

Agamemnon Book Notes

Agamemnon by Aeschylus

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Author/Context

Born around 524 or 525 B.C. in the city of Eleusis near Athens, the Greek dramatist Aeschylus is known as the first great tragedian. His childhood was spent experiencing many great transitions for the city of Athens, including the expulsion of the last Athenian tyrant in 510 B.C. and the establishment of the Athenian democratic state, ruled by many citizens. Aeschylus also fought in several military campaigns against the Persians at Salamis, Artemisium, and Palatea, as well as at the final defeat of the Persians at Marathon in 490 B.C., where his brother died in battle. These events were very formative in forging the creative mind that would write such dramatic works as the trilogy of *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*. Traditionally, Athens held dramatic competitions each year in honor of the Greek god Dionysus, at which three different theater troupes consisting of only two persons each would each act out a series of four plays together in competition for the first prize at the festival. Three of these plays were usually tragedies, plays that focused on a heroic character who falls due to his own folly. However, the fourth play was a more comical, light-hearted work, called a satire. These annual competitions provided an incentive for people to write, as well as creating an important forum for fifth-century dramatists such as Aeschylus to gain recognition for their work.

Aeschylus' won first prize at the Athenian festival in 484 B.C., after which he continued to write and compete, while also traveling to further his experience and outlook towards life. In 476 B.C. he went to Etna in Sicily under the advisement of Hieron of Syracuse, where he produced *The Women of Etna* there. Later he returned to Athens and produced the *Persians* in 472 B.C., under the watchful eye of his patron, the Greek statesman Pericles, architect of the Parthenon on the great Acropolis rock in Athens. Aeschylus was at last defeated by the younger dramatist Sophocles in 468 B.C., although he made a comeback the following year with a new sequence of plays that included *The Seven Against Thebes*. The *Oresteia* was produced in 458 B.C., the last great work he would create. Aeschylus moved to Sicily soon afterwards, dying in 456 or 455 B.C. at Gela, Sicily. Although during the course of his lifetime he wrote more than seventy plays, today only seven plays survive: *The Seven Against Thebes*, *The Suppliants*, *The Persians*, *Prometheus Bound*, *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*.

Unlike Sophocles' *Oedipus* plays which were written over a period of fifty years, Aeschylus has written the *Oresteia* all at once to be a tightly knit sequence that refer back to each other, even though events in the plays are separated by a series of months or years as they occur. The *Agamemnon* relates a story that dates back to Homer's *The Odyssey*, for there Odysseus had met with Agamemnon's ghost in the Underworld during his own wanderings. Aeschylus takes a popular myth and transforms it into a social commentary with great immediacy for the Athenian citizenry. He points out the role of women in Athenian society, twisting gender roles so that men, such as Agamemnon and Aegisthus, behave as women and women, such as Clytaemnestra, behave as men. The playwright also proposes the question of what is right or wrong, to be explored further in *The Libation Bearers*. While the Chorus perceive Agamemnon to



be justified in killing his daughter to preserve the Greeks' honor and thus allowing their fleet to sail, Clytaemnestra suggests that Agamemnon's first duty is his role as a father; his greater loyalty should be for his own children, rather than the troops at his command. Overall, the events of the *Agamemnon* prompt one to question these social values and others, leaving one with a biting curiosity to know whatever will happen next as the second installment, the *Libation Bearers*, begins.

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Plot Summary

For ten long years, the Greek army has been fighting at Troy. The war began after the Trojan prince Paris was promised that he would marry the prettiest woman in the world after he judged Aphrodite to be the winner in a divine beauty contest. However, Helen was already married to the Spartan King Menelaus, who appealed to his brother Agamemnon for help, and the two assembled a massive army to attack Troy and rescue Helen. During these ten years, many wives have waited expectantly to hear from their husbands, and many cities have been left without a king. In Argos, Agamemnon's wife Clytaemnestra has ruled the city in his absence, holding within her heart a secret hatred, because he sacrificed their eldest daughter at Aulis so that the Greek fleet could sail to Troy. Clytaemnestra has a new lover, Aegisthus, and together the two have plotted to murder Agamemnon when he returns from Troy.

The story opens as, at long last, a signal fire burns within sight of Argos, meaning that the war has ended and the Greeks are coming home. Clytaemnestra keeps her murder plot a secret and acts very excited when she hears this news, telling the Chorus of Elders that she has missed her husband so very much during all these years. A Herald soon arrives to announce that Agamemnon's ship has landed and that he will be coming into the city. When the King of Argos himself appears soon after in his chariot, his wife acts very pleased to see him, and lies by saying that she has had no other lovers while he was away. The deceitful woman urges him to walk across a red carpet of honor, because he has led the Greeks to victory. The man does not want to offend the gods by this arrogance, but Clytaemnestra finally convinces him to do as she wishes, after which the two enter the palace of Argos together.

Meanwhile, a captive Trojan princess named Cassandra remains in the chariot, lamenting about how Clytaemnestra is going to murder Agamemnon and herself. No one believes these words, however. The young woman curses Apollo for not saving her from death and boldly walks out of the chariot into the royal palace, knowing that she is going to die. The Chorus of Elder becomes alarmed when they hear screams of pain coming from within the palace. The doors open, and Agamemnon's bloody body lies on the ground beside that of Cassandra, while Clytaemnestra stands above them, showing her true personality now. She rants about how he has been punished for the death of her eldest daughter Iphigenia, and also for being unfaithful to her by making Cassandra his love slave. Aegisthus emerges from within the palace also, declaring that he has revenge for the death of his siblings, killed by Agamemnon's father Atreus.

Yet the Chorus of Elders does nothing to stop Clytemnestra and merely cowers in fear at what has happened. They call Aegisthus a coward, since it was a woman and not a man who committed these two murders, and he in turn argues back. Tired, Clytaemnestra urges Aegisthus to go back into the royal palace at Argos with her, declaring that they will now rule Argos together. She adds that they will bury Agamemnon themselves so that his bloody body does not stay there in the palace. The woman remains peaceful because, after ten years, vengeance has been exacted against her husband. Agamemnon chose to be a soldier first and a father second,



sacrificing his own daughter so that the Greek fleet could sail to Troy, wreaking more havoc and destruction. The mother's anger festered until it was released upon his return home. With these words said, the two reenter the palace and close the doors behind them.



Major Characters

Agamemnon: Son of Atreus, King of the Argos. Agamemnon aides his younger brother Menelaus by assembling a massive army and Greeks to bring Menelaus' wife, Helen back from Troy. In order for the Greek ships to sail, he sacrifices his eldest daughter, Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis, much to the upset of his wife, Clytaemnestra.

Agamemnon returns from the Trojan War after ten years, victorious, bringing along the Trojan princess Cassandra, whom he has enslaved and made his lover. Arriving home, his wife pressures him to arrogantly walk across a red carpet into the palace, offending the gods. He is treacherously slain in his own bathtub by a furious Clytaemnestra, avenging Iphigenia's death, as well as punishing her unfaithful husband.

Clytaemnestra: Daughter of Tyndareus, sister of Helen, and wife of Agamemnon. Clytaemnestra and her sister Helen married the brothers Agamemnon and Menelaus, respectively. Clytaemnestra controls the city of Argos while her husband is fighting at Troy for ten years, seething with anger about the death of her eldest daughter Iphigenia. Bold, aggressive, and cunning, she behaves like a man, dominating those around her, including the Chorus and even her own husband, when she convinces him to walk across the red carpet upon his return. With the help of Aegisthus, she plotted the bloody murder of her husband when he returns from the war, in order to avenge Iphigenia's death and punish him for his infidelity to her by making Cassandra his lover. She states afterwards that she and Aegisthus will now rule Argos, for her young son Orestes, also the next heir to the throne, has been sent away into exile.

Cassandra: Sister of Paris; daughter of Priam, King of Troy. Given powers of prophesy by the god Apollo but also cursed because she refused to make love to him, Cassandra is condemned to foretell the future, but no one believes her predictions. After Troy is sacked, Agamemnon brings her back to Argos with him, much to the upset of his wife Clytaemnestra. Although Cassandra tries to warn the Chorus about Clytaemnestra's murder plot, these old men do not believe her. The brave Cassandra then willingly enters the palace knowing that she will die there, as her body is left stabbed and bloodied at Agamemnon's side. She asks Apollo that whoever it is that will avenge Agamemnon's death, let that person remember her and avenge her death as well.

Minor Characters

Helen: Daughter of Zeus; wife of Menelaus; divine sister of Clytaemnestra. Helen is the central cause of the Trojan War, since the Trojan prince ruthlessly kidnapped her from Menelaus' palace in Sparta when he was visiting there as an honored guest.

Considered to be the most beautiful woman in the world, she was promised to Paris by Aphrodite after he judged her to be the winner in a beauty contest. The Chorus blames her for the deaths of so many young men who are fighting because of her. After Troy is conquered and Paris killed, Helen is apparently lost at sea with Menelaus after his ship is destroyed in a storm.



Menelaus: Son of Atreus; younger brother of Agamemnon; also the King of Sparta. His wife, Helen, was kidnapped by the Trojan Paris while a guest at his palace. Menelaus asks Agamemnon to assemble a Greek army to rescue her from Troy. After the war is ended, Menelaus' ship sinks during a storm, and nobody knows where he is, much to the disappointment of the Chorus of Elders in Argos.

Paris: Son of Priam, King of Troy. Paris was chosen to be the judge in a beauty contest between the goddesses Aphrodite, Athena, and Zeus' wife Hera, and declares Aphrodite to be the winner. As a reward, she promises him that the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen, will be his wife, regardless of the fact that she was already married. Paris kidnaps Helen from Menelaus, sparking the Trojan War. He does not live to see its end, slain in the ninth year by a Greek named Pyrrhus.

Iphigenia: Eldest daughter of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra from Argos. In order for the Greek fleet to sail away to Troy, Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis, much to his wife's utter disgust and total outrage. He had lured her to the place of sacrifice, called Aulis, by telling his wife that Iphigenia was going to be married to the Greek warrior Achilles. Clytaemnestra uses similar deceptions to murder her husband ten years later in order to avenge her beloved daughter's death.

