exhibit masculine behaviour as exemplified by Clytemnestra and Scylla here, displaying to an ancient male audience that these gender-breaking actions belong to evil and monstrous women. This further heightens the dehumanization of Clytemnestra's character throughout this play, as the audience is compelled to no longer think of her as a woman, but as a vengeful monster who twists both masculinity and femininity to achieve her selfish goals, no matter the effect it has on the *polis.* Moreover, this depiction of Clytemnestra's

[27] Zeitlin 1978, 164.
[28] Aesch. *LB.* 928-929.
[29] Aesch. *Aga*. 1258-1259. The insulting remarks made against Aegisthus will be further examined in Chapter 2.

character by Cassandra sets up the monster imagery that Aeschylus makes use of throughout the following plays in this trilogy, notably through the connection that is made with her character and the Furies in the *Eumenides*. Therefore, through Cassandra's frenzied language, Clytemnestra is characterized and presented as a monstrous woman due to her manly disposition, consequently demonstrating to the audience that she is an untrustworthy and dangerous woman who steps outside of her gender to kill her husband.

Clytemnestra's Masculine Language and Improper Femininity

In addition to the many critical remarks that other characters make about Clytemnestra throughout the *Agamemnon*, the language that Clytemnestra herself uses also reveals a dangerous side of her characterization to a fifth-century male audience. This is specifically demonstrated through her masculinized language and behaviour as Clytemnestra is prominent in the public sphere throughout the play, using strong and persuasive language to take control. The masculine language that Clytemnestra uses throughout the course of the play is alluded to many times by other characters, as discussed above, since her speech and behaviour is so pronounced and gender-defiant that it leads to many of the male characters to directly comment upon it.[30] The most notable example of this language can be seen in the famous tapestry scene before Agamemnon walks to his death, when Clytemnestra masterfully uses the power of persuasion to goad him into walking across the expensive cloth. In addition to her clever use of speech and rhetoric, Clytemnestra takes care to bend the norms of gender and language, utilizing both masculine and feminine language to her own advantage in order to fulfill her plan, demonstrating

[30] Aesch. *Aga*. 10-11 and 351-2.

once again the androgynous nature of her character, as well as contributing to her dangerous characterization.

The Power of πείθω *and the Tapestry Scene*

Clytemnestra demonstrates her impressive use of language many times throughout the *Oresteia*, specifically displaying her mastery of the art of persuasion. The idea of πειθώ, or persuasion, was well-known and greatly valued in ancient Greece, since it was viewed as an essential skill in public debates of various topics.[31] R.G.A Buxton carefully examines this concept, and identifies a specific type of πείθω that works in tandem with δόλος, or cunning, which is used when a person desires to overcome someone who is superior than them either in status or in strength. Buxton notes that this type of persuasion is commonly demonstrated through women in Greek myth, and that these two concepts can be virtually indistinguishable at times depending on their use, as is evidenced through Clytemnestra's acts in the *Agamemnon.*[32] Clytemnestra's use of πείθω as a form of deception during the tapestry scene has inspired many scholars to study her use of rhetoric to carry out her murders,[33] as Clytemnestra successfully assumes control of the situation over her husband through her dominance of persuasion, allowing her to subvert the gender roles during their short interaction.[34] Clytemnestra is clever enough to know that she will never be able to subjugate and conquer her husband through βία, or force, so she decides to achieve this through her mastery of πείθω instead, which Buxton claims to be the direct opposite of force and violence.[35] Moreover, Annie Bonnafé also recognizes the cunning

[31] See Buxton 1982 for an in-depth and extensive examination of the use of πείθω in Greek society and thought, and how this is represented in tragedy as well.
[32] Buxton 1982, 64-65.
[33] Foley 2003a; Bonnafé 1989 and McClure 1999 all examine the persuasive powers Clytemnestra employs throughout Aeschylus' trilogy and how she subverts the traditional gender roles in her speeches.
[34] Crane 1993, 132.
[35] For more discussion on this see Buxton 1982 58-63.

persuasion that Clytemnestra employs throughout this scene, noting that this is a type of *agon* scene that cannot be won physically through βία, instead stating that this is a verbal battle in which one can only conquer by using the power of πειθώ.[36] Thus, let us now examine the language and rhetorical methods that Clytemnestra cleverly and carefully uses when she first meets Agamemnon, demonstrating her superiority in deceptive speech and cunning use of πείθω over her unsuspecting husband.

Clytemnestra's mastery of persuasion is highlighted during the tapestry scene since she is able to quickly convince Agamemnon to commit this hubristic deed in the short span of twelve lines.[37] She begins demonstrating her deceptive use of πείθω through subverting and abusing the rhetorical formula to her own advantage when asking him, "What do you think Priam would have done, if he accomplished what you have?" (τί δ᾽ ἂν δοκεῖ σοι Πρίαμος, εἰ τάδ᾽ ἤνυσεν;).[38] Clytemnestra makes excellent use of πείθω here as she strategically speaks to Agamemnon's arrogance through this hypothetical question, to which Agamemnon must agree, ultimately placing himself below Priam if he chooses not to walk across the tapestry. [39] This masculine line of questioning that Clytemnestra employs displays her ambiguous speech since she not only cleverly uses the Socratic maieutic method to make Agamemnon's confidence waver,[40] but also quickly reverts back to her feminine role and language when she cries out to him, "Just yield! Let your power fall willingly to me" (πιθοῦ· κράτος μέντοι πάρες γ᾽ ἑκὼν ἐμοί).[41] Thus, within this short stichomythic exchange Clytemnestra fully displays the ambiguity of her πείθω through her masculine rhetorical skill, alongside the overall feminine nature of her persuasion since she only

[36] Bonnafé 1989, 155
[37] Aesch. *Aga.* 931-943.
[38] Aesch. *Aga*. 935
[39] Foley 2003a, 210.
[40] Bonnafé 1989, 156.
[41] Aesch. *Aga*. 943.

uses this strength to deceive men.[42] Bonnafé also makes note of Clytemnestra's use of πείθω to subvert gender roles, attributing the masculinity of her words to the fact that Clytemnestra wants to be treated as an autonomous male figure since she sees herself almost like a double agent of Agamemnon due to his long absence at war. [43] Therefore, Clytemnestra's mastery of rhetoric and πείθω completely subverts the gender norms in this situation, identifying her as the masculine figure in charge as she subjugates her own husband with this persuasive language, once again signaling to an ancient audience the dangerous masculinity of her character.

Codeswitching: From Masculine to Feminine

Alongside Clytemnestra's proficiency in using persuasive language, she goes beyond speaking and acting in a masculine manner, taking this a step further by skilfully switching between masculine and feminine roles throughout the play. Clytemnestra is very careful with the way in which she presents herself to different characters, cleverly mentioning her womanhood and role as wife in front of male characters alongside her masculine language in order to placate and deceive them to successfully enact her plan. McClure calls this intentional ambiguity of language a type of linguistic "codeswitching", as Clytemnestra displays her masculine language when she exercises her πειθώ, yet also acts deferential like a woman to invoke sympathy from the chorus.[44] This gendered bilingualism is evidenced first during Clytemnestra's speech about the torch relay to the chorus of elders, in which she subtly takes the attention away from her masculine and public language in front of these men by reminding them of her lesser gender with, "Indeed you hear such things from me, a woman" (τοιαῦτά τοι γυναικὸς ἐξ ἐμοῦ κλύεις).[45]

[42] McClure 1999, 70.
[43] See Bonnafé 1989 for more discussion on how Clytemnestra uses heroic and militaristic language in her speeches.
[44] McClure 1999, 71-75.
[45] Aesch. *Aga*. 348.

The deliberate shift here from masculine to feminine speech demonstrates Clytemnestra's attempt to gain respect and compassion from the male chorus, once again showing the ambiguity of her gendered discourse, manipulating the chorus by using their perception of her. The chorus is not the only victim of her divergent language, since she utilizes this codeswitching with the messenger as well, as she plays into her abandonment by her husband and laments about her womanly actions and sacrifices in response to her clever masculine torch relay, ending her feminine speech with, "Such is my boast, and since it is full of truth, it is not a shameful thing for a noble woman to shout" (τοιόσδ᾽ ὁ κόμπος, τῆς ἀληθείας γέμων, οὐκ αἰσχρὸς ὡς γυναικὶ γενναίᾳ λακεῖν).[46] Therefore, despite Clytemnestra's masculine behaviour, her repeated reference to her gender and womanhood illustrates her deception of these male characters, while also highlighting how she confounds these gender norms and improperly takes advantage of them for her own good.

During these deceptive speeches, Clytemnestra takes care to not only include feminine speech in her masculine discourse, but to also highlight her role as a tragic and suffering wife. Clytemnestra again panders to these male characters by deferring her rash and gender-breaking language and behaviour to her womanly emotions, as she displays with the messenger when she rejoices the return of her husband:

> ὅπως δ᾽ ἄριστα τὸν ἐμὸν αἰδοῖον πόσιν
> σπεύσω πάλιν μολόντα δέξασθαι. τί γὰρ
> γυναικὶ τούτου φέγγος ἥδιον δρακεῖν,
> ἀπὸ στρατείας ἄνδρα σώσαντος θεοῦ
> πύλας ἀνοῖξαι;
>
> In such a manner I will hasten to give my honoured husband the best possible welcome when he comes back home. For what light is sweeter for a wife to see, than when she opens the gates to her husband, whom God has saved, coming home from war?

[46] Aesch. *Aga*. 613-614. Weir Smyth attributes the Messenger with these lines, while other editors such as Sommerstein give these lines to Clytemnestra.

Aesch. *Aga.* 600-604.

These lines are notoriously ambiguous since they seem sincere and loving at first, as they no doubt sound to the messenger, but have a very dark meaning behind them since they foretell the murder that Clytemnestra has planned for her husband during his long absence. The "best possible welcome" that Clytemnestra envisions is not the same as what the messenger imagines, since she cunningly masks the true intentions of her words with this feminine and emotional sentiment. Moreover, she performs a similar deception when she first greets Agamemnon, lamenting the hardships she has had to endure alone with, "Firstly, it is a terrible evil for a woman to sit at home, lonely, apart from her husband" (τὸ μὲν γυναῖκα πρῶτον ἄρσενος δίχα ἧσθαι δόμοις ἔρημον ἔκπαγλον κακόν).[47] This codeswitching is also continued in the *Libation Bearers* right before Clytemnestra's murder by her son Orestes, where she tried to make use of her femininity and suffering as a woman to invoke pity in Orestes by bearing her breast and saying, "Wait, oh son! Have some respect, my child, for this breast from which many times while dowsing off you sucked nourishing milk with toothless gums" (ἐπίσχες, ὦ παῖ, τόνδε δ' αἴδεσαι, τέκνον, μαστόν, πρὸς ᾧ σὺ πολλὰ δὴ βρίζων ἅμα οὔλοισιν ἐξήμελξας εὐτραφὲς γάλα),[48] while also repeating the pains of a wife staying at home without her husband in line 920, which she also mentions in the *Agamemnon*. Though her manipulative femininity and motherhood here almost convince Orestes to spare her, as he wavers and must turn to Pylades for support,[49] unlike in the *Agamemnon* Clytemnestra cannot save herself with her ambiguous speech and is murdered near the end of the play. Both the characters and the audience in the *Libation Bearers* have learned their lesson from the *Agamemnon* and can now recognize the danger of Clytemnestra's

[47] Aesch. *Aga*. 861-862.
[48] Aesch. *LB*. 896-898.
[49] Aesch. *LB*. 899-902.

persuasion and manipulation of gender norms and gendered speech, thus demonstrating the effect of Clytemnestra's dangerous characterization through her codeswitching in the *Agamemnon*.

