

Examine and compare the motives and actions of Orestes and Electra. To what extent will an Athenian audience admire and approve of them?

Electra is the central character in the play. Her main purpose in this play is to achieve the motive of a typical Greek person, which is to be noble to the gods, family and cherish their homeland. This is why tries as much as possible to kill the murderers of her father and why she thinks by doing this, she is obeying the gods. These murderers happen to be her mother and her lover; Aegisthus. This makes her hate her mother without considering the circumstances to which she was subjected to before killing Agamemnon. Electra describes her as 'the queen of falsehood'. Pg 77. And a "worthless slot". Pg 77. She expresses the hatred for her mother freely. She also hates Aegisthus as he has taken the place of her father. "Aegisthus sitting in my father's chair, wearing the clothes he wore, pouring the same libations at the altar where he killed him". Pg 76. This shows Aegisthus' lack of respect for Agamemnon, the tradition of the Greeks and the Gods.

As a result of the situation she denies herself of the privileges and luxuries of being a princess because she doesn't want to live off the means of her worst enemies. She describes herself as 'an alien slave, a menial...dressed like a slattern in coarse and ugly garments'. The death of her Father and the exile of her brother, Orestes makes her mourn helplessly and continuously, as she cannot do anything. "So I can do nothing but wait in misery". Pg 77. Mourning in the ancient Greek sense here meant tearing off your hair, crying and all sorts of self-harm. 'I bring my sad songs here and tear my breast till it bleeds'. Pg 71.

In addition, Electra also loves her father very much. Her love for him is more of an obsession, which has been seriously affected, as he is now dead. She is subjective to him and is ready to do anything for his sake though he is dead. "I will fall, if need be, for my father's sake". Pg 80. She also loves her brother, Orestes who has been exiled. She refers to him as "her darling" and her "darling's own son". Pg 92 & 107. Her feelings towards her sister Chrysothemis is ambiguous as it changes according her actions. At a particular time she can adopt a harsh tone when addressing Chrysothemis "You ought to be ashamed, if you're our father's daughter". Pg 78. Later on, she refers to her with a much more caring approach. "Listen to me my dear..."Pg 81.

Furthermore, Electra has an aggressive approach towards issues. She lacks patience and is unable to consider the consequences of her actions before she does them "Prepare fit punishments and turn their pomp to ashes!" This portrays her aggressiveness' Pg 75.

On the other hand we have Orestes who is one of the main male characters. He is the son of Agamemnon and his main aim is also to revenge the death of his father who has been killed by his mother and her lover, Aegisthus as explained earlier, as he feels it his responsibility to the gods, which he is trying by all means not to disobey. "I would not have come back but in the gods' good time; they brought me back to you". Pg 108. It is important I note that Orestes expresses a bit of doubt after killing Clytaemnestra. "All right...if Apollo was right". Pg 114.

Also, unlike Electra, Orestes is a more calm and reserved. He does not pour out all his emotions and is more cautious in his actions. He is coordinated and plans his actions before carrying them out. For example, he tells the tutor to deceive his mother, Clytaemnestra and sister, Electra that he is dead in order to set a calm mood in the palace for his mother and also to make his sister lose all hopes that he'll be coming back to revenge the death of their father. The result of this will be that Electra will calm down. Even when she eventually finds out he is her brother he cautions her. "I

would not curb you; but there is danger in too much happiness". Pg 108. He then comes disguised to kill the murderers of his father.

In addition, Orestes contributes to the use of irony. For example "Which of you, I wonder, would be so good as to tell them within that a long expected visitor is here?" Pg 102. This is an irony as it is true that he has been long expected. Electra also makes use of ironies in the play. "Yes I see...you have it there in your hands...there is no doubt, then...O my brother". Pg 103. This is an irony as she is actually talking to her brother.

Lastly, Orestes main objective is more of justice and duty than personal hatred for the murderers of his father, Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus or his great love for his father unlike Electra. He believes that killing his father's murderers is a responsibility given to him by the gods. "I could not have come but in the gods' good time; they brought me back". Pg 108. One can still say that Electra believes it is her duty but her motives still have an implement of her personal love and affection for her father. "You admit you killed my father; and that is the most monstrous admission you could make, whether you had justice on your side or not". Pg 85

In conclusion, I personally think that the Greek audience would have sympathised with both Electra and her brother, Orestes as they both present the actions of a Greek person if he or she was in a similar situation, though it might be in different styles. In Electra, I think the audience would have loved the way she cherished the main priorities of a typical Greek person which, is to be loyal to your family and homeland. They would also have admired this in Orestes as he also does the same. The Greek audience would have also loved how she portrayed the regular tradition and culture through her mourning. In Orestes, I think the Greeks would have admired his ability to think of good ideas and his ability to make good use of his sense, as it was regarded as a very important characteristic in the society. They would also have loved the use of irony used by the two characters. The main shortcoming of this play is that the intrigue and suspense is limited, as it would have been more if the audience did not know the story..