

# Aeschylus' Clytemnestra versus her Senecan Tradition

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## 1. Clytemnestra's gauntlet

An unknown Etrurian sculptor in the second century AD decorated an alabaster urn with a scene in which Clytemnestra takes the principal role in the murder of Agamemnon (**fig. 1**). It is an unremarkable art work in both design and execution, but it has a peculiar significance that only a diachronic process of reflection on the figure of Clytemnestra can reveal. For this is the sole certain ancient visual illustration of the murder of Agamemnon to post-date Aeschylus' *Oresteia* which makes Clytemnestra the primary agent in her husband's slaughter.<sup>1</sup> Literary versions which make her both mastermind and the executor of the crime are also rare, one exception being Philostratus' even later *Cassandra*, an ecphrasis of a painting written in about 300 AD (*Imagines* 2.10, see further Easterling, this volume, pp. 000). Philostratus' semi-crazed Clytemnestra, her hair streaming, is visualised assaulting Cassandra with an axe still warm from Agamemnon's body (2.10.4). It is striking, however, that even here, in a detailed description of Agamemnon's return which self-consciously harks back to classical Athenian tragedy, no mention whatsoever is made of Iphigenia.<sup>2</sup>

Clytemnestra dominates the Aeschylean play named after her husband. She is a murderer, an androgyne, a liar, an orator, and executor of a palace coup. She is also an avenging mother. Of all the characters she has the most powerful speeches and the most confrontational scenes. Her impact was swift: when the legal speech-writer Antiphon composed the case for the prosecution in the mid-fifth-century trial of a woman accused of murdering her husband (a trial which would have been held, like the trial depicted in *Eumenides*, at the court of the Areopagus), he invoked a parallel with Clytemnestra (Antiphon 1.17). Antiphon thus implied that his own client (the accused's stepson) was an

Orestes-figure, a young man protecting the patriarchal interests of all male citizens against murderous, rapacious and insubordinate womenfolk, whether wives, mothers, or stepmothers.

This chapter is interested in the difference between Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, as presented in *Agamemnon*, and the Clytemnestras who followed her. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra is a daughter-avenging woman with a mind that deliberates like a man's, a female who slaughters two people, without help from her lover, before gloating, spattered with blood, over their corpses; she is a queen whose personal authority can quell mutinous citizens, even threatened *stasis*, and who ends the play directing her lover to join her in assuming political mastery (*kratos*) of all Argos. She represents a challenge to patriarchy unparalleled in Greek tragedy, even by Medea, who does not aspire to political power. From the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century social theorists already recognised that nothing less than the violent subversion of rule by men is at stake in Aeschylus' Argos; Winnington-Ingram, decades before modern feminism, identified the corrosive effect of Clytemnestra's jealousy of Agamemnon's status *as a man*. More recently Zeitlin's structuralist analysis showed the importance to the configuration of Clytemnestra of the Amazonian archetype and its fundamental threat to patriarchy.<sup>3</sup> In consequence there now exist several detailed and illuminating scholarly studies of the uniqueness of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra, written in the light of the late twentieth-century feminist revolution.<sup>4</sup>

These have appeared in tandem with the rehabilitation of Clytemnestra as a mother rather than an erotic figure in the drama and other literature of recent decades. As Helene Foley shows in this volume, feminist authors have read Clytemnestra's criminality as a response to unbearable patriarchal oppression. An important example Dacia Maraini in her *I sogni di Clitennestra* (1981), first performed in English as *Dreams of Clytemnestra* in 1989.<sup>5</sup> In one of the rare stage adaptations of the whole *Oresteia* by a female author, Marina Carr's affecting *Ariel*, first performed at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2002, the

relationships between the Clytemnestra-figure (Frances Fermoy) and her four children, dead and alive, is the psychological centre of the action.<sup>6</sup>

From the perspective of this chapter the most salient passage in Aeschylus' play is the climactic 'stand-off' between Clytemnestra and the chorus. She looms over the corpses of her husband and his captive priestess, and the chorus banish her from Argos. She rages against their double standard in passing sentence on her for husband-murder when they did no such thing to a daughter-murdering king. She incarnates Calchas' prophetic description of the Wrath which would be the legacy of the sacrifice to Artemis (a sacrifice that would be *ou deisēnora*, would 'cause the wife to stop respecting the husband'): 'terrible, insuppressible, / a treacherous housekeeper, a remembering Wrath, child-avenging' (*mimnei gar phobera palinortos / oikonomos dolia mnamōn Mēnis teknopoinos*, 153-5). Despite being a lone woman confronted by twelve angry men, this child-avenging housekeeper expresses no fear as she throws down her terrifying gauntlet. 'I am prepared', she declares, 'to meet you on equal terms: he who conquers me by force can rule. But if god ordains the opposite, you will learn, though late in the day, how to control yourselves' (1422-5). Clytemnestra is asking for no favours: she offers to fight physically for the rule of Argos *on equal terms* with its men.

Ever since 458 BCE this Clytemnestra has (unsurprisingly) exerted a huge influence, even surfacing in Byzantine texts at a date when Aeschylean Greek was little read: Procopius makes his power-crazed Empress Theodora allude to Clytemnestra's sinister speech 'There is the sea...', '*estin thalassa*', at a moment of political crisis (*History of the Wars* 1.24.33-7).<sup>7</sup> Yet this chapter will argue that much of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra's influence has been of a *negative* kind, exerted not through imitation but through *reactions against* her authority. These reactions, from antiquity onwards, have been instrumental in generating many morally improved but dramatically downgraded, 'effeminated' Clytemnestras, whose motive of erotic interest in Aegisthus has assumed far greater significance than it possessed in the first play of

Aeschylus' trilogy. Psychoanalytical shorthand might define this as the replacement of a Clytemnestra driven by her womb to a Clytemnestra driven by her clitoris.

For most of the last two and a half millennia the version of Clytemnestra which has been dominant in the public consciousness has not been Aeschylus' matriarch at all. That Clytemnestra was not rehabilitated until the revival of interest in staging Greek plays, traceable to Lewis Campbell's circle in south-eastern Scotland in the 1870s, when actors once again breathed solemn life into Aeschylus' authentically epicene, horrifically powerful, womb-driven Clytemnestra (see Macintosh, this volume).<sup>8</sup> The intervening centuries staged their Clytemnestra in the eviscerated form in which she appears in Latin poetry, in particular the anodyne and sexy wife of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* book 2 and the emotionally unstable adulteress of the Senecan *Agamemnon*. This chapter aims to discuss some performed realisations of Clytemnestra's involvement in the murder of Agamemnon from Aeschylus' ancient imitators until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the point at which the influence of Senecan drama on European theatre began to wane.

## **2. Downsizing Clytemnestra: from Ion of Chios to Ovid**

In the previous chapter of this volume, Pat Easterling discussed some of the ancient sources for the reception of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, especially his seminal conception of the clairvoyant Cassandra. Cassandra was apparently more palatable than the other female role in *Agamemnon*. The evidence for the way Clytemnestra was received in antiquity suggests that she was soon widely replaced by a less domineering character, of a type perhaps implied by the more sympathetic woman in Sophocles' *Electra* or Euripides' *Electra* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. This different conception of Clytemnestra may have been invented by Aeschylus himself (in his lost *Iphigenia*) or by Ion of Chios a generation later. Between Ion's first competition (in 452 or 449) and his death (before 421), he wrote a tragic *Agamemnon*. It was

sufficiently famous for Didymus to write a commentary upon it in Alexandria in the first century BC (Athen. *Deipn.* 11.468d). Like Sophocles in *Electra*, Ion may well have returned to those Homeric accounts of Agamemnon's death in which Aegisthus played the leading role, at a banquet, deciding against Aeschylus' spousal slaughter in the bathroom.<sup>9</sup>

The picture of the murder of Agamemnon offered by the surviving *hypothesis* to *Agamemnon*, to which my attention was first drawn by Pat Easterling (who quotes a substantial portion of it above, pp. 000), does not exactly square with the version in the Aeschylean text. The hypothesis claims that 'Aeschylus has Agamemnon murdered in a distinctive way on stage' (*idiōs de Aischulos ton Agamemnona epi skēnēs anaireisthai poiei*, 15-16). The earlier part of this summary has contained at least one piece of information which Taplin has plausibly argued probably derives from Hellenistic performance practices – the two chariots.<sup>10</sup> The theatre contemporary with the hypothesis writer may have played up the display of Agamemnon's booty, as performances of Accius' Roman tragedy on the theme certainly did by the mid-first century BC (see below). But this does not solve the problem presented by the language used to summarise the death of Agamemnon, whom Aeschylus 'has murdered in a distinctive way on stage'. What can this mean? It is frustrating that this hypothesis does not specify the murderer, especially since it is, I think, to stretch the meaning to make 'on stage' (*epi skēnēs*) mean 'with his death cries heard on stage'.