Watchman: A man who watches for a fire signaling that Troy has fallen. After the Watchman sees the fire at last after ten years, he expresses great joy but is also concerned about what will happen when Agamemnon returns at long last.

Chorus of Elders: A group of old men from Argos. The Chorus is a passive observer to much of the action, refusing to get directly involved in either aiding Agamemnon when warned by Cassandra that Clytaemnestra plans to murder her and Agamemnon. Nor does it make any effort to stop Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus after they emerge from the palace, bragging about the murders. Instead, the Chorus is very passive and complains about everything, without trying to do anything about it.

Atreus: Son of Pelops; father of Agamemnon and Menelaus. His grandfather, Tantalus started the curse of Atreus by cooking Pelops and serving him to the gods. Pelops was resurrected by Zeus, however, and fathered the two sons Atreus and Thyestes. Atreus, in a struggle for power with his brother, and angry after Thyestes made love to his wife, cooked Thyestes' children and fed them to him at a banquet. This shedding of kindred blood continued the curse of Atreus, followed later by the death of Iphigenia and of Agamemnon himself.

Artemis: Greek goddess of hunting; sister of Apollo. Artemis refused to give the Greek ships good winds so that they could sail to Troy because the Greeks had slain a wild rabbit, a creature which she loved. Thus, Agamemnon was required to sacrifice his eldest daughter Iphigenia at Aulis to appease her anger. After this, Artemis gave the Greeks calm winds to sail to Troy.



Calchas: Prophet of Apollo. Calchas often relays what the gods want the Greeks to do before and during the Trojan War. He informs Agamemnon that Iphigenia must be sacrificed in order to appease Artemis.

Apollo: Greek god of prophesy, music, and light; brother of Artemis. The Chorus of Elders prays that Apollo will protect them from his sister Artemis. Later, Cassandra appeals to Apollo for help against Clytaemnestra, although he has cursed her because she rejected his love, and as such he does not offer any assistance at all.

Zeus: Greek god of the heavens; king of all the gods. Many people show respect towards Zeus, including the Chorus of Elders, thanking Zeus for returning Agamemnon safely home, and Agamemnon himself thanks Zeus for giving the Greeks victory. Clytaemnestra asks Zeus to help her in murdering her husband, declaring 'Zeus, Zeus...accomplish these my prayers.' Agamemnon offends Zeus after walking on the red carpet, however, because of this act of arrogance.

Hephaestus: Greek god of fire; son of Zeus and Hera. When the signal fires are lit after Troy is conquered by the Greeks, Clytaemnestra announces that Hephaestus has set the first blaze from Mount Ida, near Troy, thus sparking a line of signal fires spreading within the sight of Argos.

Furies: Goddesses of revenge older than any of the Olympian gods led by Zeus. The Furies punish the worst of sins, especially the shedding of kindred blood, tormenting the criminal until he is himself killed. The Chorus warns that the Furies will punish anyone who does not live life in moderation and show reverence towards the gods.

Herald: A Greek messenger who announces the return of Agamemnon to Argos after the Trojan War has ended. Clytaemnestra urges him to go back to the ships and bring back her husband as quickly as possible, because she is so eager to see him again. In reality, she is eager to kill him.

Hermes: Greek messenger god and god of journeys; son of Zeus. The Herald thanks Hermes for watching over him and bringing him safely back to Argos after the Trojan War has ended.

Priam: King of Troy; father of Paris. When Paris was a baby, Priam was warned by a prophet that Paris would cause the destruction of Troy, so he sent him away to be a shepherd on nearby Mount Ida. However, it was on Mount Ida that the quarrelling goddesses found him and asked him to judge their beauty contest. Priam is slain when Troy falls.

Orestes: Son of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra. Orestes is sent to live in exile before Agamemnon returns from Argos. As a result, Clytaemnestra murders her husband without any interference and controls the kingship with the help of Aegisthus. Yet Orestes remains the rightful heir to the throne.

Thyestes: Father of Aegisthus; brother of Atreus. After Thyestes fell in love with Atreus' wife, a jealous Atreus cooked Thyestes two children alive and fed them to him,



unknowing, at a banquet. He then expelled Thyestes from Argos and the man lived the rest of his days in exile, unavenged.

Aegisthus: Son of Thyestes; cousin of Agamemnon; lover of Clytaemnestra. Aegisthus helps Clytaemnestra to plot Agamemnon's murder, although he does not commit the murder himself. Because a woman did the deed for him, the Chorus, considers him to be a coward and calls him a woman. Aegisthus avenges the murders of his siblings and the exile of his father, Thyestes, at the jealous hands of Atreus, by helping to kill Atreus' son, Agamemnon.



Objects/Places

Argos: A city located on the Peloponnesian Peninsula in southern Greece. The Argive king Tantalus began a pattern of destruction for Argos after he offended the gods by feeding them his son Pelops at a banquet. King Pelops' sons continued this as Atreus cooked Thyestes' children, exiling him brother afterwards. Clytaemnestra murders Agamemnon later after he killed her daughter Iphigenia, thus continuing this cycle of death and jealousy for the royal house of Argos.

Trojan War: A war fought at Troy between the native Trojans and the invading Greeks. Started by Paris, who stole Menelaus' wife Helen, Menelaus asked his brother to help rescue her. Led by Agamemnon, the Greek army fought for ten long years, losing many brave warriors. The Greeks won after deceiving the Trojans into bringing a wooden horse into the city's walls, thinking that it was a peace offering. However, Greek soldiers hidden within later crawled out secretly, opening the city gates for the entire army to invade the city. Troy was burned to the ground, its adult males were slain, and its men and children were enslaved.

Troy: A city located in the eastern Mediterranean, in the country that is known as Turkey today. Ruled by Priam, Troy was besieged for ten long years during the Trojan War. The Greeks wanted to rescue the Greek Helen from the Trojan prince Paris, who had kidnapped her. Troy was finally defeated through deception, and the city was burned to the ground.

Aulis: A small port city located on the Greek mainland north of Athens; site of an ancient temple to the goddess Artemis. The entire Greek fleet assembled at Aulis before sailing off to Troy. However, Artemis was angry that the Greeks had killed a wild rabbit, demanding that the ships would not sail from Aulis until Agamemnon's eldest daughter Iphigenia was sacrificed there. After this deed was completed, the ships sailed from Aulis, as promised.

Blaze: A signal fire observed by the Watchman. The blaze near Argos was the last fire in a long line of fires that began at Mount Ida near Troy, declaring that Troy was defeated and the Greeks were returning to their homes after ten long years of fighting.

Sparta: A city located on the Peloponnesian Peninsula, further south than Argos. Ruled by Menelaus and his queen, Helen, Sparta was thrown into confusion after Paris, visiting the royal palace from Troy, kidnapped Helen while Menelaus was away from the city. Menelaus demanded that his wife be returned to him, appealing to his brother Agamemnon to assemble an army to attack Troy.

Altar: An raised area sacred to the gods, usually used for ritual sacrifices. Iphigenia was sacrificed at an altar at Aulis by her own father, Agamemnon. Similarly, Cassandra later compares her own death at the hands of Clytaemnestra to a cow that is being led to the slaughter to be sacrificed at the altar.



Red carpet: A red carpet that Clyaemnestra insists that Agamemnon walk upon when he victoriously returns from Troy. At first the man is resistant because he doesn't want to be arrogant by claiming that he alone is responsible for the Greek victory, rather than it being because of the gods. However, Clytaemnestra is very persistent and Agamemnon agrees at last to take off his shoes and walk barefoot upon the carpet proudly, as if he himself were a god. This act seals his fate, having lost any godly protection and making him an easy victim to his wife's jealousy.

Scylla: Once a beautiful woman, Scylla was transformed into a hideous, snake-headed monster that lived inside of the rocks along the Mediterranean coast, eating sailors from passing ships. Cassandra compares Clytaemnestra to this monstrous creature, knowing that she is about to be murdered by her.



Quotes

Quote 1: "I cry the news aloud to Agamemnon's queen/that she may rise up from her bed of state with speed/to raise the rumor of gladness welcoming this beacon,/and singing rise, if truly the city of Ilium/has fallen, as the shining of this fire proclaims." Lines 25-29

Quote 2: "Dishonored in our old bones,/ [we] cast off even then from the gathering horde,/ stay here, to prop up/ on staves the strength of a baby./ Since the young vigor that urges/ inward to the heart/ is frail as age, no warcraft yet perfect,/ while beyond age, leaf/ withered, man goes three footed/ no stronger than a child is,/ a dream that falters in daylight." Lines 72-82

Quote 3: "My fate is angry if I obey these,/ but angry if I slaughter/ this child, the beauty of my house,/ with maiden blood shed staining/ these father's hands beside the altar./ What of these things goes now without disaster?/ How shall I fail my ships/ and lose my faith of battle?" Lines 206-214

Quote 4: "I think that the city echoes with a clash of cries.../ Trojans are stooping now to gather in their arms/ their dead, husbands and brothers; children lean to clasp/ the aged who begot them, crying upon the death/ of those most dear, from lips that will never be free." Lines 320-329

Quote 5: "There is not any armor/ in gold against perdition/ for him who spurns the high altar/ of Justice down into the darkness." Lines 381-384

Quote 6: "The gods fail not to mark/ those who have killed many./ The black Furies stalking the man/ fortunate beyond all right/ wrench back again the set of his life/ and drop him to darkness.../ Let me attain no envied wealth,/ let me not plunder cities,/ neither be taken in turn, and face/ life in the power of another." Lines 461-474

Quote 7: "It is like a woman indeed/ to take rapture before the fact is shown for true/ They believe too easily, are too quick to shift/ from ground to ground; and swift indeed/ the rumor voiced by a woman dies again." Lines 483-487

