

THE QUEEN ANCIENT AND MODERN: AESCHYLUS' CLYTEMNESTRA

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INTRODUCTION

Queen Clytemnestra says:

*This one, it is Agamemnon, my
husband. A dead corpse. The work of my right hand,
a just artificer. And that is it.* (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1404–6)¹

These are the words of the queen, and they deserve to be studied carefully. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra has fascinated audiences since her first appearance on stage, but there has been an upsurge of interest particularly in the last one hundred years. In the first half of the twentieth century the theme of moral justice/injustice dominated the scholarly debate of the play. From the 1950's onwards, however, a growing awareness of feminist theory led to a shift of focus with greater emphasis paid to gender-related issues. Over the past forty years, the play has also been used as a source for the socio-historical analysis of fifth-century BCE Athens,² especially as it concerns the position of women. In many studies the male-female conflict was regarded as this play's main theme.³ Such discussions focused on Clytemnestra's ability to act as an autonomous female moral agent and on the judgement passed on her in what is a case of regicide committed by a woman. However, such debates are inherently problematic. Clytemnestra's role has been discussed from a modern perspective, sometimes imposing on the ancient poet's text contemporary ethical and ideological values that are alien to it.

The first half of this article focuses on an examination of the character of Clytemnestra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. The importance of the context of the play is emphasized, particularly when the tragedy is used as a source for socio-historical analysis of fifth-century BCE Athens. It is vital that Clytemnestra and her crimes are considered from the point of view of ancient Athenian society rather than purely from a modern perspective. In order to form a comprehensive view of the play, a more balanced and more inclusive approach is needed, one that takes into consideration the complex gender-issues, as well as the position of Athenian women in fifth-century BCE.

As the *Agamemnon* is used in this article to a certain extent as evidence about the fifth-century BCE Athenian social context, the term 'society' has to be defined in order to clarify the difference between the poet's artistic reconstruction of the mythic Mycenaean society and his own contemporary Athenian society. The use of tragedy as a source of socio-historical analysis is a complicated undertaking. Aside from a few exceptions like Aeschylus' *Persae*, tragedies were based on mythical stories in which gods, heroes and humans acted alongside each other. The plots of tragedies take place in a mythical Bronze Age that is a product of the poets' imagination. Thus they can never be taken as straightforward evidence about the poet's contemporary society (Just 1989: 10–11). When a tragedy is mined for material for a socio-historical study, it is essential to use it with caution, supplementing it with other contemporary evidence, such as other forms of literature, law texts as well as epigraphic and archaeological material. Although tragedies should not form the basis for making socio-historical assumptions, they can be useful when discussing circumstances and attitudes that are left obscure in the light of other evidence.⁴ Greek tragedy reveals, especially for modern audiences, certain anxieties about powerful women like Clytemnestra or Medea, who transgress the norms of traditional female behaviour by adopting in their speech and actions ways that are characteristic to men.⁵ The prevailing view of the

position of women in (male-dominated) fifth-century Athenian society is expressed by Just:

From the available evidence it can certainly be said that in Athens a woman's life was in most areas much more restricted one than a man's; that she was not allowed to do, or simply did not do, many of the things that a man did. (Just 1989: 6)⁶

In the third part of this article, 'A Modern Clytemnestra', the focus shifts from the ancient world to a (post)modern one. It focuses on the recent reception of Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, both as a dramatic text received by modern readers and as an interpretation created for a production on the contemporary stage. The play and Clytemnestra's character are considered from a feminist perspective, comparing the socio-historical approach to Aeschylus' text, presented in the first half of this article, with the modern reception of the play in order to shed light on the changes of emphasis in modern portrayals of Clytemnestra. The modern reception of the character is discussed using the example of one case study: the production *Ancient Pathos—The Atrides* directed by Nikolas Kamtsis and performed by the Topos Allou Theatre in Athens in the summer of 2007.⁷ A performance analysis is followed by some observations with a particular focus on the role of Clytemnestra as played by Vicky Harris.

Greek tragedy is performed today on the modern stage more than ever before since antiquity (Hall 2004: 2). Themes such as war⁸ and the range of human emotions found in these plays make them continuously fascinating to theatre audiences all over the world, 2500 years after their creation. As scholars like Rabinowitz (Rabinowitz 2004) and Foley (Foley 2001) have demonstrated, new interpretations of Greek tragedy can offer a better understanding of modern cultural issues.⁹ They can also shed light on marginalised or neglected aspects of the ancient text.

ANALYSIS OF CLYTEMNESTRA

In *Agamemnon*, the king of Argos returns home from the war at Troy. As his war booty Agamemnon brings with him the prophetess-maiden Cassandra, daughter of King Priam of Troy. The girl was chosen by Apollo and granted the gift of prophecy but as a result of Apollo's anger towards Cassandra, nobody believes her predictions. Cassandra knows she and Agamemnon are going to die, but is powerless to prevent it.¹⁰ This is the plot that unfolds in the *Agamemnon*. Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon and Cassandra, but her motive for these murders is much more serious than just marital infidelity:

*He sacrificed his own daughter, my beloved child to whom I gave birth
suffering great pains, just to control the Thracian winds with spells (1417–
18)*

Clytemnestra hates Agamemnon, who was ordered by the goddess Artemis to sacrifice their first-born, Iphigenia. However, Clytemnestra is also angry with her husband because of Cassandra, and she says that both adulterers deserved punishment (1431–47). The situation is somewhat dubious. Clytemnestra herself is having an adulterous affair with Agamemnon's worst enemy Aegisthus, with whom she has also been plotting the murder of Agamemnon. In terms of marital fidelity Clytemnestra cannot claim moral superiority over Agamemnon. Orestes kills his mother to avenge the murder of his father, but Clytemnestra dies not just because of her adultery. The crucial issue is the regicide, and the question of whether Clytemnestra's horrendous deeds can be justified as a response to Iphigenia's sacrifice.

The *nostos*-theme is central to the *Agamemnon*. Ewans (Ewans 1982) discusses how homecoming-rituals shape the dramatic structure of the play.¹¹ In the first half of the play Clytemnestra deliberately perverts all the rituals involved in the homecoming of the king (Ewans 1982:9). This is intentional, a way for the queen to assert her power, which is an important aspect of her character. She makes the elders of Argos wait for her answer at the palace when they come to ask her about the sacrificial fires burning in every minor and major shrine in the town.¹² The elders are sceptical of Clytemnestra's reasons for believing that the expedition to Troy has been successful, and the conversation between the queen and the elders is reminiscent of a duel (258–354).¹³ However, Clytemnestra masterfully uses rhetoric worthy of a man, and in the end the elders admit defeat (351–54) (Ewans 1982: 9–10). The queen disparages the herald who arrives to inform her of the safe return of Agamemnon. Clytemnestra cuts off his announcement by telling him that she already knows of the victory and claims that her husband will tell her everything she needs to know (587–614). As Ewans puts it:

Once again, she has successfully undermined by her 'unfeminine' strength of mind and speech the normal, customary sequence of the rituals of Agamemnon's homecoming. (Ewans 1982: 11)

When Agamemnon arrives, Clytemnestra assumes control of the situation by arriving late and giving a lengthy and garrulous welcoming speech to her husband (855–913). Finally, in the famous carpet-scene (914–74), the queen persuades Agamemnon to offend the gods by walking on the luxurious purple clothes and straight to his death (Ewans 1982: 11–12). By her actions, Clytemnestra has managed to break with all the traditional Greek customs and rituals related to the homecoming of a king. That is the theme that dominates the first half of the play, as Ewans points out (Ewans 1982: 13).¹⁴ Clytemnestra's actions reveal to the audience her intentions. They also expose her growing power and the political and psychological battle between with the elders—who represent the people of Argos—and the herald (Ewans 1982: 13). What Ewans does not mention in his analysis, is the overall question of power and *hubris* that lie underneath the surface of the play. I would argue that this is the most important aspect of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: the tension between reasonableness and lack of restraint—how much is one allowed to want and at which point does one overstep the boundaries of decency. This is precisely what Clytemnestra has done. She has committed *hubris* and transgressed the norms and customs of her society by desiring (political) power.