The 'distinctive way' suggests the confining textile or robe which appears in so many versions of the murder of Agamemnon. It is a remote possibility that the spectacular taste of the Hellenistic theatre could have produced (mimed?) enactments of this exciting scene (as Ewbank's chapter shows below pp. 000-000, mimes of the murder were popular enough in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries). The author of the hypothesis might conceivably be responding to contemporary theatrical taste which enjoyed the representation of violent and sensational actions more than 5<sup>th</sup>-century audiences had enjoyed them.<sup>11</sup> But it is more likely

that the writer of the hypothesis had no experience of Aeschylus' play in performance. He could have seen two chariots in another play on the same theme – Ion's *Agamemnon* included a reference to horse-related luxury (*hippikon chlidos*, fr. 3 *TgrF*) -- but have produced the 'gross error' concerning the murder in *Agamemnon* through misunderstanding of fifth-century theatre conventions, as Taplin suspected.<sup>12</sup> In this case the hypothesis writer's confusion might result from a difficulty, born of *ignorance* of the play in performance, in understanding that Cassandra can actually see through walls -- that her commentary on the death of Agamemnon is clairvoyant rather than empirically observed.

These are speculative waters. Yet seeing the hypothesis' strange account of the murder as resulting from an inexperience of the play in performance might illuminate the absence from the ancient Greek world of certainly identified depictions, which post-date the *Oresteia*, of the murder of Agamemnon.<sup>13</sup> This absence becomes conspicuous by comparison with the numerous vase-paintings depicting scenes from both the *Choephoroi* and the *Eumenides* – illustrations of the tomb of Agamemnon, the recognition of Electra and Orestes, the death of Aegisthus, and Orestes with Erinyes.<sup>14</sup> There are, in contrast, only two possible representations (besides the late Etrurian alabaster with which this chapter began) of the murder of Agamemnon as presented by Aeschylus. Both are doubtful and in neither does Clytemnestra act alone.

There is the Dokimasia painter's brilliant calyx-crater in Boston, which Vermeule argues is a response to the *Oresteia* (although most scholars date it to 470-460 BC).<sup>15</sup> On this vase Aegisthus is unambivalently portrayed as the killer; Clytemnestra, although running in to help with an axe, is 'no more than an enthusiastic if not very useful supporter'.<sup>16</sup> If this represents the *Oresteia*, then the painter (like many dramatists subsequently) modified the Aeschylean version to make Clytemnestra less important. There is one other possible candidate in a fragmentary Lucanian crater of about 400 BC (see **fig. 4.2**), on which the

faces, especially the eyes and the wrinkles, suggest the effect created by theatrical masks. Here a woman, not in the first flush of youth, appears to be holding in her left hand the greaves of the mature, bearded, seated man; her right hand seems to be on his head. The left hand of a third party is visibly pressing the seated man's head down, probably in preparation for striking a blow with his (?) other hand. If this image represents Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, which seems likely, then she is certainly not attacking her husband single-handedly as she claims in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.<sup>17</sup>

Could the dearth of illustrations of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* be connected with the absence of evidence for any revival of this play, either on its own or as part of the trilogy? Can we discount the possibility that the other two plays were often performed without *Agamemnon*? Could it be relevant that in *Frogs*, when asked to recite the prologue of what is termed the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus offers the opening lines not of *Agamemnon* but of *Choephoroi* (1124, 1128)?<sup>18</sup> Playwrights subsequent to Aeschylus graphically tamed the Clytemnestra of the *Agamemnon*, and not just because this play was so good that it 'seems to have been regarded as an unapproachable model'.<sup>19</sup> These playwrights had other, more ideological reasons, and they found two suggestive details already lurking in *Choephoroi*. One was a tender, sexualised side to Clytemnestra, who can openly and sincerely call Aegisthus 'beloved' (895), and whose motives are now presented as including *erōs* (597).<sup>20</sup> The other was the tempting possibility that Agamemnon was actually killed by Aegisthus.

Aegisthus, when depicted as Agamemnon's murderer, invariably uses a sword. Clytemnestra, on the other hand, was always predominantly associated with the 'manslaying axe' which she so memorably demands in *Choephoroi* when she realises she is in mortal danger (889). *Pelekus* was the nickname acquired by a tragic actor called Demetrios (perhaps as early as the fifth or fourth century BC) on account of a role connected with 'the death of Agamemnon'.<sup>21</sup> *Choephoroi* thus dominated the tradition, rather than *Agamemnon*, where the

clear implication is that she kills him with a sword (1262-3, 1528).<sup>22</sup> In *Choephoroi* Clytemnestra call for an *axe*, and Orestes call the murder weapon *Aegisthus'* sword (1011). It therefore has to be faced that *Choephoroi*, acted without *Agamemnon* (or arguably even immediately after it), actually implies that Clytemnestra was neither the sole nor the primary agent in the murder of her husband. If we only had *Choephoroi* we would think that Aegisthus killed Agamemnon with a sword, assisted by the axe-armed Clytemnestra.

It is important to appreciate the *challenge* that the Clytemnestra of *Agamemnon* must have presented to ancient audiences. In my view it is likely that by the fourth century, at least, the first play was often dropped from performances of *Choephoroi* and *Eumenides*, whether separately or together, and, moreover, that it was ideologically virtually *impossible* to perform Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (or any imitation with a similarly androgynous, autonomous, proactive, amoral and politically triumphant queen) in isolation, without the other two plays of the trilogy. These are actually *required* if Clytemnestra is to be punished for her insurrection, and formally subordinated, thus (as Zeitlin's classic article demonstrated) providing an aetiology not only for the court of the Areopagus but for the Athenians' exclusion of women from the political sphere and for their system of civic and domestic patriarchy.<sup>23</sup> There is no real parallel in Euripides' *Medea*, in which the ancients could tolerate a rebel wife and filicidal mother escaping the end of her play unpunished: Medea does not install herself as tyrant of a Greek polis, and anyway her access to the *mēchanē* puts a question mark over her mortal status, and therefore over the generic requirement that she be punished at all.

In the Roman world there are few signs of an *Agamemnon* with an Amazonian Clytemnestra of the Aeschylean type, although it would be good to know more about Pacuvius' *Dulorestes*, which apparently involved Orestes taking the role of a slave in the household of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.<sup>24</sup> The twelve surviving lines of Livius Andronicus'

*Aegisthus* (late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) include references to the division of the Trojan booty and to dolphins accompanying the voyage (2-6);<sup>25</sup> in one fragment (7) the speaker forbids his listeners to discuss an unspecified subject within an unidentified woman's hearing, which looks likely to be Agamemnon talking about Cassandra. The most interesting fragment from our point of view is that which implies that the murder was performed at a banquet rather than in a bath: 'He seats himself upon the royal chair / And Clytemnestra is next to him; the third / Their daughters occupy' (9-10). One other fragment features an individual claiming *maiestas*, and the right to absolute obedience, while giving the order that a female is to be led away: 'You must endure the duty of obedience / To what my majesty demands. Lead you / This woman from the temple' (14). The speaker here, on the analogy of Seneca's *Agamemnon* 997, is likely to be Aegisthus. The evidence, such as it is, therefore points forward to the Clytemnestra of Seneca rather than backwards to the Clytemnestra of Aeschylus.

