

# Clytemnestra at Aulis: Euripides and the Reconsideration of Tradition

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**C**LYTEMNESTRA, in her final iteration in extant tragedy, rejects the timeless mythological tradition that presented her as a faithless and deadly woman and wife (Eur. *IA* 1158):

συμμαρτυρήσεις ὡς ἄμεμπτος ἦ γυνή

You shall bear witness that I have been a blameless wife<sup>1</sup>

Given the dramatic context in which it is delivered, this claim is neither inaccurate nor trivial. Indeed, I shall argue, Euripides not only rehabilitates the figure of Clytemnestra throughout the *IA*: he does so in direct contrast to other tragic versions of the character, and he highlights her newfound virtue with specific

<sup>1</sup> Translations by the author unless otherwise noted. On the notoriously problematic text of the *IA*: while we may be certain that some interpolations exist in the manuscript tradition, there is no broad consensus concerning which passages are and are not interpolated, nor indeed on what solutions may be applied or how the text may be best approached. For a diverse set of viewpoints on these questions see D. L. Page, *Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1934); D. Kovacs, "Toward a Reconstruction of *Iphigenia Aulidensis*," *JHS* 123 (2003) 77–103; and S. A. Gurd, *Iphigenias at Aulis: Textual Multiplicity, Radical Philology* (Ithaca 2005). My own approach will be the following: the text presented will follow that of J. Diggle, *Euripidis Fabulae III* (Oxford 1994). Moreover, I use as a guideline Diggle's subdivision of the text into four categories according to his estimation of their probabilities of authenticity (cf. III p.358). Unless otherwise noted, all passages discussed here will belong to the two categories that Diggle believes most likely to be authentic ("fortasse Euripidei" and "fortasse non Euripidei"). While by no means perfect, this system should provide the best chance of understanding Euripides' methodology in his reconstruction of Clytemnestra.

allusions to more commendable women in the Greek literary canon.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, it is only recently that scholars have begun to take her claim seriously and to see her as a “devoted wife and loving mother.”<sup>3</sup> And despite the radical changes that Euripides has made to create this version of Clytemnestra, his new characterization has drawn little comment. In fact, his Clytemnestra has been ignored to a remarkable degree, considering the extent and the extraordinary nature of her role in the play.<sup>4</sup> Even those scholars who have noticed Euripides’

<sup>2</sup> This process is not altogether different from that seen in Euripides’ *Helen*, where the *Odyssey* and the *Hymn to Demeter* (among others) provide comparable or contrasting models through which to understand the protagonist. On this vast subject see C. Segal, “The Two Worlds of Euripides’ *Helen*,” *TAPA* 102 (1971) 553–614; R. Eisner, “Echoes of the *Odyssey* in Euripides’ *Helen*,” *Maia* 32 (1980) 31–37; K. V. Hartigan, “Myth and the *Helen*,” *Eranos* 79 (1981) 23–31; H. P. Foley, “*Anodos* Drama: Euripides’ *Alcestis* and *Helen*,” in R. Hexter and D. Selden (eds.), *Innovations of Antiquity* (New York 1992) 133–160; D. M. Juffras, “Helen and Other Victims in Euripides’ *Helen*,” *Hermes* 121 (1993) 45–57; I. E. Holmberg, “Euripides’ *Helen*: Most Noble and Most Chaste,” *AJP* 116 (1995) 19–42; R. D. Friedman, “Old Stories in Euripides’ New *Helen*: παλαιότης γὰρ τῷ λόγῳ γ’ ἔνεστι τις (*Hel.* 1056),” *Phoenix* 61 (2007) 195–211; A. S. Stavrinou, “The *Opsis* of *Helen*: Performative Intertextuality in Euripides,” *GRBS* 55 (2015) 104–132.

<sup>3</sup> P. Michelakis, *Euripides: Iphigenia at Aulis* (London 2006) 36. Along these lines see also A. N. Michelini, “The Expansion of Myth in Late Euripides: *Iphigenia at Aulis*,” *ICS* 24/25 (1999/2000) 50. But *contra* see P. Vellacott, *Ironic Drama: A Study of Euripides’ Method and Meaning* (Cambridge 1975) 47, 202; S. Aretz, *Die Opferung der Iphigenia in Aulis: die Rezeption des Mythos in antiken und modernen Dramen* (Stuttgart 1999) 165–169.

<sup>4</sup> Though Agamemnon delivers more lines (314) than any other character, Clytemnestra is a close second at 274. At least three articles have been dedicated exclusively to the character of Agamemnon in the *IA*: H. Vretska “Agamemnon in Euripides’ *Iphigenie in Aulis*,” *WS* 74 (1961) 18–39; F. Wasserman, “Agamemnon in the *Iphigenia at Aulis*: A Man in an Age of Crisis,” *TAPA* 80 (1949) 174–186; H. Siegel “Agamemnon in Euripides’ ‘Iphigenia at Aulis,’” *Hermes* 109 (1981) 257–265. Clytemnestra, on the other hand, has yet to receive this honor. J. Gibert, “Clytemnestra’s First Marriage: Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis*,” in V. Pedrick and S. M. Oberhelman (eds.), *The Soul of Tragedy: Essays on Athenian Drama* (Chicago 2005) 227–248, does focus primarily on Clytemnestra, but his interest is almost ex-

reformation of Clytemnestra have yet to examine the tragedian's intense work with the poetic tradition in relation to his reconstruction of her character. Thus every reason exists to remedy the disregard that has marked the Aulidan Clytemnestra's passage through the realm of critical analysis.

In this article I examine the tragedian's use of other traditions as models, both negative and positive, around which to construct a new Clytemnestra. I argue that he does so to make his new characterization both emphatic and convincing, while also alerting his audience to the character rehabilitation that he is performing. I establish first and foremost that he has constructed his character as an explicit rejection of previous tragic iterations of Clytemnestra—specifically those of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and of his own *Electra*. In the second part of the article I demonstrate that he uses female figures in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and Semonides' Poem 7 as *comparandae* in order to provide the basis for a positive reconception of Clytemnestra. In both cases, the metapoetic process shows that Euripides consciously places Clytemnestra in a different traditional background, and that this new characterization should be considered a central part of his project in *Iphigenia at Aulis*.

*Methodological considerations*

A note is warranted on the intertextual nature of Euripides' poetic project, and on the audience's ability to recognize these complex poetic interactions. Because of its length and structure, Greek tragedy was inherently capable of accommodating

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clusively in her mention of a previous marriage that had been violently broken up by Agamemnon (*IA* 1148–1156). Books and articles have routinely given her less space than her illustrious husband. See for example H. P. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca 1985); C. E. Sorum, "Myth, Choice, and Meaning in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*," *AJP* 113 (1992) 527–542; D. L. Burgess, "Lies and Convictions at Aulis," *Hermes* 132 (2004) 37–55. C. A. E. Luschnig, *Tragic Aporia: A Study of Euripides' Iphigenia at Aulis* (Berwick 1988), also devotes more space to Agamemnon than to Clytemnestra, though the imbalance is not as extreme as it is elsewhere.

and reflecting on different mythic and poetic forms.<sup>5</sup> This dynamic is a powerful presence in nearly every extant play, so there is every reason to believe that Athenian audiences were accustomed to seeing diverse aesthetic forms embedded in the tragic ‘text’. Furthermore, on account of the genre’s simultaneous existence as text and performance, Greek tragedy could engage with other poetic forms through a number of means. These include specific verbal allusions to other poetic texts; the reproduction of structural or thematic elements that evoke other mythic narratives; visual cues that recall other dramatic or choral performances; and the use of imagery that is closely associated with other poetic works or forms. As we shall see, each of these allusive elements is present in the *IA*.

As to the audience’s ability to recognize these allusions, Martin Revermann has called this a question of “theatrical competence” and has argued convincingly that the baseline for such competence at the city Dionysia was fairly high.<sup>6</sup> Beyond this general consideration, there is reason to believe that much of Euripides’ audience would have been familiar with the specific poetic works to which he alludes in the *IA*. The case of the *Agamemnon* is especially instructive. The presence of numerous allusions to the *Oresteia* in late fifth-century plays strongly suggests that the dramatic poets expected their audiences to be familiar with the trilogy.<sup>7</sup> And although the *IA* was composed

<sup>5</sup> See for example C. Segal, “Greek Myth as a Semiotic and Structural System and the Problem of Tragedy,” *Arethusa* 16 (1983) 185, who describes tragedy as both “the culmination of the [mythic] system and its dissolution”; and L. Swift, *The Hidden Chorus: Echoes of Genre in Tragic Lyric* (Oxford 2010).