Clytemnestra wants to rule her house, children, lover and her city.¹⁵ The queen's behaviour is inherently transgressive, but it becomes even more so when it turns into a remorseless craving for power.¹⁶ Through the figure of Clytemnestra, Aeschylus criticises the corruptive influence of unlimited power on human nature. This also demonstrates how abandoning justice as well as common values and the rules of society leads to destruction.¹⁷ Aeschylus deliberately defines Clytemnestra's true nature right from the beginning of the play. The warder of the beacon-fires, whose monologue opens the play, describes his mistress in the following way:

For these are the orders of a woman, who has a mind firm like a man and a heart daring, hopeful (10–11)

Aeschylus' Clytemnestra is a woman with the heart of a man, and this quality makes her a character defined by opposing extremes of good and evil. She is a loving mother who also has exceptional skills of rhetoric and persuasion, but she can also be vindictive, unforgiving, fierce and remorseless.

In many studies of the male-female conflict in the *Agamemnon* the social norms and attitudes of fifth-century BCE society have been discussed using the play as evidence to draw conclusions about the position of women in fifth-century Athens. Winnington-Ingram (Winnington-Ingram 1983)¹⁸ believed that one of the main issues of the *Oresteia* was Aeschylus' alleged protest against the poor position of women in fifth-century BCE Athens. Jones (Jones 1962) interpreted *Agamemnon* as a portrayal of the destruction of the *oikos* by Clytemnestra. Vickers (Vickers 1973) argued that in *Agamemnon* Aeschylus shared the values and the moral disapproval of contemporary Athenian society when it came to the female sex. Gagarin emphasized the need to examine the *Oresteia* in terms of sexual conflict in order to highlight an important aspect of the dramatic action (Gagarin 1976: 91). Aeschylus, according to Zeitlin, saw civilization as the ultimate product of the conflict between opposing forces, including that of male control over women on the social level (Zeitlin 1996: 87).¹⁹

Viewed as gynecocentric document, the *Oresteia* holds a privileged position in any exploration of the Greek image of female, the definition of her social role and status, her functions and meanings. (Zeitlin 1996: 88)

More recently the gender issues in the *Agamemnon* have been studied for example by McClure (McClure 1997a, 1997b and 1999), Foley (Foley 2001) and Rabinowitz (Rabinowitz 2004). Foley comments that the play testifies to the impossibility of imagining a Greek wife and mother as a moral agent acting autonomously and in her own interest (Foley 2001: 201–2).²⁰ In her analysis Foley concentrates on the dialogue between Clytemnestra and the chorus, after the queen has shown them the dead bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra (1372–1576). Clytemnestra wants to be judged—if she is to be judged—as an autonomous agent, as would any (male) person who had committed regicide. However, the chorus refuse to do this and instead treat the queen as a mad wife who has killed her husband. Agamemnon suffered an unjust and disgraceful death at the hands of a woman (Foley 2001: 203). Foley points out that the fundamental problem in the *Agamemnon* is that Clytemnestra's crimes and the moral dilemma they pose are judged differently, because they were committed by a woman rather than by a man (Foley 2001: 203).

These gender-related issues in the *Oresteia*, discussed in the above-mentioned studies, are important for scholars of Greek tragedy. Athenian drama was created for a highly political and religious event, and as such it testifies to some extent to contemporary society's attitudes and ideas about women and their position.²¹ The *Agamemnon* with its rich language of gender²² is indicative of certain male anxieties about powerful women who transgress the norms of the (mythical Mycenaean as well as fifth-century Athenian) society. In view of the fact that Aeschylus' focus in the *Oresteia* is on the crimes committed by a woman, did he disapprove of a female's attempt to seize power? There is another woman in the trilogy who acts contrary to traditional female behaviour, Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra's daughter Electra. She does not obey her mother's dictates and she participates with Orestes in the murder of Clytemnestra. Although Electra does not act alongside her brother, she approves of his actions, so that makes her Orestes' accomplice. This is of course the end result of Clytemnestra's crime, but nevertheless in *Electra* Aeschylus portrays in a positive way a woman who acts contrary to female norms. Aeschylus depicts Clytemnestra as 'an embodiment of all evil' in the trilogy.²³

However, alongside these important gender-issues in the play, the *Agamemnon* should be also considered from another highly significant perspective. I would like to suggest here a shift of focus in the scholarly debate of this play in order to achieve a more balanced reading, namely to revisit the question of justice in the play.

From this point of view, the most important question in the play is something that can be termed Aeschylus' moral stance. In the *Agamemnon*—and throughout the *Oresteia*—Aeschylus defends the moral values of his society. Clytemnestra's actions are wrong and condemnable because (in addition her cruel and cold-blooded murder of her husband and Cassandra) she has abandoned her society's moral values, traditional norms and customs. Her *hubris* and her lust for power would have been offensive to the ancient audience even if she had been a man. Betensky emphasizes the importance of the context in her interpretation of the character of Clytemnestra (Betensky 1978). She observes that Aeschylus set the *Oresteia* within his own society. We have no way of knowing what he personally thought about Clytemnestra or about the status of women in Athens, but we do know something more important—that the poet had clear dramatic reasons for choosing to portray his character in this way (Betensky 1978: 11):

What is crucial is not that Clytemnestra represents one attitude or the other in the sexual battle, but that her dramatic character be as rich as possible, since she carries the action of *Agamemnon*, against which the other two plays of the trilogy react. (Betensky 1978: 11–12).

Aeschylus certainly had his reasons for choosing to portray the characters of *Agamemnon* in the way that he did. Betensky stresses the importance of Clytemnestra's character since she carries the action of the first play in the trilogy, and that the plot of the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* is the direct result of her actions. I would, however, argue that contrary to Betensky's opinion, it is possible to formulate some assumptions about Aeschylus' views about Clytemnestra and the position of women. Aeschylus' text suggests that he did not condone women abandoning their 'natural' place in society. Equally important is Aeschylus' presentation of the battle of the sexes. *Agamemnon* with its stark gender language alludes to some restrictions imposed on women and raises the issue of male anxiety.