The most important Roman republican play on this theme was by Lucius Accius (acclaimed in Seneca's day as the greatest of all Roman tragedians), who must have written his influential *Clytemnestra* in the second half of the second century BC. *Clytemnestra* was sufficiently popular to be revived in the following century, at the gala staged to celebrate the opening of Pompey's theatre in 55 BC; Cicero complained of the spectacle 'of hundreds of mules' (*Fam.* 7.1.2), which suggests that the acting text of Accius' version demanded or at least permitted Agamemnon's entrance to be attended by a spectacular military procession. It is likely that Accius' Clytemnestra was no Argive termagant but a more 'feminine' figure, subsidiary to her lover. The fragments suggest that prominence was given to her fraught relationship with her love rival Cassandra, who believed it to be her last day alive (fr. 243-6).<sup>26</sup> The fragments are unhelpful on the identity of the principal architect of the murder of Agamemnon. Yet they do positively imply that Clytemnestra's sexual jealousy of Cassandra and Aegisthus' imposition of tyrannical rule were dimensions of Accius' interpretation of the

story, while there is no evidence for a politicised Clytemnestra, a Clytemnestra acting alone, or the daughter-avenging motive. I suspect, therefore, that the status to which Clytemnestra is certainly relegated in the fully surviving Latin versions by Ovid and by Seneca was already a standard feature of republican Roman theatre.

Sadly we know little about the tragedy *Clytemnestra* by the Ephesian poet Polemaios, performed at a festival at Magnesia on the Maeander in the first half of the first century BC, because it would have provided an important bridge between the Greek and the Roman worlds at a time when revivals of the old Roman tragedies were popular.<sup>27</sup> By the last days of the Roman Republic, Agamemnon was a familiar mythical figure, and Edward Champlin has recently argued that this was essentially a result of widespread familiarity with stage plays. Agamemnon's presence in the Roman imagination made it easy for Pompeius Magnus to foster what in his opponent's hands turned out to be an unfortunate comparison between himself and Agamemnon; his notorious gala revival of Accius' *Clytemnestra* was part of this propaganda. Augustus, on the other hand, promoted a comparison between himself and Orestes: they were both young leaders who had avenged the murder of their fathers. They had also put down their fathers' insurgent wives, ensconced in love-nests with new swains: to Augustus' public, Cleopatra had thus become Clytemnestra.<sup>28</sup> This equation may have made it more dangerous for poets to trifle with the Atridae.

Polemaios' Ephesian *Clytemnestra* may, however, have been more interested in sexual love than in Roman dynastic politics, and it may have been known by Ovid, whose version in the *Ars Amatoria* (2.387-408) presents us with the most eviscerated of all ancient Clytemnestras. Ovid's narrator is urging that people in love can become vindictive if they discover they have been betrayed, for example, Clytemnestra:

[...]                    So long as Agamemnon was faithful,

Clytemnestra stayed chaste. It was her husband's crimes  
Turned her to the bad. She'd heard how Chryses, sacerdotal  
Fillet on head and laurel in hand, had failed  
To win back his daughter. She'd heard the sad tale of abducted  
Briseis, knew how shameful delay  
Had prolonged the war. Yet all this was mere hearsay; Priam's daughter  
Cassandra she'd *seen*, the conqueror shamefully caught  
By his own captive. It was *then* she welcomed Thyestes' son to  
Her heart and bed, avenged her husband's ill deed.<sup>29</sup>

This version makes no mention whatsoever of Iphigenia; moreover Clytemnestra, nearly a model matron, avoids sleeping with Aegisthus until an erotic tit-for-tat motive finally inspires her when Agamemnon returns to flaunt Cassandra under her very nose. The revenge taken on Clytemnestra by this point in the male-authored tradition has really cut her down to size.

### **3. *Agamemnon* in imperial Rome**

Along with Ovid's sexy heroine, the most influential Clytemnestra until 130 years ago was Seneca's neurotic adulteress. The argument about whether or not the Senecan tragedies enjoyed staged performances in imperial Roman times has tended to obscure the Senecan *Agamemnon*'s significance – ideological as well as poetic and rhetorical – in performance history more generally. But before this significance can be fully appreciated, there is an unfashionable task to be undertaken. Few scholars currently want to be seen to be following in the footsteps of A.W. von Schlegel, who in 1817 first pronounced the Senecan tragic texts unperformable.<sup>30</sup> But analysts of the Senecan *Agamemnon* must acknowledge that it presents a challenge to the notion of staged performance going beyond the standard tramlines of the

Senecan controversy. Even the most ardent defender of the Senecan tragedies as theatrical playscripts, Dana Sutton, concedes that the staging problems presented by *Agamemnon* make it ‘without doubt Seneca’s least satisfactory play’.<sup>31</sup>

Characters forget information of which they have previously been in possession, are unaware of the physical presence of significant characters, enter uncued, remain unidentified (neither the nurse nor the primary chorus of Argive females is textually identified at all), and ask characters who have been delivering significant speeches why they are so frighteningly silent. If any sense is to be made of the text, several characters are required by those modern scholars who believe in original theatrical realisation to perform dumbshows (Aegisthus, for example, during the Thyestean ghost’s prologue).<sup>32</sup> These problems, described in Otto Zwierlein’s monograph *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas* in 1966, are acute in the first few ‘scenes’ and in the fourth Act, whose performative infelicities (if not impossibilities) result from an imperfect conflation of Greek models, in which scenes involving Cassandra have been crudely grafted on to a structure originally dominated by Electra, indeed probably by Sophocles’ *Electra*.<sup>33</sup>

In short, I doubt if this specific Senecan text, at any rate in the precise form in which it has been transmitted, was ever staged in mask and costume as a full-blown, continuous theatrical production. Yet this does not detract from the play’s status in performance history. Texts which are declaimed are also ‘performed’; texts which are widely read inform subsequent adaptations of the story they relate. Whatever form of public exposure Senecan tragedy first received, it was only the first step in a process intended to lead to their consumption by a widely dispersed readership.<sup>34</sup> When Tiberius penalised Mamercus Aemilius Scaurus for writing a tragedy containing criticism of Agamemnon (Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61), it would have been easier to prevent theatrical production than either recitation or the circulation of the text. The graffito artist in ancient Pompeii who knew enough of Seneca’s

*Agamemnon* to quote one of Cassandra's clairvoyant lines (730, *Idaea cerno nemora*) could have found her words in a text, or heard them being declaimed; it was not necessary to have experienced them being delivered by a masked actor in costume to other masked actors in costume.<sup>35</sup> There is clear evidence in Tacitus' *Dialogue on Orators* for the public impact of recited tragedy in Nero's time; the author is a dissident orator, Curiatius Maternus, and the dialogue suggests that he has composed a tragedy on an Agamemnon-theme as well as a *Medea* and *Cato*.<sup>36</sup> Seneca's *Agamemnon* is also a salutary reminder of the extent that ancient non-theatrical declamation has informed the western dramatic tradition: Eurybates' description of Agamemnon's return after the storm (412-13) is informed by the declamatory treatment of Xerxes, and the sacrifice of Iphigenia was also a common theme in Latin display oratory.<sup>37</sup>