<sup>6</sup> M. Revermann, “The Competence of Theatre Audiences in Fifth- and Fourth-Century Athens,” *JHS* 126 (2006) 99–124. Revermann specifically discusses Aristophanic allusions to tragedy, but his discussion is nevertheless highly relevant to the *IA* and its poetic allusions, first because Euripides’ audience must have been substantially similar to those of Aristophanes, and second because Euripides’ allusions cannot be said to be any more subtle than those of his comedic colleague.

<sup>7</sup> The most famous of these are: Ar. *Ach.* 9–11, *Ran.* 866–870, and Euripides’ lampooning of the *Choephoroi* in *Electra* 518–544. Particularly

several decades after the *Agamemnon*, we may suppose that much of Euripides' audience had the opportunity to become acquainted with Aeschylus at one of two venues: the city Dionysia, where revivals of the *Oresteia* may have occurred in the late fifth century;<sup>8</sup> and the various rural Dionysia, where the reproduction of older tragedies was almost certainly the norm.<sup>9</sup> Given this combination of opportunity and expectation, it is exceedingly likely that much of the *IA*'s audience was familiar with the *Agamemnon*. To varying degrees, this would also have been true of the other texts to which the *IA* alludes.<sup>10</sup>

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apropos of this topic is the comment of W. G. Thalmann, "Euripides and Aeschylus: The Case of *Hekabe*," *CLAnt* 12 (1993) 130: "Conventions have a way of being realized in particularly memorable form in certain texts, and their use later will inevitably evoke those texts ... for Euripides and his audience, as well as for us, the *Oresteia* was such a text because of its historical significance as a major summing-up of Athenian culture."

<sup>8</sup> A number of scholars have proposed that a revival of the *Oresteia* had taken place ca. 420 or 415 BCE: see H.-J. Newiger, "Elektra in Aristophanes' *Wolken*," *Hermes* 89 (1961) 422–430; T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London 1967) 13 and 143; and R. Eisner "Euripides' Use of Myth," *Arethusa* 12 (1979) 161. More recently, this position has been questioned by Z. P. Biles, "Aeschylus' Afterlife: Reperformance by Decree in 5th C. Athens?" *ICS* 31/32 (2006/7) 206–242, who argues against the occurrence of revivals of Aeschylus at the city Dionysia in the fifth century.

<sup>9</sup> We have very little concrete evidence on any aspect of the rural Dionysia, but A. E. Haigh, *The Attic Theatre* (Oxford, 1889) 43, argues that "performances [at the rural Dionysia] would generally be confined to the reproduction of plays which had been successful in competitions at Athens." Biles, *ICS* 31/32 (2006/7) 210–211, agrees that reperformances of Aeschylus at the rural Dionysia were probably common; and E. Csapo and W. J. Slater, *The Context of Athenian Drama* (Ann Arbor 1995) 3, note that "we hear, by the early 5<sup>th</sup> c. B.C., of the reperformance of plays at the smaller festivals of the Rural Dionysia." They infer this from the famous passage in Herodotus 6.21 that after the first production of Phrynichus' *Capture of Miletus*, nobody was ever allowed to produce the play again.

<sup>10</sup> The *Electra* had been presented at the city Dionysia only a few years before the *IA*, and we may expect that there was considerable crossover between the audiences of the two plays. It is likely that the *Hymn to Demeter* was well known in classical Athens, especially given its strong connection to the Eleusinian Mysteries, on which see R. Parker, "The *Hymn to Demeter* and the

*Reconsideration of the tragic past, I: The IA and Aeschylus' Agamemnon*

The *IA* is essentially a prequel to Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*,<sup>11</sup> and there can be little doubt that Euripides composed the play with his predecessor's in mind. Indeed, many of Euripides' choices seem tailored to remind us of Aeschylus' play. For example, these are the only two extant tragedies in which Clytemnestra and Agamemnon appear on stage together, and in both plays they engage in an *agōn* in which, unbeknownst to one of the participants, someone's life is at stake.<sup>12</sup> The remarkable similarity of these plot devices is too great to be simply a coincidence. More superficially, Euripides also follows Aeschylus in making Argos (rather than Mycenae) the home of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.<sup>13</sup> And with Clytemnestra's entrance on a

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*Homeric Hymns*," *G&R* 38 (1991) 1–17. Certainly the myth of Persephone and Demeter was familiar to nearly everyone, a fact confirmed by other Euripidean allusions to the myth—and possibly even the *Hymn* itself: cf. e.g. *Eur. Hel.* 1301–1368, on which see Friedman, *Phoenix* 61 (2007) 195–211. The case regarding Athenian familiarity with Semonides 7 is more complicated; I address it at greater length below.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, the crux of the *IA*—Iphigenia's sacrifice—is narrated in the *parodos* of Aeschylus' play (see esp. *Ag.* 160–247), and it is of course Iphigenia's sacrifice that provides Clytemnestra with a motive for murder (154–155).

<sup>12</sup> Agamemnon's in the *Agamemnon* and Iphigenia's in the *IA*. Naturally, we cannot know with any certainty whether Clytemnestra and Agamemnon appear on stage together in any fragmentary plays, to say nothing of those of which we have no knowledge whatever. It seems likely that the royal couple made a joint appearance in Sophocles' *Iphigenia*, as well as in his *Clytemnestra*. Regardless, it is exceedingly likely that the *Agamemnon* provided the most famous tragic model of Agamemnon's interactions with Clytemnestra for the Athenian audience in 405 BCE. Indeed, during the famous debate between Aeschylus and Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (also presented in 405), the *Oresteia* is the first work that Euripides asks Aeschylus to recite (*Ran.* 1119–1128). This implies that of all of Aeschylus' tragedies, the fame of this trilogy was particularly (perhaps even uniquely) enduring at the end of the fifth century.

<sup>13</sup> Eisner, *Arethusa* 12 (1979) 161. Sophocles, conversely, brings the family back to Mycenae in his *Electra*.

chariot, he “evoke[s] the ominous arrivals for a sacrificial death of Agamemnon and Cassandra at Argos in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*.”<sup>14</sup> In short, the *IA* contains several types of dramatic moments that serve to remind the audience of the *Agamemnon*.

Specific verbal echoes add to the sense that Euripides’ play is, at its most basic level, a response to Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*. One example occurs when Euripides’ Agamemnon claims to have “fallen under such a yoke of necessity” (*IA* 443, ἐς οἷ’ ἀνάγκης ζεύγματ’ ἐμπεπτώκαμεν) as he faces the harsh reality that Iphigenia must be sacrificed. This statement is reminiscent of a choral description of Agamemnon’s decision in Aeschylus’ tragedy (*Ag.* 218, ἐπεὶ δ’ ἀνάγκας ἔδου λέπαδνον, “when he donned yoke-strap of necessity”), and it appears to be a direct allusion to the earlier play. Another echo is the form of address used for Clytemnestra, which in both the *IA* and the *Agamemnon* is Λήδας γένεθλον (*IA* 686, *Ag.* 914), a moniker that appears nowhere in extant Greek literature but in these two plays.<sup>15</sup> But the clearest allusion occurs when Clytemnestra “threaten[s] Agamemnon with the *Agamemnon*” by warning that if he sacrifices Iphigenia she will “give [him] the reception that [he] deserve[s]” on his return (*IA* 1182, δεξόμεθα δέξιν ἢν σε δέξασθαι χρεῶν).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Foley, *Ritual Irony* 70–71. R. Aélion, *Euripide héritier d’Eschyle* I (Paris 1983) 106, also sees this as an allusion to the *Agamemnon*, as does Michelakis, *Euripides: Iphigenia at Aulis* 29. It must be noted that Diggle (*ad loc.*) doubts the authenticity of the entrance, though it is by no means certain that her entrance by chariot is a later invention simply because the text itself is interpolated. Regardless, there is a great deal of evidence that Euripides is openly alluding to the *Agamemnon* throughout the *IA*, so the manner of Clytemnestra’s arrival is not crucial in proving this point.

<sup>15</sup> Agamemnon even uses it a second time in the *IA* (1106), and he also uses a different form of the matronymic at *IA* 116 (Λήδας ἔρνος), though it should be noted that in these two instances Diggle doubts the authenticity of the text. As W. Stockert, *Euripides: Iphigenie in Aulis* II (Vienna 1992) 211, points out, the use of the matronymic is on the whole very rare in Euripides, so his reclamation of the Aeschylean appellation is significant.

<sup>16</sup> W. D. Smith, “Iphigeneia in Love,” in G. W. Bowersock et al. (eds.), *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies presented to Bernard M. W. Knox* (Berlin 1979) 178.