Foley writes that the *Oresteia* repeatedly raises doubts about women's moral capacity and stability in a fashion that echoes standard views in classical Athens (Foley 2001: 207). The Argive elders do treat Aeschylus' Clytemnestra differently precisely because she is a woman, first in their reception of her speeches, and later in judging her actions. If it was 'natural' for the Athenians that a woman was not allowed to participate in public and political life, then to what extent can we expect them to have recognized the gender conflict that seems so evident to a modern audience? It is possible, that in depicting Clytemnestra and her crimes, the poet had a higher moral stance in mind—the idea that *nemesis* inevitably follows a person who acts against common values,²⁴ like Clytemnestra did in her *hubris*. Moreover Clytemnestra is not the only figure Aeschylus criticises. Agamemnon's unjust actions are condemned as well, even if they are not portrayed as negatively as Clytemnestra's. Agamemnon is not innocent. He used deceit to lure his daughter Iphigenia to Aulis and then sacrificed her, although an act committed in obedience to the command of the goddess Artemis was probably more acceptable to an ancient Greek than 'just' a murder. He also brought home as war-booty a concubine who could have posed a threat to the position of the legal mistress of the house.²⁵

The power of Clytemnestra lies in her intelligence. Like the warder of the beacon-fires, the elders of Argos regard Clytemnestra as a sensible woman. However, they are inclined to question Clytemnestra's decisions, thinking that she is being overemotional when she argues that the beacon-fires signal a Greek victory at Troy. They suspect that the queen believes in nothing more than rumours, and that she has no reliable evidence. Only when Clytemnestra produces irrefutable proof, do the elders agree to

trust in their queen's words (83–103, 258–350). Only then does the leader of the chorus give his approval to Clytemnestra's decision to celebrate the victory:

Woman, you speak reasonable words like a wise man.

I have heard your evidence and it is trustworthy, (351–52)

Clytemnestra is acting rationally and logically. In the absence of her husband she rules the household, as is her duty. However, the citizens fear their mistress. The queen is too powerful. She acts like a man, even in her speech. Clytemnestra's eloquence is subtle and persuasive, and she steers the course of events in the direction she herself wishes by adjusting her words to fit the situation and her own needs (Foley 2001: 207–11).²⁶ There is a lurking fear in the minds of the citizens and not totally without reason (c.f. 36–39, 140–59, 217–54), since the queen has by her side Aegisthus, Agamemnon's worst enemy, whom she clearly considers her partner. However, the queen's rationality and 'manly' features of themselves are not condemnable.²⁷ The negative connotations arise out of the sinister and power-hungry tone of the words that Clytemnestra utters even before the return of Agamemnon. The elders know that the queen is having an affair with Aegisthus, and so her words at the arrival of the herald sound ironic and baleful to them. Undoubtedly this is Clytemnestra's intention, keeping in mind how she is planning to celebrate her husband's homecoming:

How would I now best hasten the arrangements to receive my own, dear husband, as he now returns? For what joy for a woman to look is sweeter than this, to open the gates to a husband the god has saved from the war?

Take this message to my husband: let him come, this city's beloved, as quick as he can! On his arrival, he will find at home his faithful wife even as he left her, a watchdog of the house, kind to him only but an enemy to those who wish him ill;

And in all else, unchanged in every respect. Through all this time she guarded her seal without breaking it –

Of other men's pleasures or their blameworthy words I know as little as of dippings of bronze. (600–12)

The twofold nature of Clytemnestra's character becomes clear in the way Aeschylus handles the portrayal of her revenge. The queen is a monster, but at the same time she is also a loving mother.²⁸ Essentially the queen has every right to avenge her daughter's murder and in the eyes of a modern audience Agamemnon's adultery as well. The situation is complicated by Clytemnestra's *hubris*, her own adultery and the murder of her husband. Perhaps the worst issue for Clytemnestra is that Agamemnon has insulted her by introducing Cassandra. The queen's enraged rant when she reveals to the chorus the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra demonstrates her vindictiveness (1372–1406, 1431–47). Clytemnestra's hatred for her husband has its roots in Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia, who was as much Clytemnestra's daughter as she was Agamemnon's. Any love Clytemnestra might have felt for Agamemnon died when Iphigenia died and she cried so many tears that none are left (887–88)' (Winnington-Ingram 1983: 110–11). Through her desire for revenge Clytemnestra has fallen into *hubris*, and now she wants to take away everything from Agamemnon: his life, position and fortune.²⁹ Closely related to this is the murder of Cassandra, for which there at first seems to be no 'good' reason. However, by bringing her to his home, Agamemnon has offended Clytemnestra's position as mistress of the household (Winnington-Ingram 1983: 110), so not only the king but also the rival must die. However, as Wohl has pointed out, there seems to be a further reason for Cassandra's murder. As

Agamemnon sacrificed Clytemnestra's daughter so Clytemnestra is sacrificing his concubine, which in a perverted way balances Iphigenia's death (Wohl 1998: 110–11). The king's crimes provide the queen with a reason, which in the end turns out to be a mere pretext for taking over his power and fortune. Clytemnestra's total lack of morality is the feature that Aeschylus criticises the most in the queen's character; this is what she is judged on and punished for.

Taking into account the earlier versions of the myth, where the primary agent in the murder of Agamemnon was Aegisthus and Clytemnestra was the weaker partner, one could regard Aegisthus as the queen's weakness. Clytemnestra might thus be thought to be in love with him and acting in accordance with his will.³⁰ It could also be supposed that Aegisthus had planned the whole revenge.³¹ However, in Aeschylus' play it is clear that it is Clytemnestra alone who is the driving force behind the plot. For her, Aegisthus is just a pawn in her plan. She uses him to justify her deeds with reference to the blood claim of the Atreides³² in addition to Iphigenia's murder. The one who commits the murders is Clytemnestra and it is a matter of great importance to the queen that she is the one who does the actual killing. By murdering her husband she literally takes away everything he has, as she has long desired to do. Aegisthus is to her nothing more than a tool.³³ Clytemnestra handles Aegisthus with care, manipulating him with false humbleness and guiding him in the direction she herself wishes to go. This becomes clear at the end of the play, when Clytemnestra soothes Aegisthus' anger towards the elders:

*Pay no attention to this idle yelping—I
and you, we will set out and well rule over this household. (1672–73)*

The meaning of Clytemnestra's words is obvious: *she* will rule the city. It is only for show that she uses the plural form. This is exactly what happens, as we find out in the second play of the trilogy, the *Choephoroi*. When Orestes arrives at the palace he expects to be greeted by the master of the house (665–67). This after all was one of the duties of the king. Indeed it is the master of the house that opens the doors for Orestes, his mother Clytemnestra. She, not Aegisthus, is the true master of the house. Despite Aegisthus' apparent assumption of the role of the king of Argos, it is Clytemnestra who after Agamemnon's death holds the reigns of power (Foley 2001: 207–8).

In the *Agamemnon* Clytemnestra controls the course of events. She is able to persuade even Agamemnon to act in accordance with her will. As Thalmann (Thalmann 1985: 228) has pointed out, there is but one person in the play who is actually able to resist Clytemnestra and to stand up to her, and that is Cassandra, Agamemnon's war booty and Apollo's chosen. Cassandra tells the chorus of the queen's deceit and about the imminent destruction of the king and herself but the elders are confused and keep repeating that they cannot understand her words. Cassandra walks to her death as predetermined by fate, but this does not mean that she accepts it passively. She is not a voluntary sacrifice, even though she does not have the power to change the course of events in spite of her gift of prophecy. Cassandra defies Clytemnestra, who intended her to enter the house alongside Agamemnon. Thalmann observes that in answering Clytemnestra's address and requests to enter the house with silence (1035–69), she wrests control of the situation from the queen whose powers of persuasion fail her on this occasion. To fight with the queen using her own weapons, words, would be useless, but silence offers a means of resisting Clytemnestra, the master of persuasion. Cassandra thus lays claim to the only freedom she has left. She enters the palace and dies with dignity (Thalmann 1985: 228–29). Clytemnestra addresses Cassandra in a disparaging manner. One can even detect a hint of malicious pleasure at the princess' degradation in her words. Cassandra is a third party in Clytemnestra's revenge. Nonetheless the queen has decided that the maiden has to die along with her husband.