Thinking about Senecan tragedy's social and historical context also allows us to write a much fuller Roman imperial chapter in the performance history of *Agamemnon*. The perennial controversy about Senecan performance has tended to operate in misleading isolation from what we know about the *variety* of genres of ancient entertainment connected with tragedy, in all of which there survive traces of the 'return of Agamemnon' theme. For example, certain features in the Senecan messenger's elaborate description of the storm may even have entered the narrative tradition because of their treatment in a type of performance not often discussed by classicists – a mechanical puppet-show, a five-act *Nauplius*, described in Hero of Alexandria's technical treatise *On Automata*.<sup>38</sup> Besides declamation and puppet-shows, moreover, tragic material could take the form of a sung recital by a masked performer (*tragoidus*, *tragicus cantor*), a practice which is clearly attested as late as the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, or of a ballet to choral accompaniment (ancient *pantomime*), or of a mixture of these elements.<sup>39</sup> Philostratus tells of an itinerant professional singer, whose repertoire of 'tragic arias' included Nero's own *Oresteia* (*Vit. Ap.* 4.39), and that in the time of Herodes Atticus 'the affairs of the Pelopids' were still standard topics dealt with in Pythian competitions in

tragic singing (*Vit. Soph.* 2.7). St. Augustine speaks of a special class of actor whose speaking voice supplemented specialist danced or sung performances, citing the example of an actor who speaks Agamemnon's words 'in theatrical tales' (*On the Sermon on the Mount* 2.2.5).<sup>40</sup> Pantomimes became the route by which the largest proportion of the citizens of the late Roman republic and centuries of the empire had access to Greek tragedy. We know from Seneca himself, Apuleius, and Claudian that the murder (*sphagē*) of Agamemnon was a theme of the tragic dance; both Clytemnestra and Cassandra are named as figures in this genre.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, Seneca's drama, and therefore his conception of Clytemnestra, may have had a widespread influence on these other types of ancient performance based on Agamemnon themes, even if we do not go so far as to propose that Senecan tragic speeches were themselves ever incorporated into a danced entertainment. The Senecan text, moreover, survived when the puppet shows, tragic arias and pantomime libretti have been lost (the church fathers, who were opposed to pagan tragic singing and pantomime, seem still to have had at least some knowledge of Senecan tragedy<sup>42</sup>). Moreover, since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the tragedy has exerted an incalculable subterranean influence. Its poetry and sententiae are a presence in the European imagination from the first appearance of Andreas Bellfortis' *editio princeps* of Seneca's tragedies in Ferrara in 1484, through playwrights including May, Shakespeare, Kyd, and Webster, to Hofmannsthal's *Electra* (see Ewbank).<sup>43</sup> Almost throughout that entire period the Senecan version also fundamentally affected the shape taken by Clytemnestra in plays about the death of Agamemnon. This makes understanding Seneca's presentation of Clytemnestra crucial to the argument in hand.

#### **4. Seneca's Neurotic Adulteress**

Ovid's humorous rewriting of Clytemnestra certainly informed Seneca's more serious presentation of her character, as Tarrant demonstrates in his commentary.<sup>44</sup> Unlike Ovid, the

Roman tragedian does not absolutely exclude Iphigenia from the argument. But his Clytemnestra remains, in comparison with Aeschylus' heroine, an apolitical character, a feature exaggerated by the replacement of the male chorus of Argive citizens with females uninterested in the constitutional ramifications of the domestic crisis they are witnessing. The opening lines delivered by Seneca's Clytemnestra set the agenda for her character delineation throughout the drama: she regrets, in a manner remote from Aeschylus' amoral heroine, the disappearance of good character, justice, propriety, *pietas*, fidelity, and decency (112-13). This could not be more in contrast with the Greek Clytemnestra's triumphalist opening wish for good news of victory brought by morning, 'born of Mother Night' (264-5). The state of mind of Seneca's queen is marked, however, not by anger, militancy, nor triumphalism, but by anguish and psychological fragmentation. She is also self-confessedly amorous; her dominant motives, it is stressed, are sexual passion for Aegisthus and sexual jealousy of Cassandra. Finally, she is psychologically frail; she is shown struggling with the immorality even of *complicity* in the killing of her husband.

In this first soliloquy Clytemnestra is depicted as wavering, asking her *animus* why its commitment to destroying Agamemnon is vacillating (*quid fluctuaris?* 109); she characterises herself nowhere as a mother, but instead as a faithless wife beside her self with blind *love* (*amore*, 118) for Aegisthus. In her next attempt at self-analysis, her emotional register covers feelings quite unknown her Aeschylean equivalent: *fear* of her husband (*timor*, 133), sexual desire (*cupido*, 135), and shame or sexual modesty (*pudor*, 138). In the subsequent, self-revelatory dialogue with the nurse, fifteen lines are indeed spent remembering Aulis, but only in a curiously detached manner after the nurse introduces the theme (158-73); Clytemnestra's concern is not personal loss, or even a sense of insult to her status as a mother and a woman, but, oddly, shame (162) that although she had a divine ancestry she could not prevent Iphigeneia's murder. She is angry not because Agamemnon deceived and outraged the

mother of his daughter, but because he deceived the high-status descendant of gods.<sup>45</sup> Not only does Seneca cast a strange, inhuman light on Clytemnestra's experience of the loss of her daughter, but he gives several more lines in this speech, and more emotionally forceful ones, to detailing the effect of her husband's serial infidelities with young women in the camp at Troy – Chryseis and Briseis as well as Cassandra (174-91). The tortured psyche of this jealous, 'clitoral' Clytemnestra even considers suicide (199-200), still has emotional feelings for Agamemnon, and tries to persuade Aegisthus to rediscover moral innocence, and preemptively to repent (139-43).

Seneca's Clytemnestra, under emotional pressure from Aegisthus, is indeed involved in the murder of her husband according to Cassandra's account of the crime. Clytemnestra persuades Agamemnon to don the confining garment at his own victory banquet (897-900). Aegisthus strikes the first blow, but it fails to penetrate deep enough to cause death.<sup>46</sup> Thereupon Clytemnestra strikes with her axe, partially decapitating Agamemnon, and together 'the son of Thyestes and the sister of Helen' complete their bloody task (897-907). Thus in Seneca's reading the leading agent in both the original plan for the murder, and its execution, is Aegisthus. It is Aegisthus, moreover, who is unquestionably in political charge at the end of the play, when Clytemnestra asks for his help in controlling both Electra and Cassandra, and it is he who has the command of the palace guard and the Argive dungeons.<sup>47</sup> Yet she is by no means without a capacity for cruelty and violence, the relationship between the two lovers is to a certain extent co-dependent, and therefore at times the text itself seems locked in a struggle between different versions of Clytemnestra (Seneca certainly knew both Aeschylus and Ovid, as well as intervening plays).

One scholar has argued that the inconsistencies in her characterisation are the result of her declamatory realisation, which 'juxtaposes two rhetorical exercises – Clytemnestra violent, Clytemnestra insecure' in order 'to show both the criminality and the anxiety caused

by the betrayal of marriage and parenthood'.<sup>48</sup> But Stoicism may be as important to this issue as Roman rhetoric. Seneca was fundamentally interested in discovering the moral and psychological genealogy of any tragic situation, and excavating Clytemnestra's plight involved discovering contrasting dimensions of her character. His portrait involves a striking degree of the psychological 'interiority', achieved by intimate expression of private emotional impulses, so tempting to any Stoic psychoanalyst. But it is this very interiority, more than any other feature of her characterisation, that puts most distance between her and her wary, defensive, closed-off, unspontaneous and ambiguous Aeschylean forerunner, whose every word seems calculated in terms of its public effect rather than in terms of the private unburdening of personal torment. Moreover, a Stoic realisation of Clytemnestra would inevitably have to dramatise her *struggle* against vice and lust, and also to compare it with the experience of being buffeted by stormy water and raging fire, the favourite Stoic metaphorical substitutes for unreason and passion.<sup>49</sup>

But the alleged bipolarity in the Senecan Clytemnestra's portrayal has been overstated and is actually a result of scholarly expectations created solely by her Aeschylean forebear. This can be the only explanation of the degree of disagreement about her expressed by modern Senecan scholars as eminent as Tarrant and Boyle. Tarrant's careful analysis (with which I agree) argues that the psychological reversals after line 239 are evidence that the hectoring figure of Aegisthus is in control and manipulating Clytemnestra.<sup>50</sup> Boyle, however, thinks that Clytemnestra is performing a complicated, covert test of the resolve of her lover, whose 'strident rhetoric seems to betoken fear rather than 'superiority''.<sup>51</sup> He would hardly have reacted to her thus if we had lost the Aeschylean *Oresteia*. Seneca's Clytemnestra – defined above all by her neurosis and her adultery – is actually far more *unlike* her famous Greek prototype than she is *like* her.