Another instance, and an especially suggestive one, is found when Agamemnon demands that Clytemnestra obey his directives concerning the ‘wedding’ of their child, using the simple imperative  $\pi\iota\theta\omicron\upsilon$  (*IA* 739). The form itself is not rare, but its circumstances have much in common with an Aeschylean usage (*Ag.* 943): in both plays, deceptive persuasion is used as a means to effect the death of a family member, and in both plays, this dynamic is emphasized by the command  $\pi\iota\theta\omicron\upsilon$ . In Aeschylus’ play, it is Clytemnestra who deceives Agamemnon and insists that he descend from his chariot, with the secret intention of murdering him—an act she frames in sacrificial terms.<sup>17</sup> In Euripides’ play, on the other hand, Agamemnon deceives Clytemnestra and tries to convince her to turn Iphigenia over to him, with the secret intention of sacrificing her. The *agōn* of the *IA* thus reproduces the substance and structure of the Aeschylean confrontation, but the roles are reversed: deceiver becomes deceived, and vice versa.

This role-reversal is extraordinary, for Clytemnestra’s treacherous ways are central to Aeschylus’ conception of both the character and the tragic crisis. Among many others, Simon Goldhill has written extensively about Clytemnestra’s use of “multivalent” language:<sup>18</sup> “[I]anguage, when Clytemnestra uses it, becomes frightening. The uncertainty she introduces is not merely verbal, but works also towards the death of her hus-

<sup>17</sup> See esp. F. Zeitlin, “The Motif of the Corrupted Sacrifice in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*,” *TAPA* 96 (1965) 463–508.

<sup>18</sup> S. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The Oresteia* (Cambridge 1984) 68–79, and *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1986), ch. 1. Many other scholars have also treated the issue of Clytemnestra’s speech: E. Neustadt, “Wort und Geschehen in Aischylos Agamemnon,” *Hermes* 64 (1929) 243–265; A. Betensky, “Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*: The Power of Clytemnestra,” *Ramus* 7 (1978) 11–25; R. Sevieri, “Linguaggio consapevole e coscienza individuale di Clitennestra nell’Agamemnone di Eschilo,” *Dioniso* 61 (1991) 13–31; L. McClure, “Clytemnestra’s Binding Spell (*Ag.* 958–74),” *CJ* 92 (1997) 123–140, and “*Logos Gunaikos*: Speech, Gender, and Spectatorship in the *Oresteia*,” *Helios* 24 (1997) 112–135; H. P. Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton 2001) 207–234.



band, the king—the overthrow of social order.”<sup>19</sup> Her use of a dangerous, feminine *peithō* is crucial to the development of the plot (both hers and Aeschylus’), and it is one of her most distinguishing attributes in the play. Thus, by casting Clytemnestra as the victim of Agamemnon’s deceit, Euripides takes on and subverts a principal theme of Aeschylus’ play and his characterization of the queen.

Moreover, Euripides goes to great lengths to highlight the dramatic re-evaluation to which he is subjecting Clytemnestra and Agamemnon. Shortly after Clytemnestra is borne in by chariot, Agamemnon sets a number of verbal traps for his wife and daughter, repeatedly exploiting ambiguous ritual language—something at which Aeschylus’ Clytemnestra also excels.<sup>20</sup> When pressed for information by Iphigenia, he responds most vaguely by mentioning “a voyage” (*IA* 667, *πλοῦς*) she will have to make. A few lines later, he deflects Iphigenia’s entreaty to hurry back to her by insisting that he “must first sacrifice a certain victim here” (673, *θύσαι με θυσίαν πρῶτα δεῖ τιν’ ἐνθάδε*). This coupling of *thuō*-stemmed words is awkward and avoidable,<sup>21</sup> and it serves to draw attention to the deceptive nature of his speech.

His use of manipulative language becomes even more evident when Clytemnestra presses him for details on the wedding. When she asks him when it will take place, he claims it will be celebrated when the moon is full—a blatant lie (716–717). When she inquires about the wedding feast to follow (720), Agamemnon one-ups himself with a triple use of words derived from *θύω* (721): *θύσας γε θύμαθ’ ἀμὲ χρῆ θῦσαι θεοῖς* (“after I’ve sacrificed the victims I must sacrifice to the gods”). Yet perhaps the most spectacular manipulation of language in this scene occurs in the middle of this exchange (718–719):

<sup>19</sup> Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* 14.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Zeitlin, *TAPA* 96 (1965) 478–480.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. by using a different verb, such as *ἔρδω* or *ῥέζω*.

C: προτέλεια δ' ἤδη παιδὸς ἔσφαξας θεῶ;

A: μέλλω· ἔπι ταύτη καὶ καθέσταμεν τύχη.

C: And have you made offerings to the goddess on behalf of our child?

A: I'm about to. It is this very act that I am arranging.

Clytemnestra here asks after the ritual offerings (*proteleia*) for Iphigenia, and it is obvious that she is speaking of the prenuptial sacrifices that would take place before any wedding.<sup>22</sup> Agamemnon, however, feels no need to correct her on this point, and he willfully exploits her ignorance in his response: it is true that he is about to perform *proteleia*, but certainly not of the sort that Clytemnestra has in mind. The offerings will not be for Iphigenia; they will be Iphigenia herself. Agamemnon clearly takes advantage of the multivalent nature of a ritual term, and he does so in order to deceive his wife.

Beyond the fact that Agamemnon uses the same deceptive techniques as Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, this exchange also contains a sly verbal allusion to the *Agamemnon*. The only prior extant uses of *proteleios* occur in that play,<sup>23</sup> and although only one of these concerns a sacrifice,<sup>24</sup> this sacrifice is of course

<sup>22</sup> J. H. Oakley and R. H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* (Madison 1993) 11: "Sacrifices to the gods preceded every major undertaking in ancient Greece, and the wedding was no exception"; by the fourth century, "it was especially important to pay respect to the gods by performing prenuptial sacrifices, called *proteleia*." Although the *IA* was produced before any other known reference to these prenuptial sacrifices as *proteleia* (according to the TLG, after the *IA* the earliest certain use of *proteleia* in this manner is Pl. *Leg.* 774E9, ὅσα δὲ προτέλεια γάμων), it is reasonable to assume that the audience would nevertheless interpret these offerings as such; Clytemnestra is, after all, primarily interested in the wedding at this point. Furthermore, her follow-up question—"and then you'll serve the wedding feast?"—is perfectly in line with actual ceremonial procedures. Cf. Oakley and Sinos 22: "Every wedding included a feast, with abundant meat provided by the prenuptial sacrifices performed by both families."

<sup>23</sup> According to the TLG: *Ag.* 65, 227, 720. On Aeschylus' uses of *proteleia* (and the audience's understanding of it) see E. Fraenkel, *Aeschylus: Agamemnon* II (Oxford 1950) 40–41; Zeitlin, *TAPA* 96 (1965) 464–467.

<sup>24</sup> *Ag.* 227; both here and in *IA* 718, *proteleia* takes a genitive complement

Iphigenia, just as it is in the *IA*. Euripides thus presents a situation that vigorously strives to remind the audience of the *Agamemnon*, and he emphasizes the connection between the two plays by reclaiming a rare and specific Aeschylean term. In the process, he completes the role-reversal set in motion at the moment of Clytemnestra's entrance. Agamemnon's manipulation of language, based as it is on the ambiguity of ritual language, and exploited to effect the death of a family member, makes him a figure that is eminently comparable to Aeschylus' Clytemnestra.

This new Agamemnon serves as an illuminating contrast to Clytemnestra. The success of his deceptions makes clear that she is marked by a certain gullibility and frankness of speech that are incongruous with her characterization in Aeschylus. In fact, Clytemnestra's persistently straightforward way of using language is evident throughout the play. In her first interactions with Agamemnon and Achilles she is nothing if not candid. She eagerly questions her husband about Achilles, her presumed future son-in-law (*IA* 691–715). When she finally meets Achilles, she earnestly discloses all that she has learned from her conversation with Agamemnon, whereupon she gathers that the situation has been misrepresented to her (Achilles knows nothing of the marriage: 819–854). Even then, however, she does not suspect what her husband is plotting, and hangs her head in shame as she prepares to return inside (851–852). It is only with the appearance of the *Presbutēs* that she learns what is afoot, at which point, desperate for help, she begs Achilles to intervene.

Achilles agrees to intercede, and his plan to save Iphigenia, curious as it is, gives Clytemnestra another chance to subvert the traditional standard for her character. Achilles encourages the queen to beseech her husband, in the hope that she can persuade him to change his mind (1017, †εἴη γὰρ τὸ χρῆζον

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to convey the meaning of a sacrificial offering on behalf of a person or thing.

