

Agamemnon was the son of Atreus, the brother of Menelaus and the brother-in-law of Helen; he was told to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia to atone for the killing of a deer sacred to Artemis so that the Greek fleet could have wind to sail to Troy. However, Artemis snatched Iphigenia away at the last second and transported her to Tauris (now known as the Crimea) to serve as her priestess. In his absence, his wife, Clytemnestra, openly took a lover, Aegisthus, and plotted Agamemnon's murder in revenge for his "murder" of Iphigenia. After the defeat of Troy, Agamemnon received the Trojan princess Cassandra as war spoils; she predicted his death and her own at the hands of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but, naturally, nobody believed her. Agamemnon's murder had to be avenged by his son Orestes, who was helped by his sister Electra.

Two themes come out of the Agamemnon that will run through the trilogy: 1. The issue of Justice and who is to administer it, and 2. the relationship between men and women.

Ag shows up in two scenes that are designed to show his hubristic character:

1. Agamemnon's Decision: Iphigenia or the Trojan War

The horrors of killing Iph. like a sacrificial animal are weighed against the shame of losing the faith of his warriors. He chooses the latter to avoid loss of honor or *time* (lines 205-247).

The judgement on his action is clear: "he changed, and from the heart the breath came bitter and sacrilegious, utterly infidel" (lines 219-220).

But Greek society did value success in war and the increase of honor. Hence when Ag returns home, even though the chorus has been cursing him earlier, all is forgiven because he returns victorious. (See the Chorus' speech at 351-474)

On the other hand, society puts a check on outrageous excess with the concept of divine punishment for being too hubristic. This leads to a somewhat schizophrenic mentality. The imperative is to achieve, but not too much. Difficult line to walk.

2. Agamemnon's Return and Walking on the Carpet:

Clytemnestra invites Ag to step on the carpets she strews in his path. At first he outright refuses. He says all the right things, but he does give in. Why?

Clyt. tempts his pride and he can't resist. By mentioning Priam she is in effect saying "you are the conqueror, so don't you have the right to this?" And her answer to his fear of being envied is "He who goes unenvied is not admired." (See lines 905-949 for the whole scene.)

Ag's walking on the carpet is a symbol of his sacrilege. Ag has trampled on the carpets as he has trampled on his daughter. (See ll. 369-372)

The Threat of Clever Women

The problem of relations between men and women, and more specifically the problem of Greek society with strong women, is brought up by the character of Clytemnestra.

Clytemnestra is characterized as a masculine woman. She is shown to govern the household (l. 10: "a lady's male strength of heart ordains...") and to have mastered the art of speaking in public (lines 264-350). See the chorus' comment on l. 351.

When Clyt greets her husband it is with bold-faced lies, the purpose of which is to deceive him. The deception is perhaps feminine, but the boldness is not. The point of the deception is not womanish either. She means to kill him. And while part of the reason is because he insulted her and their marriage by killing their daughter, another part is because she is a woman who despises male domination. Thus when she kills him, it is not only vengeance, but a blow for her personal freedom.

But why the whole carpet scene? Clyt wants to make him demonstrate his hubris before the city. She also wants to win the verbal duel, to be the dominant one. Ag had said "do not try to make me delicate (or womanly)," but she does do just that.

Note the double meanings of "Let there spring up into the house he never hoped to see, where Justice leads him in, a crimson path" (lines 910-911).

Aegisthus is preferable because he is not a man who will dominate her. See lines 1612-end for how the chorus characterizes Aegisthus and his juvenile responses.

The return of Orestes is foreshadowed by the chorus and Aegisthus.

Agamemnon Agamemnon was the written by Aeschylus in Ancient Greece, and recounts the events in the city of Argos after Agamemnon's return from the Trojan War. The play begins with a watchman on the roof of the palace at Argos, waiting to hear of the fall of Troy from the Greek armies. He is notified by a beacon of the fall of Troy and goes to tell Clytemnestra. At this time, the Chorus enters and tells the story of how Paris, Prince of Troy, stole Helen, the wife of the Greek king Menelaus, thus sparking the Trojan War. The Chorus also tells of how Agamemnon, Clytemnestra's husband, sacrificed their daughter to the god Artemis to gain a favorable wind for the Greek ships to reach their destination in Troy. Clytemnestra calls for sacrifices of thanksgiving to the gods and the Chorus questions her decision. She states that Troy has fallen and Agamemnon has returned, knowing this from the beacon, so the Chorus gives thanks and wonders if it is true until confirmed by a herald. Agamemnon returns, bringing along with him a princess named Cassandra he has taken from Troy. Clytemnestra welcomes him and professes her love for him, asking him to enter the palace. A