It is not a question of jealousy but of Clytemnestra's wounded pride.³⁴ So the queen despises the barbarian concubine. Cassandra, however, instead of engaging in conversation with the queen, displays an icy disdain. She does not even bother to answer the queen's sugary requests to enter the house. Cassandra knows what Clytemnestra's true intentions are and she condemns the queen as a murderer. Even if Cassandra knows that she will die at Clytemnestra's hands, she retains the knowledge of her moral superiority over the queen and this gives her the right to condemn Clytemnestra.

The queen is not used to someone defying her authority. Clytemnestra's attitude towards Cassandra changes rapidly during the course of their 'conversation'. At first the queen addresses the foreign girl with condescending friendliness, which is of course a mere charade. When Cassandra answers Clytemnestra with silence, the queen becomes irritated at first and by the end she is clearly frustrated and enraged. Undoubtedly Clytemnestra feels, if not awkward, at least self-conscious when faced with the prophetess-maiden's piercing silence. Clytemnestra's frustrated anger explodes and she calls Cassandra mad. However, the queen then chooses to ignore Cassandra's disdain and she decides not to wait for her but instead goes inside to settle her account with Agamemnon. Clytemnestra kills her husband along with Cassandra, who follows Agamemnon into the house. Agamemnon is Clytemnestra's *teleios*, a ritual sacrifice to the gods (Ewans 1982: 12). Clytemnestra's *hubris* is inevitably followed by *nemesis*. At the end of the play the queen is treated in accordance with her 'wishes'. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra is judged as any murderer would be, rather than as a 'man' or a 'woman'.

A MODERN CLYTEMNESTRA

For a modern audience the key question is whether Clytemnestra's rage was justified. Foley underlines the injustice against which Clytemnestra's revenge is directed (Foley 2001: 233). Clytemnestra's husband has betrayed her by sacrificing their daughter in order to appease the goddess Artemis and to obtain favourable winds for the Greek expedition to Troy. So in a way Agamemnon killed Iphigenia for the cause of the (mythic) state and upon his return from the war Agamemnon challenges Clytemnestra's position as the mistress of the house by introducing Cassandra as his concubine. It was the duty of a Greek man as the master of the *oikos* to protect the welfare of his house and its mistress. In this respect Agamemnon has failed to fulfil his duty, so it seems logical for Clytemnestra to turn to a more dependable man, Aegisthus. As Foley points out:

Clytemnestra's monstrosity cannot entirely silence the fundamental moral imbalance in the culture's ethical system that she reveals. (Foley 2001: 233).

The inequality of male and female in the *Agamemnon* has been a central issue in the scholarly debate of the play in the past forty years. A modern reader, spectator or scholar is more inclined to seize on this particular difference between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon than the ancient audience would have done. Clytemnestra's violation of the *oikos* by her killing of its (and her) master would have been shocking for an ancient audience, but they would have recognised Clytemnestra's warrior-like characteristics and her evocation of magical incantations, especially prominent in the carpet-scene (914–74).³⁵ These qualities with which modern audiences are less familiar associate Clytemnestra with other dark and twisted tragic heroes like Ajax. Most modern readers are not familiar with the play's mythological context and the practise of ancient magic, so he/she is left to form his/her own interpretation of the play based solely on the text and/or on the basis of a performance. Indeed many modern

interpretations of Clytemnestra focus on the issue of her gender and on the question of justice. Attitudes towards Clytemnestra are shaped by the changed cultural context and for modern spectators Clytemnestra is not a warrior but an oppressed woman and a suffering mother.

This point of view was also put forward in the production *Ancient Pathos—The Atrides* in the summer of 2007.³⁶ Vicky Harris' Clytemnestra is first and foremost a hurt mother and an oppressed woman. This production was an interesting mixture of five Greek tragedies: Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Sophocles' *Electra*, Euripides' *Orestes* and Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. In just one hour it tells the story of the cycle of revenge that haunted the family of the Atrides. In the performance text of his play the director Nicolas Kamtsis used passages from all five tragedies and combined them with his own poetry.³⁷ His treatment of the ancient texts and his attempt to unify the story was dramatically quite successful.³⁸

The story begins with the events covered by Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*. The performance opens with Kamtsis' own poem, which is performed by a male narrator on a screen. After this, a female narrator walks on stage and gives the background of the story: the wrath of Artemis and Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his own daughter. It is in one of the first speeches of the female narrator that the audience first hears of Clytemnestra: 'Her mother loved her [Iphigenia] more than anything'.³⁹ A dialogue follows between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, where she begs with fierce desperation for her husband to save Iphigenia. During this dialogue Clytemnestra reveals that she has never loved Agamemnon, and that she married him just because her father showed pity to Agamemnon, who was chased by Clytemnestra's brothers after he had murdered her first husband Tantalos and their baby-boy.⁴⁰ Clytemnestra continues by stressing that she has been a perfect wife to Agamemnon and that he should save their first-born child. Agamemnon tells her that he loves his children, but he is being forced to make the sacrifice. Clytemnestra then urges Iphigenia to talk to her father in order to save herself, and Iphigenia delivers a heart-breaking plea to Agamemnon. Agamemnon answers that he is slave to no one and that it is his decision to sacrifice Iphigenia for the sake of Greece. The female narrator describes the destruction of Troy and the lighting of the beacon-fires. Kamtsis then deviates from the story as it is presented in the *Agamemnon*. Clytemnestra enters the stage and announces the Greek victory at Troy. She offers a warning that the Greeks should respect the shrines of the gods in Troy because otherwise a terrible fate would be dealt to them. This is reminiscent of the prologue of Euripides' *Trojan Women* where the gods Poseidon and Athena decide to destroy the Greeks on their journey home because they defiled the Trojan temples. The narrator gives a short speech about the horrors of war and then the focus once again shifts to Clytemnestra. Her speech is a mixture of her words in the *Agamemnon* when she converses with the chorus of Argive elders and Agamemnon's herald. She gives the herald a message for Agamemnon, ending it with the ominous words:

Yes, let him come, and coming may he find
A wife no other than he left her, true
And faithful as a watchdog to his home,
Fear to his enemies, in all her duties
Loyal, flawless, for ten long years unmarred.
Such are claims full of truth,
That bring no shame when spoken
By a gentle woman such as I.⁴¹

After Clytemnestra's monologue, the female narrator introduces Cassandra to the audience. This is followed by Cassandra's lamentation and prophecy. She engages in

dialogue with the female narrator, who replaces Aeschylus' chorus in this scene. After Cassandra's lament, the female narrator describes the murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra to the audience, while at the same time Clytemnestra prepares for her deed on stage by unveiling an axe hidden underneath a purple cloth:

The mother. The woman.
Whose body bore no pleasure.
Whose sweet gaze
Turned to poison.
Withered and perished.
And she killed, with a sharpened axe
And dragged her husband out into the light of Day
For the skies to see.
To see how a mother avenges her child's death.
The child she bore, and who bore the foundations of victory.
And she collapsed.
As only a woman can collapse. And she takes her revenge.
And only then does she rise in Time. She crawls up... and she is
reversed.⁴²