ἐπίθετ' ἦ).<sup>25</sup> Were this Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, we might expect this to be a fine course of action. In the *IA*, however, Clytemnestra's approach to her husband is far less crafty than it had been in the *Agamemnon*. Rather than mince words, as she does throughout Aeschylus' tragedy, Euripides' Clytemnestra confronts her husband openly and demands an answer to a straightforward question (1131): τὴν παῖδα τὴν σὴν τὴν τ' ἐμὴν μέλλεις κτανεῖν; (“Do you intend to kill your child and mine?”). Subtle this is not, and given her failure to save Iphigenia, perhaps it was not the best route for her to take. But such directness is entirely typical of the way she communicates in the *IA*.

The novelty of Clytemnestra's frankness is highlighted a few lines later, in the opening of the long speech with which she attempts to dissuade Agamemnon from sacrificing Iphigenia (1146–1147):

ἄκουε δὴ νυν· ἀνακαλύψω γὰρ λόγους,  
κούκέτι παρωδοῖς χρησόμεσθ' αἰνίγμασιν.

Listen now then, for I shall unveil my words,  
and no longer employ obscure riddles.

On the surface, this appears to be a simple rhetorical maneuver to convince Agamemnon of the veracity of her coming speech. But Clytemnestra's claim to “unveil” her speech (*anakalupsō*) serves two other functions. On the one hand, she has thus far done little to actually veil her speech, and she certainly has not employed any “obscure riddles”; her statement thus functions as an ironic emphasis of her previous forthrightness. At the same time, these lines again suggest that a return to Aeschylus is necessary, for Clytemnestra here echoes the first iambic lines that Cassandra speaks in the *Agamemnon* (1178–1179, 1183):<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> The text here is obviously corrupted, but Achilles must have said something along these lines since Clytemnestra goes on to follow this advice.

<sup>26</sup> R. Garner, *From Homer to Tragedy: The Art of Allusion in Greek Poetry* (London 1990) 174, also points out this allusion.

καὶ μὴν ὁ χρησμὸς οὐκέτ' ἐκ καλυμμάτων  
ἔσται ...

... φρενώσω δ' οὐκέτ' ἐξ αἰνιγμάτων.

No longer shall my prophecies come from beneath  
veils ...

... and no longer shall I instruct with riddles.<sup>27</sup>

Both Euripides' Clytemnestra and Aeschylus' Cassandra use the term *ainigma* and the metaphor of unveiling one's speech. Both of these expressions were rare in classical Greek,<sup>28</sup> and in fact the *IA* and the *Agamemnon* contain the only two extant passages in which they are found together. Thus it appears that as Clytemnestra begins her speech to persuade Agamemnon not to kill Iphigenia, she reclaims the first lines of Cassandra's famously unsuccessful attempt to alert the chorus to Agamemnon's fate.

These verbal echoes are not the only way in which Euripides reminds us of Aeschylus' Cassandra. Both she and Euripides'

<sup>27</sup> I have excluded four lines from this passage because, while they are part and parcel of Cassandra's declaration that she will engage in clear speech, they manage, in their own inimitably Aeschylean oracularity, to be at the same time nearly impenetrable in their opacity. Cf. Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative* 85: "the expression of clarity comes through an extremely complex interplay of meanings of the central term for 'clear', which, through the cumulative refraction of the structure of the similes, undercuts the very desire for clarity."

<sup>28</sup> Prior to the *IA* only nineteen occurrences of αἰνιγμα are found, and seven of these are in reference to Oedipus and the Sphinx (Eur. *Phoen.* 48, 1049, 1688, 1731, 1759; Soph. *OT* 393, 1525), which can be classified as a particular and very specific use of the term. The metaphorical concept of 'unveiling' one's language is even rarer: I have found only five instances in extant classical Greek literature, including the two cited above. (This tally factors not only the uses of ἀνακαλύπτω and the expression ἐκ καλυμμάτων, as in the above passages, but also those of ἐκκαλύπτω.) The other three are Aesch. *PV* 196, Critias fr.1 *TrGF*, and, curiously enough, *IA* 872, where Clytemnestra uses a similar expression (ἐκκάλυπτε οὔστινας στέγεις λόγους) when she insists that the *Presbutēs* inform of her of the plot to kill Iphigenia, which he has been speaking around.

Clytemnestra highlight “evils perpetrated in former times”<sup>29</sup> before correctly predicting Agamemnon’s violent death.<sup>30</sup> Both characters speak only the truth and openly eschew the deceptive speech exploited by their interlocutors (Clytemnestra to Aeschylus’ Cassandra, Agamemnon to Euripides’ Clytemnestra). Both women fail in their attempts at honest persuasion. And when Euripides’ Clytemnestra eventually threatens to give Agamemnon the reception he deserves (*IA* 1182), she prefaces this by saying that she “lacks only a small pretext” (1180, βραχείας προφάσεως ἐνδεῖ μόνον) for her to carry out the murder. This “small pretext” would seem to be Cassandra herself, whom Agamemnon will later bring home as a concubine.<sup>31</sup> The audience is thus repeatedly reminded of Aeschylus’ Cassandra throughout Clytemnestra’s speech.

The result of these references is that Euripides’ Clytemnestra is at once contrasted to Aeschylus’ version and likened to Cassandra. These two processes go hand in hand, for in the *Agamemnon*, Cassandra represents “the inverse of Clytemnestra.”<sup>32</sup> This inversion is evident in two ways: in Cassandra’s initial silence throughout the carpet scene, and in her later eschewal of deceptive language. And the result of this contrast is that Cassandra is accorded, at the end, the status of Agamemnon’s “faithful consort” (*Ag.* 1442, πιστὴ ξύνευνος). These

<sup>29</sup> *Ag.* 1184–1185, κακῶν / ... τῶν πάλαι πεπραγμένων. In the case of Cassandra’s speech, these crimes are the murder of Thyestes’ children and the subsequent cannibalistic banquet (1189). For Euripides’ Clytemnestra, the crime was that of murdering her first husband and child (*IA* 1149–1152).

<sup>30</sup> *Ag.* 1227–1237, *IA* 1180–1182.

<sup>31</sup> On Cassandra as that further pretext to murder Agamemnon cf. Clytemnestra’s words in Euripides’ *Electra* (1032–1034), where she claims that she would not have murdered Agamemnon had he not “brought that possessed maenad into the marriage-bed.”

<sup>32</sup> W. G. Thalmann, “Speech and Silence in the *Oresteia*, II,” *Phoenix* 39 (1985) 229. For a more thorough list of the ways in which Cassandra and Clytemnestra function as opposites in the *Agamemnon*, see L. McClure, *Spoken Like a Woman: Speech and Gender in Athenian Drama* (Princeton 1999) 92–93.

are the same ways in which Euripides marks his rehabilitation of Clytemnestra: he creates a character who is notable most of all for her straightforward speech in the face of Agamemnon's deception, and who can thus legitimately claim to be his "blameless wife." This analogy with Cassandra completes Clytemnestra's transition and Euripides' rejection of the Aeschylean model. Just as importantly, the depth and frequency of Euripides' allusions to the *Agamemnon* serve to demonstrate that his interest in the matter is profound. He has gone to great lengths, it would seem, to emphasize that he is remaking the figure of Clytemnestra, and that his new version is inspired by yet opposed to that of Aeschylus. And by referring to a specifically tragic predecessor,<sup>33</sup> he shows that he is consciously attempting to move away from the genre's traditional portrayal of the queen.

*Reconsideration of the tragic past, II: The IA and Euripides' Electra*

While Euripides' allusions to his own *Electra* are not as plentiful as his references to the *Agamemnon*, it is nevertheless clear that he also has in mind his own earlier depiction of Clytemnestra. To begin, the *Electra* anticipates the *IA* in its attempt to reconstruct the character of Clytemnestra as a sort of response to Aeschylus' version of the queen.<sup>34</sup> While this may not have been particularly obvious to Euripides' audience, it is nevertheless an important indicator of the type of intertextual work in which he was engaged. In a more easily discernible reference, Clytemnestra's arrival by chariot in the *IA*, while merely evocative of Agamemnon's entrance in the *Agamemnon*, is a perfect imitation of her introduction in the

<sup>33</sup> As opposed to, say, epic or epinician versions of the character and events.

<sup>34</sup> On this phenomenon in the *Electra* see M. Cropp, *Euripides: Electra* (Oxford 2013) 4–5, 23–24; H. M. Roisman and C. A. E. Luschnig, *Euripides' Electra: A Commentary* (Norman 2011) 207–208. For a more general review of the relationship of the *Electra* to the *Oresteia* see G. Gellie, "Tragedy and Euripides' *Electra*," *BICS* 28 (1981) 1–12.

