

What picture do the watchmen, the chorus and the herald give us of Agamemnon and how far do you sympathise with Clytaemnestra's decision to punish him?

In exception of his cousin, Aegisthus, and wife Clytaemnestra, the characters in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* share the view of the king as respectable, benevolent and capable ruler.

The character that opens the play, the watchman, shows obvious admiration for Agamemnon, calling him '*my king*' and begging the gods to '*just bring him home*'. This shows his loyalty to the leader and, despite his statement that she has '*male strength of heart*', implies distaste for Clytaemnestra's rule. He is fearful due to the absence of the king, suggesting distrust for Clytaemnestra.

The chorus also shares this respect for Agamemnon, though they communicate it through approval of his exploits in battle, referring to him as '*our great avenger*'. The chorus are a gathering of Argos's oldest and wisest men, the fact that they award Agamemnon their '*trust and love*' demonstrates how much he is valued by the city. Additionally, both the watchman and the chorus refer to Agamemnon with possessive terms: '*our*', '*my*', making their patriotism yet more apparent.

Pressured by the goddess Artemis, Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter, Iphigenia in order to secure safe passage to Troy and defend the Kleos of his brother and country. The chorus describe this event graphically and emotively, giving us a drastically different picture of Agamemnon to the benevolent leader they presented us earlier. *her supplications and her cries of father / were nothing, nor the child's lamentation / to kings passioned for battle . . . Pouring then to the ground her saffron mantle / she struck the sacrificers with / the eyes' arrows of pity . . .* The fact that Agamemnon is able to make himself cold to the cries of his daughter, and apparently even to look her in the eyes and still not waver understandably enrages Clytaemnestra, driving her to take her gruesome revenge at the climax of the play.

Personally, I sympathise greatly with Clytaemnestra's decision to seek retribution for her daughter's death. As William Shakespeare wrote '*Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned*' and this sentiment is upheld through a number of other Greek tragedies including Euripides' Medea. Unlike Medea, however, I find Clytaemnestra's response to be much more rational and justified, not inspired by jealousy or a selfish quest to repair a damaged ego.

It could be argued, in Agamemnon's defence, that he sacrificed his daughter in order to defend the lives of his crew, perhaps a noble act, but was it really necessary to murder a young girl in aid of a war that would end hundreds of lives simply to take back Helen? It's true that his actions showed piety, courage and love for his country, but I would have whole-heartedly joined Clytaemnestra in her pursuit of revenge for her daughter.

It has been suggested that Clytaemnestra's actions were too harsh, but I disagree. As a woman in ancient Greece, expected to fill the model of a perfect woman as being subservient to her husband, it's possible that any attempts to discuss the matter with Agamemnon would have been ignored. I think Clytaemnestra had very little choice other than to kill him if she wanted to even the score with Agamemnon without including a third party.