Then a poem by director Kamtsis is recited on the screen. When the actors return to the stage, the story continues with passages from Sophocles' *Electra*. The first scene takes place at the tomb of Agamemnon where Electra is mourning her father. Chrysothemis, the obedient daughter, arrives carrying offerings from Clytemnestra to Agamemnon's grave. The two sisters engage in an argument over their situation. Electra seeks to avenge their father's death, while Chrysothemis is inclined to accept their present miserable situation in order to live in peace. Chrysothemis then leaves and Electra is left alone with her thoughts. Clytemnestra enters the stage and there follows a bitter *agon* between mother and daughter. Clytemnestra explains to Electra her reasons:

I killed him!
I know that.
And I do not deny it
But I did not act alone.
Justice killed him too.
Tell me, this father of yours that you're constantly lamenting,
Tell me why he and he alone among the Greeks,
Why did he sacrifice your sister to the gods?
...Yes, I killed him—I made the only choice I could.⁴³

Electra blames her mother for acting under the influence of an evil man, Aegisthus. She says that it was not possible for Agamemnon to defy Artemis' command, even though it broke his heart to sacrifice his daughter. Electra tells Clytemnestra that she tortures her, while Clytemnestra accuses Electra of insulting her mother. Electra admits that this is true and Clytemnestra leaves, swearing that Electra will have to account for her behaviour to Aegisthus upon his return to Argos. When Clytemnestra leaves, two narrators inform the audience of the arrival of Orestes, which is followed by the reunion of Electra and Orestes. After this comes a passage from Euripides' *Orestes*. The narrator describes how Orestes committed matricide to avenge the death of his father, thus waking up the Erinyes who pursue him and drive him out of his mind. This is followed by the scene of the madness of Orestes, when only Electra's embrace can give him even a moment of peace. The story moves forward to Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, as Orestes flees the Erinyes and takes refuge at the temple of Athena in Athens. In this final part of the play two female narrators enter the stage. They take turns reciting how

the Erinyes pursued Orestes and how he was exonerated by the Areiopagos 'in the first democratic trial'.⁴⁴ The narrators vote both for and against Orestes, but as the votes are even in number, the goddess Athena appears on the screen as the *dea ex machina* and saves Orestes by deciding in his favour and by inviting the Erinyes, now the Eumenides, to take their place as divinities of the *polis* of Athens. The female narrators conclude the scene by saying that everyone was pleased by Athena's verdict, because everyone found their allotted place within a democratic society. The play ends with a poem by Kamtsis, presented on the screen by a male narrator.

The director, Kamtsis, also wrote the performance text. The task he undertook was not an easy one. A certain amount of scepticism at the outcome is to be expected when one is confronted with a production of one hour that combines five extant Greek tragedies. Kamtsis and his assistants, however, had read the source texts thoroughly and had the good dramatic sense to choose appropriate passages for the synthesis. In an interview with the director he told me⁴⁵ that for him *The Atrides* was above all the story of revenge, the crucial themes for him being the question of *hubris/dike/nemesis*. The fundamental question that he wanted to address in his reception of the myth was: 'who is guilty?'. Who was responsible, a human or a god? And if it was a god, was it acceptable for a human to deny the will of the gods? And finally, was it acceptable for a woman to take revenge and thus to become the personification of *Nemesis*? Kamtsis explained that for him the most important aspect of the *Oresteia* is the problem of the matricide and the conflict between archaic mother earth cults and Aeschylus' male-dominated culture: what was worse killing a mother or justice for a father (Kamtsis 2007)?

Due to the limited length of the performance Kamtsis chose to omit large parts of the tragedies, like for example Clytemnestra's monologue over the bodies of Cassandra and Agamemnon. He justified his decision by saying that in a one-hour performance it would have been too much for the audience to hear two full monologues by Clytemnestra, especially when he wanted to include in his text features he felt to be very modern, such as Euripides' portrayal of Orestes' madness, written long before the time of Freud and modern psychoanalytic theories. A weakness in Kamtsis' performance text was his decision to use his own poetry to link together the passages from the Greek tragedies. These poems were somewhat banal, lacking in artistic or poetic value.

As in the ancient theatre, Kamtsis used three actors: Vicky Harris (Clytemnestra, Chrysothemis, second female narrator), Adia Olympiou (first female narrator, Iphigenia, Cassandra, Electra) and Thodoris Anthopoulos (Agamemnon, Orestes). On the screen there also appeared Duncan Skinner (narrator, reciting Kamtsis' poems) and Angela Elzent (Athena). A separate chorus was not introduced, but the female narrators, especially Adia Olympiou, served as replacements. Kamtsis' casting was inspired and worth mentioning is also the actors' command of the English language.⁴⁶ Kamtsis wanted to create a severe and archaic atmosphere for the production and the actors certainly succeeded in conveying his intentions to the audience. The actors' change from one role to another was smoothly accomplished and it was easy to follow the transition from play to play.⁴⁷ Especially praiseworthy was the performance of Adia Olympiou (and in the concluding part Vicky Harris) as 'the chorus', since she was able to separate her role as the objective narrator of the play from her intense portrayals of Iphigenia and Electra.

The archaic atmosphere Kamtsis tried to achieve was also enhanced by the choice of sets for the production. The colours used in the staging and costumes were white, red, black and golden. The impression they conveyed was that of an ancient time, but without being conventional. The overall effect achieved was fresh and modern, but it

also referenced the play's tragic origins. The stage was square and it was painted black. The architecture of the theatre was similar to that of ancient theatres as the audience was seated in rows above the stage. However, in contrast to an ancient theatre it was also very intimate since it could only sit fifty audience members. The theatre space underlined the interpretation of the myth as a story of human suffering and intense emotions. No large sets were used, instead the set designer Mika Panagou created separate spaces for each dramatic event. The palace of Argos was demarcated by a purple cloth that Clytemnestra laid before Agamemnon and the grave was indicated by Chrysothemis' offerings for Agamemnon's tomb. The effect of the candles on high candelabra placed in every corner of the stage representing the beacon-fires was impressive, especially when Adia Olympiou lit the candles while reciting the story of the beacon-fires from Aeschylus. The lightning design was created in accordance with Kamtsis' desire for an archaic atmosphere for his production. It was very stark, with clear contrasts between white light and dark shadows. Another successful aspect of the production was the costumes. Many modern productions of ancient tragedy use either conventional white robes, or contemporary dress, but in *The Atrides* a different approach was taken. An outstanding feature was the use of long white coats, reminiscent of the dress of Russian officers of the nineteenth century, or of the dandyish bachelors of Oscar Wilde's day. In contrast, the long hair of the actresses was tied back into ponytails. This combination of the simple and the luxurious created a striking effect.

In his direction Kamtsis also made some interesting choices, the most effective of these being the way in which he chose to represent the character of Iphigenia. Instead of 'straight' acting, Adia Olympiou played Iphigenia with the aid of a doll. This doll was a sort of costume worn by the actress like a pinafore. The doll's head was at chest-level, but the actress' hands were placed on the sleeves of the dress of the doll, so the doll/actress could move more easily. Kamtsis wanted to use this marionette-theatre technique for the character of Iphigenia, so he designed the doll and taught the actress how he wanted it to be used during the performance, in order to create the impression that Iphigenia is playing and being played with at the same time: 'A body moves without the mind, out of the mind, free of your mind' (Kamtsis 2007). Kamtsis' decision to have Orestes speak in modern Greek was also significant. Orestes' way of speaking represented his alienation and his status as an outsider, the result of his many years in exile and his madness. This was a good decision, but to those spectators who did not understand modern Greek it made the story more difficult to follow, especially if they were not familiar with the original plays. Another decision that had serious ramifications for the performance was Kamtsis' decision to use a screen. As a concept it was not necessarily a bad idea, but in performance it proved somewhat clumsy giving the rather disturbing impression of a homemade video, especially when it undermined the crucial final monologue of the goddess Athena.