*Electra*.<sup>35</sup> Above all, however, her first (uninterpolated)<sup>36</sup> words in the *IA* are an overt allusion to the *Electra* (*IA* 638–639):

φιλοπάτωρ δ' ἀεί ποτ' εἶ  
 μάλιστα παίδων τῶδ' ὅσους ἐγὼ ἔτεκον.

You have always been  
 the most father-loving of all my children.

Clytemnestra's characterization of Iphigenia here as particularly fond of her father is precisely the same way she describes Electra in the earlier tragedy (*El.* 1102–1104):

ὦ παῖ, πέφυκας πατέρα σὸν στέργειν ἀεί·  
 ἔστιν δὲ καὶ τόδ'· οἱ μὲν εἰσιν ἀρσένων,  
 οἱ δ' ἀφ' ἀφιλῶσι μητέρας μᾶλλον πατρός.

My child, by nature you have always adored your father.  
 This is part of life. Some children are drawn to their fathers,  
 while others love their mothers more.

In each case, Clytemnestra not only remarks upon a daughter's affinity for her father; she also points out that this is something that is particularly true of the daughter in question. In the very first of Clytemnestra's many scenes in the *IA*, Euripides thus reminds his audience of his own previous portrayal of the queen.

Later, in the two tragic *agōnes* (*El.* 998–1146 and *IA* 1098–1275), the similarities and differences between the two Euripidean Clytemnestras emerge more meaningfully. On the surface, these two debates are only tangentially related.<sup>37</sup> But

<sup>35</sup> On the authenticity of this entrance in the *IA* see n.14 above. Once again, this is not the only evidence that Euripides intends to evoke a comparison to the tragic tradition.

<sup>36</sup> On the dubious authenticity of Clytemnestra's opening speech (*IA* 607–630) see especially Page, *Actors' Interpolations* 166–169. Diggle, *Euripidis III ad loc.*, agrees with Page, assigning these lines to the third tier (*vix Euripidei*) of likely authenticity.

<sup>37</sup> In the *Electra*, Clytemnestra takes on Electra and argues that her murder of Agamemnon was justified by her husband's earlier sacrifice of Iphigenia. In the *IA*, both Agamemnon and Iphigenia are still alive, as in fact are the other participants in the *agōn*. The question here is whether or not Agamemnon should sacrifice Iphigenia, and Clytemnestra's response is an



specific details from Clytemnestra's past that are mentioned in the *agōnes*, the rhetorical strategies that she employs in each case, and the responses of her interlocutors, are all similar enough to provide a solid basis for comparison of the two versions of the queen. Moreover, such a confluence of similarities suggests that Euripides wrote the *agōn* of the *IA* with that of the *Electra* firmly in mind, particularly as the differences between these two characterizations of Clytemnestra emerge primarily, and most compellingly, through these same similarities.

An especially striking similarity is the fact that in both tragic *agōnes*, Clytemnestra laments that Agamemnon has killed one of her children. In the *Electra*, this is hardly surprising, for Clytemnestra uses the sacrifice of Iphigenia to justify her murder of Agamemnon (*El.* 1020–1029).<sup>38</sup> Insofar as Iphigenia is (of course) still alive in the *IA*, it is somewhat startling that this new Clytemnestra can also draw on such a horrifying experience (*IA* 1149–1152):

ἔγημας ἄκουσάν με κάλαβες βία,  
τὸν πρόσθεν ἄνδρα Τάνταλον κατακτανών·  
βρέφος τε τοῦμὸν †σῶ προσούρισας πάλω, †  
μαστῶν βιαίως τῶν ἐμῶν ἀποσπάσας.

You took me by force and married me against my will,  
after killing my former husband Tantalus.  
And you violently ripped my baby from my breast  
†and dashed it against the ground.†

emphatic no. At issue in both cases is a death in the family, and whether or not it is justified, but in the *IA*, none of these deaths has yet occurred.

<sup>38</sup> Her other justification is that Agamemnon returned with Cassandra as his concubine, though we may suspect that the sacrifice of Iphigenia is the only 'real' pretext for the murder. Electra certainly confirms for us that the sacrifice was the motive that Clytemnestra was accustomed to cite (*El.* 1067–1068), and as A. N. Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Madison 1987) 220, correctly observes, Clytemnestra herself "ignore[s] her earlier admission that the sacrifice was not really the occasion for the murder [when she] claims that her need for revenge forced an alliance with Agamemnon's enemy Aigisthos."

This image is quite obviously not a flattering one for Agamemnon, who now appears to be guilty of even more serious crimes than those of which Clytemnestra accuses him in the *Electra*.<sup>39</sup> The question of how this episode should affect our interpretation of Clytemnestra, conversely, is not as simple.<sup>40</sup> A number of scholars have actually taken her citation of the incident as evidence that she is fundamentally self-centered.<sup>41</sup> This harsh judgment has been at least partially redressed by more recent critics,<sup>42</sup> but the question of the episode's rhetorical relevance has perhaps distracted critics from seeing how this earlier reaction to the loss of a child may help us better understand Clytemnestra in the context of a broader tradition.

Indeed, we might say that Euripides' use (or invention) of this episode allows us to see Clytemnestra acting against the tragic tradition by responding to infanticidal behavior with uncharacteristic forbearance. Here a comparison with the *Electra* will be most fruitful. For the *Electra*'s version of Clytemnestra, the murder of her child had constituted clear grounds for mariticide, a

<sup>39</sup> On how this may affect our understanding of Agamemnon see Lusch-nig, *Tragic Aporia* 82–83, 117; J. Griffin, "Characterization in Euripides: *Hippolytus* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*," in C. B. R. Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature* (Oxford 1990) 146; and E. Hall, introduction to J. Morwood, *Euripides: Iphigenia among the Taurians, Bacchae, Iphigenia at Aulis, Rhesus* (Oxford 1999) xxii–xxiii.

<sup>40</sup> Though Griffin, in *Characterization and Individuality* 247, argues that "essentially it is just another change, and the purpose of the mention of the first incident of child-killing is ... to emphasize her reaction to the second."

<sup>41</sup> E.g. A. Bonnard, "Iphigénie à Aulis. Tragique et poésie," *MusHelv* 2 (1945) 93; D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama: Myth, Theme and Structure* (Toronto 1967) 259; Vellacott, *Ironic Drama* 47; Aretz, *Die Opferung der Iphigenia* 167–169.

<sup>42</sup> Lusch-nig, *Tragic Aporia* 83, Michelini, *ICS* 24/25 (1999/2000) 48–50, and Michelakis, *Euripides: Iphigenia at Aulis* 36, have all correctly noted the real suffering that this earlier instance of infanticide implies. That this episode further mitigates Clytemnestra's eventual murder of Agamemnon has been argued by Michelini 50, Gibert, in *The Soul of Tragedy* 230, and Michelakis 37.

line of reasoning she had unhesitatingly acted upon. In the *IA*, on the other hand, it is evident from Agamemnon's continued presence in the world of the living that the Clytemnestra we see at Aulis has chosen a different path. Just as strikingly, she has done so despite the fact that her brothers sought to avenge her (*IA* 1153–1154):

καὶ τῶ Διός σε παῖδ', ἐμῶ δὲ συγγόνῳ,  
ἵπποισι μαρμαίροντ' ἐπεστρατευσάτην·

And the two sons of Zeus, my brothers,  
gleaming on their horses made war upon you.

Much like the Clytemnestra of the *Electra*, Castor and Pollux see the death of Agamemnon as a justifiable retribution for his murderous actions. The Clytemnestra of the *IA*, however, seems to have responded quite differently, for after her father had agreed to give her to Agamemnon in marriage, she had chosen to “reconcile” herself (1157, σοὶ καταλλαχθεῖσα) to her husband. Euripides thus reconsiders the story of Clytemnestra's (first) reaction to the loss of a child at the hand of her husband, endowing her nature with a certain tolerance which suggests that we are looking at an entirely new version of the queen.

Euripides' interest in this process of revision is further confirmed by the fact that the two agonistic Clytemnestras employ analogous rhetorical strategies. Especially striking is the fact that in each *agōn*, Clytemnestra proposes an alternate child-killing scenario to demonstrate the impropriety of Agamemnon's actions. Here again, however, the underlying similarities serve to highlight the true contrasts between the characters. In the *IA*, Clytemnestra suggests that Helen's daughter Hermione should be the child killed, since she is, unlike Iphigenia, directly connected to the issue at hand (*IA* 1199–1206). The equity of that exchange suggests the injustice of the actual scenario, a fact that Clytemnestra emphasizes by noting the inconsistency of actions and outcomes (1202–1205):

νῦν δ' ἐγὼ μὲν ἢ τὸ σὸν  
σώζουσα λέκτρον παιδὸς ἐστερήσομαι,  
ἢ δ' ἐξάμαρτοῦς, ὑπότροφον νεάνιδα  
Σπάρτη κομίζουσ', εὐτυχῆς γενήσεται.