Quote 8: "I call a long farewell to all our unhappiness.../ And here, in this sun's shining, we can boast aloud,/ whose fame has gone with wings across the land and sea: 'Upon a time the Argive host took Troy...'/ And they who hear such things shall call this city blest/ and the leaders of the host; and high the grace of God/ shall be exalted, that did this. You have the story." Lines 571-581

Quote 9: "Men spoke like that; they thought I wandered in my wits;/ yet I made the sacrifice, and in the womanish strain/ voice after voice caught up the cry along the city/ to echo in the temples of the gods and bless/ and still the fragrant flame that melts the sacrifice." Lines 592-597



Quote 10: "But now.../what else/is light more sweet for a woman to behold than this,/to spread the gates before her husband home from war and saved by God's hand?--take this message to the king:/Come, and with speed, back to the city that longs for him,/and may he find a wife within his house as true/as on the day he left her..." Lines 600-607

Quote 11: "Who is he that named you.../Helen, which is death? Appropriately/death of ships, death of men and cities/from the bower's soft curtained/and secluded luxury she sailed then,/driven on the giant west wind,/and armored men in their thousands came,/huntsmen down the oar blade's fading footprint/to struggle in blood with those/who by the banks of Simoeis/beached their hulls where the leaves break." Lines 681-698

Quote 12: "And Righteousness is a shining in/the smoke of mean houses./Her blessing is on the just man./From high hills starred with gold by reeking hands/she turns back/with eyes that glance away into the simple in heart,/spurning the strength of gold/stamped with false flattery./And all things she steers to fulfillment." Lines 772-781

Quote 13: "Not from the lips of men the gods/heard justice, but in one firm cast they laid their votes/within the urn of blood that [Troy] must die/and all her people.../For all this we must thank the gods with grace of much/high praise and memory, who fenced within our toils/of wrath the city; and, because one woman [Helen] strayed,/the beast of [Greece] broke them." Lines 814-824

Quote 14: "And all this -- do not try in the woman's ways to make/me delicate.../nor cross my path with jealousy by strewing the ground/with robes. Such a state becomes the gods, and none beside./I am a mortal, a man; I cannot trample upon/these tinted splendors without fear thrown in my path./I tell you, as a man, not god, to reverence me." Lines 918-925

Quote 15: "Hope is gone utterly,/the sweet strength is far away./Surely this is not fantasy./Surely it is real, this whirl of drifts/that spin the stricken heart. Still I pray; may all this/expectation fade as vanity/into unfulfillment, and not be." Lines 992-1000

Quote 16: "But when the black and mortal blood of man/has fallen to the ground before his feet, who then/can sing spells to call it back again?/Did Zeus not warn us once/when he struck to impotence/that one who could in truth charm back the dead men?/Had the gods not so ordained/that fate should stand against fate/to check any man's excess." Lines 1019-1027

Quote 17: "I have no leisure to stand outside the house and waste/time on this woman. At the central altarstone/the flocks are standing, ready for sacrifice/we make to this glad day we never hoped to see./You: if you are obeying my commands at all, be quick./But if in ignorance you fail to comprehend,/speak not, but make with your barbarian hand some sign." Lines 1055-1061

Quote 18: "Keep from his mate the bull./Caught in the folded web's/entanglement she pinions him and with the black horn/strikes. And he crumples in the watered bath./Guile, I tell you, and death there in the cauldron wrought." Lines 1125-1129



Quote 19: "Did I go wide, or hit, like a real archer? Am I/some swindling seer who hawks his lies from door to door?/Upon your oath, bear witness that I know by heart/the legend of ancient wickedness within this house." Lines 1194-1197

Quote 20: "For there/shall come one to avenge us also, born to slay/his mother, and to wreak death for his father's blood./Outlaw and murderer, driven far from his own land,/he will come back to cope these stones of inward hate./For this is a strong oath and sworn by the high gods, that he shall cast men headlong for his father felled./Why am I then so pitiful? Why must I weep?" Lines 1279-1286

Quote 21: "[Cassandra prayed] against that ultimate shining when the avengers strike/these monsters down in blood, that they avenge as well/one simple slave who died, a small thing, lightly killed." Lines 1324-1326

Quote 22: "Must he give blood for generations gone,/die for those slain and in death pile up/more death to come for the blood shed,/what mortal else who hears shall claim/he was born clear of the dark angel?" Lines 1338-1342

Quote 23: "You cry out as if I were a woman and vain;/but my heart is not fluttered as I speak before you./You know it. You can praise or blame me as you wish;/it is all one to me. That man is Agamemnon,/my husband; he is dead; the work of this right hand/that struck in strength of righteousness. And that is that." Lines 1401-1406

Quote 24: "Go on and threaten me, but know that I am ready,/if fairly you can beat me down beneath your hand,/for you to rule; but if the god grant otherwise,/you shall be taught--too late, for sure--to keep your place." Lines 1422-1425

Quote 25: "Can you claim I have done this?/Speak of me never/more as the wife of Agamemnon./In the shadow of this corpse's queen/the old stark avenger/of Atreus for his revel of hate/struck down this man,/last blood for the slaughtered children." Lines 1497-1504

Quote 26: "Out of such acts you see this dead man stricken here,/and it was I, in my right, who wrought this murder.../driven, a helpless baby in [Thyestes'] arms, to banishment./Yet I grew up, and justice brought me home again,/till from afar I laid my hands upon this man,/since it was I who pieced together the fell plot./Now I can die in honor again, if die I must,/having seen him caught in the cords of just punishment." Lines 1603-1611

Quote 27: "So then you, like a woman, waited the war out/here in the house, shaming the master's bed with lust,/and planned against the lord of war this treacherous death?" Lines 1625-1627

Quote 28: "But why, why then, you coward, could you not have slain your man yourself? Why must it be his wife who killed,/to curse the country and the gods within the ground?/Oh, can Orestes live, be somewhere in sunlight still?/Shall fate grown gracious ever bring him back again/in strength of hand to overwhelm these murderers?" Lines 1642-1648

Quote 29: "These are the howls or impotent rage; forget them, dearest; you/and I/have the power; we two shall bring good order to our house/at least." Lines 1673-1676



Topic Tracking: Gender

Gender 1: Agamemnon shows more respect to his fellow men, rather than the women in his life. When given a choice between giving wind for all of the Greek men to sail off to fight at Troy and saving the life of his daughter, Iphigenia, Agamemnon shows greater loyalty to the men in his life. He does not even bother to ask his wife, Clytaemnestra, about the sacrifice until after it is already done.

Gender 2: The Chorus of Argive Elders despises Helen, calling her a "promiscuous woman" because she has caused the Trojan War by allowing Paris to take her away as his lover, even though she is already married to Menelaus. Rather than blaming the man who kidnapped her, the Chorus merely blames Helen for causing the Trojan War.

Gender 3: Agamemnon does not want to be thought of as being a woman, so he is afraid of what will happen if he does not sacrifice Iphigenia. He does not want to let all of the soldiers down and deprive them of being able to wage war against Troy. War is a part of being a man.

Gender 4: Clytaemnestra announces that Agamemnon is returning to Argos, but the Chorus of Elders doesn't believe her because they think that women are quick to action without thinking about things first. These old men don't see any basis to what she is saying, insisting that they first must see some proof that Agamemnon is returning home before they can believe it. They distrust her simply because she is a woman.

Gender 5: The old men mocked Clytaemnestra because she is a woman, distrusting her premonition that Agamemnon is returning to Argos. Now, when they know that this is indeed the truth, Clytaemnestra mocks these men, insisting that even though she is a woman, it does not mean that she is a stupid or irrational person.

Gender 6: After hearing about the unknown whereabouts of the great Menelaus, the Chorus of elders calls Helen a typical woman, a troublemaker, because she has caused the Trojan War. Rather than blaming Paris for kidnapping her in the first place, the Chorus overlooks him because he is a man, using this woman as a scapegoat for what has happened to Menelaus.

Gender 7: King Agamemnon blames Helen for causing the Trojan War, calling her a "woman who strayed." This point of view is very similar to that of the old men in the Chorus, blaming Helen for so many deaths, rather than accepting responsibility, for it was Agamemnon who assembled these forces and led them into battle in the first place. If he had not brought these warriors to Troy, none of them would have ever died in the first place.

Gender 8: Agamemnon does not want to appear to be unmanly by obeying the wishes of a woman, distrusting of her because she is using a "woman's ways" to convince him. He implies that woman are manipulative people, but Clytaemnestra prevails over this



man when he agrees to walk on the red carpet. She still has a lot of power over these men, including her husband.

Gender 9: Because Agamemnon chose to follow the authority of his wife, rather than respecting the highest authority of the gods above. The Chorus suggests that he will be punished for this crime against the gods since he has offended them by walking on the red carpet. This man will suffer now because of his wife, since the gods have abandoned him.

Gender 10: Clytaemnestra behaves like a man when she pressures Cassandra to go inside of the palace. She becomes very aggressive and dominating, just like she herself was treated earlier by Agamemnon and the Chorus. Now Clytaemnestra behaves like a man and belittles Cassandra, although the Trojan does not obey as Agamemnon had done when pressured to walk on the carpet. This suggests that women have stronger personalities than men do.

Gender 11: Cassandra believes that women should be good wives and respect their husbands. Although Clytaemnestra is angry that Iphigenia is dead, Cassandra does not think that she has the right to murder her husband. Her disgust runs so deeply that she compares Clytaemnestra to a hideous monster. Even now, when the Chorus of old men ignores her warnings about what will happen, this woman remains calm and passively accepts that she will die soon.

Gender 12: The Chorus does not believe that Clytaemnestra actually committed an act of murder because she is a woman. To prove this, she shows them her bloody hands and explains exactly how she carried out this act of violence. They respond by saying that she will be crushed with "man's bitterness," as if the crime of murder was made even worse because it was committed by a woman.

Gender 13: Clytaemnestra behaves very much like a man even though she is a woman, upsetting the Chorus of Elders. She does everything that a woman is not supposed to do: she is a murderer, she talks back to them, and she wants to be the ruler of Argos. These are things that men usually do. The Chorus of men adds that women such as Helen and Clytaemnestra are evil creatures that bring destruction and ruin to men.