The music of *The Atrides* also deserves special mention. The composer Kostas Haritatos helped to create the atmosphere the director wanted to achieve in his production. Haritatos' music was modern, but with haunting notes reminiscent of a distant time. An effective example of this was Cassandra's lamentation. Cassandra did not appear on stage, only her shadow was visible from behind a white screen. Actress Adia Olympiou was singing the lamentation '*O tototoi popoi da*' in a striking manner: her voice was high-pitched, yet harmonious reminiscent of oriental music. The song supported by a series of snake-like movements choreographed by Marianna Vasilatou emphasised Cassandra's connection to Apollo. It seemed to represent a kind of mythic cry addressed by the prophetess to the god, indicating the ambivalent relation that existed between them. Apollo is Cassandra's master and her skill in prophecy comes from him, but her strength of character is her own and with it she fights Apollo.

Kamtsis wanted to convey the story of the cycle of revenge in the family of the Atrides but the production was above all the story of Clytemnestra. However, it was not the story of Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, but of the Clytemnestra of Vicky Harris and Nicolas Kamtsis. This production portrayed Clytemnestra as struggling with her role as mother and her hatred for her husband. Harris' Clytemnestra:

is a controversial character, a combination of who she was and what she became, 'a she-man'. The queen has been pushed around by men one time too many and that is why she either has to take over everything or she will have nothing. (Harris 2007)

Harris felt that her interpretation of the role of Clytemnestra tells the queen's side of the story (Harris 2007) and indeed this was the general impression given by the production. Harris' Clytemnestra was fierce, enraged and hurt and above all she desired revenge. In contrast to Aeschylus' portrayal of Clytemnestra, Harris' queen had a single, clear motive for her revenge: the murder of Iphigenia. She had loved her daughter above all else and her husband had taken that love away from her in order to appease the capricious goddess. Harris' Clytemnestra does not care for the gods, maybe she does not even believe in them. What she does believe in is the value of her child's life, the first-born from her marriage to Agamemnon and this is what he rips away from her. Harris explained that her Clytemnestra was a combination of who she was, what had been done to her and what then became of her (Harris 2007). Clytemnestra was a queen even before her union with Agamemnon, she was married to Tantalos and had a boy-child by him, but she lost both of them because of Agamemnon. Afterwards she was married to Agamemnon, bore Iphigenia, and lost her too. Harris' Clytemnestra is a figure in tragic circumstances, forced by these circumstances to become what she has become (Harris 2007) and like Harris herself, a modern audience can empathise with Clytemnestra and her reasons for desiring vengeance.

Aeschylus' Clytemnestra is a character that has crossed the line of acceptable behaviour. In her *hubris* she has forgotten the original cause of her hatred. In Harris' interpretation of the queen, the audience is shown an oppressed woman who has lost everything and who has decided as a consequence that she will never again place herself in a similar situation. Clytemnestra has emotionally detached herself from her other children by Agamemnon: Electra, Chrysothemis and Orestes, but this is the result of the pain she has been forced to endure. Harris said that she felt that the hours after Iphigenia's death were crucial for Clytemnestra:

Something snapped in her head and she thought, 'oh no, never again'. There is a saying in Greece 'not two without the third' and after what happened to Tantalos and the baby-boy and then also to Iphigenia. (Harris 2007)

There are elements in Harris' performance of Clytemnestra that reveal her desire for Agamemnon's power, as in Aeschylus. Harris' Clytemnestra, however, has been driven to this position by fate. For Harris Clytemnestra: 'is very self-centred, but by fate, not by choice' (Harris 2007). Her Clytemnestra has detached herself from her children and everything dear to her in order to protect herself from being hurt again by another man (Harris 2007). Both Kamtsis and Harris saw Clytemnestra's detachment from her children as the consequence of her decision to break all emotional ties with Agamemnon (Harris 2007, Kamtsis 2007).⁴⁸ Clytemnestra's feelings towards Cassandra arise out of injured pride, because the prophetess-maiden is a threat to her position as the mistress of the house. What is more significant, however, is that in killing Cassandra, Clytemnestra balances the loss of Iphigenia. Harris also pointed out that Clytemnestra is perhaps jealous of Cassandra's position as the chosen of a god, a

prophetess (Harris 2007). Kamtsis also thought that there is something deeper than just the threat that Cassandra poses, namely the fact that Cassandra is Apollo's prophetess and by trying to persuade Cassandra to act according to her will, Clytemnestra is also trying to dictate to the god Apollo (Kamtsis 2007). That is the ultimate expression of *hubris* (see e.g. Ewans 1982: 12).

The emotional and more human interpretation of Clytemnestra by Harris and Nicolas Kamtsis portrays the queen as acting under the influence of Aegisthus. This provides her with a good reason for her cruelty. In his play Kamtsis poses the question of whether Clytemnestra was truly in love with Aegisthus and acting as his partner in the killing of Agamemnon (Kamtsis 2007). This reading is supported by a line performed by Electra, in which she accuses her mother of 'acting under the influence of an evil man'.⁴⁹ However, in this respect Aeschylus' and Harris' Clytemnestras are alike. They are not acting under the influence of Aegisthus. They are using him in order to achieve their own ends. Harris' Clytemnestra, however, has valid emotional reasons for acting as she does. She is convinced that she has justice on her side. Harris' Clytemnestra is a 'she-man' who possesses an intelligence that is the equal of any man, but is oppressed because of her gender. Harris points out that Aeschylus suggests this in Agamemnon's answer to Clytemnestra's famous carpet-monologue in the *Agamemnon*, when he disapproves of her 'manly way of speech' (916–17) (Harris 2007).

From a modern point of view then, Clytemnestra is a woman who has been forced to suppress all of her natural abilities, feelings as well as her formidable intellect. Clytemnestra is a woman who has the 'heart of a man' (10–11), an expression of inequality and oppression in itself. She has waited for ten years for Agamemnon to return from the war that claimed her daughter's life. She has taken care of the house and the *polis* during the king's absence, just to lose it all when he finally returns. Despite her ability to govern, the people of Argos are questioning her and even her ability to think rationally because of her gender. Moreover, Clytemnestra carries in her heart the grief of her child's cruel and unnecessary death, a sacrifice that made the war possible and upheld Greek honour. When her husband returns from the war he brings home Cassandra 'the flower out of great fortune' (954–55), an insult to Clytemnestra's position as the mistress of the house. Finally, in order to avenge the death of her daughter she has to have a male accomplice, the cowardly Aegisthus to act on her behalf. It is no wonder then that Clytemnestra wants to carry out her revenge by her own hand. This is of course an extremely one-sided reading of Clytemnestra. The cruelty of her actions has to be acknowledged, as well as her corrupt and power-hungry temperament. It is important to take these negative features into account, but when new versions of tragedies are created, the features that the poet stressed in his interpretation of the myth may not be the first or most important ones for the modern reception.

