

## **Who was the real tragic hero of the Agamemnon?**

This essay shall explore the reasons why Agamemnon was the tragic hero in the Agamemnon. A tragic hero, as stated by Aristotle, must fall into the following criteria: "good or fine" meaning high stature, their "fitness of character", they must be "true to life", they must be consistent, "necessary or probable" to the plot, they must be "true to life but yet more beautiful", they must have hamartia or an error of judgement, there must be a "peripeteia" where there is a change of fortune, they must have an "anagnorisis" where they realise their faults and we must have "pity and awe" over the character. In this essay, these criteria will be used to determine whether the following characters are the tragic hero of the play: Agamemnon, Clytemnestra or Cassandra. The context of this play is quite simple, it has a simple plot. Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter, Iphigenia, before the play and this is for the war at Troy and this is his tragic flaw. After the war has ended he returns and this leads to his and Cassandra's death.

I shall firstly look at the reasons why Agamemnon is the tragic hero. Agamemnon is "good or fine"; he is the king of Mycenae and united Greece so he is a very important figure throughout this. Agamemnon in some ways has a good fitness of character; he is noble through his status but constantly proud and selfish. He is also very "true to life" as he ascended from god and he treasures his protection and is always loyal to the gods (to a point). Agamemnon is always consistent in himself throughout the play. He stays very arrogant through the play and he proud in himself but also very foolish, this leads to his downfall in the end. He is very necessary to the plot because he had a price to pay ever since the sacrifice of Iphigenia. However, it could be stated that he was doomed ever since Tantalus had been given his own son in a soup and Atreus gave his own brother, Thyestes, the same kind of thing. Agamemnon was a very empowering man, he was the king after all and this meant that he was very important to the people. They treated Agamemnon with respect and they are really happy to see him home again, this makes him "more beautiful". His fault lies in the house of Atreus and the sacrifice of Iphigenia just reignites the curse that lies over the house. The "peripeteia" for Agamemnon is his homecoming and then his murder because he dies for the reason that he killed his own daughter to go to war, and the anger of Clytemnestra from this means that his fortune changes at this point. This is really a catharsis because Agamemnon's life is taken and this purifies the death of Iphigenia, to a certain extent. We also feel "pity and awe" for Agamemnon after his death because Clytemnestra took away Agamemnon's humanity. To the Greeks, being caught in that kind of trap was something that would happen to an animal, not a human.

However, the only reason that he is not a tragic hero is because he has no recognition of what he did or "anagnorisis". He was stupid enough to think that he had done nothing wrong and being so bold did not bode well for him with Clytemnestra. He had not apologized for sacrificing Iphigenia and this was probably his biggest flaw in Clytemnestra's eyes. He does have a slight problem with walking on the crimson silks as they are meant for the deity but he actually decides to walk on them which makes it even worse for his position in life, messing with the gods is not a good thing as this means that you are doomed to death. Another factor to this could be that Agamemnon doesn't realise that his life is spared for a worse fate after the gods protected him from the storm whilst coming back from Troy. The worse fate is that Clytemnestra killed him.

On the other hand, Clytemnestra could be classed as the tragic hero, but to a lesser extent. She is "good or fine" because she comes from a very good family and she is the Queen of Mycene and she is a prominent figure in the play. Clytemnestra is a strange character as she is a very commanding and quite manly. Clytemnestra also has an affair with Aegisthus which shows her disloyalty to her husband. Clytemnestra is quite consistent through the play, her revenge for Agamemnon's life and her slight naivety about it is similar throughout the play and we can see that this is what is driving her through the play. She only changes slightly at the end of the play. In this play Clytemnestra isn't very necessary because anyone could have killed Agamemnon, although, without her the Oresteia could not have continued properly. Clytemnestra's hamartia was that she killed her own husband and went too far by killing Cassandra as well as Agamemnon. Just revenge is right in Greek Society but taking an innocent life is not right. In the Agamemnon there is a change of fortune for Clytemnestra because she has killed Agamemnon and this means that it is only a matter of time before she has to die. The whispers of Orestes from the Chorus tell us that the change of fortune for her will be in the next play – the libation bearers. Clytemnestra also has no anagnorisis in this play, although there are hints that she thinks that she did do something wrong. We feel both pity and awe for Clytemnestra which makes her a very good tragic hero. We are still in awe that she killed her husband because we knew she wanted revenge but not to that extent and we still feel pity for her because her daughter has been sacrificed and that is very important to remember, she did it for Iphigenia.

However, she does not have some things that Agamemnon has which are quite important. She is not true to life, she is a woman, and they are not supposed to kill people. The god of justice is Zeus and he decides who lives and who dies. She is not more beautiful because she has had an affair with a coward and this makes her un-pure. Aegisthus is an outcast and this makes her look even manlier. She is not a woman, 10 years of planning her husband's death has corrupted her. The thing is this is a climactic moment for her which makes her even less true to life. By killing Cassandra she makes herself look even worse to the audience.

Cassandra is more of a tragic character than a tragic hero. Cassandra is quite good or fine because she is a Princess of Troy, Daughter of Priam and a Prophetess. Cassandra is a lot more human than Clytemnestra and even though she is a prophetess (who no-one believed), in the audience she would show the true picture of what was going to happen. She is a very strong woman and this annoys Clytemnestra because Cassandra doesn't listen to Clytemnestra. She is very true to her own way of life, as a prophetess and she shows that she is true to herself, bravery is the key thing for Cassandra, she knows that she is going to die and she still goes through with it. She is very consistent in the play, her prophetess powers really emphasise that she knows that she is going to die and she is always very exotic in the play. Her hamartia would be the fact that she tricked Apollo into giving her Prophetess powers and does not give Apollo what he wants in return because she is guarding her virginity. This really is her flaw throughout her life because if she said yes then everyone would have believed her prophecies and Troy wouldn't have fallen. Cassandra really creates emotion and hope in the audience because she tells us that Orestes will come. The change of fortune would be when she is killed by Clytemnestra; she is very unlucky to be in that place at that time. Cassandra is the only character to have an anagnorisis in the Agamemnon as she prophesises her death and this shows how brave she

was. We have a lot of awe for Cassandra because she has the bravery to perform purification (catharsis) from Apollo as she throws off her garlands and stomps on them; she is also brave because she walked to her own death which the audience finds extraordinary. We have pity (pathos) for Cassandra because she was taken away from her own world in Troy and she lost everything, she was a victim, an alien in a world that she expected to live as a slave, not die as soon as she arrives there.

However, one thing that is important is if the character is necessary to the plot and Cassandra isn't actually necessary because Agamemnon would have died anyway, Cassandra is just an added death and her role in the play is not as important as Agamemnon. Cassandra really just shows the absolute truth to the audience and her role isn't really essential to the play, although, she is a match for Clytemnestra because Clytemnestra isn't used to being ignored.

In conclusion, I think that Agamemnon is the most likely candidate that would be the tragic hero in the Agamemnon. However, in the Oresteia (the trilogy), Orestes is the tragic hero because he realises his mistake and fits all the criteria. Agamemnon doesn't have a chance to have an anagnorisis, but if he did then he would be the tragic hero. All of the characters that could be tragic heroes do not fit all the criteria and this makes it a very hard decision to make when it comes to deciding which one is the tragic hero. There is some correlation between the characters but I think that if Agamemnon had more of a chance to realise what he had done then he would be the tragic hero.