## 5. Neoclassical Clytemnestras

The Clytemnestras of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and Seneca's *Agamemnon* were implicated far more heavily than Aeschylus in the shape taken by Agamemnon plays in and after the Renaissance until the late Victorian era. The *subterranean* influence of the Aeschylean tragedy must not be entirely disregarded (see Ewbank, this volume). But the texts which underlay the English, German, French and Italian dramas and operas on the theme before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, besides those by Ovid and Seneca, were medieval mythological compendia drawing on the Christian poem *Orestis Tragoedia* by Blossius Aemilius Dracontius, which was probably composed in Carthage in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. The prime motive of Dracontius' lascivious Clytemnestra is sexual feeling towards Aegisthus;<sup>52</sup> this Latin epyllion was an important text in the creation of the Christian ethical perspective on the amorous medieval Clytemnestra, who usually manufactures the robe and persuades Agamemnon to put it on, while Aegisthus strikes the blows.

The texts ultimately drawing on Ovid, Seneca and / or Dracontius would certainly include Hans Sachs' Shrovetide morality play *Clitemnestra* (1554), the deeply Senecan *Clytemnestre* (1589) of Pierre Matthieu and the *Agamemnon* of Sieur Arnauld of Provence (1642). Claude Boyer's *Agamemnon*, first performed at the Théâtre Guénégaud in Paris on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1680, is a more original tragedy concerning Orestes' doomed love for Cassandra, but Clytemnestra remains her Senecan self, nervously conducting an adulterous affair with the evil (although oddly absent) Egiste, and nursing her resentments about Briseis as well as Cassandra, which command more attention than the death of Iphigenia.<sup>53</sup> The sexually driven Clytemnestra who had emerged in antiquity, in reaction against Aeschylus' matriarchal androgyne, became the *canonical* Clytemnestra of the 16<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the early modern and neoclassical Clytemnestra. For centuries the politicised, Amazonian Clytemnestra's advocacy – indeed symbolic incarnation – of the maternally transmitted

kinship bond became irrelevant; along with the neurotic adulteress of the Senecan *Agamemnon* tradition, it was above all the victimised wife and mother in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* who provided the dominant source material for composers of libretti about the Atridae (see Phillippo and Reynolds, this volume).

Seneca's queen, morally weaker than her men and secondary to the power struggle between them, found new resonances in the politicised but essentially moral theatre of the neoclassical period, which revelled in assassinations, dynastic struggles, battles over succession, coups d'états and revolutions. Often coloured also by the Clytemnestra of Sophocles' *Electra*, she was also inherently attractive to the creators of political allegory, a dominant force in the shaping of ancient tragedy for performance before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The ideological taboos and imperatives of this era meant that the authoritative, bloodthirsty androgyne who emerged from Aeschylus' imagination in classical Athens could simply not have been tolerated on the public stage. One tragedy on the theme, dating from the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, stands out as particularly important. In James Thomson's *Agamemnon* (first performed at Drury Lane in 1738) Clytemnestra's difference from the Aeschylean matriarch is at its most strikingly extreme.

In order to understand this influential 18<sup>th</sup>-century conception of Clytemnestra, Thomson's play needs to be seen in its historical context. By the mid-1730s, under George II, the Prime Minister Robert Walpole and his Whig administration had become intensely unpopular with the Opposition, which comprised many other Whigs as well as Tories. Early in 1737 Frederick, Prince of Wales, went officially into opposition, lending the anti-Walpole elements a new focus (he is represented by the young patriot Orestes in Thomson's *Agamemnon*). They believed that Walpole was exploiting George II's frequent absences, and Queen Caroline's loneliness, in order to undermine fundamental British liberties by systematic corruption.<sup>54</sup>

Thomson's *Agamemnon* is a blistering attack on Walpole, which uses the contemporary rumours that he had become far too close to the Queen. Thomson's Clytemnestra is almost wholly exculpated, partly a result the death of Queen Caroline on November 20<sup>th</sup> 1737, in the winter prior to the tragedy's production. But Caroline had never been Thomson's real target, since she had remained popular well into her middle age. She bore her husband eight children, tolerated his affairs, and never lost his affection. Her only real mistake was to have left her 'Orestes', Frederick, behind in Hanover at the age of seven, an abandonment for which he never forgave her. Thomson's tragedy first established the Clytemnestra-Aegisthus-Agamemnon story as a theme fit for the 18<sup>th</sup>-century international stage, and his Clytemnestra is excluded from the planning and execution of the murder.

## **6. James Thomson's Whitewashed Clytemnestra**

This sympathetic but ineffectual Clytemnestra is broadly based on her Senecan prototype (she an emotionally vulnerable and erotically interesting figure), but is more innocent than in any other version; she refuses to condone or participate in the murder of her husband, and declines into near-insanity because of psychological pressure. This is the Clytemnestra beloved of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a woman of little moral autonomy, caught between competing loyalties, and beset by a tendency to swoon. As the play opens she is quivering with anxiety because the beacon signal was seen some nights ago, and Agamemnon will return any minute. Through a summary of the plot of *Iphigenia in Aulis* supplied by her own old (Senecan) nurse (I.i.) the audience learns how the afflicted queen suffered the loss of her daughter, and was abandoned by her husband to a 'soothing lover's power', the attentions of a skilful, gay and charming swain. But the most important piece of information is that Clytemnestra nobly resisted his advances for many years. For at the heart of Thomson's conception of the Agamemnon story lies Nestor's version in the *Odyssey* where Agamemnon leaves

Clytemnestra under the supervision of a bard. Aegisthus fails to seduce Clytemnestra, ‘for she was of virtuous mind’ (*phresi agathēisi*, 3.266), until he removes the singer. Only then could Aegisthus lead her as a lover to his house, kill Agamemnon, subdue the people and rule for seven years in Mycene until Orestes avenged his father by killing them both (3.254-310). The bard in Thomson is Melisander, a sage from Athens (IV.v), the birthplace of what progressive people in the 18<sup>th</sup> century already regarded as the first true republic; Thomson’s Clytemnestra stresses that she would never have departed from the road of virtue, whatever the pressure, had Melisander been present to protect her from Aegisthus’ flattery (I.i).

Yet despite the absence of Aeschylus’ Clytemnestra, Aeschylean poetry is certainly present: there are indisputable signs of the Greek *Agamemnon* in the watchman’s description of the beacon relay (I.ii.), and in much of Cassandra’s poetry, especially her lines in IV.iii about the song of the nightingale, the ghosts of Thyestes’ children, and the offstage murder of Agamemnon. The Aeschylean input is fused with Senecan material including the whole first dialogue with the nurse and Clytemnestra’s scenes with Egisthus. In the first of these she cites the distinctively Senecan motive of her pride in her descent from Jove, castigates the malign affect of ‘debasement, thoughtless, blind blind love’, fear, and shame, and fantasises about fleeing into exile (I.iv). From Seneca Thomson has also absorbed the cynical manner in which his Egisthus plays on Clytemnestra’s emotions in order to try to retrieve her loyalty and bolster her resolve. This is a challenge, however, because Thomson’s Clytemnestra is so profoundly ashamed of herself, and so in love with Agamemnon, that she fears she will not be able even to meet his gaze (I.iv): ‘How shall I bear an injur’d husband’s eye? / The fiercest for ears not a look so dreadful / As does the man we wrong’.