Gender 14: When the Chorus discovers that Aegisthus helped Clytaemnestra to plan the murder plot, it blames Aegisthus for Agamemnon's death, ignoring Clytaemnestra. The old men call Aegisthus a woman, because he didn't have the courage to kill the King himself; this comment greatly hurts his pride, and he becomes very angry. Meanwhile, Clytaemnestra, the woman who actually committed this crime stands by, forgotten and unnoticed as the men argue.

Gender 15: By the end of the story, the women and men reverse roles from what they were in the beginning. Now the only woman, Clytaemnestra, is in charge and bosses around all of the men around her such as Aegisthus and the Chorus, who are all acting like women. Before, it was the Chorus of men that was disrespectful to her, but now

Clytaemnestra takes charge and belittles all of them instead. This reversal calls the role of women in Greek society into question.



Topic Tracking: Gods

Gods 1: The Chorus fears the gods and shows great respect towards these beings, such as the goddess Artemis, because they are so powerful. Artemis, for example, had demanded that Agamemnon sacrifice his daughter before the Greek ships could sail to Troy. The old men appeal to the gods for help, urging Artemis' brother Apollo to protect them as well. They also praise the king of the gods, Zeus, hoping that he will protect them as well.

Gods 2: Even though the Greeks have won a major victory, Clytaemnestra still hopes that they are not disrespectful towards the gods by destroying their sacred altars or committing any heinous crimes, such as rape. She also notes that the fire signal that was seen by the Watchman was kindled by Hephaestus himself, the god of fire.

Gods 3: People who commit terrible crimes are tormented by avenging goddesses called the Furies. Not only will a person be punished by human laws, but the gods will punish these people also. The Chorus warns that some Greek soldiers will be punished by the gods for plundering Troy too much or being too violent in their conquest.

Gods 4: Just as Clytaemnestra had warned against, now the Herald announces that the Greeks had, indeed, destroyed the altars of the gods in Troy. He also thanks the gods Hermes and Zeus for bringing him back to Argos safely, since a storm destroyed most of the other ships in the Greek fleet while returning home. The Herald shows a great respect towards the gods.

Gods 5: The gods have punished the Greeks by destroying most of their ships after leaving Troy. The reason for this is probably because of the excessive behavior that the Greek warriors displayed while conquering the city by disrespecting the gods. The Greeks destroyed the sacred altars in Troy, burnt the city to the ground, killed every adult man, and enslaved all women and children. The humans were punished by the gods for their lawlessness.

Gods 6: The Trojan prince Paris was punished for his disregard for the sanctity of marriage, and also his disrespect towards his host, Menelaus. While a guest at Menelaus' palace in Sparta, Paris kidnapped Menelaus' wife, Helen, and fled to Troy. Because of this utter disrespect, Paris' entire city was destroyed by the Greeks with the help of the gods.

Gods 7: King Agamemnon recognizes that the gods are wholly responsible for the Greek victory at Troy, and he thanks the gods for aiding him and bringing his ship back to Argos safely. He says, "We must thank the gods with grace," because he is so grateful to them. He claims no responsibility at all himself, even though it was he who commanded the Greek army.

Gods 8: Clytaemnestra tries to convince Agamemnon to walk across the red carpet, insisting that he deserves special recognition for his accomplishments. However, he is



afraid to offend the gods, insisting that the gods have given the Greeks victory, and he had nothing to do with it at all. The gods deserve recognition, not him. But Clytaemnestra continues to pressure him.

Gods 9: Clytaemnestra finally convinces Agamemnon to walk across the red carpet because she is so persistent. Afterwards, she thanks Zeus for helping her, although she also knows that Agamemnon has offended Zeus by demanding recognition for his role in the Greek victory, taking credit away from the gods, by walking across a red carpet barefoot.

Gods 10: Cassandra remains outside in the chariot, but Clytaemnestra tries to coax her to go within the palace, declaring that Zeus made her into a slave, and she should just accept this fact instead of trying to resist. The Queen adds that she is making a sacrifice to the gods within the palace at the altar and wants Cassandra to be there as well to pay homage to the gods. The young woman refuses, however.

Gods 11: The prophetess Cassandra is very upset at Apollo because he will not save her from being murdered by Clytaemnestra. This is her curse, that she can see future events before they occur, but she can do nothing to change them. The gods have destined her to die along with Agamemnon, and there is nothing that no human can do to change that fact.

Gods 12: Although Agamemnon was acting under the command of a goddess, Clytaemnestra still blames Agamemnon for the death of her daughter, Iphigenia. She uses his actions as justification for murdering him in the bathtub, rather than recognizing that he was following orders from the gods.

Gods 13: Clytaemnestra justifies her actions in killing Agamemnon by stating that the king of the gods, Zeus himself, prompted her to kill her husband, so there was no reason for her to feel guilty. She states that basically, she did not even do the killing herself, because Zeus was exacting justice through her body.

Gods 14: The Chorus of Argive Elders does not believe Clytaemnestra's argument that the gods support her act of murder. Instead, they insist that the gods will punish her and Aegisthus for what they have done, and true justice will be served to the people in Argos when Agamemnon's son Orestes comes and avenges the death of his father, with the assistance of the gods.



Topic Tracking: Justice

Justice 1: The Chorus of Elders thinks that the sacrifice of Iphigenia was unjust, as was the loss of so many Greek lives during these past ten years of fighting in the Trojan War. These men think that it is silly for so much loss to occur for the sake of this one woman, Helen.

Justice 2: Even though the Chorus thinks that the Greeks are justified in attacking Troy because of what Paris has done, these men also state that the Greeks must be moderate in the amount of damage they cause to the city. If they become too excessive, then that is unjust and those responsible for wreaking such havoc will be punished accordingly.

Justice 3: Once again, these old men warn about the dangers of becoming excessive and prideful. Arrogance is a crime that shall be punished heavily; Paris was guilty of this arrogance because he violated Menelaus' trust and kidnapped his wife, Helen. Paris suffered terribly for this by his own death and then the destruction of his entire city and the murder of his family.

Justice 4: Agamemnon declares that he shall exact justice upon the citizens of Argos accordingly now that he has returned. Those who have been loyal to him and have not caused any problems shall be rewarded, and those citizens who have been troublemakers shall simply be put to death. Justice for Agamemnon is very simple: reward those who follow the law and remove those who do not.

Justice 5: Cassandra does not think that it is justice that she is going to soon be murdered by Clytaemnestra for no reason other than Agamemnon has made her into his love slave, and Clytaemnestra is very jealous of her. The prophetess names off a long list of sufferings, declaring that the destruction of Troy and the death of her family was not justified, and the Greeks were wrong for what they did.

Justice 6: The prophetess Cassandra accepts responsibility for the curse that Apollo put on her after she rejected his love. She and Apollo had an agreement, that if he gave her the gift of prophesy then she would be his lover; however, she did not hold up her side of the bargain and Apollo punished her. This was just, because she was arrogant and dared to defy a god.

Justice 7: As Cassandra enters the royal palace at Argos and prepares to die, she prays that justice will be done one day when Agamemnon's son Orestes shall return and kill Clytaemnestra for what she is about to do. Justice for Cassandra is "An eye for an eye," since the murderer must be punished with her own murder later on.

Justice 8: Clytaemnestra feels that she is completely justified in killing her husband Agamemnon in order to avenge the death of her eldest daughter Iphigenia. Although a woman should respect her husband, Clytaemnestra's love for her daughter overpowers



her, erasing any feelings she might have felt for her husband. She feels no remorse for what she is done and is actually quite pleased with herself.

Justice 9: The angry wife adds that Zeus himself was using her as a divine tool to exact justice upon Agamemnon because of his father's actions. Atreus had cooked Thyestes' children in the oven and then fed them to him. Clytaemnestra declares that Agamemnon was punished for his father's sins, and that she in fact had a very small part in the murder, for it was Zeus' doing.

Justice 10: Clytaemnestra thinks that she has brought justice to Argos at long last, ending a curse of bloodshed that has continued for several generations. She declares to the Chorus, 'I swept from these halls/the murder,' thinking that the murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra will erase the bloodshed that occurred in previous generations. Like Cassandra, her idea of justice is "An eye for an eye," as more murder can cleanse the sin of earlier murders.

Justice 11: Aegisthus supports Clytaemnestra's version of justice, that the death of Agamemnon will somehow fix the mistakes that Atreus made in cooking Thyestes' children in the stove and then feeding them to him.

Justice 12: The Chorus of Elders does not believe that Zeus has used Clytaemnestra as a divine tool to exact justice against Agamemnon for killing Iphigenia or to punish him for Atreus' sins. Instead, they believe firmly that she is very wrong, and they pray for the day that Agamemnon's son Orestes will return to Argos and avenge his father's death, thus continuing the cycle of bloodshed even further. Now the son will kill the mother which will be justice according to these old men.



Lines 1-502

King Agamemnon from the Greek city of Argos has been gone for ten years. During this time, the Trojan War is being waged at Troy between the Greeks and the Trojans in a fight to take Helen back to Greece. She is the wife of Menelaus, but she was kidnapped by a Trojan guest named Paris; Menelaus asked his brother Agamemnon to help him to gather an army of Greeks from all of the different city-states in the land in order to go to Troy and kidnap Helen. After a large army was assembled however, none of the ships could sail from the port city of Aulis until Agamemnon sacrificed his eldest daughter Iphigenia. After this was done, the goddess Artemis was appeased, sending wind down from the heavens so that the Greek ships could sail off to fight in Troy. Agamemnon's wife Clytaemnestra was outraged that he violated their family by killing his own daughter. Clytaemnestra did not agree with this decision, but Agamemnon did not ask her opinion before he committed the sacrifice. To him, the importance of helping out his brother Menelaus was greater than the love that he might feel toward his daughter or wife.