The example of the reception of a Greek myth and tragedy discussed in this article reflects how the context shapes the reception of an ancient play. Whereas ancient audiences might not have felt much sympathy for Clytemnestra, a modern reception that focuses on the more human side of the queen makes possible a more sympathetic view of her character. Rabinowitz (2004: 40, 49–50) suggests that the power of Clytemnestra was portrayed in a negative light because powerful women were considered to be politically dangerous. Rabinowitz believes that it is possible for modern scholarship to benefit from a deliberately anachronistic view of transgressive female characters like Clytemnestra (Rabinowitz 2004: 50). She highlights how tragedies reveal that even in societies like our own, in which the equality of men and women is enshrined in law, suspicions still remain about women with power. To be

successful, a modern woman has to be asexual in the manner of the goddess Athena in the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus (Rabinowitz 2004: 50). The nature/culture and private/public dichotomies as well as the division between the spheres of men and women in the *Agamemnon* still exist, even if they are not as readily apparent as before. She concludes:

In these centrepieces of tragedy, it does seem that woman was to nature as man was to culture. The rewriting of those stories from another point of view will have to come in our own day, ... Our task as scholars and educators is to pull at the threads to show what influences have been alienated in order to make the tragedy/democracy/culture possible. (Rabinowitz 2004: 54)

In the performance history and reception of the *Agamemnon*⁵⁰ new interpretations, like Kamtsis and Harris' version of Clytemnestra reveal that the ancient tragedies are still relevant. Harris' interpretation of the queen exemplifies Rabinowitz's approach. *Agamemnon* is a tragedy that has for over 2500 years made audiences consider questions of divine fate, justice and injustice, and the inequality of the genders. Current debates about gender equality and women's rights lie at the heart of recent productions like *The Atrides*. Harris' heartbroken mother with her fierce need for revenge introduces a queen once again reinterpreted. This is a Clytemnestra who struggles to be woman in a man's world and the ruler of the *polis*. This modern reception of *Agamemnon* has come a long way from Aeschylus' play, but it also demonstrates how the ancient tragic queen can also become a 'modern Clytemnestra'.

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¹ All references to the *Agamemnon* are from the Oxford Classical Texts' edition (Denniston and Page: 1957). All the translations are the author's.

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² Which is true of Greek tragedy in general; see e.g. Pomeroy (1997).

³ See e.g. Winnington-Ingram (1983: 101–31), Gagarin (1976: 87–118), Zeitlin (1996: 87–119), Foley (2001: 201–42) and Rabinowitz (2004). In her work McClure (1997a, 1997b and 1999: 70–111) concentrates on the issues of gender and speech in the *Oresteia*.

⁴ A good example of this is the attitude of the Athenians towards polygamy. In my MA thesis I studied this subject in four plays that portray a *ménage à trois* situation: Euripides' *Andromache* and *Medea*, Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. My hypothesis was that it was not socially acceptable to bring a concubine to the house to compete with the lawful mistress of the *oikos* (by a concubine I mean a wife who is not married to a man but has authority in the house as if she were a wife). Other evidence left this question open, but tragedies offer convincing evidence of the validity of this hypothesis. On tragic evidence on this question see Foley 2001: 57–105.

⁵ This subject has been studied extensively see e.g. McClure (1999), Foley (2001), Rabinowitz (2004).

⁶ As Just himself admits in attempting to build up a picture of Athenian women, he is producing a synthesis of common-place ideas and attitudes see Just (1989: 11). There is always some truth in generalisations, but it is equally true that the situation was more complex, for example Cohen has shown that women were not totally excluded from public life and that their every-day tasks required that they leave the *oikos* see Cohen (1989: 3–15). Also literary evidence (e.g. Dem. XLI; Aeschines I) shows that the position of women was not unchanging, but differed greatly between social classes and even families, allowing some women more freedom than others see Lacey (1968: 151–53). On the legal status of women see e.g. MacDowell (1978: 84–108), Sealey (1990: 12–49). Just's *Women in Athenian Law and Life* (1989) offers a detailed study of women and their (legal) position in fifth-century Athens. For general studies on women in this period with further bibliography see e.g. Pomeroy (1975: 57–119) and Fantham, Foley, Kampen, Pomeroy & Shapiro (1994: 68–127).

⁷ My observations on this production are based on the two performances I attended in Athens on 17 and 24 June 2007.

⁸ E.g. Euripides' Trojan plays *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*.

⁹ I base my reading of the *Agamemnon* on the two articles I consider to be the most influential in this field: Foley's chapter 'Tragic Wives: Clytemnestras' (Foley 2001: 201–42) included in her book *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (see bibliography: Foley 2001) and Rabinowitz's 'Politics of inclusion/exclusion in Attic tragedy' (Rabinowitz 2004).

¹⁰ Cassandra knows that she cannot escape death as she could not stop Agamemnon from making her his concubine.

¹¹ Ewans sees the 'unity of custom' as the most important factor of how Aeschylus' dramas are linked together. Ewans uses this term to show how Aeschylean plots are organised around particular socio-political *nomoi* (defined as a custom, ritual, traditional practise or law). In the course of the play these *nomoi* are perverted or they are forced upon the dramatic characters by their tragic situation as for example in the case of Agamemnon's homecoming and its related rituals see Ewans (1982: 6, 13).

¹² Ewans points out (1982: 2, n. 7) that in the stage directions of many modern translations and productions Clytemnestra is brought on stage at an early point at line 82, while the chorus is still singing. He claims that this is a pointless violation of the convention that characters speak when they enter. I think that in this case both interpretations are possible. Either Clytemnestra enters early and proceeds to ignore the chorus leader when he speaks to her (83–106), or she is not present and the chorus leader is addressing her rhetorically, in the hope that the queen will come. In any case she is ignoring the elders of Argos and only speaks to them when she decides what she wants to say. This is the important point, the queen is demonstrating her power over the elders.

¹³ Of course this resemblance to a duel is characteristic of every *agon* in Greek tragedy. However, this feature is particularly pronounced in the *Agamemnon* especially in Clytemnestra's dialogues with the chorus, the herald and Agamemnon. Aeschylus' language in these scenes is very pointed, sharp and severe, sometimes full of terrible irony, like for example in Clytemnestra's greeting to her husband (600–12).

¹⁴ Ewans depicts in detail how in the *Agamemnon* the first half of the play revolves around the preparations of the city of Argos for Agamemnon's return in accordance with Greek customs and the rituals associated with the homecoming of the king: the sacrifices ordered by Clytemnestra, the arrival of the herald and Agamemnon's thanksgiving prayer to the gods (Ewans 1982: p. 6 ff). He stresses the importance of the *nostos*-theme to the ancient Greeks citing examples of it from literature such as Homer's *Odyssey* and the poems dealing with the *nostoi* of the other Greek leaders. He also mentions tragedies that include a *nostos*-theme, like Euripides' *Andromache*. The only evidence he gives for these 'traditional Greek customs', despite his excessive use of the expression, come from literary sources and especially from tragedy (see pp. 7–9, also n. 19). Apparently Ewans assumes that the reader is familiar with these customs.