The act of codeswitching and the deceptive characterizations of women in Greek tragedy are not unique to Clytemnestra, as this is often displayed through other tragic wives as well, as can be seen through Medea in her eponymous play and Deianeira in the *Trachiniae*. Like Clytemnestra, both Medea and Deianeira are motivated to commit their masculine acts through the transgressions of their husbands, as Medea poisons her husband Jason's betrothed and kills her own two children when he abandons their marriage, while Deianeira accidentally poisons her husband Herakles when she learns that he has brought a young bed slave into their *oikos.* Although both of these women are similar to Clytemnestra in the fact that they also step outside of their gender to commit these masculine and fatal deeds, Clytemnestra's language and behaviour differs from other tragic wives that deceive and harm their husbands in tragedy. As we have explored in this chapter, Clytemnestra's masculine disposition and speech are highlighted by various characters from the very beginning of the *Agamemnon*, setting up her dangerous characterization and gradually hinting to her vengeful murders near the end of the play. Medea and Deianeira are much less conspicuous before they enact their crimes, as Medea decides upon her murderous plan halfway through the play when she learns about Jason's abandonment, while Deianeira does not mean to kill her husband at all. Furthermore, Clytemnestra is the only wife who has planned her evil act against her husband for years before his return home, further distinguishing her from her fellow wives who act in the moment.[50] Clytemnestra's intentional act

[50] Foley 2003a, 261. Foley speaks in-depth here about how Medea specifically differs from Clytemnestra since she is able to deceive the chorus through her feminine sympathy, and that her heroic and masculine side develops as the play progresses.

of codeswitching and her overall masculine behaviour not only reveals and highlights the improper femininity and fatal persuasiveness that is common in tragedy, but also sets her apart as the most dangerous of these tragic women, since her gender-breaking language and actions have been carefully planned. Thus, the prevalent masculinity of Clytemnestra's characterization and her improper use of feminine language and behaviour to deceive others once again illustrates to an ancient male audience how deceitful her characterization is even when compared to other tragic women, while also encouraging a fifth-century audience to perceive this type of female speech as dangerous, demonstrating that persuasion and rhetoric should be regulated and free from feminine deception.[51]

After analysing Clytemnestra's gendered language and the devaluing comments from other characters in the *Agamemnon*, it becomes evident that a fifth-century male audience would characterize her figure as deceitful and dangerous. This perception of her character is introduced at the very beginning of the play, as Clytemnestra's deviant masculine language plays a prominent role and is recognized many times by the male characters of the chorus of Argive elders and Agamemnon who continually try to remind her of her gender and femininity. Alongside these male reactions, the most scathing denunciation of Clytemnestra comes from Cassandra, who condemns both her language and her murderous intent, illustrating to the male audience Clytemnestra's monstrous and gender-breaking identity. Thus, before Clytemnestra commits the murders that influence her negative portrayal in various works over the ages, an ancient audience already perceives Clytemnestra's character as the antagonist of this play and are further convinced of this through her own masculine speech and improper use of her own gender as a wife. This ambiguity of gender and speech underlines the way in which Clytemnestra

[51] McClure 1999, 72.

confounds and subverts ancient Greek gender norms through her language and behaviour, demonstrating how Aeschylus depicts Clytemnestra's masculinity as dangerous to a fifth-century male audience. In understanding the motivations of Clytemnestra's ancient characterization, we now have a basis to examine the evolution of her character from antiquity to modernity, as well as an opportunity to explore the significance behind Clytemnestra's dangerous masculinity.

Chapter 2: Clytemnestra's Behaviour as a Commentary on Collective Greek Masculinity

Now that we have established the ancient perception of Clytemnestra's characterization, the question remains as to why a dangerous female character had such a dominant role in this play. The contrast between women's role in ancient society and their power in Greek drama has been a subject of debate for many years, as scholars attempt to discover the motivation behind these male playwrights placing female characters at the forefront of their plays, consequently giving them more agency than women had during the 5th century.[1] This discrepancy between tragedy and reality is distinctly showcased through Clytemnestra, especially when her role in the *Agamemnon* is compared to the other male characters and their weaknesses in this play. One possible answer as to why Aeschylus chooses to highlight Clytemnestra's dangerous gender-breaking behaviour is to reinforce the idea to an ancient male audience that women should not rule or have power in Athenian society, but this theory only constitutes a surface reading of the play. Instead, I propose to build upon Zeitlin's idea that the dominance of women in Greek tragedy provides a commentary on masculinity instead of critiquing women themselves.[2] This allows male playwrights to discuss unwanted characteristics of men through the guise and distance of women, since in antiquity female characters in tragedy are created for men and serve as proxies for them to reflect on their lives and experiences as men. Following this conclusion and reasoning, I will apply this reading to Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*, since I believe that her character allows a male Athenian audience to reflect on their collective masculine identity through Clytemnestra's masculinity, encouraging them to question the boundaries of masculinity as Clytemnestra emasculates the men around her through her own masculine traits. Therefore,

[1] Some notable scholars who have written on this subject are Foley 1981 and 2003; Zeitlin 1996; Wohl 2005 and Shaw 1975.
[2] Zeitlin covers this idea in her 1985 article which is also reprinted as a chapter in her 1996 book.

through her masculine, and inherently dangerous behaviour, Clytemnestra's character serves more as a catalyst for men to contemplate the gender-norms of their society than an anti-model for women.

The Influence of Women in Tragedy

As the study of women in Greek tragedy has become more prevalent through the rise of feminist studies in classics, many scholars have considered the true role of these powerful women in Greek drama. Michael Shaw briefly speaks about some popular theories on this topic, as some believe that tragedy proves that women were not strictly confined to the house and had more freedom and agency than originally thought, while others argue that the focus on women in drama is simply an Athenian fantasy rather than a reflection of the reality of their society.[3] As Shaw points out, neither of these views consult myth, the psyche and contemporary society in balance, which leads me to Zeitlin's view of women in tragedy, which is also supported by Foley, that this female pre-eminence in drama comments on masculinity and men rather than revealing aspects about femininity and women in Athenian society.[4] When examining the overall function of tragedy, it is commonly agreed upon by scholars that the purpose of drama is to provoke thought and to encourage the audience to begin asking questions about different aspects of their lives and society.[5] If this is regarded to be true, it begs the question as to what thought is provoked by the focus on women and their dominant nature in Greek tragedy. Logically, women are placed at the forefront of tragedy since these plays focus on and explore different issues that occur in the *oikos* which affect the family and its members, but the idea that this simply

[3] Shaw 1975 directs his readers to see Gomme 1937 and Kitto 1957 for the first theory, and Slater 1968 for the second view.
[4] Zeitlin 1985 and Foley 2001.
[5] Des Bouvrie 1990, 27.

reinforces the misogynistic treatment of women in Athenian society is too elementary of a concept when considering the complexity of Greek tragedy.[6] Instead, we must remember that tragedy was written by men, for a male audience and performed by male actors who take on the appearance of female characters.[7] Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that the meaning behind these dominant women is aimed at men and their own experiences in society, and that these female characters comment on issues of masculinity and gender through the guise of "playing the other", as Zeitlin coins. Although this changes in modern times, the purpose of women in tragedy during antiquity is to serve as a stand-in for men to reflect upon and challenge the collective sense of masculinity in their society. I believe that this understanding of the role of deviant women in drama is exemplified and proven through an examination of Clytemnestra's character in the *Oresteia,* as her own faults alongside her successful emasculation of the male characters in this play encourage a fifth-century male audience to revaluate the societal views of masculinity.

Uncovering Masculinity through Women

Before exploring how Clytemnestra specifically comments on masculinity in the *Agamemnon*, it is first important to understand and establish this theory as presented by Zeitlin. She introduces this idea in her 1985 article and devotes an entire chapter to it in her 1996 book, stating that drama served as a kind of education for male citizens who took part in the *polis*, and as such the morals and meanings of these plays would be directed to them and their self-advancement.[8] Mendelsohn also takes note of Zeitlin's point about women's role in Greek tragedy, stating,

> "There is little doubt that tragedy was indeed a man's game, problematizing issues central to the question of male identity while repressing any substantive consideration of real

[6] Des Bouvrie 1990, 32.
[7] Wohl 2005, 147.
[8] Zeitlin 1996, 346.

> women and their own lives and identities…this has become the cornerstone of an interpretive approach to the role of the feminine in Greek tragedy that takes femininity as a symbolic value in a discourse that is, ultimately, about men".[9]

The role of femininity and the dangerous actions of women like Clytemnestra in tragedy are not inherently about women themselves and their lives whether evil or good, but rather about the masculinity and male-self of the men who watch and experience these dramas. The female characters in Greek tragedy, then, are not used for women to self-reflect and change, though it is possible that some women would be present in the audience of these performances,[10] but that their characters would take on a variety of different roles, both helpful and destructive, in order to encourage the male characters and the men in the audience to explore their male identities.[11] These women are then giving men the opportunity to "play the other" in the sense that their characters were acted out by men on stage, as well as allowing men in the audience to experience and understand masculinity in a different way through the guise of women and their own experience.[12] This then raises the question as to what women in tragedy teach men, if drama truly is education for male citizens as Zeitlin says. The actions and behaviours of these female characters in contrast to their male counterparts can either serve as anti-models or models for men and how they should act, encouraging them to imagine and achieve a more advantageous self-model for themselves.[13] Building upon this theory, I believe that this male message disguised through the acts of women is further heightened when female characters are more

[9] Mendelsohn 2002, 25.
[10] There has been a long debate over whether Athenian women attended the theatre in ancient Greece, and it seems to be ongoing as the ancient evidence is quite inconclusive. Katz 1998b presents a detailed overview of the history of this debate, starting with Böttiger's 1776 opposing theory to Casaubon's 1592 argument that women were present at these plays. More recent scholarship in this area including Henderson 1991 and Goldhill 1994 are still opposing, yet there has been a considerable focus on the support for women in these audiences, making this possibility that much more attainable.
[11] Zeitlin 1996, 346-7.
[12] Wohl 2005, 151.
[13] Zeitlin 1996, 363.

dominantly masculine than the men in these plays, displaying the male characters to be weak and lacking the masculinity that the female characters possess. The male characters work in tandem with the female characters to demonstrate both the right and wrong actions of men, and how these actions can affect their masculinity and how they are viewed in society.[14] Moreover, using female characters such as Clytemnestra to present these questions to an ancient male audience allows the playwrights to maintain a distance between drama and reality, commenting on these topics without being too overtly political. The rest of this chapter will explore how Clytemnestra's masculinity functions in tandem with the emasculation and feminization of the chorus, Agamemnon and Aegisthus, and uncover what this reveals about masculinity in ancient Athens, while near the end of this discussion I will offer some thoughts on why these female characters were used in this way by Athenian playwrights. Thus, the dominance and agency of women in tragedy should be interpreted as reflecting certain aspects of masculinity to men that they must maintain while also challenging their beliefs of the societal expectations of this concept, as many female characters in tragedy display masculine traits more proficiently than their male counterparts.

Examples throughout Tragedy

Before examining this theory in the context of Clytemnestra and the *Agamemnon*, let us take a brief digression to explore how Zeitlin's reasoning works with other tragedies in order to fully grasp this approach. There are many women in tragedy who make mistakes and commit evil acts due to the misdeeds of the men around them, and these actions tend to harm these male characters and reveal certain aspects about their masculinity.[15] This can be seen through Medea's

[14] Mendelsohn 2002, 225-6.
[15] Swift 2016, 92

infamous infanticide and murder of Jason's soon-to-be wife when Jason chooses to forsake his marriage to Medea and abandon her, as well as in Deianeira's accidental mariticide caused by Herakles lying to her and bringing his bed slave Iole into the *oikos*. Of course, Clytemnestra's planned murder of Agamemnon after his murder of their daughter Iphigenia is another example of Zeitlin's theory, which will be analysed in detail in the coming pages. All these female characters feel the need to protect their *oikos* after their husbands have destroyed or harmed the foundation of their family, thus leading the women to transgress on their own and ruin the men's lives just as they were destroyed. Although the actions of these female characters who decide to take matters into their own hands would have been viewed as dangerous by a male audience in the 5th century, as examined in the previous chapter, the underlying comment on masculinity in each play that the playwright incorporates through these dominant women is evident through the power dynamic between husband and wife. Since the gender roles are reversed in these plays, as Medea, Deianeira and Clytemnestra all exercise power over their helpless husbands, this reversal challenges the men in the audience to rethink the concept of masculinity, as the women demonstrate masculinity better than the men, though they may be doing this for the wrong reasons.[16] Among these female characters, Clytemnestra's masculinity stands out from her fellow wives, as she is the only woman who efficiently dominates every male character in her presence, mostly without their knowledge, as the rest of this chapter will demonstrate.[17] Furthermore, Shaw points out that there are certain uncomfortable aspects of masculinity that are underlined through these female actions, as both Jason and Agamemnon only act in order to

[16] Bassi 1998, 22-3.
[17] Though Medea does dominate her husband in the end of the *Medea* through her brutal murder and infanticides, there is much back and forth between husband and wife in which Jason verbally fights back against his wife's dominance. Additionally, Deianeira's power over her husband is involuntary, since she does not mean to trick her husband in any way, thus making Clytemnestra's swift and precise control over Agamemnon, the chorus and Aegisthus unique.

secure their place in society when Jason leaves Medea since he wants to marry a Greek princess, while Agamemnon sacrifices his own daughter for military glory. Due to these actions, there is an imbalance here between the *polis* and the *oikos* that the female characters try to fix themselves, thus leading to chaos in both spheres and causing harm to the male characters.[18] Consequently, these deviant actions of the female characters reveal the dangers of improper masculinity to the audience, proving that Zeitlin's argument can be applied to multiple plays throughout the tragic corpus, while truly coming to life through Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*.