And now I, who have been  
your faithful wife, shall be deprived of a child,  
while the adulteress will have the good fortune  
of caring for her breast-nurtured child in Sparta.

Clytemnestra's logic here is self-evident; the force of her argument lies in its simplicity. Perhaps it does not absolve her of the crime she is destined to commit, but in the context of an *agōn* in which Iphigenia's fate is to be decided, Clytemnestra's point is certainly a compelling one: why should she suffer while Helen harvests the fruits of Iphigenia's sacrifice?<sup>43</sup>

The same cannot be said of her proposal in the *Electra* (*El.* 1041–1045):

εἰ δ' ἐκ δόμων ἤρπαστο Μενέλεως λάθρα,  
κτανεῖν μ' Ὀρέστην χρῆν, κασιγνήτης πόσιν  
Μενέλαον ὡς σώσαιμι; σὸς δὲ πῶς πατὴρ  
ἠνέσχετ' ἂν ταῦτ'; εἶτα τὸν μὲν οὐ θανεῖν  
κτείνοντα χρῆν τᾶμ', ἐμὲ δὲ πρὸς κείνου παθεῖν;<sup>44</sup>

If Menelaus had been stolen in secret from home,  
should I have killed Orestes in order to save  
my sister's husband? How do you think your father would  
have handled that? Then should he not have died  
for killing my child, since I would have suffered the same from him?

Unlike in the *IA*, her logic here is as fraught as her language. As Mossman notes, her point serves at best to “clarify Agamem-

<sup>43</sup> Clytemnestra's focus on the suffering that the sacrifice will cause her is undoubtedly what lies behind many scholars' accusations of “selfishness” (cf. n.55 below). But these are, in my opinion, more than offset by the fact that she frequently refers to Iphigenia's own suffering (e.g. *IA* 880, 882, 886); by the fact that other characters in the play agree that Iphigenia's death causes great suffering for Clytemnestra (e.g. the *Presbutēs* at 887 and Achilles at 897); and above all by the fact that by putting the rhetorical emphasis on her own loss, she avoids “anticipat[ing] either the reasoning or the particular emotional angle adopted by Iphigenia” (Gibert, in *The Soul of Tragedy* 230), who of course makes her own case before Agamemnon immediately after Clytemnestra's appeal.

<sup>44</sup> Diggle allows for a missing line before the end of the question, but the logic of Clytemnestra's rhetorical appeal emerges despite the lacuna.

non's crimes," but certainly not to "lessen" hers.<sup>45</sup> On the contrary, the "disturbing absurdity"<sup>46</sup> of her arguments "reveals the flaws in Klytaimnestra's attempt to equate husbands and wives."<sup>47</sup> The two Euripidean Clytemnestras thus employ similar rhetorical strategies, but the effects are entirely dissimilar. At the very moment that Euripides alludes to his earlier version of the character, he also marks the differences by having his 'new' Clytemnestra use an eminently reasonable argument, by replacing her inappropriate equation of husbands and wives in the *Electra* with the perfect correlation of two unmarried daughters in the *IA*. As Euripides reworks his own material, so too must we adjust our interpretations of his characters.

In so doing, we would merely be following her interlocutors' lead. In the *IA* the chorus responds to Clytemnestra by urging Agamemnon to obey (*IA* 1209,  $\pi\iota\theta\omicron\upsilon$ ), noting that "no one in the world can deny" (1210,  $\omicron\upsilon\delta\epsilon\iota\varsigma \dots \acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\epsilon\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota} \beta\rho\omicron\tau\hat{\omega}\nu$ ) that it is good to save one's children. Their support of Clytemnestra's arguments is unequivocal. Even more compelling is the fact that although he is given the opportunity to reply (1255–1275), and despite Clytemnestra's insistence that he correct her if she has said anything wrong (1206,  $\tau\acute{\omicron}\upsilon\tau\omega\nu \acute{\alpha}\mu\epsilon\iota\psi\acute{\alpha}\iota \mu' \epsilon\acute{\iota} \tau\iota \mu\grave{\eta} \kappa\alpha\lambda\hat{\omega}\varsigma \lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega$ ), Agamemnon makes no attempt to discredit her claims or accusations. On the basis of these responses, we must admit that Clytemnestra's statements are true and her arguments valid.

In the *Electra*, conversely, Clytemnestra finds an altogether different reaction to her arguments. Immediately after she attempts to defend herself by way of her curious Menalaus/Orestes analogy, both the chorus and Electra reject her arguments out of hand. For the chorus, Clytemnestra's "shameful justice" ( $\eta\grave{\iota} \delta\acute{\iota}\kappa\eta \delta' \alpha\acute{\iota}\sigma\chi\rho\hat{\omega}\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\iota$ ) proves that she is of unsound mind (*El.* 1051–1053). Even harsher is Electra's condemnation

<sup>45</sup> J. Mossman, "Women's Speech in Greek Tragedy: The Case of Electra and Clytemnestra in Euripides' *Electra*," *CQ* 51 (2001) 381.

<sup>46</sup> U. Albin, "L'*Electra* di Euripide," *Maia* 14 (1962) 106.

<sup>47</sup> Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* 220.

of her mother. To begin, she compares Clytemnestra to Helen and contrasts her to Castor and Pollux (1061–1064). This description of familial relations is diametrically opposed to the one Clytemnestra proffers in the *IA*, where she notes that Castor and Pollux ran to her defense (*IA* 1153–1154) but refuses to refer to Helen as a sister even once.

Electra's other accusations are still graver. According to her, Clytemnestra was guilty of actively seeking adultery as soon as Agamemnon had departed for Troy and before he had sacrificed Iphigenia.<sup>48</sup> More poignantly, we learn that Clytemnestra had been singular in her desire that Agamemnon not return from Troy (*El.* 1079); that she had “rejoiced when fortune favored Troy, and wetted your eyes when it didn't” (1077–1078, εἰ μὲν τὰ Τρώων εὐτυχοῖ, κεχαρμένην, / εἰ δ' ἦσσαν' εἴη, συννέφουσας ὄμματα). She is, in Electra's description, an exceptionally bad wife.

Given the heavy-handed nature of Electra's condemnation, it is at once striking yet sensible that at Aulis, Clytemnestra appears to respond to this very portrayal by claiming for herself all those virtues that Electra had denied her (*IA* 1158–1163):

συμμαρτυρήσεις ὡς ἄμεμπτος ἦ γυνή,  
 ἔς τ' Ἀφροδίτην σωφρονοῦσα καὶ τὸ σὸν  
 μέλαθρον ἀΐξουσ', ὥστε σ' εἰσιόντα τε  
 χαίρειν θύραζέ τ' ἐξιόντ' εὐδαιμονεῖν.  
 σπάνιον δὲ θήρευμ' ἀνδρὶ τοιαύτην λαβεῖν  
 δάμαρτα· φλαύραν δ' οὐ σπάνις γυναικ' ἔχειν.

You shall bear witness that I have been a blameless wife,  
 chaste in matters of love and always helping  
 your household thrive, so that you might rejoice  
 on your returns and be blessed on your departures.  
 It is rare for a man to snare such a woman,  
 but common for one to have a worthless wife.

<sup>48</sup> *El.* 1069–1071, θυγατρὸς πρὶν κεκυρῶσθαι σφαγᾶς, / νέον τ' ἀπ' οἴκων ἀνδρὸς ἐξωρημένον, / ξανθὸν κατόπτρῳ πλόκαμον ἐξήσκεις κόμης, “before your daughter's slaughter came to pass, / and as soon as your husband had set out from home, / you were styling your golden locks before the mirror.”

As we have seen, Clytemnestra's claim to have been a "blameless wife" should be taken at face value, for unlike Electra, Agamemnon does not reject her claims. The specific qualities that Clytemnestra mentions point to a striking reversal in her characterization. While in the *Electra* she is shown to be an eager adulteress, here, as if to confute all of Electra's accusations at once, she insists that she has been "chaste in matters of love."