Topic Tracking: Gender 1

Time went on and, as the Trojan War was being fought in a city that is very far away, a Watchman has sat waiting on the roof of King Agamemnon's palace to see if there is any signal that the war has ended, especially for a sign that the Greeks are victorious. When the war is finally over after ten long years of harsh fighting, the Greeks sail home again. The Watchman laments to himself that he has waited for so long, with no sign at all from Agamemnon's men. Suddenly, he sights a blaze of light out in the distance, recognizing this for the signal that he has awaited all of these years. Excited, he proclaims aloud, "I cry the news aloud to Agamemnon's queen/that she may rise up from her bed of state with speed/to raise the rumor of gladness welcoming this beacon,/and singing rise, if truly the city of [Troy]/has fallen, as the shining of this fire proclaims" Lines 25-29. As the Watchman rushes off to tell Clytaemnestra that her husband is finally returning from the Trojan War, the Chorus of Elders enters and recalls past events about what caused the Trojan War.

The Chorus mentions that Agamemnon and his brother Menelaus are very similar to each other, "twin throned, twin sceptered, in twofold power" and they are also called the "Atreidae" because they both have the same father, Atreus. These men wonder what shall be the outcome of the war, for they have not yet spoken to the Watchman about the signal he has witnessed; they express some disdain that the war is fought all for the sake of one woman, Helen, saying that it is all for "one woman's promiscuous sake." Helen is not very respected by the Chorus, since she is called "promiscuous" for going so willingly with the Trojan Paris after he kidnapped her from Menelaus' palace at Sparta. These men also feel excluded from the joys of fighting because they are so old, "dishonored in our old bones,/ [we] cast off even then from the gathering horde,/ stay here, to prop up/ on staves the strength of a baby./ Since the young vigor that urges/ inward to the heart/ is frail as age, no warcraft yet perfect,/ while beyond age, leaf/ withered, man goes three footed/ no stronger than a child is,/ a dream that falters in



daylight" Lines 72-82. Because these men are so old and weak, they are unable to be the great soldiers they perhaps were once in their youth; they have "the strength of a baby." Even though these men are filled with the impulse to go and fight this "vigor" is limited by the physical strength that is left in their bones. In old age, men have three feet, because of the third "foot" that is their walking stick or cane; the Chorus accepts its own mortality and realizes how death approaches them. They are "a dream that falters in daylight," for they are slowly fading away as their bodies grow until death shall consume them all. As a result, they are somewhat bitter that they are old, jealous of the younger men who are still able to fight.

Topic Tracking: Gender 2

Clytaemnestra approaches the Chorus as they speak, but she does not disturb them or make her presence known. Continuing, they lament again how sad it is that the Greeks have attacked Troy, and it is worse still that the war has gone on for ten years without any information about what has happened to those who left so long ago. They recall the prophesy that a soothsayer named Calchas had once made about the future. After observing a hound devouring a pregnant rabbit, the Chorus warns that although Troy will fall and many innocents shall be killed (implied due to the unborn young inside of the rabbit), some gods will be angry, such as Artemis, and may wish to punish the Greeks for destroying the city of Troy. They pray that her brother Apollo will protect the Greeks from any danger that his sister may cause, such as stopping the winds from blowing and forcing Agamemnon to make another sacrifice, as he did when he killed Iphigenia. The Chorus praises the wisdom of the king of the gods, Zeus, knowing that he will watch over them all in dealing with any dilemma.

Topic Tracking: Gods 1

The Chorus recalls that it was Artemis who demanded the original sacrifice of Iphigenia, it was she who had taken away their wind for the ships, for the priest Calchas told the Greeks what this goddess wanted. It was a difficult choice for Agamemnon to make, as the man uttered aloud, "My fate is angry if I obey these,/but angry if I slaughter/this child, the beauty of my house,/with maiden blood shed staining/these father's hands beside the altar./What of these things goes now without disaster?/How shall I fail my ships/and lose my faith of battle?" Lines 206-214. The loss of Agamemnon's manliness and the mere thought of being disloyal to his army is the deciding factor; he murders his own daughter so that the army can sail off to Troy, his pride as a general intact, although his role as a good father is destroyed. The Chorus is very disapproving of what Agamemnon has done, since the war is fought just for this one woman, Helen. The men describe the innocent look Iphigenia had before she was sacrificed by her father; how she was lifted up to the altar by all of the soldiers in the army; how she looked out at all of the men with sad, pleading eyes before her father stuck his knife against her. No one came to her rescue or even protested against what was about to be done. In a way, it is as if not only Agamemnon, but also the entire Greek army is responsible for Iphigenia's death.



Topic Tracking: Gender 3

Topic Tracking: Justice 1

The Chorus turns to recognize Clytaemnestra, who has been standing nearby listening to them speak. They recognize that, in King Agamemnon's absence, she is the ruler of Argos. They offer her their reverence and respect, asking if she has any good news to bring to them. The queen announces that the city of Troy has been captured by the Greeks, since she has observed the long line of signal fires that have been set ablaze all the way from Troy to within sight of the watchtower at Argos, each after the other, invoking the name of the Greek hearth god, Hephaestus. Obviously, the Watchman has informed her of the signal fire that he has seen. The Chorus is stunned to hear this news, especially since they have waited for the war to end for so many years. They ask their queen to describe in detail what is happening in Troy at the moment, thanking the gods for this great victory.

The queen imagines then, that "I think that the city echoes with a clash of cries.../Trojans are stooping now to gather in their arms/their dead, husbands and brothers; children lean to clasp/the aged who begot them, crying upon the death/of those most dear, from lips that will never be free" Lines 320-329. Rejoicing in this Greek victory and describing the suffering that the Trojan people are no doubt experiencing at that moment, she also prays that the Greeks will not disrespect the gods, lamenting "Let not their passion overwhelm them." Clytaemnestra hopes that the Greek men will not become so caught up in their victory that they will go too far and plunder the gods' altars or ruthlessly rape any of the Trojan women. The queen thus prays for the safe return of her husband Agamemnon and the rest of the Greek army.

Topic Tracking: Gods 2

Upon hearing that they have been victorious, the Chorus of Elders changes its attitude a bit about the war, no longer bitter, now that they know it is soon to be over and the men will be returning home. They sing about how great and mighty the god Zeus is, thanking him for bringing victory to the Greeks. They go on to say that Paris Alexander deserved this punishment, to have his city destroyed, because of the wrong he did to the Greeks by taking Helen away from Menelaus while staying in his city as a guest. Paris has received exactly what he deserves, stating that "There is not any armor/in gold against perdition/for him who spurns the high altar/of Justice down into the darkness" Lines 381-384. Even though he is a prince and his father is king of Troy, Paris cannot hide anywhere from the justice that the Greeks have shown to him for the wicked crime of kidnapping his host's wife. The Trojans have gotten exactly what they deserve at the hands of the Greeks.

Yet not all of these Greek soldiers will be fortunate to come back alive, and the Chorus laments those who will die in battle, warning also that some men will be tortured by the gods for sins of excess, "The gods fail not to mark/those who have killed many./The black Furies stalking the man/fortunate beyond all right/wrench back again the set of his life/and drop him to darkness.../Let me attain no envied wealth,/let me not plunder cities,/neither be taken in turn, and face/life in the power of another" Lines 461-474. The



Chorus advises that the soldiers must have moderation in the amount of people that they slaughter and in the amount of plunder they will steal from Troy. If the Greek soldiers do not have moderation, then they will be punished by those gods of revenge called the Furies. They also state that it is a very sad life to have to live after being captured, suggesting perhaps that it is better to die than to live controlled by someone else.

Topic Tracking: Gods 3

Topic Tracking: Justice 2

Having spoken all of these words together as a group, the Chorus of Elders now each speaks one by one, questioning if this news of Troy's demise is really true, or if Clytaemnestra is mistaken. One of these men comments that "It is like a woman indeed/to take rapture before the fact is shown for true/They believe too easily, are too quick to shift/from ground to ground; and swift indeed/the rumor voiced by a woman dies again" Lines 483-487. Although the Chorus had earlier said that the queen must be treated equally with King Agamemnon since he is away and there is no one else left to rule the city of Argos, now they express some disdain for her simply because she is a woman. The men say that women are impulsive creatures who do not think before they act, and who take rumors to be facts without even making sure that they are really true or not; women are unstable creatures that are "too quick to shift from ground to ground" and as such, women cannot be trusted or relied upon. This discussion about Clytaemnestra is interrupted as a Herald suddenly approaches them from the beach beneath the palace, carrying an olive sprig for peace. The Chorus of Elders waits anxiously for the Herald to arrive so that they can hear what news he brings to them.

Topic Tracking: Gender 4



Lines 503-974

Upon arriving at the very spot where Clytaemnestra and the Chorus are standing, the Herald greets them all. He proclaims that he is one of the men who went off to fight in the Trojan War, and he has at last returned after ten years of fighting. The man remains amazed that he has returned to his home city of Argos, pleased to know that his body shall die in old age on this soil and be buried on this ground, not in some foreign land. The Herald goes on to thank the gods for delivering the Greeks home safely and for helping them conquering the city of Troy after Paris kidnapped Menelaus' wife Helen. The Herald sends gratitude first to Zeus and secondly to Hermes, the messenger god, since Hermes has watched over him in order to bring this joyous message of victory to Argos after so many years. Then he states again that the Trojan altars have been destroyed, yet Paris was deserving of all this due to his terrible crime of raping Helen and of kidnapping her from Menelaus, her husband. Menelaus' brother Agamemnon is not too far behind the Herald in coming up from the beach, and it is he who is this great hero that has carried such great victories to the Greeks, with the assistance from the gods above.