Clytemnestra's Impact on Masculinity in the *Agamemnon*

Let us now examine how Clytemnestra's actions in the *Agamemnon* underlines the faults of masculinity and challenges a fifth-century male audience to question and redefine the parameters of gender in their society. In some respects, this problematic ambiguity of Clytemnestra's figure can be seen to reveal and prove that women are more fit to be ruled rather than to rule themselves, as Zeitlin points out that this is demonstrated through the natural progression of the trilogy, since the three plays move from chaotic female dominance with Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon* to more appropriate male dominance through Apollo and the acceptably androgynous Athena in the *Eumenides*.[19] Despite this, there are many aspects of Clytemnestra's character that uncover different faults of masculinity through her own actions and interactions with the other male characters in the play, as the men who criticize Clytemnestra are among the same men that are either emasculated or effeminized by her masculine behaviour. This emasculation of male figures can be seen through the chorus and her husband Agamemnon, as Clytemnestra's dominance over them through her action and language underlines their

[18] Shaw 1975, 260.
[19] Zeitlin 1978, 151-152.

weakness despite being men. The most conspicuous case of this reversal of gender roles is displayed through Aegisthus, who is characterized as cowardly and effeminate by the other men in the play while he tries to take credit for Agamemnon's murder, although Clytemnestra is evidently the instigator of these murders. Through Clytemnestra's own tyrannical and masculine actions alongside the weakness of the men around her, she introduces a discussion to a fifth-century male audience about gender roles while also challenging them to rediscover the bounds of masculinity through this gender inversion. This highlights the paradox of Clytemnestra's role within this play, as she is the most powerful and masculine character throughout the entirety of the *Agamemnon* despite being a woman, thus demonstrating to an ancient male audience that masculinity is more than just being a man, as evidenced through Clytemnestra's masculine prowess.

Clytemnestra's Masculinizing Actions

Clytemnestra's actions throughout the *Agamemnon* are the most evident sign and proof of the reversal of gender roles in this play. Since her behaviour does not reflect the workings of the gender norms of ancient Athenian society, there must be a reason as to why Aeschylus decided to give a woman more authority in his play over the man after whom the drama is named. As previously stated, I believe that this relates to the idea that female characters in tragedy are used to comment on Athenian masculinity. Like Zeitlin, Foley also explores the notion that Clytemnestra and other female figures in tragedy exhibit male insecurities instead of female faults, stating that deviant women, to whom drama gives moral autonomy, not only illustrate to the audience the problems and troubles of female independence and rule, but also highlight certain characteristics that men feared in themselves the most and would much rather critique

and explore through these female characters.[20] I argue that Clytemnestra goes a step beyond this, as she heightens these comments on masculinity through her interactions with the male characters around her, since they are depicted to be weak, emasculated and effeminate in contrast to her masculine authority. Clytemnestra herself displays a variety of these problematic male traits that are present in these female characters, which Foley lists as, "…incapacity for self-control, their vulnerability to desire, their naive ethical misjudgments, their passionate responses to victimization, their desire for autonomy and reputation at others' expense, and their social incapacities [which] are all characteristics men feared in themselves and preferred to explore through women".[21] Clytemnestra exhibits these features when she cannot control her response to Iphigenia's death, nor keep herself from having an affair with Aegisthus in Agamemnon's absence. Moreover, her murder of Cassandra not only displays Clytemnestra's lack of self-control, but also her ethical misjudgement, as she kills Cassandra even though she has done nothing wrong. Finally, Clytemnestra's pleas to the chorus to take her seriously when they assume she committed these murders involuntarily illustrates her response to her victimization, while her continuous masculine behaviour throughout the play shows her desire for independence, even if it comes at the cost of Agamemnon's death. Through this behaviour, an ancient male audience would not only be able to criticize these actions through the guise of a female character, just as tragedy so often uses the distance of mythology to engage in difficult topics, but also gives them the opportunity to recognize these male faults in the collective male society, acknowledging the consequences that occur when they are present in excess. In turn, this demonstrates how Clytemnestra's character goes beyond simply showing the problems and dangers of improper femininity and female autonomy, instead revealing the many male

[20] Foley 2003a, 116.
[21] Foley 2003a, 116.

insecurities in ancient Greek society through the deceptive guise of a woman, successfully confounding ancient gender roles through Clytemnestra's characterization and allowing the men in attendance of this play to reflect and question how their own society views masculinity through this female figure.

Clytemnestra highlights the faults of ancient masculinity by demonstrating the dangers of excessive power in rulers to an ancient male audience, as some interpret her rule throughout the play to resemble that of a tyrant. The chorus specifically calls Clytemnestra's actions and murder of her husband, the king of Argos, tyrannical, using the word τυραννίδος in lines 1355 and 1365. Gagarin makes clear note of this description of Clytemnestra by the chorus of old men, explaining that when Clytemnestra decides to murder Agamemnon, she puts aside her desire for moderation and peace as she forcefully rips the kingship from Agamemnon along with his life, giving both herself and her lover Aegisthus the usurped power. Furthermore, Gagarin states that this labelling of Clytemnestra's behaviour as tyrannical by the chorus would have likely been accepted by an fifth-century male audience, as the male characters have been revealing to the audience the danger that Clytemnestra poses from the very beginning of this play. [22] The chorus sheds light on the collective experience of the play, as Simon Goldhill explains, "The chorus as collective thus mirrors and directs the audience in its role as collective spectator, but it is only the audience that achieves 'tragic consciousness'".[23] These old men indicate to a fifth-century male audience the meaning they should be taking from this play, displaying the tyrannical undertones of Clytemnestra's masculine rule even if they do not realize it themselves. The effect of underlining the tyrannical aspects of Clytemnestra's behaviour not only reminds the audience about the possible dangers of a tyrannical government, something they would already know well,

[22] Gagarin 1976, 111-112.
[23] Goldhill 1996, 245.

but also allows the men watching this play to leave the auditorium with a better understanding of the behaviour of men in rule and the process that leads to both good and bad political decisions.[24] With this knowledge, men within the city are able to imagine and create a greater *polis* collectively, as they now recognize Clytemnestra's mistakes and rash decisions in her quest to achieve vengeance, since even though she tried to steer her city away from anarchy due to the absence of their ruler, she still created tyranny and chaos in the end.[25] In addition to this, the fact that Aeschylus chooses to demonstrate this lesson through a female character increases the distance between tragedy and reality, making this topic more palatable to a fifth-century male audience while still presenting them with these questions about masculinity to ponder outside of the theatre.[26] Therefore, it is evident that Clytemnestra's actions and her decisions throughout the *Agamemnon* can serve as a both a model and an anti-model for men who are active in the *polis* and in politics, allowing them to collectively achieve the advancement of masculinity and the city as they see how the excess of power as a result of improper masculinity can turn the city to tyranny and chaos.

Emasculating and Effeminizing the Chorus

This uncovering of the issues of masculinity through Clytemnestra's gender-breaking behaviour is also evident in the *Agamemnon* through her power in contrast to the weakened and helpless position of the male chorus. This distinction is quite striking as the chorus is comprised of elder men, since tragic choruses tend to consist of women as lamentation is considered a more

[24] Gagarin 1976, 118.
[25] Gagarin 1976, 111-112.
[26] The faults of power and masculinity in rulers are also demonstrated by men in tragedy, as can be seen in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* with Eteocles. This then presents the question as to why we have female characters who represent this and what differs between their role in this in contrast to men. I do not believe there is any difference between male and female characters representing these faults in leadership besides the distancing that women provide, though this subject could benefit from more scholarship.

feminine trait than masculine.[27] Thus, the chorus already become emasculated, and even effeminized in this case, since their role requires them to carry out these feminine acts. Furthermore, there is a distinct and unusual role swap between these male elders and Clytemnestra, since they are forced to perform these ritualized laments not only due to their position as the chorus, but also because Clytemnestra herself refuses to perform the laments of a wife mourning her dead husband.[28] This is not something that Clytemnestra forgets to do in her grief, instead she willingly chooses not to lament for Agamemnon, boldly responding to the chorus when they ask who will bury and grieve for him that, "We will bury him, not accompanied by the weeping of those outside of the family" (καὶ καταθάψομεν, οὐχ ὑπὸ κλαυθμῶν τῶν ἐξ οίκων).[29] Clytemnestra emasculates the chorus even more with this line, since she does not allow anyone in the *polis* to mourn for Agamemnon, making these men powerless since they are not able to help or grieve for their king, effectively stripping the chorus of any authority that they may appeared to have once had over Clytemnestra at the beginning of this play. Furthermore, the chorus becomes disjointed when they hear Agamemnon's cries when he is being murdered, as their unity is broken down into individual voices who separately struggle to let out panicked and fragmented words when they realize they cannot help him.[30] Despite their previous devaluing comments about Clytemnestra, they find themselves at a loss for words in trying to understand Agamemnon's death, which is in direct contrast to Clytemnestra's dominant speeches after murdering Agamemnon and Cassandra speeches, which according to McClure, "reduces the chorus to less than masculine status".[31] Clytemnestra's power in contrast to the weakened male

[27] Murnaghan 2013, 175.
[28] McClure 1999, 98.
[29] Aesch. *Aga.* 1553-4.
[30] Aesch. *Aga*. 1348-70. Gould 1996, 223 explains how the collective unity of the chorus breaks down during this scene, as the trauma of the situation causes them to transform into these individual voices instead of their usual unified song, further destroying their identity as a group of elder males.
[31] McClure 1999, 98.

chorus reveals the influence female characters have on masculinity in tragedy, as Foley explains, "When prominently presented, they may serve as antimodels as well as hidden models for that masculine self and concomitantly, their experience of suffering or their acts that lead them to disaster regularly occur before and precipitate those of men".[32] This complete reversal of power and gender as the chorus assumes the femininity that Clytemnestra has shed through her masculine actions not only demonstrates the cowardliness of men losing their masculinity, but also makes men revaluate their own understanding of masculinity, as Clytemnestra not only displays the faults of masculinity but also embodies masculinity more than these elder men, despite being a woman.

This weakness of the chorus in the face of Clytemnestra's power is also demonstrated in the final lines of the play, as there is no *exodos*, or exit song, by the chorus, a customary way to end Greek dramas which Aeschylus employs in many of his other plays. [33] In place of this, Clytemnestra speaks the last words in the *Agamemnon*, undermining and ignoring the critical remarks of the chorus as these characters exit in separate directions, the chorus into the *polis* and Aegisthus and Clytemnestra into the *oikos*.[34] The incomplete speech and silence of the chorus further emasculates the elders, while also displaying how they continue to lose their social identity due to Clytemnestra's masculine speech, since their fragmented words and shifting meter mimics the disorder of the city after Agamemnon's murder.[35] In addition to this, Aeschylus' choice for the chorus to remain silent as they leave the stage visually and aurally illustrates their effeminacy and lack of power in this situation and in the *polis* as a whole, as

[32] Foley 2003a, 11.
[33] McClure 1999, 98.
[34] Aesch. *Aga.* 1672-3.
[35] McClure 1999, 98 explains how this absence of the *exodos* also further contributes to the disintegration of the chorus by the end of this play, since although they leave still as a group of elders, their sense of identity and authority it completely shattered, as they are politically disenfranchised by Clytemnestra.

McClure explains, "In their silence, the chorus also come to resemble women, for their silence reflects a loss of political status".[36] It is also important to note that although a male chorus is clearly less marginalized than a female chorus, the fact that they are comprised of old men who yearn for their previous power but cannot act adds to their marginalization and introduces a sympathetic characterization to this chorus.[37] This in turn implicitly presents a question of masculinity and age to the audience, as these old men continue to be emasculated by a younger woman who presents the power and dominance that accompany masculinity, though she uses it to commit a crime. Perhaps the message for the audience is that masculinity fades as one grows old, or that it is a tool that must be constantly wielded so that it is not forgotten in old age. Nonetheless, through this subjugation of the chorus and the distinctive dominance of Clytemnestra, there is a clear confounding of gender roles through these characters which leads the male audience to question the expression of masculinity, further encouraging them to reassess the gender roles and identities in their own culture.

The Vices of Agamemnon

Another male character who is clearly emasculated in the *Agamemnon* in comparison to Clytemnestra is Agamemnon himself. Although he is the leader of Argos and has just returned from a successful war against the Trojans, his actions and behaviour in the *Agamemnon* display him to be emasculated in front of his masculine wife, since he is unknowingly lured into the house by Clytemnestra and murdered. Agamemnon's emasculated character is notably put on display during the tapestry scene, as we have examined that Clytemnestra's skilful use of πείθω puts her in a dominant position over her husband.[38] In addition to Clytemnestra's behaviour

[36] McClure 1999, 99.
[37] Murnaghan 2013, 176.
[38] Reference Chapter 1 for an in-depth analysis of Clytemnestra's use of rhetoric and πείθω in this scene.

during this scene, Agamemnon's responses to her persuasion also contribute to reducing the masculinity of his character, since he displays his nervous indecisiveness before heeding to Clytemnestra's commands. Throughout the tapestry scene, Agamemnon is hesitant to listen to his wife's pleas, constantly challenging her and worrying about what the people of the city will say about him, displaying this emasculated behaviour as Clytemnestra is able to carefully coerce Agamemnon without him making a strict decision.[39] Furthermore, his weakness is specifically highlighted when he finally decides to walk on the tapestry, yielding to Clytemnestra and asking the gods for forgiveness:

> ἀλλ᾽ εἰ δοκεῖ σοι ταῦθ᾽, ὑπαί τις ἀρβύλας
> λύοι τάχος, πρόδουλον ἔμβασιν ποδός.
> καὶ τοῖσδέ μ᾽ ἐμβαίνονθ᾽ ἁλουργέσιν θεῶν
> μή τις πρόσωθεν ὄμματος βάλοι φθόνος.
> πολλὴ γὰρ αἰδὼς δωματοφθορεῖν ποσὶν
> φθείροντα πλοῦτον ἀργυρωνήτους θ᾽ ὑφάς.
>
> But if this seems good to you, let someone quickly loosen my shoes, which serve as a slave for my feet to step on. As I step on these purple cloths may no ill-will of the gods' eyes strike me from afar. For it is terribly shameful to ruin this house under my feet, destroying its wealth and the weaving that was bought with silver.
>
> Aesch. *Aga.* 944-949.