Clytemnestra's talk of Agamemnon's comings and goings can also be contrasted to her earlier characterization: while in the *Electra* we learn she had exulted at the thought of Agamemnon's failure, we see in the *IA* that she has attempted to make his returns joyful. Her mention of "worthless wi[ves]" is as much as anything a reference to her own sister, whom she refers to a few lines later as a "bad wife" (*IA* 1169, κακῆς γυναικός). More importantly, whereas Electra had defined Clytemnestra's exceptionalism in negative terms—she alone "of all Greek women" (*El.* 1076, μόνη δὲ πασῶν ... Ἑλληνίδων) had cheered for the Trojans—Clytemnestra defines it positively: in contrast to the "worthless wi[ves]" who abound, she herself is a "rare" and virtuous catch (*IA* 1162, σπάνιον δὲ θήρευμα).

Euripides thus uses the *agōn* of the *IA* to systematically rewrite nearly every aspect of Clytemnestra's portrayal in the *Electra*. He does so by using the same techniques by which he had engaged with and rejected Aeschylus' version of the character, recalling and reclaiming specific moments, phrases, and rhetorical strategies, and employing them to different ends. In every sense, his engagement with the *Electra* cannot be separated from his critical review of the *Agamemnon*. For in looking back at another version of Clytemnestra, one that he had created with Aeschylus' *Oresteia* firmly in mind, Euripides rewrites not only Aeschylus' queen, but indeed his own revision of that queen. Looked at in this light, the Clytemnestra of the *IA* appears to be the culmination of a literary conversation that Euripides had conducted and explored for years. Here, in his final tragic portrait of the queen, Euripides boldly rejects a long tradition—one to which he himself had contributed—and provides for Clytemnestra a certain measure of tragic vindication.

*In search of positive role-models: Clytemnestra, Demeter, and Semonides' Woman from a Bee*

As we have seen, Euripides effectively refutes the standard tragic conception of Clytemnestra as a woman marked by her ability to engage in *dolos*, by her zest for adultery, and by her general neglect of wifely duties. But in order to complete this rehabilitative project, Euripides must not only contrast her to the previous tragic tradition: he must also find others models to serve as comparisons. To do so, he turns to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* and to Semonides' iambic poem on the "tribes of women" (Semonides fr.7).

We may start with the intriguing links between the *IA* and the *Hymn to Demeter*, a poem which is notable (among other things) for its "unusual focus on the mother and the validation of her grief and anger."<sup>49</sup> The connections between the two works are both thematic and verbal. Most obviously, both the *IA* and the *Hymn to Demeter* chronicle the premature death of a maiden (Iphigenia/Persephone) and the mother's (Clytemnestra/Demeter) reaction to this event. Less obviously, but perhaps just as importantly, in both poems the father (Agamemnon/Zeus) is complicit in a plot which is carried out through his trickery (*δόλος*: *IA* 1457, *Hom.Hymn.Dem.* 2.8). And in both cases, the plot succeeds not least because of the maiden's "naïveté."<sup>50</sup>

On their own, these basic plot similarities suggest that there

<sup>49</sup> H. P. Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton 1994) 119.

<sup>50</sup> On Iphigenia's naïveté see Burgess, *Hermes* 132 (2004) 45–46; on Persephone's see M. Arthur, "Politics and Pomegranates: An Interpretation of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter," *Arethusa* 10 (1977) 12. Arthur notes that it is due to her "naïveté" that Persephone seals her fate by reaching for the fatal narcissus, and adds that "[t]he association of virginity with a state of childlike innocence and bliss was a common theme in Greek literature." The connections between the two works, then, could almost certainly be applied to an analysis of Iphigenia's character and decision-making as well, though such an analysis is beyond the scope of this paper.



may be some relationship between the two works. Confirmation of the connection is provided by close linguistic parallels. Towards the end of the play, after Agamemnon's plot has been revealed but before Iphigenia's fate has been sealed, mother and daughter share a brief but tender moment alone, one that consists mostly of a monody sung by Iphigenia.<sup>51</sup> The moment is, on the surface, only vaguely reminiscent of the *Hymn* (specifically of Demeter's reunification with Persephone), and Iphigenia's monody—a song about Ida nurturing Paris and, as a result, her own death—seems unrelated. It is striking, then, when we hear Iphigenia singing of “the Nymphs' springs” (*IA* 1296–1298):

λειμών τ' ἔρνεσι θάλλων  
 χλωροῖς καὶ ῥοδόεντ'  
 ἄνθε' ὑακίνθινά τε θεαῖς δρέπειν·  
 and a meadow bursting with pale  
 shoots, and rosy and hyacinthine  
 flowers for goddesses to pluck.

These lines in fact allude to two different scenes from the Greek poetic tradition. The image overtly recalls the scene in the *Cypria* (fr.5 W.) in which the poet describes the flower-laden dress that Aphrodite wore to the beauty pageant on Ida—an occasion that would ultimately lead to Iphigenia's death. But while the setting of Iphigenia's monody and the *Cypria* are the same, the image of the flowers is not: in the *Cypria* the flowers are merely affixed to Aphrodite's attire; Iphigenia, on the other hand, sings of them as items “for goddesses to pluck.” The difference may be subtle, but it is an important one: the only prior reference to goddesses plucking (δρέπω) roses and hya-

<sup>51</sup> If the manuscript tradition is correct, though Diggle and others are dubious of this, the monody is introduced by Clytemnestra with the ominous statement that “your father has fled, having handed you over to Hades” (*IA* 1278, φεύγει σε πατήρ Ἄϊδη παραδούς). These lines vividly recall the *Hymn to Demeter*, which the poet begins in a similar manner: “Hades seized [Persephone], and deep-thundering far-seeing Zeus gave her away (2–3, ἦν Ἄϊδωνεύς / ἤρπαξεν, δῶκεν δὲ βαρύκτοπος εὐρύοπα Ζεύς).

cinths in extant Greek literature is found in the *Hymn to Demeter*.<sup>52</sup> More generally, in the Greek poetic tradition meadows and flower-gathering were the typical location and occupation of maidens who are about to be abducted or raped.<sup>53</sup> By speaking of goddesses plucking flowers from a meadow, Euripides recreates the setting of violent abductions and makes it the foreground of Iphigenia's lament.

This assimilation of Iphigenia to Persephone should influence our interpretation of Clytemnestra, who appears, in this light, a figure akin to the grieving goddess Demeter. In fact, this matches what we see throughout the tragedy, for Clytemnestra enters a stage of pre-emptive grief as soon as she discovers Agamemnon's sinister intentions.<sup>54</sup> When dealing with the question of Clytemnestra's laments, scholars have generally been ungenerous in their assessments, seeing in them a certain unseemly "degree of self-centeredness."<sup>55</sup> But the similarities between her position and that of Demeter, and her interlocutors' sympathetic reactions to her plight,<sup>56</sup> render such an interpretation doubtful. Instead, we should see Clytem-

<sup>52</sup> See especially Persephone's narration of her kidnapping at *Hom.Hymn. Dem.* 417–428. Iphigenia reclaims a number of words in her monody, including δρέπομεν (*IA* 1298/*Hom.Hymn.Dem.* 2.425), ὑάκτινον (1298/426), and ῥοδέας (1297/427).

<sup>53</sup> See C. A. Sowa, *Traditional Themes and the Homeric Hymns* (Chicago 1984) 135–144; N. Loraux, *The Children of Athena: Athenian Ideas about Citizenship and the Division between the Sexes* (Princeton 1993) 228. Other examples of maidens being raped/abducted while picking flowers include Creusa (*Eur. Ion* 887–896) and Europa (*schol. AB II.* 12.292 = *Bacch. fr.*10).

<sup>54</sup> See esp. *IA* 880–889.

<sup>55</sup> Luschnig, *Tragic Aporia* 64. Along these lines, see also Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* 259, who argues that Clytemnestra is "more concerned with the wrong done to herself than with the imminent loss of her daughter's life"; Vellacott, *Ironic Drama* 202; Foley, *Ritual Irony* 96; Aretz, *Die Opferung der Iphigenia* 165–169.

<sup>56</sup> See especially the *Presbutēs* at *IA* 887: οἰκτρὰ πάσχετον δὺ' οὔσαι ("you've both suffered piteously"), but also Achilles' response to Clytemnestra's pleas (897, 919–921).

nestra's reaction as one of normal maternal grief.

Setting aside Clytemnestra's justifiable grief and anger, Semonides' iambic fr.7 provides an even more compelling set of literary associations for Euripides' Clytemnestra. Admittedly, Semonides' stunningly misogynistic poem does not seem the most natural text to mine for positive female role-models. Nevertheless, a comparison between Clytemnestra's description of herself and Semonides' description of the "woman who comes from a bee" (83) reveals similarities that are too striking to be casual (83–91):

τὴν δ' ἐκ μελίσσης· τὴν τις εὐτυχεῖ λαβών·  
 κείνη γὰρ οἷη μῶμος οὐ προσιζάνει,  
 θάλλει δ' ὑπ' αὐτῆς κάπαέξεται βίος,  
 φίλη δὲ σὺν φιλέοντι γηράσκει πόσει  
 τεκοῦσα καλὸν κῶνομάκλυτον γένος.  
 κάριπρεπῆς μὲν ἐν γυναιξὶ γίνεται  
 πάσησι, θεῖη δ' ἀμφιδέδρομεν χάρις.  
 οὐδ' ἐν γυναιξὶν ἥδεται καθημένη  
 ὄκου λέγουσιν ἀφροδισίους λόγους.