In their final, third interview, their relationship descends into open conflict. She refuses to countenance the murder of Agamemnon. If Egisthus does not drop his murderous plan, she will expose him and commit suicide. Egisthus attempts to dissuade her, but,

ultimately, it does not matter, since he has already organised the killings of both Agamemnon, who will be assassinated in the bath, and of Cassandra (V.i.). Clytemnestra goes into psychological meltdown, incapable of intervention, and expresses a death wish for all four of them – Agamemnon, Cassandra, herself and Egisthus. When the back-scene opens at the climax, Egisthus stands crowing over the corpse, Electra throws herself upon it, and Clytemnestra enters, half-crazed. She drops into a dead faint after accusing Egisthus of destroying her ‘happy family’, her virtue and her honour (V.viii).

For Thomson’s Clytemnestra is an unimpeachable mother. She has kept Orestes close, adores Electra, and is tortured by the thought that her besmirched sexual reputation might adversely affect her ‘poor blameless children’ (I.i). She would like also to have been an unimpeachable spouse: the reunion between Agamemnon and Clytemnestra could not be more different from the tense formality of Aeschylus. It begins with a passionate embrace, Agamemnon charging on to the stage demanding to know ‘Where is my life! my love! my *Clytemnestra!* / O let me press thee to my fluttering soul’ (II.ii). She tearfully reproaches him with Iphigenia’s death and his prolonged absence.

The impact of this virtuous Clytemnestra must have been enhanced by its performance, with great emotive power, by an actress famous for her own respectable private life, Mary Anne Porter. She was particularly commended for the emotional effect she produced ‘when Grief and Tenderness possessed her’, and ‘she subsided into the most affecting Softness’.<sup>55</sup> What Porter’s acting helped Thomson achieve was the transformation of an ancient tragedy into an excellent example of the popular 18th-century British genre of pathetic drama, dominated by a suffering, virtuous heroine, which went under the title ‘She-tragedy’. ‘She-tragedy’ developed as the dramatists moved away from the heroic drama of the Restoration towards tragedy concentrating on the experiences of private individuals, usually women. This in turn evolved into ‘sentimental’ tragedy. Thomson’s *Agamemnon* belongs to

the wave of examples, between the late 1730s and the 1760s, of emotional and actable poetic tragedy that emphasized romantic love, and offered a nearly obligatory role for a traumatised mother, wife, sister, or daughter.<sup>56</sup>

Authors wishing to adapt Greek tragic heroines to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century British stage were faced with almost insurmountable ideological problems. They could not countenance Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, any more than they could deal with Euripides' Medea, Hecuba, or even Creusa. Like other 18<sup>th</sup>-century playwrights adapting Greek tragedy, therefore, Thomson intrusively emphasised his characters' virtue, regarded as necessary to the eliciting of sympathy. His tender Clytemnestra is engaged in a constant struggle with her desire to be virtuous, with her conscience, and with emotional vulnerability. She is a woman of whom audiences sharing an 18<sup>th</sup>-century notion of ideal, submissive femininity could approve. A perceptive theatrical critic of the later 18<sup>th</sup> century actually praised Thomson for diminishing the Aeschylean Clytemnestra's personal authority: 'the author has varied from the idea of Aeschylus; and, I think with great propriety...gives some shades of tenderness to this princess, and makes her yield with reluctance to the persuasions of Aegisthus'.<sup>57</sup>

The degree of Thomson's distance from Aeschylus, despite his knowledge of the Greek play, emerges not only in his whitewashing of Clytemnestra but in the concomitant redemption of Agamemnon. Thomson gives him the best speech in defence of the sacrifice of Iphigenia he has ever been given (II.ii): he could not put his duties as 'The *Greek*, the chief, the patriot, and the king' above his rights as a father. He says that Clytemnestra could not have continued to love him if he had proved so selfish and dishonourable. Agamemnon has never been so convincing, and the persuasive force is considerably heightened by his uxorial tenderness (he has had no affair with Cassandra). This is an Agamemnon as Patriot King, entirely reconfigured to fit the 18<sup>th</sup>-century British model of ideal male sensibility. He and Clytemnestra are both inherently virtuous human beings, on whose capacity for beneficent

action have been placed intolerable strains. At the heart of the play Clytemnestra relents towards him, just before the arrival of Electra and Orestes (II.iii), and parents and children together arrange themselves in a group embrace while they affirm their mutual regard. The Argive royal family, astonishingly, is rewritten as the new bourgeois ideal nuclear family of the mid-18th century, destroyed by the malign ambition of a single politician.

### **7. Senecan Clytemnestras after Thomson**

Thomson's *Agamemnon*, with its virtuous queen, was significant internationally. *Agamemnon* was translated into German at least three times in the mid-18th century.<sup>58</sup> It was particularly advocated by no less a dramatic and literary theorist than Gotthold Lessing, who not only praised the play in his treatise *Laocoon* (1766), but in 1756 had written a flattering introduction to a German prose translation of Thomson's tragedies, helping to make Thomson's reading of *Agamemnon* the one which shaped subsequent plays.<sup>59</sup> It almost certainly lies behind Wilhelm von Humboldt's interest in translating the Aeschylean version into metrical German (*Aeschylos' Agamemnon*, Leipzig 1816), and it was von Humboldt's translation that was used by Wagner (see further Ewans, this volume).

Thomson's Whig *Agamemnon* play also certainly influenced Alfieri, whose twin verse tragedies *Agamennone* and *Oreste* became popular in Britain after they appeared in English translation in 1815.<sup>60</sup> Thomson's version, unusually for an English-language tragedy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was also translated into French and performed in Paris in 1780;<sup>61</sup> this revival probably lies behind Citizen Louis Jean Nepomucene Lemercier's attraction to the political potential of the story. Lemercier's important adaptation was performed at the Théâtre de la République, late April (Floreal) 1797, then considered the finest theatre in Paris: it had been formed in 1792 after the Comédie Française was split by political differences, and the actors sympathetic to the revolution joined actors from the Variétés Amusantes to form the new

theatre of the new republic. Lemerrier's Clitemnestre (played by Françoise Vestris) owes much to both Seneca and Thomson's conceptions; she is a devoted mother, fearful that Agamemnon, who has a filicidal record, may sacrifice Orestes (I.iii). She is vain and silly (not unlike popular stereotypes of Marie Antoinette), swooning and twittering her way throughout an ideologically charged vision of the vile assassination of the a corrupt head of a decadent dynasty, fast becoming obsolete: Cassandre's closing speech, ultimately derived from her thrilling final words in Seneca *veniet et vobis furor* ('On you, as well, a madness is to come', 1012), assumes a contemporary political charge as she predicts that the fall of the tyrant assassins of Agamemnon is itself imminent (V.xi): *Fuyez tous le tyran qui commande en ce lieu*. Lemerrier's exaggerated Égiste, played by Citizen François Talma himself, then the young thespian darling of the revolution, is a demanding role. Palpably power-crazed, he subjects the defenceless Clitemnestre to psychological terrorism in order to coerce her into stabbing her husband (V.vi), before she succumbs to intense self-hatred (V.vii).

In the course of her two-millennial journey from Aeschylus to Lemerrier, whose evil aristocratic Égiste completely dominates the dramatic action, Clytemnestra was therefore utterly transformed from chief player into pawn, commanding mastermind into exploited accessory and love interest. But Clytemnestra would be unlikely to let male authors have the last word. Shortly after Lemerrier's politically charged neoclassical drama, a new, hilariously villainous, type of Clytemnestra began to emerge in burlesque versions of the story;<sup>62</sup> less than a century later the Aeschylean Clytemnestra was finally to wreak her revenge on the Senecan tradition in serious drama, as well.