From the beginning of his speech, Agamemnon assigns all blame to Clytemnestra instead of to himself, showing that he is not even masculine enough to take on the responsibility of his own decisions. Instead, Agamemnon offers up weak prayers to the gods, trying to find the middle ground instead of confidently walking into the house like a true leader.[40] This weak and compliant nature of Agamemnon in response to Clytemnestra illustrates that, as Crane states, "Her actions not only show Agamemnon to be pusillanimous, but establish the strength of her

[39] The same argument is made for the chorus by Moss 1988, 520 as he states that the chorus' continuous wavering between trust and hesitation with Clytemnestra further effeminates these old men, as they are not masculine enough to make a decision. The same argument can be made with Agamemnon here, as he exhibits this behaviour in lines 931-943.
[40] Crane 1993, 129.

own transgressive nature; for she acts the dominant male role that one would expect Agamemnon to fill".[41] Thus, Agamemnon's compliance in response to Clytemnestra's rhetoric and persuasion demonstrates how a dominant woman can make her husband appear as hesitant and harm his honour, presenting to an ancient male audience the dangers of indecisiveness to masculinity, especially in response to a masculine woman.[42]

In addition to this inversion of gender roles between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, there are other troubling aspects of Agamemnon's characterization that come to light when he is compared to his dominant wife. Along with being emasculated in this scene, Agamemnon's reluctant compliance with Clytemnestra's order to tread over the lush purple tapestry reveals his desire of barbarian luxuries and wealth, which he seemingly became accustomed to during his time in Troy. His desire for such riches is evidenced when Clytemnestra makes Agamemnon admit that Priam would walk over the tapestry without hesitation, cleverly using this questioning to reveal Agamemnon's affinity and jealousy of the barbarian king, as he does not want to seem inferior to him, causing him to ruin these wealthy tapestries in order to gain this barbarian status.[43] This exchange not only underlines Agamemnon's arrogance here, but also highlights how he has lost his Greek values during the war, instead wishing to collect wealth and wanting to compare himself to a barbarian Trojan king. Through this suspenseful interaction with his wife, Agamemnon is characterized as a barbarian and a tyrant, as he has become a passive object whom Clytemnestra can easily conquer and control, demonstrating both his loss of masculinity and Greek identity.[44] Furthermore, this affinity to barbarian riches and to Priam is also

[41] Crane 1993, 132.
[42] Shaw 1975, 257.
[43] Agamemnon makes a similar decision when he chooses to kill Iphigenia to sail for Troy, since in Clytemnestra's eyes he ruins the wealth of their family, their daughter, to achieve barbarian riches at Troy. Reference Chapter 1 for more on the tapestry scene and Clytemnestra's persuasion.
[44] Wohl 1998, 104.

heightened when Agamemnon reveals that he has brought home Cassandra with him, a princess of Troy, to be his bed slave. This is not only an affront to his wife, since he is bringing his concubine into the *oikos* which he already destroyed by murdering Iphigenia (in Clytemnestra's opinion), but it also illustrates his greed and desire for excess. Although it was considered normal for a leader to be awarded a conquered princess after battle in ancient Greece, the fact that Agamemnon tries to introduce Cassandra into the household where his wife resides is unacceptable, as his desire to have both his legitimate and illegitimate partners in the same place illustrates his avarice and reinforces Clytemnestra's resolve to kill him.[45] Consequently, there is a clear discussion invoked here by Aeschylus on the danger of adopting such foreign values and how this can affect a man's masculinity when it occurs in excess, leading to a complete loss of male self-hood as Agamemnon is deprived an honourable and heroic death in battle, instead being murdered by a woman through deceit.[46] Thus, male characters such as Agamemnon, as well as Aegisthus, in the *Agamemnon* represent to the audience a wealthy class of citizens who are weak and easily dominated by women like Clytemnestra, demonstrating how these undesirable male characteristics are not only revealed indirectly through Clytemnestra, but also through the male characters themselves, which is further highlighted by the masculinity of Clytemnestra.[47]

Aegisthus as the Cowardly and Effeminate Wolf

[45] Zeitlin 1978, 154-6 explains how in Aeschylus Agamemnon is the one who initiates the hostilities that lead to his death through the sacrifice of Iphigenia and the attempted introduction of Cassandra into the *oikos*. This situation also occurs in the *Trachiniae* and in *Medea* since both husbands forsake their wives for other women, though Deianeira and Medea's characterizations are different from Clytemnestra's.
[46] Gagarin 1976, 92, 97.
[47] Griffith 1995, 84.

It is fitting that the other prominent male character who is weakened in comparison to Clytemnestra's masculinity is her lover Aegisthus, as Wohl states, "Clytemnestra's transgressive power destroys the play's male rulers, rendering the legitimate (Agamemnon) and the illegitimate (Aegisthus) alike politically ineffectual and sexually abjected".[48] Like Agamemnon, Aegisthus is not on stage for a large portion of the play, appearing only near the end to take credit for Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon, making a very enthusiastic entrance speech.[49] In these lines, Aegisthus claims to have killed Agamemnon in order to avenge his father Thyestes, who was wronged by his own brother Atreus, Agamemnon's father.[50] Although Aegisthus says this was all done by his own doing, the audience and the chorus know this is false, since they just witnessed Clytemnestra enact these murders on her own while Aegisthus remained out of sight in the *oikos*. This then commences an *agon* scene between the chorus and Aegisthus, in which they criticize him and point out his femininity by saying, "You woman! You stay-at-home! Waiting for those coming home from the war, at the same time defiling this man's bed, did you devise this death for the war general?" (γύναι, σὺ τοὺς ἥκοντας ἐκ μάχης μένων οἰκουρὸς εὐνὴν ἀνδρὸς αἰσχύνων ἅμα ἀνδρὶ στρατηγῷ τόνδ᾽ ἐβούλευσας μόρον;).[51] Here the chorus is quite literally effeminizing Aegisthus by addressing him as γύναι, while also pointing out that in comparison to Clytemnestra's daring acts and murder, Aegisthus stayed at home like a weak wife and woman. Considering Aegisthus' actions all together, he is clearly effeminized in contrast to Clytemnestra, as Wohl points out, "As an illegitimate ruler, a stay-at-home associated with deceit and sexuality, Aegisthus is effeminized; with Clytemnestra as ruler, Aegisthus becomes, as

[48] Wohl 1998, 103.
[49] Aesch. *Aga*. 1577-1611.
[50] Atreus killed his own nephews, save baby Aegisthus, and fed them to his brother Thyestes at dinner before revealing the truth behind the dish.
[51] Aesch. *Aga.* 1625-7.

the chorus says, "a woman"".[52] Thus, unlike Agamemnon, Aegisthus is not simply emasculated by Clytemnestra's actions, but effeminized in comparison to her, as the chorus reveals his femininity in these lines instead of his lack of masculinity.[53]

The chorus' criticism of Aegisthus' feminine behaviour does not stop here, as they question his claim of the murder and of kingship with, "As if you will ever be the tyrant of the Argives! You who did not, when you planned his death, did not have the courage to do this deed with your own hands!" (ὡς δὴ σύ μοι τύραννος Ἀργείων ἔσῃ, ὃς οὐκ, ἐπειδὴ τῷδ᾽ ἐβούλευσας μόρον, δρᾶσαι τόδ᾽ ἔργον οὐκ ἔτλης αὐτοκτόνως).[54] Through these statements by the chorus, it becomes clear to an ancient male audience that Aegisthus' reason for wanting to kill Agamemnon is not nearly as significant as Clytemnestra's motivation, making Aegisthus a weak conspirator who cowers inside waiting for the deed to be accomplished by a masculine and strong-willed woman who has a good, or at least better, cause to successfully carry out her plan.[55] Once again, Clytemnestra's masculinity in contrast to the femininity of Aegisthus leads a fifth-century male audience to question the societal beliefs of masculinity in Athens and consider the weakness that occurs when masculinity is lost or completely absent. Through Aeschylus' portrayal of Clytemnestra and these emasculated and effeminized male characters, he encourages a fifth-century audience to rethink what masculinity entails, since he has shown through these characters that it is not something that inherently comes with being male and can be exhibited by women as well. This then allows men to collectively imagine a higher expectation of masculinity within society that is not solely contingent

[52] Wohl 1998, 103.
[53] I believe that there is a distinct difference between emasculation and feminization. For example, although Agamemnon is emasculated by Clytemnestra since his masculinity is inferior to hers, he is not portrayed to have specific female characteristics. In contrast, Aegisthus' characterization, especially in contrast to Clytemnestra, almost lacks masculinity all together, as he stays inside the *oikos* just as a proper woman should and does not interfere with the *polis* until the murders are complete.
[54] Aesch. *Aga.* 1633-5.
[55] Gagarin 1976, 63.

on rule, both from themselves and from their leaders, as they recognize how excessive power and lack of masculinity can affect the *polis*. Thus, Aeschylus promotes what he believes to be proper masculinity through the successes and faults of his characters, so that the male collective can better themselves alongside the city.

Like Clytemnestra, Aegisthus also contributes to the discussion of power and tyranny in the *Agamemnon*. As referenced in line 1633 mentioned above, the chorus calls him a τύραννος as he lets vengeance motivate him into being complicit to this action so that he can gain power and rule. Despite this, the difference between Clytemnestra and Aegisthus is that Clytemnestra's masculinity is what encourages her to plan and carry out her murders that lead to tyranny, while it is Aegisthus' effeminacy and lack of action that allows him to usurp the throne. The inversion of gender roles between the two lovers heightens their problematic characterizations as Clytemnestra's faults in her femininity complement the faults in Aegisthus' masculinity, since Aegisthus' feminine and cowardly nature allows Clytemnestra to embrace her masculinity and enact their plan on her own.[56] Therefore, Aegisthus' feminization is clearly displayed to an ancient audience when Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon while Aegisthus stays inside, demonstrating how either an excess of improper masculinity or complete loss of proper masculinity can lead to chaos and result in a tyrannical rule. Furthermore, Aegisthus presents to the audience more evidence of how the loss of masculinity and effeminate men can create chaos in the *polis* and the political sphere from the very moment he decides to enter the scene. Before Aegisthus' entrance, it seems as though the chorus and Clytemnestra might be on the brink of an agreement to try to resolve the curse on the house of Atreus, as Clytemnestra even says,

> ἐθέλω δαίμονι τῷ Πλεισθενιδῶν
> ὅρκους θεμένη τάδε μὲν στέργειν,
> δύστλητά περ ὄνθ᾽· ὃ δὲ λοιπόν, ἰόντ᾽

[56] Swift 2016, 87.

> ἐκ τῶνδε δόμων ἄλλην γενεὰν
> τρίβειν θανάτοις αὐθένταισι.
> κτεάνων τε μέρος
> βαιὸν ἐχούσῃ πᾶν ἀπόχρη μοι
> μανίας μελάθρων
> ἀλληλοφόνους ἀφελούσῃ.
>
> I am willing to swear an oath with the spirit of the Pleisthenids that I will be content with what happened, even though it is hard to bear, and that for the future it must leave this house and trouble some other family with deaths by kin. A small part of the possessions is more than enough for me in order to rid the madness of mutual murder from these halls.
>
> Aesch. *Aga.* 1569-1576.