¹⁵ The verb *kratein*, 'to rule', is closely linked with the character of Clytemnestra throughout the play. The relationship between the queen and the people of Argos can be defined as that between a ruler and her subjects. It was standard practice for subjects to obey the wife of an absent king, as becomes evident from the chorus' greeting to Clytemnestra at 258–60. The attitude of the people of Argos towards their queen is characterised by an undefined sense of fear and humility, a fact that suggests that Clytemnestra's rule verges on the tyrannical. This

quality in the relationship between Clytemnestra and her subjects is noted by Winnington-Ingram (1983: 102–103). See 10–11, 34–39, 83–85, 258–63.

¹⁶ The most notorious examples of this are the carpet-scene (914–74) and Clytemnestra's triumphant boast uttered over the bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra (1372–1406).

¹⁷ Aeschylus' poetic exploration of the concept of *dike* finds its fulfilment in the next two plays of the trilogy, when Clytemnestra's actions are judged and avenged.

¹⁸ Winnington-Ingram's article 'Clytemnestra and the Vote of Athena' was first published in 1948 in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 68, 130–47. It was revised in 1983 in Winnington-Ingram (1983: 101–31).

¹⁹ Zeitlin's article 'The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*' was originally published in 1978 in *Arethusa* 11, 149–84. It was revised in 1996 in Zeitlin (1996: 87–119).

²⁰ Foley extends her view to include Euripides' and Sophocles' plays of the same title, *Electra*.

²¹ As much as this is possible based solely on the study of tragedy that is after all an artistic construct, and as such does not give us direct knowledge of the poet's society. It does, however, mirror features that the poet, consciously or subconsciously chose to draw upon in his treatment of the mythic story.

²² This has been studied at length see e.g. McClure (1999: 70–100).

²³ The poet deliberately portrayed Clytemnestra as a vindictive murderer, since for example in the *Odyssey* (3.265f. and 4.521f.) the queen is presented as a chaste woman, who is seduced by Aegisthus into committing adultery and murder.

²⁴ Clytemnestra acts not only out of a desire to avenge Iphigenia's murder, but also because she wants to usurp Agamemnon's power.

²⁵ This could be regarded as an anachronistic reading. Different versions of the myth existed and it was Euripides who first problematized this issue in his work.

²⁶ For a detailed analysis of the queen's rhetoric see Goldhill (1984: 89–95). Thalmann (1985) and Betensky (1978) also discuss Clytemnestra's persuasive language. McClure explores Clytemnestra's rhetoric from two points of view: the feminine-masculine dynamic in Clytemnestra's speech (1997a) and the queen's almost magical means of persuasion (1997b). For a detailed analysis of the use of language and speech relating to issue of gender in the *Oresteia* see McClure (1999: 70–111).

²⁷ According to ancient Greek thought women were irrational creatures. However, in Aeschylus' Clytemnestra the difference between ordinary and extraordinarily evil is apparent. Clytemnestra is not a conventional woman, but her punishment is not solely the result of this, but comes about mainly because of her *hubris*.

²⁸ Winnington-Ingram (1983: 110) points out that there is no reason to undermine the dramatic importance of Iphigenia's death and to simply assume that the daughter's death was only an excuse for Agamemnon's murder: "Doubtless she had loved her daughter; doubtless that love had turned into hatred of her husband". The twofold nature of Clytemnestra is a good example of Aeschylus' complex characterisation. It is possible to feel compassion for Clytemnestra (as does the chorus see 1560–61). Euripides creates a similar effect in his *Medea*.

²⁹ Winnington-Ingram (1983:105–6) suggests that Clytemnestra hates Agamemnon because he is a man and thus possesses qualities and opportunities that she does not have. There is some merit in Winnington-Ingram's view: Clytemnestra's hatred for Agamemnon is so intense that it

encompasses the very fact of his male gender. Clytemnestra also uses Aegisthus as a means to an end, so it is possible that she humiliates Aegisthus on purpose by acting as the 'master' of the house. It can be argued that she hates the whole male gender. This will be discussed further below see esp. n.33 and 34.

³⁰ As in the *Odyssey* see n.23 above.

³¹ As he did in the earlier versions of the myth.

³² In her interpretation of the role of Clytemnestra Vicky Harris (Topos Allou Theatre production) sees Aegisthus as the perfect tool for Clytemnestra because he is Agamemnon's worst enemy and therefore the best way for her to achieve her revenge. Harris also points out that Clytemnestra is actually offering Aegisthus Argos, which he would have inherited as the son of Thyestes had Atreus not been the older brother. According to Harris Aegisthus is a victim and Clytemnestra could have ordered his death if she had grown tired of him. (Interview with Vicky Harris, 24 June 2007). From hereon I will refer to my interview with Vicky Harris as 'Harris 2007'.

³³ Clytemnestra knows that in order to rule Argos she needs a tool, a puppet ruler, to act on her behalf in official matters because as a woman she cannot be the one openly giving the orders. So it is Clytemnestra who makes the decisions and Aegisthus who formally announces them to the people. Also the chorus condemns Aegisthus as a coward not fit to rule Argos. He is an idle man who did not fight at Troy and he evaded his responsibility in fulfilling the blood vengeance, letting a woman act on his behalf instead (see especially 1612–16, 1625–27, 1633–35 and 1643–45). See also Foley (2001: 206).

³⁴ I agree with Winnington-Ingram (1983: 109–10) on the question of Clytemnestra's jealousy. The queen is not jealous of Agamemnon's relationship with Cassandra, but she is jealous of Agamemnon himself because he had the opportunity to leave Argos for the war at Troy, after all Clytemnestra is a woman 'with the heart of a man' (10–11).

³⁵ For the magical elements in Clytemnestra's language see McClure (1999: 80–92). For Clytemnestra as a warrior see McClure (1999: 79–80, 97–98).

³⁶ Athens, 17 and 24 June 2007. I also include here parts of interviews with Nicolas Kamtsis (22 June 2007) and Vicky Harris (24 June 2007). I have their permission to use these interviews in my text. For more information on the theatre company see www.topos-allou.gr (last accessed 30 April 2009).

³⁷ Nicolas Kamtsis was kind enough to give me the text of the play for the purpose of my performance analysis.

³⁸ Details of the production as given in the programme: actors: Adia Olympiadou, Vicky Harris and Thodoris Anthopoulos; actors on the screen: Duncan Skinner, Angela Elzent; performance text and direction: Nicolas Kamtsis; stage and costumes design: Mika Panagou; music: Kostas Haris; movement: Marianna Vasilatou; video: Michalis Papadogiannakis; assistant director: Nassa Hatzis; research: Nathalie Apere.

³⁹ Passage from the text of *The Atrides* (unpublished).

⁴⁰ This actually Euripides', not Aeschylus', version of the myth.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Interview with Nicolas Kamtsis, 22 June 2007. From here on I will refer to my discussion with director Kamtsis as 'Kamtsis 2007'

⁴⁶ The actors were Greek, but all of them were proficient in English. This is a detail worth mentioning. Kamtsis told me that this was the first production the group had performed in English in the hopes of reaching a new and hopefully larger audience.

⁴⁷ Also for the spectators who were not familiar with the original texts, the programme included a useful synopsis with references to the original plays.

⁴⁸ Kamtsis used Euripides' *Medea* as a parallel, because in his view Medea killed her children partly in order to sever all emotional ties with Jason.

⁴⁹ The text of *The Atrides* (unpublished) p. 11; Soph. *El.* 562.

⁵⁰ For *Agamemnon's* performance history see Macintosh, Michelakis, Hall and Taplin (2005).