Topic Tracking: Gods 4

The Chorus of Elders utters with great gladness that they have missed the Greek warriors who were away in the war, fearing that they would never return home, and that many of these men wished for death because the anxiety was too great to bear. The Herald is touched to hear this news, assuring the old men that everything shall be better now that they are back unharmed. He says that all of the fighting is in the past, as is the suffering that these Greek warriors have endured, "I call a long farewell to all our unhappiness.../And here, in this sun's shining, we can boast aloud,/whose fame has gone with wings across the land and sea: 'Upon a time the Argive host took Troy...'/And they who hear such things shall call this city blest/and the leaders of the host; and high the grace of God/shall be exalted, that did this. You have the story" Lines 571-581. The Herald thanks Zeus, suggesting also that in the years ahead these Greek warriors will be known as heroes for their bravery. The Chorus' spirits are lifted after hearing these words of encouragement, saying that "Old men are always young enough to learn," since they had become so bitter and devoid of any hope that the war would ever end or that the warriors would ever return home to Argos. They add that Clytaemnestra, their queen, must be told this news now as well, so that she can hear for herself.

Clytaemnestra is somewhat bitter now herself, since she was previously mocked by the Chorus for believing that the Greek ships were finally returning home after the Watchman saw the blaze burning out in the distance, a signal intended to advertise that that Troy had been captured. The queen of Argos mocks the Chorus in turn herself, saying "Men spoke like that; they thought I wandered in my wits;/yet I made the sacrifice, and in the womanish strain/voice after voice caught up the cry along the city/to echo in the temples of the gods and bless/and still the fragrant flame that melts the sacrifice" Lines 592-597. It appears that she is gloating somewhat that she was right in thinking that the Greeks were indeed returning home, even though the Chorus thought



that she was jumping to conclusions too quickly without making sure that it was really true or not. She states that her loyalty to the gods has helped her men and her husband to return home safely, recalling that she made a sacrifice to assure that the gods would protect these men.

Topic Tracking: Gender 5

She tells the Herald to wait before saying anything more, for she wishes to hear about the fall of Troy directly from her husband. The woman adds that she yearns to see her husband once again, "But now.../what else/is light more sweet for a woman to behold than this,/to spread the gates before her husband home from war and saved by God's hand?--take this message to the king:/Come, and with speed, back to the city that longs for him,/and may he find a wife within his house as true/as on the day he left her..." Lines 600-607. Clytaemnestra proclaims that she remains loyal to Agamemnon and has not loved anyone else other than him during these ten years, nor has she had sexual intercourse with anyone else either. She thus urges the Herald to return to the ships and tell her king to come to the palace right away.

The Herald is impressed by her devotion, yet the Chorus interrupts before he is able to leave, asking the Herald if Agamemnon's brother Menelaus is still alive. The Herald is reluctant to speak, because he is missing from the Greek army after a large storm shattered the entire Greek fleet as they were returning home from Troy. Afraid to talk about this sad news in the midst of the rejoicing that filled them all moments ago, the Herald only mentions that the gods conspired against the Greek fleet for some reason, but some divinity protected Agamemnon's single ship from being destroyed in the sea. When the storm ended the next day, the sea was "blossoming with dead men" who had drowned when their ships were destroyed during the storm. Yet he adds that if any of those Greeks lost at sea survive and return home, Menelaus would endure, because he is such a brave, daring man, and also because his brother Agamemnon was protected by the gods already; it would then make sense for the gods to save Menelaus as well. With these hopeful words, the Herald returns to the beach to carry Clytaemnestra's message to the king.

Topic Tracking: Gods 5

After the Herald departs, the Chorus of elders becomes very unhappy again after hearing this news about Menelaus, crying aloud what a wretched woman that Helen is, because it was she who caused all of this trouble between the Greeks and Trojans in the first place. They utter, "Who is he that named you.../Helen, which is death? Appropriately/death of ships, death of men and cities/from the bower's soft curtained/and secluded luxury she sailed then,/driven on the giant west wind,/and armored men in their thousands came,/huntsmen down the oar blade's fading footprint/to struggle in blood with those/who by the banks of Simoeis/beached their hulls where the leaves break" Lines 681-698. Helen is also blamed for the Trojan War, portrayed as a woman lounging around in "luxury" as thousands of Greek and Trojan men died out on the battlefield or near a river named Simoeis, which flows near Troy. Her name is said to mean "death" because it was because of her that so many "ships,



men, and cities" all died for the sake of this one woman. The Chorus is driven into a deep depression after hearing that Agamemnon's brother Menelaus is lost at sea and no one knows where he is.

Topic Tracking: Gender 6

The men continue to lament about the losses endured during the war, cursing now the very birth of Paris, who is the man that kidnapped Helen from Menelaus' palace in Sparta. He is called a "lion cub" due to the viciousness with which he snatched Helen away from her husband, yet the Chorus states again that Paris' entire royal family got what they deserved for bearing such a wretched man into the world; his father Priam, the aged king of Troy, is one such man who was slain by the Greeks as his city burned to the ground around him. Paris is guilty for being too prideful, a terrible sin to have committed. For those who do not live their lives moderately, there are terrible punishments to be received from the gods above, "And Righteousness is a shining in/the smoke of mean houses./Her blessing is on the just man./From high hills starred with gold by reeking hands/she turns back/with eyes that glance away into the simple in heart,/spurning the strength of gold/stamped with false flattery./And all things she steers to fulfillment" Lines 772-781. The goddess of justice protects men who are just; in this instance, the just men are the Greeks, they who have punished Troy for Paris' sins.

Topic Tracking: Gods 6

Topic Tracking: Justice 3

At this moment, the long-lost King Agamemnon finally returns to Argos and enters the area where his wife, Clytaemnestra, and the Chorus of Elders are still standing together. A female prisoner named Cassandra rides along in his chariot, but she does not speak. The old men greet their king, welcoming him back. They recall briefly that when he had first sailed off to Troy with the Greek fleet, they were unhappy with Agamemnon because he had sacrificed his eldest daughter Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis in order for the ships to have any wind to sail. Yet this old pain and sadness has gone away over time and the men are happy that their king has returned alive, well, and victorious.. The Chorus adds that Agamemnon shall soon learn what has happened in Argos while he was away.

Agamemnon replies back that he is honored by these men and happy that they have missed his presence in the city. He adds that it was the gods who gave him justice on the battlefields at Troy, "Not from the lips of men the gods/heard justice, but in one firm cast they laid their votes/within the urn of blood that [Troy] must die/and all her people.../For all this we must thank the gods with grace of much/high praise and memory, who fenced within our toils/of wrath the city; and, because one woman [Helen] strayed,/the beast of [Greece] broke them" Lines 814-824. The king of Argos thus owes all of his successes not to his men who fought so bravely, but moreover to the gods who all supported the Greeks during the Trojan War. By the end, these gods all turned against Troy and decided that the city would be destroyed for the sake of this one woman, Helen, whom Paris had kidnapped away from the Greek Menelaus.



Topic Tracking: Gender 7

Topic Tracking: Gods 7

Agamemnon says that since he has returned, the city will be restored once more to lawful order; those who have been disloyal shall be punished and killed, and those who have been loyal shall be rewarded. He is also eager to catch up on the gossip and discover all that has happened in Argos during the past ten years. Declaring that he shall have a meeting of all citizens, the king prepares to go inside of his palace without even saying a single word to his queen, Clytaemnestra, who has been standing silently. Now, however, she speaks aloud, lamenting about how difficult it was for her while Agamemnon was away for so long, since she would always hear so many ghastly rumors about how Agamemnon had been killed in some gruesome way, or that terrible things had happened to him; many times she had tried to commit suicide because it was too stressful to be worrying all of the time. Clytaemnestra proclaims that she had sent their young son Orestes to live with a friend, fearing that he would be assassinated. Finally, she cries again how much she missed Agamemnon and how happy she is that he has returned. To honor him, the queen asks Agamemnon to step out of his chariot and walk on a red carpet of honor, because he deserves special recognition.

Topic Tracking: Justice 4

Agamemnon replies that he is very flattered to hear these words from his wife, yet he cannot step on the red carpet because this is too high of an honor that it would make him no longer a humble man. He warns her, "And all this -- do not try in the woman's ways to make/me delicate.../nor cross my path with jealousy by strewing the ground/with robes. Such a state becomes the gods, and none beside./I am a mortal, a man; I cannot trample upon/these tinted splendors without fear thrown in my path./I tell you, as a man, not god, to reverence me" Lines 918-925. The king suggests that his wife, like any "woman" is trying to use her womanly charm to make him do something that he does not want to do. Agamemnon thinks that walking on a red carpet would focus too much attention on him and would honor him too highly, thus making him seem like a god. The gods punish people who compare themselves to the gods, and to avoid this, Agamemnon is trying to remain humble. Clytaemnestra becomes very stubborn, stating that he is afraid of the gods and is weak; she goes on to tempt her husband, saying that if he is not envied by his fellow citizens, then they will not respect him. In order to keep his people's respect, Clytaemnestra declares that he must walk on the red carpet; finally she urges him simply to surrender to her wishes, "Give way of your free will."

Topic Tracking: Gender 8

Topic Tracking: Gods 8

After hearing this remark, King Agamemnon does indeed relent out of frustration. He takes off his shoes, preparing to step down from his chariot and walk on the red carpet, observed by everyone else who is around. He does this regretfully, however, saying that he feels shameful to be dirtying this fine cloth with his feet. Directing some of his followers to also bring Cassandra into the palace behind him, the king steps down and



walks inside of his palace. As Queen Clytaemnestra follows her husband inside, she utters a prayer aloud to Zeus, who is the king of the gods, thanking him for his role in returning her husband to Argos safely and hoping that he will continue to protect her family in the time that is ahead of them. She appears to be very happy that her husband has returned after such a long time of worrying. It seems as if Clytaemnestra has finally found some peace of mind for herself, and she happily follows her King inside.

Topic Tracking: Gods 9



Lines 975-1330

After King Agamemnon and Queen Clytaemnestra go inside of their royal palace in the city of Argos, the captured Trojan woman named Cassandra remains seated in the chariot, waiting to be led inside by Agamemnon's servants as he has ordered them to do. The Chorus of Elders, although happy that the Trojan War has ended, says that it is afraid about something. These wise old men are not sure what exactly is afflicting them, only that "Hope is gone utterly,/the sweet strength is far away./Surely this is not fantasy./Surely it is real, this whirl of drifts/that spin the stricken heart. Still I pray; may all this/expectation fade as vanity/into unfulfillment, and not be" Lines 992-1000. The Chorus is certain that something terrible is going to happen very soon, they pray to the gods for comfort and ask for the disaster that approaches them to be avoided. There are no exact details given, however, about what exactly is bothering them.