Clytemnestra's words here seem to be genuine, a rare occurrence in this play, and she appears to truly want to avoid any more misfortune in the future and is even willing to swear an oath so that the chorus and audience trust her, choosing peace instead of wealth. Moreover, this is the only time throughout the play that Clytemnestra uses the word ὅρκος, thus reinforcing the truth of her words within these lines and increasing the possibility of a resolution between Clytemnestra and the chorus. Unfortunately, this hope is completely shattered when Aegisthus enters and quite nearly starts a physical *agon* scene with the chorus, as in lines 1649-1653 Aegisthus and his guards ready their swords while the old men begin preparing to protect themselves with their staffs. The fact that Aegisthus feels the need to subvert this verbal *agon* scene into a physical altercation demonstrates another stark contrast between Clytemnestra and her lover, as Aegisthus does not have the rhetorical genius that Clytemnestra displays to win this verbal argument. Instead, he tries to escalate the situation into a physical fight, using the only power that is available to him: a violent show of force against weak old men. Aegisthus cannot even hold his own in a debate with a group of old men, further emasculating his character in comparison with Clytemnestra's intellect, as his excessive use of force underlines how he is unfit to rule due to his cowardliness and effeminacy. Additionally, Aegisthus' presence and speech almost descend the play into chaos, causing Clytemnestra to intervene in order to prevent this from happening by

coaxing Aegisthus to stop with placating words, something she is clearly skilled at as she demonstrated in the tapestry scene with Agamemnon.[57] Again, Clytemnestra's actions and words effeminize Aegisthus as she is able to control him, and the chorus of elders, to follow her orders so that she gets what she wants, though this time she does this for peace, and not evil. Therefore, Aegisthus represents to the audience a man who is void of masculinity who becomes so consumed with vengeance that he allows a woman to enact this while he loses his honour, while Clytemnestra's masculinity heightens his deficiency in this, further demonstrating to the audience that masculinity is not inherent with manhood, but based on the quality and actions of the person.

In building upon Zeitlin's idea about women in Greek tragedy and masculinity, it becomes clear that Clytemnestra's character represents much more to a fifth-century male audience beyond the weakness of femininity. Not only do her own actions inspire a discussion of gender norms, but also the contrast between the behaviour of the male characters who attempt to interact and overpower her, allowing Clytemnestra's masculinity to deepen this commentary on masculinity. When considering how drama was dominated by the male presence, both in the production and the consumption of the plays, it is hard to believe that these prominent women only serve to demonstrate the dangers of women and femininity, and that there is not a reflection of both the men in the play and in the audience in these female characters. Through an examination of the meaning behind Clytemnestra's masculinity in comparison to the weak demeanor of the male characters in the *Agamemnon*, we are able to recognize that her masculinity provides many lessons to a male audience about how they conduct themselves as men in the *polis*. Clytemnestra warns an ancient male audience of the dangers of the excess of improper masculinity which can lead to tyranny or a loss of Athenian identity either through

[57] Aesch. *Aga.* 1654-1661.

barbarianism or emasculation, yet the sheer fact that she herself is the one who yields the most masculinity successfully throughout the play challenges the audience to rediscover what it means to be masculine. Thus, the fluctuating and inverse gender roles throughout this play not only displays the dangers of Clytemnestra's character, but also reveals a commentary on masculinity in an ancient context, demonstrating to the men in the *polis* through the distance of a powerful female character like Clytemnestra the importance of cultivating and balancing masculinity in themselves for the greater good of the city.

Chapter 3: A Sympathetic Clytemnestra: A Modern Reception

After having examined the ancient perception of Clytemnestra's character and how a fifth-century male audience would interpret her masculine behaviour, let us now explore how she is received in modern times. In contrast to the reading of her character during antiquity, I argue that a modern audience is more inclined to sympathise and relate to Clytemnestra's figure, especially with the increase of female presence in today's audiences.[1] This chapter investigates how the change of gender roles has allowed another side of Clytemnestra's characterization to come to light, a distressed and mourning mother whose children have been murdered by her unfaithful husband on more than one occasion. The motivation behind this modern characterization stems from Clytemnestra's past trauma at the hands of Agamemnon along with the loss of her daughter Iphigenia and son Orestes, whom she asserts she sent away unwillingly because of Agamemnon's absence,[2] which presents Clytemnestra as a loving mother who enacts this revenge on behalf of the children that she has been forced to give up. After determining the sympathetic aspects of her figure within the original text that appeal to modern audiences, I will study how reception theory plays a prominent role in the transformation of Clytemnestra's characterization from ancient to modern day, using the foundational works of reception theory by Hans Robert Jauss, Helene Foley and Lorna Hardwick among others who argue that the meaning of ancient texts can expand as each new generation receives them. Thus, as reception theory shows, the evolution of Clytemnestra's character through generations of receptions does not only

[1] Of course, we cannot expect that every modern audience member will recognize the sympathetic side to Clytemnestra's character. There will always be some who receive Clytemnestra as a dangerous and problematic woman, as she was characterized in her original context, or even take on a more misogynistic perception of her character. My goal here is to examine how her sympathetic characterization has become more prevalent and accepted in modernity, and how some women even use these aspects of her character as a challenge against the systemic misogyny that is still present in today's society.

[2] This sentiment is usually regarded to be a lie by classicists, but I will examine how modern audiences are more ready to take it as truth, further contributing to her modern sympathetic characterization and the duality of her character.

demonstrate the change in gender values from antiquity to modernity, but also how tragedy has the ability to become more complex with each receiving generation, thanks to the depth of female characters like Clytemnestra. Through these analyses I will prove how the complexity of Clytemnestra's characterization in the *Agamemnon* allows Aeschylus' play to flourish and stay relevant as time passes through revealing new meanings and experiences to its audience, as she becomes more sympathetic in a modern context, consequently inspiring new adaptations that will continue to promote tragedy in the years to come.

Clytemnestra as a Mother: Trauma, Revenge and Sacrifice

Iphigenia in Aulis*: A Prologue to the* Agamemnon

In order to grasp this modern sympathetic understanding of Clytemnestra's actions in the *Agamemnon,* I wish to begin with a close reading of the ancient texts in which Clytemnestra's story is told, namely Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Libation Bearers.* Though Euripides' play is not connected with the *Oresteia* and was produced fifty years after Aeschylus, *Iphigenia in Aulis* can be read as a kind of introduction to the *Agamemnon*, setting the scene for Clytemnestra's vengeful murder by staging the tragic death of Iphigenia.[3] In addition to this, many modern authors and producers take note of the continuity between these plays and combine both tragedies in their reproductions, which we will examine later in the chapter. The sympathetic aspects of Clytemnestra's character are prevalent throughout Euripides' play and occur even before Iphigenia's death when Clytemnestra is attempting to beg

[3] Sorum 1992, 530 notes that although there is a large time gap between the two plays (*IA.* produced in 405 BCE and *Aga.* in 458 BCE) the *Oresteia* sustained enough interest in antiquity that it was performed again only 10 years before *Iphigenia in Aulis*, which further strengthens the connection between these plays. On the other hand, it is possible for a modern audience to watch or read *IA.* without encountering *Aga.*, which would have been nearly impossible for ancient audiences. Although this takes away from the connection between the two plays, it does increase Clytemnestra's sympathy, as an audience would then be ignorant of Clytemnestra's murders in *Aga.*

and convince Agamemnon not to kill their beloved daughter. During this monologue, Clytemnestra begins her speech with a description of her traumatic past, revealing how she was forced to marry Agamemnon against her will:

> πρῶτον μέν, ἵνα σοι πρῶτα τοῦτ᾽ ὀνειδίσω,
> ἔγημας ἄκουσάν με κἄλαβες βίᾳ,
> τὸν πρόσθεν ἄνδρα Τάνταλον κατακτανών·
> βρέφος τε τοὐμὸν σῷ προσούδισας πάλῳ,
> μαστῶν βιαίως τῶν ἐμῶν ἀποσπάσας.
> καὶ τὼ Διός σε παῖδ᾽, ἐμὼ δὲ συγγόνω,
> ἵπποισι μαρμαίροντ᾽ ἐπεστρατευσάτην·
> πατὴρ δὲ πρέσβυς Τυνδάρεώς σ᾽ ἐρρύσατο
> ἱκέτην γενόμενον, τἀμὰ δ᾽ ἔσχες αὖ λέχη.
>
> In this first place, so that I can reproach you first with this, you married me against my will and you took me by force, killing my former husband Tantalus, dashing my baby's head on the ground, after you violently tore him from my breast. Then the two sons of Zeus, my brothers, came gleaming with a cavalry and marched against you. But my father, old man Tyndareus, he saved you when you became a suppliant to him, and then in turn you had me as a wife.
>
> Eur. *IA.* 1148-1156.

This tragic retelling of Agamemnon's capture of Clytemnestra and their forced marriage not only wins sympathy for Clytemnestra from a modern audience, but also reinforces a negative depiction of Agamemnon, since this reveals to the audience that Iphigenia would not be the first child of Clytemnestra that he has killed. Moreover, the language that is used here is important, as she recounts the excessive violence of Agamemnon when he ripped her child away from her, which wins more sympathy for Clytemnestra from a modern audience, since she is depicted as helpless against the cruel Agamemnon. Moreover, Clytemnestra is desperately trying to dissuade Agamemnon from committing this crime yet again in this monologue, yet both an ancient and modern audience knows that she will not be successful since the Greek soldiers must travel to Troy, as Sorum notes that, "Agamemnon will sacrifice his daughter, for he is a creation of his myth; in the future as in the past, Agamemnon, the descendant of Tantalus and Atreus, destroys

families".[4] Clytemnestra's description of her past trauma heightens this destructive characterization of Agamemnon as he appears excessively violent by stealing Clytemnestra away unwillingly after killing both her husband and murdering her first son in a savage and inhumane way, by dashing his head on the ground. This evokes more sympathy for Clytemnestra, since she was forced to marry the murderer of her former husband and child, but also reinforces that Iphigenia will suffer the same cruel death at the hands of her father, once again resulting in a devastating loss for Clytemnestra. Although this event of Clytemnestra's tragic past is not mentioned in Aeschylus' plays, it presents a modern audience with a sympathetic understanding of her character all the same, thus leading them to justify Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon before it even occurs in the *Agamemnon*.

After recounting Agamemnon's previous crimes against her first family, Clytemnestra goes on to explain that she has remained a virtuous wife to Agamemnon throughout their entire marriage. Instead of holding a vengeful grudge against him for killing her first husband and child, Clytemnestra details how she chose to forget the past and become a model wife to Agamemnon:

> οὗ σοι καταλλαχθεῖσα περὶ σὲ καὶ δόμους
> συμμαρτυρήσεις ὡς ἄμεμπτος ἦ γυνή,
> ἔς τ᾽ Ἀφροδίτην σωφρονοῦσα καὶ τὸ σὸν
> μέλαθρον αὔξουσ᾽, ὥστε σ᾽ εἰσιόντα τε
> χαίρειν θύραζέ τ᾽ ἐξιόντ᾽ εὐδαιμονεῖν.
> σπάνιον δὲ θήρευμ᾽ ἀνδρὶ τοιαύτην λαβεῖν
> δάμαρτα· φλαύραν δ᾽ οὐ σπάνις γυναῖκ᾽ ἔχειν.
> τίκτω δ᾽ ἐπὶ τρισὶ παρθένοισι παῖδά σοι
> τόνδ᾽, ὧν μιᾶς σὺ τλημόνως μ᾽ ἀποστερεῖς.
>
> Once I was reconciled to you, you will bear witness that I have been a blameless wife in regard to you and your house, self-controlled in the dealings of Aphrodite, and I increased the glory of your house, so that when you entered into it you rejoiced and when you departed from it you were prosperous. It is a rare spoil for a man to seize a wife such as this, though having a trivial wife is no such rarity. In addition to three daughters I bore you this son, and by robbing me of one of them you are making me miserable!
>
> Eur. *IA.* 1157-1165.

[4] Sorum 1992, 538.

Within these lines, Clytemnestra underlines the difference between their actions in their marriage, since Clytemnestra was strong enough to move on and make her relationship with Agamemnon work, protecting his *oikos* and giving him an heir and three daughters,[5] making his life better instead of destroying it as he did to hers. On the other hand, Agamemnon chooses to commit the same crime that he performed many years ago, yet now to his own child, making Clytemnestra τλημόνως since she cannot bear to lose another child. Some scholars use Clytemnestra's past to villainize her character, stating that due to Agamemnon's previous actions Clytemnestra's hatred for her husband is stronger than the love that she has for her daughter Iphigenia.[6] These lines directly refute this claim, since they demonstrate that Clytemnestra was motivated by Iphigenia's death to kill Agamemnon as detailed in the *Agamemnon*, as she has stated that she never harboured an inherent hatred for Agamemnon throughout their marriage due to her traumatic past. Clytemnestra has served him well as a wife for many years, but the murder of Iphigenia is the last straw, she cannot accept the death of another child without consequence. Clytemnestra also specifically foreshadows Agamemnon's fate if he decides to go through with Iphigenia's sacrifice, warning him with these words:

> ἄγ᾽, εἰ στρατεύσῃ καταλιπών μ᾽ ἐν δώμασιν,
> κἀκεῖ γενήσῃ διὰ μακρᾶς ἀπουσίας,
> τίν᾽ ἐν δόμοις με καρδίαν ἕξειν δοκεῖς;
> ὅταν θρόνους τῆσδ᾽ εἰσίδω πάντας κενούς,
> κενοὺς δὲ παρθενῶνας, ἐπὶ δὲ δακρύοις
> μόνη κάθωμαι, τήνδε θρηνῳδοῦσ᾽ ἀεί·
> Ἀπώλεσέν σ᾽, ὦ τέκνον, ὁ φυτεύσας πατήρ,
> αὐτὸς κτανών, οὐκ ἄλλος οὐδ᾽ ἄλλῃ χερί,

[5] The three daughters she refers to here are Electra, Chrysothemis and of course, Iphigenia. It is notable that Aeschylus refers to Clytemnestra and Agamemnon having three daughters here, since Chrysothemis is not specifically mentioned in the *Oresteia*. She does appear and play a part in Sophocles' *Electra*, in which she argues with Electra and tries to persuade her not to act against Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (lines 992-1014).