## **8. The Aeschylean Clytemnestra Avenged**

On the surface this complicated exercise in performance history has not been about Aeschylus' Clytemnestra at all. But the argument has been that reading Clytemnestra

diachronically can help us appreciate the uniqueness and power of Aeschylus' conception. Reaction against an archetype can reflect an even stronger form of influence than direct imitation. There have been many Clytemnestras since the archetype in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, but until relatively recently they were all so different from her – so much more 'feminine', so much less decisive, so defined by her relationship with Aegisthus, so apolitical, so 'clitoral' – that they actually sharpen the focus on the very Aeschylean features which have been so systematically eradicated or changed. A clearer vision of Aeschylus' achievement in the creation of his Clytemnestra, who must have been overwhelmingly threatening to her original audience, is thus made possible by reminding ourselves that in her Aeschylean form this heroine has been scarcely tolerable on the stage or in the public imagination until – in terms of the many centuries involved in the reception of Classics – very recently: the manslaying Amazon, who prioritised the mother-daughter relationship over that between husband and wife, simply could not become resonant again until the very last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, exactly the chronological point at which women's rights as both political agents and as parents finally began to be discussed with gravity. The erotic, Senecan Clytemnestra lingered on, however, in some influential quarters: there is no more sensual husband-slayer than Christine Mannon in Eugene O'Neill's 1931 *Mourning Becomes Electra* (on which see further Helene Foley, this volume). The Mannons' New England Doric mansion has seen neither infanticide nor power struggle: Christine prefers Adam Brant to her husband Ezra because he is better in bed.

In a previous volume produced by the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama, *Medea in Performance 1500-2000*, it was argued that Euripides' Medea suffered a not dissimilar fate: deprived of almost all of her prefiguratively 'feminist' opinions and hardly ever allowed to kill her children in cold blood, the authentically horrible Euripidean Medea was virtually unknown to the public theatre until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>63</sup> The

authentic Aeschylean Clytemnestra was in similar retreat for well over two millennia. She only began to speak in a voice once again immediate and relevant when she could address a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century audience, even if their increasingly *sympathetic* response to her arguments was completely different from the revulsion and fear it is possible to imagine were felt by Aeschylus' patriarchal contemporaries when confronted by his realisation of their worst possible nightmares. And it was only as late as the twentieth century, shortly after women received the vote in the USA, that Henry Lister, author of a revisionist American *Clytemnestra* in 1923, could remotely expect to be taken seriously when he wrote:

The modern enfranchisement of women has...placed the sexes on an equal basis. In making Clytemnestra the heroine instead of the villain of the play the author asks the world, newly awakened to the rights of women, whether Clytemnestra was guilty or not guilty.<sup>64</sup>

## Notes

- 1 The urn is now in the Florence Archaeological Museum (Knoepfler (1993), fig. 75 = *LIMC* 'Agamemnon' no. 96). Two Erinyes flank Clytemnestra while she attacks Agamemnon. He is seated and his upper body has a piece of fabric thrown over it. Aegisthus, most unusually, is not depicted.
- 2 Another exception is the Christian Dracontius' poem *Orestis Tragoedia*, on which see further below, pp. 000.
- 3 See Winnington-Ingram (1948); Millett (1970), 112-15; Zeitlin (1978); Hall (1989), 201-9.
- 4 See especially Foley (2001), 202-34; McClure (1999), 000.

- 5 The performance by the City Troupe, an off-Broadway theatre company in New York City, was directed by Tim Vode; Clytemnestra was played by Carmen de Lavallade. The English translation, by Vode, is available in Maraini (1994), 177-315.
- 6 See Carr (2002), especially 74-5; Hall (forthcoming a). For a discussion of several very recent feminist reconfigurations of Clytemnestra (not including Carr see Komar (2003).
- 7 See the discussion of Ure (1951), 202-3. It is interesting that *Agamemnon* and *Prometheus Bound* are the only two Aeschylean plays used in the Christian drama *Christus Patiens*: see Wartelle (1971), 359-60 and n. 1.
- 8 See also Macintosh (1997), 289-90; Hall and Macintosh (2004), 000.
- 9 This is argued by the editor of *Ion* of Chios, A. von Blumenthal, in his edition of 1939. *Ion*'s death by 421 is fixed by a reference in Aristophanes' *Peace* (832-5), which was certainly produced that year. Hyginus (117) and Servius Auctus on Virgil, *Aen.* 11.268-9 preserve yet another version where Agamemnon was killed while offering a sacrifice. The *Agamemnon* of *Ion* (or of Aeschylus, or even another unidentifiable tragedian) may have been produced at the Lenaea in 419, of which no further evidence survives than the three first letters of the name (tr. fr. adesp. 1 *TgrF*). On the other hand, the play could have been an *Aga[ue]*.
- 10 Taplin (1977), 304-5.
- 11 The possibility that some ancient audiences actually saw Agamemnon being killed was at least envisaged by Verrall, whose response to the hypothesis was to remark circumspectly that 'our knowledge of ancient scenery is not such as to warrant any positive assertion on details of this kind' (Verrall (1889), lvi-vii), and who did not deserve the opprobrium heaped on his head by subsequent scholars as a result.
- 12 Taplin (1977), \*\*\*
- 13 In the Louvre there is one imperial sculpture from Volterra (second century AD alabaster urn), on which Aegisthus and Clytemnestra simultaneously attack

- Agamemnon, who is seated and draped in fabric, while a mysterious young man enters at the side. This looks as though it could be related to Pacuvius' lost tragedy *Dulorestes* (on which see below).
- 14 See Prag (1985), Knoepfler (1993), Trendall and Webster (1971), 40-9. Oliver Taplin points out to me that there is a striking depiction of Orestes about to slay Clytemnestra, who is showing her breast to him, on a red-figured neck-amphora from Paestum, Trendall (1987), 183-4, no. 418 and plate 129a. On the popularity of the scenes from the later two plays see also Dyer (1967).
- 15 Boston 63.1246, Prag (1985), plates 3-4; Vermeule (1966).
- 16 Prag (1985), 4.
- 17 Fig. 37 in Knoepfler (1993), 55; the fragment is not included in *LIMC*. For a full discussion see Cambitoglou and Chamay (1997), 14-17. On the fourth-century kylix by the Marlay painter in whose interior appears an illustration of Clytemnestra killing her with an axe at an ornate altar (Ferrara T.264 (2482)), see above, Easterling, ch. 2.
- 18 This is not to deny that there are allusions to the text of *Agamemnon* in *Frogs*, above all at 1284-92, which is built round some lines of the opening chorus (*Ag.* 108-11).
- 19 Pearson (1917), vol. 1, 219, in the context of his excellent discussion of Sophocles' fragmentary *Iphigenia*.
- 20 There may, of course, be a sexual *double entendre* at *Ag.* 1654. But see the sensitive comment of Garvie (1986), 291, on *Choeph.* 893, where Clytemnestra, with obvious sincerity, apostrophises the dead Aegisthus as *philtat' Aigisthou bia*: 'The pathos of Clytemnestra's words contrasts strikingly with Orestes' tone...Unimpressive we know him [Aegisthus] to be, he was still loved by Clytaemnestra. It is a side of her that hardly emerged in *Ag.*'
- 21 Hesychius δ 837 = Stephanis (1988), no. 610.