Another [woman] is from the bee. The one who gets her is lucky, since on her alone blame does not settle. Under her management his livelihood flourishes and increases, and she grows old in love with a loving husband, the mother of a handsome and distinguished family. She stands out among all women and a divine grace surrounds her. She takes no pleasure sitting among women in places where they talk about sex.<sup>57</sup>

Semonides' description of the ideal woman is reflected, both conceptually and linguistically, in Clytemnestra's description of herself in the *IA*. In fact, the parallels are so extensive that we must imagine that if Euripides was not acquainted with Semonides' poem itself, then he was at least familiar with a broader poetic tradition concerning feminine virtue within which both his Clytemnestra and Semonides' Woman from a

<sup>57</sup> Transl. D. E. Gerber, *Greek Iambic Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1999).

Bee could be situated.

A line-by-line comparison may serve to demonstrate the extent to which the two poets are exploiting the same motifs. To begin, Semonides' introductory comment that "the one who gets [the woman descended from a bee] is lucky" is analogous to Clytemnestra's claim to be "a rare find" (*IA* 1162). In that context, it is also worth noting that by referring to herself as a form of prey (θήρευμα), Clytemnestra bestializes herself in a manner that is reminiscent of Semonides' poetic project. The parallels between Semonides 7.84 and *IA* 1158 are quite obvious: both Clytemnestra and the Bee-woman are said to be blameless, and the words used—*amemptos* and *mōmos*—are cognates. In *IA* 1160, Clytemnestra imitates Sem. 7.85 in both concept and language: just as a husband's "livelihood" (*bios*) will flourish under the auspices of the Bee-woman, so too does Clytemnestra improve the state of Agamemnon's household. Furthermore, both poets use forms of the verb *auxanō* (Sem. 7.85 κάπαξέξεται, *IA* 1160 αύξουσ') to accentuate this point. Euripides actually expands upon Sem. 7.87,<sup>58</sup> for where Semonides merely tells us that the Bee-woman raises a noble family, Clytemnestra even presents physical evidence of this fact when she notes that "in addition to three daughters, I bore you this son" (*IA* 1164–1165, τίκτω δ' ἐπὶ τρισὶ παρθένοισι παῖδά σοι / τόνδ'), referring to the infant Orestes who, if he is not actually in her arms,<sup>59</sup> is almost certainly present on stage.

Next, Sem. 7.88 essentially restates the earlier thesis that wives such as the Woman from a Bee (and, as we have seen, Clytemnestra) are a rarity. And 90–91 once again provide a solid point of comparison: while the Bee-woman "takes no pleasure [in] ... talk[ing] about sex," Clytemnestra claims to have been "chaste in the matters of love" (*IA* 1159). Here it is

<sup>58</sup> Fr.7.86 can be of no help here, since of course Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon before they can grow old together. But the emphasis in the *IA* is not on the future of the marriage but on Clytemnestra's general behavior in the past and present of the play.

<sup>59</sup> As Michelini suggests, *ICS* 24/25 (1999/2000) 50.

obvious that both expressions are meant to highlight the fact that each woman possesses a certain feminine chastity, but it is especially noteworthy that both Semonides and Euripides use an Aphrodite-derived euphemism to convey this idea. Still, no individual point of comparison matters nearly so much as the fact that Clytemnestra fulfills practically every criterion that appears in Semonides' list of the Bee-woman's positive qualities. The many confluences, expressed in only a handful of lines, confirm that the similarities between the two women are no coincidence.

This re-imagining of Clytemnestra as a poetic relative of Semonides' Bee-woman has important implications. We have already seen that Euripides has removed Clytemnestra from the entirely negative tragic tradition which preceded the *IA*. By referring back to the tradition of the different "tribes" of women, Euripides assimilates Clytemnestra to another, more sympathetic image of wives. Moreover, there is reason to believe that the Semonidean tradition was prominent enough for this allusion to be meaningful to Euripides' audience. Indeed, a remarkably similar (if briefer) assimilation of women to different types of animals appears in a fragment of the sixth-century poet Phocylides, who also describes a woman "from a bee" who is "both a good house-keeper and knows how to work."<sup>60</sup> We need not assume that Phocylides was familiar with Semonides' work; the two poets may have operated independently in the context of "a commonplace of popular philosophy."<sup>61</sup> But regardless of the precise relationship between the two poems, the fact that they share this pointed and specific viewpoint sug-

<sup>60</sup> Phocylides fr.3.6–7, ἡ δὲ μελίσσης / οἰκονόμος τ' ἀγαθὴ καὶ ἐπίσταται ἐργάζεσθαι.

<sup>61</sup> M. L. West, "Phocylides," *JHS* 98 (1978) 167. That this "philosophy" was indeed common is also suggested by Ischomachus' use of the bee analogy in *Xen. Oec.* 7.32–38, in which he presents the queen-bee as embodying many of the same characteristics as did Semonides and Phocylides. On this see esp. P. Walcot, "Greek Attitudes towards Women: The Mythological Evidence," *G&R* 31 (1984) 45–46.

gests that the tradition itself was fairly widely known. We can infer that many in the audience would have been able to recognize Euripides' reference to the Woman from a Bee. Euripides thus completes his rehabilitation of the figure of Clytemnestra by casting her in the mold of the bee, one of the few positive role models that existed for Greek wives.

### *Conclusions*

We can draw a number of conclusions from the series of references that Euripides makes to the literary tradition in the process of creating his last version of Clytemnestra. First, it should be obvious at this point that he did not develop the character in a vacuum, but rather in reference to a number of different traditions. He uses tradition not as a guiding light, so to speak, but rather as a poetic background against which he can (re)write the character of Clytemnestra. The tragic tradition had, as far as we know, been unrelenting in its condemnation of Clytemnestra; Euripides himself had participated in this. And as we have seen, in the *IA* he reminds his audience of these earlier tragic characterizations, but he does so not to follow in Aeschylus' (or his own) footsteps, but rather to mark the differences between this new Clytemnestra and those who had preceded her. In this sense, then, Euripides constructs a new tragic tradition that fundamentally overturns the canon.

The allusions to other poetic wives and mothers are just as valuable in this respect. By recalling the story of Demeter, Euripides not only provides a divine model for Clytemnestra's eventual vengeance, but above all he helps us understand the nature of the grief that the *IA* so poignantly dramatizes: Clytemnestra's maternal instincts are illuminated by this poetic interaction. The remarkable similarities of Clytemnestra's self-portrait and Semonides' description of the Woman from a Bee are perhaps even more instrumental in Euripides' creation of Clytemnestra as a good wife and woman. To be sure, Euripides could have constructed this character from the ground up, with no reference to any prior tradition. But it is more effective to do so by assimilating her to a model that already possessed a specific poetic, even cultural, value: when we see that Clytem-

nestra embodies the virtues of Semonides' Woman from a Bee, it becomes ever clearer that Euripides has deliberately cast Clytemnestra in a completely different, and unquestionably more positive, mold than her tragic forebears. And when we consider that she now belongs to the only "tribe" of women worthy of praise, we see that she is not simply "blameless," but in many ways exemplary.

Moreover, these literary allusions do more than illuminate the distance between Clytemnestra's tragic past and present or confirm her claim to be a "blameless wife." They also suggest that the tragedian is deeply invested in his undertaking. Commentators, when they have not been overtly critical of this version of the queen, have had surprisingly little to say about her.<sup>62</sup> But this lack of interest is at odds with the serious intertextual work in which Euripides is engaged, one that asks us to understand Clytemnestra against the background of four different literary portraits. In a play that meditates deeply on the long tradition, from Homer to the tragedians, surrounding the House of Atreus, this new vision of Clytemnestra is another example of the way in which Euripides is able to write against and at the same time revitalize the literary past. All this suggests that we cannot fully understand Clytemnestra, or indeed the tragedy itself, without taking into account the traditional backdrops that Euripides so carefully evokes, refashions, or rejects.<sup>63</sup>

*August, 2015*

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<sup>62</sup> See n.4 above.

<sup>63</sup> My sincerest thanks to the anonymous readers for their comments and suggestions, and to Professor Sarah Nooter of the University of Chicago, whose input and advice have been invaluable.