The Chorus mutters about fate and how men are so incomparable to the gods, for humans are at the very mercy of the gods. They speak, "But when the black and mortal blood of man/has fallen to the ground before his feet, who then/can sing spells to call it back again?/Did Zeus not warn us once/when he struck to impotence/that one who could in truth charm back the dead men?/Had the gods not so ordained/that fate should stand against fate/to check any man's excess" Lines 1019-1027. The Chorus of Elders mentions a man who tried to bring people back from the dead and who was punished for his pride, just like any man who questions the god's power. This is the same reference that Agamemnon himself had made when his wife begged him to walk on a red carpet so that people could bow down and honor him. He feared that this act might offend the gods, yet his wife insisted and he agreed to obey her wishes. Perhaps the Chorus is suggesting that Agamemnon will be punished by fate for his own excesses after walking on the red carpet, for this was his fear. These men continue to worry and lament as Clytaemnestra reappears from inside of her palace.

Topic Tracking: Gender 9

The Queen of Argos ignores the Chorus altogether and addresses Cassandra, who is still sitting alone in the chariot. She urges the Trojan slave to come inside of the palace, since Zeus decided that she would be controlled by her captors. Inside of her palace, they are waiting to pour an offering at the altar of the gods until this girl can join them. Cassandra does not reply, however, and the Chorus wonders if the Trojan is even able to understand what she is saying, since she is from a foreign land after all. Clytaemnestra calls her a "barbarian," and impatiently urges her again to come inside, "I have no leisure to stand outside the house and waste/time on this woman. At the central altarstone/the flocks are standing, ready for sacrifice/we make to this glad day we never hoped to see./You: if you are obeying my commands at all, be quick./But if in ignorance you fail to comprehend,/speak not, but make with your barbarian hand some sign" Lines 1055-1061. The Queen is very anxious for Cassandra to go inside of the house, but there is no response from the girl at all. In some ways, Clyatemnestra acts like a man by saying she isn't going to waste her time on "this woman." One would think that Clytaemnestra would have more compassion for the girl, yet instead she treats her with



the same disrespect that the Chorus and Agamemnon showed to her. Disgusted at having no response from Cassandra, Clytaemnestra storms back into her house.

Topic Tracking: Gender 10

Topic Tracking: Gods 10

However, Cassandra then steps out of the chariot, lamenting aloud to Apollo. Stunned that she has now decided to speak, the Chorus reprimands her that Apollo cannot do anything to help her. She continues to cry, "Apollo!" in vain, while the Chorus points out that she is a prophetess with the ability to see into the future. The old men wonder if she can see her own death as it will occur. Cassandra cries out maniacally that God hates Agamemnon because of his father Atreus, recalling that Atreus once cooked his brother Thyestes' children and fed them to him. The Chorus declares that it does not like prophets, nor does it want to know the future. Ignoring these words, she speaks ambiguously about a "stroke of atrocity she plans within the house." Confused, the men do not know what she is talking about, even as she continues to talk about a husband being bathed "bright with water" while nearby there is a murderous woman who is going to deliver a "monstrous death" to her husband. The Chorus of Elders, realizing that she is talking about Clytaemnestra murdering Agamemnon, becomes very afraid. Now there is no hope, there is no comfort, as they scream "Ruin is near, and swift."

The Trojan prophetess finally speaks more exactly, "Keep from his mate the bull./Caught in the folded web's/entanglement she pinions him and with the black horn/strikes. And he crumples in the watered bath./Guile, I tell you, and death there in the cauldron wrought" Lines 1125-1129. Cassandra explains how Clytaemnestra shall murder her husband, who is the "bull," for she will bind his arms in some sort of a net, stabbing him to death, until he shall collapse into the bathtub. She warns against Clytaemnestra's "guile" or cleverness, for it has thus far deceived them all. The Chorus does not want to believe this news, saying that prophecies serve no good use. Yet Cassandra is in her own little world, asking Apollo why he has chosen to have her die there with Agamemnon, comparing herself to a nightingale which lives such a peaceful life. She wonders why must her life be filled with death and violence. First, she saw her home, Troy, burned to the ground, its people slain and its treasures stolen. Now she, too, will die at the hands of Clytaemnestra. Cassandra laments for the sheep slaughtered at Troy, while the Chorus begins to wonder if she will ever stop complaining about all of the misfortunes that have befallen her, saying "I can not see the end."

Topic Tracking: Gods 11

Topic Tracking: Justice 5

Yet Cassandra continues with her lamenting, recalling that in the past there was a terrible sin that occurred in that house of Atreus. This girl had never been to Argos before and knew nothing about what Atreus did to Thyestes' children, and she states that there are "vengeful spirits" in that house because of the injustice that was done to Thyestes. She then asks the Chorus somewhat sarcastically what their reaction to those words are, "Did I go wide, or hit, like a real archer? Am I/some swindling seer who hawks his lies from door to door?/Upon your oath, bear witness that I know by heart/the



legend of ancient wickedness within this house" Lines 1194-1197. The Chorus of Elders is stunned that she can know about this. She replies that Apollo himself revealed these events to her. The Chorus is now very interested to hear about this girl, asking if Apollo fathered any children by her. Cassandra says that he wanted to be her lover, and in return he would give the gift of prophesy, but after she received her prophetic gifts she rejected Apollo's love. Her punishment as a result is that, although she can keep her gift of prophesy, no one believes what she tells them. Contrary to this statement, the Chorus of Elders says that it does believe that Agamemnon's life is in danger.

Topic Tracking: Justice 6

Cassandra continues to lament that she can see Thyestes' children fluttering above the house, eating their own flesh; she is haunted by this horrible vision. She marvels that a woman would dare to kill her own husband, mentioning the names of some other women in history who have committed violent acts. She compares Clytaemnestra to Scylla, a woman who was turned into a snake monster, forever bound to a coastal rock cave from which she devours passing sailors as their ships travel nearby. In essence, the Queen of Argos is herself a monster inside. Cassandra says that there is no point in complaining any more or in trying to warn anyone about what is going to happen, because nobody will listen to her prophesies anyway. She insists that she and Agamemnon are fated to die. She ends by saying that soon, the Chorus will be standing over her dead body, thinking about how right she had been in predicting what was going to happen. Although everything has been obviously explained, the Chorus acts a bit confused now, saying that it has heard everything but does not understand exactly what she means. The Chorus wonders what man shall kill Agamemnon, but Cassandra reminds them that it is a woman, Clytaemnestra, who shall commit this act of murder.

Topic Tracking: Gender 11

Cassandra again cries out to Apollo, saddened that he is so cruel to her that the Chorus cannot even save her or avoid her own death, for they too now have misunderstood her prophesy so completely. She points out how she has survived the destruction of Troy and the deaths of so many friends, and she has survived all of that ruin only to die after arriving in Argos. She makes another prophesy that shall follow her death and that of Agamemnon, "For there/shall come one to avenge us also, born to slay/his mother, and to wreak death for his father's blood./Outlaw and murderer, driven far from his own land,/he will come back to cope these stones of inward hate./For this is a strong oath and sworn by the high gods, that he shall cast men headlong for his father felled./Why am I then so pitiful? Why must I weep?" Lines 1279-1286. Finally, the Trojan prophetess realizes that she has been complaining a lot, and she suddenly decides that it won't change anything at all. Anyway, her death will be avenged by a son of Clytaemnestra, who shall one day avenge his dead father. Cassandra accepts that she will die. The Chorus of Elders implores her for how she can be so peaceful, knowing that she will be murdered and compares her to a sacrificial cow that will be slain at the altar of God.

Cassandra replies that she can't change what is already predestined to happen, stepping towards the entrance to the palace. Before entering, she points out that the



palace smells like a "slaughterhouse" inside, as if blood has been spilled everywhere, adding that it feels like an "open grave." With these words, the Trojan prophetess begins to walk into the palace, bidding farewell to the members of the Chorus, adding that after she falls at the hand of another woman, Clytaemnestra, her murderess also shall feel revenge one day. The Chorus watches dumbly as Cassandra walks off to her death, without doing anything to keep her safe. They stand in a state of inaction, calling her a "poor wretch." She speaks one final time before going to die at long last, praying to Apollo, the god of light, "against that ultimate shining when the avengers strike/these monsters down in blood, that they avenge as well/one simple slave who died, a small thing, lightly killed" Lines 1324-1326. Cassandra asks Apollo to remind the person who will one day murder Clytaemnestra that he is also avenging the her death . With these last words, she enters the royal palace of Argos and is not heard from again. The Chorus of Elders does not enter the house, but instead remains outside, waiting and listening.

Topic Tracking: Justice 7



Lines 1331-1677

After bidding farewell to Cassandra as she enters the royal palace at Argos, the Chorus of Elders wonders if her prophesy shall really come true: that Clytaemnestra will murder Cassandra and Agamemnon in revenge for his sacrificing her daughter Iphigenia ten years ago when the Trojan War first began. The old men wonder if a man so great as Agamemnon, having survived the perils at Troy, is fated to be murdered by his own wife. They ask, "Must he give blood for generations gone,/die for those slain and in death pile up/more death to come for the blood shed,/what mortal else who hears shall claim/he was born clear of the dark angel?" Lines 1338-1342. Indeed, Agamemnon's father Atreus polluted the house with sin when he cooked Thyestes' children in the oven and secretly fed them to him. The gods are angry that Atreus has done such a wicked deed, and now his son Agamemnon must suffer as well. At this moment, Agamemnon's voice is heard crying out in pain that he has been stabbed; the Chorus becomes alarmed. The men argue about what they should do, agreeing to enter the palace first to see what has happened.