- 22 See above all the detailed and judicious appendix devoted to the murder weapon in Fraenkel (1950), vol. 3, 806-9.
- 23 Zeitlin (1978). Hardwick (2002) discusses some of the ideological implications for *modern* audiences of an *Agamemnon* performed without the two following tragedies, but nobody has paid much attention to the fact that the play's ending must have been ideologically uncomfortable for an ancient audience -- it leaves a murderous human female not only alive and unpunished but in political control of her *polis* – a situation without parallel in the Greek tragic corpus.
- 24 Dulorestes... \*\*\*
- 25 These and all subsequent references to Livius Andronicus and Accius are cited (with very slight alterations to the English translations) from Warmington (1935-40).
- 26 It is possible that the play is to be identified with Accius' *Aegisthus*, which included a speech in which a character spoke about the 'might of government', *vis imperi*, breaking men's fierce spirits (frr. 8-9), a remark that women are more easily hardened (*callent*) than men (frr. 10-11), and a reference to a man, presumably Orestes, whose 'hand is fouled and spattered by his mother's blood' (fr. 12). Accius also wrote an *Agamemnon's Children* (*Agamemnonidae*).
- 27 A Magnesian inscription records the victory of an actor called Artemidorus, son of Artemidorus and grandson of Dioscorides, in the Romaia at Magnesia on the Maeander, some time in the first half of the first century BC; the play he performed was Polemaios' *Clytemnestra* (Stephanis (1988), 416 = Snell *TgrF* vol. I p. 309, number 155.1).
- 28 See Champlin (2003), especially 308-10, 297-300.
- 29 Translated by Green (1982), 203.
- 30 von Schlegel (1817), 27-8.

- 31 Sutton (1986), 24.
- 32 The worst problem is presented by the scene, unprecedented in ancient tragedy, in which Cassandra swoons, the chorus rush to her aid, but are distracted by the entrance of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra and forget Cassandra altogether. Agamemnon and Clytemnestra fail to notice Cassandra, and then Clytemnestra apparently exits without having spoken a single word after escorting her husband on stage. Agamemnon launches into a speech, and only then notices the swooning maiden and orders his henchmen to pick her up (775-90); see Tarrant (1976), 317-18. The problem of the two choruses (one of Argive women and one of Trojan captives) is similarly intractable, since the primary chorus is never even identified, and the secondary chorus' exit is never cued.
- 33 Zwierlein (1966), especially 105-7; Tarrant (1976), 18. Sophocles' *Electra* also had a profound influence on the longsuffering heroine of the Senecan *Octavia*: see Ladek (1909) and Whitman (1978), 53-4. The vengeful maternal ghost of Agrippina in that play is also at least reminiscent of *Eumenides*.
- 34 Tarrant (1985), 13-15.
- 35 *CIL IV Supp.* 2.6698: *idai cernu nemura*.
- 36 See Zwierlein (1966), 158 and n. 5. Tacitus' evidence that tragedy could be a medium for the expression of contemporary political views has encouraged scholars to look for possible links between the historical events and personalities of Seneca's time and the contents of his tragedies. See e.g. Slavitt (1992), xii-xv, Pratt (1983), 189-94. A specific case for the topicality of *Agamemnon* is made by Herzog (1928), 98-100 who perceives disguised references to Agrippina, Poppaea and Nero.
- 37 Xerxes: Sen. *Suas.* 5.1 and Tarrant (1976), 253. Iphigenia: Sen. *Suas.* 3, Petr. *Sat.* 1, Halm (1863), p. 508.

- 38 Heron, *Peri Automatopoiētikēs* ch. 22.3-6, par. 264 in the Teubner edition of Wilhelm Schmidt (1899-1914); the material may have been taken from Philo of Byzantium (see Tarrant (1976), 21).
- 39 Easterling (1997); Sifakis (1967), Hall (2002a), Jory (2002).
- 40 See Kelly (1979), 35.
- 41 See Sen. *ad Lucil.* 80.7, *Apul. apol.* 78, *Claudian in Eutrop.* 2.405; Wüst (1949), 847-50; Kokolakis (\*\*\*)
- 42 See Weismann (1972), 38.
- 43 See Tarrant (1976), 180, 196, 228, commentary on Seneca, *Agamemnon* lines 56, 115 and 299 respectively.
- 44 Tarrant (1976), subject index s.v. ‘Ovid’, and *passim*.
- 45 As Shelton says in her discussion of this peculiar slant on the murder of Iphigenia (Shelton (1983), 181 n. 19), Clytemnestra is one of several Senecan characters who believe they have an inherited family image to maintain.
- 46 At this point the text draws on both the Homeric conception of the murder as orchestrated at a banquet by Aegisthus, and the Aeschylean notion of Aegisthus’ inadequacy as a male: here and here alone Cassandra calls him *semivir* (890). The evisceration of Clytemnestra in this play has even led some translators to assume that the term *semivir* refers disparagingly to Clytemnestra, and her inability to strike deep enough to kill a man. See e.g. Harris (1904), 303 (interestingly, a female translator).
- 47 Several critics have tried to find strong reminders of the Iphigenia-motivation in the later parts of the play, for example in the imagery describing Agamemnon’s death (e.g. Shelton (1983), 176), but their need to find Iphigenia where she is not speaks louder than the alleged textual echoes themselves.
- 48 Pratt (1983), 154-7.

- 49 Rosenmeyer (1989),
- 50 Tarrant (1976), 229 (note on line 302).
- 51 Boyle (1983b), 225 n. 10.
- 52 See especially lines 126-8 and 227-70 in the Budé edition of Jean Bouquet (1995), and the Introduction to it, especially 30-1. Dracontius was interested in the dominant women of tragedy; his secular poetry also included a *Medea*. The *Orestis Tragodia* includes the delightful detail that Electra takes the rescued Orestes off to enrol him at university in Athens (284-90).
- 53 See Boyer (1680), 12.
- 54 See Hall and Macintosh (2004), ch. 4.
- 55 Victor (1761), vol. 2, 56-8.
- 56 See Hall and Macintosh (2005), ch. 3.
- 57 Davies (1784), vol. 3, 418.
- 58 See Thomson (1750), (1756), and (1771).
- 59 Lessing, ‘Vorrede’ to Thomson (1756), 3-14.
- 60 Alfieri (\*\*\*)
- 61 See Thomson (1780) and Wartelle (1978), 24.
- 62 A parody of Lemerrier *Agamemnon* of 1797, Desfontaines’ *Cassandra Agamemnon et Colombine Cassandra*, was first performed on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1803 in Paris. Jane Davidson Reid also records two plays which may represent earlier comic versions of the Aeschylean or Senecan tragedies, but which I have not yet been able to consult: Bartolomeo Cordans’ opera buffa *Attanaganamenone*, libretto by B.R. Buini, performed in Venice in Spring 1731, and *Agamenon e Clitemnestra*, a comedy in Spanish of about 1772 by Juan Crisóstomo Fariá Cordero. An English Clytemnestra defused by comedy subsequently appeared in Becky Sharp’s viricidal charade in

William Thackeray's 1848 *Vanity Fair* (see Hall and Macintosh (2005), ch. 12). The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Agamemnon burlesques included the French operetta composer Hervé's *Agamemnon* (1856): see the satirical lithograph by Honoré Daumier commenting on how Hervé's operas, including his *Agamemnon*, were 'correcting' antiquity, published in the *Charivari* of 11<sup>th</sup> December 1868 and reproduced in Delteil (1906-30) vol. 28, no. 3679. In the British Edward Nolan's *Agamemnon at Home*, first performed at St. John's College, Oxford, in 1867, Clytemnestra is a saucy transvestite role. Although a woman (Julia Matthews) played Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon and Cassandra* by Robert Reece (1868), who specialised in translating Hervé, the sexual bond with Aegisthus was presented as the primary motive.

63 See Hall, Macintosh and Taplin (2000).

64 Lister (1923), 'Preface', p. 8. This paper has improved considerably as a result of the discussions following its delivery at the Universities of Chicago, Glasgow, London, New York, Princeton, and the Center for Mediterranean Studies at Columbia University. I am grateful particularly to Clemente Marconi, Andy Ford, Helene Foley, Glenn Most, and David Sider. Comments on the typescript from Pat Easterling and all three of my co-editors have also proved indispensable.