[6] Hammond 1965, 44. Hammond believes that personal hatred must be one of the reasons behind Clytemnestra's murders and does not consider Clytemnestra's love of Iphigenia to play an important role in her actions. This is an implausible explanation since this does not explain why she directly names it as her motive many times throughout the play or why the chorus focuses on it as much as they do.

> τοιόνδε νόστον καταλιπὼν πρὸς τοὺς δόμους.
> ἐπεὶ βραχείας προφάσεως ἔδει μόνον,
> ἐφ᾽ ᾗ σ᾽ ἐγὼ καὶ παῖδες αἱ λελειμμέναι
> δεξόμεθα δέξιν ἥν σε δέξασθαι χρεών.
> μὴ δῆτα πρὸς θεῶν μήτ᾽ ἀναγκάσῃς ἐμὲ
> κακὴν γενέσθαι περὶ σέ, μήτ᾽ αὐτὸς γένῃ.
>
> Come on, if you leave me behind at home while on campaign, and remain there being absent for a long time, what kind of heart do you think I will have living in that house? When I see all her empty chairs, and her maiden chambers empty, as I sit alone in tears, always lamenting for her. "Oh daughter, your father who begot you has utterly destroyed you! Slaying you himself, it was him, no one else nor done by another's hand, having left behind such a return to his home!" There is only little pretext that is needed for me and my daughters, the ones who remain, to give you the reception that you deserve to receive. I beg you by the gods, do not force me to become wicked towards you, do not become wicked yourself!
>
> Eur. *IA*. 1171-1184.

Through these dejected, yet threatening words Clytemnestra tries to explain to her husband the consequences of sacrificing Iphigenia, giving Agamemnon every opportunity to avoid the fate that waits for him when he returns from Troy, thereby justifying the murders that she will commit in the *Agamemnon.* These aspects of her character in Euripides' play alongside Aeschylus' portrayal of Clytemnestra allow a modern audience to create a new characterization of Clytemnestra, as her dynamic character presents various readings to different audiences. Thus, Clytemnestra's explanation of her past in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* reinforces her sympathetic and modern characterization that continues in the *Agamemnon,* further illustrating her dynamicity through the modern justified version of Clytemnestra's character.

Maternal Love: Iphigenia and Clytemnestra in the Agamemnon

Even if a modern audience has not encountered *Iphigenia in Aulis* before, the sympathetic conditions of Clytemnestra's character in the *Agamemnon* function to change her characterization in a modern context, turning her from a villainess into a misunderstood grieving mother. Although these sympathetic aspects of Clytemnestra become more apparent in more recent receptions, it is

also important to remember when arguing this side of Clytemnestra's characterization that tragedy is a source of entertainment, though oftentimes there are political statements that are revealed in ancient and modern contexts, and we must be careful not to excessively psychologize these characters. Additionally, the fiction of tragedy allows audiences to justify certain crimes that they would be averse to in real life, further explaining how modern audiences are more able to see this sympathetic side to her character through the lens of her traumatic past experiences orchestrated by Agamemnon.[7] The most crucial aspect of this perception of Clytemnestra stems from the relationship she has with her daughter Iphigenia and her reaction to her death. As is introduced in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, it becomes clear in the *Agamemnon* that the driving force behind Agamemnon's murder by Clytemnestra is his sacrilegious sacrifice of Iphigenia, as Clytemnestra specifically states that she committed this murder as an act of revenge for her daughter three separate times after she kills Agamemnon.[8] This declaration of her motivation in committing mariticide demonstrates that this murder is not a product of jealousy of Cassandra or Clytemnestra's adultery with Aegisthus, but rather a consequence of betrayal that occurred when Agamemnon sailed off for Troy, an outcome that Clytemnestra carefully warned him about many years before. Additionally, the focus on Iphigenia and her death in the *Agamemnon* is not only displayed by Clytemnestra, since before she executes her murders, the chorus also speaks of Iphigenia's sacrifice at the beginning of the play. They describe Iphigenia's sacrifice in a significant amount of detail, creating a kind of *ekphrasis* of her death:

> ἔτλα δ᾽ οὖν
> θυτὴρ γενέσθαι θυγατρός,
> γυναικοποίνων πολέμων ἀρωγὰν
> καὶ προτέλεια ναῶν.
> λιτὰς δὲ καὶ κληδόνας πατρῴους

[7] Easterling 1987, 17.
[8] See lines 1412 ff., 1525 ff., 1555 ff for when Clytemnestra speaks about the murder of Iphigenia and refers to her specifically by name.

παρ᾽ οὐδὲν αἰῶ τε παρθένειον
ἔθεντο φιλόμαχοι βραβῆς.
φράσεν δ᾽ ἀόζοις πατὴρ μετ᾽ εὐχὰν
δίκαν χιμαίρας ὕπερθε βωμοῦ
πέπλοισι περιπετῆ παντὶ θυμῷ προνωπῆ
λαβεῖν ἀέρδην, στόματός
τε καλλιπρώρου φυλακᾷ κατασχεῖν
φθόγγον ἀραῖον οἴκοις,
βίᾳ χαλινῶν τ᾽ ἀναύδῳ μένει.

> Then he dared to sacrifice his daughter, in order to further a woman-avenging war, as an offering on behalf of the ships. Her prayers, her pleas of "father!" and her young age of maidenhood did not move the war-loving commanders. Her father, after a prayer, told his attendants to lift her over the altar, like a she-goat, with her head down and her robes spreading all around her, and to place a gag in her beautiful mouth to restrain any curses against his house by force and by the silencing strength of the bit.
>
> Aesch. *Aga*. 224-238.

The way in which the chorus describes Iphigenia's death is striking, especially to a modern audience. There is an immense amount of pity that is evoked for Iphigenia within these lines, notably when she calls out to her father to save her, though this falls upon deaf ears. Moreover, the way Iphigenia is described to have been handled and prepared in these lines dehumanizes her as she is treated like an animal, namely a goat, held down and bridled so as to not cause any issues for the ritual. Although Iphigenia willingly gives herself to be sacrificed in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, we are presented with a very different version of the story here by Aeschylus since, according to the chorus, she was forced to do this against her will. This adds a different nuance to this play and to Clytemnestra's actions in the *Agamemnon*, since a modern audience would see Agamemnon's treatment of Iphigenia before her death as even more reason to justify Clytemnestra's mariticide, further contributing to her sympathetic characterization since two of her children were murdered against their will. In addition to this tragic retelling by the chorus, these elders also directly state that they condemn Agamemnon's murder of his own child, describing it as unholy and unspeakable, and that, "His mind veered into a state that was impious, impure and unholy. From then on he changed his mindset to one that was all-daring. For miserable infatuation, which forms

shameful schemes and is the first cause of suffering, encourages mortal men." (φρενὸς πνέων δυσσεβῆ τροπαίαν ἄναγνον ἀνίερον, τόθεν τὸ παντότολμον φρονεῖν μετέγνω βροτοὺς θρασύνει γὰρ αἰσχρόμητις τάλαινα παρακοπὰ πρωτοπήμων).[9] Thus, from the early beginnings of this play, the understanding of Clytemnestra's character has already been set and presented as more than just a malicious antagonist, as she is a diverse character with multiple sides to her characterization and thus can easily be perceived as sympathetic by modern audiences.

Iphigenia's sacrifice as depicted in the *Agamemnon* not only serves the purpose of gaining sympathy for Iphigenia and Clytemnestra, but also of further casting Agamemnon himself in a villainized light to a modern audience. Although this depiction of Iphigenia's death is sure to rouse sympathy in modernity, there are some scholars who still argue that Agamemnon did not have a choice in this matter, and that he was bound by necessity to commit this blasphemous deed.[10] Both Gloria Ferrari and N. G. L. Hammond disagree with this notion, instead arguing that there are two choices that Agamemnon must choose between in this situation, though both options require a difficult loss. If Agamemnon chooses to not sail to Troy and conquer the city, he loses the wealth and glory of war, and if he chooses battle, he loses his daughter and inevitably his life for sacking Troy against Artemis' wishes.[11] Thus, a deliberate choice is made by Agamemnon when he decides to kill Iphigenia and not heed to Clytemnestra's imploring words to save their daughter's life. This decision further highlights Agamemnon's lust for war and glory, as shown through the tapestry scene and discussed in Chapter 2, since he is willing to kill his own daughter to achieve this wealth. This demonstrates how Agamemnon turns his back on his family, especially his wife,

[9] Aesch. *Aga.* 219-223.
[10] H. Loyd-Jones 1962 argues that Agamemnon had no choice at all in this decision since it was commanded by Zeus himself. He also uses this line of reasoning to explain why Agamemnon "chooses" to walk over the tapestry to his death, stating that he was like a puppet that Zeus controlled. Though the first argument may hold some weight, since Artemis is said to have called her sacrifice, Agamemnon is clearly convinced by Clytemnestra's persuasion during the tapestry scene, and there is no indication in the text of divine will at play here.
[11] Hammond 1965, 47 and Ferrari 1997, 28.

in making this sacrilegious choice, once again giving more justification to Clytemnestra's murder. Though this is a difficult decision for Agamemnon, the way his choice is presented in the *Agamemnon* along with the pitiable representation of Iphigenia and sympathetic characterization of Clytemnestra illustrates how he has effectively destroyed his marriage to Clytemnestra. Agamemnon has not only robbed Clytemnestra of Iphigenia alongside her pride as a woman and mother, but he also has wronged her as a wife by leaving her for ten years after committing this crime.[12] These aspects of the play present a strong justification to a modern audience on behalf of Clytemnestra's murder, as Thomson explains, "We're not asked to believe that she is naturally wicked… but that her nature has been perverted by the conditions of her life. Clytemnestra's crime is terrible, but her motive is adequate to explain it".[13] Therefore, through Agamemnon's actions a modern audience is more willing to accept that fact that just as Agamemnon used the trick of marriage to Achilles to deceive his family and murder his daughter, Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon by the trick of the net and worthily and justly sacrifices him like a sheep, and that this deed was done by Iphigenia's *dike* as she claims.[14] This once again proves that Clytemnestra's character has the ability to be read in more than one way, and that the sympathetic side to her character is just as present in the original text as her dangerous characterization, demonstrating the important complexity of her character.

Clytemnestra's Sacrificed Relationship with Orestes

Clytemnestra also has a significant relationship with another one of her children within the *Oresteia*, her son Orestes. Unlike with Iphigenia, Clytemnestra is often perceived to be quite hateful towards her son, though I argue that her relationship with Orestes can be understood

[12] Betensky 1978, 19.
[13] Thomson 1966, 30.
[14] Foley 2003a, 226.

differently by a modern audience, specifically in recognizing the maternal side of her characterization. The tension between mother and son is prominently displayed in the second play of the trilogy, the *Libation Bearers*, when Electra asserts that Orestes was thrown out of the city and denied his rightful inheritance by Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.[15] Despite this, the reference to Orestes' supposed banishment in the *Agamemnon* depicts a different version of the situation, as Clytemnestra claims that she sent her son away in order to protect him during her husband's time at war, justifying the absence of their son to Agamemnon:

> ἐκ τῶνδέ τοι παῖς ἐνθάδ᾽ οὐ παραστατεῖ,
> ἐμῶν τε καὶ σῶν κύριος πιστωμάτων,
> ὡς χρῆν, Ὀρέστης· μηδὲ θαυμάσῃς τόδε.
> τρέφει γὰρ αὐτὸν εὐμενὴς δορύξενος
> Στρόφιος ὁ Φωκεύς, ἀμφίλεκτα πήματα
> ἐμοὶ προφωνῶν, τόν θ᾽ ὑπ᾽ Ἰλίῳ σέθεν
> κίνδυνον, εἴ τε δημόθρους ἀναρχία
> βουλὴν καταρρίψειεν, ὥστε σύγγονον
> βροτοῖσι τὸν πεσόντα λακτίσαι πλέον.
> τοιάδε μέντοι σκῆψις οὐ δόλον φέρει.
>
> It is from this reason that your son does not stand beside me, who is the master of our mutual pledges, as he should be: Orestes. You should not be shocked at this. For he is being brought up by our kindly friend and ally Strophios the Phocian, who told me beforehand about two possible disasters: your own danger under Ilium's walls, and the chance that due to the lack of a leader the clamouring people might plan to overthrow the city, since it is natural for men to trample more upon the fallen. Indeed in such an explanation there is no deceit.
>
> Aesch. *Aga*. 877-886.