Upon entering the palace, the Chorus sees a hideous scene before them. Agamemnon and Cassandra are lying the ground, dead, and Clytaemnestra stands over them, explaining that she first restrained her husband by throwing heavy robes around his body so that he could not fight back at all, and then stabbed him three times. His blood splattered all over her body and hands, but Clytaemnestra says that this made her "glad" to feel his blood all over her body. She urges the Chorus to be happy that Agamemnon is dead, since he "filled our cup with evil things unspeakable." The woman is acting very differently than she did earlier when her husband first returned to Argos, inviting him to step upon the red carpet and be honored by his people. Now, her flattery has turned into hatred. Instead of praising him for being the hero that sacked the city of Troy, now Clytaemnestra calls him an evil man, principally because of what he killed their eldest daughter Iphigenia so that Artemis would send wind so that the Greek ships could sail to Troy.

Topic Tracking: Gods 12

Topic Tracking: Justice 8

The Chorus of Elders is not happy that their king is slain, and they are outraged that Clytaemnestra has murdered her husband. The queen of Argos does not show any sympathy, "You cry out as if I were a woman and vain;/but my heart is not fluttered as I speak before you./You know it. You can praise or blame me as you wish;/it is all one to me. That man is Agamemnon,/my husband; he is dead; the work of this right hand/that struck in strength of righteousness. And that is that" Lines 1401-1406. She comments that the Chorus treats her as if she was a "woman," even though she is in fact a woman. Clytaemnestra has murdered the king, and she makes this very clear to the Chorus, that it was "the work of this right hand" which stabbed him. It is almost as if she is out to prove something, since it is so important to her to make the Chorus understand that she is a murderer. The Chorus is disgusted, wondering whatever has driven her to such a



state of evil. They insist that now no one shall care for her, since she will be an outcast who is "crushed with men's bitterness."

Topic Tracking: Gender 12

Clytaemnestra is not humbled by the Chorus' words and becomes defensive, reminding these men that they did absolutely nothing at all to help her daughter Iphigenia when Agamemnon sacrificed her to the goddess Artemis. She warns the old men, asking them to try and stop her, "go on and threaten me, but know that I am ready,/if fairly you can beat me down beneath your hand,/for you to rule; but if the god grant otherwise,/you shall be taught--too late, for sure--to keep your place" Lines 1422-1425. She insists that the gods support these actions against her husband and Cassandra, stating that they will protect her if the old men decide to take the power to rule Argos away from her. Showing little respect, she says "keep in your place." It is clear now that Clytaemnestra plans to rule over Argos, replacing her husband. There is no guilt for what she has done, but instead the woman feels joy, claiming that he deserved this death after murdering their daughter at Aulis before the Trojan War began. Now she stands up for herself instead of allowing these old men to talk back to her.

The Chorus of Elders replies that the Queen is filled with pride, and now she is driven by her emotions rather than rational thoughts, "swung clear to the red act drives the fury within your brain," yet it also predicts that these murders shall one day be avenged. The men repeat the prophesy that Cassandra made, that Clytaemnestra will be murdered herself for what she has done. Again, the woman is disaffected, stating that she will be protected by her friend Aegisthus, who has been her lover while Agamemnon was away. This is the opposite of what she had said earlier, insisting that she had been faithful to her husband when he returned. She thinks it is a further revenge that Agamemnon lies dead on the floor with his mistress Cassandra while she, the murderess, is still living and has also taken another lover. Clytaemnestra is becoming very much like Agamemnon now instead of being a docile, obedient woman. She has murdered, she bosses the Chorus around, she has been so bold as to have a lover, and she wishes to rule over the city called Argos as well. The Chorus laments about how wicked Helen was for starting the Trojan War and causing so many brave men to die; now the Chorus blames women again for this murder of Agamemnon. If it was a man who committed this act, perhaps it would not have been so bad.

Topic Tracking: Gender 13

Clytaemnestra counters again for the Chorus not to blame the entire Trojan War on Helen alone, defending this woman who is in fact her sister. She insists that the deaths of so many Greek men was not Helen's fault, and these old men are merely looking for a scapegoat. The Chorus compares her to a carrion crow, disgusted that she is so proud of the terrible deed she has done. They appeal to Zeus for comfort, suddenly overcome by such sadness at how much they loved King Agamemnon, who has been murdered in his own home by his wife. They add that Zeus controls everything that humans do, including even this act of murder. Clytaemnestra agrees somewhat with this statement, saying that it was not she, but in fact Zeus that killed Agamemnon, "Can you



claim I have done this?/Speak of me never/more as the wife of Agamemnon./In the shadow of this corpse's queen/the old stark avenger/of Atreus for his revel of hate/struck down this man,/last blood for the slaughtered children" Lines 1497-1504. According to her, the King of Argos suffered because of his sins for murdering Iphigenia, but he also because his father, Atreus, murdered Thyestes' children long ago. Atreus'avengers are still in the house, and it is they who have committed this murder under Zeus' direction. Clytaemnestra justifies her actions by stating that this is an act of justice.

Topic Tracking: Gods 13

Topic Tracking: Justice 9

The Chorus continues to cry and complain about Agamemnon's death, and Clytaemnestra merely says again that he deserved what he got, for "With the sword he struck [Iphigenia],/with the sword he paid for his own act." The old men wonder what will happen now to Argos and what shall happen to Agamemnon's body. They are in a state of total confusion about what to do. Their leader has fallen, and with no one to guide their actions, these old men are lost. Clytaemnestra tells them not to worry, since she and her lover, Aegisthus, have a duty to bury Agamemnon because they murdered him, gloating to think that when Agamemnon goes to the Underworld, he will see Iphigenia. She also declares that there is nothing to worry about, for she has ended the curse of Atreus, "I swept from these halls/the murder, the sin, and the fury." There will be no more suffering in Argos according to her, contrary to what the prophetess Cassandra had predicted. Cassandra had said that Clytaemnestra's child would kill her to avenge the father's death, yet she is completely unsuspecting that anything like this will happen.

Topic Tracking: Justice 10

Aegisthus then enters the palace and praises the gods for allowing them to murder Agamemnon. He reveals that this was revenge for him as well, for Thyestes was in fact his father; it was his older siblings who were cooked alive by Agamemnon's father Atreus. He recalls the gruesome details of the banquet where Thyestes' two children were fed to him (Aegisthus was the third child and the youngest), and that Thyestes cursed Atreus' family as a result. Aegisthus feels no guilt about what has happened, "Out of such acts you see this dead man stricken here,/and it was I, in my right, who wrought this murder.../driven, a helpless baby in [Thyestes'] arms, to banishment./Yet I grew up, and justice brought me home again,/till from afar I laid my hands upon this man,/since it was I who pieced together the fell plot./Now I can die in honor again, if die I must,/having seen him caught in the cords of just punishment" Lines 1603-1611. Aegisthus has different reasons for murdering Agamemnon. He also wants to reclaim the city for himself, since Atreus banished Thyestes from the city, fearing that he would try to take back the throne. Aegisthus admits that he helped plot this murder against the King. Both of these two people insist that their actions are supported by the gods above, however, and as such, they are free from any punishments.

Topic Tracking: Justice 11



The Chorus blames Aegisthus for all that has happened, stating that he put Clytaemnestra up to committing this act of murder instead of being honorable and doing it himself, "So then you, like a woman, waited the war out/here in the house, shaming the master's bed with lust,/and planned against the lord of war this treacherous death?" Lines 1625-1627. The Chorus no longer directs its anger toward Clytaemnestra but instead focuses on Aegisthus, comparing him to a cowardly woman. Aegisthus threatens that he will punish the Chorus, declaring "Once broken, you will be easier to deal with." The Chorus insists that Aegisthus cannot rule over Argos because he is not worthy, for he did not even have the courage to kill Agamemnon himself; he had to have a woman do the deed for him. The Chorus does not respect Aegisthus. He replies that Clytaemnestra was in a better position to kill Agamemnon because she is a woman and women are better at deception than men are. Aegisthus warns the Chorus to stop or else they will suffer terribly for their disobedience.

Topic Tracking: Gender 14

Topic Tracking: Justice 12

Defiant, the Chorus hopes that Agamemnon's son Orestes will return to Argos and save them, mocking Aegisthus again for having a woman commit the murder for him, "But why, why then, you coward, could you not have slain your man yourself? Why must it be his wife who killed,/to curse the country and the gods within the ground?/Oh, can Orestes live, be somewhere in sunlight still?/Shall fate grown gracious ever bring him back again/in strength of hand to overwhelm these murderers?" Lines 1642-1648. Orestes remains their only source of hope in stopping these two murderers, nor does the Chorus believe that the gods support what has happened. Instead of perceiving Agamemnon's death to be well-deserved, it believes that the gods shall punish Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus. He threatens the Chorus again, and they become very angry, wishing to fight against him in a swordfight. Aegisthus is prepared to do battle, but Clytaemnestra interrupts, insisting that there will be no more fighting. She urges that there be no more death or bloodshed and asks Aegisthus to go inside of the royal palace with her.

Topic Tracking: Gods 14

Reluctantly, Aegisthus agrees, arguing with the Chorus and trying to pick a fight with them as he is leaving. Once again, Clytaemnestra remains calm, urging Aegisthus to follow her with the words, "These are the howls or impotent rage; forget them, dearest; you/and I/have the power; we two shall bring good order to our house/at least" Lines 1673-1676. Although Clytaemnestra was filled with rage after the death of Agamemnon, now she is now calm, going so far as to advise the man what to do. Now Aegisthus is the emotional one, just like is the Chorus of old men. Now the woman remains the only rational person, while everyone else around her begins to act like an emotional woman. With these final words, Clytaemnestra coaxes her lover Aegisthus back into the palace with the Chorus still standing outside. The queen of Argos adds that even if there is disorder in the city, the two of them will at least make sure that things are orderly inside of the palace, where there is no Chorus of Elders to question their authority. Pleased

with what they have accomplished, the two murderers disappear deep inside of the palace and are not seen again.

Topic Tracking: Gender 15