Clytemnestra's words within these lines suggest that it was not her choice nor desire to send her son away, but she felt it was necessary by Strophios' advice due to the dangerous circumstances caused by Agamemnon's choice to sacrifice their daughter and begin this war in Troy.[16] Although she presents a sympathetic explanation of Orestes' absence that she claims is void of deception, some critics do not believe nor trust Clytemnestra's story in this play, wary to accept

[15] Aesch. *LB.* 135-142.
[16] Griffith 1995, 88.

this maternal love as true due to the ancient and dangerous reception of her character, as explored in chapter one.[17] In contrast to this belief, in line with scholars such as Florence Mary Bennett Anderson, I believe that this discussion of Orestes highlights the motherly side of Clytemnestra that is hidden under her guarded exterior of masculinity, demonstrating that she is a mourning mother who has lost two children and now must sacrifice her relationship with her child and send away her son due to Agamemnon's actions again, further adding more fuel to the revengeful fire that is burning within her. In addition to this, Clytemnestra also tells a similar story in the *Libation Bearers* before she is killed by Orestes, explaining to him,

> Ὀρέστης: τεκοῦσα γάρ μ᾽ ἔρριψας ἐς τὸ δυστυχές.
> Κλυταιμνήστρα: οὔτοι σ᾽ ἀπέρριψ᾽ εἰς δόμους δορυξένους.
> Ὀρέστης: αἰκῶς ἐπράθην ὢν ἐλευθέρου πατρός.
> Κλυταιμνήστρα: ποῦ δῆθ᾽ ὁ τῖμος, ὅντιν᾽ ἀντεδεξάμην;
>
> Orestes: For you gave birth to me yet you cast me out of the house and into misfortune.
> Clytemnestra: Indeed I did not throw you out by sending you into the house of an ally.
> Orestes: I was sold disgracefully even though I am the son of a free man.
> Clytemnestra: Then where is the price, that I received in turn for you?
>
> Aesch. *LB*. 913-916.

Although Orestes does not believe these words and proceeds to kill his mother in this play, modern audiences notice the continuity in her explanation between both plays, her story stays the same even though her life is at stake in the *Libation Bearers*. Thus, modern audiences are presented with the possibility that her intentions of trying to keep Orestes safe by sending him away are in fact true. Of course, there is still the chance that like her use of persuasion Clytemnestra is also a highly skilled liar, but the option that she is being genuine is also present in both plays. Thus, in analysing the intricacies of Clytemnestra's character there are two distinct sides to her characterization: the dangerous, scheming murderess who kills her husband and king out of hate, and the suffering, traumatized mother who has finally reached her breaking point

[17] Anderson 1929, 144-145.

after losing multiple children to her war-hungry husband. I believe that the complexity of her character lends itself to the fact that different perceptions are revealed based on different time periods and values, therefore leading to a fluctuating reception of Clytemnestra's character that changes over generations of audiences.

The Effects of Reception Theory on Clytemnestra's Character

The Significance of Reception Theory

One of the many aspects of tragedy that continues to provoke interest and thought from scholars and modern audiences is that it encourages political responses without appearing to address issues in the *polis*.[18] As we have examined over the course of this study, this response can differ significantly depending on the audience and the period in which it is being presented or read, consequently revealing contrasting receptions of the text. This concept lends itself to the study of reception theory, which focuses on how individual readers and audiences can interpret literature differently. This study took hold particularly amongst German scholars, as academics such as Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser and Hans-Georg Gadamer all wrote influential pieces on this theory, spreading this new way of examining literature, especially classical literature.[19] Of these theorists, the most significant to this study is Jauss, as his innovative text *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* explores how the understanding of literature can change depending on the receiving generation, a theory which can directly be applied to the contrast between the ancient and modern perception of Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*, as we have discussed.[20] Although reception theory has been met with some resistance within the study of classics, there are many

[18] Foley 1999, 3.
[19] Hardwick 2003 includes an overview of the texts from each theorist in the first chapter of her book, breaking down their thoughts and ideas before moving on to her own study of reception theory.
[20] Jauss 1982.

scholars who have recognized the value of this area of study and how it can be applied to classical literature. As Hardwick explains, "It used sometimes to be said that reception studies only yield insights into the receiving society. Of course they do this, but they also focus critical attention back towards the ancient source and sometimes frame new questions or retrieve aspects of the source which have been marginalized or forgotten".[21] This idea can especially be applied to Greek tragedy as new perceptions of marginalized female characters open up different storylines within the play and lead to new modern adaptations of the material. This line of reasoning is the basis of this study of Clytemnestra's figure in a modern context, since in building upon this aspect of reception theory we can discover how and why the perception of her character changes in different generations.

The Foundations and Future of Reception Theory

In Jauss' work on reception theory, he asserts that the way a certain audience or generation receives a piece of literature is dependent on the social norms and ideals of that time period, which in turn reveals different layers of a text as it is received and discussed in coming centuries. His views on how texts stand the test of time goes beyond how scholars would generally regard literature, as he explains,

> "A literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period. It is not a monument which reveals its timeless essence in a monologue. It is much more like an orchestration which strikes ever new chords among its readers and which frees the text from the substance of the words and makes it meaningful for the time…".[22]

Jauss argues that the appreciation of any given text that has survived into modern times is enriched through its many receptions in different generations, thus revealing the historical value

[21] Hardwick 2003, 4.
[22] Jauss 1970, 10.

it holds by staying relevant during contrasting epochs.[23] This is not something that occurs with every piece of literature, since in order to see this metamorphosis occur future generations must take an interest in the text in order to either recreate or refute it, leading to the importance of modern adaptations and proving the significance of these defiant women in Greek tragedy, as will be discussed in the coming paragraphs.[24] Moreover, Jauss explains that the political significance of a work may not be completely understood or even recognized until later on, specifically in a society which has different ideals than the period in which it was written:

> "The distance between the immediate first perception of a work and its potential meanings, or, to put it differently, the opposition between the new work and the expectations of its first readers, can be so great that a long process of reception is necessary in order to catch up with what first was unexpected and unusable. It can happen that the potential significance of a work may remain unrecognized until the evolution of a newer form widens the horizon and only then opens up the understanding of the misunderstood earlier form.".[25]

Though I agree with Jauss' overall premise here, it is misleading to suggest that the original receiving society would not be able to grasp the intended meaning behind a text, and that this only becomes uncovered after a long series of receptions in other time periods. Instead, I believe the evolution of a text through reception results in a better understanding of the text, rather than it being correctly understood, as different sides of the story are revealed to new audiences, causing a more complex and broader understanding to develop over time. Nevertheless, Jauss' assertion that certain complex texts have the ability to reveal different nuances in different generations holds true, which can result in a contrasting story in modern times versus antiquity. The text itself stays the same, but the society and the people that are receiving the literature are what constitutes this evolution. Regarding characters such as Clytemnestra, the determining

[23] Jauss 1970, 8-9.
[24] Jauss 1970, 11.
[25] Jauss 1970, 26.

factor is evidently gender roles and identity, as the ideals of female autonomy are so drastic between ancient Greece and the 21st century. In accordance with Jauss' theory, this also accounts for the contrast in reception of female figures in tragedy, an idea which has helped carry the interest of reception theory and classical literature into modern times.

Despite the initial reluctance to include reception theory in classics, there has been a growing acceptance of these ideas as classicists realize the danger in avoiding this line of study. Classics itself is a form of reception studies and has only survived this long due to a long chain of receptions.[26] Scholars such as Edith Hall, Lorna Hardwick and Charles Martindale have chosen to continue this important study in classics, building upon the German theorists by further examining the impact that culture and society has on the reception of classical literature. Due to the innate complexity of Greek tragic texts and performances, there are multiple understandings of ancient literature that can be found in modern adaptations and translations, thus there are many insights of classical literature that are lost when reception studies are ignored, just as Hall explains the importance of this study, "…our appreciation of the original texts can be redefined by excavating their afterlife, what they have "meant" in other cultures and epochs than those which originally produced them".[27] Again, I assert that these kinds of inquiries tell scholars more than the society in which these contrasting ideas are being formed, as it grants us a deeper look into the original texts that we thought we knew, unveiling their true depth and timelessness. Thus, reception studies are valuable to other disciplines beyond classics, as it demonstrates the amount and the context of cultural continuity and differences between ancient and modern, which in turn affects the perception of the received texts.[28] Lorna Hardwick has done great study

[26] Porter 2008, 469.
[27] Hall 2004a, 54.
[28] Hardwick 2003, 11.

on this intersection of classical literature and culture, stating that this continued reception demonstrates that, "Above all, reception studies have shown that classical texts, images and ideas are culturally active presences. The vocabulary of reception studies has moved on from notions of 'legacy' to include also the values and practices of the present and future creativity of classical culture".[29] The ability that classical literature has to change and stay relevant in modern times displays the true value of such texts, as it allows modern audiences to revisit this material to find aspects and characters that have been marginalized and give them a new life and perspective.[30] Therefore, it is evident that the interest and importance of reception theory has remained even in modern times, opening up new avenues for scholars to explore innovative theories and ideas within classics, as well as in other disciplines.

The Implications of Clytemnestra's Modern Reception

Now that we have examined the influence of reception theory within classical literature overall, let us now consider how these significant elements are displayed within the modern perception of Clytemnestra's character. As we have seen, the cultural and gender differences of today's society permit Clytemnestra a sympathetic characterization in contrast to her ancient perception, demonstrating the duality of Aeschylus' character while giving her a new significance in the 21st century. This has notably taken shape within the past century with the rise of feminist classics, as this created the desire to listen to unfamiliar and suppressed voices, consequently introducing new discussions and studies in order to challenge the conceptualizations of these classical texts.[31] This has especially taken place within Greek tragedy, due to the increased presence of masculine and autonomous female characters, such as

[29] Hardwick 2003, 112.
[30] Hardwick 2003, 112.
[31] Zajko 2008, 203.

Clytemnestra. With this new interest in marginalized figures and the modern perspectives on these texts, it allows classics to stay relevant as wider audiences are able to recognize themselves within these plays. This aspect is a large motivation behind Clytemnestra's modern characterization, since viewing her figure as a sympathetic and struggling mother allows people to see a reflection of themselves in her character while still understanding the ancient implications of Clytemnestra, thus creating what Martindale calls, "…a classics of the present certainly, but also, truly, of the future".[32] In addition to this recent focus on female characters in classical literature on a scholarly level, academics who choose to study reception theory also present alternate meanings to a modern and more diverse audience, as Hall dictates, "Feminist theorists engaged in Performance Reception may, alternatively, draw on the idea of the "resisting reader" in witnessing how different translations, commentaries, and adaptations of, say, *Medea* and the *Oresteia* have reacted to ancient male authors' patriarchal control of the female characters' voices within their texts".[33] Thus, there is a desire within modern audiences to see Clytemnestra-like characters in a more accepting light, yet it is also important for readers, especially students, to understand the cause of this generational change. Through reading characters like Clytemnestra or Medea who break the ancient mold as sympathetic and understandable, audiences must realize that this is shaped by the cultural or even economic conditions that they are immersed in. This brings about an important notion to keep in mind when discussing these modern characterizations and reception theory, that, "Readers make meaning, but not in conditions of their own choosing".[34]

Clytemnestra's Influence on Modern Adaptations

[32] Martindale 2006, 13.
[33] Hall 2004a, 56-57.
[34] Harkin 2005, 419.

As reception theory has provided an explanation and foundation for the sympathetic characterization of female tragic characters like Clytemnestra, this also applies to the influx of modern adaptations of classical literature.[35] As Foley states, "Feminist classical scholars have wrung their hands over the difficulties of handling the misogynistic elements of Greek drama in a classroom, but this has not excluded from the stage feminist versions of Greek drama".[36] In response to this modern and sympathetic reception of female tragic figures, there have been numerous adaptations of these plays that highlight the sympathetic elements of these dangerous women. In the case of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, many modern artists and playwrights have taken an interest in the trilogy due to the suffering and traumatic events of Iphigenia and Clytemnestra that are highlighted within modern times, motivating them to create more feminist and female-centred versions of these plays.[37] One of the most common trends amongst these adaptations which set up this sympathetic tone to Clytemnestra's character from the beginning is either to use *Iphigenia in Aulis* as a prologue, or to include and emphasize Clytemnestra's former abuse by Agamemnon.[38] As formerly discussed, having Euripides' telling in mind while watching a performance or adaptation of the *Agamemnon* puts things in to a completely different perspective, especially for a modern audience with more inclusive gender roles, as Hall states,

> "If a production offers reasons why Clytaemnestra, an abused wife and bereaved mother, turned into a vitriolic murderess, then inevitably alters and modifies the impact of her violent characterization in *Agamemnon*, and of the triumph of patriarchy in *Eumenides*. *Iphigenia in Aulis* functions like a speech delivered by a counsel for the defence of

[35] Although there is a wide variety of adaptations of classical texts, I wish to focus on re-stagings and theatre adaptations here for the sake of space. Despite this, there is much to be discussed about fiction novels that focus on women within the mythic cycle, which has grown in popularity over the past couple of years. Notable authors include Madeline Miller, Natalie Haynes, Jennifer Saint, Margaret Atwood and Pat Barker among many others. It is notable that all of these authors who focus on re-writing the stories of women in myth are also women themselves.
[36] Foley 1999, 2.
[37] Foley 2005, 316.
[38] Foley 2005, 316 -317 includes a discussion of a number of plays that use Euripides' *IA* to introduce their *Agamemnon* adaptation, such as Davis' *Clytemnestra*, Guthrie Theatre's *The Clytemnestra Project*, and Mnouchikine's *Les Atrides*. Furthermore, Hall 2004b, 13 surveys Irish adaptations by Teevan, Carr and O'Brien that focus on the traumatic deaths of Clytemnestra's former husband and son.

> Clytemnestra: the text relates what she went through at her husband's hands, how terrible and longstanding had been his abuse of her and her children, and what the emotional circumstances had been under which he departed for Troy. The post-feminist Western liberal census can cope with the terrifying Clytemnestra of Aeschylus better if it is simultaneously offered the more sympathetic Clytemnestra of *Iphigenia in Aulis*".[39]

This specific sequencing in the adaptation of these ancient plays in order for it to be better understood and accepted in a modern context demonstrates not only the importance of reception theory once again, but also displays how influential both gender and the conflicts that come with it play within these dramas in both ancient and modern contexts. Thus, by further underlining these gender issues through adapting and fusing Aeschylus' murder of Agamemnon with Euripides' retelling of Clytemnestra's abuse, Clytemnestra becomes a moral and autonomous agent instead of a dangerous woman or a poor victim, further displaying the complexity of Clytemnestra and the *Agamemnon* as a whole that is heightened through these adaptations and receptions.[40]

In addition to adapting these plays with the inclusion of the *Iphigenia in Aulis* storyline, there are many other performances that underline Clytemnestra's sympathy in other ways. Amongst the rise of *Oresteia* adaptations that flourished during the twentieth century, Martha Graham's 1958 dance-theatre[41] piece titled *Clytemnestra* became an influential performance in setting the focus on political and gender issues in the *Agamemnon* for future retellings of Aeschylus' trilogy.[42] Graham's adaptation is most useful to our discussion here, as she conducts her piece through the gaze of Clytemnestra and invites the audience to see the story through the

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[39] Hall 2004b, 15-16.
[40] Hall 2004b, 16.
[41] Though there is no written text associated with Graham's performance piece, she still evokes sympathy for Clytemnestra using dance to reflect the emotions of the characters. The production gained such popularity that it was re-staged many times throughout the 1960s and 1970s and even aired on television in 1974.
[42] Foley 2005, 311. Foley examines different modern receptions of the *Agamemnon* where she provides an in-depth analysis of two adaptations that look at gender issues and politics in the *Oresteia*: Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra* and Martha Graham's *Clytemnestra.*

eyes of a heroine, as the story begins with her figure in Hades, trying to make sense of her past and dishonour.[43] The audience is then presented with Clytemnestra's view of the events within the *Oresteia*, as Part 1 focuses on a list of events that psychologically affected Clytemnestra, granting a great amount of sympathy to her character as she relives the trauma of her sister's rape, the death of her daughter Iphigenia, the hatred of Electra and her own death at the hands of her only son. The first feeling that the audience feels in this adaptation is sympathy for Clytemnestra and the terrible incidents she has had to cope with, even before they experience the events of the *Oresteia* in Parts 2-4, effectively gaining the trust of the audience from the onset. In addition to this, the way in which Graham chooses to stage and retell important scenes from the trilogy also greatly favour Clytemnestra's sympathetic nature, since the tapestry scene paints Agamemnon in an intensely negative light, as he crudely introduces Cassandra and tries to sexually dominate his wife throughout the entire exchange.[44] Clytemnestra's character within Graham's adaptation is not simply reduced to a victim, she remains the same complex and dangerous figure as she appears in Aeschylus, but through the emphasis of her struggle her sympathetic aspects are much more apparent and accepted to a modern audience. As Foley explains, "Graham's angry Mycenaean queen killed, but she also suffered; she does not deserve her dishonor among the dead and finally moves past it in a single gesture of love".[45] Following Graham's feminist adaptation, there have been many other reproductions of the *Oresteia* in which there is a strong focus on Clytemnestra and gender conflict, as Foley concludes her study with,

[43] Foley 2005, 314-316 provides a detailed summary of the events within the piece.
[44] Foley 2005, 315.
[45] Foley 2005, 315. At the end of the Graham's production, Clytemnestra forgives Orestes for his crime against her and supports his claim to the throne. She also turns the Furies into the Eumenides herself in this adaptation, making her even more likeable and powerful to the audience.

> "Nevertheless, we can conclude that gender/issues of identity have consistently, from the seminal performances of O'Neill and Graham onwards, played a critical role in this reception process either through highlighting gender conflict and debate or by revising and amplifying the role of Clytemnestra (and/or Iphigenia) to make an already prominent character more so".[46]

Thus, we can truly see in practice how influential and important the role of gender and society plays in understanding and interpreting literature, especially in the case of classical Greek tragedy, which includes these complex and rich female characters, consequently allowing a modern audience to achieve this feminist and sympathetic reception.

Having studied the sympathetic elements of Clytemnestra's character present within the original Greek text and how modern audiences and producers can recognize these aspects and create a modern characterization of her character, Clytemnestra's true depth and importance is revealed. The masculine actions and behaviour that served to classify Clytemnestra as dangerous in antiquity takes on a different role now, as her sympathetic characterization through her past trauma and the loss of her daughter Iphigenia work to justify her actions, enhancing the grief-stricken mother side of her characterization. Since a modern audience has the ability to recognize and feel this sympathy for Clytemnestra, it translates to modern adaptations as well, where Clytemnestra's point of view of her murders are explored through feminist productions like Graham's reworking of the *Oresteia*, amongst many others. This focus on Clytemnestra's trauma and the sympathy it evokes from a modern audience not only highlights the drastic contrast between the understanding of her character from antiquity to modernity, but also demonstrates that her character remains so influential and important within the play, since Clytemnestra and her story is what keeps the *Oresteia* relevant throughout generations of reception. Thus, this

[46] Foley 2005, 339. Graham herself also went on to produce other pieces that re-focus myth based on female experience, as she wrote *Cave of the Heart* for Medea, *Night Journey* for Jocasta and *Errand into the Maze* for Ariadne.

diachronic examination of Clytemnestra's characterization proves the impact that female characters have in Greek tragedy, as their complexity gives these plays a chance to evolve over thousands of years, as Clytemnestra is granted a new identity and potential among modern audiences.

Conclusion

Over the course of three chapters, I have presented an analysis of the ancient and modern characterization of Clytemnestra, uncovering the meaning behind the dangerous and sympathetic sides to her character while also examining the motivation of the evolution of Clytemnestra's understanding from antiquity to modernity. Through a close reading of Clytemnestra's depiction in the *Agamemnon,* it becomes clear that she is portrayed to be dangerous to an ancient male audience, as her own masculine actions and the comments from the characters that interact with her display her manipulation of fifth-century gender norms, which cause many issues throughout the play. The purpose behind this defiance is not solely directed at women and their faults, since her masculine actions in contrast to the emasculated and effeminized male characters provide an indirect comment on Athenian masculinity, encouraging the men in the audience to rethink the collective sense of gender norms in their society. The fact that this characterization and the response evoked by Clytemnestra's character does not remain the same in modern times means that her character has evolved into something new, as modern audiences recognize her sympathetic characteristics that have been present within the text since antiquity. Reception theory helps make sense of Clytemnestra's sympathetic transformation in modernity, since tragedy is able to become more complex with each receiving generation, causing different sides of Clytemnestra's character to come to light. The purpose of this study is to prove that gender-defiant women like Clytemnestra are essential to the foundation and popularity of Greek tragedy, since the depth of their characters are what continues to make these plays engaging to modern audiences.

Due to the focus on Clytemnestra's use of masculinity and femininity in this study, gender is a crucial element to consider when examining the evolution and meaning of her

characterization in the *Agamemnon*. This thesis has proposed one explanation for the paradox of women in tragedy, as Clytemnestra shows that her gender-breaking behaviour serves as a critique on gender norms in the 5th century, while also adding to the richness of her character and to the interest in the play overall. Clytemnestra's deviance and manipulation of gender throughout the *Agamemnon* allow her character to be read in more than one way, since her masculine language and actions mark her to be dangerous in an ancient context and to those who believe that societal gender norms should be adhered to, while a more modern and feminist take does not villainize her masculinity and improper use of femininity, but rather praises Clytemnestra for this as she does everything in her power to avenge her dead children. Clytemnestra becomes a dynamic character through her use of gender in this play, creating a discussion on gender norms in a fifth-century audience, while also encouraging modern audiences to continue questioning and breaking the gender norms in their own society, leading to the popularity of feminist retellings of the *Oresteia* that put this comment and use of gender on a larger display.

The focus on Clytemnestra's manipulation of gender took place in the first chapter of this thesis, in which I explored the ancient perception of her character through the many devaluing comments made about Clytemnestra by her supporting characters and through her own "codeswitching" language. Clytemnestra is characterized as a dangerous woman who creates chaos both in the *polis* and within her own *oikos* even before she commits her murders, as she is undermined, dehumanized and criticized from the very beginning of the *Agamemnon*. This analysis of how an ancient male audience would understand Aeschylus' depiction and treatment of Clytemnestra not only provides a basis to compare the modern characterization of her character, but also explores and identifies how Aeschylus plays with gender himself, as he

chooses to make Clytemnestra deviate from the existing gender norms in his play, while also introducing the question as to why he chooses to do this through Clytemnestra.

Chapter 2 proposes an answer to this question, arguing that the motivation behind Clytemnestra's defiant behaviour is not only to demonstrate the dangers of deviant women, but to serve as a comment on the boundaries of gender in Athens, since Clytemnestra is the most masculine character in the *Agamemnon* despite being a woman. Though Clytemnestra's own actions effectively inspire a discussion on gender norms from an ancient male audience, as she displays the successes and faults of masculinity through her behaviour, the emasculation and feminization of the male characters in contrast to her gender-breaking masculinity heightens this comment on gender throughout the play, since not only is Clytemnestra masculine in her actions, but she also has the power to reveal these men's lack of masculinity, or in some cases even their femininity. This observation builds upon Zeitlin's theory on the purpose of women in Greek tragedy, adding another layer to the discussion since the male characters also contribute to this comment on masculinity, while also continuing to contribute to the deep complexity of Clytemnestra that makes her so significant and interesting.

The importance of Clytemnestra's character goes beyond gender studies, as the third chapter brings in the study of reception theory in order to understand the reason behind Clytemnestra's new sympathetic characterization that is popular amongst modern audiences. It is important to remember that this sympathetic understanding of her character stems from the original texts, where Aeschylus includes this suffering and maternal side to her character, though a fifth-century male audience does not focus on these aspects. Reception theory explains how a modern audience is more willing to accept Clytemnestra as sympathetic and justified in contrast to how she was understood in antiquity, just as Jauss details that sometimes literature can reveal

its true meaning only after multiple generations of reception. This pertains to Clytemnestra's evolution in the 21st century, since her daring masculinity and tragic loss of Iphigenia alongside Agamemnon's initial crimes against her first family have inspired modern authors and producers to rewrite Clytemnestra's story, focusing on her trauma and cultivating more sympathy for her character. Adaptations like Graham's *Clytemnestra* demonstrate the modern push to redeem these dynamic female characters that were commonly villainized in antiquity, while also proving that their complexity continues to inspire and engage modern audiences after thousands of years.

The goal of this diachronic study was to examine and understand the transformation of Clytemnestra's characterization from antiquity to modernity. In performing a close reading of the text, we have discovered the ancient and modern perceptions of her character, the meaning behind these characterizations and how the evolution of Clytemnestra's character occurred through reception theory. As a result of this study, we have taken a step closer to understanding the role women serve in Greek tragedy, since this research reveals the influence that Clytemnestra has on the survival of the *Oresteia* trilogy, as she is the sole character who continues to provoke interest in modern audiences. Clytemnestra and other female characters like her allow tragedy to evolve and inspire modern artists to create their own adaptations of these plays, giving tragedy and these women a whole new life in the 21st century. The application of this study does not stop at Clytemnestra, as I believe that this same inquiry can be made and proven regarding many other defiant and outspoken female characters in Greek tragedy, strengthening the role of women within the genre. The research of women in tragedy will and must continue, if we wish to understand the true meaning behind these complex plays.

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